EXTENDED REVIEW ESSAY

Moving Beyond ‘Y’ - The Children of *New Times*

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Introduction

As one engages with the current literature on globalization, cybersocieties, media, and consumer culture, it becomes clear that the technological and socio-cultural changes shaping contemporary life are creating uncertain terrain for researchers in the field of youth studies. As adults we inhabit the same places as youth but in many ways we are immigrants to their worlds. The ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1984) of those born before the 1980s lacked the virtual ‘thirdspaces’ (Soja, 1996) of possibility that are simply routine elements of the worlds of many young people today. Soja’s concept of ‘thirdspace’ is similar to Foucault’s *heterotopia* (Foucault, cited in Soja, 1995) – a *counter-site* - “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which all the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are, simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (14). It offers a leap into radical ways of being in which ‘spaces’ are created to facilitate new perspectives on identity. However, given the variety and growing complexities of on-line human interactions enabled by the technological revolution, I believe that *Virtualspace* is a more comprehensive concept. I shall discuss both ideas at greater length later in this essay.

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I believe that here is a need for caution when speculating about the experience of being young in the early twenty-first century. As Dillabough (2009) says, there is a “pressing need for a reflexive awareness of the extent and complexity of the challenges of the field” (p. 213). Point-in-time snapshots of youthful lives may be misleading unless contextualized within historical and sociological narratives that incorporate temporal perspectives (McLeod and Yates, 2006), as well as the perspectives of young people themselves. In the growing field of youth studies, it is sometimes the case that theoretical frameworks may pre-empt readings of data before empirical work has been undertaken. According to Dillabough (2009):

Theory is often identified or conflated with the data themselves. In other words, theory emerges as the dominating source of information ... What we as readers often fail to realize in this process is the power of theory to guide our readings of young people or the ways in which the theory impacts on the formation of knowledge about young people. In such cases, theory itself emerges as a form of surveillance over the field and much research in youth studies can be read in relation to this kind of surveillance (p. 224).

It is against this background of cautionary observations that I intend to analyse a range of theories about contemporary youth foregrounded in a recent publication edited by Nadine Dolby and Fazal Rizvi, *Youth Moves: identities and education in global perspective*. This book is an edited collection of twelve chapters, each individually authored and providing different thematic connections to the text’s overall theme of “youth moving in and across shifting global terrains” (Dimitriadis, 2008, x). The insights of the authors of this collection are theoretically astute. In my judgement, they serve as useful starting points for grounded research into the lives of young people as they negotiate the unpredictable and uneven consequences of historical, sociological and technological changes.

The perspectives of young people embedded in Chapters 5, 7, 10 and 12 of *Youth Moves* create a rich context for the theoretical arguments presented in those sections. Their inclusion amply illustrates the worth of situating research within the lived realities of those about whom we presume to speak. By adopting such practices Connell (1993) argues that we may:

invert hegemony (by adopting the) standpoints (of the) socially subordinate ... (and) ... think(ing) through economic issues from the standpoint of the poor, not rich ... think(ing) through gender arrangements from the standpoint of women ... think(ing) through race ... relations from the standpoint of indigenous people ... (pp. 38-43).

Similarly, I believe that it is necessary to “think through” all of these issues *from the standpoint of young people*. In fact, in order to narrate a multiplicity of “truths”, not “a ‘truth’”, a simple construction through discourse, a future or a simple narrative of marginality which we must observe” (Dillabough, 2009, pp. 224) - we must *let them speak*.

In the following review essay, as I engage with the theories of this text, like its authors, I too, will speculate about the subjectivities of contemporary youth. However, I will endeavour to be ever mindful that I speak from the perspective of adult-researcher and that my narrative remains incomplete without the voices of youth. Echoing the three subsections of *Youth Moves*, this essay is structured around analyses of the following concepts in a three part discussion of their relevance to the study of youthful lives: ‘New Times’, cyberspace and border crossing.

