Clashing and Hybridizing Chronotopes in *Zero K*: Between Speculative Transcendence and Historical Immanence

Aldo Baratta

Sapienza University of Rome

Abstract – According to Bakhtin, chronotope is a device involved in structuring the plot, as an organizational center around which the sense of the text is condensed through an intersection between topology and chronology. Furthermore, spatiotemporality can also determine the genre of the literary work itself. This is particularly evident in *Zero K* (2016) by Don DeLillo, a novel divided into two distinct sections set in two antinomic chronotopes, one of transcendence and one of immanence. Consequently, the text is similarly divided into two different narrative genres: one related to the utopian and catastrophic novel, where the environmental dimension is central; and the other related to the urban and sociopolitical novel, where the main themes concern war, family, love, etc. The protagonist, Jeffrey Lockhart, is a sort of chronotopic *Wandersmann* who walks through both textual sections mixing the two worlds represented and the relative space-times and genres. This paper aims to investigate the chronotopic architecture of *Zero K* through a close reading capable of highlighting the hybridization between different spaces and times and thus between different literary genres – or, as it would be more correct to say, modes.

Keywords – Chronotope; Don DeLillo; *Zero K*; Environmental Disaster; Literary Genre.

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Sapienza University of Rome

1. New Chronotopes and New Genres to Tell the Unexpected

The chronotope is not just a mere hermeneutic support, a superficial coefficient of the text to be used solely as an interpretative opportunity; on the contrary, it is a nuclear part of it since it plays a structuring role in relation to the plot. As Bakhtin points out: "They are the organizational centers of the main plot events of the novel. In the chronotope the knots of the plot are tied and untied" (250). Spacetime not only delimits the background of the story, but also the interweaving of situations, the actions of the characters, the movement of the tale itself; the anatomy of the text depends on the chronotopes it hosts. This internal operativity derives primarily from the association between the chronotope and the literary genre, both factors constituting the cornerstone of a text. According to Bakhtin, "chronotope in literature has an intrinsic generic significance. It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions" (84-5); the inclusion in a certain genre – that is, the label applicable to literary works based on their content and formal features – is ratified by a specific spatiotemporal connotation, by the space and time staged.

The chronotope thus enters into a broader theoretical discussion inherent to the status of the literary genre. According to Medvedev, the mistake of the first Formalists was to confine the genre to an exclusively internal dimension, as a "certain constant, specific grouping of devices with a defined dominant" (129). On the contrary, the genre, as a microscopic transcription of reality according to a narrative sense, is also relevant to the historical-social and external context of the work, so much so that "The artist must learn to see reality with the eyes of the genre" (134). Following Medvedev, there is a symbiotic relationship between reality and genre revolving around the exchange of information: "Genre appraises reality and reality clarifies genre" (136). A generic configuration frames the reality that the work represents according to specific semiotic trajectories, and those same trajectories can be used as an epistemological tool to understand a given historical moment. For example, as illustrated by Moretti in *The Way of the World* (1987), *Bildungsroman* is an essential genre for inspecting the development of bourgeois individualism (3-13). Bakhtin carries on this theoretical inclination as he inserts the genre among five elements characterizing the literary work – together with the author's profession, social class, age and geographical origin – all of which are marked by a high extrinsic degree rather than bearing on the interiority of the text (288). Because of their bond, the chronotope also serves a function as a semiotic translator of reality: it is a narrative mechanism that transfers the world into a story, which transposes a certain portion of reality – understood first and foremost as a spacetime, as the intersection between a spatial contingency and a temporal contingency – into fictional matter. The chronotope is a textual spacetime that mirrors an extratextual spacetime. The spatialities and temporalities of a work are not only peculiar to it; on the contrary, they reflect, through a more or less explicit fidelity, the spatial and temporal coordinates of the conjuncture in which the work was written. For this reason, the genre – which we can understand as a chronotope or a group of chronotopes crystallized and canonized as an archetype – sits alongside an accidental aesthetic-narrative

suggestion such as the author's biography: the time and space in which he lives shape the text as social class or age do.

