Chapter 1

◆ Chronotopic Identities

On the Timespace Organization of Who We Are

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SUPER-DIVERSITY OFFERS SCHOLARS a broad range of opportunities to revise and rethink parts of their conceptual vocabulary in attempts to arrive at more sensitive and accurate tools for thought and analysis. The recognition of a reality that might, in some respects and to some degree, have always been there but was never enregistered in theoretical and methodological frameworks might, in fact, be seen as the most productive outcome of the current debates over whether or not super-diversity is "new." The perspective is indeed new, but it also allows us to return to old issues armed with some fresh ideas (cf. Blommaert 2015c; Silverstein 2015; Arnaut 2016; Parkin 2016). In what follows, we take these ideas to issues of identity.

Reflections and theorizations on identity within sociolinguistics and discourse analysis in the last two decades have moved more and more toward context-sensitive, social constructionist understandings (see Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Benwell and Stokoe 2006; De Fina, Schiffrin, and Bamberg 2006; De Fina 2011). Yet, even within these new paradigms, identities are often still understood in dichotomous terms as *either* micro *or* macro, individual or social, local or global, etc., with hyphenations allowing for a limited degree of complexity, and with language separated from specific identities by "and" (see, e.g., papers in Preece 2016). In this chapter we explore the Bakhtinian notion of the *chronotope* as a source of inspiration for the development of an approach to identities that avoids such simplifications by taking into account the complex interactions between practice, iteration, and creativity in social life. We shall elaborate on the following central idea: It is possible to see and describe much of what is observed as contemporary identity work as being chronotopically organized. Indeed, it is organized in, or at least with reference to, specific timespace configurations which are nonrandom and compelling as 'contexts.'

We intend to illustrate how a view of identities as chronotopic can offer invaluable insights into the complexities of identity issues in super-diverse social environments, and how it fits within a renewed sociolinguistic paradigm that stresses ethnographic, practice-oriented approaches to communication and discourse, aimed at the most minute aspects of identity practices operating as indexicals for large-scale 'structuring' characteristics of social practice—a nano-politics of identity so to speak (cf. Parkin 2016; Rampton 2006). We shall do this largely in a dialogue with some classic sociological statements on these topics, as a way to show the advantages of our mode of analysis over more sweeping and generalizing approaches.

Chronotopes and Sociology

In their seminal study on the unequally accessible cultural capital of French university students, Bourdieu and Passeron make the following remark: "Sans doute, les étudiants vivent et entendent vivre dans un temps et un espace originaux" (Undoubtedly, students live and expect to live in an original time and space) (1964, 48). The specific time they live in is measured by the academic year, with its semesters, lecturing times, and exam sessions. And the way they live is relaxed, slightly anarchic, and down to themselves when it comes to organizing their days, weeks, and months—"le temps flottant de la vie universitaire" (the fluid time of university life) (51). The specific spaces include, of course, the university campus, its buildings, lecture halls and staff offices; but also "des quartiers, des cafés, des chambres 'd'étudiants'" ("'student' neighborhoods, cafés, and rooms"), cinemas, dance halls, libraries, theaters and so forth; the Parisian Quartier Latin, of course, serves as a textbook example here (51).

It is no miracle, then, that a walk through the Quartier Latin during the academic year would reveal a specific demographic pattern—a dense concentration of young people, who would be students, and middle-aged men, who would be senior academics—different from, say, people shopping along the fashion stores on the Champs Elysées or taking the commuter trains out of Paris at 5 p.m. According to Bourdieu and Passeron, due to these specific timespace givens, students acquire a sense of shared experience, which, invariably, becomes an important part of their autobiographies later in life—"in my student days," "we met when we were students," etc. The specific timespace of student life involves particular activities, discourses, and interaction patterns; role relationships and identity formation modes; particular ways of conduct and consumption; of taste development and so forth, most of which are new, demand procedures of discovery and learning, and involve the mobilization of existing cultural and social capital in the (differential) process of acquiring new capital. References to similar timespace elements (a charismatic or dramatically incompetent lecturer, a particular café, or a then-popular movie or piece of music) create a shared sense of cohort belonging with others, which coexists with preexisting belongings to social groups and which enters into posterior forms of belonging. In that sense, our student days do not compensate for or replace preexisting class memberships (which the book documents at length), and neither constitute the sole bedrock for posterior identity formation. Rather, in Bourdieu and Passeron's view,

