Julia Kristeva’s ‘Culture of Revolt’ and (Post) Modern Religious Subjectivity

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department for the Study of Religion
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Abstract

This study offers a close reading of Julia Kristeva’s theories of ‘intimate revolt’ and ‘revolt culture’ and applies them to discussions of religious subjectivity. Decidedly non-militaristic, intimate revolt is reconceived in psychoanalytic and literary terms to mean an ongoing process of introspection and interrogation. The notion is derived from a multi-faceted and dynamic view of the mind, which, I submit, can broaden our conceptualization of religious subjectivity in popular discourse and vis-à-vis other psychoanalytic interpretations of religion. Indeed, Kristeva’s seemingly ambiguous treatment of Christianity is better understood in light of her theory of intimate revolt, which accepts and encourages working through competing ideas. Taking seriously the socio-political implications of intimate revolt, the overarching questions of this project are whether or not religion can fit into Kristeva’s vision of revolt culture, and, if so, what it might look like. I argue that, while she privileges aesthetic and psychoanalytic forms of revolt, Kristeva leaves open the possibility of intimate revolt in religion, particularly through her discussions of ‘the sacred’ and Christian mysticism. Finally, I survey progressive Christianity and John Caputo’s postmodern religion to identify potential examples of religious subjects who contribute to a culture of revolt. I conclude that – to the degree that it may be possible – intimate revolt should be promoted in religion today.
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Introduction

In *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000) and *Intimate Revolt* (2002), Julia Kristeva argues that we are living in a “culture of distraction,” in which human lives are increasingly superficial, automated and commodified. As a result, she sees the general condition of the modern Western subject characterized by a state of crisis; people who suffer from anxiety and feelings of meaninglessness are unable to participate in their own self-fashioning (knowing who I am, who I am not, who I want to be, and having a say in what I enjoy, believe, value) or to build healthy relationships with others. More and more, people are suffering – feeling empty and disconnected, struggling to find direction and meaning in life, and to name, understand, and appropriately express their inner lives (desires, love, hatred, fear and anger, etc.). Individuals, in their private lives as well as in the public sphere, are demonstrating a range of symptoms from apathy and nonparticipation to obsessive compulsion and violent outbreaks. Ultimately, Kristeva discerns an increase in the general incapacity to deal with both personal troubles (heartbreak, trauma, loss) and social problems (job insecurity, poverty, racism), and this has grave consequences for the overall well-being of individuals, as well as for society.

That we suffer from a general and increasing state of malaise is not a new observation for Kristeva. Her 1980s trilogy, as well as subsequent works such as *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) and *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995), all anticipate and formulate different elements of this diagnosis. Thus, in *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* and *Intimate Revolt*, one can see the return of concerns that have been previously elaborated. Here, however, Kristeva reflects on the possibility of a counter-measure: to develop a “culture of revolt.” To be clear, she is not advocating revolt in the typical sense of the word, as in a collective, political uprising. Rooted in psychoanalytic theory, she posits a revolt that takes place on an individual, personal level – one

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3. In this context, ‘happiness’ is linked to the capacity to name and pursue one’s desire, even if it changes or seems more or less clear at various times. It is linked to awareness and acceptance of one’s fragile and ultimately
that focuses on and rejuvenates our psychic lives, which she calls an “intimate revolt.” In brief, intimate revolt is a retrospective and introspective process through which one might recognize, interrogate and express one’s desires, fears, values and beliefs, on an ongoing basis. Crucially, she has in mind nonviolent means of revolt, such as creative and intellectual pursuits; after all, these domains are renowned for their highly personalized and politicized cultural products. Some of the greatest counter-mainstream ideas have been historically expressed in the realms of art, music, theatre, literature, fashion and academia. For Kristeva, intimate revolt is crucial for individual health and happiness and, by extension, a healthy social fabric. In other words, intimate revolt is as essential for the life of the mind as is revolt culture for the life of society.

This is a study of Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt with respect to modern religious subjectivity. It comes about in response to the precarious role of religions in Western society today. For one, fundamentalist and extremist groups are a mainstay in news media, as are religious clashes more generally. One can observe a rise in popular hostility toward religion and trends of secularization have also brought about blasé or indifferent attitudes toward religion. And yet many people still identify as religious, are returning or turning to religion, and there are many conflicts to which religious belief or tradition contributes. As a result, there is a range of meanings that one might associate with religions, from an expression of love, a cultural identity or a moral compass, to an expression of exclusion, hatred and violence. And there are many misconceptions about religions and people who self-identify as religious. Even an individual’s own religious identity might be confusing, isolating, empowering or affirming. In light of such

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3 In this context, ‘happiness’ is linked to the capacity to name and pursue one’s desire, even if it changes or seems more or less clear at various times. It is linked to awareness and acceptance of one’s fragile and ultimately unknowable subjectivity.

4 Religious clashes occur with varying degrees of severity all over the world, from conflicts between denominations within the same religion (Protestantism vs. Catholicism, Shia vs. Sunni Islam) to those between religions. Recent examples of the latter include: the small, Catholic town of Hérouxville in Quebec instating an “anti-Muslim” code of conduct (2007), anti-Semitic chanting on a London train before a West Ham United soccer match (2014), and the more violent examples of the on-going Muslim-Christian conflict in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria and Sudan (2014) and the abduction of 150 Syrian Christians by the rebel Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) (2015). And the list goes on.

5 In this case, I use the term secularization to mean the separation of “church” and “state” and the overall weakening of religious influence in the public sector. I recognize that secularization is not a uniform or linear phenomenon but it is one of many identifiable trends in Western society.
diversity and complexity, I suggest that Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt offers a unique and useful language with which to speak about religious subjectivity.

I am also interested in the ways religious subjects today can participate in Kristeva’s vision of a modern culture of revolt. This is because Kristeva focuses heavily on non-religious avenues for revolt, such as art and literature, education and psychoanalysis. And when she does speak of religion, it is often in a way that romanticizes the past and disparages the present, or at least underestimates the presence and potential role of religion in modern society beyond its insidious forms, which are rampant in news media. My hypothesis is that this lack of attention to or, better, lack of promotion of revolt in religion today is misguided. At the same time, I recognize that both the desire and capacity to interrogate, evaluate and (re)formulate one’s values and beliefs may not be self-evident in the context of religion. Therefore, this study asks, can religion fit into Kristeva’s vision of revolt culture? If so, what might revolt in religion today look like?

Kristeva is among the most prolific and influential modern European thinkers and, as such, has inspired a great deal of scholarship. However, much of Kristeva’s academic reception in the field of religious studies has focused on theories from early publications, such as her articulation of semiotic and symbolic modes of language, subjectivity as a process, abjection, melancholy, motherhood and love. These are important and useful themes in the study of religion, on which I inevitably draw. However, her more recent work, in particular her re-conceptualization of revolt, has received relatively little attention, especially from scholars of religion. As I will explicate in some detail, this later work yields significant new insights that make important contributions to Kristeva’s inquiries into religion. In addition, Kristeva’s writing is highly nuanced, often exhibiting the flare of Continental philosophers, and her books are mostly written and published first in French. As a result, her theories are sometimes over-simplified or erroneously interpreted. Thus, I offer a close reading of her recent texts on revolt and revolt culture, revisit Kristeva’s views on religion in light of these recent theories, and apply her theories of revolt to questions of religious subjectivity. As such, this study contributes something new to the extensive body of scholarship on Kristeva, as well as to the broader field of psychology and religion.
1 Method: Psychoanalysis and Kristeva

Using psychoanalysis as a theoretical model is in line with recent trends in French philosophy, postmodern theories of subjectivity, and literary, critical and social theory. While it is also a therapeutic practice, psychoanalysis is a discourse that addresses a subject’s deepest desires and fears, and way of being in the world and with others. Thus, it provides a unique language for conceptualizing and speaking about a realm of our selves to which we do not have direct, empirical access. Many religion scholars turn to post-Freudians when using psychoanalysis. Often, this is because it is presumed that the “father of psychoanalysis” has little to nothing good to say about religion. Freud, particularly in Anglo-American circles, is widely represented as a positivist who rejected religion as an illusory consolation at best or a mass delusion at worst. As a result, a certain trend has developed in the psychoanalytic study of religion that tries – at least it seems – to offset this negative interpretation of religion with a more positive one. This is not my intention, nor do I see Kristeva as contributing to this trend. I am not interested, and neither is Kristeva on my reading, in offering a sympathetic view of religion to counterbalance the critiques of Freud and other modern skeptics. Kristeva inherits ideas from and is influenced by many post-Freudians, notably Klein, Winnicott and Lacan, but she remains a Freudian. She critiques Freud but he is still the foundation of her theory and practice. Importantly, she recognizes the wide range of Freud’s texts. At the same time, in addition to her experience as a psychoanalyst, Kristeva’s work is informed by her knowledge of semiotics, literary and cultural theory. Thus, rather than simply proffering a positive interpretation of religion, I engage with Kristeva’s theories in order to contribute to a more complex and nuanced psychoanalytic interpretation of religion.

6 Beverly Clack states, this view “dominates analytic engagements with Freud’s work.” Clack, 2009, 206.
7 E.g., Ana-Maria Rizzuto, William Meissner, Stanley Leavy; See Jones, 1991, 35-50. See Rachel Blass (2006) for more on this trend.
8 Even though she was a student of Lacan, her approach to psychoanalysis as a clinical practice is much closer to Freud’s than it is to Lacan’s.
2 Layout

In chapters one and two, I outline in detail Kristeva’s reconceptualization of revolt and what she means by *intimate revolt*, respectively. A thorough examination is needed because Kristeva’s writing is incredibly rich but also challenging; her theories are layered and circular, in the sense that each theme feeds off of and into other themes written previously or soon to be written. Also, in addition to psychoanalysis, Kristeva’s work is informed by her knowledge of semiotics, Continental philosophy and literary theory. Thus, to make clear the complexity of her ideas and to facilitate a more accurate application of them, I offer a close reading of Kristeva’s notions of revolt and intimate revolt. In other words, these introductory chapters establish the theoretical groundwork for the study. I will show how, for Kristeva, we are psychically constituted as rebellious, and the expression of this need for revolt is imperative to psychic health. She emphasizes the notion of revolt as a psychic experience – an experience of “the imaginary” dimension of our minds, such that it is expressed specifically through non-violent means, as in aesthetic and intellectual pursuits. The stress on *imaginary* revolt also points to its personal and intimate nature. These chapters highlight the urgency and the efficacy of intimate revolt.

Chapter three looks at how Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, which appears only to concern individuals, might translate into a discussion of society and culture more broadly. In other words, I ask how she moves from ‘*intimate* revolt’ to ‘revolt *culture*.’ In a basic sense, psychoanalysis is a discourse that always already goes beyond the individual. The psychic health of individuals inevitably contributes to healthy social interactions among individuals. For Kristeva, the dynamic of the transferential bond in analysis becomes a template, roughly speaking, for the dynamic between individuals and cultures, which includes each person’s self-work and reflection, political engagement, and social interactions.

Kristeva does not offer a comprehensive social or political theory. However, she has always been politically engaged and regularly contributes her opinion, which is informed by psychoanalysis, on various social and cultural issues. She speaks earnestly of the implications of her theories but, rather than a fleshted-out system, she offers ideas and suggestions on how her psychoanalytic
theory might be implemented. Indeed, we are only given reflections on what a culture of revolt might look like. Therefore, this chapter outlines and elaborates on her reflections in order to emphasize the importance of intimate revolt to society at large. For this purpose, I refer to the political theory and philosophy of Hannah Arendt. I draw comparisons between Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt and Arendt’s understanding of the act of *thinking*, and I show how the two concepts are mutually reinforcing. Moreover, through a consideration of Arendt’s reflections on evil and the mind’s capacity to prevent it, I stress the potential positive impact of Kristeva’s revolt culture in terms of contemporary society and politics.

Finally, chapter three also addresses the questions of whether or not a culture of revolt is realistic and who precisely can participate in it. I call the reader’s attention to the analysis of Kelly Oliver, who has argued that Kristeva’s theories do not adequately take into account the impact of subjects’ “real life” differences with respect to the capacity to revolt. In light of such critiques, I highlight three crucial aspects of Kristeva’s revolt culture that promote its accessibility: listening, narration and interpretation. These are central features of the analytic process (the process of anamnesis) that need to be recreated in some analogous way outside of psychoanalysis. In other words, I suggest that the flourishing of Kristeva’s culture of revolt depends on promoting the role of the listening other and the work of narration and interpretation in our social and political lives. Furthermore, Kristeva explains that the acts of listening, narrating and interpretation in analysis constitute a *gift* of meaning for the analysand, a gift a psychic *rebirth* and, thus, she speaks of the work done in analysis as a process of psychoanalytic *forgiveness* (from the French *par-don*, which literally means through-gift). Thus revolt culture might also be called a culture of forgiveness, which is not individualistic but necessarily an inter-subjective concept.

Kristeva’s psychoanalytic forgiveness and psychic rebirth are reconceptualizations of religious concepts in secular terms. Indeed, there is a noticeable move away from religion in her discussions on revolt, yet the influence of religious language and concepts is widely apparent. Thus, chapter four looks at Kristeva’s views on religion: how they impact and are impacted by her theories of intimate revolt. Brought to the fore is the overarching question: does religion fit into Kristeva’s vision of a culture of revolt?
I begin with an overview of Kristeva’s writing on religion, by which she most often means Christianity. To be sure, there is no singular Kristevan position; her views on religion *qua* Christianity are highly nuanced, woven into discussions of other topics, from abjection, depression, and hate to art, love and forgiveness. Furthermore, her evaluations appear inconsistent. Kristeva can be read at times as a critic and at other times as a proponent of religion. In response to this apparent ambiguity, I suggest that Kristeva’s approach to religion is consistent with her theory of intimate revolt, which accepts and encourages working through one’s competing views. And, in fact, her writing on religion is clarified when read as an example of her own personal, analytical revolt. Furthermore, this discussion reveals that using Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt as a theoretical lens offers a deeper understanding of religious subjectivity, one that is necessarily broad but also recognizes its tentative nature.

The broader purpose of chapter four is to look at the reasons why Kristeva, by and large, discounts religion in her promotion of revolt culture. I address her view that religions today are in crisis, including her reiterated concerns of dogmatic and exclusionary trends in religion in general. At the same time, I call attention to Kristeva’s frequent references to the *sacred*, which she conceptualizes in some ways in opposition to religion, and locates primarily beyond the religious context (with some exceptions, including Christian mysticism). Kristeva’s conceptualization of the sacred is of particular interest because it shares traits with her notion of intimate revolt. Indeed, this chapter shows that it is via her discussions of the sacred and Christian mysticism that Kristeva leaves open the possibility of intimate revolt in religion today.

Much like the notions of forgiveness and rebirth, Kristeva takes the typically religious concept of the sacred and incorporates it into her secular vision of a culture of psychoanalytic revolt. Thus, regardless of her critiques and her suspicion vis-à-vis the role of religions in contemporary society, the influence and value of religious (read: Christian) constructs on her theory of revolt culture is unmistakable. As it turns out – and this conclusion is supported by her discussion in *This Incredible Need to Believe* – Kristeva’s vision of the future does not so much abandon
religion as walks a line; it is a nuanced inquiry that moves between the nebulous worlds of ‘religious’ and ‘secular.’

Kristeva comes across as pessimistic that religion can still provide a culturally formulated site for subjects to revolt. However, on my reading, her theories of revolt lend themselves to a contemporary religious interpretation. Thus, in the fifth and final chapter, I ask what religious revolt might look like today. In order to answer this question, I survey two contemporary religious discourses that exhibit some revolt-like characteristics: the postmodern Christian philosophy of John D. Caputo and progressive Christianity. In both of these cases one finds an emphasis on persistent reflection and reinterpretation of personal beliefs. In this way, as well as others, these discourses embody Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt. However, a close analysis also reveals the difficulties and precariousness associated with revolt in religion. Caputo preaches a radical postmodern religion founded on open-ended questioning but he ultimately takes for granted many traditional faith claims. And despite the inclusive approach taken by progressive Christians, their efforts are belied by a tendency to define themselves in opposition to “the Christian Right.” In other words, the progressive interrogative identity becomes, contradictorily, reified through its resistance of the so-called unthinking, conservative one. The challenges of revolt in the context of religion may be explained intuitively, but they are important to highlight. They are also surely anticipated by Kristeva and perhaps explain in part her move away from religion. Nevertheless, I argue in this chapter that, to whichever degree possible, it is imperative to promote intimate revolt in religion today. All the implications (social, political and personal) of even a partial or temporary revolt in religion should not be overlooked. Indeed, despite their problems, this chapter shows through these two examples the importance of revolt in the context of religion today.

3 Concluding Words

Broadly speaking, my research applies Kristeva’s theories of intimate revolt and revolt culture to the study of religion. I look at the value of Christianity with respect to and in light of Kristeva’s vision of a culture of revolt, and ask what her theory of intimate revolt can bring to a discussion
of religious subjectivity. Kristeva reconceptualizes the term *revolt* in terms of its etymology, “meaning return, returning, discovering, uncovering, and renovating,” and she emphasizes “its potential for making gaps, rupturing, renewing.” As a constant questioning, a confrontation of memory, a displacement of the past and, importantly, a gateway for renewal, revolt culture invites new possibilities into old discourses. It is the transformative potential of Kristeva’s psychic (i.e., nonviolent) revolt for individuals and society that is pertinent to contemporary religious discourse. In light of the rise of fundamentalist and sectarian religious groups, as well as trends of secularization and popular hostility towards religion, the need to cultivate a culture of personal rather than collective revolt in the context of religion in particular is arguably stronger than ever.

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Chapter 1: Reconceptualizing Revolt

In the opening pages of The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt, Kristeva introduces what she means by revolt. She explains that, etymologically speaking, the term means to turn back, to return, to displace, to change. She does this in order to evoke, in addition to its destructive elements, a regenerative and repetitive movement. In other words, revolt is utilized in the sense of rebellion but also in the sense of mutation, transformation, even interpretation, depending on the time and place in history. After unpacking the history of the word, she looks at revolt in the context of psychoanalysis. Through an exploration of the moments of revolt in psychoanalytic theory and practice, and in selected literary texts, Kristeva illustrates the persistent need and desire for revolt but also its polymorphous and dynamic nature. This discussion conveys a richness and “plasticity” of the term so that one might appreciate the numerous layers and “logics” of the (intimate) revolt and culture that Kristeva has in mind.

1 Freudian Revolts

Kristeva’s notion of revolt is rooted firmly in Freudian theory. She identifies three interdependent “figures of revolt” based on “the Freudian experience”: transgression, anamnesis, and games. The first is revolt in the sense of transgression of a prohibition, and this is most clearly seen in Freud’s Totem and Taboo and Oedipus. The second is revolt as a repetitive “working-through,” internal to the project of anamnesis; and the third is revolt in the sense of an exploration and questioning of identity. As we will see, even though the transgression of prohibition inherent in the Oedipal revolt signals our rebellious nature, it is not the mode of revolt that Kristeva has in mind to promote in the present situation. Kristeva’s modern revolt draws primarily from the latter two, “softer” figures of revolt (intimate revolt).

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10 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 1 & 29; Also, Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 5.
11 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 16 & 27.
12 Ibid., 16.
1.1 Transgression

1.1.1 Totem & Taboo

The classic example of revolt in Freudian theory, found in *Totem & Taboo*, is encapsulated in the image of the primal revolt of the “brothers” against their tyrannical “father,” who holds all the power and access to all the women of the primal horde. The story is well known: The brothers band together, kill the father and attempt to assimilate his power by eating his flesh. After the victory feast, the brothers are left with an overwhelming sense of remorse and so build a totem in honor of their father, as a symbol of the power he had and will always have over them. The collective revolt against authority, as well as the shared sense of guilt, produces a sense of inclusion and identity and establishes a community among the sons. However, to prevent such a heinous crime from reoccurring, murder and incest become outlawed and taboo. The problem, though, as Freud noted, is that these primal desires are bound to resurface (when the resulting authority/power and associated pleasure is threatened), and so the original act of violence is reenacted through various social rites and religious rituals. Thus, moral and legal codes and society more generally are founded on revolt.

1.1.2 Oedipus

Kristeva refers to this Freudian primal scene not because of its historical accuracy, but because of the psychic reality that it expresses. *Totem and Taboo* is widely understood to be a phylogenetic explanation of the psychic structure and dynamic known as the Oedipus complex. Following Freud and Lacan, Kristeva maintains that the Oedipal conflict is one of the pivotal stages in the formation of a subject. As in Freud’s primordial story, the Oedipus complex involves the renouncement of incestuous desires, and a simultaneous rejection of and

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13 “...a duty to repeat the crime of parricide through the sacrifice of the totem animal as often as the benefits of this deed [...] threaten to disappear as a result of the changed influences of life.” Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, translated and introduction by A. A. Brill (New York: Vintage, 1918 [1913]), 188.

14 Freud observed this dynamic from as early as 1897 (in a letter to Fliess) and made numerous allusions to this famous psychic structure over the course of his career until his more direct treatment in “The Resolution of the Oedipal Complex” (1924).
identification with the father, who is an agency of the law that governs the social-symbolic order. The child, who has been gradually undergoing a process of separation and ego identification, experiences new feelings of hate for the father, who is seen as threatening its relationship with the mother and who has authority over the child. The child must deny its desires for the primary object (the mother), learn to sublimate sexual drives and signify new objects. This is accomplished in the end by identifying with and adopting the law of the father (the bearer of the imaginary powers of the phallus), which corresponds to entering the symbolic order as a speaking subject. Importantly, this (secondary) identification with the father happens coextensively with his displacement. The father is realized to be imitable and therefore replaceable; he is separable, “otherable,” “differed/deferred” (à la Derrida), and in this way – i.e., by symbolically “killing the father” – the child succeeds in asserting itself as a subject capable of speech and symbolization. One can only speak if one displaces the authority of words. In sum, becoming a speaking subject is achieved through a symbolic act of transgressive violence.

Allow me to point out some significant elements of what we have just seen. For one, while the Oedipal conflict may be resolved temporarily, it returns at puberty and is ultimately forever displaced and renewed. That is, attempts to realize Oedipal desires are destined to fail and the

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15 Kristeva, like Lacan, accepts the universality of this pivotal stage in the formation of a subject for both genders; like Freud, Kristeva rejects the Jungian term “Electra complex” for the girl’s experience. That said, following Freud, Kristeva recognizes that the resolution of the Oedipus conflict is more complicated for girls than for boys. (She claims that Lacan oversimplifies the matter, privileging the role of the father and erasing the role of the maternal in the subject’s formation). But many critics argue that Freud does not present a clear and complete theory about this biological difference – his discussions privilege the experience of the boy and clumsily accommodate for the case of the girl; Kristeva tries to make things clear. She recognizes and highlights “two sides” of the Oedipus complex, while maintaining its universal structure. She explains that the most common understanding of the Oedipus complex – the boy’s desire for his mother and the girl’s desire for her father – is Freud’s ‘direct’ or ‘positive’ Oedipus. The initial bond that every child has with the mother, a bond that encompasses physical need as well as desire, sets the boy up for full subjectification. He identifies with the father’s symbolic/phallic law, and assimilates with the paternal place (“killing the father”) and the desire for his mother is transferred onto women in general. Kristeva explains that for the boy “becoming a symbolic subject and becoming a desiring subject are one and the same.” Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 79. However, according to Freud, the girl’s initial desire for and bond with her mother is an “inverted” or “negative” Oedipus (an obvious bias against homosexual love choices; for Kristeva this first dyadic structure gives us insight into discussions on female homosexuality). And she too must absorb the father’s law in order to become a subject capable of symbolization. But in order for a woman to take on a heterosexual position in society, a girl’s desire for her mother must be shifted to her mother’s object of desire (her father) and then generalized onto symbolic versions of him. This process is the “direct” Oedipus and it is this additional step that brings about the “erotic individuation as a woman who loves men.” Ibid., 80.
Oedipal object is forever lost and sought after (in language and other signifiers), much like the revolt against the primordial father of the horde is continually re-enacted. This is important because a key element of Kristeva’s revolt is the need for its constant renewal. Also, Kristeva makes it very clear that alongside the violence of the transgression of the primal and Oedipal father, there is great pleasure. Despite the fear and remorse that may accompany such acts, one can intuitively comprehend the satisfaction felt in defeating a rival, assuming new power, and asserting one’s independence and autonomy. This somewhat conflicted (painful, macabre) pleasure is referred to by the un-translated French term jouissance. It is an important feeling of satisfaction, thrill and joy always undercut by and held in tension with a feeling of horror and sense of death. Thus, it may be precarious and temporary, but for Kristeva “happiness exists only at the price of a revolt… None of us has pleasure without confronting an obstacle, prohibition, authority, or law that allows us to realize ourselves as autonomous and free.” In this way, psychoanalytic theory grounds Kristeva’s claim that “rebellion is a condition necessary for the life of the mind and society.” That is to say, because we are constituted as individuals and as a society by a series of acts of violence and/or transgression – and their associated jouissance – revolt is a necessary element for our psychic health and development, and for healthy social interactions.

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16 Ibid., 76-77.
17 And this is consistent with her etymological interpretation, wherein the root words “volta and voltare suggest the idea of circular movement” in revolt. Ibid., 2.
18 Freud remarks in The Ego and the Id (1923) that there is a “likeness of the condition that follows complete sexual satisfaction to dying, and [that] death coincides with the act of copulation in some of the lower animals. These creatures die in the act of reproduction because, after Eros has been eliminated through the process of satisfaction, the death instinct has a free hand for accomplishing its purposes.” Sigmund Freud, The Freud Reader, ed. Peter Gay (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1989), 650.
19 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 7.
21 See also Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 11-15.
1.1.3 Why We Can’t Revolt

When nothing in your society has an intrinsic value, when everything, including human beings and the natural world, is made into a commodity, you exploit it until exhaustion or collapse. This is a form of collective suicide.\(^{22}\)

As we saw above, on Kristeva’s view, the modern European (but also Western) subject is generally seen to be in a state of crisis. Bombarded with images and models of who we are meant to be (i.e., what we should enjoy, believe and value), we are encouraged to be automatons rather than free thinkers, dissenters, creators, etc. This results in a plethora of existential neuroses – anxiety, depression, and crises of identity. One might argue that this is not new. Is today’s society really suffering in a way that is different from the past? After all, in large part, existentialist philosophers were responding to a widespread melancholy in Europe during and after the Second World War, as were many mid-20\(^{th}\) century social and political theorists and psychologists. For example, in his famous *Man’s Search for Meaning* (2006/1946), Viktor Frankl observed that the general population (particularly the youth) was conflicted with a feeling of meaninglessness, and anxiety over that meaninglessness.\(^{23}\) Also, around the same time, Frankfurt School theorists Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the source of such problems was Western society succumbing to consumerist propaganda. In their 1944 critique of the “culture industry,” they argue that the culture of their time is not the fluid, creative, expression of individuals in a society that some are led to believe, but rather an industry of “standardization and mass production,” “infecting everything with sameness.”\(^{24}\) All of this resembles Kristeva’s assessment of today’s state of affairs. And when she writes that we are submerged in “the culture of entertainment, the culture of performance, the culture of the show,” she is referencing Guy Debord’s 1967 description of France’s “society of the spectacle.”


So what has changed? The difference for Kristeva can be seen in how people (do not) respond to the events and temperaments of the time, the ability, or lack thereof, of people to mobilize and rise up against the oppressive forces and downtrodden moods, i.e., their ability to revolt. This incapacity to revolt reveals a heretofore-unseen problem. Kristeva argues that European culture – particularly in the 20th century – produced numerous moments of revolt in the form of art, literature, political, and intellectual movements. Among them, she identifies Marxism, Freud’s unconscious, the Bauhaus, surrealism, Picasso and Pollock. 

“The great moments of twentieth-century art and culture are moments of formal and metaphysical revolt.” In other words, the history of European philosophical, artistic and religious discourses reveals a tradition of reenacting the aforementioned primal revolt – a tradition of culture as “critical conscience.”

But the tradition is in peril. Kristeva agrees with Catherine Clement, who laments that “today…there is no visible avant-garde in France, perhaps not even in Europe…” As such, the “culture of revolt” prevalent in European history up until now, is in danger of disappearing. The question is thus: Why?

Kristeva identifies two features of modern society that contribute to the growing incapacity for revolt: (a) the commodification of the individual, and (b) the lack of identifiable and reliable authority figures. First, with the rise of consumer culture, Kristeva argues that the speaking

25 Kristeva does comment on pre-twentieth-century revolts as well such as: the Enlightenment, “Hegelian negativity” in particular, Francis Bacon and the French Revolution, among others. Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 6.
26 Ibid., 7.
27 Ibid., 6.
29 It is important to keep in mind that Kristeva does not intend to portray a unified, linear view of European history. She is interested not in History (capital H) but in what Sara Beardsworth has described as “minor histories,” which means she highlights various moments within Europe’s past. Sara Beardsworth, Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004), 16. So while it may appear romanticized at times, when she talks about a European tradition one should read instead “elements that have contributed to” the European tradition.
30 The following outline is primarily based on pages 4-6 of Kristeva’s The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt (2000), but I have also relied on Kelly Oliver’s lucid summary. See Kelly Oliver, “Revolt and Forgiveness” in Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: the Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva’s Polis, eds. T. Chanter and E. P. Ziarek (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005): 77-79.
subject is being replaced by the “patrimonial individual” (by which she means an aggregate of genetic codes and body parts and organs). As patrimonial individuals, we are reduced to functionaries within an economic order; we consume commodities and/or are commodified (to the extent that bodies are enslaved and organs can be bought or sold). “We are expected to be performing entities. At best, we are asked to work well and to buy as much as possible.” Kristeva states that modern Western culture does not facilitate the establishment and development of singular, speaking beings (more on this later). And without speaking subjects, there is no one to revolt. Second, Kristeva asserts that modern society no longer has a substantial “paternal” function. Religious, social and political institutions are being revealed more and more as corruptible or as already corrupt and, as such, these discourses are losing their power to consolidate laws, norms and values: “Authority, value and law have become empty, flimsy forms.” These institutions are “normalizing and falsifiable.” With such fragile prohibitions, there is also nothing against which to revolt. Kristeva’s analysis reveals that psychic space is being “flattened” (to borrow Oliver’s evocative term) in contemporary media culture. And lack of psychic life impedes a healthy social life (more on this in Chapter 3). This is why “[r]ather than falling asleep in the new normalizing order,” Kristeva urges the reader “to rekindle the flame (easily distinguishable) of the culture of revolt.” In sum, while feelings of depression and existential anxiety are perhaps not new, Kristeva argues that “the power vacuum and lack of values” are recent phenomena. And that is why our ability to revolt, as we have in the past, is in question.

31 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 6.
32 Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 100-1.
33 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 8.
34 Ibid., 24.
36 Ibid., 8.
37 Oliver, “Revolt and Forgiveness,” 77.
38 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 9.
39 Ibid., 25.
It should be noted that Kristeva is not alone in her assessment of modern Western society, in terms of the presence of widespread melancholy and lack of hope for action (or action *tout court*) in the face of that melancholy. Also, while she focuses on France and Western Europe, similarities can be drawn with the North American context. In “Don’t Look Down: The new Depression journalism” (2013), George Packer reviews a series of books and documentaries that show the impact of the present day “slump” in the economy, in morale, in the hearts/minds/souls of Americans, which he calls “the new depression.” Packer compares this journalism with writing that emerged during the Great Depression. His survey of the representations of American lives in the aftermath of the recent financial crisis reveals a very different mood than the one revealed in the writing of the thirties. In the latter context, “Marxism…gave the ruins of the Great Depression a certain glamour. [Author Edmund] Wilson believed that he was getting closer to the heart of history: the workers and their defiant leaders weren’t marginal losers – they were the prophets of the future.”

In this way, Packer corroborates Kristeva’s view that in the past, though faced with a similar diagnosis, people responded with revolt. In this case, Marxism contributed to a revolt against the economic depression. Packer also echoes Kristeva’s portrayal of the contributing factors (i.e. the lack of a reliable “authority”) to the current state of affairs when he writes, “The new depression seems to have produced less hope. Over the years, the structures that were built during the Roosevelt Republic to secure Americans against another catastrophe […] have steadily eroded. So has the public’s faith in institutions, and the idea of sure upward movement through each successive generation.”

By contrast, “there’s nothing depressing about Wilson’s sentences – they glow with the energy of a terrible beauty being born.” Packer suggests that though many suffered very deeply, there was a determination to create something new, better and even beautiful in the face of the despair that characterizes that pre-war decade. Interestingly, even the expression “terrible beauty” sounds Kristevan. In *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*, she asks, in the face of modern melancholy and malaise: “Is the Beautiful still possible? Does Beauty still exist?” After all, “what other antidote to the collapse of

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41 Ibid., 73-74.
42 Ibid., 70.
fantastic ideologies, what other antidote to death, than Beauty? In other words, are we able to find a way to revolt against the new depression? For Kristeva, it is the lack of hope, among other things, to which she is responding. Bringing back revolt culture will hopefully produce many modern versions of Packer’s “terrible beauty.” How, then, can we re-ignite the dying flames of revolt culture?

1.2 Anamnesis

With Freud’s phylogenetic history and Oedipal dynamics of the mind, Kristeva emphasizes the fundamental need we have as subjects to revolt against authority. However, in light of today’s “power vacuum and lack of values,” as described above, she suggests that revolt in the sense of transgression against law/authority is unrealistic for today’s society. Instead, Kristeva explores a different kind of revolt, also revealed to us by Freud, this time in “the return of the archaic,” fundamental to the analytical work of anamnesis. The return of the archaic refers to the return of the repressed (die Verdrängung), but it also points to “the timelessness (zeitlos [sic]) of the drive.” For Kristeva, both interpretations help us understand what she means by revolt, derived here from psychoanalytic theory and practice. On her view, the analyst is a revolutionary because of his or her potential “to access the archaic, to overturn conscious meaning.” As we will see, the return of (and to) the archaic is still a rebellion but a revolt against time, motivated by the death drive.

43 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 9. This theme is central to her book Black Sun (1989/1987), in which she writes about the beauty that can come out of ugly depression.
44 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 25.
45 She admits that it is still possible in certain contexts. Ibid., 29. However, she does not think “the image of the intrinsically antiestablishment intellectual” exists in the way it did in the 20th century and before. Ibid., 27.
46 Ibid., 12. This is the second major occurrence of revolt in Freud, as well as the Oedipal revolt, described above.
47 See Freud’s essays Repression (1915) and The Unconscious (1915).
48 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 12. Note that Zeitlos should be capitalized, as is the rule for German nouns.
49 Ibid., 15 & 16.
1.2.1 The Return of the Repressed

In his essay on repression, Freud writes, “the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious.”\(^50\) He describes *primal repression* as the first phase of repression, which is the defense mechanism that keeps the “ideational representatives” of our instinctual impulses from being cathected (becoming conscious). *Repression proper* is the defense against any “mental derivatives” of what was originally repressed (like a television show spin-off). Also called an “after pressure,” this second phase of repression means anything associated with what was first repressed is denied entry into consciousness, and this denial by the conscious system is aided by an attraction to the original repressed representative in the unconscious.\(^51\) In sum, the impulse is at once striving for and being denied fulfillment (through cathexis of its representative). The mechanism of repression is not failsafe, though. With enough distance from or distortion of the original, derivatives of the repressed (or parts of it, as in the case of the fetish)\(^52\) can become conscious. This return of the repressed, as it were, can be observed in dreams, during free association in the analytic setting, and/or in the form of neurotic symptoms. Furthermore, the dynamic of repression is persistent in the mind. That is, repression does not just take place once and for all. Rather, “the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure.”\(^53\) It is possible for a repression to be lifted, but this requires not only knowledge of the repressed idea, e.g., hearing it spoken (Freud refers to the *word* presentation of a concept/idea as *Wortvorstellung*), but also working through various resistances such that the analysand might connect the word-presentation with its previously unconscious *thing* presentation (Freud’s *Dingvorstellung*).\(^54\) As we saw above, the resolution of


\(^52\) Note 2 on page 150 of *Repression* in *SE* 14 points the reader to section 2 (A) of the first of Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *SE* 7, 153-4.


\(^54\) Freud, *The Unconscious*, *SE* 14, 175-76 & 201. The conscious presentation of an object/idea/concept (*Vorstellung*) consists of both its *word* and *thing* presentations. Ibid., 201.
the Oedipus complex is only temporary and because the contents of the unconscious are never extracted but remain there forever, a future event or trauma could trigger a fresh defense against the now conscious idea in the form of a new repression. Thus the ‘return of the repressed’ has, in fact, a double meaning: the mental derivatives of the repressed that constantly resurface, but also the inevitable return of the repressed even after successfully lifting the repression. While it may seem discouraging that perhaps no one is ever permanently “cured,” Kristeva will suggest that Freud’s “interminable analysis” in fact opens up endless opportunities for change and renewal (more on this below). In the context of the analytic session, one embarks on a journey of free association in order to recall, name, retrieve and express unconscious memory traces, i.e., to bring the repressed to consciousness. Thus, one might describe the Kristevan revolt as a repetitive, retrospective, and introspective process.

1.2.2 Timelessness

An important element of revolt is also revealed through Kristeva’s discussion on the “time” of (anamnesis in) analysis, which is a paradoxical temporality. According to Kristeva, Freud invents the notion of “analytical space as a time of revolt.” With this double entendre, we understand that (a) psychoanalysis is a time and space where revolt can take place, but also that (b) Kristeva’s concept of revolt carries with it the properties of time (in fact, timelessness) that characterize the analytic session. Thus, to gain further insight into the workings of the Kristevan revolt, we must look at what she means by the “paradoxical temporality” that we are confronted with in psychoanalysis.

55 This is consistent with her Lacanian and post-modernist position that nothing about subjectivity is permanent. The return of the repressed is representative of the contingency of our “Being.”
1.2.2.1  (A)temporality of the Unconscious

The strange temporality of revolt is mentioned briefly in *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* but is discussed in detail in *Intimate Revolt*, in a chapter called “The Scandal of the Timeless.”

The timeless-ness to which she refers is the temporality of the unconscious. In his 1915 essay, Freud explains that “the processes of the system Ucs. are timeless [Ger. Zeitlos]; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up, once again, with the work of the system Cs.” A good way to conceptualize this is to reflect on the experience of dreaming. For, as Kristeva notes, the dream is “an exemplary actualization of the unconscious, its ‘royal path.’” There is no beginning and end to a dream, and a dream is a series of disjointed images and memories, often jumping from one “scene” to another for no apparent reason; it is not chronological. Nor does one get a real sense of the duration of events in dreams. Dreams do not conform to the rules of conscious reality, such as linear time. We can also understand the idea of the timelessness of the unconscious when we consider that its contents include memories that do not necessarily correspond with lived events, but rather to ontogenetic and phylogenetic psychic realities. Thus, the unconscious exists “outside” of time; it is time-less.

1.2.2.2  The Scandal of the Timeless

Memories are events of the past relived in the present (in dreams, for example) and crystallized for the future. Slips of the tongue and neurotic symptoms are manifestations of the mental derivatives of a repressed wish or trauma, and while they can be managed or endured, symptoms are an interruption to one’s daily routine. The scandal of the timeless, then, according to

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57 Ibid., 28-29.
60 Indeed, note 1 on page 187 of SE 14 informs us that the timelessness of the unconscious is alluded to in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), SE 5, 577-78.
62 Such as the primal scene in *Totem and Taboo* and the pre-Oedipal identification with one’s “father of personal pre-history.”
Kristeva, is that though outside of time, it nevertheless “relies on the linear time of consciousness in order to inscribe a rift there, a breach, a frustration.” She notes that the word ‘scandal’ is derived from the term ‘detainment,’ so the unconscious is scandalous because it detains (arrests/interrupts) conscious time. Similarly, “the temporality of revolt is complex and inscribed in the linearity of time. Yet it starts by breaking it.”

For Kristeva, the “scandalous” temporality of the unconscious points to the presence and temporality of the death drive, which she asserts is the most original, urgent and persistent of all the drives. Turning to Freud, as Kristeva does, we see in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) evidence of what will later be called the death drive. Freud remarks that while “there exists in the mind a strong tendency towards the pleasure principle…that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency toward pleasure.” Later in the text, he elaborates on an already established opposition between the ego instincts and the sexual instincts, wherein the former “exercise pressure towards death and the latter towards a prolongation of life.” Hence, the terms ‘death instincts’ (or, rather, drives) and ‘life instincts.’ Furthermore, we learn that not only are the two classes of

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64 Ibid., 31.
65 Ibid., 25.
66 Kristeva describes the death drive as “the most instinctual of the instincts.” Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 30. See also Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987 [1983]), 31, 76 & 124 and Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984 [1974]), 28. Note that ‘instinct’ often used (including Strachey’s translations) as the English word for Freud’s German *Trieb*, as well as for the French *pulsion*; in both cases, but particularly the latter, I agree with the position that ‘drive’ is a more accurate English translation. Furthermore, despite the controversy surrounding the existence, definition or function of the so-called “death drive,” it remains a dominant theme in Kristeva’s work (as it did in that of Melanie Klein, on whose work Kristeva draws). The theme of negativity that the destructive/aggressive drive engenders is at the heart of some of Kristeva’s most influential theories, from the subject in process (more on this below) to abjection and her work on depression and melancholy, as well as her work on revolt.
68 Ibid., 44.
69 Though he treats this dualistic nature of the drives as a hypothesis at this point in the text, Freud continues to use the life/death, Eros/Thanatos, binding/unbinding distinction, and simply refines his definition of the nature and function of the drives.
instincts in tension with one another, but that the death drive is dominant: “the pleasure principle seems actually to serve the death instincts.”

Three years later, in 1923, he suggests that the aim of the drive is to “lead organic life back into the inanimate state” or to return to a state of homeostasis, to use Kristeva’s words. And finally, in 1937, Freud writes that we can “no longer adhere to the belief that mental events are exclusively governed by the desire for pleasure. [There] are unmistakable indications of the presence of a power in mental life which we call the instinct of aggression or of destruction according to its aims, and which we trace back to the original death instinct of living matter.”

