

Maria Margaroni, Apostolos Lampropoulos and Christakis Chatzichristou, editors. *Textual Layering: Contact, Historicity, Critique*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017. 297 pp. ISBN 978-1-4985-0133-0.

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*Textual Layering: Contact, Historicity, Critique* revives the textual tradition in the theoretical humanities by putting it in the conjuncture with the postmodern expansions after 1960s, among which is the theory of the spectacularization of the western societies (*la société du spectacle*, the fundamental concept of the French philosopher Guy Debord) and how we can resist to it using the intimate revolt, as Julia Kristeva suggests. By revisiting the concept of “layering,” widely used in the humanities, the book offers a panoply of analyses that intersect with multiples areas of knowledge and praxis, such as social sciences, gender and women’s studies, psychoanalysis, linguistics, literary theory, art, architecture, digital humanities. The articles (called chapters) in this collection have in common the idea of layering that is an extension of the post-structuralist thought that brought to humanities the understanding of: the Bakhtin’s *heteroglossia*, polyphony, the intertextuality (Julia Kristeva), the view of the relations between the text and the body (especially developed in the so-called French feminism), the text as a crossroad between the meaning and the body, thus the interplay between the symbolic and the semiotic *chora* (as Julia Kristeva has defined them), the Derridean view of deconstruction, to name a few.

In the General Introduction to this collection, “Textual Tradition, Body-Layering and Nagiko’s Seductions,” the editor Maria Margaroni illustrates the different aspects of the multilayered approach by analyzing Peter Greenaway’s film *The Pillow Book* (1996). In a more general way, in the opening of her text, Margaroni points out how the contributors to this book collection understand and use layering:

“... this book employs the concept of “layering” as a convenient node where some of the key terms in what post-1960s we call the “theoretical Humanities” intersect in more or less tension. From the perspective we are adopting here, it needs to be noted that these terms (e.g. textuality, trace, memory, différence, spacing, the fold, intertext, the polylogues,

and palimpsest, among others) have been crucial for the understanding and rethinking of three central postwar theoretical “scenes” – in Jacques Derrida’s sense of the term; namely, the scene of writing, the scene of history, and the (ob)scene of the (feminine-connoted) Outside.” (p. XVII)

The book collection is divided into three parts. Part One, “Thinking with/ Thinking between,” contains four articles: “Profane Mystical Practice: Resisting the Society of Spectacle or the Science of the ‘As If’ ” (Frances Restuccia); “Thinking the Image, Technics, and Embodiment: Julia Kristeva’s Challenge ” (John Lechte); “The Layered Being of Merleau-Ponty and the Being Layered of Deleuze: a Comparison of Two Conceptions of Immanence on the Basis of the Notion ‘Fold’ ” (Judith Wambacq); and “The / Turn and the “ ” Pause: Agamben, Derrida, and the Stratification of Poetry” (William Watkin).

The editor Apostolos Lampropoulos in the Introduction of Part One clarifies the title of this part (“Thinking with/ Thinking between”). According to him, “thinking with” is “also a thinking as a response to – older texts.” In addition, this title suggests that “thinking with” is closely linked to “thinking in between” that undermines the binary oppositions and their simplifications. It is also an “invitation to an extra layer that can be added above the old layers as a new rigorous reading.” This type of thinking can also be seen as Kristeva’s idea of intimate revolt to oppose the society of the spectacle. Thus, in the part one, the authors of the four chapters are adding extra layers of rigorous reading to thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Agamben, Stiegler, Hansen, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, and Derrida.

Frances Restuccia (“Profane Mystical Practice: Resisting the Society of Spectacle or the Science of the ‘As If’ ”) thinks in between Kristeva’s intimate revolt and Agamben’s potentiality as a resistance to the robotic way of the society of the spectacle. This brings Frances Restuccia to conclude: “Both Kristeva and Agamben combat biopower through Love insofar as biopower’s ‘supreme ambition is to produce... the absolute separation of the living being and the speaking being, *zoe* and *bios*, the inhuman and human’ (RA [ Agamben, G. *Remnants of Auschwitz*], 156). Opposing such a fracture, attempting to heal it, Love in Kristeva engages (to put it simply) self and nonself at the sacred intersection she privileges against the society of the spectacle’s soullessness, and Love in Agamben entails being-thus in a way that pours together what the society of the spectacle puts asunder.” (p. 21)

John Lechte (“Thinking the Image, Technics, and Embodiment: Julia Kristeva’s Challenge”) defines his interest to identify how Julia Kristeva’s approach to the images compares with three current approaches, these of Bernard Stiegler (“transductive” relationship between the human and the technical); Gilles Deleuze (“time-image” as a rhythm in the cinema making); Mark Hansen (“bodies in code”). Lechte concludes that each one of them echoes “Kristeva’s notion of the ‘subject-in-process’ and love and the

psyche as an open system.” (p. 37) He also reiterates “the relevance of Kristeva’s oeuvre with regards to the very latest thinking on subjectivity and technicity” (p. 37), even though this field is not usually associated with her.

