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TRANS TIMES: QUE(E)RYING NORMATIVE LOGICS OF TEMPORALITY, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY IN VIRGINIA WOOLF'S *ORLANDO*

Jessica Seidel

Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main

ABSTRACT

Prefiguring contemporary inquiries into queer and trans temporality, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* explores temporal politics of sexual and gendered identity amidst socio-historical developments in modernism. In her critique of prevailing nineteenth-century presumptions about human experience and related biologically determined, chronologically structured lifetimes, Woolf creates an untimely, gender-variant character resistant to normative order. To conceptualize Orlando's non-normative temporality and gender identifications, this article draws from the threefold framework developed in Fisher, Phillips, and Katri's (2017) research on trans temporalities: 'the construction, deconstruction, and resistant reconstruction of trans subjects'. Spanning from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, Orlando's queer reality serves as dual resistance to norms of both time and gender; a confluence of constructed male past and deconstructed present as trans woman substantiates the gender variance and future reconstructions of the trans self within what this article introduces as a continuum. In consideration of modernist interactions with time and genderqueer life along with current theorizations of queer and trans temporalities, this article seeks to argue how the trans self modeled by Woolf emerges as asynchronous and ever-evolving. This article then offers, in the vein of Orlando's transgender subjectivity, an exemplification of the potential to resist and subvert hetero- and chrononormativity in introducing alternative modes of lived reality that endorse unscheduled lifetimes and divergent relations to time, gender, and sexuality.

KEYWORDS

trans temporality, queer temporality, (trans)gender, heteronormativity, chrononormativity, modernism

Introduction

While non-normative logics of time and gender are recurrent elements in Virginia Woolf's writing, her 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography* appears to prefigure contemporary inquiries into queer and trans temporality in more detail. Developing from critical engagements with (homo)sexuality and life writing that prevail in readings of the novel, this study turns toward an equally significant engagement with theories of time and their interaction with transgender subjectivity. As a fictive embodiment of this interaction, Woolf's protagonist defies clear-cut categorization: originally born a boy in England's sixteenth century, Orlando experiences a change of gender in his thirties and lives on for over three hundred years into the 1920s, transitioning from man to woman, husband to wife, and father to mother. This androgyny across centuries is a queer interpretation of time that serves as counterbalance to conventions of biologically determined and chronologically arranged life. In this vein, this article offers an exemplification of the potential to resist and subvert hetero- and chrononormativity in introducing alternative modes of lived reality that endorse unscheduled lifetimes and divergent relations to time, gender, and sexuality.

Unlike previous scholarship on temporality in *Orlando*, this article is situated within the fields of both queer and transgender studies. Although rather difficult to clearly distinguish between 'queer' and 'transgender' – the former predominantly understood as concerning non-normative sexual orientations and practices and the latter as concerning non-normative gendered embodiments and identifications – both similarly challenge and oppose normative sexuality and gender. On the one hand, in combining these two connotations, the term 'genderqueer' may be used to refer to this joint resistance and 'intimacy between *transgender* and *queer*'.¹ On the other, theories of queer and trans temporality take shape as non-normative and asynchronous experiences of time, relating to the temporal subjectivity of genderqueer individuals. Recent explorations of 'trans temporalities' have likewise approached such conceptual delineations; in the introduction to their eponymous publication, Simon D. Elin Fisher, Rasheedah Phillips, and Ido H. Katri trace detachments of trans temporality from its formation in queer theory.² While they are interested in the interrelated concepts of transness and time as both a critical means to enrich current scholarship and as an impetus for taking action to improve marginalized trans subjects' lives, their understanding of trans temporality largely rests on Kadji Amin's attention 'to the ways in

¹ Heather Love, 'Queer', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1-2 (2014), 172-176 (p. 173) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399938>>.

² Simon D. Elin Fisher, Rasheedah Phillips, and Ido H. Katri, 'Trans Temporalities', *Somatechnics*, 7.1 (2017), 1-15 (p. 1) <<https://doi.org/10.3366/soma.2017.0202>>. Note that Fisher, Phillips, and Katri's research is motivated by scrutiny of 'the widely and forcefully held linear conceptions of "progress" and "development" that constrain' trans temporalities.

which transgender experiences are constituted by yet exceed normative temporalities [...] to do justice to the complex ways in which people inhabit gender variance'.³ Assessing various arguments by scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz and Jenny Sundén, Fisher, Phillips, and Katri come to associate 'queer time' with sexuality and its potential to improve queer lives through affect and desire, embracing inconsistent gender identifications, whereas they associate 'transgender time' with an intended "actualization" of one's gender in one's own sexed body' (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 6). It is this apparent contradiction between rejecting and seeking a sense of coherence that motivates this research – a contradiction that Orlando's reality lived in queer *and* trans time paradoxically reconciles. Thus, relevant to this study is not only the correlation between temporality and queerness but also the manner in which temporality and transness interact and, beyond that, how these elements then come together more broadly.

Existing literature on queer temporality in *Orlando* examines the diverse encounters of the sexual and gendered self with time, ranging from considerations of progression, transition, and space to the utopian promise of the narrative. In his evaluation of a series of philosophers and queer theorists, Josh McLoughlin criticizes Muñoz's queer futurity for its utopianism, allegedly normative notion of the future, and its lack of a viable strategy to envision a temporal alternative for queer subjects.⁴ While McLoughlin identifies a resistance to chrononormativity within Woolf's protagonist, the suggested queer 'prevarication', a method of evading process, disregards the implications of Orlando's gender transition and trans subjectivity. By contrast, critics who discuss Orlando's physical transformation either subvert or reinforce the normativity that Woolf questions. In her interpretation of Orlando as 'queer chronotope', Pooja Mittal Biswas draws on Mikhail Bakhtin to explore the spatio-temporal dimensions of Woolf's novel.⁵ Even though she reads Orlando's transition as a deconstruction of male/female and past/future binaries, Biswas views this bodily change of gender as a move from past to present or vice versa and thus delineates pre- and post-transition states in terms of a normative binary, occasionally maintaining normative notions of linear progression. Her argument of a 'gender lag', a time gap between gender identification and biological sex, implies Orlando to live through a physical *and* mental process of completion that necessitates a start and end point. Without consideration of transgender subjectivity, the topic of transness is broached only briefly here, and the modernist context of the narrative functions to

³ Kadji Amin, 'Temporality', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1-2 (2014), 219-222 (p. 219) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400073>>.

⁴ Josh McLoughlin, 'Queer Time in Woolf and Wilde', *New Critique*, (2016) <<https://newcritique.co.uk/2016/07/25/backs-to-the-future-queer-trajectories-in-woolf-wilde/>> [accessed 16 May 2023].

⁵ Pooja Mittal Biswas, 'Queering Time: The Temporal Body as Queer Chronotope in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Anglia*, 138.1 (2020), 38-61 (p. 38) <<https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2020-0002>>.

justify its subtextual portrayal of queerness, but not to indicate how modernists conceptualize time and how this, in turn, contributes to Orlando's temporality. Further scholarly work such as Loretta Stec's article on gender transition and linear progression undermines the normativity in question. Stec scrutinizes binary categorization, its constraining forces and effects on transgender subjects such as Orlando, yet primarily considers implications of sexological developments and references contemporary rather than modernist theories of time.⁶ This crucial element of modernism, however, substantially frames and characterizes both Woolf's trans subject and literary critique and must therefore be considered as foundation for any such analysis.

