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TURNING BACK TIME: DURATION, SIMULTANEITY, AND THE TIMELESS IN FITZGERALD AND FINCHER'S BENJAMIN BUTTON

by

NATHAN R. WAGNER

Under the Direction of Dr. Randy Malamud

ABSTRACT

This MA thesis seeks to apply Henri Bergson's theory of time to a reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," and David Fincher's film adaptation of the text, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. By applying Bergson's notions of *durée* and simultaneity, timeless moments will be seen to emerge in the text and the film. I place Fitzgerald's text in context with other seminal modernist works in order to provide a study of the importance of the story within its time period. Through Deleuze's application of Bergson to cinema, I analyze the evolution of the time-image within Fincher's film, and place it within the context of a cinema of time. Ultimately, this thesis begins a discussion of the importance of how F. Scott Fitzgerald and Fincher's works contribute meditations on time in their respective time periods and media.

INDEX WORDS: Henri Bergson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," American modernism, David Fincher, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Cinema

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Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
BERGSON	5
THE STORY	11
THE FILM	28
CONCLUSION	51
WORKS CITED	54

INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the twentieth century the notion of time became radicalized. The invention and implementation of new means of transportation made travel quick and efficient, enabling people to roam swiftly around the world by boat, train, plane, and automobile. The rapid spread of new media in print, film, and radio made information travel at an unforeseen speed. The rise of mass urbanization and technologies led people to compartmentalize time, schedules, movement, and communication. These drastic changes in modern American life brought about new perceptions concerning the concept of time and experience. Walter Kalaidjian writes, "Multiplicity, diversity, complexity, anarchy and chaos could…be mapped as defining rubrics across the contemporaneous fields of culture, aesthetics, and politics of the modern American age; they aptly describe the social experience of the new masses coming together in the cosmopolitan urban centers of modern American big city life" (2). With this wave of change at the dawn of the century, the idea of time as a chronological succession with clear-cut instances is dismantled and a new paradigm emerges: time, memory, and experience as a heterogeneous whole.

French philosopher Henri Bergson introduced the concept of time as intersecting planes of consciousness and being that form an organic whole. From Bergson's extreme reworking of the idea of time where chronological order is de-stabilized and "states of consciousness, even when successive, permeate one another" (*TFW* 98), the ideas of memory and experience were liberated from the constraints of linear separation. Writers reacted to these novel ideas, and Paul Douglass writes that many of the American modernists are heavily indebted to Bergson's theory of time, including Fitzgerald, Eliot, Frost, Cather, Stein, Henry Miller, and Faulkner (2). From Bergson's theories, many American modernist writers responded in radical ways through their

texts. Katie Moss writes, "They [modernists] had to change the structure in order to capture their fragmented personal reactions. They were seeking a resolution to their internal conflicts. They wanted realism, but realism that could somehow define the internal struggle to find one's *self*" (4). Through the rise of technologies and different ways of life, the spread of war and new perspectives on a global scale, and Bergson's radical notion of time, the modernist writers gained the ability to form new ways of expressing being, memory, and experience.

Writers of the period reacted strongly to the idea of time as a flux through which people move and exist. In this thesis I will investigate Bergson's influence on F. Scott Fitzgerald through a reading of his short story "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" (1922), as well as a Bergsonian analysis of David Fincher's adaptation of the text into his 2008 film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. Two of Bergson's basic concepts concerning the nature of time will illuminate different modernist texts as well as Fitzgerald's short story and Fincher's film: the idea of simultaneity, different planes of consciousness co-existing, and the idea of *durée*, the time or experience of pure feeling outside of chronological order. Both of these concepts will illuminate that which may be called "timeless:" the realm where a linear progression of isolated presents is overthrown, and memory, experience, and being form a heterogeneous whole.

This thesis will analyze a previously ignored Fitzgerald short story and perform a fresh reading of the text, as well as place it in context with some of Fitzgerald's other works, such as *The Great Gatsby* (1925), that call into question time and memory. I will also look at other pivotal modernist examinations of time in relation to "Benjamin Button," such as T.S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets* (1943) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1927). *Four Quartets* and *The Sound and the Fury* will provide an ideal framework as seminal American modernist texts in a study of the relevance of "Benjamin Button" and Bergson's theory of time.

When Eliot writes, "Piece together the past and the future / Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception / The future futureless, before the morning watch / When time stops and time is never ending" ("The Dry Salvages" 44-7), there is a great Bergsonian influence. A discussion of *The Four Quartets* will provide a bridge between Bergson's thought and different works of American modernism, including "Benjamin Button." While Eliot was born in America, he later adopted British citizenship, but, as Eric Sigg notes, "His family, its past, and its moral atmosphere; people in the household; memories of the landscape; the dominant cultural forms, those of popular entertainment; the accents and rhythms of speech; and United States history: these 'emotional springs' made Eliot and his poems products of America" (28). With this in mind, Eliot may be discussed in the context of American modernism for the purposes of my thesis.

Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1927) also contains a great deal of a Bergsonian influence. The treatment of time within the novel suggests an idea of heterogeneous states of consciousness acting in accord with one another to form a whole. The de-lineated structure of the novel conveys the notion of time as intersecting planes of past, present, and future. At the beginning of the Quentin section he states, "I was in time again" (93), and the distinction between time and timelessness, real and virtual, memory and duration are all concepts that Faulkner's characters must struggle with. Since this text stands as a highly esteemed work in the modernist canon, an analysis of *The Sound and the Fury* with Bergson's theories will provide another foundation in my discussion of Fitzgerald's "Benjamin Button" in context with other modernist texts that have received more scholarly attention.

A study of Fincher's film will show the vast alterations in the adaptation from text to screen, including a difference in the treatment of time. A discussion of Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema*

2: The Time Image (1985) will prove crucial in my analysis of the film. Deleuze draws heavily upon Bergson's findings to assert his ideas concerning the replacement of the "action-image" with the "time-image," something that occurs within modern cinema (22). Both Deleuze and critic Andre Bazin note that in post-WWII cinema the very image of the world needs reconsidering, and it is at this point that the notion of time calls for a reconfiguration in the cinema: the time-image, those moments where the planes of past and present coalesce into an organic whole, an unified image, rises into being. My discussion of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* will begin by presenting a framework of Deleuze's thoughts on Bergson and cinema, as well as an analysis of various films in modern and contemporary cinema that comment on the nature of time. For modern cinema, I will discuss *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), and *The Leopard* (1963); and for contemporary cinema, I will discuss *Memento* (2001), *Blissfully Yours* (2002), and Fincher's own *Zodiac* (2007). In these films techniques such as depth of field, tracking shots, and montage all serve as novel devices to communicate the nature of time and experience. Consideration of these films in conjunction with *Benjamin Button* will serve my analysis of Fincher's film and its deserved place in the canon of a cinema of time.

In my discussion of Fitzgerald's text I will argue that due to the backwards notion of time in "Benjamin Button," where past and future are interchangeable, a Bergsonian analysis will provide a fresh reading of Fitzgerald's short story. Fitzgerald advocates a sense of the "timeless" by having Benjamin age in reverse, by making the old grow into the new. He thus depicts the modernist time period as a metaphorical reversal of the age, implementing a rebirth from the Victorian age to the new, modernist age. In my discussion of Fincher's film I will argue that *Benjamin Button* signifies an evolution in the time-image in its representation of the "timeless"

by making the sheets of the past and present fuse together, and by including scenes that extend into moments of pure duration. My overall goal is a comparative analysis of the manner in which Fitzgerald's story and Fincher's film take on the same basic plot and idea of a man who ages in reverse, how they communicate the "timeless" in different ways, and how a Bergsonian analysis of these two works illuminates their contemporary media and notions concerning the nature of time.

BERGSON

Henri Bergson's philosophy of time and experience provides a wealth of insight into the aesthetic mindset of American modernism. As Tom Quirk writes, Bergson "serves as an important influence upon the [modernist] age and upon any number of individuals within it" (6). The importance of considering modern literature within the framework of Bergson's philosophy is a crucial step in an understanding of the modernist aesthetic. Douglass writes that Bergson's "vocabulary unlocks modernist literature, even when it is applied in very different contexts" (5). Bergson's revitalized concepts of time, memory, and being struck the modernists deeply, and his thought became firmly embedded in their aesthetic. During the first half of the twentieth century modern writers were confronted with vast changes in technology, knowledge, and the looming confrontation of full-scale warfare, thus leading to a void in spiritual welfare. Katie Moss writes, "Feeling disillusioned with the state of the world around them, the authors began to turn inward, searching for self-consciousness, spiritual fulfillment, and inner peace" (4-5). Through Bergson's philosophy, the modernists found a voice to convey their spiritual anguish.

More than anything, Bergson provides a new lens to view the world. Bergson's philosophy predicates itself upon the notion that "true reality" transcends all rationality, and "by

directing our attention to the immaterial world of the mind we can come closer to understanding materiality" (Douglass 9). In Bergson's thought, the idea that rational organization and scientific theory offer explanations of "true reality" is discarded. Through his language and vocabulary, he asserts new theories based upon ideas of phenomenological existence where, Paola Marrati writes, "to exist means, for us humans, to experience time as constant change, an endless flow of changes into which we can only artificially distinguish clear-cut states" (1103). Bergson's radicalized perception of time, where all linear progression and isolated states of consciousness are discarded, approaches the realm of phenomenology and spiritual awareness: we exist in and move through the constant change and flux of time and essence. For the purposes of this thesis I will focus on two of Bergson's most essential concepts concerning the notion of time: simultaneous states of consciousness and the notion of *durée*.

Henri Bergson introduces his ideas for radicalizing the nature of time in *Time and Free Will* (1889). This text lays down the foundation for his idea of time as non-linear, intersecting planes of consciousness. He writes, "The fact is that, the further we penetrate into the depths of consciousness, the less right we have to treat psychic phenomena as things which are set side by side" (8-9). If consciousness is de-lineated, then different planes of perception – past, present, future, memory – may be seen as interesting modes of being. Bergson further writes, "When we add to the present moment those which have preceded it, as is the case when we are adding up units, we are not dealing with these moments themselves, since they have vanished forever, but with the lasting traces which they seem to have left" (79). The permeating quality of consciousness thus implies a whole, something that may not be stretched out and isolated into parts, but something that must be considered in its entirety. It is with this foundation concerning

the nature of perception that Bergson will assert his ideas of the "true" nature of time and simultaneous states of consciousness.

