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## Book Review

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Janae Sholtz, *The Invention of a People: Heidegger and Deleuze on Art and the Political* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

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## Book Review

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Janae Sholtz, *The Invention of a People: Heidegger and Deleuze on Art and the Political* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015)

For Gilles Deleuze, writing about a philosopher means uncovering the key concepts at work in her philosophical system with the problems to which these concepts intend to respond. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze states that “history of philosophy, rather than repeating what a philosopher says, has to say what he must have taken for granted, what he didn’t say but is nonetheless present in what he did say” (136). Any book on Deleuze and Heidegger must therefore not only put them into dialogue explicitly but make their problems (that their concepts were conceived to respond to) enter into dialogue. Janae Sholtz exposes some of those problems, especially concerning the philosophy of being or ontology, but unfortunately she seems to have missed the most urgent problems that Deleuze, sometimes with Guattari, was answering. What were these urgent problems? The changes in the modes of production with the neoliberalization of the economy and society, the crisis of Marxism that they were contributing to and responding to, the aftermath of 1968 and the future of revolution in Western Europe, left-wing terrorism, the rise of new philosophers, human rights, communication and thoughtless media discourse, the withering away of the working class identified as the revolutionary agent (the proletariat), the emergence of control societies, and so on. Some of Heidegger’s problems were “Americanization,” the atomic bomb, cybernetics, and technology, but also the decline of traditions and religion.

Deleuze and Guattari’s wild creation of concepts leads to confusion and misreadings, yet the reception of their work is perhaps symptomatic of how much can be found in their work. Like Hegel’s work which led to the divide between conservative Hegelians and the Young/Left Hegelians, Deleuze and Guattari’s work has produced a split between right-wing and left-wing Deleuzians. Their concepts are used by Right Deleuzians to understand and believe in the promises of contemporary neoliberal societies. Neoliberalism permits them to “become” and “deterritorialize,” to make themselves a “body without organs,” to travel through “smooth spaces,” to accelerate the process even further to find “lines of flight” in subsuming and delirious activities in the abstract world of financial services. As Deleuze notes so

clearly in his definition of the Left in his televised *Abécédaire* interviews, it is not a matter of morality but a matter of perception. On this point, Janae Sholtz is right: art, politics and ontology are zones of indistinction where forces and perceptions communicate, yet they cannot be extracted from their techno-social milieu, the inequalities and injustice to which Deleuzian and Guattarian concepts attempt to respond. Yet, the author does not refer to justice, inequality, capitalism, the State, power, etc. It is not that Sholtz should have written a treatise on political economy instead of this beautiful collection of interpretations. However, as I hope to make clear, a book on Deleuze (and Heidegger) that deals with “the political” and agency (a people) cannot do away with the ontic (or social) level, that is, it cannot do away with what Deleuze and Guattari fundamentally opposed. This book is important in drawing out the thematic of a people-to-come, and in many ways, its starting point is Deleuze’s borrowing of the painter Paul Klee’s phrase “We still lack the ultimate power, for: the people are not with us [*uns trägt kein Volk*]. But we seek a people” (Klee quoted at 117). Therefore the task of art is to invent the people that is missing (Deleuze write in French “*le peuple manque*”). Yet this appears more as a question rather than as a statement. Why are the people missing? And why are artists or philosophers those who can invent the people? “*Quid facti* and *quid juris*” Deleuze would ask, how can they aspire to this task? Where do they get their legitimacy or right from? (David Lapoujade recently identified all these questions as the guiding thread to Deleuze’s philosophical thought). Minorities can claim the right to be the new revolutionary agents, since they have been deprived of desires but also of a land, a language, a body, etc. Minorisation is also a condition of subjection organized by capital, and not only the new revolutionary subjectivity that should be celebrated. It is not that these replace the working class as the new proletariat, as certain interpretations would have it; they do not have a fixed substance either; they are screams, affects and intensities beyond the normalizing state of affairs.

