



**Cite This Article:** Bazila Farhat, Vandana Rajput & Aruna Bhat, "Discourse of Time and Consciousness in Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and DeLillo's Point Omega", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Conference World Special Issue 1, Page Number 260-263, 2018.

**Abstract:**

Changing conceptions of time and consciousness since seminal works of Bergson, Freud, and Jung in twentieth century have had a major shift in the way literature has been written and perceived. As literature is a social product any change in the paradigms of social matrix it is bound to get recorded in literature. The present paper aims to study and evaluate how novels, particularly Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway (20<sup>th</sup> century) and Don DeLillo's Point Omega (21<sup>st</sup> century) incorporates the contemporary, challenging and groundbreaking theories of time and consciousness in their works.

**Key Words:** Bergson, Consciousness, Discourse, Time & Literature

**Introduction:**

Conflicts, violence and wars have always provoked men and women of sensibility to make personal statement about it. Such catastrophes also prove to alter the conventional structure of the society. Following international disasters like the Great War, for instance, metaphysical concepts like time and consciousness began to be perceived in a different way. Time especially was observed in traditional concept as a succession of framed images in space. It was viewed as absolute, physical or relative. Aristotle defines time as "a number of motions in respect to before and after" (*Physics* 219 b2). It must be noted here that Aristotle doesn't imply that time is motion or change or movement itself, but rather a number of motions or changes or movements thereby, making it a function of motion. Time remains subordinated to movement in such hypothesis as time is perceived as a movement by which one can quantitatively (numerically) estimate qualitative modifications of something that experiences change. In other words, the multiplicity of movements implied a multiplicity of times, which led him to the conclusion that there must be something immobile or invariant outside of movement (or at least a most perfect movement) that could function as a metric by which all other movements could be measured. In the *Timaeus*, Plato had concluded that time was "a moving image of eternity" (*Timaeus*, 37d). Hence, both these philosophers perceived that time is subordinated to eternity or some perfect movement. Time was tracked by the reliable and constant circular movement of the sun, and thus, was perceived as absolute and mathematical. In the mechanism of physics, however, when need of the calendars to be revised arrived, the distinction between mathematical time and physical time became apparent. Eighteenth century physicist, Isaac Newton recorded the clear break between the two. He noted that:

The common people conceive those quantities under no other notion but from the relation they bear to sensible objects. And thence arise certain prejudices, for the removing of which it will be convenient to distinguish them into absolute and relative, true and apparent, mathematical and common. Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent, and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year. (88)

While Newton's definition perceived mathematical time as absolute "without any relation to anything external," (88) physical time is the one in which all times are relative in the actual flow of events. The philosophy of absolute time was debunked by 20<sup>th</sup> century physicist, Albert Einstein. In his theory of relativity which he developed against the concept of absolute time in his short paper "Relativity: The Special and the General Theory", and later published as a book in 1916, Einstein perceived time either as fast or slow in relation to each other. Then there were philosophers like Henri-Louis Bergson who dwelt on time as subjective and perceived it in relation to the consciousness of a person. He distinguishes time as we experience it also called as lived time or real duration and mechanistic time of science or clock time or abstract time in his book *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* in 1920. He understood real time or *duree* in relation to consciousness. Bergson proposed that time cannot be measured mathematically or scientifically because the moment one attempts to measure the "now," it would be gone. By seeking to measure "now," one seeks to measure something as immobile, and complete, whereas time is mobile and incomplete. For the individual, time may speed up or slow down, depending upon one's state of mind. Hence Bergson decided to explore the inner life of man, which is a kind of duration, neither a unity nor a quantitative multiplicity. He contended that real time possesses an ineffable quality of not being able to be measured by human perception.

Closely linked to this new view of time was the view of consciousness deriving in a general way from the of Freud and Jung which concentrated on the fact of the multiplicity of consciousness, the presence of all the experiences the given consciousness ever had and perhaps the experiences of all that human race had. The past always exists in the present, coloring and determining the nature of the present response and to tell the truth about a character's reaction to any literature written in those times, which therefore, derived its new narrative strategies from metaphysical as well as psychological sources. These metaphysical concepts had been treated much differently in previous ages but owing to the aftermath of Wars and catastrophes like World Wars, 9/11, Iraq war and especially the hypothesis of Bergson, Freud, Jung, and Deleuze the intense discourse on time and consciousness have structured modernist and postmodernist narratives likewise. Novelists spanning from 20<sup>th</sup> century to 21<sup>st</sup> century like Virginia Woolf and Don DeLillo have shown a special interest in the metaphysical concepts like time and consciousness. One of the quoted statements of Virginia Woolf that, "Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" reiterates Henri Bergson's idea of time as a continuous flow of time rather than as a series of separate points. The past lives on in the present, in memory and in its consequences, and in this way it also shapes the future. Don DeLillo, a postmodernist novelists, who has

