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Michael Dawson, Portland Community College

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**Book Review:**  
**Youth Culture**

***A Review of Aesthetico-Cultural Cosmopolitanism and French Youth: The Taste of the World***

*Aesthetico-Cultural Cosmopolitanism and French Youth: The Taste of the World*, by Vincenzo Cicchelli and Sylvie Octobre, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, 405 pages, 3319663100, \$111.

Michael Dawson, Portland Community College

Since the 15th century, when Portuguese caravels and Chinese baochuan started proving the possibilities, the human phenomenon we now call “globalization” has been in an accelerated phase. Driven mostly by power and plunder, the ensuing human process has been blundering and uneven, as well as complex. To the extent they have come at all, unbiased perspective on the emergence of planetary society has usually lagged far behind major globalizing forays and fallouts. After six centuries of intensifying economic and military planet-crossing, it remains to be seen whether we homo sapiens will ever achieve self-understanding and self-government robust enough to match our thickening, galloping web of transnational wars, investments, entertainments, and epidemics. At present, to say that global social science and democracy are still in their infancy seems rather too optimistic; existing practices in both these areas remain decidedly embryonic.

In this volume, Cicchelli and Octobre sail straight into this oceanic conundrum. The authors describe their central concern as being the fact that “no institutional structure presently exists to accompany or facilitate the transition 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” (p. xiii). How, Cicchelli and Octobre wonder, might “conditions for a cosmopolitan coexistence” emerge from the miasma of personal, local, and national partialities and self-flatteries that have accompanied, if not derived from, globalization up to this point? What, if any, signs are there that globalization might be eroding or counter-acting parochialism and narrow-mindedness?

This, of course, is no small question. How can we define and contemplate the processes that determine the answers to such questions? Cicchelli and Octobre, as careful social scientists, know the importance of careful definitions and convincing proofs. For any realist, analysis of the true prospects for more and better worldwide consciousness and decency must somehow trace constituent global dynamics all the way back to the individuals and local traditions from which they grow and to which they flow.

Here, Cicchelli and Octobre propose that the emergence (and reactive inhibition) of “aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism” is an important example of a social dynamic with extant and potential implications for the future of global civility. Cicchelli and Octobre borrow

CONTACT Michael Dawson  [spikeof65@gmail.com](mailto:spikeof65@gmail.com)

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Szerszynski and Urry's definition of "aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism" as being "a cultural disposition involving an intellectual and aesthetic stance of 'openness' toward peoples, places and experiences from different cultures" (pp. 5-6). Such dispositions matter, Cicchelli and Octobre contend, because they "shape cultural imaginaries as well as taste profiles," which in turn "inform how individuals receive cultural products...and...use them to shape their vision of the world" (p. 2). Despite this, "aesthetic cosmopolitanism remains largely unexplored from an empirical perspective" (p. 4). "There are," Cicchelli and Octobre lament, "disappointingly few studies, in particular quantitative ones, which examine how a population appropriates foreign cultural products" (p. 7).

Cicchelli and Octobre attempt to speak into this void by paying careful attention to how "aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism" presently works among the youth of France. To do this, the authors report on a two-stage opinion- and reaction-gathering research project they (along with their colleagues and students) conducted between 2011 and 2015. The first phase of the project was a survey administered to 1,605 French urban-dwelling individuals between the ages of 18 and 29. The second phase was a series of in-depth interviews with 43 non-randomly selected individuals from the same demographic.

The authors report their findings in great detail here. Anybody interested in empirical documentation of the mental and practical habits of contemporary first-world young adults will be amply repaid by spending time reading through Cicchelli and Octobre's tables and interview excerpts. Insights abound.

What are the main findings that emerge from Cicchelli and Octobre's study? They are contradictory – one almost wants to say that there is both good news and bad news.

On one hand, the authors find that, overall, their subjects display a striking skill with and interest in their own use of ideas, objects, and images that arrive from places and processes outside of France. Cicchelli and Octobre find that French youth are very much able to "situate cultural products and artworks for themselves," often making subtle assessments as they do this. Often, this kind of "situating" is done with a conscious appreciation of and desire for international syncretism. "In fact," Cicchelli and Octobre report, "numerous interviewees identified the genius of American cultural products as residing precisely in their ability to operate a cultural synthesis of different influences." That French urban young adults appreciate this mode of relating to "alterity" is one clear upshot of the authors' work here. They report that "even when young people do not master foreign languages, they can invest in and identify with foreign cultural products, which can, in turn, generate a variety of different pleasures and even drive a new desire to learn" (p. 290).

This, however, is the point at which the "bad news" arrives in the evidence uncovered by Cicchelli and Octobre. While it is clear that, in France, there has been an "emergence of a new kind of cosmopolitanism, an everyday cosmopolitanism, based on ordinary aesthetic and cultural experiences," both the wider logic and the organizational import of this new attitude remain rather far from what a comprehensive global humanist might wish. Within the new young-French everyday internationalism, "primary actors are not," Cicchelli and Octobre find, "governed by any kind of coherent, institutional curriculum. In fact, cultural industries and the media compete with each other; no overall vision of a global world or programme of universal ethics and politics can be gleaned from their actions....Moreover, the linkages between aesthetico-cultural cosmopolitanism and other ethical and political forms of cosmopolitanism are tenuous at best,

often reversible and disjunctive” (p. 297). Cicchelli and Octobre conclude that, barring a conscious new effort to connect it with “a broader education scheme that includes elements not solely conveyed by the major industries,” today’s globalization of individual lifestyles may remain just that – “a matter of individual agency,” a form of entertainment floating ineffectually beneath the new century’s dominant political and economic forces.

*Michael Dawson is a lecturer of Sociology at Portland Community College and a book review editor for Culture and Empathy. He is the author of The Consumer Trap: Big Business Marketing in American Life (University of Illinois Press, 2004).*