



Reconsidering queer chronotopes in literature: A critical intervention from cultural analysis

Reconsiderando los cronotopos queer en literatura: Una intervención crítica desde el análisis cultural

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Abstract: This article proposes a queer chronotopic approach to literature and culture by re-adapting Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope in dialogue with current queer criticism. Drawing on cultural analysis, the study examines the intersections between queer studies and the chronotope as a generative literary concept. The term queer is unpacked across its cultural, political, philosophical, and literary dimensions, tracing its shift from identity-based sexual politics to a deconstructive strategy for literary interpretation. The field of queer temporality is then mobilized to theorize queerness as a temporal experience that deviates from linear, progressive, and teleological schemes. The chronotope is critically reassessed and expanded beyond its original formulation, examining how time-space configurations generate literary meaning and articulate sociocultural worldviews. A brief analysis of the domestic space in *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) illustrates how a queer chronotope assembles anachronistic objects and cultural memory to critique the neoliberal assimilation. The article argues that queer chronotopes operate through anachronistic time-space configurations that refuse hegemonic cultural frameworks and reject normative agendas of assimilation and progress. Rather than offering a closed methodology, this critical intervention opens a flexible interpretive path in which ambiguities, dissonant temporalities, and cultural memory become productive sites for queer readings of narrative.

Keywords: chronotope- Bakhtin- cultural analysis- queer studies- literary studies.

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Resumen: Este artículo propone un enfoque cronotópico queer para el estudio de la literatura y la cultura mediante la readaptación de la teoría del cronotopo de Bajtín, en diálogo con la crítica queer contemporánea. A partir del análisis cultural, el estudio examina las intersecciones entre los estudios queer y el cronotopo como concepto literario generativo. Se desglosan las dimensiones culturales, políticas, filosóficas y literarias del término queer, trazando su desplazamiento desde las políticas sexuales identitarias hacia una estrategia deconstructiva para la interpretación literaria. Se moviliza el campo de la temporalidad queer para teorizar lo queer como experiencia temporal que se desvía de los esquemas lineales, progresivos y teleológicos. El cronotopo es reevaluado críticamente y ampliado más allá de su formulación original, examinando cómo las configuraciones de tiempo-espacio generan significado literario y articulan cosmovisiones socioculturales. Un breve análisis del espacio doméstico en *La biblioteca en la piscina* (1988) ilustra cómo un cronotopo queer ensambla objetos anacrónicos y memoria cultural para ejercer una crítica de la asimilación neoliberal. El artículo sostiene que los cronotopos queer operan a través de configuraciones anacrónicas de tiempo-espacio que rechazan los marcos culturales hegemónicos y las agendas normativas de asimilación y progreso. Más que una metodología cerrada, esta intervención crítica abre un camino interpretativo flexible en el que las ambigüedades, las temporalidades disonantes y la memoria cultural se constituyen como sitios productivos para las lecturas queer en la narrativa.

Palabras claves: cronotopo- Bajtín- análisis cultural- estudios queer- estudios literarios.

Introduction

Over the last decades, queer theory has earned significant strength as an academic discipline; its motivations have evolved from assessments of gender identities and sexual politics to more disparate literary issues concerning phenomenology, affects, and temporalities. In this prolific critical trend, this study follows queer theory's critical capability to deconstruct identity, to examine the lack of coherence in sexual desire, gender identity, and subjective ways of being. Furthermore, queer further proposes a non-linear temporal dissonance of cultural ideas and a deconstructive strategy for doing close reading of literary texts. Queer becomes dynamic and subject to shifting modes of analysis, while it is also tied via a material relationship to distinct cultural contexts.

Current queer scholarship has proposed the notion of "queer temporality" as one which questions the authority of accepting chronological time to non-normative experiences. This approach highlights potential for dissonances and overturning of linear time. Building on that criticism, this study adopts a cultural analysis practice to re-adapt Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope, in dialogue with queer critical issues. In doing so, this article maintains that queer chronotopes work through anachronistic "time-space" configurations, refusing hegemonic cultural outlines and rejecting neoliberal agendas of normative assimilation and progress.

This study explores the cultural connections between queer studies and the chronotope, and it goes on to deploy a chronotopic proposal for reading queer narratives. In doing so, this article offers queer critical insights on how time and space are textually formulated in the chronotope. It further delivers a critical intervention in which cultural concepts can be re-adapted and where new interpretations can be proposed in this theoretical proposal for queer chronotopes. As such, this research provides an innovative opportunity to re-adapt Bakhtin's theory from a queer critical lens. This article recommends an important critical exercise to update Bakhtin's theory to scrutinize the possibilities of queer intersubjective experiences. It further reviews a multiplicity of literary and cultural issues lurking within the chronotope.

