

CARAC TERES

Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

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Monográfico: Universos transmedia y convergencias narrativas
Monograph: Transmedia Universes and Narrative Convergences

Coordinador: Álvaro Llosa Sanz

Caracteres. Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

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Monográfico / Monograph:

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**II. Hacia los universos transmedia: narración, espacios, soportes,
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Intermediality, Multimodality and Medial Chronotopes: A Comparison between the Travel Book and the Travel Blog

Intermedialidad, multimodalidad y cronotopos mediales: una comparación entre el libro de viajes y el blog de viajes

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ABSTRACT: Using Bakhtin's "chronotope", this paper advances a comparison between the travel book *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* by Sino-Italian Bamboo Hirst and the travel blog *Emil's Trip to China*, by American Emil Kang. Firstly, it is assumed that these texts are two "intermedial transpositions" of the same genre: travel writing. Secondly, it is argued that the process of transposition affects how the genre is realised insofar as the book and the blog, as medial formats, embed different chronotopes. It is in this respect that the notion of "genium", as a conceptual field of generic and medial negotiations, is introduced. Moreover, because both texts are multimodal, the paper discusses the extension of the chronotope to photography, starting from Barthes's *Camera Lucida*. This provides a chronotopic study of some pictures in the texts, in terms of both what is represented and its mode of representation.

RESUMEN: Usando el cronotopo creado por Mijaíl Bajtín, este artículo establece una comparación entre el libro de viajes *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* de la escritora chino-italiana Bamboo Hirst y el blog *Emil's Trip to China* del americano Emil Kang. En primer lugar, se asume que los dos textos son "transposiciones intermediales" del mismo género, de la literatura de viajes. En segundo lugar, se demuestra que el proceso de transposición afecta a la manera en la que se forma el género, en la medida en la que el libro y el blog, como formatos mediales, incorporan diferentes cronotopos. Con dicho objetivo se introduce la noción de "genium", concebido como un espacio conceptual de negociación entre medio y género. Además, como los dos textos analizados son multimodales, el artículo discute cómo el cronotopo se puede extender a la fotografía, basándose en el libro de Roland Barthes *La cámara lúcida*. Esto permite llevar a cabo un estudio cronotópico de algunas fotos en los textos, tanto en términos de lo que se presenta como de su modo de representación.

KEYWORDS: intermediality, multimodality, chronotope, travel book, travel blog

PALABRAS CLAVE: intermedialidad, multimodalidad, cronotopo, libro de viajes, blog de viajes

1. Introduction

Through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of "chronotope", this paper configures an inter-medial comparison between one Italian travel book and one English travel blog about China. The former is *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore*, by Bamboo Hirst (1989), the latter is *Emil's Travel to China* by Emil Kang (2006), hosted on <<http://blogspot.co.uk>>.

Bakhtin defines the chronotope as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. [...] The 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” (258). In this regard, travel writing is a particularly fruitful object of analysis for at least two reasons. First, the genre makes the unfolding of time and space a thematically crucial aspect, insofar as travel accounts relate to a displacement in space and time. Secondly, we witness the tendency to identify travel writing in tight relation to the medial format that carries the text, as the labels “travel+book” and “travel+blog” attest. “There exists a special group of genre,” writes Bakhtin (1981), “that play an especially significant role in structuring novels, sometimes by themselves even directly determining the structure of a novel as a whole. [...] Examples of such genres would be confession, the diary, travel notes, biography...” (321).

