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Rosebud: Exploring Deleuzian Temporality through the Wellesian Shot

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ABSTRACT. One of the central themes in Deleuzian metaphysics is his rethinking of the traditional ontological conception of time. Gilles Deleuze was significantly influenced by Henri Bergson's philosophy where he moves away from spatializing time and instead develops a qualitative account of it rather than a quantitative account. Deleuze's thoughts on time develop in fascinating ways in the context of cinema, as this medium provides a novel metaphysical context that throws in further complications regarding the issue of time and movement. For instance, Deleuze regards cinematic movement as a type of 'false movement' — it does not provide the viewer with an image to which movement is then added, nor does it reconstitute movement from particular instants, but rather it immediately provides us with a 'time-image' where movement, time, and image merge into one ontological entity. This concept of the 'time-image' that he introduces in his book *Cinema 2* is a central concept for Deleuze, and for this paper, as the time-image reverses time's subordination in relation to movement. Whereas historically in the western philosophical canon time was seen to be an entity that emerged from movement, Deleuze and Bergson begin to subvert this line of thinking, arguing instead that time is tied to duration rather than movement. This reversal of subordination manifests itself in interesting ways in the context of cinema, and in my paper, I will specifically explore the phenomenon of the time-image in Orson Welles' 1941 film, *Citizen Kane.* In particular, I will be taking a close look at the phenomenon of the 'rosebud' being used to traverse through time within Charles Kane's past memories. The case of rosebud is a unique example because not only does it connect to time through being a window into Kane's memory, it also functions as a recurring signifier throughout the film in a manner that allows us

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to connect theories of time to semiotics. I will use the discussion surrounding semiotics to explore Deleuze's concept of the virtual, ultimately arguing that the function of rosebud as a signifier provides us with a useful frame to explore the virtual nature of Deleuzian temporality.

The most productive starting point would be to begin with outlining Bergson's critique of the orthodox philosophical conception of time and examining the ways he departs from it. Bergson's primary objection is that philosophers mistakenly think of time as a spatial entity. This concept is deeply entrenched in both philosophical and colloquial thought — there are countless examples of people using space as an analogy for time. For instance, think of the concept of a calendar: it spatializes time into a discrete grid where a 'year' is taken as the holistic unit, which is then divided into months, then weeks, then days. Another example is the analog clock where a circular structure is divided into twelve equal parts to symbolize twelve equal hours, which are traversed by three 'hands' to signify a specific hour, minute, and second. In both these colloquial examples, time is thought of as spatialized, quantitative, and divisible: just as the quantitative unit of the year can be broken down to months, weeks, and days, so can the unit of an hour be broken down into minutes and seconds. Consequently, these units can also be aggregated into larger units, or different temporal instants can be swapped and substituted with other instants, since they all operate according to the same basic unit. Bergson refers to this phenomenon as a 'quantitative multiplicity'.

Bergson contrasts this quantitative multiplicity with a 'qualitative multiplicity' — while quantitative multiplicities are homogenous, discontinuous, and represented by space, qualitative multiplicities are heterogenous, continuous, and appear in *pure duration.* This idea of a pure duration is crucial as Bergson wants us to think of time as a duration rather than represented by space. This shift mainly has to do with the concepts of exteriority and interiority — within space parts are external to each other, whereas within duration parts are internal to each other. The archetypal Bergsonian example to explain this phenomenon is a harmonic melody: part of the definition of a melody is the succession in which the parts follow from each other, which precludes the ability to rearrange the parts. If one were to rearrange the notes in a melody, it ends up feeling like a completely different melody. In the western musical system melodies are constructed in the context of a specific 'key' in which there are seven notes, all of which have a unique relation to each other. For instance, in the key of C, the note G is harmonically consonant with the home note of C, while the note B is the most dissonant note

