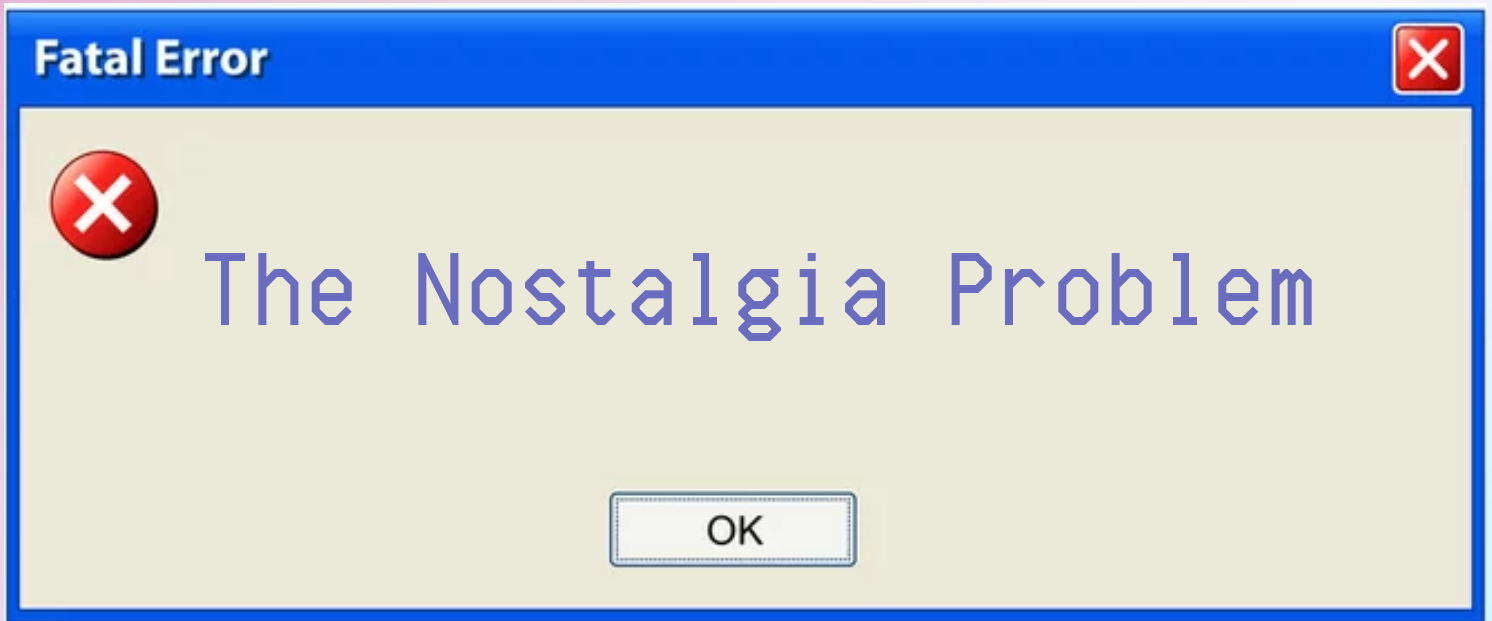




*A project by
Mayra Nassef*

Gloss(ary)

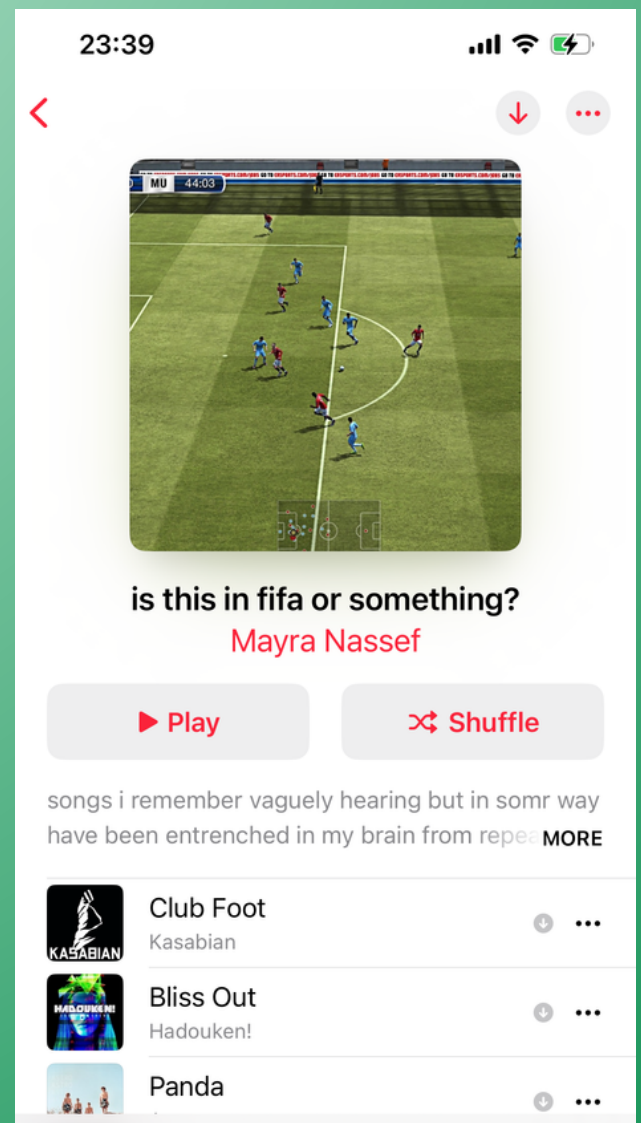
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Foreword; Dear Dead Diary:

"Nostalgia will be the death of all of us". While that is an over-exaggeration of sorts, I do think it holds weight, nostalgia is smoke and mirrors; a powerful trickster. Despite this, in times of turmoil I keep going back, to inform myself of who I was before to know where i'm going. It can be quite a spiral though. Once I started to feel that I was falling into somewhat of an abyss of nostalgia potentially as fallout from the COVID-19 crisis (an illness that I got several times throughout the crisis) , my first instinct was to critically reflect and analyse. What do those cultural objects mean to me, why did they resonate with me so strongly at the time and why do they (in some cases) still resonate with me? Most importantly: looking back: are there perhaps any flaws or problems that I recognise in these cultural objects? I explored this at length in "The Nostalgia Problem" as a personal endeavour from 2022-2023. My little personal diary, free from style guides and sometimes proper grammar and punctuation... Enjoy.. :)

Is this in FIFA or something?

"Is this in FIFA or something?" was the first thought that went through my brain when I heard Club Foot - Kasabian as part of an early 2000's alternative youtube playlist that I was listening to whilst studying (this sounds very cringe as I type this out). Well, the reason I thought that at first seemed very out of the blue. I have never played FIFA and I've never actively listened to this song before, so how come this song feels like it's been entrenched into the deep parts of my subconscious as if I've listened to it a million times? Then I thought to myself: my brother used to play a whole lot of FIFA in a certain time around 2012... So, I immediately sent the song to him, and his reaction confirmed my suspicion. The song was from the FIFA 13 soundtrack. I was experiencing my first case of second-hand nostalgia. This song that I've never heard of before, that I've only heard in the background of the living room, is now a part of my cultural recollection of the past.



This wasn't enough, though. I wanted more. I am a part-time playlist curator (I just love making playlists), so I took it upon myself to listen to the whole FIFA 13 soundtrack whilst cooking last week. Not only could I recognise 25 of the songs in the soundtrack, I could actively remember their hook and could sing along. They are now the basis of a playlist that I've created on [Apple Music](#) and [Spotify](#). What was really very striking to me was the comment sections of these songs' videos. People were feeling an intense nostalgia in relation to this music (it really shows the power of a good soundtrack!) What was more important to me though is that a lot of people linked this music to certain memories: playing FIFA with a certain someone, the days of being young and coming back from school to play FIFA, etc. Therefore, nostalgia towards cultural objects is linked to associated memories and eras.

Revisiting is important. That painful feeling is important. We can come to terms with our past, acknowledge that good memories are the ones that often stand out, and say: "when I want to remember them I have the tools that allow me to". Listening to the music, again and again, until it becomes part of your memories now. Perhaps listen to a song again, say "hmm, actually, I don't like this song that much" but still acknowledge it's significance to you. Then remember: in ten years, you will probably be nostalgic for the music you listen to now. It's a cycle, but it can be an appreciative one rather than one filled with disappointment and misery :)



Screenshot of FIFA 14

The Scariest Cases of Liminal Spaces



THE PICTURE YOU SEE ABOVE HERE IS A PICTURE THAT YOU MAY HAVE SEEN AT SOME POINT ON THE INTERNET, ESPECIALLY ON ONLINE FORUMS. TITLED 'THE BACKROOMS', THIS PHOTO HAS BECOME THE SOURCE OF CREEPY PASTA, SHORT STORIES, AND EVEN HAS ITS VERY OWN WIKI. THE REASON FOR THIS PHOTO'S POPULARITY IS SOMEWHAT CLEAR; IT'S QUITE UNSETTLING IN AN UNCANNY WAY. IT HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MAIN REPRESENTATIONS OF THE POPULAR TERM 'LIMINAL SPACES', A TERM THAT DESCRIBES PLACES THAT ARE TRANSIENT AND TEMPORARY, BUT OFTEN REPRESENTING THEM IN AN ODD WAY; USUALLY EMPTY. I ESPECIALLY SAW A LOT ABOUT THIS TERM DURING LOCKDOWN AS SO-CALLED 'LIMINAL SPACES' STARTED TO MANIFEST IN REAL-LIFE: ABANDONED MALLS, EMPTY AIRPORTS, ETC.

THE FASCINATING THING ABOUT LIMINAL SPACES AND ABOUT MOST INTERNET LEGENDS IS THAT THE HORROR COMES FROM THE FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN; THE REASON WHY PEOPLE FIND THIS PHOTO UNSETTLING DOES NOT HAVE A VERY METHODOLOGICAL EXPLANATION. I THINK THE REASON WHY THIS COULD BE RELATED TO NOSTALGIA IS BECAUSE OF SOMETHING I'VE NOTICED; A LOT OF LIMINAL SPACES ARE LINKED TO CHILDHOOD IMAGERY (SCHOOLS, AN ABANDONED MALL, AN EMPTY PLAYGROUND). EVEN THE EMPTY SPACE ABOVE HAS SOME VERY VINTAGE-LOOKING PATTERNS ON THE WALLS AND EVOKES A CERTAIN AGED OFFICE STYLE. I THINK IT'S A DEMONSTRATION OF OUR FASCINATION WITH THE PAST, AND PARTICULARLY THE FEELING OF THE PAST WHICH IN THIS CASE IS ALSO LINKED TO THE FEELING OF DÉJA-VU. DÉJA-VU IS NOT NOSTALGIA, BUT IT IS ONE OF THE WAYS WE INTERACT WITH THE PAST.

THE DIFFERENCE HERE WITH NOSTALGIA IS THE LINK, WHICH IS OFTEN THE MEMORY. AS MENTIONED PREVIOUSLY, NOSTALGIA IS STRONGLY TIED TO MEMORIES. BUT WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE THIS HAS HAPPENED BEFORE BUT HAVE NO RECOLLECTION OF IT? THE LINK IS MISSING AND THAT IS WHAT MAKES IT SO EERIE TO MANY AND EVEN INSPIRING MANY THEORIES SUCH AS THE ALTERNATE-REALITY THEORY. DÉJA-VU IN MY OPINION, IS NOSTALGIA GONE WRONG; NOSTALGIA WITHOUT THE LINK AND THE EMOTION. BUT THAT'S JUST MY THEORY OF A FEELING.