It is clear why modernist writers would turn to his thought in their attempt to view the modern world. In the first part of the twentieth century, the perception of the world was thrown into chaos. Kalaidjian writes that "modernism's new social, cultural, and technological economies of scale would rapidly remap space, time, and distance in ways that were heretofore unimaginable" (1). Bergson provided a means to make sense of an ever-changing world. The notion of simultaneity, intersecting planes of consciousness, sets a framework through which time may be reconsidered, something that would heavily influence modern writers. Bergson argues that time, when considered in a rational, linear manner, is often mistaken for space. He writes, "It is true that, when we make time a homogenous medium in which conscious states unfold themselves, we take it to be given all at once," and, "this simple consideration ought to warn us that we are thus unwittingly falling back upon space, and really giving up time" (*TFW* 98). In this light, time and consciousness are considered as intersecting planes of being, something that cannot be distinctly isolated, where "distinct states of the external world give rise to states of consciousness which permeate one another, imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole, and bind the past to the present by this very process of connexion" (*TFW* 121).

If time is considered as a heterogeneous whole, this does not mean that there is not a before and an after, no succession. In Bergson's thought, succession will be seen as essential to his concept of time and consciousness. In *Duration and Simultaneity* (1922) he writes, "Where there is not some memory, some consciousness, real or virtual, established or imagined, actually present or ideally introduced, there cannot be a before *and* an after; there is one *or* the other, not both; and both are needed to constitute time" (218). Memory acts as the uniting factor of

succession and intersecting planes of consciousness. Time may be perceived as a whole, but it is a whole with parts that continually interact with one another, constantly changing in a never-ending flux of renewal. Memory, the persistence of the past into the present, enables time into existence: if there is no isolated linear progression, then memory, present awareness, and the anticipation of the future constitute the temporal state of being. Bergson writes, "Without an elementary memory that connects the two moments, there will be only one or the other, consequently a single instance, no before or after, no succession, no time" (*DS* 207). Therefore, this notion of time as a succession, of a heterogeneous whole, constitutes the different planes of intersecting consciousness.

Time, memory, and consciousness can, therefore, be seen as "timeless." If there is a succession of states that continually interact with one another, but no linear progression, then a unified whole emerges. The past can constantly emerge into the present state through a process of "true memory." Once the sensori-motor schema, the habitual memory of present actions, is broken, then true memory may emerge. In *Matter and Memory* (1896) Bergson writes, "Coextensive with consciousness, it [true memory] retains and ranges alongside of each other all our states in the order in which they occur, leaving to each fact its place and, consequently, marking its date, truly moving in the past and not, like the first [habit], in an ever renewed present" (*MM* 131). Through the unconscious retention of true memory, the past may emerge into the present, into consciousness, thereby leading to a co-existent state of past and present intersecting with one another. This functional characteristic of true memory leads to a radical occurrence where "the essence of the general idea, in fact, is to be unceasingly going backwards and forwards between the plane of action and that of pure memory" (*MM* 134). When linear determination is discarded and time and consciousness enable the past, whether the habitually

immediate or true memory, to interact with the present and anticipate the future, the notion of simultaneity may therefore be considered timeless.

Bergson's notion of *durée* also invokes a sense of the timeless. Like his concept of simultaneity, Bergson first introduces *durée* (duration) in *Time and Free Will*. He writes:

> Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states. For this purpose it need not be entirely absorbed in the passing sensation or idea; for then, on the contrary, it would no longer *endure*. Nor need it forget its former states: it is enough that, in recalling these states, it does not set them alongside its actual state as one point alongside another, but forms both the past and the present states into an organic whole. (100)

Like the intersecting planes of consciousness that form a heterogeneous whole, duration aligns itself within this idea of past, present, memory, and being melting together into an unified whole. Duration approaches timelessness since it exists beyond the perception of rational, linear time; there is no ticking away of segments of time since all is "one." Duration resides within a realm of awakening that constitutes a loss of the ego where "at any given moment, the past, present, and future mingle within our consciousness, and this duration cannot be divided into individual moments along a traditional timeline" (Moss 5).

While *durée* functions in a similar manner as simultaneity with the incorporation of an organic whole of time and consciousness, there is another crucial aspect of duration in the mode of timelessness: spiritual fulfillment. If duration is " a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another" (*TFW* 104), then how does this enable the soul to be

fulfilled? This harmonious, completeness of the soul occurs since "duration resides in the present, which becomes a moment of transcendence where past, present, and future merge – a moment of awakening, a moment of epiphany, or a moment of self-realization and spiritual fulfillment" (Moss 7). This sense of fulfillment occurs when a higher awareness is reached: it is a moment when the material, spatial boundaries are transcended and the spirit soars. This sense of duration not only constitutes "real" time, but the entirety of life to the point where "our existence not only takes place in *duration*, but more precisely it is made of *duration*" (Marrati 1103).

For modern authors, the concept of *durée* proves to be crucial in their understanding of the self. They use these ideas of time and experience as ultimate truths surrounding the ebb and flow of being to communicate deep emotions and longings of the soul. This constitution of "real" time and essence enables a resolution of soul in timeless moments. Bergson writes, "It is impossible to distinguish between the duration, however short it may be, that separates two instants and a memory that connects them, because duration is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived" (*DS* 208). In works such as Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," the timeless is approached through sublime passages that convey the ever-changing flux of time, and this brings solace to the soul. Douglass writes that the modern author's "object – in Bergson's terms – must be to renew the linguistic system's connectedness to inner life, that self-creating evolution flowing through time" (28). The modern aesthetic depends heavily upon a language of revolution where words and thoughts merge together to create new linguistic experiences of the temporal, essence, and being. These works communicate new aesthetic tendencies through moments of deep spiritual awakening. The writers achieve this by invoking timeless moments that are constituted by simultaneity and

durée. Amid the chaos of war, technological innovation, and scientific reconstitution of time and space, "the people of the modern world were searching for solace, and they found that solace in moments of ephemeral spirituality" (Moss 61).

THE STORY

In modernist aesthetic, what is felt deep in the heart becomes valued over what is rationally explained. The popular convention of a clear-cut representation of events and moments is no longer emphasized, and the emphasis falls upon that which largely remains unseen. As Douglass asserts, "There is, as it turns out, a genuine consistency of approach, argumentation, and vocabulary among major American writers between the wars; and that vocabulary emerges from a dialogue in which Bergson was the most important single voice" (175). Through Bergson's new concepts of time and being the modernists were able to express timeless moments of spiritual epiphany in the chaos of the modern world. Moss writes, "The modernists' representation of time and memory through a disruption of linear narrative reveals cultural and psychological collapse while also exploring a resolution and a personal preservation of the self amid the ruin" (8). Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" conveys these notions concerning the mutability of time and experience into moments of pure timelessness and duration. I will provide a solid framework of other much more recognized modernist works in relation to Bergson's theories in order to perform a proper reading of Fitzgerald's text. *The Four Quartets* and *The Sound and the Fury* are two of the most essential works of modernism that directly convey Bergson's notion of time and duration, and reading these texts alongside "Benjamin Button" inspires a fresh interpretation of Fitzgerald's largely neglected story.

In the opening lines from the first poem of *Four Quartets*, "Burnt Norton," Eliot writes, "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future

contained in time past" (1-3). These lines clearly invoke the notions of simultaneity and duration by offering the image of de-lineated time contained within an organic whole, where each state acts in accord with one another. From the start, it is evident that Bergson's influence runs through the course of the text. F.O. Matthiessen writes, "'Burnt Norton' opens with a meditation on time," and "Some of the passages on duration remind us that Eliot listened to Bergson's lectures at the Sorbonne in the winter of 1911" (93). In much scholarship "Bergson's influence on Eliot has generally been seen as limited to the narrowly defined period of 1910-11" (Douglass 49), since Eliot found a "troublesome optimism with which Bergsonists seem infected" (Douglass 56). However, as evidenced by a multitude of passages within *Four Quartets*, Bergson's enduring influence on Eliot and the work seems quite apparent. While Bergson was primarily interested in the physical reality of time, Eliot took Bergson's influence a step further towards the spiritual.

In an age of moral decay, where goodness appears eclipsed by an evil spreading throughout the world in the form of war, technology, and science, Eliot applied Bergson's theories of being and timelessness in an attempt to find spiritual rebirth. Eliot invokes Bergson's notion of timelessness in order to reach these moments of spiritual fulfillment that are always within grasp in the given moment, in the eternal *now*. The entirety of *Four Quartets* can be seen as an attempt to describe and capture these moments of timelessness that lead to a rebirth of soul. Matthiessen writes, "The chief contrast around which Eliot constructs this poem is that between the view of time as a mere continuum, and the difficult paradoxical Christian view of how man lives both 'in and out of time,' how he is immersed in the flux and yet can penetrate to the eternal by apprehending timeless existence within time and above it" (94). When Eliot writes, "To be conscious is not to be in time," ("Burnt Norton" 84) he implies a Bergsonian notion of

timelessness, but raises the level of awareness to a higher level: to be conscious is to be in a state that transcends time as linear progression and rationality, towards a realm of pure being.

Eliot proposes these moments of timelessness through the process of simultaneity and duration, where moments encompass all time and being. He writes, "And do not call it fixity / Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards / Neither ascent nor decline" ("Burnt Norton" 64-6). There is a sense of stasis, but a paradoxical one: time and experience exist not in a progression from here to there, but in a whole where all of essence is gathered into unity. In this mode of eternal flux Eliot proposes that "The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies / For the pattern is new in every moment / And every moment is a new and shocking / Valuation of all we have been" ("East Coker" 84-7). In these moments of pure *durée* the past, present, and future interact to create new diversions in every moment; this is how a rebirth in spirit and essence holds the propensity to occur in moments of supreme awareness.

In passages that evoke eternal flux and change, Eliot seems to suggest Bergson's awareness of the multiplicity of time. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson writes:

> When we are seated on the bank of a river, the flowing of the water, the gliding of a boat or the flight of a bird, the ceaseless murmur in our life's deeps are for us three separate things or only one, as we choose. We can interiorize the whole, dealing with a single perception that carries along the three flows, mingled, in its course; or we can leave the first two outside and then divide our attention between the inner and the outer; or, better yet, we can do both at one and the same time, our attention uniting and yet differentiating the three flows, thanks to its singular privilege of being one and several. (210)

Eliot affirms this passage in his attempt to reach salvation when he writes, "Not the intense moment / Isolated, with no before and after / But a lifetime burning in every moment" ("East

Coker" 192-4). In *Four Quartets* distinction ceases to matter. All that remains, and for Eliot this is the reality of existence, are ephemeral moments of awakening that "create such spiritual fulfillment that they are worth the wait" (Moss 63). These moments of awareness are difficult to apprehend since consciousness is prone to rationalize and organize time, events, and experience. However, according to Eliot, when these moments do occur the soul flourishes and all experience is redeemed. Morris Weitz writes, "Within the flux the choice is always the same, either death or God; and that, if we deny God, Who is the Timeless, the Eternal, all experiences are the same in their value, that is, they are all worth nothing" (142). Eliot reflects this call to the Eternal when he writes, "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God" ("East Coker" 112-13). In this stillness, there is a connection among all parts: time, consciousness, memory, being, and transcendence – all is redeemed and the spirit is fulfilled.