In this critical intervention on queer chronotopes, this article implements a cultural analysis methodology. In what follows, I first outline the principles of cultural analysis to explicate how I draw on its concept-based methodology. Second, I briefly discuss the most slippery concept in this

research; queer. For this, I unpack the cultural, political, philosophical and literary implications that have made this concept meaningful for contemporary culture. Third, I explain how queer studies have imagined and conceived notions of space and time as liminal and marginalised cultural constructions which deviate from hegemonic schemes, schedules and outlines. Fourth, I examine Bakhtin's theory, as well as Peeren's (2008) critical input on Bakhtin, to assess how this idea of time-space coordinators generates literary meaning and articulates the text's sociocultural worldview. Finally, for illustrative purposes, I select a short passage from Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988) to explain how the home, as a domestic space, can be read as a queer chronotope that deviates from hegemonic culture.

The temporality of cultural analysis

In this study, I adopt cultural analysis's "concept-based methodology" (Bal, 2002, p. 5), which allows me to examine theoretical concepts substantiated in literary texts. Cultural analysis is the term that Dutch theorist Mieke Bal has proposed for an interdisciplinary humanities research practice, one which combines the close reading of cultural objects with the empirical use of theoretical concepts in the service of cultural critique. Bal's critical aim was to distinguish *cultural analysis* from, on one hand, the frequently dogmatic fields of the separate humanistic disciplines, and on the other, from the often vague and overpoliticized field of *cultural studies*. This research practice emphasizes the conceptual work involved in interpretive analysis, engaging with theory for understanding culture. It is understood as interpretive and critical, probing layers of meaning within cultural artefacts to help unpack the broader sociocultural worldviews in which they become legible. In this vein, cultural analysis underlines the understanding of cultures as idiosyncratic symbolic systems that can be read semiotically and, in this process, interprets cultural objects from various media.

Cultural analysis combines analytical description with methodologies from *literary studies* (close reading), *critical theory* (concepts), *cultural studies* (the political normality) as well as additional humanistic disciplines and fields that came in and out of fashion. Following the 'turns' in the large-scale redistribution of the humanities in the last decades, various *inter-*, *trans-*, and multidisciplinary fields were developed, which were often conceived of as *studies* rather than exclusive disciplines. In this humanistic context, cultural analysis interrogates the critical foundation of various cultural concepts, and hence, the scrutiny of objects enhances the theoretical concepts. Bal (2009) underlines the notion that concepts are not particularly meaningful unless they "help us to understand the object better on its—the object's—own terms" (p. 15). Then, concepts provide critical debates. Nonetheless, like most theoretical elaborations, they are not always straightforward. Therefore, in this study, queer chronotopes provide "miniature theories" (Bal, 2009, p. 19) that help us to comprehend how such cultural concepts acquire critical meaning in literature and culture.

The intellectual specificity of cultural analysis lies in its temporal orientation, as defined by a phenomenological understanding of history. The awareness of the present in which cultural objects are selected, and assessed, accommodates a temporality of contemporaneity central to this research practice. Therefore, cultural analysis provides an evaluation and temporal adaptation of critical issues. Bal (1999) defines this temporal adaptation as one that "seeks to understand the past as part of the present" (p. 1). Similarly, Jonathan Culler (1999) considers cultural analysis's "theoretical engagement" as an intellectual exercise that assembles "past and present, high and popular culture" (p. 345). Cultural analysis interrogates cultural objects and theories from the past and their meaning within the present. This practice takes theories and cultural objects from the past to the present, beyond their temporal specificity and introduces them to critical re-adaptation. In this vein, theoretical concepts are flexible, they are embedded in cultural scrutiny as they circulate "between disciplines, between scholars, between historical periods and between geographically dispersed academic communities" (Bal, 2009, p. 13). As I argue below, the close reading of queer chronotopes suggest both the dissonant and temporally asynchronous effects of a cultural past within the present for the practice of cultural analysis.

This article provides an analytic example rooted in one of the most traditional humanistic disciplines, literary studies, and the most popular genre within it, the novel. In doing so, it proves that cultural analysis is not a different field of the humanities, but an integral mode of it; and that narrative is not an escapist fictional avoidance of reality but a literary mirror of the cultural forces that shape societies.