PHOTOS OF LIMINAL SPACES ESTABLISH EERINESS AND THE FEELING THAT SOMETHING IS AMISS BY HAVING PLACES THAT ARE USUALLY FILLED WITH PEOPLE COMPLETELY EMPTY (IN SOME CASES EVEN ABANDONED) AND PAIRING THAT WITH ODD LIGHTING (USUALLY LOW-KEY), CLAUSTROPHOBIC FRAMING (NOTICE HOW IN A LOT OF PHOTOS YOU CAN ALWAYS SEE THE CEILING) AND SOMETIMES ODD PLACEMENTS OF PROPS SUCH AS CHAIRS AND SUCH. HERE THE TONE IS ALREADY SET, BUT HOW IS THIS LINKED TO MEMORY AND NOSTALGIA? WELL, THE PAST IS ROMANTICISED. NOSTALGIA IS A MANIFESTATION OF THIS, AND LOCATIONS SUCH AS PLAYGROUNDS AND MALLS ARE USUALLY LINKED TO THIS ROMANTICISATION. THEREFORE, WHEN THIS IMAGERY IS LINKED TO SOMETHING RATHER UNEXPLAINABLY SCARY (THROUGH THE USE OF CERTAIN AFOREMENTIONED TOOLS), IT FEELS VERY WRONG.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THOUGH IS THAT NOT ALL PHOTOS FEEL LIKE 'LIMINAL SPACES' TO EVERYONE. MANY CAN ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT LOOKS AESTHETICALLY CREEPY, BUT DO NOT SHARE THE FEELING OF DÉJA VU, OR THE FEELING THAT THEY'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE. THIS IS PROBABLY DUE TO MANY OF THE 'LIMINAL SPACES' TAKING PLACE IN PLACES THAT ARE VERY CULTURE-SPECIFIC (AMERICAN SUBURBIA FOR EXAMPLE) AND THEREFORE MAY NOT EVEN RESONATE WITH EVERYONE. FOR EXAMPLE, NOT EVERYONE GREW UP GOING TO MALLS. I THINK IT'S A TESTAMENT THAT IT IS PLAYING WITH OUR PERSONAL AND CULTURAL PERCEPTION OF THE PAST, AND THAT THE EERINESS COMES FROM THE DISSONANCE BETWEEN ASSOCIATING NOSTALGIA AND CHILDHOOD WITH HORROR.

"There's Definitely a Nintendo DS Game For This Movie"

Something that is perhaps quite interesting to think about is that I used to be much more of a gamer when I was younger. In fact, one of my first real gaming memories is of me holding a GameBoy in the back of my family's car, in a parking lot somewhere. I do not remember what I was playing or any of my GameBoy gaming experiences at all. After that, I moved onto the Nintendo DS and PS2. The games I used to play on the PS2 were not many, it was mostly the console that my brother used the most. I did not feel attached to it as much as I was to my Nintendo DS.

Something about change, stress, and growing up last year made me recall nostalgic memories that I never thought I could even recover. While I felt like I had trouble recalling certain days in lockdown, and unfortunately, I honestly do not think I can properly recall vivid memories from December 2020; I somehow started to recall memories from my past that I did not know could even be recalled... I was walking around one day and I had a tune stuck in my head from a DS game that I haven't played for more than 8 years for sure. After some frustration, I remembered; it was *Imagine: Modern Dancer*. The beginning of a domino effect.

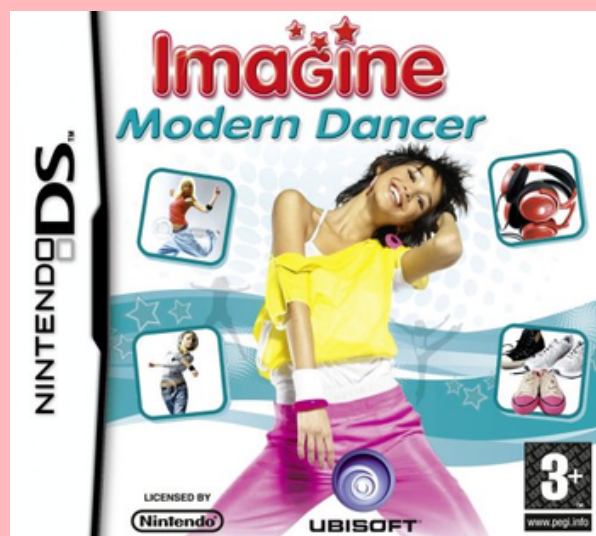
I was adamant on finding everything I used to play. I found that the majority of games I used to play were *Imagine* games. Games where I could essentially simulate certain careers in game form (these games were targeted towards young girls): *Imagine: Ballet Dancer*, *Imagine: Modern Dancer*, *Imagine: Detective*, *Imagine: Fashion Designer New York*. I also played games that were movie tie-ins such as the *High School Musical* DS games. I thought to myself: "nice try Mayra, you're not going to get a DS again, keep it as a decent memory". Then I actually found you can get a secondhand DS for a decent price, and I did exactly that. You see, as I mentioned previously, re-experiencing cultural objects can be a good way of tackling nostalgia. At least for me.

I got some games that I used to play, and ones that I didn't. One of those first ones were Imagine: Gymnast. Although it was nice and nostalgic to play for a while, at one point, I thought: 'yea, I can see why I liked this as a child, because I was fascinated with roleplaying these careers, but this is getting redundant'. It didn't ruin it for me or anything, but was a nice wake-up call that some cultural objects are meant to be enjoyed only for a certain time and are left to be tethered to a nice memory. Okay.

What about the other ones? Funny thing about DS games; a lot of it is absolute shovelware. What I mean by that is they weren't typically good games, a lot of them being tie-in games released to make some money off of some franchise. One of those being one of the High School Musical games. Just not good. I am absolutely scarred. You don't realise when you're a child obviously, but now, I'm just like "wow, these games were really just suited for my 10 year old brain". There are some good ones though. The tie-in game for Barbie and the 12 Dancing Princesses creeped me out as a child, but it's actually nice to play and incorporates elements from the film quite well and suits the platform too. The game is quite fun to play when I'm waiting for something or just bored while games that I'm currently playing (not on the DS) actually require me to actively think. Anyways, I think that me revisiting my DS era was good for me; just reaffirms that nostalgia is very context-based and that some content is meant to be revisited while some is meant to rest in its' own little memory box.



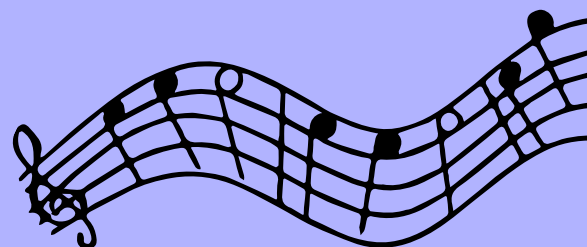
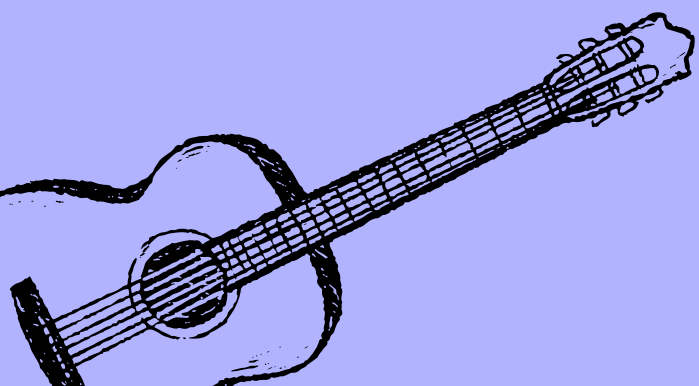
My copy of the "12 Dancing Princesses" DS game



Jack Antonoff and the Return to Singer-Songwriter

Either way, for better or for worse, trend cycles tend to call back to the past. There was a popular theory by Patrick Metzger named 'The Nostalgia Pendulum' which highlighted that we tend to start to be culturally nostalgic to what once was in a 30 years cycle - probably linked to the fact that those nostalgic for that time now have spending power (or so we hope). However, the more time passes, the more this theory seems to be untrue. Maybe trend cycles are just faster now, but now there seems to be a slight shift towards the 60's and 70's. A way in which this can be displayed is the shift to singer-songwriter that many alternative artists seem to be taking; undoubtedly the influence of Jack Antonoff's music production.

Jack Antonoff is probably one of the most famous pop music producers out there; he's worked with a huge catalogue of pop singers like Taylor Swift, Sia, and Carly Rae Jepsen amongst others. However, I noticed a shift in his production style around 2018. That's when he teamed up with alternative artist Lana Del Rey to create NFR - an album that would not only see Lana getting accolades, but also catalyse a shift in the alternative industry. You could also say that this was foreshadowed by Lorde's Melodrama, also produced by Jack Antonoff. You see, NFR (especially in comparison to Del Rey's earlier discography), is very much a huge step in the direction of singer-songwriter as the music starts to become more minimalist and the lyricism becomes more central. Not only was this a shift from the synth-heavy, rock-influenced earlier works of Lana, but was a clear call-back to the singer-songwriter acts of the 60's/70's. Whether you like or dislike Lana, she is undoubtedly a trendsetter in the alternative genre; and Jack Antonoff too, was just getting started.



What followed could only be described as a Jack Antonoff-ication of both alternative and pop female acts. Taylor Swift tried her hand at the singer-songwriter style with folklore and evermore. Other renowned indie acts such as Clairo also joined in on this with the album Sling. All of which were partially and/or fully produced by Antonoff. The most recent example being Lorde's Solar Power which was one of the recent Antonoff singer-songwriter projects that actually didn't do well as expected critically - as many deemed the songs just not very self-aware or even well-made. A perceived lack of authenticity and the singer-songwriter formula do not go well. Lorde herself mentioned that she wanted to have music that sounded like Joni Mitchell. Another example of a singer-songwriter project that also unexpectedly underperformed was Del Rey's Blue Banisters which was deemed too messy, tedious, and did not represent any musical growth since NFR. I hope this is a wake-up call for artists to actually grow as artists and do what feels natural in their career path and not just follow industry trends for the sake of it. What made aforementioned acts such as Swift and Clairo critically successful is due to them following the formula successfully.

Musical trends ebb and flow; they constantly change. Maybe this return to singer-songwriter (with a lot of projects especially releasing around COVID) is a reflection of our fatigue of digitalisation and our intense urge to go back to roots. It's also our need for authenticity perhaps. A huge part of why acts like Clairo and Lana are successful is because they also showcased the recording process in a very raw manner which was a great way to market their new stylistic shift to a singer-songwriter persona. Both artists also did not completely abandon their previous styles either, instead showing a musical growth that still somewhat incorporated previous musical elements from their discography. Either way; revisiting previous musical styles should be purposeful rather than just gratuitous.

Even though this digital fatigue stuff sounds bleak, I've been hearing a lot of awesome music releases this year so far which I've really enjoyed so this is in no way representative of the whole genre/industry!



Weyes Blood photographed by Kathryn Vetter Miller

Existential Dread and 80's Music

I wasn't sure what to title this, but honestly I think it fits quite well. Yes, it's another piece about music. One of my favourite songs that I've been listening to on repeat is "Am I Really Going to Die" by White Lies (HATE this song now, future me hates this, sick of it). Besides it being a catchy song (and 2022 is so far gracing us with a lot of good new music from alternative artists), I have yet again noticed something. Well, I noticed it around a year and a half ago during the first lockdown. The music industry seems to be really obsessed with synth - and the 80's in general. Not just within the alternative genre but the pop genre too.

