

Clean, Death, Revolt: A Sensual Politics During Quarantine

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The global compulsion to 'get clean' has never been more palpable. This discourse of quarantine, as I call it, has mistakenly relied on a form of biopolitics in order to achieve this end. In doing so, the trademarks of subjection, those like docility, internalization, and self-policing, have reached a heightened state in functioning to keep the 'psychosis of dirt' at bay. Relying on the archaeology of critical psychology and psychoanalysis, I hope to show that playing in the dirt does not necessarily have to be a bad thing. In fact, it may even be the case that *being dirty* establishes bonds of closeness, affinity, and communion. Julia Kristeva (2014) goes so far to suggest that being dirty in this way - integrating those aesthetic forms of abjection - organizes new political action, what she calls a politics of intimacy or a sensual politics. With the rallying cry *Revolt!* we are reminded of the work that needs to be done in order to better understand the destructive and threatening potential of the negative, bound up in the word dirt as well as others, and invited to refine and embrace this power.

KEYWORDS

cleanliness, death drive, late stage capitalism, neoliberalism, pandemic, politics of intimacy, quarantine, virus

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Psychosis is the work of a subject, but a subject who is on trial.

Julia Kristeva¹

1 | INTRODUCTION

The fixation on 'cleanliness' has become a global symptom that is impossible to ignore. The stark absence of disinfectant and cleaning products at supermarkets and grocery stores shows this insatiable desire to gobble-up and hoard these products - products that supposedly grant the feeling of being clean. Fighting an invisible enemy, nowadays, a virus that one cannot see and cannot, especially, taste or smell, the need to stay clean has resulted in a new social structure based on the principle of quarantine: isolating for the sake of protecting oneself and others. As Julia Kristeva (2014) declared, we are a "subject who is on trial" (p. 9) and the judge, in this psychotic frenzy to get clean, no longer assumes the form of God, the State, or some big Other but, rather, is an undecidability - a feminine authority that, as we will see, floats a politics of intimacy as a means to: *Revolt!* The femininity of this encounter, coming clean, pertains to the parallelism between the psychoanalytic death drive (*Todestrieb*) and the intimacies and sensualities associated with bondedness and connection - dirt, in other words, has a paradoxical ability to purify the subject beyond its current state into deeper and more enduring relationships. To pose this as a series of questions, what is this new and strange form of psychotic work we are mandated to do? What social and political costs come with protecting our dirtiness from others? What's more, is not this protection itself symptomatic of a more underlying fixation: the repetitious return of the need to be clean?

In this essay, I will explore the transgressive and, more poignantly, the *dirty nature* of what Freud called the death drive and how it runs as a counterforce to, in its currently heightened form under the guise of quarantine, the inescapable and repetitious pursuit of cleanliness during this time of late stage capitalism: Will we ever be able to get clean enough? The neoliberal subject, now more terrified of the other on a global scale than ever before, uses a dialectical-third, an invisible virus, as a means to arbitrate the dichotomy of being either dirty or clean, pronouncing all the more overtly the intrinsic terror of not being clean.

2 | CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY'S AFFECTION FOR DIRT

With the advent of critical psychology, scholars now have more precise tools to excavate artifacts in discourse that would signify the ongoing obsession with cleanliness. What critical psychology is and what it is not can be better set into relief against how it stands-out from more legendary strains of psychology. The embrangement of psychology as a proper discipline with other social institutions leads it to be co-opted in some ways (Hooks, 2007). As just but one example of this, psychology, in terms of its therapeutic techniques or mandates that prescribe certain forms of wellness and health, go toward helping to create subjects that are implicit in capitalist values, those such as worker efficiency, productivity, functionality, and so on (Lazzarato, 2014). What this amounts to is a whole interconnected semiology, a cartography that perhaps contains associations related to sickness, dirt, leisure, non-productivity and so forth is rejected or, even better to use a famous phrase of Kristeva's (1982), abjected from daily life and so too is the import they could bring to enrich subjectivity, their ability to challenge normal ways of being in the world, and the possibility for the subject to develop other-than-normal bonds with others, bonds that may lead to deeper human flourishing and relationality.

