



TOWARDS CHRONOTOPIA. THE DIMENSIONAL COMPLEXITY OF BAKHTIN'S CHRONOTOPE

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ABSTRACT: This article advocates a review of Bakhtin's chronotope. Whilst Bakhtin's general approach (promoting reflections on the investigation of a worldview put into narrative form) is fully acknowledged, doubt is cast upon his synthetic view of the complex relations that exist between the chronotope, the literary genre, and the individual narrative. Moving away from an understanding of the chronotope as the expression of the unity of novelistic texts, this article favours the study of the dimensional complexity that can exist in any literary narrative. The modified methodology is inspired by Bakhtin's own analysis, which suggests that three dimensions of the chronotope—*vertical*, *horizontal*, and *conventional*—can appear in various degrees and combinations in the literary text, both on the ideological and the poetic level. The brief commentaries on some classic literary texts suggest that the dimensional interplay, termed *chronotopia*, may tend towards a more monological (cohesive) or dialogical (complex) narrative.

KEYWORDS: Bakhtin, chronotope, literary genre, vertical, horizontal, conventional.

HACIA LA CRONOTOPÍA. LA COMPLEJIDAD DIMENSIONAL DEL CRONOTOPO DE BAJTÍN

RESUMEN: Este artículo propone una reevaluación del cronotopo de Bajtín. Si bien se reconoce plenamente su enfoque general (que promueve una reflexión sobre la asimilación de una cosmovisión a través de la narrativa), se cuestiona su visión sintética de las complejas relaciones existentes entre el cronotopo, el género literario y la narrativa individual. Partiendo de la concepción del cronotopo como expresión de la unidad de los textos de ficción, este artículo se centra en el estudio de la complejidad dimensional que puede existir en cualquier narrativa literaria. Esta metodología modificada se inspira en el propio análisis de Bajtín, que sugiere que tres dimensiones del cronotopo —*vertical*, *horizontal* y *convencional*— pueden manifestarse de diversas maneras en el texto literario, tanto ideológica como poéticamente. Breves comentarios sobre algunas narrativas clásicas sugieren que la interacción dimensional,

denominada *cronotopía*, podría tender hacia una narrativa más monológica (cohesiva) o dialógica (compleja).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Bajtín, cronotopo, género literario, vertical, horizontal, convencional.

POUR UNE ÉTUDE DE LA CHRONOTOPIE. LA COMPLEXITÉ DIMENSIONNELLE DU CHRONOTOPE DE BAKHTINE

RÉSUMÉ : Cet article propose une réévaluation du chronotopos de Bakhtine. Si l'approche générale de Bakhtine (qui promeut une réflexion sur l'assimilation par le récit d'une vision du monde) est pleinement reconnue, sa vision synthétique des relations complexes qui existent entre le chronotopos, le genre littéraire et le récit individuel est mise en doute. Partant de la conception du chronotopos comme expression de l'unité des textes romanesques, cet article privilégie l'étude de la complexité dimensionnelle qui peut exister dans tout récit littéraire. Cette méthodologie modifiée s'inspire de l'analyse propre de Bakhtine, qui suggère que trois dimensions du chronotopos – verticale, horizontale et conventionnelle – peuvent apparaître de manières diverses dans le texte littéraire, tant sur le plan idéologique que poétique. Les brefs commentaires sur quelques récits classiques suggèrent que l'interaction dimensionnelle, appelée *chronotopie*, pourrait tendre vers un récit plus monologique (cohésif) ou plus dialogique (complexe).

MOTS CLÉS : Bakhtine, chronotopos, genre littéraire, vertical, horizontal, conventionnel.

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1. Introduction

The chronotope is a powerful concept that encompasses the worldview shaped by the poetics of the text, understood through the interconnection between time and space.¹ For Bakhtin, this notion is closely linked to literary genres, as he believes that every genre tends to express a particular worldview through its formal characteristics: “Bakhtin’s assessment of narrative genres (...) underscores the cognitive functionality of literary genres; the belief (...) that fixed poetic and narrative structures should be understood as means of storing and conveying forms of human experience and knowledge”, state Bemong and Borghart (2010: 8). The study of literary texts then primarily becomes a question of identifying and understanding generic features in the

¹ Bemong et al. (eds.) (2010) offer the best overview of the theoretical implications of the chronotope.

individual text, which together form its unity, and especially those belonging to the novel genre. For my part, I am more interested in the chronotope's capacity for exploring individual texts than in defining their generic representativity or establishing their presupposed unity. Re-examining Bakhtin's essay on the chronotope, I will distinguish three dimensions—implicitly developed by Bakhtin himself but never explicitly categorised as such—that seem to inform all chronotopic variations: the *vertical*, the *horizontal*, and the *conventional*.² By way of various examples, I will suggest how one may invest these dimensions in what I propose to call “chronotopia”, a neologism that designates the distribution of chronotopic dimensions that can exist in a literary text, both with regard to its thematic content and its composition.

