

Introduction

Politics from “a bit of a distance”



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Julia Kristeva’s relationship to modern and contemporary social and political discourses is complex, ambiguous territory. Though she has claimed that the “problem of the twentieth century was and remains the rehabilitation of the political” (1990, 45; 1993, 68) and that our world is a “necessarily political” one (1987, 242; 1989, 235), exactly how her works are to be related to social and political thought is difficult to clarify. The difficulty is tied to both her chosen object domain, as that of singularity or what she tends to call, more and more, the intimate, and her interdisciplinary approach, which includes the entire human and social sciences, but which privileges psychoanalysis and aesthetics. Aside from her broad-reach cultural and political essays that have appeared in such publications as the popular *France Culture*, Kristeva’s major, book-length works are not easily classified as social or political texts, and even bracket more familiar political approaches. *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) and the revolt books of the 1990s, for example, reinforce her commitment to psychoanalytic and aesthetic discourses. In the latter, she expressly avoids an analysis of “political revolt” in order to concentrate her efforts on what she calls “intimate revolt.” The works of the 1980s, including her interrogation of “the foreigner” in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1988), are concerned with the fate of individual, psychic life in modern societies. Her biographical trilogy on female genius neither explicitly elaborates a recognizably feminist thought nor does her choice or treatment of Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, and Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette viscerally strike a feminist sensibility as immediately sensible. Furthermore, her turn to detective fiction and her privileging of the work of Proust over the past two decades pursues venues that avoid direct confrontation with the socio-political problematics of modern societies. Kristeva’s chosen object as the singular

or intimate and her chosen approach through psychoanalysis and aesthetics seems to limit the relevance of her work to social and political thought. Nevertheless, both Kristeva and her readers persistently remind us to think through the problematic of the relation between her object and approach, on the one hand, and more traditional and familiar social and political discourses and themes, on the other. This volume does not suggest that there is a one-to-one correlation, such that Kristeva's psychoanalytic and aesthetic approach to intimacy might be translated into social and political thought. It is questionable as to whether such a translation is not only possible, but desirable. Our concern is, rather, how might we clarify that tension, and what is the value of doing so? All of the chapters presented here, including Kristeva's own chapters, interrogate this essentially ambiguous gap between a psychoanalytic and aesthetic approach to intimacy and social and political thought.

As the chapters in this volume show, to raise the question of the relationship between the intimate and the public requires attention to the sense in which Kristeva's concern for the intimate is not a concern for the private individual in opposition to what is more properly "social" or "political". Rather, Kristeva's concern with the intimate is a concern for a border or threshold that is at once the border of affectivity and discourse, the social bond, and historical being. In a lecture addressed to Columbia University and subsequently published as "Nous Deux' or a (Hi)story of Intertextuality" in the *Romanian Review* (2002), Kristeva claims that the concepts and themes addressed in her work share the "common point" of a "frontier," "border," or, she says, "even better, 'threshold.'" This "threshold" indicates the object domain of Kristeva's interrogations into the processes governing subjectivity and language and introduces an equivocation into traditional, metaphysical distinctions, including mind/body, affect/word, nature/culture, subject/object, individual/society, private/public, and present/past. Moreover, "threshold" represents not only a spatial and temporal meaning, as in the space of a passageway or a transitional interval, but also a "social melting spot," "a political openness," and a "mental plasticity." For Kristeva, this fragile threshold is both permanently and historically in crisis.

Sara Beardsworth has aptly called the modern shape of this border "the tendential severance of the semiotic and the symbolic" (2004, 12). Kristeva's articulation of the semiotic and symbolic is most rigorously presented under those terms in the early work, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), and her subsequent work may be seen as the attempt to bring further precision to this primary problematic. The semiotic and the symbolic are two modalities of signification that are never experienced as separate, but are theoretically separable as two tendencies within signification. The "symbolic" roughly refers to the domain of symbolic representation, which includes law, grammar, logic, structure, and form. The "semiotic" roughly refers to the affective, corporeal elements of language that contribute to meaning, but do not intend or signify in the way that symbols do: one may think of the rhythms and tones of poetry or music, or the