In expanding a series of 'queerly temporal projects', this study critically engages with modernist conceptualizations of time and relates these to the genderqueer temporality discussed in *Orlando*.⁷ Following current theorizations of queer and trans temporalities in conjunction with Henri Bergson's philosophy of consciousness and time – occasionally drawing on Einsteinian science, Bakhtinian literary criticism, Foucauldian power theory, and Freudian psychoanalysis – Woolf's literary look into the future coincides with rapid developments in modernism that are made productive in this analysis. In her critique of prevailing nineteenth-century presumptions about human experience and related chronologically structured lifetimes, Woolf creates an untimely, gender-variant character resistant to normative order. Such order wrongfully scripts life as reproductive sequence, which then subtly naturalizes linearity under the influence of biological claims since progressions from birth to 'maturation to aging and decay [...] sketch a predictable, inevitable, irrevocable time line'.⁸ Continuity of this sequence necessitates a heterosexual cycle of marriage, reproduction, and child rearing that ultimately unites gender and sexual identity with temporal chronology and, by extension, heteronormativity with chrononormativity. Gendered bodies and lives outside this norm may then be associated with 'the experience of being out of sync', instead inhabiting an asynchronous continuum of gendered and temporal discontinuity that embraces ruptures of normative progression (Amin, p. 220). In such a continuum, non-normative and 'in between' subjectivities may seek 'temporal unity [in] the past (having-been), the future (the

⁶ Loretta Stec, "In Process of Fabrication": Queer Time and Trans* Selves in *Orlando* and *Transparent*, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 50 (2020), 181-198 <<https://doi.org/10.5699/yearenglstud.50.2020.0181>>.

⁷ Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici, 'Trans, Time, and History', *TSG: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 5.4 (2018), 518-539 (p. 520) <<http://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-7090003>>.

⁸ Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang, 'Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.2-3 (2007), 177-195 (p. 193) <<https://doi.org/10.12.15/10642684-2006-030>>.

not-yet), and the present (the making-present)' of their own alternative time.⁹ Thus, on a societal level, genderqueerness tackles temporal forces of the past, to retrace developments and achieve present advancement, and of the future, to guide a present orientation. This arrangement then resonates with 'the construction, deconstruction, and resistant reconstruction of trans subjects' that Fisher, Phillips, and Katri link to specific forms of resistance to hegemonic subject formation and a linear trans timeline (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 4). Since the novel's trans subject Orlando embodies such resistance, Fisher, Phillips and Katri's model functions as threefold framework for this article. In drawing from their argument, the following study joins 'trans-centered project[s]' that have been researching temporal concerns related to the production and marginalization of trans subjects, bringing together the critical fields of queer and transgender studies to reinforce a 'thoroughly intersectional approach to trans temporality' (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 4).

After an initial historical and theoretical contextualization of modernist interactions with temporality and genderqueer life, Woolf's methodology for resisting chrono- and heteronormativity will be examined. Linked to the construction of Orlando's male past, the first subsection will problematize his adolescent self and corresponding deviation from conventional attitudes toward time, gender, and sexual identity. Secondly, in line with Orlando's external change and deconstructed present as woman, the article will establish her transgender subjectivity and consequential queer resistance to normative temporality and gender identification. The third and final subsection will then assess Orlando's gender variance since the emerging continuum characterized by self-definition and agency allows for a variety of potential futures. In this temporal and gendered reconstruction of the trans self, Orlando effectively resists chrono- and heteronormative order and proves transgender subjectivity to be asynchronous and ever-evolving.

Temporality and Genderqueer Life in Modernism

With the onset of the twentieth century, a modernist interest in the subjectivity of time emerged that rethought conventional Enlightenment understandings of homogeneous chronology to reconceptualize models of temporality beyond chrono- and, in the particular case of Woolf, heteronormativity. Many contemporary thinkers, scientists, and artists adopted a skeptical attitude toward the supposedly natural progression and organization of time according to monolithic logics of rationalization, mechanization, and capitalist practice. Most notably, Albert Einstein's (1920) theory of relativity and Henri Bergson's (1910) philosophy of time, his introduction of *durée* or

⁹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 186.

duration, not merely demonstrate the modernist refusal of linear temporal sequence in favor of lived experiences of time, but, more importantly, constitute decisive contributions to Woolf's writing and its implications. *Orlando* follows Einstein's observation that experienced time depends upon an individual's perception and their frame of reference, 'calculat[ing] how time in one reference system moving away at a constant velocity appears to slow down when viewed from another system at rest relative to it'.¹⁰ In essence, this suggests that 'every reference-body [...] has its own particular time'.¹¹ As the following arguments will elucidate, *Orlando* as a literal body of reference experiences time subjectively and thereby exemplifies the theory's denial of predominant conceptions of time, specifically Newtonian objective, 'true, and mathematical time [that] flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration'.¹² Similar to his coeval Einstein, Bergson considers time to be subjective, while he differentiates between a 'homogeneous medium' utilized for counting and distinction and a 'pure duration' that, unlike in Enlightenment science, detaches from a context of absolute linearity.¹³ Although Kant's prior recognition of time as subjective basis for experience had preceded this rejection of Newton's theory much earlier, time and its universality in public – materialized by ubiquitous clocks and other timepieces – became subject to scrutiny only in the wake of the radical changes of modernism (Kern, p. 11).

Public, objective time as a measure of rationalization, largely influenced by the fourteenth-century emergence of mechanical clocks as temporal markers, further increased in abstraction with the standardization of time in the late 1800s (Kern, p. 11). Standard time both synchronizes and enables a numerical calculability of temporality, which, within the realms of capitalism, carries a certain value irrespective of individuals' experiences. Such regulation by both the clock as instrument and time as instrumentality, however, denies the reality of subjective and heterogeneous temporality. This often surfaces in modernist portrayals of time as ominous; in the works of Joyce, Conrad, and especially Woolf, the striking of clocks appears to herald specific incidents with premonition, 'like thunder' and as 'a great shock to the nervous system'.¹⁴ Due to its

¹⁰ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918: With a New Preface* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 19.

¹¹ Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, 3rd edn, trans. by Robert W. Lawson (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 26.

¹² Isaac Newton, *Sir Isaac Newton's Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and His System of the World*, ed. by Florian Cajori, trans. by Andrew Motte (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2022), p. 6.

¹³ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. by F. L. Pogson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1910), p. 90.

¹⁴ Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography*, ed. by Brenda Lyons (London: Penguin Classics, 2019), pp. 220, 211.

man-made function as social framework by which time is represented chronologically and measured objectively, the trope of the clock poses a twofold threat: that of individuals' difficulty to fit into any given temporal framework and an ignorance of more complex subjectivity. Wary of this discrepancy between objective reality and subjective consciousness, Bergson classifies time as an erroneous segmentation into distinct, sequential events by means of timepieces:

When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement [...], I do not measure duration, [...] I merely count simultaneities, which is very different. [...] Within myself a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states is going on, which constitutes true duration. (Bergson, pp. 107-108)

This sense of endurance and truthful time echoes Newtonian conceptions, though here it critiques periodization, homogeneity, and refers to a non-objective mental experience of temporality. Along with other modernists hostile toward chronological absolutism, Woolf endeavors to abolish this 'appalling narrative business of the realist: getting on from lunch to dinner, it is false, unreal, merely conventional'.¹⁵ To discredit linear time that had traditionally structured social life and, with respect to literature, above all the nineteenth-century novel, writers such as Woolf utilize this medium to reform outdated understandings of temporality. Indeed, 'from the very beginning, [the novel] developed as a genre that had at its core a new way of conceptualizing time'.¹⁶

As foundation for such modernist reconceptualization, Bergsonian duration encompasses individuals' subjectivity, their 'reality [...] in immediate experience as a flux, a continuous process of becoming, to be grasped by intuition' and dissociated from external determinants by antithetical attention to interiority (Bergson, p. x). This opposition of *temps* and *durée*, of objective and subjective time, of 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' sequence respectively, liberates lives entrapped in the fabricated organization of rigid, instrumental temporality so that modernist time emerges as fluid (Bergson, p. xi). This subjective flux that Bergson identifies as authentically experienced time then appears to resemble an interiority depicted in Woolf's writing by use of her stream-of-consciousness technique: a characterization of individuals' consciousness as perpetual non-chronological flow that refrains from rational distinction between occurrences according to social

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary: Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Leonard Woolf (New York: Harcourt, 2003), p. 136.