I think it was around March 2020 that I noticed that several songs that were charting on the Billboard Top 100 were songs that borrowed heavily from the music of the 80's... Say So by Doja Cat, Blinding Lights by The Weeknd, all of Future Nostalgia by Dua Lipa amongst many others. Synths and four beats galore. So, is this an example of the aforementioned Metzger "Nostalgia Pendulum" or as I asked previously; are we fatigued from the music industry? Is there anywhere to go from here?

Perhaps it's financially more safe for record labels to use formulas for songs that have proven to be pretty successful (now this is becoming the TikTok song formula). So maybe instead of that, record labels decided to try their hand at this 80's nostalgia thing (if film studios can do it, why can't music labels?) To be honest, it's been pretty profitable.



In addition to this, some of the songs are legitimately catchy, decent pop songs. I've even used a lot of 80's influence in my own music. However, it's also important to note that I think that some alternative acts also foreshadowed this trend in mainstream pop music such as Carly Rae Jepsen who in my opinion is becoming somewhat of an indie pop starlet after her worldwide success and fame.

Anyhow, the songs that I thought were pretty good from the ones that I mentioned and the ones that I haven't mentioned are ones that manage to add something new and refreshing rather than just using nostalgia as a ploy to have a successful hit. A lot of the songs on Future Nostalgia by Dua Lipa indeed blend some modern elements and lyricism which very much like remakes - feel relevant and well-made because they add something new to the table. Also, perhaps we have quite a tendency to be very nostalgic during times of crisis (then have a very creative outburst afterwards). Remember post-2008 music? Only time will tell.

Either way, the conversation that music is somehow "dead" is not very helpful and does not acknowledge the acts that actually use nostalgia in clever ways in their art. The idea that "music" or "art" is dead is not a necessarily new one. It's more of a philosophical question. Are we living in a post-modernist age where everything is just a modification of something that has already existed? For example, hyperpop is definitely a new type of music; but it's just a modification of pop music. The question if we have anything new to invent is one linked to the concept of hauntology and Fisher's infamous capitalist realism (which does not seem to be taken seriously by a lot of academics), but it is a legitimate philosophical question. This, in addition to Fukuyama's "end of history" amongst other similar theories. All of those ideas have pros and cons. Either way, it's not an excuse to appreciate a well-made piece of art that sounds refreshing despite using elements from other eras of music. And the answer to the question "do we have anywhere to go from here?" Well, I guess we can wait to find out. Maybe a different post can deal with this a bit more...

Situational Nostalgia and the Emirates Airline

Boarding Song

So, I got sent this clip by my brother who is an avid fan of airplanes and the aerospace industry in general (is that even what it's called?) Either way, he sent it to me and mentioned how it was quite nostalgic. Just for background info, so this doesn't sound completely incoherent and strange, Emirates Airlines was one of the airlines that I used almost all the time if I wanted to travel growing up based on where I lived (amongst other factors). And the boarding song, mostly plays when you land or when boarding. Or maybe that's a made-up memory. I don't know...

You see, since a few years I've started to use other airlines based on convenience which means that my primary choice isn't Emirates Airlines anymore. And you know what, once again, there is that nostalgia with growing up and using a certain airline which I've linked to summer holidays and certain memories (I once had a birthday on a Emirates Airline flight as a very young child for example - they gave me a small cake). Either way, the majority of times I use Emirates Airlines is when I'm going back 'home' (whatever that means). Anyways, back to the story:

So, I listened to it. And you know what, it wasn't exactly nostalgic to me. It felt like it sounded too clean. It wasn't the way I always listened to it. I prefer it in the situation it was in. It sounds much more nostalgic to me now when I actually land and hear the music through the slightly muffled airplane speakers, eyes groggy from sleep, paired with that post-travel ache. That's when I hear that music, and I instantly am reminded of my childhood memories and by proxy, the new-found emotional link of homecoming that I've attached to it especially recently. So is this situational nostalgia? What even is that? Can nostalgia have a prerequisite of different elements?



Maybe it's like the difference between listening to a studio recording of a song and the live version? Or maybe when you watch a remake? These analogies don't seem to completely describe what I intend to try to convey. But, it really highlights the importance of the five senses in nostalgia and also the way that memories can choose to highlight or even alter the ways we recall things. So, nostalgia is situational? Nostalgia is a coping mechanism that can be activated in certain situations? The way that people are most likely to feel nostalgia on wintry days than summer days? Many questions, and not a lot of answers. All I can say is nostalgia can be so selective and situational. Just proof of how personal and sometimes even made-up it can be.

In a way, this material becomes part of my identity. Nostalgia is a powerful way to form your identity and remind you of who you are and where you come from; it helps narrativise your life. Maybe it's also because of the COVID crisis and the mobility problems that came with it, but the knowledge that those days are over and can't be returned is definitely a saccharine feeling that I would call nostalgia.



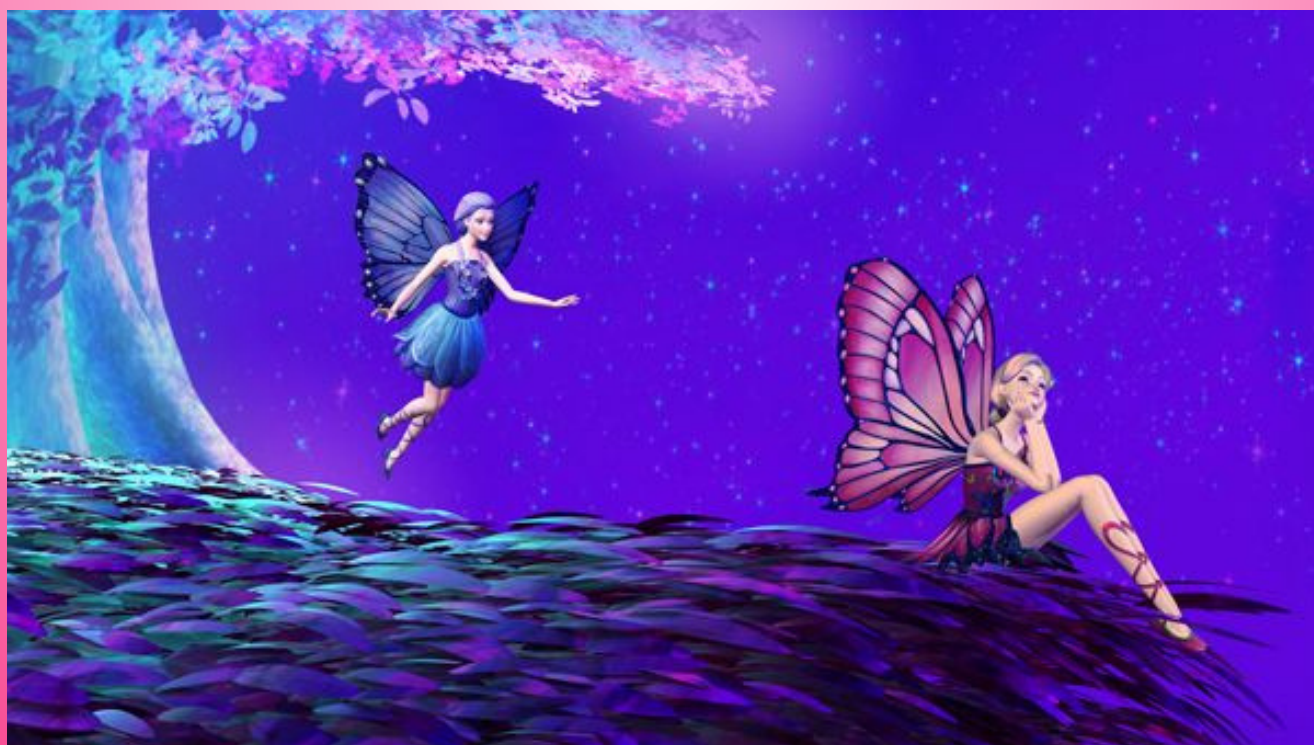
Acceptable Nostalgia and Girls' Media

It's become quite interesting to see how girls literally get shamed for liking anything as they immediately get categorised into one thing or the other. Something that immediately comes to mind is Twilight, undoubtedly a book (and film) series created with the target audience of young teen girls. For the longest time, girls have been shamed for liking Twilight and adjacent media made with a female audience in mind (chick-flicks, even Barbie films, etc.). Besides the quality of this content, it was more the association that was made with those who watched it. Girls were made to feel ashamed for being nostalgic for these cultural objects. So what people can feel nostalgic about (openly) is also partially regulated by society's norms and expectations.

It's something I experienced first-hand. Growing up, I felt the pressure to somehow stop being girly or feminine to be taken 'more seriously'. A clear reflection of how patriarchal norms and standards almost sets up femininity as a weakness. Due to this, I decided that I should abandon all my Barbie films, take down all my posters of Disney Channel series (with a more female target audience), trivialise chick-flick films, ignore my days of playing GirlsGoGames (a website with games directed toward young girls), and most importantly; no pink. "I'm not like other girls", a depressing measure that a lot of girls take that reinforce misogyny in an internalised manner. It's a defense mechanism. And I am not the only one. Certainly not.

Nostalgia can be intensely communal and may even lead and revive communities that share the same feelings towards certain media, etc. It can be a shameful feeling though if it's not legitimised. Can nostalgia also be moderated by what is acceptable to be nostalgic about? So, being nostalgic for Star Wars, a film series not without its blunders that is essentially a space soap opera (with a clear male target audience) is okay to be openly nostalgic about, but Barbie films and Young Adult novels not? Why do we feel guilt for feeling nostalgic about these things?

Upon revisiting a lot of Barbie films 2 years ago, I made a decision that being nostalgic for this content is not something to be ashamed about at all. It's perfectly valid, and openly admiring it is something that feels essential to who I am, because femininity is something essential to my identity. And my identity (which is undoubtedly influenced by nostalgia) is something that I should not be ashamed of. For me, it was a wake-up call that whatever I like and dislike is up to me, and that is the end of that. I'm also seeing a shift in the way this content is being talked about too. As many women have reclaimed this media and actually use it as a way to really showcase that in fact it is okay to like these things and to feel nostalgic about them. Nostalgia should not be gate-kept.



Screengrab fram Barbie: Mariposa (2008)

Oh, it's just like The Hunger Games

It's been quite difficult trying to write anything coherent these past few days because I indeed was sick with COVID and the brain fog was real. However, me and my friend had a laugh over the phone whilst reading the beginning of the *Unbecoming* of Mara Dyer, a book that I picked up when I was younger in my YA phase. I wasn't sure if we were laughing at the writing style, the plot, cliché elements, or all of them combined.

YA (Young Adult) fiction is a relatively new genre that has the goal of softening the transition between children fiction and adult fiction. As usual, a market is created for teenagers for the sole purpose of profit. It's not a bad idea per se, but, YA has died down, quite a lot as a genre... To be honest, I used to read a whole lot of YA a few years ago, some of it I look back to fondly, some of it I don't. However, those I look fondly towards may still have the issues I mention here. All that can be said, is opinions about YA can be controversial but recently (as we do with everything), people have started to feel nostalgic about it. *Twilight*, fervently hated a few years ago becomes an intense source of nostalgia and adoration. There's no problem with that. Well, there are some problems with the genre and the book. And those can't be overlooked.

As mentioned in the title, many novels seem to pull inspiration from *The Hunger Games*. A pure example of a YA dystopian novel. However, it's become quite gratuitous as titles upon titles come out with an all too similar plot with some sort of dystopian society, and a chosen character who's going to save them all. I say that it's gratuitous because it seems like some books want a piece of the cake, without understanding what made *The Hunger Games* well-made. The system in *The Hunger Games* was well thought-out, and the reality-tv style games make sense in the context of the story and borrow many elements that feel relevant and poignant.

