

# Hamlet, or the Player: A Deleuzian Tale

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**Abstract:** This work analyses Gilles Deleuze's account and interpretation of Shakespeare's classic play *Hamlet* as it relates to poietic action. To accomplish such a comparison, it is established that Deleuze finds in *Hamlet* a proper definition of how Time can become free from the spatial joints and show itself as the pure Difference, or formal universality, that grounds all becoming. Hence, the main hypothesis of this work is that in *Hamlet*, Deleuze finds a model to explain not only poietic activity and creation but also the absolute ungrounding of Time. Secondly, it is also held that by exploring Hamlet's agency and play, it is possible to sustain an analysis that condenses the notions of Time out of joint and purely optic and sonic situation, which are deemed central to Deleuze's conception of Time as creative scission or Difference.

**Key-words:** Deleuze, Shakespeare, Hamlet, poiesis, time.

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## ***Hamlet, o el jugador: una historia deleuziana***

**Resumen:** Este trabajo analiza la interpretación de Gilles Deleuze de la obra clásica de Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, en relación con la acción poética. Para realizar tal comparación, se establece que Deleuze encuentra en *Hamlet* una definición adecuada de cómo el Tiempo puede liberarse de las articulaciones espaciales y mostrarse como la pura Diferencia, o universalidad formal, que fundamenta todo devenir. Por lo tanto, la hipótesis principal de este trabajo es que, en *Hamlet*, Deleuze encuentra un modelo no solo para explicar la actividad poética y la creación, sino también el desfundamento absoluto del Tiempo. En segundo lugar, también se sostiene que explorando la agencia y el juego de Hamlet, es posible sostener un análisis que condensa las nociones de Tiempo fuera de las articulaciones y situación puramente óptica y sónica, las cuales se consideran centrales para la concepción de Tiempo de Deleuze como escisión creativa o Diferencia.

**Palabras clave:** Deleuze, Shakespeare, Hamlet, poesis, tiempo.

### **1. Introduction**

This paper will examine Gilles Deleuze's account and interpretation of Shakespeare's classic play *Hamlet* and its relationship with poietic action. As the play commences, it asks itself to unfold, for all its domain has become unlawful and unhinged by earlier –and undisclosed– events. This intolerable situation faces Hamlet, who declares that Time no longer holds together the world, and thus, drastic action must be taken for all to resume its course. This, to the French philosopher, is evidenced at the end of the first act, when Hamlet concludes: "Time is out of joint/O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!" (*Hamlet*, I, V, 151). The world has become undone, and the motion of worldly space and individuals no longer grounds Time. Instead, Time has revealed itself as the intrinsic Difference that fundamentals becoming, and the urge to restore the already broken chronological and structured scheme, previously assumed by the world as a guise of its passivity, takes over Hamlet. Thence, he is the actor who portrays the player, the one able to force the world into its reconstitution and give room to the emerging of the new through the actualization of the Virtual, thus forcing becoming. In sum, the central hypothesis of this work is that in *Hamlet*, Deleuze finds a model to explain not only poietic activity and creation but also its relationship with the absolute ungrounding of Time. Secondly, it is also held that by exploring Hamlet's agency and play, it is possible to sustain

an analysis that condenses the notions of Time out of joint and purely optic and sonic situation, which are deemed central to Deleuze's conception of Time as creative scission or Difference.

## 2. *Hamlet, the player*

*Hamlet* is not a linearly structured, isometrical story but a cyclical and recursive embroilment of events. Its unfolding does not respond to a serialized grouping of premeditated and cohesive events that disentangle progressively, but rather to an intricate display of correlating situations that are strung together in haphazard fashion. In fact, as stated by Terrence Hawkes, it is not safe to assume that the play effectively ends: "for there follows applause, and then that complex of revisionary ironies, which we group under the heading of the 'curtain call'" (Hawkes 1985: 313). *Hamlet* stoutly beckons the strength of its own agency: it is a play within a play, a call for action, and the realization that to act is to transgress the order in which the world presents itself: "at the beginning a dead king's presence overhangs the action and is evoked by the nervousness of the sentries. At the end, a dead king's presence overhangs the action and is evoked by those final cannons, whose sound has been associated with him throughout" (Hawkes 1985: 312).

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*Hamlet* is itself action and process since it infinitely subdivides in the multiplicity of possibilities that may become once everything comes undone. As the play plays, it unfolds, as Hamlet *hamlets* he becomes more merged with his own play. In fact, the player must sacrifice their own subjective identity when acting since it asserts the uniquely improbable whole, the virtual multitudinous "swarming of the impersonal individuations and pre-personal singularities" (Brassier 2000: 202) that enables a new structuration and configuration of the exterior forces that constitute the World. Like a dice-thrower, the player coincides with everyone and no one, as his toss affirms the necessary actualization of the Virtual: "Once chance is affirmed, all arbitrariness is abolished every time" (Deleuze 1993: 198). The positive outcome of the dice-throw is only possible if everything is suspended in pure possibility. Therefore, if Being and the player are one and the same, for it is through the player's agency that Becoming takes place (and so the virtual multiplicity actualizes into a unique state of affairs), Being is divided by two key moments of one game. On the one hand, there is the moment where the dice are grabbed when all multiple and virtual possibilities show themselves as equally attainable; on the other, they are released, and one configuration of them all will emerge as their new actual state. These are two moments or modes of existence of the same structured distribution of singularities.

Deleuze insists on the creative aspect of the game, as those two hours do not just appertain the world itself but also the player who temporarily abandons life's continuous flow and chronological serialization to fix his gaze upon it. In short, "the dice-throw affirms becoming, and it affirms the being of becoming" (Deleuze 2002: 25). To play is, equitably, to capture the already distributed singularities that constitute the current structured world that has become unarticulated and of free condition.