¹⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 38.

schedules. Those subjective qualities of time, thus, substantiate how time cannot ‘be simply presented and performed’; rather, claims Ronald Schleifer, it must be unraveled and ‘*articulated* by something other than itself’.¹⁷ Experience of duration in literature, it seems, suits such articulation and rearranges both public and private time in existential rather than chronological order to assign value and meaning to individuals’ lived realities.

While this article’s primary project is to evaluate the interrelation between temporality, queerness, and transness in Woolf’s writing, the spatial dimensions relevant to an understanding of time in this narrative are not to be overlooked. In his literary criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin borrows from Einstein’s theory and introduces the term ‘chronotope’, a synergy of time and place, to explore the close link between temporal and spatial facets in literature (Bakhtin, p. 84). In her analysis of *Orlando* as ‘queer chronotope’, Biswas identifies the ‘protagonist’s journey through time’ and the ‘physical and psychological space of the protagonist’s body’ as temporal and spatial components respectively (Biswas, p. 39). According to Bakhtin, the collaborative work of these two dimensions produces an entirety within writings: ‘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’ (Bakhtin, p. 84). In *Orlando*, this temporal visibility and articulation, to argue in both Bakhtin’s and Schleifer’s terms, thus interacts with spatial tropes such as the house and the closet that come to carry meaning within the larger signifying discourse of Woolf’s queer narrative.

However, *Orlando* not only resists linear, normative time; the novel also contradicts linear or rather, quite fittingly, straight gender identifications and sexual selves.¹⁸ Given Woolf’s intimate relationship and dedication of *Orlando* to Vita Sackville-West, a ‘pronounced Sapphist’ known for her non-heterosexual tendencies, the narrative invites considerations of sexual and gender identity by means of a queer reading.¹⁹ This reading follows the approach of many theorists in the field of queer temporality and considers queerness to be ‘an oppositional stance against the normative temporal fabric of modern life’ rather than a mere reference to non-normative sexuality and its practical and affective underpinnings.²⁰ Historically, the term ‘queer’ is not solely to be understood as ‘peculiar’ and ‘eccentric’ but also entails a sense ‘of questionable character’.²¹ Linked to early

¹⁷ Ronald Schleifer, *Modernism and Time: The Logic of Abundance in Literature, Science, and Culture, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 70; italics in original.

¹⁸ In this article, the term ‘straight’ references both a linear, homogeneous character of time and the colloquial connotation of culturally accepted heterosexuality as traditional mode of sexual orientation.

¹⁹ Vita Sackville-West, *The Letters of Vita Sackville-West to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Louise A. DeSalvo and Mitchell Alexander Leaska (New York: Morrow, 1985), p. 23.

²⁰ Melanie Micir, ‘Queer Woolf’, in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jessica Berman (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 347-358 (p. 353).

²¹ ‘Queer’, in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online], <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156236>> [accessed 23

twentieth-century connotations of homosexuality, this dubious nature of the designation resonates with public events and legislation that sought to suppress non-normative sexuality; the British 1921 Criminal Law Amendment Bill attempted but ultimately failed to rule all sexual activities between females illegal, whilst in 1928 several authors experienced censorship of those of their works that implied homosexual content.²² Not only did Woolf publish *Orlando* under the threat of obscenity charges in this particular year; fellow author Radclyffe Hall had to face both a trial and resultant ban of her lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* during the late 1920s.²³ Disguised by its fictive qualities, Woolf's queer content avoided censorship; however, it was not until the latter half of the century that modernist critics recognized her literary subversion of established heterosexual norms (Keane, p. 1088). Inarguably though, *Orlando*'s attentiveness to non-normative experiences of sexuality, gender, and temporality renders it a contemporarily meaningful statement about the modernist organization of identity and time.

Although the novel links genderqueer to modernist temporal discontinuity in its critique of normative chronology, sexuality, and gender, it relativizes the extent to which modernist – and in that temporally experimental – texts are also queer. Approaching a definition of 'queer', Heather Love differentiates between a theoretical and a more practical meaning of the term according to which both queer and modernist texts narrate a 'capacious nonnormativity, political critique, and resistance to identity', whereas only the former concern 'communities marked as gender and sexual deviants' (Love, p. 175). Moreover, if queerness names a rejection of stable sexual selves and related practices while transness resists binary logics of gendered identification and embodiment within the normative scope of the early nineteenth century, then queer, trans, and modernist narratives overlap in their nonconformity to and revolt against 'the regimes of the normal'.²⁴ Unique to *Orlando*, it seems, is its protagonist; as temporally discontinuous narrative at the interface of modernism and genderqueerness, Woolf discusses trans experience and identity before the conceptualization and theorization of the very community formations, practices, and embodiments from which these topics initially emerged. As a result, Woolf comes to 'excavat[e] pasts that certainly contained gender-variant cultural practices, without necessarily imposing the name "transgender"

March 2022].

²² Rebecca Jennings, *A Lesbian History of Britain: Love and Sex Between Women Since 1500* (Oxford: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007).

²³ Stephen Keane, 'Homosexual and Lesbian Expression', in *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. by Derek Jones (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 1085-1091 (p. 1088).

²⁴ *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. by Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. xxvi.

on those historical moments'.²⁵ In line with such an anachronistic approach, this article retraces Woolf's modernist narrative to redevelop a present understanding of the temporality of genderqueer life and, essentially, to 'do justice' to the complexity of gender-variant life that Amin and Fisher, Phillips, and Katri define as main purpose of critically engaging with trans temporalities (Amin, p. 219). After all, as Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici indicate, it might precisely be a 'claim to gender-nonconforming lives in the past' that can serve to 'legitimate trans identities in the present', consequently enabling practical intervention into future conceptions of development, progress, and trans subjectivity more generally (DeVun and Tortorici, p. 518).²⁶

It is against this background that the refusal of objective homogeneity in favor of subjectivity and existential order ruptures preconceptions of normative life schedules and related events. As evidenced by the modernist public's pursuits to prevent any occurrence of queerness, such alternative life forms as prefigured by Woolf – those that drastically unsettle the conventional rationale of a natural progression of time and existence – threaten and destabilize both the nation's past and future. Here, according to Elizabeth Freeman, conventional temporality functions as an instrument by which 'institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts' that, consequently, can manipulate time to generate 'seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time'.²⁷ As humans, individuals appear to be subject to their biologically dictated life cycle that supposes, firstly, a chronology of certain events and relations and, secondly, a natural organization of time: a 'chrononormativity' that links to an orientation of life toward rationalization, development, and progress (Freeman, p. 3). Amin reasons that the hegemonic construction of trans subjectivity might then be considered a form of chrononormativity in line with a 'progressivist temporality that joins both continuity and change [...] in conformity with normative frameworks' (Amin, p. 220). A deeply ingrained adjustment to normative schedules and a contrary subversion of stable, straight lifetimes therefore establishes the modernist appeal against naturalized normativity, more precisely heteronormativity and its temporal dimensions. Trans temporality, in essence 'visions of time as asynchronous and non-normative', connect those subjects across time who fail or resist chrononormative life (DeVun and Tortorici, p. 520). Queerly subjective experiences of time thus become the achievement of 'imaginative life schedules' developed as counternarratives to the temporal logics of heterosexuality, reproduction, and

²⁵ Various authors, *Transgender Studies Reader 2*, ed. by Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 11.