Judith Wambacq (“The Layered Being of Merleau-Ponty and the Being Layered of Deleuze: a Comparison of Two Conceptions of Immanentism on the Basis of the Notion ‘Fold’”) thinks between on the nature of the language in the structuralist and phenomenological view of Merleau-Ponty and the post-structuralist sight of Deleuze. Merleau-Ponty’s idea, as Wambacq points out, is that: “language is a behavior and words are gestures.” (p. 40) The notion of ‘fold’ of Deleuze as a “nonexternal outside,” according to Wambacq, when applied to language, “means that every expression, every actual linguistic creation [...] is made possible by the transformation of the virtual which endlessly folds back upon itself, into a well-defined, or rather determinate difference.” (p. 45) Wambacq states that both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze use the ‘fold’ to describe the difference between the outside and the inside. As Wambacq explains, Merleau-Ponty is critiqued by Foucault (-Deleuze) [the way the author of the article writes these two names means that Deleuze is in the vein of Foucault – my note, I.I.-M.]. According to Merleau-Ponty the fold “structures the whole existence.” (p. 46) However, in the understanding of Deleuze, “the fold has to be situated on the level of the virtual and not of the actual.” (p. 46) Wambacq’s conclusion is that Merleau-Ponty comprehends the fold as a “harmonious unity;” on the other hand, Deleuze “considers the fold as the infinite movement inside a violent power field.” (p. 47)

William Watkin (“The / Turn and the “ ” Pause: Agamben, Derrida, and the Stratification of Poetry”). The starting point is Bakhtin’s famous theory applying heteroglossia to the genre of novel but is considering poetry as single language as opposed to the different voices used in the novel. This angle of view is challenged by Mallarmé and other poets of modernity and post-modernity, as Watkin notes:

“... certainly since Mallarmé’s *Un Coup de Dés*, modern and postmodern poetics has been marked by a profoundly stratified formalism. From the clear strata of the various strands in Mallarmé’s masterpiece, grammatologically marked using simple typographical variance, through the great stratified works of modernism such as Pound’s *Cantos* and Williams’s *Paterson*, to the recent palimpsest texts of American poet Susan Howe, the much vaunted nontranslatable and thus singular language of poetry has committed itself to a graphical stratification not merely equal to that of prose but indeed unavailable, on the whole, to prose.” (pp. 50-51)

Watkin uses the very different views of Agamben and Derrida on language to show some important similarities between them, thus their understanding of the pause, caesura, and enjambment, hence the stratification/ layering of the poetry, especially in

the formalist poetry of Mallarmé and Pound. To illustrate this common view, Watkin also uses as an example of a layered poetry the poem “Thorow” of the American postmodern poet Susan Howe (b.1937), calling the final page of this poem “Howe’s completion of the Mallarmean project.” (p. 55)

Part Two “Displaced Pasts, Emerging Topographies” is also comprised of four articles: “Layering and Extending: Architecture’s Traumatic Work of Mourning” (Michael Beehler); “The ‘Forgotten’ as Epic *Vorwelt*” (Brendan Moran); “*Halal* History and Existential Meaning in Salman Rushdie’s Early Fiction” (Adnan Mahmutovic); and “Tactical Reason: Philosophy and the Colonial Question” (Marios Constantinou).

Apostolus Lamropoulos in the Introduction of Part Two characterizes this part the following way:

“It is not surprising that alternative historiographies either of the past (such as museums and monuments) or of the future (for instance, political and ideological manifestos) can open up even more controversial debates, from the (im-)possibility to speak about the experience of the Holocaust and represent it in fragments or traces, to the ways in which patterns that relate to tyranny and colonialism might be reproduced in democratic constitutional projects. The second part of the volume follows precisely in this direction.” (p.65)

Michael Beehler (“Layering and Extending: Architecture’s Traumatic Work of Mourning”) explores in depth the theme and ethics of mourning in architecture. One of the examples Beehler analyzes is Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin (2001). He puts into work his analysis using the distinction between *face vs façade* as theoretical metaphors for truthful experience vs appearance; some concepts of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion’s studies of saturated phenomena as well as by comparing and contrasting Libeskind’s work with Schoenberg’s opera “Moses and Aaron.” In the end of his analysis, Beehler concludes:

