
Time Out of Joint: Hamlet and the Pure Form of Time

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore why Deleuze takes up Hamlet's claim that 'time is out of joint'. In the first part of this paper, I explore this claim by looking at how Deleuze relates it to Plato's *Timaeus* and its conception of the relationship between movement and time. Once we have seen how time functions when it is 'in joint', I explore what it would mean for time to no longer be understood in terms of an underlying rational structure. The claim can be understood as about a relationship between time and action. In the second part of this paper, I want to relate this new understanding of time to *Hamlet* itself, in order to see how temporality operates within the play. I will conclude by relating these two different conceptions of time out of joint to one another through Nietzsche's eternal return.

Keywords: Kant, Plato, Hamlet, eternal return, synthesis of time, tragedy

I. Movement and Time in the *Timaeus*

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze introduces the notion of time out of joint in connection with two figures, Kant and Hamlet.¹ In the first part of this paper, I want to elucidate exactly what Deleuze means by time being out of joint. His characterisation of it is as follows:

The joint, *cardo*, is what ensures the subordination of time to those properly cardinal points through which pass the periodic movements which it measures (time, number of the movement, for the soul as much as for the world). By contrast, time out of joint means demented time or time outside the curve

Deleuze Studies Volume 5: 2011 supplement: 56–76

DOI: 10.3366/dls.2011.0037

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which gave it a god, liberated from its overly simple circular figure, freed from the events which made up its content, its relation to movement overturned; in short, time presenting itself as an empty and pure form. (Deleuze 2004: 111)

In order to develop an understanding of what Deleuze means by time out of joint, I want to begin by examining what ‘jointed’ time might look like. The key to this is the notion of the joint itself, which Deleuze presents in more detail in his 1978 lecture, ‘Synthesis and Time’:

Cardinal comes from *cardo*; *cardo* is precisely the hinge, the hinge around which the sphere of celestial bodies turns, and which makes them pass time and again through the so-called cardinal points, and we note their return: ah, there’s the star again, it’s time to move my sheep! (Deleuze 1978b)

Deleuze is here referring to Plato’s conception of time, presented in the *Timaeus*.² The *Timaeus* gives us a mythical account of the creation of the world by a demiurge, who seeks to create the universe by imposing form on chaotic matter. The demiurge

took over all that was visible—not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion—and brought it from a state of disorder to a state of order, because he believed that order was in every way better than disorder. (Plato 1997b: 30a)

As the creator himself is perfect, he desires to create the universe as far as possible as an image of himself. As he wants to create the most perfect world possible, the world has several key attributes. First, as it cannot be less intelligent than the creatures within it, it is an animal, and thus possesses a soul. Second, as unity is an attribute for perfection, the world is composed of just one animal. Third, as the sphere is the most perfect form, the universe is formed as perfectly spherical. Finally, the creator himself is eternal, but given the nature of the world as already in motion, he can only create the world as a likeness to eternity:

Now it was the Living Thing’s nature to be eternal, but it isn’t possible to bestow eternity fully upon anything that is begotten. And so he began to think of making a moving image of eternity: at the same time as he brought order to the universe, he would make an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity. This number, of course, is what we now call ‘time’. (Plato 1997b: 37d–e)

The universe is here seen, therefore, as a sphere in motion. Now, at this point, we can already note the first important point in this myth. Time is here seen as a structure of the realm of appearance. While the world itself is a copy of the creator, time has no place in relation to the eternity

of the creator himself. So how does time come about? Before the universe is organised according to time, it is still in motion, although this motion is 'disorderly'. Thus, motion is not dependant on time, as motion is prior to the imposition of time. Time is not that which allows movement to take place, but that which allows movement to become rational. In fact, Timaeus believes that time is grounded in the elements which are most perfect in the universe. That is, the celestial bodies. The celestial bodies thus occupy something like a mediating position, as on the one hand, they are similar to the eternal, whereas on the other, they are the ground for time. The planets move in an orderly manner, which is what allows time to be related to measure (the star that represents the time to move the sheep in Deleuze's example):

In this way and for these reasons night-and-day, the period of a single circling, the wisest one, came to be. A month has passed when the Moon has completed its own cycle and overtaken the Sun; a year when the Sun has completed its own cycle. As for the periods of the other bodies, all but a scattered few have failed to take any note of them. Nobody has given them names or investigated their numerical measurements relative to each other. And so people are all but ignorant of the fact that time really is the wanderings of these bodies, bewilderingly numerous as they are and astonishingly variegated. (Plato 1997b: 39c–d)