‘New Times’ ~ *Could there be New Times without new subjects? Could the world be transformed while its subjects stay exactly the same?*(Hall, 1996a, p. 237)

Defining the Times

Although the metaphor of ‘New Times’ is the overarching conceptual organiser for *Youth Moves*, it is a paradigm that is alluded to rather than explained. This is a pity, because the complexities inherent in this sociological construct lie at the heart of this volume’s attempts to map contemporary youth landscapes. The concept of New Times was popularised in articles published in the magazine, *Marxism Today*, whose contributors in the late 1980s and early 1990s began exploring the meanings and consequences inherent in a host of changes engulfing Western capitalist societies (McRobbie, 1994). Writing in the context of a post-Thatcher Britain, Stuart Hall (1996a, 1996b, 1996c) established his reputation as a major

force in neo-Marxism, cultural studies and later, postcolonial theory. During the early 1990s he identified a number of significant global and local shifts in economic, cultural and national manifestations that gave rise to the definition of 'New Times', the term he coined to embrace this whole transformative process. The issues that New Times includes seem to be interrelated but are not necessarily the outcomes of each other, and include contradictory elements such as postmodernity, new ethnicities, monocultural nationalism, subjectivity, globalization and a resurgent global capitalism. Overall, Hall wanted to capture the sense of 'change' engendered by these forces that seemed to be signalling a rejection of there being *one way, one answer, or one identity*.

Paradoxes are inherent in the notion of New Times. Opportunities to embrace choice and uncertainty sit alongside renewed searches for certainty, stability and truth. In terms of identity, for example, New Times signifies a turning away from the theories of Marx and Althusser (1969) in respect to the power of ideology to shape subjectivity. However, Stuart Hall still retains a space for structural notions of ideology that he sees as being evident in the interconnecting interests of politics, the mass media, capitalism and education (Hall, 1996a). Nevertheless, his accounts of representation and signification in the production of reality are similar to Foucault's (1972, 1977, 1980) premise that discourse shapes identity. As one of the key poststructuralist writers whose works have shaped the intellectual face of New Times, Foucault is critical of ideology and its adherence to *a* universal 'truth' and *a* 'subject'. Instead, Foucault (1984) identifies 'techniques of the self' as shapers of subjectivity:

Those reflective and voluntary practices by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (pp. 10-11).

However, a recent longitudinal, empirical study by McLeod and Yates (2006) investigating the lives of young Australians illustrates the need for a broader theoretical framework. Whilst acknowledging the primacy of subjectivity and discourse, they also assert the continued

significance of the effects on young lives of a *range* of influences that include race, class and gender:

Identities are not simple, given, presumed essences that naturally unfold, but rather are produced in an ongoing process, mediated by multiple historical and contemporary factors, including social, schooling, and psycho-dynamic relations ... the term subjectivity alerts us to ... how subjects are formed – the range of influences, experiences, and relations that combine to produce a young person ... In this way subjectivity refers to both general and particular processes and patterns in the making of young lives (p. 38).

Clearly, the tension that exists between ideology and discourse as oppositional determinants of subjectivity remains unresolved in academic debates about the new politics of identity. However, in a poststructuralist, post-Marxist world, where, and with whom do power and agency lie?

McCarthy and Logue (2008) engage with this issue in Chapter 2 of *Youth Moves*, asking, “Who now owns the terms that define the authentic traditions of radicalism that inform our works? Who now has final purchase on the terms resistance, revolution, democracy, participation and empowerment?” (p. 50). In accordance with the ephemeral choices, fragmentation, fluidity and positionality of the New Times’ construct, one would have to answer – *no one*. However, whilst New Times may have destabilized the structural basis of Marxism, that does not mean that the potential for youthful “resistance, democracy, participation and empowerment” has passed. I suggest that ‘revolutions’ continue to happen within the new ways of thinking, being and becoming enabled by the New Times’ interrogation of the totalizing social practices and narratives characteristic of *Old Times*. The various chapters of *Youth Moves* provide ample evidence of such transformations, defined by McCarthy and Logue (2008) in their section as:

The frenetic appreciation of forms of existence, forms of life, the dynamic circulation of and strategic deployment of style, the application of social aesthetics that now govern political rationalities and corporate mobilization (p. 49).

Thus, it may be argued that within the contradictory elements of New Times, new social, technological and economic configurations are facilitating – not *guaranteeing* – the

possibility of personal agency and identity choices for youth at the global/local - ‘glocal’ (Featherstone, 1990) - boundaries of their lives.

