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CONCLUSION

Elusive 'youth'

Sara Bragg and David Buckingham

My mum said she really wanted me to do it [take part in this research] because I've got a really good opinion on things and [...] she thinks that I'd be, like, a good representative of what people think. [Girl, aged 12, interview (Buckingham & Bragg 2004)] (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004)

For some time, those who would study youth have been enjoined to be Janus-faced: on the one hand, to remember that 'youth', like 'childhood', is a social construction; but on the other, never to forget that children and youth are 'social actors' (James, Jenks & Prout, 1999; Jeffrey, 2010) (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1999; Jeffrey, 2010). As a social construction, 'youth' is to be interrogated, unmasked, exposed or critiqued; yet as social actors, young people need to be heard, brought in from the margins, respected, listened to – and even 'empowered'. These contrasting arguments involve different methodological, analytical and epistemological approaches, but they also entail different positions for the researcher. So is it possible to resolve the apparent incompatibility between these two perspectives – or at least to find some way of theorising the relationship between them?

Summoning 'youth': the constructionist perspective

As the contributing authors to this volume have shown, 'youth' has been variously imagined, represented, invoked, deployed, summoned, assembled, interpellated and addressed, by a range of discourses and institutions. 'Youth' emerges here as a contingent cultural construction whose reference point is elusive and variable. These contributions remind us yet again that – like 'childhood' – the term is a site of struggle over its social meanings, a

repository of hopes and fears for the future of the world in times of socio-economic, technological and cultural change. On the whole, however, 'youth' proves more ambivalent - potentially explosive or negative - than the 'moral rhetoric of childhood' (Meyer, 2007), which retains its gilded aura and its capacity to mobilise sentiment that will add persuasive power to almost any position or policy. (Meyer, 2007).

The chapters in this book adduce several examples of the 'naturalizing' discourses about youth that are typically challenged by the social constructionist approach (cf. Lynch 2001). The marketing manuals David Buckingham discusses, the development policy documents analysed by Ofra Koffman and Ros Gill, the expressed intentions of the BBC initiative explored by Helen Thornham and Angela McFarlane, all claim to be simply identifying inherent qualities possessed by youth, yet do so in quite particular and partial ways. In this respect, they might well be compared with other well-known constructions of adolescence as a time of raging hormones and *sturm und drang* (see Lesko, 2001), or more popular representations that identify youth with idealism, independence and creativity. (Lesko, 2001)

Against this, we can point to compelling evidence of how 'youth' has signified differently in different times and contexts. In this book, for instance, we have the case of India, discussed in Ritty Lukose's chapter, where 54% of the population is under 25: here, 'youth' can more readily denote a specific age or stage of life, even as it figures in debates about globalization as always more than that. On the other hand, in contemporary Britain, with its ageing population, the term has slipped its temporal anchoring. It has come to refer both to consumption styles and attitudes that people of widely divergent ages may adopt, and simultaneously to the extended period of dependency experienced by 'young adults' in a time of socio-economic downturn. Moreover, the 'youth' who featured in the groundbreaking studies of the Birmingham CCCS in the 1970s are now potentially the grandparents of those under investigation by new generations of researchers – and, as was noted in the introduction, remote historical curiosities to today's undergraduates. Simply remarking on these facts suggests that 'things could be otherwise' – a broader cultural and historical view that significantly expands our thinking about youth cultural studies.

Yet this idea that 'youth' is a social construction is perhaps a truism these days, especially in contexts where secure categories of social reproduction have become significantly more