affective dimension of language that is part of but remains heterogeneous to the symbol. The semiotic is thereby “outside” of the symbolic as the excessive demand of affective, corporeal existence to accomplish expression, though this demand is qualified by its being conditioned by sociohistorical structures of meaning. Kristeva describes this threshold as “heterogeneity vis-à-vis language” (1998b, 9). The relation between the semiotic and the symbolic makes signification possible, even when one is emphasized at the expense of the other, as in “purely” formalistic enterprises of thinking like math or logic or in “purely” expressive music. Kristeva’s distinction entails both a theory of language and a correlative theory of the subject qua speaking being as “in process” or “on trial” (*le sujet-en-process*). The subject is not substantive, but a movement, an event, or an affective relating that takes place at a certain linguistic, affective threshold that is at once also social and historical. The “subject-in-process” is the relating of semiotic and symbolic that avoids both traditional logic, which would oppose them, and dialectical logic, which would absorb one into the other. It is, instead, a fragile border that conditions the speaking being. Drawing on Bataille’s concept of inner experience, Kristeva has described this border as “always a contradiction between the *presence* of the subject and its *loss*, between thought and its expenditure, between linkage (logos) and its separation” (1973/1995, 248). Beardsworth’s naming of the modern shape of this border “a tendential severance” locates the modern problematic of social and symbolic discourses in the historical loss of those resources that enable the giving of form and meaning to the semiotic. Such a diagnosis does not implicate Kristeva’s thought in a conservative call for the recovery of traditional forms of meaning and their social organizations. Rather, we confront the need to negotiate this modern crisis of representation, which puts at risk psychic life itself. As she says in “A Meditation, a Political Act, an Art of Living,” quoting Rimbaud, “it is necessary to be absolutely modern!” Kristeva finds psychoanalysis and aesthetics to be privileged sites that reveal and work through this crisis, and thereby provide models for thinking through the social and political problematic more generally.

Kristeva herself has called attention to the tension between her object and approach, on the one hand, and social and political discourses, on the other, and has insisted on its importance for modern societies. Just after 9/11, in a broad-reach essay entitled “*Intimité voilée, intime violée*,” Kristeva claims that the social and political scene of modern societies has the effect of “making appear as minor” both her object and the discourses she chooses to interrogate (2001/2003, 50). And yet, she insists, those concerns would be beneficial to legal and political judgment. In “*Le Désir de Loi*” in *La haine et le pardon* (2005), Kristeva analyzes the failure of the integration of law and desire that besets modern civilizations from a psychoanalytic perspective. She diagnoses the “new malady of civilization” as the loss of what she calls “the symbolic value of law”: “I imagine that this value of Law in psychoanalysis leaves jurists perplexed. It seems to me, however, that beyond the microcosm of psychoanalysis, it is not

without interest to the social field itself”—that is, she continues, “if we do not want Law to remain a ‘dead letter.’” The “dead letter” of law, she claims, is “deeply rooted in the life of the City, the experience of [the analysand], and in the much sought after speech of ‘just authority’” (2005, 344). Psychoanalysis draws our attention to a problematic of law and politics that remains unaccounted for in contemporary social and political discourses. Kristeva’s thought, we may conclude, is political in the sense that she diagnoses the failure of political discourses in modern societies and seeks those moments in which the crises afflicting modern subjectivity are revealed and worked through. In *The Future of Revolt* she claims that the interrogation of those moments is essential to the future of politics (1998c, 11; 2002, 223).

The question of politics, and its failures, in Kristeva’s work requires that we remain attentive to the manner in which her chosen discourses (psychoanalysis and aesthetics) and her chosen object domain (singular psychic life) foster a *distance* that is essentially critical. In the opening of her first book on the culture—or lack thereof—of revolt, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, Kristeva claims that the political remains the horizon of the work, but that she will “approach things from a bit of a distance” (1996, 5; 2000, 1). Indeed, Kristeva’s approach to the concept of revolt as a concept that is not inherently political insists on a perspective that casts the question of political revolt as seemingly peripheral to her task. Such a position on “revolution” was established as early as her 1974 *Revolution in Poetic Language* in which she argued that revolution no longer takes place in the sociopolitical domain, but rather in modern poetic language. However, this distance must be clarified as strategic. For example, in *Strangers to Ourselves*, a book on the stakes of otherness in growing multinational and international societies, Kristeva defends her interrogation of “arts and letters” as constituting a necessary distance from the commonplace, for the sake of the question of politics, in this case that of the Western nation-state’s negotiation of otherness.