Globalization

As a fundamental element of New Times, globalization simultaneously unites as it fragments and polarizes, empowers as it disenfranchises. It is a complex mix of parallel and contradictory processes that manifest uniquely within different contexts eliciting varying reactions from individuals and groups (Featherstone, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999; Lechner and Boli, 2008). Ritty Lukose’s (2008) exploration of the tensions between global youth cultures and traditional cultural practices in India illustrates this point. In Chapter 8 of *Youth Moves* Lukose claims:

A critical understanding of youth, agency, and globalization in postcolonial contexts requires attention to the ways that globalization structures subjectivity through articulations of consumer agency, articulations that are embedded in a long-standing tradition of debate and struggle about the meanings of Indian modernity. Young women, their bodies, and what they wear have been central to those debates, providing a fertile terrain for the reworking of youth identities in the context of globalization (p. 147).

Just as some people embrace the possibilities of multi-connectivity across the globe, others seek closer ties with cultural roots. As Featherstone (1995b) points out, “nationalistic, ethnic and fundamentalist reactions to globalization could also entail a strong assertion of local cultures” (p. 177). Like India, there are many other nations that want to embrace the benefits of economic globalization, whilst minimising their impact upon local cultures. In Chapter 11 Aaron Koh (2008) analyses the ‘glocal’ tensions in Singapore, exposing the ways in which national anxieties over globalization have led some governments towards management strategies to preserve “national identity, values and ethos” (p. 193), particularly for the generation of the new millennium, *Generation M*. Firmly situated within nation building ideology, the introduction of National Education (NE) in 1997 sought to address the perceived deficit of knowledge about Singapore’s post-war history and “equip ... (the young) with the basic attitudes, values and instincts which make them Singaporeans” (Lee, 1997

cited in Koh, 2008, p. 202). Thus, from national perspectives it seems that youthful attitudes and identities may be regarded as indices of global/local power struggles in New Times contexts.

However, it should be noted that such national preoccupations with global *youthscapes*, are not peculiar to the Singaporeans. In his Australia Day address in 2006, Prime Minister, John Howard expresses a similar concern about the state of youthful subjectivities:

Quite apart from a strong focus on Australian values, I believe the time has also come for root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools ... Too often, history, along with other subjects in the humanities, has succumbed to a postmodern culture of relativism where any objective record of achievement is questioned or repudiated ... Part of preparing young Australians to be informed and active citizens is to teach them the central currents of our nation's development (australianpolitics.com).

Echoing events in Singapore and elsewhere, in Australia, these debates have also driven moves towards a National History Curriculum featuring the study of Australian history. Such policy impulses indicate the increasing presence of national anxieties in respect to the global competition for the hearts and minds of young people as they are lured into “alternative loci where youths can participate in alternative forms of citizenship and belonging, and ... identity-making” (Koh, 2008, p. 203). Intricately connected to these processes of identification and self-construction is the consumption of global goods and services that potentially provide young people with many other optional ‘selves’. This global ‘corporate curriculum’ (Kenway and Bullen, 2008) of ideologies and materialist fantasy is also a focus of adult anxiety about young people underpinned by traditional deficit models of youth.

Consuming identities

Consumerism, neoliberal economics, accountability and “performativity” (Lyotard, 1984; Apple, 2006) are fundamental elements of the New Times that are shaping youthful lives in a variety of ways (McGregor, 2009). In recent decades many nations have increasingly turned to education reforms to respond to a variety of global challenges to national integrity and

achievements, particularly economic ones (see for example, Apple, 2006; Apple et.al., 2005; Connell et al., 2007; Ball, 1998; Marginson, 1993; Lingard & Ozga, 2007). In an address to the Melbourne Institute 27th March, 2008, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd set the agenda for his newly elected government by claiming that “the links between productivity growth and investment in human capital through education were well established” (p. 6). In terms of youth policies, neoliberal competitiveness has given rise to national regimes of global educational benchmarking and accountability. The neoliberal subject, driven by “the constant production of evidence that one is in fact making an enterprise of oneself” (Apple, 2006, p. 416) has also become part of identity-making projects within schools. This perspective is documented by Demerath and Lynch (2008) in Chapter 10. They argue that the shifting sands of cultural change, technological connectivity and “fast capitalism” (p. 179) have actually facilitated the possibility of increased agency for those young people with sufficient social and economic capital to seize the moment. This is evident in their data:

9th-Grade European-American female:

I feel I have to be the perfect student, straight As, the perfect weight (110 pounds),

The perfect size (6), and the perfect fashion googoo.