Through images and notions of time's renewal and the soul's rebirth, through memories suspended from childhood into the present and future, *Four Quartets* proposes an aesthetic that captures moments of duration and timelessness. Eliot notes the chaotic pressure of the modern age in harsh imagery when he writes, "There are flood and drouth / Over the eyes and in the mouth / Dead water and dead sand / Contending for the upper hand," ("Little Gidding" 62-5). Ultimately, he moves once more to the possibility for hope and renewal when he writes, "From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit / Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire / Where you must move in measure, like a dancer" ("Little Gidding" 144-6). In *Four Quartets*, Eliot notes the chaos of the modern world, but he is able to offer hope for renewal through timeless moments. A. David Moody writes, "The poem does not state its ultimate meaning, or not in the form in which we are likely to look for it. It offers neither a doctrine nor a revelation. There is

the difference between its beginning and end, of an alteration of consciousness; but what that amounts to is a different consciousness of the way, and not at all a sense of having attained the end" (151). This assertion is correct, and possibly how Eliot intended the poem to function. If reality is a flux where past, present, and future mingle to create constant renewal, then the text's aesthetic structure reflects this heterogeneous whole. As Eliot states, "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning / The end is where we start from" ("Little Gidding" 214-6).

If Eliot incorporates the timeless in order to show that "the possibilities of salvation are *within* our ordinary temporal experiences" (Weitz 144), then Faulkner uses these moments in *The Sound and the Fury* to provide sustenance to characters in the wake of inevitable doom. Moss writes, "Although the characters seek timeless moments, they are fully aware of the external ticking of the inexorable clock as well" (8). Faulkner shows the dark side of timeless moments, where characters are given glimpses of the eternal only to continually fall back into a reality of progression towards an ultimate end. In *Irrational Man* (1958), William Barrett writes, "If we are to redeem any part of our world from the brute march of power, we may have to begin as modern art does by exalting some of the humble and dirty little corners of existence" (65). Modern art thus delves into the unknown corners of everyday existence; the sadness, happiness, worry, distress, love, and hate of life are all accounted for in modernist works. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner works with an essentially plotless premise in order to examine exalted moments of the timeless, moments of pure duration and essence, in everyday life while chronicling the Compson family's epic downfall.

Faulkner incorporates Bergson's theories of time and timelessness in a number of ways. As Douglass notes, "Any discussion of Bergson and American literature must deal with

Faulkner" (118). Faulkner's style, especially in *The Sound and the Fury*, reflects Bergson's thought on the moments of duration that reach towards eternity and simultaneous states of consciousness, but Faulkner also reaches, however briefly, for an extension of timeless moments that create spiritual harmony. This mutability of time is most evident in the structure of the novel. Beginning with Benjy's section on "April 7, 1928," moving to Quentin on "June 2, 1910," to Jason on "April 6, 1928," and ending with Easter on "April 8, 1928," Faulkner challenges conventional time in order to portray the manner in which past, present, and future interact and inform one another. Beverly Gross writes, "To discuss the structure of *The Sound and the Fury* inevitably involves us in talking less about the ordering of events than about the ordering of its impact: what we seem to have is not a structure of action so much as a structure of effect" (447). The structure defies linearity, and, therefore, conventional clock-time; the text in itself becomes an aesthetic reflection of "real" time.

In this strangely structured novel, Faulkner creates something fresh in American literature. Through structure and extended passages of feeling, chaos, and beauty Faulkner incorporates "moments of timelessness, those moments that exemplify Bergson's theory of duration" for his characters where "for Benjy these moments bring endurance, but for Quentin the external pressure of time defeats the moments of duration" (Moss 19). In the first section, Benjy the man-child is able to endure since units of time coalesce into an indistinguishable whole. Benjy is plagued by past experiences that become indistinguishable from his present state, where Faulkner creates a sort of rhythm among the alteration of memory and the present. Faulkner writes, "Roskus said, "It going to rain all night." *You've been running a long time, not to've got any further off than mealtime, Jason said. See if I don't, Quentin said.* "Then I don't know what I going to do." Dilsey said. "It caught me in the hip so bad now I cant scarcely move.

Climbing them stairs all evening." *Oh, I wouldn't be surprised, Jason said. I wouldn't be surprised at anything you'd do*" (87). The passage conveys an alteration of past and present, like the falling of rain, and is among the most rapid alterations of memory within the novel with only one or two sentences constituting a moment in time. This type of aesthetic unhinges the conventional expectations surrounding the representation of the past and present coexisting, thereby allowing timeless moments to bring fulfillment and endurance.

Similar to Benjy, Quentin is unable to separate a sense of past idealism from the present reality, and Faulkner displays Quentin's disenchantment with the modern world through the conflict between time and timelessness. Quentin, in his confused state, is unable to cope with reality and continually regresses into the past. When walking through the New England summer, he thinks to himself: "Some days in late August at home are like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar. Man the sum of his climactic experiences Father said. Man the sum of what have you. A problem in impure properties carried to an unvarying nil: stale mate of dust and desire. *But now I know I'm dead I tell you*" (153). An observation of the present leads to a past memory, which leads to the overbearing voice of his father, which leads to a memory of Caddy, which, ironically, provides a commentary on his present state of despair. Through a phenomenal writing style, Faulkner is able to connect memories and fuse together a relation between the past and the present all in a few sentences. The section's structure suggests, as André Bleikasten writes, "a theater of ghosts where nothing is ever first, where nothing ever begins" (96). For Quentin, the present is continually haunted by the shadow of the past, and he is unable to break free from a regression into former states of consciousness.

Similar to Benjy, Quentin easily becomes immersed into idealized past memories, specifically of sweet moments with Caddy. However, when his memories are invaded with

nightmares – the loss of Caddy, his father's nihilism – conventional clock-time overcomes these periods of timelessness. In the Quentin section, the most radical section and "perhaps as great as anything yet written by an American" (Barrett 52), Faulkner conveys the Bergsonian feeling of actually moving through time, stepping through the eternal flux. Later in the Jason section, moving through time is presented in a different manner than Quentin. For Jason, "it is not so much, apparently, of escaping time as of catching up with it" (Bleikasten 116). Each brother must contend with the issue of escaping or catching up with time. Through Benjy's irrational consciousness or Quentin's dreamings, conventional time is overcome in periods of stasis where a fusion of all moments in time forms a whole. However, Faulkner does not allow this stasis to serve as an end, a final revolution for these characters. If in *The Four Quartets* Eliot is able to assert the possibility of salvation through Christian philosophy and theories, then Faulkner takes a different, darker turn in *The Sound and the Fury*. The only character that remains in this constant flux of timelessness is Benjy, the idiot. Quentin seeks an eternal segment of time, a moment suspended with Caddy that lasts forevermore, and he finds this in timeless moments when memories come to him "felt, not seen or heard" (Faulkner 169), thereby transporting him into brief states of spiritual fulfillment.

Faulkner takes known, tangible aspects of life and transforms them into transcendent states of being beyond any sort of rational understanding. For example, in Quentin's nascent state of despair he reads: "The chimes began again, the half hour. I stood in the belly of my shadow and listened to the strokes spaced and tranquil along the sunlight, among the thin, still little leaves. Spaced and peaceful and serene, with that quality of autumn always in bells even in the month of brides. *Lying on the ground under the window bellowing* He took one look at her and knew" (124). Here, Faulkner perfectly portrays a distinct moment in Quentin's last day on

earth. As the time slowly ticks away, Quentin hears this, knows this, yet there is still the account of a distinct feeling that stirs within him; it is something small, nothing more than a feeling in the air or the way the sunlight falls. Even in these transcendent moments "he cannot escape time, he is in it, it is the time of his fate and his decision; and the watch has no hands to reassure him of that normal, calculable progression of minutes and hours in which our ordinary day-to-day life is passed. Time is no longer a reckonable sequence, then, for him, but an inexhaustible inescapable presence" (Barrett 53). The flux transforms into a darkened fate, and the end draws ever nearer.

Not only does Faulkner seek an original way to present characters, narration, and the novel itself, but he also finds a way to present the unpresentable in *The Sound and the Fury*. Abstract concepts such as time and eternity are realms that Faulkner explores in his novel. As Panthea Reid Broughton states, Faulkner creates his own distinct modernist style where he "follows his own aesthete, in fact, by managing to fuse the concrete with the abstract, the finite with the infinite" (36). These passages come out most frequently and most distinctly in the Quentin section. The voice of Quentin's father provides insight into an abstract, "real" time when he states: "Time is dead as long as it is being clicked off by little wheels; only when the clock stops does time come to life" (105). This idea of "real time" as something non-mechanical, something that exists outside of human representation gains great significance for Quentin's role in the novel. Quentin feels the burden of time weighing down on him, the weight of the irretrievable past, the uncertain future, and the elusive present, and Faulkner presents this in a manner that cannot readily be pictured or defined, but felt.

Moments emerge in the text where rational time and being are eclipsed and something greater emerges, much like the potential for salvation in *Four Quartets*. During Reverend Shegog's sermon in the final section, Faulkner writes, "And the congregation seemed to watch

with its own eyes while the voice consumed him, until he was nothing and they were nothing and there was not even a voice but instead their hearts were speaking to one another in chanting measures beyond the need for words" (367). In this passage, Faulkner touches the unknown, reaches towards the eternal, and finds that space-beyond-space where "real" life occurs. However, even within these brief glimpses of salvation the characters "cannot make sense of the past, and, therefore, they will not achieve duration or find balance within…although Faulkner understands and agrees with the theories of Bergson, he forces these characters to be conquered by clock-time and allows them only irrational memories" (Moss 159).

In *The Sound and the Fury*, Faulkner ends much where he began with everything "in its ordered place" (401), similar to the structure of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Time moves in a cyclical fashion with past, present, and future informing each other and creating a constant flux of renewal. Similar to the circular pattern in Eliot's *Four Quartets* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, Fitzgerald's "Benjamin Button" delineates chronological time to the extent that conventional representations are called into question. Something in this type of structuring conveys an endlessness of time – the layers of consciousness, the crystal of time – where limitless possibilities constitute endless moments. Fitzgerald's story of a man who is born elderly and ages in reverse – a perverse take on the myth of eternal youth – views time in a mutable manner where chronological order is discarded, even though Benjamin progresses towards death. However, duration and simultaneity arise through this backwards presentation of time where past and future are interchangeable and present moments hold the propensity to exist in the sublime realm of *durée*. "Benjamin Button" turns back time and reflects Eliot's Bergsonian notion that "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning / The end is where we start from" ("Little Gidding" 214-16).

