Editor’s Introduction

Welcome to the first TASA Sociology of Youth Thematic Group newsletter for 2013. The aim of this newsletter is to provide a forum for Australian youth sociologists to exchange ideas, share research, and foster communication both within and outside the group. To this end, this edition of the newsletter contains essays, conference rundowns, news from the field and some discussions about significant upcoming events for the thematic group.

First up in this newsletter is an introduction from the new leadership of the thematic group. Myself, Julia Coffey and Paula Geldens are the new co-convenors. We have a few ideas about how to expand the group, as well as news about some upcoming events.

That said, the highlight of this newsletter edition is three essays by members of the thematic group on the theme of “Conceptual Challenges in the Sociology of Youth.” These essays are aimed at highlighting what the authors see as upcoming issues or theoretical problems that will be significant for youth studies in the coming years. They bring up important issues in research on all aspects of young people’s lives, but focus in particular on the new significance of geography in late modernity, the importance of the body in theories of youth subjectivities, and the conceptual promise of new perspectives on youth subcultures as a way of bridging “theoretical gaps” in the sociology of youth. I think that these are interesting and challenging essays which will stimulate some great discussions in our discipline.

The conceptual challenges raised by these pieces will also form the basis for a youth symposium as part of TASA’s annual conference this year, with some discussions focusing on issues raised in this newsletter.

Previous newsletters have formed the basis for things like journal special issues and conference events, and my intention is to continue making the newsletter a centrepiece of the way our thematic group runs. Last year I put out the call for contributions and received very little response. I encourage anyone interested in being more involved in the thematic group to consider contributing to future newsletters. Newsletter contributions like these can be the first step on the road to a journal article, as well as giving you the opportunity to communicate your ideas directly with the community, and potentially a role in discussions of future youth sociology events like the symposium this year.

Finally, the thematic group now has a twitter! Follow us at twitter.com/YouthTASA to get news and updates about the group. Thank you to all of the contributors to this newsletter and I look forward to the discussions it will stimulate. See you all at future TASA events!

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After a series of nominations, our thematic group has a new triumvirate of convenors. We are: David Farrugia (University of Ballarat), Julia Coffey (University of Melbourne) and Paula Geldens (Swinburne University).

First up, thanks to Dan Woodman, Steve Threadgold and Sarah Maclean, the previous convenors. During their time as convenors the thematic group was founded and has blossomed, with a number of conferences, post-grad events, journal special issues and increased engagement with youth sociologists nationally and overseas. I think we can all agree that the last few years have been fantastic.

As the new convenors for the group, we are hoping to pick up where the previous leadership left off. At this stage, the most important announcement is the Youth Symposium to be held alongside TASA this year on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of November. This event will bring together discussions on a number of key themes in youth studies (detailed on the next pages of the newsletter) and will provide a focal point for networking and collaborative discussions. Be sure to keep this date free.

As well as this event, we are currently assembling some ideas about how to better support post-graduate students and integrate them further into the group. Current ideas include publication support and mentorship programs and collaborative workshops with established youth scholars. We would be open to more ideas about how to support our emerging post-graduates, particularly in relation to how we can place them in the best position to engage with an increasingly difficult academic labour market.

Finally, please feel free to contact us with ideas and suggestions for future events and initiatives, as well as any news from the field and announcements you would like us to make on your behalf. We hope to continue the good work done by the previous convenors in the coming years.

David Farrugia, Julia Coffey, Paula Geldens

Co-Convenors of the Sociology of Youth Thematic group
The recent interest in ‘bridging the gap’ in Youth Studies – captured succinctly in the eponymous conference co-hosted by the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research and the TASA Youth Thematic Stream in November 2012 – has thrown up many important questions for youth sociologists, not least those studying the significance of youth cultural activity. Such questions have emerged from the renewed and accelerated convergence of the interests of scholars working on youth transitions and youth cultures respectively, which have begun to move the sociology of youth past a number of tired conceptual and methodological antinomies (see Furlong, Woodman and Wyn 2011). For scholars of youth culture, a sudden spike in the number of research projects investigating how (sub-)cultural participation in various spheres of leisure may continue to impact upon the biographical trajectories of affiliates beyond youth and young adulthood is a game-changer. Subculture, it seems, is not as ‘fleeting’ or ‘transitory’ or ‘ephemeral’ as we have recently been led to believe (see Bennett 1999; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003; Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004). On the contrary, sub-culture constitutes a significant part of the environment wherein young people negotiate the complex task of ‘becoming-adult’ (Bloustien and Peters 2012). The challenge for sociologists of youth is to conceptually account for this.

