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THE HUNGER GAMES

Spectacle, Risk and the Girl Action Hero

Catherine Driscoll and
Alexandra Heatwole

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The Hunger Games

The 2012 film *The Hunger Games* and its three sequels, appearing quickly over the following three years, represent one of the most successful examples of the contemporary popularity of youth-oriented speculative film and television series. This book considers “The Hunger Games” as an intertextual field centred on this blockbuster film franchise but also encompassing the successful novels that preceded them and the merchandised imagery and the critical and fan discourse that surrounds them. It explores the place of *The Hunger Games* in the history of youth-oriented cinema; in the history of speculative fiction centred on adolescents; in a network of continually evolving and tightly connected popular genres; and in the popular history of changing ideas about girlhood from which a successful action hero like Katniss Everdeen could emerge.

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Cinema and Youth Cultures

Series Editors: Siân Lincoln & Yannis Tzioumakis

Cinema and Youth Cultures engages with well-known youth films from American cinema as well the cinemas of other countries. Using a variety of methodological and critical approaches the series volumes provide informed accounts of how young people have been represented in film, while also exploring the ways in which young people engage with films made for and about them. In doing this, the Cinema and Youth Cultures series contributes to important and longstanding debates about youth cultures, how these are mobilised and articulated in influential film texts and the impact that these texts have had on popular culture at large.

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The Hunger Games

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The Hunger Games

Spectacle, Risk and the Girl Action Hero

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Alexandra Heatwole**



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**For Ruth,
and for Norma and Jim**



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Series editors' introduction

Despite the high visibility of youth films in the global media marketplace, especially since the 1980s when Conglomerate Hollywood realised that such films were not only strong box-office performers but also the starting point for ancillary sales in other media markets as well as for franchise building, academic studies that focused specifically on such films were slow to materialise. Arguably the most important factor behind academia's reluctance to engage with youth films was a (then) widespread perception within the Film and Media Studies communities that such films held little cultural value and significance, and therefore were not worthy of serious scholarly research and examination. Just like the young subjects they represented, whose interests and cultural practices have been routinely deemed transitional and transitory, so were the films that represented them perceived as fleeting and easily digestible, destined to be forgotten quickly, as soon as the next youth film arrived in cinema screens a week later.

Under these circumstances, and despite a small number of pioneering studies in the 1980s and early 1990s, the field of 'youth film studies' did not really start blossoming and attracting significant scholarly attention until the 2000s and in combination with similar developments in cognate areas such as 'girl studies'. However, because of the paucity of material in the previous decades, the majority of these new studies in the 2000s focused primarily on charting the field and therefore steered clear of long, in-depth examinations of youth films or was exemplified by edited collections that chose particular films to highlight certain issues to the detriment of others. In other words, despite providing often wonderfully rich accounts of youth cultures as these have been captured by key films, these studies could not have possibly dedicate sufficient space to engage with more than just a few key aspects of youth films.

In more recent (post-2010) years, a number of academic studies started delimiting their focus and therefore providing more space for in-depth examinations of key types of youth films, such as slasher films and biker

films, or examining youth films in particular historical periods. From that point on, it was a matter of time for the first publications that focused exclusively on key youth films from a number of perspectives to appear (*Mamma Mia! The Movie*, *Twilight* and *Dirty Dancing* are among the first films to receive this treatment). Conceived primarily as edited collections, these studies provided a multifaceted analysis of these films, focusing on such issues as the politics of representing youth, the stylistic and narrative choices that characterise these films, and the extent to which they are representative of a youth cinema, the ways these films address their audiences, the ways youth audiences engage with these films, the films' industrial location, and other relevant issues.

It is within this increasingly maturing and expanding academic environment that the **Cinema and Youth Cultures** volumes arrive, aiming to consolidate existing knowledge, provide new perspectives, apply innovative methodological approaches, offer sustained and in-depth analyses of key films, and therefore become the 'go to' resource for students and scholars interested in theoretically informed, authoritative accounts of youth cultures in film. As editors, we have tried to be as inclusive as possible in our selection of key examples of youth films by commissioning volumes on films that span the history of cinema, including the silent film era; that portray contemporary youth cultures as well as ones associated with particular historical periods; that represent examples of mainstream and independent cinema; that originate in American cinema and the cinemas of other nations; that attracted significant critical attention and commercial success during their initial release; and that were 'rediscovered' after an unpromising initial critical reception. Together these volumes are going to advance youth film studies while also being able to offer extremely detailed examinations of films that are now considered significant contributions to cinema and our cultural life more broadly.

We hope readers will enjoy the series.

Siân Lincoln and Yannis Tzioumakis
Cinema and Youth Cultures Series Editors

Acknowledgements

The foundations of our argument here were sketched in our essay, ‘Glass and Game: The Speculative Girl Hero’, published in *New Directions in Popular Fiction* (Gelder 2016). We also draw on Alexandra’s doctoral thesis – *Renegotiating the Heroine: Postfeminism on the Speculative Screen* (2015) – and on some of Catherine’s earlier work, including *Girls* (2002) and *Teen Film* (2011).

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