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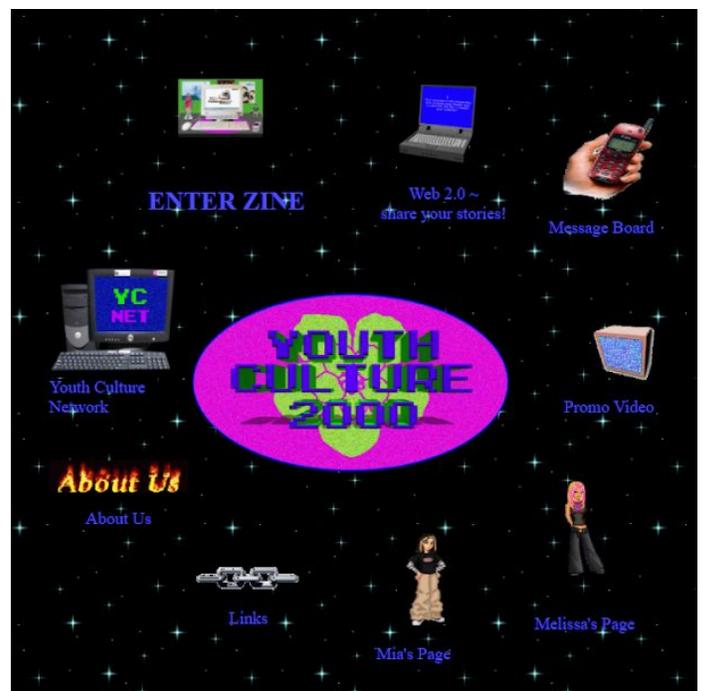
COMM 145

Youth Culture 2000: A Webzine's Critical Remembrance of the Y2K Era

Introduction

How does one begin to describe the phenomena of childhood nostalgia? For those born in the late 90s and early 2000s, this might look like the sporadic revisiting of old toys, movies and music. As someone who was born at the cusp of the millennium, my personal experience with childhood nostalgia involves rewatching old movies and searching for cringey infomercials online so I can find out whatever happened to toys like Squiggly Worms or the Fushigi Ball. Naturally, other people from my generation employ their own methods to remember the cultural era of “Y2K.” Many pursue the recreation of “Y2K” style, fashion, iconography, music and media to relive their idealized memories and immerse themselves in nostalgia. For creators Mia Lin and Melissa Niles, two women in their early 20s, they envision childhood nostalgia through an aesthetic zine and online platform named

Youth Culture 2000. On the surface, their website emulates the icons of Y2K culture with its purposeful low resolution web page, rainbow space jam-esque background, and mis-matched Lisa Frank stickers and Blink-182 posters. Upon a closer reading of their media, one might find that the creators of the platform are not merely using a retroactive approach to think of a 2000s



childhood as a simpler time, they are also subverting cultural remembrance as they inject their own negotiated reading of the 2000s. Similar to adults recognizing a good part of their life, while also acknowledging the inherent privilege of certain identities in that era, these women simultaneously address the intersectional hardships that accompanied those identities in their zany content. In their digital zine and interactive website, the creators of Youth Culture 2000 provide a nostalgic representation of popular culture through the lens of a generation who grew up in a peculiar era of expanding internet, fashion and music. In this paper, I will argue that the creators were successful in portraying an emotional recollection of the early 2000s, while also instilling their own subversive meanings into the text by reorienting semiotic traditions to acknowledge their reputation for exclusivity and materialism.

Context and Object of Inquiry

There are two concepts that would be helpful to define before further examination of evidence. The first of those concepts involves deconstructing the foundation and origin of the term “Y2K” that is widely used to describe popular culture from the late 90s and early 2000s. According to The Guardian, Y2K is described as a “supposed turn-of-the-century bug” that was suspected to “bring our infrastructure to a terrifying halt.”(Alexander) In other words, “Y2K” was a mythical computer virus that was expected to hack the internet at the turn of the century, but never did. Instead, the term has been utilized to describe the following era of “glittering utopian futurism” that descended upon the early 2000s. (Alexander) This paper is not to analyze the accuracy of the creator’s vision as it pertains to Y2K culture, nor is it to debate the legitimacy of their content. Understanding the origin of the term Y2K is a useful historical context that helps clarify the specific time period and aesthetic that is being referred to in the digital zine. The

creators highlight four areas of excellence in the early 2000s that carry on as themes throughout their zine, such as popular culture, the internet, fashion and music.