"The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," which evokes a sense of the timeless through a reversal of chronological time, thereby moving the past (youth, the new) into the future, can be seen as an exercise of craft for Fitzgerald's great novels to come, such as *The Great Gatsby*. *Gatsby*, published three years after "Benjamin Button," is one of the most revered works in American modernism, and the weight of time bears down heavily upon the course of the novel. By wanting to be "'One of the greatest writers,'" Bryant Mangum writes, "Fitzgerald seems at least in the beginning to have meant 'one of the greatest novelists,' regarding the writing of short stories as something that he had to do to support himself while he wrote the novels that, as he saw it, would be his main literary legacy and the primary exhibit of his greatness as a writer" (57). While Fitzgerald's novels receive the most scholarly attention, the majority of his stories get pushed to the side, regarded as small expenditures of craft. Lawrence Buell notes that even scholars who take some of the stories seriously, such as "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," "treat [them] as a prelude to *Gatsby*" (34). However, Buell writes that in these stories "Fitzgerald can retrospectively be seen as using his short fiction to test out devices later used in the novels" (34). A brief analysis of the use of time and the timeless in *The Great Gatsby*, illuminates similar thematic elements in "Benjamin Button."

The idea in "Benjamin Button" of making the old new, of thrusting the past into the future, troubles temporal disparity in *Gatsby*. Jay Gatsby's love for Daisy, the memory of a glorious youth, plagues him in the intervening years that he makes his fortune. After reuniting with Daisy the image appears of the past brought into the future: when Daisy arrives before Gatsby time is regained. One lengthy passage in *Gatsby* seems to overtly suggest a Bergsonian theory of time. Nick Carraway takes a moment to describe Gatsby's preoccupation with the past, stating: "He talked a lot about the past, and I gathered that he wanted to recover something, some

idea of himself perhaps, that had gone into loving Daisy. His life had been confused and disordered since then, but if he could return to a certain starting place and go over it all slowly, he could find out what that thing was…" (111-12). The memory, the ghost of the past haunts Gatsby; the purpose he sets out for himself is to resurrect this lost sense of self and perceived happiness. He wants to return, to grasp and hold tightly these fading memories: the goal is to make an idealized memory a physical reality.

Continuing Nick's assessment of Gatsby, he states: "He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never romp again like the mind of God. So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete" (112). In this passage, Fitzgerald brings the past into the future, making the "incarnation" of memory new once more, something previously dealt with in "Benjamin Button." In *Gatsby* the persistence of memory in conscious states enables the past to continually haunt present awareness. The goal in *Gatsby* is to hold forever the timeless where nothing will separate Jay Gatsby from his idealized past. Quirk notes that Fitzgerald was familiar with Bergson's theories and that he "devoted the summer of 1917 to reading William James, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Henri Bergson" (80). While Bergson's influence on Fitzgerald is "often difficult to asses or chart" (81), a close reading of "Benjamin Button" and *Gatsby* reveals Bergsonian ideas throughout the texts. Within *Gatsby* and "Benjamin Button" the idea of the past moving into present and future states reflects Bergson's timeless notion that "several conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another, gradually gain a richer content, and might thus give any one…the feeling of pure duration" (*TFW* 122).

Very little scholarly attention is devoted to Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button." Perhaps with the release of Fincher's film in 2008 a newfound recognition for the story will arise, but the only scholarly works to appear are those concerning the film. In his discussion of *Tales of the Jazz Age* (1922), the collection that contains "Benjamin Button," John Kuehl asserts that "Benjamin" is a story Fitzgerald "should have excluded," and writes, "Among the ten stories constituting *Tales of the Jazz Age*, only 'May Day' and 'The Diamond as Big as the Ritz' are exceptional, while 'The Jelly-Bean' is good" (33). This judgment does not seem to be entirely fair, and perhaps a closer analysis will reveal aesthetic merits within the story and its place in American modernism. As Mangum writes, "Any thorough study [of Fitzgerald's short stories] must also be undertaken with an eye on inclusiveness: it must account for, or at least be able to account for, the place of every single story, the weakest and the strongest, in Fitzgerald's overall development as a professional writer and literary artist" (60). The story incorporates timeless moments by turning back time and evoking instances where clock-time and habitual memory evaporate, leaving moments of duration that bring spiritual fulfillment.

Fitzgerald states in his preface to "Benjamin Button," "This story was inspired by a remark of Mark Twain's to the effect that it was a pity that the best part of life came at the beginning and the worst part at the end" (307). The story attempts to make time run backward in order to achieve youth at life's end, thereby growing into the vitality and happiness of adolescence and ending life on a "high note." "Benjamin Button," alongside the much more discussed companion piece in *Tales,* "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz," fits into Fitzgerald's fantasy period. The period, as Buell writes, "builds upon situations that are inherently fabulous" (26) in order to convey an aesthetic meditation on aspects of the modern world. Fitzgerald's overt use of fantasy forms aesthetic principles where he grounds the story in an easily

recognizable reality and then moves beyond this reality with the incorporation of the fantastic. Buell writes, "Fantasy in Fitzgerald usually involves an interplay or tension between a sense of the 'real world' and the sense of an anti-world of the implausible or the outlandish. The characteristic themes of Fitzgerald's fantasies all arise from this interplay" (28). In "Benjamin Button," the incorporation of fantasy enables Fitzgerald to create a unique meditation on the nature of time and the constant renewal in the flux of existence.

Fitzgerald's text begins humorously enough – Benjamin is born a seventy year-old man and is confused at his situation. Fitzgerald writes, "Wrapped in a voluminous white blanket, and partially crammed into one of the cribs, there sat an old man apparently about seventy years of age. His sparse hair was almost white, and from his chin dripped a long smoke-colored beard, which waved absurdly back and forth, fanned by the breeze coming in at the window" (310). This grotesque description allows fantasy to creep into 1860's Baltimore through Benjamin's "curious case." When asked about leaving the hospital Benjamin replies, "This is a fine place to keep a youngster of quiet tastes. With all this yelling and howling, I haven't been able to get a wink of sleep. I asked for something to eat and they brought me a bottle of milk!" (311). The first part of the story begins as nothing more than an absurd and humorous tale of a man born old. However, once the story progresses "Benjamin Button" breaches the Bergsonian notion of time.

The text progresses from Benjamin's birth to his death in a reverse order: Benjamin grows younger every year. By incorporating a reversal of time, Fitzgerald provokes simultaneous conscious states where at one point Benjamin is a newborn at age seventy, a teenager at fifty, and a middle-aged man at twenty. When Benjamin is born he can speak and reason like a grown man; when he dies he has the size and incompetence of a newborn. The use of the new and the

old, past and present, at the same time communicates simultaneous states of consciousness. As an old man in young age, Benjamin relaxes and smokes cigars with his grandfather, and enjoys quiet time in a rocking chair rather than playing with toys or other children. As Benjamin grows older and simultaneously younger, Fitzgerald allows moments to occur when the planes of past and present meet and a sense of timelessness emerges. Alice Hall Petry writes, "The only story in *Tales of the Jazz Age* in which death does not seem to be the negative capstone of disillusionment is…'The Curious Case of Benjamin Button,' but that is only because time does not move in a normal fashion in this story" (78). Since growing older in a chronological order only means that Benjamin will grow physically younger, the reversal of time brings a past, younger age into the future. As conventional time is dismantled, moments of timelessness afford Benjamin spiritual fulfillment within his predicament.

One of the most striking moments of timelessness occurs when Benjamin is chronologically around twenty, but appears a man of fifty. While driving to a dance with his father, the beauty of the country enraptures Benjamin. Fitzgerald writes, "It was a gorgeous evening. A full moon drenched the road to the lusterless color of platinum, and late-blooming harvest flowers breathed into the motionless air aromas that were like low, half-heard laughter. The open country…was translucent as in the day. It was almost impossible not to be affected by the sheer beauty of the sky – almost" (318). As a man caught between past and future in an indiscernible present state of time and awareness, Benjamin is afforded moments of stasis from the chaos and incomprehensibility of his life. Later at the dance he sees his future wife Hildegarde for the first time and a timeless trance overtakes him. Fitzgerald writes, "They pulled up behind a handsome brougham whose passengers were disembarking at the door. A lady got out, then an elderly gentleman, then another young lady, beautiful as sin. Benjamin started; an

almost chemical change seemed to dissolve and recompose the very elements of his body…it was first love" (318). In moments like these, Benjamin seemingly forgets the backwards age of his body and becomes transported to a state of spiritual, not physical, awareness. When he encounters first love at the dance he enters into a moment of pure duration where any sense of time ceases to matter, towards a state where "he felt that life was just beginning" ("BB" 319).

Memory plays an important role in Fitzgerald's analysis of time. In "Benjamin Button" the vision of the past becomes distorted and, Henry Alexander argues, in the end "not only his life, but whatever understanding he may have had of it are as if they had never been" (12). At the end of his life – or the physical beginning – Benjamin is seventy years old and in a state of infancy where "the days flowed on in monotonous content" ("BB" 328). Yet, without the conscious burden of the past, Benjamin is able to reach a timeless state. Fitzgerald writes:

> There were no troublesome memories in his childish sleep; no token came to him of his brave days at college, of the glittering years when he flustered the hearts of many girls. There were only the white, safe walls of his crib…the past – the wild charge of his men up San Juan Hill; the first years of his marriage when he worked late into the summer dusk down in the busy city for young Hildegarde whom he loved…all these had faded like unsubstantial dreams from his mind as though they had never been. (329)

Through this passage Fitzgerald shows how Bergson's notion of time affords timeless moments. Benjamin's life ends in a state of unawareness, yet outside of any sense of chronological time. This amalgamated conscious state provides Benjamin a sense of peace and fulfillment since he is not aware of the burden of time or memory, unlike Gatsby or Quentin. In his later age – his infancy – the burden of the past does not weigh on Benjamin, and life becomes a timeless state where "through the noons and nights he breathed and over him there were soft mumblings and

murmurings that he scarcely heard, and faintly differentiated smells, and light and darkness" ("BB" 329).