The life drive, Eros, he says, is that which “endeavours to combine what exists into ever greater unities,” while Thanatos, the death drive, “endeavours to dissolve those combinations and to destroy the structures to which they have given rise.” Whether it is described as a trend towards death, a return to homeostasis or an unbinding force, the death drive works in opposition to the life drive, which means in opposition to the temporality of life and consciousness. Thus, it is the presence and power of the death drive that gives the unconscious its time-less attribute. As Kristeva explains, “[t]he Freudian Zeitlos…is opposed to the advance or increase of consciousness, as well as of life, that characterizes all temporality. In the extreme, it is the time of death.” And, as we have seen, this “time of death” should be understood as an interruption of time, a frustration, rupture or detainment of time: a scandalous temporality.

70 Freud, Beyond, SE 18, 63. The dominance (not just the presence) of the death drive is key to a number of Kristeva’s theories.
71 Freud, Ego and the Id in The Freud Reader, 645.
73 Freud, Analysis Terminable and Interminable (1937), SE 23, 243.
74 Ibid., 246.
75 For Kristeva, Freud goes beyond Heidegger. Though the latter ontologizes time (making Being coextensive with time, a Being thrown-in-the-world), his ‘being-toward-death’ still “temporalizes” (the translation of Heidegger’s verb Zeitigen, which means to bring about, to bring to maturity). And Freud’s discovery of the unconscious mind and its atemporality is therefore unique in that it does not temporalize; it exists outside of time. Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 29-31.
76 Ibid., 31.
While Freud maintains that the death instinct functions in opposition to the life instinct, he states that “life itself [is] a conflict and compromise between these two trends [toward continuance of life and striving towards death].” He likens the relationship between these forces with the interdependence that characterizes feelings of love and hate: “clinical observation shows not only that love is with unexpected regularity accompanied by hate (ambivalence), and not only that in human relationships hate is frequently a forerunner of love, but also that in a number of circumstances hate changes into love and love into hate.” In other words, the instinct to return to the archaic, to “lost time,” as it were, that is, the opposing, unbinding, detaining death drive, is also the force that excites, provokes and reinforces the life drive. This is why Kristeva terms it a paradoxical temporality: the timelessness of the unconscious, contradictory to yet inseparable from and dependent on the time of consciousness. The potential for productivity in light of the paradoxical structure of the psyche is important to grasp because it is only through the aforementioned rupture and countering life force that renewal can take place. This is a dynamic that Kristeva has long been trying to convey, as we can see in an excerpt taken from Revolution in Poetic Language (1974): “Although it is destructive – a ‘death drive’ – rejection is the very mechanism of reactivation, tension, life; aiming toward the equalization of tension, toward a state of inertia and death, it perpetuates tension and life.” Revolt is a rupture and a renewal. Or rather, revolt is a renewal because it is also a rupture.

Finally, published before but written after Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud writes in The Uncanny (1919), that “it is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a

77 Freud, Ego and the Id in The Freud Reader, 645-46.
78 Ibid., 647.
79 This should call to mind Kristeva’s theory of the production of language called semanalysis, in which the semiotic and symbolic registers are distinct, yet nonetheless dependent on each other – continually meeting in a scission, a thetic moment, in the maternal chora. While the drives produced and discharged in the semiotic chora are assimilated and ordered by the mother’s body (which serves as the mediator between the semiotic functions and the symbolic law, the connection to the social order and the speaking world), the semiotic drives are also destructive and revolt against the mother’s body. In this way, “the semiotic chora is no more than the place where the subject is both generated and negated, the place where his unity succumbs before the process of charges and stases that produce him.” Kristeva, Revolution, 28. In other words, the speaking being (cf. Lacan’s parlêtre) is as much a subject of the unconscious drives as she is subject to the unconscious drives – in flux between the semiotic and symbolic modes of language.
80 Kristeva, Revolution, 150.
‘compulsion to repeat’ proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts – a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character.” 81 And Freud of course goes on to elaborate the well-known notion of the repetition compulsion in Beyond. The mind’s resistances ultimately keep the instincts from ever being fulfilled and as such there is an inevitable repetition. 82 The death drive is thus a force that ruptures, yet provokes life. But it is also a permanent, persistent force. And this is why it is imperative that we seek to harness the power of the death drive and the endless opportunities it opens up for us. 83

1.2.2.3 (A)temporality in Psychoanalysis

As a journey to and an encounter with the unconscious, the practice (as much as the theory) of psychoanalysis confronts and exhibits the paradoxical temporality of Zeitlos. Kristeva explains, “while human existence is intrinsically linked to time, the analytical experience reconciles us with this timelessness [that characterizes the unconscious], which is that of the drive and more particularly the death drive.” 84

The first example of “the analytical timeless”85 is the memory-trace (Erinnerungsspur or Errinnerungsrest). As we saw above, the memory trace is a remnant of the repressed manifested in some psychic or somatic way. It is a scandalous intrusion of the past into the present. In the analytical context, the goal of the analyst is to help bring forgotten or repressed memories to consciousness. In Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (1914), to which Kristeva

81 Freud, The Uncanny (1919), SE 17, 238.
82 Freud, Beyond, SE 18, 42.
83 Kristeva claims that she wants “to dedramatize death” (because she believes it is “the Freudian way”). Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 32. And the role and power of “negativity” in Kristeva’s work should not go unnoticed or underappreciated. We can see it from the subversive semiotic that arises in part due to the death drive in the maternal chora (Revolution) and the birth of desire in the negativity of abjection (Powers) to the beautiful depression in Black Sun, and now here in the time and power of revolt.
84 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 12.
85 Ibid., 34.
refers, we see that Freud’s earliest method of therapy, hypnosis, helped the patient to remember events. But there were limitations to the hypnotic technique. In the case where the patient is unable (e.g., due to resistances) to remember a forgotten or repressed event, Freud writes that the “new technique” (transference) is needed. In this scenario, rather than remembering certain events or feelings, the patient will (unknowingly at first) repeat them, transfer them, as it were, through acting out, onto the analyst. “Repetition is a transference of the forgotten past. [...] He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action.” This acting out, this repetition of the past, this return of the repressed in transference is (yet again) counter to linear time, much like a scratched record skipping that, without intervention, would continue to skip indefinitely.

The stage that follows is Kristeva’s second aspect of the timeless in analysis: the stage of working-through (Durcharbeitung). She explains, “alongside remembering, which inscribes the past in the flow of consciousness (in linear time), alongside repeating, which signals the indestructible drive or the wish for pleasure, working-through is the central process around which the other two are articulated.” Freud describes working through as the process of turning the compulsion to repeat into a motive for remembering. And it happens by allowing the patient time and a safe space for the repetition to occur, making her aware of her resistances and working through them in order to uncover the repressed impulses that caused them. Recall that it is not as simple as identifying the resistance for the patient. Importantly, “one must allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted.” This means, of course, that the process of working through takes time, i.e., requires numerous sessions. But it also means – and this is crucial for Kristeva – in the context of

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86 One can remember with relative ease events that were once conscious (e.g., lived events from one’s childhood) but bringing events and feelings that were never conscious (i.e., primal events and phantasies) to consciousness is considerably harder. Freud, Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (1914), SE 12, 148-49.
87 Freud, Remembering, SE 12, 151. Freud sees this kind of repetition in transference as characteristic of the “newer [psychoanalytic] technique” as opposed to hypnosis, which induced remembering. Ibid., 152.
88 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 36.
89 Freud, Remembering, SE 12, 154.
90 Ibid., 155.
91 Ibid.
analysis the patient must be granted a suspension of time, a moment outside of real time, in which to carry out the therapeutic work with the analyst. Freud describes it thus: “an intermediate region between illness and real life through which the transition from the one to the other is made. The new condition has taken over all the features of the illness; but it represents an artificial illness which is at every point accessible to [the analyst’s] intervention.” On Kristeva’s view, in transference one experiences “timelessness,” a “stagnation,” a “dead time.” In the ideal scenario, working through resistances will bring about an intersection of suffering from (the time of) real life with that of the repetition (the time of death), the result of which is a healing *jouissance.*

The *dissolution of transference* is Kristeva’s final example of the analytical timeless. She draws on Freud’s *Analysis Terminable and Interminable* (1937), in which he reflects on whether or not it is possible to permanently cure someone, or whether analysis is in fact interminable. On one hand, practically speaking, analysis is of course terminable. There are many examples of therapy coming to an end because the analysand’s symptoms have disappeared and suffering has declined sufficiently so as to allow the person to function in the world. However, on the other hand, Freud admits that it is impossible to know for sure whether or not the analysand will regress or if unfortunate events will trigger old symptoms. If it is true that the contents and drives of the (timeless) unconscious are permanent, and that we are also always subject to new relationships and events in time, analytic work might well be an interminable task. The latter observation points to a most profound element of Freud’s text: the depiction of the subject as ever evolving and historically contingent (past, present and future). In light of this, Freud notes that the goal of analysis is not a permanent cure, in the sense that she will never suffer again, rather that the analysand is adequately *equipped* to face the demands of life and any further

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92 Ibid., 154.
94 Freud begins the text by asking, after noting how long a process analysis can be, if one can shorten the time of analysis. Then, in thinking about the question of time, he asks whether or not one can ever truly be cured. Freud, *AT&I, SE 23*, 234.
conflicts. Thus, in a sense, analytic work continues indefinitely. This is what Kristeva picks up on when she identifies the interminable (Unendliche) as “a third variant of the timeless and its decisive variant.”

In Kristeva’s description, at the end of analysis, with the dissolution of the transferential relationship, the subject goes through a process of separation from the analyst (that mirrors the original separation from the maternal). The analysand is confronted with the possibility of the analyst’s “death” as well as the fragility of his or her own identity and life. Kristeva explains:

The analyst is no longer the guarantor of meaning in my story, my desires, and my drives; the illusion of inter-subjectivity is over; quite simply, he or she no longer is, either the subject supposed to know or the agent of the timeless of my memory-traces or my hallucinatory states of working-through. I am alone, but since he/she no longer is and since I was him/her, in him/her and through him/her I no longer am.

This can trigger the profound melancholy and sadness that might accompany the end of any relationship and re-activates what Klein has called the depressive position. But, importantly, the end of transference and the associated depression imply that the analysand is ready to create new relationships:

If the putting to death of the conscious identity (that of my analyst and of my ego) has been attempted, it is because I myself am now capable, by myself, of moving forward in the time of becoming conscious. Having put my analyst (the other) to death, I nevertheless assure his [and my] survival through the re-creation of the transferential dynamic with other others.

Rather than focusing on the impossibility of a cure, Kristeva reads ‘interminable’ to mean without an end, open-ended, so that an “interminable analysis” is understood as extending beyond the context of analysis. This can happen because the patient, having confronted the impossible temporality that characterizes his or her unconscious, is now open to the future, and

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95 Ibid., 250.
96 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 39.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 40.
has tools to continue the infinite work of working through.⁹⁹ In this sense, Kristeva argues that the end of transference is a moment of rebirth and sets up the subject for countless more “rebirths.” And the tension between impossible resolution and infinite openness and hope is the “timelessness” of the dissolution of transference.

The point of this discussion is to illuminate Kristeva’s notion of revolt by exploring the ‘return of the archaic’ as it appears in the dynamics of repression and in the Freudian Zeitlos. In this context, one sees the movement and quality of revolt that she is trying to promote: “what is essential in anamnesis is not the confrontation between prohibition and transgression but rather the movements of repetition, working-through, working-out internal to the free association in transference.”¹⁰⁰ In sum, with this second figure of revolt, Kristeva theorizes revolt as a return, a rupture, a renewal, and a repetition.

1.3 The Combinatory/Games

The third instance of revolt that Kristeva links to Freud is what she calls “the combinatorial or the game.”¹⁰¹ While the theme of the second Freudian revolt is time, here it is space.¹⁰² Kristeva writes, “again, it is not a question of the confrontation between prohibition and transgression…but of topologies, spatial configurations that are more supple and probably more appropriate to this [current] situation.”¹⁰³ Admittedly, this is the most difficult instance of revolt to unpack in Kristeva’s work because she does not elaborate it explicitly. Rather, she states that it

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⁹⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰⁰ Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 28.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., 29.
¹⁰² One is unlikely to notice the subtle internal reference here; this coupling mirrors the mention of “Time and Space” in Kristeva’s discussion of the etymology of revolt. Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 3. She writes that the incorporation of notions of space and time marks the second shift in the meaning of the word revolt; the first shift implies the notion of movement. Ibid., 1. I suggest that the etymological notion of ‘movement’ is grounded in psychoanalytic terms in the Oedipal revolt, ‘time’ in the return of the archaic, and ‘space’ in the combinatorial or the game.
¹⁰³ Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 29.
“will appear when [she speaks] of the style and thought of Aragon, Sartre, and Barthes.”\textsuperscript{104} There are some clues to what she has in mind, though. Kristeva’s text tells us that the game is a third example or configuration of revolt. In French, the game (jeu) is a homonym with I (je), and in an earlier chapter\textsuperscript{105} Kristeva writes that the “so-called truth of the signifier or the speaking being” is that “it’s only a game (jeu), it’s only an ‘I’ (je), ‘I’ am pretending.”\textsuperscript{106} Thus, one can assume that here, too, the game is used as a synonym for the subject; subjectivity is a game, which is a kind of revolt. In other words, “I” am a possible instance of revolt. Furthermore, combinatory, according to the linguistic definition (which should be examined given Kristeva’s interest in language and semiology), refers to a sound change in words due to a specific context or a result of some historical or environmental factor, e.g., pronunciation changes of certain vowels from Old English to Middle English. This is in contrast to unconditioned or spontaneous (isolative) sound changes. As we know (from Freud among others), we are not isolated beings, but rather always already situated with respect to others in a given time and place. Thus we might conclude that “the combinatory” as revolt points to changes, mutations, and displacements, brought about because of and with respect to the subject’s historical circumstances.

How does this all relate to topologies and spatial configurations? In the psychoanalytic context, one is more likely to think of Lacan than of Freud when speaking of topologies. After all, Lacan is famous for moving beyond the Euclidian barriers that arguably kept Freud stuck to analogical and metaphorical models of the mind.\textsuperscript{107} Lacan’s topological representations include the Mobius Strip, the Torus, the Cross Cap and the Borromean Knot. Importantly, these three-dimensional models take into account inevitable changes and the movement inherent to the mind, the subject

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} The chapter is on women’s belief that the phallus is illusory.
\textsuperscript{106} Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 100. Preceding the quote: “Illusory’ basically means that this law, this pleasure, this phallic power and, simultaneously, their lack, to which I accede through the phallus…is a game. […] The phallus that ‘I’ invest is what makes me a subject of language and of law; there ‘I’ am. […] ‘I’ enter the game, ‘I’ want some, too, ‘I’ play along.” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} See Virginia Blum and Anna Secor, “Psychotopologies: closing the circuit between psychic and material space,” Society and Space 29, no. 6 (2011): 1030-1047.
as well as the transferential relationship. And it is the “supple” nature of topologies (of psychic space) that Kristeva highlights in this third figure of revolt. As explained by Virginia Blum and Anna Secor, “topologically speaking, a space is not defined by the distances between points that characterize it when it is in a fixed state but rather by the characteristics that it maintains in the process of distortion and transformation (bending, stretching, squeezing, but not breaking).”

While the innovation of topologies of the subject is obviously Lacanian, Kristeva sees his models as (more or less) representative of the Freudian subject. She would agree with Blum and Secor who write that although “Freud never uses the term topology,”

the psychic processes Freud describes are in many cases arguably topological: unconscious processes such as condensation and displacement, the transference (within and beyond the analytic situation), and the play of presence and absence, from object constancy to mourning, can all be thought of as topological structures wherein certain relations are maintained despite the distortions of the surface.

In other words, Kristeva is interested in exploring a kind of revolt that takes into account and in fact highlights the unstable and contingent nature of subjectivity.

1.3.1 Kristeva’s “Subject in Process”

The notion that “I” (the subject) am a possible instance of revolt is consistent with Kristeva’s view of subjectivity. Introduced in an early article called The System and the Speaking Subject (1975/1973) and worked out in greater detail in Revolution in Poetic Language (1984/1974), Kristeva derives her notion of subjectivity from her theory of the structure and operation of language (because all subjects are speaking beings, constituted in language). In brief, every linguistic operation, or signifying process, consists of two modalities: the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic register (distinguished from the general field of semiotics) is associated

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108 Blum & Secor, “Psychotopologies,” 1034.
109 Her chapter on “‘Language’ in the Freudian Discovery” outlines 3 models of language in Freud, the last of which presents the most dynamic vision of the speaking subject that has been attributed to Freud. Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 32-64. She calls this model of language signification – the same name that she gives the signifying process that she outlines in Revolution of Poetic Language. Essentially she seems to say here that her notion of the subject-in-process was always already there in Freud; she brought it to light with the elaboration of the maternal chora, hidden in Freud’s text.
110 Blum & Secor, “Psychotopologies,” 1034-35.
with unconscious, “ungoverned,” bodily drives and primary processes. Kristeva borrows the word *chora* from Plato in order to describe whence the semiotic drives emerge.\(^{111}\) The chora is a space that is neither definable nor containable; it is not a sign or a position that can be represented.\(^{112}\) Rather, the chora is theorized as a primordial, pulsating, rhythmic source of the so-called semiotic drives, whose operation in language ultimately precedes the formation of the subject and the establishment of the symbolic.\(^{113}\) In other words, the semiotic denotes the part of language that is hidden, fleeting and rhythmic and driven by impulses that are pre-spatial, pre-temporal, and pre-Oedipal. It is the precondition and motivation for speech. The symbolic, on the other hand, refers to conscious, signifying *systems* that order and structure the semiotic drives, and in so doing articulate meaning in the world. It is the grammar and syntax in language, and is conceptually analogous to biological constraints, familial and socio-political structures in society.

Importantly, the relationship between the two modalities is one of mutual reinforcement and dependence. While the semiotic *chora* precedes the emergence of the speaking subject and the formation of the symbolic, its drive energies are only made (partially and temporarily) visible through their articulation via the symbolic. And symbolic systems (such as a text) are ultimately meaningless without the motivation of the semiotic. That is, all conscious communication is motivated by something unconscious; no signifier has meaning without the signified. This occurs in every act of enunciation, which Kristeva calls a *thetic* moment (the positing of a thesis). “Because the subject is always *both* semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he [sic] produces can be either ‘exclusively’ semiotic or ‘exclusively’ symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.”\(^{114}\) Furthermore, there is a necessary and constant *flux* between the two registers. The symbolic systems may provisionally order the semiotic drives, but the latter will always return and disrupt the former. As a result, subjectivity is not something you finally attain or an event you arrive at, but an ongoing *process*. Kristeva

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\(^{112}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{113}\) Ibid., 41.

thus calls the speaking subject the “subject in process” (*le sujet-en-procès*). “‘Process’ in the sense of [progression] but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial,” she explains, “because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled.”\(^{115}\) She calls this process *signification*.\(^{116}\) Like many postmodern thinkers, Kristeva hereby challenges the notion of the fixed Cartesian subject. Instead, we should understand subjectivity – much like “Truth” and “meaning” – as unstable, contingent and evolving. Because the subject is not fixed but open, there is always an opportunity for reinvention, and in a way, then, for revolt.

### 1.3.2 Revolt Against Identity

In Kristeva’s introductory remarks on Aragon, Sartre and Barthes, she writes, “The innovation of their texts, which has yet to be fully appreciated, resides in the revolt against identity.”\(^{117}\) Keeping the above discussion in mind, then, when she states that these authors’ texts are revolts against identity, she means, in part, that these authors are rebels because they challenge the idea that identity is fixed. In the case of Aragon, for example, his participation in the surrealist movement represents an obvious link to revolt in the sense that surrealism is known as an attack on rationalist thought, and bourgeois values more broadly, prevalent in the early twentieth century. With their depictions of illogical, contradictory realities, and shocking, disturbing or mysterious imagery, the surrealists sought to counter mainstream, conservative, pragmatic thinking with the enigmatic, violent workings of the imagination and the unconscious. Without entering the strictly political sphere (at least in the beginning), Aragon’s writing is a kind of poetic revolt of the ephemeral, the scandalous, and the erotic. Kristeva explains that for Aragon,


\(^{116}\) Kristeva, *Revolution*, 17; Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 49 & 55. With her subject-in-process, Kristeva responds, on the one hand, to theorists who try to correct the omission in formal linguistics of the unconscious drives and psychic processes in language. While she thinks that it is important to recover the pre-Oedipal “fragmented body,” these theories do not take into account the semantic-symbolic dimension of language inherent to all speaking beings. Kristeva, *Revolution*, 22. And, on the other hand, there is the trend in modern linguistics that overemphasizes semantics and signification and ultimately overlooks the role of the unconscious energies. Kristeva, *Revolution*, 23. Kristeva’s *signification* takes into account both sides of the signifying process.

\(^{117}\) Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 18.
“there were no other solutions to thought or living but writing, that only writing could legitimately rise up against watered-down opinion and art, that writing alone was a revolt in favor of the miraculous and the seizure of thought without utilitarian compromise.”118 She explains that writing, for Aragon and the surrealists, was a source of and access to a-thought. A-thought, anti-thought – a revolt against (calculated) thought. Take care not to read this as being opposed to thinking per se. A-thought is an act of thinking that allows for the expression of the unconscious and individual affect; it is opposed to purely rational and conformist thought and by extension, in this case, against the conventional, bourgeois identity. At the same time, Aragon does not offer an alternative identity. Kristeva’s analysis reveals that in both Aragon’s writing as well as in his own biography, “identity” is experienced and represented as unstable and uncertain. “‘At every instant, I betray myself, I refute myself, I contradict myself. I am not someone I trust,’ [Aragon] proclaims in ‘Révélations sensationnelles.’”119 This language brings to mind Kristeva’s subject “on trial.” Indeed, identity becomes a game in the sense of playing different roles. She remarks that even he described himself and his writing as “‘le mentir-vrai’ (the true lie): the ambition to tell the truth through a thousand disguises, masks, theatricality.”120

Aragon’s personality, life, and work give the impression – call it subjective, or ontological; in any case, it seems unshakable – of never being univocal, of scattering in pastiche, simulacrum, and approximation, so many roundabout ways of expressing truth. This is the truth of an impossible identity, not a being in the world or a nonbeing but a continuous variation….121

There is no subject per se, but rather a subject-in-process.

The same theme returns in Kristeva’s analyses of Sartre and Barthes. Sartre’s existential writing portrays subjectivity as a permanent contradiction – “a being uprooted ceaselessly by its confrontation with nonbeing”122 – much like the subject-in-process, whose consciousness is held

118 Ibid., 116.
119 Ibid., 124.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., 124-125. (Emphasis added).
122 Ibid., 165.
in tension with its (destructive) unconscious drives. As we saw in Oedipus, the subject-in-process must continually overcome the negation of self and the other, a double negation that is inherent to the process of becoming a speaking being. And Barthes is known for unraveling and questioning identity through his “demystification” of meaning and values in literature. Through his interpretation of literary and political texts, Kristeva writes, he was able to see “the fact that human beings in the second half of the twentieth century had arrived at an experience of meaning that overthrew...the possibility of meaning itself: Is there a unity – an “I,” a “we” – that can have meaning or seek meaning? This is pretty much the question Barthes raised.” And by now the answer should be obvious. Barthes, like Kristeva, to be sure (and Foucault and Butler to name a few more) was a rebel in the sense that he challenged what others took for granted. Barthes “began to distrust the meaning that his contemporaries considered natural and [...] he chose, on the contrary, to undo and displace [it].” Note that this is not the same as opposing an obvious oppressor (person, regime, or system), but questioning what is otherwise accepted and appears to be normal. According to Kristeva, Barthes’ interpretation was a discreet and invisible revolt.

Kristeva identifies the revolt against identity for Aragon as a revolt against the identity of sex and meaning, for Sartre of being and the other, and for Barthes of ideas and politics. Furthermore, for each author, it is through language and writing that he confronts the impossibility of being/truth/meaning. Aragon’s writing is a form of a-thought, Sartre’s novels and plays explore “fragmentation, separation, and the conflict of consciousnesses” and “Barthes tried to define écriture as a negativity, a movement that questions all ‘identity.’” Rather than a

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123 “[Sartre’s] bastard/actor/intellectual continuously betrays being and struggles against it relentlessly, through negativity, in nonbeing.” Ibid.
124 Ibid., 182.
125 Ibid., 189.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid., 188.
128 Ibid., 188.
129 Ibid., 18.
129 Ibid., 180 & 193.
transgression of a prohibition, here, in Kristeva’s third variant of revolt, we see (literature as) revolt in the sense of questioning, thinking, interpreting, such that identity is revealed to be a perpetual (psychical) game. These authors’ works reveal the fragile, temporary and contingent nature of subjectivity. Aragon by emphasizing the polyvalence and permanence of the unconscious; Sartre by highlighting the ceaseless conflict with the (internal and external) other; Barthes by bringing attention to the body and affect concealed in “natural language.” Ultimately, in each case, it is the persistent relationship between the (negativity of the) semiotic and the symbolic that characterizes this third figure of revolt.

1.3.3 The Risk of Revolt

An important element of the Kristevan revolt revealed through this third variant is risk. Kristeva’s analyses of these rebellious authors highlight the violence that underlies the ability to revolt and the dangerous lure of seeking stability through “adherence” to fixed identities. It is because of our inherent (psychic) negativity that we are capable of revolt, but it is also because of this negativity that we could lose ourselves in adherence to some cause or group, or self-destruct in psychosis or death. What we find is that revolt is a precarious journey, and without caution and continual renewal it can become a “tragic revolt.”

Some of you may be familiar with Aragon’s biography; his focus on action through writing shifted to more explicit political action with his involvement with the French Communist Party. Kristeva describes how his writing was in many ways a representation of numerous

\[\text{\cite{130}}\] [Ibid., 190.]
\[\text{\cite{131}}\] This theme is visited in her book, *Black Sun* (1989 [1987]), in which she theorizes depression and melancholy as sources of creativity but also in extreme cases, if it is not worked-through and represented, that same depression can result in (literal or symbolic) death. Thus the goal here too is to harness the power of our inherent negativity without letting it become destructive.
\[\text{\cite{132}}\] [Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 146.]
\[\text{\cite{133}}\] [Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 133.]
unconscious dramas and experiences of love and loss etcetera.\textsuperscript{134} And while it contributed at first to the efforts of the surrealist movement to shock and shake the bourgeois conservatism, it became too much for him to bear. As we read in Freud, confronting, assuming and working through one’s psychic life is not quick or easy; it can be painful, scary and laborious.\textsuperscript{135} Kristeva suggests that finally Aragon could not handle this deeply emotional pursuit and rather than continuing down the arduous path of writing-as-revolt, he opted for the more obvious and organized, political revolt. “The political choice might have served as an unconscious counterbalance to the risks of the imaginary. [...] It was as if political adherence brought balance to the ravaging disorder of his affective and passionate experiences.”\textsuperscript{136} Sartre, for his part, also took pride in being a rebel writer and was motivated by the freedom he saw that accompanied anti-capitalism and anti-allegiances of any kind (he even refused the Noble Prize based on this logic); but he too became heavily and unquestionably aligned with leftist socialism.\textsuperscript{137} an affiliation that many will disparage.

Both Aragon and Sartre are now somewhat controversial figures; the originality of their work is tainted for some by their political associations.\textsuperscript{138} For her part, Kristeva wants to explore and make clear the potential reasons for these choices, to help others avoid falling into the same trap, while at the same time still to acknowledge the elements of their lives and work that engender the spirit of revolt that she is proposing. In response to the case of Aragon, Kristeva writes by way of explanation: “Adherence, starting with adhering to a relationship, involves an assurance of identity that guarantees our survival. [...] If we can now make out the historical and social causes of totalitarianism, it is not certain that we have dismantled the psychical motivations for it

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\textsuperscript{134} E.g., growing up without a father and surrounded by women (his mother and 3 sisters).
\textsuperscript{135} Kristeva, \textit{Sense and Non-sense}, 130.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{138} Barthes does not get actively involved with political parties, as do the other two authors. His controversy lies in his supposed nihilism (a claim levied against quite a few so-called structuralists, including Kristeva), which Kristeva seeks to disprove.
\end{small}
nor that we are safe from the need for identity." Safe from (the danger that accompanies) the need for identity. In what sense is the need for identity dangerous? To be sure, Kristeva is especially sensitive to both the allure and potential problems of social groupings and mass movements due to personal experiences. She sees two primary “dangers”: one is foregrounding the goals of the group at the expense of individuals’ needs; the second is the often violent exclusion of the ‘other’ on which a collective identity is formed. For her, the terrorism of totalitarian regimes is the most obvious proof of what can happen when people lose their (unstable) selves in a (stabilizing) group (cf. Freud’s *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921)). And it is a problem in politics as much as it is for religions and social movements. Any given collective may share a socio-political context, but every individual has a personal story and a unique psychic life in relation to that context. By setting up a single horizon and a single perspective, only the needs of a particular group are addressed; a subject’s specific psychic needs are ignored, suppressed, or undervalued. This is partly what Barthes’ interpretations reveal. For example, he critiques certain intellectual writing and intellectuals, which, Kristeva explains, ultimately function as institutions, constituting a state within the state, a power. This writing is the opposite of writing-as-risk, the novel or essay [...]. On the contrary [...] if I sign on with fifty people, or if I write a book that is supposed to express the opinion of the group whose power I share, then my form is not my form; it is collective property. Beneath an apparent assertion of singularity, I dilute myself in the collective, I am the property of the institution in whose name I speak.  

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139 Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 147.  
140 She grew up in Communist Bulgaria and was witness to the failure of the Paris riots, the “fall” of Marxism and more recently, exclusion and violence due to race and religion world-wide.  
141 As a Bulgarian woman in male-dominated Parisian academia, Kristeva is an outsider, a foreigner on more than one account, and this undoubtedly inspires her passionate interest in the exclusion of the ‘other.’  
142 Kristeva’s essay “Women’s Time” (1979) is a hotly debated piece, in which she critiques first and second generations of feminism and proposes the inevitability and necessity of a third generation to come. Kristeva condemns first-wave feminists for being universalistic in their search for equality and warns the second-wave activists that their philosophy of difference also permits a global conception of woman, although now different from, rather than equal to man. Her concern is that in banding together under the title ‘Woman’ – capital W – for whatever socio-political agenda, women (with an e) lose sight of the important particularities that each individual female subject has to offer. The method and motivation of each generation may change, from identification with the dominant ‘masculine’ scheme or a united negation of that scheme, but the result remains the same: the sacrifice of individual identities for a collective one. In addition, she warns against the rejection of the ‘other’ on which the formation of a collective identity depends.  
143 Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 207.
This is important because while Kristeva often presents literature as an experience of a revolt, not all writing constitutes revolt. And that is why we are exploring in this chapter the movement and qualities of the Kristevan revolt.

In the case of Sartre, the initial source of his revolt became that which squashed it. “His concern to detach himself from Western conformism had blinded him, and he adhered completely, without the spirit of revolt he demanded elsewhere, to a certain leftist propaganda of the time.” The spirit of revolt that Kristeva has in mind is that which we are discussing here, that she will later call an ‘intimate revolt.’ And what we have seen is that revolt is a continuous process. In the case of revolt as a game, as a challenge to identity, it is a game without an end (an interminable analysis), a challenge that must be re-enacted over and over again. Barthes quite closely exemplifies the Kristeva revolt because he believes in a continual interpreting and unveiling, as it were, of writing and language. She describes him as a “delicate intellectual force of a man” who, “in this world dominated by popular culture [asserts] that culture exists and keeps us alive, but only provided we ceaselessly decipher it, that is, critique it in order to displace it endlessly.” It appears that he is someone after her own heart.

Kristeva refers to Aragon, Sartre and Barthes as rebels of the “imaginary” (in and through writing/language). But the subject in revolt, to remain as such, must constantly negotiate, so to speak, the fundamental violence inherent to the imaginary. While Aragon’s texts are an expression of “beautiful destructive rage” and indeed “a rebellious burst of the imaginary,” he unfortunately turned to a more tangible and stabilizing revolt in Stalinism. And for Sartre, his

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144 Ibid., 152.
145 But even Barthes, she says, can forget to be prudent and become “slightly caustic.” Ibid., 207.
146 Ibid., 189.
147 Ibid., 167.
148 Ibid., 133.
“whole rebellious position [is tainted] in that it did not go so far as to challenge what he called ‘socialism.’”\footnote{Ibid., 155.} Thus, despite their revolts against identity, the need for adherence was too strong (esp. Aragon) and while they questioned the dominant socio-political discourse, they failed to question the one envisioned as its replacement (esp. Sartre). Writing and interpretation as revolt degenerated in these cases into a tragic (read: unquestioned, defensive, even deluded) revolt. Kristeva recognizes the dangers of the game (“I”): “the path for revolt is narrow,” she writes.\footnote{Ibid., 78.} But it is a risk we must be willing to take.

2 Concluding Remarks

The goal of this chapter has been to elucidate, via Freud and the controversial rebels, the psychoanalytic foundation, complexity and depth of Kristeva’s reconceptualization of revolt. Importantly, what should now be clear is that in contrast to revolt in the political sphere – though still with political implications (more on this later) – revolt is an experience of the imaginary: “psychical revolt, personal revolt, and consequently revolt as a form of aesthetic expression.”\footnote{Ibid., 144.} First, by exploring revolt in terms of the transgression-prohibition dialectic in Freud, I have shown the constitutional need for rebellion. Second, by looking at revolt in terms of the time and method associated with anamnesis, we have seen the notion of revolt as a repetitive process of retrospection and introspection. Finally, by looking at revolt in light of the game in Aragon, Sartre and Barthes, with a detour through the subject-in-process, we can see revolt as a profound and dangerous engagement with one’s (inter- and intra-psychic) identity. All three of these figures of revolt, but especially the last two, set the stage for Kristeva’s discussion of what she calls intimate revolt, which is also the title of volume two of *The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*. I will explore the meaning and implication of intimate revolt in the next chapter.
Chapter 2: Intimate Revolt

In 2010, as part of a retrospective of her work at the MOMA, Marina Abramović performed a piece in which she sat in the middle of a large room on a wooden chair and engaged visitors, who were seated opposite her, one at a time, with silent stares (first with a table separating them and then without). She did this for 90 days in a row. The retrospective was called “The Artist Is Present” and that is precisely what this original piece was about: her ceaseless presence. Almost a million people came to see the exhibit. People lined up to sit across from her, and many were brought to tears. In an interview, Abramović was asked why she thinks, after such a long career, this particular performance brought her such mainstream attention and fame. Beyond the exposure that the venue itself provided, which she admits was important for the success of the piece, Abramović shares the following reflection:

You see what is incredible here...absence of the story...there is no story, there is no beginning, there is no end, nothing’s going to happen; I will always be there for you, any amount of time. And then, vulnerability of American public who actually don’t have any time and, then, don’t have any kind of relation to their own self and plus, you know, nobody spend attention looking in each other’s eyes.  

The details of this performance and the artist’s interpretation of the experience set the stage for a discussion on Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt. Abramović’s account reflects, on the one hand, Kristeva’s diagnosis of Western subjectivity, and on the other, the need for (a certain kind of) engagement with one’s “own self.” As we will see, Kristeva would call this type of timeless presence a gift (the artist is a present) of time, in light of the “rat race” mentality that characterizes North American culture, but also a gift in the sense of giving each individual an opportunity, even just for a moment, to engage a part of herself that is otherwise overlooked – an opportunity for personal revolt. In the context of our modern culture of entertainment and distraction, the presence of the artist in this case, as much as the analyst, on Kristeva’s view, ultimately offers a gift of one’s inner life: bringing the intimate to life. So what is the intimate?

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And, aside from going to see a psychoanalyst or staring into the eyes of Marina Abramović, how do we access it? In other words, what is *intimate* revolt?

1 The Intimate

Kristeva’s reconceptualization of revolt in psychoanalytic terms helps support her position that ‘revolt culture’ is not intended as some kind of political anarchy. Rather, she emphasizes the capacity of the individual to revolt on a personal, *psychic* level; she calls for a (re)turn to the *intimate.* The seeds of what she means by the ‘intimate’ are planted in *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt,* but she offers a thorough exploration in volume two of the series, aptly called *Intimate Revolt.* Looking at this will help us understand more clearly what Kristeva is proposing in terms of a culture of revolt, and ultimately how religion may or may not fit into this vision, and how this notion of revolt can help us understand and speak differently about modern religious experiences.

To a large extent, we can intuit what Kristeva means by the ‘intimate’: Thoughts, experiences and feelings that we only speak about with people we trust or with no one at all. In French, a diary is called a *journal intime* (intimate journal) – a name that implies an important difference between an objective report of events, as in a newspaper (*le journal* in French) and a subjective account. The regular journal is for anyone and everyone; the *intimate* journal is personal and private – a place to bear/bare (simultaneously) one’s heart and soul. We also speak of intimacy in a relationship with reference to physical closeness and emotional connectedness. It implies a privileged knowledge of someone that is not obviously apparent or available to the general public. Finally, one might have intimate knowledge of a set of ideas or a belief system because of a longtime, thorough, personal investment in that knowledge. Ideas, beliefs and values, then, are intimate in the sense that they are linked to one’s personal identity (construction). To be sure, one of the offshoots of being an academic, for example, is the vulnerability experienced when making one’s ideas public. Even outside academia it is not uncommon for a critique of an ethical, religious or political position to be felt as a *personal* attack. In fact, all of these cases point to a sense of vulnerability; sharing something intimate is a form of self-exposure.
Colloquially, it is who we are—“for real” and “deep down.” Kristeva describes the intimate as “what is most profound and most singular in the human experience.”

In her text, Kristeva compares the intimate to the “interiority that the Greeks called ‘soul.’” Much like the notion of the soul, all of the above examples point to the existence of something that cannot be adequately defined, but an experience to which we all can relate, in varying degrees of intensity and awareness. “You don’t know the real me,” people have been known to say. And it is common to feel that there is a part of ourselves that we keep safe (from scrutiny and judgment) and hidden from the rest of the world. However, psychoanalysis teaches us that we are ultimately unknowable even to ourselves. Starting with Freud, we see that the (unconscious) id can never fully become conscious, even if some elements appear in dreams, symptoms and slips of speech. Lacan, too, speaks of an aspect of the psyche called the real that cannot be posited. It is a dimension associated with the immediacy and undifferentiated state of early infancy, which is necessarily left behind when one recognizes herself as separate from other objects and finally learns to speak and symbolize. Thus, language acquisition is always accompanied by a feeling of lack—a sense that something about us is irretrievably lost. Indeed, for Lacan, we can never have full and complete knowledge of ourselves (or the world) because the real escapes symbolization. There are only clues that point to its existence, its persistence, experienced when the symbolic breaks down (when words and other signifiers fail us). The real

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153 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 44. Along similar lines, Mari Ruti theorizes a Lacanian theory of “subjective singularity,” summarized here: “the singular self emerges in response to a galvanizing directive arising from the real. This directive summons the individual to a “character” beyond his or her social and intersubjective investments. Consequently, singularity expresses the individual’s nonnegotiable distinctiveness, eccentricity, or idiosyncrasy at the same time as it prevents both symbolic and imaginary closure.” Ruti, “The Singularity of Being: Lacan and the Immortal Within,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 58, no. 6 (2010): 1113. See also by Ruti: *The World of Fragile Things* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), 107-111 and *The Singularity of Being* (2012).

154 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 44.

155 Kristeva remarks that this limited access to the unconscious is not there from the beginning in Freud. She explains that in his early writing, language was an intermediary between the conscious and unconscious mind, making the latter, in fact, decipherable. Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 40-41. This changed after 1912, with the development of his theory of drives, particularly the death drive, and his structural model of the mind (in the 1920s) (which succeeded his economic and topographical models). See Kristeva, “The Metamorphoses of Language in the Freudian Discovery (Freudian Models of Language)” in *Sense and Non-sense*, 32-64.
is “impossible” (to access, to symbolize) and unknowable, and thus, for Lacan, so are we.156 Finally, Kristeva also sees the subject as fundamentally alienated from itself. Her theory of an originary loss (in abjection), which I will elaborate on below, overlaps with but modifies the Lacanian view of the subject’s constitutive lack that I have just mentioned. A more explicit example, however, can be found in Strangers to Ourselves (1991 [1988]), in which she draws on Freud’s concept of the “uncanny” (Unheimlich).157 The experience of the uncanny, as elaborated by Freud, does not simply designate the experience of something frightening, foreign, out of the ordinary or supernatural, but rather of something that seems foreign and yet is strangely (secretly) familiar.158 According to Freud, the uncanny signals the return of things repressed and forgotten.159 In the context of her book, which addresses the social conflicts that arise when people feel threatened by those who are different, Kristeva argues that it is only upon accepting my own inherent uncanny-ness, my own “foreignness,” that I might begin to accept the foreignness of others. She explains that the “other” is as much inside of me as outside; “the other is my (‘own and proper’) unconscious;”161 my unconscious, in a way, is other to me. Hence, I

156 Lacan’s notion of existential lack is predicated on his famous pre-Oedipal ‘mirror stage’ (1936), in which a child begins to invest in her own ego, to assert and understand herself as an I. Roughly between 6 and 18 months, a child recognizes her own image in a mirror. The image is her, but at the same time she is aware that it is not her; it is separate from her. Drawing on Gestalt theory, Lacan posits that the child sees the image as independent, perfect and whole, while her own experience remains one of dependence and incompleteness. As a result, she feels fragmented and insecure. She thus longs to reunite with the Gestalt, the perfect image, an Ideal Ego, in order to regain the perceived lost wholeness. (It is important to note that, for Lacan, the sublime wholeness and unity that we long for never existed). She attempts to unite with the ideal ego by positing and identifying with various imaginary objects. Accordingly, Lacan refers to this as the “imaginary stage,” the function of which persists beyond this chronological stage of development. For more on the mirror stage, see The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli, notes by John Forrester (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 45-63, 102-113, 166-171. See also Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, trans. Bruce Fink, in collaboration with Heloise Fink and Russell Grigg (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 3-9, 42, 129-131, 186. Lacan’s discussion of das Ding (the Thing) is also useful in understanding his notion of constitutional lack. He describes the Thing as an emptiness at the center of the real that is “fundamentally veiled.” The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, translated with notes by Dennis Porter (New York & London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997), 118.