Books like Divergent have a segregated society based on an attribute (like kindness)? with divergence being the quality of having several attributes. The point it is trying to make and the society it takes place in feels very unclear and not well-thought out. The faction system doesn't make much sense (and a world that does not make sense is not a good starting point). It's just a dystopia for the sake of being a dystopia. Don't even get me started on books like Matched. This is coming from someone who was a big fan... the amount of novels trying to repeat the formula without understanding why it's successful is probably why the genre is not so popular anymore (extra points if the YA novel villainises older characters). YA also has a female character problem.

Actually, several of these books (and media) have a female character problem and a problem with writing relationships. Tris (from Divergent) in addition to Mara Dyer (and countless other characters) seem to embody this type of character trope where they do not have any imperfections and seem to be able to do unbelievable things without batting an eyelash (or without proper training) for that matter. They do not have any fears, or weaknesses, or nothing. This seems to be a problem with the representation of many female characters actually. The reason why Katniss Everdeen is a good character is because her abilities make sense and her weaknesses + fears are clear and manifest themselves in the obstacles she faces in the stories. However, let's cut them some slack, it seems to be a problem with a lot of content.

A trope that drive me insane in YA novels: "I'm not like other girls". "I'm not like other girls" is a trope that is one of the best examples of internalised misogyny as it declares that being "like other girls" is somehow lesser and therefore contributing to the idea that conventional femininity is something to be ashamed of. This sense of internalised misogyny cannot be made clearer than with a novel like Anna and the French Kiss (I hate this novel with a passion) where our main character declares that she is not like other girls, claiming herself a feminist, whilst cheating on her boyfriend with a friend's boyfriend, and being sexist towards other women.

I'm not even gonna mention the parts where Anna does disrespectful + says disrespectful things about french culture when she's in France, all while proclaiming that she is somehow better than other people at her new school. Notably, shortly after she arrives in Paris, Anna clamours about how she is robbed of everything "good and pure about America: the cinema". Ok. Silence..crickets..Anna is not the only entitled and problematic character in YA novels though. There's many like her.

There's also the awful relationship tropes that exemplify harmful relationships where controlling male characters (commonly seen through the bad-boy trope, extra points if they are British) who can be quite abusive even at times are romanticised to the extreme and are shown as completely viable, valid love interests. There's also the love-triangle thing (which to be fair is quite common in general). Other than that, there seems to be an issue with female characters in general co-existing platonically with male characters.

All in all, YA novels are for sure a part of my life that will always have an impact. But instead of just feeling nostalgic about some of these novels (even the ones I still fondly remember such as Cinder, etc.), I think it's important to realise the harmful tropes that a lot of the genre carries that most certainly should be addressed. These tropes exemplify a trend in the representation of female characters.



That's Not Very Fetch...

As mentioned in several entries, female characters in media have issues. Not as characters but in the way they're written. To tear apart every trope/element that only works to disempower women in media would be like trying to find a needle in a haystack. This is why I choose to focus on something specific here.

I think I previously mentioned before that there seems to be an attack on anything that girls value. Well, it seems like that anyways. 'Barbie' is usually used as an insult referring to girls who are conventionally feminine; dressed up in pastels, pinks, and usually obsessed about boys. While Barbie has a troubled history as a doll especially relating to its absolutely unattainable beauty standards (and they are), the efforts to make Barbie empowering by transforming the bimbo trope and making it so that Barbie can be anything; smart, with any career that she wants is notable and successful.

However, time has not been kind to femininity (or women in general no matter what). Take *Mean Girls* (2004) for example, one of my all-time fave chick-flicks which also works as a timeless parody of high school dramas. The plastics are a textbook example of female characters' hyper-femininity being seen as shallow and evil. Dressed in all pinks, obsessed with makeup and fashion, obsessed with boys... it's not a coincidence that they are villains. Cady (our main character) gets introduced as a tomboy-ish character who is "not like other girls" (here we see this trope again), and when she joins the plastics, she immediately also becomes a villain. It is not until Cady (and the plastics) strips their full hyper-femininity that they become non-villains. I am also aware that media literacy is a thing and since *Mean Girls* is a satire perhaps this representation is a satire too... just a thought... Isn't representing hyper-femininity as something to be avoided only furthers the narrative that femininity is something to be ashamed of? Why can't femininity be a source of power?

Another example from a film series that I just made a video about is that of Sharpay Evans from the High School Musical films. Sharpay Evans is not evil in the same way that Regina George is, but her hyper-femininity seems to be a contributing factor to her villainy. She's also dressed in pastels, pinks, shows an obsession with boys, and is also high-maintenance. While not exactly a 'bimbo' character (like Karen from Mean Girls), it's her ambition that also adds to her sense of villainy. Her ambition in her school's theatre and in general all contribute to her character being seen under an undesirable lens. Her depiction seems to correlate her ambition, confidence and conventional femininity as elements that make her seem shallow and un-friendly.

This depiction especially in addition to other depiction have called into question the many ways that conventionally feminine characters are demonised; this is also perhaps the reason there is a growing popularity in media that tries to challenge this. The message that women can only be deemed as strong/powerful only if they display conventionally masculine traits is harmful and intrinsically represents male strength as superior.



Is this Music Supposed to Other?

Honestly, an entry about Orientalism is long over-due. Growing up, for me, Orientalism was something that I mostly didn't even notice. I think that's the worst part; it enstills Western hegemony by othering anything that isn't so (and hegemony usually goes unnoticed). Orientalism (coined by Edward Said) refers to the mish-mashing of eastern cultures and general othering depiction of the east by the West. I speak specifically when it comes to the Middle East. There was a funny moment for me last year when I was watching one of the Bourne films (which I feel nostalgic about and generally LOVE xoxo). When Bourne lands in Russia, the key changes to the quarter-tone Arabic scale. While Russia is considered Western in some aspects, they used the Arabic musical scale to portray the place that Bourne was in as mysterious and foreign was completely unrelated to the place he was in. The point is to Other anything that is not western, whereby the Arabic quarter-tone musical scale is represented as foreign. This can be seen in so many movies; as soon as non-Western music starts to play, it indicates that something strange and foreign is about to happen. It can even be a sign of danger.

Aladdin was one of my favourite Disney films growing up. Unfortunately, it's one of the textbook examples of Orientalism. You see: the architecture somehow evokes Indian architecture, people dress in Persian clothing, say Arabic phrases here and there, and somehow the city is both conservative and not conservative. It's also of note that the main villain in the film is one of the only characters with an accent and exaggerated ethnic features but that is more of a direct implication rather than a covert orientalist one. It implies that these cultures are not considered important enough to be represented separately or even with the intent of accuracy and respect.

It's a spectacle, as if people were at the zoo. It's not surprising considering that the origins of Aladdin as a story is that of a French writer's work (one that does not know much or anything about the Middle East). These stories make us, and these stories break us. Aladdin was very popular in the Middle East too...

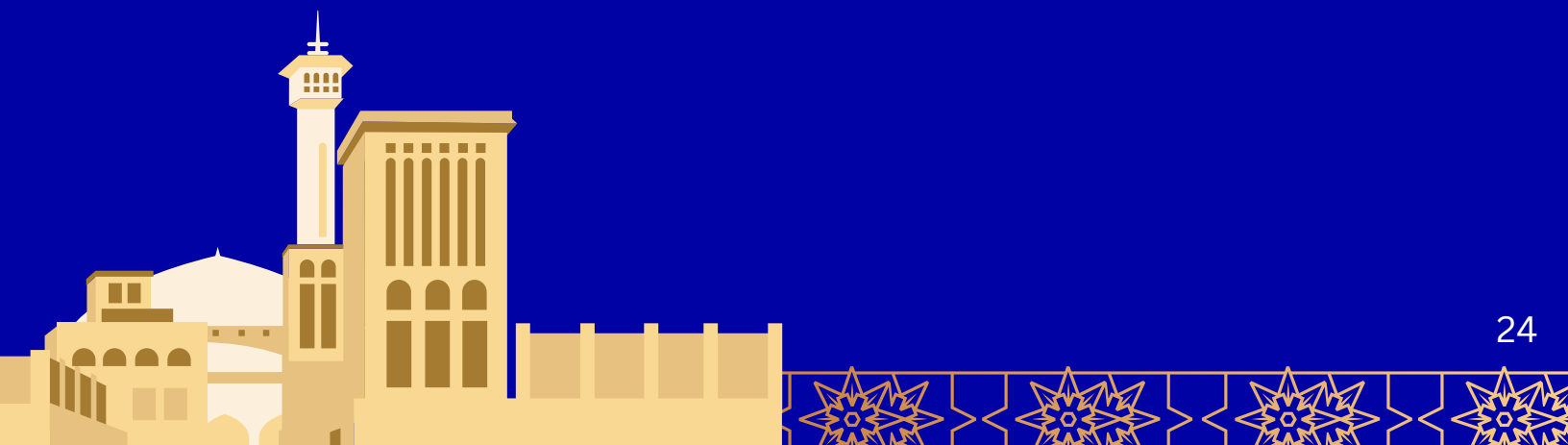


Let me give my first interesting Orientalist experience in a Hollywood film. Here I am, sitting down on my living room couch with Reese Witherspoon belly-dancing in Vanity Fair wearing some sari-styled clothing; while a popular shaabi (genre of music of the working-class) Egyptian song plays in the background. Forget the complete historical inaccuracy of the moment as the film does not even take place in the 21st century, let alone in the Middle East for this song to start playing. More importantly, it's a demonstration of this afore-mentioned mish-mashing of different cultures, in addition to stripping away the meaning and/or the significance of these individual cultural elements to the culture they pertain to. Today, I look at this moment and think it's funny, mostly because of nostalgia but also because of the sheer absurdity of it. My first reaction is usually to laugh, because it's become so normal (and laughter is also the way I deal with stress I may add). I find entertainment in the way that actors butcher Arabic (when playing the role of an Arabic person by someone who is not so) for example and use the incorrect dialects for the place the content corresponds in.

I'm not saying stereotypes don't exist; they exist for most countries. However, when an entire region is grouped together with no distinction, with paradoxical depictions (more often negative than not) that represent that region as not as culturally rich as the West, as the Other, foreign and mysterious; that is where the problem comes in.

The worst part is not just that these things didn't make sense; it's that it's become so normalised in Hollywood productions to represent the East and the Middle East as equal parts a magical land (and yes, this can refer to the availability of oil), undeveloped (yet somehow rich), mysterious, conservative (but somehow promiscuous at the same time); mixing the cultures of the several countries that make up the Middle East rather than highlighting the individuality of each of the countries in the region. It's the same morbid curiosity that western society often has towards the east + Middle East in general; that of someone observing a spectacle.

There is no need for understanding because your interpretation of the observation is enough. It's a problem. It's a problem because this can translate to self-hatred and internalised racism in the region too; too often I've heard that people are ashamed to be where they're from, afraid to speak their language in public, and simplifying their culture so that it's palatable to others. Distancing themselves from their culture. Many times I have heard casual phrases and terminology that reflects this; it's a collective trauma. For some, a colonial trauma. The message of feeling less important because of the way you were born; it's the core of discriminatory ideology. And nostalgia can never, never, mask the socialised feeling of being lesser. Orientalism is not even scratching the surface; I haven't talked about the harmful depictions either...



CULTURAL NOSTALGIA AND RAMADAN



Ramadan is a religious holiday celebrated across the world yearly where people fast and do good deeds and such and so on and so forth (you can search up online if curious). I mention it because I found myself a while ago explaining it's significance to me to someone else by saying "It's like our Christmas". I said that not because the person didn't know what the holiday was, but because I wanted to legitimise it's importance to me. And because I usually overthink, I thought about that. Why did I feel like I needed to legitimise it's significance to me by comparing it to Christmas?

