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Global Youth Culture Moves into Cultural Production

Global youth culture has emerged as a singly dynamic and transformational force in the world, remaking global structures from educational institutions to policymaking avenues, and especially, the culture industry. Youth culture has always had a vibrant relationship with the culture industry, with young people taking a central role in inspiring, creating, consuming, and spreading cultural products to a wider audience. In the digital age, the liberation of content creation activities has further amplified the role of young people in the culture industry—it could be argued that they have never been as influential within the production of culture as right now.

There is a rich body of work located within three distinct but heavily intertwined traditions that deals with this intersection of youth, global structures and the culture industry. The fields of media studies, culture studies, and globalization studies have all addressed how youth interact with the culture industry, and how postcolonial migration patterns and technological developments have created a global community of young people that is establishing new ways of making meaning in the world and challenging established hegemonic structures. This particular area of study is designated as youth culture and can be described as the intersection of expressive culture with material culture, resulting in the creation and distribution of products that are used primarily for expressive rather than utilitarian purposes (Schlegel 2000, 71-72).

All of these fields have undergone rapid growth and evolution in the post-war era, with influential schools of thought emerging in Britain, Western Europe, and the United States. These three areas of interest (media, youth, and globalization) have been treated both separately and together in many forms and through a variety of research approaches.

Within these fields, the study of youth in the culture industry has been primarily focused on consumption activities rather than production. While subculturalists who formed bands were a topic of study for the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) during the 1970s (Huq 2006, 47), other types of cultural production activities among young people have been by and large disregarded by those studying youth culture. Not until the growth of the Internet and distribution tools were young artists and content producers able to share cultural products on a peer-to-peer level and reach sizeable enough audiences to attract the attention of researchers and media companies. Scholars in the US focusing on this new participatory culture have begun investigating cultural production activities with a focus on the new generation of "digital youth," particularly since the spread of web 2.0 technologies. Therefore, recent research from new media scholars that explores the forces shaping the landscape of digital youth content creation and distribution is also included in this paper.

While the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham School are commonly identified as particular influences on the development of youth culture theory and frames of study, contemporary scholars identify an even older tradition of pre-war youth culture study confined to European cultures, which presents a distinctly different research approach and perspective from the Marxist-influenced scholars who initiated the post-war discussion (Huq, 18; Schlegel, 73). John Gillis, a contemporary of the CCCS but not affiliated with it, writes extensively on youth, reaching back 300 years to trace a strain of youth culture he perceives as continuous to the present, although split into separate working class and middle class traditions along the way. Gillis declares that youth culture is

deeply connected to its own past, which creates an unbroken layer of tradition that can be investigated systematically (1974, xi). There is also evidence that youth or adolescent cultures existed in pre-industrial societies (Schlegel, 73).

The idea of a global youth culture, however, is a relatively new one, and a forthcoming encyclopedia of communication defines and situates the term within a framework of historically relevant schools from cultural and media studies, including the Frankfurt School as well as the Birmingham CCCS, along with more recent work done in "Post-subcultural Studies" that incorporates the influence of recent new media technologies (Kellner and Kahn forthcoming). Global youth culture might sound like a cohesive grouping, but it is characterized by a restless, transformational energy that continuously emerges "in the lifestyles, performances, and sociopolitical practices of contemporary youth" (Kellner and Kahn, 1319). Kellner and Kahn identify two competing traditions that give a rather different connotative flavor to the idea of global youth culture.

The Frankfurt Tradition

The first tradition stems from the Frankfurt School, and indoctrinates the global youth community into the culture industry, seeing it as "actively responding to and identifying with modernized and cosmopolitan Western culture" (Kellner and Kahn, 1319). This leads to a conception of global youth culture that involves young people being incorporated into a Western-based, media-driven industry in a potentially culturally destructive and imperialist manner. The Frankfurt School first introduced the idea of the culture industry, which can be traced back to Theodor Adorno, the German Jewish Marxist academic who coined the term and initiated a discussion of popular cultural products and consumption in 1944. A steady procession of scholars have since decried the denouncements of Adorno and the rest of the Frankfurt School as essentialist

and pessimistic (Huq, 11; Muggleton 2003, 15; Stahl 2003, 28-29). Guy Debord went on to develop a model of spectacular culture that drew on the same ideas, which was to be heavily applied in the early 70s.