10th-Grade European-American female:

I want to be an architect or fashion designer so I will do whatever is necessary.

12th-Grade European-American male:

I told myself long ago that I may not be the smartest guy ... but if you work hard

There's a lot of people you'll go past (Demerath and Lynch, 2008, pp. 185-86).

Thus, for middle/upper-middle class Westernised youth, nurtured within neoliberal discourses of individualised, self-actualising competition, identity may also be seen to be linked to goals for “excellence”, “success” and “advancement”.

However, in Chapter 1 of *Youth Moves*, Kenway and Bullen (2008) raise questions about the capacity of young people to develop such agency, particularly within the varying contexts of cyberspace - usefully conceptualised by Appadurai (1996) as the differentiated terrains of *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *financescapes* and *ideoscapes*. They call for the development of a “critical agency” (p. 17, emphasised added) in the young in order to

fight the ‘corporate curriculum’ of consumption and media culture. Although recognising that “the internet *offers* young people the freedom and agency to look beyond the surface gloss of global consumer culture” (p. 27, emphasis added), Kenway and Bullen imply that such skills must be *taught*. I suggest that such an assumption underestimates the individual potential of young people to negotiate knowingly and powerfully within the virtual landscapes that have become so familiar to many of this generation. McRobbie (1994) points out that whilst “the image may be the trigger and the mechanism for new identifications” (p. 16) or consumer behaviour, the spectacles of cyberspace are not necessarily inherently oppressive or subversive. It depends upon how they are read. It is a tenet of the New Times’ paradigm that power is not possessed but negotiated (Foucault, 1980) by the subject within the context of cultural encounters. Within the complex flows of current global connections lies the potential for many types of dialogic spaces facilitating multi-directional and individualised experiences. I would argue that it is the uptake of that experience by the individual that will determine how it affects identity construction – rejection and resistance or acceptance and/or appropriation, or even elements of each. In their concluding remarks, Kenway and Bullen (2008) briefly acknowledge the critical edge of ‘youth cyberculture’ but in their calls for educators to appropriate youthful cyber-genres such as e-zines, they suggest that such agency belongs to a minority whose insights must be harnessed and communicated by the adult teacher. Their proposition that educators must shape the critical consciousnesses of *Young Cyberflâneurs* (Kenway and Bullen, 2008, p. 17) simply reflects the perceptions and fears of the *adult* visitor to cyberspace. According to Buckingham (2006):

To a greater or lesser extent, technological change affects us all, adults included. Yet the consequences of technology depend on how we use technology and what we use it for, and these things are subject to a considerable degree of social variation within age groups as well as between them (p. 11).

As ‘digital natives’ (Palfrey and Gasser, 2008), one might argue that young people are better positioned than their digital *immigrant* adult contemporaries to surf the ‘treacherous’ ’scapes of the Web.

As already noted in this section, young people’s lives are currently being shaped by a variety of unpredictable and powerful socio-cultural and technological factors. Within the ensuing discussions about the consequences for youth, researchers continue their attempts to map the terrain. Generally speaking, within broader public debates there are undertones of moral panic, perhaps facilitated by a sense of a loss of adult control over the emerging virtual territories of youthful engagement with cyberspace, particularly in leisure activities such as social networking and gaming which I review briefly in the next section.

Talkin’ about My(*Space*) Generation

In recent decades, virtual communities of all kinds have mushroomed in the mediated and digital cultures of the World Wide Web. For those young people who have the resources to access the benefits of online ‘virtuality’, there are many opportunities for identity building. It has enabled a vast range of identity possibilities that increasingly defy affiliations to class, race and culture. The visibility of choice underpins youthful engagement with cyberspace. As Baudrillard (1985) notes, “everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication ... an ecstasy of communication” (p. 130). Recent research indicates that media have transformed youth landscapes to the effect that many young people now, “engage in transmedia participation, operate as both media consumers and producers of media and, collaboratively interact such that local and geographically distributed affinity groups form around media” (Dodge, Barab, Stuckey et al., 2008, p. 226). Whilst recognizing the problems associated with resourcing and access, social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook have revolutionized social practices for many people in general, and for youth,

