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### Encountering Time: Selected Short Stories of J.G. Ballard and Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*

Emily J. Duchaney

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Emily J. Duchaney

Encountering Time: Selected Short Stories of J.G. Ballard and Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*

Submitted to the Graduate School  
of Bridgewater State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

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## Treatment of Time in J.G. Ballard's Selected Short Stories: An Introduction

The notion of the present moment has perplexed humanity since the dawn of time. The complexity of distinguishing any specific moment continues to baffle philosophers, artists, and scientists alike. One can easily say that one can pinpoint the present moment stating: "right now is the present;" but in the time it takes for a person to even articulate this statement, time has passed and henceforth, the present moment has become the past. The passing of time leads one to gather that with every passing moment, that moment becomes the past at the very instant of noticing it. French phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty explains that, "If time is similar to a river, it flows from the past towards the present and future. The present is a consequence of the past, and the future of the present" (411). One can determine that what Merleau-Ponty is conveying is that, ultimately, the present is caused by the past while simultaneously, and here is the crux—the present or right now is actually the future of right now. What is most important in the understanding of the present is the notion of transience. How can the present be the future? Another French phenomenologist, Paul Ricoeur, ponders the same question. He asks, "How can time exist if the past is no longer, if the future is not yet, and the present is not always?" (7). Interestingly, Ricoeur states that "the present is not always" (7). This is of great importance because it emphasizes the huge role that transience plays in the present. Transience implies that time is constantly moving, shifting, and therefore, fading away with every given moment. J.G. Ballard, a modern British writer of short stories and novels who is often identified with the genre of science fiction but who escapes this genre as well, is interested in the idea of transience which brings him to his concept of a world in which transience impacts the end of time or apocalyptic time.

There is a saying that the only constant is change. This statement adapted from

Heraclitus emphasizes the transience in our lives. Taking this statement into account, one can begin to see how the present is not permanent and that it is continuously passing and creating new moments of now. The present is in no way stationary and as Ricoeur posits, is always “passing away” (7). If one is mindful of the present moment, perhaps by following one’s breath, the realization that each moment of “now” vanishes consistently becomes apparent. Merleau-Ponty describes time itself as “a succession of instances of now” (412). From Merleau-Ponty’s statement, it can be gathered that human beings are always living in the present, leading to the investigation concerning where the past and future may fit in if humans are always present within the “now.”

“Now” is a balance between memories (the past) and expectations (the future). We know that the past is what has already happened and is no longer, but what role does it play in relation to the present? For past and present to align, there must be a mediation by our own conscious view of the present. This mediation leads us to understanding that expectations are built on past experience. However, these expectations can be altered. Although, while one does not intentionally block out the past (except in certain instances); we rely on the past in order to shape future occurrences. Ricoeur refers extensively to Saint Augustine’s work as a benchmark for understanding the conflict of time. Augustine’s masterpiece, *Confessions*, asks: “‘If the future and the past do exist, I want to know where they are’” (Ricoeur 10). This question forces the manifestation of spatial visualizations of time. Suddenly, time exists in space. It, therefore, makes sense to assume that this spatial phenomenon of time is a projection from the human mind. At any given time, we have the ability to remember past events, either for nostalgic reasons or as a way of defining our future selves. Memories are a way of revisiting the past while in the present. In this way, memories act as a bridge between the different aspects of

consciousness and awareness.

In written narratives, the way in which events are recounted is closely connected to time. Time weaves through all narratives and organizes them. J.G. Ballard has the uncanny ability to convey time in unusual and often unconventional ways. Ballard usually creates characters who are the victims of time—both the time of clocks and calendars and their narrated time. Critics of Ballard have noted that for Ballard’s characters, time seems to distend and extend, sometimes simultaneously, within his works. Peter Brigg remarks: “In the time that they have found, there is a curious mixture of vagueness and neglect for the movement of clock time combined with an underlying sense of identity between the man and the time, a sense of having arrived in one’s own time when the world is comprehensible and the course of action obvious and simple “(44). It’s it Brigg’s notion of action that is important in understanding Ballard’s scripting of characters within the constraints of time. In his writing, Ballard’s characters, as curious as they typically are, tend to merge with the time (which so often engulfs them) yet also this time provides them with a source of freedom. Ballard’s writing, while considered to be in the genre of science fiction, does not fulfill the usual science fiction motifs. Ballard tends to gear his short works toward the psychological situations of his characters. Rather than “making sense of strange situations and taking them over, Ballard’s central characters interact with strangeness, becoming different in their goals and, in many cases, realizing that they are now in a world that frees them to fulfill their inner natures” (Brigg 44). Considering that time exists only in the mind, it can be surmised that Ballard’s characters are satisfying their “inner natures” or their minds, by either coming to terms with time or becoming victims to time (44).

Ballard published almost one hundred short stories in his life, not to mention several novels ranging in publication from the late 1950s to the mid-1990s. Ballard actually states that

“there are many perfect short stories, but no perfect novels” (*Extreme Metaphors* xv). Most of his short stories were first published in science fiction magazines and according to him, “readers at the time loudly complained that they weren’t science fiction at all” (*Extreme Metaphors* xv). Ballard alludes to the commonly held standard or stereotype that the science fiction genre has—one consisting of aliens, space ships, futuristic utopian societies, and ray guns. Ballard does write about, for example, alternative visions of the future: but as he explains, “I was interested in the real future that I could see approaching, and less in the invented future that science fiction preferred” (Sellars xv). In order to do so, he relies on present-day scenarios and situations as prompts for his futuristic short stories. His futures are not merely imaginations or fabrications but rather are reconstructions based on the present at hand. He realizes that the present which as each moment passes becomes the past is what creates history and builds the future.

Ballard explores how time affects his characters in his short stories and the implications that toying with time can have on a given story. This thesis focuses on five short stories from his 1982 collection *Myths of the Near Future* which interestingly, coincides with Ricoeur’s publication of *Time and Narrative* in 1983. The following stories will be explored and explicated; “Myths of the Near Future,” “Having a Wonderful Time,” “Zodiac 2000,” “The Smile,” “The Intensive Care Unit,” (as well as “The Garden of Time” from the collection *The Voices of Time*). Both “Myths of the Near Future” and “The Smile” deal with the freezing or stopping of time. The very idea of freezing time is closely held onto by Ballard, where these stories seek to identify time in an unchangeable state, allowing his characters to exist within a time vacuum, as it were. In an interview with John Gray from 2000, Ballard discusses his childhood in pre-war Shanghai:

I suddenly saw time come to an abrupt stop, and a very different and ugly sort of clock

begin to tick. Many of the characters in my short stories and novels have sudden glimpses into what they realise is a sort of larger reality, that there's a deeper past to the human race, when the everyday clock has stopped and there are much larger clocks whose movements are virtually imperceptible but which cover giant periods of time as the human race evolved. (*Extreme Metaphors* 380-81)

Ballard's works delve inside and outside of the human mind, folding through the time of the mind and the time of the physical world. He is aware of the fact that mankind is merely a microcosmic representative of a much larger universal whole. In "The Smile" the narrator purchases a mannequin whose name is Serena Cockayne. He is obsessed with the idea of preserving Serena forever, and eventually it is revealed that Serena is actually a work of taxidermy. This of course implies that she was once human—living and breathing, where someone before the narrator chose to try and preserve her forever—by way of taxidermy.

Likewise, in "The Intensive Care Unit" the narrator pushes the dimensions of time itself. He pushes the dimensions of time to a sense of discomfort for the reader. This challenges the reader to understand the time through the narrative of the story, and to accept that according to Günther Müller: "Narrating is presenting events that are not perceptible to the listener's senses" (Ricoeur 78). Narration pushes things into another time—a time of imagination. "The Intensive Care Unit" exposes a voyeuristic world in which everything is video-oriented—human interaction is unpleasant and abnormal. The story begins in the present and then backtracks to the past and finally returns to the present where it had begun. This sense of overlapping of narrative is seen in Ricoeur, who references Gérard Genette: "The contradiction between the concern with remembering things as they were lived in the instant and the concern with recounting them as they are remembered later. Hence, the contradiction between attributing at

times to life and at time to memory the overlappings reflected in the anachronisms of the narrative. The contradiction, above all, inherent in a search committed both to the ‘extra-temporal’ and to the ‘time in its pure state.’” (87) There is a direct opposition between memory and raw awareness (or the past and the present, which of course, both exist in the present). “The Intensive Care Unit” plays a sort of game of back and forth between memory and awareness of the “now.”

Ballard plays with time in other sorts of ways, pitting characters against their inner desires as they fail to reconcile the time they have at hand. “Zodiac 2000” is an odd, fragmented story which follows one person’s insanity-driven travels through his own personal astrological zodiac. The narrator alludes to the twelve signs and houses of astrology, but by way of giving them all different names and descriptions. It is truly a puzzling read, but an intriguing one. Ballard explains in a 1984 interview with Peter Rønnov-Jessen regarding his characters: “The characters are trying to build structures through which they can escape from the limitations of self. You could say the sense of ourselves, of our physical bodies, that we all have is in itself a sort of small death—because of its enormous limitations. We find it very difficult to break through that small death to a larger world.” (*Extreme Metaphors* 207) In “Zodiac 2000” Ballard’s character is able to do just this—break through the limitations of an already-constructed model and recreate it into something new—to give birth to a whole new version of the astrological zodiac. His characters delve into a mind trip through the zodiac which prompts questions of how time affects their experiences. Similarly, Ballard’s story “Having a Wonderful Time” is structurally fragmented. The structure consists of a series of one-way postcards from a woman “vacationing.” Time passes and the woman is able to make the best use of her time (in ways which she sees a fit) while her husband begins to suspect that he will never escape his

“vacation” and in the woman’s view, wastes his time. In all five of these stories, Ballard plays games with time—games which tend to confuse both the characters and the readers of his stories. That is his trick—his niche in a way and also a dominant motif throughout his short story writing.