uncertain for most. In most 'Western' countries at least, the progression from youth to adulthood - defined in terms of acquiring social goods such as a stable job, valuable skills, and secure housing (Jeffrey 2010) - is coming to seem far from inevitable (Cohen 2003). The social, cultural and historical construction of 'youth' - as it emerged from specific conditions in mid-twentieth-century capitalist societies - is little in dispute. What is more of interest is to discover *how* and *why* this occurs. What qualities are attributed to 'youth' in different discourses, by whom or within which different institutions, with what effects or consequences? We also need to consider what is at stake in making this very argument in the first place. As Lynch (2001) asks, what is the meaning, philosophical purpose and political pay-off in arguing that an entity like youth is constructed? (Lynch, 2001) As Hacking (1999) notes, social constructionist accounts become more provoking and revealing when they suggest something beyond established, commonsense narratives. (Hacking, 1999) Yet does it follow that youth is a cultural category we would be better off without? Or are our arguments closer to someone like Neil Postman (1982), who acknowledges that childhood is a fleeting social construct, the fragile product of a concatenation of disparate historical developments, even as he laments its disappearance? (Postman, 1982) Do we *need* the idea of 'youth' - and if so, what do we need it for, and why do we need it now?

If we were to place these arguments in their own historical context, we might well conclude that in different ways, all the contributions to this book explore the impact of contemporary processes of *neoliberalization*, as well as globalization, on the construction of youth. In very broad terms, the politics of neoliberalism involve economic policies promoting private accumulation, entrepreneurship and free markets; but they also entail a project of 'governmentality' that assigns individuals increasing responsibility for their own regulation, welfare and enterprise. Young people today are increasingly being addressed, summoned or interpellated, not as 'juveniles' in need of discipline and control, but as active, creative and autonomous subjects who are required to manage their own choices, conduct and risks (Rose 1999) (Rose, 1999); as such they become harbingers of 'an emergent, newly global world order', as Ritty Lukose argues.

Thus, Thornham and McFarlane expand on the familiar construction of the 'digital native' by exploring the idea of the youthful user of new media as powerful, individual, creative, self-motivated, active, vocal and participatory, with a natural affinity for technology; while

technology in turn is constructed as merely a tool or platform for these users. Koffman and Gill explore how the narrative of youth as a journey through life stages is now taking gendered contours, with girlhood brought into being as 'a distinctively marked-out sphere and time among young women in developing countries'; they contrast the image of girls in the global North as empowered and able with that of girls in the global South as victims but somehow also entrepreneurial. More broadly, Griffin suggests that in 'late modern' societies, young people must increasingly construct themselves as distinctive, authentic and discerning selves through consumption, and as ethical, responsible moral subjects.

However, some categories of youth seem less able or less disposed to respond to these demands than others – while some are constructed as being inherently incapable of doing so, and continue to be defined in stigmatizing and pejorative ways. Thus, Sunaina Maira, Rupa Huq, Kathrin Hörschelmann and Elisabeth El Refaie demonstrate how Muslim youth in particular are now being homogenously constructed as culturally alien, even as jihadists or 'the enemy'. Mary Jane Kehily and Anoop Nayak indicate the limited terms of 'charver' and 'pram face' available to many white working class youth. In addition, several authors refer to constructions of young masculinity as 'in crisis', as less able to fit the demands of neoliberal times. More rarely, it is argued that social constructions are changing for the better – as when Carles Feixa and Oriol Romani argue that youthful Latino culture is increasingly constructed as a valid model of social organisation, or Kyong Yoon shows how in Korea national sentiments towards Japan have shifted in the space of a few years.

Whether positive or negative, it is interesting to note that that these are not only constructions of youth, but of youth *and* something else (class, globalization, gender, development, religion). In this sense, the question is not so much about the construction of 'youth' in isolation, but about the motivations and the consequences of mobilizing this category in combination with others – or alternatively, in order to exclude others that for various reasons might prove more difficult to address. When and why, in these neoliberal times, do we speak about 'youth', as distinct from (or in combination with) gender, class, or ethnicity, or any other category of social difference? What kinds of arguments and practices does the addition of 'youth' support or justify – and what does it exclude or prevent?

