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## Heather Braun, Elisabeth Lamothe, Delphine Letort (dir.), *Les Cultures ado : consommation et production*

« Introduction: Teenage Cultures, From Consumption to Production »

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From music to TV series to literature, the cultural landscape of teenagers is diverse and multifarious. Interestingly, the notion of “teenage” itself has been subsumed and possibly superseded by the concept of “young adulthood” which indicates a new phase in the process of growing up. Denoting the severance of the link between childhood and adolescence, young adulthood encompasses a specific age and gender range which approximately extends from 15 to 21. The young adult is the focus and the target of a new type of literature that now occupies a conspicuous location in bookstores. Films and TV programs are also made for this specific audience, broaching themes that resonate with their concerns as young people confronted with a web of complex issues. While the young adult’s life more often than not revolves around family and school, an environment symbolized by the “bedroom culture” which has developed in the post-World War II period,<sup>1</sup> the cultural artifacts produced for young adults show that their familiar world can no longer be insulated from the outside. Not only have (sexual) predators intruded into the peace and quiet of the home through Internet searches that go undetected, but young adults also live in a connected world in which their access to social media offers exposure to new ideas and new threats. While these multimedia platforms might stimulate new creative input on the part of active consumers who contribute to the digital revolution, they also open up new paths of juvenile delinquency. In these ways, the young adult may well embody a new state of being in a dematerialized world, making more friends on Facebook than in real life.

This *Publije* Issue examines various aspects of contemporary youth culture, using the books and films that target this specific audience as critical tools for better understanding their behavior as consumers. Young adult authors and filmmakers aim to increase their viewer ratings by speaking to the expectations of their respective fans; however, their words and images might also contribute to emerging trends. Publishers and film producers are keen to exploit the “juice” of their stories for promotional purposes. Many studies have pointed out the power of the media over the fabrication of stereotypes – including those involving race and gender. Cheerleaders, for example, have become an icon of heteronormative femininity;<sup>2</sup> their perceived physical perfection ensures their popularity while marginalizing other female types – including minority individuals who often play secondary roles in dominant-culture narratives.<sup>3</sup> Girlhood studies has emerged as a burgeoning area of research aiming to “break down the amorphousness of girlhood

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<sup>1</sup> Syân LINCOLN, *Youth Culture and Private Space*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Jason REID, *Get Out of My Room!: A History of Teen Bedrooms in America*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Natalie Grace ADAMS and Pamela J. BETTIS, *Cheerleader! Cheerleader! An American Icon*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Stacey LEE, *Unraveling the “Model Minority” Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2009.

that now seems to stretch from birth to the late 20s.”<sup>4</sup> Male youths are not exempt from such stereotyping, as noted by Vappy Tyyskä in a book that explores the many sources of social control exercised on the young generation.<sup>5</sup>

A crucial element of girl and boy empowerment may reside in the ability to shape one’s social identity through access to the Internet which offers opportunities to expand one’s social network beyond the confines of one’s regional area. Writers and filmmakers have incorporated such technologies into their plotlines, showing how the younger generation’s easy navigation of digital communication interferes with their lives. It is not entirely clear to what extent books and films have influenced the behavior of young audiences; however, John Fiske has written at length about the politics of popular culture, underlining the subversive readings that a text might give rise to:

The popular text is a text of struggle between forces of closure and openness, between the readerly and the producerly, between the homogeneity of the preferred meaning and the heterogeneity of its readings. It reproduces and recreates the struggle between the disciplinary power of the social order and the multiple resistances to this power, the multiple bottom-up powers that contest differently the more singular top-down power.<sup>6</sup>

Fiske delves into the gap between production and reception, highlighting the creative input of consumers whose interpretation of cultural texts may significantly deviate from the expected responses. The cultural historian further points out some of the contradictions of popular culture, as commodities are produced by an industry that exploits the people’s interests to serve its own economic ends.<sup>7</sup> Youth culture in particular illustrates this fundamental paradox as suggested by the multiple media platforms that young adult writers, filmmakers, and musicians use to stay connected.

The opening essays of this issue provide analyses of the changes that can be witnessed in the rapidly evolving literary and filmic fields devoted to the teenage years. In an article devoted to contemporary young adult novels, Gilles Béhotéguy explores with humor the worries expressed by authors who revise literary canons to warn their teenage female readers against the dangers of social networking. More specifically, he evokes the ambiguities of novels authored by adult writers who claim the role of educators when dramatizing bullying and peer pressure into “new adult” stories that reinforce gendered sexual stereotypes. Heather Braun’s essay addresses the creation of complex female figures seeking to transcend such sexual and gendered conformism. Beyond the now classic superheroine of dystopian fiction who belongs to the fantastic and does not provide a reliable role model, she discusses the achievements of realistic

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<sup>4</sup> Claudia MITCHELL and Jacqueline REID-WALSH, “Theorizing Tween Culture Within Girlhood Studies”, in Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (eds.), *Seven Going on Seventeen, Tween Studies in the Culture of Girlhood*, New York: Peter Lang, 2005, 2009, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Vappu TYYSKÄ, *Youth and Society: The Long and Winding Road*, Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> John FISKE, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London: Routledge, [1989] 2010, 101.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 23-25.