2. Travel Writing between Intermediality and Multimodality

Two assumptions underpin the analysis. The first assumption is that travel books and travel blogs are two “intermedial transpositions” (Wolf, 2008) that realise the same genre: travel writing. Here, travel writing is defined as the subjective recounting, via words and other modes, of real travel experiences. The term “subjective” is adopted in order to overcome formal differentiations, such as that between memoir and autobiography introduced by Paul Fussell (1980: 203). The definition also stresses the fact that travel writing is eminently a narrative genre. This means that those texts, such as travel guides, that focus on the theme of travel, but present it in a non-narrative fashion, are not travel writings *stricto sensu*. In addition, despite the fact, as noted by Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan (1998: 10), that any travel account is always, to a degree, fictional, travel writing has to be plausible, meaning that it has to relate to experiences that effectively took place. This criterion is operative insofar as it excludes from the realm of travel writing those accounts connoted by imaginary elements that are more in the spirit of science-fiction. Finally, the definition touches upon the multimodal feature of travel writing. The purpose of investigating travel accounts’ multimodality could be seen as merely functional to the inclusion of travel blogs within the realm of travel writing; however, even a cursory survey makes it clear that travel books often incorporate modes other than words (e.g. images). Hence, a multimodal perspective is not only advisable, but necessary.

Since no intermedial transposition is a neutral process, the book and the blog not only play a role in the realisation of the genre, but are, in fact, consubstantial to it. It is in this sense that the notion of “*genium*”, which derives from the contraction of genre+medium, is introduced. Hence, the second assumption is that the book and the blog, as different medial formats, embed different chronotopes. In the “Concluding Remarks” to his work, Bakhtin (1981) goes beyond his reflexion on the chronotope of the novel by arguing that, “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)” (255). In other words, Bakhtin hints at the idea that the book, as a textual artefact binding together the representational and the represented world, is also chronotopic. In the same spirit, Asif Agha (2007) affirms that, “the novelistic chronotope connects the world of the author to the ‘chronotopic situation’ of diverse listeners–readers due to the physical materiality of its textual form” (321). In this respect, the notion of *genium*, far from being only a descriptive term, comes to define a conceptual field of generic and medial negotiations, which, at once, internally dictate the chronotope of the text and externally guide its chronotopic interpretation. Clearly, Bakhtin only refers to the book because this was (and still is) the most widely spread medium for literary novels. However, once we apply his argument to the comparison between travel books and travel blogs, we can investigate: 1) the chronotopic features of the book and the blog as medial formats; 2) how these features lead to different realisations of the travel writing genre.

In order to conduct the analysis, it is also necessary to bear in mind that, while Bakhtin discusses the concept of “chronotope” only in relation to written language, travel books and travel blogs are (often) multimodal texts. Hence, we are confronted with two tasks: 1) the unveiling of the chronotope developed by each mode (in our case, words and photos); 2) the investigation of the verbo-visual relations that these modes entertain, both on the single page (printed or on-screen) and within each medial format.

3. Photography’s Chronotope: A Discussion

In his famous *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes argues that the unicity of photography lies in the fact that the referent (what is represented) comes to adhere to the reference (the form of photography). Hence, Barthes confers upon the technological apparatus of photography

such a power (indeed, a power of transparency), whose force – its “punctum of intensity” (90) – is to eternally testify “that-has-been” (77). The problem with such an argument, as Jacques Rancière (2009) notes, is that “in order to preserve for photography the purity of an affect, Barthes erases the very genealogy of the *that was*” (15). By hypostatizing the transparency of photography, Barthes turns the instant into an absolute, but in so doing, he is unable to see that “that-has-been” always conceals a history of its own. Put differently, each photo bears in itself the chronotopic conditions that “created” the referent for the camera, and for the act of photographing. Barthes is right when he states that each photo has an “adventure” (19), noting with regard to the photo of a schoolboy, that “it is possible that Ernest is still alive today (but where? How? What a novel!)” (84). Unfortunately, however, Barthes does not develop this argument any further and thus fails to investigate what this novel really is.