If, as Barrett asserts, "The world pictured by the modern artist is, like the world mediated upon by the existential philosopher, a world where man is a stranger" (49), then Bergson's philosophy enables the modernists to find a means of spiritual expression. In Fitzgerald's story, Benjamin moves through life as a stranger. The problem of his "curious case" places him in a dilemma similar to that of modern man, where time and experience change and appear incomprehensible. Andrew Crosland argues, "Benjamin's life is not really a successful one. Other people base their expectations of him on his chronological age; he adjusts to life according to physical, emotional, and intellectual maturity. And for only a few years are the two compatible" (138). Benjamin's inability to view himself in a self-consciousness manner expresses his plight: he moves through life without any memory, living in a perpetual present. In the text a sense of ironic tragedy emerges since "the significance of one's life may emerge both from the person one is and from one's memories, their extensions and connections…the atrophy of memories threatens the loss of significance" (Alexander 11). Modern man is estranged from his environment, searching for meaning in an ever-changing world, and Benjamin exemplifies this plight. The only moments through which Benjamin gains the ability to rise above the rational expectations of those around him are those moments of timelessness when he reaches a sense of fulfillment, such as the dance with Hildegarde, the couple of years in middle age when he reaches an unified whole between past and present, and the time of his death when he reaches a timeless, senseless infancy.

An understanding of "Benjamin Button," much like the majority of modern literature, becomes enlivened through a reading of Bergson's theory of time. Through a Bergsonian lens,

Fitzgerald's "Benjamin Button" may be seen as a meditation of modern man as stranger, attempting to make sense of a constantly changing world, and finding instances of spiritual fulfillment in moments of timelessness. In "Benjamin Button," Fitzgerald presents a paradox where the old grows into the new. Through this dilemma, Fitzgerald seems to suggest the chaos of the modern age: everything that came before is now subverted, and the newness of the modern age charges on unceasingly. Douglass writes, "The consciously 'modern' American writer of this century is compelled to present the results of his or her own exploration in the labyrinth" (175). The modernist writer is presented with a world of chaos, a distressing and senseless world where the soul yearns for clarity and satisfaction. Through Bergson's theories of simultaneity and *durée* these writers were able to express the yearnings of the heart, and present aesthetic models based upon the eternal flux of time and those moments of spiritual awakening that only occur in timelessness.

THE FILM

In *Cinema II: The Time Image*, Gilles Deleuze applies Bergson's theories of time to film studies. Deleuze adapts Bergson's major points in his philosophy – simultaneity, *durée*, crystals of time, subjective experience – and applies these concepts to modern cinema, exploring such techniques as depth of perception, montage, and tracking shots. He argues that in modern cinema an understanding of Bergson is essential, much as it is for modern literature. Deleuze summarizes Bergson's thought when he writes, "The only subjectivity is time, non-chronological time grasped in its foundation, and it is we who are internal to time, not the other way round. That we are in time looks like a commonplace, yet it is the highest paradox. Time is not the interior to us, but just the opposite, the interiority in which we are, in which we move, live, and change" (82). Through Bergson's philosophy, Deleuze is able to perform a reading of cinema

that reveals moments of timelessness through the mechanical reproduction of film. Keith Pearson writes, "Deleuze seeks to transform our image of time from an organic one to a crystal one. Such an image is modeled on Bergson's notion of jets of time and serves to capture the 'bursting forth of life' in which time splits and divides into two flows, the presents that pass and the pasts that are preserved" (1120). In *Cinema II*, Deleuze presents time in modern cinema as non-linear, which seems paradoxical since film's mechanical process implies a progressive nature, containing an inevitable beginning and end. However, as Darlene Pursley writes, through different readings of the "crystals" of time in cinema, "Deleuze challenged film theory with an alternative perspective on the daunting philosophical problems of subjectivity, space, and time" (1195).

Modern cinema seeks to represent different aspects of time, the intersecting planes of consciousness, through aesthetic means. Beginning in America with *Citizen Kane* and moving through the 1960's in European art-house films, modern cinema's preoccupation is time. As Deleuze notes, the separation between modern cinema and that which came before – works by Griffith, Chaplin, and Eisenstein – comes through the replacement of the "action-image" with the "time-image." The action-image is the conventional representation of a rational order of events, a clearly separated sense of past, present, and future. The time-image had to "free itself from sensori-motor links…so that it could itself escape from a world of clichés. It had to open up to powerful and direct revelations, those of the time-image" (Deleuze 23). Similar to modernist literature, modern cinema responds to the chaos of the world, and this response occurs through the time-image. Deleuze writes, "Precisely what brings this cinema of action into question after the war is the very break-up of the sensori-motor schema: the rise of situations to which no one can no longer react, of environments with which there are now only chance relations, of empty or

disconnected any-space-whatevers replacing qualified extended space" (272). Both Deleuze and critic André Bazin note that in post-WWII cinema the very image of the world needs reconsidering, and it is at this point that time's linear separation calls for a reconfiguration within the cinema: the time-image, those moments where the planes of the past and present coalesce into an organic whole, an unified image, rises into being.

Deleuze applies Bergsonian concepts in a reading of the time-image in modern cinema. He calls montage "the image *of* time," and the "principal act of cinema" (34). Montage may function as one of the crystals of time, an aberrant movement between past, present, and future, forming a non-linear reading of time and succession, formally reconstituting experience. As evidenced by films such as *Citizen Kane* and *Last Year at Marienbad*, the interplay between memory and the present suggests a revolution surrounding actuality and reality – that which may be, could be, never will be. If in the modern world "time is out of joint" (Deleuze 41), then other techniques utilized by modern filmmakers, such as tracking shots and depth of perception, also help convey the notion that "there is no present which is not haunted by a past and a future, by a past which is not reducible to a former present, by a future which does not consist of a present to come" (Deleuze 37). The nature of cinema predicates itself upon a structured order of events, but, as Deleuze argues, "it is characteristic of cinema to seize this past and this future that coexist with the present image" (37). Once the action-image is overcome by the time-image, the "reality" of time, as Bergson calls it, is revealed: simultaneous planes of consciousness coexist, and moments of duration, the unified whole of eternity, extend into moments of timelessness.

In modernist films such as *Citizen Kane*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *The Leopard*, Deleuze's time-image is brought to life. In a contemporary cinema of time, films such as *Memento*, *Blissfully Yours*, *Zodiac*, and *Benjamin Button* explore and develop the time-image in

remarkable ways. As Deleuze notes, it is in these films that "what we see in the crystal is no longer the empirical progression of time as succession of presents…it is its direct presentation, its constitutive dividing in two into a present which is passing and a past which is preserved" (274). The time-image instigates a revolution within modern and contemporary cinema. Directors such as Welles, Visconti, Nolan, and Fincher employ the time-image in order to explore regions of timelessness within the flux of existence. As Ernest Lindgren writes, "The filmmaker can move easily and rapidly from one scene to another; he can move backward and forward in time, he can compress or extend time, he can show actions developing simultaneously" (56). In short, the cinema consists of an inherent quality that holds the ability to explore endless possibilities within our temporal experience.

Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* represents a distinct break between the action-image and the time-image. Before *Kane*, films such as Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) used montage to appropriate a sense of continuous action, but the intersecting planes of past, present, and future did not come into effect. With *Kane*, Welles disrupts all linear convention. Welles incorporates montage to "move backward and forward in time," and uncover the mystery of Charles Foster Kane. This technique is something revolutionary in the cinema, where chronological time is disrupted in order to tell the story of Kane's life. In the film, montage functions similar to the working of memory where different planes of time intersect to create the full, or as full as the film allows, image of Kane. The use of montage in the film and the manner in which Kane's life is told from different points of view constitutes what Bergson calls the "crystals of time" (*MM* 135). Deleuze appropriates this concept to the cinema and specifically to *Kane*. He writes, "What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time: since the past is constituted not after the present that it was but at the same

time, time has to split itself in two at each moment as present and past…it has to split the present in two heterogeneous directions, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past" (81). *Kane* recalls this crystal-image: the different recollection-images that arise from sheets of past and present function to the point where "instead of producing an indirect image of time on the basis of movement, it [montage] will organize the order of non-chronological coexistences or relations in the direct time-image" (Deleuze 111).

The film begins with a close-up of a "No Trespassing" sign in front of Xanadu, and the image suggests that "the regions of past will keep their secret, and the call to recollection remains empty" (Deleuze 114). As Kane gazes longingly at Susan's snow globe, a literal "crystal" and recollection of his childhood home in Colorado, and whispers "Rosebud" on his deathbed, he comes to accept his fate within chronological time. Marc Singer writes, "His own modernization of time ultimately works against his desire to reverse it" (181). While Kane works at the newspaper and seeks to direct the course of news and events, the nostalgia of an idealized past continually haunts him. As Thompson continues his course of interviews throughout the film a series of trap doors opens before him to the endless void of meaning in Kane's life. Singer writes, "Each discovery Thompson and the audience make *across* time also yields a host of contradictory or self-defeating discoveries *about* time in the modernist era" (179). The very structure of the film, the incorporation of montage, reflects the crystal of time, the layers of past and present that merge together to create endless possibilities of meaning. Like *Kane*, *Last Year at Marienbad* works from a non-linear structure where past and present endlessly interact with one another to the point where truth becomes arbitrary – another reflection in the crystal, lost in the throes of memory.

If *Kane* was the "first occasion on which a direct time-image was seen in the cinema" (Deleuze 105), then Alain Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad* serves as a great reckoning within the evolution of the time-image. The distinctions in different periods of time are readily discernable in *Kane*, but in *Marienbad,* Resnais dismisses clear distinctions in time in favor of intersecting planes of consciousness. If "most of the characters in *Citizen Kane* have settled into one form of memorialization or another as a means of arresting time or removing themselves from it" (Singer 184), then the characters of *Marienbad* are presented as caught within the eternal flux of time. As Deleuze writes, "Events do not just succeed each other or simply follow a chronological course; they are constantly being rearranged according to whether they belong to a particular sheet of past, a particular continuum of age, all of which coexist" (120). For the purposes of *Marienbad*, it does not matter whether X knows A, whether they really did meet "last year at Marienbad" or not; each memory within the film's montage constitutes a *possibility* of time. What we see in *Marienbad*, as Spencer Shaw writes, are "visualized conundrums that point to the eternal return as the time of the event and to the impossibility of transparent truth, completion or finality. Rather, a finality that is endlessly becoming" (277).