The novel, more than any other narrative genre, has a strong chronotopic value because its story arises from the univocal connection between a time and a space. As written by Ghosh, "It is through the imposition of these boundaries, in time and space, that the world of a novel is created" (59); a given space must correspond to a given time. It was this spatiotemporal conformity that decreed the hegemony of the novel as an expression of bourgeois ideals of comfort, rationality, habitualness; a life is worth reporting when it respects a space-time paradigm, when it is coherent with its own time and space and can therefore become a prototype for all the others. In addition to making a given space and a given time convergent, the novel – starting from the bourgeois economizing consciousness that fuels it – has worked to parcel out spatiotemporally, in a "habit of mind that proceeded by creating discontinuities" (56) that Ghosh compared to the agrimensory practices of colonial and nation-state ideologies. In the novel, space and time are fractionated into single, autonomous units, into empirical categories which are easier to handle because they are cut out from the rest of temporality and spatiality: in this way, "each setting is particular to itself, its connections to the world beyond are inevitably made to recede" (59), as well "a setting usually requires a "period"; it is actualized within a certain time horizon" (59). This chronotopic subdivision contributes to the ordinariness with which the novel asseverates the bourgeois mentality: any episode alien to the everydayness of the here and now is externalized, downgraded to a peripheral and ignorable problem. This fragments the text into individual chronotopes that hardly interact with each other, in non-communicating times and spaces. As a direct consequence of these two chronotopic activities – one striving for congruity and the other for parcelization –, the novel has banished from its fictional jurisdiction the unexpected, that which is not likely to happen, which could subvert temporal and spatial expectations as a sudden or out of place event. Ghosh based his most famous work around this assumption: "Probability and the modern novel are in fact twins, born at about the same time, among the same people, under a shared star that destined them to work as vessels for the containment of the same kind of experience" (16). Any abnormal accident that could alter spatiotemporal fixity and subdivision would betray that bourgeois mathematical consciousness that the novel elevates to a universal episteme; if time and space do not coincide, or if one of the two bypasses its perimeters by mixing with further segments and generating unprecedented interconnections, the plot goes beyond the fence of exemplarity and customariness. For Ghosh, "human beings are intrinsically unable to prepare for rare events" (25), to accept the unexpected, because of the epistemic education imparted by the novel as an agglomeration of "unconscious patterns of thought – or 'common sense' – that gained ascendancy with a growing faith in 'the regularity of bourgeois life' "(25).

We therefore ask ourselves how chronotope and genre can manage a slippery reality, how fiction behaves when faced with an experience that has become chronotopically untranslatable due to an epistemic upheaval. In our present day, the climate crisis is for certain the most immanent and imminent of such upheavals, an event that is challenging our spatiotemporal approaches to reality; it is the unexpected *par excellence*, the great nemesis of bourgeois culture. What is happening to the environment forces us to rethink our spatiotemporality because it is based on scales different from the climatic ones: the ecological calamity demonstrates that the world is not our size, that human life can be neither a compass nor a clock. In turn, literature must revolutionize its own spatiotemporal categories by de-anthropocentring itself and inventing new chronotopes outside of a human center of gravity; traditional plots can no longer reproduce the world. But beyond the climate crisis there are other epistemic upheavals that urge us to adjust our space-time parameters, such as the progressive bellicization of international relations or the afflictions inflicted by the capitalist socioeconomic system. All

these unexpected events are such because they contradict the fractionation and coincidence between spatiality and temporality claimed by the bourgeois; they are subterraneously concatenated phenomena, played out on relationships between different and distant times and spaces that are almost invisible on the surface.

It is therefore necessary to work on the very structure of the novel, on its chronotopic silhouette which – as seen before – is also a generic silhouette, dealing with imaginative and content-formal taxonomies. In other words, it is necessary to act so that the novel, a narrative form devoted to chronotopic purity, welcomes within itself multiple chronotopes and genres, allowing for a spatiotemporal framework as hybrid and interconnected as hybrid and interconnected are our surroundings and the various unprecedented contingencies that threaten them – environmental disasters, economic-political oppressions, senseless wars.

If the chronotope becomes a fluid, hybrid narrative mechanism, then perhaps the genre should also undergo the same process of creolization – or perhaps, we should just stop using genre as a form of categorization. As suggested by Ceserani (130-5) and Bertoni (211-30), it is necessary to replace the concept of literary genre with that of "mode", that is, a less sclerotic and more mobile categorization criterion of narrative imagery. Mostly for marketing reasons such as product transparency, a novel can generally belong to a single genre but can contain various modes within itself: it can be tragic as well as comic, realistic as well as fantastic; a text identifiable as crime fiction can host a melodramatic pull, a historical novel can contemplate epic drives. The novel is a spurious, "cannibal" (Woolf 224) genre, in some ways an "anti-genre" (Bertoni 221, my translation): it must contain multiple space-times and therefore multiple genres – or multiple modes.

