

VISION, REPRESENTATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF THE GAZE IN *THE WAVES*

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Özet: Bu makale Virginia Woolf'un *The Waves* adlı eserinde hem görsel semboller hem de bununla beraber sözlü semboller arasında olan ilişkiyi inceler. Bakışın anlatımı yoluyla, romanın hem iç hem de dış yapıları ressamı bir görüş inşa eder ve bu durumu da sadece Jacques Lacan'ın psikolojik terimlerinde olduğu gibi değil, ayrıca Roland Barthes'ın semiyolojisinde de birer sembol olarak algılamak mümkündür. Bu arada bir yandan romanın karakterlerinin iç bakışları ve ayrıca yine bu karakterlerin arasındaki dikkatli bakışları, romanın iç metinsel biçimlerini ve dış metinsel biçimlerini gösterir ve buna ek olarak sözlü anlatımın da bir hayli uyumlu bir yapıya sahip olmasını sağlar. Ayrıca diğer bir yandan romanın perde arkasını biçimci unsurların bir ifadesi olarak da okuyabilmek mümkündür ve bununla beraber köklü bir manevi gerçekliği –ruh hali- göstermek için sanatsal görünümü ve sanatsal dizaynı bir araya getirir. Köklü olan sembol de kendisinin saf sanatsal yapısı ile örtüşür. Hem Duncan Grant'ın *Window, South of France* adlı resmi gibi görsel bir sembolde hem de Virginia Woolf'un kelimelerle resim yapmış olduğu gibi, bir okuyucunun görünüm ve dizaynın uyumunu gösteren renkleri de, şekilleri de ve satırları da açıkça görebilmesi mümkündür. Hem sözlü anlatım biçimi hem de resmin kendisi insanlığın dalgalarında sanatsal oluşumun entelektüel ve duygusal yönlerini sentez yapmanın yollarıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Bakış, Görünüm, Dizayn, Sembol, Biçim, Anlatım, Söylev.

Introduction

The relation between Virginia Woolf's writings and the visual arts are very close. Although some related topics were discussed by critics in the research field, in this paper, I want to focus on the importance of a painter-like vision and its representation in terms of the discourse of the Gaze. The essential questions are as follows: how do verbal representations construct a discourse of the Gaze in *The Waves*? In other words, how can a form of multi-layered vision be presented in the text? Furthermore, how does the discourse of the Gaze

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construct the significant textual form of *The Waves*? In all, how does the discourse of the Gaze indicate both the inner and the outer form of the novel, in terms of textual structure and style?

1. Inwardness and the Textual Form

The discourse of the Gaze constructs both the inner and outer forms of *The Waves*. The inner form of this novel can be seen by "inward gazes" – when the subjectivity looks into his or her own self in the mirror. Moreover, the inner form is presented as "inter-gazes" – that is, when subjectivities melt into each other in either optical or narrative ways. The outer form, on the other hand, has been composed by nine interludes in the text, in a way which the circulation of the external world can be visualised – for instance, from day to night, from spring to winter, from birth, youth to death.

A work of art has its own significant aesthetic value. According to the Formalist aesthetics, the significant meaning of a work of art lies in its purity of form and the harmonious relationship between elements of sense and sensibility. This notion prepares a ground for the reader, in order to understand the relation between narrative form and visuality in *The Waves*. The balance between vision and design reveals the essential spiritual atmosphere of a work of art. According to Roger Fry, "emotional experience" is the key to modernism. This notion indicates not only an artist's enthusiasm and technique in a work of art, but also the viewer's visual and emotional pleasure. In other words, emotional pleasure and spiritual atmosphere are able to be transformed via the pure form of a work of art, 'in which spiritual and sensuous beauty are so inextricably interwoven' (Fry, 1998: 93).