Well, many reasons (including the fact that I do live in a western society and due to the difficulties and misinformation in the West about the (Middle) East and Africa (and vice versa) the significance of this holiday is not very much understood). Christmas' significance seems to be universally known but Ramadan's often needs to be explained. However, when it comes to nostalgia, I mentioned very early on that nostalgia is very cultural. Very very much so. It's personal and subjective. And that can be very necessary to sustain a community feeling. It's often why many people go home for the holiday (well, also because family-gathering is a tradition, but because of the need of feeling connected to your culture and community).

When it comes to similarities with Christmas actually, nostalgia is really the name of the game. There are so-called Ramadan songs that are consistently used on TV (often with old footage of streets of Ramadan decorations) during the period that evoke that feeling of nostalgia (they use the same old songs all of the time). Purposefully done, and yearly played; it gives a sense of stability and comfort in the way that nostalgia does best.

Elements of nostalgia intertwine themselves in advertisements (yes there is a huge industry behind Ramadan-related content and specifically made TV shows are made for the occasion) to add to this feeling of comfort in familiarity. Nostalgia as I mentioned can be culturally communal. Communities need these cultural objects to connect and nostalgia can be a powerful way to bring communities together.

The reason why I bring this up is because I often find it difficult to be far away from my family during this holiday and I also find it important for me to surround myself with these nostalgic objects. I wanted to investigate why that is so. Well, because of tradition but also because of the familiarity that I can revel in the feeling of nostalgia and revisit the same holiday each year and know that it connects me with the people who surround me. And what is it that humans want more than connecting with other people? Societies need nostalgia, and as I mentioned before, it can be a powerful way of connecting people together. The same way that nostalgia is utilised in Christmas (which adds to the feeling of familiarity, community and warmth), it is used cross-culturally too. What someone finds nostalgic is deeply cultural and personal :)

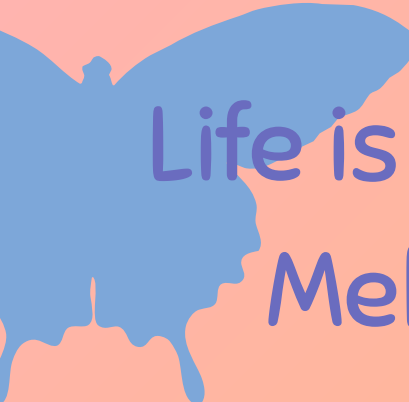


From an Egyptian magazine in the 50's

The PSA and Song that Scarred Me

I speak about how some negative elements are omitted from nostalgia. But what if that is not exactly the case because a nostalgic element becomes re-contextualised? Meet one of my traumatic video-related experiences. There are so many scary videos on Youtube that I've had the misfortune of watching when I was younger. However, there's something about that one PSA video (it's called "Think You Know" PSA on YouTube, watch for maximum immersion) that I watched as part of my IT class in primary school that truly scarred me to the core. The PSA itself was about internet security, and like privacy... some man tracks down this girl in real life... it's all so unsavoury. Something about the dark cinematography, my lack of comprehensive knowledge (at the time) about the internet and the song (especially that song) really struck a chord with me. Not to mention the absolutely unwatchable video quality is also fear-inducing... The video struck fear in my heart and I really really think it affected the way I use the internet. The possibility of the reality of the video scared me in a very real way. I've been talking a lot about fears of the internet and how because it's a current fear too it's hard to culturally examine as a relic of our past.

Unable to visit it until recently (I am still afraid of watching the whole video, also why is it like 2 pixels), I finally at least mustered up the courage to find the song in the video which I highly associate with fear and dread. I actually found that it's a lovely song by Oasis "Stop Crying Your Heart Out" and I've been listening to it again recently. You know what, I think I've purged the bad association from it. That's the interesting thing about revisiting something from your past; you have the power to re-contextualise it. And now, looking back, I'm still not nostalgic about watching that video because it STILL scares me. At least I was able to take something (the song) that I could not even come near and making it something I enjoy listening to is really a feat and I'm proud of myself. Nostalgia can be so selective... Maybe one day I'll look back fondly to that video. That day is not today.



Life is Strange (2015) and the Melancholy of Nostalgia

Life is Strange is a highly nostalgic piece of media for me. Every time I think about the game, my gaming experience, and the period of time in which I was playing the video game, I feel as if the game is almost inextricably linked to nostalgia. This feeling was made even stronger because the in-real life context surrounding the video game is something I feel nostalgic about. It came to me in a time where I was starting to really think about my future, still in the protective cocoon of high school in the city I practically spent my whole life in. At the time, I didn't think much of it, but now, it's really important to me. It was all I talked about with my friends at the time, and it also came to me in just the right time when I was going through some personal changes. Those changes have occurred, and I haven't talked to those friends in years, so all I have are the memories. So... what does this have to do with Life is Strange?

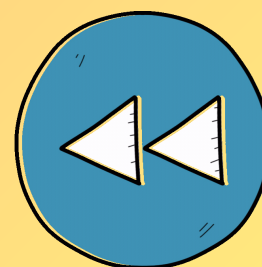
Something that Life is Strange excels at and does really really well, is create atmosphere. And fittingly enough, the atmosphere is nostalgia, and a longing for the past (or to change the past). Besides the quality of the actual game, the game evokes this in a powerful way. Firstly, through the gorgeous semi- hand-drawn visuals that fit the theme of memory and hazy sunset-y colour palette that also evoke melancholic nostalgia. The locations such as the junkyard in addition to the town of Arcadia Bay feel as if they are stuck in the past, deserted with relics of people rather than the people themselves. The music also sets the tone: teen indie music ranging from 2000's Alt-J songs (Something Good is one of my favourite songs ever) and Wolf Alice. Basically music that my 15-year old self would dig.

The atmosphere is actually heightened by the story being a genuine metaphor for nostalgia itself. Max (our main character) returns to her hometown after a few years of not being there, and discovers she has time-travel powers. The time-travel powers are a metaphor for nostalgia; implying this feeling of wishing to re-experience something and change it. The utilisation of this power in conjunction with the nostalgic tone created through music and semantics, hammer in this idea of nostalgia.

It becomes even more significant considering that the game actually acts as a bit of a warning against nostalgia (if you chose the correct and intended ending based on the graphics...). The more you go back in time to try to re-experience memories and modify them to fit your internal narrative, the more it actually creates catastrophe (literally and metaphorically). You realise throughout the game that this want to go back to the past being fulfilled does more harm than good, highlighting nostalgia as a destructive force if the negative memories involved are denied. This melancholic view on nostalgia acts as a great compliment to the tone of the game, and strengthens the overall message of nostalgia as a double-edged sword. It's essentially about acceptance of the past, and cherishing the present.

I can't say that Life is Strange is a good video game, it's highly flawed in several ways. The graphics, the plot, the dialogue sometimes, and the game mechanics are some of the weak points I can think of right off the top of my head. Also, the character of Chloe Price is insufferable. Despite all of this, I'm a sucker for atmosphere and that can sometimes really impact my enjoyment of something. And nostalgia, of course, can impact this a bit.

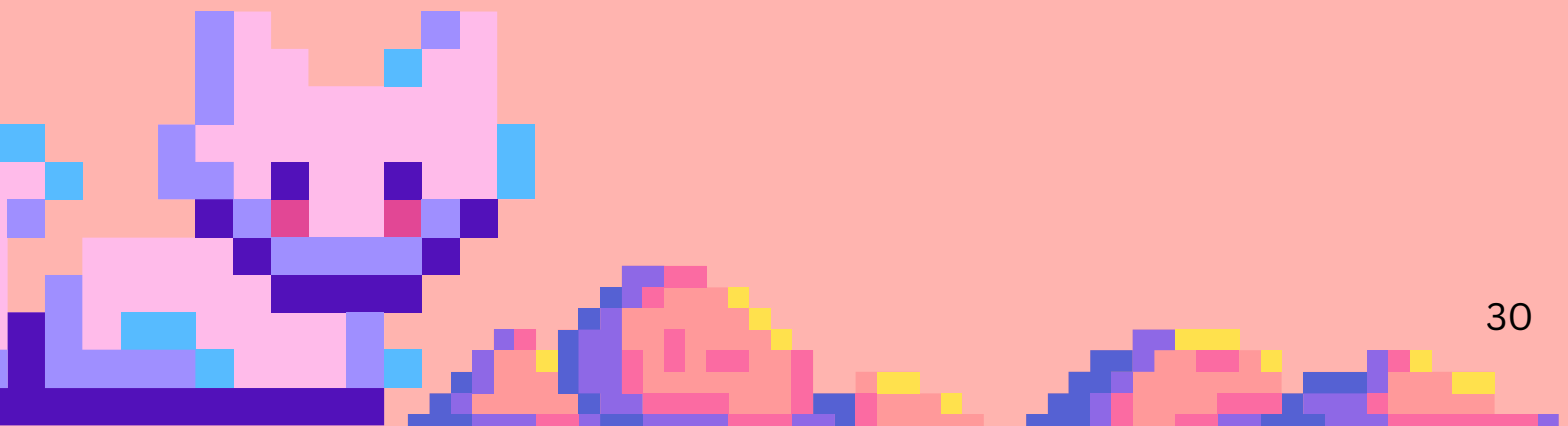
P.S. I don't like Before the Storm, it's bad.



