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3 Overview of the Volume

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The contributions of this book lead the way to a wide variety of questions related to young people moving toward adulthood in complex societies. Ideas such as youth, society, and adulthood are problematic; so is the nature of the move itself. In their opening chapters, Perret-Clermont and Resnick consider this period as a time of preparation or transition; but it can also be described in terms of socialization, of learning – and learning refers both to acquisition of skills in specific communities and to the ability to enter new social spaces – or of developing thinking abilities – for resolving problems or for reflecting on one's own trajectory. The authors included in this volume would all admit that young people neither learn nor think in isolation, and the authors would also assume the embeddedness of personal, intersubjective, group, and wider contextual dimensions, although their analyses focus on different levels.

In this dense landscape, the reader is invited to follow a spiral path, moving along these dimensions through different zones of social worlds. This path should provide some relief and some depth to this landscape. The book is organized in six parts. Parts II and III focus on communities of practice. Part II plunges us into *gray zones* of the social world. The study of these less known, more spontaneous spaces makes it possible to highlight tensions and challenges that young people face in transition periods in modern societies. Part III examines some more classical institutional learning settings in relation to nonformal spheres of life. Part IV focuses on an individual level of analysis, with special attention to discourse, before Part V shifts the focus to include interpersonal and, more particularly, intergenerational relationships in youth transition. Finally, Part VI returns to broader social and cultural determinations of transition

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pathways and shows at the end how such societal dimensions generate gray zones.

Part II: Youth-Constructed Socialization

The transition from childhood to adulthood is often considered primarily an interim period. During this time, the so-called young people are no longer children but are still not adults. As a consequence, on the social map, youth places tend to be identified as "out-places": for example, out-of-school, out-of-job, alternative leisure spaces. Furthermore, scientific approaches to skills transmission and elaboration generally focus on institutions such as school and workplaces. This part of the overview is based on the idea that noninstitutionalized spaces should be studied seriously, because young people may have good developmental reasons to invest their time and energy there with peers at the same developmental stage. Careful attention to social spaces emerging in gray zones, or *social interstices*, may increase our understanding of learning and developmental processes related to the transition to adulthood.

The four authors in this part describe different types of youth social spaces. These spaces are devoted to different kinds of activities within various socioeconomic contexts, but their structures, the way they work, and the kinds of skills they develop are very similar. They can all be described as socialization spaces in a particular culture, having their own rules and providing a place where each person can find or define his or her role. Activity is shared, and both practices and socialization processes enhance personal and collective skills, knowledge, and sense of identity.

Shirley Brice Heath argues that the youth-based organizations (YBOs) she has observed in the United States provide an institutional force to fill the voids left by lack of intergenerational communication, by nurture breakdowns, and by an absence of meaningful work opportunities for youth in community and family life. She shows how the socialization models created there are not based on transmission but rather on the idea of putting younger and older people in an ongoing transitional movement centered on changing activities, resulting mainly in real performances or in concrete production works. In playing the roles requested in order to reach the organization's collective goals, members of those cross-aged YBOs establish and follow precise rules, take risks, and assume individual responsibilities.

Thus, in some cases, such YBOs occupy an intermediate space in society. Entering into them allows youth to build an identity and to construct cognitive and social competencies through collective activities. To some

extent, these YBOs are peripheral communities of practice dealing with social uncertainty. Laurence Roulleau-Berger refers in her chapter to interstitial organizations as places with a *culture of uncertainty*. This emphasizes other features of youth organizations: the uncertainty of the individual and collective outcome of the socialization model and the kinds of competencies it fosters. Focusing on the adjustment between community-developed skills and results of the collective action and acknowledgment by their environment, Roulleau-Berger shows how intermediate or *interstitial spaces* lead, in some cases, to integration into the legitimate labor market and, in other cases, to social disaffection and marginalization.