The first chapter, “The Illusion of Now,” of my investigation of Ballard’s treatment of time explores in depth the elusive nature of the “now.” I look at the idea of “now” in light of the possibility that it is in fact altogether an illusion as implied by Ballard. Thus, for example as I type these letters on my keyboard, I can hear the analog clock ticking and I am reminded that each moment of “now” keeps passing away—those moments are gone! Yet, I am still able to remember and revisit those past moments in my mind or even on the page. Similarly, Roger Sheppard, of “Myths of the Near Future” comes to his own realization that the present is in fact an illusion or more accurately for Sheppard, a trap. It is due to his realization of entrapment that Sheppard finds the experience of the past, present, and future simultaneously. He embraces a metaphysical stretching out between his younger and older selves and, henceforth, experiences a trifold time of present awareness, memories, and prophecies. It is a perception of time beyond just the past, present; the future and instead it is an exploration of Sheppard’s perpetual *now*.

I posit that “now” is actually always and there is no tactile escape from the present moment (so long as time travel is not invented while I compose this thesis). Ballard challenges the linear model of:

PAST→PRESENT→FUTURE

Chapter one discusses how Ballard’s characters are placed into a chaotic existence and must somehow make sense of and control their temporal environment. Roger Sheppard, in “Myths of the Near Future,” has his self blend into a mixture of past, present, and future selves. This trinity of temporal experience challenges the universal constructs of time.

The second chapter, “Games With Time,” focuses on the games played by Ballard in his short stories. The chapter emphasizes in particular, his use of first person narration when questioning the notion of self in narrated time. Emphasis is placed on narration, particularly first person narration and the use of the pronoun “I.” Ricoeur discusses how the use of “I” “calls for an analysis that is, precisely, an analysis of voice” (86). Ballard toys with the use of “I” in several of the works I examine. The use of the “I” which is used in his fiction is up for debate. Is the “I” a conglomeration of senses, emotions, feelings, and perceptions? Or does the “I” actually exist as some core in our inner being—as a sort of nucleus—like the eye of a hurricane. Such questions are pondered in relation to narrated time and perceived time. The chapter stresses the importance of tense usage by the narrators.

Ballard’s own Surrealistic influences and how the surreal aspects play out in his texts, are also explored in this chapter as well as Ballardian motifs. From drained swimming pools, abandoned towns, to violence, Ballard’s texts often present readers with similar imagery. It may be Ballard’s own fear of the future (a future of nothingness) which prompts him to use such strange motifs in his short stories. While the motifs may be ordinary in nature since they do not involve magic or mythical creatures, they become a focal point for readers as their ever-occurring presence demands attention. One of his common motifs is the dreaded feeling of impending doom which leads readers to posit eternity or non-eternity (finitude). To live *in* time is to be always wondering about eternity or infinite time. Death seems to be the finite end of time for living beings but then what is to be said about possible life after death?

The third chapter, “Capturing Time, Frozen Temporality, and the End of Time,” focuses on the capturing of time in Ballard’s texts. I discuss a major issue for Ballard of whether there is a gap between humanity and time. Similar to the question of which came first the chicken or the

egg, the question must be addressed as to which came first, time or life? Is life a creation of time, implying that time existed before life or, did life (namely, humanity) construct, organize, and give a name to time which may actually be nonexistent. Ballard's stories focus on in particular, his characters and their own perceptions and interactions with time. Death is a prominent theme in the stories examined, whether it be actual physical death or more of a mental death. Ricoeur argues that death is a symbol for the limitations put on humanity in terms of time. Humanity is quite familiar with death but only from one side—the living side. We witness the deaths of others but cannot go to the “other side,” come back, and preach about death (although some claim to). Ricoeur posits, “What is more intimate to life, more a part of it than death, or rather dying? And what is more public than people's attitudes in the face of death...” (110-11). He brings up an unavoidable question for discussion because it is when watching others die that humanity turns to belief and artistry in order to understand the “other side.”

The forth chapter, “Ricoeur's ‘Third Time’ or The Fictive Experience of Time,” explores Ricoeur's “Third Time” as applicable to Ballard, “in which a consciousness otherwise marooned in a blind material universe discovers a mirror of its own world of human concerns” (Dowling 86). Focus is placed on the dynamics between the narrators in Ballard's stories, the other characters, and, ultimately, the reader of such stories. The reader of Ballard's works must come to realize a shared time of the reader, the narrator, and the narrative. However, Ballard as writer presents such difficulty for his reader by creating challenges and moments of discomfort as his reader clamors for understanding while trying to cope upon their entrance into Ballard's worlds. These challenges leave the reader trying to connect with the concerns of the Other in Ballard's texts. Elements which typically make the reader feel comfortable are presented as challenges by Ballard to the reader.

Ballard is able to heighten the strangeness and weirdness of his works by way of creating uncomfortable scenarios within his narratives. His characters are often unlikely and unheroic which creates a rift between reader and narrative. Yet this is Ballard's intent in creating such characters—he does not intend for interpretation of his works to be an easy task. By taking on the conventional construct of linear time and warping it into something challenging, Ballard makes it difficult for reader's to enter into Ricoeur's "third time" and by that makes readers feel closer to grasping the intrigue of time.

One normally thinks of time as a trinity of past, present, and future. The past has already occurred and is no longer, the present is right now, and the future is yet to come. This trinity constructed by the human mind appears linear in nature. One may visualize it as:

PAST→PRESENT→FUTURE

or

PAST←→PRESENT←→FUTURE

However, when looking at these linear models of time, questions arise regarding the emptiness before the past and after the future. For Ricoeur the future is designated by expectations. We are always anticipating what is to come in the future and how events will unfold. Due to this, we are stuck on the level of prediction which is why so many people fear the future and feel apprehension toward it—because it points to the unknown. Augustine concludes from his previous question that, ““wherever they are and whatever they are [future and past things], it is only by being in the present that they are”” (Ricoeur 10). We have come full circle back to the present—there is no escaping the ever-occurring now. We can imagine the future and remember the past but only can we do so in the present which in itself as was mentioned is transient in nature.

According to both Ricoeur and Ballard, the past and future occurring in the present makes sense. Ricoeur calls it the “three-fold present” (13). There is the present of the past, the present of the present, and the present of the future. As mentioned previously, the mind projects time as memories, expectations, or raw awareness (mindfulness of the present moment). Ricoeur explains that, “Only a mind stretched in such different directions can be distended” (18). The mind stretched in opposing directions is what Ricoeur is referring to: memory, expectation, and awareness. In this regard, it seems that time is a part of the mind—an extension of the mind—and hence, time and mind are inseparable. One cannot exist without the other because in order to understand, process, organize, and project (or feel) time, one must do it through the mind. The “three-fold present” can be visualized as such:

Present of the Past

Present of the Present      {All exist in the mind}

Present of the Future

Even if one visualizes the “three-fold present” as a linear model, the present will still dominate the model. This is because, as they reside in the mind, both past and future exist within the present. The result is that of a fractured awareness of time built upon a singular and immediate awareness of the mind in its current reference frame of “now.”

In the mind, memory is used to reconstruct the past, whereas the future is a construct of past events and present understanding. By using Ricoeur’s study as a basis for understanding, I explore Ballard’s ideas of time, which he projects onto his characters. At all times, Ballard is fully aware of the reality of his characters within their own mind. However, Ballard’s characters never challenge any of the bizarre occurrences or twists of time in any of the stories. The result leaves readers puzzled, inviting them to interpret his stories as characters themselves. By writing

about time as an extension of character awareness, Ballard seeks to show a realization beyond ordinary conception of present complexities of mind. In all aspects, he displays a truth beyond the story arc itself. Within each story, the narrative bends to reflect not just the characters, but Ballard's own views of time itself. Likewise, Ricoeur's investigation of time as a three-fold present sheds light on Ballard's self-aware notion of characters existing within the paradox of time.

The study of time in literature is troublesome because it exists always in the present. When it is written, or taking place, or read, is no matter to the overall function of the work. By extension, Ballard's stories are as much the present as they are past writings of his. Likewise, characters simultaneously exist in Ballard's world as they do our own as we read the works. This simple realization is a further extension of how Ballard uses his stories to connect with readers. Ballard's writings explore the mental and inner aspects of the human mind in relation to how time shapes and influences thought. His writings reflect the temporal experience of human existence from a psychological point of view. Equally, he demonstrates how the experience of time manipulates cognizance of the human condition; in doing so, he explores thematic elements of human distress because of our fears of being trapped by time. On the other spectrum, he exposes those distended by time, or those who somehow feel a simultaneous existence within Ricoeur's "three-fold present," that being an awareness of past, present, and future as they all exist in the present, or "now." All four of the chapters stress the role of memory reconstructing the past and constructing the future. Ricoeur's study of time and narrative is crucial to the discussion of Ballard's ideas of time and his characters' obsession with time.