157 Unheimlich translates directly as “unhomely.”

158 See Freud, The Uncanny, SE 17, 219-226.

159 Ibid., 245.

160 Social unease and political debate related to high immigration rates (particularly of North African Muslims) was widespread in France at the time of the book’s publication.

am a stranger to myself. This has been outlined because, for Kristeva, the intimate necessarily includes that which is inaccessible to our conscious minds: my unconscious “real,” my unnamable soul, my uncanny self. In other words, the intimate is not only something you know about yourself and keep private, it is something that you unknowingly experience, something that simply affects you.

On a related note, the intimate is not limited to “the activity of the thinking ego.” Kristeva warns against the tendency to presume (based on the long-standing division in Western metaphysics) that the life of the mind is somehow separate from the body. After all, one of the innovations of her subject in process is her notion of the “semitic,” unconscious drives as profoundly bodily (and maternal), and their important, persistent role in signification (which had henceforth gone underestimated, if not ignored). Thus, if the intimate includes my conscious and unconscious mind, as we have just seen, then it refers to thoughts as much as emotions — words as much as feelings. We see this clearly when Kristeva argues that psychoanalysis provides an experience of the intimate precisely because it “appeal[s] to psychical life as both discourse and affect, indissolubly.”

2 The Imaginary (Access to the Rebellious Intimate)

How do we access and mobilize the intimate in order to carry out this psychic revolt? Kristeva explains that it is by and through “the imaginary.” Recall that it is not via (typical) political channels that she is suggesting we revolt. “Faced with the invasion of the spectacle,” says

162 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 44.
163 See Kristeva, Revolution.
164 Kristeva’s stress on the role and power of affect in signification is reiterated in In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987 [1985]), 4-9, 26-27. Her focus on affect is a deliberate supplement to what she perceives as missing in the work of Lacan, who is known for his emphasis on the role of language in the (structure of the) unconscious. Her chapter “The Metamorphoses of Language in the Freudian Discovery” in Sense and Non-sense, 32-64, outlines her reading of the role of language in Freud, which implies an error in Lacan’s emphasis on language in his “return to Freud.”
165 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 49.
Kristeva, “we can still contemplate the rebellious potentialities that the imaginary might resuscitate in our innermost depths.”

In psychoanalytic theory, “the imaginary” is perhaps most commonly associated with Lacan’s registers (the Real, the Imaginary, the Symbolic). As we have seen, Kristeva is in many ways indebted to Lacanian psychoanalysis; her notion of the symbolic register of language vis-à-vis the semiotic is by and large modeled after Lacan’s symbolic order. Here, too, there are similarities with the Lacanian imaginary but Kristeva’s version is a reformulation of Lacan’s, with some important distinctions. On one hand, what Kristeva means by “the imaginary” refers to what we might commonly refer to as the “imagination” – things that we know are “make-believe” and are expressed consciously in the symbolic world. On the other hand, once again, the Kristeva imaginary includes important pre- and non-symbolic dimensions of the mind, established at the earliest moment of an infant’s psychic development. To better understand Kristeva’s imaginary, we turn to her 1980s trilogy: *Powers of Horror* (1982/1980), *Tales of Love* (1987/1983), *Black Sun* (1989/1987). This textual detour will show why and how the imaginary is the gateway, so to speak, to intimate revolt.

### 2.1 Birth of the Imaginary

We saw in chapter one that we are psychically constituted by revolt. However, the Oedipal conflict occurs at the stage when a child learns to speak; it is the last of the stages of subjectification. When Kristeva speaks of “the rebellious potentialities” of “our innermost

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166 Ibid., 13.
167 In Kristeva, as we will see, the subject is a subject of primary loss versus the Lacanian subject predicated on lack, and the corresponding need for illusion and love, in Kristeva’s account, and for the Law in Lacan’s. See Beardsworth, *Psychoanalysis & Modernity*, especially pages 62 & 71.
168 This is defined as “a content that is more or less accessible to reflection and consciousness.” John Lechte, “The Imaginary and the Spectacle: Kristeva’s View,” in *Julia Kristeva: Live Theory*, eds. Maria Margaroni and John Lechte (London: Continuum, 2004), 123.
depths,” she is (also) referring to an even more primary rebellion. Kristeva has devoted much of her career to exploring and highlighting the pre-Oedipal moments in a child’s development.\(^{170}\)

In fact, among her most innovative and renowned theoretical contributions are those that have to do with the psychic dynamics of the child’s relationship with its mother, which precedes both interactions with the Oedipal father and the mirror stage.\(^ {171}\) Looking at the psychic dynamics that prepare the subject for the moment of primary narcissism and her reformulation of the classic narcissistic structure helps us understand the Kristevan imaginary.

### 2.1.1 Abjection

For Kristeva, the first psychic event is the separation from the maternal object. She submits that before any move to signification can be made, but also before the child can begin to contemplate its own reflection and imagine/create external objects, the child must undergo a process of separation from and “loss” of the mother, with whom it is first and most intimately connected. She calls the process, ‘abjection.’ In Powers of Horror (1982), Kristeva describes the abject – in great poetic detail – as something repulsive, un-nameable, and something “not me,” and yet it feels like it might be coming from within me as much as from without. While I am disgusted by it and afraid of being engulfed back into it, I am simultaneously drawn to it. It is intoxicating yet stifling.\(^ {172}\) Abjection then is the violent rejection of the abject. In the context of the mother-child dyad, it refers to the process by which the child leaves, separates from, and ultimately, rejects the mother. In a very literal sense abjection refers to the severing of one body from another, but it also involves the psychic rupture and emotional turmoil – excitement and fear, love and

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\(^{170}\) This is partly due to the influence of object relation theorists Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott, and Lacan.

\(^{171}\) According to Kristeva, Freud over-emphasizes the role of the Oedipal father in the establishment of the subject and society. In Freud’s Totem & Taboo, the women, who are the primal father’s possessions, are relegated to the sidelines of the story after the parricide, and the subsequent emphasis on ritually re-enacting the sacrifice of the father overshadows the fact that, on her view, women (esp. mothers) are sacrificed as much as and prior to the father in the establishment of subjectivity and the sacred-social organization of society. See Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense of Revolt, 45.

aggression – that accompanies those initial attempts to “release the hold of maternal entity.”173 Taking place before the Oedipal phase, abjection of the mother is in fact the most original act of revolt.

The child does not (cannot) simply decide to lose/leave the mother. It is, from the very beginning, even *in utero*, confronted with an impending, threatening otherness. As much as the child is connected to the mother, in her body, through the umbilical cord, there is also a permanent division, a boundary, in the uterine wall. There is a passing of fluids but still a wall. After birth and into the first months of its life, this simultaneous unity and division haunts the child, who wants to be wholly assimilated with the mother, to return to some imagined perfect unity, but who wants to be free of her as well. That is, in the original dyad, the child needs, loves and desires the mother, but she is also necessarily experienced as vile and menacing. In Kristeva’s prose: “Fascinating and unsettling, [the abject] solicits desire, but desire is not seduced: frightened, it turns away; disgusted, it rejects.”174 In other words, the desire – unattainable of course – to return to some imagined state of unity (with the mother and one’s own otherness) and the beckoning by the abject will always remain. The mother must be rejected in order for the child to eventually become an autonomous subject, and yet the child will always feel the pull from this strange m/other – even if the original wholeness is an illusion. That is, “the abject is the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost.”175 Abjection consists of the desire to assimilate with the maternal object, to return to an imagined perfect unity, and the simultaneous repulsion against it, the desire to be autonomous. Abjection, for Kristeva, signals the subject’s original division and loss, on which all its relations to future objects are founded. As she explains, “The abjection of self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. […] All abjection is in fact recognition

173 Kristeva, *Powers*, 13. Childbirth is an obvious example of the separation process, and one can perhaps intuitively recognize the violence, passion, loss, pain and joy (sometimes ecstasy) associated with this event.
of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded.”\textsuperscript{176} She calls this a revolt of being.

Like everything repressed, the abject is bound to return, and thus the revolt is reactivated over and over again. Even though we never fully recover from it, it is thanks to that original rejection, separation and loss that we can eventually emerge and assert ourselves as speaking subjects: “There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being…ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. […] And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. […] ‘I’ am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death.”\textsuperscript{177} The rupture and separation of abjection is the primary revolt that initiates the process of subjectification, which culminates, as we saw above, with the (albeit temporary) resolution of the Oedipus complex. Not only is abjection foundational for our being, but through the want-loss of the mother, abjection lays the foundation for the workings of the imagination\textsuperscript{178} and for all future signification (significance). The loss of the mother, though it will haunt us forever, is the reason that we are beings subject to and of desire,\textsuperscript{179} which ultimately gives us reason to revolt and reiterate ourselves over and over again. It is this rebellious tendency of our “innermost depths” – of the intimate – that we need to tap into in order to confront and ultimately change today’s complacent and conformist culture.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[176]{Ibid., 5.}
\footnotetext[177]{Ibid., 1-3.}
\footnotetext[178]{Ibid., 5.}
\footnotetext[179]{According to Beardsworth’s fine-tuned analysis, there is a subtle but important distinction between the desiring subject according to Lacan versus Kristeva. In the case of the former, the desiring subject is tied solely to its constitutive lack that turns on the events of the mirror stage. And if desire is born of lack – a transposition of a demand that can never be fulfilled, then it too is impossible to fulfill; desire is therefore “receding” and metonymical. For the latter, the loss of the mother, which precedes the mirror stage, is coextensive with a presence beyond the initial mother-child dyad that “permits a protection against emptiness.” Beardsworth, \textit{Psychoanalysis & Modernity}, 71. Indeed, the mother’s desire (for an other) inscribes a rift between the mother-child unity. However, Kristeva introduces the notion of “a withdrawing presence…that [preserves] emptiness” (Ibid), inscribing a potentiality within the subject that functions vis-à-vis the loss/emptiness caused by abjection (Ibid., 281, n. 10). In this case desire is born of loss, which is perhaps similar to lack, but is accompanied by a loving potential that can be fulfilled symbolically. It is an understated difference that I conceptualize as the difference between being fundamentally lacking and fundamentally open. See chapter 2.1.2.}
\end{footnotes}
2.1.2 Primary Identification

In *Tales of Love* (1987/1983), Kristeva explains that on the flip side of abjection is primary identification.\(^{180}\) In order to successfully leave the maternal hold, the child must identify with an “imaginary father.” The imaginary father here is *not* the stern, threatening Oedipal father of the law (he comes later). Rather, he is a loving, idealized figure who provides consolation for the melancholy and fear associated with the loss of the primary object.\(^{181}\) This figure is modeled after Freud’s “father of personal prehistory,” who, on Kristeva’s reading, is a sexually undifferentiated, mother-father conglomerate.\(^{182}\) More precisely, then, the imaginary father is an object-less Third Party: “He is simple virtuality, a potential presence.”\(^{183}\) And the imaginary “nonobject” aids the “not-yet” subject to cope with the psychic suffering associated with maternal separation.\(^{184}\) The presence and idealization of the Third Party means for the child that it is possible to recover and recreate love and desire beyond the initial bond with the mother. In other words, the potential for love outside the mother dyad makes her abjection possible and endurable.

Kristeva also theorizes the imaginary father as *maternal desire*, a move that reinforces the importance of this stage in the process of subjectification. She explains that the mother “will love her child with respect to [an] Other, and it is through a discourse aimed at the Third Party that the child will be set up as ‘loved’ for the mother…it is in the eyes of the Third Party that the baby the mother speaks to becomes a he [sic].”\(^{185}\) If this third figure does *not* enter the scene as a

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180 Kristeva, *Tales*, 42.
181 Ibid., 21-45.
182 Ibid., 26, 33 & 41.
183 Ibid, 43.
184 Ibid., 29 & 41.
185 Ibid., 34.
locus of maternal desire as well as a “magnet for loving identification.”\textsuperscript{186} for the child, the dyadic relationship with the mother is destined to remain in abjection, a state of “devouring.”\textsuperscript{187}

Coextensive to abjection, then, the formation within the child’s psyche of an idealized, potential other is an important and necessary stage in the formation of the subject.\textsuperscript{188} At the same time, this movement away from the mother and toward the Third Party prepares the subject for all future (loving) relationships (to love and be loved).\textsuperscript{189} The emptiness produced by the separation from the mother is transformed by the loving, imaginary father into what Kelly Oliver has called a “productive distance” that eventually allows the speaking being to speak, to create, and to be.\textsuperscript{190} And in Kristeva’s words, the co-establishment of abjection and primary identification “allows [one] to block up that emptiness [of the lost mother], to calm it and turn it into a producer of signs, representation, and meanings.”\textsuperscript{191} That is to say, instead of being overwhelmed by it, through this process the infant gives expression to and finds meaning in the sadness associated with maternal loss. Because these events are pre-symbolic, the meaning is semiotic, i.e., related to drives and affect. Nevertheless, this representation signals the subject’s psychic potential and capacity for working out future affects and fantasies through imaginary constructs, first, and then in symbolic representations or “linguistic signification.”\textsuperscript{192} Kristeva explains that identifying with the loving imaginary father sets into motion a series of identifications, including specular identification (Lacan’s mirror stage), resulting in Oedipal identification and the ascension to speech. In her words: “The imaginary is a kaleidoscope of ego
images that build the foundation for the subject of enunciation.”\textsuperscript{193} It should be noted here that one’s capacity to signify does not mean that the imaginary is left behind or that it becomes completely inaccessible. Though rooted in phantasy, Kristeva’s imaginary eventuates in symbolic representation of fantasy.\textsuperscript{194} That is, while it begins as purely semiotic, and it retains this affective dimension, the imaginary also consists of symbolic “expressions” or “representations” of affect and fantasy (more on this in 2.2.2.). As we will see, such expressions of affect are central to the important work of the imaginary, and by extension to the value of intimate revolt.

2.2 The Power of the Imaginary

The last installment of the 80s trilogy, \textit{Black Sun}, picks up where \textit{Tales} leaves off. In the latter we see that love (identification with a loving Third Party) is crucial to healthy subjectivity.\textsuperscript{195} The former addresses the states when there is a lack of love, when meaning is lost. It is an exploration of the psychic significance of depression and melancholia, as well as the possible sources of therapy in the face of such psychic suffering. Not surprisingly, psychoanalysis is presented as the most effective treatment, but Kristeva also explores literature, art and religion as avenues for healing. In this context, the Kristevan imaginary becomes the protagonist, if you will, of the text. While it is clearly an important element of \textit{Powers} and \textit{Tales}, \textit{Black Sun} is the most compelling and revelatory text of the three in terms of the power of the imaginary.

2.2.1 Depression and Melancholia

Drawing on her professional experience, Kristeva details many triggers of depression: the end of a relationship, stress or insecurity in one’s career, personal illness or injury, the death of a loved one, or any of those things happening to someone we care about. It can also be an accumulation

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} See Beardsworth, \textit{Psychoanalysis & Modernity}, 69-70.
\textsuperscript{195} Defined roughly by the capacity to create meaning and meaningful relationships.
of things. Depression may be fleeting and relatively manageable (neurosis), or it can take on a life of its own and feel unlivable (psychosis). In either case, she notes that it is in times of depression and melancholia that we are confronted with a sense of the meaninglessness of Being, of life’s absurdity. “When meaning shatters, life no longer matters,” she explains. Hence the urgency to restore meaning in people’s lives – it is precisely a question of life or (a living) death.

Kristeva identifies two kinds of melancholia. The first, found in classic psychoanalytic theory, is *objectal depression*, in which depression conceals aggression toward a lost object. Behind the aggression, there is ambivalence: I love the object, but I hate it for leaving me. Because I love it, and in order not to lose it, I internalize it; but, because I hate it, that hate gets turned against myself. In the worst case, the internalized hatred results in suicide. There are common fantasies associated with objectal depression – different ways to envelop (to hold onto, to internalize) the object, such as dreams of cannibalism. Such fantasies are both “good” and “bad.” They are bad (read: problematic) because they perpetuate and contribute to a state of denial; they reject reality. They are good (read: helpful or productive) because they also reject death. In this case, the depressed person mourns a lost object. The second kind of melancholia, in which Kristeva is particularly interested, is *narcissistic depression*. Here, the wound is not from another person or someone outside myself, but from something within me. People with this kind of depression might consider themselves flawed or not “good enough.” The only object, *per se*, is sadness itself. There is a hole inside and the depressed person becomes attached to that empty

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196 Unlike Freud, Kristeva does not distinguish between these two terms.
198 Ibid, 6.
199 She cites Abraham, Freud and Klein. Ibid., 11.
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid., 12.
202 She sees narcissistic depression as the most common malady affecting modern Western society. She discusses this in *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995/1993) and again in *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000/1996).
Suicide is a way to merge with that feeling of extreme sadness and become one with the emptiness. In this case, the depressed person mourns not an object but the maternal “Thing.”

As we saw above, sadness associated with losing the (m)other is normal and necessary. All meaning is born of sadness. However, we also saw that identification with and idealization of the imaginary father compensates for that sadness and loss. With an incomplete or insufficient identification with the loving Third Party, the potential for and belief in love is not established and one cannot let go of the mother. In Kristeva’s words, “The melancholy Thing interrupts desiring metonymy, just as it prevents working out the loss within the psyche.” Failure or inadequacy at this stage results in an incapacity to create bonds with others, as well as to create meaning through signs and symbols; that is, it thwarts the subject’s emergence and/or thriving as a speaking being. Kristeva explains that success or failure at this juncture turns on the Freudian concept of negation, which she defines as “the intellectual process that leads the repressed to representation on the condition of denying it and, on that account, shares in the signifier’s

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203 She compares this second type of melancholia to Freud’s primary masochism. There is a kind of eroticization of the suffering in order to defend itself against the death drive. The sadness becomes desired because it keeps one attached to the lost Thing. But it also prevents the depressed person from making connections and from feeling love, in all its varieties, from being “happy.”

204 Kristeva, Black Sun, 13. She explains that the “Thing” is “the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated.” Ibid. This description calls to mind her notion of the maternal chora (cf. Revolution), out of which the semiotic drives emerge. She links her notion of the Thing to that of Heidegger, describing it in a footnote as “the ‘something’ that, seen by the already constituted subject looking back, appears as the unspecified, the unseparated, the elusive…. ” Kristeva, Black Sun, 262 n7). A later footnote also specifically differentiates her proposition of the Thing from that of Lacan’s das Ding, although the difference between the two is hard to see. Ibid., 262-63 n10. Lacan’s description is very similar to Kristeva’s: “The Thing is not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterized by its absence, its strangeness.” Lacan, Seminar Book VII: Ethics, 63. See also pages 115-19. One wonders if at times Kristeva wants to position herself, theoretically speaking, farther away from Lacan than actually she is.

205 Following Aristotle, she argues that melancholia is not pathology, nor a defect or a sickness. It is part of our nature.

206 Introduced in Tales of Love, Kristeva reiterates this idea in Black Sun: “The ‘primary identification’ with the ‘father in individual prehistory’ would be the means, the link that might enable one to become reconciled with the loss of the Thing.” Kristeva, Black Sun, 13.

207 One feels deprived of the Thing and yet nothing can replace “her.” One may try to replace her through unfulfilling relationships or by retreating altogether; both are symptoms of the same problem.

208 Kristeva, Black Sun, 14.
advent.” The negation inherent to primary narcissism (read: abjection) is the earliest example of this mechanism. With the transference of desire to the imaginary Third Party, I agree to let go of and separate from the mother, but precisely because I consent to the loss, I will be able to recover her symbolically. Indeed, she points out that “a ‘lack’ is necessary for the *sign* to emerge.” By contrast, depressed persons deny negation. They do not accept or consent to the loss. Unable to let go, they fall back to the Thing. And in the case of denial of negation, no signifier emerges to express the sadness associated with that loss. This is evidenced by the incapacity of someone who is depressed to articulate his or her depression. Kristeva calls this an “impossible mourning.” By denying negation, one rejects signification.

### 2.2.2 An Imaginary Cure

According to Kristeva, there are more people than ever who suffer from narcissistic depression (varying in length and intensity). And objectal depression can trigger or be intensified by one’s “original” feelings of loss or a repressed failure to adequately leave the maternal hold. In the face of such problems, as an analyst as well as a cultural theorist, Kristeva is interested to explore ways to help alleviate such suffering. In order to do this, she looks at where the system “breaks down.” As we have just seen, she identifies the root causes of depression and melancholia in an inadequate or incomplete resolution of the (albeit fragile) pre-symbolic stage of primary narcissism. In theory, “primary identification initiates a compensation for the Thing and at the same time secures the subject to another dimension, that of imaginary adherence.” The ability

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209 Ibid, 44. Emphasis added. This is drawn from Freud’s view that the content of a repressed image can only make its way into consciousness on the condition that it is *negated*.

210 Ibid., 43.

211 Ibid., 23. Drawing on Hanna Segal’s work, Kristeva describes the infant’s ascension to signs in this way: “Beginning with separation…the child produces or uses objects or vocalizations that are the *symbolic equivalents* of what is lacking. Later, and beginning with the so-called depressive position, it attempts to signify the sadness that overwhelms it by producing within its own self elements alien to the other world, which it causes to correspond to such a lost or shifted outerness; we are then faced with *symbols* properly speaking, no longer with equivalencies.” Ibid. In the context of primary narcissism, we are no longer confined to the realm of affects (psychic, bodily energies), but not yet in the world of symbols proper (the “symbolic”). We are in the stage of Segal’s *symbolic equivalents*, which corresponds (roughly) to the Kristevan *imaginary* that we are exploring.

212 Ibid., 44.

213 Ibid., 13-14.
to create imaginary objects, and by extension semiotic meaning, is the prerequisite for entry into the symbolic order, for signification. Thus, if one cannot signify, if one cannot speak, if one is so apathetic to the world of signs that one does not know how or want to participate in it, then healing work must take place at the pre-symbolic, imaginary level.\textsuperscript{214} Otherwise it would be like trying to solve the problems of someone in a language she does not understand. “Depressed persons are prisoners of affect,”\textsuperscript{215} says Kristeva, and affect is the domain of the semiotic. For the semiotic is precisely “drive-related and affective meaning organized according to primary processes whose sensory aspects are often nonverbal (sound and melody, rhythm, color, odors, and so forth).”\textsuperscript{216} On Kristeva’s account, representing affects in the imaginary and producing semiotic meaning is a vital step to overcoming depression – an idea substantiated by the many therapeutic models that use dance, music and visual art as conduits for self-expression. These methods allow suffering individuals to work out affects via the imaginary in order to create semiotic meaning, which can lead to healing, demonstrated finally in linguistic signification.\textsuperscript{217}

This is not an easy process for the depressed person. Kristeva admits that an effort is required to reject sorrow,\textsuperscript{218} but such effort can result in imaginative representation and, by extension, recovery. Both are important for Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt: the personal struggle as well as the resulting creativity and productivity. Indeed, in \textit{Black Sun} she argues that while melancholia blocks or limits one’s capacity to speak, it is at the same time a potential source of beautiful and meaningful innovations.\textsuperscript{219} This is perhaps not a surprising claim; one often finds stories of great pain and suffering behind brilliant creative works. It is even said that the latter

\begin{footnotes}
\item[214] Ibid., 61.
\item[215] Ibid., 14.
\item[216] Kristeva, \textit{New Maladies}, 104.
\item[217] She does use, more or less synonymously, the Freudian term ‘sublimation,’ but prefers her own terminology.
\end{footnotes}
requires the former. Kristeva explores this connection in chapter four, “Beauty: The Depressive’s Other Realm,” in which she asks, “Can the beautiful be sad? Is beauty inseparable from the ephemeral and hence from mourning?” The answer for Kristeva is ‘yes’ because that which emerges on the other side of sadness does so as an ideal, something idealized, that is, something beautiful. Kristeva describes it thus: “When we have been able to go through our melancholia to the point of becoming interested in the life of signs, beauty may also grab hold of us to bear witness for someone who grandly discovered the royal way through which humanity transcends the grief of being apart…” Kristeva makes a literary allusion here to Freud’s famous pronouncement that dreams are “the royal path” to the unconscious. Freud also regarded the dream “as a sort of substitute for...thought-processes, full of meaning and emotion.” Thus Kristeva implicitly reiterates that it is not through conscious thought-work but rather through dream-like work (of semiotic, affective, unconscious content) – in other words, according to John D. Caputo, “both [Kierkegaard and Nietzsche] were miserably unhappy and tormented geniuses who wrote with their blood; had they ended up happily married, with three children, and tending their lawns on weekends, we would likely never have heard a word from them.” John D. Caputo, On Religion (New York & London: Routledge, 2001), 52. Dostoevsky, too, writes in Demons (1873) that in order to be a good writer, one must suffer. See quote in Kristeva, Black Sun, 177 (note that Roudiez uses the English translation Notebooks of the Possessed for the novel title, though many argue that Devils and Demons are both more accurate translations of the Russian title). Also, in Crime and Punishment, Dostoyevsky writes: “Pain and suffering are always inevitable for a large intelligence and a deep heart. The really great men must, I think, have great sadness on earth….” Quoted in Kristeva, Black Sun, 180. For Dostoyevsky, as with Kierkegaard, suffering is regarded as kind of a gift. Finally, Marina Abramovic also claims that one needs pain to create great works – a theme she discusses with Jian Ghomeshi in this exchange:

MA: I really think that nobody done anything from happiness [sic]. Happiness is a state which is so wonderful and it’s just good to be happy. […] If you want to be creative and you wanted to really say something to this humanity, it’s a whole different agenda.

JG: Some people would really reject this… the romance of self-abuse… that you need to be in a horrible space to be able to create… some would argue that you can be healthy and balanced and still be a great artist.

MA: I would like to know the names. Just give me the names. Look at history. History is full of one tragedy after another. It’s terrible. I just want to see the names of these happy people with the happy childhood and being creative and changing the world. Give the names, I accept it. http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2396836412, 10m16s-11m16s.

Kristeva, Black Sun, 95-103.

Ibid., 97.

She refers to a conversation between Freud and two melancholy friends in On Transience (1915-1916), in which one friend states that beauty is less valuable because it is temporary and transient. Freud, on the other hand, replies that it is in fact more valuable for that precise reason.

Kristeva, Black Sun, 99-100.

Freud, Interpretation of Dreams.

imaginary work – that we overcome grief. *Black Sun* examines the paintings of Hans Holbein, Gerard de Nerval’s poetry, and the writing of Dostoyevsky and offers these creative pieces as examples of the power of the imaginary to overcome depression. Kristeva’s detailed explorations show that each of these artists takes a journey into darkness, to the brink of death, and then back to light and life. She is clear that broaching this threshold is crucial because, according to Kristeva, only when death is resisted can meaning and beauty be created. The piece of art is an expression of the artist’s refusal of death.  

Beauty is death overcome. Kristeva describes it thus:

Sublimation’s dynamics, by summoning up primary processes and idealization, weaves a *hypersign* around and with the depressive void. […] Artifice, as sublime meaning for and on behalf of the underlying, implicit nonbeing, replaces the ephemeral. Beauty is co-substantial with it. […] beauty emerges as the admirable face of loss, transforming it in order to make it live. […] Beauty is an artifice; it is imaginary.  

It is important to point out that the working-through of affects happens before their representation. As Mari Ruti has well articulated, “while the imagination feeds on sadness, a work of art only emerges when the sorrow that triggers it has been repudiated and overcome.”  

Imaginary constructs are affects finally connected to words, drives connected to language; they are sadness and joy, for example, “transposed” into something communicable, or identifiable, such as an image, a story, or a piece of poetry.

At this point, we need to clarify how Kristeva’s imaginary relates to her notions of the semiotic and symbolic. This is not self-evident because while the imaginary overlaps with both the semiotic and the symbolic, it is not synonymous with either. Actually, Kristeva describes the

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227 “Sublimation alone withstands death.” Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 100. This is in slight contradiction to what she says later in the book: “Sublimation alone, without elaborating the erotic and thanatoid contents, seems a weak recourse against the regressive tendencies that break up bonds and lead to death.” Ibid., 159. But it could be argued that nothing other than sublimation, *as long as it is accompanied by interpretation*, can withstand death.

228 Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 99 & 100.

229 Ruti, “From Melancholia to Meaning,” 647.
imaginary as *between* biology and language.\textsuperscript{230} Recall that the semiotic, in Kristeva’s account, refers to the psychic imprints, traces, and energies that are governed by primary processes (displacement and condensation). It is distinctively bodily, biological. Whereas the symbolic is governed by secondary processes such as logic and grammar, it designates “the realm of signification,” the realm of language.\textsuperscript{231} Like Freud’s dream-work, the imaginary is between the semiotic and the symbolic in the sense that it spans the two realms, like a bridge, but with extensive overlap at either side. That is, on one hand, the imaginary is by and large coextensive with the semiotic as it emerges in the pre-symbolic (pre-specular) stage of development. In this way, the imaginary refers to semiotic meaning that precedes linguistic signification. On the other hand, and at the same time, the imaginary also refers to expressions of the semiotic that involve linguistic signification. Kristeva speaks of “creative work and fiction” in this context; they are examples of when semiotic meaning is given symbolic representation.\textsuperscript{232} Beardsworth’s description is helpful here: “The imaginary constructs are within the symbolic order but, in a certain sense, not *of* it, not grasped within the field of its effects.” She goes on to emphasize “the need for the nonsymbolic dimensions of subjectivity – including the imaginary father – to take on some kind of symbolic form (her imaginary constructs). Without this, they remain a neglected semiotic ‘content,’ ripe for an outbreak in distorted and destructive forms.”\textsuperscript{233} This ‘spanning’ between the two registers is precisely the reason the imaginary is so powerful for Kristeva, particularly in cases where the world of signs is rejected: “The imaginary is a way of gaining access to more archaic affective representations,” which, as Beardsworth has rightly noted, need to be worked through in order to create the psychic preconditions (previously inhibited, interrupted or compromised) to accede to signs and speech.\textsuperscript{234} Accordingly, the imaginary (exemplified in the “sublimatory solutions” of art, literature, religion) serves a powerful therapeutic function in the history of the subject (one that, not incidentally, psychoanalysis

\textsuperscript{230} Kristeva, *New Maladies*, 103.
\textsuperscript{231} Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 264-65, n24.
\textsuperscript{232} J. Kristeva, *New Maladies*, 104.
\textsuperscript{233} Beardsworth, *Psychoanalysis & Modernity*, 70. This is a simplified version of Beardsworth’s argument that the major difference between the “subject in process” from *Revolution in Poetic Language* and the subject of the 80s trilogy is that the former emphasizes the semiotization of the symbolic and the latter emphasizes the symbolization of the semiotic.
\textsuperscript{234} Kristeva, *New Maladies*, 104.
should pay attention to and learn from). In sum, *Black Sun* reveals the important and powerful role the imaginary plays in overcoming depression, which comes from its access to and cathartic expression of one’s intimate, real, and inherently rebellious self. It is not surprising then that Kristeva returns to the realm of the imaginary when unpacking her notion of intimate revolt as a potential cure for our modern malaises.

### 3 Intimate Revolt

What does this mean in terms of intimate revolt? It means that Kristeva is asking us to tap into the dimension of our minds that develops and emerges before we learn to speak, before speech acquisition. For it is by awakening the imaginary register of the mind that we might access and find expression of important affects and fantasies previously inhibited, which would in turn allow us to articulate questions, identify, name and work through desires and fears, and interrogate our personal values and beliefs, as well as those of society (read: a culture of revolt, which will be discussed in chapter 3).

In *Intimate Revolt*, she returns once again to the works of Barthes, Sartre and Aragon in order to examine the ways in which they exemplify (or fail to exemplify) the nature of intimate revolt. (Incidentally, a keen reader will notice that the order these authors appear in this volume is the reverse of the order in which they appear in *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*. Such a repetition and reversal is a subtle demonstration of how Kristeva’s own work is, too, an example of analytical revolt). However, before she returns to the rebellious authors, she devotes a chapter to examining “Fantasy and Cinema.” You will recall that Kristeva has diagnosed modern society as obsessed with and controlled by “the spectacle,” so it is important for her at this time to clarify what she means by the intimate revolt that our imaginaries might spark, over and against the kind of cultural imagery and spectacle that flood mainstream media and, in effect, our everyday lives. Both are rooted in fantasy, but only through intimate revolt can we experience our fantasies in a

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236 Cf. Kristeva, *New Maladies*. 
healthy (read: productive, creative, engaged) way. In other words, not all imaginary discourses are examples of intimate revolt.

One might question whether or not the West is experiencing a lack or decline of revolt culture as Kristeva proposes; are we not surrounded by imaginative works, from art and literature to music and cinema? But Kristeva makes an important distinction between what she refers to as a rebellious imaginary on the one hand, and a reified imaginary on the other. A rebellious imaginary, as we have just discussed, is an expression of singular fantasies and their interpretation. A reified imaginary, however, can be seen in mass-produced and mass-distributed cultural stereotypes. “We are inundated with images,” Kristeva admits, “some of which resonate with our fantasies and appease us but which, for lack of interpretative words, do not liberate us.”

237 Intimate revolt requires that we formulate our own images and ideas rather than simply consuming those of others. Furthermore, not only do we need to represent our own fantasies, we need to interpret and work through them. This is certainly not going to happen if we complacently absorb and buy into fixed models of how to speak, what to wear, what to watch and, both explicitly and implicitly, what to desire and believe. As Kristeva writes, “There is no possible exit from the spectacle, except by traversing it in full awareness.”

238 Reiterated here are the dangers of group politics, which can be violent and exclusionary (cf., chapter 1, section 1.3.3), and at the same time the particularities of each person are highlighted and celebrated: “psychic life becomes a life only when it represents itself in a unique way…”

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Another key feature of the rebellious imaginary (versus the reified one) is recognizing the illusory nature of our imaginary constructions. As we saw above, Kristeva aligns the imaginary with artifice. It is an important artifice that gives shape to the ephemeral, but an artifice
What this means is that while Kristeva emphasizes the power of the imaginary as a tool for healing, she nevertheless remains faithful to the Freudian stance that one should not be fooled into thinking that these constructs necessarily correspond to reality. An artifice is a lie, an illusion. As she explains, “the imaginary constitutes a miracle, but it is at the same time its shattering: a self-illusion.” The same distinction can be seen in Kristeva’s treatment of fantasy. She, like Freud, observes that we are all subjects of fantasy and subject to fantasy. And on numerous occasions, she emphasizes the value of fantasy to our psychic health: “the universe of fantasy prompts us to take seriously this other reality – psychical reality – which in a factual, efficient, pragmatic world we have a tendency to underestimate and diminish.” At the same time, she warns against fantasies that do not admit their illusory status. It may subdue the subject temporarily, states Kristeva, “Yet…protective fantasy is also limiting and constricting, especially when it does not know it is fantasy. […] I am speaking of fantasy when it is fixed as stereotypical protector, when it is confused with acting out: it then ceases to be the terrain of the bracing imaginary and deteriorates into perverse poverty or psychotic asymbolism.…” For Kristeva, the psychoanalytic experience is “one of the rare places where fantasy admits its reality as a servant of desire…against the current of the spectacular imaginary that assaults us and that we all consume more or less complacently.” But it is both explicitly and implicitly clear that a certain kind of literature can maintain its lucidity and function as a form of intimate revolt, as well as other aesthetic and intellectual discourses that engage the rebellious imaginary.

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241 Ibid., 103.
242 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 65. She quotes the distinction Freud makes in *Interpretation of Dreams* between psychical reality and material reality.
243 Ibid., 172. This is one of Freud’s classic censures of religion (that religious fantasies are not treated/admitted as illusions), which Kristeva has reiterated. E.g., Kristeva, *New Maladies*, 123.
244 Ibid., 180.
245 Ibid.
4 Concluding Remarks

In the trilogy of the eighties, there is a recurring message that psychoanalysis surpasses other therapeutic approaches. Kristeva highlights the *cathartic* potential of literary and aesthetic practices, as well as aspects of the religious imaginary. Psychoanalysis, however, goes beyond these discourses by offering an *interpretation* of the *causes* of suffering, in order to dissolve symptoms.\textsuperscript{246} The importance of the interpretive process is seen, for one, in *Powers of Horror*, in which she warns that “[a] certain handling of the analytic cure runs the risk of being nothing else but a *counter-phobic* treatment, if that cure remains at the level of fantasy and does not enter, after having traversed the latter, into the more subtle workings of…*metaphoric elaboration*.”\textsuperscript{247}

In her later work, however, while her praise of the psychoanalytic approach has not faded, there appears to be an effort to expand the ways in which one might carry out the “working through,” the elaboration, the interpretation – to make intimate revolt more accessible. In other words, intimate revolt is rooted in psychoanalytic theory, to be sure, but it goes beyond psychoanalysis. After all, it would have to be more far-reaching in order to produce the culture of revolt that Kristeva has in mind (more on this in the next chapter).

Drawing on the power of the imaginary (to create meaning, images, symbols, etc.), intimate revolt sets into motion a process of reflection and questioning that is not merely intellectual but an engagement with and expression of one’s deepest concerns, and has a profound impact on one’s sense of self and the way one lives in and contributes to society. It requires investing in and being open to an endless project of fashioning and re-fashioning the self. It is unsettling and uncomfortable but potentially productive and deeply satisfying, says Kristeva. That is the beauty and risk of intimate revolt. And this is the basis for the culture that Kristeva wants to promote.

\textsuperscript{246} Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 24.
\textsuperscript{247} Kristeva, *Powers*, 36. Her designation of “counter-phobic” treatment as “nothing else but” and as inferior to “metaphoric elaboration” appears inconsistent with her claim in *Black Sun* that psychoanalysts should pay attention to “sublimatory solutions…in order to be lucid counterdepressants rather than neutralizing antidepressants.” Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 24-25. In the latter case, the term “countering” implies “over-turning,” whereas in the first case, “countering” implies covering up – like a Band-Aid. Despite the misleading terminology, the idea is the same in both cases: there is a difference between easing someone’s suffering and helping someone work out the reasons for which she is suffering.
Chapter 3: From *Intimate Revolt To Revolt Culture*

Alas! There cometh the time when man will no longer give birth to any star.248

Intimate revolt is a theory centered on the individual. However, Kristeva is clear that she has larger social, cultural and political effects in mind. She is trying to rehabilitate and promote a *culture* of revolt, after all. As we have seen, her discussion of intimate revolt is sparked not only by the “new maladies of the soul” that she sees in her practice, but also by the diagnosis that Western society at large is in peril. On Kristeva’s view, the time foretold by Nietzsche’s Zarathustra – a time without great “men” or innovations – is dangerously close, if it is not here already. It follows that she intends the revival and promotion of intimate revolt to have a much wider impact than helping out a few, perhaps privileged, individuals.

Scholars have applied Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theories to discussions on society, culture and politics, and have analyzed her application of psychoanalysis in these fields.249 However, this move is not always self-evident. In “Recent Work on and by Julia Kristeva: Toward a Psychoanalytic Social Theory,” Maria Margaroni writes, “a theory capable of weaving together the distinct idioms of psychoanalysis, sociology, and politics...can only take the form of a hermeneutics of complication, [because] each of the idioms has its own unique texture, which needs to be appreciated.”250 Indeed, Kristeva is aware that one must move cautiously between psychoanalytic and socio-political theories.251 In the context of the present discussion, she writes: “Recognition of the psychic need for revolt alone will obviously not provide a political solution: there is still a long way to go. [...] It is important not to confuse psychic need and

250 Margaroni, “Recent Work on and by Julia Kristeva,” 804.
251 That is, despite the occasional analogous application, such as France suffering from a “national depression.” Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, 55-56 & 83.
aesthetic creativity with political realism.” And thus she makes it clear in the opening paragraphs of *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* that while “evoking the current political state [she] will approach things from a bit of a distance.” And rather than a specific, comprehensive and exhaustive vision, Kristeva proposes a *reflection* on what a modern culture of revolt might look like. This approach poses a challenge to readers who want to engage with her ideas on society, culture and politics in a more concrete way. Nevertheless, in this chapter, we will explore how and why private revolt matters vis-à-vis the public sphere. While this cannot be an exhaustive exploration, it is an opportunity to consider the broader implications of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory and, at the same time, highlight the innovations and address potential critiques of Kristeva’s revolt culture.

1 Kristeva, Psychoanalysis and Politics

For Kristeva, psychoanalysis is a powerful, hermeneutical tool. She uses psychoanalytic theory to examine language, poetry, literature, art, and religious texts, in order to learn about human subjectivity and to interpret culture at large. Similarly, she sees it as a useful theoretical lens through which to look at social and political issues. Kristeva’s personal involvement in social and political movements goes back to at least the 1960s when she moved to Paris, in the midst of great intellectual innovation and fervor, as well as social upheaval, which culminated (in a way) in the events of May 1968. She was a prominent figure of the *Tel Quel* group for many years and she is known for having been influenced by the ideals of Marxism and, for a time, Maoism. Thus Kristeva’s life and her early scholarly work were already politically charged. However, her exposure and “move” to psychoanalysis gave shape and support to her views, and also revolutionized her ideas. Kristeva makes it clear that socio-political issues are better addressed when we realize that what has meaning and value in society and how we engage with and treat

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254 Ibid., 8.
255 Along with Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes, and Philippe Sollers.
others, are all reflections of and can be better understood when analyzed in light of our psychic constitution and needs. A common voice in Kristeva’s politics is her concern with the marginalization and subjugation of women, immigrants and other minorities, and she uses psychoanalytic theory to explain the reasons behind intolerant and oppressive behavior.

It could be argued that all of her work is implicitly political, depending on how you understand what it means to be political. There are, however, a few commonly cited examples of Kristeva’s more explicit psychoanalytically informed political views. For one, mentioned earlier, in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991/1988) Kristeva addresses the tension surrounding immigration in France. She argues that new immigrants are experienced by some as potentially threatening because otherness stirs within us an uncomfortable recollection of parts of ourselves, of which we are not consciously aware, i.e., things that we have repressed. The unknown and difference of the other person reminds us of our own unconscious otherness, our inherent and permanent psychic difference. She suggests that if we begin by recognizing the foreigner within, it might help us accept with more tolerance and understanding the otherness of others.