The signifier dirt, as was alluded to, is enmeshed in a web of other culturally arbitrated signifiers that are

¹See Kristeva, 2014, p.9.

historically bound. That is to say, dirt hasn't always been a bad thing (see Bataille, 1997 on eroticism and desire as seminal scholarship on the topic). Indeed, at the precise level of method, an important forerunner to critical psychology, Michel Foucault (1971, 1995), once referred to his investigatory procedure in similar terms - as an 'archaeology of subjugated knowledges' or a recovery of those alternative stories that have been silenced and, in some cases, destroyed by more dominant, powerful, or persuasive narratives about the world. On the level of the subject, as opposed to Foucault's more historical and genealogical project, Kristeva (2014) offers us an archaeological technique aimed at uncovering the false unity the covers over its void: "it is by returning to the archaeology of the subject's unity, leading to the material of language and of thought itself, that the subject reaches the unsafe regions where this unity is annihilated" (p. 9). We see here from both Foucault and Kristeva that the *topos* the signifier 'archeology' invokes does profound work in deploying tropes aimed at unearthing a phony sense of subjective cohesion (Kristeva) while, at the same time, more diachronically dredging up the sociohistorical discourses that help perpetuate that very subjective alienation (Foucault).

In more formal methodological terms, an excavation - a dig, mining, or removal of artefacts covered by dirt and soil - according to Foucault (1971), is not about cleaning or restoring these forgotten knowledges; nor is the aim to colonialistically export these findings to a museum so as to become objects for the passive gaze of the public. On the contrary, the exhumation of these forgotten artefacts critically and incisively makes an intervention in those very normative artefacts we take to be self-evident. The kind of 'power' contained therein, the ability of the discourse or, more precisely, *dispositif* (an apparatus, device, or machine), to deploy itself is dependent upon many factors such as dictating, writing, or rewriting the historical antecedents that went into the creation of that specific apparatus. The interventive power of 'finding' a subjugated knowledge has the ability to change, within the auspices of mainstream psychology, the materialist belief that mind states are reducible to brain states (Beauregard, 2013), for example, or the Enlightenment belief that the progress of technology will cure humanities woes, psychological, medical, ecological, or otherwise² (Peters, 2019).

This is all the more self-evident if we examine the case of the coronavirus. Even beforehand, there existed a biopolitical tradition that not only planted the seeds for the emergence of such a pandemic but, even stronger, necessarily watered, nurtured, and cultivated the possibility of a virus to reach the level whereby it affects all humanity. Everybody, everywhere is put at risk - all across the globe. Of course, earlier pandemics, notably the Black Plague and Spanish Flu likewise had global appeal (Kohn, 2008). Yet, the difference with the coronavirus is the international biopolitical machine that has been mobilized to treat and eradicate this disease. Take, for example, the historical speed at which a vaccine was researched, developed, and produced (Caldwell, 2021). What this amounts to is, in a certain sense, the culmination of Enlightenment values intrinsic to such a bioindustrial project insofar as global, fraternal cooperation needs to be achieved in order to design and distribute a vaccine, the worldwide implementation of a new scientific discovery, the mRNA vaccine, and the radical, increased proliferation and population of the surveilled, docile subject (Foucault, 1995), one who polices the other into social distancing and mask wearing.

We may call this the *discourse of quarantine* - a new kind of deployment of power that hitherto now could only be hypothetically contemplated, an infection that pervades global sociality and is held together, we might say, by the word clean. And yet, we are not out from under the effects that this apparatus exerts on the production of subjective, nor will we be for perhaps a generation. A different but in some ways analogous precursor to the coronavirus pandemic is the AIDS/HIV contagion and subsequent hysteria during the 1980s. That is, lack of knowledge on how the disease

²There seems to have been a dangerous 'return' to foundationalism and Enlightenment thought over the last several years (Peters, 2019); indeed, I wonder, by the cultural and political phenomenon of fake news and post-truthism. Blame has been assigned to disciplines like poststructuralism and critical theory for helping to establish the conditions necessary for this kind of paranoia to come into being - a paranoia that says something interesting about not only the trajectory of late stage capitalism but, perhaps more incisively, about the subject itself; that is, a socio-cultural form of regression engendered even further by the trauma of the virus.

could be transmitted, unfair discrimination and stigmatization of the LGBTQ community, and an absence of a sure origin story all fed into the social disfunction and, in some cases, violence that resulted from this outbreak. We can see parallels here with the current pandemic. Yet, the key difference lies in the scale and magnitude at which the biopolitical discourse of quarantine has been mobilized under the current call for public health. Put differently, with the symbol of the mask, the directive of the State to 'stay home', and the prohibition of public gatherings, as but a few cases in point, the coronavirus brings the discourse of quarantine, the fear of the dirt of the other, to new heights, even perhaps pushing beyond a limit whereby any return to what used to be normal is but a melancholic fantasy, an inability to grieve a loss.³