In *The Work of Mourning* (2003), Jacques Derrida develops Barthes’s argument and eventually acknowledges that because photography has a “*dynamis*” (57), its punctum is “drawn into metonymy” (57). In other words, what he suggests is that the punctum always stands for something else; it is a window opened onto a time-space that unfolds beyond it. Derrida also argues that “remaining as attentive as possible to all the differences, one must be able to speak of a punctum in all signs, any discourse, whether literary or not” (53). While this statement is surely valid, Derrida subsequently seems to consider these differences to be incommensurable. Indeed, he claims that photography as a technological apparatus attests to “the failure, or at any rate the limit, of all that which, in language, literature and other arts seemed to permit grandiose theories on the general suspension of the Referent” (53). As we have seen, however, what photography performs is, in fact, the illusion of presenting us with the referent. So, as soon as we acknowledge its deceptive effect and stress, on the contrary, its work of mediation between the eye and the world, the incommensurability of photography and literature fades away. The issue lies rather in the different logics that literature and photography follow in order to “create” their own referent. Literature relies on a syntagmatic logic, that is, on a progressive accumulation of words, sentences, paragraphs, etc. In fact, it is this accumulation that makes the referent appear as constantly deferred (i.e. suspended). As Maurice Blanchot (1982) contends, “the literary experience is an ordeal in which what we are able to do (for example, see) becomes our powerlessness; becomes, for instance, that terribly strange form of blindness which is the phantom, or the image, of the clear gaze – an incapacity to stop seeing what is not there to be seen” (9). Clearly, words also have a visual potential (i.e. they can be read paradigmatically, such as Chinese characters or futurist poetry), but its salience has often been

standardised by the publishing apparatus, so that the referent can only be imagined. On the other hand, images work paradigmatically, in the sense that they display their signs spatially, before our eyes. But this does not mean that the referent is *already* there; rather, as Derrida (2003) himself notes, it is “by the time – at the instant – that the punctum rends space, [that] the reference and death are in it together” (53). In other words, photography discloses “that-has-been” when we are able to “see” its chronotopicity. On this same line, Henri van Lier (2007) warns that “the photograph is made up of indices. Therefore, its unity of construction and reading is not the decision of the *trait*, which is characteristic of signs, but of the *littoral*” (18). Similarly to written texts, then, photos are a “lazy machine” (Eco, 1979: 24) that necessitates not only an observer, but also an interpreter, in order to be decoded. Photos should not only be looked at, but “scrutinise[d]” (105), as Barthes suggests – i.e. read syntagmatically. This idea has to be intended as a visual close reading aimed at revealing the chronotope of the instant; a chronotope that relates to both what is represented and its mode representation. In this respect, drawing on Michael Halliday’s work on systemic-functional linguistics, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) define a “grammar” for the analysis of multimodal texts, which can be very useful here. Specifically, it is their discussion on visual modality, intended as the representation of “people, places, and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way, or as though they do not – as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc.” (156), that will be followed as a guiding paradigm.

4. The Travel Book’s Chronotope: The Case of *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore*

Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore is a travelogue written by Sino-Italian author Bamboo Hirst (1940) in 1989. Hirst was born to a Chinese mother and an Italian father and lived in China until the age of thirteen, when she was obliged to leave the country due to political insecurity. She then moved to Italy where she still lives and works. In 1988, after many years of absence from her native country, Hirst decided to take a journey around China: “Now that I am about to land [in China]”, she notes in the preface, “many good and bad souvenirs come back to my mind” (author’s translation). From the outset, then, the book is configured as a journey *à rebours* not on the track of her own memories. Hence, it should not come as a surprise that nostalgia plays a major role throughout the book, eventually framing old-China in an ephemeral

temporal dimension that connotes it as a utopia (a non-place) that is no longer accessible. The following passage, which recounts Hirst's hopeless search for the old Saint-Joseph convent in which she grew up, is emblematic:

"This was your courtyard, there in the middle stood the Virgin Mary with Bernadette," said father Jong. Despite these explanations I cannot orient myself; anything seems now displaced, I cannot locate with precision where classrooms were, and the chapel. I simply take some photos, hoping these and others will help me to re-build the puzzle of my memories. (137; author's translation)

