

A Cinematic Reading of Virginia Woolf's "Kew Gardens"

Chia-chen Kuo

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
National Taiwan University, Taiwan

Abstract

In "The Cinema" (1926) Virginia Woolf discusses film as a new cultural product. However, I argue here that the author, already inspired by mainly silent films, began to experiment with simulating the cinematic rhythm in her writing as early as 1919 in the short story "Kew Gardens." I show how silent films may have led her to try to recreate in writing the spontaneity of images and sounds, their immediate appearance on the screen as raw percepts and affects, penetrating our bodies before our minds or subjectivities can make sense of them. In addition to the Deleuzian notions of sensation (as compound of percept and affect) and the fourth-person-singular (or nonhuman, nonsubjective) perspective or "point of articulation," I use the notion of what I call the "voice-over voice" to interpret "Kew Gardens." This voice, based on some of Woolf's observations in "The Cinema," is what appears in our minds before we can really think, helping us to make sense of these strange and unfamiliar images and sounds, these raw percepts-affects that change our bodily state. This "voice" is ambivalently subjective-objective, linguistic-mental-bodily, appearing and/or being heard on the movie screen and/or on our mind-screen. The interpretation of the story offered here thus sees what traditionally might be called the authorial or omniscient-narrative voice as a voice-over voice, and it elucidates the story's fragmented multiplicities and ambivalent sense of "enclosing everything" while also "permeating into the smallest internal spaces" in the light of a Deleuzian cinematic rhythm.

Keywords

Virginia Woolf, "The Cinema," "Kew Gardens," Gilles Deleuze,
fourth-person singular, affect, percept,
voice-over voice, cinematic rhythm

Introduction

Though obviously her other works have received much more attention from critics, “The Cinema” (1926) is Woolf’s reflection on the special role of the cinema. Most critics emphasize Woolf’s view of the cinema as a new cultural product without noticing that her main intention in writing this article was to reflect on the concept of *writing*. Woolf discovers that the cinema possesses what the traditional form of writing lacks, and she starts to re-envision writing in the light of the cinema’s influence. Hence she attempts to simulate cinema’s rhythm and to incorporate it into writing in order to compose a “cinematic writing,” i.e., writing with a cinematic rhythm. For Woolf, cinematic writing with its rhythm similar to that of bodily sensations can approximate the “moment of affect” and of being affected. However, no mimetic representation can satisfy Woolf, regardless of whatever sort of cinematic rhythm she may experiment with. “The Cinema” was composed around the same time as Woolf’s manifestos “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924) and “Modern Fiction” (1925), and thus like them should be regarded as a watershed, dividing the author’s earlier works, which still owe much to realism, from her later works into which, perhaps most obviously in *The Waves*, the cinematic rhythm has been incorporated.

“Kew Gardens” (1919) was published much earlier than “The Cinema” and we can interpret its importance as an experimental story in terms of the early onset of the cinema’s influence on Woolf. It is composed with a particular cinematic trait—the cinematic rhythm. Such a rhythm can be sensed by the reader via the *spontaneous* appearance of sounds and images. In this very short story, there are different camera shots taken from what we may call a fourth-person singular point of view in Deleuze’s sense. In addition, there is a “voice-over voice” articulating the percepts that gather around characters when affects are acting on them in “the tenth of a second” (Benjamin, “The Work of Art” 236). Percepts and affects, for Deleuze the compounds of sensations, can only be sensed by the body; they are not yet recognized by the consciousness. Such a nonhuman point of articulation may be slightly different from Deleuze’s “point of hearing,” but both “hearing” and “articulation” need to be integrated with a point of view so as to abstract particular and intangible nonhuman sensations from the milieu. The integration of a nonhuman point of view and point of articulation allows the reader to vibrate with the rhythm of the narration as if she or he were seeing a film.

A cinematic reading of “Kew Gardens” helps us to see that one way to approach “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” (Baudelaire 12) affect as a

new and "modern" structure of feeling¹ may be through a cinematic writing in which the rhythm evoked is similar to that of bodily sensations. While many critics note the tremendous influence of post-impressionist painting on Woolf, taking into account the relatively less conspicuous influence of the cinema on her writing may give us a wider perspective, wider angle on Woolf's epochal position in modernist literature.

Woolf's Cinematic Voice-Over Voice

The relation of Woolf to the cinema has a long history. The author often saw and discussed movies with her friends, and in her diary she noted her first experience of seeing films as early as in 1915 (Humm 187). Cinema played an important role in her life, not only as leisure activity but also as a form of enlightenment, a stimulus to further reflection on the art of writing. As Maggie Humm and Leslie K. Hankins remind us, 1920s cinema was still very young and vigorous, still experimenting and developing. Movies started to attract film critics as well as viewers, and Woolf participated in this flourishing visual party.² Beginning from 1915, she first saw silent films such as "the American Fox Film Company's *Anna Karenina* (1915) directed by J. Gordon Edwards" (Humm 188) and *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (directed by Robert Wiene) "in Germany in 1919" (Humm 186). Here I want to argue that such a silent film-viewing experience opened up for Woolf a new way of envisaging the *spontaneity* of sounds and images.

In "The Cinema" Woolf claims that at the *initial* moment when the sound and image appear *almost* spontaneously, voices appear in the viewer's mind where they try to express the meaning of these strange moving images (essentially being seen, unlike the images of still photography, for the first time) by speculating as to their

¹ "Structures of feeling" is Raymond Williams' theoretical concept. In *Cultural Theory*, Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick claim that structures of feeling mean "the lived experience of a particular moment in society and in history" (226), marking the exclusive experiences of perceptions at that time.