In some instances, of course, these constructions of youth clearly reflect particular forms of self-interest, as when marketers' images of youth as elusive justify their own special and indispensable expertise (Buckingham), or when Nike depicts entrepreneurialism and consumption opportunities as the solution to global inequalities and poverty (Koffman and Gill). Sometimes an even more sinister agenda is hinted at, as when Koffman and Gill refer to 'ushering in a very specific biopolitical objective: control of young women's fertility'. More blandly, and possibly benignly, it is assumed or implied that summoning young people into enterprising, self-actualising and self-responsible identities will contribute to national prosperity, competitiveness and well-being. In some cases, these constructions constitute an own goal, as in the case of the BBC initiative Blast, effectively scuppered by the too-ready belief in the image of the autonomous media creator, which then foundered on a lack of user-generated content (as discussed by Thornham and McFarlane). The latter argue that 'such conceptions of new media use ultimately serve to *mask*, rather than elucidate', and indeed, analysis of these constructions is commonly performed in the language and mode of critique. Attention is drawn to paradoxes, elisions, obfuscations, 'disavowals', to how contradictory concepts such as extreme poverty and enterprise are yoked or drawn together, potentially constituting 'acts of cultural violence' (Koffman and Gill).

Many chapters gesture towards the likely contradictions that these constructions entail for young people living in contemporary society, even if they do not explicitly explore them. Koffman and Gill, for instance, state that they are not concerned with the effectiveness of girl-oriented policies or empirical research with young women, but in 'what is produced ideologically, discursively or performatively by the distinctive yoking of neo-liberal discourses of entrepreneurialism with others which draw on 'girl power'.' However, by showing how closely the ideal 'can do' middle class girl is shadowed by her opposite, the vulnerable 'at risk' girl (Harris, 2004) (Harris, 2004), they gesture towards the potential difficulty of trying to build identities and meanings through and with such notions. At the same time, the 'Girl Effect' appears to enact the kinds of approaches advocated by the marketing handbooks discussed by David Buckingham: offering young women social meaning and substance. We return to these dilemmas below.

Taken together, these chapters suggest that the social construction of 'youth' is a diverse and multi-faceted process, whose motivations and consequences are by no means straightforward

or guaranteed. Yet to argue that 'youth' (like gender or ethnicity) is a constructed category is by no means to imply that it is therefore dispensable, unnecessary, or too politically tainted. Aside from anything else, such a position risks being politically paralyzing, stifling any potential for 'youth politics' – or indeed any other kind of politics. Rather, we would argue that the discourses, assumptions and definitions that surround and create the category of 'youth' have material consequences for young people themselves – and indeed for adults – and we need to attend to and engage with their detail and complexity. In this sense, how we (as 'adults') talk *about*, *with* and *to* young people makes a real difference. In the following section, therefore, we turn to the other side of this debate.

Representing youth: the trouble with 'youth voice'

This volume as a whole does not, of course, set out to offer a comprehensive portrait of all contemporary youth cultures. As Chris Griffin reminds us, the aims of youth studies are multiple; criticism of the Birmingham CCCS school for failing to do the same in its time not only holds it to an impossible standard, but misunderstands the intentions of the work, which was not primarily empirical but theoretical / political. Nonetheless, as we have indicated, a more or less explicit justification for a great deal of research on youth is that young people are marginalized, unheard, and disempowered; that on key issues that affect their lives, they are more spoken about than speaking up. A number of the chapters in this book can be read as restoring balance in these respects. Youth Radio, as discussed by Lissa Soep, as well as the girls' media researched by Mary Celeste Kearney and the teenagers who participated in BBC Blast (Thornham and McFarlane), focus on young people as media makers and on the principle of amplifying distinct youth perspectives. Some research participants are defined as marginal, whether by virtue of their assumed and assigned (ethnic or religious) identities, as in the case of Rupa Huq and Sunaina Maira's work, or by their media tastes (as in the case of Kyong Yoon's Korean fan subcultures). Some are 'ordinary', as in the case of the students observed and interviewed by Patrick Alexander and Kathrin Hörschelmann and Elisabeth El Refaie. Hilary Pilkington's work, in particular, by focusing on the biographies of racist / nationalist skinheads in Russia, draws attention to voices that many would rather not hear or engage with at all.