in particular. Research in the USA indicates that around 70% of young people aged between nine and seventeen years of age, use such sites on a weekly basis, with approximately 48% visiting them daily (Hayes, 2007). Given the time differentials between producing printed media and web-based transformations, such statistics should be viewed with some caution. However, I suspect that with the increasing variety and sophistication of ‘virtuality’, future surveys may show increased, rather than decreased, engagement with the Web. Email, web-surfing, instant messaging, downloading popular cultural products, blogging and gaming are just some of the activities available, not just to youth, but to all who have embraced these virtual interchanges. According to Buckingham (2006), for example, the average age of online game players is thirty.

The fact that gaming and other web-based activities often ignore generational differences, has also been noted by Catherine Beavis (2008) in Chapter 3 of *Youth Moves*. Her examination of the “texts, technologies (and) communities” (p. 64) of online gaming interrogates the rapidly evolving virtual landscapes of leisure activities and their potential as sites for youthful social and educational learning. Massively Multiplayer online games (MMOGs) and Massively Multiplayer online role-play games (MMORPGs) provide ongoing virtual worlds that usually require avatars and representations of the self. They “blur ... boundaries and overlap between ... the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ and off-line ‘realities’ ” (Beavis, 2008, p. 53) and facilitate the performance of identity free from the physical restrictions of the latter. In her analysis of adolescent girls’ use of cyberspace, Thomas (2004, cited in Beavis, 2008) concurs with this idea, claiming that virtual encounters allow young people spaces for “empowerment, relevant freedom, originality, exploration, and reinvention” (p. 58). The worlds of online gaming explored by Beavis (2008) are potentially such spaces facilitating new meanings about “values, community, and identity that may include but extend well beyond, those experienced in their immediate, physical everyday localities” (p.

61). Beavis concludes with a call for research that “focuses not just on the sites or the technology but also on the practices, understandings, and identities they invite” (p. 64). It is also my contention that the popularity and variety of online cultures of games and communities indicates the need for more research into the roles they play as virtual sites for the working out of myriad youthful subjectivities.

A sociology of youth in New Times necessitates such insights into the virtual worlds of young people. Drawing on the ideas of French philosophers, Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, sociologist Edward Soja (1996) encourages us to extend our understanding of space beyond the concrete to include virtual journeys into “Thirdspace” - “space that draws upon ... material and mental spaces ... but extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning. Simultaneously real and imagined” (p. 11). According to Soja (1996):

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimagined ...mind and body ... everyday life and unending history (p. 56).

It is a new geography of the heart and mind that opens up possibilities of new ways of being that may find particular resonance with youth.

However, I suggest that the term ‘Thirdspace’ does not quite encompass all the possibilities of such a state when one considers the experiences and opportunities afforded by cyberculture. I believe that ‘virtualspace’ - the space that self-constructs around and out of the texts of ‘real’ and ‘cyber’ areas of communicative exchange, may be a more useful term to describe these 3D processes of identity construction. An existential dimension is added that invites the geographical imagination to resituate the social-historical within a spatiality that includes a multiplicity of perspectives. What this provides for the marginalized is the possibility for strategic alliances and polyvocal modes of resistance (Soja, 1996). Employing spatial metaphors allows one to engage in new connections in a “postmodern culture with its decentred subject ... in space(s) where ties are severed or can provide the occasion for new and varied forms of bonding ... a space for critical exchange” (hooks, cited in Soja, 1996, p.

83): a space for a *new politics of identity* that challenges many previously accepted boundaries around youthful subjectivities. The final section of this essay explores some of the examples of such processes as cited in *Youth Moves*.

Border Crossing

In terms of its significance to its contribution to contemporary debates about globalization and youth culture, *Youth Moves* has been described by Series Editor, Greg Dimitriadis as “a profoundly important intervention” (ix). However, it must be noted that youth (and other) cultures do not exist in binary opposition to the global, but are constantly involved in negotiating the ebbs and flows of global *and* local spaces. Boundaries are blurred in the interchanges producing hybrids of place-bound discourses and global influences. Generated by the dynamics of individual interchanges between individual agency and ‘place’, identities are required to reconstitute themselves within the particular spaces of each new ‘location’. As Luke and Luke (1998) observe:

We can view the diasporic subject as a constituted and self-constituting social identity in a cultural space, which is always semiotic and open to a multiplicity of interpretations and articulations of difference and commonality (p. 11).

