Review for *Time and Society*

Title of review: **Deleuze and Time: One or Many Philosophies?**

Book reviewed: James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Philosophy of Time: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)

Reviewer: Craig Lundy

Bio: Dr Craig Lundy is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Social Transformation Research, University of Wollongong. He is the author of *History and Becoming: Deleuze's Philosophy of Creativity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012) and editor with Daniela Voss of *At the Edges of Thought: Deleuze and Post-Kantian Philosophy* (Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming). His research explores the intersections of historical, social and political thought, and in particular the role that history plays in processes of transformation.

The growth of Deleuze Studies over the last decade has been extraordinary. There are now two annual summits on the work of Deleuze (and Guattari), each attended by hundreds of scholars. And to the surprise of many non-Deleuzians, the quantity of publications on Deleuze today far outstrips that of his eminent contemporaries Foucault and Derrida. Nevertheless, Deleuze remains a marginal figure outside of the field that bears his name, especially in philosophy circles. Furthermore, within the Deleuze community key aspects of his philosophy remain poorly understood. James Williams' latest book on Deleuze makes considerable strides in rectifying these twin problems.

As with his previous introductory guides to Deleuze's work, Williams has succeeded in writing an accessible book, yet one that does not compromise on philosophical sophistication. To achieve this Williams employs several effective strategies, including an extensive introduction and comprehensive set of footnotes, the former for the benefit of newcomers to Deleuze and the latter for experts. Williams also devotes much attention to the method and approach of Deleuze's philosophy, forcefully arguing for its philosophical rigour and novelty. By implementing rhetorical devices that are often Socratic in style, Williams consistently remains faithful to both the reader and Deleuze – no easy feat, and one that demands great pedagogical acumen. The result is a book that establishes without doubt the importance of Deleuze to contemporary philosophy of time, and the importance of Deleuze's philosophy of time to his work more broadly.

But this is not achieved without compromise. Due to his driving interest in explicating a comprehensive, consistent and systematic philosophy of time in the work of Deleuze, Williams downplays or ignores many of Deleuze's engagements with time that are not a specific component of this unitary system. There are naturally advantages and drawbacks to this approach. Let us start with the advantages.

Of Deleuze's numerous engagements with time throughout his career, his theory of the three syntheses of time is without doubt the most significant and extensive. The three syntheses are also notoriously difficult to comprehend. As such, a full and proper explication of the three syntheses of time is a massive undertaking, achievable by only the most adept of Deleuzian scholars. Williams proves himself to be more than equal to the task. This task, however, takes no less than four of the book's five chapters: one on each of the three syntheses and a fourth chapter that focuses on Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche's Eternal Return, but specifically with respect to the role it plays in the three syntheses. As for the book's final chapter, which looks at time in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, it is clear that Williams' appraisal is guided by the philosophical system that has just been erected – time in *The Logic of Sense* is effectively rendered complementary to the three syntheses (and not the other way around). As a telltale, Williams occasionally refers to the three syntheses *as* Deleuze's philosophy of time (see p. 106, but there are several other instances). Thus what is the great strength and value of Williams' book – a peerless analysis and explanation of the three syntheses of time, and a demonstration of how time in *The Logic of Sense* fits in with this system – is also a source of the book's weakness: its limited purview.

To be more specific, Williams fails to mention several of Deleuze's significant engagements with time, including his reading of 'the untimely' and his discussions of 'the meanwhile', 'the stutter' or 'stammer', and 'dead time'. Williams has good reason for this: his objective, as he makes clear from page one, is to show how "Deleuze sets out one of the most original and sophisticated philosophies of time to have appeared in the history of philosophy" (p. 1). But does Deleuze even have a philosophy of time, by which I mean, does he have *a single systematic philosophy of time*? In one respect, of course he does: the three syntheses of time. But in another respect he doesn't, insofar as he engages with and makes contributions to the philosophy of time outside of this system. These other engagements may not be as comprehensive as the three syntheses, but it would be harsh to judge them as insignificant and/or reduce them to the three syntheses.

There are other potential drawbacks to this approach of presenting the three syntheses as the 'core' of Deleuze's philosophy of time to which Deleuze's other engagements with time revolve around. On the one hand, it downplays the originality and value of Deleuze's engagements with time in his early monographs, rendering them as proto-considerations for his latter systematic philosophy of time (whereas, I would suggest that Deleuze's reading of Bergson and Nietzsche, for instance, have much to offer our thinking about time beyond their roles in the three syntheses). But in the other direction, and perhaps more importantly, Williams' approach covers over the fact that Deleuze effectively *leaves behind* this way of doing philosophy. Of Deleuze's many books it is

generally agreed that *Difference and Repetition* is his greatest philosophical text – his 'magnum opus'. There are several reasons for this, but the most significant one is that it is the only occasion where Deleuze sets out to write a book *of this kind*: that is, a grand, systematic, comprehensive and radically original metaphysics – a philosophical treatise in the tradition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Thus if one cannot find a philosophy of time of this kind in Deleuze's work from the 1970s on, it is not merely because his interests have changed or because his latter engagements are of lesser quality. It is because his engagements with time are of a different kind.[1]

Williams is of course fully aware of all this. He is also entirely up front about his book's focus on *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. But in coming to grips with this systematic philosophy of time, the reader should be aware that significant engagements lie beyond it, and furthermore, that it is entirely open to debate how one reads the relation between them: is there a 'core' theory against which 'peripheral' developments/deviations should be evaluated?

Williams shows his hand most explicitly on this issue in the final pages of his book. As way of a Conclusion, Williams explains to the reader why Deleuze's books on Cinema, which clearly have much to do with time, add nothing to Deleuze's philosophy of time, and indeed detract from it. His arguments are rather convincing, if one presumes Deleuze to have 'a' philosophy of time, as expounded in its "most consistent and extensive form" (p. 161) (ie. *Difference*

[1] In further contrast to the suggestion that Deleuze's interests move from time to space after his meeting with Guattari (p. 2), I would also point out that space lies at the heart of both *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense* no less than time.

and Repetition, and to a lesser extent *The Logic of Sense*), against which other engagements on time are to be judged (as adding to or detracting from). But another possible approach would be to say that Deleuze's engagements with and contributions to our thinking about time occurs in a number of ways, coordinate with the varied nature of his philosophy and career: in many of his monographs on thinkers (e.g. Bergson and Nietzsche), Deleuze uses these studies to advance novel thoughts about time (e.g. his reading of the virtual and duration, or the eternal return); in *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze constructs a systematic philosophy of time in 'the grand style' (based *in part* on some of his previous original insights, but often distinct from them); in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze embarks upon a new adventure in time, one that can be formally related to his prior system (as Williams capably does) but need not be (since Deleuze doesn't); and following Deleuze's meeting with Guattari, his engagements with time take on a different character, less arborescent and more rhizomatic, to use terminology from that period.

With this approach it is no longer necessary to judge various engagements against a preferred standard or demand fidelity to an original intention/text – something Williams himself wishes to avoid (pp. 12-13). Such an approach might also compromise, however, the ability to advance 'a' philosophy of time under the name 'Deleuze'. I should therefore make it clear that these remarks are not intended as criticisms of Williams' project: this book achieves with distinction its aims of (a) establishing Deleuze as one of the great thinkers of time, and (b) demonstrating the significance of time to his mature (solo) metaphysics, and to these ends Williams must be commended. Nevertheless, this book also leaves

ample space for alternative approaches to Deleuze and time, all of which will no doubt be better off as a result of Williams' exemplary efforts.