In *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord applied Adorno and the Frankfurt School's Marxist theory of the commodification of culture to mass media and society to introduce a superficial society concerned above all with image. Debord's ideas have left their mark on modern thinkers in a number of areas, including but hardly limited to media studies and youth studies. The notion of society as a spectacle is often employed when discussing popular culture and its alienating effects, and the adjective spectacular is used to describe apolitical youth concerned with the image in identity through music, fashion, and art.

The conception of spectacular culture as a product of capitalist societies continues to be accepted and perpetuated by contemporary scholars. Alice Schlegel reveals that the global community of youth has not always wholeheartedly embraced Western youth culture because of the capitalist ideology that underlies the continuously shifting range of capitalist cultural products (79-80), arguing that creating demand for new cultural products is an essential element of commodifying culture. As a result, she states, Polish youth were discouraged from adopting elements of Western youth culture by communist ruling elites, while Moroccan youth were slow to adopt because of cultural traditions that do not embrace the capitalist ideology underlying the products of Western youth culture.

As a result of the consensus that Western youth culture is based on a capitalist model, ideology has been a significant research focus in remapping the field of youth cultural practice to a global frame of study as Western youth culture has spread. Hillary Pilkington's 2004 study looks back to the 1908s to compare cultural practices of Western youth cultures to Soviet youth cultural practices in an attempt to discover whether the meanings of these practices are transportable across

cultural space. The author uses youth from the Soviet Union as a contrast to Western youth and as a way to separate notions of modernity from consumption and individualism (122). Pilkington's comparison reveals that Soviet youth cultural practices do in fact create different meanings from those of youth cultures in the West, opening the door for questioning commonly accepted truths about global youth culture as it spreads to and is incorporated by local youth cultures around the world (131).

The Birmingham Tradition

In Kellner and Kahn's second version of global youth culture, the agency of global youth culture lies in its ability to add new voices, cultural forms, and styles to popular culture, and it is framed as a dynamic force for positive change in the world. This model emerges out of a postmodern and postcolonial tradition, which privileges diversity and hybridity in direct response to prior models that focused agency through a subcultural model relying more on class hegemonic structures and ignoring minority struggles. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) produced a steady output of work that focused on developing this idea of subcultures that has dominated youth studies for most the late 21th century. One of the primary texts that has informed this approach is Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.

Hebdige constructs a comprehensive semiotic analysis, based on the methods of critical analysis developed by Roland Barthes (1979, 16-19), of the punk movement as a case study in the spectacular nature of subcultures. Hebdige posits that style in subcultural formations in England functions as a form of protest against power structures, transforming the meaning of objects from their original use-based definitions into a visual revolt against a classist society entrenched in tradition. Hebdige assumed that a class-based political structure shaped the worldview of the subculturalists he was studying. This focus on class-based structure has given way to other

hegemonic forces in contemporary post-subculture studies, including race- and gender-based structures (Bennet 2004, 7; Böse 2003, 168).

Hebdige's tendency to neglect the perspectives of the subcultures he was studying not only goes against the social scientific origins of the term subculture as originated by the University of Chicago, but has prompted criticism in recent years to make the argument that empirical research is sorely missing in Hebdige's and others' textual analyses (Huq, 11; Stahl, 28-29). Hebdige's investigation of motivations is constrained by his lack of qualitative research—he speculates on the reasons for teds'[1] involvement in race-based attacks, but doesn't delve deeply into the negative aspects of the cultures that lie outside of his class-based framework (51). Similarly, his discussion of West Indian culture is limited by a model that at times casts "the Black Man" as little more than a metaphor to be employed by his subculturalists at the expense of a more sophisticated investigation of relationships between the different subcultures (Bennet, 8-9; Böse, 168, 175; Hebdige, 53-54; Huq, 11). Hebdige's argument for the subculture as a political formation may have been tempered in recent years, but his work has shaped much of the discussion of subcultures since its publication in 1969, and the text remains a seminal work in the fields of youth studies, frequently quoted and sometimes employed as a baseline for current work in the field.