People will object . . . there is no point in pouring over the archives of thought and art in order to find the answers to a problem that is, when all is said and done, very practical, one might say even commonplace. And yet, do we have any other recourse against the commonplace and its brutality except to take our distance by plunging into it—but in our minds—confronting it—but indirectly? Facing the problem of the foreigner, the discourses, difficulties, or even the deadlocks of our predecessors do not only make up a history; they constitute a *cultural distance* that is to be preserved and developed, a *distance* on the basis of which one might temper and modify the simplistic attitudes of rejection or indifference, as well as the arbitrary or utilitarian decisions that today regulate relationships between strangers. (1988, 151–152; 1991, 104; translation altered; emphasis mine)

Kristeva's approach establishes a reflective and creative distance for the sake of ensuring that we not lose sight of the need to rehabilitate psychic space in modern societies, and she insists that the interrogation and promotion of singular psychic life functions as a guarantee against cultural and political homogenization. Kristeva's concept of revolt culture, for instance, tracks a form of revolt that is not, properly speaking, political revolt, but which she thinks is essential to the formation of a critical disposition, which also marks a distance from and against the political and cultural homogenization of the society of the spectacle. For Kristeva, to foster reflective and creative distance from the spectacle opens the possibility of the emergence of new cultural and political horizons. The present collection seeks to provide a sustained interrogation of this complicated problematic from a variety of perspectives and across the various contexts and moments that constitute Kristeva's present oeuvre.

Two Statements by Kristeva

Part 1 of this collection includes two never before translated pieces by Kristeva. The first, "A Meditation, a Political Act, an Art of Living" (2005) is the text of a speech delivered to the University of Paris VII Denis Diderot in May 2005. The symposium celebrated her reception of the prestigious Holberg Prize in the fall of 2004, which was established by the Norwegian government as the equivalent of the Nobel Prize in the human and social sciences. This essay contains Kristeva's most recent, public reflections on the contemporary social and political import of psychoanalysis and the modern artwork. Kristeva addresses first the recognition of psychoanalysis, which distinguishes it in the human and social sciences, and, second, the significance of her own personal history and identity—a "European citizen" of "French nationality, Bulgarian origin, and American adoption"—in becoming the first laureate of the prize. A revised version of the piece has recently appeared as the opening chapter of her most recent collection of essays, *La haine et le pardon*.

The context of Kristeva's reflections here is an overarching concern for the contemporary collapse of what she calls "places of thinking." Kristeva argues that psychoanalysis and literature are "two experiences of language" that constitute journeys of return to oneself; that is, they initiate a self-interrogation constitutive of "interiority" and relations to others. The experiences of psychoanalysis and literature are politically salient because they point toward new articulations of freedom, on the one hand, and new forms of sociopolitical binding for late modern societies, on the other. Kristeva characterizes the criticism of psychoanalysis and art as the inability to ground the "unifying link" that motivates fundamental sociopolitical binding. In defense of psychoanalysis and the artwork, she says: "Their respective contributions to the complication of the humanism of Knowledge is not understood, in its pre- and transpolitical significance, as capable of founding this 'unifying link,' which lacks a political, secular rationality. Such is nevertheless

the hypothesis . . . that I would like to defend.” Kristeva contextualizes these experiences of language within the failures of two authorities—modern secular humanism and religion—and marks their recasting of the social bond with the term “*partager*.” *Partager* has its closest English equivalent in “to share,” but in its double sense: in the sense of having a connection, but also in the sense of dividing, as in “sharing out.” The essay argues that literature and psychoanalysis constitute “an ethical and philosophical horizon of a revision of the subject itself” and the concept of freedom that accompanies it. Kristeva outlines two distinct models of freedom: one that is traditionally suited to American capitalism and another that is “reinforced and clarified by the radical experiences *de partage de l'impartageable*” and is conditioned by the experiences of writing and psychoanalysis. In this context, Kristeva addresses some of the most pressing social and political issues of our time: the relationship between religion and politics, capitalism, fundamentalism, media, technology, the loss of language to articulate modern experience, university politics, obligation, law, right, sex and sexuality, nature and culture, and biology and the social. Finally, Kristeva’s own personal history and identity is significant for its crossing of national, cultural, and political borders and marks the distinction of a cosmopolitan citizen and an intellectual who affords insight into the sociopolitical problematic that she diagnoses.