To be sure, my argument is not one of what youth cultures are but rather how youth cultures work, and I do not intend here to sink into a rehearsal of the ‘subculture versus post-subculture’ debate. Certainly, as has been the sounding board of those pushing post-CCCS orthodoxies, young people’s cultural affiliations do not necessarily entail the kind of sustained commitment to spectacular behaviour as was implied (retrospectively) in the ‘subculture’ frameworks of the Birmingham School (see Hall and Jefferson 1993). Yet the burgeoning literature on ageing subculturalists suggests that they do for many remain an important (and durable) resource in negotiating more everyday biographical trajectories (Bennett and Hodkinson 2012; Bennett 2013). Similar narratives are also emerging outside of academic discourse; several recent books and documentary-style films, for instance, are painting a picture of subcultural identities as something that must be managed and mediated alongside the arrival of parenthood (Lindberg 2009; Nevins dir. 2011) – a social role that is apparently seen to demand ways of being that are incongruent with ‘being’ a punk or whatever. What is interesting here is that, where youth culture has previously been positioned as a set of reflexively-appropriated resources for young people to mediate the pressures and demands of everyday life, commentators are now observing young adults who have, by experience, come to embody their cultural attachments and must reconcile the demands of a transition to adulthood with the distinctive tastes and behaviours to which they have become, as it were, pre-disposed.

If this evokes the conceptual architecture of Bourdieu and (more productively) his sociological interest in bodies, such concerns have not found expression in work on so-called ‘youthful subcultures’ (Frith 1983). Indeed, the major debates in subcultural studies have tended to instrumentalise the function of the body as a locus for subjectivity in favour of analyses of its stylistic adornment (Hebdige 1979) or as a reflexively-deployed meaning-making apparatus (Tsitsos 1999). Little conceptual room has been left to account for why, for instance, a hardcore punk (to return to the aforementioned example) might struggle to enact the ‘soft’ and compassionate gentility required (or even desired) to nurse his new-born baby. Contra the emphasis of subcultural studies on reflexively-deployed cultural practice, bodies define our ‘action-potential’ (Duff 2010). Even where writers have acknowledged the ‘body problematic’ (Crossley 2007), concepts like the ‘reflexive habitus’ (Sweetman 2003) have been used to explain away the corporeal impact of (sub-)cultural practice. At the same time, ‘habitus’ has been shockingly oversimplified as certain writers have glossed over the complex fields of relationships in which individuals are implicated with only the broadest of sociological brushstrokes (see Kahn-Harris 2007) and in ways that recall the problems of very early theories of ‘subculture’ (see Gordon 1947).

Elsewhere, I have argued that ‘habitus’ is much more useful as a way of conceptualising the more

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Subcultural (-ising) Bodies: Youth Culture for Organisms

by Chris Driver
committed forms of attachment that continue to characterise many youths’ experience of subculture (see Driver 2011). Observing interview data where my informants articulated an experientially-driven pedagogical process of the acquisition of ‘skills’ (Ingold 2001) in a distinctive set of youth cultural practices, I argued how figuring habitus as both historical and dynamic might help conceptualise (a) how participants of youth cultures learn to ‘just do’ their performances of identity, and (b) how such identities spill out into everyday practice. It is worth pointing out that acknowledging the weight of subcultural participation in the ongoing ‘process’ of habitus (see Casey 2001) accorded closely with the narratives I had collected about experiencing the hardcore scene as a site of self-transformation and self-improvement.

Thus, to return to the purpose of this essay, I do not mean simply that youth-cultural identities act as a durable frame of reference in the post-youth biographical choices that actors make. To do so would be to deny the corporeal parameters of agency and reify the problematic at the root of this argument. What I mean to say is that youth culture needs to be acknowledged for the important contribution it makes to the environment in which young people – as organisms – grow (Ingold 1990). Rather than positing youth cultures as ways for young people to symbolically use style (see Brake 1980) or reflexively come to terms with the slipperiness of postmodern identity (Bennett 1999), there is a case for understanding them as mechanisms for achieving the ecological (hence, experiential) continuity required for young people to develop ‘as selves’ (see De Nora 2000) – precisely the kind of continuity that is (if the last quarter-Century of sociological scholarship is to be paid any heed), that has been forfeited to those socio-cultural processes of ‘detraditionalisation’ that have destabilised socially-prescribed identities.