The *iconicity* of architecture, then, solicits the experience of the impossible morning that *must fail* (if it is) to succeed, and vice versa. And this is the trauma of building. Fated to an archival of architectural fever, destined to design buildings that can never *innocently* embody the face, doomed to *both* the idealism of Moses *and* the golden calf of Aaron, Libeskind’s works like Rothko’s paintings, have much to do with “intimations of mortality:” never concrete *answering*, but rather fatally rebuilding and *extending into the future* the unresolvable question of the face and façade in a mourning that can only, ever, recite its own unfaithful idolatry.” (pp.79-80)

Brendan Moran (“The ‘Forgotten’ as Epic *Vorwelt*”) focuses on the German notion of *Vorwelt* (literally – ‘pre-world’) as a “forgotten epic” digging down and layering up on the Walter Benjamin’s writings on Kafka. In the first part of the article Moran works with the Benjamin’s contradictory understanding of *Vorwelt* as myth and also as a freedom from myth. According to Benjamin, this is a “force effective in all humans.” Morgan elaborates on this understanding: “This common–epic–disorientation frees experience from myth, which is an oppressive or repressive account of experience.” (p. 81) He concludes on our common “unmythical *Vorwelt*.” “Myth shows itself to be myth in its denial of, or disregard for, this unincorporated “forgotten,” this unincorporated *Vorwelt*, that – for Benjamin – is integral to Kafka’s world and is our shared, our epic, world.” (p. 93)

Adnan Mahmutovic’s topic is stated in the title of his text: “*Halal* History and Existential Meaning in Salman Rushdie’s Early Fiction.” According to *Encyclopedia of the Quran* (2006) “The words *halal* and *haram* are the usual terms used in the *Quran* to designate the categories of lawful or allowed and unlawful or forbidden.” *Halal* is mostly used in relation to Islamic dietary laws which is mostly about specific method of slaughtering animals, in which the blood must be drained from the veins. In this context, we can understand way Mahmutovic emphasizes that “*Halal* history as the bearing metaphor for censorship is at first sight culture specific, because the idea of *halal* belongs to the Islamic regulations of existence.” (p. 95) *Halal* history is about sanitizing history from its blood through censorship. The article focuses on Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children* (1981) based on the transition of India from the colonialism of the British Empire to independence and the appearance of Pakistan as a state, after the partition of what was known as British India. In this postmodern novel with elements of magical realism, the main protagonist Saleem Sinai tries to keep the existential meaning of history by preserving its blood and thus by creating fictional narratives that are more truthful than what is considered to really happen. Mahmutovic sums up:

“For Saleem, such would be a positive *telos* sheltered in the novel form. His metaphor of *halal* history demonstrates the character of an artwork to open up layers of meaning to a dialectical movement, which furthermore potentially produces new meanings that will or will not palimpsest the former. By being unfaithful, or rather doing something non-*halal*, Saleem emphasizes certain structures of meaning, inheritance, and production, which are bound to the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in (hi)story writing. Though Saleem propounds *haram* fiction, he cannot avoid establishing historiographic metafiction’s own *halal*.” (p.107)

Marios Constantinou’s “Tactical Reason: Philosophy and the Colonial Question” is one of the most philosophical texts in this collection. It embraces the difficult question of

law as posited, by reflecting on some of Kant's contributions in this domain of thought. The third section of the article is, in fact, its theoretical climax. The editor Apostolos Lampropoulos summarizes in a precise way the contradictions that this part reveals:

“The third section (“The Thermidorian Closure of Kant’s Legal Positivism”) sees in Kant the quintessential ambivalence of modernity between the will to revolution and constitution, interrogation of law and unquestioning conformity to its rule, the quest for truth and the pursuit of profit. [...] For Constantinou, Kant’s legal positivism is predisposed to adjust the faculty of practical reason to *raison d’état* and to turn over political judgement to the juridical imperium of the Thermidorian apparatus.” (p.68)

The fourth part of Constantinou’s article is the theoretical denouement, where, as Lampropoulos states: “Through a reading of Tocqueville, Constantinou criticizes the subtraction of political audacity from municipal liberty. He concludes that, by embracing both right and non-right, the new spirit of imperialism fixates itself pragmatically to the *no thing* as its object, becoming therefore a virtual impossibility.” (p. 69)

Part Three “De-Layering of the Feminine” consists of five articles: “Kristeva’s Revolt, Illusion, and the Feminine” (Gertrude Postl); “The Layering of Abjection in Relation to Fetish: Reading Kristevan Abjection as the Unthought Ground of Fetishism” (Tina Chanter); “Reviving Oedipus: Oedipus, Anti-Oedipus, and the Nomadic Body in Kristeva” (S.K. Keltner); “Tragedy as De-Layering: The Opaque Immediacy of Antigone” (Kalliopi Nikolopoulou), and “Metaphysical Topographies Re-Layered: Critique and the Feminine ” (Elena Tzelepis).