A viewer can see the "treeness" of a tree in a painting. Through this spiritual experience, a work of art has its coherent "abstraction". This spiritual atmosphere communicates a "universal mental concept" (Fry, 1996: 50). Moreover, a work of art can be seen as an applicable emotional expression of an artist. An aesthetic experience comes to the viewer through the appreciation of a work of art. Both Fry and Woolf did not believe in the realistic representation of things, as the reader can see in the realist doctrine, when the painter paints an object as what it appears to the human retina. According to the aesthetics of the Bloomsbury Group, the "real thing" in a work of art indicates the spiritual significance, combining an artist's unique vision and design.

The organic whole of a work of art should carry an autonomous Ideal Beauty – it is a kind of self-consistent, self-supporting, and self-contained aesthetic apprehension. J. K. Johnstone claims that Virginia Woolf's conception of the novel begins with a "protest against 'materialism' akin to Fry's and [Clive] Bell's protest against over-indulgence in realistic representation in painting" (1963: 82). Virginia Woolf, in her own fictional practice, focuses on the representation of spiritual experience, in a way which emotional and intellectual harmony can be shown through the artist's vision and the unique artistic design.

Woolf's highly visually orientated creative process makes her novel an absolute organic unity. It is a novel form of visual correlatives, in a way which one visual impression comes to follow another, creating a series of images. This visually orientated creative process indicates Woolf's narrative technique, focusing on "the states of mind" of characters – or "psychological reality" in Gillespie's term (1988: 105). When theorizing the relation between visual and verbal representations, I choose to look at Woolf's essay "Pictures" (1925) among the others, in order to understand vision and representation in Woolf's verbal form. In "Pictures", the reader can see the importance of a visually orientated way of novel writing. Novelists such as Proust, Hardy, Flaubert and Conrad all learned from painting, in order to sharpen their "eyes" to dominate their pens. As Woolf claims, "writers have begun to use their eyes" (1947: 141). Here is an example of how a visually orientated scene leads the reader's eye to approach the mind of the character. As Woolf explains,

[t]he whole scene, however solidly and pictorially built up, is always dominated by an *emotion* which has nothing to do with the eye. But it is the eye that has fertilized their thought; it is the eye, in Proust above all, that has come to the help of the other senses, combined with them, and produced effects of extreme beauty, and of a subtlety hitherto unknown. [...]. Here is a scene in a theatre, for example. We have to understand the emotions of a young man for a lady in a box below. With an abundance of images and comparisons we are made to appreciate forms, the colours, the very fibre and texture of the plush seats and the ladies' dresses and the dullness or glow, sparkle or colour, of the light. At the same time that our sense drink in all this our minds are tunnelling logically and intellectually into the obscurity of the young man's emotions, which as they ramify and modulate and stretch further and further, at last penetrate too far, peter out into such a shred of meaning that we can scarcely follow any more, were it not suddenly in flash after flash, metaphor after metaphor, the eye lights up that cave of darkness and we are shown the hard tangible material shapes of bodiless thoughts hanging like bats in the primeval darkness where light has never visited them before (Woolf, 1947: 141).

In this passage, we can see how Woolf related vision, emotion and consciousness in a pictorial scene. The "eye" and the "light" make human emotion and thought visible. The reader can also see the way in which the writer's eye leads his pen. The writer's words lead the reader to "visualize the bats" which hang in the dark cave of the character's consciousness. In other words, the role of the "eye" is really significant in a visually orientated scene. The importance of the "eye" lies in its function. It works as a "medium" between visual impressions which have been represented in a verbal form and its reader. The "eye" of the novelist lights up the character's consciousness, to make the reader "see" what is going on in the character's mind. Through visual impressions, the reader will be able to gaze into the character's mind. All these are possible, when the novelist does not "speak" as a story-teller. Instead, the novelist is like a painter here. He or she can literary "paint" visual impressions in words. For example, in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Woolf saw a

Proustian painter-like vision, which depicts a timeless moment – a fusion of impression, memory, desire, emotion and imagination. The narrator “I” in *Recherche* indicates a painter’s perspective as the “eye”, which freezes and transforms all visual impressions on the verbal canvas. In Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*, we can also see a narrator “I” on the first page of the novel, who reveals a self-conscious and a self-centered narrative. And yet, Virginia Woolf’s novels suggest something beyond that egoistic self. In *The Waves*, the reader can see that Woolf’s vision turns out to represent the multi-layered consciousness, constructing a world of inter-subjectivity. The reader cannot see any authorial “I” in *The Waves*, because the narrative position in the novel has been moving from character to character. In so doing, Woolf successfully creates a balance of vision and design, with a unified and a coherent sense of the textual form.

