FOREWORD

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P*assions of Our Time* represents the work of an exemplary twenty-first century intellectual, Julia Kristeva, a true renaissance woman, a theoretical polymath whose many insights engage in political and social questions. This book takes us on a critical journey examining politics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, gender and sexuality, literary criticism, religion, and cultural critique. Earlier versions of many of the chapters in *Passions of Our Time* were previously published as articles, lectures, and book chapters. Kristeva's principle concern is time in its broadest sense in the contemporary world. Her attempt is to show how time, in today's world, has become a closed phenomenon and lost some of its kinetic force through digitalized uniformity and hyperconnectivity. Kristeva shows how internal drives, in a Freudian sense, can reactivate the kinetic force of time within us and therefore valorize its singularity in a world that is plural and diverse.

In a first essay, one that functions as a theoretical allegory of her writerly vocation, she demonstrates how her future was overdetermined by an activity she engaged in at a children's festival in Bulgaria—the festival of the Slavic alphabet (the holiday of the Cyrillic letters). This symbolic investment constituted the “letter,” her engagement with language as translation, by allowing it to become a sort of fetishistic object in which writing was the medicine that planted the seeds of her intellectual journey and cured her of the ills of living under communism.

As in her previous work, Kristeva engages in psychoanalytic speculation, but she never does so in a dogmatic manner, whereby the analyst would take on the position of an all-knowing subject. Drawing on Freud, Lacan, feminism, and theories of the maternal, Kristeva highlights the importance of psychoanalysis in today's world. As she sees it, psychoanalysis functions as a bridge between humankind and civilization, an activity that enables the unbuttoning of the enigma of human existence. To be sure, her engagement with this heuristic process does not allow the human subject to conform to social norms. Instead it enables the subject to come into contact with the singular freedom that gives birth to creativity and the escapades of the imagination.

Throughout, Kristeva examines the infelicitous consequences of the acceleration of time. What Kristeva perceives as the paradoxical result of this acceleration of time is what she refers to as a "deep nihilistic crisis" in which diversity has given rise to new authoritarian discourses, new anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. This crisis was produced by the failure to recognize alterity ("Every I is another") and the refusal to let the other speak. As Kristeva has previously shown in her study of Hannah Arendt, secularization produced the eradication of Jewish difference into the generic "man." In opposition to a cult of identity and the corrosive force of hate produced in a self-contained environment, Kristeva proposes a more felicitous reciprocating questioning that provides a model for living together as a plural phenomenon. The loosening of borders through the activity of globalization has allowed for multicultural cross-fertilization. Yet at the same time it has allowed for the resurgence of abject nationalism because of the infelicitous clichés proliferated by identity politics articulated in a self-contained hermetic world.

At the core of this nihilistic crisis is the failure, metaphorically speaking, of what she terms "the need to believe." This phenomenon does not call for a religious revival capable of producing a dangerous fundamentalism. Kristeva equates "the need to believe" with Freud, who secularized religion and used it as a trope for the ego's drive to create meaning and its desire for knowledge.

The acceleration of time in the digital age has created an identity crisis for both the individual and the nation. The dissolution of a community of differences has had a negative impact on reciprocal trust. To be sure, Kristeva does not espouse the idea that the universe is one, but puts forth

the concept of a multiverse open to the fractures of time. This dialogic approach gives new hope to the melancholia produced in the mechanistically closed temporal space of digital technology. The creation of a multiverse allows for the mobilization of creativity as it is libidinally enacted; it therefore allows for the transcendence of dogmatic political ideologies and the authority that technology imposes and regulates. As in the case of the latter, the Internet, that messianic messenger of the contemporary world, forecloses on creativity and imposes the fabricated images of human experience. This foreclosure on creativity functions as a form of political control marked as a new human narrative that undercuts the possibilities of difference. Technological policing closes off the creativity produced in the unexpected fractures of time. The response to new technologies can only be counterbalanced by an enlightened inner life. But this phenomenon, according to Kristeva, can only be realized by giving oneself to another as in the care of the mother for the child and the primary identification of the boy with the father. Accordingly, one is able to live by investing in the other and the subsequent creation of reciprocal links.

What is most moving in Kristeva's book is her attempt to demonstrate how, in multiple domains, globalization can mean more than technological transhumanism. Neither prefabricated ideologies nor unreflected identity politics should undercut the need to believe and the quest for self-knowledge. What is required above all is the commitment to unchain the constraints of uniformity and the desire to think otherwise. We find this practice throughout *Passions of Our Time* in Kristeva's Montaigne-like engagement with self-analysis that is at the core of our being. She enables us to rediscover the paradise lost carried in the potential of language to create through permanent questioning and self-reflection. Doubt is not a handicap but rather a *modus operandi* that allows us to proceed; hope is produced by a greater level of lucidity that enables one to bypass victimhood and achieve the promise of a singular freedom carrying within it the future of humanity.

As a psychoanalyst, Kristeva shows herself to be an intellectual engaged in the world, a role that positions her in the passions of our time. She calls out to humanity and its mosaic of differences and asks us to seek new freedom and reclaim our sterilized libidinal energy from its enclosure in a self-contained temporality. We are entreated to reconnect with the world and engage in a newfound humanism, such as in her essay on

normativity and disability and another on the possibility for Islam and psychoanalysis to meet and enter into a dialogic relationship. The only demand that Kristeva puts on her analysis of figures such as Barthes, Rousseau, Teresa de Avila, and Beauvoir is to uncover their singularities and their rebellious commitment to reflect upon the world.

This intellectually stimulating collection presents Kristeva as a new age humanist; she enables us to come into the presence of a happy warrior who opts for hope instead of despair. She discovers in the human spirit, among its many singularities, a driving force to create and the need to believe. The desire for the infinite as found in religion translates into a desire for knowledge and spiritual understanding.

Out of the malaise to which she bears witness, this happy warrior reinvigorates us with hope and urges us to rediscover the humanity in us. The permanent crisis to which we bear witness allows for endless renewal. Culture must be regarded as a cornucopia and a kaleidoscope in its aspiration to diversity; it is conceived as a kind of being-for-itself in its openness to endless revision. In particular, European culture cannot be defined as a singular entity; it must be conceived as an endless questioning capable of producing new confidences and the discovery of differences. If identity is always already in crisis, it must also be a clarion, a call to constantly reinvent ourselves and rebuild our psychic space. *Passions of Our Time* is an amorous engagement with the world and a hymn to the creative force that gives life meaning and depth.

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