## Chapter One: The Illusion of “Now”

Ballard's short work "Myths of the Near Future" reflects the idea that the mix of the past and present both exist within the present. This notion is certainly not Ballard's original invention but rather an expression otherwise theorized by Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others. Within the contexts of these writers, Ballard's short work highlights the problematic aspects of time, which question time as perceived as a linear trinity with the past, present and the future aligned in a traditionally perceived manner. In other words, the mind is in a different space than the physical body, thus thought and action are separated in terms of time. Of course, this is because the body can only exist in a limited state (due to age or decay or other ailments). Yet, the mind exists in multiple areas of thought, of which multiple eras (or timelines) may be considered simultaneously. Within these existences, the mind must continually reconcile time; however, time is itself an abstraction of being. Therefore, we must consider how the mind explores time as a means to understanding the internal. Of the many ways of thinking about time, the most curious and perplexing element of time is the notion of the present or the now. The protagonist from "Myths of the Near Future," Roger Sheppard, remains trapped within his own mind; his mind and body being separate yet, interconnected but this dualism of the mind and body separation is ridiculed because both his mind and his body react to internal and external phenomena. Paul Ricoeur speculates that the time of the mind and the time of the body are both in themselves intertwined and disconnected causing a "failure to deal at any level with the problem of a gap or break between mind or consciousness and the material universe that thinkers as diverse as Augustine and Aristotle and Kant and Husserl had seen as being inseparable from the problem of time" (Dowling 33). In this sense, our thoughts and our actions are inherently indivisible from our current time, the time of now or more precisely, the

time of the present.

Typically, time is perceived as being a linear trinity with the past, the present, and the future. This three-fold time existent within each and every present moment is explained by William C. Dowling: “the present, which can seem to have some substance even as a continuously vanishing ‘now,’ turns out on closer inspection to be purely relational, something like that ‘line’ that separates a black silhouette on white paper from its background, but cannot be shown as to be some third thing that is neither black nor white” (19). In other words, if I hold a pen over a white piece of paper under a light and see the silhouette of the pen, the line of that silhouette is blurred and the silhouette itself is not completely black nor is it completely white or grey. Dowling is using this example because, like the silhouette, the present is just as hazy and lacks tangibility like the pen’s shadow. The present then appears to be a vague, internal and external phenomenon.

Humans endow various meanings to the time of now. In other words, thinking of that a present moment is a reflection of a specific point along the linear timeline is incorrect as all time is present time. The only time which is directly experienced is that which exists in the now or the present. Even if one has a flashback of the past or a prophecy of the future, these phenomena are occurring within the present, and are thereby a reflection of now. By saying that the present *is*, it implies that the present has being (or substance). Ricoeur closely studies Martin Heidegger’s theories on being, mainly those which are discussed in Heidegger’s work *Being and Time*. Heidegger introduces the concept which he terms *Dasein* (“being there”). It is his term for a conscious existence, specifically that of a human being. Dowling clarifies: “His way of putting this is well known: entities have being, but only *Dasein* has Being, meaning that only for *Dasein* is its being itself an issue. On the most elementary level, this simply means that I can ask how

and why I exist, as a rock or a tree cannot” (28). Thus, *Dasein* has to do with sentience. A tree does not have the sentience or cognitive capability to understand that it is alive, but a human being most certainly does. Human beings have consciousness, which allows them to process thoughts and henceforth question their own existence, while non-sentient beings (although a tree is a living thing) lack consciousness. Heidegger argues that *Dasein* is thrown or born into a world which it did not create and in which it will at some point die. *Dasein* “is the ‘betweenness’—the German word is *Erstreckung*, implying a ‘stretching out’—that separates the two events” (Dowling 29). If *Dasein* is what extends between birth and death it can be seen visually as such:

BIRTH ← DASEIN → DEATH

In this way of thinking, *Dasein* takes the place of being (in the literal sense) and thus represents Being, or the literal essence of human existence. This confusion of existence and *personal* existence—the human as a one of a collective versus the human as a responsive individual at odds against the collective—is often the focus of Ballard’s search for humanity.

Ballard’s short stories repeatedly focus on worlds in which the characters come to being in a state of chaos. The background (existence as it is prior to birth) is very often the catalyst that his characters must work against in order to recognize their own self-worth. Characters are thrown into the tumult of life at birth, and must deal with (or not deal with) being (*Dasein*) in some way. Ballard uses existence as a replication of Heidegger’s *Dasein*, where the essence of human conflict is, for Ballard, an extension of the human condition. Often his characters are trapped by circumstances and personal issues which act to constrain their ability to lead meaningful lives. This can lead them to live by just getting by rather than living in a way which satisfies all of their capabilities. Human beings, according to Heidegger, are “born into a world

at a time and under circumstances over which [they] have no control” (Dowling 28). Without control, humans lack a sense of being (or existence), which is negated due to the lack of individual agency. Without action, people fail to see meaning in life.

In order to establish control, humans explain their existence as matters of cause and effect. Other times, humans see themselves as agents of change. We are either acted upon by the outside world, or we act in order to change the outside world. We individually have the capacity to enact meaning by our actions. This is not lost on Ballard. In his short works, the worlds in which his characters have been born into are typically dystopian or chaotic, and sometimes apocalyptic. In almost all instances, his characters try to imagine life outside their present state of existence. Seeing beyond our current state and identity within the world, Ballard’s characters attempt to exist outside of their own unique selves (being). By doing so, Ballard uses his characters to explain the more complex aspects of *Dasein* (Being), shown through individuals as members of these fragmented and often destructive worlds. Despite their individual troubles, Ballard’s characters are representative of a shared struggle, that which reconciles the personal perspectives against the greater awareness of the present time.

Roger Sheppard in the story “Myths of the Near Future” is most representative of Ballard’s characters finding themselves dwelling on the past or thinking about the future; due to this, they never actually experience the present. Heidegger explains that while we are aware of certain phenomena at any given time, there is always a background static which we are not giving our full attention to:

*Dasein*’s investment in its projects gives us the basis for Heidegger’s well-known distinction between a reality that is merely *vorhanden* or ‘present-at-hand,’ the neutral

or passive background against which any meaningful activity takes place, and one made up of objects that are *zuhanden* or ‘ready-at-hand’: that is, so absorbed into a structure of present concern that they seem to constitute a separate and more immediate reality. (Dowling 30)

In other words, Heidegger’s distinction of *Dasein* as a split reality can be seen in two ways. The first, what he calls the “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*) can be seen as “is,” or that which exists and has permanence. The second, that which is “ready-at-hand” (*zuhanden*), is “that which can be acted upon,” or that which has potential for existence but lacks any definitive permanence beyond that of notion or idea. Ballard uses both “present-at-hand” and “ready-at-hand” concurrently in order to show how characters exhibit control. In other words, *Dasein* exhibited in the writing of Ballard establishes an awareness of creating a permanent present, through both what happens and what could happen. By choosing to act upon that which is “present-at-hand” while considering the possibilities of the outcome—that which is “ready-at-hand”—characters establish control by trying on different scenarios in which the present reflects future possibilities.

By doing so, Ballard suggests that the present is an extension of future possibilities. Oddly enough, the future must then be present awareness. Personal awareness is built upon two ideas, not unlike two timelines meeting from different directions. It is as if a person merges with what is ready-at-hand. For example, Sheppard becomes engrossed in a fantasy while standing in the street. He stares at an elderly couple and convinces himself that he can see auras of the couple’s youth surrounding their bodies. He forgets about the dog which is following him and the dangers of the sunlight to his body almost as though he has tunnel vision: “Eager to become part of this magnetic world, Sheppard raised his wings and turned to face the sun” (29). In “Myths of the Near Future” Sheppard’s experience of this “ready-at-hand” phenomenon (the

elderly couple, the auras, the blending of past and present, the sunlight, and his delusion of having wings) is exacerbated by the fact that following the previous quote, there is a break in the text. This gap or break, in both narration and sequence of events, leaves open the possibilities of interpretation, both in terms of what happened between Sheppard's "ready-at-hand" experience and, following the break, the depiction of him sitting in his room. Sheppard is not giving attention to what is around him, except for his fanatical delusion (which may be a result of events that are purposefully overshadowed by the break) and subsequent nervous breakdown. Once we return to the "present-at-hand" as we experience it (the dog, the drained swimming pools all around him, the buildings, and the motel where he is staying), the present as it is seen by Sheppard ceases to have the same influence; are all background phenomena which Sheppard pays no attention to.

How Sheppard gets back to his motel is a mystery left for the reader to solve and deal with. The events connecting the two images of Sheppard have no extant meaning for the reader, but for Sheppard, they exist, both in their occurrence (as each moment happened) and, internally in his memory. Sheppard reflects on the inexplicableness of time while sitting in the motel room:

Yet the room seemed strange, a cabin allocated to him aboard a mysterious liner, with this concerned young psychologist sitting at the foot of the bed. He remembered her jeep in the dusty road, the loudhailer blaring at the elderly couple and the other derelicts as they were all about to rise into the air, a flight of angels. Suddenly a humdrum world had returned, his past and future selves had fled from him, he found himself standing in a street of shabby bars and shacks, a scarecrow with an old dog. Stunned, the tramps and the old couple had pinched their dry cheeks and faded back into their dark bedroom.

(29)

Sheppard experiences a blending of the external phenomena he has witnessed as coexisting within his mind's eye, within the confines of his motel room. He imagines the past and what he has seen. Yet, this imagination of the past is concurrent with the present because the present is what is happening right now even if he is remembering and reliving a past experience.