2. The Gaze in *The Waves*

In *The Waves*, the reader can see a complex of multi-layered vision within the self and among the individuals. First of all, one looks into the mirror, sees his or her own abstract self, which is reflected by the mirror, as a form of the inward gaze. Furthermore, the relation between vision and the external world has been established as a dialectical discourse of the Gaze. The notion of the multi-layered vision constructs the inter-subjectivity in the text, which reflects an “internal [division]” (Katz, 1995: 233) of the narrative form – that is, the inner form of this novel. The design of the multi-layered vision is organised by an abstract model. The essential character Percival holds the coherence of the whole novel. He is an abstract model, because the reader can only perceive Percival via other characters’ eyes. The image of this essential character has been shaped by multi-layered vision among other characters. In other words, Percival reveals the inter-subjectivity, which constructs the inner form of the novel. As the representation of the multi-layered vision, this character also reinforces the inter-subjectivity.

Tamar Katz claims that the reader is able to find two kinds of concept, in order to define subjectivity in *The Waves* – one is the philosophical self – which is abstract and essential, and is detached from social, economical and cultural surroundings. The other self is defined by social codes, such as gender and class (1995: 234). Woolf’s “I” in this novel is a metaphor of “multiple subject positions” (Greene, 1999: 217). Here, I would argue, the “I” in *The Waves* indicates the “eye”. The narrator “I” can be seen as a way to perceive the external world. Barthes’s and Lacan’s theories of the Gaze also help to contribute to the theoretical development of the discourse of the Gaze, which is quite useful to observe the textual form of *The Waves*, in terms of vision and representation.

In “Right in the Eyes”, Roland Barthes defined the formation of “the Gaze” (1991: 237). First of all, Barthes claimed that the Gaze is not a sign – because the sign repeats itself, so that the viewer is able to recognize it, while the sign

also comes to establish itself through recognition. The Gaze, on the other hand, is not a significant “semantic core”. Instead, it is a halo of “*overflows*” and “*impress*” which attach to that very significant semantic core.

According to Barthes, there are three combinable ways to interpret the Gaze:

- 1) Information – what the Gaze informs us.
- 2) Relation – an exchangeable Gaze.
- 3) Possession – the Subject can seize the object via the Gaze,
or, the Subject has been seized by the Gaze, at the moment when the Gaze turns the Subject into object.

In the dialectic of the Gaze, the position of the observer and the observed are uncertain – for one can always gaze at someone or something, then the gaze will be reflected back from the observed, whose vision is always “*lurking*” over there. And yet, the Gaze is also a way of perception, as the viewer sees only what he or she gazes at. The observer’s desire leads his eyes to gaze at the observed, but he sees himself *blind* in front of the observed, because he is not able to recognize that “the other knows I see him” (Barthes, 1991: 241). The observer’s gaze focuses on the observed too much. The observed shows the object that he desires. And yet, he does not realise that he is also “intimidated, dazzled, passively constituted by the other’s all-powerful gaze” (Barthes, 1991: 241).

The conception of the inter-subjectivity in terms of the Gaze comes from Lacan’s *Le Séminaire I*. The closed circle of the gaze is a three-term structure in Lacan’s definition (1988: 218):

- 1) I see the other: my desire leads my eye.
- 2) I see him seeing me: I am gazed by the Other – and he gazes back at me right in his eyes.
- 3) The “third party” knows I see him, and I do not recognize that I am under the halo of the Gaze.