The themes of “strangeness” and psychic difference are picked up again in *Nations Without Nationalism* (1993/1990). In light of local (read: French) and global clashes among ethnic, religious and nationalist groups, Kristeva writes of the need to develop a sense of (national) identity that simultaneously celebrates and allows for the diversity of individual stories. She identifies, on the one hand, an increased attraction to a “cult of origins” – unchecked over-identification with one’s religious, ethnic, or national roots – which breeds hatred for others as well as of oneself. And, at the other extreme, self-hatred can result in rejection and repression of one’s heritage. As a theory and practice that returns to and traverses psychic and historical “origins,” psychoanalysis helps us recognize the fragile tension between what she calls our

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“symbolic identity” and our “imaginary identity” (which resembles the tension she identifies later between the need for authority and the need for transgression). Keeping this necessary tension in mind, Kristeva proposes Montesquieu’s esprit général as a uniting feature of society, which, according to her interpretation, would allow for each individual person’s commitment to his or her heritage while still preserving an overarching common allegiance. Samir Dayal describes Kristeva’s position as aligned with “a particular kind of universalist.” While she distances herself from the “leftist” proponents of multiculturalism, she promotes a kind of universalism “that is more respectful of pluralities and wary of exclusions.”

Her views on nationhood and nationalism are reminiscent of her views on the women’s movement. Reprinted in New Maladies of the Soul (1995/1993), “Women’s Time” (1979) is a critique of trends in both first and second-wave movements that seek to mobilize under a unified notion of Womanhood (capital W). Even though the second generation emerged in part because the first generation was condemned for being universalistic in its search for identification and equality, Kristeva warns that the philosophy of difference adopted by the second generation also tends toward a common notion of Woman (different from rather than the same as men). The third generation, she says, must focus on the celebration of the particularities of all women. Once again, she is concerned with avoiding exclusionary identity politics:

I am in favour of a femininity which would take as many forms as there are women. That does not at all produce a ‘group’ effect, and I am convinced that those who engage in issues concerning women not in order to engage their own singularity but in order to be reunited with ‘all women’ do so primarily in order to avoid looking at their own particular situation and end up feeling disillusioned or becoming dogmatic.

258 Ibid., 4.
260 Dayal, introduction to Crisis, by Kristeva, 23.
In these cases, and in most of her commentary regarding dogmatic ideologies (religious, political or otherwise), she is sensitive to the subject’s desire for stability that is coextensive to its inherent instability. It is for this reason that throughout her work, from the *sujet-en-procès* (1974) to the subject in revolt (1996-1998), one sees an effort to preserve and promote individuals’ uniqueness in the face of “flattening” and exclusionary group identities.

A final example is found in *Hatred and Forgiveness* (2010/2005), where Kristeva unpacks the psychological motivation behind the discrimination of disabled people. Disabled persons, she explains, present a perceived physical or mental deficiency or brokenness, and as such they can invoke in us a fear of (psychic or physical) death. They open a “narcissistic identity wound in the person who is not disabled.” For Kristeva, recognizing our often unconscious complicity in these problems is the first step to rectifying them – personally and, by extension, systemically.

I present this short review of her more explicitly social and political writings to familiarize the reader with how Kristeva uses psychoanalytic theory in her socio-political discussions. According to Beardsworth, “Kristeva […] never specifically discusses the problem of modern institutions in a political theory addressed to their formation and limitations. She does, however, develop both an ethical and a political thought on the basis of her psychoanalytic and literary position.” To be clear, Kristeva certainly does mention limitations – and failures for that matter – of modern institutions, but importantly (and this is the key to Beardsworth’s observation) she offers psychoanalytically informed opinions, reflections, and discussions, not a comprehensive political theory. The subtle difference between referring to Kristeva’s contributions as her thought on socio-political matters rather than a social or political theory per se is very useful to keep in mind when engaging with her ideas on revolt culture. After all, Kristeva insists that she is not the type of intellectual who has an answer for everything,

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neither does she want to promote psychoanalysis as the solution for social problems. Rather, psychoanalysis helps us think about and analyze various situations in a way that takes the subject’s psychic constitution and needs into account. Indeed, it has been said that “Kristeva is one of the few philosophers of our day to provide a language for thinking about how the personal becomes political, namely how affective and somatic forces enter into language and culture.”

Much of Kristeva’s use of psychoanalytic theory is diagnostic but, to be sure, it entails prescriptions as well. In fact, her discussions on intimate revolt and revolt culture, including their imperativeness, can be seen as a response to problems she has been observing over the course of her entire career. As we have seen, making choices regarding the future requires an ongoing analysis of the past. Thus, in a sense, in this case the description and the prescription go hand in hand.

2 Inner Revolt / Public Action

Kristeva is known for her focus on the individual and her avoidance of metanarratives. “We must keep ourselves from presenting great syntheses,” she explains. “We must try to be as concrete – I would even say microscopic – as we can be.” For Kristeva, focusing on the ills of individuals is more realistic than larger political programs. However, she insists – and rightly so – that there is an important link between people’s private and public lives. It should not be surprising that psychoanalysts – along with many other professionals, presumably – see their work with individuals as having social implications. “Social health is dependent on individual health, society being but a massive reduplication of persons,” says D.W. Winnicott.

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265 Ibid., 103.
267 As Beardsworth has observed, “Kristeva not only sees things in a nontotalizing way but refuses to make totalizing gestures.” Beardsworth, Psychoanalysis & Modernity, 17.
Kristeva sees her use of psychoanalytic theory and practice as political in the sense that she helps to produce “healthy” citizens, who are better equipped to engage with others in the public sphere; this is precisely what is at stake with Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt and vision of revolt culture. It may seem facile to think that helping to produce healthy individuals will bring about socio-cultural change. Thus, let us explore what individual health means for Kristeva, how individual health (read: intimate revolt) translates to social health (read: a culture of revolt), and why the latter is so important.

2.1 Individual Health

Kristeva’s view of psychic health, like much of her work, incorporates classical Freudian views and ideas from key British (Klein, Winnicott) and French analysts (Lacan, Green). With Freud, we learn that psychic health is associated with a subject’s capacity to cope with the inevitable disappointments and changes that life brings. This capacity to cope points to, for example, the ability to identify fantasies, work through defense mechanisms and to express emotions in appropriate ways (e.g., through sublimation). It also means being able to manage one’s primal instincts vis-à-vis the demands of society, which, he has famously observed, are often in conflict (cf., Totem & Taboo, Civilization). These ideas can be seen in the work of British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein, who tells us that the ability to mourn (a coping mechanism) and to feel guilt (having a conscience) are important signs of mental health. Finally, notoriously opposed to (North American) ego-building methods, Jacques Lacan’s approach to analysis assumes that psychic health entails acceptance of the subject’s inherently fragile ego and constitutional lack. For Lacan, a healthy individual is also one who can name his or her desire, which emerges because of this lack, and continually pursues it (despite its impossible fulfillment). In his approach, one develops a kind of self-confidence from self-awareness, that is, knowing that I cannot know who I am.

271 In a 1989 interview, Kristeva states, “I consider that my work as an analyst is political work, to take it in a microscopic and individual sense.” Kristeva, Interviews, 42.
272 Freud, AT&I, in SE 23, 250. Cf. chapter 1.2.2.
Kristeva inherits many elements of the above-mentioned views. However, the following description of psychic health (vis-à-vis society) by D.W. Winnicott captures her position particularly well. In his essay, “The Concept of a Healthy Individual” (1967), Winnicott suggests “in health a man or woman is able to reach towards an identification with society without too great a loss of individual or personal impulse.” He emphasizes the idea “that the man or woman feels he or she is living his or her own life, taking responsibility for action or inaction.” Recall that, for Kristeva, the crisis of modern, suffering subjectivity is linked to the decline of reliable authority figures and institutions with which to identify and transgress, and to the commodification and conformity of individuals. The reverse is also true: Kristeva’s “healthy subject” is an autonomous, unique individual who is simultaneously part of (i.e., participates in, helps form and transform) a community. Thus, we can say that psychic health for Kristeva corresponds to a capacity for intimate revolt.

2.2 Social Health

The analytical situation, above all, brings about the subject in revolt. Through the transferential link with the analyst, which is both real and imaginary, the analysand’s unconscious drives are mobilized and fantasies put into words. A subject frees, or is freed from, his or her desire. In other words, instead of carrying out desires in extreme or unhealthy ways, on the one hand, or repressing desires, on the other, analysands are accompanied on a journey of their imaginaries in order to discover and work through and learn how to sublimate desires. However, as we saw above, engaging our rebellious imaginaries is not a one-time event but a necessarily recurring process, which creates, what Kristeva calls, a series of rebirths of the subject. There is a new beginning associated, for example, with each uncovered memory trace, with each confrontation

\[273\] Winnicott is associated with the “independent” branch of the British Psychoanalytical Society; Kleinians are another branch, as are the followers of Anna Freud.

\[274\] Winnicott, *Home Is Where We Start From*, 27.

\[275\] Ibid.

\[276\] “Freud’s discovery has shown that psychic life becomes a life only when it represents itself in a unique way – in the particular discourse that constitutes a veritable poetics and maieutics of the individual subject.” Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, 179. Emphasis added.

\[277\] Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 231.
of prohibitions (in language and by the analyst), and with the realization of the impossibility of fulfilling desire. Importantly, the journey of recollection and regeneration – the revolt – continues after the end of analysis. Kristeva explains that “the suspension of the transferential link – which leaves part of my desire or drive not worked-out or not sublimated and insofar as my analysis is terminated but not finished – incites me to turn my aggression on all unity, identity, norms, values: in short to make myself a subject of perpetual revolt, of incessant questioning.”

One of the primary reasons that Kristeva sees the subject in revolt as crucial for a healthy social fabric is the former’s ongoing reflection, inquiry and renewal. Through this process, the subject in revolt works to become free of ‘false selves’ (Winnicott) – free of the masks worn, knowingly or unknowingly, in order to fit in with or ignore the world. Fitting in (conforming) or hiding from others (depression) are acts that perpetuate the status quo, either by repeating or retreating from social norms and ideals. And if the status quo is never questioned, disastrous things can happen, as exemplified in recent European history, a fact to which Kristeva is highly sensitive (more on this below). Rather, individuals engaged in this personal revolt recall, name, and explore their desires, and interrogate their values, and relationships to power and meaning; by extension, the desires, values, power and meaning of a culture are inevitably revised, perhaps rejected or renewed. “As a transformation of man’s relationship to meaning this cultural revolt intrinsically concerns public life and consequently has profoundly political implications.”

Alongside the permanent reflection and inquiry that characterizes the (analyzed) subject in revolt is the capacity for making meaningful connections with others. To be sure, a meaningful connection refers to a healthy romantic relationship or friendship, but it also means being able to relate to and interact with others who are not necessarily (or who are decidedly not) friends.

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278 Ibid., 232-33.
279 Ibid., 11.
Kristeva explains that the patient “obtains a psychical suppleness” through the analytic process that makes her open to new creations – in the sense of creative pursuits, but also in the sense of creating bonds with others. In other words, the encounter with the other in analysis (that is, transference and countertransference with the analyst) awakens the subject’s imaginary faculties and facilitates the subject’s capacity to encounter other “others,” outside of the analytical situation. Kristeva explains that the subject in revolt is, thus, “able to take a position in order to assume a judgment in a specific situation and... capable of questioning things from the place of another subject.” In today’s diverse societies, one can surely appreciate the value of individuals who can at least try to imagine walking in another individual’s shoes, i.e., to take on the perspective of another. For Kristeva, the ability to question value systems and to connect with others on some level are two important reasons why the subject in revolt is an ideal social and political actor.

Intimate revolt is rooted in psychoanalytic theory and analytic sessions are the ideal method for carrying out this intimate journey. However, there are other ways to engage in this personal revolt. As we have seen, beyond the couch Kristeva points to literature, art and other aesthetic practices, as well as certain engagements with “the sacred” (more on this later) and various intellectual pursuits, as potential means for carrying out intimate revolt. All of these modes can facilitate the individual’s singular expression of affects; they have the potential to express the journey of anamnesis, the working out of desire and the renewal of the subject. As such, they are activities that can produce, as psychoanalysis does, engaged, thoughtful, subjects. In light of this, Kristeva insists that literary and aesthetic revolts (read: intimate revolts) are crucial influences on the cultural landscape; they are not merely “decorative” or secondary to social and political means of cultural change. Indeed, what she argues is that one cannot have social revolt without psychic revolt.

280 Ibid., 237.
281 Ibid.
282 Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 80-81.
3 The Power of Intimate Revolt Culture

Can this permanent reflection and inquiry really have the impact that Kristeva proposes? In addition to improving the lives of individuals, and strengthening the social bonds that make up societies, she has suggested that revolt culture is crucial for the functioning of a nation as a whole and even for international relations. To consider the potential power of Kristeva’s revolt culture, a brief detour through the philosophy and political theory of Hannah Arendt is useful.

3.1 Arendt on Thinking: Can thinking prevent evil?

In *The Human Condition* (1958) Arendt makes an observation that foreshadows the cultural crisis Kristeva writes about decades later: “Thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time.”283 This observation also clearly informs Arendt’s later publication, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). The striking observation that Arendt makes is that despite the appalling gravity of his crimes, Adolf Eichmann – the Nazi officer who facilitated and managed the deportation of Jews to death camps – was really very “ordinary, common-place, and neither demonic nor monstrous.”284 She writes that his evil doing was not borne of an inherent or insane desire to do evil, but of his shallowness – his lack of thought. His apparent normalcy was especially disturbing because it points to the existence and potential existence of many more like him; Eichmann’s life opened Arendt’s eyes to “the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil.”285 In the wake of the Eichmann trial, and the controversial reception of the idea of the banality of evil, the idea of thoughtlessness became Arendt’s central preoccupation. It was Eichmann, she says, who prompted her philosophical investigation into what we are doing when

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we think in *The Life of the Mind* (1971). It was Eichmann who incited her to ask the bold question: “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even ‘condition’ them against it?” Arendt believes it is. This is relevant to our discussion because, as we will see, Arendt’s *thinking* is precisely a form of intimate revolt. Thus, we are in essence asking if intimate revolt could prevent “evil.” Or rather, what is the socio-political power of intimate revolt?

Arendt’s philosophy of thinking in *The Life of the Mind* asks the question “what makes us think?” In order to answer this question, Arendt takes as a departure point Kant’s distinction between reason (*Vernunft*) and intellect (*Verstand*). The former points to an “urgent need” or inclination to think, and to think beyond what can be known. The latter, on the contrary, involves the “desire to know,” and to name; the intellect is the faculty that motivates and governs the world of science. Arendt explains, “[t]he need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same.” Truth, as in scientific evidence or mathematical systems, exists only in the world of appearances and in order to describe what is perceived through our senses. The intellect seeks to grasp and explain its existence. Meaning, on the other hand, is outside that which can be perceived, it does not appear in the world, it is the unattainable something that exists only insofar as we search for it – speculate about it. Reason motivates this speculation; it takes for granted a thing’s existence and asks what it means for that thing to *be*. In this respect, says Arendt (although he did not

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287 Ibid., 5.
288 Ibid., 193.
289 Arendt uses the word ‘intellect’ in deliberate contrast to the more common translation of *verstand* – understanding. Ibid., 13.
290 Ibid., 15.
291 Interestingly, this is an aspect of thought that Arendt touches upon in *The Human Condition*, in which she states that thought is the source of art works, writing, philosophy and poetry (in the sense that they speculate and search
recognize that he had done so), Kant liberated ‘thought’ from the confines of knowledge, and as such legitimized it as a faculty of the mind.\textsuperscript{292}

Given that reason prompts us to think, Arendt then explores what we are doing when we think. For one, she describes thought as a “soundless dialogue of the I with itself.”\textsuperscript{293} She derives this property from a dualistic theory of the mind: an “original duality or split between me and myself which is inherent in all consciousness.”\textsuperscript{294} This existential questioning, which she also calls ‘Socratic thinking,’ is an exchange such that “I” am the interrogator and the interrogated. It is not a far stretch for one to relate this depiction of thought as an “inner dialogue” to the common notion of conscience (derived from the same Greek word, syneidēsis, as is consciousness). Indeed, conscience, for Arendt, is a byproduct of consciousness.\textsuperscript{295} However, what she describes as a “silent intercourse” with the self is not always present telling us what to do and what not to do. Rather, the inner dialogue is a kind of after-thought, a means by which to hold oneself accountable to oneself – but only if one engages it. If one avoids this self-examination, one will never recognize moral inconsistencies and thereby, never come to know the difference between right and wrong. Surely, engaging in the act of thinking plays a role in the prevention of evil.

Another essential characteristic of thinking is its capacity to remember. Thought holds on to objects and events that are sensed in the world and recalls them in their absence. Furthermore, says Arendt, this memory-tool goes beyond simple recollection: “in these operations the mind learns how to deal with things that are absent and prepares itself to ‘go further,’ toward the

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\item for meaning) as opposed to cognition, which is the source of concrete things, i.e., knowledge. Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 170.
\item Arendt, \textit{Life of the Mind}, 63.
\item Ib\textsuperscript{id.}, 74-75. Interesting note: Arendt first mentions this “dialogue between ‘me and myself’” as the Platonic essence of thought in \textit{The Human Condition}, page 76.
\item Arendt, \textit{Life of the Mind}, 74-75. She refers to the Greek word syneidenai from which consciousness is derived, which means ‘to know oneself’ or ‘to observe myself.’
\item Ib\textsuperscript{id.}, 193.
\end{itemize}
understanding of things that are always absent, that cannot be remembered because they were never present to sense experience.”

This, she explains, is why we are able to tell a story using abstract thoughts – abstractions that only become accessible to us in the recreation of the story – even though we have not experienced (sensed) those words or images. Thought as a memory-tool also demonstrates how thinking necessarily “destroys” reality. We cannot actively think, says Arendt, without being aware of the fact that we are thinking, and in that moment of thought-awareness, we are no longer participating in the here and now but, albeit momentarily, in our minds. In other words, when someone is thinking, she cannot be in the moment, as it were. For example, you may notice that eyes sometimes drift up and to the left when someone is trying to remember or imagine something. This is a manifestation of the momentary negation of the real that is inherent to thinking. Even if that which you are thinking about is directly in front of us, we must retreat to an inward place, a place apart from the world of appearances, in order to think of that object and as such, that thought-object becomes suspended in both space and time. Thereby, a related feature of thinking is that it is outside time. Arendt explains, “[t]hinking annihilates temporal as well as spatial distances. I can anticipate the future, think of it as though it were already present, and I can remember the past as though it had not disappeared.”

Thought’s capacity to recall past events and to conceive of events described to us, as well as possible moments in the future, means that we are able (through the above-mentioned inner dialogue) to evaluate and in turn facilitate or prevent the recurrence of any given event – including a catastrophic one.

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296 Ibid., 77.
297 Ibid., 85.
298 One’s capacity to translate thought into action in the world of appearances involves the two other faculties of the mind (‘willing’ and ‘judging’) that Arendt explores, (though The Life of the Mind only includes ‘thinking’ and willing’ because she did not live to publish the third installment, which exists only as a series of lectures). Because a comprehensive examination of all three faculties and how they inter-relate is beyond the scope of this inquiry, I ask the reader to simply keep in mind that all features of Arendt’s ‘thought’ are carried out with respect to the other two mental activities. Note also that this does not undermine the importance of thinking in our discussion; thinking always prompts the other faculties of the mind, and therefore, is still essential.
Arendt also describes thinking as “somehow self-destructive.”

Here she draws once again on Kant, who did not believe that reason’s urge to think was ever fully satisfied. She quotes the philosopher: “I do not share the opinion...that one should not doubt once one has convinced oneself of something. In pure philosophy this is impossible. The mind has a natural aversion to it.”

In terms of Arendt’s philosophy of thinking, this means that anything we are sure of in one moment becomes subject to questioning in the next. In other words, thinking is self-destructive in the sense that thought-objects and ideas are never permanent; meaning is continually called into question. This observation is once again reminiscent of comments she makes in The Human Condition: “[t]he activity of thinking is as relentless and repetitive as life itself.”

In The Life of the Mind, however, Arendt wants to know if thinking can prevent evildoing, and this feature of thought supports her hypothesis that it does. If thinking is carried out as an on-going activity, as described above, one cannot fall into mindless patterns of obedience. Obedience, she explains, is conformity to governing rules and codes of conduct, without consideration of their content. For example, in the case of Nazi Germany, for there to have been – as there was – a complete reversal of ethical and moral codes, “everybody [must have been] fast asleep when it occurred.”

That is to say, the ceaseless deconstruction of ideas inherent to thinking must prevent – by definition – the blind acceptance of whatever values or virtues are promoted in a given a society. Thinking in this way, must indeed be a condition that prevents evildoing.

Finally, according to Arendt, thinking is accessible to everyone. Thought, as outlined above, is not a privilege for those of a certain status or for those with a certain IQ.

[Thinking] is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty in everybody; by the same token, inability to think is not a failing of the many who lack brain power but an ever-present possibility for everybody – scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded. Everybody may come to shun that

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299 Arendt, Life of the Mind, 88.
301 Arendt, Human Condition, 171.
302 Arendt, Life of the Mind, 177.
intercourse with oneself whose feasibility and importance Socrates first discovered.\textsuperscript{303}

Furthermore, says Arendt, “[if] the ability to tell right from wrong [has] anything to do with the ability to think, then we must be able to ‘demand’ its exercise from every sane person, no matter how erudite or ignorant, intelligent or stupid, he may happen to be.”\textsuperscript{304} In other words, if thought is a condition for preventing evil, then we are all \textit{obliged} to think. Thus, we must always be held responsible for our actions because as thinking beings we all have the capacity to indulge or deny the mind’s inclination to think. Thinking, therefore, is not contingent upon a pre-existing, morally “good” character, nor do certain circumstances preclude thought. Arendt does not deny that there are factors (“internal” and “external”) that may facilitate or hinder thought, but this does not undermine the fact that in every moment the \textit{possibility} of thought exists – one always has the option to engage or not to engage in critical thought (we will take this up again later). Avoiding that inner dialogue on a regular basis produces a meaningless existence. Even though a person may appear to have certain convictions – be they “good” or “evil” – those convictions are not her own if she does not question and recommit to them over and over again. Arendt explains, “[t]he sad truth of the matter is that most evil is done by people who never made up their minds to be or do either evil or good.”\textsuperscript{305} This is precisely the \textit{banality} of evil.\textsuperscript{306}

Eichmann was indeed thoughtless. Perhaps he “knew” what he was doing, but his incapacity to understand the meaning – the gravity – of his actions, points to a lack of inner dialogue, a lack of thought. There was no abstract reflection. Eichmann was thoughtless because he was always in the world of appearances; he never went to that inward place where he might have come to know right from wrong. And, to be sure, he did not simply stop thinking during his role as a Nazi officer; Arendt observed a man who lived a \textit{life} of thoughtlessness. And it is because of this life of thoughtlessness that Eichmann ended up where he did, doing what he did as an accomplice in the gross, tyrannical evil that was the Holocaust.

\textsuperscript{303} Ibid., 191.
\textsuperscript{304} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{305} Ibid., 180.
\textsuperscript{306} Good actions can therefore also be banal.
3.2 Thinking as Revolt

The language Arendt uses to describe thinking bears a striking resemblance to the language Kristeva uses to articulate revolt. Recall that intimate revolt is a repetitive process of retrospection and introspection. These moments can be compared with and paralleled to thought’s continual search for meaning, its capacity to remember and abstract, and its activity as an inner dialogue, respectively. In addition, those who do not revolt are described in similar terms as those who do not think. For Kristeva, without intimate revolt, individuals are complacent and robotized – they “[fall] asleep in the normalizing order.”³⁰⁷ Similarly, in Arendt’s account, non-thinking also produces complacency, and un-questioned obedience;³⁰⁸ she states, “[u]nthinking men are like sleepwalkers.”³⁰⁹ Having read Arendt extensively, Kristeva is fully aware of the parallels.³¹⁰ “My interest in Hannah Arendt is...that she tried to rehabilitate anxious thinking [la pensée inquiète] against calculated thinking that is just ‘computerizing.’”³¹¹

Of greatest importance for both authors are the consequences of a society without thinking individuals or of a society without individuals who engage in intimate revolt, as the case may be. Kristeva observes that the consequences are essentially one and the same:

Generally when the media employs the word ‘revolt,’ we understand nothing other than this nihilistic suspension of questioning in favor of so-called new values, which as values, precisely, have forgotten to question themselves and have thereby fundamentally betrayed the meaning of revolt that I am trying to emphasize here. [...] The pseudo-rebellious nihilist is in fact a man reconciled with the stability of new values. And this stability, which is illusory, is revealed to be deadly, totalitarian. I can never sufficiently emphasize the fact that totalitarianism is the result of a certain fixation of revolt in what is precisely its betrayal, namely, the suspension of

³⁰⁷ Kristeva, Sense and Non-Sense, 9.
³⁰⁸ Arendt, Life of the Mind, 177.
³⁰⁹ Ibid., 191.
³¹⁰ She has referred to Arendt as a woman “of revolt” and the revolutionary aspect of thinking in Arendt is, in part, the reason she is the subject of Kristeva’s first volume on female genius. Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 94-95.
³¹¹ Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 114.
retrospective return, which amounts to a suspension of thought. Hannah Arendt has brilliantly developed this elsewhere.\textsuperscript{312}

In the above passage, Kristeva directly confirms Arendt’s thesis that the tyrannical evil of the Nazi regime was a result of thoughtlessness. Indirectly, the overarching similarity between the authors’ theories makes them mutually reinforcing; and the importance of each work is effectively enhanced. In Arendt’s account, thinking is explored and justified philosophically. Reason prompts us to think, in the sense that we have an urge or an inclination to search for meaning. Reading Arendt through a Kristevan lens means thought, as a form of intimate revolt, is justified also in psychological terms. “Anxious” thinking is more than a philosophical inclination, albeit an important one, but also a psychological need – the basis for psychic health, as we have seen. Thinking as a preventative measure against evil is given new meaning when it is understood as a form of psychic revolt, because the latter constitutes an individual’s identity, a sense of community and the associated feelings of inclusion, which, in effect, relieve the individual of potential tendencies to participate in (violent) acts of exclusion. Furthermore, the inclination to think that Arendt describes becomes an obligation when she establishes that our capacity to think is a condition for understanding what is right and wrong. However, to “demand” people to think in order to prevent evil doing is perhaps not enough to make it happen. In light of this, Kristeva’s theory serves as a supplement to Arendt’s. Revolt, as we have seen, is not only a matter of psychic health but it is a source of pleasure (see Chapter 1, Section 1.1). Furthermore, Kristeva insists – contrary to Arendt – that the life of the mind is invariably connected to the body and soul.\textsuperscript{313} Thus, the jouissance of revolt, though it may be fleeting and can accompany feelings of sadness and loss, is a pleasure that is decidedly somatic as well as psychic. Thinking as revolt is not only an abstract urge or an obligation, it is also desirable; thinking contributes to an individual’s happiness.\textsuperscript{314} This does not mean that thinking and other forms of intimate revolt are effortless; both Kristeva and Arendt present theories that entail a

\textsuperscript{312} Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 6.

\textsuperscript{313} For Arendt, the mind is separate from the body, and because the soul is connected to the passions, which are bodily things, and visible on the body, the soul is also separate from the mind. Therefore, the body and soul are part of the world of appearances and markedly not of the mind. See Hannah Arendt, Life of the Mind, 30-37. Kristeva remarks on this oversight/misunderstanding in Arendt’s work. Kristeva, Hannah Arendt, 179.

\textsuperscript{314} Psychoanalytic theories link happiness to self-awareness and capacity for self-expression, which does not necessarily correspond with conventional ideas of happiness. For an interesting discussion on health and happiness from a psychoanalytic point of view, see Mari Ruti’s The Call of Character (2013).
degree and kind of work, whether it is a self-interrogation, a working-through of desires, or a re-evaluation of accepted norms and values. However, Kristeva’s ‘revolt’ adds to Arendt’s thought a more apparent motivation. For example, Arendt writes that a life without thought is “not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive.”\(^{315}\) But how is one, really, “fully alive” if the body is not considered, or if the soul is disconnected from the life of the mind? Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt brings this important dimension – the affective/bodily component – of psychic life, which Arendt ignores or discredits, to the fore. Kristeva says that “the true life of thought” is “thought vivified and incarnate in the desiring body,”\(^{316}\) which is precisely intimate revolt. Moreover, it is the important difference between Arendt’s anxious thinking, which is an act of revolt, and calculated thinking, which is not. Thus, Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory supports and expands on Arendt’s philosophical argument.\(^{317}\) At the same time, Arendt’s exploration of the banality of evil in thoughtlessness provides a powerful example of the potential impact that personal, psychic revolt can have on society at large.

### 4 Conditions for Intimate Revolt Culture

At this time, one could justifiably ask: How accessible is intimate revolt? Who can and cannot revolt? This is a concern raised, for example, by Kelly Oliver (2001, 2004, 2005), who thinks that traditional theories of subjectivity in contemporary theory do not adequately take into account a subject’s social position.\(^{318}\) To clarify, Oliver posits a distinction between subjectivity – one’s sense of self as a self with agency and “response-ability” (inherently ethical), and ‘subject position’ – one’s historical and social position within a given cultural context (inherently political). For Oliver, “our experience of ourselves as subjects is maintained in the tension

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\(^{315}\) Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 191.

\(^{316}\) Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, 81.

\(^{317}\) This is important because it has been suggested that Arendt’s emphasis on the power of thought is a generalization of her personal (read: biased) position as an intellectual. For example, Peter Schotten claims: “As a person whose happiness, career, and identity were defined by her capacity for thought, Arendt was disposed to assume what she thought true for herself was true for everyone.” Peter Schotten, “Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann Reconsidered” *Modern Age* 49, no. 2 (2007), 143. Using psychoanalytic theory, Kristeva (although, notably, also an intellectual) gives supplemental evidence to Arendt’s claims.

\(^{318}\) Kristeva’s subject-in-process, on which her theory of intimate revolt depends, is included in Oliver’s critique.
between our subject positions and our subjectivity.”

On her reading, Kristeva’s intimate revolt assumes a privileged subjectivity and, consequently, any suffering that is specific to oppression is not considered or, at least, not properly addressed. This is an important critique to think about because, to be sure, psychoanalytic sessions, as well as creative and intellectual pursuits, are arguably bourgeois privileges that require spare time and money, which are available to a limited few. In addition, Kristeva references famous (mostly wealthy, white) writers in her exploration of revolt and she is a prolific intellectual herself, as are many of her contemporaries. Thus, the question arises as to how realistic it is to propose a culture of rebellious imaginaries. Is it a theory that resembles and requires a Western, capitalist value-system, in which theoretically everyone is equal and has equal opportunity to education, jobs, safety and health, etcetera, but where, in fact, there are so many systemic imbalances and prejudices and individual-specific incidents, that in terms of actual lived experiences, opportunities are far from equally attainable?

Let us be clear that, fundamentally, everyone is potentially capable of the intimate revolt Kristeva has described, just as we saw with Arendt that everyone has the capacity for anxious thought. However, not everyone will engage in these psychic revolts. And, of those who do, individuals do not necessarily revolt permanently; recall that Sartre and Aragon moved in and out of their imaginary revolts. And Catherine Clément has remarked: “Those who practice inspiration as a profession, be they artists, mystics, prophets, philosophers, or dancers on a crowded dance floor, go back and forth between the world of the banal and that of the extraordinary.”

Also, clearly one person’s revolts would not look like the revolts of another,

320 Clément, *Syncope*, 240. There is an interesting comparison to be made between Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt and Catherine Clément’s notion of syncope. Briefly put, Clément develops a philosophy of subjectivity around the idea of syncope (in music, in grammar, in bodily functions) that highlights, among other things, the importance of interruption and destruction to creativity. For example, she writes: “That the artist is considered to be ‘crazy’ is not an accident: it is a necessity. […] the artist’s reality demands crossing through an essential syncope, a veritable mental collapse, resulting in new work. In fact, from this chaos only something new can emerge. This eclipse that fractures consciousness is the very prerequisite for the creative act. Syncope is resistance, rebellion, rejection of the world and dissolution of the subject; […] no creation is possible without the syncope of the subject.” Clément, *Syncope*, 236. Clément explains that those major events that break up the routine in our lives, such as, mourning and the experience of loss, give way to a new era for better or for worse. This reminds us of the repetitive regeneration of the subject inherent in the revolt that Kristeva is endorsing. Moreover, Kristeva’s insistence that intimate revolt is a way to challenge the status-quo and reinvent social norms echoes Clément’s description of the
and some revolts may have more lasting popular impact on society than others, such as the works of great authors and artists. Indeed, inherent in the idea of an *individual* psychic revolt is that it occurs precisely with respect to the individual’s particular history, and therefore within his or her particular financial constraints, for example. As Kristeva rightly points out, “standard of living doesn’t equate with quality of life.” In other words, economic disadvantage does not decidedly preclude one from being capable of revolt; this is as shortsighted as suggesting that intelligence (not to be confused with education) requires money. Kristeva states that her vision entails “defending culture as revolt, a culture that upsets and protests, with everyone in on it, from the avant-gardes to the unemployed.”

Nevertheless, Kristeva is not naïve; she recognizes that there are some prerequisites for a culture of revolt, one of which is a certain degree of freedom – freedom to question authority figures and authoritative values, the presence of which are also necessary. In one interview, she offers Rwanda and Zaire as examples of countries wherein solving fundamental economic difficulties takes precedence over the issue of a waning cultural life. Generally speaking though, in Kristeva’s view, Western (certainly French) culture fulfills that condition of freedom, at least it has in the past. Hence, she emphasizes the need to re-establish respectable, trust-worthy “paternal functions” within Western society, i.e., in politics, popular cultural idols, to higher education and the family, while simultaneously encouraging a healthy interrogation of the effects of syncope: “The ancient past comes back, raging, to attack the present. Through his ecstasies the mystic leaps beyond social distinctions, crosses them with a bound, annihilating them. […] The way of syncope struggles against the religious hierarchy and wins: new orders are founded. And the social order often represses these rebellions of the sublime: syncope always opens up the way to the stake – the phoenix’s pyre as well as that of the Inquisition.” Clément, *Syncope*, 223. And, “The expression ‘social body’ defines the shackles that must be destroyed: an enormous flesh made up of constraints and customs, of conventional gestures and paths taken […] It is nothing other than identity: it is I […] I, with my definitions: an unbearable collection of belongings to. […] Against self, I have no refuge but the let-out of syncope.” Clément, *Syncope*, 251.

321 Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, 89.
322 Ibid., 82.
323 Ibid., 109-10.
actions and values of such figures and institutions.\textsuperscript{324} Nevertheless, Kristeva implies that, currently, it is mostly members of an elite group who are at the fore of revolt culture.\textsuperscript{325} So, in part, she charges those in privileged positions, which includes her audience, to help cultivate an environment that would facilitate intimate revolt for as many people as possible, regardless of their socio-economic positions. This attitude is revealed in the following concern: “one shouldn’t deny the anxiety of the unemployed, the anxiety of the adolescent, the anxiety of women […] Our thoughts and culture should accompany this anxiety.”\textsuperscript{326}

Beyond the re-establishment of social limits and prohibitions, Kristeva does not detail exactly how our thoughts and culture are to “accompany” people in their anxieties. But she does point to some important features of an environment that would foster psychic revolt. Such features are traced back to the dynamics of the psychoanalytic encounter. More specifically, we need to look to develop social and political (near) equivalents of the psychoanalytic bond, which depends on the presence of a \textit{listening other}, and of the psychoanalytic process more broadly, with an emphasis on the healing and regenerative power of \textit{narration} and \textit{interpretation}. In other words, in order to cultivate a culture of revolt, the role of the listening other and the work of narration and interpretation, which are at the heart of the relationship between the analyst and analysand, must be more or less reproduced in our social and political lives.

\section*{4.1 Listening Other}

An important element of the psychoanalytic experience is the role of the analyst as “listening other.” In \textit{Tales of Love} (1987/1983) Kristeva offers an extensive exploration of the amatory dimension of transference in psychoanalysis. And, she suggests that, in light of the failings of religious and other secular discourses, psychoanalysis is the ideal and perhaps only place

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{324} Ibid., 31.
\item \textsuperscript{325} “Some (still an elite, but it’s getting bigger […]]) are beginning to, well, [speak] up.” Kristeva, \textit{Revolt, She Said}, 87-88. And “the new forms of revolt we mentioned require the intervention of both the elites and certain distinct groupings – the professions, specific age-groups and so on.” Ibid., 90.
\item \textsuperscript{326} Kristeva, \textit{Revolt, She Said}, 104-5.
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wherein this unbiased, amatory listening can take place. However, in a 1992 interview, she admits that the role of the listening other in psychoanalysis can and must be available elsewhere:

Psychoanalysis is indeed a privileged listening post, but one should invent and diversify listening posts in order to compensate for the general deficiency of the symbolic markers […]. Consequently, the analyses we are able to produce…could be put to practical use…by those I might call ‘basic intellectuals,’ those who play their parts in educational centers, schools, mayors’ offices, and new microspaces that need to be opened, to be invented.\(^\text{327}\)

Over a decade later, in *Hatred and Forgiveness*, Kristeva reiterates the political import of this kind of listening: “Listening to the speaking being is a Copernican revolution of values and norms, opening new possibilities of connection to others, which constitutes the very essence of politics.”\(^\text{328}\) Of course, she still submits that analysts are in a unique position to listen to the unconscious, and thus she argues that France, and its current crisis of subjectivity, still needs psychoanalysis, perhaps now more than ever.\(^\text{329}\) At the same time, though, she speaks of how this kind of listening can be employed in policy-making in the public sphere. For example, she explains that analytical listening is the underlying philosophy that informed the pragmatic initiatives made by the “National Council on Disability” to encourage the development of a society that includes a healthy “interaction” with the disabled.\(^\text{330}\) Thus, it is possible to employ an ethics of amatory/analytical listening beyond the particular setting of psychoanalysis.\(^\text{331}\) Indeed, she refers to “analysands and all those trying to open their speech to the unconscious” as those who would be able to provide the openness and “psychoanalytic ear” needed for excluded people to express their fears and creativities.\(^\text{332}\) Implied here is that one does not have to be in therapy to be open to and aware of one’s own vulnerability, and that this openness and self-
awareness is an important dimension of being capable of “listening” to the vulnerability of others. 333

To contribute another concrete example, I would argue that the philosophy underlying a lot of the much-needed media-literacy initiatives is also grounded in a kind of analytical listening. The voices of daughters, sisters, and friends with eating disorders are being heard and the response is an effort to reveal the tricks of photo-shop, to change and diversify the standards of beauty, to embolden other sources of self-confidence. Teaching people, especially young people, how marketing works and about advertising strategies, is an example, I suggest, of listening to the vulnerability of speaking beings and accompanying them in their anxieties. It is especially opposed to “solving” identity crises through consumerism and mass-produced identities. And, finally, it encourages the kind of critical engagement with the world that is at the heart of Kristeva’s revolt culture. This is an example of the ethics of listening employed and deployed at the discursive level. Whether it is support through socio-political discourse or infrastructure or in a one-on-one relationship, the listener is to the sufferer as piano chords are to the soloist’s melody, so to speak. For this reason, listening others – more broadly conceived as we have here – can accompany people in their pain, suffering and anxiety, which in turn can facilitate their psychic revolts.

4.2 Narrative & Interpretation

On the flip side of the “listening other,” the psychoanalytic experience provides a space and opportunity for putting anxieties and desires into words. The related acts of narration and interpretation that arise within the transference relationship are crucial, on Kristeva’s view, for

333 While we are speaking of those involved with the public sphere (e.g., social programs, government policy), the same could be said for individuals’ personal connections in the private sphere. It is through identification with another’s suffering that one might facilitate the sufferer in her putting words to pain. If the listener can relate on some level, and therefore be more sensitive, to what the other person is feeling, she can ask the right questions or not ask the wrong questions, essentially, have a gauge for what the other person may or may not want or need to hear or say. At the same time, if the sufferer senses non- or at least reserved judgment and understanding in the listener, she will more likely feel permitted to talk about her pain.
the regeneration of the subject. In her experience, patients come to analysis in order to work out various symptoms, but ultimately, in search of a new beginning. When successful, the analyst facilitates an interpretation of the patient’s suffering that brings about his or her psychic rebirth. Interpretation, here, does not imply a rational understanding or intellectualizing of traumatic events. Rather it involves giving meaning to suffering where there may not have appeared to be any. The analysand’s narration and the analyst’s interpretation or silence articulate and give shape to the semiotic.\textsuperscript{334} Thus, interpretation is an affective experience of identification (via the process of transference and counter-transference), such that individual transformations are exacted at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Can this transformation take place outside of analysis? Drawing on Kristeva’s engagement with Arendt (mostly in \textit{Hannah Arendt}), Noëlle McAfee presents a chapter in \textit{Revolt, Affect, and Collectivity} that considers the power of “bearing witness” through narrative in the public sphere, particularly in the context of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC).\textsuperscript{335} Much like the analysis I presented above, McAfee presents Arendt through a Kristevan lens in order to show that there is transformative power in narration beyond that which Arendt proposes. In Arendt’s model, narrative is primarily a form of communication that, when shared with or heard by others, “completes” the event in question. This is important for “accomplishing” a political action. McAfee explains Arendt’s position as such: “true action is pointless unless it is done in the company of others and recorded by others. It is not enough for an action to occur; the story of its occurring needs to be told. Action has no meaning unless it is accompanied by or followed with a narrative.”\textsuperscript{336} The meaning Arendt has in mind, though, is of the historical and political order. It crystallizes the events for a community – the \textit{polis} – such that they are not forgotten, and to be sure, learned from. Clearly the following is part of what makes the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions important – that the wounds of the community as a whole are tended to and future horrors avoided. Taking into consideration the Kristevan subject, who is affective and desiring,

\textsuperscript{334} Kristeva, \textit{Intimate Revolt}, 19.
\textsuperscript{335} McAfee, “Bearing Witness in the \textit{Polis},” 113-125.
\textsuperscript{336} Ibid., 118.
and the Kristevan conception of language production, we see that narration also confers upon the story a *semiotic* meaning. Precisely because every story told is ultimately informed by the imagination of the subject recounting it, the story is given an *affective* meaning, which, regardless of its historical accuracy, has the potential to transform the subject because it is a form of working through conscious and unconscious memories. Public testimonies, McAfee argues, such as those at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, provide victims of trauma a space and opportunity for a healing that is analogous to psychoanalysis. “Like an analysand, the witness narrates her story that she offers to the community for interpretation.” Thus, there is a double purpose to narrative and interpretation in the public sphere, on McAfee’s view: healing individuals and also fractured communities.