In addition to burgeoning evidence that subculturalists are maintaining their youth-cultural identities as a meaning-making apparatus well into adulthood – and, apparently, even into their twilight years (see Bennett 2013) – an empirically-grounded case for the biological impact of distinctive leisure activity is beginning to unfold. Clifton Evers’ work on Australian surfers for instance notes how the embodiment of competences required for an ‘affective attunement’ to the surf manifests itself both emotionally and physiologically in the everyday lives of his research population (see particularly 2006, 2009). Men who surf, argues Evers, develop particular ways of being that allow them to negotiate the dicey social ecologies of homosocial intimacy, becoming (see Lande 2007) able (in fact, predisposed) to ‘just do’ their masculinities the same over a beer and conversation in the pub, or on a beach at the edge of the Indonesian jungle, as on their boards in the surf at Bondi. Surfers also embody their cultural experiences by way of body shapes developed in the throes of local breaks (see Evers 2009), and in physiological changes that manifest in their ears and eyes and attune their bodies and senses to the demands of life in the sea. The point here is that this is not as abstract as the nomenclature implies. Doing culture can have real (physiological) and documentable biological consequences.

All of this is to suggest that distinctive leisure activity impacts upon the ‘ontogenetic development’ of the ‘organism-person’ as it unfolds in the world (see Ingold 1990). A cumbersome lexicon, but I would like to stress here its precision. The principle aim is to transcend the ongoing division of academic labour between the biological and the cultural. Such a division rests on the hegemony of Neo-Darwinian biology that holds apart the organism (as the physiological realisation of genetic information over time) and the person (‘the seat of consciousness, the locus of intentional agency’) (ibid.). The trouble with the notion of the ‘person’ is that it refers to differences between humans that have their ‘ultimate locus inside people’s heads’ (p.211). The trouble with the former is that it treats bodies as genotypic outputs, which unfold according solely to the ‘bio-chemical substance, DNA’. Yet, to reiterate a point to which the above discussion of Evers’ work alludes, ‘enfolded within the organism itself is the entire history of its environmental relations’ (Ingold 1990, p.219). As Ingold observes:

…every organism is an open system, generated within a relational field that cuts across the interface with its environment. For the developing human organism, that field includes the nexus of relations with other humans. It is this nexus of social relations that constructs him or her as a person. Thus the process of becoming a person is integral to the process of becoming an organism. (1990, p.220)

In this sense we can begin to position youth cultural activity as the collectively-enacted coming-together of a ‘morphogenetic field’ (Goodwin in Ingold 1990, p.215).
What is needed then is a concerted effort to take seriously the ontogenetic impact of ‘culture’ – as aesthetic experience produced in the course of inhabiting environment/s – upon the ‘coming-into-being’ (Ingold 2008) of the person-organism (read: bodies). This means taking seriously young people’s testimony concerning the ways in which youth culture opens up and closes down agency; the minutiae of gender-performativity and the hierarchies of power it produces in youth-cultural space – not only to the relational positionality that reproduces a durable patriarchy, but in relation to masculinities and femininities in other arenas of socio-cultural activity (see Sewell 2012); to the kinds of action and competences (‘body techniques’ (see Crossley 2007)) they enable and the kinds of contexts in which they are enabled (‘body pedagogics’ (Shilling 2007)); and, to the myriad ways in which those invested in youthful identities inhabit their everyday place-worlds in terms of their own biographical milestones and unique chronologies of ‘critical moments’ (Henderson et al. 2007). In short, we must start analysing collectively learned modes of practice for their significance as ‘aesthetic technologies’ (see De Nora 2000) that manifest change at the level of ‘what a body can do’ (Deleuze 1992). To understand the real impact of youth cultural activity:

...we have to see it as consisting in certain powers of perception and action, involving dispositions and sensibilities established in the course of a lifetime of practice and training in an environment. Here the person is conceived not as a substantive entity, but rather as a locus of growth and development within a field of relationships. And by the same token, the contribution that other people make to one’s own knowledge – often represented in the idioms of kinship – is not one of substance but rather one of setting up the conditions in which growth can occur. (Ingold and Kurttila 2000, p.194)

While the authors of the above were remarking on the function of ritual and experience in the process of indigenous peoples forging a relationship with their lands, it is not difficult to imagine how such thinking might apply to scholarship on youth cultures (could the fact that it hasn’t already point to an undercurrent of ethnocentrism in the sociology of youth?). In such a formulation, the organism takes centre stage as the ‘enactive vehicle of being-in-the-world’ (Casey 2001); where it both affects and is affected by the collective production of (subcultural) places. It is by this generic process – by the (sub-) cultural-ising of bodies – that youth cultural activity comes to structure (alongside the cumulative weight of a lifetime of experience) the subject’s dispositions, tastes and behavioural orientations. Such observations might go some of the way to explaining how ageing subculturalists continue to enact their youthful identities long after they have discontinued any tangible connection with the cultural spaces in which those identities are originally forged, and why work on youth culture has, maybe now more than ever, much to offer work on youth transitions.