On the Platonic model, therefore, we cannot have something like an understanding of the pure form of time, as time is the way in which something else (in this case, the number, or measure of motion) presents itself. Time is simply an imperfect way in which the eternal patterns of the world present themselves. It is always an ancillary time premised on a logically prior movement. The possibility of understanding time as out of joint therefore requires that we move away from the Platonic model of time, as Platonic time is always impure. While the mythological nature of Plato's account in the *Timaeus* may lead us to treat it lightly, underlying Plato's account is a more substantial philosophical position. In this regard, we can see the *Timaeus* as, with some reservations,³ providing an account of how an essentially rational structure becomes exemplified in the world as a whole.⁴ In this sense, just as *The Republic* explores the nature of moral justice through its externalisation in the city-state (Plato 1997a: 368–9), the *Timaeus* relates goodness to the whole of an eminently rational universe. The *Timaeus* therefore provides a mythological account of the relationship between the world of appearance and the forms. This relationship essentially makes man, as rational agent, at home in the world. These relations between psychology

and cosmology are also played out in Hamlet's characterisation of his own condition in terms of the universe as a whole, as we shall see in the second half of this paper. We can see that the subordination of time to an eternal, intelligible, and also, representational, model of time is central not just to Plato's conception, but also to a more general trend in pre-Kantian philosophy. Leibniz, for instance, argues that the notions of space and time are simply ways in which we, as finite intellects, perceive what are essentially a series of intelligible relations between things:

As for my own opinion, I have said more than once that I hold space to be something purely relative, as time is—that I hold it to be an order of coexistences, as time is an order of successions. For space denotes, in terms of possibility, an order of things that exist at the same time, considered as existing together, without entering into their particular manners of existing. And when many things are seen together, one consciously perceives this order of things among themselves. (Leibniz 2000: 15)

Space and time are simply 'well founded phenomena' by which we inadequately perceive the true 'conceptual' order of things. As such, time is really a mode in which the essential structure of succession appears to us. In this case too, therefore, time is secondary to a rational, conceptual and representational way of ordering things. Time is predicated on a prior rational structure. Number is expressed in the celestial movement of the heavens. To be 'in joint' is therefore to be hinged, tied to cardinal numbers and tied to a prior rational order. For Deleuze, it is Kant who first provides an understanding of time which is not reducible to Leibniz's 'order of successions,' and I therefore now want to turn to Kant's attempt to provide an alternative conception of time.

II. Kant on the Difference between Concepts and Intuitions

The key innovation in the Kantian system in this regard is the division between intuition and the understanding. Kant argues that in order for us to be able to think, an object must be given to thought. In the case of both Leibniz and Plato, what is given to thought is a confused image of the true nature of things; that is, a copy that differs in degree from it. For Plato, what is presented is an image of eternity in time, but time is simply a manifestation of the rational movement of the celestial bodies. Similarly, for Leibniz, space and time are simply confused perceptions of a properly conceptual reality. Kant's claim in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is essentially that rather than regarding perception as merely a confused form of conceptual thought (what Kant calls in relation to

Leibniz ‘intellectualised appearances’ [Kant 1929: A271/B327]), there is a difference in kind between perception and concepts. In his article, *Concerning the Ultimate Foundation for the Differentiation of Regions in Space* (1768), Kant presents this difference explicitly as the grounds for a refutation of Leibniz. If we take Leibniz’s position as being that space and time are simply confused presentations of conceptual relations, then we would expect all of the properties of spatial and temporal entities to be ultimately explicable in conceptual terms. If we consider a hypothetical universe containing simply one glove, however, then even if we were to completely specify the conceptual relations between the parts of a glove, we would not be able to tell whether the glove was left or right handed, as the mirror image of the glove would have exactly the same relations between the parts that composed it:

However, since there is no difference in the relations of the parts to each other, whether right hand or left, the hand would be completely indeterminate with respect to such a quality, that is, it would fit on either side of the human body. But this is impossible. (Kant 1968: 42–3)

Given that the glove must be left or right handed, it therefore possesses a determination (its ‘handedness’) that is not reducible to conceptual relations. If this is the case, then spatial entities cannot be seen merely as expressions of a non-spatial rational nature (we might think of this claim that space is also out of joint as a parallel thesis to the one we are considering), but also contain something in excess of the rational. In this case, therefore, Kant writes that ‘there are no inner differences here that any understanding could merely think; and yet the differences are inner as far as the senses teach’ (Kant 1997: sec. 13). The argument from incongruent counterparts shows that space cannot be seen as a mode of presentation of conceptual relations in the way that Leibniz proposed, and Kant makes similar arguments in the *Critique of Pure Reason* for the difference between time and succession. Kant’s distinction of concepts and intuition therefore has the consequence that time cannot be seen as the moving image of eternity, as it is no longer the expression of an underlying representational structure, whether the ‘number of movement’ or the true ‘order of things’. Once we recognise a difference in kind between concepts and intuitions (or between time and measure), then our understanding of time is no longer ‘joined’ to, and dependent upon, an understanding of rational movement, and thus we open up the possibility of a genuine understanding of the ‘empty and pure form of time’ itself.