So, as he fixes his view over life itself, the player can follow the strict law of time in its purest and most formal state; he can put himself within the becoming of the Being; he is both aloof, glancing over the chronology of the world, and amidst the world, capable of provoking a new actualization of the Virtual. The roll of dice is, then, not a metaphor but an explanation of becoming, of how someone can interfere in the chronological serialization of Time and break it so a new combination of singularities may be dispensed. This coincides with Deleuze's point of view on the ontogenesis of thought: to think is to create, thoughts become just as an individual actualizes. To think is to introduce Time in its purest form onto the world of representation and recognition, or which is the same, to introduce the immense distance of the virtual into the actual.

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In this sense, *Hamlet* is a knead of multiple and virtual events that, at a certain point, actualize in one single Event that garners them all: the bloody aftermath and deterritorialization of a whole kingdom. Even as an unas-

suming and innocent spectator of *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet intermingles with the various reactions and comments of the others, as well as the voices and elocutions of the players. His words become one with action; they reflect each other perfectly, rendering a pure description of what has happened and provoking everything to move forth:

Suit the action of the word,  
The word to the action; with this special observance,  
That you o'erstep not the modesty of nature;  
For any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing,  
Whose end, both at the first and now,  
Was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature;  
To show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and  
body of the time  
His form and pressure (*Hamlet*, III, II, 27)

This *mise en abîme* of Hamlet's agency can also be attested, as observed by Marie-D. Garnier, in Hamlet's first appearance on stage, which rests "on a differential letter" (2003: 64):

King: Take thy fair hour, Laertes; time be thine, and thy best graces spend it  
at thy will! – But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son, –  
Hamlet [aside]: A little more than kin, and less than kind (*Hamlet*, I, II, 63–5)

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A rhetorical counterpoint marks Hamlet's disjunctive agency, linked to his witted language that twists word's sense and structure, so multiple meanings may arise (and thus, replicate the pure Difference that lays ground to all language and sense).<sup>1</sup> In fact, just as Deleuze and Guattari observe in the collective enunciation and minor language, Hamlet will usually retort his antagonists with a half-buried, "subdued tongue" (Garnier 2003: 65) that willingly tears the possibility of dialogue by installing befuddlement. In addition, this is also Hamlet's way to express sense in itself, as he can force onto his interlocutors a paradoxical term that shatters the univocity of meaning:

Polonius: How does my good Lord Hamlet?  
Hamlet: Well, God-a-mercy  
Polonius: Do you know me, my lord?

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<sup>1</sup> This is also explored by Michael Saenger (2021).

Hamlet: Excellent well; you are a fishmonger  
 Polonius: Not I, my lord!  
 Hamlet: Then I would you were so honest a man  
 Polonius: Honest, my lord!  
 Hamlet: Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man pickt out of ten thousand  
 Polonius: That's very true, my lord  
 Hamlet: For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a god kissing carrion, –Have you a daughter?  
 Polonius: I have, my lord.  
 Hamlet: Let her not walk i' th' sun: conception is a blessing; but not as your daughter may conceive: –friend, look to't  
 Polonius [aside]: How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter: –yet he knew me not at first; he said I was a fishmonger: he is far gone, far gone: and truly in my youth I suffer'd much extremity for love; very near this. I'll speak to him again. – what do you read, my lord?  
 Hamlet: Words, words, words  
 Polonius: What is the matter, my lord?  
 Hamlet: between who?  
 Polonius: I mean, the matter that you read, my lord  
 Hamlet: Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here, that old men have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum; and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams: all which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for yourself, sir, shall grow as old as I am, if, like a crab, you could go backward  
 Polonius [aside] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't (*Hamlet*, II, II, 180–241)

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Just as Raymond Roussel's arithmetical construction revolutionizes language to the point it stammers and forces the birth a minor, babbling tongue (Foucault 1963: 21; Deleuze 1998: 130), Hamlet redirects language towards an odd articulation, both direct and misleading, a language that is "affective, intense, but no more than an affection of which he speaks" (Deleuze 1998: 135). Such poetic exercise makes language "language flee, spin over a witching line" (Deleuze 1998: 138), always in disarray, as it bifurcates and varies in each of its own terms by the intensive force of meaningless and unarticulated sense that is being expressed. Hamlet forcefully modulates language; the undertone of his remarks, like an invisible whirlwind, swallows all that makes sense to his peers and confronts it with a different reality: the pure Difference that sustains all becoming.

So, Hamlet's chameleonic diction and language force multiple interpretations to arise with only the addition or extraction of a letter, a change of tone, a question that repeats what has been said to him, or even the pronunciation of a certain word. Hamlet does not speak in a grammatically correct fashion; instead, he treats language passionately, affectively, so it stutters. The speed of his voice forces the speech to haste and impedes one meaning to overcome the totality of the words: all at once, Hamlet informs his words with the totality of sense; he expresses Difference in itself. This, to the person that still lives attached to the motion of the world, makes Hamlet appear as maddened, a revolutionary senseless hazard that causes confusion and chaos.

That I essentially am not in madness,  
But mad in craft (*Hamlet*, III, IV, 187)

This is what discerns Hamlet's agency from any of the others: on the one hand, there is pure activity, the assertion of the essential and pure Difference that fundamental is becoming. On the other hand, there is the passivity by which one "acts", carried away by the world's motion and succumbing to it as a mere body that either recreates or repeats what movement has been enforced. In this sense, it is Ophelia who becomes the representation of madness and derangement. In contrast, Hamlet is madness itself, a genuinely crazy and feverish subjectivity engulfed by the intolerable sight of the world undoing itself. Ophelia succumbs to incoherence and passivity; she is herself out of bounds (and so presents the representation of Difference to the other actors). In other words, Hamlet's incoherent behaviour is both seeming and true, for he artfully displays the limit of representation and the true sense of action: to his opposing parties, he is insane, someone whose actions carry no meaning and are inconsistent with the world's lively time; to himself he is exasperated and piqued, vexed by the urgent call for action his father's ghost has made. Further from this, Ophelia's death is followed by a linguistic difficulty, which also serves the purpose to discern agency from passivity:

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First clown: How can that be, unless she drown'd herself in her own defense?

