

## Editorial – Issue 4:2

This issue provides us editors of LCS with an opportunity to dialogue with our contributors from a slightly different position compared to how we have done it so far. As the first guest edited issue of the journal, the pages that follow after this editorial have been carefully arranged, shaped and curated by Anna De Fina and Sabina M. Perrino, our guest editors. Their proposed theme, *Chronotopes and the COVID-19 Pandemic*, invites readers to think about chronotopes as an entry point to the study of how sociocultural, linguistic and ideological activities get organised in space and time under the conditions of the recent global pandemic. De Fina and Perrino argue for the potential of sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological elaborations of Bakhtin's conceptual work since these "involve a discussion of fundamental issues such as the conceptualization of context, the relationships of this construct with ideologies, the configuration and interpretation of meanings at different levels and their social circulation".

We find our guest editors' invitation to attend to elaborations of Bakhtin's notion of chronotope instrumental to revisit some of the main themes that we have explored over the last few years since *Language, Culture and Society* came to light – themes that have constantly revolved around: (i) the historical, political and economic underpinnings of scholarly knowledge on language, culture and society; (ii) the (colonial, capitalist and racist) forms of oppression that we contribute to (re)produce in our own disciplinary endeavours; and (iii) the conditions of possibility for sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological work that helps us imagine alternative and more socially just futures. In line with readings of Bakhtin's knowledge production as a reaction to nation/empire and the core Western values of (geographical, cultural and racial) homogeneity and monological discourse (van Toorn, 1992; San Diego Bakhtin Circle, 2000), his notion of chronotope can easily be seen as providing a 'safe house' in Pratt's (1991) terms, that is to say, a social and intellectual space where social groups aspire to "constitute themselves as horizontal (...), sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings and temporary protection from legacies of oppression" (p. 40).

Examples of the making of safe houses through strategic mobilisation of a chronotopic lens can indeed be found across various areas in the social sciences and humanities. We are reminded, for example, of Paul Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, where he uses the figure of the sailing slave ship crossing the Atlantic as a chronotope to centre his critique of European modernity's ideas of nation, race, ethnicity, authenticity, and cultural integrity, and their impact on black subject positions in the West. Gilroy settles on the image of ships moving across various spaces in Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a system of cultural exchanges and circulation of knowledge and people, one that "might fit with a theory that was less intimidated by and respectful of the boundaries and integrity of modern nation states than either English or African-American cultural studies have so far been" (p. 4). Expanding on DuBois' (1903) concept of "double consciousness," he argues for a reimagining of modernity that not simply includes the marginal positions of enslaved populations but which rather marks the ungentle aspects of slavery and terror as crucial and systematic enough to understand them at the heart of modernity itself. In an attempt to challenge established mainstream (including academic) views of black British and cultural political history, Gilroy's (1993) chronotope both reifies

cultural nationalist narratives of place, race and ethnicity (i.e., the black Atlantic) and exposes modern Britain's own untidy ensemble of regional and class-oriented conflicts. But not only that: Gilroy also disrupts the ethnic identity foundations which "have contributed to the scholarship and the political strategies that Britain's black settlers have generated and to the underlying sense of England as a cohesive cultural community against which their self-conception has so often been defined" (p. 3).

Gilroy's chronotope of the sailing ship sits well with the history of postcolonial work interested in ambivalence that we began to discuss in our last issue (4:1), and which we defined as our scholarly capacity to have multiple and sometimes contradictory understandings and accounts of the same object, person, process, and practice. Closer to our disciplinary home, language and communication is also a potentially fruitful area for strategically adopting Bakhtin's notion of chronotope to pursue safe houses driven by decolonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist agendas. If Bakhtin (1981) used the idea of chronotope to describe how novelistic discourse articulates spatiotemporal indicators into integrated wholes where "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" (p. 84), then we scholars of language and communication can productively engage with it, for our work has long been focused on complexifying understandings of context as embodied in material situations where language and other semiotic modalities are inscribed. Against this background, this guest edited issue brings about a chronotopic analytical perspective as an epistemological lens to multi-scalar processes whereby space-time configurations are invoked in daily practices, making widely circulating models of action and personhood recognisable while at the same time helping (re)constitute new contexts for action, interpretation and social relation.

