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From her very earliest works to the essay published in this volume, Julia Kristeva has been preoccupied with the question of revolt. What, she asks, is time and again, is revolt? Is it even possible given our cultural circumstances and the state of “crisis” that characterizes modernity as we know it? How is it related to those practices and experiences that most concern her – art, poetry, and psychoanalysis – and how do these, in turn, carry revolutionary potential? What kind of subversion, finally, does revolt offer in the face of religious fundamentalism, financial crises, the invasion of the spectacle, or even radical evil?

In the essay published here, as well as in her previous work, Kristeva locates revolt in the intimate sphere, and she describes it in terms of return, recollection, rebirth, re-creation, and renewal. It is, as she puts it, “an indication of life that is unambiguously alive,” and it is made possible through vigorous interrogation and critical thought. Through retrospective return we go in search of ourselves, and in the process we revisit our past in order to open our future. Elsewhere, I have discussed Kristeva’s concept of revolt precisely as a temporal phenomenon, highlighting her consistent emphasis on revolt as a movement of return that makes possible renewal and change – what I have called “revolutionary time.”¹ In what follows, I want to focus on a particular dimension of her temporal analysis, namely, her association of revolt with the Freudian *Zeitlos*, or the timelessness of the unconscious, which she discussed at length already in *Intimate Revolt*, and which appears again in the present essay as one of the “logical paradoxes” that haunts revolt, if indeed we understand the latter as a feature of psychic life and its social manifestations (writing, thought, art...). How, I ask, can Kristeva’s discussion of the timelessness of the unconscious be reconciled with the temporal analysis of revolt that I have offered elsewhere? How, in other words, can a revolt marked by “timelessness” nevertheless be characterized as essentially “temporal” in nature?

If time traditionally has been viewed as located in consciousness, one might ask how we are to think time once we have established, with Sigmund Freud, that the subject is unconscious. Kristeva raises this very concern in her book *Intimate Revolt*: “If we emancipate ourselves from the ‘symptom of ‘being conscious’; what about time? . . . What do we do with time, by definition conscious, if we postulate an unconscious psyche?”² These questions bring her straight to what she calls the Freudian “scandal” of the *Zeitlos*, or timeless. Kristeva notes that the early Freud keeps with the classic philosophical thesis that time is a given of consciousness, but that, starting with *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), “the unconscious as well as the id” begin to “enjoy a temporality called *Zeitlos* (timeless).”³ Freud himself says notoriously little of this concept. It is introduced in passing in his essay “The Unconscious” (1915). Here, Freud attempts to establish the special properties of the unconscious, and he states that one such property is that the processes in the unconscious system “are *timeless*, i.e., are not chronologically ordered, are not altered by the passage of time, indeed bear no relation to time whatsoever.”⁴ He acknowledges that his description of the unconscious might come across as both “obscure” and “confused,”⁵ yet when he revisits the notion of timelessness five years later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he does not provide much more clarity:

As a result of certain psycho-analytic discoveries, we are to-day in a position to embark on a discussion of the Kantian theorem that time and space are ‘necessary forms of thought’. We have learnt that unconscious mental processes are in themselves ‘timeless’. This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them.⁶

What we are to make of these allusive remarks remains contested. Freud himself simply reiterates that his own understanding is limited. In his *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), he again revisits the topic of the timeless, now using the terminology of the id rather than the unconscious:

There is nothing in the id that corresponds to the idea of time; there is no recognition of the passage of time, and – a thing that is most remarkable and awaits consideration in philosophical thought – no alteration in its mental processes is produced by the passage of time. Wishful impulses which have never passed beyond the id, but impressions, too, which have been sunk into the id by repression, are virtually immortal; after the passage of decades they behave as though they had just occurred.

They can only be recognized as belonging to the past, can only lose their importance and be deprived of their cathexis of energy, when they have been made conscious by the work of analysis, and it is on this that the therapeutic effect of analytic treatment rests to no small extent.⁷

It is worth noting that Freud, here, defines the task of psychoanalysis as making temporal the atemporal content of the id. To bring repressed memories to consciousness would, in other words, amount to giving them a proper place in (linear) time – to acknowledge them as belonging to the past so as to not compulsively repeat them in the future.

Freud's references to the timelessness of the unconscious appear in what is usually described as his metapsychological work. Adrian Johnston explains that "the metapsychological domain contains the aggregate of a priori principles that must be in place at the outset for the initiation of analytic interpretation as such."⁸ Metapsychology, in other words, establishes the fundamental concepts used to represent and describe the operation of the mental apparatus. We might say that it establishes the conditions of possibility for all subsequent clinical work; it sets up the *scene* for analysis. Freud himself saw metapsychology within the field of psychoanalysis as analogous with metaphysics in the field of philosophy. Does this imply that the timelessness of the unconscious would be Freud's version of what philosophers refer to as "metaphysical presence"? Does the timelessness of the unconscious imply a subject somehow *exempt* from the movement of time? And if so, how does the timelessness of the unconscious square with Kristeva's insistence on the inherently temporal nature of human existence in general and of revolt in particular?