Beyond the zine's aesthetic iconography, the greater historical context of zines are worth acknowledging. The creators of Youth Culture 2000 were inspired by more than their childhood nostalgia and love of the Y2K aesthetic. Greater meanings lie in the method of communication of a zine or "fanzine." In an interview with Mia and Melissa, they recognized the punk-feminist subculture of "Riot Grrrl" and the significance of using a webzine as a medium. A "zine" is a homemade publication admired for "producing a paper unhampered by corporate structure, cash and censorship." (Schilt 6) Riot Grrrl was more than a locally printed and distributed publication; it was an ideological movement that centered everything punk, feminist and taboo. Youth Culture 2000 provides a unique twist because of its position as an online platform with its main form of distribution through social media, like Tik Tok. In the interview, they also noted the lack of intersectional feminism in movements like "Riot Grrrl." They realize that a zine created by a white queer woman and a woman of mixed race from middle-class households could not represent all of Y2K culture, but they could at least begin with their own experience and leave the opportunity for others to share theirs on the in-site Youth Culture Network forum. How interesting that a zine about an era of supposed technological utopianism is depicted through a medium that defies the original reach of local grassroot collectives. Yet, allows for a reach of nearly five thousand nostalgia-searching late 90s and early 2000s babies in the first couple months of publication. The historical context of zines further confirms the significance behind the webzine as a site of cultural memory that does not undermine the potency of nostalgia.

Evidence:

In the webzine Youth Culture 2000, eighteen pages are utilized to their fullest extent to immerse its audience in a visually stimulating, nostalgic journey through Y2K culture and childhood memories. Just skimming through the digital pages and looking at the use of intentional cut and paste collages with early 2000s symbols and imagery is enough to extract emotional reactions from readers. Speaking from my own experience of browsing through the zine at first glance, the visual appeal itself functioned to resurface a culture to the forefront of my consciousness. The art on the pages serves as a necessary complement to the text in their articles, and also, accurately depicts the cut and paste methods characterized by zine culture. The visual and textual elements work in tandem to present a cohesive representation of the early 2000s, as it is understood through the lens of its creators and their desired audience.

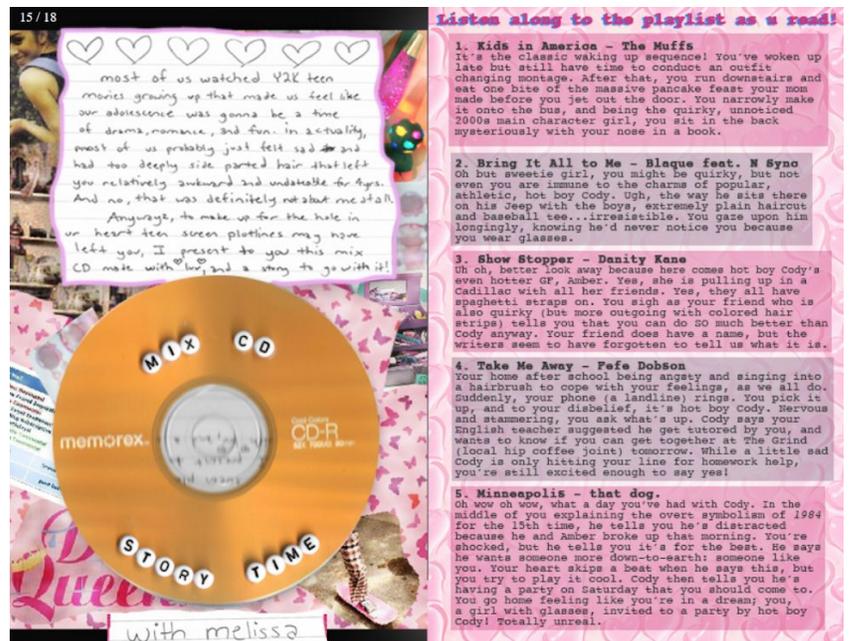
While these visual elements are powerful as they aid the communication of Youth Culture 2000's message, the text within its articles reveal the more nuanced rejections of hegemonic narratives from the Y2K era. The creators embrace their own experience growing up in the 2000s and create a temporal vehicle through which the reader can follow along as they might wonder how their own experience relates to the stories of the creators. Utilizing the approach of epistemological framework employed in the beginning of *The House of History* by Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, I will perform a textual analysis to understand how this digital zine acts as a site of remembrance. The creators' writing is inherently historical in the way that it is filtered to exude a selective representation of a time period. Essentially, Mia and Melissa could be considered historians because they draw "upon their own collective experiences and socio-economic contexts" in order to highlight selected portions of Y2K popular culture. (Green and Troup 2) The active creation of the platform itself can be viewed as an "interpretative act" that builds a catered, nostalgic perspective through the careful selection of evidence and content.

