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ARCYP's Objectives:

1. To promote the study of and research in young peoples' cultures and texts, in Canada and internationally, across a range of disciplines, and to build an understanding of such scholarship that defines "young people," "culture," and "text" broadly.
2. To create interdisciplinary spaces for advocates, activists, and scholars to exchange research on young peoples' cultures and texts, and to create opportunities for collaborations between academic scholars and members of community organizations that work with young peoples' cultures and texts.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

MAVIS REIMER

At the annual general meeting at Congress 2009 in Ottawa, members agreed that the Association needed to develop a presence on the web as soon as possible. The Executive took that as its first order of business in summer, approved a logo, and developed a website for the Association. You can check out the site here: <http://arcyp.ca>. Please let any member of the Executive know if you have suggestions for other material you'd like to see on the ARCYP site.

The Executive met at the University of Winnipeg in early November. As part of our gathering, we organized a colloquium on the film *Slumdog Millionaire*. It was a reminder to all of us of one of the objectives of ARCYP, that is, to provide opportunities for dialogue about young people's texts and the representations of young people in texts.

On the list of topics discussed by the Executive in November was the progress of the Association toward application for independent membership in the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. In order to be considered for membership, the Association must have been active for at least three years, with a constitution approved by the membership for this period of time. Since the constitution of ARCYP was approved at Congress 2008 in Vancouver, our first opportunity to make such an application is May 2011. Whether we should do so will be among the topics we will be discussing at the AGM in Montreal in May. For this year, we continue to be hosted by the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE).

ACCUTE has agreed to schedule all of our panels together on one day—Monday, May 31, 2010. We have three panels of scholarly papers, and a roundtable on young people and participatory culture,

(continued on page 2)

CONFERENCE PAPER ON TEEN SEXTING GOES VIRAL: HOW AN OBSCURE CANADIAN ACADEMIC BECAME A BARBARIAN ATTACKING THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN CIVILIZATION; OR, “WHO THE FUCK IS PETER CUMMING?”

PETER E. CUMMING

“What possible objection could there be to speaking frankly about topics in which most people have utterly no interest? Most academic work, especially in the humanities, is published for an audience smaller than a successful cocktail party, and the rest falls still-born from the press, ignored by citizen and colleague alike.”

(Mark Kingwell, “Tenure Blues,” *Academic Matters*, October/November 2009, <http://www.academicmatters.ca/current_issue.article.gk?catalog_item_id=3409&category=/issues/OCT2009>)

In May 2009, at the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences at Carleton University, when I presented a conference paper, “Children’s Rights, Children’s Voices, Children’s Technology, Children’s Sexuality,” to a small group of colleagues from the fledgling Association for Research in Cultures of Young People, I began by stating, “The title of this panel, ‘Youth, Technology, Sexuality,’ sounds like a recipe for ‘moral panic.’” I was not intending to be prophetic; I was merely making what I thought a reasonable if unremarkable observation about North American culture’s inability to think clearly and calmly about matters pertaining to youth and sexuality, particularly in relation to digital technologies. I did not think my paper was either strikingly original or particularly controversial; rather, I felt that I was making what I hoped would be a useful and timely cultural studies report on sexting (the sending of nude or semi-nude photos or sexually suggestive text messages via cellphones and instant messaging), youth, and adults’ (over)reactions to such behaviour. My argument was that we do not actually know much about youth sexting, that it is probably not as widespread as legal and media moral panics engendered by it might suggest, that it is no more “innocent” or “experienced” than

sexual behaviours of children and youth in other generations and other cultures, that youth have no monopoly on foolish behaviours, that the sledgehammer reactions of adults, particularly in some parts of the United States, were clearly doing more harm than good to children and youth, and that we need to rethink young people’s rights in relation to their sexualities. (A link to the full text of my paper is found at the bottom of my York University “Research” page at <http://www.arts.yorku.ca/huma/cummingp/research.html>.)

For better or worse, though, my words were prophetic: the paper—and its proposal, a press release about it and radio, television, newspaper, and online interviews arising from it—caused an international media and Internet flurry (several hundred Google “hits” in numerous languages for “‘peter cumming’ sexting”), which, significantly, often had little to do with what I was saying in my presentation. What buttons, I have often wondered since the paper was first presented, did this paper press, which hit such a raw nerve with people in Canada, the United States, Australia, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Central and South America?

