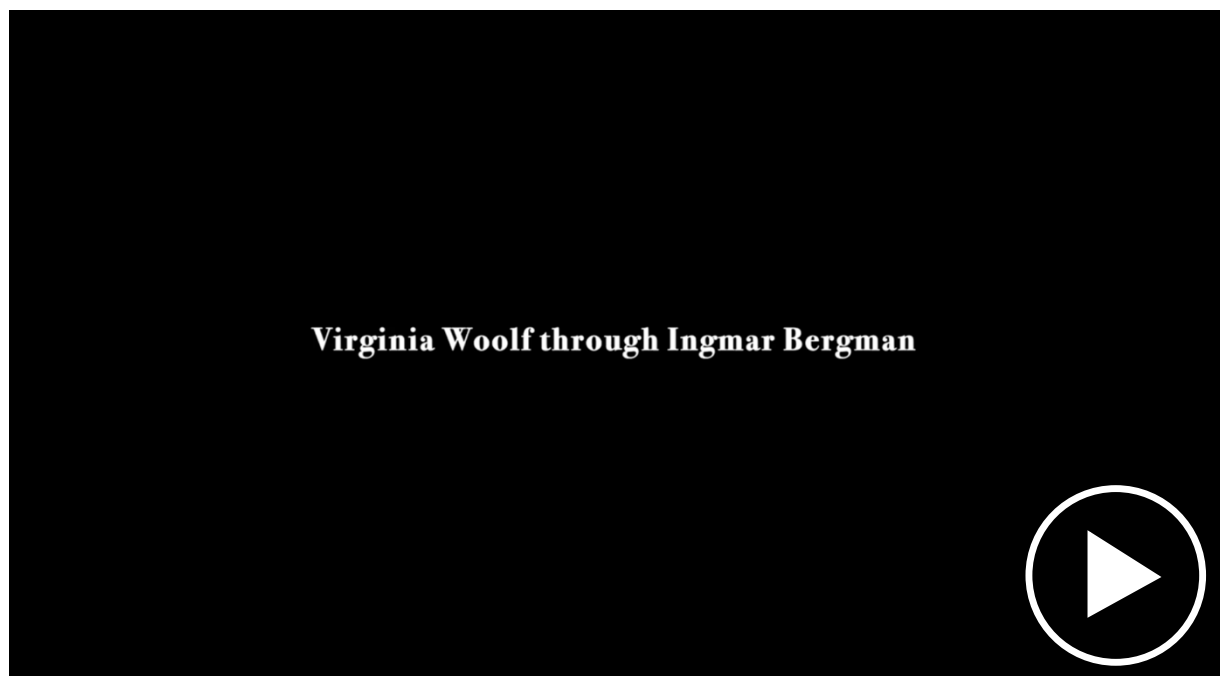


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Virginia Woolf Through Ingmar Bergman: In View of the Stream of Consciousness



Abstract

This video essay stages a cross-media dialogue between Woolf's novels and Bergman's films. This comparison takes inspiration from "crossmappings," Elisabeth Bronfen's cross-media practice. Whereas this method typically guides research presented in written articles, this video essay deploys it in audiovisual form. Bronfen takes shared cultural pathos as the starting point to compare works of different media. In terms of Woolf and Bergman, their resonance with each other lies in their common adoption of the stream of consciousness style in their respective verbal and visual forms. This video essay examines this interplay through the narrative of trivialities, time, memory, trauma, and patterns of the stream of consciousness expressions. As

a practice-based form of research, the process of composing this video essay demonstrates the affordances of videographic pieces in helping the video maker discover new meanings and knowledge beyond expectations. In the case of this work, the findings include the freedom digitalization offers to traditional, non-digital media, the possibility to visualize Woolf's ekphrastic writing, and the personal touch incorporated in the accented voiceover.