The second piece by Kristeva, “Decollations,” is the translation of a chapter from *Visions capitales* (1998a)—the catalog of a museum exhibit that Kristeva organized in the spring and summer of 1998 as part of the Carte Blanche program initiated by the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Louvre. In the preface to the catalog Kristeva asks whether we are “inevitably slaves of the image” and suggests that there is another possibility of our relation to the image: that of confronting an experience of the sacred. For Kristeva the image is perhaps the last link we have with the sacred: “with the *terror* that provokes death and sacrifice, with the *serenity* that follows from the pact of identification between sacrificed and sacrificing, and with the *joy of representation* indissociable from sacrifice, the only possible crossing” (1998a, 11). Privileged within this aim to uncover what Kristeva takes to be one of the last remaining experiences of the sacred is the act of beheading or decollation. The exhibit includes an array of historical images of beheadings and confronts the difficult task of examining violence by and against women, including reactions against sexist oppression. The exhibit, and this chapter in particular, is significant for Kristeva scholarship in that it renders concrete her prior analyses of the position of women in relation to death and violence, not only as the victims of violence, but also as the bearers of violence and death in the cultural imaginary (cf. *Powers of Horror*, *Black Sun*, and *Strangers to Ourselves*). Kristeva insists that the image, particularly the image of decollation, allows us to confront the libidinal impact of the mother, both the loss of her and her threat to us. The artistic image of decollation negotiates two types of anxiety: first, the anxiety over the loss of the mother and its corollary fear of the mother as all-powerful; second,

the anxiety, for men, of the threat of castration and its corollary fear of the castrated mother. The image accommodates unconscious anxiety by sublimating the death drive. Kristeva's return to the act of decollation addresses the historical development of our relationship to violence, which culminates in an image culture that has become "complacent" in its "manner of seeing settled horror, increasingly conformist, pretentious, theatrical, mummified." The image may function to settle horror, but it also carries within it the possibility of its experience and transformation.

The Image and the Violence of the Spectacle

In posing the question of her exhibit, *Visions capitales*, in terms of the significance of the image as an experience that opposes enslavement to it by negotiating the destructive element of the drive, Kristeva offers a counterpossibility for the image in a society dominated by, what she calls following Guy Debord, the society of the spectacle. The chapters in part 2 examine Kristeva's analyses of the crisis of representation and the subsequent collapse of psychic space by the spectacle's colonization of the psyche. Further, each offers an account of the image that challenges the violence of image culture and draws primarily from her three books that carry the subtitle "The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis"—*The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, *Intimate Revolt*, and, more recently, *La haine et le pardon*. The significance of those analyses is examined in relation to the image in film, photography, the media, and Kristeva's own fictional writings.

Kelly Oliver's chapter, "Meaning against Death," outlines the social and political stakes of the violence of the spectacle. She draws on Kristeva's insistence on the "dead letter" of Law from *La haine et le pardon* and her insistence in *Visions capitales* that the image can sublimate the death drive to examine the violent fate of the crisis of representation that Kristeva's work tracks. Oliver claims that what is at stake here is the question of meaning itself, particularly the meaning of acts of violence that saturate image culture and fuel the society of the spectacle. Kristeva claims in *La haine et le pardon* that the "failure of the integration of Law in desire" finds tragic expression today in the sexually exploitative drama of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. She insists that the "the young people of Fort Ashby" are not exceptions, but rather "the banal subjects of the banal planetary village" (2005, 346). Oliver follows through on Kristeva's psychoanalytic account that the new malady of our civilization lies in the disintegration of prohibition and enjoyment. The failure is not reducible to a weakening of prohibition, but rather what Oliver calls "the colonization of the psyche" by the economy of the spectacle and the heightened forms of technological policing, which put at risk the possibilities of the intimate production of meaning. The result of the disintegration is "hatred without forgiveness." That is, the result is the free reign of violent impulses and indulgences or the purification of abjection due to the lack of our capacity to fore-give meaning to desire. According to Oliver, "It is as if the

subject occupies an abyss between law and desire and therefore takes refuge from violent repression through regression.” Such is the reason why the prison guards of Abu Ghraib defend themselves “in all innocence” as “just having fun.” Oliver claims that they occupy a time prior to responsibility, which she explores through a theory of perverse regression to an infantile enjoyment of sadomasochistic pleasure without guilt. Kristeva herself claims in the conclusion to her “*Le Désir de Loi*,” “The desire of the other is diverted by a manic jouissance that is fed by the sexual victimization of others.” There is, she continues, an “urgent necessity to remedy the psychosis that today separates the *desire for Law* from the *desire for the other*” (2005, 348). Thus, the disintegration of law and desire in the new malady of civilization has as its consequence the disintegration of social and ethical bonds, giving rise to hatred as the form the subject/other border takes. Oliver links her analysis of perverse regression to vulnerability as the narcissistic wound that constitutes the speaking being. The lack of forgiveness that besets our anxieties over vulnerability is essentially linked to the absence of discourses that emphasize a passion for life. In this context Oliver examines the images of violence in art, cinema, and media and delineates the images of female suicide bombers and images of women as bearers of sexualized violence, like those of Lyndie England, as “amorous disasters.”