in the key. Therefore, any melody in the key of C is defined by the succession of its notes, based on each note's relationship to the note of C. Hypothetically, consider a melody with notes C, B, G, C in succession: the ontological function of the melody is to establish the home key with the first note, create an aura of dissonance with the second note, establish a harmonic climax with the third, and then resolve the melody back to the home note with the fourth. A theory of spatialization would theorize that one can divide the melody into its base units, i.e., the notes, and rearrange them in any order while still retaining the melody. However, this approach does not take into account the ontological weight of the *order* of notes — it is the ordering of notes that is the crucial element in determining the character of the melody, as each note as a unique relation to the other. Therefore, while melodies are often represented as quantitative multiplicities, they are in fact qualitative in nature, as the parts within the melody are internally related to each other. Bergson uses the idea of a melody as an effective analogy for the mistaken characterization of time: just as a melody cannot be divided or rearranged, time is also indivisible and impossible to rearrange. Time is fundamentally heterogenous and defined by its internal succession – all the spatialized representations of time fail to convey its nature as a dynamic unfolding process.

Deleuze affirms the changes that Bergson makes to the philosophical account of time and further elaborates on his critique by reintroducing the concept of intensity and arguing that time is a philosophically intensive concept. Mary Beth Mader outlines Deleuze's commentary on the concept of intensity in her article "Philosophical and Scientific Intensity in the Thought of Gilles Deleuze". Mader emphasizes that Deleuze is not simply engaging with the scientific conception of intensity; rather, Deleuze has his own novel ontological account of intensity that marks a fundamental departure from modern scientific intensity. Deleuze initially finds the historical origin of the concept of intensity in Aristotle, and studies the medieval reception of Aristotelian intensity. Aristotle created the term 'alteration' to describe qualitative change, i.e., cases in which a quality becomes more or less of itself, which medieval philosophers then transpose onto quantitative and scientific frameworks to develop the term 'intensity'. An example that Mader cites is Deleuze's commentary on intensive distance in relation to Bertrand Russell's theory of distance. Russell argues that technically speaking the idea of a distance is not a discrete quantity, but rather is a "one to one relation" between "any pair of terms of a given class" (Mader, 2017, p. 264) that are not divisible or addable. However, he thinks that despite distance being a relation we can still turn distances into measurable properties through

transposing them onto a mathematical grid of measurement using the axiom of Archimedes and the axiom of linearity. This transposition allows us to extract a quantifiable magnitude out of this relation between two entities that we term as 'distance'. Deleuze wants to call attention to this process and point out that scientists often forget the fundamental assumption they make when discussing intensive quantities. When science talks about intensities such as distance, they are not talking about these intensities in themselves, but rather they are transposing them onto an extensive grid and talking about them through the lens of these quantifications.

Mader also notes how Deleuze was influenced by J.H. Rosny's unorthodox reading of thermodynamics. Rosny claims that the source of any instance of energy is an intensity, and that any intensity is the product of difference — therefore, if energy is fundamentally intensive then sums of energy would be "sums of differences" (Mader, 2017, p. 269). Deleuze further emphasizes the generative aspects of intensities that science fails to capture: Mader states Deleuze's example of altitude. While one can scientifically examine changes in altitude through the lens of quantification, different changes in altitude also generate a qualitatively new state. For example, if one goes significantly higher in altitude, the air pressure and oxygen levels will drop, and vice versa, which causes one to perceive different altitudes very differently, essentially leading them to be fundamentally different qualitative states.

Mader thinks that another crucial distinction that Deleuze makes is that between the coordination of independent variables and the ordination of variations. Deleuze thinks that the former is an operation that is characteristic of the sciences, while the latter is the realm of philosophical expression. He maintains that the goal of science is to create the conditions for reference to states of affairs so as to determine the truth or falsity of propositions and functions that express referential claims — at the conceptual heart of this endeavor is the coordination of variables. Contrastingly, Philosophy attempts to create concepts, i.e., put conceptual elements together into an intensive formation, which therefore requires intensive ordination. To map purely intensive ordinates onto space and time is to functionalize an intensive reality and pair it with an extensive reality. Deleuze therefore regards philosophical intensity and scientific intensity as fundamentally different but related: philosophical intensity forms the conceptual foundations for scientific intensity, while scientific intensity is essentially philosophical intensity that is converted to extensive coordinates to render it measurable.