There should be no doubt that Freud's statement about the timelessness of the unconscious offers a challenge to any traditional account of time. If Kristeva is right in suggesting that Freud's theory of the unconscious was a "Copernican revolution" of sorts – a claim that she makes both in *Strangers to Ourselves* and in the present essay,⁹ this revolution is, she notes elsewhere, nothing other than "a revolution of the conception of time."¹⁰ She ascribes "an incomparable originality" to "the Freudian *Zeitlos*."¹¹ It is, in her view, different from all previous attempts to conceptualize time, from Aristotle and Saint Augustine to Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Bergson, and Heidegger. As she puts it in the present essay: "Freud underscored the unprecedented timelessness (*Zeitlos*), which no philosophy had identified before him and which characterizes the unconscious" (emphasis mine). The unconscious, she explains elsewhere, has "its own time," and Freud is repeatedly described as a "revolutionary of lost time."¹²

Adrian Johnston similarly characterizes Freud's "dethroning of the self-transparent, rational subject" as such a "radical rupture in the history of ideas" that it is worthy of the epithet revolutionary.¹³ But he raises concerns:

All revolutions naturally appear novel when contrasted with the status quo against which they react. However, at the same time, all revolutions also contain the seeds of their own destruction. If successful in overthrowing the previous theoretical regime, a revolutionary theory immediately runs the risk of becoming as complacent as its predecessor. Although this observation is itself practically a truism, the revolutionaries frequently become the new tyrants.¹⁴

How, we must ask, can psychoanalysis – and the revolt it gives rise to on Kristeva's account here and elsewhere – avoid stagnation and complacency? How are we to assure that the Freudian theory of the unconscious – one that, among other things, was formulated as a critical response to the metaphysics of presence – not posits yet another version of such presence, articulated precisely in terms of a "timelessness" embedded at the core of the human psyche? Does the Freudian revolution amount to nothing more than a removal of eternity from the "there" and "beyond," by placing it instead at the heart of the "here" and "now" of finite life, and if this is so, can Kristeva remain faithful to Freud while at the same time characterizing intimate revolt as a movement of perpetual return and renewal, a movement marked by time?

In order to address these questions, we must do some of the clarificatory work that Freud himself avoided. What, we must ask, does it mean to say that the unconscious is "timeless"? Is this timelessness similar to or different from the selfsame everlasting presence that is such a core feature of the metaphysical tradition? According to Freud himself, as we have seen, unconscious processes are timeless because they "are not chronologically ordered, are not altered by the passage of time, indeed bear no relation to time whatsoever." Or, in the later formulation also quoted above, their timelessness is explained by the fact that "they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them." Unconscious processes defy causality and chronology. Most of us have experienced some version of this when we dream: dreams rarely follow the linear narrative logic of real-life, real-time events. But is this really to say that unconscious processes are eternally stable and ever-present, or does it rather mean that they do not fit neatly into the notion of time with which we are familiar? Does the unconscious truly lie *outside* of time, or is it rather structured by a different temporal order than the one we know?

Kristeva describes its timelessness as a “time outside time,” which would imply not a *non-time* but, precisely, a *time* outside of time, a time different from the time we know, a time, perhaps, that challenges our common notions of time. Following Freud, she stresses that the timeless breaks the *linearity* of time: it is “a rift” in “the linear time of consciousness.”¹⁵ And indeed, she notes, the timeless “has nothing to do with the belief in a life beyond, a time beyond, an eternity beyond.”¹⁶ In the current essay she underlines this distinction. Timelessness, she notes, “characterizes the unconscious and not the mystical *nunc stans*” – a term philosophers often use to refer to the “eternal now” at the heart of the metaphysics of presence.

With Kristeva’s remarks in mind, I want to suggest that the term “timeless” is somewhat misleading, since it implies an *exemption* from any form of temporal movement. What Freud is trying to do, it seems to me, is to articulate a notion of time that has nothing in common with our current views of time as linear-progressive motion. He seeks to establish a temporal model that, precisely, would be impossible to label “temporal” from within our current temporal paradigm. The Freudian revolution, as Kristeva puts it, “has nothing else to seek or find but lost time.”¹⁷ In her analysis of the timeless in *Intimate Revolt*, she indeed suggests that we translate the term *Zeitlos* to “lost time” rather than to “timelessness.” Is Freud trying to retrieve a lost notion of time? A time different from the one that has come to dominate philosophical discourse? Jacques Derrida defends this view: “The timelessness of the unconscious is no doubt determined only in opposition to a common concept of time, a traditional concept, the metaphysical concept: the time of mechanics or the time of consciousness. We ought perhaps read Freud the way Heidegger reads Kant: like the *cogito*, the unconscious is no doubt timeless only from the standpoint of a certain vulgar concept of time.”¹⁸ But if the timeless in fact *is* temporal, albeit of a different temporal order than conscious time, then we must ask what kind of time it is. I will attempt to do so in what follows.