4.3 A Culture of Forgiveness

McAfee’s analysis of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions points us to Kristeva’s writing on forgiveness. Kristeva admits that forgiveness is not first a psychoanalytic concept, but a religious one. At the same time, while one can observe certain religious elements in it, she develops her notion of forgiveness within the context of her practice as a psychoanalyst. On Kristeva’s view, people who undergo analysis are ultimately seeking a way to forgive, either themselves or someone else, in order to start anew. Thus, working with the etymology of the French word *par-don* (through-gift), Kristeva conceptualizes the listening other’s interpretation, and resulting transformation, as a form of *for-give-ness*: a gift of psychic rebirth.

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337 Ibid., 121.
338 Ibid., 123.
To be sure, Kristeva sees the potential psychological benefits of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as some official, public, national apologies. These are indeed examples of accompanying individuals and a community through suffering for the purpose of regeneration and growth. However, it is important to note that Kristeva specifically states that (in her conception) to forgive is not to forget. In fact, a truly reprehensible act is neither forgotten nor forgiven! Following Arendt, Kristeva insists that forgiveness does not erase the act; it is directed only at the person. This may call to mind the Christian adage ‘one forgives not the sin but the sinner.’ In Arendtian terms, one forgives the “who” not the “what.” Yet, the who refers to someone capable of thinking and judging his or her own acts and only such people are worthy of judgment fueled by forgiveness. The counter-example for Arendt is, as we saw earlier, the case of Eichmann, who revealed himself as a robotic bureaucrat, a non-person. Thus, on Arendt’s view, the prerequisite for forgiveness is evidence of critical thought and judgment. Not unrelatedly, for Kristeva, the requirement is not simply confession, but remorse. While she acknowledges the Jewish and Christian heritage of the term forgiveness, Kristeva rejects the religious sentiment of “absolute forgiveness without repentance.” Therefore, forgiveness is not suitable for all people in all situations. That which determines whether or not it is suitable is not the gravity of the crime but the intentions of the criminal. Kristeva explains that both the Freudian topography of the mind and the psychoanalytic method point to the possibility of re-fashioning the psyche. Guilt, she reminds us, along with anxiety, depression, and even psychosis, is a product of both conscious and unconscious logics of the mind. She states, “we are intrinsically bearers of the very sources that generate ill-being – whether it is our own ill-being (symptoms, suicide, etc.), or that which affects others (violence, hatred, murder, etc.) – and that can also allow us to get rid of it.” Therefore, when there is a genuine desire for transformation (which could be from the point of view of a victim or an offender), one has the power to alter his or her unconscious, that is, if given the chance, through forgiveness.

342 Ibid.
343 Kristeva, Hannah Arendt, 233.
344 She jokingly claimed in an interview that she “may not be Christian enough” for that. Kristeva, “Forgiveness,” 283. Incidentally, it is in the privacy of the analytic session that one can best discern the sincerity of someone’s remorse. Kristeva, “Forgiveness,” 282.
345 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 18.
346 Ibid., 19.
While she sees the potential benefits for some of the public testimonies and apologies that have occurred in recent years, Kristeva states that regarding the more reprehensible, so-called “unforgivable” crimes, psychoanalysis is likely the only context in which a penitent criminal might heal, and learn how to forge new relationships. And, in the public arena, she argues – following Arendt again, and contra to Derrida (1999) – there must still be judgment and punishment. An individual may seek out a chance to transform him or herself on a personal level, but to society debts must still be paid. For, as Freud too remarked, certain laws and prohibitions must be maintained and enforced for a civilization not to disintegrate into chaos. Instead, forgiveness takes place primarily in the private sphere because it requires a loving bond with a listening other. She does not mean romantic love in this context, but rather a love, nevertheless intimate, that means making oneself available to accompany a person on his or her journey of interpretation (and associated sublimation). It is through this love that the listening other suspends time and judgment so that the one seeking forgiveness might freely symbolize – if but temporarily – what has been previously inexpressible. In this sense love does not annihilate hate but can suspend it, for a moment at least.

This brings us back to the question of accessibility. While Kristeva’s notion of forgiveness is shaped by her experience as an analyst, the gift of interpretation and meaning is not confined to the analytical situation. Kristeva has stated, to put it in different terms, that forgiveness is “nothing other than the unconscious coming to consciousness;” it is a kind of sublimation. In Kristevan terms, then, we can say it is the symbolization of the semiotic. In her 1987 publication,

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349 Kristeva, “Forgiveness,” 283.
350 Thus, the time of Kristevan forgiveness, much like the time of Freudian analysis, is an interruption, a pause, or a deferralment: it is atemporal.
Soleil Noir, Kristeva explores the writing of Dostoyevsky, writing in general, and the aesthetic act even more broadly, all as forms of forgiveness. This may seem inconsistent with the need for a listening, loving other, but Kristeva explains that there is still an “other” in attendance in the aesthetic act; she is just not immediately present the way an analyst or similar interlocutor is. The other is invoked, and the working-through happens via imaginary constructs, but there is still identification with an ideal other, and the potential for complete transformation (i.e., at the level of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real). Simply put, then, aesthetic practices can be an expression of the inexpressible, but the ‘other’ is a discourse, an ideal, whereas in analysis or between two people, the other is literally present, with the power to intervene.

Finally, alongside writing, art, and analysis, in terms of sublimatory acts, we return to narration and interpretation, with which we began this discussion. As we have seen, the healing capacity of this Kristevan forgiveness depends on the symbolization of suffering, or putting words to trauma. In the words of Alison Rice, “[Kristeva] believes in the creation of a narrative that does not erase the past but transcends it, allowing the subject to start anew, which is the ultimate goal of forgiveness, and the evidence of its effectiveness.”

Kristeva’s reconceptualization of forgiveness is not intended only for diagnosed patients suffering from obvious symptoms (such as depression or anxiety), nor is it solely for criminals in need of rehabilitation. In Kristeva’s model, we all need loving, listening others that might provide for us the time and space to express our inner lives, which facilitates the questioning of social norms and values and the challenging of traditions such that we do not become a society of complacent automatons more inclined to imitate than to create, which Kristeva sees happening already. Understood as a gift of psychic rebirth, a gift of interpretation and of meaning, it is thus only through and in light of forgiveness that a subject can make mistakes, make amends, name and express her demons and desires, all for the purpose of (continually) refashioning the self and one’s place in the world. In other words, forgiveness becomes the condition necessary for

353 Ibid.
intimate revolt. And her notion of revolt culture depends upon a culture that fosters and provides forgiveness. Kristeva’s forgiveness is not confined to a singular act. Rather, it is a way of life—a way of being in the world with others such that we all have the opportunity to transform ourselves, to revolt, which is, indeed, a gift.

What I have been describing here is no less than the conditions for a culture of intimate revolt, which might also be described as culture of forgiveness. A society that accompanies individuals in their journey of desire, fear and suffering is one wherein subjects aim to live by the ethics of analytical listening and can express and interpret their inner lives. This points to an important feature of Kristeva’s culture of revolt: it is decidedly inter-subjective. I highlight this because Kristeva’s thought has been critiqued for being individualistic. To be sure, the intimate is “what is most profound and most singular in the human experience,” and intimate revolt is a personal experience. However, what we have seen is that intimate revolt cannot happen without the loving support and interpretation (forgiveness) of a listening “other,” which can take a variety of forms. That is, while the listening other can refer to an analyst, parent, friend, as we saw above, it can also refer to a discourse or an ideal. This is important because it shows that our psyches are shaped as much by the interaction with cultural products as with specific, individual others. Thus, far from being individualistic, revolt culture assumes an ongoing dynamic between the psyche and culture.

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355 Ibid.
356 For example, McAfee writes, “Going beyond Kristeva, [Kelly] Oliver transforms the notion of psychic space from being subjective to intersubjective.” Oliver’s view that “psychic space is my imaginative placement of myself in a world of others…overcomes some of the individualistic tendencies in Kristeva’s thinking.” McAfee, “Bearing Witness in the Polis,” 116. Contrarily, though, Samir Dayal thinks that Kristeva’s writing (on Arendt, in this case) elaborates the importance of society as “a kind of literalized, radical inter-subjectivity.” And that there is a very important “intrapsychic dimension” of the plurality that Kristeva has emphasized over the course of her career. Dayal, intro to Crisis, 11, 15-16. I agree with Dayal on this topic and do not find much to substantiate McAfee’s claim that “Even though Kristeva argues that subjectivity is constituted dynamically by heterogeneous processes, the subject seems always to be by herself. She is a speaking being creating herself.” McAfee, “Bearing Witness in the Polis,” 116. Take as one counter-example Kristeva’s description of the psyche as “one open system connected to another.” Kristeva, Tales, 15. I hardly see the Kristevan subject as “creating herself” when Kristeva writes that “only under those conditions [of loving connectedness to another psyche] it is renewable.” Ibid. Note that this misreading does not discredit the rest of McAfee’s essay, which contains some useful and thoughtful analysis.
357 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 44.
Indeed, no one can revolt on one’s own. Kelly Oliver (2004, 2005) picks up on this element of Kristeva’s theory and, as part of her goal to develop a psychoanalytic social theory, fleshes out the ethical imperative in Kristeva’s notion of psychoanalytic forgiveness. Oliver wants to show that Kristevan forgiveness is only possible with the other’s responsivity. That is, we have a response-ability – an ability and obligation to respond – to help each other transcend our inherent alienation. The capacity for love, the forgiveness that makes this transcendence (read: sublimation) possible, even if temporarily, is, for Oliver, the defining feature of our subjectivity (over and above the idea of an inherent alienation). Furthermore, and importantly, Oliver draws attention to what Kristeva does not: precisely that forgiveness does not come freely and equally for all people, thus not all people have (in equal measure if at all) the psychic or social resources for psychic development, creativity and love, i.e., for intimate revolt. In other words, Oliver shows that “one’s social or subject position has much to do with whether or not the operations of the loving third [i.e., the availability and responsivity of a listening other] are possible and/or successful.”

5 Concluding Remarks

Kristeva is aware that a culture of intimate revolt is an ideal and not easily attained. However, that should not limit people from trying. With respect to this project she sees herself with a similar mindset as the participants of the social revolts in 1968; she describes them as “realists who want the impossible.” With this in mind, intimate revolt might be thought of along the lines of an ethical ideal akin to Nietzsche’s notion of Eternal Return (by which Kristeva was surely influenced). Revolt culture is a psychoanalytic theory that provides a framework – not a comprehensive model – with which to think about social ethics and infrastructures. We might interpret it as a commitment of individuals in a society to continually work on themselves.

³⁵⁹ Oliver, “Revolt and Forgiveness,” 91.
through retrospection, interrogation, narration and creation and to support one another in that work, through analytic listening and interpretation, i.e., forgiveness.

In the following chapter we will investigate the role, if any, that religion can play in this culture of revolt. Despite or perhaps because of her personal and intellectual engagement with religion, Kristeva’s vision noticeably focuses on secular modes of psychic forgiveness; I am interested to examine why she more or less abandons religion as part of the future of revolt and whether or not this is a valid move. At the same time, I will explore the ways that her notion of psychic revolt influences her views on religion.
Chapter 4: Kristeva, Religion and “The Future of Revolt”361

Religion is notably missing from Kristeva’s depiction of the future of revolt culture. In *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*, she asks: “what modern modes might re-create what was in the not-so-distant past the jouissance [read: revolt] of the religious man?” And she suggests that revolt culture may very well entail the “surpassing of homo religiosis.”362 Despite the fact that, following Freud, Kristeva sees rebellion as foundational to the sacred-social link and she has described religious ritual as a “coded revolt,”363 her texts on the subject364 emphasize new, secular variants of revolt. This leads me to ask: What concerns does Kristeva have regarding religion today with respect to her vision for a culture of revolt? What role, if any, might religion have in “the future of revolt?"

This chapter directs our discussion to the possibility of a modern religious subject in revolt. Such an inquiry necessarily happens alongside a discussion of Kristeva’s views on religion in general, which are sometimes perceived as ambiguous. On one hand, she has stated that she does not believe in God;365 she has described religious consolation as illusory,366 à la Freud, and continually submits psychoanalysis and aesthetic practices as methods superior to religion for dealing with suffering.367 On the other hand, Jewish and Christian themes and imagery are unmistakably woven throughout Kristeva’s work. She frequently evokes religious language (e.g., the idea of a psychic “pardon” is admittedly born of a religious construct) and appeals to biblical

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361 Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, title of part II.
363 Ibid., 14.
364 *Sense and Non-sense, Intimate Revolt, Revolt, She Said.*
367 *Powers, Tales, In the Beginning, Black Sun*; See also Beardsworth, *Psychoanalysis & Modernity*, 166-77.
figures, Christian theologians and mystics.\footnote{368} Thus, her writing on religion is left open to charges of Christian nostalgia or apologetics, and her approach to psychoanalysis has been described as pseudo-theological. Because of this seeming obscurity, this chapter will clarify Kristeva’s views on religion in light of her theories of intimate revolt. Indeed, I argue that Kristeva’s theories on revolt help illuminate her views on and approach to religion.

There are two caveats worth mentioning when considering Kristeva’s views on religion. For one, Kristeva is not a scholar of religion per se, and she admits this.\footnote{369} Like many contemporary, Continental theorists, she analyzes and comments on religion in the context of other discourses (e.g., women’s movement, motherhood, literature, politics, psychoanalysis). For this reason, most of her writing on religion appears variously throughout her body of work rather than in a concentrated study. One might suggest two exceptions: *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* (1987/1985) and *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2009/2006). Interestingly, both of these books are small publications, the topics on which Kristeva was invited to speak (which makes one wonder if others are more inclined to isolate and summarize Kristeva’s views on religion than she is herself). Also, due in part to the Eurocentric intellectual tradition that she inherits, Kristeva privileges a “Greco-Judeo-Christian” worldview. With this vantage point, coupled with her proximity to Orthodox and Catholic Christian traditions, Kristeva speaks primarily of religion *qua* Christianity.\footnote{370}

\footnote{368} Especially in her three most recent books: *Hatred*, *INB*, *Teresa, My Love: An Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila* (2014/2008).
\footnote{369} Kristeva, *INB*, 26.
\footnote{370} Occasionally her use of the term ‘religion’ is meant to delineate a broader sense of the term, but usually she references a non-Christian tradition by name. For example, in an etymological survey of the word ‘belief,’ she refers to “Chinese religions,” Confucianism and Taoism (although it is a rather superficial and simplified reference). Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, 32-35. Her treatment of Islam is clearly non-specialist and probably the most revealing of her Christian-centric position. Eliding the complexity and diversity of the tradition, she most often speaks in binary terms with respect to either fundamentalist, violent (read: terrorist) sects of Islam or mystical branches (Sufism). To her credit, Kristeva acknowledges that hers is an “all-too-simplified overview” when she responds to a question about Allah and the role of the father in Islam. Kristeva, *INB*, 64-68.
In this chapter, we will see that (a) the apparent ambivalence of her thoughts on religion is consistent with her vision for the future of a culture of revolt (i.e., an example of intimate revolt); (b) conceptualizing religious subjectivity through this Kristevan lens offers a more dynamic and comprehensive (more accurate) depiction of religious subjects and, in doing so, disrupts the dichotomies becoming prevalent in psychoanalytic interpretations of religion more broadly; finally, (c) she indubitably critiques religion of a certain kind, but her theory of intimate revolt nevertheless leaves open the possibility that religion of a different kind might fit into her vision of a modern culture of revolt.

1 Kristeva and Religion

Religion has always been and remains in recent years a recurring subject of analysis for Kristeva, whether it is featured in a text that explores a given theme or a more central focus of a text. My words (“a recurring subject of analysis”) are chosen carefully because, from Kristeva’s perspective, she is not proselytizing but analyzing. However, despite repeated assertions that she is not a believer, one might detect in the tone of her writing and in certain comments a certain longing for her childhood faith. Similarly, though her analyses highlight the downfalls and failures of religion, they also point to its capacity for fulfilling (fantasmatic) desires and the potential cathartic and healing power of religious imagery, symbolism, and ritual. These benefits overlap with many of the goals of psychoanalysis, and the line between the two discourses (religious and psychoanalytic) at times appears blurred. Thus, Kristeva has been called out as a Christian apologist and her depiction of the psychoanalytic project has been deemed pseu-do-theological. Arthur Bradley, for example, states that “it is increasingly possible to speak of a ‘theological turn’ in Kristeva’s thought over the last 20 years” and that this has “polarized

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371 Powers, Tales, and Black Sun. Beardsworth summarizes these texts as exploring what she calls the “minor histories” of abjection (Powers), Love (Tales) and Loss (Black Sun). Beardsworth, Psychoanalysis & Modernity.
critics into those who see her work as the basis for a new version of Christian theology and those who see her recourse to Christian symbolism as a worryingly retrogressive step." Indeed, it is hard to deny (and I doubt Kristeva herself would deny) that there is a “certain umbilical attachment” to Christianity in Kristeva’s writing. How are we to understand Kristeva’s views on religion in light of this ambiguity? I will suggest that we look at this question through the lens of intimate revolt.

2 The Early Years (roughly 1975-1995)

Diane Jonte-Pace (1997) and Sara Beardsworth (2004) have both argued that Kristeva’s work should not be read as Christian nostalgia or an endorsement of religion. One of the reasons Beardsworth mentions, which frankly should be obvious to scholars of religion, is that writing about religion and even promoting the study of religion cannot be equated with religious promotion, belief, or adherence. Along the same lines, Jonte-Pace points out that discussing psychic and/or social benefits of religion reveals little or nothing of one’s personal religious stance: “Kristeva’s affirmation of the efficacy of religion does not imply an affirmation of religious faith.”

In her chapter “Julia Kristeva and the Study of Religion,” Jonte-Pace offers a lucid review of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory of religion (from the 80s and early 90s), and addresses the paradox that characterizes it. Jonte-Pace’s persuasive suggestion is that three books often turned to for Kristeva’s views on religion (Powers of Horror, In the Beginning Was Love, and Strangers To Ourselves) can be read as the analyst’s re-writing of three of Freud’s oft-cited texts.

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375 Ibid., 281.
376 Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 157. Kristeva uses this phrase to describe Sartre’s relationship to the East Bloc. I thought it fitting and a touch ironic to use her own phrase here to describe her relationship to Christianity.
378 Jonte-Pace, “Kristeva and the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion”, 257.
on religion and culture (*Totem and Taboo*, *Future of an Illusion*, and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, respectively). Through these re-workings, Kristeva brings attention to over-looked or under-noted elements in Freud’s readings, which include most notably the role of the mother (and her sacrifice) and the semiotic in the formation of the subject, religion and society. At the same time, one sees reiterated in Kristeva’s work classic Freudian views on religion, which tend to be read as negative evaluations, such as its function as wish fulfillment and its illusory nature. However, Jonte-Pace notes that, in contrast to Freud, whose pronouncement that religious concepts and constructs are illusions has resonated as an indictment of religion for many decades, Kristeva “emphasizes the enlivening, creative effect of illusion.”

And she argues that where Freud’s writing focuses on religion as repressive and regressive, Kristeva’s writing, though not disagreeing with Freud, highlights its liberating and therapeutic functions. For example, in Kristeva’s analysis of the death of Jesus (man/god) in Christianity, she moves beyond the Freudian interpretation of the crucifixion as fulfillment of the subject’s Oedipal desire to murder the father. On her reading, the death and resurrection allow the believer to represent the psyche’s pre-Oedipal dynamics as well, which include the mourning over the loss of a primal union (Abjection), and the (re)unification with the divine Other (Primary Identification). More than just an Oedipal wish, this central theological tenet in Christianity is an expression of one of the most profound events in the subject’s psychic development. Jonte-Pace claims that according to Kristeva, “Christology thus has a positive and even necessary function.”

One of Jonte-Pace’s key points is that there is a shift of focus from the negative aspects of religion to the positive ones in Kristeva’s revisions. Kristeva highlights and explores, specifically more than Freud, the positive psychic and social effects of religion, and Christianity in particular. Thus, it might not be too far-fetched to see why Kristeva has been labeled as a Christian apologist, especially in light of the atheism traditionally associated with

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380 Jonte-Pace, “Kristeva and the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion,” 256. The change in the status of illusion (from negative to positive) is a characteristic designated to many contemporary psychoanalysts who, it has been argued, are presenting a more sympathetic position vis-à-vis psychoanalytic interpretations of religion. See Rachel Blass (2006). Incidentally, Jonte-Pace notes that Kristeva shows in *In the Beginning Was Love* that Freud’s “own attitude toward fantasy and the unconscious was far more tolerant of illusion than he admitted.” Jonte-Pace, “Kristeva and the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion,” 259.

381 Ibid., 256-7. It is important not to be misled by this reading. For Kristeva, an important problem with religion today is the way it can hinder thought (in Arendt’s sense of the term), i.e., how it can prevent thought as revolt. Of course, this theme is more prevalent in Kristeva’s later texts, which Jonte-Pace does not examine.

382 Ibid., 258.
psychoanalysis. However, addressing these critics, Jonte-Pace insists that “Kristeva takes neither the stance of believer and defender nor the stance of secular critic and attacker. Rather, taking an analytic or hermeneutic stance, she shows how religion functions as a ‘polylogic’ or multivocal discourse in psyche and culture.”\(^ {383}\) That is, Kristeva takes into consideration the many dimensions of religion and the various effects it has on the subject and society. Her writing reveals that in some ways religion is problematic (suppressive and misogynistic, for example), while in other ways it is valuable (because it can be healing and psychologically illuminating). Thus, in contrast to Freud, who is often read as reductively negative toward religion,\(^ {384}\) Jonte-Pace reads Kristeva as offering a more complex depiction of religion.\(^ {385}\) To be clear, and Jonte-Pace and I agree, it is not that Kristeva presents a view of religion that is positive per se. Rather, she presents a psychoanalytic interpretation that consists of numerous and varying valuations.

Let us also be clear that the social and psychic benefits of religious representation that Kristeva discusses are not necessarily in contradiction to what the self-proclaimed atheist, so-called critic of religion, and father-of-psychoanalysis wrote. As James DiCenso has argued in *The Other Freud* (1999), despite the typical readings of Freud, which tend to highlight his positivist critique of religion, upon closer inspection one finds that Freud's work makes room for a broader psychological discussion on the nature of religion and the function of religious forms vis-à-vis culture. DiCenso carries out a hermeneutic inquiry into what are seen as Freud’s most problematic concepts and texts in order to show the “latent” or “marginalized” insights into the relationship between religion and psycho-cultural forms. DiCenso then demonstrates how the revisions and “de-literalization” of Freud’s theories by both Lacan and Kristeva point to a more open and dynamic understanding of the psychological dimension of religion in culture.\(^ {386}\)

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\(^{383}\) Ibid., 249.

\(^{384}\) Note that this is not necessarily an accurate reading of Freud on religion. Freud’s views are arguably far more complex than the standard interpretation of his work on religion states. See DiCenso (1999) and Dion (2012).

\(^{385}\) I agree with Jonte-Pace that Kristeva’s writing offers a more complex view of religion than is traditionally seen in the field of psychoanalysis of religion.

\(^{386}\) As a side note, I wonder if not only do “latent” meanings exist in Freud’s writing, as DiCenso argues, but if, rather, they are more important. After all, psychoanalysis teaches us that what is on the surface is not as authentic as
DiCenso’s study to suggest that if we can accord the possibility of an “other Freud” hidden beneath the surface of the popular Freud,\textsuperscript{387} that even Freud’s views are more complicated than standard readings would suggest, surely one can appreciate a Freudian (revisionist) such as Kristeva presenting, perhaps more explicitly, an equally (or more) multifarious reading of religion. Jonte-Pace highlights this complexity as she reiterates her thesis: “Neither a critic nor a defender of religion but, in my view, an interpreter of the way religion functions in culture and psyche, Kristeva offers a nuanced reading of religious texts and practices.”\textsuperscript{388} On my reading, Jonte-Pace and DiCenso are right to emphasize the scope of Kristeva’s views on religion (\textit{NB:} not beliefs). Indeed, one of the reasons I am drawn to Kristeva on religion is because of the sophistication she brings to the topic, which is more representative of the various positions religious subjects take vis-à-vis their beliefs and traditions, and the varying positions each religious subject takes vis-à-vis her beliefs and tradition.

That said, I wonder if it is more accurate to say that Kristeva is both a critic and a defender of religion rather than neither, as Jonte-Pace argues. The central principle of Kristevan subjectivity is paradoxical: always desiring stability but incapable of achieving it. There is no stasis but rather a movement between modes of language; every moment of speech is a simultaneous expression of the semiotic and symbolic. It follows then, perhaps, that like the maternal object that is simultaneously desired and abject, and the Oedipal father who is hated and feared but also adored and admired, in Kristeva’s views on religion we find \textit{simultaneous} rejection and praise.

\textsuperscript{387} To be sure, DiCenso does not want to “refute or dismiss the critical arguments at the surface of Freud’s inquiries into religion. [...] Freud’s analyses fall short of the conclusiveness to which they aspire. Nevertheless they contain important insights into regressive psycho-cultural aspects of religion.” DiCenso, \textit{The Other Freud}, 144.

\textsuperscript{388} Jonte-Pace, “Kristeva and the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion,” 248.
It should be pointed out that regardless of Kristeva’s nuanced analyses of religion past and present, on Jonte-Pace’s reading, psychoanalysis – over and above religion – is the way of the future. She argues that, for Kristeva, psychoanalysis “constructs a pathway to the realm of imagination and meaning” and, moreover, “provides a foundation for ethics” through the awareness of the other, of drives, and of death. 389 Thus, despite a more complex presentation of religion, Jonte-Pace writes that Kristeva’s vision for the future nonetheless “affirms, revises, and extends Freud’s utopian vision” of outgrowing religion. 390 As we will see, this is true, to a certain extent. I will fine-tune the claim to say that Kristeva’s vision for the future is a utopian vision of outgrowing a certain kind of religion; it is a psychoanalytic cultural theory that is nevertheless and admittedly – not ashamedly – infused with religious concepts, even if distinct from religion. Thus, she leaves open the door for religion in some sense to be a part of revolt culture – or, more precisely, the possibility of religious subjects to be subjects of revolt.

3 The Later Years (roughly 1995-present)

The contributions of the above-mentioned authors are important to consider when looking at Kristeva’s views on religion. However, they do not address her more recent work, which is the focus of my study. Admittedly, the paradox continues. On one hand, we see that religion is left out of her vision for the future of a culture of revolt. On the other hand, we see explorations of ‘the sacred,’ (1998), of ‘the need to believe’ (2009), and of mystics and saints (2010). These discussions could lead one to think that Kristeva is not as ready as it would seem to leave religion behind. Indeed, Arthur Bradley argues that despite Kristeva’s self-professed atheism, her approach to psychoanalysis “remains ontotheological in form” and her ideal of a “‘mystic atheism’ ultimately remains within the theological tradition it seeks to call into question.” 391

389 Jonte-Pace, “Kristeva and the Psychoanalytic Study of Religion,” 258.
390 Ibid. Jonte-Pace differentiates Kristeva’s vision for the future from that of Freud by saying that Freud sees “a religionless future guided by science,” whereas the future for Kristeva would be guided by psychoanalysis. Ibid. Arguably, though, Freud’s view – rather, his conviction that psychoanalysis is a scientific endeavor – implies that his vision for the future also emphasizes psychoanalysis (as well as science and rational thinking in general). Jonte-Pace argues that Kristeva differentiates herself from “Freud the rationalist” by reconceptualizing psychoanalysis as a means of opening up a subject to itself, to its potential, rather than simply a nihilistic, objectifying science. Ibid.
391 Bradley, “Mystic Atheism,” 279.
Bradley is not altogether off the mark with these claims. However, I do think that he over-states his case. Criticizing Kristeva for being pseudo-theological ultimately misunderstands how and why she continues to engage with religion.

3.1 The Crisis of Homo Religiosis

Religion is not a significant feature of Kristeva’s writing on the future of revolt culture. In large part, this is because, according to Kristeva, “homo religiosis” is in a state of crisis, notably since the late sixties and persisting today.392 We can understand the crisis in religion in a few ways. First, on Kristeva’s view, fewer people are religious.393 We see that in the above-mentioned quote, “modern modes” of jouissance are juxtaposed with that of “the religious man,” implying that (despite debates on the topic) modernity has brought about a process of secularization.394 Indeed, Sara Beardsworth points out in her analysis of Kristeva, psychoanalysis and modernity that Kristeva’s assessment of the failure(s) of religion is attributed to her taking secularization as a given.395 At the same time, Kristeva recognizes that (particularly of late) some people have held fast to their faiths and others are discovering or returning to religion.396 However, for

392 Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 40.
393 Kristeva describes the term ‘religious’ to mean self-identifying as a believer, but also being an active member of a particular denomination, engaging in religious study and attending church regularly. Kristeva, Crisis, 131.
394 While the once popular and taken-for-granted “secularization theory” as a universal, linear and irreversible phenomenon has been largely refuted, it is important to note that the effects of modernization and globalization on religious belief and practice in different parts of the world, which is highly difficult to measure and accurately report, is still widely discussed; the issue is raised time and again, either as the focus of an article or as a side comment in numerous academic journals on religion. Many scholars now support revised or adapted interpretations of the secularization theory, which take into account various working definitions of the terms ‘modernization’ and ‘secularization,’ as well as different geographical locations, among other factors. As Michael Hogue writes, it is “not the case that modernity has left religion unchanged. French sociologist Daniele Hervieu-Léger suggests, rather than thinking through the grid of secularization, it may be more productive to think through the notion of the ‘metamorphosis’ of religion.” Michael S. Hogue, “After the Secular: Toward a Pragmatic Public Theology” Journal of the American Academy of Religion 78, no. 2 (2010): 356. Thus, I do not think it is unreasonable to grant Kristeva her interpretation that France but also countries around the globe are not “religious” in the same way that they were in previous centuries. For more on this topic see “The Secularization Debate” (1999) and Hogue, “After the Secular.”
395 Beardsworth, Psychoanalysis & Modernity, 141.
396 Kristeva writes, “several of my French colleagues (among them especially Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor) have already devoted colloquia and publications [to the] various aspects of the ‘return of the religious,’ be it in the guise of the need to believe, of sects, or of the clashes between religions.” Kristeva, INB, 5). And “We see religion making
various related reasons, she is skeptical of these modern variants. From her vantage point, religious adherence today primarily serves to subdue neurotic symptoms and anxieties and to repress desires (rather than sublimating them). Religious representations may provide temporary relief but they do not uncover and work through underlying reasons for suffering. Reminiscent of Freud’s critique of religion in his day, Kristeva expresses concern that modern forms of religion are, more often than not, sites of idealization and blind automation that succeed in shutting down, or at least suppressing, the life of the mind, the imaginary, effectively inhibiting thought and creation/creativity. “New maladies of the soul” have shored up the desire to forge a stable, “pure” identity and some religious groups have taken advantage of this need, which is linked to what Kristeva calls the subject’s foundational, pre-religious, “need to believe” (more on this later). The result is an increase in religious groups that are dogmatic, exclusionary, and potentially violent. Indeed, for Kristeva, the prevalence of religious conflict and religio-political violence throughout the 20th century and particularly into the 21st century is strong evidence of a crisis in religion.

There are many instances wherein attachment to a group identity and/or religious ideals have resulted in or contributed to violent conflict. Kristeva explains that clashes often arise in the case of groups whose identities become centered on a perceived need (whether valid or not) to protect themselves against some impending threat or oppressor.397 She speaks, for example, of the ethnic and religious “purifications” that characterized the Bosnian-Serbian war (1992-1995), which would have been fresh in Kristeva’s mind during her writing on revolt (1996-1998): “The Moslem Bosnians do not want to mix with orthodox Serbs and orthodox Serbs have excluded the Bosnians. There is a sort of desire for a pure identity, each clan outbidding the other.”398 Since then, one can also point (as Kristeva does) to recurrences in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the
attacks of September 11th 2001 and, more recently, to the crisis in Syria and many more bleak examples. Kristeva writes that this kind of defensive revolt, which is protective not productive, is a common feature of (religious) fundamentalism. Note that the desire for revolt and protest is not inherently problematic. On the contrary, as we have seen, Kristeva sees this desire for transgression and revolution as an important element of subjective constitution, of psychic health and a healthy society. Moreover, “there is an element of revolt in the religious act. The issue here is how to take into account the movement of revolt and not let it be strangled by dogmatism,” i.e., how to avoid a tragic revolt (Cf., 1.3.3). It is in light of this concern that Kristeva promotes a culture in which the need for revolt is more likely and able to be expressed symbolically, in the form of various cultural and aesthetic pursuits, instead of literally enacted against others, i.e., those not of one’s group. The insular and exclusionary nature of many modern religious sects is in striking opposition to Kristeva’s psychoanalytic model of revolt. Recall that the goal of intimate revolt is to facilitate

the well-being of the subject, as it results from his capacity to establish as many optimal connections with others as possible. This is not out of a concern to make him useful to a community whose criteria we might have established (which is what ideologies and religions do) but in order to allow him a plurality of connections in communities that can change and can be questioned.

Kristeva admits that there are some cases wherein an organized social revolt against repression might be necessary, but she is quite skeptical – even cynical – on whether or not any politico-religious group can protect the freedom of its members to challenge and question its own ideologies – a freedom that is crucial to the flourishing of each individual and to avoid degeneration into dogmatism. She points out that the even when justified, the downfall of any revolutionary movement, be it social, political or religious (she refers to Stalinism, certain Islamic fundamentalist sects, and feminism, among others), is when the motivating principles turn into ideologies that are not questioned from within. Freud has famously denounced religion for making truth claims that cannot be refuted or questioned, and Kristeva reiterates

[399] Ibid., 106.
[400] Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 233-34.
this criticism of religion, as well as its related tendency to exclude others, both of which are characteristics incompatible with her vision of revolt culture.

The above-mentioned criticisms of religion are not entirely new for Kristeva (or in general for that matter), but for her they are more of a concern today, and specifically problematic with respect to her notion of intimate revolt. For example, it can be said that religion has always been dogmatic and exclusionary. However, it is arguably a more severe problem of late because rapid diversification in many societies is happening alongside a process of globalization (read: homogenization),\(^\text{403}\) which results in widespread resistance to change and intolerance of difference. As we have seen, she also blames the growing influence of technology and the media for distracting individuals from discovering, exploring and expressing their inner lives and, instead, cultivating a culture of conformity. This leads people to feel insecure and/or irrelevant, and therefore more attracted to groups with strongly defined membership criteria that, by extension, create a feeling of belonging.\(^\text{404}\) Kristeva sees these issues as relatively recent phenomena: “Repressive returns to systems foregrounding the needs of identity are resurfacing, nationalism, traditionalism, conservatism, fundamentalism, and so on.”\(^\text{405}\) This quote does not only indict religion, of course, but it certainly reveals her skepticism and implies her lack of faith, if you will, in the future of religion as a site of revolt. For Kristeva, the Church and other religious institutions are among the authorities that are being revealed as losing influence and unstable, and/or corrupt and manipulative (see Chapter 1). Thus, her writing focuses on new secular variants of intimate revolt. She envisions a “liberated form of representation of revolt…a cultural space…that will not become a space for religious dogma, but one that understands the spiritual anxiety driving religious dogma. In this scenario it is via education, culture and creativity that this need for revolt could be expressed, without strangling itself in dogmatism and fundamentalism.”\(^\text{406}\)

\(^{404}\) See Kristeva, Sense and Non-sense, 23.
\(^{405}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{406}\) Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 106.
3.2 The Sacred

We can give no justifiable definition of this word. But some of us can still imagine (try to imagine) what sacred means.\(^{407}\)

Despite her criticisms and skepticism, Kristeva never abandons religion *tout court*. Though religion is more or less left out of her vision for a culture of revolt, she admits that “revolt is an essential movement in the religious act”\(^{408}\) and that religion is “a tradition full of revolt.” And she leaves the door open for a modern religious revolt when she suggests that religion would need to be transformed, “rethought and modified in the light of the modern crisis.”\(^{409}\) She does not specifically outline what this revised version of religion would look like but, looking to her recent publications,\(^{410}\) we can get a sense for what it could mean. We will see that while religion *per se* does not figure prominently in her vision of revolt culture, her discussions reveal an important place and role for the sacred. Indeed, there are important similarities between Kristeva’s conceptualizations of the sacred and of intimate revolt.

From Freud to Bataille to Girard, among others, we learn that individual subjectivity, as well as collective societies, is founded on sacrifice. An original act of violence, while repressed and concealed in both psychic and societal structures (institutions, language and culture), is ultimately and necessarily reenacted through various rites and rituals via “surrogate victims.”\(^{411}\)

This sacrificed scapegoat, once feared and condemned, is then venerated for having provided

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\(^{408}\) Kristeva, *Revolt, She Said*, 106.

\(^{409}\) Kristeva, *Crisis*, 130.

\(^{410}\) Cf. “Europe Divided: Politics, Ethics, Religion” in *Crisis, F&S, INB, Hatred and Teresa, My Love*.

\(^{411}\) In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud writes that it became “a duty to repeat the crime of parricide through the sacrifice of the totem animal as often as the benefits of this deed [...] threat to disappear as a result of the changed influences of life.” Freud, *Totem*, 188. For Girard, likely influenced by Bataille, the sacrifice serves as a resolution of the crisis brought about by the “mimetic desire” that constitutes a human being's experience of the world. See René Girard, “From Mimetic Desire to the Monstrous Double,” in *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1977): 143-68. See also Carolyn Gill, ed., *Bataille: Writing the Sacred* (2005).
(though only temporarily) the resolution to the conflicted and violent tendencies of both the subject and of society at large. A community experiences the sacred through the resolution and diffusion of aggression, purification of the abject, through the reenactment of a ritual sacrifice. The ceremonial sacrifice of the “surrogate victim” is particularly prevalent in religious traditions, but is not limited to religion. The sacred is thus associated (most commonly) with ritual sanctification, holiness, but also with social bonds (among men), law and order.

At the same time, René Girard tells us that the “full range of the term sacred,” is derived from “the Latin sacer, which is sometimes translated ‘sacred,’ sometimes ‘accursed,’ [and] encompasses the maleficent as well as the beneficent.” Likewise, for Bataille, the sacred is linked to the experience of bodily and instinctual excess, from uncontrollable laughter and tears, to eroticism and (especially) violence, e.g., the release of excess in sexual acts is jouissance, which the French call le petit mort (a little death). Lucy Tatman offers a metaphor (among many) of the sacred as “contained, yet always bursting forth, erupting, demanding, dark, terrible.”

Finally, the use of the French word for sacred (sacré) has a double meaning; in addition to its reference to holy things, given a particular context and/or tone, sacré is an expletive, meaning ‘damned,’ ‘bloody,’ or ‘blasted.’ Thus, even hidden in language is a “cursed” side of the sacred.

At bottom, the notion of the sacred is elusive, and not uncharacteristically, Kristeva never offers a definitive definition of the term. Her interest in linguistics and psychoanalysis results in an analysis and exploration of the many ways ‘the sacred’ is represented and experienced. She too moves beyond the common understanding and considers the “full” meaning of the sacred in her exploration, which begins as early as 1982/1980 in Powers of Horror:

Could the sacred be, whatever its variants, a two-sided formation? One aspect founded by murder and the social bond made up of murder’s guilt-ridden atonement, with all the projective mechanism and obsessive rituals that accompany it; and another aspect, like a lining, more secret still and invisible,

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412 René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 257.
nonrepresentable, oriented toward those uncertain spaces of unstable identity, toward the fragility – both threatening and fusional – of the archaic dyad, toward the nonseparation of subject/object, on which language has no hold but one woven of fright and repulsion? One aspect is defensive and socializing, the other shows fear and undifferentiation. The similarities that Freud delineates between religion and obsessional neurosis would then involve the defensive side of the sacred. \[414\]

Kristeva specifies that Freud’s critique of religion here is applicable to only one “side” of the sacred. In other words, there is a dimension of the sacred, presumably contained within religion (though perhaps not exclusively), to which Freud’s critique is not applicable. This is an important distinction when thinking about Kristeva’s views on religion and psychoanalytic interpretations of religion more broadly. I suggest that when Kristeva describes present day religion as desacralized, it is this ‘other side’ of the sacred that she thinks is lacking. And the other side of the sacred is linked to one’s capacity for intimate revolt. The sacred commonly brings to mind the first aspect of the formation (i.e. the defensive and socializing aspect, which is also paternal, ritualistic and purifying). Kristeva is interested in the other side of the sacred.

3.2.1 Kristeva and Irigaray: The Maternal Sacrifice

First, on the other side of the sacred paternal sacrifice is a maternal one. “French feminists,” a group with which Kristeva is sometimes (though not un-problematically\[415\]) associated, are known for offering a gendered analysis of the phallocentric language that permeates Western discourse. The sacrifice at the heart of the sacred has been subject to such a critique by Kristeva but also by Luce Irigaray, whom I include here as an interesting point of comparison and contrast. Following Freud, Irigaray and Kristeva agree that there is a sacrifice central to the formation of human subjectivity, society, and indeed, central to religion. However, they argue that the surrogate victim in subject and society formation – concealed by and through language and culture – is the female subject, the mother in particular.