always wrestled with metaphysical concept of time notes that “It’s all about time, dimwit time, inferior time, people checking watches and other devices, other reminders. This is time draining out of our lives. Cities are built to measure time, to remove time from nature. There’s an endless counting down, he said. When you strip away all the surfaces, when you see into it, what’s left is terror.” By “terror,” DeLillo means an altered comprehension of the time, space and existence. Both Woolf and DeLillo, much disturbed and perturbed by major events that they witnessed in their respective eras, were moved to write and highlight the complex inner world of feelings and memory. While Woolf quite dextrously carries it out through the challenging technique of stream of consciousness, DeLillo aims to execute it by economy and suggestiveness.

Woolf’s 1925 experimental novel, *Mrs. Dalloway* depicts the relationship between past and present and how they affect the future. The novel, unlike the neat and linear plots of traditional Victorian novels, is structured through time instead of chapters. The Big Ben is treated as a concrete manifestation of how time structures the novel. Also, its tolling after every hour reminds the fictional characters of their mortality that time gone won’t come back. Set in London on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June in 1923 the protagonist Clarissa Dalloway is shown preparing a party that she’s going to throw the same evening. Throughout the narration the reader is introduced with other characters like Septimus, a war veteran, who now suffers from shell shock and his heartbroken wife, Reiza and Peter Walsh, Clarissa’s old lover. All these characters are linked with each other through time and consciousness. The novel does not remain confined to one day but delves into the past of the fictional characters as well using the stream-of-consciousness technique, from one mind to the next, constantly changing focalisation. This change in focalisation is best depicted in the scene when Reiza wants to leave the park and is trying to relax Septimus down as he is caught in frenzy again. This scene is illustrated through Septimus’ view. Peter Walsh also happens to watch this scene and when the focalisation changes to his view the reader realises that he interprets it completely wrong. The strikes of Big Ben indicate the end of Septimus’ focalisation and the beginning of Peter’s.

“It is time, Septimus,” Reiza repeated. “What is the time?” He was talking he was starting, this man must notice him. He was looking at them.

“I will tell you the time,” said Septimus very slowly, very drowsily, smiling mysteriously at the dead man in the grey suit. As he sat smiling, the quarter struck – the quarter to twelve.

And that is being young, Peter Walsh thought as he passed them. (78-79)

This technique permits Woolf to describe actions which take place simultaneously. A stimulus from outer world is identified by the minds of different fictional characters and in this way many streams-of-consciousness are brought together in the narrative. This also emphasises the tension between lived time and clock time when reading the sequence the reader can experience the subjective duration of time for the different characters. With the help of memories of various characters the past of the characters is revealed which throws light on their present situation, their thoughts and decisions. Woolf calls this technique as the “tunnelling process.” For instance Septimus’ memories of the past are overshadowed by war and haunted by his dead friend Evans who died in the war. Suffering from shell shock, those memories become hallucinations and enter his present. Memories of the past show the dreams and expectations the characters had on life when they were young. Clarissa is disappointed at her superficial and passionless life which was way different when she was young. Peter did not become a writer and Richard not successful in politics. Septimus who wanted to be a poet but is now suffering from shell shock and is mentally not even able to love his wife who wanted to be a mother. Woolf, through these fictional characters attempts to pull together their fragmented lives. The internal time which Woolf uses as a tool to obliterate the boundaries is often dominated by external time which is further made clearer in DeLillo’s novel *Point Omega*.

Published in 2010, *Point Omega*, DeLillo’s a short classic novel, is set in a post 9/11 America that aims to investigate the metaphysical issues of time and consciousness. As in *Mrs. Dalloway* Woolf projects the movement of time through the Big Ben, in *Point Omega* DeLillo endeavors to show the nature of time through *24 Hour Psycho*, a conceptual video-work of Scottish artist, Douglas Gordon. The video-work of Scottish artist, Douglas Gordon, is a slowed down and soundless version of Alfred Hitchcock’s memorable black and white movie, *Psycho*, slowed down to the pace of two frames per second so that the movie completes a 24 hour cycle. Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho* evokes critical ways of thinking about perception and consciousness in liaison with time and image. The course of action takes place in two distinctly diverse milieus: a cold dark gallery, where the slowed down version of the movie is being played and a desert in which time and space are creatively presented to operate in a much different and strange way as compared to the life in a city. The exhibition of the slowed down version of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* and the experience of the characters in the desert to perceive the time slowly suggest that the temporal experience of the gallery and the desert remains the same. The cold dark gallery and the hot expansive desert become synonymous with the zones of meditation and contemplation for the viewers and the characters, respectively.