Frances Restuccia is also concerned to emphasize the absence of forgiveness as an act that bestows meaning to suffering in the context of image culture. “Kristeva’s Intimate Revolt and the Thought Specular: Encountering the (Mulholland) Drive” chronicles Kristeva’s account of intimate revolt—constituted by intimacy, time, forgiveness, and revolt—to contextualize the import of Kristeva’s account of fantasy and the cinematic image. Acknowledging that Kristeva is not known as a film theorist, Restuccia explicates the significance of Kristeva’s work on the cinematic image for film analysis as well as the significance of the filmic image for Kristeva’s search for a rehabilitated revolt culture in which affectivity is interrogated and expressed by the imaginary, and which subsequently challenges the emptiness of the society of the spectacle in which psychic life is in danger of being lost. The “thought specular” represents a cinema that challenges the specular robotization of subjectivity. This “other cinema” fulfills Kristeva’s fourfold requirement of intimate revolt: intimacy, time, forgiveness, and image. Cinema is capable of thinking the specular by distancing us from it. Restuccia examines David Lynch’s *Mulholland Drive* as exemplary of Kristeva’s thought specular. Restuccia says that insofar as Lynch’s film represents “fantasy’s paralyzing takeover of the psyche,” it also enables the spectator to free herself or himself from fantasy to establish a critical distance and, thereby, both self-relation and relation to the spectacle. Through a play on the psychoanalytic notion of “drive” in *Mulholland Drive*, Restuccia offers a psychoanalytic account of the film that privileges Lynch’s film as an accomplishment of that “other cinema” Kristeva praises: a filmic image and an image of film that reinscribes subjectivity’s intimate depths within the specular image.

John Lechte also engages Kristeva's relationship to film theory. "Julia Kristeva and the Trajectory of the Image" examines her account of the cinematic image, her treatment of Sartre's "mental image," and their relationship to the role of Debord's "society of the spectacle" in Kristeva's work. Lechte provocatively situates her thought in relationship to Deleuze's cinematic work on the image to explicate the significance of Kristeva's analysis of the image as a "dynamic force in the formation of subjectivity." He claims that Kristeva's approach to the image opens a level of thinking that is not reducible to a traditional psychoanalytic account and puts her thought in relation to Deleuze's inauguration of a "cinematic turn" in contemporary analyses of the image. Lechte examines Kristeva's relationship to Sartre's "mental image" to demonstrate what is unique in Kristeva's thought on the image: that it historically tracks an ontological shift in our conception of the relationship between the image and reality. He claims that two conceptions of reality are at stake: "one that is virtual and as such is not real (the psychic image that gives rise to fantasy), and another that has come to be real despite being virtual (media images)." Further, because Kristeva follows Sartre's linking of the image to nothingness, it challenges the thingliness of the image as diagnosed by Debord and instead emphasizes an articulation of psychic space that is irreducible to the traditional subject/object dualism of other psychoanalytic accounts. Kristeva's psychoanalytic semiology instead demonstrates the synthetic process of subjectivity formed in and through images. The image as the dynamic framework of a synthetic process ultimately draws Kristeva's work in close proximity to Deleuze's own account of the image in his film books.

Robyn Ferrell's "The Darkroom of the Soul" also emphasizes the importance of the image for Kristeva's account of modern subjectivity and the media construction of reality. She takes as her starting point Kristeva's claim in *New Maladies of the Soul* that "[m]odern man is losing his soul, but he does not know it, for the psychic apparatus is what registers representations and their meaningful values for the subject. Unfortunately, that darkroom needs repair" (1995, 8). Ferrell explores Kristeva's description of "the darkroom of the soul" in the context of press photography to gauge the significance of Kristeva's psychoanalytic semiotics for articulating contemporary psychic life as shaped by the dominance of the image. Ferrell claims that photography, though it is distinguished from the cinematic image in its representation of reality, can be understood as a visible language grounded in the photograph as utterance. The relation to reality that is assumed in our way of seeing the press photograph reduces the photograph to a repetition of reality. However, press photography harbors a paradox in which the striving for neutral realism is undermined. Following Barthes, Ferrell describes the photographic image as mythical; that is, the photograph carries out a signification that makes meaning possible. With the press photograph, faith in the reality of the image underwrites the vision of the image. Ferrell links the mythic photographic image to Kristeva's account of the sacred and the production of meaning. The darkroom, Ferrell argues, is a succinct analog of the

psychoanalytic account of subjectivity insofar as the photographic process—and even more so in the inclusion of the darkroom in digital cameras—presents reality and the production of that reality. Though the image is deceptive in that it is underwritten by belief in its faithfulness to reality, the image of the darkroom makes visible the production of a meaningful narrative.