²⁶ This article follows such a methodology for evaluating both the potential of *Orlando* as a narrative and *Orlando* as a trans subject from the modernist period to guide a present orientation.

²⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3.

longevity.²⁸ On the one hand, it seems that a potential to escape the chronological arrangement of life through genderqueer time is emerging; yet, on the other hand, the mechanisms of these alternative subjectivities and their spatiotemporal interactions with gendered identification, embodiment, and desire appear uncertain. As will be argued in the following subsections, Woolf's exemplary trans subject serves to resolve this uncertainty.

Construction of the Trans Subject: The 'Having-Been' Orlando

In view of Orlando's subjectivity prior to his physical transition from man to woman, it seems that a discrepancy between private, genderqueer time and public, straight time occurs as early as in his adolescent boyhood. The most recognizable modernist effort to override claims of temporal linearity within the novel constitutes the creation of an almost four-century-long lifespan; Woolf's protagonist floats from his male youth in the Elizabethan era to his female thirties in the twentieth century, suppressing death as the supposedly natural end of human life and thereby contradicting chrononormative time. Such an unconventional continuum, a queer rendition of time and space, scrutinizes traditional 'logics of development, maturity, [and] adulthood' while Orlando embodies a direct resistance to those concepts (Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality', p. 13). In his experience of time, 'brevity' merges with 'diuturnity' so that a fusion of seemingly conflicting sensations is achieved, validating how 'the task of estimating the length of human life [...] is beyond our capacity' (Woolf, *Orlando*, pp. 68-69).

Aware of this temporal relativity, a literary reproduction of Bergsonian philosophy and its argued tension between objective and subjective time becomes discernible: an 'extraordinary discrepancy between time on the *clock* and time in the *mind*' (*Orlando*, p. 68; emphasis added). In this light, Woolf's narrator contemplates how time functions 'with amazing punctuality', however, 'has no such simple effect upon the mind of man [that] works with equal strangeness upon the body of time' (*Orlando*, p. 68). Man's mind, the consciousness perceiving the passing of time, represents a fleshly recording instrument that impinges on individuals and their inner temporal experience, whereas the other external recording instrument, the clock, dictates punctually a chrononormative order and thus serves as a symbolical framework to socially navigate individuals, their experiences, and respective actions. As chrononormativity's antagonist, 'the queer element of the human spirit' – here materialized by Orlando's alternative subjectivity – counters the fabrication of straight time and introduces a deviant, heterogeneous, and above all authentic perception of temporality

²⁸ Jack Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies', in *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 1-21 (p. 1).

(*Orlando*, p. 68). Echoing Bergson's assertion of lived time as perpetual flow, Howard German and Sharon Kaehele agree with this 'subjective reaction [of Orlando's mind] to temporal reality' as they identify a 'dialectic between the ephemeral and the enduring', wherein an existential meaning of Orlando's individual experience is privileged.²⁹

From the very first sentence of the novel, an ambiguity in relation to Orlando's gender transpires; although *he* is introduced as undoubtedly male, given the contemporary circumstances of sexual suppression, the possibility of disguise addressed by the narrator already hints at the transness beneath his masculine surface. In his youth, Orlando finds himself attracted to the 'extraordinary seductiveness' of an unknown 'person' despite their unrecognizable gender identity (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 26). Perceived as chronological occurrence at 'six in the evening of the seventh of January', the stranger disguised by clothing (who later turns out to be Orlando's love interest Sasha) arouses his sexual self and triggers his departure from normative life in straight time (*Orlando*, p. 26). Both normative sexuality and temporality are overruled by his 'simple', yet 'extremely strong' senses that 'were mostly taken from things he had liked the taste of as a boy' (*Orlando*, p. 26). In this experience of queer self-revelation demonstrated in the stream of consciousness that follows the encounter, the fleeting quality of Orlando's mind manifests; particularly the symbolism of water and birds, flowing and flying respectively, signifies his subjective perception of time as fluid (*Orlando*, pp. 28, 39).

From his adolescence onwards, Orlando's inner desires evidence his lack of chrononormativity and consequential genderqueer reality. In consideration of social convention, the uncertainty as to Sasha's man- or womanhood troubles Orlando. When she skates toward him, he worries 'that the person was of his own sex, and thus all embraces were out of the question' (*Orlando*, p. 27). Not only a tension between straight and queer time occurs; with culturally unaccepted homosexuality in mind, Orlando also realizes the relevance of Sasha's sex for their future relationship. The conflict between his private, inner attraction and a public, external normativity suggests the concealment of his subjectivity and thus represents, to borrow José Esteban Muñoz's theoretical inflection, the potential of an overt 'queer futurity' (Muñoz, p. 185). Melanie Micir attributes Orlando's sexuality to his exceptionally long lifespan, reasoning that he is 'only able to become a queer subject – experiencing everything from heterosexual courtly desire to ambiguous sexual longing [...] – because [his life] takes place over three centuries' (Micir, p. 354). However, already in the relatively few years of his adolescence, he resists sexual norms in becoming

²⁹ Howard German and Sharon Kaehele, 'The Dialectic of Time in *Orlando*', *College English*, 24.1 (1962), 35-41 (p. 36) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/373845>>.

attached to an individual without certainty about gender or social acceptance of a potentially non-heterosexual relationship.

While queer individuals fail to meet heterosexual norms at the most fundamental level, especially those whose maturation does not parallel others' linear progress in younger years visibly lack chrononormativity.³⁰ Prior to his liaison with Sasha, Orlando is a clumsy, 'sulky stripling' who only grows into a traditional nobleman and 'animated' personality once he recognizes a possible desirable future for himself (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 29). As youngsters are often incapable to 'corporeally occupy who they may later find themselves to be', this undesirability of a chrononormative adulthood characterizes many queers' lives, most notably their very own relationships to time and personal progression (Jaffe).³¹ Such undesirability then may lead to a discrepancy between their lives and the 'normative narratives of sexed development, continuity, and coherence' that adhere to a predetermined and linear lifetime (Amin, p. 220). Claudia Castañeda emphasizes that childhood and adolescence operate according to a 'system of normalization', a perspective reflected in early twenty-first-century transgender activism that is oriented toward normalizing gender-variant children.³² Jack Halberstam explains that this activism within and by trans communities, more specifically by parents on behalf of their children, adheres to medical, psychological, and similar discourses and tends to consider its trans subject as 'a minor in need of advocacy, or [even] a patient in need of care', so that a child's development may either meet or fail the intended 'normal' progression.³³ In essence, this possible temporal discontinuity then 'constitutes a pathological instance of childhood *and* gender simultaneously – there is "something wrong" with the child *through* its gender' (Castañeda, pp. 60-61; italics in original). Orlando's coming of age, however, resists any attempts of normalization and thereby circumvents not only the hegemonic 'construction [...] of trans subjects' but also the pathologization imposed on diversely developing genderqueer individuals (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 4; Stec, p. 193).

³⁰ Sara Jaffe, 'Queer Time: The Alternative to "Adulthood"', *JSTOR Daily*, 10 January 2018 <<https://daily.jstor.org/queer-time-the-alternative-to-adulthood/>> [accessed 9 April 2022].

