

BOOK REVIEW

## Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities: Toward a Living Present

Rachel Loewen Walker. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022  
(ISBN 9781350185494)

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Drawing on a rich archive including the work of Gilles Deleuze, the writing of Jeanette Winterson, and personal experience, *Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities* argues that we ought to understand time in terms of a living present. This understanding, Loewen Walker claims, has affordances in the context of social justice most broadly, and for feminist, queer, indigenous, and environmental politics more specifically. The monograph joins (and addresses) many other works about the affordances of Deleuze's approach to time for feminist philosophy, including writing by Elizabeth Grosz, Claire Colebrook, and Rosi Braidotti.

In Loewen Walker's vision, to understand the present as living is to see it as a "contraction of the past and an anticipation of the future" (4). The present is "thick with every past," Loewen Walker writes; it also stretches to the future through anticipation (52). The author gives the example of learning to ride a bike as a seven-year-old. On the one hand, this moment draws on past experience or is a materialization of the past, its contraction: the rider has learned the rhythm of pedaling, for instance. She pushes one foot after the next. The road is there; the bike has been made. The past contracts to make this moment. At the same time, the present is anticipatory: the biker's present action shapes what might come next. She might crash into the sidewalk, for instance, in a moment of distraction. For Loewen Walker, the present is living in that "it actually *changes* the past and future of self and other through continuous, reverberating waves" (4). That is to say, if the ride is successful, the past is imagined as developing a useful habit. If not, the past is lacking: previous actions or the bike itself is insufficient in some way. The present then holds immense potentiality: not simply a culmination of the past but an active shaping of it, not simply a moment toward the future, but a moment of potential becoming toward a future as yet unknown and unformed.

A central argument here is that time does not "preexist the world in which we live, the systems of communication and time-keeping through which it is read" (12). Instead, as we tell stories in the present, we make time, positing a past and anticipating a future. This should not be understood as a form of idealism, however. Loewen Walker reads Deleuze and Winterson through new feminist materialism, especially the work of Karen Barad, and indigenous ways of knowing, such as the work of Juan Alejandro Chindoy Chindoy, to claim that we make time in the stories we tell. But the stories themselves emerge as part of material intra-actions: they involve storytellers, audiences,

the place of telling. The stories have material effects on the future, too, actually bringing about potential futures through telling particular stories. And the stories are not predetermined. They are, instead, figured here as instances of possibility, happenings, or even Deleuzian events.

The most compelling chapter of *Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities* takes this understanding of storytelling and the living present to revisit the familiar lesbian, gay, or queer coming-out narrative. This narrative, Loewen Walker recognizes, feels cliché; its interest is passé in queer studies, yet Loewen Walker identifies how coming out still has purchase in 2SLGBTQ communities. Often, coming out is imagined as a movement from interiority to exteriority, from artifice to authenticity. Instead, Loewen Walker argues that we can understand the speech act of coming out as an event that ruptures chronological time. To come out is to reshape the past and anticipate a different future. The speech act can likewise be understood as an act of differentiation, an unfolding of spatio-temporal being, a becoming rather than the expression of something previously hidden. Loewen Walker also brings attention to the affects that are sometimes attached to coming out. These affects, she argues, complicate feminist post-structuralist suspicions of identity (such as Judith Butler's) and the coming-out narrative as a result. Coming out is not primarily part of a mechanism of control or capture; instead, it "resonates with us as positive experiences, glimmers of hope, and warm memory" (110).

Loewen Walker's approach to storytelling and the living present also has implications in the context of environmentalism. One chapter, "Thick Time: Echoes of the Anthropocene," develops the provocative argument that stories of climate change that focus on crisis and future peril have the effect of bringing that crisis into being, in part by fostering feelings of necessary doom and resultant paralysis in the present. Instead, troubling a human-centered approach to climate change and the Anthropocene narrative, Loewen Walker considers the life of jellyfish, marine animals with "no fixed mass, clear life span, or marked gender," animals that are currently thriving (129). Life, such as the life of jellyfish, will go on without us, Loewen Walker insists (131). Our narratives of climate change should anticipate more than peril and should not focus simply on sustaining what is or what has been. Rather, we need to make room for what might become (135–37).

For the most part, Loewen Walker develops her understanding of the living present from Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of Sense*. *Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities*, however, is certainly not an exegesis of Deleuze's writing. It is also not a work of critique. Rather, as Loewen Walker claims in the book's introduction, *Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities* follows a diffractive methodology: "a method of reading ideas and insights through one another, and of attending to relations of difference between them" (10). This means that much of the labor of this monograph is to bring works together, to read discourses and events alongside one another and through each other, to consider, for instance, the decolonial protest movement Idle No More alongside scientific discourse about the Anthropocene alongside the work of British novelists, French philosophers, and European physicists. Such a practice of feminist philosophy seeks to develop a philosophical method that does not begin from abstraction but rather seeks to develop concepts that are responsible to the present. Loewen Walker is a white, queer settler, presently living in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Her philosophical practice as developed throughout this book attends to the complexity of this location.

Although this method is certainly a strength of the monograph and indicative of its ambition, it also raises some questions as well. In part, this is because attention to

specific philosophical works, novels, and events are passed over relatively quickly. More substantially, though, the book raises the question of how feminist settlers in North America, trained in continental philosophy, might address Indigenous North American philosophy. One place this question comes up, for instance, is in Loewen Walker's treatment of Alex Wilson's "N'tacimowin inna nah': Our Coming in Stories." Loewen Walker summarizes how Wilson argues that for many Two Spirit people, coming into being as Two Spirit is not a practice of "coming out" so much as "coming in." To come in is "not a declaration or an announcement. Rather, it is an affirmation of interdependent identity" (96). Coming in is a "storying activity" (104). It generates "everyday relationships between teller and listener, or subject and community, askance of the settler timelines that view coming out as an inside/outside phenomenon" (104). Though compelling, in the context of a chapter on "queerness," queer time, and the attempt to develop a "queer politics without identity," Loewen Walker's attention to Wilson raises more questions than answers (91). Is everyone who is "coming out" in fact "coming in"? Are Two Spirit people "queer"? What happens when the category "queer" comes to "include" First Nations peoples? Is Loewen Walker's practice of incorporation an appropriation of indigeneity that works to provide a model of coming out without identity, or is it a form of decolonial practice, one that unsettles the Eurocentric bias of the discipline of philosophy? Inclusion is certainly not enough: the act of inclusion is often a practice that seeks to incorporate difference, an incorporation that does not work toward decolonization so much as toward a multicultural philosophy that can function to legitimize colonization. Although this is certainly not the project of *Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities*, the monograph skips over possible tensions leaving central questions unaddressed. Reading *Queer and Deleuzian Temporalities*, as I did, as a settler on the unceded ancestral lands of the D<sup>x</sup>wədəwʔabš past and present, I was left wondering how to practice feminist philosophy in this living present? How should we live here together and toward what futures?

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