Like the preceding authors, Maria Margaroni's concern is with the socio-historical status of the image in modern societies. She provocatively traces the failures and possibilities of the image through Kristeva's relationship to Byzantium in both her literary and her theoretical texts. "Julia Kristeva's Chiasmatic Journeys: From Byzantium to the Phantom of Europe and the End of the World" chronicles the allegorical mode of Kristeva's form of detective narration, in general, and the *iconomy* of the image in Kristeva's latest detective novel, *Murder in Byzantium*, in particular. Margaroni follows what she calls "Kristeva's precarious leap into Byzantium" as an historical and conceptual space for addressing political concerns over the nation and its future, image culture, the fate of psychic life, and the possibilities of conceptualizing freedom. Kristeva finds in the *iconomy* of Byzantium, Margaroni argues, a culture of images, but one that restores to the image a critical economy of "seeing" against the ever-growing "society of the spectacle." Utilizing an allegorical mode of writing, Kristeva's novel brings to the fore the opposition of two competing principles of freedom that are complicated by the figure of Byzantium. Byzantine iconography marks an economy of the image that is irreducible to the spectacle and instead leaves its mark as a trace or inscription of what remains hidden. As such, it denotes, Margaroni argues, a *passage* from the invisible to the visible that inscribes heterogeneity in the symbol. Byzantium, the figure of a lost, archaic origin *and* other of Europe, allows Kristeva to think the history and, simultaneously, a "future anterior" of Europe. Margaroni situates Kristeva's "phantom Europe" within the broader imaginary of both discourses on Byzantium and those on that of a future Europe. In so doing, she outlines the benefits and the limits of Kristeva's, as well as others', topos of Byzantium as "a desirable, impossible Europe."

Intimacy and the Loss of Politics

Part 3 approaches the difficult question of what it means to bring Kristeva's approach to intimate, singular psychic life through psychoanalysis and aesthetics into dialogue with social and political philosophy. Each of the chapters in this section delineates Kristeva's political thought according to her relation to the loss of politics in the modern world.

Sara Beardsworth's "Love's Lost Labors: Subjectivity, Art, and Politics" traces the destructive element of the drive in contemporary societies back to a loss of symbolic resources that could adequately negotiate the vulnerability of the speaking being as the fragile border between affect and symbol. Beardsworth distinguishes between what she elaborated in her *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis*

and *Modernity* as “the loss of loss” and what she calls here “the loss of the lost.” Beardsworth argues that Kristeva’s thought of artistic sublimation turns Hegelian negativity into a dynamic of loss that is revealed in and through the Freudian account of subjectivity and that to clarify what politics might mean for Kristeva, she must thematize the sublimatory dynamic of the artwork. Beardsworth distinguishes between the psychoanalytic and aesthetic positions that Kristeva adopts along the lines of her distinction between the intimate and the public. Whereas psychoanalysis interrogates what is intimate, art makes itself public. While the two cannot be rigidly distinguished, Kristeva’s “politics” nevertheless requires that we take into account the aesthetic dimension, particularly its negativity, as exemplary. Beardsworth argues that the deepest moment of Kristeva’s thought is that of loss. The “loss of loss” articulates the condition of the modern subject in conditions of modern nihilism; that is, Beardsworth says, in conditions where historical being is “blocked.” It marks our inability to confront and work through loss, which is the effect of the failure of politics in the secular aftermath of religious authority. The loss of loss signals the failure of negativity to provide form and meaning to the affectivity of semiotic/symbolic collapse. The dynamic of loss is not simply one element of subjective process, but, according to Beardsworth, “present’s love’s lost labors,” where love marks the positive dynamic of subjectivity missing in modern societies. For Kristeva, Beardsworth argues, Freudian psychoanalysis brings this vision into view. Within this problematic Beardsworth analyzes the significance of the figure of the maternal feminine in Western cultures as what has been lost. This she calls “the loss of the lost,” and it is in the artwork that the maternal feminine often functions to negotiate Western culture’s relationship to loss.

