

Tools of thought

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Peg Rawes, *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics: Through Kant and Towards Deleuze*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008

Geometry is typically associated with the principles of ‘scientific’ exactitude and management of space, as well as with the kind of ‘black-boxed’ efficacy and mastery that characterize the discipline in its absolute or universal modality as quintessential exemplar of apodictic knowledge. If *applied geometry* is recognizable by the tools of compass and the ruler, it is these which, specifically in their practical deployment, famously serve Kant in making the distinction, as he does in the *Critique of Judgement*, between *a priori* imagination and reflective judgement, and between geometrical construction and the higher geometry.

For Peg Rawes, however, it is Kant’s dalliance with the basic tools of the geometer itself that is, in a way, most telling, and in the philosopher’s very attention to these utilities lies, in a sense, the traces of the thesis developed in her book. “We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein”, This diagnosis of Foucault resonates with the general proposal made in *Space, Geometry and Aesthetics*. Geometry is given back to the body, or the body back to geometry - nowhere more so than in Husserl’s assertion, cited by Rawes, that, rather than being an instance of irrefutable reason, geometry is a “‘living science,’ which is constituted by an internal genetic or ‘living ‘tradition’”.

If this explains the book’s main title, Rawes’s subtitle, *Through Kant and Towards Deleuze*, also proves to be accurate, albeit in what would seem, initially, to be a rather more perverse way. For while we get plenty of Kant, we encounter almost no discussion of Deleuze at all. The majority of the references to his work appear in footnotes, notably to chapters 3 and 4, and we only ever get the sense that he is indeed on the *horizon* (a moot term itself subject to extended exegesis in chapter 6). Accurate though it may be, then, it does lead one to ponder the apparently idiosyncratic inclusion of Deleuze’s name in Rawes’s title. Closer inspection reveals that this comes down to the author’s need to proclaim the influence on her *methodology* of Deleuze’s idea of a ‘minor’ tradition. In Deleuze’s case, this tradition is made up of Hume-Spinoza-Nietzsche, in Rawes’ case, it is Proclus and forgotten trajectories of Kant in aesthetic geometric ‘sense reason’, which are “to be traced out of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and embodied in the figure of the reflective subject in the later *Critique of Judgement*.”

Rawes, in this context (as frequently elsewhere in the book), explicitly invokes the figure of *anamnesis*, exemplified by her assertion that Kant repeats part of Plato’s *Meno* – namely the famous Socratic example of the slave boy with intuitive geometric understanding - and that Proclus, in assigning “the imagination to a position of mediation between the intelligible and sensible realms”, is a precursor to the third *Critique*. The first two chapters make a strong case, on this basis, for revealing a minor tradition of geometric thought within and in some senses *against* philosophy, and certainly against

orthodox accounts of the functioning of geometry within the tradition. The inspiration for chapter 2 on Proclus, 'Folding-Unfolding', is undeniably Deleuzian, and *The Fold* is clearly not far from the author's mind at this juncture, as well as when she moves towards a detailed engagement with the distinct modalities of expression in Spinoza and Leibniz, as these are articulated, in turn, in chapters 4 ('Passages') and 5 ('Plenums'). In her innovative chapter on Spinoza, Rawes argues that the term *passages* names the quality of Spinoza's *Ethics*, most notably in the *Scholias*, which have a function beyond that of a discursive demonstration of a geometric method and entail, rather, a performative 'figurational' strategy. The uniqueness of Leibniz's geometric method, Rawes proposes, is, by contrast, his conception of the plenum as a topological figure enabling the paradoxical border of monadic interior and exterior (which is perhaps most succinctly proposed in the late concept of the 'vinculum substantiale', not here discussed) "rather than a finite limit" between them. Leibniz's role in producing the conditions for a thought of a properly immanent conception of temporality prepares the way, then, for the chapter on Bergson's more emphatically topological geometric method. For Rawes, Bergson's specific contribution to the history of sense-reason arises from the fact that "duration produces topological relations between philosophy and the subject that dramatically reconfigure the nature of science, philosophy and life".

The Deleuze towards whom the book is stepping is not therefore, as the author (with welcome subtlety) demonstrates, both in word and in deed, to be located at the end of a career, from Proclus to Husserl, of the concept of 'sense-reason'. The inclusion of a final chapter on Husserl in place of the Deleuze which the book is still supposedly moving *towards*, is in fact to be explained rather by elements of Husserl's thought which, Rawes argues (largely in footnotes), are compatible with Deleuze. And, while the chapter does not directly discuss the latter, it is, arguably, true that there is indeed more of an affinity between the two philosophers than might commonly be expected, particularly in their respective concepts of sense (the convergence being most obvious in Deleuze's book entitled *Logic of Sense*).

Rawes writes with a keen eye for connections between architectural design, the visual arts and geometrical minor philosophy (in this regard, there is an especially rewarding paragraph on the importance of *drawing* as 'postulate' rather than 'axiom' in Proclus on page 56). That intention is explicitly announced in her introduction, and the difficult task of giving palpable coordinates to an apparently ineffable and abstract domain allows the book to participate in potentially fruitful exchange with recent books by Rajchman, Massumi, Grosz and Goetz, each of whom has participated in an engagement with space and/or architecture in the movement either to or from a 'Deleuzian' aesthetics. Deleuze, then, is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere in particular in this richly suggestive and ceaselessly inventive book - a kind of wind, as he himself liked to characterize Spinoza's *Ethics*.

This commendable addition to our thinking of space and philosophy succeeds in renewing our thinking concerning geometry and does so with a real feel for the creation of concepts. A book which makes geometry breathe for the non-initiate is, arguably, already testament to a considerable achievement.

Garin Dowd