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Although there has been an increasing interest in ‘the body’ over the last two decades, particularly in sociology (Turner 2008, Shilling 2003, Budgeon 2003) and feminist philosophy (Butler 1993, Grosz 1994, St. Pierre & Pillow 2000, Bray & Colebrook 1998), the approaches which focus on the lived body have not received much attention in the sociology of youth. Foregrounding embodiment and the material body can be notoriously difficult to achieve, particularly when combining a theoretical framework of embodiment with empirical research. The material body is elusive, and can be difficult to locate, seeming to slip somewhere between ‘theorising’ about it and its ‘lived’ actuality (Butler 1993). Developing approaches in which the body and visceral experience is central, rather than marginal, poses both challenges and new opportunities in research with and about young people in the sociology of youth.

The lived body has not received much attention, theoretical or otherwise, in the sociology of youth (though Frost 2005, Farrugia 2011 and Nayak 2003 are among crucial exceptions). The body is present, or implicit, in many studies exploring the gendered subjectivities of young people at school; or in the ways class-based inequalities impact young people’s transitions to employment. It is at the same time absent, however, as ‘the body’ – the ‘vehicle’ by which we engage with other people, ideas and through which we experience the world – is rarely overtly discussed. Inequalities are variously mapped on to the body, for example, in discussions of how sex and gender, race, ethnicity, class, disability mediate a young people’s opportunities and experiences. The way these inequalities are lived and experienced through the body – are embodied – often elude attention. In sociology, feminist studies and cultural studies, this paradox is referred to as the body’s ‘absent presence’ (Witz 2000). This is understood to result from the body’s implication in the mind/body dualism; the body’s separation from the mind, will and reason. This dualism has been implicit in the establishment of many disciplines including sociology, which was founded on a differentiation between the ‘natural’ (including the body) and the social (Blackman 2008). As a result, this dualism is ‘insidious and rather difficult to think against’ (2008: 6, my emphasis). Arguably, through writing about the body, as I am doing now, the body remains an absent presence. It is only when I acknowledge I am writing with a body (my fingers pressing the keys, my eyes blinking, my elbows on the desk as I read back) that my body, ‘appears’. Making the body ‘present’ does not mean we should write about our bodies writing¹. Instead, and more practically, Blackman (2008: 5) suggests that a good place to start ‘thinking through the body’ is to ‘become aware of the bodily basis of thought…to explore bodies as sites of potentiality, process and practice’.

I saw what the body can do when it put into practice in the unexpected setting of a presentation during a conference. Caitlin Fisher (2013) began her presentation speaking about the ‘body projects’ of professional female footballers in Brazil and the ‘feminine’ modifications to their body they are required to make to be accepted in the masculinised space of the sport (wearing make up for games, tighter uniforms, styling and growing their hair). After a few minutes, she stepped away from the lecturn, music began to play, images and video footage of herself and her teammates were displayed on the screen behind her, and she ‘danced’ her presentation. As she spoke, she also moved her body correspondingly, miming the moves of her game. She explained, ‘I watched a recording of me presenting about my work…I was all neck up and body was rigid, it was not speaking…but I was speaking about body! This was one of my inspirations for expressing the work more through my body.’ This is one potentiality of a conference body; one that will have a lasting impact on the way I ‘think through the body’. While most of us will likely not have the courage nor inclination to ‘dance’ our work to audiences, there are many ways in which we can begin to think through the body in our research and writing in the sociology of youth.

What does embodied work look like in the sociology of youth?