The flexibility of queer as a cultural concept

In recent context of sexual liberation marked by the sociocultural aftermath of Stonewall Riots, most Western societies have experienced a hype of mass media in which gay and lesbian identities have been granted a normalised representation, away from the homophobic stigma of the past. This normalised image has coincided with an increase in the commercial investment in venues and the commodification of LGBT lifestyles in various forms which have shaped a cosmopolitan scene. Thus, capitalist investment has produced a globalized homogeneity and commodification of gay places. The latter has urged a global phenomenon through which the neoliberal market has become progressive as it facilitates the convenient commodification of sexual minorities (Alderson, 2016). As such, assimilation and progress often follow the inescapable course of global neoliberalism. However, while activist groups maintain that there is still a lot to accomplish in terms of the ‘progress’ of sexual minorities, the inverse is also possible: the notion that, even as *gay* has acquired a transnational status, queer narrative may thwart this normalizing and progressive tendency.¹

The semantic configuration of queer has an extensive history as a concept in the humanities. Originally, a nineteenth-century synonym for ‘strange’; then, it became a pejorative insult for individuals identified with same-sex desire; and currently it has become a concept that describes non-heteronormative subjectivities within a wide spectrum of possibilities. In this vein, the concept has undergone a process of *resemiotization* (Iedema, 2003). It has been transformed “from taunt to flaunt, from a hurtful slur to an emblem of positive identification” (Thomas, 2000, p. 18), it persistently condenses “a signifier of attitude, of a refusal to accept conventional sexual and gendered categories, of a defiant desire beyond the regular confines of heteronormativity” (Glover et al., 2000, p. 106). However, queer remains problematic as it is historically laden with harmful implications. The concept acquires its meaning “through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult” (Butler, 1993, p. 226). It invokes the dread of abuse and shame which varies from physical violence to social ostracism. As Butler (1993) emphasizes, no reclamation can ever eradicate *queer* from its signified of shame: “In this sense, it is always an imaginary chorus that taunts ‘queer’!” (p. 226). The historical implications of queer, and their cultural effects, are crucial when assessing the intricacies of non-heteronormative experiences. Hence, this study follows a ‘critical turn’ into the stigma behind the concept.

In this cultural analysis motivated research, concepts need clarification as they are temporally and discursively situated. While the term *homosexual* derives from the medical discourses of the late nineteenth century indicating, mostly, deviation and pathology; the concept of *gay* rejects the former and promotes social visibility and acceptance (Halperin, 2012). On the contrary, *queer* is the outcome of a deconstructive critical perspective that considered the notion of *gay* an indicator of cultural assimilation and suggested countercultural alternatives. If gay and lesbian politics and activism follow

¹ In this line, we find instances like the “It Gets Better Project”, an Internet-based video campaign that started in September 2010. This campaign aimed to provide hope for LGBT youth after numerous teenagers across the US committed suicide due to school bullying. Although originally from the US, this media project motivated campaigns in several Western countries. Many activists, politicians and celebrities supported this campaign by creating their own videos of hope compiled on the project’s website. In general, this campaign conceives hope as an escape from the wrongs of the present to find happiness in the future. This notion of hope resonates with how neoliberalism integrates affects into the market, encouraging diversity, inclusion, and liberal progress.

an identity-rights model committed to social recognition, queer considers identity as a temporary and non-essentialist phenomenon. Instead of campaigning for the recognition and legitimation of gay and lesbian identities, queer confronts the validity of the hegemonic system. Hence, queer tends to emphasize dissidence, subversion, deviation, as well as certain incoherencies and inadequacies of the subjectivities it names.

Some of the foundations of queer theory have their genesis in Foucault's first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1978), in which the French philosopher investigates the relationship between discourses of sexuality and hegemonic power. Drawing on the scientific discourses of nineteenth-century sexology, Foucault distinguished reproductive heterosexuality against "an explosion of unorthodox sexualities" (p. 49). In this vein, *heteronormativity* is considered the heterosexual normativity that symbolizes cultural normalcy. This concept is formulated

through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness, embedded in things and not just in sex, is what we call heteronormativity. (Berlant et al., 2000, p. 318)

Accordingly, queer is substantiated only in contrast to heteronormativity. In a similar vein, Halperin (1995) maintains that queer has become "an identity without an essence [which] demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative" (p. 62). Consequently, the concept of queer would be validated when in contrast to society's normalcy but does not have any essential characteristic.

Jagose (1996) considers that queer operates as "an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies" (p. 1). Jagose explains that queer developed from gay and lesbian studies, but contrary to those fields, queer is "unaligned with any specific identity category" but describes "those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire" (p. 3). Thus, queer "dramatizes" the difficulties of signifying an essential identity. The concept's "deliberately capacious way" of implying "how many ways people can find themselves at odds with straight culture" (Warner, 1999, p. 38) are both its strengths and potential limitations. Despite its flexibility, queer has provided philosophical and cultural possibilities for understanding gender and sexuality as cultural and political subject positions.

