

GENERATION, TIME, AND MEDIA

One of the basic underlying interests of Karl Mannheim's social theory of generations in the late 1920s was his interest in understanding social change¹. Despite this original interest, many who have studied generations have focused on specific cohorts, trying to get to grips with the generational identities of baby boomers, or millennials. This trend is further strengthened by the advertising and consumer industries trying to label consumer groups in terms of generation X, Z or the equivalent, in their search for relevant target groups. In this special issue, we would like to return to the theme of generations and social change, with a specific focus on the role of time and memory in the process of generation formation. The themes of generations, time and memory are indeed interrelated in complex webs of interconnections. Social memory is also often related to media, such as the family album of interphotographs, where – especially during vacations and summer holidays – intergenerational encounters are documented and preserved for posterity. As such, generational theory deals with social processes of change, processes that can also be said to produce time. In the process of 'generationing'², memories of past experiences, often tainted with nostalgia, are an important ingredient, where people situated in the same location of the historical process can come together through common experiences and the memories thereof. Such remembrances are often mediated in various ways; they can be formed around 'media events'³, or be focussed on media technologies or contents from one's formative years.

Social memory, as a collective phenomenon, is also characterized by the encounters between different generational memories, as well as of institutionalized forms of memory work, for example in media features of "baby boomers" or "millennials" in the press or on television, providing with prescriptions for how to behave as a member of a certain generation. These encounters also produce time, where the memories of specific generations (or generation units) are relationally situated to other memories.

The special issue brings together a group of researchers from Italy, Sweden, Estonia and Portugal, discussing the temporal aspects of generation theory and of memory formation in order to better understand the temporal categories of experience, and of social existence more generally. The special issue has a background in the form of two workshops, the first arranged at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan in February 2017, and the second at Södertörn University in Stockholm in September

¹ K. Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations", in *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge* [1928], London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1952, 276-320.

² A. Siibak, N. Vittadini, "Editorial: Introducing Four Empirical Examples of the 'Generationing' Process", *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 6, 2 (2012).

³ D. Dayan, E. Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press.

2017. We wish to thank all the participants in these workshops, many more than could fit into this special issue, for lively discussions and for sharpening our thoughts around this theme.

In the first two articles, the editors of this special issue set up a theoretical framework for the following articles. Firstly, Göran Bolin reflects on the role of generation theory for the general understanding of social change: how it occurs, how various factors impact on the quality of change, its pace and depth. Discussing the generation theory of Karl Mannheim in relation to his predecessors Dilthey, Pinder and Heidegger as well as successors such as Ortega y Gasset, Mariás and Ricoeur, he emphasises the importance of analysing processes of generating in culturally and geo-politically specific media landscapes, taking the comparative example of Sweden and Estonia – neighbouring countries that in their technological media landscapes are quite similar, but where there are significant historical differences due to Estonia having been under Soviet rule up until the early 1990s.

In the second article, Fausto Colombo focusses specifically on the role of memory in the construction of a generational “we-sense”, the specific phenomenon of how generations come together and constructs an in-group out of shared experiences. Memory, Colombo argues, is essential for producing the common “we sense” of any generation, and in the article he proposes a multidimensional model to illustrate the functioning of the generational memory, combining a focus on social and collective memory and how the media are crucial for memory formation. However, as memory is also highly ideological, it is both made of emphasis of the past, as well as instances of forgetting.

Signe Opermann and Veronika Kalmus discusses the methodological challenges of operationalizing generation theory in the wake of Karl Mannheim. Taking their point of departure in quantitative and qualitative data from Estonia, they argue that a multi-methods approach including survey data and focus group interviews reveal important nuances among generation units. Such nuances, they argue, are based on differences related to specific life events, lifestyle and social status, plus differences when it comes to the Russian-speaking and Estonian-speaking parts of the Estonian population. Generational units are thus each responding slightly different to their location in the historical process.

Giovanni Boccia Artieri and Elisabetta Zurovac explores the memory work actualised on Instagram, where a specific form of intergenerational “Jugonostalgija” appears, in which the present nation state experiences are bracketed to the benefit of a cross-border nostalgic relationship with a past Yugoslav identity. Building on the distinction made by Svetlana Boym between restorative and reflective nostalgia, the authors develop an analytical framework where posts fit into the four different categories of Belonging, Competence, Creativity and Distance.

Maria Murumaa-Mengel and Andra Siibak focusses on how Estonian young people in the ages 19-23 use social media as a “generational glue” in the formation of their generational identity. Through having the young respondents abstain from using social media for five days, the authors argue that the method promoted self-reflexivity of one’s own social media behaviour and offered the participants an “outsider’s look” upon their media habits, and how it encourages “technostalgia” for pre-digital forms of communication.

Cristina Ponte, Sara Pereira and Teresa Sofia Castro contributes with a comparative perspective building on two sets of data on Portuguese families, and the role of the media in the formation of the generational self-appreciation. The interviews were collected in 1996 and 2016, and reveal the quite dramatic difference in the media landscape of

Portuguese families, from having been dominated by television in the 1990s, to digital and personal media in 2016. In addition, several other societal changes are observed by the researchers, such as the widening gap between grandparents and grandchildren, and the general changes in the contextual conditions for children.

In the last article of this special issue, Francesca Pasquali reflects on the mourning of celebrities such as David Bowie, George Michael and Prince, and how such mediated mourning can be generationally defining. Using media material from Italian Press, she analyses the “discursive articulation” of generational identity through collective mourning, and how the media reporting forms a grand narrative that generational identity can be hooked up on, and that is further established on the artist’s respective social media platforms. Mourning artists, Pasquali shows, is as much about nostalgically travelling back to the moment when one first encountered the artist in question and becomes a component in a strong generational narrative of remembrances.

In epistemological debates in the social sciences and the humanities it is often pointed to the fact that change is presupposed rather than established in analysis⁴. Sabina Mihelj and James Stanyer has even argued that it is important that social theory and research is “taking time seriously”⁵. It is in this spirit we would like to see the contributions in this issue, proposing that generational theory is one way to study social change – and to highlight the large role that both mass and personal media play in the fostering of generational identity.

Göran Bolin - Fausto Colombo

⁴ D. Deacon, J. Stanyer, “Mediatization: Key Concept or Conceptual Bandwagon?”, *Media, Culture & Society*, 36, 7 (2014): 1032-1044.

⁵ J. Stanyer, S. Mihelj, “Taking Time Seriously? Theorizing and Researching Change in Communication and Media Studies”, *Journal of Communication*, 66 (2016): 266-279.