our student identity represents a relatively superficial phenomenon, "plus proche de l'agrégat sans consistence que du groupe professionnel" (closer to an aggregate without consistency than to a professional group) (1964, 56), let alone "un groupe social homogène, indépendant et intégré" (a homogenous, autonomous and integrated social group) (49), which reproduces underlying (class) differences while constructing one new layer of shared biographical experience. Thus, while students share almost identical experiences and develop particular, and similar, identities during their days at the university, the meanings and effects of these shared experiences will differ according to the more fundamental social and cultural identity profiles they "brought along" to university life.

Probably without being aware of it, Bourdieu and Passeron provided us with one of the most precise empirical descriptions of what Bakhtin calls a "chronotope," (a notion that he applies to works of literature), which he defines as follows: "We will give the name *chronotope* [literally 'timespace'], to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981, 84–85). Indeed, Bakhtin coined this term to point toward the inseparability of time and space in human social action and to the effects of this inseparability on it. In his work he identifies the "literary artistic chronotope" where "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole," such that the chronotope could be seen as "a formally constitutive category of literature" (84). It is thanks to this concept of chronotope that Bakhtin was able to address the co-occurrence of events from different times and places in novels, the fact that shifts between chronotopes involve shifts of an entire range of features and generate specific effects. He saw the interplay of different chronotopes as an important aspect of the novel's heteroglossia, part of the different "verbal-ideological belief systems" that were in dialogue in a novel, because every chronotope referred to socially shared, and differential, complexes of value attributed to specific forms of identity, as expressed (in a novel for example) in the description of the looks, behavior, actions, and speech of certain characters, enacted in specific timespace frames. Importantly, Bakhtin assumes also that chronotopes involve specific forms of agency and identity: specific patterns of social behavior "belong," so to speak, to particular timespace configurations; and when they "fit," they respond to existing frames of recognizable identity, while when they don't they are "out of place," "out of order," or transgressive (see Blommaert 2015a for a discussion).

In a more contemporary and applied vocabulary, we would say that chronotopes invoke orders of indexicality valid in a specific timespace frame (cf. Blommaert 2005, 73). Specific timespace configurations enable, allow, and sanction specific modes of behavior as positive, desired, or compulsory (and disqualify deviations from that order in negative terms), and this happens through the deployment and appraisal of chronotopically relevant indexicals—indexicals that acquire a certain recognizable value when deployed within a particular timespace configuration.

Through these lenses, one can, for example, also read Goffman's (1963) *Behavior in Public Spaces* as a study of the orders of indexicality operating in public spaces and not elsewhere, while his description of poker players in *Encounters* can be read as a study of the orders of indexicality valid in places such as the poker rooms of

Atlantic City or Las Vegas (Goffman 1961). Howard Becker's (1963) *Outsiders*—jazz musicians and marihuana users—also organize their behavior and the criteria for evaluating behavior determining different degrees of membership in their "deviant" community, within the clearly demarcated timespace configurations of the 1940s–1950s American-metropolitan jazz clubs. Studies of doctor-patient interaction show that these are also typically set in the highly specific, regimented, and asymmetrical timespace configurations of medical centers and consultation times therein (Cicourel 2002).[1]

In such timespace configurations, Goffman situates specific actors enacting specific roles (poker players must be strangers and can never have met each other elsewhere; they gather just to play poker and do that competently), specific, relatively strict "rules of engagement," and normative assumptions (focus on the game, play the game by its rules), as well as identity judgments (a "superb" poker player). Like Bourdieu and Passeron, Becker, and others, Goffman describes the indexical organization of specific chronotopes: the ways in which particular socially ratified behavior depends on timespace configurations, or more broadly, the ways in which specific forms of identity enactment are conditioned by the timespace configurations in which they occur. The "gatherings" described in *Behavior in Public Places* are such timespace configurations, and the specific modes of behavior Goffman describes and analyzes are the ones that "fit" those particular configurations. The careful description of such nonrandom chronotopic connections, by the way, bears a well-known academic label: ethnography.