Second clown: Why, 'tis found so

First clown: It must be *se offendendo*; it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act: and an act hath three branches; it is, to act, to do, to perform: argal, she drown'd herself wittingly.

Second clown: Nay, but hear you, goodman delver,—

First clown: Give me leave. Here lies the water; good: here stands the man; good: if the man go to this water and drown himself, it is, will he, nill he, he goes — mark you that; but if the water come to him and drown him, he

drowns not himself: argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life

Second clown: But is this law? (*Hamlet*, V, I, 5)

Moreover, Ophelia's tragedy is folded in with her father's assassination; they both will become the intolerable that faces Laertes, whose avenging thirst will contrast Hamlet's. Thus, the play will continue to add plies up until the very end, when it all concludes as the play mirrors itself in the multiplicity of avengements and bloodshed. Opposing Ophelia, Hamlet must first proactively regain control of the matter at hand and seize the unhinged Time that wrests everything from his hands; only then will his soul be finally put at ease. Thus, the madness to which Hamlet is subject is not the reiteration or representation of mourn, which supposes passivity and rest, but the unrelenting urge to recompose what has been broken into with such force that it itself forces one to act.

On a second note, the play's recursive motion can be appreciated in the playlet, where everything is plied to maximum intensity, as Hamlet has indeed cast the die in the hope of obtaining confirmation of what the Ghost has told him. In this scene, all truths are equally possible, all outcomes outweigh each other, and Time "runs most obviously backward, and where the play does not just glance over its shoulder, so much as turn fully round to look squarely at the most prominent action replay of them all" (Hawkes 1985: 318). Hence, not only does *The Mousetrap* offer the "replay" of something that, within *Hamlet*, is unbeknownst, but it is also a retelling of the events that have foreclosed Time's passive succession. At this point, *Hamlet* suffers the intersection of pure Difference, for its entirety is at play. What becomes from such a pivotal and decisive point is the generation of further events that will move onward the action of the play and grant it a proper release and unfolding: "For *Hamlet* to operate, the past has here to be causally fused to the future" (Hawkes 1985: 318).

For this to happen, however, Time must abruptly cease its coherent course. In this sense, *Hamlet* is an attempt to express the mundanely experienced fugacity of Time and how action interferes with it. As Dymphna Callaghan points out, Shakespeare's poetry is characterized by "sheer speed" or an "agitated urgency" (2007: 104), where time is the bill to be paid, and a rapid pace must be assumed. The poet is pressed for time, and poiesis becomes business, making the lyric activity no longer an ostensible timelessness leisure. Hence, continual haste shapes all action: "the progress of time is not stately and orderly as in classical and medieval models of time, but careening, so that youth and beauty come crashing into oblivion" (Callaghan 2007: 108). In essence, Shakespeare is an exponent of an Elizabethan phenomenon where



time is regarded as what also undergoes transformation. Nothing is the extent of motion, and everything is subsumed by a Nature “that unfolds this accelerated temporality” (Callaghan 2007: 108). This coincides with Waller’s view that time is deeply concerning to the Elizabethan literature, where the nature and meaning of time is scrutinized to the point it grounds a “profound, if gradual, intellectual revolution” (Waller 1976: 10). Time is now regarded as the abstract category of constant experience, as it becomes opposite to the static and unfathomable Eternity. Additionally, time is the passing of moments or inevitable mutability and change one perceives in life. This is expressed, for instance, in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 60: “Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore, So do our minutes hasten to their end.”

Thus, *Hamlet* exposes how action must, in a way, decelerate this fugacity because his vengeance is in tension with the rapid unfurling of life. *Hamlet* explores the character of the time “that is at once the matrix of human activity and constituent of our being” (Kastan 1982: 4), as the ghost is the intruding voice of an unexperienced past that cleaves time’s brevity and wounds the present. The breach left by this is only healed by action, which Hamlet translates as an avenging thirst that demands recognition of a time anterior to the play. But this does not mean that Hamlet is expected to succeed, or rather his action to foreclose Time’s fleetingness, for the mutability of life overpowers his capacities, however “irreversible and complete” (Kastan 1982: 27) an action may be. As underlined by Waller, “Time’s incessant dissolving of intentions or relationships underlies Hamlet’s unusual sensitivity and explains much of his sense of delay in fulfilling the ghost’s demands” (Waller 1976: 124). Indeed, Hamlet often reverberates through the dialogues and masquerades behind manifold meanings as he counterpoints his pairs fleeting experience of life with arrest and inquisitive demands. In other words,

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Hamlet differs from the rest of the court by his insistence on understanding life as involving complicated and crucial metaphysical issues, which for the sake of his own integrity he feels must be faced and not dismissed by pragmatic assertions that they are irrelevant to everyday life (Waller 1976: 124).

In essence, *Hamlet* is an exponent of Time’s tragic dimension. Tragedy is when life’s alleged homogeneity is disarrayed, and action becomes dire, for healing action is requested. The end of the play strongly evokes this, as “Hamlet’s time has indeed ended with his ‘arrest’ by death, and the play closes quickly behind him, focusing and freezing our attention upon his experience” (Kastan 1982: 90). This agrees with Matthew Wagner’s interpretation that Shakespeare “understood theatre as a temporal art” (Wagner

2007: 68), an idea his drama draws upon and out. There is a “temporal ‘thick-ness’” (Wagner 2007: 1) that Hamlet navigates, where the past and future heavily weigh the present, and the event is what unsettles the fluent aging of the world. At first glance, this is but oxymoronic, for how come action is conditioned by witnessing the intolerable situation in which Time becomes so radically unhinged that its flow is no longer possible? At the heart of this question lies the main interest of this work because it is through Hamlet’s persona that Deleuze will throw some light on how this problem may be solved. Why is Hamlet able to conclude that such coherence has been broken? The presence of ghostly beings that solidify Hamlet’s “prophetic self” shows the coalescence of the actual and the virtual: a virtual King that seeks revenge through the actual prince, himself a virtual king and master of his domain, that will avenge him. This is, to Hamlet, intolerable, for a significant breach capsizes the whole world, and only his partaken action will heal it.

