



CONSUMPTION AND PUBLIC LIFE



AESTHETICO-CULTURAL COSMOPOLITANISM AND FRENCH YOUTH

The Taste of the World

VINCENZO CICHELLI
AND SYLVIE OCTOBRE



Consumption and Public Life

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Foreword

Francis Scott Fitzgerald once noted that the marvellous thing about being young is that it is just “like having a big plate of candy.” For those young people in Europe who are fortunate enough to live in relatively settled and peaceful social conditions, the world is open to them in ways that their predecessors could hardly have dreamed of. From cheap flights offering access to a wide range of interesting and exciting places, to the Erasmus scheme allowing students to study across the length and breadth of the EU, to the ever-expanding cultural vistas opened-up by TV, film, books, magazines, websites, blogs, and other social media, young people today have a vast array of windows upon the world around them to gaze through as they may wish.

For the intellectually curious and the experientially adventurous, there has probably never before existed in human history more opportunities—both more direct, and more indirect and mediated—to explore the planet and encounter the multitudinous cultures and forms of Otherness which it plays host to. Mass media and electronic communication systems, in particular, can open up vast horizons and allow exploration of the unfamiliar and far away. The world can appear as a giant smorgasbord of fascinating things to taste and experiment with. Never has the big plate of candy gestured towards by Fitzgerald seemed so capacious and so accessible to so many. The manifold varieties of life across the world are opened up to youthful cosmopolitans, whose tastes and dispositions are, in multiple ways, increasingly cosmopolitan and affected by wider cosmopolitizing tendencies—even if many or most young people would not necessarily use such terminology to describe themselves.

And yet, at the same time, such young people live within a European environment that is fraught in many ways—from economic crises and the austerity policies of neoliberalism, to mass youth unemployment in many countries, to controversies over mass migration threatening the borders of so-called “Fortress Europe,” and to the resurgence of the Far Right, which is picking up support from the dispossessed and the so-called “losers” of contemporary globalization processes. Across the continent, young people face a series of challenges and struggles deriving from, and contributing to, the anti-cosmopolitan and de-cosmopolitizing tendencies of our time.

This book provides us with a vast amount of information about young people's cosmopolitan (and non- and anti-cosmopolitan) experiences, thoughts, dispositions, and practices in France today—and by extension, in other parts of Europe and other parts of the advanced post-industrial, capitalist world too. Octobre and Cicchelli have engaged in a massive amount of work—both empirical, methodological, and theoretical—to bring to light the subtleties, nuances and often little understood and subterranean features of how young people both relate to, and help to create, forms of cosmopolitan taste and practice. The book is sociology at its best—methodologically rigorous and multivalent; attuned to the complexities of experience; acute in its theoretically inspired probing of the data; and highly attuned to the implications of what the authors have found is at work across the youth cohorts of France at the present time.

Undoubtedly, the book is a major contribution to the sociological and interdisciplinary study of the following domains—youth, culture, consumption, media, and everyday life. Indeed, one of its most positive features is how it both blends together these different scholarly domains, and also contains important conclusions that speak to them all at once. It is simultaneously a major contribution to the sociology (and anthropology) of “really existing” cosmopolitanism, or of “cosmopolitanisms” in the plural. It follows in the line of, and markedly extends, a stream of scholarly work which, over the last decade and more, has probed how cosmopolitan tendencies, and their countervailing opposites, actually “work” in everyday settings among “ordinary” people. The large-scale and systematic investigation of these researchers has yielded both micro-level experiential insights as well as more macro-level patterns and trajectories affecting French social life taken as a whole. In this sense, the book amply fulfils the promise of sociology to be the science of both individual and group experience on the one hand, and of social structural factors on the other.

But even more than that, the research contained in this book works as a crucial contribution to political sociology and the comprehension of politics in Europe at this strikingly odd juncture in history. The findings most immediately concern the different sorts of cosmopolitanism (and its others) which exist among French young people, but they have much broader resonance too. One

simply cannot understand politics today without understanding the interplay between youth, cosmopolitanisms, and anti-cosmopolitanisms.