The gaze is like an instrument, the tunnel, through which light is embodied and through which – “[...] – I am *photo-graphed*” (Lacan, 1979: 106). At this crucial moment, the Subject (I / eye) turns out to be the Other, under the mysterious Gaze of the third party, “whose eyes I do not even see” (Lacan, 1988: 215). This shifting, evasive, uncertain and flexible halo of the Gaze creates an endless possibility of new meanings to our relation to things.

The process of two codes interact to produce a new meaning can be seen as a sign of the exchangeable position between the subject and the object, the observer and the observed. Woolf’s eyeless playpoem gazes at nothing but the “enigmatic eye: the eye of truth” (Barthes, 1991: 240). The form of the novel per se is an imaginary inter-subjectivity. The following schema would show the reader the way in which the concept of the multi-layered vision works, so that an imaginary inter-subjectivity is able to exist as it should be:

- 1) Monologic (monologue): the individual's gaze at the camera, or the individual gazes at his reflection in the mirror.
- 2) Polyphonic (many-voiced): Polymorphously, or multiple dimensions of the imaginary inter-subjectivity.
- 3) The Third Party: the powerful gaze which comes from Empire, History and so forth.
- 4) The Birth of New Meaning: both the reader and the characters are all under the powerful gaze of the playpoem. The playpoem gazes back to the "enigmatic eye" – the eye of truth, and the true state of mind.

In *The Waves*, the monologic is the primary level, which presents six speakers' individual stories. The individual character talks about his or her own point of view, when he or she has opinions on a particular issue. For example, Neville talks about his thoughts on religion. Bernard thinks that there is always "a story" in everyone (Woolf, 1931: 37). The most important example is the "mirror experience" of three female characters in the novel – Susan, Jinny and Rhoda. Three of them all look at the mirror at the same time. At that very moment, the mirror gazes back and reflects an image, showing the inner self of each one of them.

Moreover, the reader can see that the narration of what Susan, Jinny and Rhoda see in the looking-glass indicates the inward gaze. For instance, Susan always sees Jinny – the female figure that she is always jealous of, when she gazes into the looking-glass:

[a]ll this I see, I always see, as I pass the looking-glass on the landing, with Jinny in front and Rhoda lagging behind. Jinny dances. Jinny always dances in the hall on the ugly, the encaustic tiles; she turns cartwheels in the playground; she picks some flower forbiddenly, and sticks it behind her ear so that Miss Perry's dark eyes smoulder with admiration, for Jinny, not me (Woolf, 1931: 40-41).

Jinny is always the centre of the crowd – she dances, she kisses, she loves and she hates. All these arouse the jealousy of Susan. When Susan looks into the mirror, she sees her own anger and jealousy because she knows that all the admirations go to Jinny. She can only stay in "the cage of home for the boy to look after". When Susan looks into the mirror, she also looks into her inner self. She wants to have everyone's attention, just like what Jinny has. And yet, she knows that she can never be like that, so she is jealous. The house is the ultimate place that is right for her. She has to play a down-to-earth role as a mother, to take care of her family, her husband and her children. Ironically, the house is also a cage for her. The thing is, she knows that she will never be able to escape from it.

Polyphonic narrative style occurs, when characters in the novel talk about the same issue, one follows another. It forms a discourse of the Gaze. For instance, when Susan is talking about her experience of seeing the scene that Jinny kisses

Louis, her reaction is that she “will not sit next to Jinny and next to Louis. [She] will take [her] anguish and lay it upon the roots under the beech trees” (Woolf, 1931: 13). Bernard follows Susan’s story right away, as if the narrative continues by a different angle of seeing. To the reader, the story continues along with another part of the Gaze. And yet, to Bernard, his vision follows Susan, which makes the continuity of the story possible:

“Susan has passed us”, said Bernard. “She has passed the tool-house door with her handkerchief screwed into a ball. She was not crying, but her eyes, which are so beautiful, were narrow as cats’ eyes before they spring. I shall follow her, Neville. I shall go gently behind her, to be at hand, with my curiosity, to comfort her when she bursts out in a rage and thinks, ‘I am alone’” (Woolf, 1931: 14).