This extract is also interesting in another respect: Hirst mentions that she takes photos of the places of her memories. In fact, several pictures enrich the book; however, these are not the ones actually taken by Hirst, but rather by the famous Italian photojournalist Giorgio Lotti, whose name appears on the book cover. At the same time, Hirst never refers to Lotti's presence during the journey, or to his work alongside what she writes, so that we are left with an unanswered dilemma: Were Hirst and Lotti travelling together? Lotti (private communication) confesses that the photos were taken on different occasions over a period of 16 years: "As a reporter for *Epoca* and *Panorama*, I went to China 12 times between 1974 and 1990." This means that, although these photos are roughly contemporary to the journey accomplished by Hirst, they nonetheless refer to another China; they recount another history; they represent another chronotope. This is even more crucial in relation to China, which underwent radical socio-political changes during the last three decades of the 20th century. Indeed, while Hirst narrates an experience that took place after the opening of Chinese borders in 1978, Lotti's photos relate to a China that was still inherently isolated from the rest of the world and in which free mobility was limited. Therefore, if we consider the conditions that presupposed Lotti's activity, all photos acquire a political relevance that is eventually absent in Hirst's text. Thus, we can suggest that besides (and even beyond) Barthes's "that-has-been", these photos testify above all the very *possibility* for the photographer to be *there*.

But, how do photos and text relate? First of all, it is notable that the images are quite numerous (49 out of 248 pages) and are interspersed throughout the whole book. In this sense, images and words entertain a balanced relationship within the book, so that none of the two modes can be said to be subordinated to the other. Moreover, the very decision to alternate words and images creates a strong chronotopic relation between them, blurring any authorial distinction, *as if* the work was accomplished organically from the outset. In particular, this

(deceptive) effect of chronotopic concordance is pursued in three ways. First of all, the photos' captions are quotations taken from the text, so that it seems that what is described with words by Hirst is "simultaneously" immortalized in pictures by Lotti. Secondly, Hirst rarely verbalises the time of travel. As Wolf (2005: 433) reminds us, the visual options available to an image for rendering the passing of time are rather limited. In this respect, Hirst's vague notations on the time of travel, in favour of a visual and descriptive representation of the journey, help words and images to find a deeper assonance. For example, although each chapter is dedicated to a city, the narrative transitions from one chapter to the other are rather elliptical and it is only at the very end that Hirst informs us that the journey lasted six weeks. Hence, we could say that it is primarily the book (as a medial format) to impress an over-reaching coherence upon the narrative. Thirdly, the chronotopic concordance between words and images has to do with what is represented in pictures and their mode of representation. To start with, all photos are in black and white. While Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) contend that "black and white" kindles a neutralisation of affection (253), indicating "'what might be' rather than reality" (159), here another interpretation seems possible. The black and white works as a blurring of the chronotopic coordinates of what is represented, so that scenes are "epicised", so to speak; they are secured within a still visual desaturation, which annihilates any historical anchorage. This is even more so if we consider that for Lotti (private communication) "it is through colours that we can recreate movement in photography".

Let us now focus on two examples. The first is the photo on pages 120-21: a standing young woman is immortalised while seeding a ploughed field by hand. She wears humble, worn-out clothes. The figure of the woman and the earth under her feet are in focus, although it is not possible to clearly identify her physiognomic traits due to her bent position. The rest of the field, both in the foreground and in the background (which sums up to the majority of the photo's space), is out of focus. As Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) affirm, "by being 'decontextualized', shown in a void, represented participants become generic, a 'typical example'" (161). In this sense, the impossibility of recognising the woman's traits and surroundings confers upon the whole picture a highly symbolic (i.e. epic) connotation. The woman comes metonymically to stand for all Chinese who are and have been peasants. However, because she is portrayed alone, the picture could also bear a counter-message: namely, it could point to the progressive abandonment of the countryside, which happened in particular after 1978, when Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping opened China to "the socialist way to capitalism". At the same time, if we relate the photo to the text next to it, we can suggest a

third possibility. Indeed, the picture is juxtaposed to Hirst's encounter with a woman called Blu Cielo ("Blue Sky"), who recounts to the traveller her hard times in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. In this respect, the photo comes to refer to a much more precise historical event: the migration to the countryside that a whole generation of Chinese people was forced to experience during the 1960s. Independently from the interpretation we decide to offer, it is important to stress that all of them are *possible*, insofar as they are presupposed by the chronotopes embedded in what is represented, in its mode of representation, or in the relation between text and image.

