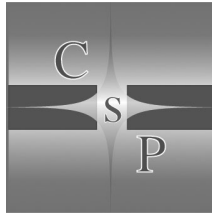


Youth, Media and Culture in the Asia Pacific Region

Youth, Media and Culture in the Asia Pacific Region

Edited by

Usha M Rodrigues and Belinda Smaill



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Youth, Media and Culture in the Asia Pacific Region, Edited by Usha M Rodrigues and Belinda Smaill

This book first published 2008 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2008 by Usha M Rodrigues and Belinda Smaill and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-84718-460-X, ISBN (13): 9781847184603

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:

Asia Pacific Modernities: Thinking Through Youth Media Locales Belinda Smaill	1
--	---

Part I:

Youth, Consumption and the Borders of Culture: Fields of Analysis

Sells Like Teen Spirit: Business, Technology and the “Post-Fordist” Youth Market Bill Osgerby.....	19
--	----

Youth and Online Morality: Negotiating Social Differentiation and Civic Engagement in China Ian Weber	45
---	----

Broadcast Yourself: Moral Panic, Youth Culture and Internet Studies Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg.....	71
--	----

Youth Media Directory Usha M. Rodrigues.....	87
---	----

Part II:

Media Performances: Subjectivity, Representation and Engagement

China’s Super Girl: Mobile Youth Cultures and New Sexualities Audrey Yue and Haiqing Yu.....	117
---	-----

Bad Girls Go Digital: National Selves, Cyber Selves, Super Selves Chris Hudson.....	135
--	-----

“bro ’Town — <i>The Simpsons</i> of the South Pacific”: How Global Cultural Icons Bring Meaning to the Local Philippa K. Smith and Katalin Lustyik.....	157
---	-----

Part III:**Media Uses and Communities**

“c’mon commodify us!”: Commodity Fetishism and Resistant Practice in the Bandung DIY Hardcore Scene Sean Martin-Iverson	177
Cool Consumption: Rasta, Punk and Bollywood on the Streets of Yogyakarta, Indonesia and Kolkata, India Harriot Beazley and Kabita Chakraborty.....	195
East Asian Mobile Youth Cultures Damien Spry.....	215
Contributors.....	231
Notes.....	235

CHAPTER ONE

ASIA PACIFIC MODERNITIES: THINKING THROUGH YOUTH MEDIA LOCALES

BELINDA SMAILL

In focusing on youth in the Asia Pacific region this collection brings together two disputed cultural formations. Both “youth” and the “Asia Pacific” are invoked in an assortment of contexts to signify the positions of a whole range of different interests. Examining the notion of youth and media against the background of the Asia Pacific, then, entails an acknowledgment of the stories told about the potentiality and the excesses of youth as well as the way a territory as disparate as the Asia Pacific is narrativised into an impossibly coherent entity. Here I will endeavor, by way of an introduction, to work through some of these stories and the scholarship that has sought to revise these accounts. The chapters in this collection explore geographically and culturally specific sites in the Asia Pacific where media, both old and new, facilitate a rethinking of youth subjectivities and communities through, at a localized level, confronting many of the ambiguities that are sketched out in this introduction. It is significant that these activities and performances of youth are conditioned by and/or defy many of the technologies of modernity including the forces of market capital, the nation and the hierarchies that structure the flows of the global cultural economy.

Although the “Asia Pacific Region” itself signifies a geography prone to alter its borders depending on the intention of its application, for the purposes of this collection the Asia Pacific is understood to include East Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China), South East Asia (Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines), South Asia (Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka) and Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and the islands of the Pacific). This regionality encompasses colonizing and decolonized cultures, emerging market economies and established centers of capitalism. Perhaps the only consistency across this formation is the way in which these cultures have all functioned, or

continue to function, as the “other” of the previously imperial centers of the West. Stuart Hall aptly describes this kind of relation as “The West and the Rest” (1992). The polarity referenced by Hall in this often quoted phrase is a categorization produced historically by the West to perpetuate an easy distinction between Western culture and its others. This perpetuation effectively renders invisible the tensions and anomalies that permeate the almost unwieldy reality of what constitutes the range of cultures of “the Rest.”

The Europeanized West, anchored in the history of enlightenment humanism, has been cast as coterminous with modernity. Within this dialectic, “the Rest” are posed as somehow without, or out of step with, the ideologies of reason and progress that define the modern. This casts the “other in another time,” (Chow 1991, 30) and seals cultures and regions off as if they are bounded entities with shared and static values and attributes. Far from this, non-Western cultures are themselves grappling internally with the many contradictions of modernity. Significant in this sense is Rey Chow’s articulation of the coevalness of cultures that poses the non-West as always contemporary to the West and equally “transforming and translating into the present” (1995, 196). Chow’s notion is useful for approaching both the unevenness within the ordering of Asia Pacific nations and the dialectic between the West and the Rest. She writes: “the coevalness of cultures, in other words, is not simply a peaceful co-existence among plural societies but the co-temporality of power structures...” (1995, 196). Thus, if Western modernity has been characterized by shifting hegemonies and hierarchies of exclusion within and across national cultures, this is equally the case where the Asia Pacific is concerned.

Indeed, the categorization of the Asia Pacific as a discreet entity is itself a construct of modernity. This concept of regionality took shape as late as the middle of the twentieth century as a confluence of political and economic forces came into play. As Shirley Geok-Lin Lim and Wimal Dissanayake note, with World War II came the war in the Pacific and following this the Cold War, both of which, through focusing security concerns on the nations of the region, brought a new discursive coherence to this disparate array of nations (1999, 2-3). Adding to this, the exceptional growth of market economies was accompanied by the formation of economic communities (such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation or APEC), created as an “imperialist globalization project” (Chen 1998, 5) in the Pacific, intended to rival that of the Atlantic.