Post-Subculture Studies

Since the sway of the Birmingham School has declined, there has been an explosion of Post-Subcultural studies that seek to lessen the influence of the concept of subcultures that has dominated youth culture studies since the CCCS's heyday in the 70s. Pilkington's study of Soviet youth has contributed to broadening the study of youth cultures while affirming that subcultures are

[1] The British Teddy Boy subculture, also known as the teds, is written about by the CCCS as one of the earliest spectacular subcultures in England. Teds were identified by their Edwardian style of dress. The subculture was London-based but inspired by American rock and roll music of the period.

not the primary or universal structure posited by previous scholars, by establishing that Soviet youths experience the meaning of subcultures differently from Western youth cultures (131).

Rupa Huq investigates the relationship between pop music and contemporary youth culture and, in the process, presents her rethinking of subcultural and popular music studies theories using case studies based on ethnographic research. She moves the debate to the globalized and hybridized stage, with London serving as a backdrop for transnational postcolonial youth movements that remake the pop music scene. Huq precedes her original research with an extensive multi-chapter discussion of academic schools and thinkers who have contributed to the fields of youth culture studies, postcolonial studies and popular music studies.

She presents extensive historical research that builds her case that previous work in the field of youth culture studies has been analyzed within limited and homogenous national frameworks, and that transnational settings are prime examples of the complexity of the current relationship between pop music and youth culture. She also points out that previous culture studies texts underestimate the agency of youth as a whole, as well as specific minority subgroups (12). Huq is reluctant to offer specific conclusions beyond broad affirmations of the value of diversity in youth culture, but states that for globalized young people, pop music is "a form of social practice to be created as well as a cultural text to be consumed" (166). Huq's work indirectly makes the case for further research on popular music creation as a social practice among young people.

Huq moves the debate irrevocably past the notion of subcultural studies and into the fast-paced and constantly shifting terrain of global youth studies. She is building on several anthologies and numerous studies that have already made the same contention quite convincingly (Stahl; Bennett and Harris; Muggleton and Weinzierl), but her broad-based discussion achieves a comprehensive dimension lacking in other works touching on the same topic. Huq sheds light on several glaring holes in the work of the Birmingham CCCS that shuts the door on continuing further along the

class paradigm alone, and acknowledges the force of movements originally marginalized or omitted by the CCS (e.g., girl and gay subcultures) (16, 26).

The *Post-Subcultural Reader* also introduces its anthologized works with a section that details the major criticisms of the Birmingham CCCS output, pointing out certain failures to account for a broader base of subcultures and an almost exclusive focus on working class white males (7). While identifying the same omissions as Huq's discussion of girl and gay subcultures, a puzzling footnote in the anthology suggests that women and girls have less place in the realm of subcultures (19), an assertion that is directly refuted by McRobbie, who wrote extensively on the Teeny Bopper culture in 1976 (qtd. in Bennet, 7) that existed among preteen girls. In contemporary digital youth culture, the work of the Pew Internet and American Life Project has documented for many years now how girls are significantly more likely to be content creators and have blogs and personal pages online (Lenhart et al 2007), suggesting that girls have a central role in Internet culture production.

Globalization

While not the first to coin the term, Pilkington employs the neologism "glocal" (a conflation of the terms global and local) to express how youth cultural practices center on using communication strategies to situate themselves simultaneously within local and global spaces. This interaction of the global and local has been and will continue to be an embarkation point for scholars focusing on the global aspects of youth culture, particularly in the wake of vast migration movements that have reconfigured national identity as well as personal identity. The past two decades have seen broad-based studies on immigrant populations refine the specific issues facing immigrants and deepen the scale of study to acknowledge that different types of immigrants have differing experiences and draw distinct meanings from similar activities (Kasinitz et al 2004).