2. Presentation of Bakhtin's chronotope

Due to its somewhat deceptive etymology (i.e. time-place), the chronotope is sometimes believed to designate simply the setting of the literary work or the importance of a place for the plot. This confusion is understandable, as Bakhtin (1981: 84) introduces the chronotope in very general terms: “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature”. This definition only indirectly indicates how he intends to use the notion in the many analyses to follow. Reading the essay, it becomes clearer that the chronotope does not concern a mere semiotic study of space and time, nor even the inseparable connection between space and time in a narrative as such, but rather space-time as the fundamental parameter through which existence as a whole is conceived and the narrative is shaped into an aesthetic unity.

For Bakhtin, the chronotope has a triple function: *ideological*, *poetic*, and *generic*.³ With regard to the first function, Bakhtin uses the notion of the chronotope to encapsulate a historically specific societal conception of human existence as seen through the parameters of space and time. “The specific forms into which a culture's ideas about time-space materialize Bakhtin calls chronotopes”, affirms one of the leading Bakhtin scholars, Holquist (1982: 8). The link to the given historical reality is crucial. In a footnote, Bakhtin comments on Kant, insisting on the concretisation of the chronotope in actual reality (whereas for Kant, space and time are categories

² Of these three terms, only the first two are actually present in Bakhtin's (1981) essay: *horizontal/horizontality* (148, 157, 158) and *vertical/verticality* (148, 156, 157).

³ I use the term *ideological* very broadly to refer to the content-bound part of the chronotope. The term covers all cognitive comprehension of the world (politics, morals, philosophy, religious beliefs, etc.).

necessary for understanding and structuring the world as such, not means for forming or expressing a certain conception of society, history, or life). Aesthetic form assimilates a current worldview according to its inherent laws: “Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)”, says Bakhtin (1981: 253).

This relation to the actual reality is necessarily articulated in the literary text in such a way as to create a signifying totality, as the chronotope forms “a literary work’s artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality” (Bakhtin, 1981: 243). This unity can encompass a wide range of visions, opinions, habits, themes, or motifs related to the actual chronotope of a specific world, as the chronotope “determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature” (Bakhtin, 1981: 85). It is thus entirely possible for Bakhtin to integrate into his analysis the theme of eating in Rabelais’ works, insights through metamorphosis in the adventure novel of ordinary life, the presence of magic and mystery in chivalric romances or the undermining of feudal society by the figure of the fool in medieval works, as well as to raise multiple questions about our vision of the world, actual life, work, popular culture, and so on.

Besides being the expression of an already existing worldview assimilated by the narrative discourse, the chronotope also has a *poetic* (i.e. compositional) *function*, as it presents itself as “a formally constitutive category of literature” (Bakhtin, 1981: 84). The spatial and temporal relationships open up possibilities for the plot, offering diverse and dynamic settings, sceneries, patterns, and scenarios to exploit. The chronotopic motifs become “organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events,” making them “the place where the knots of narrative are tied and untied” (Bakhtin, 1981: 250). This poetic function should not be understood in a strictly structuralist sense. The famous motifs analysed by Bakhtin (such as the road, the castle, the threshold, or the drawing-room) do not exist in a conceptual vacuum. They should not be seen as abstract, absolute entities with an unchangeable scope or signification, but as historically defined potentials, always invested in the contexts that constitute their conceptual framework. Scholz (1998: 164) concludes rightly that “Bakhtinian chronotope research (...) aims (...) at an historical poetics”. Lanser and Rimmon-Kenan (2022) also show in their article on the chronotope that all “formalist” features are subject to diachronic change.⁴

⁴ For an extensive overview of *diachronic narratology*, in which identifiable, objective features are primarily understood in relation to their use in a particular context, see Hühn, Pier, and Schmid (eds.) (2023).