² In Hankins's article, the Woolfs attended several film forums and at least Leonard Woolf participated in the activity of the Film Society Program (148-49n2) which was founded in 1925. Woolf's closet friend Clive Bell shared his film review of *Entr'acte* (1924) with them (153-54) and the writing of "The Cinema" was even inspired by *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Humm 185-86). In addition, Hankins suggests that we can read the articles of a British pioneer film critic, Iris Barry with "The Cinema" juxtapositionally as if they were in a dialogue because Woolf and Barry respectively provided their comments on the flourishing phenomena of the cinema at that time (167).

possible meaning. Yet most of the time these mental voices were not heard because “[t]he eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles down to watch things happening without bestirring itself to think” (“Cinema” 180). Nevertheless, such voices “appear” in their minds when audience members see something quite abstract and unfamiliar on the screen, and in that flashing moment the eye asks the brain for help:

The eye wants help. The eye says to the brain, “Something is happening which I do not in the least understand. You are needed.” Together they look at the king, the boat, the horse, and the brain sees at once that they have taken on a quality which does not belong to the simple photograph of real life. They have become not more beautiful in the sense in which pictures are beautiful, but shall we call it (our vocabulary is miserably insufficient) more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life? (“Cinema” 181)

From this passage we see that in Woolf’s analysis, most of the time the eye perceives alone, with the brain not functioning. However, at certain moments the eye is puzzled by something totally unfamiliar and the brain is called on for help, called on perhaps to “capture” the sense of certain rare percepts and affects in the fleeting moment before this frame is replaced. At this flashing moment when the brain is also brought into play, the image and sound appear spontaneously but now the sound appears as voices in the viewers’ minds/brains. In other words, when viewers’ see an unfamiliar image on the screen the first “sound” appearing in their minds will be that expressing puzzlement in the form of a question: “What’s that on the screen?”—or else there will be some tentative statements attempting to explain the meaning of the image.

I would like to clarify my understanding of this special form of voice. First, we should not conflate this voice with “thought” as the “thinking voice,” because this voice-over voice is completely spontaneous. That is, the filmgoer is not really aware of it as a clear-cut thought or comprehensible voice; it is what I shall call an “I-less” voice. Second, we should not confuse this voice with the auditory hallucination of a schizophrenic: it is rather the common experience of any film audience member as s/he attempts to immediately comprehend the strange image on the screen. Here I will suggest that we explain it as a function of that *distraction* to which Walter Benjamin says all participants in the mass culture are subject.³ Third,

³ Benjamin argues in “The Work of Art” that distraction is a common trait of “modern” people,

we should not confuse this voice in the film viewer's mind with the real voices in talkies, whether they appear in dialogues or monologues. Nonetheless it is true that while in "The Cinema" Woolf is only influenced by silent films, she also seems to be aware of talkies as the cinematic force of the future, with their shocking, "savage" sounds; moreover, as we have seen, she tends to perceive images and sounds together in any case.⁴

This particular kind of voice that appears in the filmgoer's mind I will call the "voice-over voice." A voice-over is normally the "off-camera" voice we hear either commenting on a character's situation or directly expressing his/her thoughts, as if this were his/her own inner voice. A voice-over is of course recorded independently of the actual shooting of the film. In its detachment from the real-life character, that is, its difference from living speech ("spoken speech"), the voice-over can seem more like writing, like the words of the narrator or author of the screenplay; in this way it may suggest to film viewers the stream-of-consciousness technique of a modern novelist. However, when Woolf wrote "Kew Gardens" and even "The Cinema," this particular recording technique had not yet been invented. Woolf created rather than simulated this particular kind of cinematic spontaneity; it was one of her experimental techniques as a writer. Yet why did she create this? Exactly what did she want to capture with this spontaneity?

Throughout her career, of course, Woolf pursued the goal of capturing in narrative writing the precious, transient "flash of the moment" as well as intangible

since they are forced to receive so many stimuli all at once. Pamela Caughie says: "Distraction, in Benjamin's analysis, is a 'new mode of participation' in the 1920s-1930s mass culture, one that 'is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception' in 'all fields of art'. . . . Here 'distraction' refers both to the way popular culture diverts the public's attention from high art and to the kind of inattentive listening often associated with mass media" (xxiii). Thus it is that Benjamin laments the death of the traditional artwork with its aura. "The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested" ("The Work of Art" 238).

⁴ Talkies, or films where we actually hear people speak (the old silent films could also have musical accompaniments, the recorded sounds of trains, etc.), first appeared in 1900 in Paris and there followed a period of experimentation and development. However, the first feature-length talkie, *The Jazz Singer*, did not appear until 1927, a year after "The Cinema" was published. As for the "savage force" of the cinema of the future, in "The Cinema" Woolf says: "no great distance separates them [the audience] from those bright-eyed naked men who knocked two bars of iron together and heard in that clangor a foretaste of the music of Mozart" (180). At the end of the book she continues with this theme: "It is as if the savage tribe, instead of finding two bars of iron to play with, had found scattering the seashore fiddles, flutes, saxophones, trumpets, grand pianos by Erard and Bechstein, and had begun with incredible energy, but without knowing a note of music, to hammer and thump upon them all at the same time" (186).