### ***3. The unfolding of the world: Hamlet’s call for action***

Stand, and unfold yourself (*Hamlet*, I, I, 2)

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Although not treated in abundance and not necessarily under the same hypothesis, the subject of Time out of joint and its relationship to Hamlet has been thoroughly analyzed in works that must be here taken for granted (e.g., Barker 2012; Swarbrick 2018; Lambert 2012; Ryle 2014, and Buydens 2005: 180). One of them, which will be regarded as the mainframe for this chapter, is Somers-Hall’s “Time Out of Joint: Hamlet and the Pure Form of Time” (2011), which focuses on the Kantian formal aspect of the unhinged Time, something that Deleuze will reprise on several occasions after first working it out in *Difference and Repetition*. As Somers-Hall observes, Deleuze introduces the idea of Time out of joint in *Difference and Repetition* as the “demented time, or time outside the curve which gave it a god, liberated from its overly simple circular figure, freed from the events which made up its content, reversing its rapport to movement, in short, [Time] presenting itself as empty and pure form” (Deleuze 1998: 120). To understand what is a Time that has not gone completely mad, Somers-Hall focuses on Deleuze’s lessons on Kant and Time, for it is there that Deleuze will find the correlation between world and movement: as the movements of individuals are numerable, and their summation constitutes world’s motion, Time is the totality of movement; thus, Time is grounded by movement.

The joints by which Time is restrained are the cardinal points or hinges around which time passes. They make time recursive and structured. In this regard, Time is but a passive occurrence, for the individual is overhauled by the movement of the world, which is but a representation of eternity. In this sense, one could only behave according to the world's motion and flow, as Time is the passing of presents that affect each other through the bodily encounters that make up all movement. So, Time is something experienced as part of the lived world, as something only sensed and configured by the motion of the elements; as the actual that passes through the joints of the world, it remains cohesive to the lived present that gives way to it:

The joint, *Cardo*, indicates the subordination of time to, precisely, the cardinal points through which pass the periodic movements it measures. As long as time rests within its joints, it is subordinated to extensive time: of which it is the measure, the interval or number (Deleuze 1998: 40).

Thence motion, even if disorderly, is hinged by these frames that allow it to be rational and schematic, and it is within these locks that Time becomes grounded by the worldly elements that compose it. Time is measurable, or measurable, if it is strictly correlated by the total sum of movements that is the world. This, which Somers-Hall identifies as the “platonic model” of Time—manifested in *Timaeus*—, disallows the conception of Time as pure form: “Time is simply an imperfect way in which the eternal patterns of the world present themselves. It is always ancillary time premised on a logically prior movement” (Somers-Hall 2011: 58). This is the classical conception of the relationship between time and motion, where there is a hierarchy of movements towards Eternity or the form of which all moving things participate. However, “there is a tendency of time to emancipate, when the movement that measures it is the more *abhorrent, derived*, marked of meteorological and terrestrial matters of contingences” (Deleuze 1998: 40). Thus, when time is out of joint when the door comes off its frames, it means that movement is subordinated to time, and time “is no longer related to the movement it measures, but the movement to the time that conditions it” (Deleuze 1998: 41).

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Now, instead of focusing on the platonic model that influenced the idea of a jointed time, as Somers-Hall does, it is here purported that within Deleuze's philosophy itself, there is a model that corresponds to this aspect of time. Furthermore, it is intrinsically connected to agency and Becoming. Thus, as Deleuze develops the image-movement and opposes it to the image-time (via the contrast between the sensor-motor scheme and the pure optic and sonic situation), where no privileged instant is the element

of movement, a proper explanation of how Hamlet acts and why is Time so essential, is granted. Hence, in the next chapter, it will be asserted how Time as pure form, agency, and becoming are all encompassed by the direct image-time that stems from the disarray of the image-movement and how *Hamlet* fits in all this.

### 3.1. Time before unhinging, or the image-movement

To start with, Deleuze basis both his definition of image and movement in Bergson's account of the world as the concatenation of moving images. As defined in *Matière et mémoire*, images

act and react one upon another in all their elemental parts according to constant laws, which I call laws of nature, and, as a perfect science of said laws would permit, without doubt, the ability to calculate and foresee what will happen in each and every one of those images, the future of the images must be contained in their present, and it should not add to them anything new (Bergson 2012: 11).

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It follows, then, that images are a form of existence situated half-way between 'thing' and 'representation', that are in constant motion and, once conjoined in an absolute sum of movement, form the matter. Moreover, as images concatenate through motion, they form the matter of the world, which Deleuze will name a Plane (because it is a world of "n" dimensions) or an infinite assemblage of things that vary from each other. In addition, in this plane, "being and the becoming coincide"<sup>2</sup> (DS 02/11/1982) since

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<sup>2</sup> As the reader may well know, Gilles Deleuze dictated yearly seminars at Vincennes for more than a decade. These seminars were recorded by his students. Unfortunately, these are but now starting to be edited and published in French and English (the Spanish reader is possibly aware that Deleuze's seminars have been thoroughly edited, revised and published by Cactus publishing house). In order to both recognize their great efforts and support the project, I have chosen to use Mrs. Stivale and Smith's "The Deleuze Seminars", an ongoing web-page/research project that is up to the task of providing the English reader a curated edition of these seminars. In order to reference them, I have chosen to employ "DS" as shorthand for "*Deleuze's seminar*", followed by a date, to refer to a specific lecture. In this case, for instance, the complete reference would be: *Cinema: The Classification of Signs and Time*, 6<sup>th</sup> lecture (of the year 1982), 21 December 1982. The reader should head to the webpage Mr. Stivale co-ordinates with Dan Smith named "The Deleuze Seminars" to gain access to the edited transcription of the recording. Full index of the transcriptions and translations can

what comes to be are these images that incessantly change, in so far as they are in contact with each other: “they are perpetually in motion, they don’t stop moving” (DS 02/11/1982). Thus, the plane is a system where any image is inseparable from the action it exerts on the rest and how they respond.