From the opening tracking shots of the walls and objects in the manor, with the repeated phrase "Along these corridors, through these salons and galleries, in this edifice of a bygone era, this sprawling, sumptuous, baroque, gloomy hotel, where one endless corridor follows another," the labyrinth of memory and experience is established, and both character and spectator are lost in the maze. The opening tracking shot stands as a revolution of the time-image. Along with the repeated soundtrack, Resnais is able to create an endless flow of time – there is no distinction between instances and the film opens up possibilities of the crystal-image where past, present, and future are ceaselessly reborn within the flux. Deleuze writes, "If Resnais' tracking shots are

famous it is because they define, or rather construct, continuums, circuits of variable speed" (119). The tracking shots at the start of the film, and throughout, convey an unbroken extension of time where a continuum is established through long takes that present an aesthetic representation of time's vast expanse. With the incorporation of tracking shots and montage in the film, "movement changes its form from being perceptually sequential to mentally simultaneous as an exploration of the coexistence of the past, present, and future we also find in phenomenology's inner time-consciousness" (Shaw 274). *Marienbad* takes *Kane* a step further and portrays the time-image as a model of being in and out of time through the disruption of linear narrative and conventional modes of cinematic representation.

Returning to *Kane*, the film that launched the time-image, the film's use of depth of field further illuminates modern cinema's fully formed time-image. The invention of deep-focus in *Kane* allows the image on screen to present itself with the depth of the physical world. André Bazin writes, "Orson Welles started a revolution by systematically employing a depth of focus that had so far not been used. Whereas the camera lens, classically, had focused successively on different parts of the scene, the camera of Orson Welles takes in with equal sharpness the whole field of vision contained simultaneously within the dramatic field…Welles restored to reality its visible continuity" (28). The implementation of depth of field allows the image on the screen to reflect the continuum of time and experience. As the image includes all focal points, the entire vision opens up, and past, present, and future converge into one. Consider the scene when Mr. Thatcher visits young Kane and his parents in Colorado. When Thatcher and the parents go inside the house to discuss Kane's future, the framing of the shot utilizes a depth of focus. Thatcher and the parents are in the foreground, and the young Kane can be seen playing in the snow through a window in the background. The framing and the focus of this shot reveal the

time-image. The shot reveals an action in the present, but the parents and Thatcher in the foreground suggests a determined future for Kane, and the young boy in the background presents an idealized past receding within the frame. Through the depth of the frame, Welles reveals an entire continuum of time.

Deep-focus allows for the Bergsonian notion of simultaneity to occur: through the cinematic technique layers of past, present, and future intersect. It is this striking new use of depth in the cinema that "directly forms a region of time, a region of past which is defined by *optical* aspects or elements borrowed from interacting planes" (Deleuze 108). Even though Welles allows planes of time to intersect into a unified whole, there is not any redemption to be found in this simultaneity. Much as in *Marienbad*, the characters and the viewer are still lost within the enigma of memory and the irretrievable past in the end. After his series of interviews, Thompson states: "I don't think any one word can explain a man's life." When Thompson goes to visit Jed Leland at the hospital, Leland tells him, "That is one of the greatest curses inflicted on the human race, memory." Most of the shots that occur in the present action of the film are tightly framed on the screen, such as the overhead shot of Susan drinking in the bar, thereby suggesting a burden of the past that weighs heavily upon the present. The use of depth of field occurs primarily in recollection-images, memories where different planes converge to form a continuum. Memory and nostalgia heavily burden the film, and, as in *Marienbad*, cinematic techniques explore the different regions of the past.

With the break of the sensori-motor schema in modern cinema, the action image is replaced with the time-image. After WWII, the world was torn and frayed, and the chaos of technology, war, and a loss of belief in the heart of man loomed on the filmmakers of the time. Deleuze writes, "Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The

cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world," and "Restoring our belief in the world – this is the power of modern cinema" (172). This assertion reflects Bergson's idea that art "put[s] to sleep the active or rather resistant powers of our personality, and thus bring us into a state of perfect responsiveness, in which we realize the idea that is suggested to us and sympathy with the feeling that is expressed" (*TFW* 14). Modern art implies an attempt to return to a state of fulfillment, to give voice to primordial feelings and abstract conceptions of time, experience, and being. In modern cinema, filmmakers such as Welles and Resnais seek to make sense of a chaotic world. However, revolutionary films such as *Citizen Kane* and *Last Year at Marienbad* only reflect the nature of memory and time through presentation, they do not implement a state of timelessness that includes clear moments of spiritual fulfillment.

This is not to say that modern cinema does not offer glimpses of spiritual renewal in timeless moments. Consider the final scene in Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard*. The Prince of Salina attends a party in a great palace. As he passes through drawing rooms and large chambers in solitude, the weight of Garibaldi's revolution, the changing times, and the fading of the aristocracy plague his thoughts. The old nobility and the youthful, rising middle-class are all in attendance; it is a meeting of different planes of time. Visconti incorporates tracking shots that follow the prince throughout the palace forming a continuum, and uses depth of field with the prince among the guests, old and young, revealing a man lost in a sea of time. The prince is usually framed in the middle of the depth of people, and these cinematic techniques allow him to appear as a man stuck in an existential crisis – lost in time, vacant in meaning. In this timeless scene, however, the prince is offered one moment of fulfillment. The young and beautiful Angelica, his beloved nephew's fiancée, asks the prince for a waltz, and he grants the request. During the waltz "their glances embrace; they are for each other and at each other, while the

nephew is pushed into the background, himself fascinated and nullified by the grandeur of this couple, but it is too late for the old man and the girl alike" (Deleuze 97). Throughout much of the film, the prince moves heavily, burdened with nostalgia for a different age. In this one moment with Angelica, he returns to a different time, beauty and youth restored to his life; and then, in an instant, it all vanishes. However, for a timeless moment, a point of simultaneity, a moment of duration occurs and he reaches a brief instance of spiritual fulfillment. As Deleuze writes, "The too-late conditions the work of art [*The Leopard*], and conditions its success, since the perceptible and sensual unity of nature and man in the essence of art *par excellence*, in so far as it is characteristic of it to arrive too late in all other respects except precisely this one: time regained" (97).

Fincher's *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* utilizes all of these modern cinematic techniques that constitute the time-image. Similar to Fitzgerald's text, timelessness comes from the manner in which Fincher incorporates aspects of the time-image to evoke the disruption of time and narrative into moments of simultaneity and duration. The framing structure of *Benjamin Button* recalls *Kane's* narrative technique, the tracking shots recall the mystery of *Marienbad*, and the depth of field invokes the spiritual fulfillment of *The Leopard*. At the turn of the twenty-first century the sense of dread and chaos is not altogether different from the apocalyptic anticipation at the start of the twentieth century. In an age where information and people travel at lightning speed, the need to reconfigure the concepts of space, time, and movement seems as relevant as ever. Many instances in contemporary cinema present reactions in form to the question of time. Through an innovative narrative structure, Christopher Nolan's *Memento* presents a revolution in montage on the voyage to self-discovery. Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Blissfully Yours* incorporates tracking shots and extremely long takes in order to extend moments

into pure duration. Finally, Fincher's *Zodiac* provides an artistic meditation on the nature of time and obsession through aesthetic presentation and a complete genre reconfiguration.

Memento seems to be the most cited film in discussions of a current cinema of time. Memory is the primary focus for the main character, but also for the viewer who must determine what came before (or after) certain events. Interestingly enough, as Diran Lyons points out, the structure of the film "force[s] the audience to identify with Shelby's affliction" (128). Nolan's narrative technique, similar to Resnais' in *Marienbad*, suggests the workings of memory. The spectator is forced to watch Leonard Shelby wander through his present condition without any sense of past. Since the film is told in reverse, the viewer does not know what to make of the present situation, much like Shelby. *Memento* begins and ends in an indiscernible present. The start of the film is the narrative end, and the end of the film the beginning of the narrative, recalling Eliot's line, "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning / The end is where we start from." Formally, *Memento* resembles an action-image that relies upon a reverse continuity for its exploration of the workings of memory, the indiscernible past. However, the existential hero moves as a perfect figure of the time-image – he is at once in and out of time – since he no longer forms a construction within himself to order time into space; he now moves through time only.

Memento recalls a form similar to *Kane* and *Marienbad*, but the action of the film is straightforward; the viewer, at first, is not lost among the throes of memory. The time-image emerges through the hero's existential plight, but it becomes fully formed through a clever use of montage. Instead of playing the different segments of narrative in reverse continuity by themselves, Nolan intersperses between every "backwards" scene splices of a black and white conversation that Shelby is having with an unidentified caller. In these scenes, Shelby attempts to

make sense of his situation in a running commentary throughout the film, leading the spectator to question each event after (or before) it transpires. In one instance, Shelby recalls Sammy Jankis, another victim of short-term memory loss. In a shot of Jankis sitting in a wheelchair outside of a hospital, a man walks by, and after the man passes Shelby's image replaces Jankis in the wheelchair. Lyons writes, "The shot cuts after the subtle and subliminal instant, the climax of this particular take indicating a metonymical swap and transformation not only of Shelby and his ongoing construction of self but more importantly of our perception of the film's overall events to this point" (133). In this one scene, the crystal is revealed, and the forking of time, the endless re-workings and possibilities, emerges. With this scene the entire narrative of the film is called into question. Is Shelby really Jankis? Did Shelby kill his wife? The answers to these questions are not really the point of the film. The narrative of the "present," the scenes that run in reverse, comes under the black and white segments' influence; these scenes of an unknown past claim shape to the narrative and direct the course of possibilities. What matters is that through this black and white meta-narrative the time-image emerges within the film through the forking of time, the layers of past and present that form unclear distinctions about memory and reality.

In the rapid technological age, Taiwanese experimental filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul seeks to slow things down a bit. In the majority of contemporary cinema brief glimpses of shots thrown together in a flurry of montage replace the methodically crafted scene or time-image. Even a well-crafted summer action film such as Nolan's *The Dark Knight* (2008) reflects the quick-cut representation of how we live now. Weerasethakul's *Blissfully Yours* offers a counter-argument to the majority of contemporary film through its use of extremely long takes, extended tracking shots, and infrequent montage use. If *Memento* primarily reflects the time-image through montage, *Blissfully* presents the time-image through more subtle cinematic

techniques, and allows the viewer to experience the film in real-time. The film's first forty-five minutes follows the three main characters – Roong, Min, and Orn – on a series of errands around the Thai-Burmese border, starting at a doctor's office and then moving around town, using extremely long takes to a generally disorienting effect. The audience does not know whom these people are, their motivations, or anything that is happening at the film's start. It is not until nearly an hour into the film that the opening credits appear. The entire film unfolds in real-time, but the second half of the film transforms the disorienting elements of the first part into moments of sublime beauty.