The final aspect of Deleuze's ontological framework that needs to be explained is the concept of the virtual. In Daniel W. Smith's article "Conditions of the New", he outlines how

for Deleuze a 'new' ontological element must exist in the realm of the virtual. The structures of the transcendental cannot be traced off from the structures of the empirical, as transcendental idealist philosophers such as Immanuel Kant had attempted in the past. Traditionally modernist philosophers thought of the relationship between the possible and real as one of resemblance: one may think of the possible as a field of options, some of which are then actualized by the real — the real resembles the possible, and the real is also therefore a limitation of the possible. However, Deleuze replaces this possible-real opposition with a virtual-actual complementarity. The virtual is not constituted through identity; rather, it is constituted through difference and when it is actualized it differs from itself, such that every process of actualization is the production of the new i.e., a new difference which therefore is difference-in-itself. In another article titled "The Concept of the Simulacrum: Overturning Platonism", Smith notes that Plato's theory of the Forms was one of the primary pillars of transcendentalist philosophy that prized this dichotomy of the possible and the real, which Deleuze attempts to reverse. While Plato's theory argues that there exist abstract and transcendental ideas of Forms that are then actualized in an imperfect manner in the corporeal world, Deleuze uses the concept of the simulacra to subvert this hierarchy between original and copy. Deleuze valorizes the idea of a distorted copy claiming that "Simulacra are those systems in which the different relates to the different by means of difference itself" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 106). In these virtual systems we find no prior identity and internal resemblance, but rather the simulacra are built up from difference-in-itself.

Now that the ontological groundwork has been set up, we can move on to examining Deleuze's thought on cinema through *Citizen Kane*. Deleuze primarily talks about *Citizen Kane* in chapter five of *Cinema II* where he uses the film to introduce the concept of the 'time-image'. Deleuze praises the film because of how it incorporates this concept into cinema — he thinks it is the first time a film has ever done so as he writes in Chapter 5, "the first occasion on which a direct time-image was seen in the cinema was not in the mode of the present, but in the form of sheets of past, with Welles's *Citizen Kane*. Here time became out of joint and reversed its dependent relation to movement; temporality showed itself as it really was for the first time" (Deleuze, 1986, p. 105). The last sentence is crucial for two new concepts that Deleuze introduces, i.e., the time-image and the movement-image, which he uses to correct Bergson's implicit critique of cinema when Bergson claimed that spatializing time stems from a 'cinematic illusion'. Bergson argues that we mistakenly spatialize time because we are trained

to think of a passage of time as similar to a movie clip, where time is made up of a collection of divided extrinsic moments which is analogous to the frame or shot in a cinema. According to this framework, just like in cinema how we get a clip by aggregating a bunch of extrinsic shots, a passage of time is also an aggregation of a collection of extrinsic moments.

However, Deleuze thinks that Bergson makes a mistake when he reduces cinematic temporality to a mere illusion of spatialized time, and Deleuze creates the concepts of time-image and movement-image to correct this. He challenges the belief that the fundamental building block of cinema is the immobile frame; instead, he believes that the frame functions as a 'time-image' — an image that is fundamentally connected to the temporality of the past images and the future images that are going to follow the 'current' image. Following this conception, the image of cinema is an intensity just like how Bergson claimed time itself is an intensity — the parts of cinema are intensively related like the parts in time, they are not divisible extensive parts like Bergson claims. Furthermore, in *Cinema 1* Deleuze introduces the concept of the movement-image which underscores that cinema "does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image. It does give us a section, but a section which is mobile, not an immobile section plus abstract movement". In this way the concept of the movement-image liberates time from its subordination to being the measure of movement, and instead lets time function as an intensive property that unfolds itself irrespective of the developments in axes of motion.

In this paper I aim to explore these cinematic concepts through *Citizen Kane,* both in order to explain why Deleuze attaches so much importance to the film, and also to explore what the film itself can teach us about Deleuzian temporality and cinematic theory. I will be discussing three clips in the film: Firstly, a clip of Charles Kane firing his close friend and business associate Jedediah Leland, which Paul Douglass writes about in his essay "Deleuze, cinema, Bergson"; then, a clip of Kane stumbling on his wife attempting suicide which Stephen Crocker mentions in his article, "Citizen Kant: Flatness and Depth in the Image of Thought"; and lastly, a clip that I myself identify where Kane's parents are discussing the matter of giving him away while he plays outside in the snow for the last time, unaware of the events that are taking place inside the house.