However, there is one of these images that, aside from being knowable extrinsically by the grace of perception, is also known intrinsically via affection: the own body. These affections felt in the own-body are the commotions received from the other images as movements that claim a bodily response, “it seems to me as if each of them contains in its way an invitation to act and, at the same time, the authorization to withhold and not even do anything” (Bergson 2012: 12). As the world itself is a set of images, there is at least a differentiation between them regarding those that force agency and respond to what is forced onto them, and those that act. This interaction is mediated by movement: it is motion that the exterior images force into the body, which itself passively responds and “restitutes movement” (Bergson 2012: 14). The own body is, then, an image that acts by choosing how it responds to the worldly motion. Again, any agency that the own-body would partake in, as long as it is in response to either its perception or affection, will always be in terms of motion. In short, the own-body reflects the worldly force that images impress on it in a particular way; it is the input that actualizes or promotes the individuation of what is virtually existent in the other images. However, this action is still embedded in the bodily joints of the moving world:

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As my horizon widens, the images that surround me seem to draw themselves over a more uniform background, thus becoming indifferent to me. The tighter the horizon, the more the objects it circumscribes are staggered distinctively, according to the more or less easiness with which my body touches and moves them. They give back to my body, as a mirror would, their eventual influence; they are ordered in terms of increasing or decreasing capacities (*puissances*) of my body. *The objects that surround my body reflect its possible action on them* (Bergson 2012: 15).

Hence, the matter is the set of images and perception of those same images that relate to the possible action of a certain and determinate image, the own-body. This means that it is through motion that two individuals are related in the world of images, but also that by the halt of such motion

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be accessed here: <https://deleuze.cla.purdue.edu/full-index/> (last accessed 24 of February of 2025).

that the new can happen. Thus, action cannot be properly entertained in the image-movement, because here Time is still bonded by motion and spatial joints, Time must break free, for only then will subjectivity find itself internal to Time as the form that fundamentals motion, and only then will these virtualities become available to conform an actual. Having obtained that the images are themselves movement (and that they interact with each other by means of it), Deleuze needs to state what movement is. To do so, he recapitulates Bergson's three theses on motion.

The first thesis states that, while the travelled space is infinitely divisible, motion is not. Movement is a steady present, or an "act of travelling" (Deleuze 1983: 9), which means that the travelled spaces and distances (where movement takes place) appertain entirely to one and only homogeneous space, in so far that the composing movements are heterogeneous and irreducible to one another. Moreover, motion cannot be reconstituted by the stringing of positions in space, or instants in time, even if the unmovable "cuts" would, once added to one another, make up the total sum of the world (the totality of positions in space, of presents in time). Brief, it cannot be reduced to the travelled space:

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When you reconstitute movement with the travelled space, you have already considered movement as something that has passed, that is, as something already done. But movement is the act of erring, it is the erring in act. That is, movement is that which is done. Precisely, when it is already done, there is only a travelled space left. But not movement. [...] Travelled space is fundamentally divisible, it is essentially divisible. In contrast, movement, as the act of transversing a [determinate] space, is indivisible. Thus, it is not spatial (*de l'espace*), it is of the duration. It is an indivisible duration (DS 02/11/1981).

Motion is always "behind one's back" (Deleuze 1983: 9). Now, this is already linked to *cinéma* and its images, as cinema is formed by two complementary givens: instantaneous cuts (which are the images) and the moving impersonal time, "uniform, abstract, invisible or unperceivable" (Deleuze 1983: 10), that is 'within' the machine with which the images are paraded. Yet, what cinema gives are not the photograms themselves, but an image in which movement does not increase (nor decrease), an image where movement is given in itself: a moving image of movement or image-movement. This first thesis then establishes the notion of movement as a cut, a mobile breach between bodies (their acts and responses) that is not the sum of an unmovable cut and an abstract movement. Therefore, the world is always "in the process of being made and unmade" where only "halts and states, 'snapshots' cut out from change" (Marrati 2008: 10) are perceived.

That is why movement is only divided by changing in nature; it is heterogeneous, and change is only given by jumps and instantaneous cuts, which, ensembled, create a false sense of motion. At the same time, the space that gathers these images is cuttable, divisible, and numerable because the difference between points A and B does not matter; it pertains to the same continuum, only differentiated by random numbers that make sense when structured within a made-up series. This implies that movement and time are narrowly related, since depending on how movement is conceived it is that Time will show itself either directly or indirectly. If motion is regarded in a false, cinematic way, where the jointed static images pretend to reconstitute with “immobile sections, of positions or states that have been arbitrarily cut out from the real movement, which is unreel over the length of an abstract and always identical time” (Marrati 2008: 12), then movement is reduced to space as a travelled continuum, and time is also spatialized, as it is reduced to a series of instants that merely reproduces the spatial juxtaposition of images. In contrast, if movement is regarded as the condition of possibility, as what demands action and creation, then movement becomes an intensive Time, the incessant qualitative change that is not an external frame in which events occur but the duration “identical with invention itself” (Marrati 2008: 14).

Bergson’s second thesis on motion aims to discern and specify what motion is and how it is composed, and what illusions of movement must be avoided. The main mistake is to always reconstitute movement with instants or positions, which, to Deleuze, has at least two ways to be done (the classic and the modern). In broad terms, movement is traditionally conceived as the structured, or lawful, passing of one form onto another, that is, “an order of positions (*poses*) or *privileged instants*” (Deleuze 1983: 13) that add up to an acme. In contrast, what Bergson purports (according to Deleuze) is that the element of motion is a *moment whatsoever* (*moment quelconque*), and not a privileged portion of space. It is according to equidistant instants, chosen in terms of vicinity that the impression of continuous movement is obtained:

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The forms are themselves immobile, or move in terms of pure thought, but the finite movement is that of one matter that passes from one form onto another. [...] In simpler terms, it is not the form herself that moves, but the matter that moves passing from form A to form B. The forms are simply captured more or less close to their actualization into matter (DS 10/11/1981).