In this way, economic and security paradigms have attempted to impose a degree of order on a markedly heterogeneous territory. Another

indicator of the upheavals of modernity, the transnationalising effect of population movements, points again to the impossibility of making totalizing claims about the region. "Asian and Pacific countries," as Stephen Castles notes, "have a long history of permanent or cyclical migration for purposes of trade, work, religion or cultural exchange" (2004, 17). This movement has been exacerbated by political instability associated with the Cold War and the flows of migrant workers connected with the unevenness of the economic boom in recent decades. The consequences of differing histories of migration have left, for example, modern nation-states in Southeast Asia and Oceania with a high level of cultural diversity while some East Asian nations are much less ethnically heterogeneous (Castles 2004, 17). An acknowledgement of the contemporality of power structures that constitute the Asia Pacific must also account for the tension between the differences as well as the strategies of coherence inaugurated by modernity. In this sense, to place emphasis on culture, politics and economics, and the nomenclatures they deploy, highlights the constant flux of transactions and redefinitions between and across cultural borders in the region.

If the shifting cultural terrain of the Asia Pacific can be understood through a historical frame as a *site* of "becoming," the notion of "youth" is, ontologically, frequently posed as a *state* of becoming. Perhaps because of their associations with change and the advent of "the new," the discourse of youth often bears great metaphorical weight when the challenges of modernity come to the forefront of cultural sensibilities. In this manner, Johan Fornas writes that youth "has long been associated with future hopes, promises of a new life and the progress of modernity" (1995, 1). Such optimism must be offset by an acknowledgement that youth have also been charged as the harbingers of moral decay or, conversely, are, with women, made to embody the vulnerability of the collective in periods of crisis such as war or natural disaster. As Bill Osgerby suggests "it is perhaps inevitable that conceptions of 'youth' and chronological age will figure in attempts to make sense of social change" (1997, 319). Rather than functioning as a straightforward biological category, "youth" often becomes the discursive screen onto which a society's fears and hopes are projected.

The study of youth and its relationship with the media is now well established. Despite the persistent popular conceptions of youth being in danger of the harmful effects of the media, whether through representations of violence in film, television and computer gaming, or pornographic images on the internet, research in the field has largely problematized these simplified accounts of media impact. These accounts

are bound up with the way the movement from childhood to adulthood has been the locus for a perceived “excessive” anarchic youthfulness and the focus of continuing moral panics. Both analyzing this cultural ground, and moving beyond it, youth scholarship has sought out the specificities of the pleasures, uses, contestations and exploitations that characterize the complex relationships between young people and the media. As David Buckingham writes “to define young people as merely vulnerable and credulous thus represents a forceful legitimation of adult power and control” (1993, 4). The conception of childhood or young adulthood through an idealized innocence and purity, itself a cultural construct, also denies the social experiences of youth and falsely limits them to the realm of the pre-social. In ways that counter notions of youth as either “uncontaminated” or prone to corruption at the hands of the media, much recent work in the area of youth studies has sought to theorize young people’s experience and identity formation in regards to changing social contexts.

Frequently cited as the forebears of youth culture research, the members of the “Birmingham School,” those most noted for their role in the internationalizing of British cultural studies, produced a theoretical framework for the study of subculture. Works such as *Resistance Through Rituals* perceived youth culture as “subcultural” in order to theorize the relationship between youth, youth industries, such as fashion and music, and the consumption of popular culture. Methodologically this work brought to bear semiology and neo-Marxist perspectives on the analysis of male youth and their resistance to class domination through spectacular forms of style. Critiques of this work have shaped cultural studies and its influence on media studies.¹

In addition to these critiques, a large body of work has emerged exploring youth as a constantly changing cultural construction in a given context, the way young people use media, and the interrelationship between these. For example, Paul Willis’s 1990 study *Common Culture* argues for a relation between youth and media in which capitalism itself provides the resources for an active and inventive consumption that he terms “symbolic creativity” (1990, 98). Yet, as Jim McGuigan observes, Willis, while aligning himself with a strong notion of individual agency, is unable to realize a radical critique of youth cultures, partly because he “puts his faith in market capitalism’s capacity to deliver the goods for everyone’s creative use” (1992, 119). In her critique of subcultural theory Sarah Thornton perceives youth culture, and dance culture in particular, not as authentic, existing prior to the media, but through the way media industries are “integral to the authentication of cultural practices” (1996,

9). Youth cultures then are part and parcel of a youth subjectivity that is already constituted through a myriad of discourses and institutions, including those of the mass media.

These brief examples demonstrate the way the analysis of youth cultures, since the work of the Birmingham School, have been concerned with the function of individual agency within broader power structures, most notably consumer capital. With the rise of poststructuralist theory, and the work of Michel Foucault in particular, this becomes much more a question of “subjectification.” That is to say, a subject’s relationship to herself, and thus also a youth identity, is not simply a matter of intention but rather concerns the way subjects are produced and disciplined through regulatory discourse. These movements in scholarship are evident in cultural studies and media studies more broadly but are amplified in the case of youth research. This is perhaps both because the image of youth is so saturated with cultural meaning, and thus a rich arena for speculation, and because young people constitute a visible grouping that, while far from unified, embodies more than any other group the flux of changing and ideologically resistant identity.