bodily sensations.⁵ Here I will try to show how she achieves these goals in a very particular way by using this voice-over voice technique to “articulate” the story “Kew Gardens.” On my reading, both human voices and nonhuman sounds or noises are captured by, or become part of, this voice-over voice in the larger “cinematic experience” of the story. The whole story is really the moment of crystallization, the spontaneous condensation of a whole world of visual and acoustic sensations which, in my view, simulates the author’s experience of seeing silent films. For the bodily sensations, the special percepts and affects sensed by the film viewer’s body are beyond the bounds of language (the brain functions but not properly) and even beyond any critical meta-language (Woolf herself could not describe what the percepts and affects are). In Deleuzian terms the story’s voice-over voice is, like that in a film (especially one in which characters did not otherwise speak), preconscious and even preverbal because the percept and affect in the milieu evoke the audience’s direct bodily sensations.

A Deleuzian Perspective

Let us briefly note the Deleuzian definitions of percept, affect, and sensation. According to Deleuze and Guattari’ in *What is Philosophy?*, an artwork can produce a bloc of sensations which is preserved only in and by itself and has nothing to do with the will or intervention of the creator. As they say, “[i]t [the artwork] is independent of the creator through the self-positing of the created, which is preserved in itself. What is preserved—the thing or the work of art—is a *bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*” (164). Moreover, the value of the artwork, of this bloc of sensations, is not limited by the short time (as especially with cinema, dance, music) during which the actual “material lasts,” for in momentary flash or explosion of percepts and affects there lies a certain kind of eternity:

⁵ In “A Sketch of the Past,” Woolf says her vision of writing is to record these moments when she is vulnerable: “I only know that many of these exceptional moments brought with them a peculiar horror and a physical collapse; they seemed dominant; myself passive. . . . I feel that I have had a blow . . . it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words” (72). In addition, we should not forget that in “Modern Fiction,” Woolf confesses or explains away her meticulous stance of writing, which is different from that of the so-called materialists: “Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. . . . Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (160-61).

sensation is not the same thing as the material. What is preserved by right is not the material, which constitutes only the de facto condition, but, insofar as this condition is satisfied . . . it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself. Even if the material lasts for only a few seconds it will give sensation the power to exist and be preserved in itself *in the eternity that coexists with this short duration*. (166)

By "percept," Deleuze and Guattari mean that which satiates the nonhuman milieu in which affects acting on humans are "nonhuman becomings" (169). According to them, "[t]he percept is the landscape before man, in the absence of man" (ibid.). The milieu is satiated with percepts as by the production of multiple forces when they are intersecting each other at singular points. Although humans are in the milieu, they are no longer conscious and complacent subjects in the philosophical sense because they cannot aggressively take any action, but merely respond passively to the forces acting on and penetrating them. Deleuze and Guattari continue here: "[c]haracters can only exist, and the author can only create them, because they do not perceive but have passed into the landscape and are themselves part of the compound of sensations" (ibid.).

As for affect Brian Massumi, translator of *A Thousand Plateaus*, argues that it is "an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (xvi). Thus affect means the body's ability to react to the forces acting on it. In Deleuze and Guattari's view, affect usually bespeaks the milieu of percepts in which humans are penetrated by some accelerating and violent forces in the moment before their consciousness or "protective shield" has begun to work. Thus they argue: "Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of the state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are *beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived" (*Philosophy* 164).

Thus even though Woolf's voice-over voice appears in the mind of each member of a film audience, we cannot subjectify it. As we have seen, voice-over voice appears in the viewer's mind when s/he sees something rare and intangible on the screen: this voice is passively responding to the strange image seen on the "screen" (of the theater/brain) and inquiring into its meaning. Hence the philosophical concept of the subject has not arisen yet; since "the affect is not a

personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel" (*Plateaus* 240), how could one claim that these voices are subjectified? Indeed if we go one step further we might say that the Deleuzian subject is a nonsubjective "superject," reacting to the movement of the object (*The Fold* 20). In Deleuze, a point of view/point of articulation is not directed from the subject or to the object; thus we cannot say this viewer with such a voice in the mind is a conscious subject, nor can we aver that the image on the screen is a phenomenological object, constituting certain relations with the (non)subject. Instead we must say that the point of view, from (for) which both the image on the screen and the voice-over voices in the human viewers' minds are unfamiliar, is itself nonhuman, in a sense coming from nowhere and looking at nothing.

In the milieu, then, or on the plane of immanence, multiple forces are intersecting and acting on the (non)subject:

every point of view is a point of view on variation [of the object]. The point of view is not what varies with the subject[;] . . . it is, to the contrary, the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation (metamorphosis), or: something = x (anamorphosis). . . . [P]erspectivism amounts to a relativism, but not the relativism we take for granted. It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject. (*The Fold* 20)