The conventional narrative of youth cultural studies is one of 'structure and agency'. Typically, for instance, accounts open by setting the scene of 'structure' or 'context' – the larger forces against which young people live out their lives. These might be, as in this book, contemporary youthscares, dominant media representations of youth, or concepts (empire, imperialism, neoliberalism, translocalism). Following this, data from empirical research often demonstrates something gratifying and hopeful: at best resistance or at least difference, excess, that which escapes the determining force of structure and shows that young people have agency or room to manoeuvre. The abstract age category – 'youth', 'childhood' – is contrasted with the 'real', that is, the live, flesh-and-blood subjects (young people, children) to whom these labels are applied and who live in and through them in ways that are – it is implied – more contradictory, messy, yet therefore optimistic, than might be thought. Implicitly or explicitly, many youth culture studies seem to construct this kind of narrative. Moreover, and perhaps ironically, the young people we encounter on their pages often prove to possess similar qualities to those supposedly constructed by neoliberalising discourses: that is, they are independent, creative, self-fashioning, critical, reflexive and individuated.

However, attending to young people's perspectives is perhaps no longer as self-evidently necessary, virtuous and urgent as it may once have seemed. Currently, we are seeing across a broad spectrum of thinking, policymaking and provision in fields such as education, politics, research and governance, a growing movement to promote, engage and listen to 'youth voice'. Multiple agencies and instruments across a range of voluntary sector and membership organizations, social enterprises and networks compel, direct, invite and/or inspire individuals and institutions working with young people to engage with 'voice', or its cognate terms of participation, consultation, choice, leadership, empowerment, agency, democracy, capacity-building, partnership, and co-design or collaboration with young people as 'service users'. In these contexts, the elusive category of youth is once more stabilised, assigned attributes of obviousness and authenticity: such measures imagine a subject that exists prior to the process in which it engages. 'Voice' as a metaphor evokes notions of presence and authenticity, whilst being reified and emptied of substantive content. 'Youth' is abstracted from other social differences, and universalized. Accounts of youth voice often imply that it arises spontaneously, from the desire of young people to be 'heard': yet in practice it often emerges in conditions that are both structured and heavily incentivized. Paradoxically, whilst the expression of views is seen both as a right and as

having inherent value, young people are also seen to need training and development if they are to exercise voice in an acceptable or appropriate manner.

The participatory dimensions of new media (such as blogging, social networking and mobile communications) are often celebrated as the transparent means by which youth voice can be accessed, and despots in other nations overthrown, for example through so-called 'Facebook Revolutions' like the Arab Spring. This of course conveniently forgets how in the UK, for instance, these very same technologies have been blamed for facilitating looting and riots – and indeed how they are extensively used by the authorities for surveillance and control. It also ignores the continuing inequalities in access to these media, and their extensive commercial dimensions, not least as means for gathering (and then selling) information about consumer behaviour. New media come to be seen here as merely neutral tools, and even as inherently open and democratic – as providing in themselves a guarantee of authentic dialogue and creative self-expression.

These measures often claim a transparent legitimacy from the 1989 United Nations Convention, which enshrines the child's right to have a say in matters that affect them. However, the kinds of critical, reflexive research discussed in this volume encourage us to ask more searching questions to respond theoretically, politically and methodologically to this situation. What are the social positions and relationships constructed in the process of enabling 'youth voice'? What material and symbolic resources are needed in order to realise one's voice or to narrate one's story and place in the world? How do the existing opportunities and practices serve to produce particular kinds of voice, and constrain or limit others? And what are the relationships between voice and action?

As many commentators have remarked, there are constraints in terms of which kinds of young people are able and disposed to play these kinds of games in the first place. Phil Cohen (2003) claims that in the UK, the New Labour government (1997-2010) took a 'cultural turn' that set the agenda for youth research, with its idea that the qualities of marginalised youth could help to rejuvenate the economy, revitalise inner cities and so forth. But in the process, he argues, 'new lines of battle were drawn between those youth identities regarded as examples of healthy happy hybridity (and hence both marketable and political) and those which clung to pathological purities (bad for business and civic boosterism)'.