Chronotopes as Identity Frames

A shorthand term such as *chronotope* enables us to avoid an analytical separation of behavior and context, which is not matched by the experiences of people engaged in such activities. In its most simple formulation, the idea we develop here is that the actual practices performed in our identity work often demand specific timespace conditions as shown by the fact that changes in timespace arrangements trigger complex and sometimes massive shifts in roles, discourses, modes of interaction, dress, codes of conduct and criteria for judgment of appropriate versus inappropriate behavior, and so forth. We see this factor as a constraint on what is possible in the way of identity work—a *framing* constraint not always accurately identified in studies on identity.

Let us take a rather simple example: a group of colleagues who share their 9 to 5 daytime in the same office; all of them have mutually known names and roles, often hierarchically layered, and specific shared codes of conduct that govern their interactions (the shortcut term for such codes is often "professionalism"). Men are dressed in suits and neckties, ladies wear similar formal professional dress. The group, however, has developed a weekly tradition of "happy hour." Every Thursday after work, they jointly leave the office and walk to a nearby pub for a drink or two. The moment they leave their office building, men take off their neckties, and the tone, topics, and genres of talk they engage in with each other change dramatically—a Goffmanian frame shift of sorts. "Professional" and job-focused talk may be exchanged for

banter, small talk about family life, joke-cracking, or flirting. And the roles and relationships change as well: the office "boss" may no longer be the "coolest" person, and a very competent worker may turn into a very incompetent drinker or joke-teller. We see the same people engaging in entirely different social practices and relationships, embodying entirely different roles and identities grafted onto or mobilized alongside existing ones (the boss in some way remains the boss even during happy hour)—all of it due to a change in the timespace configuration in which they move, which in turn changes the frame within which behavior is produced, evaluated, and understood. "Happy hour" behavior is intolerable during office hours, and office behavior is intolerable in the pub ("No job talk!")—timespace reordering involves a complete reordering of the normative codes of conduct and redefines the space of what is possible and allowable in performing identity work. Such phenomena, once we start looking for them, occur constantly. In fact, one may be hard pressed to come up with modes of social conduct that are not conditioned by nonrandom timespace arrangements. Our suggestion here is to take this kind of "context" seriously—that is, that we need to address it in a systematic and meticulous way and see what purchase it has. Doing so will increase the accuracy of our analyses of the dynamic and changing nature of social life and of the groups that organize it.

At the most basic level, it is good to point out that the chronotopic nature of specific forms of identity is part of common sense understandings about the way groups and cultures function. Thus, chronotope-based constructs are already entrenched in our everyday vocabularies. For example, when we speak of "youth culture," we obviously speak (be it with perplexing vagueness even in published work) about a complex of recognizable cultural phenomena attributed to a specific period in human lives—"youth"—which is often also specific to a place or a region. For example, Talcott Parsons's discussion of American youth culture differs from that of French youth culture offered at the same time by Bourdieu and Passeron (Parsons 1970, 155–82). Youth culture, therefore, is always a chronotopically conditioned object of study.

Identifying a phenomenon such as youth culture in terms of its chronotopic conditions involves and explains certain things. It involves generalizability. If specific forms of cultural practice mark specific periods of life, all such periods must have their own forms of cultural practice. In other words, a chronotopic qualification such as youth culture could (and perhaps must) be extended to any other form of cultural practice describable as tied to and conditioned by specific timespace configurations. In fact, there is nothing more specific to youth culture than, say, to the culture of young parents, or of mature professionals, or of retired senior citizens. In each case we shall see specific forms of practice and identity construction conditioned by the particular stage of life of the ones who enact them, usually involving trajectories through specific places (think of schools for teenagers or kindergarten for young parents). And just as youth cultures typically set themselves apart by specific forms of jargon and slang (now both in spoken and written forms), other age groups similarly display such discursive and sociolinguistic characteristics.