This dual function of the chronotope—reflecting a worldview (ideological function) and organising the narrative (poetic function)—fits well into Bakhtin's entire approach to literature. In his 1924 essay “The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art”, Bakhtin (1981) criticises the formalist school, stating that literature, like language, must be understood through an *architectonic* approach, as a sociohistorically grounded form of discourse in which semiotic systems meet reality. The theorisation of the chronotope correlates with this view of literature, as it designates a form that cannot be approached in a purely materialistic way but is intrinsically related to a profound and complex context of human action, experience, and reflection. In short, a chronotope is not merely a perspective, a theme, a motif, a narrative element, or a narrative scheme; it embraces thematic depth as well as poetic configurations of the narrative.⁵

Finally, the *generic orientation* of the chronotope is fundamental for Bakhtin (1981: 85), as the chronotope “defines genre and generic distinctions”. Bakhtin focuses almost exclusively on the novel genre. He starts by displaying three ancient genres that form the basis for the novelistic variations up to at least the eighteenth century: the adventure novel of ordeals, the adventure novel of ordinary life, and biographical texts (as Bakhtin deals only with the novel, he considers these genres to be a kind of proto-novels; the common feature of all texts analysed, however, is their long narrative format). Bakhtin identifies an overarching chronotope for every novelistic variety: “the chronotope of the Greek romance”, “the chronotope of the everyday-adventure novel”, etc. The chronotope presents itself as the expression of the particular worldview that a certain genre is bound to articulate through the unity of the text. As an example, one could mention the rather categorical way in which Bakhtin (1981: 234) characterises the *Bildungsroman*: “(...) the issue is primarily one of overturning and demolishing the world view and psychology of the idyll, which proved increasingly inadequate to the new capitalist world”. The individual text can fit into a given generic form, be a mixture of different genres, or distance itself from a genre. But it is always categorised according to its genericity, and thus to its conformity with what is seen as a coherent representation of a particular worldview.

This implies that the narrative use of motifs coloured by the fundamental parameter of time interconnected with space, even though it is subsumed under the generic essence of the text, is interpreted in relation to the specific historic relation that exists between the represented (i.e. semiotic) chronotope and the actual (i.e.

⁵ Nonetheless, some studies on the chronotope stress its ideological function (as in the fine study of the philosophy of human action and experience by Steinby, 2013), others explore mainly its poetic function (as Lanser and Rimmon-Kenan, 2022, who try to merge the chronotope with classical narratology).

referential) chronotope. However, Bakhtin (1981: 85) observes that some literary forms become fixed: “generic forms, at first productive, were then reinforced by tradition; in their subsequent development they continued stubbornly to exist, up to and beyond the point at which they had lost any meaning that was productive in actuality or adequate to later historical situations”. He calls this *sedimentation*, a term that designates the stagnation of an aesthetic form reused in a later context, even though it is no longer directly generated by the historical context in question. Bakhtin (1981: 252) also acknowledges the possibility of a wide range of relations between the chronotopes in the same narrative, whether they are sedimented or not: “Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships”.

To sum up, with the notion of the chronotope, Bakhtin stresses the importance of reflecting upon literary form and its relation with reality through various epochs, pointing to what literature makes of a society- and time-bound worldview within its own poetic framework. Within this broad methodological frame, he uses the term chronotope in a multipurpose way. The notion refers to the actual worldview already present in society. This *referential* chronotope is what Mitterand (1990) calls the “cultural” level of the chronotope. Subsequently, Bakhtin uses the same term for the worldview that is assimilated and expressed by and through the narrative, which then in fact becomes a *semiotic* chronotope. In the narrative, the (semiotic) chronotope appears on different levels. Every genre expresses its own *generic* or *subgeneric* chronotope, through which the individual narrative is apprehended. Bakhtin (1981: 251) is also discussing *minor* chronotopes, as particular motifs (e.g. the road) and themes (e.g. chance), which are present in different subgenres and genres, and even “provide the basis for distinguishing generic types”.

Given this generous and rather vague use of the notion of the chronotope, it is not surprising that Bakhtinian scholars have attempted to clarify its nature. Mitterand (1990) suggests that one may split the chronotope into “culture”, “genre”, “subgenre”, “text”, “theme”, and “aspect”; Bemong and Borghart (2010) opt for “plotspace”, “generic”, “major”, “minor”, and “micro” as chronotopic levels. Keunen (2000) reformulates the binary distinction between major and minor chronotopes from a cognitive perspective, linking genological aspects (major chronotopes) to textual superstructures and thematic aspects (minor chronotopes) to action schemata.