characters who prize the attainment of self-awareness and self-knowledge against all odds, lending them greater depth and legitimacy than their idealized counterparts. Also questioning categorization, Virginie Douglas tackles the necessity to reassess literary and age boundaries through the study of contemporary British young adult fiction. She demonstrates how thematic and stylistic hybridization in young adult literature emphasizes issues of transition and in-betweenness also experienced by young readers of this fiction. Claire Heuillard furthers this study by retracing the evolution of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), an American TV series created by Joss Whedon and centered on characters as they grow from fifteen-year-old high school students to 22-year-old young adults. Although the characters evolve in a familiar adolescent world of school and friends, Whedon provides glimpses into the adult world by showing how growing up transforms the characters' fears and responsibilities. The series blends the fantastic and the mundane to give social relevance to characters' adventures; Heuillard also examines fans' posted responses to the series to better understand its successful appeal with a young audience. *The House of Night* (P.C. and Kristin Cast, 2007-2014) encompasses a twelve-book series which, according to Gaïane Hanser, uses the figure of the vampire to create a sense of proximity and relevance with young adult readers. The author, however, questions the morality of the sexuality depicted in these stories, which contain graphic descriptions and endorse patriarchal role models, ascribing female characters to a complicit role in their sexual assault. Through analyzing online responses to the characters' fictional acts, Hanser attempts to observe the impact of the book series on its readership.

The second part of this issue considers how adaptation, theatricality, and multi-modal advances in technology have shaped how adolescents consume texts in the digital age. Silke Jandle's essay explores how teens use Youtube and vlogging as powerful platforms from which to speak to their peers about bullying, body image, and sexuality. This "transmedial phenomenon" provides guidance for adolescents struggling with these issues as well as accessible role models who can help them resist the stereotypes and pressures they face daily. Delphine Letort offers a comparative reading of Green's young adult novels as "paper routes to adulthood" alongside more accessible media platforms including Youtube and the film adaptations of his novels. Through his frequent use of vlogs and his direct communication with teenage readers, Green is able to bridge generational gaps and also address issues omitted from the adaptations of his novels. Isabelle Van Peteghem-Tréard considers how filmmakers Sofia Coppola and Gus Van Sant use specific filmic techniques such as long shots and filters to capture a Lacanian "extimacy" and, more specifically, to highlight the intimate and fragmented nature of adolescence. By slowing down the pace of their narratives and embracing "the cinema of slowness," these films emphasize the experiences of teenage angst and adolescent struggles in order to better comprehend youth and mortality. Robert Legg examines the gender dynamics at play among

male participants in an amateur youth performance of Claude-Michel Schönberg's musical *Les Misérables* in the United Kingdom. Viewing the behavior of these young actors through the lens of Judith Butler's gender performativity and R. W. Connell's "hegemonic masculinity," Legg demonstrates how this performance allowed teenage participants to experiment with non-mainstream masculinities while comparing them to more "orthodox" masculinities from the "safe" distance of the stage. Finally, film scholar Gilles Menegaldo analyses the representations of teenage life in two American independent films, *The Virgin Suicides* (Sofia Coppola 1999) and *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001), films that highlight generational conflicts through motifs of rebellion against a backdrop of suburban boredom. The filmmakers portray adolescents who are estranged from the adults around them, using a non-realistic mode of representation to convey their self-destructive instincts.

The third part sheds light on the relationship between adolescence and the struggles of history which often lead to an early emancipation from childhood. Crystel Pinçonat examines three autobiographical texts by Hispanic American writers who expand on their memories of Americanization as a turning-point in their coming-to-age story. Nicholasa Mohr, Luis J. Rodríguez and Victor Villaseñor relate their humiliating experiences of failure and frustration in American schools where they felt rejected and stigmatized for their different appearances. Their personal narratives allow them to regain a voice stifled by cursing conventions in their youth, thereby addressing an audience of young adults whom they intend to reach by providing minority models of success. Eliane Elmaleh deals with a biographical painting series about Harriet Tubman by the African American artist of the Harlem Renaissance Jacob Lawrence. She deciphers his technique in an in-depth analysis of the narrative shaped by the paintings and the captions accompanying them, evoking the dual reading of an illustrated children's book. This comparison allows her to demonstrate that Lawrence's paintings are characterized by didactic interest, aiming to celebrate the Black woman's heroic activism through the use of Biblical symbols that might light a spark of hope in a young viewer's mind. In the final article of this issue, Jacqueline Jondot dwells on the corrupted innocence of Palestinian teenagers trapped in the middle of a conflict which overwhelms every aspect of their lives. Robbed of their childhood by a war that turns normalcy into an impossible dream, the teenagers of Susan Abulhawa's novels are caught up by the realities of an ongoing conflict. Death is an omnipresent threat whereas the danger of physical injury looms large in the teenagers' daily life, turning their experience of growing up into a budding awareness of impossible horizons. Her narrators describe teens who feel estranged from their bodies and their homeland, two forbidden territories that writing can hardly help reconcile.

As the above suggests, this *Publije* issue gathers scholars from different fields all around the world who share the same concern with youth culture, aiming at transcending youth

stereotypes by questioning the ideological impact of various cultural artifacts that greedy industries manufacture for adolescent consumers. Similarly, minority literature, independent cinema, and Internet videos open up new spaces of (self-)representation, allowing for new opportunities for transgenerational and transnational bonding.