What Sheppard comes to realize in his sunlight-driven madness is that the present, the *now* in which he exists, is actually a composite of his past and future, a representation of being that is built on two separate yet simultaneous realizations. Sheppard sees beyond the traditional notion of time as the past being separate from the present and separate from the future. His view can be explained with the theories held by Ricoeur about a three-fold present which includes the past of the present, the present of the present, and the future of the present. Usually these presents are explained as memories, raw awareness, and expectations. "Myths of the Near Future" begins with a prolepsis. Ballard begins the story with a scene from the middle of the work—Sheppard is sitting in a stranded Cessna while the tide on Cocoa Beach continuously creeps into the aircraft. He is thinking about his ex-wife Elaine who is dead at that point in the story. Thus, Sheppard is experiencing the present of the past; he is delving into his memory bank. He is not consumed by just memories however because he is still conscious of the present of the present and the ready-at-hand. The second paragraph of the story begins: "But Sheppard sat calmly at the controls, thinking of his dead wife and all the drained swimming pools of Cocoa Beach, and of the strange nightclub he had glimpsed that afternoon through the forest canopy now covering the old Space Centre" (7). Ricoeur would note that the sentence, from the very beginning, is pluperfect, or written in a tense which designates that something has happened before.

The tense used by the narrator conveys time within the narrative. Here, the narrator

speaks of Sheppard as functioning on two levels. On one level, he is described in the past as having completed an action (sat); on another level, Sheppard's mentality exists in the present, described as in the process of being active (thinking), but the narrator also describes a third level of thought, that of the past being recalled, where Sheppard recalls the nightclub "he had glimpsed". Despite the memory having passed, Sheppard revisits the memory in the present, thus making the present a reflection of the past, here achieved by Ballard on several levels. The importance of time, as Sheppard relives and experiences it, is the central question in discussing Ballard's approach to human interaction and the essence of being.

Sheppard's *Dasein* is a construct, a being born into a strange world, especially when his being is compared to the reader's understanding of reality. He lives on Earth, in North America, yet there is a definitive question as to *when* he is living. Sheppard continually refers to Cape Kennedy, which was only known as such from 1963 to 1973. From then on, the name was changed to Cape Canaveral. Henceforth, the reader is initially led to believe that Sheppard is living within that ten year time frame. However, as the narrator explains the events of a widespread pandemic which begins to affect people everywhere, there is a direct reference insinuating that the 1980s and 1990s have already occurred:

As the illness became more widespread, affecting one in a hundred of the population, blame seemed to lie with the depletion of the ozone layer that had continued apace during the 1980s and 1990s. Perhaps the symptoms of world-shyness and withdrawal were no more than a self-protective response to the hazards of ultraviolet radiation, the psychological equivalent of the sunglasses worn by the blind. (12)

From this statement, another problem of understanding emerges. When is Sheppard living?

What is the year, decade, or even the century? Since Sheppard refers to Cape Canaveral as Cape

Kennedy and the 1980s and 90s have already passed, it would seem that he lives in the twenty first century. But, we have no clear indication as to why he preferences Cape Kennedy over Cape Canaveral. It may be that Sheppard's awareness is based upon the same dual notion of time as having both a past and future component, where either the past or the future influence and shape the conceptualized present.

Some textual evidence helps give a general idea as to *when* Sheppard lives. There is a reference made about Apollo 11 (the reference is specifically to "Armstrong on the moon") therefore placing the year of these events as having occurred after 1969 (13). Additionally, it must be considered that, as stated by the narrator, the disease (in the present) has been in existence for twenty years: "It was now twenty years since the earliest symptoms of this strange malaise—the so-called 'space sickness'—had made their appearance" (12). Taking this into account, as well as the Armstrong reference, we can infer the year to be at least 1989. Yet, within the explanations, there is reference to the 1990's, which would have to place Sheppard into the twenty first century. Sheppard's existence, in multiple yet indefinite times, helps to convey the issues of time as an indicative factor in relation to being. Sheppard's essence is therefore cut from "his" time, the result of which is a character without a sense of being.

This crux in the text coincides with Sheppard's notion that his past, present, and future selves are all one and that there is no distinction between the three. They are all occurring together and he is just beginning to realize it. The narrator describes Sheppard as feeling "that he was growing older and younger at the same time—his past and future selves had arranged a mysterious rendezvous in this motel bedroom" (20). It is as if Sheppard's *Dasein* is being stretched out between life and death with each side pulling equally. He is aging, yet becoming younger. Augustine, heavily analyzed by Ricoeur in the first volume of his work *Time and*

*Narrative*, discusses *distentio animi* or the distension of the mind in his work *Confessions*.

Ricoeur explains that “Only a mind stretched in such opposite directions can be distended” (*Time and Narrative Vol. 1* 18). Sheppard’s mind is expanding in a metaphysical way which is unclear. As a reader, it is not known whether Sheppard is delusional or if he is really experiencing a temporal oddity.

Not long after his “breakdown,” Sheppard realizes that the present is a trap. As he is sitting in his motel room, thinking, he loses grasp of his past and future selves: “So this was present time. Without realizing it, he had spent all his life in this grey, teased-out zone” (29). His mystical experience has ended for the time being and he is convinced that it was all an illusion (or more likely, a delusion). Sheppard’s attitude toward the present he experiences in his motel room is negative due to the fact that he sees himself as being lost and trapped. His mind is no longer distended but stagnant. Michel Delville discusses Ballard’s attitude toward time and the manner in which Ballard’s characters react to such distorted time. Ballard, like Sheppard, sees time as a constraining ploy of some sort:

... Ballard’s talent for colourful doom visions is related to the unveiling of correspondences between outer and inner landscapes. More often than not, his characters are simultaneously activating and being activated by changes in their environment. They eventually gain a superior state of awareness beyond the terms set by conventional ways of apprehending and transcending reality, including traditional means of understanding, measuring, or simply coping with the passing of time (13).

Sheppard goes on to the end of the narrative experiencing a different perception of time than past, present, and future as separate things. Somehow, whether it is the result of a delusion or a result of the infectious sunlight, Sheppard transcends the ordinary means of perceiving time. He has

had a lot of life-changing events occur in his life: the divorce from Elaine, the “space-sickness” pandemic, leaving Canada to move to Florida once he finds out that she has died, as well as the sunlight affecting his own mind. During one of his mystical rants he tells Anne to “throw away your watch...Everything that’s ever happened, all the events that *will* ever happen, are taking place together. We can die, and yet still live, at the same time” (34). Sheppard’s mind is so distended, so tumescent that he is able to see time beyond its linear models and set intervals. Past, present, and future are one in the same—all occurring at once, always. As Delville notes, “the inner rhythms of mental life cannot be contained within the linearity of man-made instruments of time measurement such as clocks and watches” (17). Sheppard can see this, and it is why he tells Anne to get rid of her watch. He believes it is useless to her when all time is occurring simultaneously.

Perhaps, transience is what plays the largest role in defining what the present or the now-time is. To live in the present moment without an awareness that the present is constantly going away and changing leads to one living in a mousetrap of sorts. Consciousness creates our notions of the present, such as thinking of a photograph or painting which seems to be able to freeze a moment of time. In actuality, that photograph or painting has trapped that time. And as decay, wear and tear affect these works of art, they change. This is the transient nature of the world we inhabit. As Merleau-Ponty posits, “let us be more precise and say that consciousness deploys or constitutes time. Through the ideal nature of time, it ceases to be imprisoned in the present” (414). Roger Sheppard’s consciousness has distended in the sense of Augustine’s *distentio animi* and is therefore, not trapped by the limitations of the present. He is able to see the past, the present, and the future as one coalescing occurrence.

Sheppard's mind and body connection is exhibited by Ballard's play on the present or the now. Sheppard is henceforth, always trapped within the time of the now. His mind distends in opposite directions from the past to the future.

## Chapter Two: Games with Time

The multifaceted grouping of phenomena that is reality requires organization for a sense to be made of it. Experiencing various aspects of reality demands some graspable order such as chronological time and dimensions of space which anchor us to our specific reality. Time and space are supportive pillars which the human mind relies on for its apprehension of reality. Thus, our engagement with reality on a daily basis is a conceptualized notion of time. The manner in which we use different tenses to relay events shapes our perception and understanding of *when*. Tense usage for example is crucial in narratives, especially written ones. Reading a narrative is based on an interaction between the reader and the narrator. While the reader considers what the narrator thinks, the reader is imperceptibly forming a conclusion from ideas within the text. In order to combat this, the narrator simultaneously appeals to the readers' participation. Interacting with many of Ballard's narrators is a unique undertaking considering that the narrators often fumble with or forgo the use of chronological narration. Ricoeur refers to something which he calls *narrated time*: "It is 'narrated time' because as a temporality fundamentally continuous with that of earlier generations who also understood themselves and their cultures in terms of stories, it underlies both written and unwritten narratives of human existence" (Dowling 69). Ricoeur's thoughts coincide with the idea that human beings can only understand time as it is presented to them in their own time. We can understand the past or maybe even the future, and most certainly do we have to understand these times within the only time—present time.

The idiosyncratic employment of time in his narratives stems directly from Ballard's own philosophies and influences. Surrealist art had an immense impact on Ballard's style as a writer. However, the entire cultural movement of surrealism was not Ballard's point of interest; instead it was a selection of the paintings which struck Ballard. The numerous interviews documented in

*Extreme Metaphors* have shed some light on his passion for the art. During a 1995 interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, Ballard is very blunt as he explains his fascination: “I think my imagination was powerfully attracted to the visual images of surrealism...My interest in surrealism has always been in half a dozen painters. But I’ve never been very interested in anything else” (*Extreme Metaphors* 294). With a very specific focal point, Ballard was able to invert what was considered mainstream science fiction writing, into something much more psychological and subjective. Will Self held an interview with Ballard the same year, when Ballard expressed his philosophical beliefs stemming from his interest in surrealist painting: “The whole point of surrealist painting is that it is answerable to nobody. It is unprogrammable because it all comes from the unconscious” (*Extreme Metaphors* 307). Ballard’s take on the “meaning” and purpose of surrealist visual artwork exposes his own deep-seated, subjective perplexity. Like messages and symbols from the unconscious which usually appear in dreams, surrealist visions do not make any universal sense. They always require interpretation and an interaction between the artist and the viewer. Each one always questioning the other: “What does it mean, how does it mean that, and why?”

