



Phenomenology of Youth Cultures and Globalization: Lifeworlds and Surplus Meaning in Changing Times. Edited by Stuart R. Poyntz & Jacqueline Kennelly. New York: Routledge, 2018. 294 pp. ISBN: 9780415720700.

Youth research has long revolved around postmodern interpretations of young people's experiences; the overwhelming focus of youth studies has been identity formation, individualization, and the various ways young people construct their lives separately from the structures and histories that shape them. Largely, the driving question of youth research is: How do young people make sense of their (postmodern) lives? Throughout *Phenomenology of Youth Cultures and Globalization*, editors Stuart Poyntz and Jacqueline Kennelly take a different perspective as they aim to “resuscitate and recuperate phenomenology as a robust empirical, theoretical and methodological approach to youth cultures” (p. 1). The editors assert that phenomenology has informed many empirical approaches to youth cultures, but its role has not been acknowledged by the larger field, especially since postmodernism has been the primary lens through which youth studies scholars view the worlds they inquire about. Hence, this edited collection draws from phenomenology in order to explore the specific role of globalization in young people's lives, especially those living in various regions and under diverse conditions around the world. In an attempt to re-orient youth research away from postmodernism, Poyntz and Kennelly rely on scholars such as Heidegger, Arendt, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricoeur to make a clear and logical case that many experiences in life are universal, and individuality can be reduced to a description and a phenomenon of human experience. In investigating collective experiences of young people globally, the book reveals the situations, tensions, and opportunities that give contour to youth experience.

The book is divided into three main sections: 1) “Intersubjectivity: Oneself and Another”; 2) “Experience and Meaning-Making: Oneself and the World”; and 3) “Embodiment and Temporality: Oneself and Time”. The first section consists of authors who recognize Hannah Arendt's “Web of Relations,” which outlines how humans are “bound together across a shared horizon of social life” (p. 3). These chapters articulate how subject and world inform each other, absolutely. This concept is fundamental to the main theme of the book, which is that globalization is one of the central “philosophemes” of our era, explaining the dynamics of human experiences today. To explain globalization's impact on young people's social networks, the authors in this section take a phenomenological approach, concerned with the ways subjects navigate the world through an array of symbolic articulations. They attempt to answer the question: How is globalization unfolding among young people living in various regions and under various conditions around the world?

The authors in the second section utilize a phenomenological emphasis on the connections between “I” and “the other” as their central theoretical approach. Thus they use *inter-relationality* as a way to understand how young people produce knowl-

edge with the outside world. For example, in Chapter 6, “(Re)scripting Barbie,” Naghmeh Nouri Esfahani and Victoria Carrington view and attend closely to “the ways in which [Barbie] influences the co-construction of the worlds of young girls” (p. 119) and unpack the interaction between artefacts and users. They found that the young girl in question, Nava, read and used embedded scripts of the “global fashion doll” while at the same time “agentively re-inscripting the dolls” (p. 130). The result of this research explains the phenomenological nature of playing. At the same time, Nava’s behaviour becomes the explanation for the entire phenomenon of Barbie playing. Using phenomenology as a qualitative methodology, Esfahani, Carrington, and others in this volume should be critiqued for their tendency to take vague situations as they appear to their participants and create relationships between themes and people. It would be much more useful to interact with a larger group of Barbie players and use more information to acknowledge differences and similarities between Barbie players across different regions.

The final section prioritizes *embodiment* as a central theme of phenomenological investigations. The chapters in this section build off Merleau-Ponty’s “embodied phenomenology,” where he notes that we are caught up in the world and “we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 6). In particular, Aaron Klaassen’s chapter references Merleau-Ponty’s fascination with how the self and the world join together through one’s perception. He uses aspects of subcultural theory developed in the Birmingham School, combined with Merleau-Ponty’s theories, and takes seriously the role of embodied experiences of punk bands, which contribute to the way punk members define themselves as part of the subculture. He considers punk bands, as well as the audience members and fans, as “part and parcel of the political, cultural and social configuration of this thing we call ‘punk’” (p. 16). So, in order to view punk membership phenomenologically, Klaassen thinks about authenticity as a phenomenon and thus works to re-understand subcultures as historical in nature.

In thinking about the goal of the book, phenomenology is advantageous in this project because it permits analyses that focus on meaning-making processes within the context of much larger historical frames. It is clear that, for the most part, the authors achieve their desire to connect human activity to larger structures of history that have a direct effect on contemporary social life. The phenomenologists do this by suspending their personal biases and assumptions to simply describe what a phenomenon essentially is (known to phenomenologists as “*Epoché*”). Through observation and interviews, the goal becomes to *describe* core commonalities and structures of experience (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). What results here is an interesting perspective on youth identity that does not erase history in favour of uniqueness, but instead emphasizes the roles of history and collectivism, which surely have an impact on world-making.

Phenomenology also has some inherent challenges that are simply not addressed in the book. Clearly, the authors believe experiences present people as entangled with the objects around them. At the same time, this can mean that when people have access to different objects and surroundings, their experiences change. So the approach taken here does not account for the ways that collective experiences are understood

in the absence of a perceived object. One long-standing critique of this approach is that it is very difficult to deduce universal phenomena from small sample sizes, and throughout the book, the authors conclude social trends based on the behaviours of a few. Poyntz and Kennelly state that globalization is uniting young people across various regions; however, this is hard to prove, especially when much of the research is restricted to relatively small samples. Therefore, understanding the macro nature of globalization is extremely difficult.

Overall, the book illustrates that phenomenology can contribute to deeper understandings by exposing taken-for-granted assumptions of knowing and acting. The behaviours revealed in *Phenomenology of Youth Cultures and Globalization* might not be new revelations necessarily, but they are important to note in order to understand that the truth of events is subjective and knowable only through embodied perception, moving through space and time in specific ways. This understanding is imperative for emerging youth studies scholars who are passionate about uncovering young people's behaviours in the current milieu.

References

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