The second example is the picture on page 70. It is taken from an angled perspective and shows an elderly man in full shot who is seated by the doorstep of an old mosque. In the foreground are four pairs of shoes, while in the back, past the figure of the man, is a second entrance to the mosque, in front of which nobody can be seen. Concerning perspective, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996: 136) suggest that when a scene is framed from an oblique angle, it usually conveys a lack of involvement between the photographer and the scene. Although it could be said that the perspective works here as a form of respectful estrangement, another interpretation of its use will be proposed. Again, the difficulty with identifying the traits of the old man confers upon him a symbolic connotation: he stands not only for all Chinese Muslims, but also for the millenarian history of Islam in China. This is, indeed, supported by the caption, which states, "Great Mosque [in Xian] was built 1200 years ago" (Hirst, 1989: 71). At this point, depending on whether we privilege what is represented *per se*, or China's historical background, the photo can convey two controversial meanings. On the one hand, by focusing on the man's age, we could think that Islam in China is by now professed by old people and, at any rate, by a restricted number, since in the foreground only four pairs of shoes can be seen. On the other hand, if we contextualise this image historically, it could also testify a fresh wave of Islam, at least in comparison to the years of the Cultural Revolution during which all forms of religious belief were persecuted and many places of worship destroyed. It is according to this latter interpretation that the use of the perspective acquires a specific chronotopic function. The photo's oblique angle triggers the gaze from the old man down to the pairs of shoes in the foreground. So what do these shoes mean? Certainly, there are "only" four pairs of shoes, but more than the number, it is the absence that looms over them – the absence of the people who wear them – that strikes the gaze. The *presence* of these shoes kindles a phantasmagorical *absence* that tells us of the history of Islam in China. The oblique angle works then as a *mise en abyme* of Islam vicissitudes in the country: in the background, the absence of believers stands

for China's forceful secularism during the Cultural Revolution; the old man in full shot witnesses today's recrudescence of religious worshipping; the shoes in the foreground attest to the strengthening of this renewal, leading us also to believe, from the point in time of the interpretant, that Islam has continued to grow. Thus, the shoes open up to a double interpretation: *in praesentia* they refer to Islam's future; *in absentia* they bring the echo of the past – of the empty door in the back – and stand for all Chinese people who died because of their faith.

More generally, what this second example reasserts is that each photo, far from being a transparent impression of the instant, always embeds a chronotope that equally pertains to the subject represented and to its mode of representation. Photography, then, cannot help but mediate between the eye and the world, thus opening up a hermeneutical space that can be chronotopically investigated.

5. The Travel Blog's Chronotope: *Emil's Travel to China*

Emil's Travel to China <emilstravels.blogspot.co.uk> is a travel blog written by American Emil Kang in 2006. The blog is built using the “dynamic views” template, a piece of information that can be found by scrolling down the page to the bottom. It is worth mentioning because it is this choice that shapes the travel account's appearance. The blog presents the heading “Emil's Trip to China” in the top-left corner. Just below this, we find a darker bar with six options which define how the blog content can be displayed: “classic”, “flipcard” (default one), “magazine”, “mosaic”, “sidebar”, “snapshot”, and “timeline”. Then, further down, four more links – “recent”, “date”, “label”, “author” – allows us to perform other arrangements, but these do not really produce sensible changes because Kang has written only one blog without labelling the entries.