DeLillo introduces the video-work of Gordon in the prologue and unresolved epilogue of the novel titled as, “Anonymous” and “Anonymous 2” that take place on September 3 and September 4, respectively. There are various observations made by the narrator regarding the video-work that can be read as a separate narrative in the novel. After a while, though only for ten minutes, two more unnamed characters, visit the gallery, which afterward, in the novel, becomes clear are, Richard Elster, a 73 year old military intellectual and retired war planner at the Pentagon who had helped executing the Iraq war, and Jim Finley, an amateur filmmaker. The central part of the novel which is sandwiched between “Anonymity” and “Anonymity 2” consists of four chapters and forms the main action of the novel. This section of the novel takes place in the desert of California, in a desolated house, where Richard Elster holes in. He calls it as “a spiritual retreat,” (29) from the maddening cacophony of city life. The place where Richard lives is “a sad hybrid. There was a corrugated metal roof above a clapboard exterior with an unfinished stonework path out front and a tacked-on deck jutting from one side. This is where we sat through his hushed hour, a torchlit sky, the closeness of hills barely visible at high white noon” (23). Elster hopes to exchange his sense of time for existential time, i.e., his lived time. Jim Finley, who hopes to rope in Elster for a documentary on his experience in Iraq war, a single take film as memory and history, joins him after a few days. Elster keeps stalling Finley’s proposal and rather spends time with him by sharing his reflections on time, extinction and French paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s concept, ‘Omega Point.’ The novel has a

non-chronicle sequence—beginning from the gallery on September 3, to the days that follow in the desert and then again back to the gallery on September 4 and also possesses a variation in the identities of the narrator-third person, in the prologue and epilogue, and first person in the central piece of the novel. Besides, the split into two spaces—the claustrophobic art gallery and spacious deserts of California enables DeLillo to expound the concepts of consciousness, space and experience of time through the course of the novel. The conventionally perceived relationship between time and space is completely altered both in the art gallery and the desert.

Through the novel, DeLillo seems to compare the shallow and mundane reality of everyday life with the pure time offered by the experience at the museum. The conceptual art, *24 Hour Psycho*, opens the portal of sublime experience for a critical reader as he/she finds the rupture in the accustomed flow of time that reveals too much which one is bound to miss otherwise. Such an experience has a tremendous effect on the observer's consciousness as well. The close watchfulness, total concentration and absolutely keen perception prompted by the video-work propound an experience of pure consciousness. In the narrative of *Point Omega* as well as in that of *24 Hour Psycho*, Henri Bergson's subjective experience of time is reasonably apparent. Bergson claims that time is perceived through a series of separate and disconnected spatial constructs—just as seeing a film. One feels that one is seeing an uninterrupted flow of movement but essentially what one sees is a series of fixed images and stills. This is exactly what the anonymous man sees in the gallery—a series of frames, rather than an uninterrupted flow of movements. Cinema like Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* provides an opportunity, a tool to perceive real time whereby the anonymous man creates an "ideal world" (10) in his mind and clears the otherwise clouded human consciousness. DeLillo seems to put across the idea that consciousness and the existential time, the lived time of an observer are interrelated and hence change in any one of them would cause the change in another. What happens in the gallery suggests that time and consciousness are entwined with the close observation of movement—the slightest camera movement produced the profound shift in time and space for the anonymous man. This is what Bergson terms as pure duration, "the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states" (100). Drawing upon Bergson's theory of abstract time, Deleuze explains that the concrete time is that which is condensed to an abstraction, a pattern, reflected on a watch but since the human mind is conditioned to move by the watch, the concrete experience is lost. This real time is experienced both by Elster and the anonymous man in *24 Hour Psycho*, something which are pure conscious moments. This is what Elster distinguishes as 'true' life that cannot be reduced to either language or discourse. He says "The true life takes place when we're alone, thinking, feeling, lost in memory, dreamingly self-aware, the submicroscopic moments. . . His life happened...when he sat staring at a blank wall, thinking about dinner" (21).