The main body of Sholtz’s book is a commentary and explanation of some of Heidegger’s and Deleuze’s main concepts. Regarding Heidegger, the discussions move from *poiesis* and art as a saving power in relation to *Gestell* and technology (89-112) to the concepts of earth and world that are also significantly interpreted (96-106), and connected to Deleuze’s and Guattari’s own usage of earth in *What is Philosophy?*.

The commentary on “The Origins of Work of Art” is extremely insightful, especially when the author explains the small changes or additions that Heidegger made in the three different versions of the text. Earth, enigmatically described as “sheltering,” “does not give itself in terms of meanings and significances related to our human endeavors... [it] needs the setting-up of world in order to be itself or at least reveal itself” (100). The discussions on the cosmic and the planetary are also useful in making sense of Heidegger’s vocabulary and in highlighting the misinterpretations of

earth, soil and blood. It is by reading carefully the controversial 1934-35 lectures on Hölderlin and the 1933 “Rector’s Address” that Sholtz makes this clear:

If Heidegger is engaging in the politics of enrootedness, it is not that of those longing for a nostalgic return to a once great past [for instance Ancient Greece or Prussia]; it is nothing already present or already known, to be extricated or purified, and there is no simple return to an original source. (199)

It is because the *polis* is a place that unifies social relations that the soil of the earth is considered to determine the people (202). But this is also true for language, which is also treated as a place (“we *are* in language” [202]). The “task” and the “endowment” are also tied to Heidegger’s notion of people [*Volk*], compared to the “public” that remains tied to “everyday business” (209). The author is aware of the difficulty of this terrain, given Heidegger’s anti-Semitism and his involvement with National Socialism. It is not that Janae Sholtz and Deleuze forgive Heidegger for this involvement, but they also recognize the power of his concepts and his thinking. Hence, Deleuze’s words are taken by the author as a core element of the Heidegger-Deleuze relationship: “He got the wrong people, earth, and blood” (3, 12, 125). Heidegger therefore opened up new fields of inquiry in relation to being, art and politics, but continued to oppose difference and identity, to presuppose a “homology between Being and beings” (218). In short, and by largely following Oliver Marchart’s chart about post-foundational political thought, we can argue that Heideggerian political thought wants to derive everyday politics from the ontological realm (even when this is an abyssal ground), while Deleuze thinks we should constantly have access to the ontological as virtual (or as transcendental empiricism). In other words, even everyday occurrences and catastrophes provide access to the ontological, it is not something that is restricted to philosophers or theologians. The author is right to emphasize stability and “the unity of difference” in Heidegger, which she calls appropriately “metaphysical racism” (219). However, she does not distinguish enough between the two thinkers: she would agree with the claim that Deleuze is not a post-foundational political thinker, as defined by Marchart, but she does not activate sufficiently the potential of Deleuze’s political thought for today. Worse still, by emphasizing openness, fluidity and multiplicity, she risks essentializing and fixing such positive affirmations. As David Lapoujade states: “One should leave behind [*défaire*] the idea that Deleuze had only sung the joyful affirmation of the powers of life” (*Deleuze: Les Mouvements aberrants*, 22). This joy is closely tied to dangers and deaths one finds along the way. It is not that ontology comes first, but as Deleuze puts it in *A Thousand Plateaus*, “before Being, there is politics.”

Sholtz is right to build “conceptual bridge[s]” (128) between Heidegger and Deleuze since there are common gestures at play in the way they create concepts and use language in new ways in philosophy to pose new problems. Deleuze certainly understood philosophy as ontology, a transformation realized by Heidegger. Heidegger’s essay “The Age of World Picture,” for instance, seems particularly significant for Deleuze’s own project of noology (the study of “images of thought” and their historicity). Heidegger is interested in what defines the age as “world picture” since by using calculative or instrumental reason, modern societies have attempted to unleash a drive to dominate the earth, making it an unworldly world. The notion of picture is extremely close to what Deleuze means by “image of thought,” a “general theory of thinking, a thinking of thought” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 500). This is not a detail in Deleuze’s philosophy given that Deleuze emphasized in his 1986 introduction to the English translation of *Difference and Repetition*, the image of thought precedes the creation of concepts. The author rightly notes Deleuze’s explicit references to Heidegger’s lectures on thinking, but does not pursue this point to explain the political project behind it. Deleuze transforms Heidegger’s own understanding of thinking to define what the Left stands for: “The Left really needs... people to think” (*Negotiations*, 128).