For example, in "The Cinema" Woolf describes her experience of *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* like this: she saw a shape like a tadpole on the screen and what it evoked was a direct bodily sensation of fear. That is, a voice-over voice in Woolf's mind at that moment roughly conjectured it as an image of fear and only later could she *recognize* that such an image could be understood consciously in a statement. So she retroactively records her voice-over voice at that moment: "[f]or a moment it [the image of a tadpole] *seemed* to embody some monstrous diseased imagination of the lunatic's brain" ("Cinema" 183, emphasis added). Woolf's voice-over voice at that emerging moment tries to interpret what she sees on the screen, and the spontaneity of this sound-image simulates that of her bodily sensation of fear. She is penetrated by percepts and affects, becoming haecceity "in the sense that [she] consist[s] entirely of relations of movement and rest between molecules or particles, capacities to affect and be affected" (*Plateaus* 261). Some rough, intangible,

preconscious and preverbal sensations can be sensed by her and other film audience members with the spontaneity of sounds and images. As in symbolist or modern ("abstract") poetry, there is no clear rational reason why a tadpole represents a "monstrous diseased imagination," but the Deleuzian (and, I am suggesting, Woolfian) approach does not resort to metaphor in the traditional sense. Rather, Woolf resorts here to the preverbal and subconscious affect, and only later when composing "The Cinema" can she calmly, rationally analyze it: "it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words. The monstrous quivering tadpole seemed to be fear itself, and not the statement 'I am afraid'" (ibid.).

Just as parents' voices constitute the primordial integration of sounds and images when "they" are reading picture books and explaining the content to their children, this time, a picture is turned into a series of moving pictures: both the movie and the parents' voices are replaced by the silent film audience's voice-over voice(s). Such an initial integration of sounds and images constitutes a certain rhythm and the audience has to (collectively, communally) vibrate with it. As Benjamin argues: "That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film" ("Baudelaire" 175). This rhythm inherent in the film is almost imperceptible to the consciousness. However, right at that rare moment when the sound and image are integrated, the specific rhythm of sensations explodes, acting on the audience and forcing them to perceive it and even to vibrate with it. And in "Kew Gardens," Woolf amplifies such a rare cinematic rhythm and simultaneously condenses it into this short story.

Reading "Kew Gardens" in a Cinematic Way

"Kew Gardens" was published in 1919 and it has been considered one of Woolf's most "experimental" stories (Briggs 76; Oakland 265; Roe 169). I will take the "experimental" sense or feeling of the story as being closely tied to Woolf's interest in silent cinema, the voice-over voice and the pre-subjective cinematic rhythm as discussed above. In a letter to Vanessa Bell in January 1920, Woolf expresses her delight at discovering a new art form after completing the story:

[I am] happier today than I was yesterday, having this afternoon arrived at some idea of a new form for a new novel. Suppose one thing should open out of another—as in an unwritten novel—only not for 10 pages but 200 or so—doesn't that give the looseness and lightness I want; doesn't that get closer and yet keep form and speed,

and enclose everything, everything? . . . For I figure that the approach will be entirely different this time: no scaffolding; scarcely a brick to be seen; all crepuscular, but the heart, the passion, humor, everything as bright as fire in the mist. . . . Whether I'm sufficiently mistress of things—that's the doubt; but conceive *Mark on the Wall*, *K.G.*, and *Unwritten Novel* taking hands and dancing in unity. What the unity shall be I have yet to discover; the theme is a blank to me; but I see immense possibilities in the form I hit upon more or less by chance two weeks ago. (qtd. in Bell 72-73)

This potential capacity of narrative fiction to "enclose everything" in an open-ended way—the discovery of which gave Woolf such joy—I see as tied to the new cinematic rhythm in/of her writing.

Generally speaking, the critical reviews of "Kew Gardens" are diverse. First, besides observing the influence of the post-impressionist paintings on this short story, most critics tend to induce a central theme in "Kew Gardens." For example, Linden Peach regards this 1919 (the final year of World War I) story as presenting the inconspicuous but omnipresent threat of war (65). As for George M. Johnson, "Kew Gardens" is a supernatural story in which Woolf "demonstrates her ambivalence toward the supernatural and reveals her trying out a new method of creating a disturbingly haunting atmosphere" (244). Another trait shared by most critics is that they tend to view this story as narrated by an omnipresent or anthropomorphized narrator (the snail), and from this viewpoint there is inevitably a sense of totality at the end. For example, John Oakland argues for "both an acceptance of the temporariness and fragmentation of the initial impressions, but also, in a time-lapse continuum, a realization of a continuing character identification composed collectively of these moments and the reactions to them, so that a wider version of life and selfhood is promoted" (266). Sue Roe thinks the whole story is described from "a snail's-eye view from the interior of a flower-bed" (169).

Nevertheless, on my reading, then, these fragmentary impressions are the affects of and/or acting on the characters. Fragmentary as they are, they are neither identifiable nor total.⁶ Furthermore, the inspiration to record or capture these

⁶ Fragments are fragments. Such a concept remind(s) me that in order to explain the concept of cultural difference, Homi Bhabha once quoted from Paul de Man to explain Benjamin's saying that "Benjamin is not saying that the fragments constitute a totality, he says that fragments are fragments, and that they remain essentially fragmentary. They follow each other metonymically, and they never constitute a totality" (322n68). Even though the contexts in Bhabha and in this paper are distinct, I want to point out that there will be no totality produced as other critics

fragmentary affects is what Woolf received from her silent-film viewing experiences. I am taking the story as a sort of vessel containing a condensation of multiple affects, something like what one may experience (in Woolf's view) at certain rare moments while watching a silent film, when one is penetrated on a pre-conscious level by sensations, that is, by percepts and affects. And like a film this story integrates images and sounds, a nonhuman viewpoint and narrative voice. The main issues I will further explore here, then, are these: In what sense is the narrative voice in the story in effect a voice-over voice? And how do the nonhuman (fourth-person-singular) and the percepts and affects function in the story?