³¹ Note that Halberstam points to parental activism's struggle 'to distinguish childhood self-knowledge from adult identity'. While gender-variant expression in children can take on many meanings, ranging from a 'lifelong sense of gender nonconformity' to a 'stage to pass through', this expression in childhood must not necessarily relate to later gendered identifications in adulthood. Here, endeavors and measures to define the transgender child stand at odds with the complexity of transgender subjectivity and the possible reconstructions of one's trans self throughout life. See Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 69-70.

³² Claudia Castañeda, 'Childhood', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1-2 (2014), 59-61 (p. 59) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399605>>.

³³ Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), p. 53.

In terms of his life's progression, the most determining stages of Orlando's further development are announced by the ordering chimes of clocks. As a temporal marker, St. Paul's bell 'remorselessly' rings in the end of his relationship with Sasha; confined within straight time, the 'sixth', 'seventh', and 'eighth' stroke successively reveal that she chose to not appear at their agreed meeting place and time (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 43). Violently, the simultaneity of clock time and mind time – Orlando's shock-induced paralysis and the resulting two-hour-long process of understanding Sasha's decision – problematizes conventional chronology. Juxtaposing objective with subjective time, a modernist association of negative vis-à-vis positive temporal experience emerges as '[the strokes] seemed notes first heralding and then *proclaiming death* and disaster [...] [and] [w]hen the twelfth struck he knew that his doom was sealed [...] The passionate and feeling heart of Orlando knew the *truth*' (*Orlando*, p. 43; emphasis added). Figuratively, the shortly occurring death caused by apocalyptic clock time seems to foreshadow the end of Orlando's identification as a man, whereas the truth he discovers in his heart then references the authentic transgender self that is to be revealed shortly.

Ultimately, Orlando's dual departure from a female partner as well as chrononormative time provokes the retreat into his secluded country mansion where lastly his gender transition takes *place*. The house as spatial element and its conspicuous 'three hundred and sixty-five bedrooms' and 'fifty-two staircases', typifying the days and weeks of a year respectively, appears to be not merely an allegory for time but also for queer space (*Orlando*, p. 76). Jack Halberstam argues that such space suggests the 'place-making practices' of non-normative individuals so that, linked to Bakhtin's argument of visualized time in the number of rooms and stairs, Orlando's estate 'becomes charged' with meaning (Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality', p. 6; Bakhtin, p. 84). Very much 'responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history', the house as continuum of time and space is both a temporal metaphor for Bergsonian endurance untouched by public progression and a plot device that conserves a certain interiority irrespective of external socio-historical events (Bakhtin, p. 84). Biswas reasons that 'the social reality presented or performed in the outside world is at odds with or lags behind the experiential reality of queerness within one's own mind' (Biswas, p. 53). Thus, the chronotopic mansion incorporates Orlando's sheltered subjectivity on the inside and a consequential objectivity, or rather fabricated reality, on the outside, which seems to resonate with the trope of the closet frequently applied in queer narratives. Orlando's closet-house demarcates a dimension of genderqueer time and experience beyond heteronormative conformity that enables subjective temporality to develop; it becomes a 'safe space' where 'an established temporal order gets interrupted and new encounters consequently take place' (Biswas, p. 53; Freeman, p. xxii). The

new encounter with the transitioned Orlando that Woolf's protagonist and readers shall experience, induced by an interruption of straight time in the form of Orlando's 'trance', comes to resemble the 'proclaim[ed] death' of his exclusively male self (Woolf, *Orlando*, pp. 94, 43). While to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick queer 'progress' requires 'risky and affirming acts of the most explicit self-identification as members of the [genderqueer] minority', Orlando not only proceeds to identify as woman after his transition, but he achieves to restructure his reality according to an existential order unaffected by chrono- and heteronormativity.³⁴

Deconstruction of the Trans Subject: The 'Making-Present' Orlando

Upon arrival in the present of 1928, Orlando's transition as external manifestation of inner trans subjectivity substantiates the constraining forces of normative order as opposed to the temporal free space that is queerness. Various critics define this space not as fixed but rather as an infinite, durable, and indisputable 'moment'; Sedgwick compares it with "an immemorial current", whilst Spivak and Ryan consider it a 'non-dimensional verbal mode' that continuously transitions as process of making or *producing* a present.³⁵ In the same vein, Orlando as queer Einsteinian 'reference-body' transforms into a *product* of 'its own particular time' to follow an own temporal logic of progression (Einstein, p. 26). As a result, Orlando's achieved self-*production* as trans subject effectively resists and in that deconstructs the hegemonic subject formation that Fisher, Phillips, and Katri critique for adhering to a linear notion of progression (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 4). Announced again by a clock's strokes, *she* 'leap[s]' into the twentieth-century present, experiencing not only a pronoun but also bodily change (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 206). Gender transitions as such 'time-warping experiences' shape individuals' identity and hence contribute to the continuously produced present that Woolf judges by its shocking narrowness (Jaffe; Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 206). Situated in between sequenced past and future, in 'between the unknowable and the knowable', the present as 'immediate experience' resembles a 'narrow plank' without enough room for subjective development.³⁶ Thus, when considering the general use of the term 'transition' that 'conjoins expectations of ongoing, indeterminate process with expectations of eventual arrival',

³⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 58.

³⁵ Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, 'Queer Moments: The Performative Temporalities of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick', in *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory*, ed. by Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-56 (p. 2); Derek Ryan, 'Queering *Orlando* and Non/Human Desire', in *Virginia Woolf and the Materiality of Theory: Sex, Animal, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 101-131 (p. 108).

³⁶ Gabrielle McIntire, 'Virginia Woolf, (Auto)Biography, and the Eros of Memory: Reading *Orlando*', in *Modernism, Memory, and Desire: T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 119-146 (p. 136); Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 207.

individuals' respective perceptions of and interactions with temporality, as diverse as they may be, come to counteract a supposedly objective, restrictive present.³⁷

Subjectivity, therefore, interacts with diverse experiences or lived realities and – returning to the notion of clothing as disguise and external change – also embodiment. Orlando's present gender is described as a candid expression of familiar experience: a 'vacillation from one sex to the other' that occurs '[i]n every human being' (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 132). The surfaced femininity visualizes 'complications and confusions' of embodied subjectivity within the bounds of heteronormativity rooted in hegemonic dualisms of Western discourse (*Orlando*, p. 133). Besides the major binarisms of 'male/female', 'reality/appearance', and 'whole/part' that Donna Haraway detects accordingly, *Orlando* evinces and deconstructs specifically binary tensions of objective/subjective, nakedness/clothing, and truth/hide.³⁸ Since clothing can range between representing truthfully or hiding altogether an individual's interiority to 'keep the male or female likeness, while underneath the sex is the very opposite of what it is above', its performative qualities function as an effective means of self-representation that, in the case of Orlando, extends to a gendered embodiment of subjectivity (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 133).

Even though Orlando's choice of clothes appears to be the main indicator for the gender transition, 'a certain change [is] visible [...] even in her face' and thus her body (*Orlando*, p. 132). While for critics such as Jay Prosser the novel concerns externally indicated genderfluidity rather than 'the sexed body' as its protagonist 'break[s] through the limits of the flesh', Amber Jamilla Musser emphasizes the importance not to ignore 'flesh [and] how bodies have been made to speak of difference'.³⁹ However, as the body consists of flesh that materializes, in Woolf's narrative, Orlando's transitioned self *in addition* to her gender-indicative clothing, it cannot be disregarded in an examination of her gendered identification. As trans time operates in a de-sequenced, fluid fashion, Orlando's infinite and indisputable genderqueerness surfaces, becomes visible through clothing but also conduct and body, and thereby 'articulates a particular relationship to embodiment' that here externalizes her inner trans subjectivity (Musser, p. 19). Pondering over her poem's manuscript and the past three hundred years, Orlando recognizes how 'through all these

³⁷ Julian Carter, 'Transition', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1-2 (2014), 235-237 (p. 236) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2400145>>.