Through reading this example, the reader can see that Susan’s story turns out to be Bernard’s story. Or, to be specific, it is ONE story with multiple angles of the Gaze. Here Bernard makes a perfect comment on polyphony: “[b]ut when we sit together, close”, said Bernard, ‘we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory” (Woolf, 1931: 16). The polyphonic narrative is a way which six speakers possesses and gazes at each other. The speakers are constructing a network of language, in a way which they melt into each other. Six of them would become ONE – composing that one ultimate story, the “eyeless playpoem”. The inter-subjectivity in the text is not a concrete entity, which is visible to the eye. Rather, it is imaginary, it is “eyeless”, it is “indefinable”, it is “untranslatable” and “ungendered” (Woolf, 1931: 241).

The form of inter-subjectivity, as the reader can see in *The Waves*, indicates a fluid subjectivity, or a “permeable subject” in Miriam L. Wallace’s term. A subject is “at once both individual *and* capable of merging across individual and gendered boundaries” (2000: 296). This process of dialectic shifting of the individual among other individuals in the discourse of the Gaze is the very spirit which Woolf depicted in the text – a non-definable self, a psychological being which exists at the level of imaginary.

3. Visual and Verbal Representations

The expression of colour in *The Waves*, according to Stewart, is “abstract”. Each interlude is a part of a “larger unit” – a synthesis of colour, shape and mass (1982: 91). Colour is a sensational visual language, which functions in a way to make the completeness of the textual form. Moreover, colour indicates the “sun’s position”, in a way which the sunlight can be seen as a spiritual force. Bathed in the sunlight, objects look differently “with a fanatical existence”. Here, I would argue that the “abstract colour” indicates perceptual and emotional values, symbolising deeper meanings than only “the play of sunlight”. In other words, the “abstract colour” is “visible” to the mind’s eye, because it reveals “the play of consciousness” (Stewart 1982: 94), representing the inner world of an individual. Here the Post-Impressionists contributed to

transfer the Impressionist motif of “sunlight effect” into an expression of the “abstract colour”, which is only visible through the mind’s eye. The Impressionist canvas of the sunlight impromptu has been replaced by the Post-Impressionist play of the abstract colour. The Post-Impressionist painters do not only paint the representation of objects, as if they are products of following the sun’s gaze by the painter. Rather, the Post-Impressionist painter chooses to follow his own mind’s eye, to express his own “state of mind” in terms of emotional and spiritual experiences.

Woolf depicted not only the out-of-door landscape, but also the indoor furniture in nine interludes of *The Waves*. Both the landscape and the indoor furniture are not mechanical representations of some sort of “sun-bathed” objects. Rather, they are in a balanced form of sense and sensibility. In the first interlude, the sun rises gradually “as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan” (Woolf, 1931: 7). In other words, the “sunlight” can be a metaphor of “the lamp”, the eye, or the synthesis of the sensational and the intellectual play of a female writer. If we say “the lamp” symbolises Woolf’s vision, then the waves of the sea, the river and the water in the interlude indicate her emotion, her feeling, and her mood, with ups and downs. Now let her vision lead us from the garden to the room. Here comes another play of visual sensations. The calmness and the quietness of the indoor scenes actually indicate her inner peace. The Gaze is lingering over there:

[w]hat-ever the light touched became dowered with a fanatical existence. A plate was like a white lake. A knife looked like a dagger of ice. Suddenly tumblers revealed themselves upheld by streaks of light. Tables and chairs rose to the surface as if they had been sunk under water and rose, filmed with red, orange, purple like the bloom on the skin of ripe fruit. The veins on the glaze of the china, the grain of the wood, the fibres of the matting became more and more finely engraved. Everything was without shadow. A jar was so green that the eye seemed sucked up through a funnel by its intensity and stuck to it like a limpet. Then shapes took on mass and edge. Here was the boss of a chair; here the bulk of a cupboard. And as the light increased, flocks of shadow were driven before it and conglomerated and hung in many-pleated folds in the back-ground (Woolf, 1931: 110).