These first two chapters of Part II give a complex view of the processes implied by a social activity oriented toward a collective, visible result. Feelings of belonging and out-group acknowledgment lead to agency and skill construction, which together can bring the group or the person closer to the official society; thus leaving marginal spaces. But not all youth groups present the features of the YBOs studied by Heath or the open, uncertain frames described by Roulleau-Berger. Some youngsters enter and stay in groups that offer far fewer developmental opportunities, provide fewer learning and creative activities, and increase the distance to official social spaces and institution. Why is this so?

In his chapter, Karsten Hundelde analyzes how particular youth-based groups with precise rules and role definitions may provide an extremely strong sense of belonging and responsibility to young people while also fostering antisocial, violent behavior. Such is the case with gangs and neo-Nazi groups. In developing a specific culture, therefore, some interstitial spaces seem to lead youngsters to deep marginalization and alienation. Using the notion of an *identity package*, Hundelde articulates specific group culture features, their potentially affective benefits for youth, and their related implied *life careers*. According to the attitudes and actions that an identity package promotes, or the sort of learning required, these life careers can be more or less oriented toward general societal integration. For instance, in the neo-Nazi group, Hundelde shows the dramatic consequences for individual thinking of a collective affiliation to an external, influential ideology offering the direct benefits of a sense of belonging.

Contributing to the understanding of a life-career concept, Alain Coulon gives a detailed view of one part of the path: the process of becoming a member of a specific group. He focuses on the positive consequences of learning the rules, both for identity development and for a possible transition in the societal space. The group he analyzes shares collective activities that result in neither performances nor visible products. Nevertheless, Coulon's

discussion shows that rule-governed collective activities themselves enhance individual skills and positive identity feelings that can then help the youngsters find a way to be recognized and accepted in official institutional spaces.

One of the major challenges for scholars is understanding how and why shared activities in youth groups, placed in societal interstices, may lead to results that are the opposite of the evolving relationships their members will have with "official" society and the institutionalized world (including the educational sphere, the labor market, and the legal arena), and of their individual development.

From a social point of view, the youth groups described by Shirley Brice Heath and Laurence Roulleau-Berger are *open* to the social surrounding, allowing young people to be acknowledged individually or as a group by official institutions and to find ways to connect to official society. Some groups described by Hundelde are closed to others and cut off young people from official social activity, bringing them to full social alienation.

From a psychological point of view, constructive youth spaces are likely to help members define and construct their relationships with the outside world and contribute to a strong sense of self and to the ability to connect to others. Overall, they become *protected spaces* in which one can take the risk of thinking without threatening one's self-image or identity too much. They provide opportunities to risk ignorance or doubt, where proper thinking starts.

It seems that only interstitial spaces that offer opportunities for both socialization and thinking allow their members to be creative participants, open to external opinions and challenges, ready to accept new relational modes, to develop new skills, and to undertake a process of transition through different social spaces.

Part III: Personal Agency Through Collective Activity

Part II of this volume considers personal development within group dynamics in specific environments. Part III presents a different view of ongoing psychological processes occurring on an interpersonal or personal level. During shared activities related to learning and thinking processes, what happens to the individual's feeling of agency? How can the situation be meaningful for the learners or the novices? How does this meaning affect both the sense of identity and the thinking process? What is the place of the peer, the adult, or the more skilled person? And how do social and cultural environments influence personal meaning, the sense of self, and thinking processes?

The first two chapters in Part III provide a general theoretical orientation. Felice Carrugati and John Rijnsman present theoretical constructs articulating identity dynamics, meaning construction, and learning processes in contextualized sociocultural settings. The next chapter, by Tania Zittoun, presents specific cultural contexts or educational settings where articulations between learning and identity dynamics become particularly salient.

