Beyond the Pink:
(Post) Youth Iconography in Cinema

Christina Lee

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This thesis is presented for the degree of
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I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Christina LEE Hsiao Ping
Publications and Conference Presentations

Refereed Publications

Christina Lee. “Party people in the house(s): The hobos of history” in *Liverpool of the South Seas: Perth and Its Popular Music*. Tara Brabazon (ed.) Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2005. pp. 43-52. This chapter was written in association with the research on rave culture, as featured in Chapter Six.

Christina Lee. “Let me entertain you” in *TTS Australia: Critical Reader*. Bec Dean (ed.) Northbridge: PICA, 2005. pp. 17-18. This piece was written in association with the research on nationalism and xenophobia, as featured in Chapter Seven.

Christina Lee. “Lock and load(up): The action body in *The Matrix*, *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, forthcoming 2005. This journal article was written in association with the research on simulacra and masculinity, as featured in Chapter Two and Chapter Seven.

Conference Presentations

“Lock and Load(up): The Action Body in *The Matrix*. *Alchemies: Community Exchanges*. 7th Annual Humanities Graduate Research Conference. Curtin University of Technology: Bentley, Australia. 6-7 November, 2003. This conference presentation was derived from research on the simulacra and the action hardbody as presented in Chapter Two and Chapter Seven.

“Taking Out the Trash: Remembering Molly Ringwald”. *Culture Incorporated: Bodies, Technologies, Habitats*. Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Annual Conference. Christchurch Arts Centre: Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand. 6-8 December, 2003. This conference presentation was derived from Chapter Three.

“Donnie Darkest: Master of the Universe?”. *Beyond the Frame: Transcending Borders in Cinema*. Annual Graduate Student Conference. San Francisco State University: San Francisco, United States of America. 14-16 October, 2004. This conference presentation was derived from Chapter Seven.

“You Must Remember This: The Teen Time Traveller”. *Everyday Transformations: The Twenty-First Century Quotidian*. Cultural Studies Association of Australasia Annual Conference. Murdoch University: Murdoch, Australia. 9-11 December, 2004. This was a revised version of the conference paper presented at San Francisco State University.
Abstract

*Beyond the Pink: (Post) Youth Iconography in Cinema* is a project in cultural time travel. It cuts up linear cinematic narratives to develop a hop-scotched history of youth, Generation X and (post) youth culture. I focus upon the pleasures, pedagogies and (un)popular politics of a filmic genre that continues to be dismissed as unworthy of intellectual debate. Accelerated culture and the discourse of celebrity have blurred the crisp divisions between fine art and crude commodity, the meaningful and meaningless, and real and fictive, unsettling the binary logic that assigns importance to certain texts and not others. This research project prises open that awkward space between representation and experience.

Analysts require methods and structures through which to manage historical change and textual movement. Through cinema, macro-politics of identity emerge from the micro-politics of the narrative. Prom politics and mallrat musings become imbued with social significance that speak in the literacies available to youth. It grants the ephemerality and liminality of an experience a tactile trace. I select moments of experience for Generation X youth and specific icons – Happy Harry Hardon, Molly Ringwald, the Spice Girls, the Bitch, the invisible raver, teen time travellers Marty McFly and Donnie Darko, and the slacker – to reveal the archetypes and ideologies that punctuate the cinematic landscape. The tracked figures do not configure a smooth historical arc. It is in the rifts and conflicts of diverse narratives and subjectivities where attention is focused.
This research imperative necessitates the presentation of a series of essays arranged in a tripartite framework. The first section proposes theoretical paradigms for a tethered analysis of filmic texts and Generation X. The second segment explores sites of struggle in public spaces and time. The final section leaves the landscape of post-Generation X to forge the relationship between history, power and youth identity. I particularly focus on the iconography, ideologies and imaginings of young women to lead the discussion of the shifts in the experience and representations of youth. By reinserting women into studies of film, it is imperative to stress that this is not a dissertation in, and of, women’s cinema. Rather, it serves as an historical corrective to the filmic database.

The existing literature on youth cinema is disappointing and narrow in its trajectories. Timothy Shary’s *Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema* and Jon Lewis’ *The Road to Romance and Ruin: Teen Films and Youth Culture* exemplify the difficulties of capturing the complexities of individual films when they are collated in artificial and stifling categories. At one end of the analytical spectrum is the critique that comes with the caveat of ‘it’s just another teen movie’. Jonathon Bernstein’s monograph *Pretty in Pink: The Golden Age of Teenage Movies* is one such example which derails into acerbic diatribes and intellectual dismissal. *The Cinema of Generation X: A Critical Study* by Peter Hanson is a more successful project that is interested in the influences that inform a community of filmmakers than arriving at a catalogue of generic themes and narratives. There is an emphasis on the synergy between text, producer and readership.
I continue this relationship explored by Hanson, but further accent the politics of film. The original contribution to knowledge offered by this doctoral thesis is a detailed study of (post) youth popular culture, building into a model for Generation X cinema, activating the interdisciplinary perspectives from film and cultural studies. With its adaptability into diverse media forms, cultural studies paradigms allow navigation through the expansive landscape of popular culture. It traverses beyond simple textual analyses to consider a text’s cultural currency. As an important carrier of meaning and sensory memories, cinema allows for alternative accounts that are denied in authorised history. As a unique form with its own visual literacy, screen theory is needed to refine observations. This unique melding of screen and cultural studies underscores the convergent relationship between text, readership, production and politics.

This doctoral thesis activates concepts and methods of generationalism, nationalism, social history and cultural practice. There is a dialogue between the chapters that crosses over text and time. The 1980s of Molly Ringwald shadows the dystopia of *Donnie Darko*. The celebrity status of the Spice Girls clashes with the frustrated invisibility of the female raver. Douglas Coupland’s vision of Generation X in 1991 has evolved into Richard Linklater’s documentation of post-youth in the new millenium. Leaping between decades through time travel in cinema, I argue that the nostalgic past and projections for the future evoke the preoccupations and anxieties of the present.
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# Table of Contents

Declaration i

Publications and Conference Presentations ii

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements vi

Table of Contents vii

Introduction 1

1 *The Subcultural Style of Generation X*
   Elastic Youth: Redefining the Experience 25
   27

2 *Here’s Looking At You, Kid*
   Outlaws at the Border: The Politics of Youth Cinema 62
   64

3 *Taking Out the Trash, A Stroll Down (Popular) Memory Lane*
   Going Nowhere? Popular Memory and Youth Cinema 92
   94

4 *Declaration of Independence*
   Girl Power: The Politics of Pop 131
   133

5 *Violent Femmes*
   The Beauty in the Bitch: Angry Girls in Teen Cinema 169
   171

6 *Behind the Strobes and Smoke*
   Club Casualties: Go-Go(ing) Girls of Rave 201
   202

7 *Masters of the Temporal Universe*
   Boys to Men and Back Again: The Historian and the Time Traveller 234
   236

8 *Thanks For the Good Times, Where to Now?*
   Another Sunrise, Another Sunset: Beyond Generation X 276
   278

Conclusion 307

Bibliography 325

Audio-Visual Sources 359