Movement is not the reflection nor the bodily articulation of eternity; instead, it is the concatenation of indistinct instants that only make sense when they pass through the joints of the world. So, the final thesis on motion is reached: “not only is the instant an unmovable cut of movement,

but movement is a mobile cut of duration, that is, of Everything, or of an everything” (Deleuze 1983: 18). Hence, motion is the transposition within space. Each time there is a displacement of parts amongst the bodily joints that structure space, there is also a qualitative change of an everything: “movement supposes a difference in potency (*différence de potential*)” (Deleuze 1983: 19) that is reconstituted or filled each time it changes. This means that movement refers always to change, to migration, to variation; it is rhythmic, it is a vibration where the continuum of time and space are elemental. Nevertheless, in terms of intensity, a body has its own velocity, or speed, according to which it perceives or reacts; it affects or is affected. This is correlated in Time, though considered not as a plain sum of movements, but as how a body exists intensively in relationship to others through its duration. In these terms, action will still be a passive enrolment of the self in movement, thus Time will be conceived indirectly.

However, if matter is considered as an Everything, an all-encompassing reality, then it does lodge possibility of unrelenting change. So, even if framed (or hinged), the everything is an open system. The Everything is defined by Relation, because images relate to each other by how they change their positions while moving. This also defines the bodily joints that ground Time: “of duration in itself, or of Time, we can say that it is the everything of the relationships” (Deleuze 1983: 21). The Everything does not contain homogeneous parts, for any division would imply a change in nature of the system as a whole:

The everything is created, it does not cease to create itself in a different dimension without parts, as that which trains the set of a qualitative state to another, like the pure becoming without arrest that passes through those states (Deleuze 1983: 21).

Furthermore, Time is regarded as duration in so far “movement links the objects of a closed system to the open duration, and duration to the objects of the system that she forces to open up” (Deleuze 1983: 22). Thus, the joints are what determine a relatively closed system that comprises all that is present in the world, or the actual images, without complete access to their own virtualities. Secondly, the joints are a geometrical or physical structure that constitutes the closed system in relationship to the chosen coordinates or variables that determine the nondescript moment; in other words, the frame is a composition of space, a structure that the body of the image occupies. Each action, inasmuch constrained by the movement of the world, responds to the action of another body within an extensive milieu, that is, a space with regular and heterogeneous magnitudes, which also means



this, any action that occurs in this homogeneous, continuous space, happens amidst the jointed Time.

However, there is a void between each movement that allows an action to partake where the new emerges and transforms the disposition of the individuals that compose the world (this means an act that rearranges the matter and forces the opening of the Everything). Because these actions are still bonded to the serialized movements that compose the jointed Time, any action that remains linked to the image-movement is but the prolongment of the motricity of sensation and perception, which means that it only extends the chain of actions once more, in which subjectivity remains passive. What these actions do is create a new breach, a new emptying of motion, but still schemed or structured within the image of movement itself. Hence, as fast as this caesura manifests (which is the pure Difference that grounds all becoming), it is again refilled and muffled.

Then, what happens if Time breaks loose? Is it possible to obtain an image that relates purely to Time, an image that remains related to the world but also transversally cuts through the sensorimotor continuation that restrains Time to motion so that pure action happens? To even consider such a possibility, Deleuze must entertain the idea of a direct image of Time, an image not contingent upon enchainment and actions, a Time snatched from the joints of the world. Image-movement only throws an image of time in its empiric form, where time's course is composed by the flowing series of presents that tag along each other and pass through the schematic joints of space, a successive present according to a before and an after. This way, Time is only conceived as an excess or defect of movement, an aberration in the series that jumps outside the empiric flow of things. Since the image-movement is characterized as being "like a movement in extension" (DS 12/04/1983), its aberration would represent the cut in the chronological consequence that proposes Time as the whole of movement or the total sum of individual motions that compose the world.

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Hence, whilst jointed and numerable, Time is the interval between movements; it is the difference between present A and B: first happens A, which is succeeded by B, then C, then D (which may recall A), etc., and from A to D time "has passed." It can be observed, then, how *Hamlet* is, at its core, an imbricated story that disarrays the image-movement and highlights the image-time, as Hamlet must unfold the main Event (the assassination of his father by his uncle) inwardly, being Time the main basis for everything that happens. For example, Hamlet must await vengeance, even if at present, the King is vulnerable at its most; given that Time is out of joint, the present matter of fact does not overhaul the exact moment when everything concludes, there is no privileged moment in which things must happen, that

would mean that everything falls into a certain structure and action is a passive response to worldly action:

But, in our circumstance and course of thought,  
'Tis heavy with him: and am I, then, revenged,  
To take him in the purging of his soul,  
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?  
No.

Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent:  
When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage;  
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed;  
At gaming, swearing, or about some act  
That has no relish of salvation in't;—  
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven (*Hamlet*, III, III, 70)

Since Hamlet has witnessed the maddening and intolerable circumstance of Time being out of joint, he moves intensively through Time itself; he is no longer apprehended by the geometrical and plane space. Instead, Hamlet becomes knowledgeable that he is within Time, he is internal to it: his space is recursive, topological, and intensive, the present becomes the instant, Time's movement becomes duration, and he himself but a degree of intensity of Time, its total unfolding being the degree 0° of all becoming, where all possibilities conjoin, and the Virtual is at the brink of actualization. In essence, the image-movement, or sensor-motor scheme that appraises the world, is mainly an enchainment of actuals, whereas an image-time would imply that any actuality has lost its privilege to remain the true form of reality.