Fiction must be rhizomatic, plural, to correctly describe the imbalances of the Anthropocene; only a fluid chronotopic framework can tell our present, as a result of the interweaving between infinite spatialities and temporalities that go far beyond human perspective.

2. *Zero K*: A Chronotopic Dichotomy

Zero K (2016), Don DeLillo's second last published work, lends itself well to a discussion around these topics, as it is a text with a high chronotopic awareness, transparent in highlighting its spatiotemporal mechanisms, that is difficult to categorize in a single genre, rather containing different modes within itself. Here we therefore choose to focus on a chronotopic analysis,[1] entrusting the other themes of the novel – two above all: language and biogenetics – to pre-existing studies.[2]

The novel is built on an orderly and symmetrical pattern: it consists of two parts with ten chapters each, separated by a short interlude of half a dozen pages containing an inner monologue. The two sections in turn convey two opposing chronotopes, in a spatiotemporal conformation made explicit by the titles themselves – "In the Time of Chelyabinsk" and "In the Time of Konstantinovka", that is, a specific moment in a specific place. The chronotopic dichotomy echoes a similar narrative dichotomy. The two parts tell two stories very different from each other in both content and form, to the extent that the plot appears at first glance to be a patchwork; the development is abrupt, the reader – as well as the protagonist – is disoriented and seamlessly thrown from one fictional microcosm to another. *Zero K* seems to be composed of two novels belonging to two different genres: a utopian and catastrophic

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[1] For works that chronotopically analyze DeLillo's other novels, see Iacoli; Peterle; Stamenković; Asatryan; Kohn; Alkhayer; Harack.

[2] See Carati; Barrett; Medeiros Casteluber and Manganelli Fernandes; Nel; Glavanakova; Herbrechter; Dong; Cofer; Ashman; Maffey and Teo; Furjanić; Baratta.

novel in the first section, a urban and political novel in the second. We therefore propose to say instead that *Zero K* is a complex text that contains multiple modes.

The title of the first part mentions Chelyabinsk, a Russian city near which in 2013 a meteoroid about 15 meters in diameter and a mass of 10000 tons crashed at a speed of 54000 km/h causing a 500-kiloton explosion and more than a thousand injured; the chronotope thus refers to a time condition in which unpredictable natural disasters can occur. The novel starts at Convergence, a bioengineering laboratory with a labyrinthine structure located in the Kazakh desert in which an attempt is made to defeat mortality through a revolutionary cryogenic technology: terminally ill patients decide to freeze their bodies waiting for a better future in which medicine will be more advanced and in which environmental disaster will no longer be a threat. This first section is therefore divided into two mirror-image thematic frameworks: on the one hand the sense of danger in the face of the extinction of the human species – catastrophic novel –, on the other the hope of anthropic survival through the invention of an innovative world – utopian novel. What is triggered is a chronotopic dialogue between the spacetime of the desert – through which the barren wilderness of Kazakhstan hints at the annihilation of civilization – and the spacetime of the labyrinth – through which the intricate architecture of Convergence hints at a stubborn and cancerous reproduction of the human. In both cases, what prevails in the first part of *Zero K* is a chronotope of transcendence, that is, a literary mode that tells of speculative imagination, both disastrous and propitious: the story hypothesizes a future space-time, in which the human species has either become extinct or saved.

Instead, the title of the second part concerns Konstantinovka, a small town in Eastern Ukraine in which – in the plot of the novel – a terrible battle takes place within a separatist war against Russian oppression; the chronotope thus refers to a time condition torn apart by bloody fights and abuse of power. This part is set mainly in New York City, where the protagonist comes back after witnessing the cryogenic operation of his father's second wife. *Zero K* recovers a traditional thematic apparatus for a sociopolitical novel by DeLillo: the everyday life of a late capitalist citizen is represented, and the plot momentarily abandons speculations about the future to focus on the political surface of the present through a urban tale. The second part stages a chronotope of immanence, that is, a historical and realistic literary mode in which actual events are reported, both private – the daily activities of an everyman dealing with relationship problems, family difficulties, etc. – and public – the shadow of a war that is never truly remote –, in a city like New York which is adjacent to experience and therefore ordinary.