To begin with, we need to separate this term—the fourth person singular—into two sub-terms: “the fourth-person” and “singular.” The concept of the “fourth person” no longer indicates, as do the first, second and third persons, the identity of the speaker in the sentence. That is, no subjective position, even no human position can be occupied here. From this nonhuman, nonsubjective perspective, anything seen on the “screen” of the story must be unfamiliar, a random pattern of percepts and affects that accelerate and collide. Unlike those other personal pronouns with their concrete, precise reference, the fourth-person bespeaks nonhuman and nonsubjective blocs of sensations.

As for the concepts of “singular,” “singular point” and “singularity” which originally carry a topological denotation in mathematics, Deleuze uses them to describe the point of intersection between different forces—a point at which these forces are becoming something other than what they were and producing percepts and affects. Just as the intersection between the “wasp and the orchid” takes place as or at a (point of) singularity, one from which ensues an entirely different force and one where an affective assemblage is formed, “the fourth-person singular” implies not just the nonhuman affects or forces acting on humans but also the emergence of a new force at this very moment of affecting and being affected, a force which transforms the original relations and forms new assemblages.

In “Kew Gardens,” then, Woolf presupposes a nonhuman, nonsubjective perspective which is not situated at that of the author, the narrator or any anthropomorphized or human characters but as at that of a camera or the fourth-person singular. Jean-Jacques Lecercle also contends that “[t]he first element of structure becomes apparent when we realize that the story is composed of a number of passages that can be assimilated to camera shots in the cinema” (146). For Kai-Lin Yang a fourth-person singular viewpoint

claimed because nothing is certain in that flash of moment.

is an eye only to see singularity; however, it seems that authors have to transform themselves into this “fourth person singular eye” sometimes. Therefore, they are no more “I,” “you” or “he.” The story they tell is no “little story” that belongs to someone or something. They [authors] become the fourth person singular (*ça?* it?) . . . without self-consciousness. It is an eye only to see the pure event in life. Here, the point of view (*point de vue*) or the point of hearing (*point d’ouïe*) concerned about multiple singularities replaces the viewpoint of the subject or the object. . . . (sic, 373)⁷

Thus we can read the first paragraph of “Kew Gardens” as a camera shot or camera-eye’s view, a view or shot from a nonhuman and nonsubjective point of view:

The light fell either upon the smooth, grey back of a pebble, or, the shell of a snail with its brown, circular veins, or falling into a raindrop, it expanded with such intensity of red, blue and yellow the thin walls of water that one expected them to burst and disappear. Instead, the drop was left in a second silver grey once more, and the light now settled upon the flesh of a leaf, revealing the branching thread of fiber beneath the surface, and again it moved on and spread its illumination in the vast green spaces beneath the dome of the heart-shaped and tongue-shaped leaves. (29)

This long close-up of the flower bed, leading the reader to focus on the smallest details, the mutations and gradations of light and color, in effect foregrounds the strange non-humanness of any camera shot. This point of view is neither Woolf’s nor any character’s, not even the snail’s, but that of an “I-less” camera shot. As Julia Briggs says:

[t]he bed was populated by small insects and snails, moving in a different rhythm among the leaves and stones, a world of nature such

⁷ Every quotation from this article comes from my own translation. The original quotation is “這是一只僅能觀看特異性之眼，然而每個作家在其生命的某一刻中似乎都必然幻化為這只『第四人稱單數之眼』，他們因而不再是『我』、『你』或『他』，講述的也不再是特屬於某人或某事的『小故事』，而是一個不再具自我意識的第四人稱（它？*ça?* it?）……一只觀看生命中純粹事件之眼。在此，對複數特異性的觀點 (*point de vue*) 或聽點 (*point d’ouïe*) 取代主體觀點或客體觀點……” (373).

as is seldom perceived except by very small children, a world without people—‘not oneself but something in the universe that one’s left with.’ Such observed movement implies an observer, although the narrative style resists the notion of individual consciousness, so that the paragraphs describing the flower-bed are, in some sense, both eyeless and “I-less.” (76)

Benjamin’s optical unconscious may also imply that an unconscious “brought to light” by camera shots does not belong to any subject or object, for only by means of these “eyeless” shots can the “I-less” unconscious emerge. Benjamin claims that “a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man. . . . The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses” (“The Work of Art” 236-37). Humm agrees with this idea: “The true meaning of a film does not derive from its narrative content but rather from the processes by which film more abstractly connects with a spectator’s conscious and unconscious thoughts and memories” (189).

Along with the nonhuman affects arising from the optical techniques or from a nonhuman point of view, sounds (including voices) must also be taken into account. Melba Cuddy-Keane reads “Kew Gardens” as a composition of diverse sounds with nonhuman percepts and affects: “there is, too, a nontraditional perception of wholeness—comprehensive but not unified around a center—and a nontraditional sense of pattern—neither humanly ordered nor anthropocentric” (85). I agree with Cuddy-Keane’s point that contemporary sound technologies motivated Woolf to become very aware of the traits and qualities of sounds. In a sense, “Kew Gardens” can be regarded as an articulation of diverse sounds, all of which are directed towards a nonhuman “point of hearing” (Yang 373). Woolf indeed describe this “cacophony” in a passage combining organic and mechanical images, as being “like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another [as] the city [murmurs] . . . ” (“Kew Gardens” 36). In addition, another description from Deleuze can also explain this phenomenon:

If we suppose that the concert is divided into two sources of sound, we are positing that each hears only its own perceptions but is harmonized with those of the other even better than if it had perceived them, because of the vertical rules of harmony that happen

to be enveloped in their respective spontaneity. These are the harmonies that replace horizontal connections. (*The Fold* 80)

In the beginning, we can still distinguish which sound is which. After all, we have the human voices of the eight characters' four dialogues: the conversation of the married couple Simon and Eleanor (29-30), that between the old man (murmuring about ghosts) and his nephew, the meaningless chitchatting of two elderly women (32) and the two young lovers' fragmented dialogue (33-35). And there are mechanical sounds: those of the aeroplane, the omnibuses and the street (35-36). However, in the end all the sounds are immersed in the larger, more encompassing cacophony of sound or noise. Then at the end a voice-over voice says: "Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence?" (35-36). For while the members of individual couples can hear and more or less understand each other—in fact even the possibility of such normal "communication" is perhaps questioned by the author—there is no one to hear the more generalized cacophony, the babel, or even if there were it would after all be meaningless noise, a babel. In this sense, once again, the "point of hearing" is nonhuman and nonsubjective.

In the traditional view of narrative fiction, the omniscient narrator is either the author or a figure closely related to the author; more metaphysical or allegorical readings may take the author and/or omniscient narrator as God, whose intention is personified through this author's work as vehicle. To put it in other words, this omniscient narrator, just like realistic writers, controls and manages everything in the work. From the perspective of this omniscient narrator who knows all, who can see the whole "scene," the reader can also know everything. However, Deleuze in his metaphysics begins from Spinoza's idea that (contra Descartes with his pure mental and pure physical substances) there is only one substance, an immanent God who *is* the world—so that everything else in the world is an attribute or aspect of God—and then takes away God so that everything is a mere contingent attribute or (virtual) aspect on the plane of immanence. Thus I would argue that, in the first place, the sounds (or noises) do not all proceed from a single more-or-less identifiable point—e.g. an omniscient narrator—and in the second place that they are also not received by (or "heard" at) a single, concrete, stationery point.⁸ Rather we have here an indefinite number, a multiplicity of points of articulation, and at

⁸ Cuddy-Keane suggests that the story's multiple sounds are directed to, or received at, "the position of a stationary microphone" (82).

these affective points—for affect is both “to be affected” and “to affect”—there is not even such a clear distinction between the speaker or originator of the sound/voice and the listener/receiver. This fits Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism, the Spinozan model of the world minus the underlying substance (God), and also is analogous to the idea that a camera not only “receives” the visual image but also “makes” or “creates” it.

In “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” Woolf speaks of her bewilderment in the face of an apparent multiplicity of perspectives with no one absolute or underling one:

how was I to transmit it [this confusion about perspective] to you? All I could do was to report as accurately as I could what was said, to describe in detail what was worn, to say, despairingly, that all sorts of scenes rushed into my mind, to proceed to tumble them out pell-mell, and to describe this vivid, this overmastering impression by likening it to a draught or a smell of burning. (111)⁹

This brings us back to the central point of my interpretation, the voice-over voice, which itself implies no clear distinction between the unfamiliar image-sound on the screen as object or subject of perception: it is an affect (both affecting and affected), a bloc of sensations where the subject-object distinction is broken down. The “wordless voices” at the end of the story are part of the organic-and-mechanical, trans-human cacophony that may seem to enclose all yet simultaneously pervades all, penetrates even the tiniest spaces. For again, the non-human points of articulation are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere: “Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence?” (“Kew Gardens” 35-36).

Moreover, since no single subject (character and/or reader) can occupy a point of articulation (as speaker and/or listener) permanently, in “Kew Gardens” Woolf’s (narrative simulation of a) cinematic voice-over voice will fit *any* audience member’s experience of (as it were) “seeing silent films” and trying to make sense of the strange sounds-images that appear on the screen before our minds begin to

⁹ In “The Brown Stocking” which reviews Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Erich Auerbach also contends that Woolf does not know her characters as other authors do. “[T]he author certainly does not speak like one who has a knowledge of [her] characters . . . and who, out of [her] knowledge, can describe their personality and momentary state of mind objectively and with certainty” (531).

function. In a very special sense of the term, then, we might say that the author is here the filmmaker and thus too the omniscient narrator.

Thus we could say that the four couples' "movements" (which include their words, as a Deleuzian reading might also imply) in the story are shot from a fourth-person singular point of view and also expressed from a nonhuman point of articulation, and it is the voice-over voice technique that integrates these. Woolf seems to have two ways of doing this. First, the camera shot is fixed on certain landscapes or characters and a voice-over voice from nowhere describes their state-of-mind, what they are thinking or feeling. Thus with the fourth couple, the young lovers, the camera shot gives us a full view of both figures while a voice-over voice portrays the man's intense feeling:

[t]he action and the fact that his hand rested on the top of hers expressed their feelings in a strange way, as these short insignificant words also expressed something, words with short wings for their heavy body of meaning, inadequate to carry them far and thus alighting awkwardly upon the very common objects that surround them, and were to their inexperienced touch so massive; but who knows (so they thought as they pressed the parasol into the earth) what precipices aren't concealed in them, or what slopes of ice don't shine in the sun on the other side? (34)

The lens fixes on the man putting his hand on the woman's and a voice-over voice simultaneously intervenes to express the man's feeling, perhaps his mixed feelings or the *strangeness* and confusion of being in love. Here Woolf stresses the fact that normal human words (langue, voice) cannot express this, so we come back to the (omniscient) narrative or narrator's voice as voice-over voice, by which we readers try to make sense of it—which we can only do by entering into it, into them, into their or his feelings. In other words the intensity of their affection for each other is beyond the limit of words so the voice-over voice gives us his/their bodily sensations by way of "explanation." In fact, we cannot be certain of the nature of the percepts "around" them and the affects "acting on" (tactile? visual? something else?) because we have in effect come too close, we have already entered into them, partaken of them. Mere words (the word "love" for example or the sentence "I love you") conceal depths of danger or despair ("precipices") and also hope ("shine in the sun on the other side"), above all contingency, chance, uncertainty as befits a Deleuzian reading.