### ***3.2. Witnessing the intolerable, or has this thing appear'd again tonight***

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time  
agreeing (*Hamlet*, III, II, 273)

Before moving onwards, it is important to clarify, at least briefly, what it is for Deleuze to conceive Time as pure form. As Anne Sauvagnargues remarks in *Deleuze: l'empirisme transcendantal*, where she undertakes the meticulous mission to explain empirical transcendentalism throughout the entire work of the philosopher, Kant's conception of how Time constitutes the collapse of the subject (the "I think" or Cartesian cogito) is key

to understand this formal aspect: “the two functions of the subject are thus disconnected from each other, while the universal function of the ‘I think’ collapses under the empirical self it produces as its result” (Sauvagnargues 2011: 23). The rupture of this constitutive implication of the subject entails a concrete event: “the subject only appears to itself cracked in the mirror of time” (Sauvagnargues 2011: 23). In this regard, as time remains within its hinges, it is subordinate to the extensive movement. So, as Time is “out of joint”, it is movement that subordinates itself to time:

‘Time is out of joint’, time is no longer enrolled in such a way that it is subordinate to the measure of something other than itself – which would be, for example, astronomical movement. Time has ceased to be the number of nature, time has ceased to be the number of periodic movement. It is as if, being previously wrapped in a way to measure the passage of celestial bodies, it unwraps like a kind of serpent, it shakes off all subordination to a movement or to a nature, it becomes time in itself for itself, it becomes empty and pure time. It no longer measures anything. Time has taken its own immeasurability. It is out of joint, that is, from its subordination to nature; it is nature that will be subordinated to it (*DS* 14/03/1978).

Movement becomes the description of the space where the act occurs, for Time is now the “condition of the act” (Deleuze 1998: 41). At this point, Deleuze makes a formidable suggestion: “time thus becomes unilinear and rectilinear, not at all in the sense that it would measure a derived movement, but in itself and by itself, insofar as it imposes on all possible movement the succession of its determinations. It is a rectification of time” (Deleuze 1998: 41). It is precisely Hamlet who completes this emancipation of time: “he really operates the reversal because his own movement results only from the succession of determination” (Deleuze 1998: 41); he needs time to act. Consequently, the liberated time is no longer defined as the successive parts of movement but as numbers and places that are now understood and determined by it. Permanence, succession, simultaneity, all these concepts attributed to the spatialization of time are merely temporal fragments, and everything that moves and changes is *in* time. Hence, Time “does not change, does not move, nor is it eternal” (Deleuze 1998: 42); it is instead the unchanging and fixed form of everything that changes and moves.

The loss of coordinates leads to the dissolution of the “I think,” since it is an act of instantaneous determination operated by the individual representing his own thought. By creating an image that implies an indeterminate existence (the I am), where the individual is determined as a thinking substance (thus, I am a thing that thinks), Time is circumscribed to the schema-

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tized and actual movement. But Deleuze objects, “how could determination be applied to the indeterminate if one does not say how it is ‘determinable’?” (Deleuze 1998: 42). Thus, it arises that this is only possible under the empty form of Time, for there the indeterminate existence finds itself determinable: “so much so that the ‘I think’ affects time, and only determines the existence of an I that changes in time and presents at every moment a degree of consciousness” (Deleuze 1998: 43). Moreover, the self becomes an act that determines its own existence, as “it is a passive or rather receptive I that experiences changes in time” (Deleuze 1998: 43).

Thence, a fracture emerges between the I and the Self where “existence can never be determined as that of an active and spontaneous being, but of a passive self that the I represents to itself, i.e., the spontaneity of determination, as an Other that affects it” (Deleuze 1998: 44). This madness of the subject corresponds to a Time out of joints: “it is like a double diversion of the I and the Self in time, which relates them to each other, stitches them to each other. It is the thread of time” (Deleuze 1998: 44). Thus, having subjectivity becomes the formal relation where one affects oneself and determines its own existence, Time can be defined as the affect of oneself by oneself, or at least as the formal possibility of being affected by oneself. But how does all this relate to the figure of the player? Here lies the heart of the Deleuzian argument. If time is the immutable form of interiority, is because it enables the self to be affected by itself, not only by an external object but by his own temporalized being, as it is formally internalized in Time. Thus, the other thing that the self thinks is its own fracture, from which it watches its own disappearance, an image that Deleuze deems intolerable:

It is not that time is internal to us, or at least it is not especially internal to us, but we are internal to time, and in this capacity always separated by it from what determines us by affecting us. The interiority never ceases to dig into us, to split us, to redouble us, although our unity remains (Deleuze 1998: 45).

Alike a dizzying scission: a crumbled subjectivity that can see its own temporal constitution, a dissolved self that witnesses its own operation in time, where the creative dynamism of the foundation of subjectivation is resolved. In short, it is a shift that constitutes the unlimited space and opens the entire possibility of something becoming actualized. So, Time exercises over the suffering subjectivity the law of its own formality. This law is the first principle of creation; it has neither interiority nor content, for it is pure, objectless form (neither sensible nor intelligible) that “does not tell us what to do, but to what subjective rule we must obey, whatever our action may be” (Deleuze 1998: 46). In summary, the unhinged Time is the lawful, pure

form of universality: “it does not tell us what is needed, it only tells us: ‘It is ought to be!’” (Deleuze 1998: 46).

When time breaks out of its frames, one must follow the infinite and Kafkaesque “road of slow death, deferred judgment, or infinite debt” (Deleuze 1998: 47). Like an inexorable judge, Time leaves no alternative but to pursue one’s own disintegration and become a spectator of the law that constrains and supports the world’s motion and possibility of change. As Somers-Hall states, Deleuze’s notion of Time is fundamentally different from the structure of representation, as he “opens the possibility of seeing time as capable of exhibiting organization in its own right” (Somers-Hall 2011: 62) rather than Time being a mode of succession and motion amidst which subjectivity finds itself. Movement is not a mode in which Time appears to the subjectivity; it is instead how the subjectivity organizes Time and conceives motion: “The pure and empty form of time therefore has the same relationship to succession and coexistence as substance for Spinoza has to the attributes” (Somers-Hall 2011: 63).