Apostolos Lampropoulos in the Introduction of Part Three describes this part the following way:

“This part of the volume aims to rethink the feminine as a renegotiation both of the already established layerings that make up our notions of sex, sexuality, and gender and, perhaps, of the very concept of layering. This double possibility is precisely what the title “De-Layering of the Feminine” aims to reflect, also profiting from the ambiguity of the “of,” which produces the feminine not merely as the object of a de-layering process but simultaneously as its acting instant.” (p. 137)

The first three articles actively look at the different layers of Julia Kristeva’s theoretical body of works and actively try to de-layer them or to put additional layers. The last article uses Luce Irigaray’s views in a similar way.

Gertrude Postl (“Kristeva’s Revolt, Illusion, and the Feminine”) focuses on the crucial for Kristeva notion of revolt as a transgression of what is prohibited, as a repetition (as a return, Lat. *volvere*), and as a displacement. Postl posits on the feminine potential for revolt, presented by Kristeva, and clarifies that it has “nothing to do with violence or the literal overthrow of a given order” (p. 152). Postl concludes that in the society of the spectacle, perhaps, the challenge for women is:

“... not just to play with the phallic order but to play with the illusion of the phallic order, engaging in a game of illusions without getting lost in those illusions, using the means of the spectacle, interconnecting mystery, pragmatism, and atheism, identifying neither with the seductress nor the martyr but threatening both as necessary illusions and playing them against each other (“balancing pleasure and sacrifice” [quoting Kristeva *Revolt She Said*, Los Angeles and NY, 2002, p. 35 – my note, I. I.-M.]), engaging in artistic and linguistic interventions knowing that they might just add yet another layer of illusion.” (p. 154)

Tina Chanter (“The Layering of Abjection in Relation to Fetish: Reading Kristevan Abjection as the Unthought Ground of Fetishism”) mixes productively Kristeva’s notion of the abject with Marx’s understanding of the commodity fetishism. Chanter analyzes how abjection can work at the intersection of social class, gender, race, religion. From the perspective of the capitalist white male dominated society the abject can be the other taking different forms – from the gender other, race / nation other to the class other (immigrant workers, for instance). Chanter concludes that abjection can also be used as a tool of revolt:

“Abjection can be taken up as a strategy of survival, or protest, as a political maneuver, as an artistic endeavor that refuses to adhere to the canonical ways in which aesthetics has proceeded to discriminate purity from impurity, and beauty from ugliness, all the while making certain genders, races, classes, abilities, religions, nations represent some allegedly purified, idealized version of humanity, while others come to inhabit zones of illegibility.” (p. 167)

S.K. Keltner (“Reviving Oedipus: Oedipus, Anti-Oedipus, and the Nomadic Body in Kristeva”) reflects and elaborates on Julia Kristeva’s investigation of the dialectic between Oedipus and Anti-Oedipus in her three major works: *Power of Horror*, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, *La haine et le pardon* and the use of Kristeva of Freud’s, Heidegger’s, and Celan’s thoughts and takes on Oedipus as a figure of: our psychic life, the figure of dwelling, and the figure of nomadic body. Sara Keltner’s conclusion sumps up the most important inferences of her analysis on this very complex problematic:

“Kristeva’s revival of Oedipus represents something both ‘universal’ and ‘social-historical.’ Oedipus is at once a figure of psychoanalytical normativity and a figure that challenges the psychoanalytical normativity; a sacred, nomadic figure and a ‘deadly Greek;’ an archaic subject and a modern one; the genius and the failure of Freud. Even further, Oedipus embodies, and thus challenges, metaphysical and social binaries: intimate and public; psychic and social; male and female; foreigner/stranger and citizen; even German and Jew. Perhaps true to his appearance as both detective and criminal in Sophocles, Oedipus is a riddle, a stranger to himself – a boundary-being irreducible to a single structure, dynamic, or referent. The figure of Oedipus is thus, for Kristeva, *ambiguous*, and to such an extent that the figure seems to metamorphose into other figures radically at odds with whom Oedipus has come to represent, including most recently and surprisingly, Anti-Oedipus. Oedipus stands as a condensatory metaphor of a specific and traversable, sociohistorical field of difference in need of revolt.” (pp.181-182)