Carrugati presents a new formulation of *joining society* as one of youths' learning challenges in modern societies. Those challenges can be seen as the paths to development of one's capacity to initiate new learning processes specific to new areas of activity required by today's conventional life. In modern societies, learning can be considered a collective process requiring partial rejection of the old organization of knowledge, and the development it fosters implies a horizontal movement (from one community of practice to another) rather than a vertical shift (from a novice to an expert position). Based on recent advances in sociocognitive psychology, Carrugati's chapter emphasizes the deep embeddedness of cognition, social signification, and meaning-making challenges. Against this general theoretical background, learning interactive processes can only be considered by looking carefully at both their social frame, on the one hand, and their meaning for personal identity and self-esteem, on the other hand.

In the next chapter, Rijnsman emphasizes the affective dimensions of meaning and identity that are related to learning processes. He proposes a model that shows the interdependence of self-image and coordination with other persons and with social objects. This model shows particularly the importance of the personal need to maintain a good sense of self in learning and thinking activities. From that perspective, Rijnsman reinterprets the identity dynamics of school and family settings and some of the conditions of developing a positive sense of self, which brings him to new considerations of the process of becoming an adult.

These two chapters sketch a general framework based on the interrelations of social dynamics, cognitive processes, and personal affective implications, including *positive self-maintenance strategies*. This framework allows us to develop a complex understanding of group, intersubjective and personal youth actions, and of learning processes in their *social frames* and *cultural contexts* as they appear throughout this book and more specifically in the next chapter.

Tania Zittoun presents an example of a specific preapprenticeship school setting established to help adolescents who have failed in school prepare for further training as apprentices in the Swiss dual system. In this special program, adults try to work on improving youths' identity by helping them

to acquire socialization skills and developing their cognitive competencies. Thanks to their engagement in this highly structured social space, young people can discover their own value and become able to confer new meaning on learning activities and on their own actions. Hence, they develop social and cognitive skills allowing their social transition to the labor market and the adult world.

Part IV: Learning in Practice and Discourse

Looking at different types of social and interactive frames, the first two parts of this volume show how learning presupposes socially shared activity and how it is embedded in personal identity and meaning-construction processes. Hence, learning can no longer be considered a simple transmission process. But what is it? And if learning is related to specific sociocultural settings, what happens when a person moves from one setting to another? How can one learn the way to enter new communities of practice? What competencies are transferable and how? Focused on communicative and shared practices, the authors in this part adopt different reflective positions that enable them to unpack the notions of learning and competencies and to think through the relations between formal educational settings, other everyday life social situations, and the role of communicative activities.

The chapter by Roger Säljö examines the discrepancy between the experience an adolescent can have in school versus that of everyday life. In order to analyze the origin of this gap, the author views formal education from a historical perspective, supposing the constitution of a specific body of knowledge, particular structures of communicative activities, and specific modes of thinking. Such a formal education has been justified by the necessity to conserve complex memories of knowledge that are not transmitted in everyday experience and produces a group of people who would conserve it. In democratic societies, where young people learn a lot outside of school and through media and new technologies, school has to redefine its function. History has produced a type of school knowledge, modes of thinking, and modes of communication that oblige students to make abstractions of their experience of the everyday world outside of school. This suggests that failing at school exercises or testing activities could be related to a student's inability to forget his or her knowledge of the real world. This also brings up the fact that school knowledge and its modes of communication are often irrelevant for everyday life and therefore may have no meaning for students. Säljö highlights the need to propose a new metaphor for learning that could help redefine school aims. He also points out the specificity of

school, notably as a unique "context for systematic reflection on knowledge and for the production of a broad range of intellectual and practical skills."