Second, the camera shots can also move along with the characters, a cinematic technique called "cinestrip" (a continuous shot without montage). In this case the voice-over voice must present certain percepts of speed and rushing in order to catch up with the fast pace of the characters and their changing state of consciousness. For example, when later the young man in the fourth couple gets tired of reflecting on the meaning of their relationship, he drags his girlfriend away with great determination, strength and speed like a machine, a car or train. She is

looking vaguely round and letting herself be drawn on down the grass path, trailing her parasol; turning her head this way and that way forgetting her tea, wishing to go down there and then down there, remembering orchids and cranes among wild flowers, a Chinese pagoda and a crimson crested bird; but he bore her on. (35)

Here the voice-over voice describes the not quite equivalent velocity and intensity of her reaction by describing the jerking of her neck as she turns her head, the flashing of the landscapes before her eyes which she associates with memories (having been "down there" before), but which now are closed-off possibilities for her as his greater strength and will prevail. The syntactic structure corresponds to this woman's out-of-breath pace: Woolf uses a string of seven present participles to indicate how fast she is being dragged along by the man and (perhaps) how thrilled she feels. We readers are also out of breath. The whole reading process is a simulation of the voice-over voice itself, which is our attempt to make sense of what is happening so fast that our own minds cannot quite keep up with. The affective-affecting, vibrating cinematic rhythm sweeps us up so that we see what she sees and feel what they both feel.

The last paragraph of the story is an admixture of multiple sensations as everything, including the characters (and snail) and we ourselves and also the author or omniscient narrator or (on my reading) voice-over voice, gets merged together in the non-human perspective of the fourth-person-singular. Lecercle among others speaks of the non-humanness of this variegated admixture of visual and acoustic sensations (144). We know neither precisely what are these shapes being looked at, and these voices being heard, or who is looking at them or from where. Any sense of subjectivity of either perceiving subject or perceived object disappears (143). All is merged in one vast organic-and-mechanical assemblage:

Yellow and black, pink and snow white, shapes of all these colors,

men, women, and children were spotted for a second upon the horizon, and then, seeing the breadth of yellow that lay upon the grass, they wavered and sought shade beneath the trees, *dissolving like drops of water in the yellow and green atmosphere*, staining it faintly with red and blue. It seemed as if all gross and heavy bodies had sunk down *in the heat* motionless and lay huddled upon the ground, but their voices went wavering from them as if they were *flames lolling from the thick waxen bodies of candles*. Voices. Yes, voices. Wordless voices, breaking the silence suddenly with such depth of contentment, such passion of desire, or, in the voices of children, such freshness of surprise; breaking the silence? . . . [T]he city murmured; on the top of which the voices cried aloud and the petals of myriads of flowers flashed their colors into the air. (emphases added, “Kew Gardens” 35-36)

The camera shots move sometimes faster and sometimes slower and a voice-over voice articulates this passage, sometimes out of breath and sometimes in tranquility. We feel simultaneously dizzy and agitated. Words flash by us and lead us on. Syntactically, Woolf weaves short, rapid-fire sentences together with long, complex ones in this paragraph. With the syntactic change of pace we also sense the changes-in-velocity of the garden and the garden’s resonance with the velocity, rhythm, cacophonous music of the city. In the end, every boundary disappears and color, temperature, voice and velocity are distilled into crystal-like sensations. As Deleuze and Guattari say,

[T]he being of sensation is not the flesh but the compound of nonhuman forces of the cosmos, of man’s nonhuman becomings, and of the ambiguous house that exchanges and adjusts them, makes them whirl around like winds. . . . [T]he plane of composition involves sensation in a higher deterritorialization, making it pass through a sort of deframing which opens it up and breaks it open onto an infinite cosmos. (*Philosophy* 183, 197)

Conclusion

Here I have drawn from Woolf’s own observations on her earlier experience of watching silent films, her notion of a voice-over voice, the voice that appears in

viewers' own minds as they try to make sense of new and unfamiliar images as they first flash onto the movie screen of the theater/brain. I have then used this trope or concept of the voice-over voice to interpret the "cinematic rhythm" of the early experimental story "Kew Gardens," a reading which also brings into play the Deleuzian notions of sensation as compound of percepts and affects, the fourth-person-singular and/or nonhuman-nonsubjective perspective or "point."

Such a reading allows us to see the radically unfamiliar, experimental, paradoxical aspects of the story—its non-human or trans-human dimensions, its mixing of the dynamic of "enclosing all" with that of "pervading into every small space," its questioning (or even muting, deadening) of the powers of verbal language, normal conversational discourse, rationality—in a way which remains immanent to or within the story itself, without resorting to those traditional critical devices or figures, of author, (omniscient) narrator, character or for that matter even subject, object, "meaning." (Deleuze has claimed to have no use for things like "metaphor" and "meaning"—at least in the conventional sense.)