III. Time out of Joint and Deleuze

Does this mean that Deleuze's 'time out of joint' is an essentially Kantian form of temporality? In fact, Kant's understanding of time is limited by his commitments to an essentially epistemic and subject-centred project. That is, Kant is concerned with the conditions under which a subject can attain a priori knowledge of a world of objects. On this basis, he claims that whereas 'hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects, ... we must ... make trial whether we may have more success in the tasks of metaphysics, if we suppose objects must conform to our knowledge' (Kant 1929: Bxvi). In working out the implications of this assumption, Kant takes time and space to be faculties of the subject. That is, they are ways in which that which is to be thought by the subject is given to the subject. As space and time are faculties through which the subject apprehends objects, then those formal properties of the object that derive from its spatio-temporal nature can be known a priori. Given that we are interested in knowledge, which involves concepts, and Kant has posited a radical split between concepts and intuitions, the major project of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to show how the faculty of the understanding can be related to the faculty of intuition. In Deleuze's words, 'does he not once again come up with the idea of harmony, simply transposed to the level of faculties of the subject which differ in nature?' (Deleuze 2003: 19). Kant himself recognises that this is the central problem of the *Critique*, and it is the role of the transcendental deduction to show that it is impossible that 'appearances might very well be so constituted that the understanding should not find them to be in accordance with the conditions of its unity' (Kant 1929: A90/B123).

This is not the place to give a full description of Kant's account of how intuition and the understanding are related, but Kant's essential claim is that the understanding relates to intuition through the notion of synthesis. Kant defines synthesis as 'the act of putting different representations together, and of grasping what is manifold in them in one act of knowledge' (Kant 1929: A77/B109). Now, conscious empirical synthesis takes the form of making judgements. When I count, or bring together the moments of a judgement ('the apple is red'), it is I who actively relates these representations to one another. In a sense, the spontaneity of my ego is what holds together the passive determinations, 'apple' and 'redness'. On their own, these determinations are unities, and thus are in themselves indifferent to one another. In fact, this is clear from Kant's definition, as judging *is* this conjunction of what is

manifold in a single act (*S* is *P*). Kant's understanding of the relation of the understanding to intuition is analogous to his understanding of judgement, and it is the understanding that actively relates different spatio-temporal representations to one another to allow us to represent to ourselves a well ordered world. Such an approach has a number of consequences. As Deleuze notes in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, it presupposes 'a methodologically reduced plane that provides an essential certainty—a certainty of essence—we ask: how can there be a given, how can something be given to a subject, and how can the subject give something to itself?' (Deleuze 1991: 87). Deleuze's claim is that Kant has essentially taken a psychological account of how we synthesise judgements and reiterated it at a transcendental level. 'The same function that gives unity to the different representations in a judgement also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations in an intuition, which, expressed generally, is called the pure concept of the understanding' (Kant 1929: A79/B104). By using this model, Kant ties the notion of synthesis to the notion of consciousness, and hence debar any form of synthesis that is not ultimately governed by judgement. This leads to a further sharp dichotomy between passivity and spontaneity. If the activity of synthesis is tied to the subject, then there is no possibility of a form of synthesis which does not involve a subject—intuition becomes a passive material to be taken up and organised by the conceptual understanding. Furthermore, once again, we do not arrive at a truly pure form of time, as time is now a faculty of a subject:

It is impossible to maintain the Kantian distribution, which amounts to a supreme effort to save the world of representation: here, synthesis is understood as active and as giving rise to a new form of identity in the I, while passivity is understood as simple receptivity without synthesis. (Deleuze 2004: 109)

Deleuze's notion of time will therefore take up this idea that it is fundamentally different in kind from the structure of representation, but as Deleuze does not '[trace] the so-called transcendental structures from the empirical acts of a psychological consciousness' (Deleuze 2004: 171), he opens the possibility of seeing time as capable of exhibiting organisation in its own right (what Deleuze calls 'passive synthesis').

At this point we can return to the empty and pure form of time itself. We can now give a schematic account of it by noting the revolutionary result of the Kantian theory of intuition. That is, that rather than time being a mode of succession, succession is a mode in which time appears

to us. In fact, succession is simply a way in which *we* organise time for Kant. Deleuze puts this point forward as follows:

Time cannot be defined by succession because succession is only a mode of time, coexistence is itself another mode of time. You can see that he arranged things to make the simple distribution: space-coexistence, and time-succession. Time, he tells us, has three modes: duration or permanence, coexistence and succession. But time cannot be defined by any of the three because you cannot define a thing through its modes. (Deleuze 1978b)

The talk about modes is important here, and refers us to Spinoza's conception of substance. Spinoza held that all attributes, such as thought and extension, are equally expressions of the same substance. Here, Deleuze is suggesting that succession and coexistence are simply different 'attributes' of time. The pure and empty form of time therefore has the same relationship to succession and coexistence as substance for Spinoza has to the attributes.⁵ The characterisation of 'substance' as time is therefore made possible by two innovations. The first is the recognition by Kant that time is not an expression of an underlying rational structure, whether the number of movement or the concept of the Leibnizian monad. Without this insight, time is simply a mode of expression of an underlying rational structure. The second is the understanding that time itself is capable of synthesis. This frees time from its role in Kant's system as merely a form of receptivity, and allows it to take the role of a pre-individual ground (or 'unground') of both the modes of temporality we find and of the subject itself. The reason why Deleuze introduces this notion is that we need to explain the interaction of the two very different forms of time themselves. Deleuze posits a difference in kind between the successive nature of habit and the coextensive nature of memory, two fundamental structures responsible for the constitution of the subject.⁶ The question of how memory is able to relate to habit arises, a question much like Kant's question of how two different faculties can relate to one another. Deleuze's answer to this question in terms of time is ultimately Spinozist.⁷ Habit and memory can relate to each other because they are simply different modalities or expressions of the form of time itself. As such we can think (somewhat figuratively) of memory and habit as simply being different ways of presenting the same underlying form of time itself. By taking this approach, the problem of the priority of succession over coexistence, or vice versa, is put out of play. They are both expressions of the same ontologically prior temporal form, which in itself is neither successive nor coexistent. The empty and pure form of time is therefore that which

bifurcates itself into the past of memory and the present of habit. Placing time out of joint and opening up the possibility of a pure form of time itself is, therefore, essential to Deleuze's constitution of an ontology of becoming. I want to return to this point in the final section, when we see how time out of joint is related to the eternal return.