Ballard’s short stories insist that the reader study symbols, metaphors, similes—everything inside and outside of the text in the same way that a surrealist painting tempts the viewer toward inquiry. The search for meaning in Ballard’s short stories is complicated by fluxes in the narration and variations in the (seemingly) fixed time in which we inhabit: “Indeed, finding oneself in the role of the ‘close reader’ can tempt madness, for the closer the text is read the more unreadable it gets, the more bemusing it is that any meaning can ‘leak’ from its dense weave” (Luckhurst 299). Consider “Zodiac 2000” which begins with an “Author’s note: “An updating, however modest, of the signs of the zodiac seems long overdue. The houses of our

psychological sky are no longer tenanted by rams, goats, and crabs but by helicopters, cruise missiles and intra-uterine coils, and by all the spectres of the psychiatric ward” (66). The setting of a sanitarium can be understood considering that the astrological zodiac (horoscopes) attribute emotional characteristics to people depending on their zodiac sign. The replacement of animals for military devices is brusquely interrupted by the nonchalant mention of “intra-uterine coils” (66). This contraceptive device, popular in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, makes up the fourth house of the narrator’s bizarre zodiac, meaning it was formerly the sign of the Cancer, yet is now “The Sign of the IU (69). The sign of Cancer is symbolized by the crab which may suggest that the IUD, like the crab, is within a shell (the uterus): “within the safekeeping of her placental vault” (69). This tiny section, under a close-reader’s microscope, becomes undoubtedly complex, ambiguous, and far-fetched. Each of the twelve newly transformed houses of “Zodiac 2000” can be given countless meanings based on or not based on the current astrological houses. Each of these houses occurs at a separate time and thus, astrology conveys time.

The interplay between the narrator and the reader of a text works in the same way. When an artist, be it a painter or writer, wants to relay events from the past, it is as if there is always a pair of tinted glasses separating the past from the artist, the artist from his recreation of the past, and the reader from the presentation given by the artist of the past. Ricoeur stresses the importance that verb tenses play in a narrative, “Can past events, whether real or imaginary, be presented without any intervention of the speaker in the narrative? Can events simply appear on the horizon of a story without anyone speaking in any way?” (*Time and Narrative Vol. 2* 64). In short, verb tenses always convey time and for Ricoeur the relationship between these verb tenses and lived time is essentially the distinction between the time of fiction (utterances and

statements) and the time of life (action). More importantly is the distinction between discourse (engagement) and history (reporting). With discourse, there is always a speaker yet, with a historical utterance, it is as though events shape, convey, and narrate themselves.

In Ballard's maddening short fiction, time is more often than not toyed with. Perhaps, this has to do with Ballard's psychological insertions in his writing which, while considered SF, is like nothing the SF community has ever read. His fiction has taken on the term "Ballardian" due to the recurring motifs throughout his fiction. Drained swimming pools, men inclined toward sexual fetishism, barren towns, and a steadily creeping doom of time all permeate the texts of Ballard's short works. The emanating question is why Ballard chooses to use these motifs again and again and how do they interact with the way in which he presents time in his short works. Perhaps, it is Ballard's feelings toward the future—toward eternity—which stimulate the recurring motifs, especially the impending doom (or closing in of time). Ballard touches on the future in a 1982 interview with V. Vale: "I would sum up my fear about the future in one word: *boring*. And that's my one fear: that everything has happened; nothing exciting or new or interesting is ever going to happen again. The future is just going to be a vast, conforming *suburb of the soul*" (*Extreme Metaphors* 148). Ballard seems to fear an emptiness of activity, a world without events, and essentially a universe in which one can only dwell within the mind. To dwell only within the mind is to dwell in a world constrained and constricted by time. It becomes a world in which the mind not only experiences but is actually the creator of time. Dowling's makes Ricoeur's musings more easily understood as he points out that, "The power of consciousness to actually create time thus lies in what Husserl calls a double intentionality, the second intentionality being, so to speak, consciousness perceiving itself in the process of constituting the temporal object" (26-7). In a world where one can only dwell or play within the

mind, consciousness becomes the key tool for navigating this type of universe. Mentally, humans organize consciousness based on series of observations; this may include the creation of temporal objects—objects which have substance and tangibility—as opposed to ethereal and abstract concepts of the mind.

Ballard's "Zodiac 2000" takes place within the mind of a psychiatric patient. By travelling through the different signs of the new zodiac, time is traversed in the patient's (and the reader's) mind. Doing so, Ballard invites the reader to participate in a sort of game, where the confusion of time is mapped out within the patient's mind. The reader, then, must find the path depicted by the map, which will lead to Ballard's end meaning. This exploration reflects the external navigation through time which people constantly experience. After going through the twelve signs or houses of the new zodiac, the narrator explains that once the patient has reached the final sign (the twelfth house): "he would leave them and take the left-handed staircase to the roof above his mind, and fly away across the free skies of his inner space" (75). The patient's "inner space" is his mind and it is finally unconstrained by the trap of time or the enclosure of the zodiac. The structure of the story even promotes the entrapment of the patient's mind in time. Each of the twelve signs is distinctly separated from one another with a bolded heading for each sign. Michel Delville, biographer of Ballard, finds several reasons to focus on Ballard's use of time: "Implied in many of these stories of imprisonment in time and space is a conception of the human condition as that of being trapped in various kinds of psychological, cultural or social confinement" (14). In the patient's case, he is confined by his lockdown in the sanitarium as well as his entrapment within the signs of the new zodiac which he creates for himself. However, the world of the narrative is and must be separate from the lived reality or the reality of our daily lives. We must separate Ballard's zodiac from the current zodiac which is in place for people to

check their daily horoscopes. Ricoeur explains that, “What is essential is that the narrated world is foreign to the immediate and directly preoccupying surroundings of the speaker and the listener. The model in this regard is still the fairy tale” (*Time and Narrative Vol. 2* 68-9).

Ricoeur goes on to explain that the fairy tale genre creates a distance in which we can feel safe as an outside reader yet at the same time feel relaxed and uninvolved. However, as an active participant in that we read the text, we must simultaneously be involved, thus negating our standing as an outsider from the text. This is part of the reading process, in which the reader’s engagement with the story is meant to bring away some meaning from the text. As elaborated by Ricoeur:

The paradox that results for us is the same, however, insofar as the notion of plot has been borrowed from drama, which Weinrich also excludes from the narrated world. I do not think this difficulty should detain for long inasmuch as the universe of discourse that I am placing under the title “narrative configuration” concerns the composition of statements and leaves intact the difference affecting utterances. Besides, the distinction between tension and relaxation is not as clear-cut as it may first appear. (*Time and Narrative Vol. 2* 69)

Ricoeur notes the relaxation of being separate from the text, but the tension built in the text is precisely what engages us as readers. Tension and relaxation work symbiotically, where the reader acts to balance both in order to achieve the individual result that is derived from the act of reader. Though Ricoeur explains the separation of immersion and distance through tension and relaxation, keep in mind that this is part of Ballard’s games.

Ballard’s games are furthered in another fairy tale-esque short story entitled “The Garden of Time.” This story recounts the struggles of Count Axel and his wife who fear an oncoming

army on the horizon and only in their garden can they be safe from the impending doom. Within the garden are time flowers which, though there are few left, when opened, they emit a light and seem to reverse time and simultaneously cause the oncoming army to recede: “Raising his head, Axel peered over the wall again. Only the farthest rim of the horizon was lit by the sun, and the great throng, which had now receded to the horizon, the entire concourse abruptly flung back in a reversal of time, and appeared to be stationary” (*Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard* 299). Here, there appears to be a halting of time itself. The army has receded and “appear[s] stationary” (*Complete Stories of J.G. Ballard* 299). “The Garden of Time” ends with Count Axel and his wife becoming stone figures to protect themselves from the approaching army. They become eternal figures in time. But does their stone-existence imply their deaths? For Ricoeur: “In this sense, eternity is just like time. That it exists causes no problem; how it exists and acts leaves us puzzled. It is out of this puzzlement that arises the first function of the assertion of eternity in relation to that of time: the function of the limiting idea” (*Time and Narrative Vol. I* 37). This idea which Ricoeur speaks of is death. Death does not necessarily imply a lack of eternity, for many believe that life goes on after death, but it does imply a finitude to time. If Count Axel and his wife are not dead as statuesque beings, then perhaps they are just frozen in time. If so, their freezing of time protects them from the army which has made its way into their garden and Ballard leaves it unclear as to whether or not Axel and his wife will ever shed their statue figures and continue living *in* time.

Yet, how can a freezing of time occur in a story such as “The Smile” in which a man purchases what he believes to be a mannequin and actually it turns out to be a woman whom was victim to a taxidermist? The narrator’s obsession with Serena, as she is called, is overpowering to the point where he gets jealous when the male hairdresser comes to doll her up. He suspects

adultery but from a woman who is thusly, frozen in time. To the narrator, Serena lives. She stares at him and “Each day the smile creeps a little further across her face” (177). He feels that she is mocking him in some way—and though she is not a living, breathing being—to the narrator she is. Delvile elaborates on the narrator’s situation: “the inner rhythms of mental life cannot be contained within the linearity of man-made instruments of time measurement such as clocks and watches” (17). Disregarding the time of clocks and calendars, internal, psychological urges, feelings, and emotions do not cease, they continue, and this continuation is enough to drive some, including the narrator, mad.