Deleuze strains this thoroughly; once freed from the seams of motion, all possibilities are conjoined in Time as virtual multiplicities. This means that Time vessels all presents as intensities, as different degrees of itself. At this point, an image of emptiness and inaction forms, for movement cannot be prolonged any further, and a demented circuit between the actual and the virtual is crystallized, where all outcomes are equally possible, only one to be assumed as the new worldly structure, and that just by pure chance. Action, then, is prefaced by a situation that is disconnected from the chronological succession of presents (which Deleuze calls *situation purement optique et sonore*):

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A purely optical and sonic situation does not extend into action, nor is it induced by an action. It is meant to make one grasp, it is supposed to make one grasp something intolerable, unbearable. Not a brutality as a nervous aggression, an exaggerated violence that can always be extracted from sensori-motor relations in the action-image. It is not about scenes of terror, although there are sometimes corpses and blood. It is about something too powerful, or too unjust, but sometimes also too beautiful, and which therefore exceeds our sensori-motor capacities (Deleuze 1985: 29)

This breach in motion is paralleled by a pure description that replaces the object with the multiplicity that it evokes. This situation does not extend into action, because it conflates with its description, as the image stands for its own object, no longer being any independence between the object and its represented image. Hence, the subjectivity is no longer in a state of

(passive) agency, rather it succumbs to a pure state of seeing, a faculty of foresight, of vision:

In other terms, I am literally in front of an image that merges with its own object. That is precisely why it no longer extends into action – it stands for its own object. That is what we called a description, [...] all the descriptions that declare themselves as descriptions, they form non-sensorimotor situations, that is to say, what we called pure optical and sonic situations. A pure optical and sonic situation or a description is the same thing, it's a situation cut off from its motor continuation. It is actual but does not extend into another actual; it is cut off from its links with other actuals, it is cut off from its motor chains (DS 15/05/1984).

This can be attested by *Hamlet's* first act, where the ghostly being consolidates the scarring of Hamlet's domain and makes the space unbreathable, stagnated: "The ghost is and is not there; he is an absent presence. What's more, he carries the dust of the past with him. The air of the play is unbreathable, and the more Hamlet does to exhaust the past, to unearth it" (Swarbrick 2018: 106). This forces the overlapping of perspectives and presents in the immensity of Time: only agency may resume everything as before the breach created by the Ghost, but to do so, Hamlet himself must submerge within the intensive spatium of Time. Furthermore, Hamlet remains a description, a maddened adjectivization of himself, throwing its own virtuality at the eyes of the rest. For instance, the Queen will only find the unbearable truth and abandon her passivity when Hamlet confronts her with the image of the intolerable:

Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear,  
Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?  
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,  
And batten on this moor? Ha! Have you eyes?  
You cannot call it love; for at your age  
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,  
And waits upon the judgement: and what judge-ment  
Would step from this to this? Sense, sure, you have,  
Else could you not have motion: but, sure, that sense  
Is apoplext: for madness would not err;  
Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd  
But it reserved some quantity of choice,  
To serve in such a difference. What devil was't  
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?

Eyes without feeling, feeling without sigh,  
Ears without hand or eyes, smelling sans all,  
Or but a sickly part of one true sense  
Could not so mope (*Hamlet*, III, IV, 59)

In addition, *The mousetrap* is a virtual description of the play itself “Belike this show imports the argument of the play” (*Hamlet*, III, II, 160), and, masked as entertainment, it seeks to install upon Hamlet’s antagonists the image of the intolerable, of what has truly happened –accessible not by recollection but by reenactment. So, when perception (passivity) is no longer sustained by the action of representation, or recognition, the actual is withdrawn from its spatial joints and forms a circuit with its own virtuality (the pure Difference that scars and grounds its existence). Hence, instead of having a continuation of actuals, what is obtained is a consolidated tandem of actual images and their own virtual ones. Finally, because all motion is abrupted, one is granted access by these circuits to the pure Time that lodges all presents that pass, remain and come. This unfolding means that what was the previous state of matters is non resumable, as for everything to unfold and Time be again jointed, all Hamlet’s kingdom and domain must self-implode, since all actors are involved in the intolerable circuit that crystalizes the new becoming, whose birth must be forced by action.

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#### 4. Conclusion

I’ll have grounds  
More relative than this: –the play’s the thing  
Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king  
(*Hamlet*, II, II, 595)

In conclusion, Time out of joint is but the pure Difference to which a maddened subjectivity is witness, it shows itself amidst a situation where no longer is chronological continuation permitted, nor tolerated. Hence, in so far *Hamlet* is a story of Time and becoming, what the hero does is assert the pure chance that commands Being and its necessary actualization, the pure Difference that fundamentals all becoming. To do such act, Time must unhinge, so then the overlapping of moments is possible. This means that all presents become equally attainable, for they embroil with one another within the pure formality and intensity of Time. Then, true agency is possible, as the subjectivity occupies the immeasurable space that scars becoming, as it is out of the worldly joints.

Additionally, ‘time-out-of-jointness’ relates to the metaphysical inquiry Time is put through in Elizabethan literature. As it was briefly explored, uncertainty and distrust envelop the times when the play is produced, making *Hamlet* an exposition of this pressing matter. To be ‘out of joint’ is to elude the fleeting nature of Time itself, which is regarded as the greatest thief of all, for one experiences it as recurrent but also intangible. The recognition of being unbounded adds density to life, because action now does not agree with the haste discourse of nature, it rather repurposes it. Hamlet becomes lawless, at the very least insane and incoherent, and his peers try to institutionalize him by forcing chronology upon him. Yet such efforts are fruitless, since Hamlet ends up acquiring his revenge, only to be the more futile: his action does indeed deal with the scission his father’s assassination caused, and Time is indeed reinstituted, but this just means that everything is refunded to how it once was.

Hamlet is a player; he has the power of pure agency because he is subdued by the formality of Time. Since Time has unhinged, Hamlet is notified of how the world has disembroiled, as it bears a scarring that is so unbearable that a new actual must be conceived. However, to do so, with all possibilities at hand, Hamlet must roll the dice and affirm the chance that he not only has undone his domain but will eventually reconstitute it. A tale of Difference and action, *Hamlet* entails a thorough understanding of how to act and become are narrowly linked by the fundamental agency of Time, the pure formal law that grounds Being, as it is pure coming-to-be.

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