It is then possible to visualize *Zero K* as a text based on a series of binaries derived from the primary dichotomy between the chronotope of transcendence – the temporal distance of the future, whether optimistic or pessimistic, and the spatial distance of the desert and the labyrinth, two places far from everyday experience – and the chronotope of immanence – the temporal proximity of the present and the spatial proximity of the city. This gives rise to the bipartition between the two literary modes mentioned earlier: *Zero K* is both a catastrophic and a utopian novel – a speculative fiction – and a historical-political novel – a realistic fiction. Moreover, in the two places mentioned in the titles, Chelyabinsk and Konstantinovka, a new distinction emerges concerning the human agency of destruction: in the first case, the human has no explicit and intentional agency, as it's an environmental disaster: in the second one, death depends on intentional and direct human agency, as it's a war. Chakrabarty wrote: "A nuclear war would have been a conscious decision on the part of the powers that be. Climate change is an unintended consequence of human actions" (221). This leads to a further dichotomy of the novel, that between nature and culture. Both parts present this pair as insoluble, at least at the beginning. In the first section, the chronotope of the desert – nature – collides against the chronotope of the labyrinth – cultures –, evolving from a territorial

conflict – the sandstorms trying to break down the walls of Convergence – to an ontological one, in which the human resists biological laws by defeating death with technology. In the second section, the chronotope of New York is divided between a natural and a cultural environment: the city is described as a jungle of animal noises and generally as a place also inhabited by nonhuman species, and at the same time as an increasingly digitalized space. This failure to break the antinomy between nature and culture leads to the final dichotomy between the two parts: if the first section of the novel welcomes a transhuman perspective, given that Convergence attempts to empower the human being by overcoming his limits, the second one welcomes a humanist perspective, exploring essential components of humanity such as love, politics, ethnicity, family, etc.

3. Jeffrey Lockhart as Chronotopic *Wandersmann*: An Intersection of Modes

The protagonist, Jeffrey Lockhart, unravels the obsessive geometry of the novel. Jeffrey is a textual *Wandersmann* who navigates the two portions of the novel experiencing both chronotopes and addressing their respective thematic declinations. In other words, he lives both Convergence and New York, both speculative transcendence and historical immanence, as an interliminal figure who acts as the sole link to an otherwise disjointed plot. Citing De Certeau (139-55), we say that Jeffrey produces textual and discursive meaning through his journey, and in doing so he creolizes the generic configuration of the novel through the connection of its two distinct parts and modes. We witness a clash of chronotopes, in which, due to the character's interference in the two space-times, New York merges with Convergence and Kazakhstan, the chronotope of the city breaches those of the labyrinth and the desert.[3] Speculative transcendence and historical immanence intertwine, and thus all the thematic binaries of the novel dissolve: the antinomies between future and present, wilderness and urbanity, nature and culture, transhuman and human, vanish. In the ending, after Jeffrey returns to New York after a second visit to Convergence, *Zero K* invents a new novel mode that covers both the telling of elsewhere and elsewhen and that of here and now. A posthuman perspective is born, no longer anthropocentric, characterized by updated spatiotemporal categories suitable for describing the surroundings, through a renewed and hybrid chronotope resulting from the intersection of previous ones.

We now conduct a close reading of the novel to better highlight the chronotopic operation it carries out.

4. Chronotope of Transcendence: Between Utopia and Catastrophe

The first part, "In the Time of Chelyabinsk", is steeped in spatial and temporal transcendence, in the projection of the human into a geographic and chronological beyond, both in a positive sense – Convergence, with humanity surviving – and in a negative sense – the Kazakh desert, with humanity becoming extinct. The novel opens with an impactful sentence: "Everybody wants to own the end of the world" (DeLillo 3); whether it is a utopian or a catastrophic tale, fiction aims to colonize the end of the world, now with predictions of death, now with

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[3] *Zero K* is not the only novel in which DeLillo implements a convergence between different chronotopes. In *Cosmopolis* (2003), for example, the limousine is a mobile chronotope that configures the plot according to a linear and katabatic progression. Or, in *Underworld* (1997) the same role is played by the game-winning ball, which with its passage through different owners, different places and different decades diffracts the story by intertwining multiple themes.

predictions of life. The entire first part oscillates between these two poles by involving a speculative narration; both the Kazakh desert and Convergence are located "at the far margins of plausibility" (115), they are sites with a high inventive range as they are "literal landmarks of implausibility" (115), of counterfactual imagination.