Generalizability, in turn, implies fractality. There is no reason why chronotopic cultural practices would be confined to the "big" stages of life only, because even

within narrower timespans we can see nonrandom co-occurrences of timespace configurations and forms of cultural practice and identity enactment. Think of the timeframe of a week, for instance, in which specific days would be reserved for "work" (involving specific trajectories through time and space) and others for, say, religious services, family meetings, shopping, and leisure activities. The timeframe of a single day in such a week, in turn, can be broken down into smaller chronotopic units, with activities such as "breakfast," "dropping kids off at school," "going to work," "being at work," "returning from work," and eventually "watching TV in bed" all marked by nonrandom collocations of time, space, and behavioral modes. The rules of macroscopic conduct also apply to microscopic behavior. In the same way, while societies recognize particular chronotopic arrangements as defining big groupings based on chronotopic conditions such as those characterized by commonality of age or profession, participants in smaller or less homogenous communities can identify other kinds of chronotopic arrangements as relevant to group identities at different and progressively more micro levels, such as schools, classrooms, or peer groups.

These considerations explain why and how a chronotopic view of identities can be used as a tool for better accounting for the complex identity work that goes on within communities and to relate it more specifically to times, spaces, and practices without resorting to simplistic dichotomies between macro and micro contexts. This means that we must surrender the perceived clarity of existing and widely used identity categories and diacritics in order to gain analytical accuracy and precision.

Classroom Chronotopes and Super-Diverse Identity Work

Let us illustrate the deep embedding of identities within, and sensitivity toward, timespace arrangements by means of elements of analysis taken from an ethnographic study of a small community of practice. In so doing, we shall also sense the advantages of transcending the existing, *prima facie* obvious, identity categories and diacritics. The community in question is a super-diverse fifth-grade classroom in an inner city school in Sicily (for a description of the project see De Fina 2015 and chapter 11 this volume). The class was comprised of eighteen children (ten boys and eight girls) aged ten or eleven. Origins and mother tongues in the class varied, as seven boys and four girls were born in Sicily of Italian parents, five were born abroad of foreign parents and two were born in Sicily of Tunisian parents. Among the foreign-born children, three girls were from Bangladesh and one was from Sri Lanka, and one boy was from Morocco. Among the Sicilian children, one girl was a special-needs student. The class had two regular teachers and one special-needs teacher.

A traditional sociolinguistic approach to identities in this classroom would focus on teacher-students identities as basic to communication and as driving the analysis of interactions. However, a closer look at the daily practices of this community reveals how central timespace configurations are to its actual social organization, as well as how such timespace configurations affect relevant identity categories, roles, and negotiations regarding the practices performed by the group.

If we start by looking at temporal structure, we can easily see how chrono-topes define the scenarios and the conditions within which identity work takes place. Daily lessons are regularly divided into activities that take up specific times (for example math lessons and foreign language lessons have the same duration but happen on different days) and require particular space configurations (desks aligned in certain ways, occupied by students sitting in places assigned to them by the teachers, teachers sitting or standing at the front center table or going around from desk to desk).

These timespace configurations are constitutive of what Goffman calls "front regions"—scenarios of interaction recognized as primary and official (1959, 106–60). Because of the routine and ritualized nature of these activities and interactions, expectations about roles and identities are rather fixed, since the rules of the game are similar for students and teachers in different schools in different times and space. Thus, for example, in terms of linguistic resources, the roles of student and teacher are strongly connected with the use of Italian as the official language. Deviation from such a rule leads to the potential attribution of identities that hold negative con-notations for the deviant participant (such as 'bad,' 'undisciplined,' or, as in the case we will see below, 'ignorant' student). An example of these kinds of chronotopic role-behavior expectations can be found below. Note that utterances in Sicilian are transcribed in italics.

