

## Communication and 'revolt'

### ABSTRACT

'Revolt' is usually associated with 'rebellion', or 'revolution' in a political sense, and at an intuitive level there is certainly a connection or similarity among these three concepts. The psychoanalytical theorist and philosopher, Julia Kristeva, has however developed a notion of 'revolt' (and, related to it, of 'revolution') that goes far beyond the common understanding of the term. Moreover, in her understanding of the concept, 'revolt' may indeed be a 'communicational' prerequisite for contemporary 'globalised' society to break out of an invidious (and potentially violent) standoff between a dominant world culture, subject to the logic of the market, on the one hand, and a fundamentalist ideological reaction to it, on the other. Kristeva points the way to a creative enlivening of individuals' lives, as well as of society at large, through her passionate elaboration on the potential for 'revolution' in language and communication, and also her development of the notion of 'revolt' as a legacy of Western culture – a legacy which is under threat in the present 'culture of the spectacle'.

## **INTRODUCTION**

What is 'revolt'? Commonly one associates the word with 'rebellion' or 'revolution' in a political or even 'military' sense, such as the rebellion of the slaves under the leadership of the gladiator, Spartacus, against the might of Rome in ancient times. Or the American, or French revolutions (in 1776 and 1789, respectively) may come to mind – against a colonial power (Britain), in the case of America, and against the oppression of the proletariat (and to a large degree the bourgeoisie) by the aristocracy and royalty in the case of the French Revolution. But reading the work of the psychoanalytical theorist and philosopher, Julia Kristeva (one of the most original thinkers of the present era), soon disabuses one of this prejudice. Take the following response, on her part (Kristeva, 2002: 99-100), for example to the question by Rainer Ganahl, namely: '*What is revolt, and where does this need for revolt come from?*'

In contemporary society the word revolt means very schematically political revolution. People tend to think of extreme left movements linked to the Communist Revolution or to its leftist developments. I would like to strip the word 'revolt' of its purely political sense. In all Western traditions, revolt is a very deep movement of discontent, anxiety and anguish. In this sense, to say that revolt is only politics is a betrayal of this vast movement... Therefore if we still want to conquer new horizons, it is necessary to turn away from this idea and to give the word revolt a meaning that is not just political. I try to interpret this word in a philosophical and etymological sense. The word revolt comes from a Sanskrit root that means to discover, open, but also to turn, to return.

It is important to notice that she emphasises the conquest of 'new horizons', and also the possibility of giving the term 'revolt' a new, but simultaneously old, meaning – that is, to 're-turn' to a meaning that has largely been forgotten, covered up by its one-sidedly political use. And imparting or rediscovering a specific meaning in the word also, crucially, implies communication. Unless people are apprised of the meaning and implications of 'revolt' as used by Kristeva at a communicational level, any potentially salutary consequences it might have, would be buried under a layer of ignorance and prejudice.

### **1. CONSUMER CAPITALISM AND THE CULTURE OF REVOLT**

Moreover, 'returning' to its etymological sense of 'return', is itself a revolutionary gesture in the present climate of globalised multinational consumer capitalism, where meanings are largely determined by the branding, marketing and promotion of commodities ranging from cellphones and motor cars to continents (the 'India'- or 'Africa'-brand) and people (for example, someone as 'marketable' as David Beckham), where the latter generally do not seem to realise or mind that they are reduced to mere commodities. And even if it is patently absurd to equate all the diversity of a continent like Africa to a 'brand' – think of Africa's varied cultures, its irreplaceable wildlife, its beautiful mountains and lakes, which are most enjoyable when there are *not* masses of tourists around – this process is already underway. Whatever the apparent differences among commodities, they remain commodities – entities to be bought or 'exchanged' for money, the great equalizer,

through which everything in consumer culture is reduced to an axiological quantifier, thereby alienating it from the personal value it may have for someone. This is why an oldish car – which may still be mechanically sound – is reduced in (exchange) 'value' year after year, and even if one is attached to it, car advertisements will inevitably be aimed at promoting 'new' cars at the cost of the 'old' in the mind of its owner. Few people can resist such pressure in a society where the fact that any 'new' commodity really belongs to the *same* order of things as the old, is ceaselessly covered up. Something that is truly novel will have to resist the almost irresistible pressure to be assimilated into the order of exchange value and 'marketability'. Hence Noëlle McAfee's (2004: 114) observation, apropos of Kristeva's call for a resurrection of the 'culture of revolt':

What revolt today? In an era when anything new, novel or disruptive is immediately co-opted into the same, this really is a pressing question. What revolt can there be in a world in which, as Kristeva puts the question, the culture of the show has supplanted the culture of revolt?