Figure 1. *Citizen Kane,* Film by Orson Wells, 1941

Beginning with the first clip, pictured above, Peter Douglass believes that the crucial cinematic technique that Welles uses that appeals to Deleuze is the *deep focus shot.* Speaking in the cinematic register, a deep focus shot is defined as a shot where the foreground, middle ground, and background are all in focus. This contrasts to a more conventionally focused shot that aims to highlight a certain aspect of a frame and create contrast by applying focus to the foreground over the background or vice versa. As Daniela Angelucci writes in her article "Deleuze and the Concepts of Cinema", deep focus is used by Welles to create a "diagonal perspective, in which the background is in communication with the foreground as well as with the intermediate levels" (Angelucci, 2014, p. 330). Douglass notes how Welles uses these "slights of hand" to "blend the flow of memory and perception images" (Douglass, 1998, p. 28). This sequence of shots incorporates complex temporal relations — the clip is being recalled by Jedidiah, so the clip itself is a memory that incorporates the past while it is unfolding in the 'present' while Kane and Bernstein themselves contain their own temporal relations to each other and the general narrative of the film. The deep focus shot therefore functions as a movement-image

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that displays a liberated form of time that moves freely between time states. As Douglass notes, after Jedediah finishes recounting the incident, "a ceiling beam in the upper right-hand corner becomes more noticeable to the audience, furnishing a dividing line between past and present" which further complicates the temporal relations in the frame as we see a mix of both the cinematic past and the cinematic present within the same shot. The clip functions as a useful example of Deleuze's commentary on cinematic temporal states in *The Brain is the Screen*:

> It seems obvious to me that the image is not in the present. What is in the present is whatever the image represents but not the image itself. The image itself is a bunch of temporal relations from which the present unfolds … the image renders visible the temporal relations which cannot be reduced to the present. For example, an image shows a man walking along a river, in mountainous terrain: in this case, you have at least three 'coexisting' durations in the image, which are not to be confused with the present of what the image represents … it will be clearer if we look at some examples: an Ozu still-life, a Visconti traveling-shot, and a Welles deep-focus shot. (Deleuze, 1986, p. 290)

As we can see in the last sentence of that quote, Deleuze cites the Wellesian deep focus shot as a paradigmatic example of a shot that exposes the complex temporal relations that are embedded within cinema, and this shot that Douglass picks out is an apt instance that illustrates what Deleuze means.

Figure 2. *Citizen Kane,* Film by Orson Wells, 1941

Moving on to the second shot, pictured above, this clip is also recalled by one of the characters, this time by Kane's second wife Susan Alexander, and it offers a useful explication of the Deleuzian concept of the time-image. Stephen Crocker also mentions the use of deep focus, but in this context the technique is primarily used to compress the events of a specific passage of time into one privileged instant. Crocker writes,

> In the Wellesian shot, the whole is contemporary with the elements it presents… In an extreme deep focus shot, we see Kane, a tiny figure in the background entering the room. In the middle ground Susan lies catatonic in her bed, and filling almost a third of the frame in the foreground is a drinking glass and a pill bottle, the evidence of her suicide attempt. If it were shot with shallow focus and analytical editing the scene would have been broken into a series of separate shots from which we would subsequently have to infer a meaning. (Crocker, 2017, p. 131).

As Crocker notes, conventional directors attempt to convey temporal information through linear montage using 'shallow focus and analytical editing' — we might get a series of frames

where in the first sequence the viewer sees Susan taking the pills, followed by a sequence of her reacting to the effects of the pills and passing out into an unconscious state, finally concluding in a sequence where Kane walks into the room and notices Susan's attempted suicide. Welles departs from this cinematic framework by "jamming all the elements into a single frame" (Crocker, 2017, p. 131) which allows the frame to function as a Deleuzian time-image by exhibiting its intensive quality: the various inter-locking parts of the frame work together to give us a temporal narrative in one instant, rather than forming a temporality through multiple instants.