Such perspectives are echoed by Giardina (2008) in Chapter 4:

Individuals – particularly youth - ... strategically and situationally patch together their identities from an international array of global television, popular music, and techno-culture so as to actively manipulate global configurations of cultural difference, racial hierarchy, and citizenship (p. 73).

In a similar vein, Stuart Hall (1996b) argues that a New Times’ milieu allows for strategic and positional concepts of identity, more accurately defined as a *process of identification* – an active construction of fluid ‘selves’, subject to the vicissitudes of change and transformation without the closure demanded by modernity. For the growing numbers of young international, fee-paying students imaginatively defined as the “mobile students in liquid modernity” by Singh and Doherty (2008) in Chapter 7, such ‘self-constitution’ is a necessary strategy for negotiating educational journeys around the globe. The challenge for

globally mobile youth is to fashion ‘contingent identities’ “sutured from what is possible in the circumstances and what one aspires to” (Singh and Doherty, 2008, p. 119). Agency in these contexts relies upon an ability and willingness to embrace processes of change, growth and experimentation, thereby facilitating the emergence of new ethnicities and hybridic identities and a foregrounding of local and minority voices within New Times.

However, in Chapter 4 of *Youth Moves*, Giardina (2008) argues that such processes may simply yield a superficial *stylish* hybridity (p. 74) that masks deep-seated social problems. Giardina claims that commercially inspired representations of postcolonial identities “wash over and efface harsh realities witnessed in the everyday interactions between and among diverse segments of a population” (p. 75). His concerns are grounded in mediated visions of “*managed* cultural hybridity” (p. 75, emphasis added) disseminated in popular culture via movies such as *Bend it Like Beckham*. Citing the work of Gardner and Shakur (1994), Giardina calls for a “cultural pedagogy of multiple figurations and identities” (p. 79) evident in less commercial, more progressively minded films such as *Dirty Pretty Things* and documentaries like *England Is Mine*, both of which expose the complexities of identity in a postcolonial world. Regardless of academic debates that focus upon celluloid representations of the supposed ‘realities’ of youthful identities, there is evidence that the performance of multiple subjectivities is something many young people ‘play with’ at the interface of their diasporic, ‘glocal’ situatedness. A simple review of popular social networking site *MySpace* clearly supports Bauman’s (1996) assertion that “identity is a freely chosen *game*, a *theatrical* presentation of self” (p. 18).

In terms of youthful identities, cultural complexity may facilitate a playful ‘trying on’ of different selves *or* signify attempts to disrupt the processes of normalization within the dominant culture *or* express a whole range of desires or concerns that defy neat definitions of agency or resistance. As Bhabha (1990) notes, “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to

something *different*, something *new* and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (p. 215, emphasis added). Such border crossing is now simply a part of the postcolonial moment as illustrated by this young woman’s comments:

I rap in Bengali and English. I rap on everything from love to politics. I’ve always been into rapping ... it was rebellious it’s from the heart. It’s “I’m Bengali. I’m Asian, I’m a woman, and I’m living here” (Gardner and Shakur, 1994 cited in Giardina (2008, p. 79).

Thus, being *unfixed*, one’s identity is not forced into essentialist loyalties and antagonistic exclusions. Hybridity is a potential bridge across borders, a disruption that destabilizes the imposed categorization of power and dominance.

Kelly’s (2008) study of African Canadian youth reported in Chapter 5 of this collection, provides more evidence of such contextual identities self-constructing within multiple worlds of consumerism, media, ethnicity, national discourses and Americanization:

Gerald: Like, everything that black kids identify with (pause) that I know about, is like, African American. Like, rap is African American, all the movies you watch are African American movies, clothes you wear, (the) styles are African American. Everything is, like, American (p. 94).

And –

Etta: I am born in Canada, so I am Canadian technically I am half African But maybe I am biased with the whole thing. I do not see myself as African (p. 91).

The voices of these participants provide insights into the workings of some youth cultures at the global/local interface of identity construction. Kelly (2008) observes that her students “make use of ... space-distanced media to develop ... cultural formations ... specific to the students’ own social location (that) nonetheless reflects and reinforces a globalized capitalist economy in terms of its consumerist orientations” (p. 98). She argues that it is the appropriation of global products, either purchased or downloaded, that facilitates the crossing of social and cultural boundaries.