One of the most successful passages in the book is the interlude on Klee, and the commentary on the astonishment his paintings produced in Heidegger (112-4). A discussion at this point on Deleuze’s own reflections on Klee would have been welcome, as well as a comparison with his treatment of Francis Bacon, for instance. Another brilliant analysis is given by the close reading of the “Six Basic Developments in the History of Aesthetics” (33-37) from Heidegger’s lectures on Nietzsche, which brings great insights into Heidegger’s own understanding of the relationship between art and aesthetics from a historicist point of view. Generally, the first two chapters of the book on Heidegger’s Nietzsche and Deleuze’s Nietzsche are very useful, in comparing their two interpretations and the consequences for their respective ontologies. A beautiful analysis of active/reactive forces from *Nietzsche and Philosophy* is given in chapter 2 (55-61), yet the larger political consequences of this are not drawn (for instance, the parallel between power and potential, *pouvoir* and *puissance* in Foucault and Negri). Nor does the author see in the commentary of the “Origin and Reversed Image” section of *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (60), the main question Deleuze had for Nietzsche: “how do reactive forces triumph?” Deleuze responds by arguing that reactive forces dominate by “subtraction”, by separating active forces from what they can do.

Even though she distances herself from the knotty problem of ideology critique, Sholtz is aware of the role of fiction, *simulacra* and the powers of the false, especially when she draws the useful distinction between Heidegger’s usage of myth as a way to pass from art to politics, and Deleuze’s own

tentative explanation of the role of fabulation in politics. Myth and fabulation are two distinct ways to draw together territory and earth (238). Kant is rightly convoked in the analysis of Deleuze's theory of sensation and perception (or percept), yet Kant could have also functioned as a "conceptual bridge" (much like Nietzsche or Klee) to map out the differential relations of a Deleuzian Kant and a Heideggerian Kant. The "plateau" on Axelos is less successful since there is no real engagement with Kostas Axelos' concepts (and his book on Marx and technology is his most famous) and the prolongation of those in Heidegger and Deleuze. He also disappears as quickly as he appears in the text, unlike Klee whose recurrent intervention really helps the progression of the argument. Another omission is the important essay "What is a Creative Act?," which is one of the few texts where Deleuze refers to control societies; this makes it a crucial essay to understand the passage from art to politics in his later political thought.

Why is art the privileged passage to politics? *Quid juris?* Neoliberal societies already function on the aestheticization of life, resulting from a certain conditioning of capitalism and elite forces. We have been turned into consuming machines that are devoid of resistance to the present, even worse, our own resistance is most often used to fuel the very machine that these resistances attempted to short-circuit. Deleuze and Guattari's thought have therefore been interpreted as being not only compatible with capitalism but precisely its very motor (by Boltanski and Chiapello, or by Žižek amongst many others). But these readings are often not patient enough, and they do not see that Deleuze and Guattari's own concepts, for instance deterritorialization, were made in relation to the immanent problem of capitalism itself. Capitalism and schizophrenia are two different kinds of limits (respectively, the relative and the absolute limits); they differ with respect to how they integrate desires as part of the "axiomatic," one delirium can be subsumed but not the other. To aestheticize oneself is what everyone does in post-2008 neoliberal societies (through Facebook or Instagram to network, and through LinkedIn to find jobs), aesthetics has become entirely integrated with capitalism, but this does not mean that art no longer has a role to play. Contrary to these loud interpretations, Deleuze pre-empted these criticisms in his famous short essay "Societies of Control" (1990), where he writes powerfully: "Many young people have a strange craving to be 'motivated'," or "[w]e're told businesses have souls which is surely the most terrifying news in the world."

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