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# The Nick Of Time: Politics, Evolution, And The Untimely



## Synopsis

In this pathbreaking philosophical work, Elizabeth Grosz points the way toward a theory of becoming to replace the prevailing ontologies of being in social, political, and biological discourse. Arguing that theories of temporality have significant and underappreciated relevance to the social dimensions of science and the political dimensions of struggle, Grosz engages key theoretical concerns related to the reality of time. She explores the effect of time on the organization of matter and on the emergence and development of biological life. Considering how the relentless forward movement of time might be conceived in political and social terms, she begins to formulate a model of time that incorporates the future and its capacity to supersede and transform the past and present. Grosz develops her argument by juxtaposing the work of three major figures in Western thought: Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson. She reveals that in theorizing time as an active, positive phenomenon with its own characteristics and specific effects, each of these thinkers had a profound effect on contemporary understandings of the body in relation to time. She shows how their allied concepts of life, evolution, and becoming are manifest in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Luce Irigaray. Throughout *The Nick of Time*, Grosz emphasizes the political and cultural imperative to fundamentally rethink time: the more clearly we understand our temporal location as beings straddling the past and the future without the security of a stable and abiding present, the more transformation becomes conceivable.

## Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books (December 6, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 082233397X

ISBN-13: 978-0822333975

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.8 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #703,349 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #147 in [Books > Science & Math > Experiments, Instruments & Measurement > Time](#) #1260 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Consciousness & Thought](#) #2002 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Gender Studies](#)

## Customer Reviews

“Elizabeth Grosz traces a timely path through the work of three major thinkers. Darwin, Nietzsche, and Bergson, each in his own way, force a rethinking of duration and transformation at the interchange between nature and culture. The Nick of Time suggestively connects their trajectories, drawing them together into a contemporary dialogue on the politics and philosophy of change.”

•Brian Massumi, author of *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*

“Elizabeth Grosz’s *The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely* is a major work. It achieves a richly nuanced and sweeping reconsideration of temporality in the context of contemporary feminist theory, critical theory, and theories of evolution. The considerations of Darwin, Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze, and Irigaray are especially impressive. The Nick of Time is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding how memory, historicity, and politics connect to and are reconfigured by temporality.”

•N. Katherine Hayles, author of *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*

“Superbly written, deftly executed, and wonderfully instructive, *The Nick of Time* is a first-class piece of writing and thinking. It is unique in that it is interested in ‘philosophy of life’ issues not only for their own sake but also because of Elizabeth Grosz’s wider theoretical and practical commitments, such as feminism and a radical cultural politics.”

•Keith Ansell Pearson, author of *Germinal Life: The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*

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I first became interested in this book after seeing it in a bookshop. Having read some Darwin and a fair bit of Bergson I was interested. It is rare indeed nowadays to see any work at all on the concept of time in any other form than the typical linear classical physics/relativity idea. This posits time as something that either acts as a medium through which matter moves or in the case of relativity as another dimension much like the three known space dimensions. In both cases time is strongly spatialised i.e. thought of in the same way that space is. Time is of course strongly linked to change whether it is the idea of change prevalent in ancient times e.g. Plato and Aristotle, Heraclitus or the more modern versions used in science. Grosz has studied time's presence through three well

known figures Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Henri Bergson. Darwin's concern was how organisms evolved over time, Nietzsche how the human being uses the "Will to Power" to become more and Bergson was interested in both. That is in how organisms evolved and what duration (time) actually is, especially in comparison to space. Grosz analyses all of them in turn. She does something unexpected with Darwin, she suggests that natural selection is in fact a positive "force" rather than a purely negative influence on species. I did not find myself believing this, it makes more of natural selection that it is originally posited to be. In turn she considers the ideas of Nietzsche who did foresee Bergson to some degree in that he proposed "The Will to Power" which can be recognised a little in Bergson's *elan vital*. Finally she discusses Bergson's ideas on time/duration, evolution, intelligence, instinct and so on. She studies Bergson far more deeply than either of the other two. She also relates these concepts to politics especially those of feminism, racism and other forms of political struggle. Her discussion of Bergson is deep and she understands his work well. At times I found myself impressed at her whole grasp of Bergson's issues. She locates a kind of complete whole within his work which eluded me. I had read *Creative Evolution*, *Time and Free Will* and *The Creative Mind* but have not as yet covered *Duration and Simultaneity* or *Mind-Energy*. I find that she takes the most from Bergson and relates it at the highest level to much else in our current cultural and political reality. However I did not feel convinced by her study of Darwin and the earlier parts of the book felt a little disjointed. Some parts, especially those on Bergson flowed well together. A good piece of work with more potential.

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