



Philip Goodchild **Revolt, She Said**
NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY,
UK
By Julia Kristeva

Translated by Brian O'Keeffe; (Semiotext(e)), Los Angeles and New York: MIT Press, 2002; 139 pp.; pb \$ 9.95, ISBN: 1-58435-015-6.

This book is a translated series of interviews with the Bulgarian psychoanalyst, feminist and philosopher Julia Kristeva, conducted by Philippe Petit, Rainer Ganahl, and Rubén Gallo. Kristeva came to France as a student in 1965, where she settled, writing all her main publications in French. The publication in book form of a set of interviews is common among French intellectuals. Both the advantages and disadvantages of this literary form are in evidence here: the book gives an intimate portrait of Kristeva's living thought, enabling her to comment on her work, to reveal the issues that are decisive for her, and to explore her relation to a wider French intellectual culture. At the same time, the interviews pass quickly from one topic to another, without taking the time to develop a full argument or point of view on any particular issue.

The immediate occasion for the interviews is the 30th anniversary of the student uprisings in Paris of May '68, in which Kristeva was a full participant, being trapped by a cordon of riot police in the Sorbonne. Following the recent publication of Kristeva's *Le sens et non-sens de révolte* (1996), and *La révolte intime* (1997), Kristeva is asked about how she sees May '68 in hindsight in relation to her concept of revolt. May '68 was spearheaded by sexual and cultural contestation, embodying a very French atheism, that is, a valorization of a particular psychic life sustained by sexual desire and rooted in bodily needs. If May '68 implied the 'death of God', this was because it contested fixed principles of value in the name of a psychic life expressed as a process of production, or a value awarded to life itself. The result was a mutation in metaphysics, a change in religion or civilization, which invoked the relentless questioning of all values, power and identities.

Yet for Kristeva, one cannot simply put aside limits, prohibitions and paternity, for without these revolt becomes impossible. These are indispensable conditions for the life of thought and language. Indeed, in contemporary society, where prohibitions are either forbidden, or much more complex in the form of deprivations and exclusions, then people lack reference points and internal representations. When people experience isolation at work, the breakdown of the family, weakened religions, and a 'new world order' governed by economic rather than political powers, then they lack the internal representations necessary for revolt and psychic health, and are likely to suffer from 'new maladies of the soul', such as depression and psychosis. Psychoanalysis, therefore, functions to integrate limits and laws alongside the transmutation of values; it draws on the (psychic) 'truths of monotheism' and the power of desire to give psychic life its

meaning.

There is clearly a very particular sense of 'revolt' under consideration here: Kristeva is concerned with the self-questioning and anxiety that gives the kind of depth to psychic life that is normally overlooked in the modern world. Rather than being concerned with political revolution, because political revolutionaries tend not to question themselves, she is concerned with a psychic revolt, a movement of returning, discovering, uncovering and renovating which, following in a tradition from Plato, through St Augustine, Hegel and Nietzsche, finds that truth can be acquired by a retrospective return. Revolt is thus primarily based on the Hegelian operation of the negative as a principle of reflection and deepening in psychic life. She gives it a psychoanalytic inflection, however, by returning primarily to traumas, memories and conflicts, rather than the eternal securities of religious dogma or metaphysics. Alongside this, she reads Oedipal revolt in Freud's primal horde as representing simultaneously both the social bond and religion, drawing our attention to the element of revolt or protest that is so common in contemporary religious commitments. Moreover, Kristeva is also interested in exploring what counts as 'sacred' for women today, linking feminism to the revolt against paternity, as well as regarding the sacred as the source of meaning or depth in psychic life.

The book as a whole celebrates the liberty of self-questioning over against a normative culture of liberty as free enterprise or normalization. It shows how radical philosophical, personal, sexual and cultural questioning need not be nihilistic or relativistic, but an essential part of the deepening of psychic life. It should be said, however, that none of these themes are developed at length or in depth, and readers are advised to consult other publications for Kristeva's more sustained contributions to rethinking psychoanalysis, feminism and philosophy of religion.