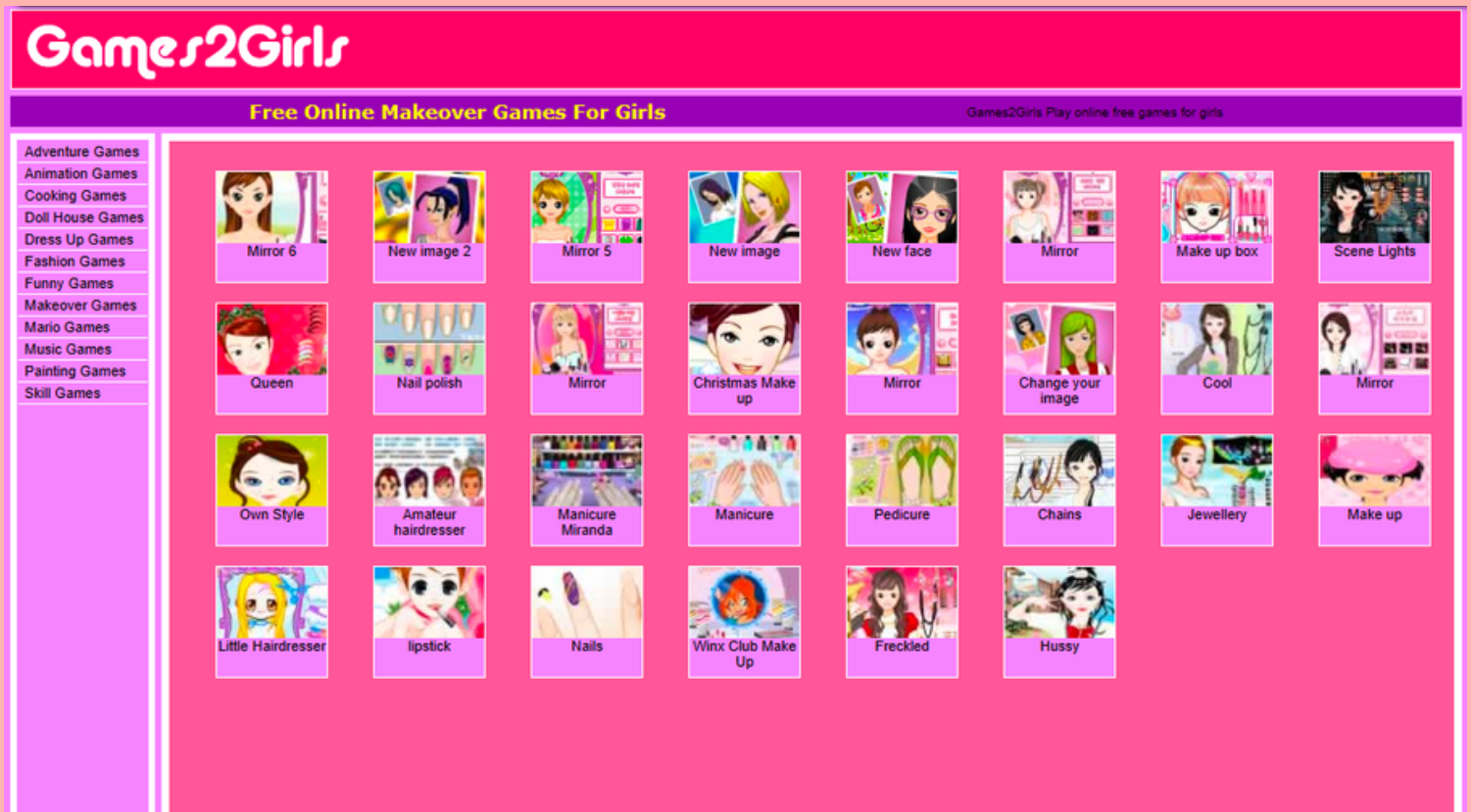
Games for Girls: The Flipside

I think it's clear that on my blog I've become somewhat of a champion of not being ashamed of liking more conventionally feminine things. That has not changed. But, there is unfortunately a downside to a lot of this media created for young girls. Growing up with the internet already existing is not something that can be easily dismissed. You grow up with the whole world at your fingertips, and in some ways, that is also an issue; filtering suitable content from non-suitable content can be a challenge for both kids and adults alike. So, what am I alluding to here? What does this have to do with games for girls?

Many online websites existed where kids can go online, even engage with other people in MMORPGs or even just smaller-scale games. There were also those websites (in the age of Flash R.I.P) where there were potentially hundreds of games with just about anything you were interested in. Websites like GirlsGoGames and the such. For me, these websites were great fun, and a great way to kill time but also just to really enjoy the fact that there was a gaming space for me in the internet. There were many games I genuinely enjoyed playing (especially the cooking games wow). And yes, I do feel nostalgic for that time. But honestly, a lot of those games were not good.



By "not good", I don't mean they were not good quality, that's a given; those websites prioritised quantity over quality. Some of them were really all about appearance - when there are games to try and remove acne from a genuinely flawless Elsa (don't ask), what message does that send? Some of these games have you applying makeup or removing perfectly normal blemishes, etc. from what seems to be either a face that already has makeup applied or one that is natural - because believe it or not acne and blemishes are completely normal. These games display maybe one of the worst things young people have to deal with today: the constant (and sometimes digital) completely unrealistic standards they are being surrounded by. And girls grow up with that. And continue to face the pressure as teenagers and adults.



Screenshot from kinda now defunct games2girls rip u were luvd by me

CLUB PENGUIN AND STATUS IN VIRTUAL WORLDS

Growing up with the internet is so weird, I feel like that somehow needs to be acknowledged again. As mentioned in my previous diary entry, the internet was really a place where I could go and play games online. However, there were ones that were just a bit more engrossing than the ones mentioned in the previous diary entry. Virtual world games like Club Penguin, Moshi Monsters and Poptropica were games I frequented quite often and are a great source of nostalgia for me.

What was completely unique about these games is that they were free (more on that in a sec) games with a large scope with the target audience of children. They also had the opportunity for children to chat openly (for better or for worse) in a somewhat regulated manner, introducing them slyly to the world of social media without throwing them immediately into the deep end. Some of these games also had a very unique art style and really fun mini-games and missions within. While I lost interest in Moshi Monsters, Club Penguin and Poptropica were websites I frequented quite often.

With those two websites in particular, it felt like the variety of things you could do in those virtual worlds made it really easy to stay on there for much longer and to return much more frequently. Also having your own virtual space in Club Penguin, your own pet (the PUFFLE!!!) and your own inventory was almost like a unique way of self-expression.

The websites had a unique art style, and totally creative concepts, locations, and themes. Club Penguin has an iconic style, with iconic locations like the Dojo and the Pizza Parlour that were oozing with personality and fun. Poptropica - (created by the author of Diary of a Wimpy Kid!) while less of a social game, also had a unique art style, with several islands that you could explore including themed islands. It was such a nice way to spend my free time and in a way was a simulation of society - butttt that's sometimes not all peaches and cream.

You see, you realise these things now, but when you are 10 years old playing Club Penguin and find that users who have a membership can express themselves in a much more detailed manner (and own more puffles, hello), you feel like you need to have that too - because it also indicated social status in the website. Because you could tell when someone was a member, it created a social hierarchy and a status system in what was an otherwise very fun kid-friendly game. Putting across the idea that you need to pay money or have a membership in order to gain more status signifiers is an entirely strange idea to put across to kids but what is even more questionable is the fact that this may have been a soft transition into the age of micro-transactions in games directed towards children. It's an exploitative practice and while it is not as easy as it is now to accidentally press on the pay button, it is directly targeted at children which is something that is certainly ethically dubious. Poptropica too, jumped on this, as they also had paid memberships which meant that you could get access to exclusive costumes and access to certain islands. However, because Poptropica was a much less social game, status signalling was not as big of a part of this membership option. Either way, it's directed at kids.



In a way, this is so much tamer than games on phones that are basically built on micro-transactions and taking advantage of children's naïveté and maybe even their mistakes if they accidentally press on something (I feel bad for kids growing up now). Those games are unfortunately built on those payments, relying on those first rather than delivering a quality game.

While Virtual World games like Club Penguin and Poptropica are well-made, I acknowledge that they also needed to make money somehow. However, I do think that marketing towards kids is a dangerous game. Now that most of those websites are dead and gone due to the death of Flash (R.I.P) and the popularity of mobile games, I think while looking back fondly to those games, we must always remember that they were indeed also flawed in many ways and at the end of the day, tried to get children to pay for status/virtual experiences :)



Screenshot from Club Penguin in the last moments before it shut down forever...

Ice Princess (2005) and Figure Skating's Ugly Underbelly

TW: Eating disorders

I grew up watching Disney Channel films. An earlier film that I was obsessed with was Ice Princess; one of those seminal films for me growing up. I watched it countless times, had the DVD, and it was not just a film that I just enjoyed – it was a film that genuinely inspired me to directly take action. In my Letterboxd diary, I wrote that it may have inspired me to have an "unhinged obsession with. figure skating for like two years". Little of that is a joke. This film played a large role in inspiring me to go take figure skating lessons (which were not easy to find where I lived at the time) and I even just looked at Google for hours to see the leotards that I could one day wear. Seems a bit excessive but I really thought it could happen for me. Butttt I dropped it after a few lessons – it just wasn't for me and I do have eras of being obsessed with certain things as a child (which is absolutely normal).

So, with Ice Princess, rewatching it made me feel nostalgic for sure. I mean because of the fact that I emotionally tie it with that era of my life, but also because of that very 2000's soundtrack and it's entirely wholesome message of following your dreams with almost entirely supportive female friendships throughout the whole thing. I mean what more can you ask for in a film targeted at young girls? In a way I was really grateful for growing up with movies like these that made me more ambitious and provided somewhat healthy representations of female characters being in control of their own narrative. However, I am completely glad that I did not follow the figure skating path because Ice Princess simply does not show the whole truth.

While I did mention the film was wholesome, the industry and profession it is trying to present is certainly not. And that is something that the film sometimes glosses over or sometimes doesn't address. I mean – maybe a bit too dark for a children's film.

For example, Casey Carlyle (our main character) could land triple axels and end up fourth place in a competition within only a few months of training when that stuff takes yearssss and sometimes girls (and boys of course) have to start at the age of 12 (or even younger) to even get at that level to compete. In fact, this training that starts at that young age means all the problems that the character of Gen (who is a figure skater already at the start of the film) goes through like not having time to have a normal life which includes having a social life, eating what she wants, or having time to study for school start for some kids at that young age (if not even younger) are the only ways in which this lifestyle is addressed. That pressure can be overwhelming, and certain aspects of it like eating are well-known to be preposterously bad.

The film actually addresses the eating issue very subtly as characters make comments about not being able to eat cheese or have any carbs or anything that actually is needed in any balanced diet. While they seem like just small comments showing the pressure in the industry to stay a certain shape, this pressure is more of an endemic problem within the industry (and other loosely-related ones like gymnastics and ballet that seem to factor in a lot of aesthetic elements). Eating disorders plague the industry, with a large proportion of athletes in the sport coming out and speaking of the commonality of eating disorders and body-related issues, a problem named as even worse than doping...

The idea of pushing 12 year olds to their limits, and urging them to stay in the same shape to be "lighter" when their body is growing and they literally have to gain weight to grow is a way in which the sport makes the shelf-life of many of the athletes as short as a few years, and can be mentally and physically harrowing. Also mentioned in one of the small comments in Ice Princess, these athletes do have a shelf-life in the industry. Worse now than ever – and displayed by the several early retirements we see with athletes that haven't even hit 20 – they opt for intense sequences with several quads and triple axels, and in training putting overt pressure and strain on their bodies, making them get career-ending injuries much earlier and retire much earlier. There's an excellent video about [this](#) which goes into a lot of detail about the phenomenon. The point is clear: it's an industry that is intensely flawed.

As much as Ice Princess tries to romanticise the sport, the reality is much bleaker than that. The infamous Nancy Kerrigan incident, Kamila Valieva's recent breakdown and the countless athletes who retire before becoming adults because they couldn't take it anymore display a much more uglier side of this beautiful sport. In Ice Princess, if characters can't take it, they drop out, but it's seen as an individualised issue rather an issue within the industry itself that needs to change (Yes, I do think the minimum age for competing needs to be increased and these aforementioned issues should be tackled more productively).



The point of this is no matter how much Ice Princess makes figure skating look like an easy-to-get-into profession and barely gives attention to the pressures in the industry such as intense competitiveness, body-related issues, and countless others is well... is expected for the type of movie it is. However, even though we feel nostalgic for content like this – we must never forget it is not a blueprint of reality. And really, I do feel thankful I did not go down that path.



IPC-C344-31 Photo Credit: Rafy
L-R: Gen (Hayden Panettiere), Casey (Michelle Trachtenberg).

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Screenshot from Ice Princess (2005)

The Fictional Golden Age

I haven't been blogging in a while due to the absolute inadequacy of time I had - I'm not done sharing my thoughts just yet :) During this busy time, I went to a museum (the Rijksmuseum), and while I was looking at paintings from Rembrandt and Vermeer - widely considered to be some of the pioneers of the Dutch Golden Age period, I was wondering why exactly certain eras become idolised such as this one. Almost every country has their own Golden Age, and it serves as a mythos that is also a reminder of the country's greatness (and its' capacity of greatness), but is also interlaced with a sense of nostalgia and disappointment if the present does not live up to it. This era is completely fictional.

By fictional, I mean it's greatness is narrativised. It is true that during this time in several different countries, they consider themselves to flourish in every way possible. Even the name "Golden Age" suggests its' background in Greek mythology, implying that it is the best (almost utopia-like era) compared to other ages. Golden ages are just patriotic stories we tell ourselves, riddled with sometimes, frankly speaking - harmful nostalgia. This is the very reason (and a good one at that) why some museums in the Netherlands are not using that word any longer as colonial spectres start to poke through the golden curtains.