Figure 3. *Citizen Kane,* Film by Orson Wells, 1941

The last clip, pictured above, offers us insight into the distinction Deleuze makes between privileged instants and 'any instant whatever's. As emphasized earlier, this is the crucial distinction that Deleuze thinks Bergson ignores with his critique of cinematic temporality: Deleuze argues that Bergson reduces all cinematic instants to any-instant-whatevers. Deleuze maintains that while there are shots in cinema that are interchangeable as Bergson claims, there

are also 'privileged instants' which he writes in *Cinema 1* are "remarkable or singular points which belong to movement, and not as the moments of actualization of a transcendent form" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 6). The key characteristic of privileged instants as Deleuze defines them is that they are immanently explained, and do not rely on an extrinsic transcendent dimension to explain their ontological status. They therefore stand as singular points in a temporal relation that are not interchangeable like any-instant-whatevers. The above shot stands as one of the key privileged instants of *Citizen Kane* as it forms the nexus for temporal relations in the film and ties the narrative together. It is the central moment in the narrative that is being referred to in the very beginning and the very end of the film: when Kane utters 'Rosebud' as his last words as he drops the snow globe and passes away, and in the last frame of the film when we see Kane's childhood sled burning away in the fireplace with the word 'Rosebud' etched onto it. In this deep focus shot one sees both the beginning of a new temporal arc for Kane—with the signing of the contract that hands over his custody to Walter Thatcher—as well as Kane's old temporal arc coming to a close, with Kane enjoying the final moments of his childhood out in the snow. To refer back to the point that Crocker makes, linear montage style directing would attempt to convey this narrative piece by piece, but with his deep focus shots Orson Welles manages to connect both these temporal arcs into the same frame.

The ending of the film supplies us with an aspect of the Deleuzian virtual: the ontological function of 'Rosebud' serves to cultivate an asubjective temporal structure that moves temporality away from the dichotomy of the possible and the actual and into Deleuze's favored metaphysical framework of the virtual by cutting off perceptions from the subjects of the film. Throughout the film the viewer receives first person accounts of the memories of all the characters, and temporality is therefore attached to a subject as the events unfold through their memories. However, when the narrative is resolved in the final scene by displaying the meaning of the phrase 'Rosebud', crucially, as Angelucci writes,

> the enigma [of rosebud] is revealed only to the eyes of the spectators -and not to those of the characters - in the last scene, in which is filmed a pile of by then useless objects once belonging to the protagonist in the past being thrown into the fire by the attendants: 'Rosebud' is the sign impressed on the wooden sled with which Kane used to play during his childhood. (Angelucci, 2017, p. 330)

The climactic reveal of the meaning of Rosebud departs from the subject-based metaphysical

framework of the film: it provides the viewer with a perception that is not tied to a subject—one that is therefore asubjective and virtual. Deleuze uses the concept of the 'ciné-eye' to emphasize the ability of cinema to provide such virtual phenomena. He writes in *Cinema 1*, that the cine-eye "couples together any point whatsoever of the universe in any temporal order whatsoever … this is not a human eye ... for although the human eye can surmount some of its limitations with the help of contraptions and instruments, there is one which it cannot surmount, since it is its own condition of possibility" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 80). The cine-eye therefore underscores the omnitemporal nature of cinema as it can "see without boundaries or distances" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 81): in this context we can identify that even though the meaning of Rosebud was not apprehended by human eyes, it was perceived by the cine-eye. This asubjective characteristic of the final scene creates a metaphysical entity that is fundamentally generative as part of Deleuze's virtual: a temporal relation that does not require the perception of a subject to exist, but instead unfolds on its own as a virtual phenomenon.

This brings me to my concluding point, that the primary reason Deleuze valorizes *Citizen Kane* is because it is a fundamentally anti-representational film. It generates a unique temporal framework that could not have been experienced otherwise outside of cinema, and conveys the virtual over the dichotomy of the actual and the possible. Each character in the film has a particular theory of what Rosebud could possibly mean, and the journalist's attempt to uncover the meaning was a quest to represent an actuality from the realms of the possible, but the ultimate reveal of the meaning of Rosebud traverses all of the individuated subjects in the film. It becomes a signifier that is not perceived by a subject, a virtual entity that does not rely on the transcendent categories of the possible, but instead controls and distorts the temporal framework of the film and the intensive nature of cinematic time.

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