One way to redress the absent presence of the body is to discuss the embodied ‘realities’, or experiences, of
the young people in our research. This means trying to understand why being in their specific bodies and experiencing particular things impacts the range of ‘options’ available to them or influences their ‘decisions’. For example, in the research I undertook towards my PhD, it was important to take a theoretical perspective that enabled me to pay attention to the affects, or embodied sensations associated with people’s work on their bodies (Coffey 2012a, 2012b). Focusing on this gave me a way to understand the numerous contradictions that existed between participants and the complexity beyond the traditional (gendered) understandings of men’s and women’s bodies and embodiment. For example, some young men who played professional sport said they felt ‘addicted’ to their training, and that they would continue their rigid and strict regimes regardless of whether they were playing the sport. These men experienced their bodies in a similar way to some women in the study who said that they were compelled to keep up their strict exercise / make up / diet regimes / cosmetic surgery in order to maintain a sense of self that was tolerable (Coffey 2013a). A focus on their embodiment – what if felt like to be them, in which their bodies (through body work practices) were centrally implicated, meant that I could explore and analyse the data in a more complex way. Gender binaries emphasising strength and musculosity as ideal in men, and slenderness and a generally heightened concern about appearance was the feminine ideal and norm for women, were prominent in their descriptions, but the ways their bodies were experienced could not be mapped straightforwardly back on to gender (Coffey forthcoming). Exploring the affects and embodiments related to gender and health too, enabled a way of examining the complexities surrounding how participants’ body work was both actively ‘chosen’ but at the same time shaped and limited by gendered physical ‘ideals’ and the cultural conditions in which the body – its appearance – seem to matter more and more to both men and women. Equally, the body is centrally implicated in all experiences of and interactions with society, culture, ‘structures’ and inequalities related to gender, sexuality, race, place, ability, and so on. Others have explored the importance of the body and embodiment in their research with young people. Farrugia (2011), for example, highlights the visceral dimensions of homelessness, and the ways that homelessness is a symbolic burden that is embodied by the young people in his study. Nayak (2003) and Nayak & Kehily (2006) have also explored the ways that gender, class, ethnicity and place are embodied and lived out by young people.

**What are some methodologies conducive to embodied work? (What of the researchers’ body?)**

Pairing an approach which ‘thinks through the body’ with methodology means we must continue to find ways of positioning ourselves and our bodies in the research. Nayak (2003: 29) has used ethnographic observation and ‘thick’ description to give an ‘embodied account of young people coming-of-age in industrial times’. Sandelowski (2002) and Blumenthal (1999) argue that qualitative methods such as interviews must make room for the multiplicity and variation within and across identities, and factor in that the ‘self’ of the researcher is also multiple and divided. Attending to the affects and relations between the participants in the interview encounter is one way forward. Others working with these similar frameworks in empirical research (Fox & Ward 2008; St. Pierre 2002; Sandelowski 2002) suggest that a focus on non-verbal aspects of the interviews, such as body signals and other sensory elements can open up the research beyond the confines of traditional methodology. From this perspective, the method of interviewing can itself be explored as a process of relations between the interviewer and participant. This means that the researcher’s own embodiment is as central to the research as the participants’, since both contribute to the meanings and knowledges produced in the interview encounter.

The researcher’s body and experience of embodiment is present and a part of all stages of the research project, in the planning, the interviewing, the analysis and writing. My own presence was as much a part of the research and the ‘data’ as the participants’ bodies were. Because I did not discuss my own body in interviews, I had to find a way of making my body visible in the research to avoid positioning myself as the privileged, disembodied researcher. I did this through writing about my own positioning within the dynamics of gender and health I had written about in the analysis of participants. I have found writing my embodiment into publications difficult, as others have (Throsby & Gimlin 2010: 114, Young 2011). However, in research with a corporeal focus, it is important to make bodies visible or present, rather than absent.

The body is still mainly implicit, not overt or explicit, in the sociology of youth. For example, in studies of how young people negotiate transitions from school to work, or are implicated in class or gender relations, the bodies of young people are obviously present, but the ways these relations are experienced by young people and are embodied are usually not foregrounded. The non-rational aspects of experience or individuality are often latent, or are not the key focus of analysis. Corporeal theories aim to place the body
and embodied experience - at the forefront of analysis to highlight the active relations between bodies and the world. This focus on the body’s potential and lived experience can correct or work against previous approaches in which the body is invisible or rendered inferior to the mind in a binary logic. More than this, beginning to ‘think through the body’ can open up a way of exploring the ways the body is implicated in the complexities and tensions in young people’s lives. Approaching young people’s bodies as well as our own bodies as sites of potentiality, process and practice, will facilitate the conceptual development of the body and embodiment in the sociology of youth, and will add important dimensions to practice and research with young people.

Note:
1 For an example of how ‘writing your body’ can be done well, see Quinn (2012).

References


For much of the twentieth century sociologists left the analysis of the physical world to geographers…and other social scientists…The historical neglect of the physical world in sociology is odd given that many of its founders gave critical attention to this dimension. (Kim, LaGrange and Willis, 2013)

In this essay we want to make case for better theoretical recognition of the fundamental importance of space and place in analyses of young people's lives, and to suggest that better attention to rural and regional young people is one step on the way to achieving this. We want to argue that now more than ever, the sociology of youth must develop a ‘heterogeneous and multi dimensional use of place’ and that this would be achieved if place was to attract ‘the same reverence as age, class, race and gender in our work’ (Geldens, 2005). Our essay traces the marginalisation of rural and regional young people from the sociology of youth back to the “founding fathers” of sociology, and locates the absence of a spatial perspective as part of the establishment of the European metropole as the emblem of modernity. In the present essay, we want to move beyond this metropolitan focus to invite a more nuanced dialogue with place, arguing that rurality, and place in general, represent a challenge to the sociology of youth.