(Cohen, 2003) As Anita Harris (2006) argues, there is 'a tension between social changes that have ushered in an agenda of child and youth participatory rights and the economic and political forces that have made meaningful participation for a diverse range of youth difficult to achieve.' Young people are actively required to exercise their responsibilities as citizens, yet for many the traditional markers of citizenship have become ever more difficult to achieve; and in this context, participation may not be a meaningful practice – and may even prove to be an oppressive imposition. As Harris suggests, there is a risk that the imperative of participation 'serves only to further 'responsibilize' children and youth, and ultimately blame them for their failure to engage'. (Harris, 2006) Furthermore, if 'voices' are not listened to, and if listening does not translate into action, cynicism and disengagement would seem to be an entirely reasonable response.

More broadly, the search for 'youth voice' has been analysed as symptomatic of the same 'neoliberal' shift identified in the first section, away from the notion of a 'welfare' state to a 'pedagogic' (Pykett, 2010) (Pykett, 2010), 'post-welfare' or 'governance' state acting not as provider, but instead as a funder and monitor of educational and social services provided by others. Here an interest in 'youth voice' differs from an interest in young people as cultural actors (as in the early Cultural Studies approaches described elsewhere in this volume), or even in youth as explicitly political agents, as Lukose argues. Instead, 'youth' can be seen as a form of technical expertise or capital that can be exploited in particular circumstances, and for particular purposes. It may represent an identity that can be professionalized, or utilised in the interests of transparency and increased efficiency. Thus this new attention to youth voice can be seen to represent the rise of new forms of knowledge production and nodes of expertise – most dramatically represented in this volume by Carles Feixa who finds himself conversing with British PM David Cameron on the subject of gangs, but also in Lissa Soep's work with and for Youth Radio. It can be linked to the ascendance of evidence-based policy-making as a dominant model for policy deliberation, which increasingly calls upon activist and non-governmental organizations to research the populations they 'represent' to produce credible knowledge that will further their goals, sway policy-makers and gain media credibility (Grundy & Smith, 2007). (Grundy & Smith, 2007). Within evidence-based policy-making, social science research methods are valorized as the pre-eminent form of knowledge production: they are able to claim legitimacy and render the worlds of hitherto marginalized groups visible in the policy process.

Many scholars have pointed out the political pitfalls of the evidence-based approach: it is often seen as symptomatic of the depoliticizing and managerialist dynamics of neoliberal governance, deflecting notions of politics defined as distributions of power, force and agency. There is an ontological politics at stake here, as research and knowledge production is inevitably bound up with struggles over which kinds of 'youth' realities are to be made real within policy deliberation. We might well argue that the emphasis on youth voice serves as a means of 'enrolling' young people 'into the architectures of governing' (in John Clarke's term, 2010) (Clarke, 2010); or that voice can serve as merely a form of 'vernacular ventriloquism', affirming an official and pre-existing position or managerial purpose, and that it is in a sense already 'scripted'.

Yet this would be to underestimate the possibilities here. Youth voice also has a performative function, inspiring changes through moral force rather than more legislative, top-down methods (Bragg & Manchester, 2011, 2012). (Bragg & Manchester, 2011, 2012) However constraining and even patronizing they may find it, young people can and do self-consciously mobilize voice – and speak as 'young people' – in their efforts to alter the balance of power. It can also provide an opportunity to make a positive difference, not merely to the position of young people, but in other respects as well. Young people are not simply the victims of a process of manipulation: they are not only what they are constructed to be. Rather, they may be able to employ the social constructions that are available to them, in knowing and self-reflexive (not to mention cynical and even deliberately deceitful) ways, in order to achieve real, material outcomes that are not necessarily foreseen by institutions – although we should beware of assuming that these outcomes will necessarily and inevitably prove to be politically progressive or even democratic.

Nonetheless, in this situation, it becomes difficult to regard 'youth voice' as a straightforward matter of 'empowerment'. This view will do little to explain David Cameron's interest in Carles Feixa's research, or the funding for Rupa Huq's from a government initiative on Preventing Violent Extremism. Rather, we need to be asking reflexive questions about how 'youth voice' is enacted within and through specific sites and practices, and the positions, capacities and narratives it offers to those involved (Barnett, Cloke, Clarke, & Malpass, 2011). 'Youth voice' is enacted, brought into being, rather than immanent or pre-existing: the term

designates a diverse range of practices that require careful, situated interpretation if we are to understand their meanings and effects. Any youth voice is largely what we - as adults, researchers, educators, policy-makers and practitioners – make it: it has no prior existence and it cannot ‘act’ alone, whether to improve services, offer emancipation, or any of the other virtuous aims with which it has been tasked.