One could go further and raise the related question, how one could, or should communicate what Kristeva regards as the urgent need for a return to the 'culture of revolt'. But before one is able to answer this question, the notion of a 'culture of revolt' should be clarified. This may explain why anyone should perhaps, in Kristeva's judgement, be interested in pursuing such a culture, and not simply to wallow in the (well-disguised) homogeneity of consumer culture which, after all, claims, and seems to be able to, satisfy all human needs (*except*, if she is right, the deep-seated need for 'revolt' at a personal as well as societal *niveau*). From one perspective, that of the history of European culture, there is nothing remarkable about her call for a resurrection of the 'culture of revolt', and it is unproblematic to communicate what it means here – as she reminds one (Kristeva, 2000: 6-7):

Europeans are cultured in the sense that culture is their critical conscience; it suffices to think of Cartesian doubt, the freethinking of the Enlightenment, Hegelian negativity, Marx's thought, Freud's unconscious, not to mention Zola's *J'accuse*, and formal revolts such as Bauhaus and Surrealism, Artaud and Stockhausen, Picasso, Pollock, and Francis Bacon. The great moments of twentieth-century art and culture are moments of formal and metaphysical revolt.

Few people (assuming they are familiar with the cultural history in question) would have difficulty in relating to revolt in this sense – were it not for these intermittent intellectual or artistic challenges of what had become entrenched traditions at certain times, one could hardly, at all, have spoken of a 'history' of European (or any other) culture. It is well known that the Dada movement (see Dada 2006 & 2006a), for example, was provoked into existence by what the dadaists saw as the obscenity of the First World War's senseless slaughter, incongruously happening in a society that valorised 'pretty pictures'! Hence the dadaists' rejection of traditional art as metonymy of this society, and their use of visual and audial shock tactics to jolt people into realising that, instead of condoning the war and everything that underpinned it, they should revolt against it. But Kristeva does not want one to restrict 'revolt' to these intellectual and formally artistic rebellions. It is clear

that she wants to bring it down to ground level, as it were, to all human beings capable of understanding that, today, their very capacity to resist the dominant culture around them – consumer capitalism – is in serious danger of becoming, not just dormant or anaesthetised (which it already is), but perhaps altogether occluded. In McAfee's words (2004: 112): 'This culture of revolt is now in danger of extinction. It is caught between two impasses...' The latter are what Kristeva refers to as 'the failure of rebellious ideologies, on the one hand, and the surge of consumer culture, on the other' (quoted in McAfee 2004: 112). In fact, leaving aside the question of 'failed' ideologies on the political 'left', just how successful consumer capitalism has been at neutralising forms and practices that may start out as manifestations of revolt, is apparent in the almost total assimilation of many of the revolutionary graphic designs which emanated from the Dada movement (Economou 2005: 64-69). Who could miss the irony, that, what was actually intended as the means of articulating a devastating critique of, or revolt against, extant society, has been harnessed by mindlessly profit-oriented capitalism for its own ends of 'normalising' consumer behaviour! Hence – what are the chances of dislodging such routine consumer behaviour, which reduces most 'consumers' to puppets dancing to the tune of the puppet-master, capital? Is this conceivable, and, if it is, how does one communicate this to those consumers who are quite happy to continue being just that: consumers?

