INTRODUCTION

Chronotopes of Youth

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In this introduction we discuss the key concepts of the book, starting with chronotope, followed by the five terms included in the title (youth, space, time, agora, global city), and ending with global generations.

Chronotopes...

Science, art and literature also involve semantic elements that are not subject to temporal and spatial determinations ... Every entry in the sphere of means is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope.

Bakhtin 1981, 258

To focus on the concept of chronotope is to elevate the time/space dimension of the social experience to a powerful analytic tool. The academic use of the concept “chronotope” derives from the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. His article “Forms of time and the chronotope in the novel” was written between 1937–38 and published later in English in the compilation The dialogical imagination (1981). Here the chronotope is defined as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (Bakhtin 1981, 84). The notion was borrowed from physics and mathematics, especially Einstein’s Theory of Relativity. It refers to the inseparability of time (chronos) and space (topos), where time is a fourth dimension of space. For the social sciences, the chronotope is a double-sided concept. On the one side, it can be seen as the time of space (the historical dimension of geography or social memory); on the other side, it can be seen as the space of time (the geographical dimension of history or the social locality).

For Bakhtin, the chronotope is the organizing principle for fundamental narrative events in a novel. He distinguishes five types of chronotopes: the Road, a place for encounters (such as Don Quixote); the Castle, a place for history, traces of centuries, a museum-like character (the Gothic novel); the Salon, a place for dialogues, a barometer of political and business life (novels of Balzac); the Town, a place (street, square) for cyclical every-day life (the novels of Flaubert); the Threshold, a place for crisis and break in a life, a corridor, passages (the novels of Dostoyevsky). In essence, the chronotope is exemplified as
a kind of street-corner time and place: “the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representative of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at a spatial and temporal point” (Bakhtin 1981, 243).

Through the chronotope, events can be effectively represented in narration:

The chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins (...) It is the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the (...) representativity of events. And this is so thanks precisely to the special increase of density and concreteness of time markers – the time of human life, the time of history – that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas (...) Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representations.

BAKHTIN 1981, 250

For Bakhtin, the chronotope is not a fact but a perspective: an interpretive knowledge that needs and breeds creativity. He described the chronotopical imagination as follows: “those things that are static in space cannot be statically described, but must rather be incorporated into the temporal sequence of represented events and into the story's own representation field.” He continues: “the relationships contained within chronotope (...) are dialogical” (Bakhtin 1981, 251–2). For our purposes then, the dialogic chronotope is the gate that connects (local) events, (social) memory, (researcher) imagination and the subjects of study – young people and youth cultures.

... of Youth

Who describes distant cities undertakes a journey in space, who describes its own city undertakes a journey in time: the city seems disseminated through the traces of lost times; as ultraviolet light, the memory teaches everyone the secret codex accompanying, as a prophecy, the book of life.

BENJAMIN 1980, 10

The subjects of this book are young people – youth, and their lifestyles: that is, youth cultures. And the object of analysis is the variety of their connections to specific time/space sites: that is, chronotopes. In a broad sense, the term youth cultures describes young people's social experiences expressed collectively, through the construction of differentiating lifestyles. Youth cultures are constituted mainly in the fluid dimension of youth leisure time, or in the interstitial