As outlined in Chapter 9, Nuttall (2008), too, is interested in the impact of global cultural artefacts on the rise of hybridic and resistant identities. Situated within the context of South Africa, her study explores the ways that contemporary advertisements use irony and parody to airbrush the brutality of that nation’s past and appeal to the global consciousness of

aspirational youth for whom *style* offers the key to integration and equality. Crossing the boundaries of that historic racial divide is being accomplished by the pragmatism of neoliberal capitalism. According to Nuttall (2008),

Formerly, the ads state ... that you had to be white to adopt a particular lifestyle; now you have to know how to be stylish ... what they don't say ... but imply is that you no longer have to be white, but you do have to be middle class, or at least you must find the money to buy products ... increasingly ... young people who are not middle class are buying ... fake products ... which are cheaper versions ... thus enabling them to circumvent some of the restrictions of class and economic status (p. 168).

Such fluidity is likely to be particularly appealing to youth as active negotiators of their emergent independent 'selves'. Friedman (1990) also notes the role played by consumerism in the shaping of hybridic identities:

Consumption within the bounds of the world system is always a consumption of identity ... a negotiation between self-definition and the array of possibilities offered by the capitalist market (p. 314).

In her analysis of South Africa's 'Y Culture', Nuttall's (2008, p. 151) goes on to scrutinize the reworking of racial identities by middle class South African youth within the competing possibilities and constraints of the legacies of Apartheid and the rise of new capitalism and globalization. She identifies Y Culture as a "remaking of the black body ... by the first postapartheid generation ... signal(ling) the supercession of an earlier era's resistance politics by an alternative politics of style and accessorization" (p. 151) – a case of - *Buy who you want to be* - in these New Times. In other words, crossing the bridge to social harmony depends more upon class than race. However, noting Giardana's (2008) criticisms of celluloid representations of diasporic communities as presenting superficial visions of racial harmony, we may also question the depth of change engendered by the signs and symbols of 'stylish hybridity'.

In broader contexts, there is also considerable debate among social theorists about the meanings that may be derived from self-stylization. Dick Hebdige's work (1979, 1988) reflects this dilemma as he moves from a position of attributing power and resistance to

images and symbols to an ambivalent lament about the commercialisation of self-representation so as to render it politically impotent:

Commodities can be symbolically repossessed in everyday life and endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings (Hebdige, 1979, p. 16).
and –

The Face; Levi jeans; the image of the ‘self-made man’ constructing himself through consumption and therefore embodying the spirit of the West. The articulation of commodity consumption, personal identity and desire which characterises life under hypercapitalism ... there is nowhere else to go but to the shops (Hebdige, 1988, p. 168).

However, such a perspective ignores the re-assemblage and bricolage evident in the self-representation of young people. What is evident is a great deal of mixing and matching of old and new in youthful attempts to create current representations of identity that resonate with their individual circumstances. Nuttall’s (2008) analysis of Y Culture supports this contention:

As Y youth come to inhabit a culture of selfhood shaped in part by African-American hip-hop culture, they also rebel against it, resulting in a form of pastiche. A cut-and-paste appropriation of American music, language, and cultural practices is simultaneously deployed and refuted (p. 163).

Stylistic texts may well be the “loaded surfaces of life” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 18), but their readings can be ambiguous and contradictory and we must be cautious of imposing our meanings upon the complexities inherent in texts and signs. The motivations of youthful choices are best explored in dialogue with young people themselves, as exemplified in the words of this young person:

I don’t want to box myself in as a Goth or I don’t want to box myself in as a Skatie or I don’t want to box myself in as a Punk like some people do ... cause if you like some sort of – you know if you’re a Goth and you see some Skatie shoes and you say ‘Oh that looks really good’ – you can’t do it you know – if you’re not wearing your Docs you’re not a Goth.. (McGregor, 2001, p. 147).

However, regardless of individual intent, the body remains a place of ideological struggle, desire, representation and identity construction. In his later writings, Foucault (1984) acknowledges the role played by individual self-constitution:

The practices by which individuals were led to focus attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play ... a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen. In short, with this genealogy, the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and on others, a hermeneutics of desire (p. 5).

