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Iain MacKenzie, *Resistance and the Politics of Truth: Foucault, Deleuze, Badiou*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018. 148 pp. €29.99 EU (pb). ISBN 9783837639070.

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The relationship between truth and political action, and concomitantly between theory and practice, has been central to philosophical and activist debates on social transformation. In order to act politically, do we first need to understand the origin and dynamics of oppression? Can we ever become truly free, without grasping the truth about domination—historical, theoretical and otherwise? These are activists’ eternal questions, orbiting around the issue of the “truth in politics.” Iain Mackenzie’s monograph *Resistance and the Politics of Truth. Foucault, Deleuze, Badiou* takes such fundamental queries as a point of departure, albeit flipping the problem on its head. Instead of asking about the “truth in politics,” the book instead examines the question of a “politics of truth.” The rationale for this gesture, as the author explains, is that the usual response to the conundrum of “truth in politics” leads either to an attitude of militant dogmatism or to an attitude of sceptical defeatism towards political action. For this reason, MacKenzie reverses the question’s logic to engage instead with a “politics of truth,” and thereby scope out practices of productive resistance heretofore hidden from view. What does a “politics of truth” mean in this context, and in this book specifically? Whereas “truth in politics” is about the movement from the diagnosis of a problem (theory) to finding a practical solution to it (practice), the “politics of truth” works from the assumption that it is impossible to detach politics from truth. In other words, a political perspective is always already implicated in any articulation of truth. This means that we can only access a certain version of truth, and that our forms of resistance are produced—and can (easily) be co-opted—by the system that we are opposing. By consequence, this changes how we should approach questions of political struggle, resistance and freedom. The book’s main purpose, then, is to propose alternative forms of resistance rooted in and produced by this reoriented approach.

MacKenzie situates his enquiry in poststructuralist and post-foundational theoretical frameworks with a particular focus on the question of event.[1] He proposes “to understand the relationship between truth, politics and resistance as an evental relationship” (p. 10-11). Figures who are well-known for their rethinking of the relationship between truth and politics and for whom “event” as a conceptual category is of importance are, thus, marshalled as critical sources for the comparative study at hand. Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze (poststructuralism) are read against Alain Badiou (post-foundationalism) in order to conceive of practices of resistance as “an art of the event” (p. 11). MacKenzie focuses on critique, where critique is considered as a “production of difference and, therefore, as the overcoming of indifference” (p. 19). The thrust of

the book, in the most general terms, is that critique should be considered both as a creative practice *and* as an act of resistance, one guided by learning.

The monograph is divided more or less as the title indicates, with a discussion of Foucault, then Deleuze (and Guattari), and finally Badiou. Despite such broad coverage, Deleuze is accorded more weight by the author, in terms of the depth of analyses in the relevant chapter and in the book's conclusion, featuring a return to Deleuze's thought. In chapter one, MacKenzie dissects the famous exchange between Noam Chomsky and Foucault (1971) in order to map the differences between their approaches to political theory. He contrasts Chomsky and Foucault's theoretical positions on such questions as human nature, science, justice, power, revolution and transformation, to expose the problematic aspects of Chomsky's "naturalist and universalist claims about human nature" (p. 45). Chomsky's position is unsatisfactory, the author concludes, because it replicates the standard procedure of the "truth in politics," that is, moving in a straight line from diagnosis to transformation. Rejecting Chomsky's approach, MacKenzie argues for the validity of Foucault's method, proposing to develop a "a transformative politics of truth" focusing on events that "enable us to transform what we think is possible" (p. 44).

Chapter two concentrates on Foucault's politics of truth, demonstrating how Foucault "suspends the category of truth," while at the same time being committed to resistance (p. 23). MacKenzie proposes the intellectual as an emblematic figure of resistance in Foucault's work, "as a bearer of a new politics of truth" (p. 57). This proposition rests upon a vision of the intellectual as an individual capable of facilitating exchanges between discursive regimes that can, in turn, challenge essentialist ideas inherent to humanism, naturalism or universalism. Furthermore, the author discusses the importance of "a relay between intellectuals and activists" (p. 68) in order to break up, on the one hand, the image of the intellectual as an individual subject acting in isolation and, on the other, to conceive of political struggles as constant movements back and forth between the theorizing and the practising of politics. The author argues in favour of practices that aim at "creating truths that will unsettle the disciplinary and discursive regimes" (p. 57) by listening "to the small often unheard voices within [...] disciplinary institutions" (p. 68) that can be mobilised to transform their institutions.