What fallout will this new obsession with cleanliness have on subjectivity? How does staying clean structure relationality on the level of romance, love or friendship? In the spirit of critical psychology, what kind of political power might we find underneath the dirt if we dig a little bit deeper, if we, one might say, unearth the artefacts that demonstrate counter-evidence to the normative narrative surrounding this event? Perhaps it would be better not to envision a return back to normal but, rather, an excavation of the ramifications that this new state of the world will entail.

3 | FEMININITY QUA DEATH DRIVE

Critical psychology, with its disciplinary tools to quarry stories that we might find not amenable to our common way of hearing and to further make explicit those institutions and peoples that try and keep these discourses hidden, is particularly situated to lead the way in re-articulations of those buried artifacts. Such an articulation, a kind of retelling or re-introducing of abjected artifacts into the discursive circulation, must first explain the way that these discourses became tainted in the first place. In order to do this, I propose starting with the close connection that being dirty or unclean has with what we could say is the absolute form of uncleanliness: namely, death itself. As a disciplinary forerunner to critical psychology, psychoanalysis (Parker, 2015), offers a bounty of clinical, anecdotal, and even empirical research that can aid in conceptualizing the almost homologous association contained psychically and socially between death and dirt.

The kinship between the two - death and dirt - begs the question, if we were to pose it in dialectical terms, what does it mean to be clean? In part, interestingly, psychoanalysis advances its understanding of cleanliness using the parameters and logics of the feminine. That is, examining the paradoxical nature of the relationship between femininity and the death drive, Lacan suggests it is not the actual woman that helps to illustrate the difficulty the subject has formulating and solidifying its desire but, rather, in a general sense, symbolizes a container or void into which the signifier is able to assume its form. Lacan argues that the death drive finds its ultimate fruition in the realm of aesthetics, which is to say the beautiful, "beauty in all its shining radiance, beauty that has been called the splendor of truth" (Lacan, 1992, p. 217). It would be through aesthetic sublimation, then, that the death drive is able to carry *jouissance* beyond symptomology and toward a subject that historicizes, which is to say that agentially masters the signifier. This process is what Lacan (1998) called *après-coup* a kind of afterwardsness, as it is sometimes

³In her book *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva (1992) analyzes in great depth the melancholic state that results from unexpected or traumatic loss. When the subject loses something that it once loved or had taken to be its own, at which point this object is excised, the void that it had filled becomes a site of possible transformation but, more than likely, initiates a doubling-back of the now freed libidinal energy into an internalized hatred, a self-loathing that oscillates between idleness and excitation. A failure in the symbol, to put it differently, has taken place - the subject has not 'processed' the experience in a way that would reassociate and, indeed, redirect its maps of reference. Kristeva (1992) describes melancholia as "inhibition and asymbolia that becomes established now and then or chronically in a person, alternative more often than not with the so-called manic phase of exaltation" (p. 9). On the level of global society, we might wonder will there be a quick forgetting of the pandemic as there often is with other media spectacles, a kind symbolic substitution from one form of global trauma to another (what does this do to populations; why does this keep happening?), or as an apogee of biopolitics might the coronavirus pandemic herald a return to the dirt, to that melancholic void that changed intersubjectivity so radically?

translated, by which the subject applies meaning to an event after the fact, after the trauma, encounter, and so on has already happened. In part, this fact allows for psychoanalytic interventions to be employed such that the meanings or associations tied to the event, the ones that create symptoms, for example, can be reformed with other less threatening connections. Sublimation in traditional Freudian practice is precisely the manifestation of these new connections. Aesthetic sublimation that I have referred to above would represent a specific type under the kind of sublimation in that 'the beautiful' is but one means by which the subject may agentially reconfigure its usually symptomatic relation to its death drive. The danger comes when one forgets the *dirty nature* of the death drive, our typical and everyday way of being socially and intersubjectively, whereby the subject adheres to the axiom: to be clean is to be beautiful, even though this kind of beauty comes with the cost of a false sense of mastery - false such that that mastery is necessarily phallic in nature, which is to say that the lack of the subject becomes obfuscated and muddled.