IV. Aristotle's *Poetics*

The emphasis of the first half of this paper has been on what one might call the metaphysical aspect of time out of joint. In this second half of the paper, I want to return to the question of drama itself, and see how the move to a different conception of drama affects our notions of temporality.⁸ My argument will be that implicit in classical drama is a metaphysics of time that is overturned in *Hamlet*, and so the second half of this paper will retrace the evolution of the metaphysics of time, but within the domain of the dramatic. In this domain, it will no longer be a question of overturning the priority of movement, but instead of overturning the privileging of the act. If we are to look at the notion of a time out of joint in drama, a good place to begin will be with Aristotle's definition of tragedy in the *Poetics*, at least in order to provide a contrast to what we find in *Hamlet*. Aristotle presents a somewhat similar position to Plato's in the *Physics*, arguing that time requires change, as without change, we would not be able to determine that time had passed. Time here is simply the measure of motion, and so we once again have the subordination of time to a rational structure. Aristotle claims that tragedy is

the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions. (Aristotle 1995: 1449b25–9)

For our purposes, what is important to note is that in Greek tragedy, what is central is action ('they do not act in order to portray the characters; they include the characters for the sake of the action' [Aristotle 1995: 1450a20–1]). As Michael Davis points out, 'the *Poetics* is about two things: *poiêsis* understood as poetry, or imitation of action, and *poiêsis* understood as action, which is also imitation of action' (Davis 1999: 9).

We find the same emphasis on action in Hegel's conception of tragedy. If we look at a play such as *Antigone*, we can see that the drama

arises from the actions of its characters, and traces their consequences. The conflict at the centre of the drama emerges through King Creon's prohibition on the burial within the city of Antigone's brother, the traitor Polyneices, and Antigone's transgression of this prohibition. Here the conflict occurs between the laws 'of the gods, that are unwritten and unfailing' (Sophocles 2003: 501), the right to bury the dead, and the laws of the state, exemplified by Creon's prohibition. Each character chooses to act solely according to one determining principle, and does not recognise the rights of the other. The one-sidedness of their opposed actions means that a resolution can only be achieved by the tragic death of Antigone, and Creon's loss of his wife and son. We can note that what is presented in this case is a legal conception of the individual. To begin with, action is fundamentally tied to the concept of law in Greek tragedy. The tragedy cannot occur simply through a misfortune on the part of the characters, since this is 'not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us' (Aristotle 1995: 1452b36). Likewise, it cannot involve evil characters suffering misfortune, as 'pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune' (1453a4). In this sense, the plot of tragedy involves 'a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune is, however, brought about not by vice and depravity but by some fault' (1453a6–10). In order to explore Deleuze's reaction to this form of drama, I want to bring in here Rosenberg's analysis of drama, as it is central to Deleuze's application of the metaphysics of the empty and pure form of time to drama itself.⁹ In what Rosenberg calls 'old drama', the basis of tragedy is some kind of fault on the part of the agent, some kind of transgression for which the agent is responsible:

[T]he concepts of morality or social law, applying exclusively to human beings and ignoring possible analogies with other living creatures, tend to define the individual not as an entity enduring in time but by what he has done in particular instances. A given sequence of acts provokes a judgement, and this judgement is an inseparable part of the recognition of the individual. (Rosenberg 1994: 136)

When we look at the legal conception of the person, it is not the case that the unity of the individual can be given in terms of his or her acts themselves. Rather, when someone comes before a judge, what the judge relates to is not a unity governed by personality, but rather a series of acts which are unified by the last act's relationship to the law. As Rosenberg notes, the actual acts of a murderer are in large part no different from the acts of anyone else, and are only made criminal by

the fact that they precede the murder itself: 'entering an automobile, stepping on the gas, obeying the traffic lights'. (Rosenberg 1994: 138) When we look at a criminal act, it is the law that provides a framework for the analysis of action, and which imposes a structure of artifice that unifies the conduct of the perpetrator. This is not merely the case in the sense that it is the transgression of the law which defines the act as criminal, but also that the law provides a way of synthesising certain other acts which, without reference to the crime, would be indifferent in relation to the law. We can see that there is a certain artificiality to such a mode of analysis in the following way. First, there is the fact that in determining the guilt or innocence of the perpetrator of a crime, the judge explicitly sets to one side the personality of the individual in order to base the judgement purely on the identity of the actions. Second, we can note that if it is suddenly discovered that the alleged perpetrator did not commit the crime, then the entire identity of series of actions before the law disintegrates. The actions of 'stepping on the gas' and 'obeying the traffic lights' now take on an entirely innocent aspect. In this sense, law is what draws together a series of acts that in themselves are indifferent to one another, in a similar way to that in which the Kantian notion of judgement draws together the moments of intuition which are themselves purely passive in relation to one another.