³⁸ Donna J. Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 149-181 (p. 177).

³⁹ Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 168; Amber Jamilla Musser, 'Introduction: Theory, Flesh, Practice', in *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), pp. 1-30 (p. 20).

[external] changes she had remained, she reflected, fundamentally the same' (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 163).⁴⁰

Although the external visibility of Orlando's inner genderqueer self equals a truthful representation of her reality, a possible concealment of said truth emerges as reactionary pressure to conform to heteronormativity. This tension of truth/hide, however, not only interacts with clothing as disguise but also opposite nakedness; when Orlando awakes from the transformative sleep announced by 'trumpets peal[ing] Truth! Truth! Truth!', her undisguised body forces a confession of gender (*Orlando*, p. 97). In 'complete nakedness', a blank canvas of the self, Orlando proves to inhabit a female body (*Orlando*, p. 97). Halberstam detects these 'apparent oppositional logics' in modernism; in Woolf's novel, truth and hide come to mirror visual manifestation and concealment respectively as forces of heteronormative order attempt to discourage Orlando's reveal (Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality', p. 11). This mental closet structure of transphobia misguides Orlando, yet again, to hide the allegedly 'shameful' truth: 'Truth come not out from your horrid den. Hide deeper, fearful Truth. For you flaunt [...] things that were better unknown and undone' (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 96).⁴¹ As a narrative device that functions to unveil hidden details about a character, a reveal frequently occurs in a dramatized manner, and while it can enable those affected to exert agency, the mere act of revealing oneself 'frequently demands that trans persons continuously reassert and defend their truth'.⁴² Interestingly though, after weighing options of further hiding or revealing the true self, the transition that is 'accomplished painlessly' and without 'surprise' seems almost anticipated by Orlando, which further reinforces the idea of an indisputable, always existent transness within Woolf's protagonist (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 98). Since Orlando cannot delay her transition any longer, she assumes agency in the unpersuaded decision to reveal a conventionally unaccepted genderqueerness to the public, invalidating socially imposed feelings of shame and fear 'without showing any signs of discomposure' (*Orlando*, p. 98).

No punishment follows Orlando's 'change of sex [that appears to be] against nature', which, conversely, occurs rather naturally as a self-evident realization of her unchanged inner self (*Orlando*, p. 98). At odds with the power and decision-making abilities that medical personnel and gender clinics frequently hold over those seeking gender transitions, Woolf's trans subject takes

⁴⁰ Note how despite Orlando's transition from a male to a female body, her inner self remains unchanged; due to her trans subjectivity, she experiences only a physical but no mental change.

⁴¹ Note that Fisher, Phillips, and Katri's study of intersectional trans temporalities largely rests on 'the central argument that the historical narrative of gender transition is ensconced in narratives of [...] transphobic and reproductive developmental time', which this article draws from. See Fisher, Phillips, and Katri, p. 2.

⁴² Danielle M. Seid, 'Reveal', *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1-2 (2014), 176-177 (p. 176) <<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399947>>.

action based on own will rather than being controlled by external factors. Fisher, Phillips, and Katri identify the latter as a common experience among clients unable to autonomously choose the timing, circumstances of, and access to therapies, surgeries, and prescriptions (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 2). Orlando's life experience thus exposes significant discrepancies between trans realities of disadvantaged and more prosperous individuals, determined by markers of difference such as age, race, and income. Trans activists like Dean Spade, cofounder of the nonprofit legal aid organization Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP), warns that 'the most marginalized trans people experience more extreme vulnerability, in part because more aspects of their lives are directly controlled by legal and administrative systems of domination'.⁴³ Halberstam adds that 'this domination intensifies to the extent that they must petition for hormones, surgery, employment protection, name change, and so on, and if they cannot afford to do so, they become illegible and therefore dangerous within the systems' of domination, which ultimately causes further marginalization of those individuals (Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 49). Compared with goals of queer activism, trans thus aims at social transformation rather than a mere critique of such systems of domination and power, its politics arising from unstable notions of identity (*Trans**, p. 50). Orlando's move 'away from an unchosen gender category' then presages what Julian Carter recognizes as the 'open-ended refusal [by many of today's trans communities] to define "transition"' itself, as an expression of gender and term alike (Carter, p. 235). The psychobiological debate that arises instead, taking 'great pains to prove (1) that Orlando had always been a woman [and] (2) that Orlando is at this moment a man', is dismissed due to mere factuality of a transitioned body form (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 98).

Woolf, here, revolutionizes not solely an understanding of biological sex dissociated from cultural dimensions that would only become subject to theoretical consideration with the emergence of gender studies, but she also problematizes trans subjectivity's relationship to time and its rejection of a normative orientation toward straight lifetimes. In view of this linearity, Orlando's present symbolizes 'death through narrative closure', according to Gabrielle McIntire, 'since reaching the present equals reaching the end of the story' (McIntire, p. 137). However, while the novel ends with a depiction of the present, the narrative ends once Orlando reaches the age of thirty-six and excludes her biological death. Thus, in this 'oncome of middle age [when] [n]othing is any longer one thing' after another, Orlando resists the linear sequence of birth, ageing, and death – or rather past, present, and future – that her transgender subjectivity queers and merges into an

⁴³ Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 13.

asynchronous continuum (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 210). After all, it is precisely this emergence of an asynchronous continuum that produces a sense of coherence for Orlando to heal her own relationship to personal progression, yet allowing for self-determined gender variance.

Resistant Reconstruction of the Trans Subject: The ‘Not-Yet’ Orlando

From the construction of a male past and the deconstructed present as trans woman, a potential of various future reconstructions of Orlando’s gender identity arises. As chrono- and heteronormative milestones of birth, procreation, and marriage are re-evaluated, a fluid complexity of both Orlando’s transgender subjectivity and temporality emerges. Such an optimistic ‘queer futurity’ beyond a restrictive straight present offers ‘infinite and immutable potentiality’ so that Orlando as ‘a model of gender inversion recedes into anachronism’ of the early twentieth century (Muñoz, p. 127; Halberstam, ‘Queer Temporality’, p. 18). Experiencing an unparalleled flexibility of gender, Orlando’s reality lived according to genderqueer time across centuries refuses ‘a predictable, inevitable, [and] irrevocable time line’ dictated by chrono- and heteronormativity to envision a re-conceptualized mode of life (Dinshaw, Edelman, Ferguson, Freccero, Freeman, Halberstam, Jagose, Nealon and Hoang, p. 193). Within the snippet of Orlando’s life that the narrative chronicles, this re-conceptualization is embodied already in her transness that enables a certain self-actualization through physical transformation. Such a self-actualization, contrary to McLoughlin’s critique of future-oriented queerness, refrains from following a ‘trajectory punctuated by the same [normative] markers’ that characterize chronological life (McLoughlin). Rather than ‘eva[ding]’ what lies ahead, it welcomes potential, more authentic futures of the own body (McLoughlin). ‘Resisting normative temporality’, here, does not equate to resisting ‘process’; quite the opposite, transition constitutes a process on its own trans terms in its own trans time (McLoughlin).⁴⁴

As she ‘vacillat[es]’ between male and female, Orlando’s non-binary gender identification refrains from specifying a definite man- or womanhood (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 132). In the course of the physical transition, her conduct and characteristics also alter, even though those conventionally attributed to one of the two genders intermix: Orlando ‘detest[s] household matters’ and is ‘bold and active as a man’, yet she exhibits ‘womanly palpitations’ such as heightened emotionality

⁴⁴ With regard to terminology, note Halberstam’s preference of the term ‘trans*’ due to its refusal of ‘certainty through the act of naming’. The use of the asterisk serves to ‘modif[y] the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity’. While this article follows Halberstam’s conceptualization of trans*, especially the self-definition and agency associated with the asterisk resonates with Orlando as trans subject: ‘The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations’. See Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, pp. 3-4.