First, of course, children and sexuality: even

though it has been a hundred years since Freud characterized children not as asexual or presexual beings but as sexual beings, indeed, polymorphously perverse ones, western culture has not learned to put “children” and “sex” comfortably together in any kind of sentence. In particular, many people in western culture are resistant to the concept of young girls as sexual beings; significantly, although the only study available at the time of my conference paper suggested that more females than males sext, the media recuperated this into conventional wisdom by concluding that this was because the girls’ boyfriends put them up to it—even though the same study showed that more girls who sexted did so because it was “fun and flirtatious” than because they were pressured into it. Second, the conjunction of children and sexuality with digital technologies

exacerbates the panic of adults who do not understand and hence disproportionately fear such technologies. Third, the linking of youth,

sexuality, technology and the discourse of “children’s rights” created a further flash point. Fourth, remarks in my proposal about George W. Bush’s America (“In Bush’s America, is there no middle ground between child pornography, sexual assault, abuse, and exploitation on the one hand and youths’ “abstinence” on the other?”), no doubt drew the ire of American conservative commentators. Fifth—and surprisingly to me—comments I made likening sexting to earlier behaviours such as playing Doctor, strip poker, and, especially, Spin the Bottle took on a lofty dimension as if I were attacking the Holy Grail. Finally, “sexting” (which some commentators have called *the* buzz word of 2009) was timely. What, then, were the responses to the ideas I presented—that children exchanging naked pictures of themselves were not, for the most part, producers and purveyors of child pornography who deserved to be treated as registered sex offenders?

Many responses were not based on ideas at all, but on knee-jerk reactions to selective excerpts from my paper. Conservative Fox TV commentator Bill O’Reilly attacked me in print, Internet <<http://www.billoreilly.com/newslettercolumn?pid=26642>>, radio, and television <[\[results/m/22379327/sexting-shocker.htm#q=sexting\]\(http://www.foxnews.com/search-results/m/22379327/sexting-shocker.htm?q=sexting\)> as a “loon,” a “loopy teacher,” and a “barbarian,” crediting me with singlehandedly threatening the erosion of American family values. He flashed my picture on Fox TV, causing people around the Internet to make fun of my face, my smile, my tie \(children’s smiling faces\), and my name—American humourist Dave Barry \(whom I used to find funny\) even set up a blog called “IF IT WERE NOT FOR THIS BLOG’S STRICT POLICY AGAINST MAKING FUN OF NAMES...we would probably be tempted to link to this” to facilitate people making fun of my name in relation to studies of sexuality. Trustf8 piped up, “omg that face... that TIE... that EMAIL ADDRESS is just . . . disturbing.” Coconuts wondered, “what were his parents thinking?” “Peter’s Parents” \(alas, long deceased\) joined the thread to](http://www.foxnews.com/search-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

state, “Obviously we don’t think like most of the people on this blog do.” At least NurseCindy sympathized, “Poor pitiful Peter. You just know he got picked on as a kid. In fact he’s

probably still getting picked on” <http://blogs.herald.com/dave_barrys_blog/2009/05/if-it-were-not-for-this-blogs-strict-policy-against-making-fun-of-names.html>. Indeed, some people wondered if I actually existed, given my name. Someone in Seattle quipped that I was being quoted only because “Professor Dick Orgasm” couldn’t be reached; for someone in South Africa, it was “Dr. Susan Shagwell.”

Indeed, some right-wing attacks on me—mostly based on misinformation—became very unpleasant, even disconcerting. Letters, e-mail messages, and Website postings, addressed to me and the President of my university, inflamed by O’Reilly’s linking me with the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), and confused by the existence of someone else who shares my name—only with an “s” on the end of his surname, labeled me a “pervert” (an e-mail from western Canada was more precise, calling me an “eastern pervert”) and a “pedophile,” calling for disciplinary action against me. (Being a male scholar in the field of children’s and childhood studies and a creative writer of children’s books and plays, of course, makes the label of “pedophile” especially damaging—those who use such a word as a weapon of hatred are no doubt not thinking of the Greek roots

“ Someone in Seattle quipped that I was being quoted only because “Professor Dick Orgasm” couldn’t be reached; for someone in South Africa, it was “Dr. Susan Shagwell.” ”



of both parts of the word.) An Australian television report called me “clouds in cuckooland,” which, I took not to be a compliment. On air, O’Reilly asked a Boston psychiatrist, “What should be done about a nut like this?” (namely, me) to which the psychiatrist—who had interviewed me by telephone and to whom I had provided a copy of my complete paper—responded, “He needs to be marginalized.” (At about this time, O’Reilly repeatedly called Kansas physician George Tiller, “Tiller the Baby Killer”—until Tiller was murdered in his church.)