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\[415\] Kristeva is neither French nor does she self-identify as a feminist. Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous, to name the most well known, are nevertheless commonly associated with one another under this title because of their gendered analysis of mainstream philosophy, their use of poststructuralist and/or Lacanian theory, and lyrical writing style.
Kristeva returns to the story of the brothers’ paternal sacrifice in *Totem & Taboo*. Where Freud emphasizes the sacred-social pact formed among the brothers after the murder and subsequent feast of penitence, Kristeva highlights the simultaneous, underlying rejection of the maternal. The argument, which is laid out in *Powers of Horror* but picked up again in *Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*, goes like this: the social order that emerges after the famous drama of the horde of brothers who revolt against their father is established and ordered by two main prohibitions or taboos: *murder* and *incest*. Kristeva explains that while Freud opens the book with a discussion on the incest taboo, his focus ends up to be the taboo against murder – the murder of the father. “The woman- or mother-image haunts a large part of that book,”416 she writes, but ultimately her role disappears or is hidden, eclipsed by the social pact the brothers establish among themselves and between them and the dead, venerated father. “The brothers, who have become social beings, resorb the feminine, renounce it. This feminine is the feminine of women, as objects of desire, but also the brothers’ feminine, in the sense of their passive desire for the father, their love for and fascination with the father.”417 Thus, while the sacrificed victim in the story appears to be the father, Kristeva offers a gendered analysis that suggests the real murder at the heart of society is the one unheard and unseen, which is the murder of the mother.418

In “Belief Itself,” Irigaray corroborates Kristeva’s reading through her own critique of Freud, alongside one of Christianity, showing how both of these traditions repress, ignore and/or conceal the female figures that are central to them. Irigaray presents two stories paralleled with one another. One is Freud’s story of his grandson’s *fort-da* game; the other is of a nameless woman patient who literally bleeds (hemorrhages) during the ceremony of the Eucharist.

In fort-da (gone-there), a child plays with a string attached to a wooden spool. He throws the spool, while holding onto the end of the string, into his cot, over its veiled edge where it can no longer be seen – “fort” – only to pull it back over the veiled edge, back to him – “da.” The game is complete. Irigaray argues that Freud’s analysis of the child and his game completely elides the symbolic role of the mother in this story. The veil that covers the bed, “the mediation for the performance of presence in absence, for the process of re-presentation in this particular scene, where for the first time the son plays symbolically with his mother.” He plays with his mother in order to master her, master the presence and absence of her, to enter beyond the veil, to re-enter the womb, and then to return, to remove himself when he chooses. For he knows that he can never return to that place, that place where even then they were separated by a placenta, never to be wholly connected. But with this game she is mastered…or so he believes. The child believes he can make his mother present to him with his ritual – that he can bring back the womb. In fact, “the string of the reel is not like the first cord and does not bring her to him: he merely believes this and weaves this absence into his language.” Freud overlooks the symbolic presence of the mother completely in his analysis, ignoring her, silencing her, keeping her at a distance.

In the analysand’s story, Irigaray speaks against the primordial maternal sacrifice in the Eucharist ceremony. She bleeds, says Irigaray, because she is witness “to a sacrifice of woman/matter/nature hidden beneath the sacrifice of the son explicitly commemorated in the Eucharist.” The ceremony becomes one between father and son. The body and blood of the son offered up in the communion is symbolic of the body and blood of the mother, whose distance, whose absence breaks the heart of the son, but is pushed away, sacrificed for the sake of the father. She writes:

No one must see that it is they, the wives and mothers, who are being offered up in communion here, who effect the communion, that, like the earth and its fruits, it is

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420 Ibid., 34.
the body and the blood especially of virgin women that are being sacrificed to that intermale society. The duty to bear children, to be silent, to be in attendance but off on the side – all this wounds the flesh and the spirit of women, and there is no representation of that sacrifice. 422

Paramount to both stories is the simultaneous presence and absence of the female figure, and the belief in the ritual that both mourns and commemorates her. Irigaray claims that these traditions necessarily conform to the structure and language of the masculine order, in which woman and her vital, life-giving role as mother are sacrificed and used for its sustenance.

Both Kristeva and Irigaray highlight the maternal sacrifice at the heart of the sacred-social contract, over and against the dominant theme of paternal sacrifice in sacred narratives. The two authors differ, however, in the resulting interpretative significance of this analysis. For Irigaray, re-conceptualizing the sacred in light of the repressed maternal is impossible within the current patriarchal framework. Women cannot speak – cannot become speaking subjects – in this sacrificial economy. Societies of men form a sacred bond through repeated ritual sacrifices of women, and therefore women are fundamentally excluded from any real participation in that community. Thus, they are also excluded from the sacred: “[W]omen are drawn back into a social system that is determined by sacrifice. They have no part in it, have never had a part in it. They remain a lifeless body at this level.” 423 Irigaray questions what a society might look like in which women could achieve their potential as subjects, realize their gender, or have a relationship with god. 424 As Martha Reineke points out, “Irigaray’s inquiry serves as a vehicle by means of which she can gain distance from the sacrificial economy to explore the terrain of an alternative economy less hostile to women.” 425 Importantly, where Irigaray rejects the sacrificial economy altogether, Kristeva’s reconceptualization of the sacred, of which the lost/hidden maternal is one dimension, emphasizes its revolutionary and transformative potential vis-à-vis the phallogocentric economy. In fact, Kristeva suggests that women may be in a privileged

423 Irigaray, “Women, the Sacred, Money,” in Sexes, 78.
position to bring about social and political change because of a possible link between the feminine and the sacred.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{F&S}.} Indeed, the maternal sacrifice concealed within the sacred carries with it the power of revolt, which will be made clear as we unpack further aspects of the other side of the sacred.

### 3.2.2 Kristeva and Clément: Abjection and Filth

Next, on the other side of sacred purification is \textit{abjection}, which is linked to filth and defilement. In the above-mentioned quote, Kristeva asks if the other side of the sacred might include “the fragility – both threatening and fusional – of the archaic dyad, toward the nonseparation of subject/object, on which language has no hold but one woven of fright and repulsion?” This language is reminiscent of the stage in the process of individuation called abjection. As we have seen (chapter 2, section 2.1.1), for Kristeva the move to signification occurs not only through a rejection and objectification of the mother, but through an \textit{abjection} of her. The maternal body is felt as repulsive but one is simultaneously drawn back to it. The tension contained in that pre-Oedipal ‘archaic dyad’ between mother and child is a locus for the sacred, says Kristeva.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{Powers}, 17.} This is because, similar to the paradox (the love/hate, the captivation/repulsion) inherent to that stage of undifferentiation, there is a paradox inherent to the sacred. On the surface are religio-social prohibitions and ritual cleansing against defilement, while at the same time, on the other side of the sacred but still very much a part of it, is everything that is abject.

In \textit{The Feminine and the Sacred}, Kristeva reminds Clément: “filth and the sacred are adjacent to each other.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{F&S}, 91.} Indeed, Kristeva explores at length in \textit{Powers of Horror} how, certainly in the history of Western religions, the sacred depends on the purification of the abject. Clément agrees that the abject is coextensive to the sacred, and she points out that sacred filth is often related to
the body: blood, pus, excrement, vomit, etc. However, according to her observations, bodily

dirt and filth are not always made sacred through purifications; they are sometimes considered

sacred in and of themselves. For example, the hair of “sacred dancing girls in India” is never

washed. And Clément describes how one sees unwashed hair all over the streets of India and

remarks that it is not because people are unclean, lazy, or poor. Rather, one chooses not to clean

his or her hair as a symbolic renouncement of the world. The oil returns to the hair and grows

more and more matted. Eventually the hair will appear to be more like part of the forest than of a

human. “The renouncer’s hair recovers the naturalness of the tree; it becomes vegetal and is not

washed. And yet there is nothing impure about these filthy bundles. [...] By sleeping in the

temple with the dancing girls with unwashed hair, the ‘twice-born’ man identifies with the

god.” This is in stark contrast, for example, to the prohibitions and ritual cleansing of bodily

fluids and other abject things found in the Hebrew Bible, which Kristeva discusses. Not to

mention the ultimate cleansing of the abject – sins – by the Christian scapegoat, Jesus. Again, in

contrast to Kristeva’s analyses of the Jewish and Christian traditions, Clément shares her (non-

specialist) reflection that in many non-monotheistic traditions “the sacred has to do with odors,

natural secretions, nail clippings, and, finally, with hair. In short, the sacred participates in all the

materials that dear Lacan categorized under the generic name ‘object of desire’ that is, the detail,

the partial, the piece of body that is not the whole of the body, and even its waste.”

For Kristeva, the maternal body is the epitome of abjection. A pregnant woman literally

embodies something foreign – an ‘other’ person – as much as she experiences foreign feelings

and hormones. The placenta simultaneously connects and separates mother and child. And the

navel reminds us of this coincident dependence and rejection – the dialectic relationship that

allows for signification and symbolization. The womb is the physical boundary between the

semiotic heartbeat shared with the mother and the symbolic order of the father, the border that all

speaking beings will traverse in order to exist in the social sphere. The following passage from

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429 She lived in Senegal and India while writing the book.
430 Clément, F&S, 87.
431 Ibid., 87.
an early essay “Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini” (1980/1975), describes the abjection inherent in the maternal body:

Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. ‘It happens, but I’m not there.’ ‘I cannot realize it, but it goes on.’ Motherhood’s impossible syllogism.

For Kristeva, as much as for Clément, the proximity of the female body to abjection suggests a unique relationship between women and the sacred. However, it should be pointed out here that one of Kristeva’s early critiques of Christianity, or perhaps better to say of the Marian tradition within Christianity, is how its representation of motherhood obscures this other side of the sacred by denying the abjection inherent to it. In her famous “Stabat Mater” (1987/1983), Kristeva discusses motherhood through two lenses, printed in two adjacent columns. On one side, she traces the trajectory of the discourse of maternity in the Christian West and criticizes it as insufficient, particularly the role of the Virgin. On the other side, in bold print, Kristeva describes her own physical and emotional experience of pregnancy and giving birth to her son (in 1976). The division of the text visually reminds the reader of a mother’s naturally divided body. Kristeva’s bolded narrative illuminates the emotional counterpart of the abjected body. She takes the reader on a journey through her encounter with both unimaginable love and ‘unconscionable’ hate, through joy and pain, terror and delight, deprivation and benefit, life and death. Beside this description is Kristeva’s analysis of the representation of motherhood in Christianity, specifically through the deification of Mary. She writes that there is “something in [the virginal, Christian] Maternal notion that ignores what a woman might say or want.”

Kristeva argues that in addition to Mary’s virginal status, resulting from an erroneous translation to begin with, Mary’s eminence is reinforced in the history of the Catholic and Orthodox

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433 Clément writes: “All the same, it’s because of the ‘ignoble’ that the female body is directly linked to the sacred.” Clément, F&S, 89.
434 Kristeva, “Stabat Mater,” in Tales, 236.
435 She writes that the original Semitic term indicating “the sociolegal status of a young unmarried woman” was replaced by the Greek word parthenos, which implies virginity in the way we understand the term today. Ibid., 236-37.
traditions with the introduction of her immaculate conception; if she is to be the mother of Jesus who conquers death and sin, then she cannot be a product of sexuality. Mary also remains a virgin after giving birth to Jesus and for the rest of her life married to Joseph. And the establishment of her status as *Aeiparthenos* (ever-virgin) at the second council of Constantinople (381 CE) allows for Mary’s new title *Theotokos* (Bearer of God). Finally, the mother of God is declared sinless, and she overcomes death through assumption (Catholic) or dormition (Orthodox). On Kristeva’s reading, the culmination of these traits donned upon Mary is a consequence of the fact that “western Christianity has organized [this] ‘translation error,’ projected its own fantasies into it, and produced one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations:” the male fantasy of the pure and holy virgin mother. And on her view, modern women cannot identify with a representation of motherhood that does not include sexuality, sin, or death. The maternal experience is the epitome of abjection, whereas the Virgin (body and soul) is the epitome of purity. Thus, in this early essay Kristeva argues that the representation of femininity and motherhood in the Marian Christian tradition represses an important dimension of the sacred.

At this time I remind the reader of the link between abjection and revolt, which in turn points to a link between (a certain facet of) the sacred and revolt. Recall that the revolt of *Being* that characterizes the process of abjection describes for Kristeva the birth of the rebellious imaginary, and this rebellious imaginary is the means by which we access our most intimate and singular selves, and thus through which we can engage our intimate revolts. Though not the focus of this discussion, the connections between the female body, abjection and the sacred, as the title of their book suggests, leaves open the possibility of a particular link between the *feminine* and *sacred*. In light of Kristeva’s discussions on revolt, we can imagine that feminist revisions of this tradition might well contribute to the kind of re-evaluation of religion (*qua* Christianity) that she sees as imperative.

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436 Ibid., 237.
437 At the same time, she recognizes that the Virgin Mary is nevertheless a strikingly powerful and venerated female figure, of which there are so few in the Christian tradition, and as such, she is also a positive and useful image.
3.2.3 Instability & In-between-ness

In contrast to the ritual, law and order associated with the (Freudian) sacred-social community/bond, Kristeva suggests that the other side of the sacred might be “oriented toward those uncertain spaces of unstable identity.” Freud (and Girard) tells us that there will always be a need to reiterate and re-enact the ritual sacrifice when stasis is threatened, when aggression returns. Again, Kristeva wants to highlight that which exists beyond or underneath the sacrificial exchange. Reminiscent of her sujet en procès (chapter 1, section 1.3.1), which also never permanently achieves stasis, the other side of the sacred is imagined here like her semiotic chora, as an unstable space, a moment, a lapse in time, out of which the symbolic sacrifice repeatedly arises. Thus, the sacred is associated with the instability and in-between-ness that characterizes subjectivity, which is always in process and always on trial, always in dynamic tension between the semiotic and symbolic registers of language. Kristeva articulates this in her correspondence to Clément:

What if the sacred were the unconscious perception the human being has of its untenable eroticism: always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the nameable? What if the sacred were not the religious need for protection and omnipotence that institutions exploit but the jouissance of the cleavage – of that power/powerlessness – of that exquisite lapse?⁴³⁸

Of course, Kristeva’s final question implies the response, which Clément affirms in her own portrayal of the sacred:

Beyond the cleavages between Good and Evil, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden, intellectual and sensible, the sacred is ‘sublime’ [...] . It is the enveloping sensation of the absolute when one stands before a mountain landscape, the sea, the sunset, a nocturnal storm in Africa. So, yes, the sacred authorizes the lapse, the disappearance of the Subject, the syncope, vertigo, the trance, ecstasy, the ‘above-the-roof’ so blue.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Kristeva, F&S, 26-7.
⁴³⁹ Clément, F&S, 30. Clément does not include the reference, but “above the roof, so blue” most likely refers to these lines from a poem in Paul Verlaine’s Sagesse (1881): Le ciel est, par-dessus le toit; Si bleu, si calme! Un arbre, par-dessus le toit; Berce sa palme. In English: “The sky is above the roof; so blue, so calm! A tree, above the roof, sways (also: rocks, as in a baby) its palm (leaves/branch).” My translation. There are many interpretations of
Here we see that Clément agrees that the other side of the sacred carries with it the idea of tension, cleavage, being on the borderline, in-between-ness and instability. It is not a stretch to suggest that, for these authors, the sacred encompasses an experience that might be described as uncanny, unconscious, or inaccessible, which are all adjectives associated with the intimate nature of Kristeva’s revolt.

Indeed, the other side of the sacred as in-between-ness and instability substantiates the link between the sacred and Kristeva’s notion of revolt. Keep in mind that the notion of an “unstable” subjectivity on the borderline is for Clément as much as for Kristeva, not a negative feature but rather a (potentially) productive one. For example, in the above quote, Clément compares the sacred to syncope, which refers to the interrupting space in music that creates (syncopated) rhythm. In the foreword of her book, *Syncope: The Philosophy of Rapture* (1994), syncope is described as “a word designating an eclipse, interval, absence, followed by a new departure.”

Likewise, Kristeva’s notion of subjectivity includes a disrupting semiotic that is repeatedly expressed through and serves to regenerate the symbolic. She explains that in every signifying practice there is an “acceptance of a symbolic law together with the transgression of that law for the purpose of renovating it.” Thus the in-between, unstable side of the sacred is also conceptualized as a source of renewal. Clément says it explicitly: “the sacred shatters the order and introduces a new one.” Once again, the nature of the sacred as described here resembles that of intimate revolt. Just as the sacred is associated with a lapse, a momentary “absence of the subject,” an interruption/syncopation in time, (“it eclipses time and space”), so is Kristeva’s revolt associated with the timelessness of the work of anamnesis (memory trace, working-

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the poem. Clément’s usage suggests a reading that emphasizes the simultaneous presence and absence of the sky – the sky is only defined by the roof, otherwise its start and end are impossible to determine – and the discernible yet intangible blue colour of the sky.

440 Verena Andermatt Conley, foreword to *Syncope*, ix. Emphasis added.


443 Ibid., 30.
through, and interminable analysis; see chapter 1, section 1.2.2), which points to the analyzed subject’s repeated (psychic) ruptures and rebirths. In other words, sacred transgression and renewal resemble closely the introspection and creation associated with intimate revolt.

The authors share some examples of the sacred as a source of social resistance, in particular. Clément, for example, describes women in Popenguine, Senegal, who would shriek and scream intermittently throughout a Catholic mass. “A strange, sacred phenomenon was breaking out at a religious ceremony.” She goes on to comment that these women were Serer women, known typically as villagers or servants. According to her observations (during her travels in Africa and South Asia), women who experience the sacred in the form of a trance or the like are more often minority, lower class or less-educated women. “When I was living in India,” she writes, “I did not see any sacred disorder in the religious practices of middle-class Indian women, thoroughly ‘bound’ by a century of British Puritan occupation, and also by their caste state of origin.”

“I’ve rarely seen [women in the grip of the sacred] when they knew how to read and write.” She suggests to Kristeva that the freedom and desire to “let go” correlates to one’s social status: “I think that the capacity to accede violently to the sacred truly depends on one’s minority status or on economic exploitation. ‘Id’ must find an out somewhere, and, in the absence of education, that place of expulsion is the sacred.” In other words, she suggests that discontent derived from a constrained or oppressive social situation might more readily manifest itself or find expression in a visceral, corporal (intimate) sacred experience.

Kristeva, for her part, discusses medieval female mystics St. Teresa of Avila (on whom she will later write a book), Hildegard of Bingen, Angela of Foligno and Ms. De Belliere du Tronchay (“Louisa of the Nothingness” or “Louisa-the-poor,” or “servant-of-the-poor”). She explores the

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444 Ibid., 5.
445 Ibid., 7.
446 Ibid., 9.
447 Ibid., 10.
way these women carried out their “confession[s] of unrepresentable experiences” through the metaphors and images of poetry, art and song, instead of via traditional settings that did not allow for expression of the sacred in the visceral, ecstatic and/or nihilistic ways that these mystics experienced it: “a battle against the invisible and the unspeakable” or “a confrontation with abjection…and with nothingness.”

Also, where their social status as women may have limited them from experiencing the sacred in traditional settings, their mystical experiences, along with their inspired and often revered writing and aesthetic creations – products, to be sure, of their “rebellious imaginaries” – functioned as a form of resistance to the hegemonic powers of the day.

Research by Carolyn Walker Bynum supports the claim that through their heightened spiritual yet simultaneously (and importantly) fully somatic experiences, medieval mystics were able to enact a degree of social resistance. Bynum explains that through extreme asceticism, fasting and self-inflicted harm, among other things, 13th century female mystics achieved a kind of spiritual jouissance. She argues that the physical suffering (both voluntary and involuntary) that medieval women mystics endured was infused with eroticism. Just as the line between illness and self-mortification was blurred, so too was the line between suffering and ecstasy. In addition, though not necessarily central to her thesis, Bynum points out that the status associated with these mystics gave them a degree of control over their environment, which might have otherwise been controlled by the men in their lives (e.g., fathers, priests). Thus, Eucharistic or ascetic ecstasy, she writes, can be interpreted, for one, as a religious rejection and revolt against worldly pleasures and sin, but also as a form of social resistance:

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448 Kristeva, F&S, 35.
449 Ibid., 36 & 37.
450 Ibid., 37.
452 Ibid., 133.
453 I want to avoid the implication that the reason women had these experiences was for the purpose of some kind of emancipation. Bynum is clear that one should consider the social context and psychological factors that might have affected these women, but it would be anachronistic to suggest that there was some kind of conscious, pseudo-
It is not surprising that women, who often could not control the disposition of their own bodies against the wishes of family or religious advisors, voluntarily or involuntarily punished those bodies at moments of life-crisis. Nor is it surprising that, since women were usually not able to renounce property [...] they chose to renounce food, the one pleasure they not only fully controlled but were also chiefly responsible by role for preparing for all of society.454

One could argue that there is a less-than-empowered side to the fact that these women took control of their bodies through asceticism (modern day anorexia) in the face of a society wherein others controlled their bodies. However, Kristeva and Clément are not offering evaluations but simply exploring aspects of the sacred; a medium for liberation (in some sense) is one of them, creative expression of the intimate (soul, love, pain) is another. As an additional example, Clément points to African Americans who “found sanctuary only by inventing the Negro spiritual, then the blues, and finally jazz.”455 However, the most important of hegemonies that the sacred resists, according to Clément, is the distinction between the sexes.456 In addition to bisexuality in mystics, Clément describes a “spectacular therapeutic rite” called the N’Doeup found in villages in Senegal. Because only women perform this holy ritual, the one male healer must dress as a woman in order to perform the ceremonies.457 And she offers further examples:

Sacred transvestism [is] part of the classics of ethnology, and even in the realm of the Holy Catholic Church. [...] In India, the most extravagant character I have ever met is an adult male of about fifty, married with children and not effeminate in any way. But when he is in a trance and renders the oracle of his temple, he is no longer called by his legal name, he is called the “Mother.”458

feminist motivation behind their ecstatic experiences. The theological reasons cannot be overlooked or underappreciated in this context. See Bynum, Fragmentation & Redemption, 143-46.
454 Ibid., 141-42.
455 Clément, F&S, 19.
456 Ibid., 30.
457 Ibid.
458 Ibid.
Clément states that bisexuality is more common in India than in the West. The Hindu god Shiva, for instance, is sometimes represented as half man, half woman. The way in which the lines between the sexes are blurred in many representations and expressions of the sacred is, according to Clément, a form of resistance against the hegemonic discourse of sexual binaries.

In this extended discussion, we see that sacred instability and in-between-ness is the flip side of a sacred communal experience through ritualized social order. The other side speaks to an experience of something “un-describable” for the individual, which resonates with Kristeva’s preference for and attention to the personal: “The sacred is, of course, experienced in private; it even seem[s] to us to be what gives meaning to the most intimate of singularities, at the intersection of the body and thought, biology and memory, life and meaning.” And instead of law and order, the other side of the sacred is a medium for rejection and resistance. The parallels between the characteristics of Kristeva’s sacred and those of intimate revolt are apparent. They both capture an experience that is personal, potentially unsettling, psychic as well as somatic, rebellious yet creative.

### 3.3 Religion and/or the Sacred?

Kristeva’s writing suggests that instead of religion, it is the sacred that has a role to play in her vision of a culture of revolt. She is “convinced that this new millennium, which seems so eager for religion, is in reality eager for the sacred…” The implication here is that religion and the
sacred are two distinct concepts, which is misleading. To be sure, Kristeva does not confine the sacred to religion, but neither can one assume that the former is other to the latter. However, the degree to which the sacred can be located in her conception of religion is admittedly unclear. Recall the description in *Powers of Horror* (1982/1980) that we saw above, which speaks of two sides of the sacred, wherein one side refers to (religious) purifying rituals and the other side to the hidden, abject, unstable and threatening side. By the 1990s, Kristeva seems to drop the idea that there are two sides of the sacred, stating instead, for example, in her correspondence with Clément, that there is religion (belief, ritual etc.), and there is the sacred (abjection, eruption, interruption, jouissance). In other words, no longer two sides of the same the coin, ‘religion’ and the ‘sacred’ are discussed as separate and discrete notions. In this way, she appears to reiterate the somewhat colloquial and facile distinction between being “religious” and being “spiritual,” which (problematically) sets up in opposition what one might popularly call “institutionalized” religion versus a “real,” lived experience of “something beyond,” implying a mutually exclusive relationship. This is not precisely the case for her, though; Kristeva is not interested in either/or interpretations. At the same time, she is trying to focus on and emphasize that which underlies the ritual, symbolic dimension of religion. In order to clarify that one should not assume the two concepts are equivalents, Kristeva writes, “the sacred may not be the same as the religious;” but, again, this does not mean that they cannot, and do not at times, overlap. In *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt* (2000/1996), she states that the “function of purity” and the “function of revolt,” which are “inherent to the constitution of all sacred or social space [...] converge and one is never possible without the other.” Therefore, there is still a degree of two-sidedness to her notion of the sacred. On my reading, though, the two-sided metaphor becomes limiting because the ‘other’ side that she is interested in, in fact, overreaches the organizing, ceremonial side of the sacrificial exchange. Take, for example, another passage from *The Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*:

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463 “Let us distinguish between belief and religion, on the one hand, and the sacred, on the other. [...] Belief and religion, as constructions, may be imaginary [...], ideological (as in the atheistic communist believers), scientific (where one believes in the omnipotence of science); all these constructions deny sexual jouissance and the immature child’s narcissistic dependency on its parents, but also our dependence on nature, biology, genetics. They propose figures of consolation and of healing omnipotence.” Kristeva, *F&S*, 26.
464 Ibid.
465 Ibid.
On the one hand, there is the discourse, of the norm and purity, subsuming a social harmony whose symbolic peace the priest celebrates; on the other, there is singing, dancing, painting, the use of works, the exultation of syllables, and the introduction of fantasies in narrative, which first give way to sacred incantation and then are gradually detached from the religious scene in secular literature. [...] Sacred possibility...precedes purity and exceeds it.  

Thus, despite her dualistic language, her explorations show that while the sacred is certainly not limited to religion, the former can still be contained within the latter. This is important to note, for if we can still locate the sacred within religion to any extent, and the sacred is conceptualized in many ways, as we have seen, like Kristeva’s intimate revolt, then Kristeva implicitly leaves open the possibility of a kind of religion that might be compatible with her vision of revolt culture. It is the presence of the other side of the sacred (or the sacred tout court, if you like) that distinguishes what Kristeva sees as a “bastardized” or “fundamentalist” form of religion from a version wherein a religious subject might be capable of intimate revolt.

3.4 Christian Mysticism

Throughout Kristeva’s body of work, one can see a recurring interest in Christian mysticism. This is noteworthy because her references to Christian mystics are illustrations, implicit and explicit, of the sacred/intimate revolt in religion. As early as 1987 (1983) in Tales of Love, she explores the contemplative and amorous mysticism of Bernard de Clairvaux and that of the humble Quietist, Jeanne Guyon. In the more recent The Feminine and the Sacred, she refers to the rebellious, creative expression of the sacred associated with medieval mystics. And in Intimate Revolt, she associates the first Christian centuries with “a revolution in the intimate,” highlighting St. Augustine as a representative of the intimacy associated with the revolt she has

466 Ibid.
467 See Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 34 & 41.
468 Kristeva, INB, 21.
469 See Kristeva, Tales, 151-69 & 297-317.
470 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 50.
Alongside other philosophical dialogues, Augustine’s prayers and meditative practices resemble the personal questioning inherent to the Kristeva revolt. St. Ignatius of Loyola is also presented as an example of “tormented intimacy” and revolt; she calls him “a creator of language,” simply because of his logical surveillance of the states most rebellious to reason. She describes his Spiritual Exercises and Spiritual Diary as the merging of ritual and affect. And she highlights Loyola’s loquela – that mystical experience of divine sounds (perhaps with words) and its accompanying interior, soulful delight – as “embodied speech.”

When thinking about the possibility of intimate revolt in religion, we would do well to “keep in mind this intimacy of Loyola’s, made of loquela and tears, subjacent to the thought of prayer and which seems to indicate the ultimate register of what he calls the ‘unfolding of thought’ targeted by the spiritual exercise, closest to the unthinkable pathos of the soul.” Finally, most recently, in her historical fiction on St. Teresa of Avila, Kristeva provides her most in-depth exploration of mystical experiences thus far. More than simply an account of mystical jouissance (ecstatic suffering), she emphasizes, through the protagonist, Sylvia, the Saint’s experience of faith as infused both with passion and sensuality, but also with ongoing anxiety and desire to understand her faith, demonstrated through her intimate writings.

Kristeva explains in an interview that Teresa occupies an “espace de dédoublement,” in the “extreme of passion and the extreme of reason.” As we have demonstrated in earlier chapters, the co-presence and tension of affect and thought, of the semiotic and the symbolic, is central to her vision of intimate revolt and in line with her conceptualization of the sacred. The link between Kristeva’s notions of revolt and the sacred, to which I have been pointing, is made stronger when she describes the sacred as (a) something that “allows our most imperative bodily needs to access symbolic representations that

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471 Ibid., 46-51.
472 Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 100.
473 Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 46.
474 Ibid., 46-47.
475 Ibid, 47.
476 Such as The Way of Perfection (1583) and The Interior Castle (1588).
could be shared and that are sometimes sublime,” and (b) “the most singular gratification intersecting with the constraints of the community – balancing pleasure and sacrifice.” In light of these descriptions, one can see that all these examples contribute to Kristeva’s view that the tradition of Christian mysticism contains within it (not universally, of course, but nevertheless) the capacity for intimate revolt, which is related to the presence and workings of the sacred in the sense that she has conceptualized it. However, Kristeva identifies this particular kind of mystic religiosity with early and medieval Christianity, not with modern times. So what does this mean looking forward? What of religion today: is there room still for the sacred, a possibility for intimate revolt?

4 Kristeva’s Vision

The above questions are answered in part by looking to a small publication called This Incredible Need to Believe (2009/2006). Not surprisingly perhaps given its title, this book is the most direct engagement with Christianity of Kristeva’s texts. Simply put, she explains how religion, but Christianity in particular, acknowledges and cultivates subjects’ inner lives and that, in this respect, it should be learned from, especially if we are to overcome the nihilistic tendencies of secular society today. At the same time, she makes clear that we must be diligent to analyze and critique religious discourse in order to prevent the spread of controlling, potentially dangerous, fundamentalist trends. Her goal is to shed light on underlying causes of clashes among religions and clashes between religion and secular society, as well as elaborating her vision for a future, which might reconcile such differences and overcome their mutual problems. Indeed, she writes that she is looking for complicity between Christianity and other religions, but also, and more importantly, between Christianity and “this vision to which I adhere that grows out of

478 Kristeva, Revolt, She Said, 34 & 35.
479 The majority of the book is a published interview with Carmine Donzelli, titled “This Incredible Need to Believe.” This is followed by another published interview in Paris Notre-Dame, which is the magazine of the Paris diocese, entitled “From Jesus to Mozart (Christianity’s Difference).” The next section, “Suffering,” is based on a lecture given at the Church of Notre-Dame for the Parisian Conférences de carême (Lenten services) in 2006, and “The Genius of Catholicism” was a text written in honour of Pope Jean-Paul II after his death (in 2005) and published, as was the final section “Don’t be Afraid of European Culture,” in the daily Roman Catholic newspaper La Croix.
Christianity, although detached from it today.\textsuperscript{480} Falling somewhere between faith and atheism, then, between religion and secularism, we will see that her vision recognizes the need to attend to our inner experiences and unconscious desires, which, according to Kristeva, religious faith taps into, but also the need to engage in a constant analysis and interpretation of our belief contents and ideals, religious or not. Though she does not use the same terminology in this book, this vision calls to mind her culture of intimate revolt.

4.1 The Need to Believe

For Kristeva, psychoanalysis reveals that all subjects have a fundamental “need to believe.” Importantly, this need is \textit{pre-religious}, anthropological – she is not saying that we all have a need to believe in (a) \textit{God}. She explains that the psychic processes underlying subjectification point to and result in \textit{the need to believe}. She highlights “two mental experiences” that support this constitutional belief.\textsuperscript{481} The first one is the “oceanic feeling,” which, following Freud’s speculations, she understands as the feeling of omnipotence and certainty that accompanies the earliest stage of subject formation, when one’s sense of self is coextensive to the maternal container (i.e., pre-separation). That early sensation of certitude and truth – though precarious and fleeting – contributes to the psychic structuring for belief. “Belief, not in the sense of a supposition, but in the strong sense of an unshakable certainty, sensory plenitude, and ultimate truth the subject experiences as an exorbitant kind of more-than-life \textit{[sur-vie]}, indistinctly sensory and mental, strictly speaking, ek-static.”\textsuperscript{482}

The other experience, chronologically subsequent, is the stage of primary identification, on which many of Kristeva’s groundbreaking theories are founded. As she has emphasized in the past, this stage of identification necessarily precedes the Oedipal drama, and in contrast to the stern, Oedipal father or the law the ‘Father of individual pre-history’ is conceptualized as a

\textsuperscript{480} Kristeva, \textit{INB}, 106.
\textsuperscript{481} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{482} Ibid.
loving, supportive third party. In this context, Kristeva explains that the Imaginary Father’s support, provided to the incipient subject as it separates from the mother and begins to create imaginary objects outside itself, creates a sense of confidence in the subject vis-à-vis her capacity to individuate and be in the world with others. In other words, the subject comes into being in part because she is recognized by the other as a subject: “‘I’ am only if a beloved authority acknowledges me,” writes Kristeva, “This is a fundamental support, without which I would not be able to achieve any norm, accept any frustration, obey any prohibition, take upon myself any law or moral code.”483 These early mental experiences thus constitute the subject as a subject of belief – i.e., in an ideal, in oneself.

Recall that the subject is also constituted as a permanent subject in process, a subject of revolt. This follows for, as Kristeva explains, alongside the need to believe is a corresponding “desire to know. Supported by this faith that lets me hear and talk to a loving/loved third person, I burst into questions.”484 Kristeva offers the charming example of young children who, quite soon after learning to speak, do not stop asking questions: asking why everything is what it is and how everything works. They are looking for meaning, to make sense of their worlds; but they look for answers because they believe in the possibility of answers.485 In this sense, childlike questioning, rooted in the need to believe, represents the kind of openness that Kristeva is encouraging in her vision here – a similar openness to that which we saw in her culture of intimate revolt.

To be sure, however, beliefs are not – cannot be – ultimately realized. Ideals, as much as identities, are illusions. In other words, the need to believe is coextensive with the impossibility of belief.486 This paradox comes to the fore dramatically in what might be called a stage of rebellion, often in adolescence, when previously conceived certainties that have developed are

483 Ibid., 9.
484 Ibid, xii.
485 Ibid., xii-xiii.
shown to be untrue or at least more complex than they seemed. Kristeva observes that feelings such as deceit, confusion, uncertainty and anger are expressed through a variety of (often nihilistic) symptoms commonly associated with teenaged angst, e.g., depression and anorexia. Many “coming of age” or “innocence-lost” narratives address these themes. Understanding the desire for revolt and encouraging its expression in useful (i.e., innovative, non-violent) ways is part of the goal of psychoanalysis and part of Kristeva’s vision for society. For while she identifies the teenage years as particularly prone to this kind of inner conflict, “there is in us, a perpetual adolescent.”\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{INB}, 11.} In other words, we all struggle with the need to believe, the impossibility of belief, and the associated need to revolt. Kristeva’s vision, her culture of intimate revolt, would accompany subjects in this precarious journey without being destructive.

According to Kristeva, secular societies are neglecting the subject’s need to believe, which results in inhibiting one’s capacity to think and create. We find ourselves dominated by a culture of superficial entertainment (distractions from questions) and quick-fix consumerism (“easy answers”). Religions can provide “easy answers,” of course, but they can also pay heed to the need to believe – in both positive and negative ways. The sacred experiences and writing of Christian mystics are positive examples of how Christianity has responded to this need; the mystics elaborate their interior lives, put into words their ecstasy and pain, and embark on a journey of anxious questioning. However, there are also negative responses, which Kristeva finds more prevalent today, where the need to believe is exploited to the point of creating hierarchical institutions wherein power over others is exacted at the expense of individuals’ freedom to question or challenge their beliefs and institutional ideals.\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{INB}, 11.} For this reason, “faith is potentially fundamentalist,” writes Kristeva,\footnote{Kristeva, \textit{INB}, 11.} but not necessarily so. Likewise, she points out that “belief is not itself delirious but has the potential to become so.”\footnote{Ibid., 14.} It is in light of this (too often realized) potential that Kristeva is wary of religion and insists on its continual analysis:

\footnote{Ibid.}
the interpretation of texts and behavior, notably – for my part – in light of semiology and psychoanalysis, allows a new approach to the religious continent. The discovery of the unconscious by Freud has shown us that, far from being ‘illusions,’ though all the while being illusions, the different beliefs and kinds of spiritualities accommodate, encourage, or make use of precise psychic movements, which allow the human being to become a speaking being, a seat of culture or, inversely, of destructiveness.491

In other words, religious faith cultivates the subject’s complex inner experience, but it can also breed hate and capitalize on the power of the death drive. At the same time, as mentioned above, secularism can be equally problematic. Indeed, for Kristeva there is a fine line between the dominant trends of both secularism and modern religious movements. They both exploit the subject’s need to believe in ideals:

The perpetuation of the paradisial syndrome, notably in the idealization of the bourgeois couple, as portrayed by TV soap opera cliché, or by people magazine-type glamorizing of the life of the couple, has become a pillar of global morality. These show-business, commercial, or vulgar variants upon an excessively secularized paradise are intrinsically religious.492

Moreover, the destructiveness that can accompany religious fundamentalist groups is mirrored in the nihilism that accompanies the failure to achieve the ideals created by society, such as ideals of masculinity and femininity, of true love, of financial or social success, etc. In both cases, the problem is a reification of ideals, stabilization of identity through an overinvestment in ideals, rather than an ongoing interpretation of them. Kristeva wants instead to encourage subjects (adolescents, but also adults’ repressed adolescent selves) to work through the difficult existential paradox that accompanies the need to believe. Indeed, she is “convinced that by taking this prereligious need to believe seriously, we could confront not only religions’ past and present fundamentalist off-course drift but also the dead ends of secularized societies.”493

491 Ibid., 24.
492 Ibid., 18.
493 Ibid., 12.
4.2 More on Christianity

Kristeva’s attention to religion and Christianity in particular, which includes her exploration and praise of the sometimes-religious concept the sacred and the intimate revolt of the mystics, can be attributed to her view that, despite the serious problems we are witnessing today, secular societies have something to learn from religion. Kristeva describes herself as “a woman who is not a believer – a psychoanalyst, teacher, writer – convinced nonetheless [of] the ‘genius of Christianity.’”\textsuperscript{494} For her, the history of Christianity, including literature and art inspired by Christianity, reveals “an extraordinary awareness of psychic life.”\textsuperscript{495} This leads us to ask: in addition to being a discourse of ideals, what psychological insights does Christianity offer? The following psychic benefits are reminiscent of those mentioned in her earlier writings (noted, as we saw above, by Jonte-Pace). However, they are also an elaboration of them, tailored to the specific concerns she has in her later writings for a cultural revolution. I highlight here three related features that Kristeva attributes to Christianity, all of which derive from the event of the crucifixion of Jesus: (a) the importance of sharing and sublimating suffering, (b) access to the sacred, and (c) revelation of the absurdity inherent in belief.

Christianity’s emphasis on the role of suffering in the religious experience reflects the psychoanalytic “truth” that suffering is an inherent and important dimension of all speaking beings.\textsuperscript{496} In addition to the communal, ceremonial sharing in the suffering of Jesus, Christianity’s extensive history of social activism testifies to suffering as a common, human experience. Kristeva sees the acknowledgement of suffering as a point on which people of diverse belief systems – religious or not – can unite, that is, above and beyond the “real” articles of faith (e.g., origin stories, miracles), which divide people. In particular, she identifies an overlapping goal between psychoanalysis and Christianity in the need to be “present to [subjects’] suffering” and to engage in “a kind of listening that reaches out to them, that makes

\textsuperscript{494} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{495} Ibid., 82.
\textsuperscript{496} Kristeva writes that the sources of suffering are different in each case. In psychoanalysis, suffering comes from repression. In Christianity, it is valorized as a rite of passage. Ibid., 80.
contact and illuminates.” And she sees in Christianity the important psychic benefit of sublimating said suffering, which is demonstrated through the representation of suffering throughout the tradition, including Christian philosophy, literature, music, art, and theology. Both psychoanalysis and Christianity valorize (symbolic) “language as the royal road to traversing [suffering].” Finally, according to Kristeva, Christianity’s extensive treatment of suffering reveals the psychic truths that subjects have “the right to pain” and, moreover, that pleasure can accompany pain.

Once again, in light of the “sovereign suffering” central to Christianity, Kristeva ascribes to it a unique role in opening up a renewable access to the sacred. In her view, the sacred is revealed for the Christian through Jesus’ death and resurrection. The crucifixion is the Christian epitome of psychic and physical abjection, which is followed by the ultimate of reunions. Not only does spiritual (and, for some, bodily) resurrection become possible for the believer via this divine sacrifice, but it is a sacred rebirth that is infinitely renewable through forgiveness. We saw this exemplified by but not limited to her Christian mystics, whose lives and works expressed their personal encounters with the sacred through an intimate knowledge of abjection, in-between-ness, and resistance, of ecstatic union/identification with and love of/by an Other.

At the same time, and perhaps most importantly at this juncture, Kristeva sees the very crucifixion of Jesus as a scandal that in fact prepares the path for a way beyond religion – to “the necessary new humanism.”