Due to the strong links youth and popular culture analysis has had with British cultural studies since the 1970s, this field has, until very recently, demonstrated a remarkable Eurocentric and northern hemisphere bias. The key theorists in the field have been motivated by an investment in and a desire to theorize what they perceived as the youth counter-cultures that they saw emerging around them out of the British underclass such as mods and rockers, punk and skinhead cultures. More latterly this has expanded, but remains largely focused on youth practices and cultures based in Britain and Europe more broadly. Yet, importantly, this work includes a focus on diasporic cultures to be found in Mercer (1994), Back (1996), Sharma (1997) or Nayak (2003). The expanding literature on hip-hop and African American youth must also be acknowledged in this context. What this has meant for apprehending the relationship between youth and media is a marginalization of the conceptualizations offered by non-Anglo American or non-European regimes of governmentality, nationhood and capital and the way youth cultures figure within these.

Work emerging more recently on the movements of globalization and youth cultures has gone some way towards addressing this imbalance.² Doreen Massey focuses on the spatiality of youth culture when looking at the interacting forces in play in the constitution of the global and the local. She argues that understandings of youth and media must also account for the social relations that construct localities. She argues that these relations:

are not just neutral “connections” between one cultural constellation and another, or others; they reflect in their form and their direction geographical differences (uneven development) in cultural influence, fashion, economic power, the spatial structure of the media industry, the traces of the migrations perhaps centuries ago, trade routes, the access to ownership of computers, the dominance of Hollywood—and a host of other phenomena. (1998, 125)

For Massey, the meaning produced through these relations in turn influences the terms through which points of contact are realized with other, non-Western, group identities. In their formulation of youth cultures Maira and Soep (2005) seek to offer greater critical and interdisciplinary valency to the field through coining the term “youthscapes.” This notion draws on Arjun Appadurai’s well-known model of globalization and incorporates concepts such as “ethnoscapes” and “technoscapes” to account for the fluid dimensions of global cultural flows and allow for a theorizing of localized youth cultures at the intersection of political and social currents. In another important example Tony Mitchell (1996) explores local popular music scenes in Italy, Central Europe, Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Mitchell’s study works to displace the powerful cultural imperialism thesis that perceives all local youth cultures to be appropriated or displaced by the reach and dominance of Anglo American music industries.

The chapters in this collection offer further valency to this thinking around the relationship between place, broader understandings of global dialogues and the specificities of youth media practices. Yet, more than this, through emphasizing the regionality of the Asia Pacific this collection also attempts to offer particularity to the wide debates that characterize globalization studies while also accounting for the co-temporality of *other modernities*. There is no doubt that in the cultures of the region young people are engaged in the consumption and production of media (and are represented in the media) in ways that evidence the intersection of population movements, the expansion of markets, increasing technological change and the global spread of ideologically infused popular imagery. But there is also a need to explore how youth are grappling with the contradictions engendered by distinct regimes of capital, nation and the legacies of historical particularity. This entails not only a focus on the accelerated aspects of global interactions, but also the reified cornerstones of modernity such as the nation-state and how these are propagated by and in the name of youth.

Stories told about markets of capital frequently invoke the utopian empowered subject of consumer choice or the dystopian homogenizing of

local cultures through cultural imperialism. Miranda Joseph similarly observes the current self-perpetuating narrative generated by capitalism itself: “even as capital (and information and people) flows ever more unfettered across the boundaries of nations, traveling great distances instantaneously, capitalism, we are told attends ever more precisely to place and culture and depends ever more profoundly on the extra-economic bonds of community and kinship” (2002, 147). For Joseph the particularity of “community” or “the local” were once connoted as existing against or outside the forces of abstracted global capital. They are now part of the story, she argues, that “capitalism is telling about itself” (2002, 149) as it is understood to find infinite new markets in heterogeneity. Media, both old and new, offer complex sites across which the assimilatory demands of local and national cultures intermingle with other communities of capital and culture. In order to comprehend the way capitalism, cultural history and social change are being mobilized within communities and lifeworlds of youth in the Asia Pacific, it is necessary to look at how these stories are invariably complicated by instances of media use.

This collection

The chapters in this collection use the notion of youth, and the communities, practices and representations that accompany this, to anchor their focus on the localized phenomena that characterize Asia Pacific modernities. The approaches represented here are necessarily interdisciplinary, encompassing research methods and preoccupations not only from media studies but also cultural studies, anthropology, communications, television studies and journalism. I have noted above the way “youth” exists as a category that exceeds precise biological determinants. In part, it is the institutions of the nation-state, such as the education system, the juridico-legal system and the welfare system, which regulate definitions and attributes of youth. Yet it is also given meaning by the media, including those who designate and interpellate youth markets. Importantly, youth is also constituted through the technologies of the self, such as the experiences and identifications in individual and groups of subjectivities. For this reason, the contributors here are not limited to understanding this discourse by way of a particular age range. Instead, they maintain the fertile possibilities inherent in perceiving youth as constructed within and not outside the media practices under discussion.

This volume is divided into three parts. These sections exist only to emphasize the main trajectory of chapters. Contributors consistently

present arguments that work not only within but also across the three imposed divisions. Part one, “Youth, Consumption and the Borders of Culture: Fields of Analysis,” stages four broad frameworks that aid in understanding the key issues and practices that structure the field of knowledge in the Asia Pacific. These practices both adhere to and breach imposed cultural borders. I have noted how the cultures considered “other” to the Europeanized West are, in distinct ways, engaged in the transformative processes of modernity. In chapter two, Bill Osgerby offers a broad-ranging context for how this is occurring by way of the cycle of commodification, globalization and changing cultural environments.

