

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**Carlo Galli**, *Janus's Gaze: Essays on Carl Schmitt* (ed Adam Sitze; trans Amanda Minervini), Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8223-6018-6 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-8223-6032-2 (paper)

*Janus's Gaze* was published first in Italian in 2008 (as *Lo sguardo di Giano*) to collect a series of interventions penned by Carlo Galli, possibly the most authoritative Schmittian scholar to date.

The five chapters composing this book address some of Schmitt's most fundamental concerns. Galli himself in the preface suggests that the book offers a relatively comprehensive interpretation of Schmitt's thought on modern political form (the state) and its constitutive horizon (political theology conceived as a particular reading of secularization). An excellent introduction to the work of the German jurist for students and scholars approaching his work for the first time, I think. Galli indeed presents in very clear terms the relationship between Schmitt and, respectively, the state (Chapter 1), political theologies (Chapter 2), Machiavelli (Chapter 3) and Strauss/Spinoza (Chapter 4). The last chapter is instead focused on what he defines as the Global Era, to which I will return later.

The rather intriguing title speaks volumes about Galli's understanding of the intellectual figure represented by Carl Schmitt, who must accordingly be studied by taking into account all the contradictions and ambivalence of his personal and academic trajectories, marked by radical moments of "occasionalism" and opportunism, as has been discussed at length in the secondary literature (for a review of this debate see, among others, Minca and Rowan 2015). According to Adam Sitze (p.xxxv), who edited the volume and wrote a fascinating introduction to it, for Galli "Janus symbolizes the doubleness of things, the passage from inside and outside, and the transmutations and the determinations of the elements emerging from the primordial chaos' ... As such, Galli suggests, Janus is a fitting name for the unspoken core of Schmitt's genealogical inquiry into the doubleness or contradictoriness at the origin of modern politics."

However, Galli ends his preface to *Janus's Gaze* by stating that today "the very different political logics of the global age consign ... [Schmitt's] gaze to outdatedness and disorientation.

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Today, the question is not Schmitt's thought, but what exceeds that thought. After all, even a Janus gaze can't see beyond the end" (p.xlviii). If this is the case, one may ask, why another book on the controversial German jurist Carl Schmitt, or, in this specific case, why the translation of another book *on* Schmitt?

The important objective of this book, and of its translation into English, is in my opinion twofold. On the one hand, as noted above, to introduce not so much Schmitt's thought to the English speaking readership, but rather Galli's take on Schmitt's thought, which is indeed a relatively innovative contribution to the related debates. On the other hand, to tease out Schmitt's troubling intellectual figure from a position, like the one claimed by Galli, of a "non-Schmittian schmittologist". I would like to share with the reader a few notes on these two points. If, as argued again by Sitze-reading-Galli (p.xxviii), "Schmitt's achievement was to have written *the genealogy of the political*, where 'the political' is a name for an unnameable crisis, an originary contradictoriness, a drift (*deriva*) of terms that can only be understood with reference to its derivation from the obscure Void at the origin of modern politics ... ", then I am surprised that Galli's major work on Schmitt—*Genealogia della politica* (2010a)—perhaps the most comprehensive work ever written on "the political" in Schmitt, remains untranslated to date. Instead, we are offered a sort of "compact" version of that analysis in *Janus's Gaze*. While it is fully understandable that publishers may hesitate to take the risk of translating a 1,000-page tome, at the same time it is difficult for me not to locate this one translation in relation to the absence—in English—of *Genealogia della politica*, a translation that would significantly impact current debates on Schmitt. And this very absence, somehow, represents an implicit limit to the relative importance of the volume discussed here.