Convergence is the extreme attempt to fight the end, death, through cryogenesis and the consequent transhuman purposes, and by extension to avert the environmental apocalypse and any other danger of humanity: " 'We are here in this location to design a response to whatever eventual calamity may strike the planet' " (66). The labyrinth is the space of paroxysmal construction, so exaggerated that it becomes tangled and perverse, the opposite of the naked devastation of the desert in which it stands; as paroxysmal and perverse is cryogenic therapy, the obstinacy on a body destined to die. The chronotope is therefore a chronotope of reiteration, typical of the labyrinth: Convergence replicates spaces – the laboratory layout – and times – human lives – which should be limited beyond their limits. Such repetition leads to immobility and disorientation: "I didn't know what else to say, what to do, where to go. Three, four, five days, however long I'd been here – time compressed, time drawn tight, overlapping time, dayless, nightless, many doors, no windows" (115); in Convergence there are almost no windows, that is to say the subchronotope that creates space-time movement and reference, that contrasts an otherness and an identity, therefore everything is identical to itself and static. The transhuman ideal of Convergence is based on homology, on forced equality: in the hallways Jeffrey encounters no one but identical twins and dummies; analogous to the cryogenic project there is a linguistic and philological project which aims to create a universal language without inflections and dialects, uniform for every speaker and part of the world. The furniture validates this prevailing homogeneity, even using tautology in the description: "It was called a food unit and this is what it was, a component, a module, four undersized tables […]. The room was small and featureless. It was generic to the point of being a thing with walls. The ceiling was low, the bed was bedlike, the chair was a chair. There were no windows" (20). In parallel, given the chronotopic cohesion, time is a prison of replicated and iterative actions: "In the food unit I put my face nearly into the plate and chewed the last few bites of dinner. All the food units throughout the complex, one person in each, stacked in my mind. I went to my room, turned on the light and sat in the chair thinking. It felt as though I'd done this a thousand times, same room every time, same person in the chair" (134); time does not flow, there are no days of the week or any traditional time distinction. The only way to prevent the apocalypse seems to be the standardized, tumorous proliferation of the human.

Transcendence, achieved at a chronotopic level through the absence of spatial and temporal deictics, also concerns the desert, which like the labyrinth constitutes a non-place and a non-time albeit for antinomic reasons – in the first case due to an excess of anthropic reiteration, in the second due to a total anthropic absence. In the desert it is impossible to find your way around, there are no spatial reference points: "I got up and walked across the floor to the spare room, where I went directly to the window. Stood and looked. Spare lands, skin and bones, distant ridges whose height I could not estimate without a dependable reference. Sky pale and bare, day fading in the west, if it was the west, if it was the sky" (116); nature is asymbolic, even the colors of the sky do not grant a compass. Similarly, the desert is ahistorical, does not involve temporal progress: "It's not battered and compacted by history. History is buried here […]. History in burial mounds" (30-1). Both the chronotope of the labyrinth and the chronotope of the desert stage a transcendental spatiotemporality as they surpass experience by positioning themselves outside immanent reality, and subsequently branching off into an optimistic tale or into a pessimistic one.

Another Convergence strategy to neutralize the apocalypse consists in obsessively projecting soundless videos of environmental disasters on the screens that cover the hallways, with the goal of anesthetizing the fear of the end: death is so overexposed as to be harmless,

since "Catastrophe is our bedtime story" (66). The winner of the clash between the chronotope of the desert – extinction and pessimism – and that of the labyrinth – survival and optimism – is therefore the second contender. The catastrophes shown are amplified by the reiterative logic of the labyrinth and then defused into Baudrillardian "simulacres" (9-13), hyperreal, hyperapocalyptic representations that Jeffrey begins to doubt:

> It is possible that this is not factual documentation rendered in a selective manner but something radically apart? It's a digital weave, every fragment manipulated and enhanced, all of it designed, edited, redesigned. Why hadn't this occurred to me before, in earlier screenings, the monsoon rains, the tornadoes? These were visual fictions, the wildfires and burning monks, digital bits, digital code, all of it computer-generated, none of it real. (DeLillo 152)