Osgerby considers how the shifting markets in a post-Fordist era should not be understood simply by way of a cultural imperialism model, but in a manner that accounts for young people’s active engagement with the market and the constitution of new regionally distinct demographics of consumers. As Osgerby describes, economic and cultural developments in China, Japan and Thailand have heralded the rise of new generations of consumers. In his discussion it is not only the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe that have been subject to the machinations of corporate strategy, such as the work of “coolhunting” or locating emerging trends and marketing territory, but also the cultures of the Asia Pacific. Through an analytical bricolage that encompasses popular media commentary, the socio-economic movement of markets, scholarly accounts and youth media practices, Osgerby observes the web of interdependence and flux that characterizes the relation between consumers, media products and industry. As he writes the post-Fordist era must be understood through the way “youth’s cultures of consumption ‘feed back’ into sites of production and representation in an on going cycle of commodification” (22). This facilitates the transglobal reach of business, youth signifiers, and also the different circumstances and the alternate modernities presented by youth cultures in the Asia Pacific.

Looking more specifically at the pivotal case of China, Ian Weber, in chapter three, brings the European derived humanist notion of civil society to an understanding of the way new media technology, such as internet and mobile cultures, have developed in relation to the operation of state power. Weber investigates the way this model of civic society offers an analytical framework. Yet he also articulates the primary distinctiveness of Chinese modernity, including the way that “the state–society relationship was defined by the state as the principle locus of dynamism in which society is arranged into vertical, dependent relationships rather than assertions of independent moral decisions” (52). Within this relationship youth have been at the forefront of social activism in China and media,

such as the internet, offer young people new and cogent ways to challenge prevailing regimes. Weber emphasizes, through a series of examples, including the 2003 SARS health crisis and online and mobile pornography, how youth are negotiating, within given cultural parameters, the operation of state and economic power and traditional morality in a fast changing society. Accounted for within this change is the important cleavage between rural and urban China. These two sites of youth subjectivity are both, albeit through different sets of aspiration and expectation, beholden to the state's "command of symbolic capital" (66).

In contrast to the distinctive case of China in which tradition and accelerated change intertwine in ways that grapple with the regulation of cultural borders, in chapter four Catherine Driscoll and Melissa Gregg confront broader questions around internet studies. One facet that distinguishes new media from old is that it is less and less bound to the desires of a localized identity alone. While there are aspects of internet use that are highly culturally specific (as a number of the contributors here demonstrate), there are also important ways in which the West and the non-West are caught in the same rhetorical strategies that frame media use and production. Yet, rather than focusing on well-theorized notions of "placelessness" and the internet, Driscoll and Gregg cite their own context of writing as Australians and situate their analysis of youth within the "global flows" that contribute to the experience of youth and their construction of and in the media. "Youth," in this manner, are bound to the anxieties around YouTube and the panic over social networking sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Friendster. As the authors observe, however, anxieties and tropes, particularly around questions of surveillance and intergenerational dynamics, are "produced by those that position themselves as 'youth' as well as those that do not" (80). This chapter offers a wide-ranging analysis of the production of meaning in the media, the populist public sphere and scholarly analysis in order to critique notions of generationalism in regards to the internet.

Usha M. Rodrigues provides a "Youth Media Directory" in chapter five. This mapping includes policy initiatives undertaken by various governments and non-government organizations, as well as community activities that provide a forum for youth expression and media terminology. The directory presents a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners by bringing into focus a portion of the initiatives enabled by youth and also those undertaken by governments as a way of managing and servicing youth cultures. As taxonomy it indicates the way youth practices are codified into institutional entities, whether it is print media, public broadcasting or the much more spontaneous example of internet

blogging. Rodrigues's mapping offers a direct reflection of the way youth media practices in the Asia Pacific, whether initiated from above or below, function as a fertile field for future research.

The chapters in part two, "Media Performances: Subjectivity, Representation and Engagement," are all concerned with the ways of performing identity that are enabled by particular media such as television, internet blogs and social networking sites, or even a mix of multiple media technologies. These media examples do not simply provide various forms of representation, but in all cases they facilitate new emerging subjectivities and localized identities within modes of media publicness. Exploring the phenomena of China's first *American Idol*-style singing contest, Audrey Yue and Haiqing Yu examine in chapter six the figure of Li Yuchun (Chris Lee), the 2005 winner of this contest.

As Yue and Yu note, Li's escalating success has been termed "the *Super Girl* spectacle." This spectacle has been facilitated by the wholesale support of the market economy and has capitalized not only on television, but also internet, newspaper, books, magazines, DVD, MP3, MP4 and mobile phone technology. Central to the figure of Li is her androgyny and "tomboy" appearance. The authors locate *Super Girl* Li's female masculinity within a historical context of androgyny and gender in Chinese popular culture as well as the trans-cultural flows that characterize new media technologies. Yue and Yu argue that through Li's huge fan base, a community has emerged that offers a privileged space to explore new modes of female subjectivity. This is a space enabled through the figuration of "tomboy femininity" which offers new autonomy and a shift from prevailing traditions of Maoist femininity. Yet they also expand on the way this new subjectivity is "both defiant of and friendly to the powerful masculine forces of tradition, the state and the market" (130). Thus the *Super Girl* example offers an important avenue through which to think through the contestations and reifications that characterize the relation between old and new femininities and sexualities among youth in contemporary China.

Drawing on examples principally from Singapore and China, in chapter seven Chris Hudson further explores the issue of femininity as a site of contestation in the realm of youth practices. Hudson's analysis focuses on the construction of "cyber-selves" and the increased use of online blogs in the exploration of new subject positions. The activities of particular Chinese and Singaporean individuals in the "blogosphere" present an example of the way a new generation of media-literate women might be seen to be exercising forms of sexuality that challenge narratives of nation and the prescribed discourses of women as bearers of national

and family ideals. Elaborating on a theoretical framing offered by the work of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, Hudson's analysis seeks out the ways in which youth practices function within a field of power relations to create mobile and transitory points of resistance. For Hudson, this occurs centrally through the way these women appropriate the tradition of the "Bad Girl" and take up the internet in the service of the constitution of "super selves." Through discussions of sex, economic agency and images of nudity these bloggers are scandalously visible in the public space of the internet in ways that exceed the national feminine self and enable the emergence of the "super self."