These are all fruitful categorisations that may help us resolve the problem pointed out by Pushkin (2017: 439): “Bakhtin is addressing the issue of potential excessive diversity with establishment of ‘the major chronotopes, those are most fundamental and wideranging’ (...), however, which ones are the major ones and

where exactly their borders are, what they include, is left to Bakhtin to decide". In order to introduce my dimensional approach, I will proceed differently. Rather than accepting Bakhtin's generic framework and distinguishing possible extensions of the chronotope (macro, micro, etc.), I will articulate a critical view on his theorisation in order to establish a modified approach based on the dimensions that exist within Bakhtin's generic chronotopes. In doing so, I retain Bakhtin's view of the ideological and poetic function of the chronotope, as opposed to an exclusively thematic or formal approach which does not do full justice to this very concept. Following Bakhtin, I also stress the coexistence of different kinds of chronotopes.

3. Revaluation of Bakhtin's chronotope

Although closely following Bakhtin's brilliant analysis, my main concern about his theoretical framework is that he does not provide a clearly defined methodology that would allow his claims to be systematically tested—however stimulating they may be. I am therefore reluctant to embrace Bakhtin's often categorical mode of theorisation when it comes to the multiple relations that might exist between the historical context, the cultural heritage, the current worldview, the literary genres, and the consequent shaping of literary forms through time. As Pushkin (2017: 357) puts it, "the holistic vision is at the same time the greatest strength and weakness of Bakhtin's theory". This is not to deny the important relations that necessarily exist with external parameters, but rather to establish, as a first methodological principle, that the *relations between text and various contexts should be conceived as less absolute* than they appear in Bakhtin's essay.

Indeed, it is far from clear how to understand the fact that a certain genre expresses the actual reality. If the worldview of a certain epoch is condensed into a chronotope which is then assimilated to a specific genre, how can the same epoch develop a multitude of genres? Nor is it clear which mechanism leads to the creation of a genre. As Bemong and Borghart (2010: 7) point out, "not every dominant chronotope will generate a particular literary genre". There is also a certain inconsistency between Bakhtin's general claim concerning the generative mechanisms of the chronotope and the sedimentation of literary traditions. The persistence of supposedly inadequate forms highlights what Pushkin (2017: 441) rightly calls "double standards of continuity versus contemporarity" in Bakhtin's theorisation. How can the sedimentation of a certain chronotope be theoretically accounted for if assimilating the current worldview is indeed the essence of the chronotope? As a second methodological principle, it seems necessary to *loosen Bakhtin's categorical view of generating mechanisms between reality and fiction*.

The general methodological flaws in Bakhtin's essay become especially apparent with regard to the question of literary genres. First of all, Bakhtin never really discusses what constitutes a genre. In addition, although beginning with genres is a helpful way to navigate the multitude of literary texts—since this procedure allows many features common to a range of texts to be placed under a single umbrella—such an approach runs the risk of simplifying any narrative that does not fit into the general scheme employed. For example, even the most realistic novel may show traces of a unrealistic treatment of time and space or refer in some way to a timeless metaphysics informing a specific reality, no matter how meticulously the realistic discourse concretises the time and space of the actual reality represented in the storyworld. How many non-realistic “minor” (or even major) chronotopes, present to whatever extent in the discourse, can a realistic novel include and still be the expression of its generic chronotope? My third methodological principle is therefore to *prioritise the individuality of the text* rather than seeing its essence in its genericity. In other words, I conceive the text neither as the coherent and organic representation of a generic model, nor as a patchwork of different generic models.

Naturally linked to this issue is Bakhtin's focus on the novel genre. This predilection is a well-known Bakhtinian feature: the modern novel, from the *Bildungsroman* onwards, appears in his work as a sort of superior, fully achieved form that presents a free character in a complex world, in which both the character and the society are susceptible to change. This corresponds to “the chronotope of humanness,” as Morson (2010) eloquently entitles his enlightening study on Dostoevsky. The modern novel is in this sense a genre that could exist only by virtue of a non-transcendent society that lends its primary importance to the evolution of man as understood in his relation to sociohistorical reality. For Bakhtin, only this extended narrative format is fully capable of expressing a worldview (as indicated by the title of his essay: “Forms of time and chronotope in the novel”). But he also mentions other genres in passing, as “the chronotope of theatrical space” (Bakhtin, 1981: 163), “the chronotope of the theatre” (166), or “the chronotope of storytelling in traditional tales” (254).⁶ Given that there are no methodological contraindications for extending the scope of the chronotope, and that any literary text might assimilate and shape conceptions of our existence filtered by spatiotemporal parameters, a fourth principle is to *extend the application of the chronotope to other literary genres*.