A central feature of the Freudian *Zeitlos* is that it is non-linear in nature, and that it therefore puts into question basic notions such as causality and progress.¹⁹ This it has in common with a temporal model that I have discussed at length in my own work as *revolutionary time*. Revolutionary time is best described as a movement of perpetual return into the past and to a somatic realm of bodily experiences and drives, but it is a movement of return that makes possible change and new beginnings. As a temporal model, it offers an alternative to the two models traditionally available to us, namely repetitive-cyclical time on the one hand (typically associated with female subjectivity) and progressive-linear time on the other (associated instead with male subjectivity). If these temporal models have been built on a sexual division of temporal labor (female reproduction and male

production), revolutionary time returns us to the heterogeneity of the human body and to the idea that such sexual division of temporal labor generates a repetition of the same rather than offering new horizons of future possibilities. To explore the relationship between the timelessness of the unconscious and revolutionary time helps us better understand why Kristeva would tie the Freudian *Zeitlos* to her own analysis of revolt understood as a movement of perpetual return and renewal.

In order to better elucidate the relationship between revolutionary time and the Freudian *Zeitlos*, we must look at the context in which Freud mentions this concept. His remarks on the topic in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* immediately follow his discussion of our tendency to compulsively repeat repressed memories of infantile sexual life. In remembering our past, we experience our memories precisely as belonging in the past (they have a place in linear time), but if the memory is repressed, we experience it time and again (we repeat it), and each time it is experienced as unfolding in the here and now of the present: the repressed memory affects our present life and is experienced *as present* rather than as the past event or wish that it in fact represents.²⁰ Freud makes it very clear that this not only is a neurotic pattern: it is in fact common in most people, and we see examples of it in children's play, or in our tendency to experience the same obstacles in one relationship after another.²¹

It is his observation of this *compulsion to repeat* that leads Freud to suggest that there exists a death drive "beyond" the pleasure principle, already established in his earlier writings, and it is this death drive that Freud as well as Kristeva associate with timelessness. As Kristeva puts it in the present essay, "the analytical experience reconciles us with this timelessness, which is that of the drive, and more particularly the death drive." The death drive paves the way for and is governed by a discontinuous temporality, a time incompatible with linear progress, a time of repetition or, as Freud himself puts it in implicit dialogue with Friedrich Nietzsche, a "perpetual recurrence of the same thing."²² One way of understanding Freud's claim that the unconscious is timeless is to link it to the idea that because some memories are repressed (because they are unconscious), the relationship between past and present is of an oscillating, non-linear kind. This in turn would mean not only that our past shapes our present, but also that the opposite is true, that our past is continuously shaped and reshaped by the present through which it can be accessed and retrieved. Or, as Johnston puts it: "the contextual parameters of the subject's present retroactively alter the very past which supposedly influences this same present."²³ While repressed memories are not yet conscious, they need a catalyst in the present to appear even in their repressed form: "fresh mnemonic traces behave like a Trojan horse for repressed childhood desires . . . the past overdetermines the present only insofar as the present inadvertently provides the past with certain opportune openings, namely, materials

possessing associational connections to repressed contents," Johnston explains.²⁴

In *Intimate Revolt*, Kristeva presents a case study that serves to illustrate this temporal structure. Danièle has been in analysis for four years and speaks rarely of her mother: "She had always maintained outside of time the painful memory of this mother," Kristeva notes.²⁵ But when she finds out through friends that her analyst (Kristeva) is traveling to Jerusalem, Danièle has a dream about her mother, who had gone to Jerusalem as a little girl while her own parents (Danièle's grandparents) were deported to the camps. The news about Kristeva's present trip to Jerusalem is what triggers the repressed memories of an earlier trip to Jerusalem, and this present event marks the beginning of a possible working-through. Kristeva highlights the temporality at play for her patient: "Danièle had suffered, in the fullest sense of the term, an intersection between linear time, on the one hand, accentuated by my trip, which we were able to discuss, and, on the other hand, the timelessness of the mother-daughter symbiosis, in this case, opening onto a traumatic generational history."²⁶

The term that Freud uses to describe this retroactive process is *Nachträglichkeit*.²⁷ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis explain that the notion of *Nachträglichkeit* – rarely used explicitly by Freud, but developed at length by Jacques Lacan – was meant to convey "that the subject revises past events at a later date and that it is this revision which invests them with significance."²⁸ While Freud viewed *Nachträglichkeit* as a mark primarily of neurotic temporality, Lacan would highlight that it in fact is an integral aspect of the very process of psychoanalytic interpretation.²⁹ What the analyst does is precisely to retroactively reconstruct and reinterpret past events in order to integrate them in the present.