The cultural relevance of queer lies in the wide range of practices in which it has been used, either to account for a (non)identity or to name a process; a way of behaving; an orientation; or an attitude. The scope of queer studies has been described by Seidman (1996) as, "a study of those knowledges and social practices that organize 'society' as a whole by sexualizing ... bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture, and social institutions" (p. 13). Since its inclusion into academic jargon, queer has reached far beyond same-sex desire, toward different forms of alternative lifestyles and orientations. According to Teresa de Lauretis (1991), queer stimulates a desire, "to recast or reinvent the terms of our sexualities, to construct another discursive horizon, another way of thinking about the sexual" (p. iv).

Even though queer springs from gender and sexuality, the critical concept has turned towards dimensions that exceed such spheres. Sedgwick (1994) hailed queer as a promising concept; one that works "outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all" cautioning, however, that this should not remove same-sex desire, "from the term's definitional center [because that] would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself" (pp. 8–9). Sedgwick was a pioneer as she predicted queer as a critical lens, an open network of possibilities, "gaps, overlaps,

dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (p. 8). Influenced by Foucault's view of human sexuality as discourse, queer theory adopts a literary approach to human sexuality, hypothesizing our temporal being not as a static circumstance, but as a literary procedure, embedded within a linguistic process, driven by cultural dynamics that corroborate its continuous tendency to resignification. As such, queer remains a significant cultural concept that fails to describe an essential identity. While queer indicates sexual dissidence, it also figures as a literary process, a charge, one that entails dissonance and deviation.

This study proposes that feeling bound to a time and space which disengages from society's temporal hegemony functions as a queer cultural practice. In this vein, we should remember that queer subjects have regularly been conceived, understood, and represented according to the outlines of history's official discourses. As Sinfield (1998) maintains:

in our current modes, we are a recent and ongoing creation. For we did not come out, in the wake of the Stonewall Riot of 1969, in the sense of emerging, already formed, as if from behind a curtain. Rather, we have been making our history and hence ourselves—though not, of course, in conditions of our own choosing. (p. 1)

Sinfield's implication is that restricting sexual identities or subjectivities to tempo-centric historical periods is reductionist; identity is a much more complex construction. Furthermore, queer cultures have a tense relationship with history, one unavoidably fraught with harmful incidents of homophobia, pathology, shame, and criminalization. American author Edmund White (1994) points to a similar idea, he writes: "To have been oppressed in the 1950s, freed in the 1960s, exalted in the 1970s, and wiped out in the 1980s is a quick itinerary for a whole culture to follow" (p. 215). The non-progressive phenomenon described above also resonates with what Sedgwick (1990) described as "the unrationalized coexistence of different models" (p. 47) within the discourses of sexuality which expose a process of historical accumulation. While these temporal models of sexual identity may emerge at different moments, and with different purposes, they can intersect and co-exist with each other. Following Sedgwick's "refusal of the model of linearity and supersession", this study adopts a deconstructive view in the literary encounter with the past not as a way of doing history, but as a textual strategy "to denaturalize the present" (1990, p. 48). Consequently, the history of queer subjectivities has not always followed the progressive logics of sexual liberalism, and queer criticism has examined the homophobic injuries of the past for critical purposes.

Theorizing space and time in queer studies

Earlier notions of "queer space" appeared in academic scholarship during the 1990s and have been developed in the humanities, social sciences and, also, the field of architecture.² In this vein, the most widespread proposals of "queer spatialization" have been influenced by Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) and Foucault's essay "On Other Spaces" (1986), where the latter philosopher coined the notion of "heterotopias". In general terms, Foucault's spatialization of sexuality has been extensively overused by both literary studies and queer criticism. Indeed, scholars frequently invoke Foucault's heterotopias when interpreting queer spaces as

countersites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (1986, p. 24)

Foucault discusses contemporary critical theory's tendency to separate notions of time from space. He argues that a space-time continuum is assumed in the Western conceptions of reality and

² See, for instance, Bell and Valentine (1995); Browning (1996); Ingram et al. (1996); Betsky (1997); and Higgs (1999).

discursive practices: “space itself has a history in Western experience, and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space” (1986, p. 22). If we follow this view, space becomes unavoidably a temporal phenomenon. Even if Foucault’s concept of heterotopias has been critically used to encourage the subject of space, he also anticipated the importance of time as an aspect of spatial thinking. However, while the philosopher’s elaboration of “heterotopias” has been paramount to the humanities, this study underlines the importance of time and space as experiences of the literary phenomenon. As I argue below, the relevance of the chronotope lays in its literary synthesis of these two aspects.