◆ Example 1

1.	T1	((to Antonio)): Quand'è che ti sei andato a tagliare i capelli.
2.	Antonio	*Duminica.*
3.	T1	*Du-mi-ni-ca,*
4.		((voices)) @@@@@
5.	T1	*Du-minica!*
6.		*Duminica@@@*
7.		((voices)) @@@@

Translation

1.	T1	((to Antonio)) : When did you go to cut your hair.
2.	Antonio	*Sunday.*
3.	T1	*Sun-day.*
4.		((voices)) @@@@@
5.	T1	*Sun-day.*
6.		*Sunday@@@*
7.		((voices)) @@@@

In this fragment Antonio answers a question posed by the teacher in Italian (line 1), with an utterance in Sicilian dialect (line 2). The use of Sicilian instantly provokes a reaction from the teacher, who imitates Antonio's response (lines 3, 5, and 6) while at the same time inciting laughter from the rest of the class (lines 4 and 7) and producing laughter herself (line 6). The teacher's reaction is

immediately understood as a challenge to Antonio's identity thanks to the fixed, well-established (and historically sedimented) associations between official classroom discourse (which is expected within the timespace frame given) and Italian and the related indexical significance of dialect in this context. Since a child who does not speak proper Italian is regarded as unfit for interaction with a teacher, indexical associations of dialect with ignorance and lack of sophistication immediately arise.

However, this community of practice engages in many different types of activities and interactions whose recurrence in time and space also shape specific orders of indexicality associated with them. These are represented, for example, by "back region" activities. First, it must be noted that timespace configurations change completely in back regions (such as those created in peer communication during lessons) with respect to front space activities. For example, in back regions the timing of talk is affected by the disruption of role hierarchy that is implicit in these interactions. Talk needs to be uttered in spurts, at particular intervals of time (when teachers are not looking), and in whispers. Relevant space configurations for peer-to-peer talk include closer proximity between two interactants, single desks, and neighboring desks as focal points rather than the front table where the teacher speaks. In a sense, space is reconfigured even though no physical displacement of objects is taking place. Simultaneously, though, back regions may become front regions when school activities change, as in the case of breaks when students and teachers may move freely around the room, the position of desks can be altered, and certain particular desks may assume prominence as meeting places for the different groups that organize peer interaction. When children are on break, for example, the rules of the game also change completely and so do their inventories of relevant identities and the indexical associations that arise from linguistic (and other kinds of) behavior. Because behavior that has been cemented in back regions depends much more on specific routines and practices established by individual communities, as researchers we need to pay special attention to what happens there.

During back region exchanges and during all events in which peer-to-peer interaction is predominant, the way uses of linguistic resources are interpreted in terms of identity displays changes completely with respect to teacher-student interactions. For example, in this class neither the use of dialect nor of Italian seemed to regularly invoke specific indexicalities for all children. However, considering the sheer amount of speech in dialect versus Italian, dialect seemed to divide children along gender lines, while the type of uses of dialect also divided children along ethnic lines. So when males spoke in Sicilian the choice may have been relevant or not in terms of identity claims, while when foreign-born girls used Sicilian, inferences on their identity presentations always arose. In the case of both males and females, again, the possible indexicalitites related to dialect use are closely linked with activities and timespace arrangements. In the case of boys, for example, when they were in a "play" frame (with all the possible configurations in terms of proxemics, behavior timing, etc.), dialect may have been simply an unmarked choice, but if they were in a "fight" frame (with associated timespace arrangements) dialect became indexical of greater aggression and greater "manliness."

Let us look at an example. In the following fragment, Manlio and Nino have been involved in a fight during a back stage exchange.

◆ Example 2

1.	Nino	*Chista è a me' matita stava disegnando io*!
2.	Manlio	((screaming)): MAESTRA MI FAI DARE LA MATITA DA NINO?
3.		Maestra G! ci stava disegnando Carlo!
4.	Nino	Mae non è quella è quella!
5.	Taeacher	Tu l'hai finito il tuo disegno, TI SBRIGHI?
6.	Nino	E Manlio finiscila! *Tinni vai?*
7.	Manlio	*Suca!*
8.		(…)
9.	Manlio	*A cu ci rici suca?*
10.	Nino	*Suca a cu' ci u rici a* (…)
11.		(…)
12.	Nino	*Puo' ammuttari quanto vuoi tanto* (…)
13.	Manlio	*Nino è 'na munnizza!*