Ricoeur’s theories regarding the distance between reader and subject matter seem to offer a distinct difference in terms of meaning however, Ballard seems to intertwine the two, showing that there is no difference between the reader’s understanding of a text and how the reader *reads* the text. Where tension builds distance for Ricoeur, that very same tension is a necessity when considering how Ballard wishes the reader to interact with his text. He understands that there is less of a distance than that explained by Ricoeur, but both see the end result of reading and narration as a time game. However, for Ballard, both the reader and the narrator are the two parties participating in the game, not the author leading the reader into the game as Ricoeur would argue. Together, reading and participating are the same for Ballard because of his playfulness with chronology and narration. Reading, for Ballard, is the game.

### Chapter Three: Capturing Time, Frozen Temporality, and the End of Time

This chapter examines instances in a selection of Ballard's short stories wherein characters attempt, and sometimes succeed in stopping time in some way. They are faced with time that becomes arrested whether it is by freezing, being captured, or by being halted. I am examining specific examples of this in connection with Ricoeur's musings on eternity and finitude in order to uncover why humanity, specifically characters in Ballard's stories, feel it necessary to control time. One reason may be that they feel lost in the sporadic reality of time. Time, in its seemingly linear perspective of hindsight, is far from being categorized or measured as a direct line. Instead, time is shown in clashes of reality interspersed with flashes of memory. Together, reality and memory create the individual perspective of time, but individuals still feel overwhelmed by the reality presented to them; therefore, people use time as an anchor for measuring their reality. Of course, this only works in concert with individual recognition. Time as measured by others presents a fractured view of how we see reality as an actual, measureable instance of life. One example of time's incapacity for establishing reality can be seen by apocalyptic scenarios.

The end of the world—or the end of time—is widely feared and speculated upon in this postmodern era and has, previously and almost always, been a subject of extreme interest, perplexity, and terror. In 1999 and in the years leading up to it, much of the population feared that the year 2000 would be the end of time and again, in December of 2012, due to the theories surrounding the Mayan calendar, many people panicked and prepared for either annihilation or Judgment Day. Uncertainty causes the human mind to naturally speculate and more often than not such speculations lead to fears and phobias. Ballard's awareness regarding the psychological nature of peoples' reactions to the idea of time ending is likened to Ricoeur's sentiment on the

microcosmic end of time—death. Ballard admits that he recognizes humanity's innate fear of the future which he believes was born out of the first use of the hydrogen bomb: "Probably the first casualty of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was the concept of the future. People certainly lost interest in the future. They began to fear the future" (Ballard 243-44). Ballard suggests a brilliant connection between the use of nuclear weapons and the fear of the future. He observed humanity's anxiety about the reality of a probable nuclear war. The possibility of the world ending on any typical day became a real threat and in turn, as Ballard describes, "The twentieth century has been described in terms of death and decline" (Ballard 243). People in modern times fear that which they cannot control, and nuclear war is certainly uncontrollable by the masses. In the same interview with Ballard in which he stated the previous idea, Ballard explains how technology, World War II, and all the "colossal" changes which these brought about influenced humanity's phobia concerning the end of time (Ballard 243). People are always aware that death is lingering in the future but that does not mean that they want a specific source of death to live in constant fear of.

Ricoeur recognizes that death—or rather, observing the death of another—is one of the closest phenomena to the human condition. Human beings are always conscious of the end and according to Ballard, as previously stated, this awareness stems from fear. Fear of the unknown is an innate quality of how humans perceive reality, in part because there is no measure for impending tragedy. In other words, people fear the unknown because they don't know when they will happen, how they will happen, or in some instance why they happen. This fear had a major influence on much of Ballard's works wherein he presents situations in which his characters react to death and the end of time. "The Smile" introduces the reader to Serena Cockayne, a once-living woman turned into a work of taxidermy. She is purchased by the story's narrator who

initially believes that she is a mannequin. However, the uncanny poise and character which the narrator perceives about Serena immediately hints in his eyes that she is not a mannequin:

“Serena was the kind of woman that men invent” (165). This ambiguous statement suggests that not only is Serena a work of art by a taxidermist, but also that the narrator creates a relationship with a non-living figure and henceforth *invents* Serena’s disposition. Much like one observing a piece of artwork being sculpted, the narrator brings Serena to life in his own mind and world in order to fulfill his fears of the unknown. By making Serena a “living” figure, the narrator is able to establish a relationship with her based on what he invents about her, i.e. her personality, rather than a simple visual image of her. The effect is one of the narrator creating a possible future that is otherwise unforeseeable.

All works of art are subject to external conditions, thus the narrator’s obsessive attempts to control the environment and “life” which Serena inhabits. However, when the narrator has grown older and Serena has decayed a bit, the relationship he has with her has become detrimental. It must be noted that the narrator, “wait[s] for her to die and set [him] free” (177). He is waiting for Serena, a non-living work of art, to “die” rather than expressing a wish for his own death to set him free. Unfortunately for the narrator, Serena is already dead and her only source of vitality is the narrator’s love and care for her. The story concludes with the narrator expressing his fear of Serena’s ever-expanding smile. He feels that something in her smile is menacing and silently judging him: “As I look at it now across the study it seems to contain a complete understanding of my character, a judgment unknown to me from which I can never escape” (176-77). The obscure opinion which the narrator believes Serena has about him is a reflection of his own internal insecurities and conceptions about himself. The reader is left at the end of the story knowing that the narrator is waiting for Serena to die so that he can regain his

freedom. The narrator survives the story as does Serena, but, of course, his death is imminent whereas Serena's "death" is much more difficult to imagine let alone, to predict how long it will take for it to happen. When Serena does "die" is actually when the narrator approaches his demise for then she will retreat back into her non-living state which has been there all along. In other words, Serena's pseudo-livelihood will cease to be an invention of the narrator and she will simply be a smiling and slowly languishing work of art—a representation of her own as well as the narrator's demise.

Every person's understanding of death and the future is possible only by means of beliefs, predictions, experiences, and artistry. So also is the past or more specifically, history understood in this way. When talking about historical events, generally people find that a collective and definitive description of an event is difficult to relay because everyone interprets occurrences differently, especially when they have not directly experienced such occurrences. Ricoeur connects interpretation to understanding, particularly focusing on one's daily perception: "Understanding—even the understanding of another person in everyday life—is never a direct intuition but always a reconstruction" (*Time and Narrative Vol. 1* 97). Ricoeur fathoms that day to day comprehension is not something that one has innate knowledge about but, rather, is placed together in one's mind. In other words, understanding is formed out of uncertainties and spontaneity. It is built within the mind in order to make sense of our reality. Human beings are forced to create their own realities; it is impossible to create a concrete version of life or events from a web of unknowns. In other words, in order to construct individual reality, the mind borrows from memory, whether real or imagined, to establish some navigable path through reality.

Ballard's "Myths of the Near Future" showcases how one's understanding of reality,

particularly the past, present, and future, is constructed by the mind. The story also displays an instance where death is reversed and Elaine, the protagonist, Roger Sheppard's wife, "come[s] alive from the dead" (42). Sheppard perceives both mentally and visually that Elaine's past and future selves are blending together (He sees this happening to everyone, including animals). This surrealistic approach to Sheppard's perception of time is in all senses Ballardian, or a major motif inherent in most of Ballard's works and as Peter Brigg describes:

Just as Dali has pictured the soft time of his distorted watches, so Ballard shows characters responding to time as they understand it, often appearing to float through external reality with little consideration of such necessities as sleep, food, and the regular features of life. This is frequently acutely pointed by the characters being placed in worlds where regular forms of existence are collapsing. (44)

Sheppard confronts myriad images of past and future selves surrounding those that he sees and his understanding is that these selves from different times, all exist and are occurring at the same time in the present. The world in which Sheppard inhabits has been decimated by a space sickness resulting from the breakdown of the protective ozone layer and causing people to go mad and die in great numbers. His world is indeed collapsing, and the paradigm of what time once was is dissolving as well. In turn, Sheppard reconstructs time (though it is unintentional) and is able to transcend the constraints of a separate past, present, and future.

Sheppard is able to recapture the past, present, and future visually, simply by looking at the other beings around him. Many of Ballard's characters attempt to or do eventually capture time. This form of gaining control over time allows them to solidify otherwise transient phenomena. By building reality from transient phenomena, Ballard shows readers the human desire for control. Ballard's characters most often capture time visually, such as in the case of

Roger Sheppard, or the similar case of the narrator of “The Intensive Care Unit.” Here, the main character is a father and husband, who lives in a world in which everything is done via videography. All human interaction takes place through a camera. There is no intimacy (at least physically). All time is recorded through a lens and so long as it is filmed, it is also captured. Ballard seems to suggest that the very essence of capturing life gives that life value. However, he is aware that videos are tangible objects, which will eventually decay (as do all works of art), suggesting that there will come a time when eventually all videos, and by extension all records of life, will be lost. By capturing time, it is possible that these characters are attempting to create what Ricoeur calls the “eternal present” (*Time and Narrative Vol. 1* 29).

