

***Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity.* Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson, eds. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012. Pp. 196. \$99.95 (hardcover) \$34.95 (paperback) \$27.99 (electronic).**

**Reviewed by: Alison N. Novak, Drexel University (ann37@drexel.edu)**

© 2014 ALISON NOVAK

*AGE, CULTURE, HUMANITIES* 1 (2014), PUBLISHED BY THE ATHENAEUM PRESS AT COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

Andy Bennett and Paul Hodkinson's *Ageing and Youth Cultures: Music, Style and Identity* should be a part of any subcultural or age scholar's library. The editors bring together a diverse range of studies to explore what happens to participants of "youth cultures"—specifically, musical subcultures associated with young people—as they become older. Bennett and Hodkinson argue that youth cultures such as punks, clubbers, goths, riot grrls, soulies, and break-dancers, whose members generally enter the culture at a young age (in the teenage years) and identify with the group to promote a lifestyle counter to cultural norms, are growing increasingly multi-generational, thereby changing the identity of individual participants as well as of the group as a whole. Bennett and Hodkinson write, "Critical here is an understanding of how the identities and lifestyles constructed by 'post-youth' individuals may often need to include the accommodation of new demands" (4). In this edited volume, adult participants in these youth cultures are engaged in an effort to understand their role and status within these communities, providing an insider's view to each culture.

The first two parts of the four-section book question the physical element of the age identity of youth-cultural participants. Here, the aging body becomes a focus for researchers who study what it means for the individual to dress in a way that is inconsistent with adult cultural dress norms. An overarching theme of these chapters is the changing notion of what older participants view as the purpose of their involvement in youth cultures. For example, Ross Haenfler finds that, "for most older participants, straight edge becomes less of an embodied stylistic display and more of a personal philosophy or expression of lifestyle politics" (10). Most participants continue to engage in the youth culture well into their fifties (120). However, many members tone down their appearance through changes in dress and piercings in an effort to adapt to the demands and pressures of adulthood, parenthood, and their careers.

Further, members continue to attend music festivals, concerts, and expositions, but change their roles and even physical locations at these cultural meetings. Bill Tsitsos's chapter, titled "Slamdancing, Ageing and Belonging," proposes that as members of the slamdancing subculture age, their willingness to mosh or slamdance lessens as "age-related physical limitations" affect dancing ability and injury recovery time (73). Members still attend musical expositions, but instead stand further from the front of the stage and out of the mosh pit.

The third section investigates the changes made by aging group members as they attempt to grapple with the often contentious identities of youth versus adult cultural participant. As members age, they take on adult responsibilities such as parenting and professional careers. Andy Bennett argues in his chapter, "Dance Parties, Lifestyle and Strategies for Ageing," that rather than "giving up" the scene, participants redefine what

it means to be a member of the group and integrate the practices into their adult identities (109). For example, Bennett writes, “for many the attraction of the dance party has never faded, resulting in myriad strategies among ageing individuals to remain active in particular scenes” (95). The analysis of these strategies is a key strength of the volume, because they can be used as a point of comparison between youth cultures and other identity categories, such as race, religion, and sexuality.

The final section investigates the changing practices of entire aging communities. In his study of a goth festival that included older participants, Hodkinson concludes that the entire group became more accepting of family responsibilities and began to invite families and their small children to music venues and parties. Kristen Schilt and Danielle Giffort’s investigation of riot grrls and punks, in their chapter titled “‘Strong Riot Women’ and the Continuity of Feminist Subcultural Participation,” demonstrates that long-established communities often take on a mentorship role by guiding the practices of new members or new groups (151). Older communities can act as cultural liaisons and guardians for countercultural practices, sometimes assuming a gatekeeping role to ensure that new youth cultural movements maintain the same values as older movements.

Perhaps most notably, Ross Haenfler’s chapter, titled “‘More than the Xs on my Hands’: Older Straight Edgers and the Meaning of Style,” offers readers another critique of the notion of youth culture. Ever since the emergence of their culture in the 1980s, straight edgers have often displayed their membership through tattooing Xs on their body. What this chapter importantly shows is the notion of “aging out” of youth cultures: members join these groups as teenagers and may choose to leave the group in their adulthood, but markers of former membership remain, such as tattoos. Haenfler found (like other studies offered in the book) that most adult members shed some aspects of their counter-culture look, such as covering up tattoos, although rarely do they leave the cultures entirely. Haenfler questions the purpose of the tattoos, which is often to depict commitment to and membership in the straight edge community. Haenfler’s study asks older members what their tattoos mean to them now that they have aged. He ends by asking the reader whether these tattoos hold the same membership meaning if they remain on older individuals who no longer associate with that scene.

It is clear that the contributors care deeply about the youth cultures they interrogate. Because the authors are also members of the groups they study, their use of language, style, and insider knowledge adds credibility to their findings. This most likely could not be achieved by an outsider, considering the gatekeeping practices that many of these groups employ. The access granted to the author-members enables them to study the groups interpretively, through interviews, ethnography, and deep readings of media texts. This group of researchers avoids traditional cause-and-effect models and quantitative research in an effort to look for norms, values, rules, and roles only understood through interacting with members of the various youth cultures.

Missing from the book are several important topics worth considering when investigating the relationship between youth cultures and aging communities. For example, the

book lacks a reflection on the ways youth cultures are integrating technology into their daily practices, such as the use of social media in the punk community. Further, while many authors suggest that it is the media who repeatedly construct these groups as being primarily youth oriented, there is little consideration of how these mediated constructions influence older members' feelings of belonging. While this collection focuses on youth-culture groups oriented around music, this investigation could easily be expanded to study other youth cultures oriented around politics, gaming, or sports. For example, consider the primarily young membership of Occupy Wall Street. Similar to the groups studied here, non-music youth cultures often include older adults who complicate the idea of what it means to be a member. A clearer explanation of what makes musical youth cultures important or different would help highlight the significance of the work.

Also missing from the volume is a consideration of the protest nature of many of these youth cultures. Because these groups are counter-cultural, they offer members an alternative mode of being and behaving. In *Youth in Revolt*, Henry A. Giroux defines behaviors and memberships within these groups as acts of protest (against government, popular culture, and mainstream norms), and argues it is critically important that we study these acts to understand the new nature and meaning of "youth" in the twenty-first century. It would be helpful if this volume explored the various cultures in the context of protest as a means to illuminate the relationships among youth, adults, and culture.

Despite these oversights, this edited volume has many implications for the work of age and humanities scholars. First, it provides a thorough and detailed investigation of youth cultures, conceptualizing the category to include members of various age groups. This is helpful because it serves as a theoretical background for the study of membership. Second, through twelve case studies of various musical and stylistic cultures, it provides ample evidence of the changing position of age in contemporary society. Researchers interested in exploring the most popular musical youth cultures will find this volume a good resource. By integrating age studies and the study of musical counter-cultures, Bennett and Hodkinson's collection offers a much-needed perspective in age scholarship.

#### WORK CITED

Giroux, Henry A. *Youth in Revolt: Reclaiming a Democratic Future*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013.

---

***Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain*. Kay Heath. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009. Pp. xii + 247. \$75.00 (hardcover) \$24.95 (paperback and electronic).**

**Reviewed by Devoney Looser, Arizona State University (devoney.looser@asu.edu)**

© 2014 DEVONEY LOOSER

*AGE, CULTURE, HUMANITIES* 1 (2014), PUBLISHED BY THE ATHENAEUM PRESS AT COASTAL CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

There is general agreement that "middle age" has thus far been the most neglected life stage in aging studies scholarship. This is particularly the case in histories of aging. What