Fortunately, not all responses attacked me personally but instead engaged in a discussion of ideas about children, sexuality, and technology in the spirit in which I had tried to present them. As a result of the paper and its resulting publicity, I had many thoughtful, rewarding exchanges with lawyers from Canada and from the American Civil Liberties Union, journalists, law enforcement officials, grateful mothers of American children declared as registered sex offenders for decades because they sent semi-nude photos of themselves by cellphone, representatives from Facebook, and so on. My attempts to distinguish pornography from nudity had resonance with naturists, while Europeans tended to share my amazement at American prudery. Throughout this furor, I am proud to state that my university has stood behind me, upholding the academic freedom (and its accompanying responsibilities) that allowed me to do this research. Studies that have been done since I presented the paper have tended to corroborate my earlier suggestions. ARCYP is to be congratulated for mounting such an important and timely panel: indeed, that ARCYP panel included two out of three papers presented at Congress 2009 about sexting—mine and a paper from Australia.

Of the 4000 papers presented at Congress 2009, three papers were highlighted as being the “three most requested stories” in “worldwide media coverage”: mine was the first in the list <<http://www.cnw.ca/fr/releases/archive/June2009/01/c9458.html>>. As the story spread around the world, I needed to use Google’s “Translate this page” to try to find out what was being said about me in Polish and Vietnamese. Throughout the furor, I was

labeled everything from a “pedophile” <<http://www.freenorthamerica.ca/phpbb3/viewtopic.php?f=5&t=4993>> to “one extremely brave professor” (Christopher Null, <<http://tech.yahoo.com/blogs/null/143500>>). Fortunately, though, saner heads eventually recognized the “real truth,” and helped me put into context both “Peter Cumming” and my little conference paper. On the respected academic Website “inebriateddiscourse.com,” Max Canning mused,

According to Bill-O [Bill O’Reilly], there has been insufficient negative reaction to the sexting phenomenon. In fact, he is appalled to find that somebody is actually saying that sexting is relatively innocuous. Who is it? Is it our Democratic president? The liberal Speaker of the House? Maybe it’s lefty Janeane Garofalo? Nope. It’s Peter Cumming. I know what you’re thinking. Who the fuck is Peter Cumming? Cumming . . . as it turns out is an obscure Canadian academic who delivered a paper at an equally obscure symposium. . . . Peter Cumming, an unknown, constituent-less, *Canadian* professor who teaches at a *Canadian* university, and who delivered those remarks at a symposium held in *Canada*. And so apparently this is somehow indicative of a moral decline in America, according to O’Reilly. Wow Bill, you really knocked it out of the park on this one. Shithead.” <<http://www.inebriateddiscourse.com/2009/06/bill-oreilly-is-asshole.html>>

If nothing else, strange things attributed to me on the World Wide Web should help make all of us skeptical about “information” and how it spreads in a wired and multilingual world: one recent Web story, no doubt translated from English to some other language and back again (by machine or human, I cannot tell), has the following to say about youth, sexuality, technology, and Peter Cumming:

“Sexting ‘No Inferiorer Than Spin-the-Container’, Canadian Academic Says. . . .

Youths exchanging bare photos of themselves over mobile phones—known as ‘sexting’—should not face kid publishing charges . . . , a humanities discussion heard. Peter Cumming, an join forces with highbrow during York University in Toronto, presented a paper upon children’s sexuality during a 78th Congress of a Humanities as well as Social Sciences fortifying a use as a complicated movement upon ‘playing alloy or spin-the-bottle.’ ‘Technology does shift things, as well as there can be really critical consequences,’ Professor

Cumming said. ‘But which obscures a actuality which immature kids as well as immature people have been passionate beings who have explored their sexuality in all times, as well as all cultures as well as all places.’ ‘A eminence has to be done in between nakedness as well as kid porn,’ he added. <<http://www.theopca.com/sexting-no-inferiorer-than-spin-the-container-canadian-academic-says/>>.

