

John Lechte and Maria Margaroni. *Julia Kristeva: Live Theory*. London: Continuum Books, 2004. 174 pp. Index. Paper.

Co-authors John Lechte and Maria Margoni provide readers with a highly-readable and concise collection of essays on the life and work of Julia Kristeva. In re-examining Kristeva's intellectual contribution in theorising and critiquing contemporary culture, the book provides an excellent overview to the work of this important scholar. Of particular interest is the time and care taken by the authors to contextualise her work – from *Revolution in Poetic Language* (trans. 1984) to *Colette* (2004) – “within their intellectual and socio-political contexts” (p. 1). This commitment is honoured throughout the book (of which the first two are sole authored by Margaroni, and the remaining three by Lechte), and provides the reader with a rich introduction, as well as re-exposition of the core concepts that ground Kristeva's thought. Rounding out the book is an interview conducted by Lechte with Kristeva on her life and work.

The book excels in centring the role of Kristeva's critical and creative thought as a pillar of poststructuralism. Central to this contribution is the deconstruction of central themes in Kristeva's thought. Key concepts such as “semiotic”, “subject”, “symbolic”, “Oedipus”, “political agent” “violence”, “love and depression”, “revolt” and “the female genius” are ably revealed as central to the complex, rigorous and deep questioning of political structures and social traditions that define Kristeva.. Equally well presented is the importance of Kristeva's work in redefining creativity in relation to a broader and more radical critique of culture and society.

Each chapter is centred on one of the main themes in Kristeva's work. Chapter one, “The Semiotic Revolution: Lost Causes, Uncomfortable Reminders, Binding Futures” focuses on *Revolution in Poetic Language*. The chapter is a precise and well-thought out examination of Kristeva's politics at the time of writing, as well as her attitudes towards the theoretical frameworks dominant in France at the end of the 1960s. More importantly for students of social and political theory is the attention granted in the chapter to Kristeva's theorisation of the “subject” as both an unstable psychic process, and a political agent.

Chapter two, “The Trial of the Third: Kristeva's Oedipus and the Crisis of Identification” revisits the Oedipus complex found in *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (2000). Margaroni contextualises Kristeva's mistrust in the paternal function, and her effort to reclaim its value function in offering an overview of Oedipus in Freud and Lacan. This chapter will be of interest to readers keen on Kristeva's thinking on the process of identity formation and the role of the mother in the Oedipal event as it weaves together different

threads in her thinking from *Tales of Love* (1987), to *New Maladies of the Soul* (1995), and finally *Intimate Revolt* (2002). This is an important chapter that will be of benefit to readers working on disrupting structures of patriarchy, as well to undergraduate students who are new to Kristeva's feminism.

"Love and Death by Any Other Name...(On Love and Melancholia)" takes the reader back to Kristeva's earlier work -- *Tales of Love* and *Black Sun* (1989) -- in pursuit of issues again raised in later work, namely the trilogy on the Feminine Genius. This chapter provides a fascinating analysis of the subject, particularly of the relationship between melancholia and love as representative of the subject's denial of what could make love possible. Of particular interest is the exposition of Kristeva's privileging of Freudian analytical framework in theorising melancholia and love, and their impact on social relations in paternalistic structures.

Chapter four, "Violence, Ethics and Transcendence: Kristeva and Levinas" draws on Levinas' emphasis on ethics as transcendent of the Other, meaning that the Being is de-centred. Levinas' philosophy is invoked to highlight the central role of violence, conflict and materiality as the origin of both society and the individual. Kristeva's thinking about art and society is explored in analysis of the dissymmetry between self and the Other, as well as her ideas about creative processes -- art, writing, being in love -- as a basis for revolt that can lead to more than the formation of self and subjectivity; it can also lead to political and social change. The idea of the subject-in-process as a form of unconsciousness is a strength of this chapter, which not only questions Kristeva's complexity, while emphasising her controversial yet significant contribution to social and political thought.

The *pièce de résistance* of the book is the last chapter, "The Imaginary and the Spectacle: Kristeva's View", which addresses the contentious issue of the "society of the spectacle" and the double nature of the imaginary. Invoking the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Husserl, and Cantor, the chapter illuminates the relationship between the imaginary and infinity, understood as analogous to the realm of transcendence. Imagination is not illusion, as critics of Kristeva would contend, but rather a realm of infinite possibilities. This important revelation of Kristeva's association of the imaginary with revolt will appeal to students of social movements, civil society as well as state-society relations from the perspective of the individual agent.

Julia Kristeva: Live Theory is an introductory text but holds much wider appeal for students of politics, sociology and anthropology who are working on issues of individual acts of resistance to structural domination. A highly-readable, and comprehensive account of the

complex ideas of one of the most influential critics of contemporary society, the book will be of benefit to undergraduates and graduates alike who require a stimulating account of Kristeva's life and work. Scholars familiar with Kristeva's thought will appreciate a book that illuminates new directions in her thought, as well as the reformulation of older themes and issues without losing sight of the woman behind these complex ideas.

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