Now, obviously in the case of the law, the problem is of determining whether the structures of the law apply to the actions or not (whether the person is guilty or innocent). In the case of 'old drama', we do not have the difficulty of determining whether acts properly accord with the structure of the law. Rather, characters in 'old drama' are constituted to be in accordance with their fate from the outset:

The dramatist's definition of the character was not an arbitrary superimposition that exchanged the emotional, intellectual, and mechanical characteristics of a biological and social organism for some one deed that concerned the court; it constituted instead the entire reality of a character, avoiding the ruinous abstraction of the law by determining in advance that his emotions, his thoughts and his gestures should correspond with and earn in every respect the fate prepared for him. (Rosenberg 1994: 139)

In 'old drama', therefore, character is seen simply as a manifestation of the underlying unity provided by actions' relation to the law. On the basis of this relation of character to action, Rosenberg presents his criticism of 'old drama'. Once character has been subordinated to the structure of the law through action, the possibility of an exploration

of the change or development of character is ruled out. Thus, while Creon's relations to those around him—Haemon, for instance—may change during the course of the play, this is simply as a result of the expression of the same moral identity. This is explicit, for instance, in Hegel's reading of tragedy, where 'the truly inviolable law is the unity of the action' (Hegel 1975: 1166). Hegel's understanding of tragedy sees it emerging through each character's adoption of a partial aspect of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) as his guiding principle. Thus Antigone is justified in appealing to the rights of the family in seeking to bury Polyneices, just as Creon is justified in upholding the laws of the state. They are both also culpable in that their action fails to take into account the complete structure of ethical life. The resolution of tragedy is the restoration of balance to the ethical, but as 'the *individuals* have more or less put their whole will and being into the undertaking they are pursuing' (1166; emphasis in original), the resolution of the tragedy can only occur with the dissolution of these partial views, and with them, the characters who embody them. Thus, by focusing on action, we rule out an account of character, or at least of a change of character. We can, however, further note that this model of drama mirrors that of a metaphysics of time I presented in the first half of this paper. Rather than seeing the character as an entity that develops in time, we have a drama which is subordinated to the movement of the action. Similarly, the singularly human nature of action as relation to ethical structure reflects that what is being played out is something primarily atemporal. The duration of the play is simply the mode of expression of the underlying rational structure of the law of action. In the case of the metaphysical notion of time in joint, this structure was given by an initial movement, or conceptual determination. Here, the phenomenal manifestations of characters in classical drama are merely manifestations of an underlying law, or an underlying judgement: the fate of the character. Hence, 'psychology can establish the plausibility of Macbeth's or Lear's behaviour, but for the sufficiency of his motivation, we must not refer to a possible Macbeth or Lear "in real life" but to the laws of the Shakespearean universe' (Rosenberg 1994: 140).

V. Hamlet and Time out of Joint

The focus of Deleuze's philosophical interest in *Hamlet* is in Hamlet's hesitation. Provided we do not simply explain Hamlet's hesitation as a contingent psychological phenomenon,¹⁰ we can approach *Hamlet* as offering an alternative to the Greek conception of drama. In the opening

scene, Marcellus sets up the opposition to the Platonic scheme by noting that war has severed the connection between action and the celestial bodies in the Kingdom of Denmark:

Why such impress of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward, that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day?
(Shakespeare 2003: I, i, 75–8)

As Spencer notes (Spencer 1943: 11), the view of the celestial spheres as a rational realm mirroring the rational faculty of man was widespread at the time that Shakespeare was writing, and views such as that of the humanist, G.-B. Gelli, that ‘man is made of two natures, one corporeal and terrestrial, the other divine and celestial; in the one he resembles beasts, in the other those immaterial substances which turn the heavens’, were the standard fare of renaissance cosmology. Hamlet relates his own inability to act to a more general malaise with the universe:

And indeed it goes so heavily with my
disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile
promontory; this most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave
o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden
fire—why, it appeareth no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent
congregation of vapours. (Shakespeare 2003: II, ii, 281–6)

In this sense, Hamlet’s concerns are not simply psychological, but are also related to a feeling of incongruence with the kind of rational cosmology put forward by the *Timaeus*. *Hamlet* sees Hamlet himself not as an identity in the legal sense, or in the dramatic senses which we find in Aristotle. He is not defined by action as, for instance Sophocles’ own model of the vengeful son, Orestes, is, who claims that ‘talk is expensive’, and is instead concerned with ‘practical details’: ‘where we should hide, where we can leap out and push that enemy laughter right back down their throats!’ (Sophocles 2001: 1720–5). We do not need to turn to Greek tragedy for the figure of an identity, however, as Hamlet’s character is paralleled within the play itself by Laertes and his need for revenge. As Rosenberg points out, the drama prior to Hamlet’s return from England concerns his inability to act:

I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do;
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do't. (Shakespeare 2003: IV, iv, 43–6)