(*Orlando*, 133). Such behavioral changes signal a respective gender, further resisting the presumed equivalency of gender identity and sex with its connotation of biological determinism and inherent properties. Interestingly, gender transitions are generally considered successful only when a respective ‘[self-]presentation seamlessly supports [...] claims’ of a changed gender (Carter, p. 236). Biswas, for instance, reads Orlando’s gender variance as an ‘incompleteness of [her] inner transformation into womanhood’ that presupposes a stable and clearly demarcated definition of Orlando’s transitioned self (Biswas, p. 52). On the contrary, Orlando feels neither wholly masculine nor feminine: ‘She was man; she was woman; she knew the secrets, shared the weaknesses of each. [...] Thus it is no great wonder, as she pitted one sex against the other, [that Orlando] was not sure to which she belonged’ (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 113). This ambiguity indicates an inconclusiveness of her gender identification that, even in Orlando’s present, suggests a future gender variance and inherent transness. More importantly, however, her transition proves trans life experience to be more complex and nuanced than merely following the ‘chronological progression from a “terrible-present-in-the-wrong-body” to a “better-future-in-the-right-body”’ that often wrongfully characterizes the temporal locales of pre- and post-transition (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 2). It is this in-between of trans subjectivities that wholly deconstructs binaries of time and gender, invalidating any notion of a definitive ‘departure’, arrival, completion, or even ‘*return*’ as Biswas argues, implying a start and end point of the transitioned state (Biswas, p. 59; italics in original).

In this continuous resistance to developmental time, non-normative temporalities arise that are oriented toward alternative life schedules and associated life events. Halberstam locates specific ‘paradigmatic markers’ within normative life – ‘birth, marriage, reproduction, and death’ – which Orlando, however, not only opposes but reformulates (Halberstam, ‘Queer Temporality’, p. 2). Similar to her death that only exists figuratively in the refusal of conventional temporality and gender identification, Orlando’s birth is not a biological, unalterable one-time event determinative of her gendered self, but rather is one of many points in time in her asynchronous continuum that can be revisited to birth an always existent trans reality.⁴⁵ Consistent with modernist pursuits to assert subjective experience of private time, the emerging temporal heterogeneity then mirrors individuals’ alterable instead of predetermined development – what Fisher, Phillips, and Katri identify as ‘resistant reconstruction of trans subjects’ that challenges the normative trans timeline

⁴⁵ While Biswas identifies Muñoz’s ‘temporal unity’ within the narrative, her discussion of Orlando’s differently gendered identities adheres to a progression from past to present or from the present back to the past, a point of ‘origin’. See Biswas, pp. 56, 59. Note also how Fisher, Phillips, and Katri critique such an adoption of ‘the hegemonic trans life-story as linear (tortured past, liminal present, hopeful future)’. See Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 4.

as linear (Fisher, Phillips and Katri, p. 4). Besides, the peripheral nature of heterosexual reproduction in the novel further disrupts the 'narrative coherence' of supposedly essential lifetime experiences; from her own birth to that of her children, almost no explicit mention of Orlando's seventeenth-century 'three sons by Pepita' and twentieth-century 'fine boy' occurs (Dinshaw, Edelman, Ferguson, Freccero, Freeman, Halberstam, Jagose, Nealon and Hoang, p. 181; Woolf, *Orlando*, pp. 176, 204). Only addressed by few words after her gender transition, reproduction – and thereby the preservation of the labor force indispensable for productivity and progress as the aims of chrononormativity – is rendered irrelevant across several centuries.

By Woolf's fuller description of one of Orlando's marriages, yet another heteronormative marker is queered and resisted. The heterosexual union between her – a gender-ambiguous individual physically transformed into a woman 'as tolerant and free-spoken as a man' – and Shelmerdine – an only marginally masculine man 'as strange and subtle as a woman' – emphasizes a contrast of masculine femininity versus feminine masculinity (*Orlando*, p. 179). Yet this need not be considered a negative discrepancy between their gendered identification and sex, that is as a subjectivity that supposedly 'lags behind' the body (Biswas, p. 52). While generally, observes Halberstam, such inherent contradiction derives from a 'failed femininity' or 'unsuccessful male mimicry', Woolf rather utilizes Shelmerdine's and Orlando's respective man- and womanhood to subvert nineteenth-century conventions of marriage and sexual desire within the heterosexual framework deemed appropriate at the time (Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality', p. 17). Notably, contemporary transgender activism focuses to a large extent on the conflict between such trans womanhood and radical anti-transgender feminism. While transgenderism was widely discussed – both 'accepted and rejected by different feminists at different times' – anti-transgender feminism converts its refusal to acknowledge and admit trans women into its 'women-born women' spaces into a distorted reflection of feminist thought as a whole (Halberstam, *Trans**, pp. 114-116). By contrast, emerging debates around an inclusive transfeminism depart from sole concerns 'about women'; instead, transfeminism calls for an engagement with femininity, particularly the 'precarious femininity' of transgender women, to achieve a genuinely 'liberatory vision of womanhood' as its transfeminist project (*Trans**, pp. 119, 125).

As for the public display of matrimony, Orlando chooses, despite her aversion, to wear a wedding ring even before becoming engaged to lover Shelmerdine. Woolf stresses Orlando's previous search for 'A Lover' rather than 'A Husband', and thereby seems to indicate not merely the inadequate Victorian insistence on marriage as equal alliance exclusively between heterosexual man and woman; she also emphasizes the resultant disregard of an emotional prerequisite for

married love, irrespective of normative sexuality (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 167). Paradoxically, in displaying her anticipated marriage through the symbolic meaning of the ring, Orlando simultaneously dechronologizes marital proceedings and 'yield[s] completely and submissively to the spirit of the age' (*Orlando*, p. 167). In consideration of the narrative's critical stance, this reference most probably alludes to the socio-political marginalization characteristic for female experience and a corresponding obligation 'to yield and to resist' as subject to male supremacy (*Orlando*, p. 109). Women of Orlando's time, be it sixteenth- or twentieth-century contemporaries, therefore rely on diverse and creative forms of resistance to entrenched phallogocentric power dynamics.

In respect of such dynamics, Michel Foucault identifies a variety of 'points of resistance' largely in the 'role of adversary' but also 'support'.⁴⁶ McLoughlin locates an adversarial resistance in Orlando's repeated refusal to marry that, on the surface, seems to be a plausible means to defy a heteronormative institution such as that of marriage (McLoughlin). The other form of resistance of these seemingly contradictory modes, however, is also reflected in Woolf's novel, wherein this very institution of marriage, specifically that of Orlando and Shelmerdine, is instrumentalized as supportive resistance to an oppressive heteronormative order. Their adjustment to convention – which emerges as an inversion of convention due to their queer subjectivities and non-chronological relationship – voids normative claims of marriage 'precisely in being achieved' and thus releases the queer 'into a space [...] beyond sexual norms'.⁴⁷ Here, Orlando exerts agency and experiences transfeminist self-definition; she becomes 'author of [her] own categorizations' as a married transgender woman (Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 4).