On the level of the subject, then, Lacan helps us to see the strange and aporic position that the death drive has in relation to the feminine. Namely, subjectivity, in order to fully sublimate what it believes to be beautiful - a forged connection made here between cleanliness and aesthetic style - necessarily *makes dirty* or muddies its subjective coherences, that the subject, in truth, is decentered and never self-present. This phallic move, on the level of subjectivity at least, initiates a violent and insurrectionary *will to normativity*, we might say. In other words, to establish what one shines-up to be clean, there must, in the same maneuver, be a discharge of that which is dirty. This discharge, as Lacan (1992) insinuated, is less on the side of the death drive than it is with building cohesion, civilization, and relationality.

4 | LATE CAPITALISM AND THE HIJACKING OF THE DEATH DRIVE

Fong (2016) expands upon a psychoanalytic perspective that is more at the level of the subject by further envisioning how these insights might apply to society and economics. Specifically, the author develops the key concept of the *drive to mastery*, and situates it within the parameters of Marxism that can pave the way toward a critique of late capitalism. He offers us the following distinction between the traditional Freudian death drive and what he suggests is the undertheorized concept of the drive to mastery,

The death drive is a drive to eliminate any self/other distinction, to cast off difference and be reimmersed in the environment. The drive to mastery, by contrast, is a drive to build and reinforce the living organism's protective structures. (Fong, 2016, p.18)

To further expound on this underappreciated drive to mastery, Fong traces Freud's original insights in light of the move to historicization and genealogy that went on during the twentieth-century. That is, Fong straddles the line between assuming certain biological or human universals, such basic things as the need to be cared for, the morphology of the body, and so on, while also admitting that these universals are contextualized and influenced by their particular environments. Drive theory, as the case of the Wolf Man⁴ goes to show, is not arbitrated by inherent, internal, or enclosed drives that are not interlinked with the drives of other subjects - drives are molded and shaped

⁴One of Freud's most famous cases, the Wolf Man, a moniker that has outlived the actual name of the analysand, Sergei Pankejeff, helped launch not only Freudian dream analysis but also psychoanalysis itself. With regard to drive theory, this case study demonstrated that Pankejeff's neurotic and depressive symptoms were interrelated to feelings he had toward his sister as well as his relationship to his parents, perhaps as Freud suggested, bearing witness to the primal scene itself - seeing his parents have sexual intercourse. The debate between the literal or fantasy sense of the primal scene is not at stake here. What is important is to dispel with the misguided and solipsistic belief that symptoms arise on their own (a limited view of the disease model of mental illness, might be one good example, how biomedicine sees depression as resultant from lower-than-normal levels of serotonin in the brain). The subject's psychodynamic constitution is a complex co-construction that cannot be easily disentangled using a magic pill that would expediently deliver a cure.

by the drives of others, intersubjectively, and this leads to the development of social groups and inter-relations.

The critique of capitalism comes, for Fong (2016), through the subversive powers that the drive to mastery brings to bear on discursive structures and, more pointedly, the economic conscription (or subjection) of subjects. That is to say, late stage capitalism with its ideological implementation of neoliberal economies, in a certain manner, hijacks the individual's drive to mastery, creating new internal psychic tensions, to use terms Fong might employ, that are rarely in the best interest of the subject. As a result, operating psychically, as Butler (1997) argues, these incursions by capital mimic the psychoanalytic concept of the Real to a greater or lesser degree. That is, late stage capitalism through a complex process of allure, dispersion, and enticement sets a specific standard of beauty, examining this process at the level of aesthetics, whereby the behaviors of competition, compulsion, and purchase aspire to reach this ideal (an ideal that, we will see later on from Kristeva, is misplaced).

With the dawn of quarantine, we have to ask ourselves: How has the standard of beauty in late stage capitalism shifted? It is not enough, anymore, to simply level a critique of this hegemony in terms of deconstructing normative standards of beauty through dismantling hetero, patriarchal, white, cisgender or colonial discourse - although, that work is still crucial - rather, even more fundamentally, the other and every other is now *dirty*, an (a)symptomatic carrier of an invisible pathogen. To parse this into terms used previously, the discourse of quarantine represents the apotheosis of stratifying, discriminately, subjects under capitalist commodification insofar as relationality as such becomes purely transactional arbitrated by health, safety, and protection. The standard of beauty that this now entails paradoxically requires the other to be covered-over, literally by wearing a mask, a face shield, or gloves, while also in a socio-ontological sense being buried, unreachable, by mounds and mounds of dirt. I am, in other words, only clean to the other if I can protect them and myself from, in many cases, an assumed assailant, an "invisible enemy"⁵ to use Donald Trump's (Cathey, 2020) now notorious phrase, that requires an entire biomedical and industrial framework to diagnose, treat, and cure. This one question hauntingly remains: Will vaccination clean-up this dirt?