## **2. REVOLT, DISCONTENT AND PLEASURE**

To drive this point home, consider the following: In the earlier excerpt from her work, Kristeva (2002: 99-100) connects revolt with 'a movement of discontent, anxiety and anguish'. Who could possibly be attracted to something as ostensibly unattractive as that? And yet, I am willing to wager that, if I (or anyone else) could communicate (and concomitantly demonstrate *how* to communicate) to readers what there is about this that *is* attractive, even imperative to embrace, some would have the courage to do so. A good starting point to persuade someone that no one could really do without at least a modicum of revolt in their lives, is Kristeva's observation (2000: 7), that:

Happiness exists only at the price of a revolt. None of us has pleasure without confronting an obstacle, prohibition, authority, or law that allows us to realize ourselves as autonomous and free. The revolt revealed to accompany the private experience of happiness is an integral part of the pleasure principle. Furthermore, on the social level, the normalizing order is far from perfect and fails to support the excluded: jobless youth, the poor in the projects, the homeless, the unemployed, and foreigners, among many others. When the excluded have no culture of revolt and must content themselves with ideologies, with shows and entertainments that far from satisfy the demand for pleasure, they become rioters.

Is there anything here with which those unfamiliar with Kristeva's work – or psychoanalysis generally – could identify? What kind of pleasure is she talking about? The pleasure that consumers experience when they buy that new cellphone with the camera and radio functions? That new car, which surpasses the neighbours' as far as sheer pizzazz goes? Or the Compact Disc-player with better sound reproduction than ever before? The new hiking boots that come with a two-year guarantee? No – not in so far as a certain kind of pleasure accompanies the act of buying. This

kind of pleasure is not what Kristeva has in mind when she links 'revolt' with the 'pleasure principle' (first formulated by Freud). *But* – when you listen (and I mean really 'listen', not when it is playing in the background)<sup>1</sup> on your new CD-player, to the choral section of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, and the sheer beauty and rousing power of the following 'revolutionary' vocal-symphonic passage, you may well be privy to a vicarious experience of the vision of universal liberty that Beethoven as Romantic espoused, and which this music communicates in unsurpassable manner to attentive listeners:

Freude, schöne Götterfunken,  
Tochter aus Elysium;  
Wir betreten Feuertrunken,  
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!  
Deine Zauber, binden wieder,  
Was die Mode streng geteilt;  
Alle Menschen werden Brüder,  
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt!<sup>2</sup>

And this experience (as well as many similar, musically or cinematically mediated experiences – and not only ones restricted to Western culture and art) would impart *pleasure* – albeit of the inimitable, imaginatively generated variety that is accessible through great art – of the kind that is inseparable from the pleasure principle. What is the difference? The supposed 'pleasure' accompanying buying consumer goods – in accordance with the capitalist ideological adage, 'Shop till you drop!' – yields, at best, an ephemeral, fleeting 'pleasure' which rapidly gives way to the dissatisfaction born of the realisation that a 'newer', 'better' model or alternative brand of the same commodity has become available, and is without doubt a 'Must have!' In other words, as Joel Kovel perceptively points out (2002: 52), consumer capitalism really promotes a state of constant *dissatisfaction* – it is 'wrong' and undesirable to be 'satisfied' with a consumer product for too long, whatever the promises of 'satisfaction' that may have accompanied advertisements and promotions of the product in question. No sooner has it been acquired, than it must be made to be seen as inadequate, otherwise the wheels of capital would not turn fast enough for maximum profits to be made.

In contrast, what Kristeva alludes to as the pleasure accompanying 'revolt' is precisely – as she specifies – the experience of having overcome an obstacle of some sort, having challenged - with good reason - some injustice, some unjust law (like those reinforcing apartheid in the era that bore that name), or oppressive authority, in the name of something 'greater', more valuable, or more imperative. In the case of listening to Beethoven's 9th Symphony such an experience of struggle overcoming oppressive barriers is musically mediated. But it is probably also the case that every person can recall a situation where she or he felt constrained to protest, resist or challenge

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<sup>1</sup> See in this regard Adorno's (1978) trenchant analysis of what he calls the 'regression in listening' witnessed in the modern age, where reproduction of art has become possible, where music recedes more and more to the status of 'background sound', and where 'listeners' are more interested in the technical equipment than in the experience of the music that it reproduces.