Keywords: Virginia Woolf, Ingmar Bergman, cross-media, stream of consciousness, accented video essay

Academic guiding text

This video essay stages some intersections between works by Virginia Woolf and Ingmar Bergman, a dialogue composed of their corresponding written texts and audio-visual expressions. The cross-media comparison takes Elisabeth Bronfen's hermeneutic practice, crossmappings, as its inspiration. In her monograph *Crossmappings: On Visual Culture*, Bronfen (2019, p. 171) proposes using common symbols and forms to compare works of different media (such as drama plays, literature, fine arts, TV series, and films) despite their diverse production backgrounds (historical and geographical). The possibilities of comparison lie in the shared cultural pathos of the works in question. For instance, reading the American TV series *The Wire* along with Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Bronfen (2019, p. 173) uses their common symbol – chess – to delineate the motif of a power game shared by these two works. *The Wire* features the drug war between the police and the underworld in Baltimore, Maryland, which resonates with the confrontations between the British royal family members who fight for the throne, as described in *Richard III*. In other words, the craving for power transforms socio-cultural backgrounds, making it possible to compare works from different media.

So far, projects derived from crossmappings have been conducted in written articles. This video essay explores such cross-media comparison in an audio-visual form. The reason a dialogue between Woolf's and Bergman's works can be presented is their shared pathos embodied in the stream of consciousness style. Woolf's writing features multiple temporalities and spaces all at once. Bergman's films also explore mindscapes and non-linear

narratives through color, light, editing, and more. This shared style reflects their protagonists, usually female characters struggling for their identities in marriages and motherhood. These resemblances produce organic connections for comparison. Trigoni (2021, p. 108) points out that the term “stream of consciousness” was proposed by Alexander Bain in 1855. In his *The Senses and the Intellect*, Bain explains this style as a type of mental wave. As Zhang (2021, p. 134) agrees, the mental wave indicates that thoughts flow continuously instead of successively. In literature, the stream of consciousness style “records the flickering parade of impressions across a character’s mind from a subjective point of view” (Zhang, 2021, p. 133). In this project, my take on the stream of consciousness focuses on such subjective impressions beyond conscious control.

These impressions are illustrated in the video essay’s five sections. The first section visualizes the stream of consciousness as a narrative of trivialities, which corresponds to Zhang’s (2021, p. 136) comment that Woolf’s writing on the flow of thoughts shows details of life with precision and delicacy. The following section, titled “Timeless Time,” presents how time shall be considered a personal matter defined by conscious perception (Duran, 2004, p. 302). The precious moments can be imprinted in the mind and preserved there as if “[t]ime had ceased” (Woolf, 1937/2002, p. 203). The third part illustrates memories connected through common cues, such as a movement by a table, that bring the past to the present. As McIntire (2008, pp. 170) posits, “for Woolf the past and the present are both continuous and contiguous with each other.” The fourth part shows that traumas cannot be stated but sensed and felt (Trigoni, 2021, p. 122). The quote from *Mrs. Dalloway* (Woolf, 1925/2000, p. 11) unfolds Clarissa’s trauma due to her lack of identity and love in her marriage, her loss of power as a mother, and the fear of being reduced to nothingness, which leads to “an epistemological abyss” that engulfs her existence (McIntire, 2008, p. 153). The final part taps into Woolf’s description of the writing process in *Jacob’s Room* (Woolf, 1922/1971, 1). According to Trigoni (2021, p. 127), the task of the stream of consciousness writer is to develop the atoms of life, finding patterns in the untraceable trivialities. But it is an agonizing process to recall the irretrievable past and to find threads in present life that might be painful and even traumatic.