Although not giving the same centrality to communication in learning and thinking activities, the next two chapters reduce the gap between school and other settings and challenge the idea of knowledge transfer. In his chapter, Jonathan Tudge argues that understanding processes should be seen as happening through complex practices, of which language is just one component. Rather than focusing on specific skills or bodies of knowledge, he looks at the *personal culture* that individuals establish throughout their life paths in several activity settings and communities of practice. Examining children's everyday lives, where they are involved in very different types of activities, in different contexts, and with different others, Tudge argues that they progressively become aware of the particular meaning some of these activities have for significant others in their lives. Children then seem to be willing to initiate similar activities in other contexts. Tudge proposes to consider *competence* as something that a person has acquired and practiced, and that he or she can display in various contexts. Viewed from that perspective, the difficulty of some adolescents to be considered competent in formal settings – especially girls from lower-income families – could be related to the fact that they were not, as children, encouraged to initiate communication practices within their families. From such a perspective, school can promote the development of transferable skills only if educational activities are understood in relation to other everyday interactive situations.

David Middleton situates his analysis on the level of *discursive activities*. This allows him to consider directly the articulation of the individual and the collective, because personal identity or individual learning can be considered as realized through the shared activity of communication. This perspective allows him to question the difference between formal and vernacular settings. In both cases, the "learnability" of a specific piece of knowledge or practice stems from its public visibility or its presence in discourse. This is the case for identity definition, meaning elaboration, or learning. But these settings are used to develop different cultures of discourse: What about conscious awareness, which, in Vygotskian terms, appears to be possible only in formal settings? Middleton questions this difference, because the discursive analysis of an everyday situation shows how complex thinking procedures are actualized as they are improvised in the games of argumentation and resistance. Such observation could be very beneficial for reflection on improving learning and thinking opportunities for young people.

In the last chapter in this part, Jacques Perriault looks at others' learning and thinking activities in shared practices, both discursive and concrete,

which deal in another way with the question of knowledge transfer. This author focuses on cognitive operations required by new technologies in educational settings and questions the origin of their acquisition. At one level, Perriault shows the very important role of communicative activities in early family life for the acquisition of high-level cognitive abilities that are required for new learning technologies. For instance, a sense of timing or parallel processing ability is important for students to learn if they are to participate effectively in interactive videoconferences; several studies have suggested that such competencies are developed mainly through morning mother-child interaction. It seems that, once these cognitive abilities are acquired, they can be activated in other situations. But at another level, other culturally mediated skills that are required in order to benefit from a videoconference – such as taking notes and preparing questions – are developed in classical educational settings. Although these skills are familiar to students, they are not mobilized in these situations. Students seem to call upon two conflicting definitions of the situation: that the activity should be one of learning but the concrete situation should be an everyday experience, such as watching TV, which does not require these activities. Such an analysis of practice suggests that knowledge transfer is highly dependent on the way in which individuals interpret shared activities for only some types of complex cognitive processes.

More generally, the chapters in this part suggest that, in order to evolve and adapt to new societal challenges, educational settings should carefully take into account students' out-of-school experiences.

Part V: Intergenerational Sites for Thinking

Not only do youth groups and formal educational settings foster the development of young people's identities, communicative skills, and reasoning abilities, but so do families. More precisely, one of the important processes that occurs in youth is the evolution of one's position toward persons from preceding generations. This process implies interactions with adults. Intergenerational relationships imply negotiations, discussions, and sometimes conflicts. This part of the volume examines different types of youth-adult interactions and the nature and role of some of these relationships in the transition to adulthood.

The first two chapters in this part examine how, in familial intergenerational discussions, young people express new identities, develop strategies, and realize role changes in relation to older people. The first chapter, by Clotilde Pontecorvo, provides various examples of social settings involving

middle-class Italian families during dinner table conversations. In these situations, children are usually asked to account for their behavior and to reason consequently, and adolescents often take the floor and challenge their parents with questions and issues that generally have social importance. By using conversational analysis, Pontecorvo shows that the family gathering, as well as schools, can provide a proper setting in which group conversations make it possible to share the difficulties of facing new problems and the pain of thinking and reasoning. Young children and adolescents become tuned to their family community of practice. Hence, they can develop good reasoning and thinking abilities: a critical competence for assuming responsibility of action and discourse that is necessary both for becoming adults and for developing the logical and scientific skills required in further education and work.