<sup>2</sup> Freely translatable as: 'Joy, beautiful, divine Spark, Daughter from heaven; Drunk with fire, we enter, heavenly, your holiness! Your magic unites again, What fashion has split asunder; All people become brothers [and presumably 'sisters'], Where your gentle wing(s) tarry!

something or someone in the face of having been treated unfairly or unjustly, or perhaps when one did so on behalf of others who could not stand up for themselves. Let me see if I can communicate what is at stake here; if I'm successful, it means that the potential for 'revolt' in Kristeva's sense is still there, perhaps latent, perhaps already actualised to some degree, maybe recollected, recognised as something participated in at an earlier stage of one's life. This may take the form of something small – a child mustering the courage to point out to a parent or teacher that she or he has been discriminated against or overlooked in favour of someone else who has unfairly been privileged. It would be characteristic of 'revolt' that, should the act of rebelling against authority unjustly exercised, fail in the face of power, a certain 'pleasure' or satisfaction may still be experienced in the knowledge that one's 'revolt' was justified. Or it could assume the guise of a more serious conflict between power and resistance, as when someone or a group of people in positions of discursive power<sup>3</sup> (people in management positions, who are the agents of management-discourse, for example) see fit to victimise an individual employee or group of individuals. Should the latter simply allow the former to ride roughshod over them, there could be no pleasure or satisfaction that one has 'stood up for oneself', while, if the less powerful of two discourses opposes the more powerful at its peril, with no guarantee of success – for instance when management abuses its privileged discursive position at the cost of employees' rights – a 'revolt' has taken place, and those who have staged it gain a certain fulfilment from having done so, irrespective of whether they 'win' or 'lose'.

Incongruous as it may seem, however – and this is what I am at pains to communicate to readers – *even if one should lose one's life* in the process, resisting or revolting against an unjust or cruel authority may yield 'pleasure' of the kind associated with the pleasure principle<sup>4</sup> (and I don't mean masochism). How is this possible? Such an event would be structurally instantiated by the massive revolt that the slaves engaged in under the leadership of the gladiator-slave, Spartacus, against Rome in antiquity (in 72-71 BCE, to be more precise, see Mallory 1971: 440), at the end of which he and thousands who followed him were executed by the Romans. This represents what Lacan calls 'the revolutionary's choice: freedom or death!' – the situation which, unlike the so-called 'mugger's choice' ('Your money or your life!'), which is a lose-lose situation, entails a win-win scenario instead (Copjec 2002: 17-19). Why? Because it is better to fight for freedom from inhuman suffering under tyrannical oppression, than to endure it: if you suffer it in silence, you don't live a properly human life anyway; hence it is better to resist, which may result in freedom from oppression (winning), or in death (which likewise frees one from such inhuman suffering (winning)). Hence the 'pleasure' (or *jouissance*) associated with it (see footnote 4). Hence also the convergence of 'pleasure' and 'revolt'. This could be explained more carefully, though, with the earlier examples in mind.

Psychoanalytical theorist, Kaja Silverman (1983: 57; see also Freud 1957: 38-45), observes that: 'For Freud, pleasure represents the absence of unpleasure; it is a state of relaxation much more

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<sup>3</sup> I am using the term 'discourse' here in the Foucaultian sense of 'language invested with power'. Patriarchal discourse, management discourse, religious discourse and bureaucratic discourse are all instances of this. For an elaboration of discourse in this sense (in relation to the commitment of crime), see Olivier 2003.

<sup>4</sup> It would be more accurate to speak of the kind of 'pleasure' attained by such a supreme sacrificial act as *jouissance* (ultimate pleasure or fulfilment) in Lacanian psychoanalytical terms. See Lacan's 'ethics'-seminar (1997: 262-283) for the way in which Antigone, who sacrificed her life for her brother, embodies such *jouissance*. The latter is the correlate of 'desire' in a (Lacanian) psychoanalytic sense.