5 | SENSUAL POLITICS: BEING TOGETHER, ALONE

Analysis and critique are helpful avenues to pursue when performing a *curettage* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) of existing knowledges and dominant discourse. Purcell (2013) remarks how the violence of the procedure of a curettage is an important first step since it "dismantles the cage; it clears the way for desiring-production to create as it will" (p. 26.). In a biomedical sense a curettage is "a procedure to scrape and remove tissue from the inner lining of the uterus" (*Dilation & Curettage* (n.d.), para. 1). Yet, in the tradition of critical psychology, this procedure has as its aim the conceptual annihilation of traditionally held meanings that would give these historical concepts their theoretical intelligibility. Importantly, this makes the way for a refashioning of archaic and outmoded frameworks that work to segmentize and disenfranchise. Nonetheless, a curettage does not implant a positive seed in order to allow for something new to grow. Polity, on the other hand, germinates this new strain of discourse such that it's a creative, practical intervention and embodied enactment that produces new concepts and material systems. Julia Kristeva (2014) gives us this novel nucleus under the category of *sensual politics* or a politics of intimacy.

With the radical slogan - "intimacy is not the new prison. Its need for connection might, one day, initiate

⁵This kind of language is in itself interesting for the fact that it fascistically intensifies the rhetoric typical of the war on terror (cf. Beshara, 2019). That is to say that Muslims and people of Middle Eastern descent now do not just become the ire of discriminatory practices fueled by the mass media machine anchored previously by being able to signify specific terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda. Rather, the clandestine nature of this new 'invisible enemy' sends the paranoia and subsequent social unrest into overdrive, feeding certain conspiracy theories that create followings by having their members piece together supposed key pieces of information that are leaked anonymously. The guise of anonymity furthers the fevered kind of religiosity that borders on being messianic in nature therein threatening, in a very real way, if the insurrection at the capital is any indication (Leatherby et al., 2021), the bonds and institutions that hold the United States together as a nation state.

another politics" - Kristeva (2014, p. 3) heralds the return of what has, on her account, been obscured or, more conspiratorially, purposefully quashed under certain meta-narratives that have extensive historical roots in the West. That is, to return to Derrida (1976), the privileging of the *logos* concomitantly with the phallus has resulted in a version of metaphysics that finds its way into our writing practices and institutions, the use of certain metaphors and how they are positioned amongst themselves in order to create a worldview of inequity. In an attempt to undermine this, Kristeva valorizes Freud's discovery of the unconscious and its diabolic pursuits that exceed and escape meaning. The chaotic, libidinally roaming passions of the unconscious, if harnessed correctly, may allow a retrieval of the power of the negative. Kristeva says as much when she calls for a kind of 'return' - a retrospective return with not only the aim of conducting a historical archaeology in order to retrieve lost artefacts but, over and above, in order to regain the power of this negative energy.

At first blush, this may seem counterintuitive given the formula Kristeva offered earlier; namely, that a new political form may find itself in the familiarities of intimacy, with its affections for being close, sensual, and like the other. Nonetheless, the work that needs to be done, not of trying to stay clean in a more superficial sense, keeping the body hygienic, disinfecting surfaces, and so on, but of confronting the subjective threat of psychosis - in terms of drive theory: embracing and resubjectivizing the dirty nature of the death drive. Psychosis in its psychoanalytic treatment endangers subjective cohesion, the clean associations embedded in cognitive schemas, for instance. What can be even more menacing is when the subject hears, sees, or senses its own unconscious desires and afflictions out in the world, being a passive witness to the, again, diabolic pleasure that, in some cases, results in a break with reality. Kristeva is suggesting just as Freud did that part of the psychoanalytic cure is to repossess this negativity of the unconscious so that it serves the subject and, this is Kristeva's novel contribution, coalesces into a politics of intimacy. What this amounts to, then, is being able to actually be close to someone, intimate to another in a real and not superficial way. To regain a sense of the negative, as a result, only then provides the values necessary to launch political action under the conscriptive power of late stage capitalism since, as Fong (2016) has argued, the unconscious under this regime has been put to work to serve commodification, value, competition, and labor.

