

H-France Review Vol. 11 (October 2011), No. 236

Chris Tinker, *Mixed Messages: Youth Magazine Discourse and Sociocultural Shifts in Salut les copains (1962-1976)*. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang 2010. x + 193 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$53.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-3-03911-905-9.

Review by Richard Ivan Jobs, Pacific University.

Salut les copains, as both a radio program and magazine, is synonymous with the French youth culture of the early 1960s, particularly with the musical form of *yé-yé*, which was more bubble-gum pop than rock. Its association with this moment is considerable as in recent years there has been a baby-booming nostalgia industry around *SLC* with a series of CD compilations, illustrated coffee-table books, and a DVD box set. The magazine can be credited with transforming France's juvenile press market into one dominated by popular music while also giving us Johnny Hallyday, the golden-coifed goose of its celebrity journalism who, for a time, even had a regular feature column, "*La Lettre de Johnny*." At its height, *SLC* sold more than a million issues a year, doubling its nearest competitors, most of which it had inspired. Chris Tinker's new book, *Mixed Messages: Youth Magazine Discourse and Sociocultural Shifts in Salut les copains (1962-1976)* surveys the textual content of *Salut les copains* in thematic fashion over the fifteen years of its existence.

Salut les copains magazine was launched in the summer of 1962 by Daniel Filipacchi and Frank Ténot as a spin-off of their popular radio program of the same name. The radio program began broadcasting at the end of 1959 from Europe No. 1, an independent station with transmitters located outside France, although the show itself was produced in Paris. The radio show employed an American template targeting a young demographic that mixed music and news and emphasized participation from its young audience via letters, surveys, and on-air interviews and conversations. The magazine also took a mixed approach to its format, including news of record releases and concerts, a hit parade, song lyrics, anecdotes and interviews with celebrities, fashion advice, current affairs, humor and cartoons. It emphasized inclusiveness for its audience through participation by its readers via letters, polls and questionnaires, concerts, and an interesting feature, "*autour du magnetophone*," which published the transcripts of conversations on specific topics by a small group of readers broadcast as part of the radio program. There was also what we could consider today a personals section, "*Je cherche un copain*," featuring headshots of readers with a list of likes and dislikes, as well as contact information. This emphasis on the participation of the *copains* was innovative and unique in European broadcasting and publishing. Thus, *Salut les copains* was as much about creating a sense of community as it was about building market-share, or rather the former was explicitly a strategy for the latter. It sounds a bit like a social networking business model, *non?* Given all of the above, *SLC* is certainly worthy of historical study, which could situate it in a variety of perspectives including social, cultural, and mass media. While Tinker's book is not a history, it will prove quite useful to those researching a topic that intersects in some way with French popular youth culture of this era.

Tinker wants to counter the view of *SLC* "as a neutral, apolitical vehicle for French *yé-yé* music artists" (p. 15) by emphasizing how the magazine "engages with many of the issues affecting France during what was a period of considerable change" (p. 16). As such, he considers *SLC* as ideally suited for discourse analysis in order to reveal the ideological underpinnings related to culture, nation, youth, and gender that dominated France at the time. Each of the four chapters takes up one of these topics and

traces the shifting emphases in editorial content over the fifteen-year period under study. Yet the book reads more like a catalog of his selected themes as covered by the magazine than it does as a focused monograph advancing an overall argument based on the interpretation of primary material. Tinker mostly confirms the interpretive work of others by writing how *x* is an example of what *y* discussed elsewhere, drawing heavily on scholars in cultural history and cultural studies, but at such a pace that none of the ideas in play are fully developed. This lends to the text a kind of hurried, report quality as he swiftly applies the relevant secondary work to do the interpretive heavy-lifting but without really elaborating much on his own.

Consequently, Tinker points out complexities and ambiguities that never get fully explored in his commentaries. For example, to sum up the bulk of the second chapter, "The Nation," Tinker writes "In short, *SLC* promotes a strong, unitary notion of French identity via its support for French-speaking artists and popular music, while recognizing, if not embracing at times, the influences of Anglo-American popular music" (p. 83). Or in his book's conclusion: "In sum, *SLC* clearly mobilizes discourses that are supportive of hegemonic ideologies....However, the magazine also questions and undermines these positions through counter-hegemonic ideologies especially from the late 1960s onwards, albeit with varying degrees of intensity" (pp. 172-173). Such assertions are convincing but hardly debatable. Tinker never takes the next step to tell us what is meaningful, significant, or relevant about this. This lack of elaboration is a shame because Tinker raises many interesting points but sprints from topic to topic so quickly that he loses opportunities to explicate. That is not to say that one does not learn and profit from the text. Because of its catalog-like and summative quality, the book will make a good resource for researchers because Tinker exposes how *SLC* brushed up against all sorts of interesting issues, from the ORTF state-controlled broadcast media to the marriage of Johnny Hallyday and Sylvie Vartan, or from weight control to attitudes toward Turkey and Turkish pop stars.

Finally, Tinker limits his study to written texts with no consideration of visual features. There are no images, nor any image analysis. This choice seems odd to me; if Tinker is eager to explore the ideological discourses of the magazine, images ought to feature prominently. After all, *SLC* could be considered a French equivalent to the glossy teen-mag, which is all about the images, especially the advertising, which could make up a third or more of a given issue's content. As a result of the above, the book is even shorter than its 174 pages of text suggest, as footnotes make up a large portion of many page layouts. So *Mixed Messages* is something of a mixed blessing: it makes the textual content from *SLC* accessible through its thematic organization, which will likely help others find useful material for their own research; but at the same time the rich material uncovered by Tinker is underutilized in the larger framework of interpretation.

Richard Ivan Jobs
Pacific University
jobs4049@pacificu.edu

Copyright © 2011 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the [Editor-in-Chief of H-France](#). The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.