Exploring mass rather than digital media performances, chapter eight is concerned with the televisual and unique case of New Zealand animated sitcom, *bro'Town*. As Philippa Smith and Katalin Lustyik write, this series, first screened in 2004, draws much inspiration from *The Simpsons*. Yet, in the narrative premise focusing on the lives of five teenagers, New Zealand's cultural diversity is at the forefront with three characters of Samoan ethnicity, one of Scottish, Jewish and Samoan descent and one Maori character. In their discussion of *bro'Town* the authors examine the important historical context of television animation and its address to, at different points in the development of the form, child and adult audiences. This sitcom employs satire and stereotyping to construct a social commentary which functions multidimensionally to appeal to both children and adults. The particular performances of subjectivity and ethnicity in *bro'Town*, moreover, have addressed and engaged audiences in ways that are, again, unique to the cultural context. In this sense, the ethnic stereotyping and the irreverent, scatological and carnivalesque humor of the series has generated much debate while also offering further localized symbolic capital. Smith and Lustyik investigate the key responses to *bro'Town* while seeking to account for the resonances this genre adaptation has demonstrated with New Zealand viewers.

Part three, "DIY: Media Uses and Communities," looks at the way youth are involved with more explicitly demarcated communities that emerge around systematic modes of media use. These communities very much adhere to a "do-it-yourself" (DIY) ethos that works usually from the margins of reified power structures while also negotiating the pervasiveness of these structures. Sean Martin-Iverson identifies a salient example of such a DIY community in Indonesia's Bandung hardcore music community. As he describes in chapter nine, Bandung is a city in West Java province and home to a vibrant underground music scene and attendant subculture. Martin-Iverson's analysis is centrally concerned with the way this young male subculture presents a community based on anti-

capitalist activism. Through the autonomous production, distribution and consumption of a range of different media and practices, including music recordings, live performances, and non-professional photocopied publications or “zines,” this scene resists and remains independent from the commodifying impetus of global capital. This non-profit economy of cultural expression, Martin-Iverson argues, represents a move towards establishing a non-capitalist system of value. Through reference to concepts such as commodity fetishism, Marcel Mauss’s theory of the gift, and David Graeber’s anthropological theory of value, this study makes a close examination of the systems of value deployed and challenged in this community.

Also studying instances of male subculture, in chapter ten Harriot Beazley and Kabita Chakraborty are concerned with street children in Yogyakarta, Indonesia and Kolkata, India. These groups of boys, while largely economically disenfranchised, work to maintain a certain attachment to material culture. As the authors argue, they use modes of consumption that participate in the global economy but they do so in ways that are highly selective. This consumption assimilates and “rehabilitates” other subcultural styles such as Rastafarian, punk and hip-hop in Yogyakarta, and Bollywood culture in Kolkata. Beazley and Chakraborty interrogate the way these two different geographical and cultural contexts for youth activities present communities who enact a tension between subjugation to the dominant consumer order and autonomy from this order. While their impoverished status leaves them without agency in increasing consumer-oriented societies, they are able to develop social capital and a collective identity through whatever avenues are open to them to acquire coveted commodities. This investigation of the meanings and values of consumption within these youth cultures brings to the fore the role of the popular media in subject formation. Noting the liberalization and privatization of the media in Indonesia and India, Beazley and Chakraborty observe the impact of global media on consumption patterns both broadly and in relation to street youth. The sophisticated and discerning consumption of various “cool” styles indicates the manner in which these youth subjects use the regimes of taste offered by the media in ways that are counter to normative expectations.

The notion of communities of use is approached from a different angle in Damien Spry’s study of mobile youth cultures in chapter eleven. This analysis discusses cases of young mobile media users in Japan, South Korea and China. Important in this examination is an acknowledgement of the pervasive pre-social conceptualizations of child actors either innocent and pure or uncivilized and savage. As Spry proposes, an understanding of

children's media use must encompass the critical dimensions of "children and youth as actors in spatially, temporally, economically, politically and socially structured communities" (218). In this sense the sites of youth activity, such as the family home, the school, the cityscape, are redefined by young people through their patterns of use in the differing cultural contexts under discussion. These locations become, through mobile media use, "trans-localities." Significantly, this is not only a spatial shift, but youth activities in this case register the destabilization of the putatively dichotomous relation between childhood and adulthood. For example, in the case of Japanese girls utilizing the *keitai* (phone) to orchestrate liaisons with, often, older men for *enjo kosai* (paid companionship) sexual mores are challenged. For Spry, the examples under examination demonstrate how different social roles (child, adult, teen, student, friend, son or daughter) are performed simultaneously, in the same physical space, and produce new and complex social experiences.

Above I mentioned the unevenness of the collected nations in the region. The power structures within and between these nations vary greatly and owe much to diverse histories of colonization and imperialism. Contemporary youth and their relationship to media, both old and new, bear the traces of these histories. This is evidenced by instances where subjectivity is performed in the media sphere, whether it is the cultural irreverence of the Polynesian animated sitcom *bro'Town* or the rethinking of traditions of Chinese femininity in the example of the *Super Girl* phenomenon. It is also suggested in the DIY communities from the specificity of Bandung's hardcore music scene to the selective consumption on the streets of Yogyakarta and Kolkata.