Just as with everything I discuss within my blog, nostalgia can be blinding to the overwhelmingly negative side of things. The same is to be said here. The Dutch Golden Age is a purely white narrative - as it highlights triumphs of the usually white elite and does not highlight the much more controversial side of that era. The prosperous era was in part, if not largely a result of colonialism as well as their infamous slave trade that is simply not talked about enough. While museums such as the Rijksmuseum have installed sections that address this side of history, it remains to be still a point of controversy with many feeling that Amsterdam Museum's choice to not use the word "Dutch Golden Age" a bit too drastic, and the Netherlands troubled colonial history is not nearly as known and widely discussed as it should be.

Such Golden Ages do not just ignore colonialism, but also the large population who lived in poverty as well as the internal conflicts that were occurring. Something to also note, is the role of women was still reduced in that era, and therefore there may have been many brilliant painters, scientists, and other figures who were never as highlighted or even mentioned at all due to the largely male-oriented nature of the major public figures in that era who actually made it into history.

This idea of a Golden Age is not strictly Dutch, and this is in no way a condemnation of having history to be proud of - countries absolutely need that. It is the lack of acknowledgement of perhaps the more darker elements that were in that narrativised era that is more of an issue. History is complicated - and always told from the victor's point of view - but it's portrayal is every-changing. The key is not to erase history, or refuse it completely, but acknowledge it (goes without saying states should make reparations asap). At the end of the day, most Golden Ages in general have darker sides. But it is a true part of the past, and it can only serve as a learning point.

Characters (usually here, a country) also have flaws, with any compelling character, their flaws and their history can teach them more about themselves and provide them with room for growth - and audiences love to see characters grow and evolve. Perhaps this myth of a "golden age" also leaves room for nationalism, as "golden ages" usually do not take place in the age of globalisation where wealth and progress is more shared than ever before and highlights individual superiority in some way. Despite this, the key is always acknowledgment - when looking back towards those Golden Ages - we should also think about their narrative of being one of - if not the greatest eras in history, but also acknowledging the progress and achievement, on par with the darker side of things. Maybe then, we can learn to accept the present.



Syndics of the Drapers' Guild by Rembrandt. Painted in 1662.



The Night Watch by Rembrandt. Painted in 1642.

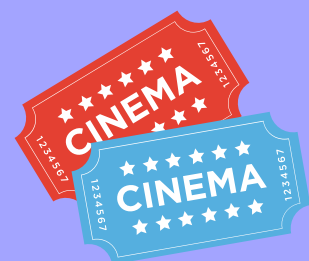
Nobody Asked for This Remake

Originality is dead – I think that's what a lot of people say when discussing the absolute insurmountable number of reboots of classic beloved franchises/shows/movies. The philosophical question of whether originality is dead and whether postmodernism is the way to go will remain just that – a philosophical theory. What is not a theory is the fact that the entertainment industry loves rebooting/remaking things – maybe because it's a safe economical bet. You know that no matter what, there is a dedicated fanbase who will show up to see something already established. It's really one of the classic usages of nostalgia for profit. But has it gone a bit too far?

I say that because I – a previous Teen Wolf fan – just saw the SDCC trailer for the Teen Wolf movie and not only was I disappointed – I just felt a mere sense of "why did this get made?" with a mix of "ohhh they're bringing someone back from the dead" which by the way is just straight up put in the trailer.... This phenomenon of bringing a character back from the dead not only reverses the effect that this character death had on the larger story universe, it trivialises character deaths in general (when done several times Supernatural-style), lowers the stakes, and feels like cheap fan-service. Unless it is purposeful, and intends to actually further the story (and character) in interesting ways, it's just a nostalgia thing. Besides that, why is there a Teen Wolf reboot just a few years after the show ends? There isn't even enough distance or time for the fanbase to properly feel nostalgic about it. Maybe I shouldn't just judge from the trailer – but it seems to be they are bringing back an old villain too. In other words, is there something different they're bringing to the table?

This obsession with reboots makes sense economically speaking, but creatively speaking – a well-made remake should bring something new to the table (and no, not just improved CGI). A big problem that I had with the new Star Wars films (especially The Force Awakens), is that it was by-far a less well-written version of A New Hope. The only cool thing that differed was that Rey was suggested to just be a nobody and not connected to any Skywalker, a move that was stupidly reversed later on – and the audience's response to Rise of Skywalker is proof that audiences are getting sick of soulless remakes too. Same to be said for Jurassic World. And the new Obi-Wan Kenobi series. In a way, it's even worse if they just switch out the male character with a female character under the guise of feminism – it's insulting – just create a new, original character for women!! It implies that female characters can only be placed in a male character's shoes in order to be respected.

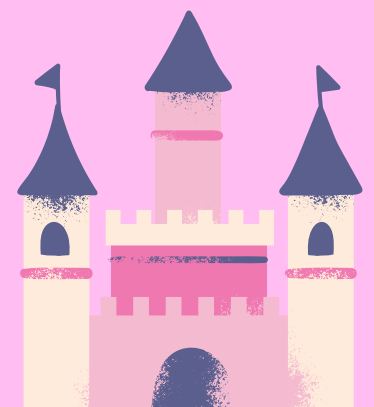
A reboot/franchise has to justify its' existence artistically, because if it's essentially the same thing – then it's very clearly a cop-out. It's not original. But for example, if you have something new to offer to the table like with the new Spiderman films which portrays Spiderman (and his story) in a different way to previous renditions of Spiderman, then you are indeed expanding on nostalgia and making it something to add on to and learn from rather than just reducing it to its' vacant and redundant nature. The nature of nostalgia is idealisation, so reliving it through reboots/remakes that are essentially the same thing repeated exposes nostalgia for what it is; a fantasy. However, if it is treated as new material, much more can be done – with the base of an existing fandom who will still show up – and will continue to show up if a compelling story is written. Because otherwise, they can just revisit the old material.



Living in a Barbie World

If you know me or even just scrolled through this blog, something becomes quite apparent; I'm a huge fan of the Barbie films. I grew up with them, I have fond memories of them; I attribute them to intense feelings of nostalgia. I used to go every month to the shops to see if a new Barbie DVD was out (so 2000s lol), and if there was, I would get it. They were straight to DVD films and were produced quite regularly so it was a steady roll-out of content. While i was the perfect demographic, I also watched kids' content that was not necessarily my demographic too like Cars (2006) and How To Train your Dragon (2010) - beloved films of mine - which I'm very glad about because unfortunately, while Barbie films have many pros, their cons - especially when it comes to their young female target audience - should be acknowledged.

Barbie (as a doll) is almost universally known and infamous for setting unrealistic beauty standards and portraying an overwhelmingly Euro-centric hegemonic idea of beauty. Barbie in the early days was just that; a pretty doll that unfortunately represented the time it came out in. However, in the 2000s, there was a shift, with Mattel trying to target a new generation of young girls - and successfully so! If you would like to see the almost hour long video where I talk about these films in detail and their impact, check out my [YouTube video](#) I made a while back.



In a way, these 2000s Barbie films represented a different, more humanised portrayal of the iconic doll. And looking back, most of the films focus on the titular Barbie character's adventures, with male sidekicks rather being mostly supplemental than central to the plot. These films showcase mother-daughter relationships and healthy female friendships - not a commonality in media for women. Most of the characters derived power from their femininity and their wit. They were designed for young girls to really try out different roles and make them feel empowered. However, some of the baggage of the Barbie title is still very present.

While I mentioned the pros here which personally helped me in my growth, the cons must be acknowledged. A doll is purely appearance-based, and translating that to the screen was a challenge that was faced successfully for the reasons I mention above. However, dolls do not look like humans. It's ridiculous to assume that animated characters should look like humans. But when almost every Barbie character has an impossibly small waistline (in almost every one of these films), that sets a standard. The Barbie character (and the characters that surround her) are usually very thin and adopt to intensely Eurocentric body standards.

Maybe it's the setting of medieval Europe in a lot of these films, but the problem here is how the villains look like. The villains in most Barbie films (especially earlier ones) usually have larger noses, a larger build, and sometimes even non-Eurocentric features. The problem of the way different types of noses are seen can be almost separated in a completely different blog post, but associating these features with villainy is not just a surface-level problem; it may have discriminatory undertones. Unfortunately, this isn't just an issue within these Barbie films but also a larger problem within animated films in the 2000s and media in general in that era (also now).

I think when we feel nostalgic about these films we should always remember the time they came out in and the fact that they also have flaws that can be detrimental. Because growing up with these type of representations made me and definitely other people feel less beautiful as someone with less Euro-centric features.

Fortunately (and I think Barbie/Mattel is doing this quite well), some franchises are adapting to the times, and you can definitely see the progression within Barbie films. Less popular now, and not as good as it can be, still throughout the years you can see that Barbie films start to introduce more diversity (note the word introduce), villains who adhere to Eurocentric beauty standards (subverting the previous trope), and female characters who are strong in different ways. This growth is noteworthy! The weight thing though is a much bigger problem that is here to stay, and not just in Barbie films but in media in general.

I thought this was important to note because as much as I love Barbie films, cherish them, and continue to watch them - we must remember when we are nostalgic that they are a product of their times and they are bound to have flaws. Just as your favourite movie may not be perfect, your comfort movie from 10 years ago is definitely not perfect. And when Y2K makes a comeback, we need to distance ourselves from the darker part of it (and we aren't doing a great job I must say).



Screenshot from Barbie:Mariposa (2008)

Totally not a Teenager's Body

So, my current Instagram icon is Clover from *Totally Spies*. Other than the fact that it fits the tone of my personality and my blog, it's also because like many girls growing up, I have a soft spot for *Totally Spies* because I grew up with it. This French-Canadian children's show has so much heart and creativity that it is not a surprise to see that it has grown to be one of those beloved shows that is almost associated with the 2000's. It's exactly the type of media I needed growing up, and exactly the type that I continue to revisit. Not to use this word for the thousandth time, but it's nostalgia bait for me. However, it too, has flaws; the odd sexualisation and ageing up of young girls (it is also a problem in general media by the way). A strange yet common way to represent young female characters in animated shows. But let's start on why it is such a staple show to begin with, and why it has cemented itself as an integral part of pop culture.

Totally Spies' main three characters have different interests and personalities that intersect; allowing for an interestingly slightly more complex portrayal of different girls. Fan-favourite Sam is supposed to be bookish and smart, but she does not have the annoyingly clichéd early 2000s treatment of how a smart female character is supposed to look like; glasses and all. They are accepted and not shamed by the show for their personality. It's not groundbreaking stuff or anything, but this is the early 2000's we're talking about where ugly duckling transformations were all the rage. That is part of the problem unfortunately. But we also need to speak of the style of the show and the fashion choices (!).

The show absolutely bursts with creativity, and even when the animation is lacklustre, 70's inspired editing choices and wacky creative stylistic choices and animated face expressions make it so fun to watch even by today's standards. The creative gadgets are still memorable to this day and continue to inspire that genre of girls' media. What is even more noteworthy is the fashion. Animation lacks for sure, but the main 3 are always changing their outfits up in some of the most stylish and timeless fits I've seen on television - and to this day they inspire my style and many others' style! It just shows how much heart was put into it. However, on second watch, some parts of the show stand out which *Totally Spies* is sadly not the only culprit of.

The female characters (like most characters in general) in *Totally Spies* do not look like teenagers in a high school. In fact, they look even more developed than some 20 year olds, with slender bodies and accentuated assets. It's a larger problem in kids' animated shows and how they represent their female characters because of the simple fact that animators can animate them to look younger and it isn't a casting/minor consent issue.