The television screen is another subchronotope of transcendence, capable of distancing in time and space the object it depicts, making it inoffensive because it is alien to everyday experience; the inhabitants of Convergence believe they are exempt from climate change because they cannot spatiotemporally relate to the disasters they witness, even doubting their actual reality. The space-time incompatibility is clear in a scene that describes Jeffrey's reaction following yet another projected disaster: "I continued to wait, expecting more. […] There was nowhere to go and I had no idea what time it was. My watch was fixed on North American time, eastern standard" (37); chronotopes are destabilized, they do not correspond, the time and space in which the protagonist lives – according to the logic of television exposure and *simulacre* – are not and cannot be the same as the catastrophe just observed. The end of the world is just a plausible future to speculate on at the same level as that of cryogenesis; environmental catastrophe and biotechnological utopia, the outside of the desert and the inside of the laboratory, are equated by the screen, the only true window of Convergence – but a hyperreal one, and therefore liable of falsehood. The equivalence between the two chronotopes and between the thematic pairs they decline – nature and culture, authentic and artificial – reaches its climax in the scene in which Jeffrey discovers an apparent oasis within Convergence, according to the perceptive dynamics typical of the desert mirage:

> Here was a walled garden, trees, shrubs, flowering plants. I stood and looked. The heat was less severe than it had been on the day I'd arrived. This is what I needed, away from the rooms, the halls, the units – a place outside where I might think calmly about what I would see and hear and feel in the scene to come […]. I walked for half a minute along a winding stone path before I realized, dumbly, that this was not a desert oasis but a proper English garden with trimmed hedges, shade trees, wild roses climbing a trellis. Something even stranger then, tree bark, blades of grass, every sort of flower – all seemingly coated or enameled, bearing a faint glaze. None of this was natural, all of it unruffled by the breeze that swept across the garden. (122)

The oasis, a classic element of the desert, is on the contrary yet another room in the Convergence labyrinth, yet another human artefact; a double illusion, a doubly counterfeited *simulacre* is established, for it is not the classic mirage due to hallucinations from the heat but an actual fake replica.

5. Chronotope of Immanence: History, Family, War

The opening of "In the Time of Konstantinovka" is alienating compared to what we have read so far:

> The office belonged to a man named Silverstone. It was my father's former office and two of the paintings he owned were still on the wall, dark with strips of dusty sunlight, both of them. I had to force myself to look at Silverstone, behind the burnished desk, while he droned his way

through a global roundup that ranged from Hungary to South Africa, the forint to the rand. (165)

The office is a different chronotope from that of the desert and the labyrinth because it is mobile and immediate; Jeffrey is there for a job interview, for a practice contiguous to the experience on which the sustenance of his daily life depends. Space and time are both open, the opposite of the enclosure of Convergence: light enters the room suggesting the presence of a window to the outside, and the character's speech is equally distended since he mentions distant countries, attracting and amalgamating them into a single economic deixis, in an indistinct proximity of financial interests.

The novel moves into the chronotope of New York. Setting, temporality, characters and themes change drastically: the speculation about the future, the empty hallways and rooms, the brutal desolation of the desert are replaced by the noise of traffic, clogged sidewalks, family turmoil, and precarious work. An evident chronotopic reversal is immediately marked, establishing an immanent spacetime:

> The sun reappeared seconds before the rain stopped and we went past an untended shish kebab cart and saw a skateboarder sailing past at the end of the street, there and gone, and we approached a woman in Arab headdress, white woman, white blouse, stained blue skirt, talking to herself and walking back and forth, barefoot, five steps east, five steps west along a sidewalk webbed with scaffolding. Then the Money Museum, the Police Museum, the old stone buildings on Pine Street and our pace increased again, no cars or people here. (179)

Time – the progress of the sun – and space – the cardinal points and the flow of buildings – once again become points of reference. New York is a chronotope in which diversity prevails, in which each place and each moment is different from the other, in which time and space follow one another relentlessly – as is translated on a formal level by an excited, paratactic syntax; there are no longer replicated mannequins and twins, but citizens with kaleidoscopic, multi-ethnic clothing who move frantically.

In this second part, the places are always free, wide, and turned to otherness as in the case of a rooftop, suitable for providing a panoramic view of the surroundings: "Her son was what we talked about in one of our rooftop intervals, cloudy day, our customary place at the western ledge, and we watched a barge being towed downriver, inch by inch, discontinuously, with a few tall structures fragmenting our view" (193). Similarly, time is once again articulated, marked by the scheduling of daily commitments and, above all, by the return of History, by the renewed perception of a chronological progression of events: "When we returned from the Convergence I announced to Ross that we were back in history now. Days have names and numbers, a discernible sequence, and there is an aggregate of past events, both immediate and long gone" (167).