Yet the notion of the Asia Pacific, as anything more than a mutable security or economic classification, remains a fiction. Rather than reifying or displacing the terms of this fiction, the chapters within this collection have focused on particular examples of youth practice or subjectivity that are constructed through localized cultures within the region. The chapters then operate in a productive tension with the overarching frame for this book, youth and media in the Asia Pacific. This framing enables a broad-based suggestion of the co-temporality of cultures that have historically been posed as "other" to the European derived West. Significantly, while these societies may have been cast historically as outside and in stasis when compared to the teleology of Western progress in cultural representations, global capital by no means observes this same construction. Capitalism, now constantly invested in seeking out new niche markets, is focused on desire and experience in the present, not the social hierarchies of history. As the contributors here have demonstrated,

particularly Osgerby's discussion, to grasp the phenomenon of youth media it is also necessary to understand the narratives of capitalism and the ingrained mutuality between social activities and economic value systems. This, to reference Chow's notion, goes some way towards apprehending the coevalness of cultures or the manner in which Asia Pacific modernities more broadly are also, albeit differently, struggling with generational contradictions and divisions in their movement through the modern. Media manifestations of the discourse and experience of "youth," as perhaps the most visible of sites for comprehending social change, concentrate the conflict produced by the competing forces of tradition and renewal.

Works Cited

- Amit-Talai, V. and Wulff, H. (eds). 1995. *Youth cultures: A cross-cultural perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Appadurai, A. 1990. "Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy." *Public Culture*, vol. 2, no. 2: 1–24.
- Back, L. 1996. *New ethnicities and urban culture: Racisms and multiculturalism in young lives*. London: UCL Press.
- Buckingham, D. 1993. "Introduction: Young people and the media." In *Reading audiences: Young people and the media*, ed. David Buckingham. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Castles, S. 2004. "The myth of the controllability of difference: Labor migration, transnational communities and state strategies in the Asia-Pacific Region." In *State/nation/transnation: Perspectives on transnationalism in the Asia-Pacific*, ed. Brenda S. A. Yeoh and Kate Willis. London: Routledge.
- Chen, K. 1998. "Introduction: The decolonization question." In *Trajectories: Inter-Asia cultural studies*, ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge.
- Chow, R. 1991. *Woman and Chinese modernity: The politics of reading between East and West*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1995. *Primitive passions: Visuality, sexuality, ethnography, and contemporary Chinese cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cohen, S. 1980. *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of mods and rockers*. London: Martin Robertson.
- Fornås, J. 1995. "Youth, culture and modernity." In *Youth culture in modernity*, ed. Johan Fornås and Gøran Bolin. London: Sage.
- Geok-lin, S. and D. Wimal. 1999. "Introduction." In *Transnational Asia Pacific: Gender, culture and the publics sphere*, ed. Shirley Geok-lin,

- Larry E. Smith and Wimal Dissanayake. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hall, S. and T. Jefferson (eds). 1976. *Resistance through rituals: Youth subcultures in post-war Britain*. London: Hutchinson.
- Hall, S. 1992. "The West and the rest: Discourse and power." In *Formations of modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Gram Gieben. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Maira, S. and E. Soep. 2005. "Introduction." In *Youthscapes: The popular, the national, the global*, ed. Sunaina Maira and Elisabeth Soep. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Massey, D. 1998. "The spatial construction of youth cultures." In *Cool places: Geographies of youth cultures*, ed. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine. London: Routledge.
- McGuigan, J. 1992. *Cultural populism*. London: Routledge.
- McRobbie, A. 2000. *Feminism and youth culture*. London: MacMillan.
- Mercer, K. 1994. *Welcome to the jungle: New positions in black cultural studies*. London: Routledge.
- Mitchell, T. 1996. *Popular music and local identity: Rock, pop, and rap in Europe and Oceania*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Nayak, A. 2003. *Race, place and globalization: Youth cultures in a changing world*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Osgerby, B. 1997. "'The good, the bad and the ugly': Media representations of youth since 1945." In *Introduction to the media*, ed. Paul Cogley and Adam Briggs. London: Longman.
- Ralph, S. et al. (eds). 1998. *Youth and the global media: Papers from the 29th University of Manchester broadcasting symposium*. Luton: University of Luton Press.
- Sharma, S., J. Hutnyk and A. Sharma (eds). 1997. *Dis-orienting rhythms: The politics of the new Asian dance music*. London: Zed Books.
- Thornton, S. 1996. *Club cultures: Music, media and subcultural capital*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Willis, P. 1990. *Common culture: Symbolic work at play in the everyday cultures of the young*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

PART I

YOUTH, CONSUMPTION AND THE BORDERS OF CULTURE: FIELDS OF ANALYSIS

CHAPTER TWO

SELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT: BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY AND THE “POST-FORDIST” YOUTH MARKET

BILL OSGERBY

Murdoch, marketing and the “MySpace generation”

Australian media baron Rupert Murdoch has always had an eye out for the main chance. And in July 2005 he hit pay dirt when News Corporation, his multinational business conglomerate, bought the popular online social network site MySpace for \$US580 million. Initially, some commentators questioned whether Murdoch could turn a profit from the social network’s thriving free community. For the sceptics, social network sites like MySpace were not auspicious, next-generation internet portals but flash-in-the-pan fads that would be quickly deserted by their fickle young members (Olsen 2006). The gamble, however, paid off. MySpace had fourteen million regular users when the News Corporation deal was announced, but by December 2006 the figure had grown to fifty million, and eighty of America’s top one hundred brands were advertizing on the site (Rosenbush 2006). A new business pact also underscored the success of Murdoch’s move into the world of online networking. In August 2006 internet powerhouse, Google, paid \$US900 million to provide search facilities and advertizing on MySpace and other web sites owned by News Corporation’s subsidiary, Fox Interactive Media (Olsen and Mills 2006). And, as growth in the US remained steady, MySpace began expanding aggressively into new international markets. Networking sites were quickly launched in Britain, France, Germany, Australia, Japan and New Zealand, followed by a potentially money-spinning move into the Chinese market in 2007 (Kharif 2006; Barboza 2007).