In the context of research, this implies that we need to attend more critically to what has been termed ‘the social life of methods’ – how we ourselves have contributed to making young people researchable subjects and offered categories through which they may think of themselves. John Law in *After Method* (2004) argues that ‘Method is not... a set of more or less successful procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities. [it] is not, and never could be, innocent or purely technical.’ (Law, 2004). He goes on to state that ‘presence’ also makes ‘absence’ – an idea that we can apply in this context to ‘youth’ itself. Lukose makes a similar point when she argues that ‘youth is often mobilized to mask other matrices of social difference’. Celebrating ‘youth’ rebellion in the Arab Spring obscures other questions of class, gender, and rural-urban divisions. Making youth more visible, for instance, means making gender less so: the term ‘youth’ invokes a generational narrative around age differences where feminist slogans referring to ‘girls and women’ draw forth more solidaristic narratives of what women might share or what kinds of intergenerational relations are possible. As Patrick Alexander’s chapter shows, such generational discourses also influence how teachers and students relate to each other, conjuring barriers between and across ages, even as their experiences speak of commonality as much as difference. And as Mary Kearney shows, the endlessly renewing concept of youth – and its all-too-frequent identification with technological novelty - may obscure commonalities with earlier cultural forms and practices.

The ontological politics here extend to the kinds of persons who inhabit the world. In their genealogical study Osborne and Rose (Osborne & Rose, 1999) claim that as the knowledge practices, scientific devices and research technologies of the social sciences - such as consumer surveys, opinion polls, and census techniques - have seeped out into the world, people have increasingly come to ‘fit’ the demands of the research. They have internalized the phenomena and become ‘researchable’ from the perspective of the devices and techniques formally created to ‘discover’ them – as the quote right at the start of this chapter

illustrates. The nature of the kinds of identities we attribute to ourselves and the forms of life we have come to lead have, therefore, been shaped at least in part by the methods and analyses of the social sciences themselves. These norms are being embedded in institutional practices, and are coming to set the horizons of how young people can account for themselves as learners and individuals. As researchers, we cannot stand outside this process. Our own methods also enact youth and render them knowable to different groups, from Prime Ministers and media companies to educators and activists.

However, none of this is to imply that 'youth voice' is simply an illusion, or merely a manifestation of adult manipulation. On one level, we would agree that youth voice represents a political opportunity – albeit one that, like all political opportunities, is highly contingent and almost inevitably compromised. In such situations, young people cannot be seen simply to 'speak for themselves'. However, they can consciously *use* the imperative for youth voice for their own purposes: they can knowingly construct themselves as 'youth', bearing witness to the imperatives of those who invite them to speak, yet they can also negotiate with the positions that are available to them, and thereby use the political opportunity for their own purposes.

We need to be more aware of the ontological politics involved, acknowledging how we create social realities and social worlds. We need to acknowledge their potential and their ambiguities. Evidence-based methods can be homogenizing; but they can also produce knowledges about other areas that might otherwise not be included. They are productive and perfromtive.

Different youths? – studying youth enactments

What principles for future research and practice might respect the constructed nature of youth, for which our contributors have collectively argued, whilst responding theoretically, politically and methodologically to the demand for 'youth voice'? By way of answer, let us step away from the life-affirming and regenerative notion of 'youth' and briefly enter instead the realm of disease. In *The Body Multiple* Annemarie Mol (2002) presents us with an exemplary approach to making sense of the complexities of the social world. (Mol, 2002)

Her examination of medical practices was carried out using very detailed observations, a kind of multiple ethnography that attempts to examine the object in question - the disease atherosclerosis - and the things that make it: language, spaces, pathogens, texts, interactions, professions, medical devices. Whilst these accrete to construct what is then treated as a *singular* concept, when studied in practice the objects of atherosclerosis are multiple and not co-terminous. Most strikingly, for example, the atherosclerosis identified in an amputated limb by means of a microscope in a lab is not the same as – but is made to cohere with - the atherosclerosis of the consulting room, where it is diagnosed through different procedures with living patients.