To better get a hold of this, Kristeva (2014) suggests that her own idea of abjection grants an avenue to pursue in order to understand a deeper level of intimacy. The term abjection is most substantially developed in her book *Powers of Horror* (Kristeva, 1982) wherein she likens this state of being to a terror that threatens subjective constitution. Abjection has nothing to do with cleanliness, as Kristeva (1982) makes clear:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior... (p. 4)

Those aesthetic forms like the corpse, a hateful smile, or a friend who stabs you, that are abjected and cast off from subjective cohesion provide the means by which the negative paradoxically fuels both internal psychic cohesion and intersubjectivity. Abjection is a kind of eclipse of life by death, a certain non-death in that one's mortality becomes all the sharper, put into relief against the annihilation, destruction, the negative. The nature of femininity that Lacan (1992) articulates corresponds to Kristeva's own notion of the violent and repulsive power that abjection seems to elicit. That is, Lacan sees the feminine as a certain container, void, or lack that has been purified in some way. This purity births aesthetic forms inasmuch as it is predicated on abjection (see Cixous, 1976). Indeed, it would only be through a kind of abjection, looking at this using a Lacanian femininity, that aesthetic forms, like beauty, clean, and politics, would be able to assume a form.

How does abjection factor into intimacy? Under quarantine, generally speaking, the very condition of being intimate was absent since, by its very definition, quarantining calls for social isolation - in order to protect the other from yourself, to keep the other or yourself from catching the virus and falling ill. Yet, as the virus has helped make explicit, *the discourse of quarantine has fostered subjects that are sicker*⁶ than prior to its advent. Pointedly, it is clear that cases of domestic violence have risen dramatically over the last year (Bouillon-Minois, Clinchamps, & Dutheil, 2020), there has been an overall decline in mental health and wellbeing (Henssler et al., 2021), and the availability of basic, life-sustaining necessities like food and water has been limited (Macias, 2020). The biopower at work under the guise of quarantine is not unlike the recursive logics of late capitalism that Fong (2016) points-out insofar as the apparatus necessarily needs to create more sick subjects in order to then be able to turn around and treat those very people - all the while, of course, making a profit and further perpetuating the death march of capitalism. Put into more concrete terms, politicians, public health workers, and other social authorities that redouble the discourse of quarantine remain ensnared by capitalist biopower that will not only have to manage the fallout wrought by the pandemic but will, no doubt, repeat the cycle, on different scales, again and again.

Intimacy, then, has nothing to do with spatial proximity. Intimacy means holding abjection. "Intimacy is not the new prison" (Kristeva, 2014, p. 3). Being in quarantine or not, one can still be imprisoned. The negativity of abjection destroys the prison cell, if we are lucky, and creates deeper and more enduring bonds between ourselves and others. Here, we find a form of polity that does not necessarily subvert the structures of late capitalism - as would, let's say, relying on strategies from poststructuralism like disavowal, *détournement*, or reclaiming. Instead, this refined being-with stands outside subjection through an incorporation of negativity. Kristeva (2014) invokes the Freudian insight of retroaction (*nachträglichkeit*), a theory of epistemology that covertly relies on the power of negation: otherwise known as the death drive. Kristeva (2014) uses the following words echoing this sentiment, "[Freud] maintains that the symbol and/or thought are a sort of negation, which itself is nothing but a transformation under certain conditions of rejection or of a disconnection proper to the drive, which is elsewhere called the "death drive" (p. 8)." The unwieldiness of the death drives is what allows the analysand's experience in analysis to result in an *anamnesis*, a psychological restructuring, and, in a more macro, social sense, creates a vision for a new form of political action - a politics of intimacy.

6 | THE PROBLEM OF TWO EVILS

This would amount to a kind of social or intersubjective restructuring, a cutting and then res-soldering the social bonds and connections that results from a romancing of extreme evil. Kristeva (2014) makes the distinction between radical evil and extreme evil. The former occurs when we stop questioning, growing, and reflecting - a sort of fascism that realizes "the superfluity of human beings" (Kristeva, 2014, p. 17). Extreme evil, by contrast, goes a step further and does not merely enforce a specific injunction, with regard to capitalism, to enjoy (Zizek, 1989), for example; rather, this version of evil "sweeps away the meaning of the distinction between good and evil" (Kristeva, 2014, p. 18) and is exhibited in socio-cultural and historical events such as the Holocaust. This is abjection in the raw, so to speak. The stripping away of libidinal investments and moral values producing a form of subjective destitution more radical than what one might find in the analytic clinic such that extreme evil brings into existence an unworld or a subject-lacking-