News Corporation’s acquisition of MySpace, then, was clearly a major business coup for Murdoch. But it also had much wider economic and

cultural significance. The relentless growth of Murdoch's media holdings, for example, epitomized the rise of huge, multi-interest business conglomerates whose corporate strategies straddled national boundaries in an increasingly interconnected (but unevenly developed) world economy. Authors such as David Hesmondhalgh have shown how, since the 1970s, a more competitive and less predictable market environment has spurred companies on to secure their economic survival by adopting strategies of horizontal integration (buying up rivals who operate in the same industrial sector), vertical integration (taking control of companies involved at different stages of production and circulation), internationalization (buying or partnering companies abroad) and multi-sector integration (buying into related industries to ensure a cross-promotion of products) (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 159–77).¹ News Corporation has been at the vanguard of these moves. Following its inception as Murdoch's holding company in 1980, News Corp developed into "the first vertically integrated entertainment-and-communications company of truly global reach" (Shawcross 1997, 399), with operations that spanned six continents and encompassed a plethora of different media: books, newspapers, magazines, broadcast TV, cable and satellite TV, films, music and the internet. The purchase of MySpace and the subsequent deal with Google, then, were yet more advances in News Corp's inexorable global expansion. But Murdoch's staking of a claim in MySpace not only exemplified processes of business conglomeration and internationalization, it also pointed to key shifts in commercial practice and marketing.

According to a number of theorists, since the late 1960s modern capitalist economies have undergone a fundamental transformation, moving from a "Fordist" era of mass production for mass consumer markets, into a new, "post-Fordist" epoch of flexible production for a profusion of differentiated market segments.² In contrast to the mass production of standardized goods characteristic of Fordist enterprise, post-Fordist business practice is characterized by the deployment of sophisticated technology in more flexible forms of manufacture and distribution, with the production of small batches of goods geared to a plurality of market "niches." With this shift, issues of style, image and marketing practice have assumed growing importance, as businesses strive to invest their products with values and meanings that appeal to groups of consumers who identify with specific kinds of lifestyle (Murray 1990, 43). As a consequence, Joseph Turow explains, target marketing has now emerged as "a hot, hip, even central, strategy after decades of being considered a relatively marginal part of the national ad industry's thinking" (Turow 1997, 19). And the growth of social networking web

sites like MySpace is at least partly indebted to the commercial quest for a means to zero-in on specific segments of the worldwide youth market.

Social networking web sites are so attractive to major media players like News Corporation because they represent a sophisticated channel of access to young consumers. In a 2005 cover story, *Business Week Online* highlighted the way young people's lives have become permeated by new information and communications technologies. The magazine announced the arrival of "the MySpace Generation": "the first cohort of teens and twentysomethings ... to grow up fully wired and technologically fluent" (Hempel 2005). "Social networks," *Business Week Online* stressed, "are their medium," with youngsters "flocking to sites as a way to establish their identities." The article continued:

Here you can get a fast pass to the hip music scene, which carries a hefty amount of social currency offline. It's where you go when you need a friend to nurse you through a breakup, a mentor to tutor you on your calculus homework, an address for the party everyone is going to. (Hempel 2005)

But *Business Week Online* also underscored the commercial promise of this online community. "For a giant brand like Coke," the journal reported, "these networks also offer a direct pipeline to the thirsty but fickle youth market." Advertizing campaigns were increasingly being tailored to social networks as a way to build brand relevancy among the young (Hempel 2005). Indeed, major companies like Target and Procter & Gamble were soon running advertizing campaigns on MySpace, while record corporations such as Interscope Geffen A&M were using it to launch albums by bands like Nine Inch Nails, Beck and Queens of the Stone Age (Rosenbush 2005). Going far beyond the simple placing of banner advertisements, these social networking ad campaigns have been built around interaction with site members on their home turf, fostering brand awareness through the web site's "friend" connections in a way companies hope will be both memorable and meaningful to young consumers (King 2006).

This chapter surveys these changes in the world of youth culture and youth marketing. I begin by assessing the impact of new information and communications technology on young people's lives, and highlight the way the youth market has been a driving force in the development of a complex flow of multi-faceted, transglobal media industries. Particular attention is given to the way electronic technologies have been associated with the development of goods and services targeted not at a mass "youth" market, but at a series of distinctive "niche" consumer groups. A corollary

of these trends, it is argued, has been an increasingly pivotal economic role for “cultural intermediaries”—designers, advertizers and marketers—whose expertise in signifying practices has been increasingly drawn upon by businesses in their efforts to invest their products with cultural associations that will appeal to young consumers around the world. I argue that the rise of these “coolhunting” specialists that began in the West is now a global phenomenon.

Issues of business organisation and marketing strategy, however, cannot in themselves account for the meanings activated by the “MySpace Generation” in its practices of media consumption. The use and appropriation of texts by audiences and consumers is always a crucial link in the “cultural circuit.” This paper argues that any attempt to understand the relationship between youth and the media demands attention be given to young people’s active engagement with the commercial market, and to the way youth’s culture of consumption “feed back” into sites of production and representation in an on going cycle of commodification.