⁶ He also states in his final observations (written long after the initial essay) that “any and every literary image is chronotopic” (Bakhtin, 1981: 251). In fact, Bakhtin goes so far as to say that everything is chronotopic, from the outside world to the single word, a claim that would render the notion so general as to become useless.

These four principles underline the *dimensional* methodology of the chronotope that I wish to advocate. That is, I suggest in the following section to extract three dimensions that together embrace Bakhtin's thinking about the chronotope: the *vertical*, the *horizontal*, and the *conventional*. This kind of approach is rather uncommon, but at least two inspiring ideas exist in Bakhtin scholarship: the identification of *synchronic* and *diachronic* relations by Zoran (1984), and the distinction between *centripetal* (stabilising, collective) and *centrifugal* (fragmental, idiosyncratic) forces suggested by Ladin (2010). Rather than circumscribing the chronotope into entities on different levels (macro, minor, micro, etc.), their originality lies in the cut through the notion of the chronotope itself. This is also the methodological principle followed in this essay. These alternative approaches, mine included, should be seen as complementary (and by no means as opposed) to the hierarchical approaches by Mitterand (1990) and Bemong and Borghart (2010).

4. Chronotopic dimensions

The *vertical dimension* is expressed in Bakhtin's analysis of certain medieval works. Within this dimension, concrete space and time are governed by a superior system of values belonging to a parallel world that projects meaning and purpose into the actual world: "Here the influence of the medieval, other-worldly, vertical axis is extremely strong. The entire spatial and temporal world is subject to symbolic interpretation", says Bakhtin (1981: 156) about *Le Roman de la Rose* and the *Divina commedia*. In this latter work in particular, life on earth is meaningful only through its relation to eternal life: the Divine overrides the goings-on of everyday existence through the powers of the Final Judgment and Eternal Life. As societies are conceived as concrete variations appearing and disappearing along an eschatological timeline, the lessons learned in the assimilated real world are universally applicable: "Everything that on earth is divided by time, here, in this verticality, coalesces into eternity, into pure simultaneous coexistence", according to Bakhtin (1981: 157). Societies may change, but they remain subject to the same higher logic and ethical standards: "Should these vertical structurings turn out as well to be other-worldly, idealistic, eternal, outside time, then this extratemporal and eternal quality is perceived as something simultaneous with a given moment in the present" (Bakhtin 1981: 148).

The *horizontal dimension* is opposed to verticality. Associated with the adventure novel of ordinary life, it grows stronger from the Renaissance onwards. Here the conception of life, society, and individuals primarily concerns and applies to the specific time-space depicted in the narrative. There is no ultimate meaning or regulation beyond what is human and societal: the real world is sufficient and governed by its own laws. The storyworld is portrayed such that individuals and

societies evolve through an extended experience of historical time and in constant dialogue with the societal context. Earthly life matters for its own sake and develops by its own standards, whether it unfolds in the public or the private sphere, just as the whole society evolves for reasons of its own (i. e. not through vertical, transcendental forces). The story portrays lifelike characters who are able to evolve through their experiences in real time and in a real place—becoming someone that they were not before, something that no higher dimension imposes. The representation of characters becomes less monological and less construed, leaving them to make their own choices: “The *primary initiative*, therefore, belongs to *the hero himself* and to his own *personality*,” states Bakhtin (1981:116) already in his chapter on the adventure novel of everyday life. In this way, the individual becomes the hero of his own destiny in a real world.

This presentation of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of narrative representation should be understood in the light of the general aim of this essay, which is to modify Bakhtin’s organic approach to the chronotope while still following his analysis. As Bakhtin (1981: 158) himself explains, the vertical and the horizontal can coexist, as in the *Divina commedia*:

The vertical (...) compresses within itself the horizontal, which powerfully thrusts itself forward. There is a contradiction, an antagonism between the form-generating principle of the whole and the historical and temporal form of its separate parts. The form of the whole wins out.

The clash between the chronotopes is resolved by Bakhtin in a way that reminds us of the formalist use of the *dominant*.⁷ This means, in Dante’s case, that the linear movement of life is not fully absent but scaled down:

Each image is full of horizontal potential, and therefore strains with the whole of its being toward participation in historical events—toward participation in a temporal-historical chronotope. But the artist’s powerful will condemns it to an eternal and immobile place on the extratemporal vertical axis (Bakhtin, 1981: 157).