intimately connected with death than with life'.<sup>5</sup> Again it may appear to be incongruous, but this remark simply means that all mental activity is governed by the pleasure principle in the sense of the tendency to diminish unpleasure or discomfort, tension, pain, as much as possible. (For instance, when we are hungry, we eat to lessen 'tension; when we are cold, we look for warmth to do so, and so on). To understand what Kristeva means by positing a connection between 'revolt' and pleasure in this sense, one has to recall that, in the normal course of events, it is sufficient to do those things that remove discomfort, like eating, drinking, sleeping, shopping, travelling to work to earn a living, and so on. This means that the so-called 'reality principle' (Freud 1957: 43; Silverman 1983: 58-59, 133) is put in the service of the pleasure principle – it is not enough to dream of food, or to imagine eating it; such attempts to attain 'pleasure' are merely hallucinatory and do not have any substantive effects; 'real' food has to be found and ingested. For as long as one is in a position to satisfy the demands of the pleasure principle by the mediation of the 'reality principle', there is no need to 'revolt', one might say. But as soon as consideration or negotiation of the 'reality principle' becomes problematical, or is blocked, for example such as when one is retrenched and unable to find another job, or under conditions of economic recession (or worse, depression, or even war) it may prove to be extremely difficult to satisfy the demands of the inescapable pleasure principle. Under such conditions, where one's very physical existence may be at stake, 'revolt' is called for. It may make all the difference. But – understandably – this is extremely difficult to communicate to people who live under conditions of relative wealth and consumer bliss, except by means of evocative descriptions, or examples, or evocations of imaginary situations with which they are able to identify.

What would be cases of such situations? A sense of what is involved here may be apparent from what was alluded to earlier, namely a situation where one is, say, an academic at a university going through a merger process. Having rested on one's laurels for a number of years (that is, satisfying the pleasure principle by negotiating 'reality' with the means at one's disposal: using one's income to enlarge one's house and to buy a luxury car, but not expanding one's intellectual horizons through the requisite research in one's field) one has not taken cognisance of the fact that social 'reality' has changed drastically, and that, because of relative academic inactivity, the means to negotiate 'reality' with the necessary economic means is threatened by the spectre of retrenchment. At this time in the process, 'revolt' in Kristeva's sense would only help in so far as one may 'revolt' against one's own complacency, which has brought one to this sorry pass, and rebel against one's own mute, smug earlier acceptance of the *status quo*, by setting one's mind to either engaging in creative, productive academic activity to demonstrate one's prowess in one's field, or leave academia and engage in constructive activity in a new, different field. At any rate, Kristeva's point is that *anxiety* – a certain sense of 'nothingness' within oneself – could be very productive in this situation, to the extent that it may trigger a 'revolt' on your part. In other words – complacency must, sooner or later, make way for creative rebellion.

To push this scenario further, and now resorting to Lacanian psychoanalytical terms: it may be that, when the alienation accompanying a merger process reaches a climax, and the full implications of the changed contours of social and economic 'reality' have become apparent, a sense of 'trauma'

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that, as set out in *Beyond the pleasure principle* (Freud 1957a), there is something more fundamental to psychic functioning than the pleasure principle, namely the death drive, and ultimately the former can be seen as being in the service of the latter (which tends towards ultimate stasis, or the complete absence of all excitation and tension), although it mostly functions alongside it. Hence Silverman's remark.

may set in, and in the shape of the inability on the part of individuals to cope with the changed situation at any of the levels to which they have been accustomed. 'Trauma' here means, in Lacanian terms, the disruption of one's imaginary (iconic) and symbolic universe (the shattering of the image-configurations and language-frameworks or discourses which normally serve to negotiate social 'reality'), to such a degree that one 'knows' *that* 'something' devastating has happened, but one is not able to say exactly *what* it is (see Olivier 2005: 671-680), and the more one tries to find words or explanations of what has happened, the more the phenomenon or event recedes and eludes one's grasp – despite the urgent, inescapable need to talk about it and find new ways to come to terms with it (see Olivier 2006, for a discussion of the 9/11 attacks as an instance of trauma in this sense). In Lacan's terms, the 'real' (to be distinguished from 'reality') has disrupted or impinged upon one's personal world, and has confronted one with the 'internal limits' of the language (see Copjec 2002: 95-96) that has served one adequately up to this point, but which no longer does so. This is the moment when a reconfiguration of one's symbolic universe – one's customary communicational frame of reference – becomes imperative, and a personal 'revolt' is called for. Anyone who can identify with the situation sketched here, would understand what it is that Kristeva attempts to *communicate* with the notion of 'revolt'.