Queer criticism has impacted ways of understanding subject positions, not merely through its examination of non-heteronormative subjectivities whose experiences occupy liminal relationships to hegemonic culture, but also by reconfiguring ideas of temporality. In her Introduction to a *GLQ* special edition on queer temporalities, Freeman (2007) argued in favor of this critical shift. She claimed:

If we reimagine ‘queer’ as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, or see the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even non-relationality), we encounter a more productively porous queer study ... (p. 159)

Freeman’s emphasis on queer studies’ porosity confirms the concept’s natural flexibility as a deconstructive strategy for literary analysis. In this critical vein, other scholars have also contributed to queer criticism’s turn to issues of temporalities: Dinshaw’s *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999); Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004); Love’s *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007); and Freeman’s *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010). In general, those intellectuals theorize queerness as a temporal experience that deviates from linear, causal, progressive, and goal-oriented outlines. Those issues of time have influenced academic debates which question progressive schemas often conceived in social, historical, or literary terms.

Dinshaw’s work aims at “constructing a community across time” (p. 34), as a cross-historical affective coalition that involves “a queer historical touch”, endorsing “a consistent impulse to make contact, even finally a desire for bodies to touch across time” (p. 3). Dinshaw assembles asynchronous historical moments “in touch” with one another within a temporal dynamic that looks to the past for queer identification. From a different viewpoint, Lee Edelman’s refusal of futurity suggests that society’s hegemonic temporality is tied to the temporality of heterosexual reproduction. Edelman’s antisocial thesis underscores the idea that heterosexual reproduction supports an ideology of futurity that dominates Western cultures. He analyses the tensions between reproductive futurity—imagined as generations succeeding on a linear pace towards the future—and a queer refusal for that heteronormative worldview. Edelman proposes a queer refusal of “reproductive futurism” (p. 3) symbolised in the figure of the child as the emblem of society’s continuity of normative values and expectations. According to Edelman, this queer refusal demands embracing a “*jouissance*” (p. 36), a negative denial of redemptive futurity. Therefore, since queer subjects contradict “every social structure” (p. 3), they challenge that hegemonic ideology which enforces the future.

Heather Love recommends “the turn backwards” (p. 5) as a strategy to evaluate the cultural circumstances of socially “disqualified identities” (p. 4) and their effects in literary queer history. In her assessment of “backward” experiences, Love distinguishes anachronistic feelings associated with the past and temporal experiences which defy “the inadequacy of narratives of progress” (p. 27) through the persistence of the past within the present. Love’s elaboration of “backwardness” addresses a past of pain and shame that no progressive future can easily redeem. Elizabeth Freeman theorizes queer temporality against Benjamin’s notion of “homogeneous empty time” (p. xxii) which indicates a moving-forward understanding of time. Following Freeman, normativity organizes societies into dominant arrangements of time. This hegemonic time follows a discursive regime which

coordinates individuals in what she defines as “chrononormative ways” (p. 5), the somatic regulation of subjects into the demands of nations, labour, and markets. This neologism implicates heteronormativity’s temporal dimension, supported through the implementation of schedules and outlines that regulate subjects. Thus, chrononormativity is “goal-oriented, intentional, and culminating in epiphanies and major transformations” (p. 5). On the contrary, Freeman maintains that queer represents backwardness, and temporal delay. Its discursive possibilities may thwart the self-naturalising ideologies of timing while suggesting backwardness and lateness. Drawing on Butler’s theorization of performativity, Freeman coins the concept “temporal drag” (p. 64) to underline drag’s temporal dimensions and expand their valences to signify an alternative temporality of disavowed political projects. Freeman interprets the idea of queer temporality both independently of and in relation to the discourses of hegemonic history.

The intricate relation between issues of queer temporality and ‘the literary’ is, of course, largely heterogeneous. Despite this heterogeneity, those notions challenge the linearity of time and progress. Developing notions of queer temporalities has provided powerful tools for an important critique of those ideologies of progress in sexual politics while suggesting the extent to which queer subjectivities are bound to a cultural past. In this vein, critical proposals about queer temporalities are often permeated by anachronistic perceptions, affects and artefacts.

Rethinking the chronotope in literature and culture

Drawing on cultural analysis, Bal (2009) regards narrative not only as a literary genre but as a “cultural force [which] constitutes a major reservoir of the cultural baggage that enables us to make meaning out of a chaotic world and the incomprehensible events taking place in it” (p. 18). Furthermore, this study also considers the chronotope as a generative force, a vital literary concept in the cultural and ideological design of the narrative. Indeed, the chronotope represents the textual configuration that makes the narrative possible.