The second half of the film repeats many of the same techniques of the first part, but the extension of time, and therefore, the time-image, appears in the film's formal presentation. The next sequence follows Roong and Min on a romantic picnic in the jungle. Extended takes capture them lounging in a primitive paradise. There is one particular scene that fully captures the time-image. The scene by the lagoon clearly suggests Deleuze's time-image and Bergson's notion of *durée*. Weerasethakul presents a concept of non-linear time through his extended takes that do not place time and space into easily divisible parts, but allow life and time to flow and extend into a continuum. After a romantic picnic, Roong and Min lounge by a lagoon. In this wordless chorus of beauty and nature nothing and everything happens. Nothing in a linear, action-image oriented model occurs. Min sits on the bank with Roong's head in his lap. Weerasethakul incorporates extremely long takes of Min's feet splashing in the sun-dappled water, or gazing up to the sky with the sun streaming through the trees. The length of these takes implies moments of pure *durée*: a chronological sense of time and action are discarded, and scenes are allowed to extend and breathe into timeless moments. The characters find spiritual fulfillment in these moments away from the chaos of the modern world, these moments of timeless beauty.

The pursuit of the timeless haunts contemporary cinema much like it did modern cinema, although on more infrequent occasions. So-called "independent" or "experimental" films such as *Memento* and *Blissfully Yours* largely exist around the margins of mainstream cinema, unless discovered at film festivals and later exalted by film critics. David Fincher presents something of a rarity in contemporary cinema: a technically proficient mainstream director whose aesthetic relies upon a refinement of mood, image, and time. Fincher does not pander to conventional representations of action and story portrayed in an easily recognizable structure. In films such as *Se7en* (1995) and *Fight Club* (1999), Fincher can be seen as refining his visual aesthetic, experimenting with digital technology and narrative technique. Beginning with *Zodiac* and followed the next year with *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Fincher fuses his visual craft with material concerning the question of time. Graham Fuller writes, "*Zodiac* did indicate Fincher's ability to slow the pace and show how the years take their toll on ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances" (27). If *Zodiac* presents a subtle meditation on the nature of obsession over an extended period of time, then *Benjamin Button* provides a similar meditation surrounding moments of time, albeit much more overt, where past, present, and future meet and scenes are extended into timeless states.

With *Zodiac*, Fincher transforms the police-procedural genre into something entirely new. The film initially presents itself as being about a group of detectives and newspapermen attempting to solve the Zodiac killer murders that occurred in the late sixties and early seventies. However, the film becomes something far greater. Kent Jones writes, "This is finally not a movie about a serial killer, but about the real-life exhaustion of trying to catch one… it's a movie about getting sucked into the vortex of obsession, as the expanding distance in time from the actual event makes an abstraction out of the investigation itself and turns the case into an urban legend"

(46). Fincher presents a carefully designed narrative where the serial killer plot rests in the background. The main focus is time's passing, and the obsession that unites the men over a great expanse of time. Fincher begins the film at the time of the second murder in 1969, and over a period of twenty-two years he follows the pursuers in their quest for fulfillment. The distance in chronological time incurred from the moment of the murders to the positive identification at the end of the film implies a dramatic abstraction of time. Over vast periods of linear progression, the past continually persists into the present, and nothing in the film fades away in memory.

While "the weight of time presses in from all directions" (Jones 46), the film's impact stems from its abstraction of time. Fincher evokes a sense of the timeless by presenting a portrait of obsession that does not diminish when placed within a linear progression of events. The reporters and detectives are in constant pursuit of the unattainable – the truth – throughout the film, and this quest leads to an obsession that shrugs against linearly defined instances. Time is transformed into an abstraction through a carefully implemented use of montage: the years that pass on the screen cease to matter and what remains is the pursuit of truth. The crystal emerges through each lead, each diversion in time and memory, and each glimmer of hope for an elusive truth. The film presents simultaneity through the presentation of the past, the murder case, constantly haunting the film's present moments. For the characters and the viewer, the film forms an amalgamation of time, where past and present fuse together in moments of timeless obsession. Through the film's invocation of timeless moments, there is hope and potentially fulfillment since the pursuers collaborate towards a single mission. However, since the film lacks an overall resolution – the killer is not captured – there may only be room for a *potential* for spiritual fulfillment. In this sense, *Zodiac* differs greatly from *Benjamin Button* since in the latter

Fincher provides timeless moments that extend into pure duration, thereby allowing the soul to find solace.

As time rushes through the contemporary age – through technology, scientific discovery, communication, and media – Fincher's films move at their own pace by seeking reflective moments in time that reveal simultaneous states of consciousness. *Benjamin Button* takes the same basic premise of Fitzgerald's text – a man is born old and ages in reverse while living life forward – moves it ahead fifty years, and adds a precision and lasting impact to every passing scene. The adaptation seems slightly troublesome since Fitzgerald's short story is quite brief and Fincher's film runs nearly three hours. Concerning the art of adapting the short story to film, Linda Seger writes, "It implies a process that demands rethinking, reconceptualizing, and understanding how the nature of drama is intrinsically different from the nature of all other literature," and later, "The first job of the adaptor will be to figure out how to fit the original material into different time parameters" (2). Fincher and screenwriter Eric Roth's adaptation of Fitzgerald's text implies a great expansion where most all characters, settings, and scenes are completely altered from the text. Ultimately, *Benjamin Button* presents itself as a film where, as J.M. Tyree writes, "The fountain of youth is viewed in successive stages, as a miracle by some, as a monstrosity by others, and finally as a great sorrow…despite all the mysterious counteracting of time, and the storyteller's manipulation of it, death comes anyway" (38).

The burden of time weighs heavily upon every passing scene. In the film, and unlike many instances in the text, Benjamin understands his situation. Time is his main obstacle, and if he eagerly approaches youth from an old age, he knows that these years of vitality will pass as well. The only means through which Benjamin finds fulfillment are in timeless moments that transcend each situation into a state of pure feeling and beauty. The film follows the structure of

Fitzgerald's text through a series of episodes. Whereas "Benjamin Button" mainly provokes humor and irony in each episode of the text, Fincher's film incorporates this structure to convey transient moments in life. Fincher utilizes a sense of tragic beauty through deep-focus, montage, and extended takes, where each shot, each sequence, each encounter, appears as a moment of time longing to be regained. Set in 2005 New Orleans around the time Katrina lands, the film is a looking back: an adaptation, a recreation of a different era. But, the framing device grounds the film in the present, and the fusion of these time periods together, linked by shared memory, enables the film to function as a deep meditation on the nature of time. Tyree writes, "Within the frame story about Katrina and the loosely structured plot showing Benjamin aging backwards, there are strings of melancholy vignettes, many of which are as much about mood as they are about plot" (37). This is first introduced when Benjamin lands in Murmansk during WWII. While staying in a hotel, Benjamin meets fellow traveler Elizabeth Abbott and they begin an affair. In the midst of this passionate encounter, Benjamin's first love, Elizabeth abruptly departs and leaves Benjamin a note that reads: "It was nice to have met you." It is at this moment that Benjamin first realizes the transient nature of the encounters in his life and how time, once passed, recedes deep into the continual flux.

Fincher presents these retrospective moments through subtle innovations in montage. The years progress onward, but clearly isolated instances in time are downplayed in favor of a constant continuation of events, with one memory seeping into another. The passing of time in *Benjamin Button* follows closely to what Fincher does in *Zodiac*. Amy Taubin writes, "Fincher downplays historical markers, choosing the least obvious and touching on them only glancingly as if to say that one is seldom fully aware of history, if at all, as it's being made" (34). Without easily identifiable instances in history, the film's montage provides a continuum of time that

evokes a constant flow of events and experiences. One particular scene in the film comments on time's mutability. Similar to the framing device that grounds the film in 2005 New Orleans, Fincher offers another framing device early in the film. In the midst of WWI, right before the time of Benjamin's birth, M. Gateau, a clockmaker, creates a clock that moves in reverse. The hope is that it will move backwards to the point where his son, who died in the war, will return home. Fincher presents Gateau's idea through a montage of scenes where the action in the frame moves backward in time, from the moment of the son's death to the point where Gateau is still embracing him before he goes off to war. From the beginning of *Benjamin Button* the nature of time is challenged, and Fincher presents different cinematic techniques that allow him to move forward and backward in time through the power of cinema.

Even though Benjamin ages in reverse – a perverse take on the fountain of youth – he must live his life forward, and every person that he meets leaves a lasting memory. The film is actually just that: we watch as Benjamin moves through life, travels different places, and meets various people with whom he shares significant experiences. There is no driving plot. Fincher takes his time telling the story, and each scene unravels with a precision to detail. It is in this sense that the film can be taken as a representation of life unfolding, something inherent in the cinema. As Siegfried Kracauer writes, "One may also say that they [films] have an affinity, evidently denied to photography, for the continuum of life or the "flow of life," which of course is identical with open-ended life. The concept "flow of life," then, covers the stream of material situations and happenings with all that they intimate in terms of emotions, values, and thoughts" (71). Every person that Benjamin meets – from Queenie, to Captain Mike, to Elizabeth Abbot, to Daisy – makes an impact on his life. The structure of the film follows Benjamin as he meets these people and has personal interactions with them. Fincher captures the "flow of life" by

stringing together the different scenes, allowing them to unfold at their leisure, disregarding chronological or historical time, and providing emotional resonance to every passing moment.

The "flow of life" in cinema recalls Bergson's and Deleuze's discussion of the crystal of time, where planes of consciousness meet and form divergent experiences. Near the end of the film, Benjamin states: "There is no time limit. You can start whenever you want, change, stay the same. There are no rules for this thing." He speaks this passage in a voice-over over a montage of Benjamin in his youth (old age) traveling the world, working various jobs, meeting different people, and exploring every possibility of being. In this montage Benjamin continually starts his life over, moving through the crystal of time. In these brief scenes, time forks in different directions as Benjamin changes his identity, and cinematic techniques reflect the different diversions and possibilities that Benjamin's life may take. Deleuze writes, "Time has to split at the same time as it sets itself out or unrolls itself: it splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which makes all the present pass on, while the other preserves all the past. Time consists of this split, and it is this, it is time, that we *see in the crystal*" (81). These splits in the crystal compose time's divergent qualities. The crystal represents time's possibilities, and in the film Fincher portrays this through the previously mentioned montage at the end of the film, and the flow of the film's entirety. In this sense, what we see in *Benjamin Button* and in the crystal is "always the bursting forth of life" (Deleuze 91).

