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Twenty years ago the publication of *Cool Places* (Skelton and Valentine 1998) created visibility for emerging research on geographies of youth. In a promising beginning it brought together the work of early career researchers whose focus was on young people (e.g. Tim Lucas, Luke Deforges) with interdisciplinary youth researchers from the social sciences who were beginning to think about space/spatiality (e.g. Shane Blackman, Paul Watt, Kevin Stenson). At the same time it stimulated other geographers to apply their wider thinking to the specificity of the condition of youth (e.g. Doreen Massey, Fiona Smith etc.). In the two decades that have followed, pockets of excellence work have appeared, ambivalently located either within the sub-disciplinary field of children and young people's geographies, or within mainstream adultist geography. Yet geographical work on youth has not developed the same coalescence of capacity as 'Children's Geographies'. I suggest that it has failed to mature as a sub-disciplinary field in its own right for several reasons.

The ambiguity of the category 'youth' – defined in multiple and varying ways between the categories of childhood and adulthood over both time and space (see James 1990, Sibley 1995, Skelton and Valentine 1998) -- means it readily dissolves either into the more strongly demarcated field of Children's Geographies or into mainstream 'adult' topics for example education, mobility or wider studies of production and reproduction in the Global South. In the absence of subsequent collections of youth geographies or the creation of a more clearly bounded field of scholarship, research about young people's lives has lost visibility and distinctiveness.

This contrasts with the way that the field of Children's Geographies emerged. It was given impetus by engagement with, and cross-fertilisation from, Social Studies of Childhood (James and Prout 1990). Here, the theorisation of childhood – exploring its historical, social, political and cultural dimensions – helped to demonstrate the importance of this concept and actuality to core social science and policy debates about social identities, moralities, the state, welfare and public space (James et al 1998). This translated into an empirical focus on children as agents in their own lives rather than 'adult becomings' (Qvotrup 1994) which contributed to opening up a rich vein of ethnographic studies within Geography devoted to understanding and giving voice to children's experiences playing, living, and learning (Holloway and Valentine 2000a). A 'spatial turn' within sociological studies stimulated interest in geographical work on the spatialities of childhood which enhanced its recognition beyond the discipline's boundaries.

This interdisciplinary relationship was facilitated by funding from the UK Economic and Social Research Council for a programme of research on *Children 5 to 16* which brought together leading scholars from across the social sciences and had a strong international component in Europe and the Global South. Not only did this support a new body of empirical research about children's lifeworlds, but it also provided funding for international conferences and public engagement and policy workshops, which in turn led to the production of journal special issues and the proliferation of research monographs, edited collections, and academic papers. This external visibility and recognition produced new respect for, and acknowledgement of, children's geographies within the discipline which was cemented by its gradual appearance in undergraduate curricula and the emergence of a cohort of Ph.D. students which secured its sustainability as a sub-disciplinary field. Critical mass was perhaps achieved when the journal *Children's Geography* was launched in 2003 with a strong international emphasis. Although focused on geographical issues and spatial concepts, the journal welcomed multi and interdisciplinary submissions, and established an innovative forum for policy makers and practitioners. The strong founding theoretical approach derived from the social studies of childhood, as well as close-knit transdisciplinary social networks, have contributed

to the journal achieving a high impact factor compared with mainstream geographical journals which have more diffuse foci and diverse intellectual traditions. In this way, the journal's success has further increased the status and momentum of the field both within, and beyond, the porous boundaries of the discipline.

Youth Geographies has struggled however to define its own identity separate from the field of Children's Geographies within which it is often subsumed, with the consequence that the distinctive experiences of teenagers and young people are often overlooked or marginalised (Valentine 2003, Weller 2006, Vanderbeck 2007, Evans 2008). Indeed, youth geographers have become largely fixated on definitions of youth, debating and contesting whether youth is an identifiable group determined by a particular biological age range, or a performative category which signifies a particular way of being. In doing so, researchers have underscored the importance of spatial and temporal variations in the use and meanings of these terms, and the dangers of an assumed homogeneity of experience (Skelton 2002, Valentine and Skelton 2003a, Weller 2006, Evans 2008, Jeffrey 2010).

Whereas early work on Children's Geographies had a positive focus on uncovering young children's agency, often through play and participatory methods, the general construction of youth as 'problematic' meant that agency in the context of youth geographies was encountered through the more negative lens of debates about young people's rights and responsibilities. This was most evident in highly politicised discourses about gangs, drugs, alcohol, graffiti, street violence and other forms of urban transgression in which young people were frequently positioned as inherently irresponsible or the product of poor parenting, often with reference to other markers of difference such as class, race and religion (Aitken 2001, Collins and Kearns 2001, McDowell 2006, Ruddick 2006, Hopkins 2007, Nayak 2010).

While the ESRC also funded a research programme about young people's lives titled '*Youth, Citizenship & Social Change*', this was not as effective at creating an interdisciplinary academic

community around its agenda as the *Children 5 to 16* Programme. The contributory projects were relatively diffuse in their theoretical and methodological approaches. Rather than developing its own framework for thinking about young people's experiences, work from this programme drew heavily on mainstream social theories of individualisation to interrogate the changing nature of transitions from childhood to adulthood (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002). The argument that as industrial society has been replaced by a new modernity the old predictable social order and its authorities have been challenged such that changed individuals now have more opportunities to choose between a wider range of different identities, lifestyles, and social ties, resonated with youth researchers working in Western European and North American contexts (Valentine and Skelton 2003b). Yet, this way of thinking proved much less applicable in other global contexts (e.g. Hörschelmann and Schäfer 2005, Tomanoviç and Ignjatoviç 2006, Nilan 2008). Rather over time even within Anglo American geography there was a move away from a focus on youth transitions towards an emphasis on the value of taking an intergenerational approach (Vanderbeck 2007) and of thinking about youth within the wider framing of geographies of age (Hopkins and Pain 2007) or geographies of family life (Valentine and Hughes 2012).

Instead in the last few years there has been a shift in the axis of youth geographies. Young people's political frustrations have exploded across the streets of North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Europe in what Rodenbeck (2011) termed a 'volcano of rage'. The internet generation has mobilised across national boundaries to co-ordinate protests and to share ideas and tactics, creating in the process a new political language and capacity to act (Jeffrey 2011).

Indeed, some commentators have drawn on the sociologist Mannheim's (1952) seminal argument about the relationship between the formation of generations and social change to attempt to understand what has been called a youthquake. Mannheim (1952) argued that people who share a particular significant experience (e.g. major social upheavals such as the great depression, a war, or

a period of rapid social change) develop a shared sense of social or political consciousness and vision of the world. In this vein it has been argued that the global financial crisis in the late 2000s - attributed to the mismanagement of assets/resources by the baby boomer generation at all scales from family to national/global – means that the current younger and future generations will not be able to accumulate and consume in the same way. As a consequence it is argued these generations are developing distinctive attitudes and values including stronger pro-environmental values and a commitment to tackling global challenges of sustainability (e.g. Collins and Hitchings 2012) as well as a concern with the impact of multiple forms of intergenerational inequality both within and between nations (Diprose et al. 2017, Willetts 2010). It is a potential rise in generational consciousness which is also coinciding with a gradual shift in global power with the emergence of the BRIC economies of the global south characterised by their youthful populations.

These global social trends suggest that youth geographies, by shifting its focus from a preoccupation with boundaries, towards understanding contemporary structural problems as generational inequalities and giving a voice to the agency of young people, might have an important contribution to make to the wider discipline and the opportunity to gain more recognition for its impact as a consequence.

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