In his seminal essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel” (1996), Bakhtin describes the chronotope as a “formally constitutive category of literature” which refers to the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” (p. 84) equivalent to the literary text’s worldview and cultural values. Bakhtin disapproves the common tendency of modern thought which considers time and space as separate and independent units. He goes on to elaborate a definition of this concept:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (p. 84)

Time and space remain significant cultural concepts that mediate subjects and their worldly experiences; nonetheless, as abstract and transcendental ideas they lack importance. Since chronology cannot be detached from the sequence of events, the chronotope embraces both spatial and temporal coordinates. Thus, Bakhtin’s concept realigns the relationship between event and space. Rather than the event taking place against an empty setting, the chronotope is the primary point from which all events develop. Narratives usher in chronotopes, in which space and time are fused in a textual manner, where events unfold. Also, the chronotope bears larger cultural implications. For Bakhtin, the categories of time and space are “forms of the most immediate reality” (p. 85) which generate meaning within intersubjective interaction. The connecting between time and space provides meaning to the different chronotopic subjectivities. Such a link varies according to social, cultural, ideological, and geopolitical considerations. As such, time and space are not abstract concepts, but sociocultural categories that provide meaning to the subject’s experiences.

At the risk of generalising, Bakhtin's concept has remained fossilised and applied mostly to canonical literature. The chronotope has been used to theorize about time, space, genre, and narrative devices (Riffaterre, 1996). The concept, however, though essential for literary theory, is seldom used in current criticism. A noteworthy exception is Peeren's seminal book *Intersubjectivities and Popular Culture: Bakhtin and Beyond* (2008), which draws on Bakhtin's theoretical concepts to analyse popular culture. Peeren goes on claim that "space and time, in their invariable chronotopic intertwinement, produce identities" (p. 33). Then, cultural identities are regulated by specific chronotopic arrangements of space and time. Following Bakhtin's statement that the chronotope implies "the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied" (p. 250), Peeren expands on this idea, proposing that it is, "where the knots of subjectivity—of identities conceived as self-narrativizations—are made and unmade" (p. 36). Peeren emphasises how, far from being merely textual markers, chronotopes articulate subjectivities, "reformulating identities as processes grounded in time-space(s), both on the level of their socio-cultural construction and on that of their subjective 'experience'" (p. 33). Since the subject is produced by the specific time-space constellation to which it belongs, the chronotope can be deployed as a textual strategy to examine cultural experiences.

The chronotope is the textual configuration of time-space that generates meaning in the narrative, it further projects a specific cultural worldview. According to Bakhtin, "every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (p. 258). Elaborating on this idea, Peeren maintains that "[m]eaning itself becomes chronotopic, since all signs, in order to signify, need to be—audibly, visibly, or haptically— inscribed in(to) space and time" (p. 33). Peeren regards the chronotope as an "optic" that enables us to "see" the "forces in the culture" (p. 42) that structure time-space constellations that organize the world into a *mise-en-scène*. In the configuration of narrative, the chronotope functions in a manner that enables cultural identities to validate their subjective position. It is within the chronotope where identities and their memories can take their subjectivity and place in the world (Peeren 2008, p. 42). Therefore, the chronotope symbolises an ideology of textual coordinators that shapes subjectivities through specific literary models.

Chronotopes may not be unique but multiple and diverse, and each one portrays and interprets time-space arrangements in distinctive ways. In fiction, chronotopes may indicate different things: a nation, social class, culture, subculture, or community. It may also incorporate both public and private forms of time-space configurations. Additionally, chronotopes can also be marginal or peripheral, and influenced by other hegemonic ones. Regarding what he calls "minor chronotopes", Bakhtin observes:

each such chronotope can include within it an unlimited number of minor chronotopes; in fact, ... any motif may have a specific chronotope of its own. Within the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work or author; it is common moreover for one of these chronotopes to envelope or dominate the others. (p. 252)

Moreover, chronotopes may not be necessarily restricted to a single time and space marker. Peeren argues that some chronotopes may "comprise multiple, spatially dispersed settings or long periods" (p. 40). Besides, the coincidence of time and space may be the site of various chronotopic structures. As Peeren maintains, "different groups of people sharing the same country, city, or even building, may construct this time-space and their position within it in widely divergent manners" (p. 40). The presence of various chronotopes indicates that each time-space unit invites a distinctive scrutiny that addresses how subjectivities are textually staged, and the way they provide instances for subverting the normative. The chronotopic context generates a significant impact on its meaning and effects, regardless of whether it is "a success or a failure, a confirmation or subversion of the cited norm" (Peeren, 2008, p. 71). Peeren's elucidation of how chronotopes are textually situated and deployed is

central to this article, insofar as it emphasises how the context can determine the circumstances in which the normative and the subversive may carry different meanings, reinforcing the notion that each chronotope warrants a separate analysis of how identities are conveyed. As such, what is subversive in one chronotope is not necessarily subversive in another one.