“Cyberkids”: popular myths and commercial realities

According to *Business Week Online*’s feature of 2005, the new “MySpace Generation” were uniquely tech-savvy. “They live online. They buy online. They play online,” the magazine boldly announced (Hempel 2005). Such edicts, however, were just the latest instalment in a history of pronouncements proclaiming young people the torchbearers of a new world of liberating digital technology. Writing in *Wired* magazine in 1996, for example, media critic Jon Katz crystallized this optimistic vision of a new generation of “cyberkids” in his argument that youth were “the epicenter of the information revolution, ground zero of the digital world” (Katz 1996, 123). For Katz, young people were the harbingers of a new, technologically driven era of freedom and opportunity. “Not only is the digital world making the young more sophisticated, altering their ideas of what culture and literacy are,” Katz enthused, “it is connecting them to one another, providing them with a new sense of political self.” The young, Katz concluded, “occupy a new kind of cultural space. They’re citizens of a new order, founders of the Digital Nation” (Katz 1996, 123). Two years later, Don Tapscott took a similar line. “The Net Generation has arrived!” trumpeted Tapscott as he hailed the advent of a new cohort of “N-Geners” that, he argued:

will develop and superimpose its culture on the rest of society. Boomers stand back. Already these kids are learning, playing, communicating,

working, and creating communities very differently than their parents. They are a force for social transformation. (Tapscott 1998 1, 2)

The fervor of such rhetoric, however, disguises the way many young people have been left out of the “digital revolution.” In America, for example, research produced by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2001 pointed to marked patterns of inequality in young people’s access to, and use of, the internet. According to the study, while ninety per cent of teens and young adults (aged fifteen to twenty-four) had experience of going online, important disparities existed between different ethnic and socio-economic groups. For example, just six per cent of white youth had never been online compared to thirteen per cent of African American youth and one in four Hispanic youngsters. And, while ninety three per cent of upper-class and upper-middle-class youths had been online, this compared to only eighty five per cent of their working-class peers (Rideout 2001, 15-17). In Britain, too, research by Keri Facer and Ruth Furlong (2001) and Sonia Livingstone and Moira Bovill (1999; 2001) has suggested that disparities of access to new communications technology reproduces inequalities of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic class (see also Buckingham 2002, Livingstone 2002). In an international context, moreover, inequalities of access are even more glaring, with a global “digital divide” separating the “media rich” from the “media poor.” In 2005, for example, over sixty three per cent of the populations of the US and the UK could be classed as “internet users,” and over seventy per cent of the population of Australia. This compared to just over five per cent of the population of India, and under four per cent of the total population of Africa (International Telecommunications Union, 2006).

Aside from issues of accessibility, the *quality* of young people’s relationship with new technology is an important issue. As Neil Selwyn explains, “access to a personal computer does not guarantee a connection to the internet, any more than ‘access to the internet’ is a guarantee of effectively accessing every available web site and online resource” (Selwyn, 2004, 348; see also Lee 2005). Indeed, while Livingstone and Bovill (2005) found that most young people in the UK had some kind of internet access, important disparities remained. Middle-class youngsters, for example, had quicker access through broadband and had more access points in the home (including their bedrooms), which allowed for the development of greater technical literacy and confidence (Livingstone and Bovill 2005, 3-4). Clearly, inequalities of various kinds pervade young people’s experience of new media and any “generational” label, whether it be “cyberkids,” “NetGeners” or the “MySpace Generation,” is inevitably a

blunt instrument that homogenizes social groups that are profoundly diverse in their identities, attitudes and life experiences.

At the same time, we should not lose sight of the way new information and communications technologies—computers, mobile phones, MP3 players and so on—have become an established part of young people's lives. Indeed, the commercial success of many of the most significant innovations, including instant messaging, music downloads and pre-paid mobile phones, has been fueled largely by the youth market (Brynin and Kraut 2006, 15). The scale of some of these success stories is staggering. In 2006, for example, market consultants PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated that by 2010 the worldwide video game market would be worth around \$US46.5 billion (cited in Kolodny 2006). And the growth of mobile gaming was particularly impressive. According to market analysts Juniper Research, the market for mobile games was worth \$US3 billion in 2006, and was set to climb to around \$US17.5 billion by 2011 (cited in United Press International 2006). This growth was indicative of the wider explosion of mobile products and services. In their survey *mobileYouth 2003*, for instance, market researchers Wireless World Forum estimated that in developed markets young people spent up to 13.5 per cent of their disposable income on mobile phone products, with the global youth market spending around \$US18.2 billion on mobile data services, a figure set to grow to over \$US27 billion in 2006 (Wireless World Forum 2003). The mobile music market, meanwhile, was becoming especially lucrative. Analyzing trends across thirty eight countries, Wireless World Forum estimated that the mobile music market grossed around \$US4.4 billion in 2005, rising to nearly \$US6 billion in 2006, the sector accounting for nearly fifteen per cent of the entire global music market (Wireless World Forum 2006).

The upsurge of social networking web sites was also indebted to the youth market. Elements of social networking have long been a feature of the internet in the form of bulletin boards, forums, internet relay chat, instant messaging, and peer-to-peer software. Since 2002, however, a glut of new social web sites have appeared that allow members to develop personalized pages, to publish user-generated content (UGC) in the form of music, photos and video, and to make links with like-minded friends at home and abroad through instant messaging and chat. Friendster, one of the pioneers, was founded in 2002 and had attracted four million members within a year of its launch. Others quickly followed, including Facebook (launched in 2004), Bebo (2005), Yahoo! 360 (2005) and, of course, MySpace. Within a year of its 2003 launch MySpace had eclipsed Friendster as the top social network site, and by 2007 it was boasting an