The specific life lived thus corresponds to an atemporal value: the eternal truth (the vertical dimension) is superior to and transcends the actual reality depicted (the horizontal dimension). In other words, different worldviews (the ideological function

⁷ The notion of the *dominant* is most accurately explained by Jakobson (1978) as the major element that determines the configuration of the hierarchically subsumed elements in the narrative. Even though Bakhtin criticises the formalists, he elaborates nonetheless an approach to the chronotope that clearly identifies dominant features.

of the chronotope) can coexist in a narrative, and it is possible to identify them, as does Bakhtin in this passage, without tying them to generic models.

To this complexity it seems possible to add a third dimension: the *conventional*. This dimension might at first sight seem incompatible with Bakhtin's general framework. It should logically be absent from a theorisation where the literary chronotope assimilates the worldview of a given, actual reality. Consequently, Bakhtin does not explicitly theorise a conventional dimension. But his analysis nonetheless makes room for identifying such a dimension. Firstly, he describes the sedimentation of literary forms: motifs belonging to traditional genres continue to be used, even though they do not spring from the actual reality's worldview or are imposed by a vertical transcendental power. Secondly, he characterises certain genres without insisting on either the horizontal or the vertical dimension. This latter feature is particularly visible in his presentation of the adventure novel of ordeals: "All the aspects of the novel (...) are, without exception, in no way new", declares Bakhtin (1981: 88). This is another way of saying that this genre does not primarily assimilate actual reality. Consequently, Bakhtin (1981: 110) presents the adventure novel of ordeals as the most abstract of all genres:

In general, the homogenization of all that is heterogeneous in a Greek romance, a homogenization that results in a huge, almost encyclopaedic genre, is achieved only at the cost of the most extreme abstraction, schematization and a denuding of all that is concrete and merely local.

To illustrate this, Bakhtin (1981: 100) shows that events may occur anywhere or at any time as long as the setting (rather than the development of character) drives the plot forward: "For a shipwreck one must have a sea, but which particular sea (in the geographical and historical sense) makes no difference at all". Furthermore, in this kind of story, biographical time does not exist: the hero remains the same after having re-established order by his actions, without experiencing the metamorphosis or evolution which is so important in the horizontal dimension. Also, there is no profound horizontal analysis of individuals, people, society, or life: "Greek adventure-time lacks any natural, everyday cyclicity—such as might have introduced into it a temporal order and indices on a human scale" (Bakhtin 1981: 91). In other words, the horizontal dimension is largely absent.

As for the vertical dimension, transcendental forces may well be present in the adventure novel of ordeals, but they play an auxiliary role rather than representing a developed world view. While the adventure is certainly sometimes *conducted* by transcendental forces like chance or the will of the gods, it does not serve as an *illustration* for these values. There is no philosophy of the world or existence as such,

apart from the depiction of strong individuals with fixed identity who are able to overcome crises or difficulties in order to achieve their aims and confirm their identity. The adventure follows a reversible sequence of events in which the plot obeys its own fictional laws, triggered by coincidences, encounters, chance, or luck. It is in this sense that we may speak of a conventional dimension of the chronotope: the story seems to unfold following its own logic. It is neither sufficiently anchored in the sociohistorical (horizontal) world nor in the transcendental (vertical) world; it displays neither a biographical or a historical (horizontal) time-space, nor an eternal (vertical) time-space. After all, is it not this very conventionality that permits Bakhtin to affirm that the adventure novel remained more or less intact up to the twentieth century (with the difference that he speaks of sedimentation and abstraction, and not of a conventional dimension)?

The dimensional approach of the chronotope, briefly outlined above, points to various aspects of the text rather than allowing the notion of the chronotope to serve as a final, synthetic, generic notion. As already mentioned, Bakhtin also cites the possibility of seeing combined chronotopes in an individual text. However, in his view, a complex narrative is seen as a blend of novelistic genres. This reduces the individuality of the text to a combination of overarching categories; it also makes applying the chronotope to other genres more awkward.⁸ In order to point to the inherent dimensions of the narrative, whether they appear in a novel, a short story, or another narrative form, I suggest forming the notion of *chronotopia*.⁹ Obviously inspired by Bakhtin's *heteroglossia*, this neologism stresses the possible dimensional complexity of the narrative (rather than to consider the narrative in the light of its conformity with a generic chronotope or a combination of subgeneric chronotopes). To illustrate different variations of chronotopia and put this idea into practice, I will briefly highlight the interplay of some chronotopic dimensions in a few well-known works. As indicated by the title ("Towards chronotopia"), the following section is to be seen primarily as a methodological suggestion that needs to be developed and confirmed by deeper and more detailed studies.