Bakhtin argues that chronotopes formulate “chronotopic values” which “colour” (p. 243) the emotions and affects which are perceived as normal by the subjects. By means of chronotopic values, subjectivities communicate their secondary role as axiological categories where time and space are “coloured by emotions and values” (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 243). Characters often accept these chronotopic values which are naturally adopted and become “part and parcel of every perception, every awareness of a series of events” (Scholz, 1998, p. 155). The chronotope is itself preserved through the intersubjective ratification of its normative frame. Because of this, the concept represents an intersubjective territory, produced for those who share its values and partake on its cultural staging. Then, intersubjectivity is the interaction between self and other through which the subject is chronotopically staged. Nevertheless, Peeren observes that Bakhtin does not elaborate on what she describes as “chronotopic belonging”, something that “leaves unexplored how subjects come to feel a certain loyalty to a chronotope, to its values, rules, and practices” (p. 56). Diverse subjective ways of seeing will adopt chronotope-specific forms. Consequently, the chronotope may be regarded as a literary element of difference, one that designs ways of belonging and non-belonging.

The chronotope embodies a sociocultural time-space construction, one that is socially composed, and potentially subverted. It displays itself in the collective fields of cultural practices and social interactions. It has the potential to reformulate the diverse generative components of cultural traditions. The latter suggests the concept’s connection with cultural memory. When discussing the foundations of cultural analysis, Bal (1999) distinguishes cultural memory as a performative act of citationality that “establishes memorial links beyond personal contiguity” (p. 218) and does not necessarily adhere to intentionality. As a social *mise-en-scène*, the chronotope follows a script comprising distinct acts of cultural memory. Peeren further suggests that cultural traditions develop on the level of different social and intersubjective practices, instead of a single individual memory (2008, p. 40). As such, literary chronotopes may evidence some of the objective forms that culture undertakes. Then, cultural memory is activated not to call in a fixed history but to reformulate different traces from the past in the uses of chronotopes.

Homes as queer chonotopes

In this section, I draw on the principles of cultural analysis and queer studies to examine a case of queer chronotope in contemporary British narrative. For this, I discuss a short passage from Hollinghurst’s debut novel, *The Swimming Pool Library* (1988). The plot explores the fortuitous meet between two queer men from different generations: William Beckwith and Lord Charles Nantwich. This novel offers a stimulating case-study in which the two main characters articulate a distinctive chronotopic belonging attached to anachronistic dwellings and outdated objects. In this brief illustrative example, I aim to show that Nantwich’s home is (in itself) a queer chronotope that signifies a time-space shift from the London of 1983, the novel’s main chronotope.

Lord Charles Nantwich lives secluded in a seventeenth-century mansion. On his first visit to this home, William is “surprisingly taken aback, by its air of secrecy and exclusion, to the invalidish world of Edwardian ghost stories, to a world where people never went out” (p. 99). This domestic space condenses different temporalities and anachronistic objects dissonant with the novel’s milieu. The eccentric owner declares: “it’s quite a little museum I have here” (p. 106). The Lord’s comment indicates this chronotope’s dissonant shift from the present into a cultural past. Nantwich’s “museum” preserves a variety of different relics. The most iconic one is a stele of Pharaoh Akhenaten, who ruled Egypt from 1353 to 1336 BCE. William describes this historical object in ambiguous terms:

‘Fascinating, isn’t it. It’s a stele showing the King Akhenaten.’ I looked again. ‘And who are the other two?’ ‘Ah’ said Charles with pleasure. ‘They’re King Akhenaten as well.’ He chuckled, though it could by no means be the first time he had explained its mystery. (pp. 107–108)

Nantwich elucidates a past in which the Pharaoh led a cultural revolution: “he broke away from the worship of Amon (as in Amenhotep) and made everyone worship the sun instead ... But such apostasy was not enough. Oh no. He had to change the way he looked as well” (p. 108). Akhenaten is depicted with broad hips, curved shoulders, and female breasts. Nantwich goes on to explain: “For a while it was quite an icon to me, ... The point, as I saw it, was that you could take an aesthetic decision to change shape. The king seemed almost to turn into a woman before our eyes” (p. 109). The Pharaoh is an in-between figure in terms of gender and sex discourses; something conveyed through his ambiguous sexual anatomy. Akhenaten transformed his gendered identity, a metamorphosis that reflects the cultural transformation of the status of same-sex desire throughout Nantwich’s life, during the twentieth century. Born in 1900, Nantwich hails from the last phase of the Victorian era, which culminated with Queen Victoria’s death in 1901. Since homosexuality was a criminal offence in Britain until the Sexual Offences Act was passed in 1967, Nantwich kept his queer identity secret for most of his life. Nantwich stands across two discursive eras of same-sex desire: the period before the British decriminalization of homosexuality and the homophobic era of the AIDS pandemic. In this vein, Nantwich’s affective captivation with Akhenaten becomes intelligible in terms of historical figures lingering on amid continuous revolution in the cultural status of same-sex desire.