⁶Of course, I am not mitigating the substantial loss of life and unfortunate human suffering that has come to pass because of COVID-19. What I am saying is that a closer look at the structures that surround this historical event or rupture seem to be almost more viral than the virus itself insofar as they infect and continue to infect generations of people with forms of death and violence that mimic the underlying fascination we have with the negative or with the void. The human capacity for violence is historically well documented. By shifting this aggression to the register of desire, neoliberalism has successfully achieved a form of subjugation that is, in itself, reinforcing.

a-world culminating in a void of subjective interrelations and practical action.

One might wonder, how does the extreme evil that Kristeva sifts-out from the dirt, found in the diabolical acumen of the unconscious, as Freud might say, help foster a politics of intimacy? If Lacan (1992) is right to suggest that the death drive bears the reflection of the feminine, which is to say, permits aesthetic forms to take shape, then it would be that a 'sensual politics' forms only through its flirtation with extreme evil - a violent form of castration acceptance, to put it explicitly, insofar as the void, hole, or lack of the subject is accepted for what it is. Kristeva (2014) warns such a political formation is, quite obviously, not without danger since it comes close to psychosis, what she calls the "semiotic *chora*, this infra-linguistic musicality that all poetic language aims for" (p. 9). Sitting at the heart of the need to know or of belief more generally, the psychic experience of what Freud called 'the oceanic feeling' or maternal plenum, this kernel gives rise to representations that ignite inner experience. It is, in other words, the possibility of extreme evil that goes beyond and traverses normativity in order to not merely transgress (cf. Bataille, 1997) but to access a source of commonality, a sensual form of political action.

7 | CONCLUSION

Such a political process is not unlike analysis in as much as Kristeva (2014) relates that "I seek the logic of extreme evil so as to refine its interpretation in the transference - countertransference" (p. 17). This refinement and creation of *feminine intimacies* goes a long way toward countering antagonists of critical studies: one of their central claims being that the theory offers no positive conclusions or practical actions. Here, the opposite is the case, the critical *ethos* carried forward by the logic of extreme evil necessarily reforms social and cultural bonds in ways that bring people closer together, not in terms of space or proximity, the lifting of quarantine, so to speak, but empathically, pragmatically, and sensually.

The reworking and restructuring of the subject's relation to cleanliness, through the obliteration of ideality, as Kristeva (2014) relates, reveals an epiphany that the virus holds the space for something much more sinister. A substitution has taken place, in other words, whereby the invisible pathogen that is transmitted through close contact, sneezing, and coughing symbolizes the more extreme threat posed by the death drive. Interestingly, through its recapitulations of the logics of late capitalism (cf. Fong, 2016), the drive to mastery, in its perverted form, nowadays, has us hoarding cleaning products, toilet paper, and other perishables. The desire to obtain these products demonstrates clearly the subtle control biopower exerts on our libidinal investments. Moreover, the discourse of quarantine muddies the much more psychotic force that would threaten to undo our stakes in this very apparatus.

The close association between the death drive and femininity, how the two symbiotically bring aesthetic forms like beauty, cleanliness, and polity into being, suggests that the feminine intimacies of Kristeva's (2014) politics of intimacy undo the whole dramaturgical scene staged by the courtroom - that we are a subject on trial and our sentence is to do the work requisite of our own inner fear of extreme evil. Such a strategy, if it can be called that, is not on the order of avowal or disavowal, going beyond Foucault (2014) here. Rather, this psychotic confrontation regarding the arbitrariness of words, images, and objects with their associative meanings creates, in the subject, a sort of abjection that has been re-incorporated. The subject cathartically realizes the dirtiness of its own nature.

We are left to wonder, then, when the administration of the vaccine is over and life returns to normal, what will take the place of the virus? The pandemic has given us a unique opportunity to examine our relationship to the other, especially in terms of health, sickness, and cleanliness. Will this opportunity slip by? Or, will we seize the moment, as the discourse of quarantine winds down, to finish the work of developing stronger, more enduring, and intimate bonds with others in order to *Revolt!* - divesting our desire to find cleanliness under the disguise of

commodities and, instead, find solace in the dirt?

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