Mol's book invokes these disjunctures formally, through juxtaposing different kinds of text on each page to replicate in a small way the complexities of the social world, whilst acknowledging that the book itself is only a partial reproduction of a small part of that world. It shows us that to really get to grips with what surrounds us, we need to listen very carefully to all the voices and discourses at play, and look very closely at the practices that are enacted. Without this we will follow a reductionist path that reduces social objects to single points of 'understanding' and 'explanation', and lose sight of the specificity of cases by grouping together things that have, at best, a passing resemblance to one another. It is only through this detailed and nuanced ethnographic approach that Mol is able to reveal the intricacies of the social construction of complex objects like diseases.

We need to recognise that a disease, in all its complexities and with all its precedents, antecedents and attendants, is a simple object compared to the subject matter of this book - 'youth'. Yet ultimately, we need to do something similar: to trace the proliferation of the concept of youth, the sites in which it circulates or has currency and the different social actors who use it. In the process, we need to consider how it functions, how we come to know what we think we know of 'youth' and the social practices from which the concept emerges. We need to produce complex ways of seeing the specific practices, processes and contexts through which what comes to be recognized as 'youth' is produced.

In her chapter, Lukose discusses how in anthropology the concept of culture gradually changed from being a noun to an adjective. Likewise, Steve Woolgar (2012) has argued that we should treat reified, revered and standardized ideas like 'childhood' (and by extension,

youth) as gerunds in order to convert them into objects of analysis, studying 'youthing', or how youth is produced, assembled, and rendered in different contexts (Woolgar, 2012). He suggests we might think of 'child' and 'youth' as analogous to notions like 'social' or 'natural' or 'modern': as Bruno Latour and others working within the Science and Technology Studies paradigm have argued, these are not givens, but made and sustained through considerable and significant work, albeit involving mundane devices, ordinary technologies and unremarkable objects. Neither 'youth' nor 'culture' pre-exists their enactment in practices – social, political, cultural and symbolic acts of making (Isin 2008). (Isin, 2008) Ontological enactment brings into being the nature and existence of relevant objects and entities. The being engaged in cultural consumption is being enacted (constituted) as youthful or young, as the same time as the texts are being constituted as youth-culture. In this way, as Woolgar argues, we can show how these entrenched conceptual entities are not natural and inevitable but could be otherwise.

The challenges of this kind of approach are captured in the work of Dan Cook. In relation to commercial culture's construction of 'childhood' and 'youth', for example, he has shown how the market becomes embedded in how we come to know these concepts and how children and young people might come to identify and understand themselves and others as a result (Cook, 2003). For example, he describes how one kind of mundane device – department store layout plans - offer young people 'ways of locating – materially and bodily – their position with regard to key social indices like age and gender... social class and ethnicity' (165). As he argues, if commercial interests commodify youth, they do so not by manipulating consumers but by respecting them and taking them seriously, legitimating the 'child's perspective' – whether actual or ascribed - as a source of authority and acting upon it. Whilst definitions of what is 'authentic' and 'cultural' in youth terms have often hinged on what can be seen as untainted by commerce, such work contributes to undermining such conventional oppositions (see also Steiner 2013, Zelizer, 1985). (Zelizer, 1985) (Steiner, 2013).

Perhaps it is on these kinds of theoretical grounds that we might begin to combine, or at least to understand the relations between, the two seemingly incompatible perspectives with which we began. Accumulating yet more data about the diverse manifestations of youth culture is a necessary and important process. Creating the possibility for – and intervening in

– forms of youth politics and practice remains an important imperative. Yet there is an urgent need here for much more theoretical and methodological reflexivity, and for moving beyond the rather parochial confines of previous youth research. Despite the historical developments in the field, we would argue that critical questions remain to be addressed. We hope that this volume has provided some diverse indications of how this might be done.

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