The issue also encourages us to explore the institutional conditions under which such configurations, practices and models circulate and become entangled with processes of knowledge formation and the long-standing structures of inequality that these processes enable. As De Fina and Perrino put it in their introduction, this approach gives "analysts nuanced possibilities to unveil subtle and blatant injustices and sociocultural inequalities as they have emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic and ways in which groups organise concerted responses to them". This thread is indeed taken up and expanded in different directions by the contributors throughout the entire issue. From social media posts-engagement (Sonya E. Pritzker and Tony Hu; David Divita; Anna De Fina) to grassroots, migrant domestic worker led activism (Lydia Cathedral) to interactions among small groups of migrants (Farzad Karimzad and Lydia Cathedral) to (auto)ethnographic narratives (Sabina M. Perrino), readers are presented with a wide range of chronotopes and figures of personhood that are embodied and made sense of in situated practices, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic both in digital spaces and in territorialised locations within Mainland China, Hong Kong, United States and Italy. In their accounts, the contributors zoom in onto the daily making of difference, subalternity, fear, uncertainty, solidarity and state governance as mediated by meaning-making practices in which spatiotemporal configurations get categorised, moralised and materialised through the discourses and actions of social actors and institutions.

In earlier discussions, we argued for an approach to the COVID-19 pandemic as a social phenomenon that should never be detached from larger discourses, practices and processes of governance, oppression and inequality making (issue 2:2). Just as discourses around COVID-19 prove to function as an echo chamber of intertwined xenophobic and public health associations about immigrants and more generally those identified as Others (Black, 2020; Chun, 2020; Du, 2020), or as enablers or State-based surveillance (MIRCo, 2020), the chronotopic practices analysed in this guest edited issue foreground a variety of spatiotemporal categories of nationhood and foreignness that deserve close examination, interpretation, and historicisation. Most contributors focus on how such categories are enacted and circulated as part of collective strategies aimed to display convivial alignment and survival, but they also appear embedded in biomedical and public health responses to COVID-19 that explicitly mobilise and reproduce ideologies about the management of racialized and colonised people (see, particularly, the contribution by Lydia Catedral). Yet, even in such highly oppressive circumstances, collective forms of contestation can often get articulated around these categories, in what we see as another fruitful terrain for the making of safe houses through strategic mobilisation of chronotopes.

The engagement with such collective practices resonates with a growing body of work examining the semiotic efforts of groups who strive to have a transformative effect on (in)imaginable forms of political action by drawing the public's attention to widespread forms of racialization and racial discrimination, police violence, homophobia or land expropriation (e.g., Dick, 2010; Rosa, 2016; Hartikainen, 2017; Delfino, 2021; Silva & Lee, 2021). While considering how such collectives strategically (re)align with various chronotopes of political participation and the dialogical relationships between these chronotopes and the social personae they invoke, this language scholarship also attends to the models of State-citizen interaction that such forms of collective action may help reconfigure, constrain and regulate. We find this tradition instrumental to analysis of the politics of the public realm that avoid celebration of emancipatory practices centred on chronotopes and figures of personhood of 'active citizenship' associated with 'modern liberal democracy', for these always require a politics of public visibility predicated on visual presence – i.e., a politics of permissible protest marches and parades, of public as well as visual media presence that aim to make both the social struggles and size of marginalised groups publicly visible. Surely, these spatiotemporal indicators and practices of active citizenship can be seen as supporting forms of participation perceived as favouring public recognition. But they may also prevent people from engaging in other (more radical) activities that are unlikely to be tolerated by the liberal (i.e., capitalist) state. It is precisely this ambivalence that, in our view, makes noticeable the very limits of the political and socioeconomic order of liberal democracy.

Altogether, a preoccupation with safe houses allows us to think of chronotopes not only as a window to lived experiences of marginalisation and ways of coping with them by the social groups concerned, but also as a terrain for potentially and effectively altering existing institutional arrangements and the styles of social imagination that they make (im)possible, (un)desirable and (un)intelligible. We hope that our readers keep these and other related developments in mind as they engage with our guest editors and contributors to this issue.

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