This point is obviously true in the French case. The book allows us to comprehend more deeply than hitherto the politics of hope and despair that underpin and drive the popularity of the Front National in some places and among some demographics, and also, the visceral loathing by other groups of Marine Le Pen and all the anti-cosmopolitan orientations she stands for and represents. Likewise, the surge of support for President Macron and the *République En Marche* movement can only be understood in light of certain kinds of cosmopolitan idealism held by younger supporters of a political movement that is itself very young. Enthusiasm amongst those in their teens and twenties for a figure like Jean-Luc Mélenchon obviously echoes similar support for (equally elderly—a notable factor in itself) political candidates like Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the US. These older men seem to function as cosmopolitan moral beacons for many young people in a political world otherwise widely perceived to be populated by reactionary, nationalistic, xenophobic villains.

The categories encompassing different sorts of youth cosmopolitan and cosmopolitanism which Octobre and Cicchelli have created out of their data, in order to make sense of it, are indeed eminently exportable to other national contexts. The obvious case to which the categories should be applied is to the Brexit-ing UK, where the youth vote in the 2016 EU referendum was overwhelmingly in favour of remaining in the EU, while older voters across the various social classes tended to opt for a vision of the country rooted in the myths of past imperial and martial glories. While the UK situation is not quite reducible to a simple divide between cosmopolitan youth and the anti-cosmopolitan elderly, nonetheless that broad formulation generally holds true. But we will only really understand the different tendencies at work within British youth—both those for the EU, and those against it, and those who were seemingly apathetic—if we apply to the study of them the detailed and sophisticated categories that have been created in this book.

In that sense, this book is a major work of political sociology, which both allows us to understand much better than hitherto the forces at work in France over the last decade, and also can be used to facilitate future analyses of how

French, British, European and North American societies—among others—will develop in socio-political terms in the near future. The book shows us what drives young people and how cosmopolitanism works “on the ground”. Consequently, no treatise could be more timely or of greater use to social scientists across the board at this present point in history. Returning to Fitzgerald, this book is for the analyst of cosmopolitanism and its Others rather like a big plate of candy— *ou peut-être un plat de gâteaux pâtisseries et macarons* —from which we may choose very many choice and tempting morsels.

David Inglis

Exeter, UK

23 June 2017

Preface to the English Edition

Although the past 20 years or so have seen cosmopolitan studies gradually spread throughout the world, particularly in the English-speaking countries and in Germany, empirical research that focuses on cosmopolitanism remains much more difficult to find. While this volume evidently cannot fill this gap single-handedly, it nonetheless hopes to make a significant contribution to the existing literature by examining one of the most neglected dimensions of cosmopolitanism, empirically speaking: the aesthetico-cultural dimension. This facet encompasses cultural consumption patterns and their associated imaginaries, as well as opportunities for contact (either virtual or mediated) with aesthetic and cultural alterity. The research presented in this volume (based on a survey and a qualitative investigation, see Chap. 1 for their detailed presentation) examines this dimension by means of a study conducted on the cultural consumption choices and imaginaries of young French men and women (aged 18–29 years old) in the era of globalization, as well as the former's impact on how such individuals view and relate to the world.

This case study naturally presents a number of specific points, informed both by the French context and our theoretical and methodological choices, but it nonetheless seeks to outline a set of general traits describing the socialization of individuals in today's globalized contemporary world that can be applied to other national contexts. The unique protocol adopted by this study has inspired others, including several surveys currently being conducted in Brazil, South Korea, and Quebec (Canada).