**Metrocentricity, Placelessness, and the Marginalisation of the Rural**

From a brief look at the theoretical frameworks and research directions currently driving work in youth sociology, one could be forgiven for assuming that the most conceptually significant young people live in the metropolitan centres of the United Kingdom, Western Europe, the United States and Australia. It appears that, in the main, the experiences of young people in rural and regional places, as well as those outside the global north, have failed to penetrate the conceptual frameworks with which we engage. Rural young people, and discussions of place in general, are often absent from the way in which we routinely give shape to our intellectual field.

Here we argue that the development of a perspective which acknowledges the importance of place in young people's lives is one of the most significant conceptual challenges facing contemporary youth sociology. Our argument here is motivated by concern about the generalising of knowledge developed about the centre to the periphery, as well as a desire to emphasise the growing importance of place in the experiences and life chances of young people today. While spatial processes have always been important, deepening geographical inequalities and the increasing significance of trans-local flows of economic and cultural capital mean that place has a renewed significance for young people in late modernity. We argue that a spatial perspective means more than merely noting geographical differences in young people's lives, but incorporating place into the heuristics and conceptual frameworks which define and animate our field.
Metrocentricity, Eurocentricity, and the Marginalisation of the Rural

Connell’s (2007) arguments concerning the Eurocentric origins and focus of our discipline provide a starting point for understanding the conceptual challenges of a spatial perspective. According to Connell, the establishment of sociology as a discipline involved drawing together and institutionalising a theoretical canon which defined sociology’s objects of study and outlined the conceptual problems that the discipline was to address. The work of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, followed in particular by Parsons, have been placed into a narrative of disciplinary progression which has shaped subsequent work in sociology. From the metropolitan centres of Western Europe, the founding fathers wrote narratives about the foundations of modern societies which in the 1960s were drawn together to establish the disciplinary canon that is now taught to undergraduates. These authors made a number of conceptual distinctions which continue to shape modern sociology, including the sociology of youth.

One was the distinction between pre-modern and modern societies. Sociology was to be the discipline which studied modernity, focusing on issues such as the functional division of labour and its relationship to different forms of social organisation, the consequences of industrialisation and the emergence of class inequalities under capitalism, and the cultural changes associated with modernity, in particular the emergence of bureaucratic rationality as a means for organising the social world. While claiming to study the social as such, these narratives defined modernity as a process which took place in the burgeoning urban spaces within European nation states and which constituted sociology’s object of study. In one fell swoop, the rest of the world was defined in opposition to the characteristics which defined sociology’s object of study, forming the backdrop against which modernity was defined.

The distinction between pre-modern and modern societies also mapped on to a distinction between rural and urban places. Foundational sociological thinkers such as Durkheim, Tonnies and Marx all created theoretical distinctions between urban and rural places which were fundamental to their theories of social change. For Durkheim (1933), modernisation describes the movement from simple, homogeneous and static societies which offered a narrow range of identities to their members (mechanical solidarity) to complex, heterogeneous, rapidly changing societies (organic solidarity) with increasingly differentiated and individualised identities and experiences. Similarly, Tonnies’ distinction between gemeinschaft and geselleshhaft (1974) describes a movement from community-like social bonds held together by collective identities and expectations, to an impersonal and individualistic modernity. Marx and Engels (1970) describe the history of capitalism in terms of urbanisation, which they hold partly responsible for the alienation of modern identities. Durkheim’s distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, Tonnies’ distinction between community and society, and Marx’s distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies all describe modernisation as a process of urbanisation in which rural ways of living give way to an urban modernity. The rural and the urban, the pre-modern and the modern, are theoretical dichotomies that have shaped sociology into a discipline which excludes perspectives outside the metropolitan centres of the West.

Metrocentricity, Aspatiality and the Neglect of the Rural

In the sociology of youth, the lives of urban young people continue to be taken as emblematic of young people as a whole, erasing rurality, and space itself, from theory in the sociology of youth (Cuervo and Wyn, 2012). This unacknowledged metrocentricity, which continues into the theoretical perspectives driving contemporary youth studies, has led to a fundamental aspatiality in many areas of the sociology of youth at a time when geographical inequalities are deepening. This is perhaps best illustrated by examining the place of rural and regional young people in the geography of contemporary youth inequality.

