

Elizabeth Grosz. *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2004. ISBN 1 74114 327 6.

Elizabeth Grosz. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005. ISBN 1 74114 572 4.

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It is time, "a little time in the pure state," which rises up to the surface of the screen.

Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*

With her two books, *The Nick of Time* and *Time Travels*, Elizabeth Grosz joins those writers and thinkers for whom the phenomenon of temporality holds a particular fascination. Grosz acknowledges early on in *The Nick of Time* that there are many Western philosophical traditions that could hold direct relevance for her attempt to reconsider the relationship between time and life, but which are nonetheless neglected. She identifies, in particular, the pragmatic and phenomenological traditions, which are both passed over in favour of the first book's exclusive focus on Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson, and the second's wider, but still eclectic, additions to this trio: Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Alfred Kinsey, William James, Luce Irigaray and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The elision of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger seems particularly surprising, perhaps, until the full force of the first book's subtitle dawns: *Politics, Evolution and the Untimely*. If we are to properly consider time as an ontological element, as Grosz' project insists we must, it is not the *reality* of

time that is critical, but the peculiar qualities and characteristics that evade the conception of reality: the *untimeliness* of time. Time needs to be considered ontologically, argues Grosz, in terms of its evanescence and waywardness:

Time is neither fully “present”, a thing in itself, nor is it a pure abstraction, a metaphysical assumption that can be ignored in everyday practice ... We can think it only in passing moments, through ruptures, nicks, cuts, in instances of dislocation, though it contains no moments or ruptures and has no being or presence, functioning only as continuous becoming. (2004: 5)

Philosophy, as Grosz reminds us, tends to submerge time in representations of space and matter. Life and reason attempt to control time with limited acknowledgment of the way all forms of life necessarily organise themselves according to a (conscious or unconscious) temporal economy. All the philosophical figures represented across the two books acknowledge, in their own ways, this organisation and the epistemological complications it impels. Temporality is, for all, conditioned by the *event*, by nicks or ruptures that emerge from the systems which aim to contain them, to incite change and unpredictability (2004: 8).

The figures across the books, and the books themselves, are linked then by the motivation to recognise the full force of temporality in relation to life. This connectedness is traceable in a number of ways. Firstly, the motivation is unmistakably expressed, as already suggested, as fascination. The specific concern with time discernable in Grosz’ writing and those she discusses means that *fascination* can here be productively considered in Maurice Blanchot’s sense of the term. The reconsideration of time encouraged by Grosz impels a mode of attunement which overwhelms any dialectical compartment to the world. Another way of conceptualising a thread across and between the two books is to consider them as practical Deleuzian exercises. When Grosz describes *The Nick of Time* as an exploration of the philosophical models that underlie much evolutionary research, it is difficult to avoid thinking foremost of the “model” of schizoanalysis.

Given Deleuze’s own sustained engagements with both Nietzsche and Bergson it is perhaps not surprising to find these as two of the figures whose understanding of temporality is here central to a practical ontology of becoming. The figure who stands out across the two books is Darwin, although what Grosz is ultimately drawing out in her engagement with his work is what Deleuze (with Guattari) also notices, namely just how nomadic Darwin’s contributions to an understanding of life are. The first three chap-

ters of *The Nick of Time* and the second chapter (in particular) of *Time Travels* explore how Darwin's account of life can be understood as an open and generative field constituted by forces of growing complexity. The features of this system, in Grosz' extrapolations, do not exhibit stasis and essence, but are more appropriately understood as "active vectors of change" (2004: 19).

The exploration in the first book of the practical implications for living beings of their immersion in the continuous forward movement of time explicitly outlines an ontology of becoming. But Grosz' concern here, as ever, is fundamentally pragmatic. In moving beyond the phenomenological tradition to consider the reality of time as constitutive of becoming and not being, she is attesting to the possibilities of practical transformation. Her engagement with Deleuze in this first book is, in this way, an especially relevant example of applied Deleuzianism. Dispensing with his explicit vocabulary, the concepts of openness and transformation are instead sought in the very scientific discourse (evolution) where such a re-viewing has real power to reconfigure the possibility of transformation in feminist, queer and anti-racist discourses.

The explicit link that Grosz makes here is to the body. The ontology of life that she draws out in Darwin impels an understanding of bodies as beings that are foremost *temporal*, rather than spatial. In this movement Grosz readily acknowledges the ways in which she is moving beyond the relationship between biology and culture she has worked with previously. What she is also moving beyond, of course, is the still influential stranglehold that psychoanalysis has on the biology-culture model. The biological body is here explored neither as a passive receiver of cultural inscription, nor as an "alien" force which *inhibits* such inscription, but as an interactive surface which gives itself up to cultural location (2004: 4). It is by reconsidering the ways in which Darwin's ontology posits forms of life as unavoidably immersed in the forward movement of temporality that this "reversal" of the biology-culture schema can be thought.

Although Nietzsche and Bergson can be more readily anticipated from the Deleuzian impulse of the two books, their location here in relation to Darwin, to each other and to the particular temporal concerns of the project ensures some interesting juxtapositions. Having re-thought the model of evolutionary biology in the first section of *The Nick of Time*, Grosz' second and third sections – on Nietzsche and Bergson respectively – cast the two in a unique light which refuses the singularity of the Darwinian or Deleuzian frameworks which tend to contextualise their work. Nietzsche and Bergson are read here through Darwin, but through a peculiarly Deleuzian Darwin. The results are dynamic: Nietzsche's will to power, for example, when read

in the second section as a transformation of Darwin's ideas on the struggle for existence, appears at once more and less bold than is typically appreciated. This ultimately, inevitably, challenges Nietzsche's representation of himself as the "Anti-Darwin" (2004: 101). As "champion of the exceptional, the unique, the unrepeatable," it emerges how Nietzsche has more, and more *unanticipated*, aspects in common with Darwin than he admits. And, in turn, the conceptualisation in the third section of Nietzsche as Bergsonian (by way of his understanding of the unpredictable continuity of the future) is a characterisation itself recast by reading Bergson as "the most philosophically rigorous of the early twentieth-century Darwinians" (2004: 156).

Across the books, these juxtapositions work to ensure that Grosz does not fully submit to the process she cautions against, whereby philosophy submerges time in static representation. As an exploration of the insights of these diverse thinkers on temporality, Grosz' project itself retains something of the unpredictable sense of the event. This is especially evident in the two-book model itself: where the first book systematically (if, as suggested, *surprisingly*) investigates the cultural inheritance of the force of time (2005: 4), the second draws together eight years worth of essays which reflect more generally on the question of time. Across the ideas and figures of *Time Travels*, disjunction is less of an organising principle and more of an organic affect: time itself rises up as the distance, and closeness, between the concerns – from Darwin to the legal system to prostheses to female sexuality. In this book, the evanescence of time is immanent; the two together preserve untimeliness by working as a nick, disrupting our immersion in temporal continuity by encouraging our fascination, but never our mastery.

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