

“ICONOCLASTIC THEOLOGY, GILLES DELEUZE AND THE SECRETION OF ATHEISM”

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The theological readings nurtured by the Deleuzian approach have been increasing in recent years, especially in current methodologies like process theology, radical political theology and eco-theology. In this direction, the work of LeRon Schults offers a sort of introduction to the “theological” thinking of Gilles Deleuze, that is, to the ways in which the contribution of this philosopher can be redefined within the theological work, despite his strong criticism to religious phenomenon.

In this book, Schults will cover what is understood primarily as the first and second Deleuze, that is, his initial work related to comments on great modern philosophers like Spinoza, Kant and Nietzsche, to *Capitalism and Schizophrenia project* carried out together with Felix Guattari (the last stage, more associated to the aesthetic aspect of Deleuze’s approach, will be mentioned peripherally) In each of these cases, Schults identify the various “theological” lines presented in each work, such as the definition of theology as a “science of non-existing” entities, the link between the Anti-Oedipus and the Anti-Christ, the transcendent dimension of the immanent, among other elements that we will develop below.

The author proposes a “hammering theology” from the atheism that Christianity secretes. At the beginning of the book, Schults will develop some central points of departure for further approach. First, he explains his bio-cultural understanding of religion, where corporeality, contexts and language is uniquely linked in defining the religious phenomenon. On the other, he identifies the dynamics of “secretion” within Christianity, especially on two elements: revelation (where images and discourses transgress the dimensionality of meaning) and ritual (as an act that responds to a mimetic dynamic, both the legitimization and transgression of religious practice as closed acts and languages)

Here the idea of *iconoclastic theology* that Schults identifies in Deleuze’s approach. Starting from the “investment” that Deleuze makes on Plato, Schults supports that this “theological” proposal hammers away copies of the icons as models, as opposed to the Platonic idea of images as reflection of an original object. Deleuze destroys models and copies. Schults makes clear, however, that the

problem is not the image itself but to treat them as representations or simulacra from something beyond them, that is, of an original object or model.

In deleuzian language, the iconoclastic forces are opposed to the sacerdotal forces. From here, Schults proposes a scheme of crossing axes that run throughout the whole book, and is composed as follows: the *theogonic forces* (sacerdotal theology) -that respond to an anthropomorphic promiscuity and sociographic prudery- and *theolitic forces* (iconoclast theology) -that respond to a sociographic promiscuity and anthropomorphic prudery.

The distinction between difference and totality, transcendence and immanence, subject and object, among others, will occupy the first part of the book, where Schults develop the work of Deleuze around modern philosophy. Here we find the inquiry into the idea of disjunctive syllogism in Kant, the concept of immanence of Spinoza and the idea of becoming simulacra in Nietzsche. "Sameness is the condition of imaging differences" (p.30): this statement is central to understanding the infinite movements within the intensity of difference that evidence the transcendental (not transcendent!) dimension of the immanent, producing new axiological engagements. The latter defines the purpose and being of theology itself.

In the following three chapters, the author analyzes the major "philosophical projects" in Deleuze, finding in them clues to understanding an iconoclastic theology. The works are *Difference and Repetition*, *The Logic of Sense* and *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project (*Anti-Oedipus* and *Thousand Plateaus*) With respect to the first, the central question that the book raises up is: what is what causes difference? Here are two central elements in Deleuze: the characterization of identity as a difference in-itself and the non-being as a positive concept. This understanding questions the essentialist notions of identity as neoplatonic versions of difference. That discussion is rescued by Schults to refer to the historical dispute at the Council of Chalcedon around the Trinitarian theology and the notion of *perijóresis*. Undoubtedly, this debate would have faced otherwise from Deleuze contribution, where identity and sameness in the perspective of Chalcedon could mean "the reciprocal syntheses of differential relations in the ideal-virtual within immanence" (p.84) This leads to refer and reread the problem of Christ representation and the condemnation of heresies during the III and IV century, whose strength came precisely from its performance as flows of resistance and atheism against the "sacerdotal discourses" of that time.