One of the most significant priorities of the sociology of youth has been tracing the consequences of deindustrialisation and the movement from a manufacturing to a services economy on young people. Consequences of these changes, such as the fragmentation of the industrial class structure, the collapse of the youth labour market, and the increasing complexity of contemporary youth transitions, have been understood through theories of late modernity. These theories attribute these changes to (amongst other things) the accelerating liquidity of capital amidst an increasingly globalised, deregulated world economy. According to Giddens (1991), globalisation has also meant that contemporary identities are decoupled from stable moorings such as class or locality, and have become products of individualised reflexivity made possible by the transnational availability of cultural symbols. The outcome of these arguments is the vivid image of a homogeneous reflexive modernity in which identities are constructed without reference to the local.
This image has obscured inequalities between urban and rural young people that have deepened due to the very changes the theory describes. In Australia, many rural and regional places have historically been dependent on a narrow range of industries, typically manufacturing or agriculture. With the gradual disappearance of manufacturing work and the dominance of global agribusinesses over a shrinking collection of family farms, the structural foundations of many rural places have been reshaped. In some cases these places have reinvented themselves as tourism economies, turning rural towns into consumer goods for the urban middle class. However, in many cases manufacturing and agricultural work has been replaced with nothing at all, creating a complex network of geographical inequalities across the country. As opportunities for economic participation and cultural consumption become increasingly located in a narrow range of “global cities” (Sassen, 2012), one consequence of these geographical inequalities is a reshaping of rural young people’s relationship to urban spaces. The issue of mobility and youth outmigration from rural areas has become increasingly significant, and interacts with class relations in rural communities (Jones, 2004). Young people who wish to return must often draw on urban educational capital in order to build lives for themselves in their rural communities (Cuervo and Wyn, 2012), a process which describes complex flows of educational capital that transcend urban/rural divides. Rural places which develop tourism economies also present challenges to young people brought up in old working class cultures, creating forms of reflexivity that change class and gender relations in local communities (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moodey, 2006). Contemporary structural inequalities are profoundly spatial, and contribute a geographical dimension to educational inequalities, class relationships, and changing gendered identities (Weirenga, 2009).

The changing landscape of geographical inequalities faced by young people mean that narratives of a homogeneous reflexive modernity simple will not do. Neither will generalisations about movement from an industrial class structure to a post-industrial service economy, which excludes places that have shifted from reliance on agricultural economies to a more or less total absence of economic opportunity. And neither will the frequent elision or tokenistic mention of place, such as research projects situating themselves within ‘various geographical locations around Australia’, ‘Victoria’, or ‘areas representative’ of the state in which the study took place.

Here we want to argue that place is important and that failure to explicitly engage with the ‘space’, ‘place’ or ‘ecology’ within which young people are making their lives is akin to the error of mechanically applying pseudonyms in educational research in which ‘a particular school in a particular town or neighbourhood studied at a particular historical moment [provides for the school to] be treated as if it were a placeless, timeless, representative instance of school’ (Nespor, 2000). That is:

…place is not just a setting, backdrop, stage, or context for something else that becomes the focus of sociological attention, nor is it a proxy for demographic, structural, economic, or behavior variables…Everything that we study is emplaced; it happens somewhere and involves material stuff…place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game—a force with detectable and independent effects on social life. (Gieryn, 2000)

What is required is a thoroughly spatial youth sociology that is alive to the geographical dimensions of youth inequalities and the complex relationship between local and global processes that make up contemporary young people’s subjectivities. In this, our position goes beyond the call for greater attention to be given to young people in rural/non-urban/urban fringe/remote/isolated/village/periphery and other ecological locations, as well as concerns about decontextualisation – which inevitably mean that the life-chances and experiences of those inhabiting the urban, by default, speak for all. While these are important, they are steps on the road towards a more spatialised youth sociology that theorises the geographical dimensions of the biographical transitions and lived subjectivities of contemporary youth. As a heuristic, spatiality contributes another dimension to traditional analyses of young people, demonstrating the significance of issues like mobility and translocal cultural and economic flows. Spatial perspectives challenge the metrocentricity of contemporary youth sociology, alert us to new dimensions of existing theoretical concerns, and thus represent a pressing theoretical challenge to the sociology of youth.
References


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One of our goals for the sociology of youth thematic group is to engage with the growing interest and participation in digital sociology. Digital sociology is the exploration of the implications of digital technology for sociological practice. It is broad, and entails many different dimensions and practices. As Debra Lupton outlined in the October 2012 edition of Nexus, digital sociology includes:

- **Professional digital practice**
  
  Using digital media tools for professional purposes: to build networks, construct an e-profile, publicise and share research and instruct students.