For previously excluded outsider groups, destabilizing the notions of the unity and coherence of modernity has enabled new forms of identity construction.

Stuart Hall associates this decentring of consciousness with conditions that have, paradoxically, enabled him, as a person of 'colour' to attain a greater integrity of identity:

So one of the fascinating things about this discussion is to find myself centred at last. Now that, in the postmodern age, you all feel so dispersed I become centred. What I've thought of as dispersed and fragmented comes ... to be the modern condition (Hall, 1987 cited in McRobbie, 1994, p. 27).

However, in Chapter 6 of *Youth Moves*, Valdivia's (2008) examination of media representations of Latina/o youth questions the degree to which such optimistic predictions have become reality in the 21st century. One is reminded of the hegemonic power of media to render 'invisible' or stereotype whole groups of people, particularly youth and specifically youth of colour. Valdivia (2008) notes that if Latina/o youth are represented in mainstream American media at all, their stories are linked to a variety of deviancies:

For every 11 stories about youth and crime there was one story about youth and poverty. Even stories about education focused on crime ... (p. 103)

According to Valdivia, problematising Latina/o youth also extends to more serious areas of reporting such as in medical scholarship that "singles out Latina/o youth as 'at risk' for a broad range of behaviours that threaten their health as well as the health of the national body" (p. 103). Thus, it may be argued that youth, particularly those whose identities challenge socio-cultural 'norms', remain focal points of national anxiety making the disciplining of young people the metaphor for restoring order to societies exhibiting the fragmentary, unstable manifestations of New Times. Fuelling the social angst, a growing neo-conservatism has fuelled a politics of representation in many nations that simultaneously trivialises, commodifies and scapegoats many young people within contemporary public discourses:

Youth (are) no longer seen as a symptom of a wider social dilemma, they (*are*) the problem... youth become an easy target for a public discourse in which the dual strategies of scapegoating and commodifying take on the proportions of a national policy and a minor revolution in the media (Giroux, 1998, pp. 31-34 *emphasis added*).

Valdivia's (2008) analysis reminds us that it is most likely to be youth of colour who are most vulnerable to such processes. Quijada (2008) supports this contention in Chapter 12 and also advocates the need for “ hybrid dialogical spaces in which youth – no different than other marginalized populations – listen, relate, (in)form, conflict, and learn with others to transform their own and others' social conditions” (p. 209). That is to say, one must empower oneself through the exercise of practices that facilitate the growth of a personal awareness of one's own personal subjectivity and agency. Drawing upon Foucault's (1980) assertion that power is “exercised, and ... only exists in action” (p. 89) one may argue that the best way to engage in exercises of power production is to counter existing ‘regimes of truth’ with alternative models. Although equality of access to the global village remains an on-going problem for many young people, it would seem that within the context of New Times, there are emerging opportunities for youth to “talk back” (McGregor, 2000) and bring down the walls that circumscribe their identities.

Concluding remarks

Youth Moves: identities and education in global perspective edited by Nadine Dolby and Fazal Rizvi (2008) is a timely collection that incisively foregrounds many of the issues and themes pertinent to a contemporary sociology of youth. As such, it provides educators and researchers with a breadth and depth of theoretical perspectives from which to develop deeper understandings of young people and the New Times in which they live. The diversity of subject matter and global locations covered by the individual authors positions this text as a valuable resource for more grounded research into the lives of contemporary youth. That is indeed, the necessary ‘next step’. Within contexts of rapid technological change, New Times has facilitated flows and networks of information and resources around the globe. The consequences for young people are impossible to predict. Youth has been ‘spoken of’ and

‘spoken for’ for far too long. It is my hope that texts such as *Youth Moves* will motivate more researchers to take theory into the field in order to engage with the lived realities and polyvocal narratives of youth. In keeping with this desire, I believe that it is fitting to conclude this essay with the insightful reflections of a young person, struggling with a core issue at the heart of *Youth Moves*: youthful subjectivity:

What is the self? I am never sure if it is my self which is showing or an environmental me. Often I feel disgusted with myself. Is that my self? It is different every time I look at it. Like trying to describe a sea whose face constantly changes with the movement of the wind and of the moon... (McGregor, 2001, p. 165).

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