Nantwich’s home is a queer *mise-en-scène* that departs from the London of 1983, harking back to cultural memory by means of anecdotal citationality. In doing so, this museum symbolizes an historical repository that opens anachronistic possibilities to provide a queer critique of the cultural assimilation of gay identities. The purpose of this brief analysis is to evaluate the strange persistence of a cultural past, address the textual ambivalence of queer experiences, while also evaluating conjunctions of dissidence and temporality. For the length of this article, this case-study serves solely for illustrative purposes. For more comprehensive chronotopic explorations, applying the critical intervention suggested in this article, further in-depth analyses are required.

Conclusion

This article has proposed a queer chronotopic approach to literature and culture—not as a rigid method, but as a flexible cultural analysis strategy through which to explore cultural memory in narrative. Drawing on Bakhtin’s theorisation of the chronotope, and Esther Peeren’s input on Bakhtin’s concept, this concept-based study has projected the chronotope as the literary *mise-en-scène* of time and space coordinators which provide narrative meaning and a cultural force that prompts queer readings. This approach by no means claims to be a closed methodology—which would contradict the aims of cultural analysis—but, as queer theory’s deconstructive emphasis itself, it does not satisfy itself with methodical procedures, it opens a path for original interpretations. In this vein, ambiguities have a queer potential because they assemble different time-space possibilities—cultural memory, present reading, multiple interpretations—and they have an ambivalent presence. As such, ambiguities serve to queer hegemonic interpretations and smuggle dissident discourses within narrative.

By investigating queer chronotopes we gain a richer interpretation of narrative’s discursive complexities and the enduring resonance of cultural memory. These literary territories allow us to meditate on notions of dissidence, and to generate anachronistic links with historical legacies and their affective potential. In this vein, outdated ways of being, misplaced objects, anachronistic affects and artefacts can all participate in the logic of queer chronotopes. These interpretations combine cultural legacies and fashion procreative elements of subjectivities and ways of belonging to

discursive worlds. The interplay of the chronotope between queer subjectivities and their literary representations proposes the concept's relationship with a form of memory that is not only personal but also cultural. As such, the present may bring memory traces of other dissonant pasts.

As a modality of narrative, time tends to follow the logics of linearity, but it may also hold dissonant and anachronistic arrangements. Time can be regressive or discontinuous. Hence, anachronisms are a crucial feature of queer chronotopes, an affective beckoning of a prior time through assembling dissonant archives of pastness. This engagement with pastness undermines the hegemonic understanding of time as linear and progressive. Accordingly, queer signifies an attempt to dislocate hegemonic time and to track what develops because of that dislocation. This disruption may occur, for instance, in political and social groups, dissident forms of sexual practices and non-heteronormative subjectivities.

This study has put emphasis on how queer chronotopes lag behind cultural actuality. These literary constructions assemble the past to critique the social possibilities in the present in which a diversity of anachronisms signifies a way of challenging social inadequacies. As such, queer chronotopes become cultural repositories at odds with the neoliberal prospects of normative assimilation. The conflict between promises of assimilation and the recurrence of an anachronic past serves as a background to these chronotopes. The temporal fluctuation between past and present signifies a shifting site of critical output. Hence, queer chronotopes present a literary practice that enables envisioning a time-space disconnected from neoliberal identity politics, at odds with the increasingly trivialising and uniformized gay culture of the globalisation era.

Queer does not specify a monolithic sign that perpetually replicates itself without regard for its chronotopic context. Furthermore, we must remember that queer theory is an evolving and flexible academic discourse that constantly shifts and undertakes new analytic models. This study has also put an emphasis on the scrutiny of literary identities, away from their associations with fixed essences of being. It considers identities as multiple and flexible yet also situated in the chronotopic and discursive contexts of their cultural articulations. Indeed, queer ways of being often exceed heteronormativity's inscriptions on the literary and are, instead, sensitive to the volatilities of sexual desire and the uncertainties of sexual identity. In this vein, queer chronotopes validate queer as a mode of critique, a movement away from the identity politics of equality that usually eradicates critical differences. Thus, the concept requires a critical practice which avoids the humanist rights-bearing declarations of identities established in specific sexual orientations.

The concept of queer avoids straightforward categorizations through the intricate textual displacements of subjectivity and the critical impossibility of identifying the rigid frontiers of signification. The diversity of chronotopic contexts of queer narrative complicates any easy categorization. Then, this study has employed what Butler (1993), in a debate on queer politics, called "the temporality of the term" (p. 223). Drawing on Butler, this study has confirmed how this flexible concept often commands a temporal resignification; queer is constantly pulled into another sphere of meaning, *vis-à-vis* the hegemonic frame.

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