Strange, but I do not recall making those comments.

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Listen to This (Canada/Israel/Palestine) animated
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Imagine-Education (Canada) Montreal documentary
We Are All Here (USA) animated
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Injection Supervisee (Canada) Montreal documentary
Natural Selection (Canada) Montreal
Silent Scream (Armenia) documentary
Lily (Canada) Montreal

DO YOU HAVE ANY NEWS OR ARTICLES YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN THE NEXT ARCYP NEWSLETTER?

EMAIL
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WITH THE SUBJECT LINE "ARCYP NEWSLETTER SUBMISSION"



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9:00AM - 10:15AM

Hope and Change?:
Young People's Cultures and Social Justice

Chair: Louise Saldanha (Grande Prairie Regional College)

- Writing the Past for the Future: An Examination of Youth Writing in *Our Story: The Canadian Aboriginal Writing Challenge* • Jennifer Hardwick (Queen's)
- Literary Interpretations of Aboriginal Education • Dawn Thompson (Vancouver Island University)
- A Just Society?: Canada and its Commitment to the UNCRC • Stephen M. Gennaro (York) and Jeffrey Canton (York)

10:30AM - 11:45AM

Childhood and Nature

Chair: Jamie Paris (University of British Columbia)

- Aesthetics and Addiction: On Heather O'Neill's *Lullabies for Little Criminals* • Roger Davis (Grant MacEwan)
- An Eight-year-old Child's Understanding and Relationship with Nature • Magdalena Rudkowski (Ryerson)
- The Ever-Present Child of Nature in William Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" • charlie peters (Manitoba)

11:45AM - 1:15PM

Lunch Break

1:15PM - 2:30PM

ARCYP Annual General Meeting

Chair: Mavis Reimer (University of Winnipeg)

2:45PM - 4:00PM

The Child and the City

Chair: Natalie Coulter (Wilfrid Laurier University)

- From Ezra Jack Keats' *A Snowy Day* to *Grand Theft Auto IV*: Urban Space as a site for child play • Naomi Hamer (Winnipeg)
- Liminal Children in Liminal Spaces: Coming of Age in Toronto's Suburban Literature • Cheryl Cowdy (York)
- Mumbai Dreaming: The Glittering Scumscapes of Anosh Irani's *The Song of Kahunsha* and Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan's *Slumdog Millionaire* • Heather Snell (Winnipeg)

4:15PM - 5:30PM

Participatory Ontologies and Youth Cultures

Chair: Stuart Poyntz (Simon Fraser University)

A multidisciplinary roundtable discussion with **Darin Barney** (McGill), **Zoe Druck** (SFU), **Mary Bryson** (UBC), and **Clare Bradford** (Deakin)

7:00PM

Dinner @ Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill - 1254 MacKay

Join us for a delicious dinner and Les 'Jam Sessions' Planète Jazz. Five dollar cover charge. See <http://www.upstairsjazz.com> for further details.

For more general information about the 2010 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, visit <http://www.congress2010.ca/>.

ARCYP FORUM AT 2009 CONGRESS FEATURED IN *jeunesse: young people, texts, cultures*

The papers included in the panel on “Disciplinary Definitions of ‘the Child,’” hosted by ARCYP at the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities in Ottawa on 26 May 2009, have been published in Issue 1.2 (Winter 2009) of *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures*. *Jeunesse* is an interdisciplinary, refereed academic journal whose mandate is to publish research on and to provide a forum for discussion about cultural productions for, by, and about young people.

The forum, entitled “**The Child,**” **Childhood, and Children: Defining our Terms**, includes:

The Production and Use of the Globalized Child: Canadian Literary and Political Contexts

Margaret Steffler

In Search of History’s Child

Mona Gleason

The Missing Child in Canadian Sociology: Is It Time for Change?

Patrizia Albanese

Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Un/Defining the “Girl”

Shauna Pomerantz

Can the Child Testify?: On Childhood, Testimony, and the Cultural Construction of the Child as Political Subject

Julia Emberley



Visit <http://jeunessejournal.ca> to read the entire forum (and all review essays) for free!



ARCYP is currently housed at the Centre for Research in Young People’s Texts and Cultures at the University of Winnipeg. See <http://crytc.uwinnipeg.ca> for news, resources, and more!