Ricoeur likens the eternal present to that of something held firmly in place or something which stays constantly steady, much like an anchor. In other words, transience is lost. The “eternal present” can be seen in “The Intensive Care Unit” as being a construct of the main character’s belief that his videography is indestructible. However, Ballard hovers above the page aware that the videos— and therefore the individual concept of life lived in a state of permanence—is fleeting. Wishing to move beyond purely visual intimacy, the father decides that his family should all meet in person, though he does set up a video camera to record the meeting. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, the scene which unfolds is one of gruesome violence between the family members. Yet, the father’s description of how he feels counteracts the intense violence: “Smiling at them affectionately, rage thickening the blood in my throat, I am only aware of my feelings of unbounded love” (205). The father’s description is actually conveyed as something picturesque. Despite the outbreak of aggression toward one another caused by what Ballard describes as, “sensory overload,” the father is still able to find the event to be a bonding experience (246). The father feels that he captures a moment in time and therefore, creates a

memory. His memory will survive in the form of the video from which he has set up cameras to capture the experience of the family meeting. Jeff Marker discusses the importance felt in society to videotape highlights and achievements in the lives of our loved ones. As with all important events in life—especially in his life which is in a world of cameras—it is important to preserve moments in time: “Perhaps more accurately, the failure to preserve ‘important’ moments on video has come to signify a lack of affection” (337). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this idea holds true; smartphones and the like allow anyone to capture video at any time. It is as if the preservation of the events in one’s memory is no longer good enough.

Due to the violent outcome of the family meeting, the “eternal present” is shattered—the stability and the safety are removed without the distance of televised meetings. Without the separation of individual space, substituted by the lens of cameras, the family becomes overwhelmed with the physical intimacy. One problem of the story is what drove the family to violence. The reader is left to wonder why physical intimacy, or proximity, causes the destruction of the family unit, specifically through physical violence. One reason may be that the family experiences a sensory, or even emotional overload, perhaps both. Also, it could be because the family meets and doesn’t like each other. Or, due to their limited exposure to their family members through videos, the family doesn’t realize its capabilities toward violence. Having no other personal connection, this abrupt meeting may have triggered otherwise unforeseen primal qualities that could not have been exercised or experience in isolation. The intimate meeting destroys what was eternally in the present and leads to death and destruction, or as Ricoeur puts it, “the limiting idea” (*Time and Narrative Vol. 1* 23). Ricoeur uses this term to designate death, finality, and the end. The family’s eternal present is abruptly disrupted by the

limiting idea when there is no safety behind a video camera or a television screen. Coming face to face with one another is just too much for them to handle when they are completely used to a world of pure videography as a substitute for lived reality.

“The Intensive Care Unit” is an experiment of shared visions, one which Ballard displays through media as a connective resource. However, it should be noted that the story allows for transmission between the family members. In the case of “Having a Wonderful Time,” Ballard limits the shared perception of reality by exploring the individual response to one way transmissions through a series of letters, in which the letters act as a wall against individuals, limiting their ability for a shared response. Thus, the world of “Having a Wonderful Time” is completely enclosed by perimeters of time *and* space. The story is structured as a series of one way letters which may or may not have reached the addressee. The letters encapsulate a time period of one year exactly—a year which is captured in time via the written word. Not only are the letters chronologically captured but they are also all written from the “Hotel Imperial.” This time frame of one year illustrates how Diana—the author of all the letters—is trapped, not only in a specific place but also in a timeframe of one year. The letters, which are intended to be postcard-esque vacation letters, actually show how Diana and her husband Richard become trapped in Las Palmas. While Richard figures out what is really going on and that he will never be able to leave his “vacation,” Diana simply goes with the flow of things and keeps herself occupied, thinking of it—or rather coming to believe that—it is an extended vacation. These two instances of memory and reality create a dual perspective (for both Richard and Diana) where time and space merge. For Richard, time leads him to a sense of claustrophobia and makes him feel exiled, where Diana finds that time seems endless, leading to a sense of fulfillment because the pressures of time are lifted. Thus, the spatial constraints felt by Richard are never mirrored in

Diana's own experience.

Richard sees this "vacation" as a trap, yet in Diana's second to last letter, she reveals that he has died after being washed ashore on the beach. He had stolen a motor boat in his attempt to escape. Diana's letter states, "Sadly, we'd completely lost touch, though I feel the experience has given me a degree of insight and maturity which I can put to good use when I play Clytemnestra in Tony's new production of *Electra*. He and Mark Hastings have been pillars of strength" (49). Diana has a newfound sense of drive after almost a year of being trapped on vacation while Richard on the other hand, attempted an escape and with his death, achieved his escape. One problem, though, is that it is never revealed in the letters, and possibly never revealed to Diana, as to why Richard stole the motor boat in the first place. One can only assume he was attempting to escape in order to free himself from the constraints of time and space, both of which dominated his "vacation." Diana's final letter postulates that her addressee never received her correspondence, leaving Diana's writings as a mere diary for herself. If this were true, then Diana's writing serve to both capture time and space by way of recording the sequence of events in writing. For Richard, Diana's letters have no meaning. He may have written a dialogue, but in the events of the story, Richard's frustrations are never given voice.

For Ballard's characters, the entrapment within time and space, whether unintentional or on purpose, usually leads to a negative experience. Where people believe that controlling time makes life easier for themselves, what they are actually doing is "taking to the extreme the spatiality of the postmodern chronotope" (Gomel 2006). In other words, Ballard suggests that time is itself a constraint on perceptions of human reality, where "Ballard's novels show that if time is dead, it is because it has been murdered by the violent excesses of the would-be builders of New Jerusalem. Myth is only a reification and obfuscation of history" (Gomel 2006). By

building their own realities, Ballard's characters act as architects of their own consciousness.

However, to do so omits the fact that time and space are social constructs, not individual realizations. Ballard suggests that history, both the mental and actual events of time as recorded by written dialogues and individual recollections, are simultaneously necessary in order to present a complete and utterly subjective understanding of our own mental capacity for understanding the unknown.

## Chapter Four: Ricoeur's "Third Time" or The Fictive Experience of Time

The three stories examined in this chapter all bring up the subject of preservation in some form. "The Smile" most obviously deals with it due to the physical aspects—the preservation of Serena Cockayne, a dead human preserved with taxidermy. But the preservation of Serena is also employed by the narrator who buys Serena and gives her a personality. He lives through Serena and henceforth, preserves himself. However, as readers learn at the end of the story, the narrator is preserved in a similarly dead manner as Serena, as he is waiting for her "to die and set [him] free" (177). In "Having a Wonderful Time," death too is the source of freedom. As Richard (and thusly readers) dies, his body is washed ashore; this death is his only freedom from the permanent vacation he and his wife are on. In this manner, the permanence of his vacation is that he won't be able to return from it. A similar scenario is shown in "The Intensive Care Unit," when the narrator's family all come together in person for the first time without a lens of videography separating them. The scene is violent and a complete overload of the senses for the characters. The family is bloodied and injured from what can only be assumed was a physically brutal battle. However, as the narrator (who is also the father) says in closing "Smiling at them affectionately, rage thickening in my throat, I am only aware of my feelings of unbounded love" (205). The father tells the reader that although he feels overwhelming anger and a defensive urge, he simultaneously feels a complete sense of empathy for his family. These stories reflect the preservation of the present moment as well as capturing specific points in time.

In these stories, Ballard references time over and over in order to capture the meaning of plot. Using time, he explores the present—his present of writing and our present of reading—by referencing that which has just happened or is about to happen. This referencing, of course, is dictated by plot. But, outside of the writing, Ballard's usage of time is compounded by the

reader's arrival to the text. For instance, where Richard's story is captured through the letters, and thus preserved, there is the distance between the reader and the events of "Having a Wonderful Time." The series of letters are all dated through the sequence of exactly one year. However, as this is a short story, the entire progression of the year can be read in one sitting by the reader. This "year" creates a vacuum of time where the events of the story are infinitely held within their present existence. Further, these letters exist in the "present" of 1985-86, which for a modern reader, is nearly thirty years past. For Richard the story of his death as told through a one year spanned series of letters will all exist within the year 1985-86. Thus, if the letters are lost, what or who will measure the time? It also begs another question; does time exist without someone or something to measure it?

Time can seem impossible to measure, but its effect on consciousness is something that must be measurable because we go to great lengths to try to establish time, via clocks, calendars, and viewing the changing of the seasons. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur underscores human interest in measuring time and also the awareness that measuring time is ultimately a subjective art form. For Ricoeur, time is both a complete and abstract notion: "[H]e wants to maintain that consciousness in such cases is simply 'taking up' time already present in external reality, just as width and breadth, of a table must really be there before I could measure them with a yardstick" (Dowling 21-22). A phenomenon needs to exist to be measured in order for one to ponder the question of its measured existence. But, if time is abstract, then how do we measure it? Perhaps this is the essence of "third time." Dowling observes of Ricoeur:

Yet it will turn out that his aim has been, all along, to show that in a certain sense we already inhabit the past. Ricoeur's ultimate point will be that the temporality we inhabit as social beings—what he will call "narrated time" (*le temps ra-conté*) or the "third time"

of narrativity—is a time of volition and preoccupation intelligible only in narrated terms. This will be, for him, both the time of ordinary existence and the ground of truth in historical narrative. It is “third time” because it stands apart from both Aristotle’s cosmic time or “time of the world” and Augustine’s phenomenological “time of the soul,” the only two concepts to have emerged from centuries of philosophical speculation. It is “narrated time” because, a temporality fundamentally continuous with that of earlier generations who also understand themselves and their cultures in terms of stories, it underlies both the written and unwritten narratives of human existence. (69)

The narrating of human life is of importance to human existence and is a source of fascination for Ballard, but he enlarges the notion by the inclusion of technology—narrating through photography and videography, but also through other means of artificial capturing such as taxidermy.

In works by Ballard, who is capturing both the written narratives of his characters, and the unwritten response of the reader, time is eliminated. The reader experiences the stories in the present of the narrative, bringing the fictive present to the personal present of the reader. Given that reading builds upon the reader’s own experiences, the reader too blurs the lines of time by travelling through the spaces presented through Ricoeur’s notion of “third time.” In addition to Ballard’s exploration of capturing time, by means of narration, he also is aware that this blurs the lines of time and space.