Woolf’s indoor settings in *The Waves* are quite different from the Impressionist sunlight impromptu. Here I want to use Duncan Grant’s painting, *Window, South of France* (Stone, 1999: 219) as a good example, in order to show the Bloomsbury composition of the inner peace of the artist, and the external cheerful bright landscape via the window frame.

The window frame looks like suspending in the midair, which provides a gateway to lead the viewer’s eye from the inside to the outside. At the same time, it brings the sunlight back into the room – the painter’s studio. The bright early summer afternoon sunlight turns the right window frame into a bright golden colour. Thus the rest parts of the window frame represent the shade of a

multiple interaction among purple, light green and light yellow. The panes on both sides are like looking-glasses which reflect and synthesis both the inner and the outer scenes, including the outer landscape on the left side, the wall paper, the whiter jar (with iron grey shade) and red flowers on the right.

Seeing the bright golden window bar on the right, the reader can tell that the sunlight comes from the left hand side of the viewer (West). Some yellow and light green are involved in the lower right hand side of the painterly space – the seat cushion of the chair and the spots between the red and purple roses on the wall paper. A brown and deep green curtain stables by the jar, with iron grey shade and deep red flowers in it. This leads our eyes to the out-of-door landscape scene. It is “classic unspoilt Mediterranean view unfolds through fields and trees towards the sea” (Stone, 1999: 220). The sea’s soft yellow blue echoes the white yellow delightful sky, and the soft blue of the window frame. From the sky to the earth, the external landscape has been bathed in a cheerful glory of the sunlight. The fields can be divided into four levels from the window frame to the sea. The red and yellow farm cottages are in the shadow, beside the exuberant growth of green trees. The quiet, peaceful and joyful South part of France scene in Grant’s painting indicates a recreational and harmonious balance between the external warm bright sunlight and the painter’s searching for an inner peace in his studio.

Conclusion

Virginia Woolf’s narrative form represents not only a deconstruction of the myth of a self-centered narrative tradition, but also a construction of a feminine position in the literary tradition. She opened a new narrative direction for novelists. The Bloomsbury Group brings a new attitude to the visual arts – it is some liberation and, some modernization at the level of personal relationships, aesthetic enjoyment and intellectual openness (Williams, 1980: 59). Their intellectual and artistic contribution within the particular historical context makes the Bloomsbury aesthetics significant. Roger Fry’s interpretation of the “significance” of form (Bell, 1947: 223) definitely goes beyond the orthodoxy of academic “representational” aesthetics of his time. It is all about different ways of seeing the visible world. The Ideas such as “the camera cannot lie” only indicates binary oppositions such as true or false, when one thinks about the relation among the visible world, artistic vision and representation. The aesthetics of the Bloomsbury Group pay attention to the balance between intellect and sensation. The aim is to make works of art a perfect unity of vision and design. That is, a work of art should be a representation of the balance between the inner and the outer worlds. This significant concept transfers the painter-like vision from material realism into the spiritual.

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VISION, REPRESENTATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF THE GAZE IN *THE WAVES*

Abstract: This article explores the relation between visual and verbal representation in Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* (1931). Through the discourse of the Gaze, both the inner and outer forms of the novel are constructed as a painter-like vision, which can be seen as signs not only in Jacob Lacan's psychological terms, but also in Roland Barthes's semiotics. On the one hand, inward-gazes and inter-gazes of characters indicate the inner and the outer textual forms of the novel, providing a coherent structure of the verbal narrative. On the other hand, the interlude of the novel can be read as an expression of Formalist elements, combining artistic vision and design together, in order to show the essential spiritual reality which is known as "the state of mind". The representation of the essential being is in its artistic pure form. In a visual representation, such as Duncan Grant's painting, *Window, South of France* (1928), the reader can see the way in which colours, shapes and lines also demonstrate the harmony of vision and design in Woolf's painting in words. Both verbal narrative form and the painting itself are ways to synthesise intellectual and emotional aspects of an artistic creation in the waves of humanity.

Keywords: Gaze, Vision, Design, Representation, Form, Narrative, Discours.

