

American Cinema and Youth: New Global Histories

Scholarship on American cinema and youth is dominated by examinations of Hollywood teen films that relate depictions of young Americans to social, psychological, and/or industrial currents running through the United States. Broadening our understandings of this important and complex media-audience relationship is both a salient and timely endeavor, not least because such fare has consistently occupied a preeminent position in audiovisual cultures across the globe, and because their numbers, loyalty, and supposed vulnerability have made young movie-watchers — American or otherwise — a point of interest for producers, marketers, politicians, watchdogs, and other claims-makers. The themed content of this English-language issue of *Iluminace* aims to do just that by spotlighting the transnational dimensions of this relationship, by foregrounding its transmedia dimensions, and by revising our understandings of well known topics and films. It is comprised of four original essays, which can be seen as answering such calls insofar as they respond to the broader impulses driving them, and two interviews with leading scholars in the field reflecting on this important aspect of global audiovisual culture.

The first of themed essays is a revisionist reception study in which Lisa M. Rabin reopens the casebook on a series of studies conducted in the 1930s into the implications of young people's consumption of motion pictures in New York City. Researchers initially proposed these youths' testimonies were evidence of their pathological relationships to the movies. However, Rabin suggests these data actually reveal a more nuanced picture, one in which movie-going and content in fact helped Italian and Puerto Rican youths negotiate personal identity and human interactions in this economically and socially challenging environment.

If Rabin's essay considers transnational dimensions of studies of American cinema and youth while maintaining a focus on the United States, the second essay provides a case-study of the cross border flow of a talismanic embodiment of American cinema and youth: the starlet. In her contribution, Šárka Gmíterková examines how images of young Hollywood actresses were taken up in two key media sectors of 1930s Czechoslovakia. The country's leading film magazine, she argues, utilized these alluring and otherworldly fig-

ures as a means of imagining local equivalents and of securing female readers on the promise that they too could break into the movies. Moreover, a major film production company saw in Hollywood starlets a potentially replicable model of talent acquisition and development that would help increase the appeal of its output; a fleeting practice which ultimately proved to be rather ill-suited to the dynamics of this small national market.

The third essay, co-written by Jindřiška Bláhová and myself, also approaches the relationships between American cinema, youth, and Czechoslovakia, albeit from a quite different perspective to that of the previous contribution. We consider the different ways this nation's communist-controlled film company appropriated youth-oriented American imports in the 1970s and 1980s, and framed them for local audiences in a manner derived from changing cultural policies. We try to make the case that these films were used in four historically situated ways: to blame student unrest on lax parenting, to demonize American capitalist democracy, to undermine subversive indigenous youth subcultures, and to suggest the liberalization of the cultural sphere. In so doing, this essay — not unlike Gmitterková's — illustrates that some overseas elites embraced youth-oriented dimensions of American cinema rather than only voicing concerns about them.

Whereas the movement of film and film-related phenomena across different texts and channels is central to the three preceding contributions, transmediality is the principal concern of the fourth and final essay. Valerie Wee's contribution brings the historical perspective of this issue very much up to date with an examination of the handling of the GLEE franchise, especially the 2011 spinoff GLEE THE 3D CONCERT MOVIE. Wee considers the industrial dynamics and moral implications of industry stakeholders encouraging young fans to contribute their creative labor to the production, content, and promotion of this property through various online activities marshaled around a competition inviting fans to pronounce themselves the world's "biggest GLEEK". In so doing, she highlights a media conglomerate's efforts to capitalize on the Gen-Z consumer-producer or "produser".

These four themed essays are followed by the aforementioned interviews I conducted with two world leading authorities on American cinema and youth.

It is at this point that I would like to stress that the point of this issue is not to dismiss or downplay the type of work highlighted in the opening paragraph: much of it still needs to be done after all. Rather, it is to suggest that new work in this vein might be complemented with additional approaches which develop our insights into American cinema and youth. Accordingly, the first of the interviews was conducted with a scholar whose work in this vein is routinely cited to enable others — including myself, I should make clear — to spotlight their intended contributions to the field: Timothy Shary. Shary considers the processes of writing and subsequently revising and updating his seminal study of American youth-centered films of the late twenty first century, *Generation Multiplex*, so as to respond to subsequent developments in this sphere of cultural production and in scholarship examining it.

The themed content of this issue concludes with an interview I conducted with Catherine Driscoll. As well as providing insights into her longstanding research into the topic, Driscoll posits in some detail the value of work which approaches American youth cinema as an international and a multimedia phenomenon; scholarship considering the

transnational dimensions of such fare and its status as a node in the networks of objects and texts traversing audiovisual cultures past, present, and future.

With inward-looking studies of American cinema and youth far from exhaustive, and with the international and transmedia dimensions of this topic only just being systematically explored, much work still needs to be done on this most important of media-audience relationships. While its limited scope means a volume such as this can only make the most fleeting of gestures towards broadening our understanding of the topic, it does so in the hope of inspiring other scholars to work — or to continue working — along similar lines.

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