Translation

1.	Nino	*This is my pencil I was drawing with it!*
2.	Manlio	screaming)) TEACHER CAN YOU TELL NINO TO GIVE ME THAT PENCIL?
3.	Teacher	G.! Carlo was drawing with it!
4.	Nino	Teacher it's not that! It's that!
5.	Teacher	You have finished your drawing, WILL YOU HURRY?
6.	Nino	And Manlio stop it! *Go away!*
7.	Manlio	*Fuck you!*
8.		(…)
9.	Manlio	*Who did you say fuck to?*
10.	Nino	*Who are you saying fuck you to* (…)
11.		(…)
12.	Nino	*You can push as much as you want* (…)
13.	Manlio	*Nino is trash!*

At the beginning, Manlio and Nino were fighting over a pencil. As we see when Manlio enters the front stage to address the teacher (whom he calls by her first name in line 3), he switches from dialect into Italian and Nino does the same. As Nino gets back to his fight with Manlio he starts in Italian but then continues in Sicilian when he goes from asking Manlio to stop, to ordering him to go away. The fight escalates into insults (lines 7–13) which are all exchanged in Sicilian. Given the presence of many similar instances in the recordings, it can be concluded that dialect is used in these cases to convey a "true man" identity.

At the same time, the entire exchange will be seen as constituting a breach of normal order in the front stage activity because children have broken rules that relate to proper behavior, which involves the invasion of each other's space (through the

fight over the pencil), of the teacher's space (through screaming), and of the regular time frame of the lesson as they have spoken when they are supposed to be silent. Thus, while they can be cast as real men in their own sphere of action, they appear as troublesome disturbers in the official sphere of front stage interaction.

The existence of front stage and back stage regions in this community points to two important phenomena: the presence of reified and socially dominant chronotopes and chronotopic identities (the typical/acceptable teacher or student identity) which is widely recognized, and liminal ones (defined and developed in the back regions), but also to the *coexistence and interaction* of these regions and identities within communities. A full understanding of what goes on in the social processes observed here must consider all these possible interactions as constitutive of the life of such community, since no single "line" of regulated conduct suffices to explain these processes.

These examples illustrate how complex the relations between identities and contexts are but also how the conveying and negotiation of identities depends on recognizable and iterative timespace-behavior configurations. Above, we pointed toward the generalizability and fractality of chronotopic frames. We can add another item at this point: their ability to *interact*. The macroscopic chronotopes intersect and co-occur together with the microscopic ones and with several others in between, and the different chronotopic frames need to be constantly balanced against each other. (As observed above, the boss remains the boss during happy hour or the teacher may remain the teacher during breaks but they still need to "fit" the happy hour or break frame.) And to go back to our example of the chronotope of youth culture, when we take a long and hard look at it in practice, we can see how it is composed of a large quantity of more specific chronotopic arrangements. Students, for instance, can perform much of their student practices from Monday till Friday in a university town, but perform their practices of friendship, family life, love relationships, entertainment, and local community involvement during the weekend in their home town. Throughout the week, however, both spaces are connected in intricate ways through various types of interactions, from mentioning names "from elsewhere" during a conversation to phone texting and social media contacts.

And this is dynamic as well: The freshman student will organize his/her life differently from the senior and more experienced student, just as the junior professional will act differently from the "old hands" (and note that the transition from newcomer to old hand can happen very quickly—the literature on the experiences of frontline soldiers in the Great War is replete with stories of "aging" overnight during their first battle). In the same way, children from the classroom we discussed can enact old and new identities in a bus that takes them to a school trip or in an entirely different space: a public auditorium where a competition among schools takes place.

Chronotopes shed light on various forms of cultural globalization in which local and global resources are blended in complex packages of indexically super-rich stuff. Hip-hop is a prime example, of course (Pennycook 2007; Westinen 2014), where the global AAVE templates of the genre are mixed with deep sociolinguistic locality—often strictly local dialects—and lyrics that bespeak the (chronotopic) condition of local youth-in-the-margins. Chronotopes, thus, also involve numerous scalar

distinctions, which can be seen as the features that enable relatively unproblematic co-occurrences rather than conflictual ones. The appropriation of music and songs from different parts of the globe into very local contexts is an important element of identity work for youth in their play frames, while it would be read as an index of deviant identities in the context of a math lesson. As the singing of hip-hop songs can be used to project coolness and worldliness among young people belonging to peer groups across the globe, the singing of an American song performed *sotto voce* in Sicilian dialect during a lesson by a Moroccan boy can constitute a parallel act of affirmation of a worldly and young persona.