that owning a cell phone would not have “unlocked an exclusive world” where a certain beauty and body standards reign supreme. (Mia 11) When Mia recalls the memory of begging her parents for a cellphone, but then infuses the memory with a conversation on materialism and identity, she proves Kansteiner’s belief that the connection between memory and identity contains high political and psychological value. (Kansteiner 184) In regards to individual and collective memory, Kansteiner focuses on the conceptualization of individual memory through the lens of its social context and states that “collective memory can only be imagined and accessed through its manifestation in individuals.” (Kansteiner 185) For example, this zine could have represented the widespread acclimation of cell phones among children and teens through a timeline, or with statistics, or media representations of teens with phones, but grounding the transformative practice of technological advancement through the perspective of an individual who experienced the materialism firsthand is much more interesting. On top of that, the way Mia instilled her article with her own conclusions on the materialism and “internalized cultural belief system that relies heavily on consumption” of the Y2K era, speaks volumes about the critical remembrance that occurs. (Mia 11)

In the last section of the zine titled “Mix CD Story Time,” Melissa guides her audience through an audiovisual narration of her idealized Y2K coming of age movie plot. The audible experience is derived from a curated Spotify playlist that the reader can listen to while following along with the corresponding movie scenes that are written in the zine. Melissa’s “Mix CD Story Time” exemplifies the research in Jackne’s “Music, memory and emotion” that highlights the influential role music has over memory. Through accompanying her fictional storytelling with songs from the 2000s, Melissa captures the manufactured emotions from coming-of-age films. Jackne’s analysis points out that “hearing music associated with our past often evokes a strong

‘feeling of knowing’” and that listening to music is more effective than hearing or seeing a title. (Jackne 3) Therefore, the experience of “Mix CD Storytime” would be incomplete without simultaneously listening to the corresponding playlist. Personally, I did not recognize every song on the playlist, but it did help stimulate my emotions as I read through Melissa’s plotlines. As a result, Melissa still managed to infuse the ending portion of the zine with lasting nostalgia and even inspired me to continue listening to my favorite songs from the 2000s. However, the music is not the sole focus of the ending section, and is used to enhance the text. Melissa’s story

demonstrates the act of “critical remembering,” explained by Collins in her analysis about WestWorld. (Collins 22, Under Review) In our interview, Melissa described her goal of rebelling against the typical, heteronormative, and misogynistic character archetypes of the 2000s. She hoped to employ tools of satire



to flip the story of a “shy, semi-nerdy girl who finally gets noticed by a man who changes her life forever” and instead, create a narrative that centered her queer identity. At the end of the story, the “quirky, unnoticed main character girl” is able to find love with the woman who would have typically been her competition for the male love interest. (Melissa 15) Using the logic Collins applies to Westworld’s cowboys, this narration effectively “queers” the identity construction of 2000s teen movie characters. (Collins 27, Under Review) The creators find a balance between

these platforms. They hope to continue exploring the subcultures of the early 2000s and ideally, find ways to include more diverse perspectives. Youth Culture 2000 critically understands the effect popular culture has on society. As the “Y2K” aesthetic continues to trend on social media platforms, the digital zine can be used as an ethnographic study to comprehend how the generation who grew up in the early 2000s looks back on their childhood to instill new meanings that show a greater comprehension and awareness of identity.

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