At the same time, this book directly confronts the difficulty of engaging with right-wing writers marked by an extremely controversial personal and professional history of political involvement, like that one characterizing Carl Schmitt (on "the trouble" of working with Schmitt for geographers, see Minca and Rowan 2014). Schmitt's Nazi involvement has been the object of much controversy, something of great relevance for anyone using or even critiquing his work. This

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

is not the place for recalling the debates between what Sitze defines as the “Schmitt defence industry”, and those, at the other extreme, who reject the very idea of engaging with the work of a Fascist thinker as a matter of principle and academic integrity. However, in this respect, it is perhaps worth noting how Galli’s work (here and more generally) is important in contextualizing the travels and reception of Schmitt before, during, and after the “Nazi period”. In this sense, like in a previous translation of Galli’s work, *Political Spaces and Global War* (2010b), Sitze’s introduction is as relevant as the content of the book itself (on this see Minca 2012). His reading of Galli’s exegesis of Schmitt’s work is in fact crucial to appreciate how a book like *Janus’s Gaze* may contribute to current debates on the German jurist. In particular, Sitze rightly comments on the enormous influence of Schmitt on the academic and political context of his time, but also on the post-WW2 period, including the controversial discovery of Schmitt in English-speaking politics and international relations in the past two decades or so. On the other hand, Sitze shows how Galli’s work is key not only for his capacity to engage with the secondary literature on Schmitt in five languages, but especially for his claim, as noted above, of being a “non-Schmittian-schmittologist”. Accordingly, for Sitze, “[o]n Galli’s reading ... the task of reading Schmitt is not to quarantine his Nazism to the period from 1933 to 1936 in order to liberate the rest of his work for neutral analytic ‘use’ or even for leftist reappropriation” (p.xxxi-xxxii). “Galli’s re-reading of Schmitt”, insists Sitze, “is not, in the end, an attempt to retrieve or recuperate Schmitt’s teachings. To the contrary, Galli’s unprecedented philological labor culminates in a curt claim about the definitive and irreversible exhaustion of Schmittian thought in the global age” (p.xxxiii). This positioning, that Galli clearly delineates in the preface to the volume, is of great relevance precisely due to Schmitt’s controversial political leanings and, in particular, his affiliations with Hitler’s regime and the fact that he was never “denazified”. Perhaps this translation will help to identify a position in the broader debates about the appropriateness of studying controversial thinkers like Schmitt that may allow us to discuss work of this political relevance without either being considered apologists of Fascist thinkers or, on the contrary, simply refusing to engage with authors, like Schmitt, who have been nonetheless extremely influential in European political thought.

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Having said that, I would like to conclude by mentioning a few reasons why, despite all the merits that I recognise in this editorial initiative, I still remain perplexed about the translation of this one book from Galli's oeuvre. First, this translation, concerning a book published almost a decade ago, arrives a bit late given the "Schmittian momentum" in international debates on the revival of "the political". Having this book available in English immediately after its publication would have impacted debates on Schmitt in a different ways, I guess. Second, and following the previous comment, while some of the issues discussed in the first four chapters of *Janus's Gaze* are central to the understanding of Schmitt's work, at this point in time they do not seem to bring anything particularly new to the related discussions. If anything, the most innovative contribution of this book is perhaps, again, Sitze's introduction, and his reflection on how to treat Schmitt (and Galli's reading of Schmitt) after more than ten years of deep and intense engagement with this controversial scholar on the part of English-speaking academia. Finally, the fifth chapter on the redundancy of Schmitt's thought in understanding the "global age", while possibly representing the most innovative contribution offered by Galli in this book, at the same time presents a rather questionable idea of "what to make of Schmitt" in contemporary political thought. As noted by Sitze (p.xxxv), "[o]nly in the final chapter of *Janus's Gaze*, where Galli outlines the terms of Schmitt's desuetude in the global age, ... does it become clear that *the use* of Schmittian thought and *the abuse* of Schmittian thought are, increasingly, one and the same thing". In other words, according to Galli's interpretation of the global spaces of the present, Schmitt's thought, and in particular its spatial articulation, seems to be helpless. I am not sure that many would agree with such a bold statement, based on a specific—and in my opinion rather superficial—depiction of the "global age", and its geopolitical development. However, my hope is that this the last chapter in particular will provoke further reflection—in Schmitt studies and possibly beyond—on the actuality—or final redundancy, to speak with Galli—of Schmitt's political thought, in a moment in which global politics, with the rise of populism and new forms of nationalism, seems to be on the verge of a new sea-change.

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

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