Now, as these lines makes clear, Hamlet is very much aware of what he should do, but he is simply not able to do it. To this extent, we have an odd dramatic structure since, if characters are understood in terms of the relations of acts to the judgement of the law as they would be in classical drama, then Hamlet's various speeches, and use of speech in the first half of the play, are simply irrelevant to the structure of his role. As Deleuze writes, 'Hamlet is the first hero who truly needed time in order to act, whereas earlier heroes were subject to time as the consequence of an original movement (Aeschylus) or aberrant action (Sophocles)' (Deleuze 1998: 28). Rather than the movement of the action determining the time of the drama, Hamlet experiences time itself as being the ground of action. In this sense, he operates within a time out of joint where his relation to the world, and to himself,¹¹ is governed by a fundamental passivity. His actions unfold in a time which is not his own. In this sense, Hamlet's experience is much like that which Bergson describes in his influential analysis of waiting for sugar-water to mix:

For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*. (Bergson 2002: 176; emphasis in original)

Rosenberg's interpretation is precisely this, that Hamlet's character cannot be understood as purely derived from the structure of the action he is to undertake, unlike in the case of an identity, and hence he exists outside of the role that the play assigns him. The task of taking on the role of avenging his father is simply too big for him. The sea voyage is therefore necessary to the structure of *Hamlet*, as it represents the break in the structure of the play whereby Hamlet becomes equal to the task allotted to him. What does this involve? Deleuze talks about the first half of Hamlet in terms of the '*a priori* past'. In this sense, Hamlet exists in the past of the event of the murder of his father (he is yet to become equal to the action of revenge). Hamlet, in the first half of the play, exists in a state of relation to a past that is disconnected from the present. In this sense, there is a failure to relate the past to action, which is mirrored

by the failure to identify himself with the actual structure of the law. As Deleuze puts it, in his discussion of Hamlet and Oedipus, 'they are in the past and live themselves as such so long as they experience the act as too big for them' (Deleuze 2004: 112). The second time, the action, is the moment of the present, where the self becomes capable of acting. In this sense, for Deleuze, Hamlet mirrors the central problem of Kant's transcendental philosophy: how can two orders, which are different in kind, be brought into alignment with one another? For Kant, this problem is posed in terms of the incongruence of intuition and the understanding. For Rosenberg and Deleuze, the problem is posed in terms of the incongruence of personality as 'an organic coherence intuitively based on the real world of sensation' (Rosenberg 1994: 135), and legal identity as the basis for action. Hamlet recognises that his relation to the world, and even to himself, is mediated through a time divorced from the movement or actions of agents, and thus experiences himself as subordinate to time:

The spontaneity of which I am conscious in the 'I think' cannot be understood as the attribute of a substantial and spontaneous being, but only as the affection of a passive self which experiences its own thought... being exercised in it and upon it but not by it. (Deleuze 2004: 108)

The question is not how this time of duration can be overcome, but of how it can be related to the time of action. We can therefore see 'old drama' as dramatising an ontology of movement, whereas Hamlet dramatises an ontology of time as out of joint or freed from movement. It provides an image for enabling us to think the gathering together of time.¹² Hamlet's question is how he is able to reconcile his personality with the identity of action. For Deleuze, it is only against the future that these two moments can be related. It is only the future that allows the self of the past to be brought into a 'secret coherence' with the present, as action precisely is this relation of past and present towards a future. There are thus three moments to Hamlet; the first, that of passivity, where he is incapable of acting. The second is the caesura, the voyage to England, which Deleuze represents as the present, and the final moment, the future, the horizon against which the action takes place. Together they provide what Deleuze calls a 'symbol' or 'image' (Deleuze 2004: 112) of the totality of time. They show that the two modes of time, the past and the present, can be brought into relation with one another, but only through a third moment of time, the future. In this sense, 'it matters little whether or not the event [of the past] occurs or the act [of the present] has been performed or not: past, present and future

are not distributed according to this empirical criterion' (Deleuze 2004: 112). That is, Deleuze's claim is that we are not concerned with the actual (empirical) relationship of past, present and future in the play (he notes that in another image of time provided by Oedipus, the act empirically precedes the event of the past), but with the formal relations that present the metaphysical structure of temporality. On Deleuze's reading, it is necessary that Hamlet die in the empirical future, not because his character is incapable of changing, but instead for the following reasons. First, because the future is the horizon of action, and the point at which Hamlet's acts escape him as a subject of action; and second, because if Hamlet is to be viewed as a hero who truly relates to time out of joint, this time must ultimately be separated from the subject for the pure and empty form to itself take primacy. If *Hamlet* is to truly provide an image of the totality of time, then the third moment, the unity of the past and the present, must be the equivalent of the Spinozist 'substance as time' that we encountered in the first half of this paper. Just as what unified the times of succession and coexistence was that which was expressed in both and thus was itself neither successive nor coexistent, the future, as the unity of the past and the present, escapes both aspects of Hamlet's character. In order for an image of the totality of time to be constituted, the moment of 'secret coherence' must be one where Hamlet is neither subject to the event, nor capable of acting. This moment is the moment of his death.