Lisa Walsh’s “Symptomatic Reading: Kristeva on Duras” also returns to Kristeva’s diagnosis of modern culture as melancholic and her privileging of the artwork as capable of working through loss. Walsh focuses explicitly on Kristeva’s readings of Duras in *Black Sun* and in *La haine et le pardon*, and she confronts the controversial status of Kristeva’s reading of Duras—namely, that Duras’s work cannot be considered to be literature as such. Kristeva’s claim that Duras’s work is not literature raises questions regarding what literature is for Kristeva and, in relation to our concerns in this volume, its relation to current social and political realities. Walsh questions Kristeva’s claim that Duras’s work cannot be considered literature as such and situates Kristeva’s reading of Duras within Duras scholarship. She defends Duras against Kristeva’s claim while at the same time she seeks to delineate the function of literature for Kristeva in modern societies. Both readings take place around the question of the value and work of artistic sublimation within what Walsh calls, following Duras, *la chambre noire* of literature’s object domain. Walsh situates her return to Duras against Kristeva within Kristeva’s 2003 preface to the Chinese edition of *Powers of Horror*. In it Kristeva describes how literature can be both a form of terrorism and its antidote. Walsh emphasizes this distinction between what Walsh

calls “authentic” literature, a form of political therapy, and literature that participates in violence and destruction. Whereas Kristeva continuously privileges avant-garde literature as an exemplary accomplishment within the cultural failure of semiotic/symbolic disintegration, Duras’s work represents a noncathartic melancholia that, Kristeva warns, is potentially dangerous to her readers. Walsh argues, on the contrary, that Duras’s work as the exploration of *la chambre noir* “might become a singular, and as such political and ethical, haven for an increasingly victimizing and victimized population” which would allow for an intersubjective connection as an essential production of meaning itself.

S. K. Keltner’s “What Is Intimacy?” also recalls Kristeva’s readings of Duras as representative of a modern failure. She situates Kristeva’s reading of Duras in relationship to Freudian psychoanalysis, Arendtian political phenomenology, and Heideggerian ontology to track the genealogy of Kristeva’s analysis of the modern constitution of intimacy, in which Duras plays a central role. Keltner argues that Kristeva’s emphasis on the term “intimacy” from the mid-1990s to the present should be contextualized within her analyses of intimacy in the 1980s in *Powers of Horror*, *Black Sun*, and *Strangers to Ourselves*. The survey of the concept of intimacy in Kristeva’s oeuvre reveals a significant relationship to both Arendtian and identity politics, which Kristeva is generally seen to warn against, as well as opens a reading of the significance of the emergence of Freudian psychoanalysis as conditioned by a nationalist conception of intimacy.

Cecelia Sjöholm’s chapter, “Fear of Intimacy? Psychoanalysis and the Resistance to Commodification,” argues that the significance of Kristeva’s reclaiming of the concept of intimacy—the object of the psychoanalytic, aesthetic, and philosophical practices—is to be sought in a resistance to commodification. Kristeva links intimacy to sensorial experience as a necessary moment of singular psychic life that protects against the commodification of the psyche in consumer culture. However, as Sjöholm shows, Kristeva’s trajectory is unique: “Looking at philosophy and psychoanalysis, anything connected with the concept of intimacy is usually discarded as unreliable, corruptible, and full of disguises and lures.” Sjöholm analyzes Kristeva’s insistence on intimacy in relationship to the more popular psychoanalytic and philosophical warning against the concept in the work of Lacan, Kant, Habermas, Adorno, and Arendt. Sjöholm returns intimacy to the Enlightenment, critical theory, and Arendtian concern for public space and political community. She demonstrates that the intimate as a space of emotions, feelings, and sexuality—as constituted by the bourgeois novel—is not a subjective depth that transcends social and political space, but is rather a cultural product constructed in the historical development of bourgeois public space. Critical theory demonstrates that intimacy as emotion, feeling, or desire is susceptible to commodification and, even further, as Arendt has shown, threatens public life itself. Though psychoanalytic practice would seem to affirm intimacy insofar as it physically occupies intimate, private spaces in practice, analytic theory distances itself from intimacy. Sjöholm argues that the emphasis on Oedi-

pus aligns psychoanalytic theory with universality and law. Any concern for intimacy as the domain of emotion, feeling, and desire is subordinate to law; and psychoanalysis, like critical theory and Arendtian political phenomenology, insists that a resistance to the discourses of intimacy is simultaneously a resistance to the commodification of the unconscious. Sjöholm demonstrates that for Kristeva intimacy reconfigures the soul/body dichotomy and is the “domain” in which sensations are linked to signification. Rather than being that which is susceptible to commodification, intimacy is precisely that which protects against the colonization of singular psychic life. Kristeva’s reclaiming of intimacy is to be seen, Sjöholm argues, as a response to philosophic and psychoanalytic devaluations of intimacy and is an act that resists the very universalization and law that those discourses have banked on. For Kristeva, public or political community may very well depend on it.