### **3. ECOLOGICAL REVOLT**

But one should go further to grasp what is globally at stake today, the urgency of which Kristeva wishes to stress. Would a set of circumstances where one's very humanity were threatened, count as a situation calling for 'revolt'? And could what was referred to earlier as 'the revolutionary's choice' perhaps have something to do with this? First, it should be noted that there is a good deal of evidence that, what I have described above in imaginary terms as a crossroads-situation in an academic's life, is paralleled, globally, in factual terms – widespread ignorance of this state of affairs on the part of global consumers notwithstanding. This mondial crossroads-situation is captured succinctly by Joel Kovel (2002: 17) where he observes: 'From countless *environmental* events we derive a crisis of global *ecological* proportions'. Or, more elaborately (2002: 5):

As the world, or to be more exact, the Western, industrial world, has leapt into a prosperity unimaginable to prior generations, it has prepared for itself a calamity far more unimaginable still. The present world system in effect has had three decades to limit its growth, and it has failed so abjectly that even the idea of limiting growth has been banished from official discourse. Further, it has been proved decisively that the internal logic of the present system translates 'growth' into increasing wealth for the few and increasing misery for the many. We must begin...therefore, with the chilling fact that 'growth' so conceived means the destruction of the natural foundation of civilization.

From a wide spectrum of sources Kovel (2002: 3-27) has assembled persuasive evidence to the effect that, since around 1970, the environmentally damaging process that began centuries earlier (with the Industrial Revolution) has started yielding conspicuous symptoms of the earth buckling under the colossal strain of humanity's considerable, inconsiderate and short-sighted industrial



activities. It is impossible to enumerate all or most of these manifestations of what amounts to a genuine geophysical and geobiological pathology here. Suffice it to point to only one sweeping fact: the earth's oceans' temperature has, on average, increased by about 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit during the last century (arguably because of humankind's industrial activities, resulting in what is known as 'global warming'), which has led to a significant decrease in marine organic productivity, and probably to a change in thermo-weather patterns, as well as to the death of an alarming percentage of corals, and a steep decline in fish populations (further ruined by human overfishing). Add to this the contamination of coastal waters, to such an extent that many swimmers at popular beaches become ill from swallowing harmful bacteria and other contaminating materials (Kovel 2002: 17), and one may begin to grasp the magnitude of the growing catastrophe. Kovel is not the only thinker to have taken the situation briefly alluded to here seriously;<sup>6</sup> others have done so, and even a mainstream journal such as *National Geographic* (September 2004) has sounded the alarm about the precarious state of the natural environment, and its possible effects on human society.

What is the connection between this ostensible digression and the notion of 'revolt' in Kristeva's work? It should be apparent from the excerpt, above, where Kovel establishes a causal link between the 'growth', characteristic of the 'present world system', and the calamitous state of nature. Isn't (economic) 'growth' precisely what consumer capitalism – inextricably joined with what Kristeva calls the culture of 'spectacle', 'show' and 'entertainment' – is predicated on? Perpetual, short-sighted, self-justifying (that is, not really justifiable, except on its own terms), and, it would seem, 'limitless' growth. Except – no economic 'growth' in a *limited* spatio-temporal sphere *can* be limitless. Not only are the world's resources limited, but given the world-population, the relation between such resources and the ever-growing number of humans is bound, sooner or later, to manifest itself as severe scarcity – accompanied by violent struggle, or worse, by abrupt, catastrophic changes in global climate patterns. Hence, the parallel between my earlier imaginary local scenario in an individual's life, and what I referred to as a demonstrably factual global condition: just as the fictional individual is jolted into the shocked awareness that he or she has been living in a fool's paradise, and that the time for 'revolt' (born of anxiety) has arrived, the large masses of consumers in the global, postmodern culture of entertainment, information and electronic communication, was by several authoritative accounts, been blissfully unaware that they have been fiddling while the proverbial Rome has been burning. *The time for global 'revolt' is here* – unless significantly increasing numbers of people take note of this communication from various thinkers, journalists, photographers, cinematographers (like the inimitable Godfrey Reggio, director of the simultaneously stunning and shocking *Qatsi* trilogy<sup>7</sup>), and others (retransmitted here by means of this article), the negotiation of the reality principle to meet the imperatives of the pleasure principle is bound to become increasingly difficult, until it eventually reaches breaking point, that is, *trauma* on a global scale. But make no mistake: *'revolting', resisting, will not be easy*, because – and I hope that this *caveat* will be clearly communicated – the normative, dominant world order is one of consumer capitalism, which requires a certain kind of behaviour from all of us to be able to survive, and deviating from that, even infinitesimally, will meet with censure and disapproval on the part of the upholders or guardians of the system. Besides, even those people who wish to initiate their revolt

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<sup>6</sup> See Olivier 2005a for an investigation into the current state of nature on planet earth (specifically as far as it can be linked with capitalism), as well as for a list of sources in this regard.