In the following chapter, MacKenzie turns his attention to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of difference in order to develop the "pragmatics of creative resistance" (p. 71). He demonstrates how Deleuze and Guattari forget humanism, rather than fight against it, in order to be able to theoretically develop the relationship between creativity and resistance. MacKenzie focuses here on immanent critique, and the ways in which "we can *learn to resist* the regimes of contemporary institutional life" (p. 72). He follows Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics and shows that critique is not a question of knowledge but rather of the process of learning. Practices of resistance are conceived of as learning practices: "Resistance is always a particular expression of the potential within an institutional formation. [...] Resistance does not come in readymade forms that can be applied across all domains, all institutions, in the same way. Rather, practices of resistance must be learned from within the system we hope to resist in ways that will differ depending upon those institutions" (p. 91). Viewed from this perspective, then, it is impossible to either predict how people will resist, or to project what would be the most effective way to struggle against a system of oppression. That is also the reason why, the author maintains, the openness inherent to learning is key for political practice.

Chapter four is devoted to Alain Badiou's work, framed as a possible counter-argument to the book's central contentions. MacKenzie examines Badiou's critique of Deleuze, his renewal of the

concept of truth, the question of event, and the procedure of political subjectification. Even though the “political edge” is somewhat blunted in Deleuze and Guattari, the author acknowledges, Badiou’s position remains undesirable as it “amounts to a return to a dogmatic form of thought” (p. 95) that “is unable to frame a way of thinking about, or motivate, sustainable practices of resistance to the regimes of truth and power that discipline and control our contemporary lives” (pp. 95-96). Whilst the archetypical figure of resistance for Deleuze is the learner, Badiou champions the militant: a subject is seized by the event and transforms his or her practices accordingly. In MacKenzie’s reading, Badiou’s conceptualization of politics is “a dogmatic obfuscation of a process of learning, dogmatic because it does not get inside the ways in which all truths must be created in and through learning” (p. 115). In an alternative reading of Badiou, one could argue that learning in Badiou’s framework would be too cumulative a concept in some sense. Only a true event is capable of accomplishing a radical reconfiguration in the sense-making processes that would, in turn, lead to truly transformative political actions. MacKenzie positions himself, however, against such a reading of Badiou, explicitly favouring the Deleuzian learner. He asserts, for example, that “the learner can be a militant, but the militant will never be a learner” (p. 116). Whether Badiou’s radicality is positively or negatively understood, this contention is up for debate, at least to this reader. The learner can be a militant only if we assume that the militant is *not* understood here as Badiou’s subject to a political truth, but “simply” as an activist developing their panoply of political practices.

Chapter five returns to Deleuze and the learner, as the figure of resistance, to elaborate on transformative political practices in contemporary society. Here, MacKenzie focuses on art as a way to think and to make a difference: “the learner becomes the artist as critique becomes resistance, and the artist becomes the learner as resistance becomes critique” (p. 121). He turns his attention to Boris Groys’ work in order to examine the relationship between art and truth and to redefine the socio-cultural position of the artist in the contemporary era. In this reading, an artist is no longer an exceptional figure, a “messenger or a visionary,” but is instead an individual offering “a paradigm [for] how we all create and document our lives on the internet” (p. 132). An artist fuses with the rest of us, as internet users, in our daily “mass production of art.” In this way, he or she “is able to express the non-identity of all of us in the age of the internet and algorithmic control” (p. 132). MacKenzie concludes that “learning to resist, today, involves experiments in becoming more connected than the algorithms allow” (p. 133). The book ends with a reflection on “how to think and act differently” as an activist (p. 135). Instead of relying on a pre-defined identity which functionally legislates who is and what makes an activist, MacKenzie claims that “it is much more promising, from an activity perspective, to engage in the process of becoming active and the becoming subject that this implies” (p. 138). We do not know in advance how subjects will engage in immanent critique and how they will practice resistance. In this context, the open format that the Deleuzian perspective offers is, for MacKenzie, “a properly activist-oriented conception” (p. 138) of political practice.

Iain MacKenzie’s *Resistance and the Politics of Truth* advances the slogan “learn the art of resistance!” (p. 139) by elaborating on critique from a Deleuzian perspective. The book is clearly written and can be recommended to students, graduate and postgraduate alike, who wish to become familiar with the theoretical reconfigurations accomplished by some of the major thinkers of French Theory for thinking politics. At times, the author’s readings are not entirely persuasive, as noted above in terms of Badiou’s militant. Nevertheless, in general, the book provides a useful overview of Foucault, Deleuze and Badiou’s key arguments, alongside elucidating their respective positions on politics in relation to each other.

NOTES

[1] Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

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