Kalliopi Nikolopoulos (“Tragedy as De-Layering: The Opaque Immediacy of Antigone”) applies the notion of de-layering to the tragedy and is in response to Judith Butler reading of Sophocles’ *Antigone* in her book *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (NY, 2000). For Butler, Antigone is a revolutionary figure who puts into question the social order. Nikolopoulos identifies this approach as an “optimistic theoretical assumption according to which theory can isolate specific problems, identify their social determinations [...] and thereupon undertake the project of improving the world” (p. 183). Nikolopoulos disagrees with this view using Nietzsche’s stand from *The Birth of the Tragedy* (1872) by claiming that such an “optimistic theoretical assumptions,” in fact, do not understand the nature of tragedy, which is irrational: “Hence, to understand tragedy as the process of de-layering requires a move away from discursivity and rationalization. It requires our attunement to tragedy’s fundamental law, which explodes all rationalization, and which Nietzsche expressed in a paradoxical, almost oracular, formula: ‘All that exists is just and unjust and equally justified in both.’” (pp. 184-185) Nikolopoulos concludes that Sophocles’ Antigone is “the enigma of transparency, of rootedness in the most extreme deracination – a problem that proves insurmountable for our optimistic, theoretical age of mediation.” (p. 194)

Elena Tzelepis (“Metaphysical Topographies Re-Layered: Critique and the Feminine”), using mostly the book *This Sex Which is not One* (1977) of the French feminist Luce Irigaray, digs into “the philosophical, political, textual, and sexual aspects of Irigaray’s mode of mimesis.” Tzelepis suggests that Irigaray’s view of *mimesis* is both “performative and deconstructive” (p. 195). This is Irigaray’s subversion of the philosophical tradition, her way to revitalize and revisit the concept of *mimesis* and its

ambivalent relation of women to it as an “affirmative deconstruction” (A. Lampropoulos, p. 141).

In the end of the collection is the Epilogue “Layering is Not” by Christakis Chatzichristou. It comprises reflections, in the form of fragments, on the notion of layering. The fragments are numbered L 100 – L 159. In the initial fragment L000 – the other two editors, signed with their initials as *MM* [Maria Margaroni] and *AL* [Apostolus Lampropoulos], recognize the importance of Chatzichristou’s exploration of layering by acknowledging: “Everything that precedes this epilogue (the introductions, the individual contributions, the 2007 IALP conference) owes its existence to Christakis Chatzichristou’s thinking on layering and his layered experimentations as an architect, a writer, and an artist.” (p. 209)

Chatzichristou’s fragments delve into layering in architecture (especially the notion of the ‘fold’), painting, literature and text (intertextuality), gender studies, philosophy. He defines layering as “more of a process than a product” (p. 213); he poses the question if the layering is an “ontological shift or an age-old practice” (p.223). Chatzichristou points out that layering upsets the *Gestalt* theory/ system “by violating the clear distinction between figure and ground, and figure and figure, consequently creating bad-gestalt” (p. 224). In the last fragment (L159) of his palimpsestic epilogue, he talks about the nature of layers:

“In layering, each layer could be seen as a two-dimensional “container” with various transparency, porosity, and memory. By varying its transparency it can be totally invisible or totally opaque. With varying porosity it can absorb or emit elements from to other layers. With varying memory it can go back to an “original” state or agree to “temporarily forget” some of its elements or parts.” (p.229)

Lechte, one of the grand connoisseurs of Kristeva’s work, underlines that thanks to its various layers, “Kristeva’s thought communicates with the central issues of our time” (p. 37). In fact, the presence of Julia Kristeva’s thought in many of the articles here proves Lechte’s conclusion. Kristeva embodies one of the important threads of thought along with these of Bakhtin, Benjamin, Derrida, Lacan, Deleuze, Agamben, Merleau-Pony, Hansen, Irigaray, Butler (to name just some of the thinkers whose theories are taken by the contributors in this volume as layers to build upon) that lead us, as readers of this theoretical adventure, through the multilayered labyrinth the book represents.

In conclusion, the book collection brings together an array of specialists by staging a multilayered meeting between them and the reading public from the fields of literary theory, psychoanalysis, philosophy, women’s and gender studies, architecture, visual studies, post-colonial and social studies. As a result, the book will be of interest to many specialists in the humanities who would enjoy and appreciate this multilayered collection.