⁸ Although various studies exist on the chronotope in other genres or even in other domains—such as tourism (Spode, 2010), organisation theory (Schultz et al., 2012), or didactics (Ritella, Rajala and Renshaw, 2021)—these studies rarely follow Bakhtin thoroughly, as they are often limited to the mere study of space and time separately, and without providing any considerations on the ideological function of the chronotope.

⁹ It seems to me that the term "chronotopia" is preferable to the term "heterochronic" suggested by Falconer (2010), as it conserves both the spatial and temporal dimensions and at the same time suggests an expansion of the notion. It is also more malleable than Pechey's (1998) term "chronotopicity", which is designed to describe the richness of the novel form.

5. Towards *chronotopia*

Up to this point, I have treated the poetic and the ideological functions of the chronotope as two sides of a paper (to borrow Saussure's metaphor for the relation between the signifier and the signified). In a narrative text where the chronotopic motifs provide a metonymic, referential sequence of events anchored in—and explained by—the circumstances in a particular historical time, one is likely to find a worldview concerning the values and implications of the actions that take place in the reality that governs the plot. In other words, one can identify a narrative where the poetic and the ideological functions are cohesive. This is particularly evident in the *Bildungsroman* and the realist novel, where these both functions are predominantly horizontal. These kinds of texts, where the worldview and the organisation of the narrative closely cohere, may be characterised as predominantly *monological*.

This contrasts with texts that I would describe as principally *dialogical*, that is, texts in which there is a tension between the dimensions of the chronotope, either on the ideological or poetic level.¹⁰ As already shown, this is the case in the *Divina commedia*, where two ways of seeing earthly life are confronted on the ideological level. Even if the timeless, vertical dimension prevails, it is challenged by the conceptions of the horizontal, time-bound unfolding of events in the profane world. Another illustrative example of a dialogical narrative is the fantastic genre, which displays two possible worldviews, following the well-known definition of the fantastic genre as a narrative that induces a continuous hesitation in the reader's perception of the reality represented, as suggested by Todorov (1973). It is not so much a conflict between earthly (horizontal) and eternal (vertical) life as in the *Divina commedia*, but rather a clash between two horizontal systems that each promotes a certain governing of the real world: either the world is ruled by known and explainable forces, or by yet unknown ones.

There are also stories that combine different dimensions on the poetic level—that is how space and time organise the story. This is the case in Balzac's short novel *Le Colonel Chabert*. The story is predominantly organised horizontally, in accordance with the laws of the real world. However, Balzac inserts a fictional *topos* into the logical unfolding of events. The colonel is buried alive but manages to escape. He

¹⁰ The terms *monological* and *dialogical* have been used in a chronotopic context by Keunen (2011) in a completely different manner. He distinguishes between a straightforward linear plot, steadily marching towards the end (monological), and a plot that presents a number of key moments which have to be understood in regard to one another (dialogical). It is thus a division that focalises on two different poetic configurations of the narrative.

emerges from the ground without clothes, through a narrow opening. The scene, which adopts the form of a classical catabasis, has an obvious symbolic function in the narrative: it is the rebirth of the Napoleonic colonel, returning to life in the Bourbon Restoration. But Balzac is far from providing a fully satisfactory explanation of how this event could have occurred in the real life that constitutes the setting of the story. In other words, the horizontal poetic function is not fully able to justify the insertion of the scene. The result is a coexistence of distinct poetic chronotopes. The scene constitutes a sort of *conventional hiatus*, in which we find the reutilisation of a *topos* set against the background of the *horizontal emplotment* that otherwise informs the text.

Some texts might also show a tension between the composition (poetic function) and the overall message (ideological function) of the narrative. An example can be found in the philosophical novel *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus. The novel clearly follows a horizontal narrative logic. The story is perfectly transposable into a metonymic pattern of linearity and causality: mother's death, some days off from work, the funeral, mourning, travelling back, meeting a girl, back to work, meeting the neighbour, and so forth. Camus does introduce vertical aspects such as the symbolic visit of the priest in the prison, but this is nonetheless justified by horizontal logic, as a priest should come and visit a prisoner condemned to death. The adventure thus mainly unfolds according to a referential logic. It is significant that when Meursault blames the sun for the murder, and thus introduces a vertical logic (following the idea that transcendental forces were governing him) into the horizontal unfolding of events, he provokes the laughter of the audience.