In the analysis of *Logic of sense*, Shults focuses on the relationship between the paradox, the event and the body, especially on the idea of *paradoxical agency*, where the senselessness of paradox, instead of being a negative element is rather a dynamic of distribution of sense. In other words, the meaninglessness is producer difference in the plane of immanence. It's interesting the application that performs Schults on this principle in relation to the "sense" of the theology of the Incarnation. The sacerdotal model has followed the Platonic-Aristotelian

perspective on the eternal intentionality that emerges from corporeality. Iconoclastic standpoint, suggested by Deleuze, insists that all intentionality is actually effect of the body.

This deepens and radicalizes the historicizing of Christology, but not from the emphasis on a Supernatural Entity that incarnates, but rather, from the projection that arises in the immanent dimension of Christology. In this sense, metaphysics production is projected in the immanent dimension where "everything happens in the boundary of things and propositions" (p.125) This immanence is defined from a central opposition developed in *Logic of sense* between *Aion* as pure becoming, and the *Chronos*, that ties the bodies to a static present. *Aion*, instead, is the "present" as becoming. This leads to redefine the concept of the eternal in the Christological event, where the first is understood as the opening of the pure immanence printed in the second.

Finally, in the analysis of Capitalism and Schizophrenia project of Deleuze and Guattari, Schultz states that the concept of *machine* -as the rhizomatic dynamic that links and deconstructs desires as flows, and systems of interruptions of flows- are already theological as maquinitic assemblage and desiring-production. For example, for Schultz the concept of abstract machines is inherently theological, since they do not focus on the real performances but constructs the real to come.

Here the author focuses with greater depth in the understanding of religion in Deleuze, who at times manifests certain reductionism in his proposal, demonstrated on a modern, essentialist and western framework to define religion. In this sense, the religious phenomenon and discourse seems -for this philosopher- rather closed and static, instead of identifying instances of mimetic tension in the flows that compose it.

The "schizophrenic God" that infers the iconoclastic theology allows reterritorialization of transcendent figures. The secretion that comes from the religious -at least in some expressions- comes from the paradox that occurs between the attempted to represent an infinite Supernatural Agent and the denial of its complete possible representation. Here theology is understood as a *war and nomadic machine*, where its "demonic condition" -a term that Deleuze mentions in repeated occasions, not as antagonism but as the opposite resisted secretion of the given- which allows the emanation of flows. This "nomadic theology" has no time and place for the Oedipal segmentation, represented in some Christological icons.

For all this - Schultz concludes - *atheism is good news*. From a deleuzian perspective, good news means believing in this world. Therefore, an iconoclastic theology is built between a sense of naturalism -as the questioning of the appeal of Supernatural agents- and secularization -as questioning the intervention of these entities in the social world. Deleuze, meanwhile, is a metaphysic secularist, whose theological challenge is the projection of the transcendental dimension

of the immanent through the iconoclastic deconstruction that, on the one hand, questions every closure in representations, and secondly, enhances secretions in the theological and religious practices and discourses, identifying and projecting the flows that print the constitutive difference of the given.

As mentioned at the beginning, this book represents a complete introduction to Deleuze's approach within theology. It identifies and develops with great depth the core elements of this philosophical framework in relation to religion. Although, we want to draw attention to two observations regarding the general proposal of this book. First, the theological applications and reinterpretations made by the author could be deepened. In this sense, we can find a disparity between the analysis of the work of Deleuze and the development of strictly theological issues, including those mentioned as deeper analysis of the heretical movements, the flows that are manifested in various Christological models or an approach of the secretions gestated in various contingent historical movements, such as the mystics, the Reformation, the Anabaptists or liberation theologies. Secondly, a deepening on socio-anthropological studies may have helped to clarify the analysis proposed by Schults and Deleuze on the flows within religious expressions, especially the revisions on the complexity of the ritual and symbolic dynamics.

Beyond this, the work of Schults represents a great contribution to contemporary politics and postmodern theology, through the analysis of the still resonating implications of the judgment in modern philosophy about the "death of God", which far from nullifying the place of religion, it projects the atheism that secretes and presses their limits, not as negation but as a propellant of heterogeneity, difference and paradox.

Nicolás Panotto¹

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¹ CONICET-FLACSO-GEMRIP, Argentina. E-mail: nicolaspanotto@yahoo.com.ar