Many readers of Ballard’s short stories will undoubtedly find similarities among the stories. The engagement of the reader in the narrative is stressed by Ricoeur and that engagement is certainly of crucial interest to Ballard but Ballard acknowledges the presence of the reader by using narrative techniques and by distancing the reader from the present—the act of

reading. These stories seem to come from a different perspective, where Ballard intentionally uses narrative techniques as a means to distance the reader from the present. Thus, the narrators in “Having a Wonderful Time,” “The Smile,” and “The Intensive Care Unit” all have the advantage of looking backward while the reader is forced to contemplate while reading in a chronological manner—forward, seemingly from the beginning to the end of the story. The reader is forced to consider the action organized in the story starting with the first page and finishing with the last page. The action, as focused on by Ricoeur, the space or break between the backward and forward view of a narrative is according to him the most interesting. It is the time where the reader must come to terms with the decision at what point to get submerged and ask what implications does the narrative have for me right now? Ballard structures his narrative based upon the assumed response of his reader, challenging the reader to accept such a narrative involvement despite the difficulties faced using the space between text and audience to heighten the distance between the reader and any specific interpretation of the text. This approach leads to multiple interpretations, presenting human experiences, ultimately linking the reader to the time experienced by Ballard’s characters. It is not easy to for the reader to submerge oneself into the story—it is an intellectual challenge to cope with the understanding of action in a truly chronological order in Ballard’s works but with a second or continuous reading of such stories, interpretation can be allowed. A shared time must be arrived at by the reader in connection with the narrative and the narrator.

This shared time, which is both figurative and literal, presents an idea pertaining to how one understands narrative time. Ricoeur talks about a “third time,” the space between narrative time and the lived time of the reader: “Narrative in which a consciousness otherwise marooned in a blind material universe discovers a mirror of its own world of human concerns”

(Dowling 86). Dowling presents Ricoeur's theory in a clear and understandable manner. In other words, to the reader, the text functions as a "mirror" of lived experience within the moment it is read; however, there is the further element of the narrative time in which the story takes place. This is the time of the narrator, the temporal reality in which the narrator lives. It is separate from the time of the author, but may contain elements of the author's own time. Ballard explores these times in a destructive way, creating moments of discomfort and uneasiness because the reader finds oneself clamoring for understanding and coping with the challenge of entering Ballard's world. Together, these spaces of time create a distance between reader, text, and author, which one rarely thinks about when reading.

This space is important as it distinguishes the boundaries of understanding the narrative and its effect on the reader's interpretation—thus, the unnervingly surreal events in "The Smile" and the vague nothingness depicted in "Having a Wonderful Time." The former invites the reader into the narrator's own psyche wherein he conveys his every conscious and unconscious desire focused on his fascination with the mannequin named Serena, into the mind of the reader, without any intention of demanding a judgment of any sort to be placed on the narrator despite the weirdness of his love affair with Serena. The narrator's significant other is a perfect trophy, who is the recipient of his desires for control and perfection. Serena is the vessel through which the narrator brings to life his demands for perfection, control, and a strange sexual urge. She is in his mind timeless, until he neglects to maintain her appearance, letting his trophy decay. However, as she is dead, and therefore unable to breathe as a living creature, she is permanently halted as she would be at the time of her death. According to Dowling, "Fictive time thus becomes the basis of Ricoeur's insistence on literary autonomy, or the principle that every fictional work is a self-contained world with its own laws and its own logic, separate from

external systems of value or belief” (87). This is the crux of understanding “The Smile.”

Logically, we cannot buy taxidermy of humans, but the system at work in the story is not of value; instead, Ballard shows us how the passage of time is reflected by the narrator’s growing madness.

Serena is emblematic of stasis. She constantly sits in the chair with an ever-widening smile creeping across her face. But, as the narrator neglects her, she falls into decline as both an object and a person following the natural state of decomposition. Serena is, for the narrator, symbolic in her state of preservation, but her decline also foreshadows his own impending demise and mirrors the narrator’s mind falling apart. Ricoeur observes that, “All fictional narratives are ‘tales of time’ inasmuch as the structural transformations that affect the situations and characters take time. However only a few are ‘tales about time’ inasmuch as in them it is the very experience of time that is at stake” (*Time and Narrative Vol. 2* 101). This is the current problem that the narrator faces when dealing with the decay of Serena and his own mental stability. The ambiguity of Serena’s identity as a figure of the narrator’s consciousness is represented by her smile; as it grows, the narrator feels an increasing sense of torment, through his belief that the smile mocks him.

Time has a function within the existent world of “Having a Wonderful Time” in which both the characters and the readers are all wound together through a series of events. In “Having a Wonderful Time,” we experience Diana and Richard’s vacation through their letters, which capture their separation as a permanent record of events. Unlike Serena, who ages into a state of decay, Diana and Richard live eternally through this series of recorded instances. While Diana blossoms, Richard dies an untimely death. He is found washed ashore on the island and pronounced dead from drowning after attempting escape. However, despite his death, his letters

act as form of preservation, much in the same way that Serena is preserved through taxidermy though only for some time. The difference here is that while Serena decays, Richard will always be preserved, so long as the letters are preserved so that they may continually retell the story and capture this time.

“The Intensive Care Unit” is an even more intense example of Ballard’s fascination with time. The reader is placed at an even further distance from the narrative due to the filter of videography. If everything in the lives of the characters is handled and seen through the lens of mechanical media, then the reader would be witnessing the events after a recording of time passed. The time passed is an extension similar to “Having a Wonderful Time,” but the experience goes beyond the recording of words and presents a visual image, thereby heightening a reality of captured time based upon a live feed. Thus, the story goes beyond the recording of words in “Having a Wonderful Time” and proceeds to the recording of visual images. This recording as such, echoes Ricoeur’s idea of a “tale about time” as well as providing the reader with the ambiguous idea of “third time.”

The very idea of fiction is to erase time, and thus, allows the reader to experience multiple worlds from the privilege of the present. And, that we have the benefit of learning from the historical past, we enter into the world of the text knowingly searching out the gaps presented by our experiences. In doing so, the reader builds a catalogue of experiences through both the narrative past and the historical past. Dowling suggests that the division between past and present enable a broader understanding to gaps in time:

With each story, the reader is anticipating some outcome or ending with which to find meaning while the narrator is simultaneously, looking backward, or rather, telling the story from a reversed point of view with the end meaning already in mind. The gaps

between the reader, the narrative, and the narrator leave a space for what Ricoeur describes as the fictive experience of time—the mortal time wherein the reader attempts to fit himself into the story. It is an intermission of engagement, a period between where the reader's engagement with the text and the narrative temporality cease to exist. This interlude forces the reader to connect the narrative to his own present time as he is reading, creating a gap where time is both distant and immediate simultaneously. The reader must connect to the narrative is his own present time, as he is reading. (Dowling 68)

The connections as such suggest that fictive time is both historical and factual; by reading, we bring the past to the present, making the narrative past a piece of our individual, historical and present selves. However, Ballard challenges the reader's ability to do just this—he instead creates uncomfortable and anxiety-driven works which leave the reader feeling distanced from fictive time of the text at hand. “Third time,” as discussed by Ricoeur, must be a presentation of timelessness, bridged by the distinct relationship between the reader, author, and the text. Ricoeur also assures that a separation must be distinguished between measured time (clock time) and internal time (personal time):

We must stop with a simplistic opposition between clock time and internal time, therefore, but must consider the variety of relations between the concrete temporal experience of the various characters and the monumental time. The variations on the theme of this relation lead fiction well beyond the abstract opposition we have just referred to and make it, for the reader, a powerful means of detecting the infinitely varied ways of combining the perspectives of time that speculation by itself fails to mediate. (*Time and Narrative Vol. 2* 108)

Ricoeur discusses the removal of the constraints of measured time (clock time) and internal or personal time. In order to arrive at the “third time,” one must see all of time—past, present, and future time within a narrative. The reader must also recognize the oppositions between reader, text, narrator, and author.

To experience Ricoeur’s fictive experience of time, readers must live within their own time while simultaneously experiencing the time of the narrative and henceforth, entering into a “third time.” Ricoeur explains how the narrative acts as a “window” to this “third time:”

A work can be at one and the same time closed upon itself with respect to its structure and open onto a world, like a ‘window’ that cuts out a fleeting perspective of a landscape beyond. This opening consists in the pro-position of a world capable of being inhabited. And in this regard, an inhabitable world, such as many modern works project, is so only within the same problematic of an inhabitable space. What I am calling here the fictive experience of time is the temporal aspect of this virtual experience of being-in-the-world proposed by the text. (*Time and Narrative Vol. 2* 100)

Readers of Ballard must project themselves into the time of the texts to fully experience the fictive experience of time. There is a separation between the time of their reading and the time existent within the story but meanwhile, the readers must immerse themselves into the time of the narrative. The separation is exactly what Ballard intends to create between the reader and the text. He does not make it easy for the reader to immerse oneself into the time of the narrative.

Ballard’s short stories not only play games with time both for the characters and the reader but also place the reader into a perplexing “third time” as defined by Ricoeur. The stories examined in this chapter all shed to light a seemingly common theme for Ballard—that of preservation, the extension of time, and especially the weirdness and strangeness inherent

within Ballard's narratives. In order to experience that extension of time for the reader, they must fully immerse themselves within the time of the written narrative which then, brings them to Ricoeur's "third time" of understanding of the narrative. Though Ricoeur never wrote on Ballard's works, there seems to be a connection between the phenomenological theories of Ricoeur and the readings of a selection of Ballard's short stories.

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