Conclusions: Back to Sociological Theory

The chronotopic nature of cultural practices helps us to get a precise grip on a number of other things as well, and this is where we need to return to our sociological classics. It may help us rethink *generations*, *anachronisms*, and *obsolete* cultural practices, for instance.

Except for census sociology, generations are notoriously fuzzy and puzzling units of sociocultural analysis. As Bourdieu and Passeron point out, the joint experience, several years long, of being a student in the same university and program does not cancel the power of reproduction of inequalities across "generations." Thus upper-class and working-class people may have attended the same schools, the same lectures, and the same movie or theater performances, and spent time in the same cafés and neighborhoods—none of that would reshuffle the transgenerational cards of social class difference, for the same experiences have different meanings and effects depending on this slower process of transmission and social dynamics. The "generation" of social class, therefore, is a slower and longer one than that of, say, intellectuals, engineers, or jazz lovers.

We would suggest that we can get a more precise grip on generations when we consider what was said above: that at any point in time, we organize our lives within interacting macroscopic and microscopic chronotopes. This means that at any point, our cultural repertoires might contain obsolete elements that no longer fit into the social order we now incorporate. Middle-aged people typically still have (and upon request, can perform) a vocabulary of slang obscenities developed during adolescence and hugely functional at that stage of life as symbolic capital for "cool" or "streetwise" peer group identities, but for the deployment of which very little occasion can be found in life at present. Similarly, many people still know small bits of mathematics jargon, of Latin and ancient Greek, learned in high school but never used again since the last day of school. Such resources remain in the repertoire and can, perhaps, be invoked on nostalgic storytelling occasions, but would have very little other function or value. As we move through "generations," the cultural stuff that defined the chronotopic arrangements of earlier stages remains in our repertoire, but becomes obsolete.

In that sense, the coexistence and interaction of chronotopes in cultural practices can also provide a basis for understanding *sociocultural change*. Entirely new phenomena are often tackled by means of very old and obsolete cultural resources—they

are often managed by means of anachronisms, in other words. Thus, the key social identifier on Facebook (something entirely new, see further) is "friends"—one of the oldest notions in the vocabulary of social relations anywhere. The entirely new social community configuration of Facebook "friends" is thus anachronistically addressed and molded in the terms of an entirely different social community configuration.

Change can also be detected in the emergence of new phenomena within fixed chronotopic frames. As we discussed above, some models of social organization and interaction become more fixed and dominant than others, especially if they are supported by institutional structures of power. Thus good/bad student or teacher identities are based on relatively stable chronotopically organized practices and behaviors. And yet, when we analyze those practices with serious ethnographic precision we may see signs of change and perturbation of the social order. Such changes may be signaled by the appearance of new roles and new behaviors within well-structured, traditional activities. For example, Carnival celebrations in many European countries imply the dressing of children in clothes that evoke traditional figures in their culture, the consumption of certain foods, and the development of certain activities. The arrival of girls in a saree combined with the performance of bhangra dances and the eating of 'exotic' foods in a Sicilian school point to the possibility of change happening within the molds of established chronotopes.

At the same time, change can be conceptualized in different ways in different social groupings at different scales. New events, processes, and phenomena can be normal for a younger generation and simultaneously abnormal for an older one, while it is the older one that holds, in many social domains, the power to define, regulate, and judge these new things, and will typically do this by taking refuge in old, obsolete concepts or discourses. Such anachronisms are often the stuff of public debate and social conflict, as when the Baby Boomers are blamed for the creation of economic bubbles and overspending, the Woodstock generation is getting crucified for their tolerance of soft drugs, or the *soixante-huitards* (those who were students during the May 1968 revolt) are coming under attack for a lofty leftism or the "decay" of the moral order. It is this layered (heteroglossic) copresence of chronotopically organized practices, in a sometimes unbalanced and anachronistic way, that may lead us toward the finer grain of social order and social conflict.