The taxi and its window overturn the absence of windows and the consequent spatiotemporal stasis of Convergence and the desert, functioning as subchronotopes that enable the speed and spatiotemporal complexity that a story set in New York requires:

> I sat in a taxi with Emma and her son, Stak, all three bodies muscled into the rear seat, and the boy checked the driver's ID and immediately began to speak to the man in an unrecognizable language. I conferred quietly with Emma, who said he was studying Pashto, privately, in his spare time. Afghani, she said, to enlighten me further. […] He was seated directly behind the driver and spoke into the plexiglass shield, undeterred by traffic noise and street construction. […] The driver did not seem surprised to find himself exchanging words and phrases in his native language with a white boy. This was New York. Every living breathing genotype entered his cab at some point, day or night. […] We were back in mainstream traffic moving slowly down Broadway […]. Horns were making sporadic noise and Stak was still talking to the driver through

the closed panels. […] Traffic was stopped dead and I nudged the window switch and listened to the blowing horns approach peak volume. We were trapped in our own obsessive clamor. (169-72)

The car window prevents impermeability by opening to the outside, represented by the noise of traffic penetrating the car. Jeffrey witnesses a parade of diverse individuals, actors in a reality layered by multiple contingencies: spacetime becomes discontinuous due to the variety of everyday immanence, in a melting pot of stories, ethnic groups, cultures, lives; the narrative world is as dynamic as the city flowing by the window. The linguistic dimension supports all this: Stak and the taxi driver speak in a particular language, situated and unintelligible to most, fully refuting the linguistic standardization project sought by Convergence.

During this second part, the novel addresses the theme of a Russian-Ukrainian war which affects the protagonist personally as Stak, his partner's son, is Ukrainian. History breaks into Jeffrey's life and forces him to turn his attention to his surroundings, to the urgencies of a politicized and interconnected world; war is not a distant and unrelated accident but rather comes from a dangerously neighboring and related spacetime, threatening his life through dense, networked correspondences. There is no opportunity for speculation about the future, what is important is only the present, from the microscopic private life of an alternative family to the macroscopic public life of a planet at war. Everything still remains rooted in an anthropocentric perspective, no longer transhumanist as in the first part but decidedly humanist: New York City is the center of the world, and its chronotope magnifies the problems of the individual – love, work, fatherhood, etc. – on a global scale, as gravitational centers; what happens in Jeffrey's everyday life has ties to the fate of countries at war, almost as if it could influence them. For this series of reasons, in "In the time of Konstantinovka" a chronotope of immanence, of spatiotemporal adjacency, stands out, at least in its first chapters.

6. Towards a New Hybrid Chronotope: Manhattanhenge

In fact, as the section continues, the novel again shifts its chronotopic connotations through the character of Stak and Jeffrey's return to Convergence to witness his father's cryogenesis. During a visit to a museum, Stak introduces into the text a non-anthropocentric and posthuman perspective, entirely distinct from both the transhumanist perspective of the first part and the humanist one presented so far in the second part: "Stak talked to the rock. He told it that we were looking at it. He referred to us as three members of the species H. sapiens. He said that the rock would outlive us all, probably outlive the species itself" (216-7). An alternative temporality, not calibrated to the human lifespan, is hinted at, and through scientific nomenclature humanity is intended as a biological species equal to any other living being; furthermore, a material agency is also assumed, as the rock appears capable of understanding Stak. Similarly, when Jeffrey returns to Convergence he immediately perceives a difference: "I wasn't sure whether this was the same room I'd occupied before. Maybe it just looked the same. But I felt different, being here. It was just a room now. […] The room was not an occasion for my theories or abstractions" (231); he is no longer able to abstract, speculate, transcend experience – actions that Convergence should allow instead –, having been contaminated by the immanence of New York. At this point it is said that " 'Time is multiple, time is simultaneous' " (244): a new blend temporality is born, which is both multiple like that of the first part – diffracted like the rhizomatic architecture of a labyrinth, in a series of all possible futures, some positive and some negative –, and simultaneous like that of the second – where everything that happens, like in a modern megalopolis, is interdependent, and the life of a New York citizen is connected to the events of a war in Ukraine. A merging is activated between the chronotope of transcendence and the chronotope of immanence, because Jeffrey