However, the message connected with life—the meaning of life, of what life is and should or could be—is by no means the expression of a specific spatiotemporal reality or decipherable through an understanding of the particular society depicted. The abstract, metaphysical dimension embraces the horizontal unfolding of events and imposes its message, which ultimately is independent of actual reality. If one were to perform what Genette (1997) calls a “diegetic transposition”, setting the action in another time and place, the lesson learned would be the same, even though some motifs might change (just as existences lived in different epochs and under different circumstances end up in the same circle of Hell in Dante's work, as they are variations on one and the same vertical scale). In other words, what Camus states about the meaning of life is vertical, not bound to context. *L'Étranger* is therefore an example of a narrative that predominantly displays *horizontal emplotment* (the action unfolds according to metonymic and referential logic anchored in a detailed reality) but conveys a *vertical worldview* (the story illustrates what life is independently of the referential space and time represented).

Another famous philosophical story, Voltaire's *Candide*, displays a different distribution of the chronotope. The poetic chronotope is clearly *conventional*, as the composition is very close to that of the adventure novel, although it is exaggerated and parodied. While it is true that the characters live in and visit many real places (with some exceptions, like the imaginary castle in the first chapter or El Dorado), these places are only vaguely described, and the plot is never driven by specific sociohistorical factors, although real events are sometimes alluded to. Real space and time are constantly overturned by Voltaire, who presents a tale where death can easily be erased (a man burned to death is not in fact dead, etc.) and where the characters can set out for—or be transported to—any destination for as long as they wish. By contrast, the worldview conceived through the interconnection between time and space, and assimilated by the aesthetic form, is clearly *horizontal*. The final sentence illustrates this admirably: “we must cultivate our garden.” That is, humankind must work, produce, develop, grow, and evolve within the frame of earthly life, and with regard to that very life. Earthly life is what lends existential meaning to the characters. As a late parallel to Rabelais, Voltaire illustrates how to replace the *vertical* dimension (society necessarily structured by God-given powers and ecclesiastic norms) by *horizontal* values (free humans working towards change) on the ideological level of the text.

6. Final remarks

According to Bakhtin, the nature of the chronotope is threefold: it assimilates a worldview (ideological function), it organises the narrative (poetic function), and it crystallises its unity (generic function). While still referring to Bakhtin's analysis and subscribing to his architectonic standpoint with regard to literary analysis, the ambition of the present study has been to downplay cultural and generic categorisations in order to focus on the configuration of the text as such. The dimensional approach highlights the horizontality, the verticality, and the conventionality of the chronotopic features. By acknowledging the co-existence of these dimensions—developed through the ideological (which conveys a worldview) and the poetic (which organises the narrative) functions of the chronotope—it becomes possible to investigate the *chronotopia* of the individual text, that is the chronotopic interplay within the text as well as with reality, without having to decide to what extent the text adheres to a certain genre or is a mixture of several genres. This approach may facilitate the study of the chronotope in genres other than the novel, in contrast to Bakhtin who mainly comments on novelistic genres and thus describes novelistic chronotopes.

I have suggested naming *monological chronotopia* the common case in which the ideological and the poetic functions of the chronotope display the same dominant dimension—that is when the nature of the worldview closely correlates with the logical organisation of the narrative. By contrast, *dialogical chronotopia* appears when different dimensions operate in the same narrative. Through some roughly sketched comments on a few literary works, I have outlined some possible clashes on the ideological level (as in the *Divina commedia*, where the achievements in earthly life associated with the horizontal dimension are challenged by transcendental vertical values), on the poetic level (as in *Le Colonel Chabert*, where the horizontal realist composition is momentarily replaced by conventional composition), and finally between the ideological and the poetic level (as in *L'Étranger*, where the timeless, vertical message is solidly anchored in a detailed sociohistorical horizontal setting).

Terminology aside, the main rationale of this study is that underscoring the potential ideological and poetic complexity in literary texts can lead to a reappraisal of the theoretical status of the chronotope. While still drawing on Bakhtin's analysis, the dimensional approach naturally opens the study of chronotopia in any narrative genre. This approach loosens the theoretical constraints traditionally associated with the notion of the chronotope from its generic organicity and its status as an assimilated worldview of an actual reality, as well as from its novelistic bounds, making future uses of Bakhtin's ground-breaking notion conform more closely to his final thoughts on the multi-layered nature of the chronotope.

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