Acknowledging the historical Christological debates (at the Council of Nicea) and debates on the divine/human nature of Jesus (especially at the Council of

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497 Ibid., 77.
498 Ibid., 80.
499 Ibid., 81. Alongside this claim is the one that beauty is a result of working through pain – aesthetic creations are therapeutic – and Kristeva has identified Christian art as exemplifying this psychic truth. This is a theme primarily taken up and explored in her earlier work, *Black Sun*, though she returns to it in *Hatred and Forgiveness*, which is in many ways a summarized overview of her life’s work. See Kristeva, *Hatred*, 57-78, especially page 70. See Chapter 2.2.2. The Imaginary Cure.
500 Kristeva, *INB*, 24. She also states that there is a “pressing need to radically reform humanism.” Ibid., 2.
Chalcedon), Kristeva follows Hegel and reads the event of the crucifixion as the death of God. In a psychoanalytic reading, the death of God represents for individuals the persistent role of the death drive in the psyche: subject formation is a series of rejections, prohibitions, and renunciations; “each and every one of us is the result of a long ‘work on the negative’: birth, weaning, separation, frustration.” At the same time, Kristeva explains that a divine being who faces suffering to the point of annihilation, the kenosis (emptying, from the Greek kénose) of God who descends into hell and becomes nothingness through death, is a paradoxical, even absurd notion – one that speaks to the absurdity inherent in our subjective need to believe. As she stresses: “the absolute necessity for the human spirit to aspire to the Other, desire the divine, want to seize meaning, is suddenly revealed to be empty, vain, useless, absurd.” And thus, Kristeva argues, “Through this co-presence of the absolute-and-the-nothingness of desire […] Christianity reaches the limits of the religious. [Thus] with kénose we are no longer confronted with the religious but with the sacred, understood as a traversal, via thought, of the unthinkable: nothingness, the useless, the vain, the absurd.” For Kristeva, beyond the limits of the religious is her vision of a secular sacred, which she sees as an ongoing, long-term project. It incorporates the necessity to confront the need to believe but insists on being aware of and working through the impossibility of belief.

4.3 A Third Way

This Incredible Need to Believe, as well as Thérèse, Mon Amour (which is more than a historical account, but a commentary on today’s society and culture), confirms Kristeva’s earlier views: just as she praises certain aspects of religions, Christianity in particular, she remains critical. At the same time, though she criticizes modern versions of religion for constricting thought, she also censures modern secular discourses that encourage a kind of rational, calculating thought that produces knowledge cut off from the senses – “disinterested in inner experience, [ignoring] its

501 Kristeva, INB, 93 & 94.
502 In a similar vein, Slavoj Žižek reads the sacrificial interpretations of Jesus the Christ’s death as “perverse.” See Žižek, The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity (2003).
503 Ibid., 95.
504 Ibid., 98.
intrinsic authority.” It follows that Kristeva’s vision can be located somewhere in the middle of the extremes of “a narrowly rationalist humanism [and] a romantic spirituality.” As Maria Margaroni notes, Sylvia’s personal journey via the mysticism of St. Teresa is a conduit through which Kristeva describes “a third pathway,” between fundamentalism and secularist nihilism, “that promises to lead us beyond the deadly dilemmas we are currently facing.” My reading is supported by Margaroni’s view that Teresa’s mysticism is an illustration of the balance and tension that Kristeva has in mind. There is something in the Saint’s “faithful infidelity to the dogma of the ideal Father” that permits Thérèse to ‘measure the necessity’ of the Ideal and ‘test its impasses while opening up, at the same time, unheard of possibilities of overcoming, of freedom” The expression faithful infidelity is a perfect characterization of the double, even if contradictory, investment that Kristeva sees as necessary for the speaking subject: acknowledge the need to believe, listen to it, attend to it, express it, but be constantly wary of its potential for destruction. That is, real knowledge is linked to, nay, dependent on the need to believe, but it is only possible to achieve if we interrogate “the historical contents of beliefs, theirs truths: absolute or constructive? Protective or temporary? Illusory, beneficial, or death ridden? Endlessly.”

Kristeva’s third way grows out of and contains concepts that are inherently religious (revolt, forgiveness, the sacred), but which she ultimately interprets and re-conceptualizes in psychoanalytic, i.e., secular terms. The “faithful infidelity” of St. Teresa is consistent with the notion of a “mystic atheism,” which Kristeva associates with female mystics in The Feminine

505 Ibid., viii.
506 Ibid., 27.
509 “From [Kristeva’s] perspective, what is most urgent today is to understand the human need for an Ideal and to reclaim (indeed, to reinvest) this need in full awareness of the dangers inherent in it.” Ibid.
510 Kristeva, INB, xiii.
and the Sacred.” And her references to the anxious questioning of St. Augustine, to Meister Eckhart who asks God “to leave [him] free of God,” and to John of the Cross who describes belief as a “vain pursuit,” support what Arthur Bradley has called Kristeva’s “position between excessive transcendentalism of Judaeo-Christian theology on the one hand and the overtly reductive version of materialism offered by Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and scientific materialism on the other.” Finally, Kristeva describes her thought and work as contributing to a “philosophy of immanence.” The “emptying” of God, discussed above, changes the Ideal from a transcendent Other to an immanent one, among us, and in fact, inside us. The death of God takes the believer to the limit of belief and allows her to retrieve the Other within herself. For Kristeva, “a new conception of the human is being constituted…where transcendence is immanent.” Thus, we see a clear foundation in religion, but also a simultaneous attempt to move away from it. Bradley describes Kristeva’s project in Derridian terms – as “a certain ‘religion without religion’ where the ‘without’ signals both a certain continuity and a resistance at the same time.” The implications of this are a matter of debate, which we will discuss below.

5 Kristeva’s Revolt

We have established that Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt closely resembles her notion of the sacred. We have also seen how Kristeva’s vision of revolt culture, which we might also call her new humanism, is indebted to religious concepts. She states that her “vision of human complexity […] springs from Christianity, though it is now detached from it” and that “the

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511 Kristeva, F&S, 37. Margaroni points out that Kristeva characterizes Colette as a ‘mystic atheist’ as well.
512 Margaroni, “Julia Kristeva’s Voyage in the Theresian Continent,” 89.
514 Kristeva, INB, 33-34.
515 Kristeva, INB, 25.
516 Bradley, “Mystic Atheism,” 287.
517 Kristeva, INB, 78.
history of Christianity is a preparation for humanism.\textsuperscript{518} It is perhaps not surprising that critics find Kristeva’s views on religion challenging: because rather than actually moving beyond it, it appears that she has one foot in and one foot out of religion. She demythologizes religion, yet her psychoanalytic vision for the future is interpreted as a secularized religion. In other words, part of the ambiguity associated with Kristeva comes from the theoretical and personal proximity she keeps to religion despite her claims of merely analyzing it.

In terms of personal matters, Kristeva’s criticism of religion might be undercut for some in light of her reflections on her own religious upbringing: “I grew up in the shadow of icons,” writes Kristeva, “and for a long time observed the faith of my father, an Orthodox Christian and seminarian. […] The debates with my father…left me with an interest at once passionate and critical in \textit{an experience of faith} that continues to be informed, and tends to be refined, by contact with scientific, philosophical, and, above all, psychoanalytic thought.”\textsuperscript{519} Indeed, alongside her objective analyses of various subjects, there are passages and essays, mostly informal and more recent, in which Kristeva’s subjective experience with and feelings on religion (among other things) are laid bare. And despite her claims to have abandoned her childhood faith, there are passages that seem to contain at least an element of nostalgia. Take for example this segment in Kristeva’s correspondence with Clément:

\begin{quote}
Those who understand analytical experience – in any case, with me – are rarely believers. Some have been, most are not at all, or, almost not at all. So I rarely hear people talk about God, and, when it happens, as you can imagine, my ‘free-floating attention’ momentarily fastens, even crystallizes, on that word. I experience a hint of shame at the idea of that curiosity; might it prove that God has not completely abandoned me, as I have a tendency to believe ordinarily?\textsuperscript{520}
\end{quote}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{518} Ibid., 83.
\item \textsuperscript{519} Kristeva, \textit{Hatred}, 209.
\item \textsuperscript{520} Kristeva, \textit{F&S}, 23. See also pages 46-47.
\end{itemize}
Another interesting example is found in the post-script of her recent publication, *Thérèse, Mon Amour* (2014/2008). Through the voice of the protagonist Sylvia, who writes a letter to well-known atheist and ridiculer of religion Denis Diderot, Kristeva effectively expresses her experience of doubt vis-à-vis her own atheist convictions. As Maria Margaroni succinctly summarizes, “Sylvia tells us that she began her psychoanalytic perusal of Thérèse’s mystic writings without much conviction, in an attempt to confront ‘a kind of a UFO, a baroque relic’…however she was taken by surprise in the course of her analysis and found all her certainties interrogated.” Moreover, Kristeva/Sylvia addresses and questions a particular event of existential despair and sadness that Diderot experiences after having written *La Religieuse* (The Nun), which is a mockery and a criticism of religious orders. In the post-script, Kristeva/Sylvia suggests that, on some level, his tears are due to a lack of understanding of the nun’s sacred, intimate experience of the divine. “Against and beyond Diderot the philosopher, Sylvia [and Kristeva] turns to Thérèse in order to understand what he [and she] (in his committed atheism) does not know what to do with, i.e. the exaltations the soul experiences when it unites with the Other.” In light of this, we might understand the book on Teresa of Avila, which is an exploration of the saint’s inner world, as Margaroni does: as a simultaneous interrogation of Kristeva’s own inner world.

Implied in the examples above is Kristeva’s view that it is important to both acknowledge and examine one’s oceanic feelings. This might trouble some modern, secular thinkers in the field of psychoanalysis and religion, wherein, for example, Freud is seen as part of a de-mystifying tradition and/or intolerant of reality claims that cannot be objectively determined. For

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521 *Thérèse, Mon Amour* is historical fiction, which the subtitle of the English version implies: *Teresa, My Love: An Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila.*


523 Ibid.


Kristeva, however, religious experience is not beyond the scope of analysis, and we see this in her consideration of personal religious affections and reflections.

Theoretically speaking, Arthur Bradley critiques her vision of a “mystic atheism,” suggesting that it does not succeed in finding the balance between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, between the obscurantism of secularist nihilism and dogmatic religion in the way that she claims to do. Rather, he argues, “There is an important sense in which her psychoanalytic critique of Christianity remains – both wittingly and unwittingly – complicit with the Judaeo-Christian theology she is attempting to question.”526 Does Kristeva find the right balance? Is her self-described philosophy of immanence “a contemporary manifestation of negative theology”?527 Bradley suggests that it is – that her notion of an “infinitely immanent sacred” falls prey to Derrida’s criticism of negative theology: “even when it appears to deny that God is a being it is only in order to posit Him as a more supreme or superessential (hyperousios) being.”528 In other words, that it is “a concealed positive theology or ontotheology.”529 According to Bradley, in the case of Kristeva, the superessential being is located within the subject itself, the Other within.530 I agree with Bradley’s assessment that Kristeva’s vision might be called “theological” in a certain sense of the word (NB: minus the qualifiers ‘positive’ or ‘negative’). In fact, she admits that her psychoanalytic project could bear the description of ‘theological’:

_Homo religiosis_…can move beyond the hatelove that keeps him going only by taking a step to the side: by taking himself as object of thought. By developing his theology, by forcing it to confront the plural interpretations of his need to believe, the multiple variants of his needs to believe. Is this not what Freud did when he claimed it is possible to tell the love of the other, infinitely; to analyze oneself in analyzing it, infinitely? Might psychoanalysis be one of the variations of theology? Its ultimate variation, _hic et nunc_?531

526 Bradley, “Mystic Atheism,” 287.
527 Ibid.
528 Ibid., 288.
529 Ibid., 292.
530 Ibid., 288.
531 Kristeva, _INB_, 70.
I differ from Bradley in that I do not see the depiction of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic readings as pseudo-theological as problematic, nor do I see it hindering the implications of her theories vis-à-vis the cultural, political and philosophical conversations to which she contributes. I suggest that a large reason for this difference is that Bradley, along with other critics, does not take into account that Kristeva’s approach is always already an example of intimate revolt. In other words, while Bradley’s critique of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic project is illuminating, the problematic that he identifies is undercut when one considers her approach as an example of intimate revolt.

5.1 The Intimate

I suggest that both the theoretical and the personal proximity to religion can be better understood and appreciated in light of Kristeva’s theories of intimate revolt. There are three important aspects of revolt that I call to the attention of the reader. The first is the introspective and retrospective nature of Kristeva’s intimate revolt. As a process of returning, it is not only reasonable but also necessary to return to religion for Kristeva, precisely because of the role it has played in her personal life and in the history of the Western world. Religion qua Christianity is an unconscious memory-trace inscribed into Kristeva’s individual history and also in the consciousness of Western subjectivity. The above-mentioned doubts, reflections and questions are all suggestive of Kristeva “working-through” a resurfacing memory-trace. And, in her account, it is important for the realization of a culture of revolt to acknowledge and confront the insertion of our religious past in our present psychic and social lives. To be clear, she does not “ascribe to religion the force of the sole determinant of behavior […] nonetheless…the conception of the individual offered by religion – fashioned by History and fashioning it in turn – leaves its imprint on everyone and, unbeknownst to us, influences our psyches and our behavior.”

532 She was raised in an Orthodox family in Bulgaria and educated by French Dominican nuns in a Catholic school. Her father was deeply religious, her family name is Christian and she is named after a saint.

533 Kristeva, Crisis 132-33.
5.2 The Big Question Mark

The second important feature is expressed in the concern that Kristeva voices in the foreword to *This Incredible Need to Believe*: “whether the believers, and especially those who believe they don’t believe, will be capable of reading into my reflections ‘a big question mark.’”

Interestingly, even Bradley acknowledges “Kristeva’s psychoanalysis…remains utterly shaped by what she sees to be the hermeneutic project—the questioning of the self and the self as a question.” Indeed, we see time and again that beyond her approach to psychoanalysis, her vision and in fact her entire body of work is always open to questioning; on my reading, it is an example of permanent (intimate) revolt. As such, her psychoanalytic vision, her “religions without religion” is *deliberately* left open to critique and therefore to revision. Freudian scholars will see a similarity here with Freud’s reasoning behind his preference for science over religion. Indeed, echoing Freud’s famous admission: “perhaps the hopes I have confessed to are of an illusory nature, too,” Kristeva writes in *Sense and Non-sense of Revolt*, “I admit that what I have said may only be illusion as well.” Freud, however, “hold[s] fast to one distinction,” i.e., that “[his] illusions are not, like religious ones, incapable of correction.” In this well-known essay, he does not make any room for a religious faith or beliefs – illusion if you will – that might be questioned, doubted, altered or rejected. Kristeva, on the other hand, while she certainly agrees that religion can be dogmatic and potentially dangerous, has also discussed at length other expressions of religiosity precisely because they are not only open to but also, in fact, *founded on* the notion of personal interrogation and renewal.

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535 Bradley, “Mystic Atheism,” 287.
536 Freud argues that science is not threatened by overturning previously conceived scientific “truths,” stating that because scientific discoveries are based on an evolution of knowledge collecting skills and experiences, that it is inherently open to an ongoing development and adaptation of the truth. This is in contradistinction to Freud’s reading of religious truths as illusory and closed to adaptation. Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, in *SE* 21, 53-55.
537 Ibid., 53.
538 Kristeva, *Sense and Non-sense*, 106.
Kristeva’s commitment to open-endedness is seen in her approach to her clinical practice: “Yet isn’t it the function of the analyst to pay heed to every question, not to answer them all, surely, but to displace, illuminate, or conjure away the object of interrogation?” And open-ended enquiry is the foundational methodology of the correspondence between Kristeva and Catherine Clement in *The Feminine and the Sacred*; it is stated in the introduction to the book that they “[limit themselves] to raising questions rather than giving answers” and the book closes by imploring the reader to “hold on to the imperative for permanent questioning as the principal note of our approach to both the feminine and the sacred.” Looking at her work as a commitment to intimate revolt, as a permanent questioning, helps explain the personal reflection on whether or not God has really abandoned her, as mentioned above. To clarify, this reflection is not a sign of ambiguity, self-deception, or self-contradiction, but rather a sign of her openness – an openness to old and new revelations, to the ongoing change in meaning that can emerge via the process of intimate revolt. Finally, as we have seen, with her writing on intimate revolt, revolt culture and in *This Incredible Need to Believe*, the imperative for permanent questioning is more than a methodology of research but a constitutional pleasure and a necessity for the future of healthy individuals and a healthy society. And we see that she has implemented this pleasure of thinking, questioning and analyzing into her own research.

5.3 Movement

The final important feature of Kristeva’s revolt that we can see in her writing is movement. Before I expand on this, let me first emphasize that opening a space between the hyper-rationality of science and the hyper transcendentalism of religion is clearly a goal of Kristeva’s. For scholars of religion in particular, creating this space (this “third way”) has important implications because dichotomous categories, such as ‘science’ and ‘rationality’ versus ‘religion’ and ‘emotionality,’ inevitably exclude a vast number of subjects who do not fit

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540 Kristeva, *In the Beginning*, xiii.
542 See Kristeva, *INB*, 20.
543 Margaroni, Bradley and I all agree on this point. Not to mention that a section title in *This Incredible Need to Believe* is “Neither Secularization, Nor Transcendentalism.” Kristeva, *INB*, 71.

into either. In Kristeva’s work we see a complication, if not an explosion, of the ‘secular versus religious’ duality. This is particularly significant in light of the psychoanalytic tradition that inherited for the most part Freud’s narrowly defined depiction of religion. However, possibly even more important than the space itself is the movement within that space, something to which Bradley does not give much consideration when he claims that Kristeva does not convincingly achieve her desired “space.” This feature, inherent to her conceptualization of revolt, is crucial because, among other things, it recognizes, as psychoanalysis does broadly speaking, that subjects are not essential beings, removed from history, but continually formed and transformed (consciously and unconsciously, intellectually and emotionally) through socio-historical events; recall that for Kristeva specifically, we are subjects in process. The movement integral to Kristeva’s theory of revolt is significant with regards to psychoanalytic interpretations of religious subjectivity. Beyond creating a new category, or many categories, between religious and non-religious, the movement of revolt, which also characterizes Kristeva’s “third way,” allows for the possibility that subjects do not take up any category or definition of religion in a fixed way. It means that subjects can (and perhaps should) move among categories.

This last feature calls to mind the Butlerian concept of performativity and fluidity in gender. At the risk of over-simplifying Butler’s theory, I think it is a useful comparison. Much like in the case of gender categories, there are many culturally accepted and perpetuated assumptions and stereotypes associated with various religious labels, denominations, traditions and language. Butler aims to show that there is nothing essential about gender (i.e., a pre-existing identity that is determined by one’s sexed body and that determines one’s desire). Rather, we should understand gender as an ongoing series of performances, which can serve to either reinforce or challenge socially constructed gender norms. I suggest that the lens of Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt, inasmuch as it is an ongoing process of retrospection, interrogation and reinvention, also results in a vision of religious subjectivity as an ongoing performance. As such, individuals are no longer locked (by others or themselves) into a particular meaning of what it means to be religious. Religion could be inserted in the place of gender when Butler writes: “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and
because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic and sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.” 544 And, keeping with the comparison, Kristeva appears as a good example of someone presenting personal and theoretical positions that are ‘discontinuous’ or ‘incoherent’ with the stabilizing categories of both ‘religious’ and ‘atheist’ – they do not fit neatly into either. Kristeva, then, does not straightforwardly conform to either norm. However, if you revisit her views as a product of intimate revolt, it is perfectly feasible to accept that Kristeva may at one moment be nostalgic for her childhood faith, the faith and traditions of her father, what she first knew and became attached to, and then in the next moment speak of religion as a dogmatic, robotic system that should be abandoned.

6 Closing Remarks

There are many insights to draw from this chapter. For one, I hope to have demonstrated that “Kristeva on religion” demonstrates not ambiguity but revolt. 545 Perhaps one could use the word ‘ambiguous’ but only to the extent that intimate revolt lends itself to un-fixedness and uncertainty. In addition, Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt allows for a broader understanding of religious subjectivity and a more dynamic one. To be clear, this is not an explicit goal, per se, of Kristeva’s. 546 It is my observation that looking at religious subjectivity through the lens of intimate revolt results in this important contribution to the field of psychoanalytic interpretations of religion. And finally, on a related note, we have seen that there are parallels between Kristeva’s treatment of organized religion and the “defensive and socializing” religion to which Freud’s critiques are directed. On its own, this would leave Kristeva open to the same criticism

545 My suggestion that Kristeva’s writing (in general but especially on religion) is an example of her theory of intimate revolt is even more credible when one considers Kelly Oliver’s observation that Kristeva’s writing can also be read as demonstrating her theory of the dynamic between semiotic and symbolic modes of language. Kelly Oliver. *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 11.
546 Though she acknowledges “the complexity of religious experiences.” Kristeva, *INB*, 12.
Freud has received: religion is reduced to a narrow conception of the term. In the latter’s case, Freud’s reproach is directed toward a very specific conception of religion, with which he was personally confronted, living in Catholic Vienna in the early 1900s. However, one can also identify similarities between Kristeva’s ‘sacred’ and Freud’s ‘oceanic feeling.’ The difference is that while Freud more or less brackets the discussion of the oceanic feeling, Kristeva’s open-ended exploration of the sacred becomes central to her thoughts on religion, subjectivity, and culture at large, the importance of which lies in the connection that she ultimately draws between the sacred and revolt. In terms of this study’s question regarding the role of religion in revolt culture, we can take away that despite her own focus on secular versions of the sacred and new variants of revolt, Kristeva nevertheless leaves open the possibility that certain religious subjects today are still capable of revolt. I suggest that the intimate nature, the big question mark and the movement of revolt characterize the modern religious subject in revolt – a subject whose relationship to his or her religious traditions and beliefs might be inconsistent, uncertain, and changing, while all the while personal, intimate, and thoughtful (in the full sense of the word). In the next chapter, I look to postmodern Christian philosophy and progressive Christianity as potential examples of religious revolt today.

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547 For example, Marsha Hewitt argues that Freud’s famous critique of religion should be revised as being directed towards a specific kind of religiosity, i.e., “the unquestioning, blind adherence to religious beliefs [and] desperate clinging to an all-powerful deity that provide[s] the illusion of a safe haven not only against the forces of nature but the responsibility to understand them through scientific knowledge.” Marsha A. Hewitt, “Attachment Theory, Religious Beliefs, and the Limits of Reason,” Pastoral Psychology 57 (2008): 70.

548 In Civilization and Its Discontents, Roland asks Freud how he might explain the “oceanic feeling” that religious people speak of. Unable to relate, Freud, though he tries to link the feeling to the omnipotence associated with primary narcissism, ultimately gives up trying to formulate a psychoanalytic account.
Chapter 5: Religion and Revolt Today?

I established in the previous chapter that Kristeva’s vision for the future leaves the door open for religious subjects in revolt. In other words, religion does not have to be excluded from the concept of a revolt culture, despite Kristeva’s criticisms of religion and her focus on secular revolts. So what might a religion of revolt look like? I suggested that the modern religious subject in revolt is one whose understanding of his or her religious traditions and beliefs is tentative and changeable, and also affective and reflective. Because Kristeva does not do so to any notable degree, this chapter explores two potential examples of revolt in religious discourses today. As it turns out, these brief investigations shed light on some limitations and challenges of this psychic revolt in religion. Nevertheless, I maintain that, to whichever degree possible, intimate revolt should be encouraged explicitly and specifically in the context of religion – at least more so than Kristeva does. In other words, regardless of how you label our current age (secular, post-secular, modern or postmodern, etc.), if religion continues to be a part of it – and it will – then alongside secular avenues it is imperative that religion be promoted as a site of revolt.

First, discussions in postmodern Christian philosophy\textsuperscript{549} call to mind Kristeva’s intimate revolt. Though these thinkers do not make reference to Kristeva, nor Kristeva to them, there are interesting comparisons to be observed. In particular, I will look at the work of John D. Caputo, because of resemblances between his postmodern interpretation of religion and Kristeva’s theory of intimate revolt. We will evaluate below whether or not, or in what ways, we can refer to his version of “religion without religion” as a contemporary example of intimate revolt. As a byproduct of this discussion, we see reiterated the rigor and importance of Kristeva’s theories.

Second, I will look at a revolt-like trend in the North American movement of progressive Christianity. This is an interesting case because it offsets Kristeva’s attention to European

\textsuperscript{549} Or, perhaps, \textit{Postmodern Philosophy of Religion}. This category overlaps with various related discourses, such as \textit{Existential Christian Philosophy} (e.g., S. Kierkegaard, P. Tillich), \textit{Death of God} Theology (e.g., J. Robinson, H. Cox, T. J. J. Altizer, via Hegel, Nietzsche, and the “religion-less Christianity” of D. Bonhoeffer), \textit{Radical Theology} (e.g., Bishop J. S. Spong), \textit{Radical Orthodoxy} (e.g., J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, G. Ward), \textit{Postmodern Christianity} (e.g., J. Caputo), \textit{Postmodern Philosophy} (G. Vattimo), and \textit{Postmodern Theology} (C. Raschke, M. C. Taylor, J-L. Marion, and for some, Badiou).
traditions, and also because it attempts to move us (albeit not entirely) outside academic circles to a non-scholarly or “on-the-ground” example of religious revolt. To focus the brief discussion, I refer to the anthropological work of Rebekka King, whose case studies and analysis help us identify ways that intimate revolt can be observed in this context, but also to take note of how precarious intimate revolt can be.

1 Postmodern Christian Philosophy

1.1 Caputo’s Postmodernism

The term “postmodern” is now ubiquitous in academic circles and beyond. However the meaning implied is not consistent. One might be referring to the notion of a postmodern time period, which follows the “modern” time period, as in the fields of art and architecture, or one might have in mind the notion of a postmodernist movement, which designates a trend of critical reconsideration of prevailing, “modernist” ideas, which vary from field to field. In philosophical circles, postmodernism is also associated with the field of poststructuralist thought, out of which it arguably emerged. Simply speaking, poststructuralism calls into question structuralism’s assumption that we can uncover and know, in any final and absolute way, the underlying structures – hidden motives or unconscious support – of the way we live our lives and the cultural products around us. For poststructuralists, the meaning and value of a cultural “sign” (e.g., a word, image, gesture) is neither fixed nor singular and, more importantly,

550 Marxism is a proto-typical example of structuralism. The Marxist critique of capitalism states that the underlying structure of capitalism is a class system in which the labourers are exploited for the sake of the rich, yet they are unaware of their objectification. Rather, they are made to feel that they are free and in control of their own destinies. (Note, of course, that Marx is also sometimes considered a figure of Enlightenment or Modernist thought, so these categories are neither clear nor distinct). Another example is the social-anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, who studied the common underlying structures of simple societies, such as the regulation of women through marriage, the transmission of myth, incest taboos, etc., all of which serve to reinforce a stable society but that might otherwise seem “natural.” And finally, we have the structural linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Many attribute the whole structuralist movement to Saussure. In line with the theorists I just mentioned, for Saussure, the underlying structure of language (which goes beyond words and includes images, symbols, math and science) and culture was a system of signs. The point for structuralists was to discover the underlying structures that give rise to prevailing values.

551 I am referencing here Saussure’s formula of the $\text{sign} = \text{signifier} + \text{signified}$, wherein the sign is the basic unit of meaning and is made up of the word or image (the signifier) and its associated mental concept (the signified). For example, sinaasappel in Dutch is orange (the fruit) in English. If you do not know the Dutch language, then
because we are inextricably linked to and imbedded in the structures we are trying to observe, we are looking at them with certain biases.  

Similarly, postmodern philosophy typically questions the notions of absolute Truth, capital T, and of a stable and knowable self. And there is an emphasis on the historical, cultural and psychological conditions that produce truths and shape our subjectivity. Caputo is often called a postmodern thinker because these are views that he holds, as does Kristeva, for that matter. However, there is more to his understanding of the postmodern moment. For Caputo, postmodernity coincides with a time that is decidedly post-secular.

As we have seen, Kristeva depicts Western culture as being in a state of ideological, social and subjective crisis, which is a result of technologizing and homogenizing trends in secularization, and the weakening of the grand, European religious traditions. This worldview, particularly the latter part, is reminiscent of what has been termed *Death of God Theology*, which develops via Hegel, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche, whose Zarathustra popularized the philosopher’s observation that “God is Dead…And we have killed him.” The influence of Hegel and Dostoyevsky on Kristeva is well known, and we have seen in previous chapters that her views portray what one might call, the distinction between “Christianity” and “Christendom” found in both Kierkegaard (*Sickness Unto Death*) and Dostoyevsky (*The Brothers Karamazov*). While not using these terms, Kristeva too criticizes the idea of an institutionalized social and political authority (*Christendom*) that is corrupt, self-serving, and normalizing, which in turn obscures, if not prevents, individuals’ potential for growth and meaning-making – meaning derived from a personally-invested journey of the “sacred” (*Christianity*). On her view, much like the 1960s “Death of God” theologians, the reign of Christendom is over and the void is filled by equally problematic trends in secularization or fundamentalist versions of religion.

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*sinaasappel* is only a signifier with no signified; there is no meaning, no mental object attached to it. If you speak Dutch, though, then this has signified, it means something.

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Key figures commonly associated with the poststructuralist movement are Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Judith Butler, Derrida, Lacan, and Kristeva.
Caputo would not disagree with Kristeva’s evaluation of the downfalls of secular culture. However, according to him, we have entered a new phase. In *After the Death of God* (2007), Caputo and co-author Gianni Vattimo address what they see as “the Postmodern Return of Religion,” a return enacted by philosophers and cultural theorists more than by religious leaders. In his introduction to the book, Jeffrey Robbins states “this transition from the death of God to postmodern faith (or, if you will, from secularism to postsecularism) is one of the defining chapters in contemporary religious thought.” Caputo suggests that Nietzsche’s deconstruction of the Enlightenment understanding of subjectivity and truth that defined modernity “boomeranged” onto his own arguments, including his critique of religion, presenting them as perspectives among many, rather than authoritative views. Nietzsche’s critique of religion, along with those of Freud and Marx, become the focus of postmodern critiques and, thus, in a twist of irony, an impetus for the current *return* to religion. This reasoning is not necessarily wrong. Certainly, part of the postmodernist approach is to critique the “grand” critiques and predominant theories. However, Caputo’s interpretation of modernist views is at times superficial or simply erroneous. Of course, Caputo states that his understanding of “post” in his use of postmodern, along with his deconstruction of modernists’ critiques, does not mean a total rejection of such critiques. He explains that postmodern does not imply after-modernity so much as *through*-modernity, and he speaks of a “New Enlightenment […] that is enlightened about the limits of the old one.” His interpretation here is reminiscent of Kristeva’s call to “traverse” Christianity, by which she means “knowing and analyzing: not…becoming imprisoned within it,” and her call for a “New Humanism,” which, on my reading, involves a repeated return to, reflection on, and potential reinvention of the past, for the

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554 Ibid., 13.
555 Ibid.
556 He reduces many complex, modernist philosophies to simple notions like “certitude,” “objectivism” and, ironically, “reductionism.” See, for example, Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 73.
purpose of a renewed future (i.e., revolt culture). The difference is that Kristeva’s psychoanalytic approach succeeds at analyzing the contributions of her predecessors (and contemporaries) without entirely discrediting them. For example, we have seen time and again the way she is indebted to but nevertheless moves beyond both Freud and Lacan. Indeed, Kristeva’s “return to religion,” if one must call it that, is still part of the critical analysis she brings to all the cultural products she discusses.

On the other hand, Caputo’s emphasis on the new authority of religion is partly supported by his view that the great skeptics of religion (Freud, Nietzsche and Marx) are being “called out” for making absolute truth claims. And Caputo has implicated Freud in particular via his criticism of psychoanalysis as a universalizing metanarrative, or “big story,” that has lost its clout. Close readers of Kristeva, however, will know that psychoanalysis, in most of its post-Freudian, “postmodern” iterations, is far from a homogenizing, universalizing discourse, but rather a theory and practice that recognizes the subject as having a unique, personal story contingent on his or her place and time in history. Thus, Caputo’s dislike of psychoanalysis is rooted in a stereotypical understanding of Freudianism and Freud’s critique of religion, whereas Kristeva’s psychoanalytic interpretation of religion is decidedly not reductionist or dismissive. Rather, she works with Freud’s relatively limited discussions on the matter and opens up his critique to a postmodern deconstruction that allows for a broader and more nuanced conception of religion. For Caputo, the return to religious discourse is a sign that religion reveals subjective truths that we cannot find elsewhere. Kristeva takes seriously religious narratives and sees the value therein, but she maintains her critical distance, where Caputo does not, as we will see. Therefore, Kristeva’s treatment of religion, as well as her vision for a culture of intimate revolt, is in fact a better example of the approach that Caputo is trying to espouse. This approach is perhaps best described simply as one that allows and sees the value in including religious language and concepts into the discussion of who we are as individuals and as a society. That said, I maintain

559 Caputo, After the Death of God, 136-37.
560 “Like many other contemporary theories of subjectivity, psychoanalysis operates under the assumption that human beings are constituted through social processes of language acquisition and acculturation [and] emphasizes that we form ourselves in response (or resistance) to the innumerable external influences that surround us.” Ruti, World of Fragile Things, 5-6.
that through his approach to religion and his idea of a postmodern religion, Caputo demonstrates important elements of Kristeva’s revolt, even if he might also fall into tragic revolt (in Kristeva’s sense of the term).\textsuperscript{561} Moreover, despite Caputo’s failings, revolt should nevertheless be encouraged in the context of religion.

1.2 Caputo’s Postmodern Religion

1.2.1 Personal Experience

In \textit{On Religion} (2001), Caputo presents his notion of a postmodern religion. To start, he acknowledges that ‘religion’ resists definition. But this is not a problem; indeed, he wants to open up the meaning of the word beyond its traditional associations. Caputo states that his goal is not to distinguish between church-going “religious people” and “non-religious” people who read the paper on Sunday mornings. “I would rather speak of the religious \textit{in} people, in all of us,” he writes, “I take ‘religion’ to mean the being-religious of human beings, which I put on a par with being political or being artistic. By ‘the religious,’ I mean a basic structure of human experience.”\textsuperscript{562} Moving away from the focus on creeds and ceremony and toward a more personal experience, Caputo goes on to outline his version of religion in terms of love: “Religion is for lovers,” he says, and he redefines religion as “the love of God.”\textsuperscript{563} Deliberately broad, then, his vision is described through an unpacking of this expression.\textsuperscript{564} And he establishes the following guiding question, borrowed from Augustine’s \textit{Confessions}: “What do I love when I love my God?”\textsuperscript{565} With this question in mind, Caputo suggests that “the religious sense of life” is being passionate about something that is bigger than you, that overcomes you, something that you cannot quite comprehend. Thus, the love of God is love of the “impossible,” i.e., that which

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\textsuperscript{561} See Chapter 1.3.3. “The Risk of Revolt.” Not to be confused with Caputo’s use of the term in his discussion on ‘the tragic sense of life,’ which we look at below.


\textsuperscript{563} Ibid., 2 & 1.

\textsuperscript{564} It is also an expression he admits is “a little vacuous and even slightly sanctimonious.” Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{565} Ibid., 2.
takes over when we reach the limits of our own possibilities. Later, in *After the Death of God* (2007), Caputo re-conceptualizes God using the notion of the *event*. Influenced by Deleuze (*Logic of Sense* 1969), Caputo describes the event as “not precisely what happens…but something going on in what happens…it is not something present, but something seeking to make itself felt in what is present.” The event is also sheltered by a *name*. The name (word or thing) is not the event *per se*, but “a kind of provisional formulation” or evolving, mutable expression of an event. According to this theory, God is a name that “shelters” (note, not equivalent to but representative of) a God-like event that stirs within us; the event is “astir” in the name/concept of God. In Derridian terms, Caputo explains that while the name given to events is deconstructible, the event itself is not. Events are irreducible, though not fully formed and true in any absolute sense, à la Plato’s forms. As such, events are always soliciting us, calling us forth. God, then, is the name that harbors within it an uncaptureable feeling – an experience of a sacred, God-like concept, and specifically *not* the traditional concept of a paternal figure or cosmic force. For Caputo, God is the event/thing that is *astir* in religious people. What we love when we love God is the mystery and impossibility of this God-like event. In this way, Caputo moves away from the traditional concept of religion that involves belief, rituals, and institutional participation. Rather, he adopts and adapts Derrida’s notion of a “religion without religion.” This is part of his effort to dissolve the typical divide between religious and secular. Still, Caputo makes it clear that the great religious traditions are *included* in his understanding of religion even though it goes beyond them and, moreover, that they are an important means by which we learn about various cultural and historical interpretations of said religious experience, along with peoples’ customs and practices. Also, the great traditions help

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566 Ibid., 10-14. Caputo is borrowing again from Derrida when he asks us “to think of God as the ‘becoming possible of the impossible’.” Ibid., 10.
567 Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 47.
568 Ibid.
569 Ibid., 48.
570 Ibid., 47-59.
572 Ibid., 9.
preserve religion through institutions and structures, which he sees as important.\textsuperscript{573} Thus, it is perhaps more accurate to describe his vision as a religion with or without religion. Whatever the scenario, for Caputo, “the religious sense of life would never mean just one thing for everybody.”\textsuperscript{574} Its personal and unique quality is comparable, we could say, to the intimate nature of Kristeva’s revolt.

1.2.2 Interruption & Transformation

There are other elements in Caputo’s description of postmodern religious experience that call to mind Kristeva’s intimate revolt, such as the notion of timelessness, or better, time interrupted. Caputo claims that “in religion, the time, time itself, is always out of joint. The religious sense of life awakens when we lose our bearings,” when “we are out of our element.”\textsuperscript{575} In other words, he claims that the event of God summons us in particular when our daily routine is interrupted by, when we are confronted with, something that we do not feel equipped to deal with. And in those moments, often of vulnerability, when we become “unhinged,” we might begin to reflect on “the possibility of the impossible.”\textsuperscript{576} We let go, or are perhaps forced to let go, of our own handle on reality and “find ourselves in the grip of something that carries us along.” We are moved by something, i.e., the event of God. Furthermore, he suggests that in these moments, or an accumulation of them, we might be transformed.\textsuperscript{577} The potential for transformation, particularly when so-called ordinary life is interrupted by something extraordinary, is an important feature of Caputo’s postmodern religious experience. And, as we have seen, rupture and renewal are also inherent to Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{573} Ibid., 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{574} Ibid., 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{575} Ibid., 13.
  \item \textsuperscript{576} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{577} Ibid., 14.
\end{itemize}
One cannot help but notice that for someone who claims to move beyond the religious/non-religious dichotomy, Caputo uses a lot of traditionally religious language. Also, he does not use any clearly articulated model or theory of subjectivity to help explain how or in what way we are transformed. Rather, he takes for granted the religious significance of life’s interruptions and of personal transformation. Indeed, the transformation he describes calls to mind William James’ description of religious conversions (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902) provoked by extraordinary life experiences (involuntary, instantaneous conversion) or of the more deliberate, meditated kind (voluntary, gradual conversion). However, James at least attempts a psychological explanation for these conversion experiences where Caputo does not. Furthermore, Caputo does not seem to consider that someone might as easily abandon a religious faith as find one when confronted with his or her physical, social, emotional or psychological limits. Or that religion – even in the broad definition that he presents – may not be considered at all in the case of a “life-changing” incident, nor be a factor in someone’s “personal transformation.” On the other hand, Kristeva has a rigorous psychoanalytic theory to substantiate her notion of psychic rupture and renewal. She develops these concepts out of the notion of time interrupted in psychoanalytic theory and practice, specifically, the timelessness of the unconscious and the paradoxical time inherent to the analytic process of anamnesis. It should be pointed out that *On Religion* is part of the “Thinking in Action” publication series, which is specifically geared towards disseminating academic ideas to a wider, more mainstream audience. So Caputo deliberately avoids highly theoretical terms. However, a similar bias can be observed in his more scholarly work, such as the exchanges with Vattimo. Ultimately, with his descriptions of the love of God as transformative, that nothing is impossible with God, and the idea that God is an irreducible, incomprehensible event that summons us, Caputo does not diverge much from the conventional conception of God as transcendent, mysterious, and omnipotent, and one who calls the faithful to action. That said, I do not think this rules him out altogether as a figure of revolt. At least, I do not think this means that we should give up on religion as a site for revolt.

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579 Chapter 1.2.2.
1.2.3 Love

In Kristeva’s model, interruption (also rupture, abjection, etc.) is necessarily accompanied by and accomplished with love. We saw this in her theory of maternal abjection and primary identification with the loving “father of personal prehistory.” For Kristeva, we cannot enter the world of signification without the support of the loving Third party (to love and be loved is the foundation of one’s capacity to create bonds with others, to create objects outside ourselves and learn to speak). For Caputo too there is an emphasis on the role of love in the religious sense of life. He describes religious experience as being “beset by love, overtaken by love, drawn out of [oneself] by love.” Indeed, it is foundational to his philosophy of religion that love for God and the passion inspired by the mystery of the love of God are what provoke the religious sense of life and sustain it. Life’s interruptions disturb our sense of reality and of what is possible, but it is this incomprehensible love (along with hope and faith, but mostly love) that incites and allows one to be open to something beyond, to the possibility of something that seems impossible, to face the uncertainty of life, if you will. To be sure, Caputo and Kristeva conceptualize the complex notion of love very differently. However, in both cases, the subject’s interruption or rupture is endured because of love. And furthermore, common to both thinkers is that love (given its ambiguity) ultimately contributes to a healthy society. The function of love, for Kristeva, is rooted theoretically in the psychoanalytic concept of the loving Third Party. It gives the subject the confidence and motivation to speak and symbolize, as well as to question and rebel. And, as we have seen, we need numerous versions of the loving other (institutions and individuals) to provide the support needed in society for a culture of intimate revolt. For Caputo, whose concept of love is more broadly philosophical and theological (if not a bit vague), love of the impossible, the un-describable event of God, not only inspires us to question what it is that I love when I love God, but also and importantly, how to love God. Caputo’s postmodern religion is ultimately about doing love, i.e., showing love to others (more on this below).