Connecting Woolf and Bergman through an audio-visual presentation of their stream of consciousness expressions shows the affordances of the video essay. Due to the combination of verbal, visual, and sonic elements, the video essay offers opportunities to conduct “explanatory research” in more performative, creative, and “poetic” ways (Grant, 2020, p. 200). Works by Woolf and Bergman are known for their aesthetic beauty in either verbal or visual forms. It is worth showing them in pairing to maintain and even amplify their lyrical styles. Furthermore, born in film studies, videographic research has been widely developed in the last decade to study audio-visual materials. By editing, resizing, and coloring primary texts as “practice-based research,” the visual sources are no longer only available for commentary but can be used to produce new meanings (Grant, 2018, p. 22). Applying such “practice-based research” to this cross-media project allows more findings to surface unexpectedly. One finding accentuates digitalization. Woolf’s novels and Bergman’s films, originally conceived as non-digital media, can be brought together because of the “digitally afforded freedom,” which facilitates “the incorporation of elements and layers of various cultural expressions” (Williams & Vassilieva, 2020, p. 19). The interaction between the digitalized media reveals the naturally “intertwined relationships between the verbal and the visual” (Williams & Vassilieva, 2020, p. 23). The dialogue between these two media also visually demonstrates Woolf’s ekphrastic writing (Brosch, 2018, p. 233), which originally “brings the thing shown vividly before the eyes” (Elsner, 2002, p. 1). In other words, the affordances of the video essay allow new knowledge and meanings to emerge in poetic expressions.

The video essay is composed of very simple elements, including quotes from Woolf’s novels that I read in the voiceover, footage and monologues from Bergman’s films, background music, and ambient sounds. To maintain Woolf’s quotes as they are, I show scans of the exact passages of the material/printed novels used. The dialogue between Woolf and Bergman is primarily presented through their resonance in the corresponding verbal and visual materials. The juxtaposition of these materials is designed according to the content of the quotes. The stream of consciousness style focuses on the description of thoughts, which are abstract, ungraspable, and intangible. Therefore, my selection of Bergman’s footage is not based on its capacity to illustrate the quotes literally but, more often than not, metaphorically. For

instance, in section two, conscious time is subjective rather than objective. In other words, precious moments in life can be fixated in the conscious mind as if they had never passed. This is symbolized as the tranquil beauty of nature portrayed in *Summer with Monika* (Bergman, 1953); in section five, the lighthouse described in *Jacob's Room* (Woolf, 1922/1971, p. 1) is not visualized by an actual scene of a lighthouse in *Wild Strawberries* (Bergman, 1957) but metaphorized as the protagonist Isak's childhood home.

Meanwhile, an actual sonic dialogue is also included in the video essay, composed of my reading of quotes from Woolf and monologues of Bergman's characters. In my voiceover of the quotes in English, my diction inevitably reveals my accent as a Mandarin-speaking scholar. This accented Woolf contains two intentions: on the one hand, the stream of consciousness style is usually considered characters' "inner speeches" or "interior monologues" in novels (Bernini & Fernyhough, 2022, p. 642; Zhang, 2021, p. 133). The voiceover thus serves as a reenactment of such interior monologues in an audio form. On the other hand, my "inauthentic" accent taps into what Barbara Zecchi describes as "the accented video essay." Over the last few years, Zecchi has dedicated many of her video essays to exploring the role that her (Italian) accent plays in them. In her most recent publication, "An Accented Video Way of Thinking: Becoming Videoessay," she beautifully puts it thus: "the accent is not acoustic, but a visual and tangible style, a textural materiality that resides on the surface of language, on its skin" (Zecchi, 2024, p. 29). For this project, I intentionally chose a calm tone and a soft voice in the voiceover as my interpretation of the passages: the flow of thoughts as the protagonists' reflections on the past and the present. The reflections are done nostalgically or lamentingly – some sentiments universally shared. By producing such an accented performance of the original works, reading is no longer a process of repetition but creates something personal.

About the author

Jialu Zhu is a PhD candidate and instructor at the English Department of the University of Zürich. Her freshly completed PhD project explores the representations of home troubles in the American Westerns, Hong Kong gangster films, and Chinese melodramas. Her research interests accentuate world cinema, modernist literature, and cross-media studies.

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