Although this point was not emphasized or pursued above, the interpretation presented here takes a short story as being virtually the same thing as a movie—for here again such distinctions, like those of subject/object, affecting/being affected and author/narrator/reader, tend to break down. And one very interesting implication of this, mentioned above but again not pursued, is that now we are in effect looking at all the readers of a given book as being "equivalent" to all the viewers of a film, that is, to the film audience. True, I sit alone in my room reading a book, but I also sit alone there watching a movie on TV or on my computer. Still, this idea of the film audience sitting in the theater *en masse* and simultaneously experiencing the voice-over voice, that voice which at a pre-thought level helps them to make sense of the strange and unfamiliar images appearing on the (on their) *screen(s)*, is a compelling one.

For one thing it brings us back to the modern (modernist) "shock" of a more mechanical world, one aspect of which was the new art of cinema, that Benjamin speaks of in his "Baudelaire" and "Work of Art" essays. For here both the greater individualism of late-19th-century big-city dwellers and the heightened "mob effect" play important roles. But for another it brings us right back into the present, to the internet simultaneously browsed by millions, the rapid-fire "communication" of MSN network and even intra- and inter-group communication of online games. What connection this might have to a Deleuzian-cinematic reading of a short story is not entirely clear as yet, but perhaps the strange and unfamiliar question may seem to be appearing on the screen of an emergent future.

Works Cited

- Auerbach, Erich. "The Brown Stocking." *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953. 525-53.
- Baudelaire, Charles. "The Painter of Modern Life." *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*. Trans. and Ed. Jonathan Mayne. New York: Da Capo P, 1964. 1-40.
- Bell, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. New York: Harcourt, 1972.
- Benjamin, Walter. "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." 1939. *Illuminations*. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. 155-200.
- _____. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." 1936. *Illuminations*. 217-51.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation." *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990. 291-322.
- Briggs, Julia. "The Novels of the 1930s and the Impact of History." Roe and Sellars 72-90.
- Caughie, Pamela L, ed. *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Garland, 2000.
- _____. Introduction. Caughie xix-xxxvi.
- Cuddy-Keane, Melba. "Virginia Woolf, Sound Technologies, and the New Aurality." Caughie 69-96.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. 1988. Trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- _____. "Percept, Affect and Concept." *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill. London: Verso, 1994. 163-99.
- Edgar, Andrew and Peter Sedgwick. *Cultural Theory: The Key Thinkers*. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Hankins, Leslie Kathleen. "'Across the Screen of My Brain': Virginia Woolf's 'The Cinema' and Film Forums of the Twenties." *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*. Ed. Diane F. Gillespie. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1993. 148-79.
- Humm, Maggie. "Modernist Women and Cinema." *Modernist Women and Visual Culture: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2003. 157-91.
- Johnson, George M. "A Haunted House: Ghostly Presences in Woolf's Essays and Early Fiction." *Virginia Woolf and the Essay*. Ed. Beth Carole Rosenberg and Jeanne Dubino. New York: St. Martin's, 1997. 235-54.

- Lecercle, Jean-Jacques. "Interlude 2: Making Sense of Literature—Joyce, cummings, Woolf." *Deleuze and Language*. New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002. 132-53.
- Massumi, Brian. "Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgments." Deleuze and Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus* xvi-xix.
- Oakland, John. "Virginia Woolf's *Kew Gardens*." *English Studies* 3 (1987): 264-73.
- Peach, Linden. "Pent-Up Voices: *The Voyage Out* (1915), *Night and Day* (1919) and 'Kew Gardens' (1919)." *Virginia Woolf*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000. 40-66.
- Roe, Sue. "The Impact of Post-Impressionism." Roe and Sellars 164-90.
- Roe, Sue and Susan Sellars, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Woolf, Virginia. "A Sketch of the Past." *Moments of Being: A Collection of Autobiographical Writing*. 1976. Ed. Jeanne Schulkind. San Diego: Harcourt, 1985. 64-159.
- . "Kew Gardens." 1919. *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*. San Diego: A Harvest/HBJ Book, 1972. 28-36.
- . "Modern Fiction." 1925. *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. IV: 1925-1928. Ed. Andrew McNeillie. London: The Hogarth, 1994. 157-65.
- . "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown." 1924. *The Captain's Death Bed*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1950. 94-119.
- . "The Cinema." 1926. *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, 1950. 180-86.
- Yang, Kailin (楊凱麟). "Luo Yi-Jyun's Fourth-Person-Singular Writing (2/2): Temporal Cartography" (駱以軍的第四人稱單數書寫 (2/2): 時間製圖學). *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 35.2 (2005): 369-403.

About the Author

Chia-chen Kuo (郭家珍) graduated from National Chiao-Tung University, Taiwan. She received her MA degree in English and American Literatures at National Central University, Taiwan. The title of her thesis is "Shadow, Penumbra and Female Empowerment in *Mrs. Dalloway*." Her past research emphasized the gender issue and post-colonialism. She is currently a PhD student at National Taiwan University, specializing in modernist literature and cultural theory.
Email: piopcina@yahoo.com.tw

[Received 13 February 2008; accepted 15 January 2009; revised 15 February 2009]