581 Ibid., 32.
583 Ibid., 15.
1.2.4 Questioning

Caputo is reminiscent of Kristeva’s revolt in his emphasis on constant questioning and his discussion on the uncertainty of faith. Beyond the fact that Caputo’s vision of a postmodern religion is founded on a question, it is ultimately unanswerable, says Caputo: “Augustine’s question…persists as a life-long and irreducible question.”\(^5\) In other words, we cannot really ever know God. The nature of the event is that while it is summoning, it is neither static nor discernible. In fact, the former is so because of the latter. “In the religious sense of life we passionately love something that resists any Final Explanation,” and because it cannot be finally explained, we are drawn (by love) to continually pursue the question of what we love (when we love God).\(^5\) Furthermore, according to Caputo, the continual pursuit of the impossible mystery of the event of God results in a passionate life, what he repeatedly refers to as “a life worth its salt.”\(^5\) Persistent uncertainty permeates not only the question of God, but the question, ‘who am I (who loves God)?’ It is thus a condition of life in general: “I am one who finds his life a question, whose life is always being put in question, which is what gives life its salt. We seek but do not find, not quite, not if we are honest, which does not discourage the religious heart but drives it on and heightens the passion, for this is one more encounter with the impossible.”\(^5\)

Caputo’s questioning seems particularly revolt-like when he admits and discusses the uncertainty of the existence of God tout court. He acknowledges that beyond not knowing what God is, or, rather, what we love when we love God, in fact we cannot know if there is a God at all. He writes: “The faithful need to concede that they do not cognitively know what they believe by faith in any epistemologically rigorous way.”\(^5\) What this means for Caputo is that there is always a nagging realization that there may not be anything or anyone that knows or cares about

\(^5\) Ibid., 27.
\(^5\) Ibid., 31.
\(^5\) Ibid., 11. Caputo returns to this idiom repeatedly and in various forms throughout the book, calling the religious sense of life “salt-giving,” and defining life in terms of “salt and passion.” Ibid., 14 & 19. See also pages, 2, 3, 5, 9, 13, 26, 27, 38, 94, 121 & 129.
\(^5\) Ibid., 18-19.
\(^5\) Ibid., 111.
us, that our existence may be limited to the time we have on earth and guided by chance and fate alone. In other words, Nietzsche may have been right. Caputo calls this feeling “the tragic sense of life.” 589 Caputo goes on to state that the religious sense of life is necessarily in constant tension with the tragic sense of life: “The religious sense of life...the love of God...takes shape in the face of this facelessness, is forged over and against this tragic sense,” writes Caputo. 590 And “faith cannot be insulated from unbelief; it is co-constituted by unbelief, which is why faith is faith and not knowledge.” 591 Knowingly living with – even welcoming – an unresolvable question about one’s beliefs intimates the big question mark that characterizes Kristeva’s intimate revolt. Furthermore, Caputo calls to mind the movement of revolt when he speaks of a postmodern faith that moves back and forth between belief and non-belief. He argues for “a radical and inescapable fluctuation or ‘undecidability’ between what we have called here the tragic and the religious sense of life.” 592 This means that at any given time, someone may be more or less sure about or committed to his or her faith. Of course, uncertainty, for most people, is not comfortable or comforting. Questioning can make one feel vulnerable, and an open-ended question – one that is never resolved – might provoke a sense of existential insecurity. Nevertheless, uncertainty and the accompanying ongoing questioning are defining features of Caputo’s postmodern religion. Indeed, Caputo suggests that it can be dangerous not to recognize and admit that we cannot know if what we believe is true. He maintains that an over-assurance of one’s beliefs, which he attributes to fundamentalist traditions (especially trends that we are witnessing in the world today in fundamentalist groups producing discriminatory or physical violence against others), conceals a repressed fear of the fact that faith has no guarantee, that such beliefs might not be true in any objective sense. 593 “Fundamentalism,” he argues, “attempts to close down the open-ended question ‘what do I love when I love my god?’ with a fixed

589 Ibid., 118-19. Note that he does not reference Unamuno (1921). Rather, he has Nietzsche’s existential philosophy in mind. I presume that his use of this particular phrase was to mirror his notion of ‘the religious sense of life.’
590 Ibid., 120.
591 Ibid., 34.
592 Ibid., 124. See also 36.
593 Ibid., 124.
Answer.” 594 Similarly, we have seen Kristeva speak of the dangers that can ensue when self-questioning stops. 595 Thus, the imperative in Caputo’s postmodern religion to keep the question of one’s beliefs open and moving might be interpreted as a call for intimate revolt. This is all well and good, if it is possible. And perhaps it is. Except that Caputo himself struggles, if not fails, to keep alive the tension he advocates. I will discuss this further below.

1.2.5  Pluralism & Action

The emphasis on open-ended questioning gives rise to two key features of Caputo’s postmodern religion – pluralism and love in action – both of which, I submit, are worth promoting. First, Caputo makes it clear that his notion of the religious sense of life does not describe one particular religion. Because we cannot know what one loves when one loves God, then no one can make any claim to know the Truth, with a capital T, about God; no one religion is “right.” This is important to highlight because Caputo is open about his own ties to the Christian tradition, but he makes an effort not to present it as the right or best religion. 596 Rather, each religious tradition is a unique expression of this mysterious event of God. He writes, “We are social and historical beings, concretely situated in one historical, cultural, and linguistic tradition or another, formed and forged by one religious tradition or another.” 597 Moreover, the religious sense of life might also describe those who do not identify with any conventionally religious tradition at all. As we have seen, for Caputo, postmodern faith is about love, wherein love could

594 Ibid., 108.
595 For example, see chapter 1, section 1.3.3: “Risk of Revolt,” and chapter 3, section 3.2: “Thinking as Revolt,” in particular, my reference to Kristeva, Intimate Revolt, 6.
596 This is in contrast to his contemporary Vattimo, whom Caputo criticizes for privileging Christianity, along with Richard Rorty for his treatment of the United States as an ideologically superior country. Caputo, After the Death of God, 77-83. In particular, Caputo is concerned with how Judaism is absorbed into the “Judaico-Christian” tradition and left out of the ethical imperative to love that Vattimo suggests accompanies the Christian event of Jesus’ death (God’s kenosis into the world). As a counter-example, Caputo argues that Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas demonstrates that there is a similar ethical call in Judaism. This is shown through his theory that God “deflects” our loving glances upward toward our neighbor. Caputo points out that there is a Christian bias inherent in “Death of God” theologies in general: “They tend toward a schema that inevitably casts Judaism in a bad light and hence restages what Derrida calls the ‘duel between Christian and Jew.’” Caputo, After the Death of God, 79. And he traces “supersessionist theories” from Hegel and Feuerbach all the way to “completely secular, atheistic neo-Marxists like Žižek and Badiou.” Caputo, After the Death of God, 81.
597 Caputo, On Religion, 34.
be for various things, from Augustine’s God to a broader and potentially secular concept like peace, justice or love itself. In his understanding of “religious” as a broadly human experience, Caputo is aiming to cut across traditional boundaries.

Put another way, Caputo, like Kristeva, is concerned about the dogmatic tendencies of some mainstream, traditional religious traditions. In After the Death of God, Caputo returns to this theme from On Religion via a reading of the Christian message that discourages rigid, authoritarian beliefs. In such a reading, he highlights the weakness of God, rather than His omnipotence and power. Caputo refers to all the “upside-down” ways to enter the Kingdom of God (first shall be last, guests at the party are those not invited, lepers before the healthy, poor and forsaken before wealthy and upright), which are epitomized in the death of Jesus. With this in mind, he puts forward the notion of weak theology. The Biblical “suffering servant” and the humility that Jesus preaches and exemplifies in the New Testament have been construed in the history of Christianity as a call for Christian social justice work. And Caputo does not discredit this interpretation. However, there is something perhaps more profound at stake. For Caputo, weak theology refers to “the weakening of the militant dogmatic tendencies of the confessional theologies.” As we saw above, Caputo insists that no religion – even his own – can claim to be certain of the Truth. Focusing on the image of weakness in the New Testament and in the death of Jesus allows Caputo “to reinscribe, or reinvent, or reaffirm” his Christianity within a framework that “has laid aside the trappings of modernist certitudes.” Despite being off the mark with this accusation against modernist thinking, the takeaway point is that, while Caputo supports the interpretation of Jesus’ humility as a model for Christians to be humble servants, he wants to emphasize that being humble also implies the possibility of being wrong, or at least of

Caputo, After the Death of God, 73. He presents weak theology as an analogy of Vattimo’s weak thinking.
Ibid.
Ibid.
As mentioned above, the sweeping claim that modernist thought is about certitude is superficial at best and erroneous at worst. He fails to acknowledge that Enlightenment philosophers and modernist thinkers (many of whom could be described as both) set into motion the very kind of analytical thinking and interrogation of authority and authoritative views that he espouses.
being also right. (For Caputo, being open to numerous admissible perspectives is a hallmark of the postmodern approach). “A good mind, it has been said, is one that can cling tenaciously to two contradictory ideas.”\textsuperscript{603} Weak theology allows for many versions and interpretations of the event of God.

Many of the world’s religions have histories of competing theological views and scriptural interpretations that are divisive at best and sources of great violence at worst. Thus, “weakening” the attachment to one’s own religious “Truth” and accepting numerous and varying interpretations of religion as (lower case) true seems like a worthwhile goal, something worth promoting. I would like to defend Caputo against potential charges of relativism. I call him a pluralist because he is not encouraging blind acceptance of any and all “religious” interpretations. He does not want differences ignored but brought to the table and engaged. Caputo recognizes that tensions inevitably arise from differing views but de-capitalizing Truth, as well as weak theology, involves keeping the lines of communication open despite said tensions. “Like anything else that is worth its salt, religion is at odds with itself, and our job is not to sweep that tension under the rug but to keep it out in the open and allow this tension to be productive.”\textsuperscript{604} One could argue that advocating for a model in which many belief systems are equally valid is simply a way to preserve the validity of one’s own beliefs. Caputo may not be willing to truly consider the possibility that even the so-called irreducible “event” of God is just as much a social, historical and, especially, psychological construction as the creeds and ceremonies and stories that are said to have disseminated it. And therein may be the limit of his personal revolt. However, even if Caputo is unable to truly revolt vis-à-vis some of his foundational theological views, there is nevertheless an attitude of revolt evident in his efforts to question conventional conceptions of God and de-capitalize religious Truth.

\textsuperscript{603} Caputo, \textit{On Religion}, 62.
\textsuperscript{604} Ibid., 94.
The second key feature of Caputo’s postmodern religion moves beyond the question of *what* I love when I love God; it is about love in action. Caputo sees his project as turning back the critique on various “modernist” critiques of religion (e.g., Marxist, Existential, Freudian), while at the same time offering his own deconstruction of traditional concepts of religion. However, he also wants to offer something affirmative beyond the *undoing* of old constructions: “If all there is to thinking is critique and delimitation, skepticism and doubt, then it will not inspire us. It will simply be disruptive and negative.” Caputo thus refines his guiding question to “*How do I love when I love my God?*” Caputo maintains that even though we may not be able to answer the question of faith, it nevertheless “requires a response.” If religion is for lovers, if it is about an experience of loving God – whatever God may mean – then it is ultimately an *action*. “The name of God is something to *do*.“ According to Caputo, we may not be able to state with certainty what God is, but the passion provoked by this “event” is made evident by those who experience it through how they live their lives. “It is not a matter of finding a dictionary equivalent for the love of God but of *doing* it, of giving testimony to it, of seeing that its effect is to translate us into action, to move and bestir us. Love is not a meaning to define but something to do, something to *make*.“ As we have seen, Kristeva’s theories of intimate revolt and revolt culture, in addition to revolt itself, involve the subject’s rebirth and investment in the creation of values, making meaning in society and connections with others. In other words, revolt is not for revolt’s sake but ultimately for the renewal of the subject and the establishment of intersubjective bonds, which, in turn, contribute to a healthy society. Likewise, Caputo’s postmodern religion, with its emphasis on personal reflection, nevertheless has implications that are interpersonal. In other words, Caputo’s “religion without religion” provides grounds for a social ethic of “doing” love.

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605 Caputo, *After the Death of God*, 118.
607 Ibid., 130.
608 Ibid. Also, “the love of God is something to *do*.” Caputo, *On Religion*, 141.
609 Ibid., 140.
1.3 Caputo’s Tragic Flaw

Of course, Caputo has in mind only very charitable ways of *making* and *doing* love. He takes for granted that the over-powering love for and of God will inspire actions that are compassionate and just, rather than something malevolent. This bias, which we have observed above, points again to the limits of Caputo’s revolt. He claims to embrace the uncertainty of his postmodern faith and promotes a life filled with the passion he associates with “not knowing” what God is or if there is a God,\(^{610}\) but he leaves unquestioned some of his own theological presuppositions. Caputo admits that the strength of character, if you will, that is required of the lover of fate in what he has called ‘the tragic sense of life’ is “perversely” appealing, but that, ultimately, he is not “seduced” by this view.\(^{611}\) Both his words and his tone portray a negative value judgment of this so-called equally admissible perspective. He explains that the reason the religious sense of life is more attractive is because in the tragic view there is no distinction between the cruelty or, rather, “cruel indifference” of nature and of humans; they are both equally innocent.\(^{612}\) Also, Caputo reads into this view that if there is nothing beyond what we see, and fate governs all, then human beings are simply destined to be a certain way, i.e., unchangeable. Thus, he asserts, the tragic sense of life lacks a foundation for moral sensibility, and thereby supposedly lacks a desire for justice. By contrast, as we saw above, the love that undergirds the religious sense of life produces passion and compassion in pursuit of justice. He explains: “The name of God is the name of the One who takes a stand with those who suffer, who expresses a divine solidarity with suffering, the One who says *no* to suffering, to unjust or unwarranted suffering.”\(^{613}\) To be clear, I think compassion for those who suffer is a desirable quality. The problem is assuming that said compassion and desire for justice are necessarily derived from the event of God. As Stan van Hooft remarks in his review of *On Religion*, “I doubt that a passion for justice needs to be grounded in love of the impossible.”\(^{614}\) Ironically (because of his criticisms of psychoanalysis), Caputo here fails to address one of Freud’s classic arguments against the promotion of

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\(^{610}\) Ibid., 127.

\(^{611}\) Ibid., 121.

\(^{612}\) Ibid., 122.

\(^{613}\) Ibid., 123.

(organized) religion. The father of psychoanalysis contends that if we ceased to rely on religion for our morals, we would inevitably find rational bases for civilized behavior. Thus, Caputo takes for granted the existence of a God who is intervening, benevolent and just, when he claims that neither the existence nor qualities of God are knowable.

Caputo sets up the religious sense of life in opposition to a life without passion, without hope or love, which he calls the tragic sense of life. Implied in his depiction of the latter, particularly with his use of the term ‘tragic,’ is that one will surely go mad in the face of a “meaningless” life, like one of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes. However, it is not convincingly argued that a life guided by fate cannot have the abovementioned qualities (nor is it convincingly argued that “God” and “fate” are the only alternatives). Though Caputo has Nietzsche in mind, we would still like to consider, as a counterexample, Albert Camus. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1955), Camus starts from a similar place as Caputo, stating, “I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it.” And because we are conscious, rational beings trying to understand our universe, its unknowability makes the nature of our existence absurd. But Camus goes on to argue that the greatness of human beings is fed on “the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference.” The Biblical allusion here is intentional, for he claims that religious answers are inadequate in the face of life’s absurdity. Likewise, escape through suicide is also an illogical response; a refusal to grant a meaning to life is not a declaration that it is not worth living. In fact, life is perhaps lived better if it has no meaning. Camus’ absurd life produces

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615 Freud, *Future*, SE 21, 39. In fact, his argument goes further to state that society needs better reasons than religious ones to be good people. That is, if fear of punishment from God is the only grounds for someone’s moral behavior, then he or she could be a danger to society.


617 The world, actually, is not reasonable. The absurd is when our desire for clarity and meaning meets the irrationality of the world. It is absurd only because we seek meaning where there is none. Ibid., 26.

618 Ibid., 52.

619 Ibid., 15.

620 Ibid., 53.
a sense of freedom in acknowledging life’s limits.\textsuperscript{621} It requires a continual, conscious revolt against giving in to some final answer, whether it is through death (via suicide) or hope in something eternal (God) and, rather, a willingness to take on the challenge of pursuing something known to be futile. And finally, living the absurd life, i.e., a life with no determinable meaning, is a life of necessary passion, because it is a life of living in the present. Camus’ famous example is Sisyphus, his absurd hero, who finds passion in a life for which the sole purpose is to roll a boulder up a hill. Broadly speaking, then, Caputo and Camus present a similar view of the human condition, but whereas the former concludes that a life “worth its salt” is only derived from a sense and love of the impossible, the latter shows that a passionate, conscious, and ethical life\textsuperscript{622} (to return to the abovementioned theme) can be derived only from what is possible, i.e., without appeal to something eternal, transcendent, or to an “event” of God, if you prefer. Caputo uncritically discredits such existentialist positions in his assumption that fatalism is hopeless and that the inevitability of death (and no afterlife), i.e., a life without the possibility of the impossible, is necessarily tragic. In other words, Caputo speaks of a religion based on open-ended questioning and undecided-ability, but his view is belied by his own un-questioned beliefs. In light of this, Caputo might be seen, ironically, as an example of Kristeva’s \textit{tragic} revolt.\textsuperscript{623}

\subsection*{1.4 Caputo and Revolt}

To what degree, if at all, can we call Caputo’s “religion without religion” an example of intimate revolt? To be sure, his vision of a postmodern religion ultimately obscures traditional religious

\textsuperscript{621} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{622} Ibid., 59-65. Camus does not wish to present a fleshed-out ethical system, but he does state that the lack of recourse to eternal values does not imply a life without consequences or a life without ethics. He speaks rather of an \textit{ethics of quantity}, wherein value judgments are exchanged for factual judgments. Ibid., 59. Factual judgments are perhaps best described as case-by-case values. This has been referred to as a kind of \textit{situation ethics}, in which we are free to deliberate and come up with novel solutions to problems based on our observations in a particular situation. In other words, values are not static or absolute and by extension rules, laws and even individually made decisions are always relative to particular historical conditions. An absurd person is still responsible for his or her actions, but not guilty vis-à-vis a religious value system or some categorical imperative. Ibid., 65. Situation ethics means learning from past experiences not from some higher power.
\textsuperscript{623} See chapter 1, section 1.3.3.
beliefs. His notion of a radically uncertain faith presumes, even if tacitly, the conventional notion of an otherworldly, intervening, benevolent deity. However, there are still elements of Caputo’s approach to and conception of religion that can be interpreted as forms of revolt, from his focus on an intensely personal, time-interrupting, experience of love, to his call for open-ended questioning of what and if God is. Caputo’s may only be a limited or partial revolt, but, in the eyes of his audience, which is largely religious in the traditional sense of the word, his postmodern faith contains some radical ideas (ideas that some would even deem heretical), and the potential effects of said ideas are important to consider. My interest in the question of whether or not an attitude of revolt is possible in religion today stems in part from an interest in the benefits that individuals and society at large stand to gain, and the goals of pluralism and “love in action,” as I am calling it, are worth promoting. In sum, it can still be said that Caputo demonstrates characteristics of intimate revolt. However, this survey shows that there are limitations to what he is able to truly call into question regarding his religious beliefs. To be sure, Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt is never an easy undertaking. Indeed, it is an on-going challenge to question, with the potential of rejecting or reconceiving, values and beliefs that may seem inherent. However, perhaps what this example shows is that there is something particularly difficult about revolt vis-à-vis one’s religious values and beliefs.

2 Progressive Christianity

In an effort to move beyond the theoretical views of a self-proclaimed non-believer, and beyond the academic arena of a postmodern Christian philosopher, I turn the reader’s attention to the focus of Rebekka King’s ethnographic study: “a loosely organized group of liberal mainline Christians [who self-identify] as progressive Christians.”\textsuperscript{624} We will see that the way in which these subjects use and inhabit the label \textit{Christian} is tenuous and controversial (even self-

\textsuperscript{624} Rebekka King, “Notes on a North American Anthropology of Christianity,” \textit{Bulletin for the Study of Religion} 39, no. 1 (2010): 12. While the progressive Christians in question here are not academics \textit{per se}, King points out that “they are by far the largest non-scholarly consumers of the fruits of the religious studies scholar’s labour.” Ibid., 14-15). Popular proponents of progressive Christianity include John Dominic Crossan, Bishop John Shelby Spong and Marcus Borg.
alienating), but it is precisely because they maintain their affiliations to the religious tradition that they are of interest to us with respect to the notion of contemporary religious revolt.

One of Freud’s main critiques of religion, and a problem with which both Kristeva and Caputo have engaged, is what we might call the “blind follower” phenomenon, i.e., that religious institutions can and do provide unquestionable explanations for empirically unknowable things (e.g., the afterlife, the existence of God and/or demons), as well as codified rules regarding moral behavior. Such standardization has produced large groups of people who adhere to a similar worldview and moral landscape, which are challenged rarely or with great difficulty and resistance. To be sure, this is a hyper-generalized description and does not address the complexity of religious experience even within a conservative or traditional religious setting. I present the “blind follower” phenomenon simply to highlight the juxtaposition seen in progressive Christianity. More specifically, I want to explore (even if superficially) how this group appears to display the characteristics of religious revolt that we identified in previous chapters (and that are not far from Caputo’s vision of a postmodern religious experience).

For one, Kristeva’s “Big Question Mark” is a defining feature of progressive Christianity. Questioning previously accepted theological tenets and morals is not met with resistance but rather is welcomed and encouraged. King explains that her subjects

…meet regularly to debate and articulate a theology that upholds their conceptions of intellectual integrity in light of modern science and contemporary morality. […] My subjects are engaged in a two-tier interpretive process: a dialogue format derived from a standard church Bible study and textual sources selected specifically because they challenge and refute a traditional Christian worldview, especially in regards to the authority of ecclesiastical structures and biblical canon. 625

King describes a group of individuals who are actively thinking through established Christian norms, values and customs via a process of re-interpretation of texts and symbolism. They refer to “popular texts and videos that challenge traditional representations of religious beliefs and

625 Ibid., 12 & 13.
practices.” This critical examination can result in the rejection of “certain traditional core elements, including the miracles of Jesus, the authority of scripture, sacrificial atonement theology, and a relational or interventionist God. In fact…some members go so far as rejecting a deity completely.”\textsuperscript{626} The acts of challenging tradition, re-interpretation, and rejection are all aspects, as we have seen, of the kind of revolt that Kristeva wants to encourage.

King’s analysis suggests that the Christians involved in her study have profound personal investments in what should be seen, on my view, as both a spiritual journey and, perhaps more importantly, a journey of self-understanding. King explains, “The Christians I study are attempting to self-consciously redefine what it means to create a Christian identity.”\textsuperscript{627} Such a “social process of refutation” has a revolt-like effect on the popular understanding of Christianity in North America, which is in line with Kristeva’s cultural vision. However, addressing questions of one’s personal identity is also necessarily an \textit{intimate} exploration. After all, one can intuit the impact on individuals of unpacking – deconstructing – established and familiar constructions of the self (tied perhaps to childhood memories and/or participation in overt or implicit religious symbolism through various rituals and other culturally reinforced traditions). Exposing one’s previously taken-for-granted beliefs and value system to a systematic questioning means allowing oneself to be vulnerable and inhabit a space of insecurity (hence the need for supportive, loving, listening “others”), as Kristeva has explained with regard to the psychoanalytic process. Hence, the religious identity \textit{re}-construction that the progressive Christians are undertaking can be characterized as an \textit{intimate} revolt.

When we consider what I have highlighted as the \textit{movement} inherent to intimate revolt, progressive Christianity as an example becomes a little less straightforward, or at least it prompts some reflection. To be sure, progressive Christians inhabit a space \textit{between} typical conceptions of religious vs. secular, theist vs. atheist (which is an important feature, on my view, of

\textsuperscript{627} King, “Notes,” 13.
Kristeva’s project, and Caputo’s, for that matter). King explains that many subjects in her study self-identify according to the seemingly paradoxical title: “Christian atheists or non-theists.”

One subject interviewed specifically addresses the lack of nuance associated with popular labels and hence “calls herself both an atheist and a Christian.” She goes on to explain that keeping the name of “Christian” is quite intentional: “We need to hang on to that identification and that label because if we don’t it’s been totally co-opted by the fundamentalists on the Right.” In this way, progressive Christians clearly and deliberately complicate the way these categories are traditionally understood, which in turn limits the assumptions that can be made about individuals’ faiths and how they interpret and live out their religious subjectivity. Occupying this in-between space destabilizes traditional notions of the “Christian” subject. Moreover, the vagueness of such an un-fixed identity leaves room for individuals to re-interpret and reconceive of their own self-definitions. In other words, it facilitates the notion of a subject-in-process.

Two related questions come to mind for me – questions I cannot answer conclusively in the present context but which I raise for the purpose of reflection. For one, what kind of movement is taking place in progressive Christianity? More specifically, is it a linear, one-directional movement, i.e. a slow and steady process of “de-conversion”?

Or is there movement in many “directions,” so to speak? Are there individuals who, on any given issue, “move” toward a more conservative or traditional theological position than they had previously held? I think about this question because intuitively it seems unlikely – especially given the implied meaning of the word “progressive” – though theoretically not impossible, of course. And if the deconstruction at work

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628 King, “The Author, the Atheist…,” 15.
629 Ibid., 16.
630 I suggest that it is a slow process in order to appease lingering, unconscious, attachments or guilt. In the sense that unconscious defense mechanisms regulate the amount of traumatic content that reaches consciousness, and assuming that proving all childhood or previously-held beliefs false at once could be overwhelming. Gianni Vattimo would argue that in fact Christianity is destined for such a one-directional process of, what I have termed, “de-conversion.” In his chapter “Toward a Non-Religious Christianity,” he argues that the true culmination and goal of Christianity is a secular society governed by (love-fueled) charity. Vattimo, After the Death of God, 27-46. Because it is against authoritarianism, “Christianity must be nonreligious.” Ibid., 37. And because, on Vattimo’s reading, when you deconstruct Christian language, myth, and allegory, you are left only with charity, undergird by love, the “moral-metaphysical assumptions” of the tradition are bound to weaken. He writes, “As I see it, Christianity is moving in a direction that cannot but lighten or weaken its moral load in favor of its practical-moral charity.” Ibid., 44.
in the progressive Christian community is a kind of one-directional undoing of traditional Christianity, what does this say about the kind of questioning involved? In other words, and this is my second question, is there a point at which the process of refutation, re-interpretation and renewal becomes rather a practice of self and group–affirmation? That is, does it reach a point of stagnation that can no longer be classified as an intimate revolt?

King’s study suggests that there is, indeed, a danger of reifying the progressive Christian imaginary, to use Kristeva’s language. King includes a pointed observation that in their attempts at redefining what it means to be a Christian in today’s “secular” world, progressive Christians necessarily set themselves up in opposition to what they perceive as outdated, inflexible, other Christians, a category that includes “a conglomeration of evangelicals, fundamentalists, conservatives, and charismatics identified, somewhat arbitrarily, as the Christian Right.” In other words, King observes that the progressive Christian’s “subversive Christian identity [is] defined primarily as not the evangelical Christian Right,” which she terms as progressive Christianity’s “Protestant proximate other.” Moreover, her study indicates that this “not-them” position is reiterated and reinforced by the kind of knowledge consumed by the group. Offering a Bourdieu-inspired reading, King explains that certain authors and speakers are given “authoritative power” within the progressive Christian discourse in light of various social attributes and, more importantly, by virtue of their “symbolic capital.” The merit, authority and convincing power of an author or speaker rests upon the preservation and perpetuation of the

631 King, “The Author, the Atheist…,” 18.
632 Ibid.
633 Ibid., 15. Citing Jonathan Z. Smith, “What Difference a Difference Makes,” in Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 253. The term ‘Protestant proximate other’ emphasizes the fact that not only is there an “other” against which they are defining themselves, but that their proximity to the other is an important feature of that self-definition. King explains, for example, that the progressive Christians in her study maintain the common notion that belief is the central feature of what identifies a person as a Christian; however, their belief system reverses many, if not all, of the tenets of traditional Christianity. Thus, they are simultaneously distancing themselves from but remaining close to “the Christian Right.” King, “The Author, the Atheist…,” 16. Joel Robbins explains it this way: “it is the closeness of Christianity that makes its otherness so potent: repugnance in this case can be explained in classic anthropological terms as a response to an anomalous mixture of the similar and the different.” King, “Notes,” 13. Citing Joel Robbins, “What is a Christian? Notes Toward an Anthropology of Christianity,” Religion, 33 (2003): 193.
634 King, “The Author, the Atheist…,” 17.
“not-them” rhetoric that underlies the collective identity.\textsuperscript{635} King states, “a critical analysis of these popular religious writings suggests that their attention to scholarly method and detail is limited and biased.”\textsuperscript{636} Thus, is there still a possibility for genuine self-critique or does the discourse become a practice of unreflective (read: reflexive rather than thought-through) criticisms of the Protestant proximate other? The former scenario is hard to envision when you also consider King’s claim that “progressive Christians often insist on proselytizing their atheist or non-theistic gospel to other Christians.”\textsuperscript{637} In other words, despite its goals to be critically minded and open to theological debate, progressive Christians risk becoming attached to their own narrow (if not fixed) idea of what makes an authentic Christian identity.

The irony at play here is particularly noticeable when one remarks the emphasis made in liberal Protestant groups such as this one on “inter-religious ecumenism.”\textsuperscript{638} If one of the goals of progressive Christianity is to encourage a more inclusive and united community (among Christians, other religious groups, and non-religious groups), then setting itself up in such stark contrast to the Christian Right appears somewhat hypocritical, problematic, or at the very least, something to think about and negotiate.\textsuperscript{639}

\textsuperscript{635} Ibid. King references Bourdieu (1991).
\textsuperscript{636} King, “The Author, the Atheist…,” 17.
\textsuperscript{637} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{638} King, “Notes,” 14.
\textsuperscript{639} This calls to mind Žižek’s critique of multiculturalism, wherein he describes “authentic radical fundamentalists” as more tolerant of the Other than those who claim to be multiculturalists, whose so-called “tolerance of the Other’s Otherness...is sustained by a secret desire for the Other to REMAIN ‘other.’” Slavoj Žižek, On Belief (New York & London: Routledge, 2001), 68-69. Note that Žižek also attacks what he calls “moral majority fundamentalists,” who differentiate themselves from those demonized in mainstream society for their intolerance. The full argument is this: “moral majority fundamentalists and tolerant multiculturalists are two sides of the same coin, they both share the fascination with the Other.” The former “displays the envious hatred of the Other’s excessive jouissance, while the multiculturalist tolerance of the Other’s Otherness...is sustained by a secret desire for the Other to REMAIN ‘other.’” Ibid.
Hence the question: does progressive Christianity, in its strong opposition of the Christian Right as close-minded and its potential “prejudiced use of scholarship,” become close-minded itself? In other words, does it become an example of tragic revolt instead of intimate revolt? The answer is not obvious; one cannot draw conclusions too quickly. It is too simple to censure progressive Christianity for being intolerant of what it sees as exclusive and uncritical interpretations of the faith, texts and traditions. For one, taking a stand against a certain interpretation of something (e.g., a literal interpretation of the Bible) does not preclude one from remaining open to different interpretations of his or her views and beliefs. Also, one could argue that introspection and questioning do not and should not necessitate turning against a view or position. That is, ongoing reflection and refashioning of one’s values and beliefs do not necessarily result in the rejection of them. Therefore, finally, the “direction” of the movement of revolt should not be of consequence, as long as there is movement of some kind. With that in mind, and in true postmodern fashion, perhaps progressive Christianity serves as an example of both kinds of revolt: it is representative of the characteristics of intimate revolt, while at the same time serving as a reminder of the precarious nature of revolt and the fragility of the subject in revolt that Kristeva has explored and cautioned us against.

3 Closing Discussion

Kristeva looks at instances of religious revolt through her inquiries into mystics and her protagonist in Teresa, My Love, but in this chapter we addressed how religion today might be reconceived in such a way that fulfills Kristeva’s call for intimate revolt. In the first case, we identified elements of revolt in Caputo’s postmodern interpretation of religion, such as its intimate and interpersonal nature and the call for persistent uncertainty. We saw too that Caputo’s religious revolt only goes so far; he ultimately leaves unquestioned traditional views regarding the existence and nature of God. Thus, despite the appearances – admittedly, the hope – that Caputo’s “religion without religion” might serve as an example of intimate revolt in contemporary religion, it does not quite do justice to what Kristeva has in mind. We have seen the challenges and maybe even the limits of revolt in religion in the example of Caputo.

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King, “The Author, the Atheist…,” 17.
However, if his efforts to encourage a *weak theology*, that is, to discourage the need for and attachment to being “right,” to holding the absolute Truth, might result in a more tolerant, pluralistic “religious” landscape, and if reconceiving God in terms of an “event” of love might translate into *actions* of love, then intimate revolt should nonetheless be promoted in the context of religion. For although Caputo is a flawed figure of revolt, his approach is still in alignment, even if partially, with Kristeva’s vision of revolt culture. On that note, this survey has also shown that Caputo’s postmodern philosophy would be greatly enhanced with the consideration of a rigorous and comprehensive theory of subjectivity and subject relations, such as those offered in the field of psychoanalytic theory, which he has dismissed, and by Kristeva in particular. Thus, the deficiencies in Caputo’s approach in fact point to the importance and value of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic interpretation of religion.

We have also surveyed progressive Christianity in North America as an example of a contemporary religious movement that is contributing to a culture of revolt. This example is particularly interesting because of its visibility and authority in the wider cultural context. Despite the degree to which its members do or do not perfectly and consistently carry out Kristeva’s intimate revolt, it is nevertheless meaningful that the dissident and heretical voices of this group come from within a hegemonic position vis-à-vis the larger religious landscape (i.e., as North American mainline Protestants). We can only speculate at this juncture on the influence this group has on Christian communities across North America, and we have yet to really consider the impact of the notion of a “Christian atheist” on members of other religious traditions and non-religious members of society. I suspect that the effects are not negligible. Either way, I claim that progressive Christianity is an important case to consider because it expands the potential sites for religious revolt beyond those that are considered “fringe” (e.g., mysticism). Admittedly, it may be *more likely* that intimate revolt in religion occurs alongside the influence of various intellectual discourses, from Marxism and existentialism to feminism and postmodernism, and such instances represent a smaller percentage of the religious

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641 See King, “Notes,” 14.
642 …and the associated message of historically and culturally located faiths, consistent with modern science and liberal morality, to put it succinctly.
population. Regardless, this example also shows that religion should not be overlooked as a contemporary site of intimate revolt. After all, it is irrelevant who sets the wheels of change in motion, so long as change makes its way into mainstream (revolt) culture. Also, at the same time, one should not only look at so-called liberal-minded, intellectually-inclined believers for examples of intimate revolt; even members of seemingly isolated and “non-thinking,” dogmatic religious groups, can be revolutionaries. Take, for example, the story of Grace and Megan Phelps-Roper. These two sisters were born and raised in the Westboro Baptist Church, which is a stereotypical, close-minded, most would say ‘hateful’ religious sect. And yet, their Twitter correspondence with David Abitbol of “Jewlicious” prompted them to reflect on their received beliefs and values and led to their departure from the church in 2013 – a decision that they knew well guaranteed the sisters’ disownment by their own family. Thus, even an exclusive and exclusionary religious context should not be ruled out as a potential site for revolt.\footnote{In light of this story, one might be curious to think about whether or not some people are more likely than others to engage in this intimate revolt and, if so, for what reasons. Marsha Hewitt (2008) analyzes religious belief through the lens of attachment theory. The implications of her research are that, indeed, certain people are more likely to and/or more capable of psychic revolt and attachment theory can help us understand why that is.}

Kristeva does not see contemporary religion as a likely source of intimate revolt and rather focuses on promoting it in secular realms. However, the goal of this chapter was to reiterate the imperative that I suggest accompanies Kristeva’s theory of revolt culture, even if she does not directly or sufficiently address it herself: to encourage intimate revolt specifically within the context of religion today. Maybe all religious revolts are doomed to fail on some level, or rather they are short-lived or only partially fulfilled, but I contend that they are still worth promoting.
Conclusion: A Moving Faith

Revolt is a loaded term, with significance on numerous levels for Kristeva, from the personal to the professional. For one, she leaves her homeland, Bulgaria, during its struggles against political and social strife, and she emerges on the French intellectual scene during a period of rich avant-garde thought and cultural critique. She is known for her active participation in — though not always in full support of — various aesthetic, political and intellectual revolutions of the 60s and 70s, from surrealism and formalism, socialism, communism and feminism, to structuralism and post-structuralism. In other words, Kristeva has many personal experiences of revolt and this engagement shapes her academic writing. She is sensitive to the movement and energy of revolt that can disrupt hegemonic and oppressive systems and bring about change, as demonstrated in her first major publication, Revolution in Poetic Language (1974/1984). At the same time, however, Kristeva’s experiences have made her wary of — even averse to — large-scale ideological and political movements, which are often exclusive.

So why use such a politically charged term like revolt? For one, it suggests that this is not a subject to be taken lightly. The etymological and psychoanalytic interpretations of the term ‘revolt’ remove it from its militaristic associations while retaining its sense of urgency. Thus, it implies that there is something important at stake that requires us to act and react; it is not simply a cultural description or diagnosis. Importantly, she has in mind a prescription — an impetus to set something new in motion. However, despite the allusion to mass rebellion, Kristeva appropriates and reconceptualizes the term to show that what we need is not revolt en masse but personal revolts — revolts on the level of the intimate, tapping into the singular imaginary of each individual. To be clear, while the focus is on individual subjects, her notion of a subject is one

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644 Granted, the revolts she has experienced are decidedly different from those in other parts of the world, wherein the word revolt might invoke much stronger images of terror and/or triumph.

645 This is partly due to her personal disillusionment with Marxism and Maoism, and the failure of the May ’68 uprising in Paris. Her criticisms of the feminist movement in “Women’s Time” remain controversial and she has also criticized religions for being exclusionary.

646 Psychoanalytic theories are sometimes criticized for being overly descriptive.
that is not isolated but necessarily in dynamic relation with other subjects and with culture at large. In this way, though it is not an all-encompassing social theory, Kristeva certainly intends for revolt culture to have social and political implications.647

This study has taken for granted Kristeva’s premise that there is an urgent need for examination and reevaluation in culture at large, but also with reference to religion specifically. I think we are all sadly aware of the many instances of intolerance, tension, oppression and violent conflict that today’s religious climate has produced. In consideration of this, and because it had yet to be undertaken by Kristeva or others, I set out to explore how religious subjects may or may not participate in the idea of a nonviolent, regenerative culture of revolt. This task was of particular interest in light of Kristeva’s seemingly contradictory views on religion. She speaks mostly of secular forms of revolt, while at the same time appropriating religious concepts, such as forgiveness and rebirth. Indeed, we have seen the influence and value of Christianity to Kristeva’s revolt, but we have also seen that contained within the notion of psychic revolt is a critique of religion – at least, of a particular kind. In light of this simultaneous homage to and critique of religion, I have argued that Kristeva’s theories of revolt actually clarify her so-called ambiguous views on religion. As an ongoing, retrospective and introspective journey of one’s inner life, intimate revolt necessitates a continual return to religious concepts and constructs, even if it analyzes and deconstructs them, because they are foundational to how we understand modern subjectivity and societies. This is one way that religion remains a possible site of cultural revolt.

Through a Kristevan lens, revolt in religion is also linked to the presence of a specific concept of the sacred. Beyond the more common emphasis on paternal sacrifice and purification, intimate revolt in religion would coincide with an accent on the other side of the sacred – that which is

647 Sara Beardsworth argues that instead of grand social theories, Kristeva writes about minor histories of various forms of suffering. For example, in her 80s trilogy, Powers of Horror is the study of abjection, a “minor history” of the fate of the abject, Tales of Love, investigates the modern crisis in love, and Black Sun explores the meaning behind melancholic depression and the fate of loss (Beardsworth, 2004, 16).
abject, maternal, bodily, unstable, and in-between. In other words, a religious subject in revolt would be attuned to and would tap into the messy, disruptive and daunting yet, at the same time, creative and passionate nature of “the sacred.” Put more simply, one might think about religious revolt as a fervent interrogation of one’s religious life, from affects to actions. This description called to mind for me some recent trends in Western Christianity, both within and outside of academia, that proclaim and promote a personal, interrogative, even unsettling approach to religious faith: John Caputo’s postmodern religion and progressive Christianity. However, given closer examination, neither was a perfect example of Kristeva’s revolt. That said, despite their moments of tragic or failed revolt, we saw that religious subjects who make an effort to be actively engaged in a process of questioning their own religious beliefs and traditions are among those contributing to a religious landscape that is more tolerant and inclusive. Such traits are crucial wherein, for better or worse, religion remains a constant in our society.

Therefore, even if they are not flawless examples – if there exists such a thing – we have seen that there is at least a desire for something akin to Kristeva’s intimate revolt in the context of religion today, a desire that can perhaps inspire others. Thus, one of the fruits of this study is that Kristeva’s notion of revolt must be encouraged within religion as much as in any other area of modern culture. The potential impact of a religious movement that questions itself is of great importance to the wider community. I have also shown that applying Kristeva’s theories of revolt provides a way of complicating preconceived notions about religious subjectivity. That is, the idea of an ongoing, personal, psychic revolt offers a way to conceive of and speak about religious subjectivity that takes into account the diversity of ways in which people are religious, and the inconsistency of the experience of religious faith by any given individual.

Kristeva’s notion of intimate revolt gives theoretical support to the concept of what I suggest we call a “moving faith.” I give it this title because a religious subject in revolt can be described as a subject whose relationship with his or her religious tradition and beliefs is one by which the subject is moved (affected) as well as one that moves (changes). I want to differentiate this concept from the idea of a faith that “makes room for doubt,” or the claim that “faith is made stronger through doubt.” These are common tropes in religious discourse, which, in my opinion,
serve to placate Christians’ feelings of guilt that arise from questioning. Such feelings are then repressed and the questions left unaddressed. Contrarily, the moving faith of the religious subject in revolt means that one accepts the inherent vulnerability of our subjectivity and, by extension, of our values and beliefs. A moving faith inspires the religious subject to actively revisit and interrogate everything associated with his or her religious life, from the inherited concepts and values to the language one uses and the traditions in which one participates. In other words, the religious subject in revolt, a subject whose faith is moving, is someone who remains open to change. Perhaps this kind of openness is not fully possible, and perhaps this is why Kristeva promotes intimate revolt in secular realms. But if it is at all possible, we must encourage individuals to embark on and support one another in their faith journeys, which may very well result in a renunciation of faith. In this way, religion need not be excluded from the vision of a culture that questions itself. After all, if we are to have a hope of achieving Kristeva’s vision of revolt culture, perhaps we should begin by returning to and overturning the reputation that religion has for cultivating followers with closed minds and irrefutable beliefs.
Bibliography