In this manner, the I which is fractured according to the order of time and the Self which is divided according to the temporal series correspond and find common descendant in the man without name, without family, without qualities, without self or I, the 'plebeian' guardian of a secret, the already-Overman whose scattered members gravitate around the sublime image. (Deleuze 2004: 112)

One might in fact question whether Deleuze is correct that Hamlet's death really marks the instigation of time definitively out of joint, or rather the reinstatement of jointed time as the rule of his line comes to an end, however.

VI. Conclusion: The Eternal Return

As well as a novel conception of philosophy, we also have a new conception of theatre. Both of these novelties present a new way to coordinate the moments of time. The metaphysics of time out of joint relates succession and coexistence through a prior empty and pure form of time, whereas the theatre of time out of joint relates the past and

present to one another against the horizon of the future. The final question is, therefore, how are these two forms related to one another? The answer, I think, is found in Nietzsche's claim that *Hamlet* is an essentially metaphysical tragedy, that 'it is not reflection, it is true knowledge, insight into the terrible truth, which outweighs every motive for action, both in the case of Hamlet and in that of Dionysiac man' (Nietzsche 1997: 40). Deleuze follows Nietzsche in claiming that at the heart of *Hamlet* is a metaphysical truth, even if this is no longer the truth of Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, but rather that of the eternal return. The recognition that there are two forms of the eternal return allows us to relate the two terms of Nietzsche's characterisation, Hamlet, and Hamlet's 'terrible truth'. While we can give the eternal return a dramatic reading as a tripartite structure in terms of the act, as incorporating the past into the present in order to relate to the future, 'such an exposition remains purely introductory' (Deleuze 2004: 113). It presents us only with an 'image' of time, such as we found in *Hamlet*. In addition, Deleuze presents a second interpretation of the eternal return, this time in terms of an 'esoteric truth' that 'concerns—and can concern—only the third time or the series' (Deleuze 2004: 113). It is in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that these two moments are related to one another. We can begin by noting parallels between *Hamlet* and *Zarathustra*. Both involve their central characters moving from a state where they are not equal to their action to the act itself. The bulk of *Zarathustra* is governed by Zarathustra's inability to think the eternal return ('O Zarathustra, your fruits are ripe, but you are not ripe for your fruits' [Nietzsche 2006: 117]). *On Redemption* is central in this respect, in that it explores two different relationships to the past. As Zarathustra says, 'this alone is revenge itself: the will's unwillingness towards time and time's "it was"' (111). This conception of time, with its 'dreadful chance', is the past of mathematical succession—the line of time that is the expression of a rational movement. In this framework, temporality itself is seen as the ground for resentment, man is not the ground for his own actions (he cannot will backwards), and so he is in this sense alienated from what he is by the structure of temporality. The spirit of revenge is therefore engendered by the passing of time, and its incommensurability with the will. Nietzsche offers two solutions to this problem. The first is the annihilation of the will (the Schopenhauerian solution); the second is the redemption of time. The eternal return is that which offers us the possibility of a more appropriate relation to temporality.¹³

Deleuze claims that the second part of *Zarathustra* is concerned with the transformation of Zarathustra, as he finally becomes adequate to the

thought of the eternal return. In the last part of *Zarathustra*, Zarathustra finally throws off his 'pity for the higher men' (Nietzsche 2006: 266). In his pity for the higher men, Zarathustra was still conceiving of the eternal return as the return of time determined by that which exists within it. Such a form of time is the time of revenge and the 'fragments and limbs of human beings' (110). The final stage, Deleuze claims, is unwritten, and would have dealt with the death of Zarathustra. Deleuze describes this final time as 'time by excess' (Deleuze 2004: 113), where the subject is once again dissolved, and time prior to its actualisation in a field of beings presents itself. In essence, we can read the eternal return in this formulation as the unity of past, present and future. It is also, however, the metaphysical structure of time itself: 'the eternal return is neither qualitative nor extensive, but intensive, purely intensive. In other words, it is said of difference' (303). As Deleuze notes, 'we rely upon the overly simple circle which has as its content the passing present and as its shape the past of reminiscence' (114) when we see the eternal return in terms of Hamlet or Zarathustra. In fact, the eternal return, or the empty and pure form of time, is that which makes the relation of past and present possible, rather than this relation itself. It is also that which allows us to think an ontology where time is not subordinated to the movement of things, but rather where things emerge from the unfolding of time itself. For Deleuze, Zarathustra's progress therefore amounts to the dramatisation of the process of coming to think an ontology of becoming. It is only once he has given up the last trace of an ontology of being (his pity for the higher men) that he becomes capable of thinking of the redemption of time itself, rather than a redemption of things through a change in our relation to time: 'Only the extreme, the excessive, returns; that which passes into something else and becomes identical... Eternal return or returning expresses the common being of all these metamorphoses, . . . , of all the realised degrees of power' (51). The eternal return is therefore both a test to redeem our own relationship to time, which Deleuze formulates in a way which parallels Kant's imperative ('what ever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return' [Deleuze 1986: 68]), but also time itself, redeemed from movement.

Notes

1. 'The Northern Prince says "time is out of joint". Can it be that the Northern philosopher says the same thing: that he should be Hamletian because he is Oedipal?' (Deleuze 2004: 111).