Orlando's doubts as to what constitutes marriage as a major life event, supposedly desired and hence experienced by most individuals, ultimately raise the question of what constitutes normality. Even for a pioneering work such as that of Woolf, heterosexuality as default option for society remains the frame in which Orlando's genderqueer story is told. Given the era's cultural and legal restrictions, a heteronormative guise of the transgender protagonist and his/her relationships avoided censorship and ensured *Orlando's*, but also fictive Orlando's, existence in public. Here, veiled and yet visible queerness implicitly introduces a non-heteronormative future, firstly in the use of binary pronouns and secondly in the depiction of heterosexual attraction between male Orlando and female Sasha as well as female Orlando and male Shelmerdine, at least at first glance

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, ed. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 95.

⁴⁷ Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 63.

of the straight censor.⁴⁸ Disguised as fiction, slowly but steadily surfacing facts that deviate from socially accepted sexual identity and gender can be addressed. Despite the propagation of normative timelines in the public sphere, an individual's subjectivity determines their respective reality so that 'the true length of a person's life' within one experiences certain milestones of life 'is always a matter of dispute' (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 211). It is this evident complexity of a presupposed and firmly established 'normal human system' – a distorted perception of stable and authentic selves – that ultimately challenges the meaning and scope of 'normal' time and gender (*Orlando*, p. 211).

Non-conclusive definitions of both expose the artificiality of a favored temporal and sexual order in Woolf's universe and by this the existence of various fluid alternative life forms. Remarkably, Halberstam detects Western culture's preference of 'longevity as the most desirable future', whereas 'people who live in rapid bursts' are condemned as a threat to this ultimate objective (Halberstam, 'Queer Temporality', pp. 4-5). *Orlando*, paradoxically, accomplishes both; virtually immortal, Woolf's protagonist survives centuries and agilely leaps through time at once. Resisting chronology and biologically determined sex, *Orlando* lives within an asynchronous continuum of possible gender identities, alternating between 'a great variety of selves' (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 213). Within the narrative, such changes of selfhood link to frequent changes of gender, consequently achieving an effective resistance to binary identification and a continuous reconstruction of the trans self without 'knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be' (Stec, p. 191; Halberstam, *Trans**, p. 4). This is also what Carter identifies as the 'promise of transition': the opportunity to 'live in the time of [one's] own becoming and that possible change is not restricted to the narrow sphere of [one's] conscious intention' (Carter, p. 237). *Orlando*'s self-contemplation disclosed in a lengthy stream of consciousness as to 'What' and 'Who' she is – a '[t]ruthful' thirty-six-year-old woman 'but a million other things as well' – thus comes to demonstrate the complexity of transgender subjectivities and their lived realities (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 214). Similarly, Bergson postulates that 'we shall no longer consider states of consciousness in isolation from one another, but in their concrete multiplicity', which alludes to *Orlando*'s life in trans time encompassing a division of selves that is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's model of human

⁴⁸ In this article, the use of binary rather than the now widely adopted they/them pronouns directly refers to the novel's terminology situated within a modernist framework of heteronormativity, not least because of the circumstances of censorship at the time of publication. The in this article maintained change of pronouns serves to emphasize *Orlando*'s change of gender as resistance to said heteronormativity. In doing so, this study aims to avoid the 'risk [of] divesting past gender practice of what made it meaningful in its own time and place' that DeVun and Tortorici warn against. Only when addressing *Orlando*'s potential reconstructions of the trans self, non-binary pronouns are used. See DeVun and Tortorici, p. 520.

psyche (Bergson, p. 73). Essentially, the compromise between normativity and genderqueer reality, embodied by Orlando's 'Key self'/superego and 'true self'/ego respectively, generates the fluidity characteristic for both Woolf's protagonist and time (Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 214).⁴⁹ While *Orlando* ends after six chapters, it substantiates the broad spectrum of gendered selves that the 'not-yet' Orlando may potentially experience in their, rather than her or his, own temporal becoming (Muñoz, p. 186).

Conclusion

Woolf's precursory vision of transgender subjectivity within the modernist climate of the early twentieth century urges the reader to reconsider normative logics of time and gender. In presenting a trans-specific narrative, *Orlando* exemplifies and thus conceptualizes alternatives to linear understandings of progression. Spanning from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, Orlando's alternative reality serves as dual resistance to both chrono- and heteronormativity; a confluence of constructed male past and deconstructed present as trans woman substantiates Orlando's gender variance and future gendered reconstructions within an asynchronous continuum. In line with modernist efforts to reconceptualize predominant modes of objectivity and development, queer and trans time emerge as conflictive alternatives to a chronological order largely maintained by public temporal markers. In particular, scientific and philosophical discoveries by Einstein and Bergson respectively refute Enlightenment understandings of homogeneity and linear progress to reinforce the significance of relativity and individual experience, specifically with respect to temporal reality. Bergsonian duration, an authentic sense of time experienced as continuous flux, draws attention to a relevant interiority of individuals such as Orlando's trans subjectivity that denies not only normative temporality but also sexuality and gender.

Prior to the bodily transition, Orlando's genderqueerness surfaces by means of his subjective mind time, gender nonconformity, and uncertain sexual desires for female Sasha. As an adolescent male, his past self is constrained by imperatives of public chrononormativity and clock time; however, his trans reality demands a physical actualization of his sexed body. Retreating to the chronotopic closet-house, the spatial dimensions of his subjective temporality facilitate the transition's physical part. The external change manifests an always existent transness within Orlando, thus linking subjectivity to embodiment and material self-fashioning, and demonstrating the restrictive chrono- and heteronormative forces that attempt to counteract any such trans disruption of convention. By contrast, present Orlando resists concealment of her indisputable gendered and temporal discontinuity that essentially merges constructed man- and deconstructed

⁴⁹ In this analogy, Orlando's genderqueer reality develops from inner desires as the Freudian id.

womanhood into gender-variant reconstructions of the trans self. A consequential ‘split subjectivit[y]’ produces non-normative conceptions of temporality and gendered identity that manifest in Orlando’s dechronologized birth, rather insignificant parenthood, and resignified marriage to male Shelmerdine (Amin, p. 220). Since determinant markers of an allegedly ideal lifetime are queered and alternative life schedules arise, the fabricated understanding of the normal – continuously generated by societal claims to reproductive development and progress – is not merely debunked but superseded. As gender-variant subject, Orlando comes to inhabit an asynchronous continuum characterized by self-definition and agency that allows for a variety of potential becomings of their ever-evolving transgender subjectivity.

As this article exemplifies, queer and trans temporality constitute productive frameworks to explore and evaluate temporal politics of sexual and gendered identity amidst socio-historical developments in modernism. Against philosophical, scientific, and psychoanalytical backgrounds, such critical inquiry clarifies both past progress and persistent shortcomings, demonstrating a necessity to further pursue, if not reapproach, a genderqueer agenda in all sectors from society to politics to academia. To lay the foundation for an intersectional reapproach of the queer and trans, however, it is essential to examine and prioritize the diverse and historically contingent manners in which transgender subjects take temporal form. As precursor to the temporal projects and queer strategies of today, Woolf’s anachronistic narrative suggests trans temporality to be no recent phenomenon but an experienced reality of the 1920s. Ahead of its time, *Orlando* maps a blueprint on how to achieve the resistant reconstructions of trans subjects and their various subjectivities. Woolf invites us to participate in this process that proves to be a timeless challenge; to stop a potential future from further receding into a dim distance as a chrono- and heteronormative past lingers on and continues to produce a temporally and sexually restrictive present.

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