Luce Irigaray retrieves this notion of *Nachträglichkeit* from the Freudian corpus, viewing it precisely as a critical key through which Freud can be read against himself, and more specifically as a leverage point that would help us formulate a critique of the metaphysics of presence. In the opening essay of *Speculum of the Other Woman*, she notes that Freud "destroys a certain conception of the present, or of presence, when he stresses secondary revision [*l'après-coup*], over-determination, repetition compulsion, the death drive, etc."³⁰ What Irigaray seems to suggest is that the repetition that stands at the heart of both neurotic symptoms and the analytic cure as such represents an alternative temporal model, one that would challenge the privileging of presence and that would instigate a retrospective return to the past so as to make possible a different future.

This all leads to the notion that the timelessness of the unconscious brings about a perpetual movement of retrospective return. Just as we might say that (female) cyclicity (so often described as monotonous repetition) has been made to be the non-time that (male) linearity needed in order to

appear as time (in the sense of progress), the timelessness of the unconscious could be understood as the determining ground that makes conscious time possible but that in itself would be, precisely, non-temporal. If we, instead, recognize that the *Zeitlos* is atemporal *only if viewed from the standpoint of conscious-linear time* (just like female cyclicity is “repetitive” only from the point of view of male “progress”), we should be able to characterize the repetition and retrospective return that governs the unconscious not as a dead repetition of the same but rather as the condition of possibility for renewal and change.

Kristeva reminds us that we must “persevere, relentlessly recommence, the retrospective return so as to lead it to the limits of the representable/the thinkable/the bearable.” And to find oneself in this limit situation – to revolt – is to be able to forgive: “analytic interpretation emerges as a secular version of forgiveness, in which I see not just a suspension of judgment but a giving of meaning, beyond judgment, within transference-countertransference.” We return in order to forgive – ourselves as well as others – and such forgiveness implies nothing less than a rebellious rebirth; a revolt in time and of time.

¹ See Fanny Söderbäck, “Revolutionary Time: Revolt as Temporal Return,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2012): 301-324.

² Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman, vol. 2 of *The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 27 and 33.

³ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 30.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, “The Unconscious,” trans. Graham Frankland (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 69-70.

⁵ Freud, “The Unconscious,” 78.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 31-32.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, “The Dissection of the Psychical Personality,” Lecture XXXI in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 92.

⁸ Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 11.

⁹ See Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 169. In the current essay, she notes that “Freud’s

discovery of the unconscious was the new Archimedean point,” and adds, a bit later, that psychoanalysis is the “‘Copernican revolution’ that Freud introduced in the twentieth century and that we increasingly perceive to be one of the only ones that does not turn away from either affliction or the revolts of modernity.”

¹⁰ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 28.

¹¹ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 30-31.

¹² Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 31.

¹³ Johnston, *Time Driven*, 5.

¹⁴ Johnston, *Time Driven*, 5.

¹⁵ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 25 and 30.

¹⁶ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 31.

¹⁷ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 42.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” chap. 7 in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 215.

¹⁹ Following Derrida, Alan Bass views the *Zeitlos* not as non-time but as a time that appears to be atemporal only from the standpoint of linear-progressive (i.e. conscious) time. He ventures to explicitly tie this “other” time to primary processes and drives, to primary narcissism and auto-eroticism, to the early relationship with the phallic mother: in short, to what he calls a pre-Oedipal “feminine” phase. If Freud himself had compared metapsychology to metaphysics, Bass brings attention to the fundamentally *non-philosophical* nature of metapsychology, and argues that the metapsychological concept of time offers a challenge to those models developed in the (male) philosophical tradition. See Alan Bass, “Time and the Witch: Femininity, Metapsychology and the Temporality of the Unconscious,” *MLN* 91:5 (1976), 904.

²⁰ Freud notes that, “what appears to be reality is in fact only a reflection of a forgotten past” (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 19).

²¹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 23.

²² Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 23.

²³ Johnston, *Time Driven*, 9.

²⁴ Johnston, *Time Driven*, 7-8.

²⁵ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 37.

²⁶ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 38.

²⁷ There is no standard English translation of this term. Strachey usually translates it as *deferred action* or *secondary revision*. Laplanche prefers the term *afterwardsness*. The French term is *l’après-coup*. My brief comments on

Nachträglichkeit here are based on Sara McNamara's work on this topic. See her paper "In the beginning was the end of her story: Irigaray and Freud on *Nachträglichkeit* and Feminine Temporality," presented at the *Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP)*, Montreal, 2010.

²⁸ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 112.

²⁹ See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 274-275.

³⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 28.