2. Deleuze makes this connection between jointed time and the *Timaeus* explicit in his lecture on Kant (Deleuze 1978a: 21 March 1978). In the section on time out of joint, he claims, 'In the *Timaeus* there were some very beautiful pages on the arc of the Demiurge which makes circles, this bending activity. However, this time as an image of eternity, the cyclical figure of time subordinated to movement and whose secret will be the periodic return of planets to the same position relative to each other, is indeed a time which is the image of eternity.'
3. As Francis Cornford notes, the forms have no generative power, and so cannot replace the role of the demiurge in *creating* a moving image of eternity (Cornford 1937: 28).
4. 'It is to be taken, not literally, but as a poetical figure. The whole subsequent account of the world is cast in a mould which this figure dictates. What is really an analysis of the elements of rational order in the visible universe and of those other elements on which order is imposed, is presented in mythical form as the story of a creation in time' (Cornford 1937: 27).
5. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze argues that despite developing a univocal conception of being, the fundamental limitation of Spinoza's philosophy is that substance is understood in terms of being, rather than becoming: 'Substance must be said of the modes and only of the modes. Such a condition can be satisfied only at the price of a more general categorical reversal according to which being is said of becoming, identity of what is different, the one of the multiple, etc.' (Deleuze 2004: 50). Deleuze's own metaphysics can therefore be seen as an attempt to invert Spinozism, with becoming taking the place of substance.
6. The constitution of the time in terms of memory and habit is the topic of the first two of the three syntheses of time. Cf. Deleuze 2004: 90–107, Ansell Pearson 1999: 99–101.
7. My interpretation of time here differs from that of James Williams in his recent study of Deleuze's philosophy of time in that I take the relation between the two forms of drama to be defined by the priority of movement or time. Since Plato, on Deleuze's reading, sees time as essentially confused movement, there is no possibility of the formulation of an empty and pure form of time, as time only exists as a secondary effect of the rational movement of the celestial bodies. Without this rational movement, on this conception, there would equally be no time. We can therefore only conceive of an *empty* form of time once we see time as primary, or at least as independent of movement (by, for instance, Kant's recognition of the difference in kind between the faculties of intuition and the understanding). It is in this sense that Hamlet is seen as Kantian by Deleuze. The future is the *pure* form of time because, as Deleuze writes, 'the future, which subordinates the other two to itself and strips them of their autonomy, is the royal repetition' (Deleuze 2004: 117). In terms of the three syntheses of time, the future is that which is expressed in both the past and the present, each of these functioning as attributes to time, which is analogous to Spinoza's conception of substance. The claim that both the past and the present are attributes of the future, as the pure form of time, is what allows Deleuze to overcome the difficulty he encounters at the conclusion of the second synthesis, that it appears as if the pure (virtual) past is subordinate to the (actual) present. Relating both to the future prevents the prioritisation of either temporal synthesis. Williams instead interprets the empty and pure form of time in terms of a subtractive procedure where number is removed from time: 'For Hamlet, once his father's ghost has spoken, the numbering and legitimacy of kings is out of joint and his time becomes empty (there is no next numbered ruler) and pure (there is no legitimate ruler)' (Williams 2011: 88–9). Such a subtractive approach runs

the risk of occluding the fact that the presence of number in the world is an expression of a deeper rational structure (such that it is not a question of simply removing numbers from the world, but of overturning their transcendental ground). As Williams notes, with the empty and pure form of time, temporality ‘changes from a cardinal time numbering revolutions of the circle, to an ordinal time setting events in order’ (Williams 2011: 89). Once we see the empty and pure form of time as a change in that which is repeated (from the rational to time itself), these two moments can be recognised as different aspects of the same process.

8. In doing so, I follow Deleuze’s claim in *Difference and Repetition* that ‘the theatre of repetition is opposed to the theatre of representation, just as movement is opposed to the concept and to representation which refers it back to the concept’ (Deleuze 2004: 11–12). Deleuze’s claim here is that we can distinguish a theatre grounded in genuine repetition from a theatre grounded in movement as the instantiation in the world of a concept. The latter account of theatre clearly mirrors the account in the *Timaeus* of (rational) movement as the instantiation in the world of the atemporal rational structure of the forms.
9. Cf. Faulkner 2006: 109–14 for further discussion of Deleuze’s use of Rosenberg, although Faulkner does not address the question of the pure form of time directly.
10. Cf. Bradley’s Hegelian reading of Hamlet, where ‘the direct cause’ of his failure to act is read as ‘a state of mind quite abnormal and induced by special circumstances,— a state of profound melancholy’ (Bradley 1920: 108).
11. Deleuze cites Kant’s paralogisms as providing a model for Hamlet’s hesitation, where Kant argues that even the self is given under the form of time.
12. On the processual nature of this gathering, see Williams 2011: 91.
13. My account here focuses on the metaphysical doctrine of the eternal return. For detailed analysis of the ethical doctrine, see Hardt 1993: 26–55; and Ansell Pearson 1997, 1999. Lorraine 2003 suggests a connection between Deleuze and Derrida’s ethical uses of the formula, ‘time is out of joint’.

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