Emily Zakin’s “Humanism, the Rights of Man, and the Nation-State” examines the relationship between Arendt and Kristeva. She links Arendt and Kristeva’s political thought to the question of the political’s modern legitimation crisis and argues that for Kristeva the political is that which must be interminably “worked through.” Zakin situates her reading of Kristeva and politics in the context of Slavoj Žižek’s recent inversion of Dostoyevsky’s famous claim about the death of God in *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the *New York Times* (March 12, 2006), Žižek claims: “If God exists . . . everything . . . is permitted.” Žižek here marks what Zakin calls “the legitimation crisis” of modernity’s replacement of religious authority with secular authority and its fateful realization in the resurrection of God in politics necessitated by the crisis. Zakin addresses two points that Žižek raises as the context for her reflections on Hannah Arendt and Julia Kristeva: first, the crisis of European political structures and, second, the loss of all transcendent values and any ultimate ground of law. For Zakin, Žižek can aid in evaluating the significance of Arendt and Kristeva’s work insofar as he insists that our political being is constituted in our relations to others in the world and that the public space of appearance may allow us to rethink the question of political legitimacy. Zakin does not pursue these issues in Žižek’s own thought, but takes his insights into the crisis of legitimacy, as well as those of Foucault and Lefort, as the clue to negotiating Arendt and Kristeva’s significance. She concludes that Kristeva’s psychoanalytic supplements Arendtian political phenomenology.

Jeff Edmond’s chapter, “Kristeva’s Uncanny Revolution: Imagining the Meaning of Politics,” examines Kristeva’s relationship to the political as an uneasy one and links the question of politics in Kristeva to an interminable “working through.” In spite of her various and multiple contributions to social and political problems, Kristeva’s more direct claims about the political express ambivalence. Edmonds explains the significance of Kristeva’s claim that politics is ultimately enigmatic as evidence for its importance. He argues that Kristeva’s refusal to directly answer questions concerning the political as such is not a

rejection of politics, but “of the simplistic and fetishistic repetition of the political as a criterion for thinking.” The persistence of the question of politics reveals a deeper problem: its inability to represent and give meaning to human experience. Edmonds argues that Kristeva’s distance from the political is precisely an attempt to reinvigorate political discourse by insisting on the necessity of linking it to experience and imagination. He argues that Kristeva’s work is neither apolitical nor directly political, but occupies a marginal position that allows for a critique of contemporary political fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is characterized as a purely symbolic bond that is not governed by concrete, material ties, but rather by fantasy and a logic of exclusion that cements the social-symbolic bond. Kristeva’s “political” work seeks to disrupt fundamentalisms and reopen the question of political solidarity on new terrain. Edmonds argues that Kristeva provides a notion of solidarity based not on the mediation of the father, but on what he calls “an active working through of the loss of that authority.” This working through of the loss of the ground of authority becomes the political task that the imaginary must bear. Edmonds concludes that Kristeva’s ambivalent relationship to the political is strategic insofar as the refusal to answer the question “What is the political?” calls on the imaginary for ceaseless interpretation.

Idit Alphonso’s chapter, “Religion and the ‘Rights of Man’ in Julia Kristeva’s Work,” concludes the volume by examining the correlation between religious and psychoanalytic subjectivity in Kristeva’s work through attention to the relationship between language and desire. Drawing on the seminal texts of the 1980s and Kristeva’s epistolary exchange with Catherine Clément in *The Feminine and the Sacred*, Alphonso analyzes the conditions of “meaningful experiences” in our narrative capacities. She takes as her point of departure Kristeva’s claim in *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* (1985/1987a) that the structure of the unconscious and the structure of monotheism can be related according to a primary narcissistic wound around which symbolic capacities are acquired, specifically in relation to Kristeva’s rehabilitation of the maternal function in psychoanalysis. Alphonso provocatively situates this comparison in relation to the “Rights of Man” and argues that Kristeva’s analysis of the “power” of “religious narrative” illuminates the significance of the role and need for narrative in secular life.

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