experienced both by intersecting the city with the labyrinth. The Convergence delegate says: " 'We're living and breathing in a future context, doing it here and now' " (239). Even cryogenic bodies themselves change, endorsing this mix: "Here, there were no lives to think about or imagine. This was pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing" (256); if before they were virtual speculations, anticipations of a future, transcendental beings, they now become spectacles, that is, an immanent phenomenon of the here and now, a concrete circumstance that impresses sensory experience. The culmination of the mix between chronotopes occurs with the projection, mirroring the environmental disasters depicted in the first part, of the Konstantinovka war video, in which Jeffrey witnesses Stak's death – the boy having meanwhile fled as a volunteer to fight for his country – helplessly (262-4): what is represented is no longer an artificial and distant simulacrum as in "In the Time of Chelyabinsk", but a real and simultaneous event that touches him closely, an episode which can be placed in a precise space-time rather than a spaceless and timeless probability, a palliative fiction. History enters Convergence, the present dissipates the future.

The ending of the novel completes the intersection between the two chronotopes by creating a new hybrid one. DeLillo recounts Manhattanhenge, an event which in the symbolism of the novel is capable of resolving all the thematized dichotomies. Manhattanhenge is a phenomenon that occurs twice a year at the same distance from the summer solstice – around May 28th and July 12th – in which the setting of the Sun aligns perfectly with the streets that cross the borough of Manhattan, in east-west direction; it is therefore a perfect example of a chronotope as it involves a clear deixis, a precise moment in a precise place. During Manhattanhenge the dichotomy between culture and nature breaks down, and the two extremes finally coincide: anthropic construction – skyscrapers – and environmental accident – sunset – collaborate to offer a spectacle of immanence that does not lose a transcendental physiognomy, as a physical event permitted only by human interference. DeLillo initially describes this occurrence as a sort of apocalypse, a model of environmental catastrophe that could make humanity extinct. Nonetheless, following a recurring procedure in DeLillo's endings,[4] the last perspective of the text is bestowed upon a macrocephalic child who is witnessing Manhattanhenge together with Jeffrey, but according to an entirely different cognitive and emotional inclination. The child is a fully posthuman figure who inserts a non-anthropocentric vision into the novel, as Stak had done:

> Then there is Ross, once again, in his office, the lurking image of my father telling me that everybody wants to own the end of the world. […] The full solar disk, bleeding into the streets, lighting up the towers to either side of us, and I told myself that the boy was not seeing the sky collapse upon us but was finding the purest astonishment in the intimate touch of earth and sun. (274)

Unlike Jeffrey's father and Convergence, the boy does not attempt to colonize the end of the world with his imagination, he neither projects his own fears and hopes onto the future, nor occupies spacetime with his own anthropic individuality. On the contrary, he admires Manhattanhenge for what it is: a physical spectacle in which humanity has no place, is not mentioned, is not present as gravitational agency; a possible collision between the Earth and the Sun can only be considered catastrophic when conceived through a human point of view, as the end of humanity is not equivalent to the end of the world. In the finale the novel then welcomes, after the transhuman perspective of the first part and the humanist one of the second part, a posthuman position that, like the definition given by Braidotti, "rejects dualism" (3) and undermines the binomial scheme on which the text was built. The chronotope of Manhattanhenge hybridizes that of Chelyabinsk and that of Konstantinovka, hybridizing in

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[4] A paradigmatic example is Wilder, in *White Noise*'s finale.

turn all the themes and modes they contained. It is a new spatiotemporality in which immanence does not prevent a dose of transcendence and vice versa, in which the cries of a child sitting nearby on a bus possess a greater metaphysical and sublime value than an inventive abstraction like heaven – "I went back to my seat and faced forward. I didn't need heaven's light. I had the boy's cries of wonder" (274).

7. Conclusion

In light of what has been discussed, *Zero K* is a novel capable of recounting the current climate crisis, since it brings the environmental disaster, considered a distant space-time, closer to the experience. Fiction must accommodate multiple chronotopes at once if it is to constitute an effective document of the current geological era; the generic purity of the bourgeois novel must make way for a narrative configuration that intersects different modes, enriching the imaginary through different inventive stimuli. Like Jeffrey, we all have to intertwine our spacetimes; the bourgeois claim of a fragmented world is not admissible today, in the face of environmental catastrophes and global wars.

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