Deleuze borrowed concepts from Bergson even those which he discarded. For instance, Bergson acknowledges time as a continuous flow but didn't believe in time as a series of moments. Deleuze reintroduces time as a succession of moments because time is inseparable from the experience in human consciousness as postulated in quantum mechanics. In quantum mechanics, time appears to be smooth and continuous, and inseparable from human consciousness. DeLillo portrays Elster as a person conscious of the flexible and relative nature of time. He notes, "Days turns to night eventually but it's a matter of light and darkness, it's not time passing, mortal time. There's none of the usual terror. It's different here, time is enormous, that's what I feel here, palpably. Time that precedes us and survives us" (56). He experiences time at quantum level, made of series of moments and devoid of past and future. Elster experiences timelessness in the desert as for him time slows down to a grinding halt. There are no clocks and no calendars in the desert where they stay. Here, time sheds its mortal nature and becomes "blind" (30), "enormously old" "deep" and epochal" (90). In "Time, Consciousness, and Quantum Events in Fundamental Spacetime Geometry" Stuart Hameroff takes clue from Deleuze that time is inseparable from human consciousness and advances the view that consciousness not only experiences time relatively but also creates time. He further states that human consciousness is inversely proportional to time; the more expanded the human consciousness is, the slower is the experience of time. He illustrates:

People in car accidents describe "time slowing down", and famous athletes like the basketball player Michael Jordan are able to excel because the other teams' players seem to be reacting in relative slow motion. Physical speed aside, this may occur by an increase in the frequency of conscious OR events. For example if Jordan is having 60 conscious events per second, and the players defending him are only having 40 conscious events per second, Jordan has 50% more perceptions, decisions and reactions over any given time interval than his opponents, who will appear to him to be in slow motion. (np)

DeLillo chooses the deserts of Anza-Borrego, California as a meditative place where Elster's consciousness expands to experience time at a slower pace. He demonstrates the interrelation between consciousness and time-experienced and how any change in any one of them would cause the other one change too. The desert, as a meditative place, offers Elster a chance to expand his consciousness to the extent that time nearly feels dead or ancient. Richard Elster says, "Time slows down when I'm here. Time becomes blind. I feel the landscape more than I see it. I never know what day it is. I never know if a minute has passed or an hour. I don't get old here" (30). Elster finds the expansive desert a place where he becomes oblivious of the passage of time, days, minutes and hours. His statement, "I don't get old here" hints that Elster finds himself living in the interstices of movements and is able to catch the moments that are individual entities in themselves. His life in the desert is akin to his experiences in the gallery where he watches *24 Hour Psycho*, and where he is able to see the interstitial spaces/movements between the two consecutive frames. He learns to live 'in the moment' and becomes aware about the phenomenon of time as something smooth and continuous.

Elster, who assisted the planners of Iraq war at the Pentagon feels completely disillusioned of the life that one has learned to live over the years. Contrary to Elster's temporal experience in the desert, time appears fast paced to Finley and for the people belonging to the city. By juxtaposing the fast paced time of the cities with the expansive time of the desert, DeLillo observes that time is the function of speed at which life is lived. People living in the cities and towns have become accustomed to the speed of rapidly moving traffic and ephemeral electronic devices which define the life in the cities. . The city, where Elster has spent most of his life, doesn't allow him to think beyond "News and Traffic. Sports and Weather" (23). The undying noise of the traffic and technology, the terms and conditions of various policy papers dictate the life in the city. Elster's obsession with time is, in fact, his

awareness about his expanding consciousness. Proximity with nature provides him with a different experience of time that is smooth and continuous in the words of Bergson and succession of moments, according to Deleuze. He verily asserts that cities have removed time from nature because there the time is not seen in Bergsonian or Deleuzean terms but as a linear phenomenon divided into past, present and future as well as into seconds, hours, minutes, days, weeks, months, years etc. The smallest unit of time as per modern clocks is one second where as quantum physics has proven that even  $10^{-43}$ th part of a second is also smooth and continuous and, therefore, cannot be considered as a separate unit of time. Moreover, life in the cities has generated innumerable layers of artificial and unnatural modes of living that predicate a blind adherence to a scientifically calculable time. A conscious observation of such a life reveals that underneath, there is an interstitial void, meaninglessness and terror, something which is a necessary reality which is lost as "unknown." In the gallery, however, the conceptual art offers an experience whereby the observer gets conscious of the process of careful watchfulness which one misses amidst the ubiquitous consumerism of the postmodern culture.

*Mrs. Dalloway* and *Point Omega* show that time exists in different forms. At one level its fast pace deters us from appreciating the present. At another level time becomes subjective when experienced at a slower pace, expanding the consciousness. However, the monotonous pace of our civilization which runs of the wheels of profit buries the primal consciousness of humans of how to see, think and even live our life. Septimus's suicide and Ester's disappointment in the system he was once proud of manifest that no matter how monumental achievements a society makes it is all futile unless people in general are contended.

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