The idea of hybridity runs through much globalization research, particularly in relation to immigrant populations. Hybridity marks a movement away from the uneven relationship of appropriation as epitomized by punks drawing from reggae culture (Hebdige 63-70), towards a more equitable relationship in which influences are absorbed and outputted in new configurations. Hybridity discourses have, however, been challenged as a mythic construction that privileges oppressors by offering a way to wipe the slate of historical imbalances in the outputting process (Böse 170-171). On the other hand, hybridity is a particularly potent metaphor for understanding the experiences of second and 1.5 generation[2] immigrants who are forced to contend with more than one dominant cultural influence in forging their own unique cultural practices and identity. For example, South Asian teens adopt a mix of ethnic Indian styles and music as well as more mainstream black cultural tastes and practices to reflect their hybrid backgrounds (Warikoo 2007, 401).

Unsurprisingly, Western and non-Western scholars have tended to focus on how Western youth culture spreads to and influences the global youth audience, often framing Western youth culture as a modernizing force that wipes out local cultural traditions for better or worse. Post-colonial work and globalization studies have tempered this extreme view in recent years, presenting a far more nuanced picture of how globalization is affecting youth culture. A similar trend presents itself in media studies: Asian media scholars contend that Hollywood's role in the global media landscape has been overrepresented in English-language media research, and that global penetration data has misrepresented the effects of Western programming on non-Western audiences (Keane et al 2007, 3-4).

[2] Generation naming has become surprisingly complicated with imprecise uses for each of three terms: first generation, second generation, and 1.5 generation. In this case, I am using the terms second and 1.5 generation in the same way that Kasinitz et al employ them—to refer to people whose parents were immigrants but who themselves were raised substantially in a host country.

There are still powerful centers of cultural production, however, from which media products are broadcast to a majority of other countries and inform global youth culture around the world, again highlighting the problematic terrain of the global and local community. Due to recent migration patterns, New York has emerged as a center for black culture and London a center for South Asian culture (Warikoo 397, 400-401). New York and London have been traditional media centers but remain relevant today in part because of their remarkably multiethnic populations, which bring together so many cultural influences that practically every niche and corner of the world is represented in one way or another. New centers with a global reach are already emerging, particularly in regions with official government initiatives designed to encourage art and media in community outreach efforts such as Singapore's Creative City initiative (Yu 2008, 961-962) and in cities with heavily multiethnic populations and strong media industries like Toronto. While it is still tempting to consider these urban centers as "melting pots" where every culture is able to express their own cultural and artistic values, recent scholarship reveals that this is simply not the case.

In a study of emerging global youth culture in multiethnic settings, Natasha Warikoo finds that racial and ethnic boundaries are maintained through cultural consumption and expression as well as a policing system among peers that reinforces essentialized qualities of ethnic and racial identities. Warikoo also discovers that in both New York and London, black culture is currently considered to be the mainstream "cool" culture, disseminated through MTV among other mass media sources. She identifies authenticity as a vague but powerful force which teens use to establish boundaries and assign status within their community. Together, these findings paint a picture of cultures vying for dominance and higher rank within the community and the individual, often based on unspoken norms and valuations and associations with insider and outsider status.

Globalization studies also repoliticizes youth culture, reclaiming it from its apathetic role in Post-subcultural studies, when scholars were balking at the CCCS's class-based subcultures and

focusing more on escapist elements in youth culture (Huq, 34). A preoccupation with contradictions and shifting boundaries characterizes most of globalization theory, as well as a focus on hegemonic patterns and how youth culture attempts to subvert them (Maira and Soep 2005).

Digital Youth and Cultural Production

Research on the digital age has paved the way for dedicated research on culture production among young people around the world. As mentioned earlier, the Pew Internet and American Life Project, has provided a baseline for participation in online content creation among US youth since 2000, and many researchers have been tracking content creation by region and country for a similar length of time.