The families discussed by Pontecorvo seem to offer resources mainly for the transition to adulthood, whereas other studies show that families themselves are the sites of chief developmental struggles. Manfred Hofer is interested in parent-adolescent relationships and their modification in modern Germany. He considers discourse as a realized behavior that informs us about the adolescent's individuation process. First, speech acts mirror identity positions. Speech behavior and type of discourse are related to one's position in a symmetric or asymmetric relationship; they are highly sensitive to one's will to modify these respective roles or statuses. It is thus possible to observe changes in mother-adolescent speech behavior from early to late adolescence and to see how the individuation process is discursively realized. This brings Hofer to examine how adolescent speech acts are a means of modifying the nature of the relationship, the adolescent's role, and the parents' position toward them.

The two preceding chapters focus on discourse exchanges, but the next two chapters in this part examine intergenerational relationships as parts of wider dynamics on temporal and social levels. In her chapter, Ursula Staudinger adopts a life-span perspective. In such a paradigm, the role of a single interaction has to be understood as it happens at a specific moment in a life course, as it is related to former interaction, and as it has consequences for future situations. The meaning of similar interactions can change with the person's age, and it is highly dependent on wider historical and cultural circumstances. With an example taken from research on wisdom-related thinking, the author shows that social interactions should be understood not only as shared dialogic situations but also as symbolic, inner, or virtual ones. This sheds light on the fact that what develops during a situation of social interaction is often not visible in the interaction itself, but only through

the person's action or thinking after a certain time, which is required for integration. Such a point may have consequences both for theory and for methodological approaches to learning in adolescence.

Claude Kaiser's chapter extends the notion of interaction to social and shared cultural contexts. Using a social-representation approach, he is interested in symbolic encounters between groups and the mismatches that can result from them. For instance, in studying a vocational school setting, he shows that the teachers' representations of the style of teaching provided in their innovative school and their expectations of the students' behavior were totally different from the students' representations of their own learning practices, which were very traditional. Looking at the effective actions of these students, Kaiser notes that their learning practices and interactions did not correspond to their discourse about these practices. Such remarks highlight the importance of the symbolic field in which intergroup relationships take place: ideologies and power games shape adults' and youths' representations of themselves and their relationships with each other in different ways. The consequences of such an analysis are two. First, one consequence for research is that a phenomenon such as youth has to be examined through a multimethod analysis: What is enacted is not what is said through discourse. Second, this could mean that young people's transition to adulthood requires the mastery of the symbolic game that structures the field of institutions, and that shapes discourse and practice, in order to move in this symbolic space.

Part VI: Pathways to Adulthood in National Context

The previous part of this volume suggests that young people's transition to adulthood may be related to knowledge, competencies, relationships, and specific social and cultural contexts. This final part looks at macrostructural determinations of this developmental path.

In the first chapter in this part, Annie Fouquet examines not individual but structural determination of the transitional pathway to adulthood. Although the unemployment rate has been the main indicator of youth's social insertion, recent societal evolutions call for deeper analysis. The duration and outcome of transitional pathways vary according to national school and vocational systems or the role of the family. Behind the relation between education/training and work that distributes youth into an occupational status, argues Fouquet, one should pay attention to the way labor markets are set up in each national economy. These different adjustments cause young people to develop new abilities to overcome difficulties

addressed by national conditions; such abilities can be understood as responses to structural conditions.

Other difficulties arise in trying to give macrostructural views on transitions. In the next chapter, Paul Ryan analyzes some of the main indicators used to describe the youth school-to-work transition. Comparing France and the United States, he unpacks the notion of youth employment. Depending on whether or not military service, higher education, and voluntary inactivity are taken into account, youth employment rates vary drastically. All of these dimensions are important in enabling us to identify which resources young people may develop while not studying or working. The idea of the duration of the transition, which was examined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), can also be questioned. Considering the drastic changes in this transition in England between the 1950s and the 1980s, Ryan shows how measurement and calculation can reveal or hide the dynamics of school-leaving or entering the labor market, with or without formation. This approach emphasizes the variability and inertia of national and historical definitions of concepts related to youth and to becoming part of the labor market; it calls for clearer operational definitions.