- **Sociological analyses of digital media use**
  
  Researching the ways in which people's use of digital media configures their sense of selves, their embodiment and their social relations.

- **Digital data analysis**
  
  Using digital data for social research, either quantitative or qualitative.

- **Critical digital sociology**
  
  Undertaking reflexive and critical analysis of digital media, informed by social and cultural theory.

Digital sociology through professional digital practice, such as academic use of social media like twitter and through blogging, offers significant opportunities for public engagement and sharing of ideas both within and outside of the academy. This can be particularly useful for the sociology of youth as a way of linking with the numerous youth organisations in Australia that already have an established social media profile. Further, digital engagement offers a way to improve the public profile of sociology, as Debra Lupton suggested in response to the 2012 ERA results. Using social media such as twitter provides a great way of sharing ideas with each other and others interested in youth studies, whilst also contributing to our public profile. If you already use twitter, follow us at [https://twitter.com/YouthTASA](https://twitter.com/YouthTASA); or start an account and join the conversation!

Here is a list of other useful links and information about digital sociology and academic engagement with social media:

- [http://markcarrigan.net/2013/02/21/what-does-twitter-have-to-offer-academics/](http://markcarrigan.net/2013/02/21/what-does-twitter-have-to-offer-academics/)
- [http://digitalsociology.org.uk/?page_id=2](http://digitalsociology.org.uk/?page_id=2)
Youth Cultures, Belongings and Transitions: Bridging the Gap in Youth Research

21-23 of November 2012
Griffith University Southbank Campus

This international conference was co-convened by the Griffith Centre for Cultural Research and the TASA Sociology of Youth Thematic Group. The conference had its genesis a year earlier, at the end of the TASA 2011 conference dinner in Newcastle. Over three years the youth thematic group had grown into one of the larger thematic groupings within TASA and, while we had run a number of successful events, we had yet to take on the challenge of organising a conference. I suggested a theme of exploring ways of working across the two dominant approaches that shape youth sociology, the transitions and cultures perspectives that have traditionally remained two distinct traditions of research. The first traces patterns in transition to ‘adulthood’ and the second studies young people’s cultural practices. While the two approaches have developed along separate paths, with real engagement rare, the conditions appear right for increasing engagement and even convergence.

The theme, no doubt helped by the sunny Queensland location, garnered more interest than we imagined and we had close to 100 registered delegates for the three-day conference. This included many international visitors, coming from as far afield as Singapore, Estonia and Finland. Our keynote speakers Professor Andy Furlong from University of Glasgow UK, Associate Professor Anita Harris from Monash and Professor Robert Hollands from University of Newcastle UK set the pace for the conference. Andy, Anita, and Robert challenged us respectively to ask what youth means today, how we understand belonging and its political consequences and finally to better recognise all the work crossing youth-research traditions that already takes place. The various plenary sessions scheduled for the three days featured equally luminary presenters including Johanna Wyn, Rob White, Alan France, Pam Nilan, Ani Wierenga, and Dorothy Bottrell, as well and some up and comers in youth studies such as David Farrugia and Chris Driver.

Through the multiple topics addressed at the conference, including gender, global and local identities, the culture industries, creative education and the rise of digital technologies, the importance of working across the division of the cultural and transitions approach emerged as a common theme. As the conference presentations showed, for example, the cultural competencies acquired by young people through their engagement in particular youth practices are increasingly providing pathways into new types of adulthood, transcending leisure to shape other aspects of their biographical trajectory including paid employment, relationships, and parenthood.

The conference, I believe, has helped set the agenda for the sociology of youth for the coming years. As well as the significant administrative support provided by the Centre for Cultural Studies, particularly from Christina McKinley and our PhD volunteers, it was possible only due to a Thematic Group Support Scheme Grant from TASA.

Dan Woodman (Also on behalf of Andy Bennett, Christine Feldman and Steve Threadgold)

*A longer version of this conference report appeared in a previous edition of Nexus
Kathy Edwards (RMIT University) and Nathan Manning (University of Bradford) have recently made novel (and youth friendly) use of systematic review methods by applying them in a study of the efficacy of civic education for increasing political participation. Systematic review methods aim to bring the same level of transparency and rigour used in conducting primary research, to the task of reviewing existing research evidence. They are extensively used in health care and the shift to evidence-based practice, but their uptake in other fields, like youth studies, has been much slower, partly due to justifiable critiques of positivism and empiricism. However, the pair contend that such methods can have use value. They are currently working on another paper which will draw on sociological accounts of young people’s (dis)engagements with politics to help explain why civic education shows little effect on normative political behaviours. A further publication is planned to outline the potential uses and benefits of systematic review methods for youth studies.