For a number of reasons, conducting a work of this scope on the effects of cultural globalization in various cultural domains and their subsequent influence on individual worldviews is a tall order in France. First of all, several challenges stem from the state of scientific research in France, particularly with regards to the sociological study of cultural practices. This area of research, while highly dynamic, is still heavily indebted to the works of Pierre Bourdieu and tends to favour analyses in terms of distinction by focusing on the role played by French school institutions in the acquisition of capital. It is thus unsurprising that studies stemming from this perspective have rarely looked at the impact of globalization, since they have largely limited themselves to the

national context (even despite the fact that culture is one of main factors of globalization). The ideas put forth by Arjun Appadurai on mediascapes, or by Nikos Papastergiadis and Motti Regev on the aesthetic dimension of cosmopolitanism have largely been ignored, even though they could have entered into dialogue with a different French research tradition, one that is more closely aligned with cultural studies and illustrated by the work of Eric Macé and Eric Maigret on media cultures, for example. Nonetheless, critical analyses of the model of distinction, always conducted in a national framework, continue to be the prevailing standard in French sociological research.

Moreover, even the mere concept of cultural globalization has received less analytical attention in France than in other countries, owing to the fact that so many people in France have traditionally held a negative view of the phenomenon. What was analysed on the international level in terms of homogenization has been echoed by a number of French intellectuals, including Alain Finkielkraut and Frédéric Martell . Studies that highlight the complexity of cultural dynamics in the era of globalization are few and far between in France (with some notable exceptions). The orientation towards cosmopolitanism taken by French research is not unrelated to the fact the national policies which support the creation and diffusion of French cultural products (production subsidies, tax exemptions, audiovisual broadcasting quotas, etc.) ensure that national products occupy a significant place in the various cultural markets, including highly globalized sectors such as recorded music and film. France is characterized by its defence of the concept of “cultural exception,” a bulwark that was partially erected to confront (primarily) North-American cultural imperialism and the anticipated homogenization it would engender, whereas the argument for cultural diversity emerged to promote cultural products from less geopolitically prominent regions. The French stance on cultural globalization is an ancient one that was reactivated after the Second World War. As early as 1946, when the Blum-Byrnes agreement established a quota system that limited the number of foreign (mostly American) films that would be shown in France each year, American cultural hegemony became a topic of criticism. This defensive posture often uses the protection of young people from the harmful effects of cultural

impoverishment as its alibi. A report published by the French Senate was thus titled “Les Nouveaux Médias: des jeunes libérés ou abandonnés ?” [“The New Media: Are Young People Being Liberated or Abandoned?”] (Assouline 2008).

Finally, the very notion of cosmopolitanism has not yet found its place in the French conceptual landscape. France is, above all, characterized by a highly powerful national narrative—both in terms of its self-image and the image it presents to others—that is deeply rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, rationalist thought, and the invention of human rights. While such universalizing concepts might have a priori seemed favourable to the idea of cosmopolitanism, such was not ultimately the case. No doubt republican universalism, which forms the bedrock of the French social contract, did not mesh well with the idea of cultural difference. In addition, the various schools of thought that are making a strong comeback in France—declinist and nationalist currents, as well as what we can gather under the umbrella term of “*anti-Enlightenment*” thought, to quote Zeev Sternhell (2009)—and the spectacular rise of a xenophobic, populist and anti-European far-right political movement in the 2017 French presidential election have rekindled hesitation about using a word that evokes a number of anti-Semitic stigmas; as well as the fear of the dissolution, or even contamination of French culture and of domination by the globalized elites. But perhaps, more fundamentally, we should ask whether cosmopolitanism—viewed as a heuristic tension between the specific and the universal—can find its place in a country whose strongly anchored identity is, since at least the French Revolution, based on two complementary but sometimes competing beliefs: the cultural specificity of the Nation (with its history, its memorial places, its national narrative) co-exists more or less happily (depending on the historical circumstances at the time) with the universality of the Republic, viewed as a cosmopolitan canopy that ensures equal rights to all those who participate in the *politeia*.

Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism’s absence from French scientific, intellectual, and political debates, as well as the mistrust of globalization—a position patently displayed in the political platforms of several 2017 presidential candidates, and which fed into voters’ fear about the country’s decline all throughout the electoral campaign—contradicts what can be observed among young people in France. In fact, young French men and

women present a number of undeniably cosmopolitan traits. First of all, 20 per cent of them are the result of immigration. In France, migratory flows are stable (around eight per cent). The proportion of mixed immigration status marriages continues to increase since the middle of the twentieth century (Simon et al. 1996), however, which foretells a sustained rise in multiculturalism . One uniquely French situation is that there are more descendants of immigrants in France than there are immigrants, with a large percentage of the former being the descendants of sub-Saharan African immigrants and northern Africa (Bouvier 2012). Second, mobility is part of the world view of young French individuals, especially students, who embrace a cosmopolitan spirit and view encounters with cultural alterity as formative youth experiences. Finally, young people are among the segments of the population that have the most contact with the various cultural flows that traverse France, whether these flows are correlated with factors that are linguistic or historical (especially linked to regions affected by French colonization, to the French-speaking world, or to the Anglo-American sphere), geographic (there are more frequent and intense exchanges with countries that are closer), or a number of new influences, as seen by the wave of Asian cultural products that has spread to France since the 2000s, first with the arrival of Japanese *manga* , then *anime* , and finally, *hallyu* , the Korean wave.

Many of these traits—which are, moreover, shared by many European countries and are sometimes also present in other geographical regions—make young people an ideal vantage point from which to examine current cultural and political transformations. For looking at aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism in the current context, likewise, means examining the linkages between the former and other, more ethical and political dimensions, while globalization is accused of producing two apparently irreconcilable trends: the speeding up of (especially cultural) contacts and exchanges, and the withdrawal and isolationism of national cultures, as evidenced by the rise of Euroscepticism—Brexit at the helm—and the proliferation of arguments in favour of “national priority” from France to Austria and from Norway to the United States. There as well, the cultural argument is essential, couched in terms of identity, patriotism, and sovereignty. The coexistence of these two tendencies suggests the need for supranational policies and regulations in a

world where countries and their political, social, and economic realities are ever more interconnected. There is a discrepancy between the belief, in the foundations of political modernity, that nation-states are able to determine the future of national societies and the real constraints of the world economy, international law, and military alliances which greatly reduce their leeway.

In this context, therefore, we must ask ourselves to what extent and under which conditions aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism is likely to encourage an ethical interest in others through solidarity, or a political interest in others through hospitality. There is likely no simple answer to this question. New studies shall be necessary to fully explore young people's modes of cosmopolitan socialization, of which aesthetic and cultural orientation towards others is only one aspect. However, we believe that we have highlighted both the strength of socialization to otherness through the "miniscule knowledge" (Pasquier 2002) supplied by media cultures—despite such knowledge being devoid of any overarching pedagogical agenda—and the need to harness these forms of openness to alterity, rather than simply relegating them to individual responsibility. It seems necessary to define a potential model of cosmopolitan education, since no institutional structure presently exists to accompany or facilitate the transition from imaginaries of the world to representations, or even to more structured forms of knowledge that are better suited to operate the shift from a budding shared awareness of the world and its problems to targeted action designed to tame globalization and create the conditions for a cosmopolitan coexistence. These considerations present new avenues for research that could explore both the tensions inherent to any form of openness to the world and the best ways to help young people structure the aesthetico-cultural resources that they possess to live in today's shared world.

Using both quantitative and qualitative data, we shall describe youth aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism by combining an analysis of consumption modes, behaviours, and preferences with an investigation of global imaginaries (Part I). Then, we shall seek to understand how cosmopolitanism is developed, as a skill, a resource, or a form of capital (Part II), before moving to an exploration of how young people capitalize on their knowledge and affects, including by confronting the tensions and divisions inherent to cosmopolitanism (Part III).

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