In fact, all designs can be considered sub-genres of the travel blog as a *genium*, insofar as each one of them impresses its own sub-generic chronotope upon the blog content. Apart from the “classic” design – with the typical central column filled with words and images – it is notable that none of the others displays the full verbal and visual content of the entries, but only extracts. It is thus possible to argue that, while not disclosing much about Kang's experience, these designs tell us about the potentialities of the template to permute the appearance of the

blog. In turn, these permutations have inevitable recoils on the enjoyment of the travel blog, promoting what Katherine Hayles (2012: 55) calls “hyper-reading”. In the present case, we can choose not only the visual appearance of the blog, but also how to “assemble” Kang’s experience; that is, the spatial and temporal order of the reading. This is particularly true for those designs that, by presenting as much content as possible within a single screenshot, give us a wider spectrum of choices. Paradoxically, it is the (chronotope of) the reading to “create” the (chronotope of) the *genium*. In this respect, to the extent that these designs favour a paradigmatic display of the blog’s content that does not really allows us to read it syntagmatically (i.e. read the entries and observe the images), the designs attest to a self-referential exposure of the medial format’s capacities, which is not directed to the enjoyment of the travel blog. In other words, while in books the publishing intervention tends to conceal itself by conventionality, so that the book appears to be functional to the enjoyment of its content, in blogs the medial format exposes itself and the reading goes hand in hand with it.

For the sake of the analysis, we focus on the “flipcard” design because it is the default one. It shows 30 cards in one screenshot and when the cursor passes over them they reveal the date of the entry and the number of comments. Overall, the journey lasted two weeks (4th-20th of October 2006). The experience (and its narrativization) is then concluded. But is it really so? From an experiential point of view, this is no doubt the case. However, from a medial perspective the conditions of the narrative’s existence are, so to speak, always temporary, insofar as the possibility to update or change the blog content continues to loom over it even once the travel experience is over. We could say, then, that the chronotopic coordinates of the blog format are always open-ended. Furthermore, since a blog can be updated, either by adding new entries, or by modifying/erasing old ones, its chronotope is unstable both at the level of the single entry, as well as of the whole website. More precisely, blogs are not (and cannot be) conceived as fully accomplished works, precisely because their *raison d’être* is that of being temporary, and constantly updated, texts. While the book’s physical finitude frames the chronotopicity of the work as something with a beginning and an end (Bakhtin, 1981: 255), and it also dictates its chronotopic reading as a largely sequential practice, blogs do not have medial outer boundaries, but only nominal ones (i.e. the URL), so that its generic assemblage is left up to the reader, who is constantly asked to discern what is part of the blog and what is not, eventually looking for an overall coherence. In this sense, Jill Walker (2008) is right when she notes that “each post makes sense in itself, but read together the posts tell a larger story. That story is usually partial and incomplete and does not form a narrative whole” (115). In

other words, what is narrated in blogs responds mainly, if not exclusively, to the chronotopic rhythm imposed by the medial format upon the writing process, rather than to an over-reaching conception of the work.

By clicking on each flipcard a new window opens and presents the text, pictures and comments. Since each entry is displayed within a different space, it is visually isolated from the rest of the blog. In the top-left corner of the new window, we have the possibility to go back and forth between the entries, but we also *simultaneously* have the chance to change the design, or to browse other entries that remain in the background. Hence, the blog offers the possibility to perform *both* a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic reading. This reasserts that the whole blog is nothing but a heterogeneous collection of pages that 1) are opened to a galaxy of other pages; and 2) exist only when they are actually reached. Put differently, the chronotope of the blog format is spatially inhomogeneous (a web, indeed) and temporally durative (pages exist only at the time of the visit). Evidently, these features have repercussions on the chronotope of the travel blog as a *genium*. Let us focus on Kang's written posts. Here is the first one:

Day 1 – An uneventful flight. We flew from JFK to Beijing on Air China on a Boeing 747. The plane was the smallest 747 we'd ever seen as it only had 37 rows. About half the plane was walled off to use for cargo. Here's our entire alumni group in Tiananmen Square, looking at Tiananmen Gate. Our guides advised us against holding up our UNC banner as police are more vigilant against perceived group protests with the presence of the Falun Gong... maybe at the Great Wall... (Kang: 2006, web)

This post is relevant in two respects. First of all, it is rather bare in form and content: not only is the syntax paratactic, but the narration is so minimal that it loses both its spatial and temporal thickness. This is a feature typical to the majority of the blog's posts, so that what emerges is more related to "the fact of knowing, with having, with knowledge as a possession" (Adorno, 1991: 84), rather than to the delivery of a subjective representation of China. In other words, Kang tends to episcise the narration (far more radically than Hirst does), thereby marginalising its time and space specificity in favour of a purely documentary function. This becomes even more prominent when it is considered that many posts are filled with everyday details, which are, in Kang's own words, "uneventful". It is in this respect that the first post is also relevant: by accounting for an "uneventful flight", it overtly reveals the extent to which the chronotopic rhythm of the blog – its necessity of being constantly updated – affects the narrative, by eventually turning the "uneventfulness" into something relevant.