Benjamin moves through these events as an existential drifter, and every moment reveals something significant, something treasured in memory. Upon his return home from WWII, Benjamin remarks, "It's a funny thing about coming home. It looks the same, smells the same, feels the same. You find out what's changed is you." It is in these simultaneous meetings of past and present – Benjamin's childhood home and the newly changed man – that timeless moments

occur within the film. The scene recalls Bergson's theory of succession, where planes of consciousness meet and form a heterogeneous whole. After his return, Benjamin is reunited with his childhood friend, Daisy. In the scene, Benjamin slowly becomes enchanted with Daisy, newly transformed from young girl to beautiful woman, the sequence recalling the moment in Fitzgerald's text when Benjamin first meets Hildegarde at the dance. After dinner, she takes Benjamin out to a park in the middle of the night and begins to perform some of her dance routines for him. Fincher frames the scene with a depth of field. Benjamin is in the foreground and Daisy is in the background dancing while a fog rises around her against the nighttime sky. In this shot, Benjamin is firmly placed in the present, and Daisy resembles an idealized past and future in the continuum. Fincher holds this shot for an extended duration, allowing the feeling of beauty to endure, to sweep over Benjamin and the audience alike. As Deleuze writes, "We suggest that depth of field has many functions, and that they all come together in a direct time-image. The special quality of depth of field would be to reverse time's subordination to movement and show time for itself" (109). In *Benjamin Button*, Fincher advocates depth of field in order to stop time for Benjamin, thereby allowing time, experience, and being to coalesce into a state of spiritual fulfillment.

Two scenes that make use of depth of field occur on the same dock near Mr. Button's house. About halfway through the film Benjamin is visited by his dying father. Unlike Fitzgerald's text, in the film Mr. Button abandons his grotesque child on the steps of a retirement home. After learning the truth about who is father is, Benjamin resents his father's decision to abandon him. Following a brief reconciliation, Benjamin and his father sit on a dock and watch the sunrise, and Fincher lingers on this scene of absolute beauty. While Benjamin and his father sit on the dock in the foreground, the depth of the frame extends to the end of the dock, to the

sea, and to the sky and sunrise. A continuum is established, with sheets of the past and present (Benjamin and his father) extending into eternity (the sea, the sunrise). A similar scene occurs when Benjamin takes Daisy to the very same spot some years later. After "meeting in the middle" and Daisy's accident, Benjamin and Daisy begin a passionate love affair. Daisy becomes distraught over her loss of talent due to her injury. Benjamin takes her to the same dock and Fincher reproduces nearly the exact scene that Benjamin had with his father. Benjamin and Daisy sit on the dock in the foreground and the shot extends to the dock, the sea, and, this time, the sunset. Daisy reaches a state of metaphysical awareness during this scene; the planes of past, present, and future meet together in a timeless moment, and her soul is calmed. In these scenes, the longing of the soul outwardly manifests itself into the natural surroundings, and the moment of *durée* that occurs establishes a bond between spirit and eternity.

However, these timeless moments do not last very long, and the characters relapse into chronological time. Tyree writes, "When separated lovers Benjamin and Daisy are reunited, time remains time, and it all too quickly slips away" (35). While instances that transcend linear progression may be grasped, the continual march of time, the succession of the before and after, never ceases. Benjamin's greatest curse is that while he grows ever more youthful, he must watch everyone that he cares for whither and fade away; fate cannot be stopped. The scene with Daisy's accident conveys this sense of unstoppable fate that courses through the film, disrupting timeless moments. Fincher crosscuts between a taxi driver, Daisy, and the various people and events that shape the unfortunate outcome. As Benjamin notes in a voice-over, if one motion occurred just a fraction of a second sooner or later, nothing would have happened to Daisy, but such is fate. Fincher presents the accident as an unstoppable force, a means through which fate triumphs over modes of timelessness. On an aesthetic level, the montage of Daisy's accident

comments largely on the manner in which the director gains the ability to exert a guiding providence over a series of events, to control action and time in film. Taubin writes of the scene, "It's the film's most poignant reflexive moment. Movies are a control freak's medium. You sit around in editing rooms, moving shots around, shaving seconds here and there to get exactly the result you want. In life, terrible things happen and there's nothing you can do about them" (34-5). In one graceful montage, the scene conveys the director's ability to manipulate time and events, but also comments on the inability to surmount an inevitable fate.

The film ends much like the story, with death overtaking all attempts to remain within timeless states. In both Fitzgerald's text and Fincher's film, Benjamin's "curious" reversal of time cannot stop the immanent march of death. Similar to Fitzgerald's short story, in the film Benjamin ages into a small baby. However, he does not die alone as in the text, but rather, in his beloved Daisy's arms. A final montage presents images of those people that mattered most to Benjamin, a sequence that appears like flashes before Benjamin's dying eyes. Images of Ngunda, Tizzy, Queenie, Captain Mike, Elizabeth, and Daisy flash upon the screen, all in the idealized state that Benjamin would most want to remember them. The final shot of the film finds Gateau's clock in a basement as Katrina's floodwaters wash over it. The general implication is that nothing lasts; even in the end, the hand of fate washes both time and timelessness away. Tyree writes of the end:

> The melancholy and sea-fog loneliness hanging over the film is true to a certain form of Fitzgeraldian ruined splendor, and its Hurricane Katrina frame story makes *Benjamin Button* a fable for the Age of Catastrophes in which things cannot end well. The film suggests that we only have a moment to live, but it also depicts the very lengthy stretches

> of life that are wasted or mis-lived, while showing moments of connection and happiness as fleeting. (38)

Even if insurmountable time and fate are all that remain in the end, whereas moments of timelessness and emotional harmony are lost in the flood, what lingers in the film are those moments of pure *durée*. The film argues that while in the end all experience is ultimately surmounted by unstoppable forces, the moments of timelessness and spiritual fulfillment (the dock, Daisy dancing in the night) give depth and meaning to life.

In times of frenzied and disorienting change, artists seek moments of solace and spiritual fulfillment through aesthetic expression. *Benjamin Button* recalls the narrative structure of *Kane* (the framing device, series of vignettes) and *Memento* (forking of time, reverse narrative), but it also adds something more to the time-image: spatial organization is discarded and being and experience are allowed to move through the flux through memories that linger into the present. Much like *Blissfully Yours*, Fincher allows scenes and moments to expand into pure duration. In chaotic times, when time, technology, and media move too quickly and cataclysmic events shatter the world, artists respond in revolutionary ways. Deleuze's time-image emerges in the tumultuous years during and after WWII, and develops in remarkable and sublime ways up through the twenty-first century. With *Zodiac* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, David Fincher joins the tradition by exploring ways to represent time and timelessness in a senseless world. Bergson's concepts of simultaneity and *durée* help give rise to conscious states that extend towards spiritual expression in modern and contemporary cinema. In *Benjamin Button*, Fincher sets the pace to capture the "flow of life," the divergent experiences that constitute and shape the possibilities within the constant flux of events, thereby allowing moments of timelessness in which the characters and audience encounter the sublime realm of the eternal.

CONCLUSION

Both F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" and David Fincher's *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* comment on the nature of time and being in their respective eras. Through times of frenzied change and disillusionment both artists react to the state of the world through aesthetic expression. Henri Bergson's philosophy of time enlightens readings of both the text and the film, and Gilles Deleuze's appropriation of Bergson's theories to the cinema enables a deeper reading of Fincher's aesthetic. In both the text and the film time appears in an abstract manner where simultaneity and duration emerge through aesthetic presentation. Bergson writes, "To tell the truth, it is impossible to distinguish between the duration, however short it may be, that separates two instances and a memory that connects them, because duration is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived" (*DS* 208). In his work, Bergson argues that time and being are truly experienced and lived as a continuous flow, where clear-cut instances, distinctions between past and present, do not exist. Both Fitzgerald's text and Fincher's film seek these timeless occurrences in order to reach moments of spiritual fulfillment.

Fitzgerald's "Benjamin Button" fits into the artistic framework of American modernism. In modernist texts "events, order, time, and linear movement mattered less, and thought, feeling, introspection, and emotional states mattered more" (Moss 9). In a time of great chaos the modernist writers valued the expression of spiritual feeling over rational presentation. For these writers, the "real" exists in conscious states beyond conventional representation. Fitzgerald's text may be placed within the tradition of such esteemed modernist works as Eliot's *Four Quartets*, Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, and Fitzgerald's own *The Great Gatsby* through the incorporation of the Bergsonian notions of simultaneity and *durée*. The short story differs from

the film through Fitzgerald's ironic tone that runs through the text. The timeless moments that do occur within the text are fleeting; spiritual fulfillment is brief, but it does afford Benjamin moments of stasis. Fitzgerald's representation of a man that ages in reverse – where planes of past, present, and future are subverted, meet in the middle, and occasionally coalesce to form a whole – works in the tradition of modernist texts that seek to find timeless moments outside the confusion of the modern world.

Fincher's *Benjamin Button* retains a similar plot structure to Fitzgerald's text, but he adds something much more in the film: sequences that utilize depth of field and extended takes which provide emotional resonance within heterogeneous states. In the text, Fitzgerald suggests the possibility to expand and rework the parameters of time, leading to an ironic commentary surrounding modern man's existential state; in the film Fincher favors scenes, such as Daisy dancing in the moonlight or Benjamin sailing along the Gulf Coast, that extend towards the sublime continuum of being and eternity. Fitzgerald's "Benjamin Button," unlike *Four Quartets* and *The Sound and the Fury*, contains few moments of timeless beauty. The few instances that occur within the text resonate deeply, but, like the hand of fate that ends the text, they come to an immanent end. Fincher's film follows this premise, but the beauty that does linger on the screen resonates in a deeper and more hopeful way than in the text. Fincher elevates Deleuze's time-image in contemporary cinema, following his modernist forbearers *Citizen Kane*, *Last Year at Marienbad*, and *The Leopard* in a revolutionary aesthetic. However, the major miracle of the film may not be the pure feeling that appears on the screen, but the manner in which Fincher defies conventions within contemporary cinema and creates a mainstream film according to his own precise discretion, his own careful pace.

Both works seek timeless moments that aspire towards spiritual fulfillment, and maybe this is all that matters. Times change, and technological and scientific progression will never cease; wars will never end. The world will spin ever faster, and moments of introspection and spiritual welfare will become scarcer and scarcer. What Fitzgerald's text and Fincher's film reflect are reactions against this sort of progress. In the end, contentment is not found in the race for power, money, or technological innovation; in the end, the same fate awaits everyone. It does not matter if we rule the world or age towards eternal youth. What does matter, and what both works argue in favor of, are those precious moments in life where everything – time, space, being, and soul – converges into an organic whole, and the spirit soars. It is in these instances of timelessness where true life resides – in that realm of pure feeling and duration, where time, ego, and rationality cease to matter, and the soul finds fulfillment. Within enduring moments of pure feeling and eternity we find that nothing else matters.

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