

Slavoj Žižek , *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (New York: Routledge, 2004). xii+213 pages.

The Slovenian theorist Slavoj Žižek has published a number of books in the past few years that continue his work of integrating psychoanalytic theory with contemporary popular and political culture. The present book purports to be an “encounter” with Gilles Deleuze, chosen because of the centrality of Deleuze’s work (especially of those works he co-authored with Félix Guattari) for contemporary theoretical resistance to capitalism. The aim is to differentiate two different strains of thought in Deleuze’s work: one that leads to *The Logic of Sense*, and another that emerges in Deleuze’s work with Guattari, beginning with *Anti-Oedipus*. The method for this differential encounter is Žižek’s by now quite familiar brand of Lacanian theory laced with illustrative references to popular culture, and it is the deficient way in which he deploys this method that makes the book of limited interest—save perhaps as a reminder of the almost complete lack of contemporary scholarship dealing with the relation between Deleuze and Lacan.

Žižek is straightforward about the fact that a Lacanian encounter with Deleuze is not a dialogue; it is not a question here of interpreting what Deleuze meant, let alone of ‘getting him right.’ Rather, it is a matter of reading Deleuze against Lacanian theory, thereby developing something like a negative image that would expose a shift in Deleuze’s thought—its “guattarization”—and explore the consequences of this shift. If Žižek’s book actually staged this encounter, it would be interesting and well worth reading. Instead, Žižek is content, throughout the book, to bypass the work of articulating the concepts that would form the contours of such an encounter and instead produces a text whose argument is constituted almost entirely of rhetorical questions (“and is this not the same as that?”) and innuendo (the perpetual use of “perhaps” as a pseudo-logical connector).

The book’s thesis—which at times amounts to little more than an assertion—is that Deleuze’s philosophical project, up to and including *The Logic of Sense*, is fissured by what appear to be two equally incompatible theses on becoming. On the one hand, Deleuze claims that sense is produced by actual material causes, but that it is produced as an immaterial effect of these causes. For example, in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze discusses novelistic depictions of battle in which a wounded character, put out of action, thereby becomes detached from

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the conflict and, through this detachment, allows the battle to take on a new sense, one no longer reliant upon the intentions of any of its participants. However, this understanding of the becoming of sense seems to contradict the other way that Deleuze speaks of it, as the becoming of material things from out of a virtual multiplicity. According to this second formulation, each material being is a singular instantiation of the cohesion of a virtual multiplicity. Žižek does little to anchor this dichotomy in Deleuze's work—a lack that gives his resultant critique a certain air of naïvete—drawing both sides of this “either/or” not from Deleuze's texts but from Manuel DeLanda's book on Deleuze *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (2002). Leaving aside the question of the accuracy of DeLanda's reformulations, the chief weakness of Žižek's book is that he is unable to ground his central claim in Deleuze's work. Instead, Žižek's uncritical appropriation of DeLanda's dichotomy allows him to bring it to a tidy dialectical resolution.

Žižek's first step in this resolution is to render the ontological either/or as the pair “Being and Becoming,” which, in Žižek's reading, Deleuze unproblematically translates into the opposition of “the Good and the Bad” (28). Following this move, Being would be Bad insofar as it is conflated with the power of the State, molar assemblages, and the blockage of new, creative flows. Becoming, on the other hand, would be Good insofar as it is, in a corresponding way, conflated with the liberation from (or revolt against) the power of the State, the formation of temporary, open, and transient assemblages or groups, and the valorization of perpetual transformation. This extension of the oppositional dichotomy in Deleuze is enabled through the collaboration with Guattari who, according to Žižek, offers an “easy escape” for Deleuze from the theoretical impasse of his ontological dilemma. This easy escape not only results in a philosophical caricature of revolt and liberation, but also occludes the problematic status of the dilemma itself. In Žižek's opinion this occlusion is rectified in Alain Badiou's work, which emphasizes the difference between Being and the Event. By rigorously investigating this distinction, their connection appears properly in relief, as a yet-to-be-explicated resonance between ontologically distinct domains. Žižek's book is, at best, only suggestive of the possible directions and derivations of such a project.

In fleeing the problems of his ontology for the relative comfort of an apparently radical cultural theory grounded in an alternative psychoanalysis, Deleuze shows himself to be, at bottom, “secretly

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Hegelian” (69). Again, where an argument would be effective in fleshing out this claim, one finds only insinuations and distractions that do little to inform the reader of the reasons for claiming an affinity between Deleuze’s ontology and Hegel’s dialectic. For Žižek, this affinity is best expressed in Deleuze’s treatment of the subject as “(just another) substance” (68). The subject, as the mere occasion for the production of sense, is identified with Becoming and therefore placed in opposition to Being. This, in turn, repeats the Hegelian distinction between the “false” infinite that merely goes beyond a given limit (the subject as Substance or Being) and the “true” infinite that is the act of exceeding a limit (the subject as singular Becoming). Deleuze’s dual ontology thus places his philosophy precisely in the situation of the Hegelian dialectic that it seeks not merely to avoid, but in some sense to counter.

Finally, the reason for the failure of Deleuze to solve his ontological dilemma, as Žižek interprets it, “is a rather ridiculous simplification, if not an outright falsification, of Lacan’s position” regarding the Oedipus Complex, and psychoanalysis in general (80). Again, presumably out of a desperate desire to escape the impasses of his double ontology of sense, Deleuze overlooks the complications of the Oedipus Complex in order to provide a figure of opposition for the proliferation of the liberated sexualities invited and advocated by *Anti-Oedipus*. Here Žižek hits upon an interesting thesis: that the very exemplarity of Oedipus, as Lacan treated the character in his later work, contests the typical interpretation of Freud’s reading. Moreover, Žižek points out that the resolution of the Oedipus Complex, the emergence of the child from the early, familial coordination, is also the emergence of the child into “the order of sense proper” (83); this emergence thus seems to function as a “deterritorialization.” But a verbal slippage occurs here in the description of “symbolic castration” that renders Žižek’s either/or claim about Deleuze’s ontology precarious at best. In symbolic castration, the phallus is detached from the physical body and, in the fact or “Event” of this separation, it constitutes an “incorporeal symbolic order.” Returning to his earlier claim that the reality of the virtual is equivalent to the Lacanian Real, Žižek reformulates this constitution as the actualization of the virtual out of a preceding actual, and thus seems to force the question of which came first, the virtual or the actual. His resolution of this chicken-and-egg problem is that the two actions—the actualization of the virtual, and the virtual meaning of the actual—are “two sides of the same coin” (84). Pause for effect.