Images also support these considerations. To start with, pictures betray an amateur approach to photography: sometimes, what is represented is not correctly framed; other times, a whole set of photos reproduce the same scene from very similar angles, thus suggesting a tendency towards quantity over quality. Besides, the mode of representation adheres to what Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) define as “naturalism”, that is, “how much correspondence there is between the visual representation of an object and what we normally see of that object” (158). As seen above, the pre-tension of rendering reality “as it is” is the most evident effect of photography; but it is a deception. In Kang’s case, such a pretension, which is declined in terms of plain naturalism, tells us that the use of the camera is rather conventional; in other words, by erasing the camera’s mediation, its use aims to simply reproduce (rather than produce) what is seen. Finally, we note that photos are often displayed without any rigorous decision as to the layout, so that their relation with the text appears to be arbitrary. More generally, all these aspects are indicative of the fact that pictures bear a predominant documentary function; they were not taken in view of a professional exhibition, but in order to testify the experience and fill the blog.

The first picture, for example, shows from a frontal perspective the group of people with whom Kang travelled. All people are staring at the camera, an occurrence that Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) label as a “demanding gaze” (118) because it seems that the subjects ask the observer something. But what do they ask? We could say that this and other photos portraying Kang and his colleagues bear a strong self-referentiality whose dominant chronotope, on Barthes’s wave, is that of witnessing the “having-been-there”. Such a chronotope is, indeed, typical of the tourist trip, intended as an experience that entails visiting unknown places: “In one ride,” writes Kang (2006) almost at the end, “we were able to experience, tourist China, urban China, and rural china [sic]. I will never forget it” (web). Hence, first and foremost, what these photos ask the observer is to “Look who we are! Look *where* we are!” Retrospectively, we could also suggest that in *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* there are no pictures of Hirst not only because Lotti was not with her during the journey, but more precisely because she could not testify of having been in the China she was looking for; the China of her childhood.

As for China, pictures in the blog equally portray urban and rural places, conveying the idea of a country torn between a hyper-accelerated development and extremely poor regions. Similarly, the representation of Chinese people is also double-sided. On the one hand, various images show Chinese people as modern tourists (which was unthinkable at the time Lotti took his

photos). On the other hand, in particular on the occasion of Kang's visit to Lhasa and Guilin, we are presented with pictures of people still living in very humble conditions. Negotiating between these contradictory images, the overall representation of China and the Chinese adheres to the contemporary (Western) chronotopic imaginary of a fast-developing country in which, however, deep social and economic inequalities remain.

6. Conclusion

After deconstructing the hypostatisation of photography as a transparent apparatus, the paper discussed how the concept of "chronotope" can be fruitfully extended to the analysis of photos. In fact, all photos embed a specific chronotope, which relates to both what is represented and its mode of representation.

Furthermore, the inter-medial analysis showed that Hirst's travel book and Kang's travel blog realise the travel writing genre very differently. This is so because each medial format is inherently chronotopic and impresses upon the genre its own chronotope, eventually dictating the reading. It is in this regard that the notion of "*genium*", intended as a field of generic and medial negotiations, was introduced.

More generally, although it is possible to say that *Il mondo oltre il fiume dei peschi in fiore* and *Emil's Trip to China* share the same generic matrix, the medial formats on which they rely make of them two incommensurable *genium*. In this sense, an intermedial analysis that aims at comparing analogue physical texts and virtual digital ones cannot overlook the necessity to elaborate *a priori* a common set of literary and aesthetic values.

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