Any discussion of culture production and content creation requires addressing exactly which activities fall into the realm of cultural production. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, youth culture has been described as the intersection of expressive culture and material culture, resulting in products that are used primarily for expressive rather than utilitarian purposes (Schlegel 71-72). This holds true, but in keeping with the capitalist origins of the movement, these products do often serve a specific economic objective that can be described as utilitarian. Youth culture today is functioning under emerging open source rules for appropriation, customizing, and remixing, conventions that in some cases are directly contradicted by current copyright law enforcement.

The boundaries between art and commerce have become increasingly blurred, particularly as anecdotal evidence points to increasing numbers of artists having discovered ways to make their art into a viable livelihood (Alboher 2008; Walker 2007). In the other direction, Rob Walker talks about cultural forms which originated from purely commercial motives that have now been co-opted by youth culture for primarily expressive objectives (qtd. in Fawkes 2007). Cathy Davidson argues that creative collaboration among youth online, often indistinguishable from social networking, is a

lucrative source of free labor for corporations investing in digital and mobile technologies (2008). She points out that users while have more agency in this new age of digital technology, corporate control of most content in the digital space threatens that agency.

Music has always had a special role in youth cultures, as evidenced by the first studies of youth culture production being centered on music (Huq; Schlegel, 78). More recently, scholars have focused on dissecting hip hop in as many different ways as possible, including art as social practice and art as commercial venture. The music industry is arguably the primary battleground for the struggle to define ownership, authorship and intellectual property rights that is currently reconfiguring every art form, and the dramatically changing landscape of commercial and independent music provides a birds-eye view into many of the issues facing young media makers today. Remix remains the preferred metaphor of choice for understanding how digital culture is altering contemporary society.

Political agency and media production have also intersected in previously inconceivable ways, within organizations like MoveOn and Avaaz, both of which produce and place advertising as advocacy tools for international policymaking and funded by youthful globalized constituencies ("Wakey Wakey" 2007). And recently, vast amounts of virtual ink went into dissecting just how influential young people were in the recent US presidential election, and what global youth populations can expect in the future from US policymaking, particularly as their clout grows (Davidson 2008).

The Digital Youth project has initiated forward-thinking research in the arena of youth and production, with a particular emphasis on youth in the United States and Japan as part of their initiative to explore digital youth in communication, learning, and play (Carter et al 2008). Among the findings in their final report is that culture production has become everyday practice for most young people in the US. And while most young people who create digital media have no

professional motive, youth who start informally creating and distributing content online can find that these informal activities influence their decisions to pursue production as a professional pursuit later in life (Ito et al 2008). The project has yielded published works on media production in Japan and within immigrant communities in the US, but is largely confined to a US population. Investigation of global youth culture and cultural production was not part of the project objectives.

Future Research Areas

There is great potential for study in the arena of global youth culture and cultural production, with major questions yet to be asked, such as: How are globally networked infrastructures changing collaboration geographically and culturally? Do families scattered in multiple countries use content creation to close geographic gaps? Are youth in the US exposed to cultural production in other countries as much as young people in other regions are exposed to content originating from the US? Does language pose significant barriers to creating and distributing content online, and where is online language headed in a multilingual digital space? Do diaspora communities use culture production in political, economic, or expressive ways that differ from rooted communities?

In New York, as a global media center, there is great potential for further research in diaspora and immigrant communities involved in culture production, and how extra-national influences make their way into global media productions. Many after-school programs in New York offer digital production classes in audio and video which give high school age youth the opportunity to create their own videos, often without a set subject or topic. An ethnographic study in such an after-school program could investigate questions like: How do young immigrants in structured digital production classes use their blank canvasses? Are political, expressive, or commercial

objectives a part of their products, and is there a change in perceived agency before and after the course?

Research methodology has emerged as a contested site for agency, and just as in every other aspect of work, study, and play, youth are demanding an increasingly active role in being studied. A project based in an after school program would be an excellent methodological fit for participatory youth research, which has the potential to act as a vehicle for personal, academic and community change (Tupuola 2006). Maira and Soep also discuss how participatory research across multi-site ethnographic projects can capture the links between young people's local and global identities, practices and influences (xvii). It seems only fitting that such a potent force as global youth culture shape its own objectives and outcomes as we move towards investigating its productive capabilities.

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