<sup>7</sup> See Olivier 2005b for an analysis of the aesthetic significance of Reggio's truly astonishing cinematic achievement with the three 'Qatsi' films – *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi*, named in Hopi language to indicate 'Life out of balance', 'Life in transition', and 'Life as war', respectively.

against the global norms of consumerism by simply arguing for, communicating and promoting the limitation of economic growth for the sake of indefinite sustainability, still need to use the very system they wish to change into a more humane and nature-friendly system. But such ambivalence is part and parcel of the postmodern condition – Linda Hutcheon (1989: 11-12) calls it ‘complicity and [simultaneous] critique’.

#### **4. REVOLT, COMMUNICATION AND FUNDAMENTALISM**

There is another, related factor to consider here, too. In Kristeva’s understanding, ‘revolt’ may indeed be a ‘communicational’ prerequisite for contemporary ‘globalised’ society to break out of an invidious (and potentially violent) standoff between a dominant world culture (the culture of the show or entertainment), subject to the logic of the market, on the one hand, and a fundamentalist ideological reaction to it, on the other, as evinced in the turn, on the part of millions of people worldwide, to fundamentalist religions. She points out (2002: 106) that ‘...there is an element of revolt in the religious act’, reminding one that it is connected with what Freud called ‘oedipal revolt’ – the rebellion of the mythical band of primitive brothers against the father, in which he is killed, leading to remorse and a consequent, ceremonial social pact among them, an event in which, paradigmatically speaking, society and religion originate simultaneously. Hence, she argues (2002: 106), one should not be blind to the fact that when people turn to Islam, it is often because they are rebelling, in a manner analogous to ‘oedipal revolt’, against a whole range of things, including ‘...the misery of the Arab world...Zionist imperialism...rich, colonial France...banks...or against consumer society’. Referring to the ease with which disenchanted young French Algerians (with no avenue available to them to express or communicate their frustration) turn to dogmatic Islam, she continues (2002: 106):

The issue here is how to take into account the movement of revolt and not let it be strangled by dogmatism...An open mind, a mind set on revolt as I understand it, could become a permanent voice on a level of esthetics, literary creation, discussions, art and the communication which has to be established with these young people. It is this type of liberated form of representation of revolt that I am looking for. This implies that a new cultural space will open up that will not become a space for religious dogma, but one that understands the spiritual anxiety driving religious dogma. In this scenario it is via education, culture and creativity that this need for revolt could be expressed, without strangling itself in dogmatism and fundamentalism.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

To sum up, then: for Kristeva humankind’s capacity for ‘revolt’ – a capacity, it should be added, by which its humanity stands or falls – is facing potential suffocation by two grave dangers, namely monodimensional consumer society’s complacency, on the one hand, and the tendency to turn to religious fundamentalism, on the other. I have tried to indicate, briefly, what serious ecological concerns accompany the ‘anaesthesia’ inculcated by consumer capitalist habits and practices. As Kristeva also indicates, it is only through *communication and education* that people (not only those

in France with whom she is most immediately concerned, but people worldwide in globalised society) may be made aware that their need for revolt, however dormant it may be, could be resurrected, and be apprised of the many avenues through which they could channel it creatively. Needless to stress, practitioners in the field of communication studies – academics as well as 'professionals' in the private sector – would be guilty of gross long-term negligence and irresponsibility, unless they take the situation sketched here sufficiently seriously to integrate (or 'factor') it into their communicational practice.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> And if they think there is reason to doubt the accuracy or gravity of the situation as I have briefly outlined it, they are free to consult the many available relevant sources themselves (see Olivier 2005a for a list of some of these).

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