What exactly is contested across generations? And how exactly does this contestation operate? Those are questions we might begin to explore now. Similarly, an awareness of the layered copresence of such practices may enable us to get a more precise understanding of the complex balance between "thick" and "light" communities and forms of membership therein. In earlier work, we pointed toward the—in our view increasing—importance of "light" communities on social media (i.e., communities not formed by the "thick" bounds of nationality, ethnicity, gender, class, and so forth but rather by the transient criteria of lifestyle, taste, and political inclination; see Blommaert and Varis 2015), where people gather and jointly act while focusing on objects, meanings, and practices.

Such "light" groups were never really privileged by sociology: the Durkheimian and Parsonian tradition displayed a marked preference, precisely, for the mechanisms of cohesion and integration that brought multiple disparate light communities

together into a thick community—the nation, the tribe, the region, the family, the religious community, etc. (cf. Durkheim 1885; Parsons 1970; Lukes 1973). And we have seen above how Bourdieu and Passeron disqualify students as an "aggregate without consistency" that could surely not qualify as a "real" social group. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that a serious sociological study of students, due to the ephemeral character of this community, should not address the student community in isolation, for it could never be seen as entirely autonomous with respect to the larger, deeper forces of social class distinction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964, 56). Thus, while students could be studied as a group, they could not be studied as a *group in itself*; the "groupness" of students must, rather, be constantly checked as to its features and characteristics against the thick community structures upon which it was grafted.

We can considerably refine Bourdieu and Passeron's relatively rudimentary base-superstructure model by paying attention to the specific chronotopic organization of behavior judged to be characteristic of specific groups. It would help us to see that the thick structures, while perhaps determining, are not necessarily dominant in explaining the social valuation of cultural practices typical of light communities, for the precise mode of valuation will be an effect of the specific chronotopic arrangements we address.

The largest social space on earth these days is the virtual space. And it is entirely new as a sociological and anthropological fact. We already mentioned how entirely new social environments such as social media are often approached from within anachronistic modes of social imagination; and the world of social analysis does not differ too much from that of lay practices in this respect. We can only point toward the possibility of an extraordinarily interesting line of research in the vein sketched here. There are specific timespace challenges raised by online culture: Contrary to the social imagination of classical sociology and anthropology, the social practices developed online involve no physical co-presence but a co-presence in a shared "virtual" space of unknown scale-dimensions, involve often an unknown number of participants (also often of unknown identities), combined with a stretchable time frame in which temporal co-presence is not absent but complemented by an almost unlimited archivability of online communicative material. Thus, determining the specific chronotopic nature of cultural practices in a virtual cultural sphere promises to be a stimulating and thought-provoking exercise. Issues of scale—the internet is an immense social space—will call for ethnographic precision in analysis, so as to avoid rapid but unfounded generalizations of the kind "Facebook is a family of two billion people." Using a far more refined research tool, directed with great precision at the specific context-situatedness of any form of social practice, must help us ditch such sociological (as well as political) illusions and replace them with a more complex, but also far more accurate, image of what really goes on in that colossal social space, what exactly contributes to modes of social organization there, and how patterns of organization change over time.

Notes

This paper considerably revises, expands, and elaborates an argument sketched in earlier working papers (Blommaert 2015b; De Fina 2015), in turn building on Blommaert and Varis (2015). We are grateful to Ben Rampton, Piia Varis, Ico Maly, Jef Van der Aa, Max Spotti, Rob Moore, Sjaak Kroon, and Jos Swanenberg for numerous discussions on the topics covered in this paper.

1. Symbolic interactionism—a sociological discipline now nearly forgotten—provides fertile material for chronotopically organized identity work, and rereading some of these classic studies while building our argument was inspiring. The hardcore ethnographic stance of symbolic interactions, as we can see, points directly to the inevitable relevance of spacetime configurations for understanding social behavior. See Blumer (1969) for an influential discussion of symbolic interactionism.

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