The next three chapters examine some consequences of these national and societal structural situations, and especially some of the consequences of the economic and political breakdowns characterizing late modernity for youth development. They also shed some light on some of the bottom-up reaction against social fragmentation.

The national and historical variability of the notions of youth and transition to the labor market is highlighted in the chapter by Dragan Popadić, which refers to the situation in the former Yugoslavia after the war of the early 1990s. Because of Yugoslavia's isolation from other countries, its disintegration into five parts, and the decomposition of the national economic system and the labor market, youth transition here has a totally different meaning from that in other countries. Popadić nevertheless argues for the potentially integrative role of the educational system. Thanks to its resistance to change, the school system was the last institution that had maintained a memory of a traditional culture and of such prewar values as the importance of multietnic and pluralistic communities. Thus, in this specific historical and cultural context, if it survives the changes, the school system may have an *integrative* function for youth and for the society in general.

The extreme situation in the former Yugoslavia reminds us that the school system not only offers a social setting in which young people can learn and

develop but also provides the basis for the wider civic sphere while being highly sensitive to the evolution of society in general. Speaking about such evolution, the two next chapters explore some of the effects of political and economic liberalization on young people, their training, work opportunities, and means of action.

Another example of extreme social disintegration is the highly liberalized market that is characteristic of the United States and that generates new modes of work. In his chapter, Stuart Tannock examines recent typical youth workplaces in the United States, where a majority of working youth are employed in dead-end jobs, such as in fast-food restaurants or mall retail outlets, with turnover surpassing 100% per year. Although there is some policy dealing with this issue, education and special programs do little to change the conditions for most youth with low wages. Trade union leaders in both the United States and Canada have argued that an alternative response would be to organize youth service into unions, to benefit both youth and unions, which face a declining, aging membership. Tannock uses an ethnographic approach to explore how these youths position themselves with respect to their unions, coworkers, and employers and how they evaluate their work and union activity. He suggests that, if unions were to adopt a model of full membership and education for youth, it could potentially transform the cynicism created by dead-end service jobs into a positive motivation for learning and change. Here, then, resisting old institutions seems to offer a way to empower underskilled young people.

In the last chapter in this part, Saul Meghnagi brings together structural changes and the resources people can develop in order to survive in new social and work conditions, with special attention to the role of women. On one side, he examines the deinstitutionalization of life paths beginning in the 1990s in Italy after their institutionalization in the 1950s and 1960s. If the latter is characterized by the standardization of role definition according to age and gender, a strong social welfare emphasis, and, as a result of nonnormativity, a clear marginalization, the deinstitutionalization of the 1990s is less predictable. Behavior and roles are no longer related to gender or age; the welfare system is weak; and because norms are less clear, marginalization is hard to localize. Although women have been agents of this social change through their claims for new modes of social agency, they are still part of a fragile group in the new society. On the other side, Meghnagi identifies knowledge as an important resource for people to protect themselves in their fragile conditions created by social disintegration. This protective knowledge seems to be acquired primarily through lengthy, rich work experiences and supposes cross-context abilities.

This part closes the spiral path that we charted for this volume. Here we see how new, fragmented social conditions create new conditions for youth development. The lack of clear role definitions and social marks can handicap young people but can result in resourcefulness as well. Not only do young people belong to more than one social space, but they can also be active in different spheres, where different types of interaction allow them to develop specific kinds of knowledge. Finally, it appears that, in some new social spaces or gray zones generated by modern societies, young people create communities of practice, where they can be creatively and actively involved for a long time. Through such shared activities, they seem to develop competencies, reinforce their identities, and elaborate new means to move on to other social spheres.

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YOUTH-CONSTRUCTED SOCIALIZATION