Similarly to the Barbie films, the variety in body shapes in the show is non-existent, and the diet jokes are a-plenty (it still is a product of its' time so...). You see, *Totally Spies* is a show made by adults, and therefore its' representations of children matter - especially when they can be seen as sexualised. I will not even mention the accusations that *Totally Spies* had some weird suggestive scenes because I simply do not remember those and do not find them significant enough - what I still do remember though is the ageing up.

Shows like Kim Possible are the same too in this regard. They are characters sometimes as young as 14. Do I think the pros far outweigh the cons in this situation? Absolutely. It is just a note. And a reminder. When something has the power to set trends, we must remember that we should also make it inclusive and realistic to the real world - where not all girls look like that (most young girls don't look 25 as well, so).

For now I am strictly also speaking of animated shows; and we clearly see this is as a continuing issue with some questionable camera angles being chosen in shows like Miraculous Ladybug to represent a female character as young as 12 - angles in my opinion that are more suggestive than Totally Spies. And i do not mean to be a party pooper at all; quite the opposite! I love Totally Spies and its' impact on me is genuinely huge (I also love Miraculous Ladybug but that is besides the point lol). But as with anything, I want to take a step back and say hey; it also was not flawless. Nostalgia can be blinding, and to prevent that we can use it as a learning opportunity. When we want to revisit those Y2K fashion moments, we need to always remember that unfortunately; it can be a bit exclusive.

But yea, maybe I'll be tuning in to the new season coming out next year, which I don't know why that is being made but hey let's see.



Wii Sports Is not Switch Material

One of my first blog posts here was actually about the Nintendo DS - in which I talked about my positive feelings associated to the console, my nostalgia for it, but ultimately how most of the games for it were shovel-ware and just do not hold up anymore the way they used to. The Nintendo Wii is the exact same - Well, not exactly... because you see, in late 2006, something very special happened... Wii Sports.

Wii Sports is synonymous with the Wii itself, and is considered one of the best games made for that particular console. It represented the console itself, its' accessibility, colourfulness, and its' wide target audience. You see, Wii Sports was family-friendly, incorporated elements of fitness utilising the wacky controller-type situation and was very much fit to play in social situations.

Many games for the Wii took that into account, and the Wii itself kind of became that type of console that everyone liked (unlike the much more controversial Playstation). In fact, I actually do not remember playing Wii Sports a lot on my own, more it's underrated sequel Wii Sports Resort (which is a masterpiece btw, where my Wii Sports Resorts fans at!!).

It was creative, incorporated somewhat realistic gameplay (although not flawless, I mean this is the 2000's we're talking about), and has just about my favourite game soundtrack ever that still manages to evoke nostalgia - it's a colourful and warm catchy tune that still holds up today (because it's just good, but also nostalgic, what more can you ask for?)

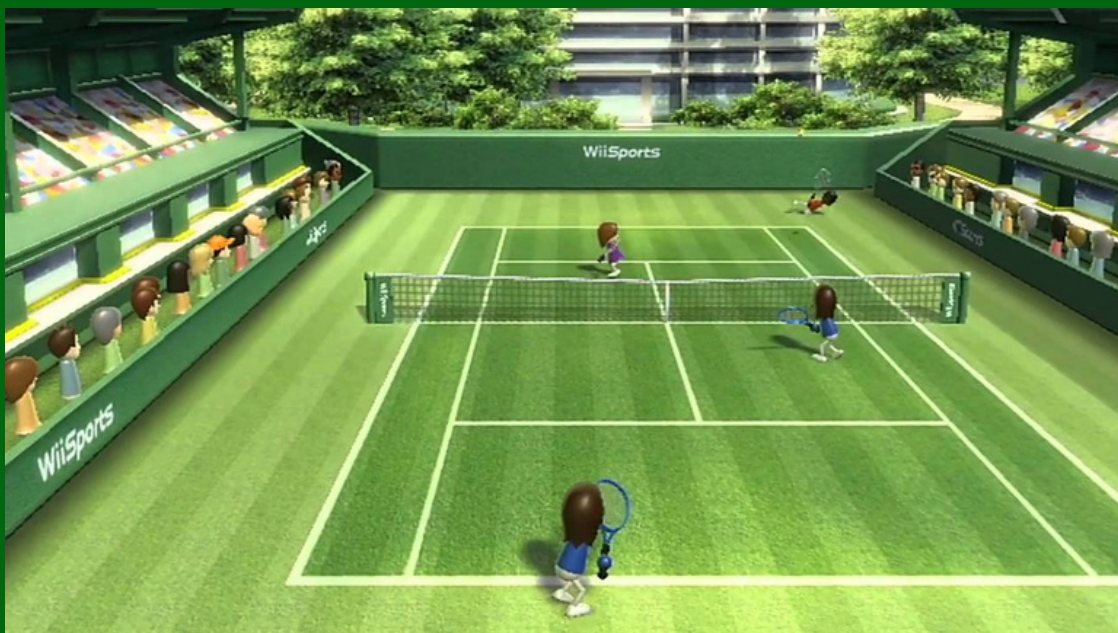
But, just like anything else, it is indeed a product of its' era. You see, a game like Wii Sports particularly fit the Wii and was designed in a way to elevate the console's features and personality + tone. It was a perfect fit for that era in gaming, and was pretty much groundbreaking at the time of its' release - but the ground has indeed been broken, which means more breaking is just... not that special anymore. You must be like, okay, what are you trying to say, that the Wii and Wii Sports are a product of the era it came out in and we should appreciate it for what it was rather than obsess over the imaginary good old days? Duh - of course. But... here's the catch... well it's more of an expected catch I must say... they made a Nintendo Switch Sports.

The fact that I just found out today of the existence of this reboot/remake/rehash - whatever you like to call it - is proof that maybe this wasn't wanted. And maybe this wasn't needed. Meh reviews like this one by Metro are not a good sign either. You see, people aren't dumb, nostalgia is charming at first, but just like chocolate, too much of it makes you feel kind of sick, subsequently making you think about why you're having so much of it in the first place and if it's any good for you...

As I previously mentioned, Wii Sports was the perfect game for the Wii Console, it was like lightning in a bottle and it practically saved the company's dwindling profits. But most importantly: it represented the time it came out in. The Switch is just not designed to capture what was special about Wii Sports. First of all, the controls are just not the same, the design is not the same, it removes the whole face-to-face socialising aspect that people attached to it, and most importantly; it is clear nostalgia bait.

While I do think there may be some positive intentions behind this game and some re-vitalised elements which undoubtedly can be quite fun, it will just not hold up, and clearly does not hold up. It's not culturally resonant. It naively misunderstands what made the game so special to many in the first place. Reboots are becoming more commonplace - but people are just not buying into it anymore. It's fun at first, but will just. Not. Hold. Up. :)

UPDATE: I played the game, it's not good.. Switch controller response is poor, range of sports are poor, and the design/concept is terrible.



Still from Wii Sports



Stills from Wii Sports and Wii Sport Resort

I'm a "Saaaad Girl" :(

Arguably, Lana del Rey's reign as the 'sad girl' queen supreme is over. Well, kind of. Her legacy continues to influence female alternative/ pop artists to this very day both in terms of genre and image/aesthetic. Despite the public's qualms with her following her controversial comments made in 2020 claiming that she felt underprivileged in the industry in comparison to other artists who were coincidentally POC; she is one of the most influential artists of the century thus far. While previous actions caused a slew of her fans and fellow artists to quit following her (also arguably because of the quality of her music); there is a solid reason why we can feel nostalgic about the impact of her early career as we see ripples of influence that are both implied and explicitly mentioned by artists like Clairo, Billie Eilish, and international artists too such as ROSALÍA and Eefje de Visser.

What can we feel nostalgic about? It is precisely the same thing she mentioned in her creme-brulée crust depth of a cultural analysis during the pandemic (arguably the worst time a celebrity can complain about their lives): It's the right to be a 'sad girl'. Unfortunately, she does posit a point in the letter, but her victim mentality and her implicated racially-motivated name drops allowed the media (including social media) to pounce on her. Her insistence that she had done nothing wrong made it worse. However, the thing I am speaking of is conventional femininity and vulnerability.



Lana del Rey's signature pout, frown, her dark aesthetic, lyricism, paired with strikingly melancholic crooning about toxic relationships was not a mainstream look for female artists. While obviously also influenced by the likes of Fiona Apple, Kate Bush, and other alternative/pop artists before, Lana del Rey took the "sad girl" image to new extremes in the digital age, further exacerbated by a subculture that would covet her aesthetics to express their female teen angst on sites like Tumblr. It is therefore no surprise she rose to fame on Youtube and Tumblr.

So what? She was one of the artists who brought the "sad girl" aesthetic into the mainstream despite critic and media backlash? Well, yes... It is this insistence that there should be a space for female vulnerability and sadness that was a core to Del Rey's music and image. Patriarchal industries such as the music industry are bound to prioritise more patriarchal ideals; female distress is not one of them. In fact, expressing emotion is not one of them. Historically, female sadness was perceived as borderline hysterical behaviour (a word that in itself has negatively-laden feminine implications), therefore previous artists claiming and re-claiming it as a source of power should be celebrated.

This 'sad girl' aesthetic is being claimed by some of the biggest pop artists today. Billie Eilish has explicitly named Del Rey as an influence, something that can be seen both with her music and her image. Female artists can make moody music, and they can reclaim teen angst, female angst, female melancholy and not be considered weak. You do not have to be a singer-songwriter to be vulnerable - not anymore. Perhaps Del Rey's outburst was a result of her doing something that didn't feel completely right to her creatively at the time - a shift to a more singer-songwriter image that slightly abandoned her dark hopeless aesthetics. That is just a theory though...

Either way, instead of looking at that era and feeling sheer disappointment (usually accompanied by a real-life frown) as I was a big fan of Lana, I can feel nostalgic for the good parts of it; at least what it brought to the music industry. Anyways, this ‘sad girl’ aesthetic is not absolved of criticism either. It comes with that Tumblr Effy Stonem-Alex Turner-Sleaze-fest aesthetic baggage that was all the rage back then. That is a dark moment in history that we seem to have exported onto TikTok (the extent of this I am not sure of though as I am not on the platform).

While facilitated justttttt slightly by Del Rey’s image and lyrics, her music is arguably targeted at an older audience (definitely not the audience listening to her at the time and definitely not the audience on Tumblr; both intersect). This ‘sad girl’ aesthetic can borderline glamorise drugs and mental illness as evident by the prevalent use of Del Rey’s imagery with such lyrics such as “I wish I was dead” on countless Tumblr posts. Why Tumblr allowed such content to proliferate unregulated is above me, but it was a definite part of that subculture and should not be forgotten if we choose to feel nostalgic for that era. We shouldn’t allow this to be repeated in TikTok; not again.

Other than that, must not forget that this subculture majorly excluded (and excludes) people who are well... not white and privileged.



Lana Del Rey from “Ultraviolence” photoshoot

Beauty and Beastly Appearances

A reflection on Disney classics is long overdue as a topic for a blog post. But I think that I will take it piece by piece. I just revisited the original 90's Beauty and the Beast, a movie that I for sure loved as a child. My memories of it are fond with some of the reasons being the gorgeous animation and the gothic visuals. Oh, and also Belle - loved her as a child. There's a reason why it's a classic, but it seems like people speak of it (the original) in a more negative light. So yes, there is some critical reflection on the past, however, I have some criticism too - albeit from a different perspective. Because criticism can only be in the perspective of current societal outlooks. To note though is that I won't talk a lot about the remake because yea it's soulless, yea the dress doesn't look good, yea its too long blah blah blah... however I will briefly comment on this need to 'fix' previous media rather than creating new original well-written content.

I do think that Belle is an admirable character. The insistence that female characters who are involved in a relationship or are not notably physically strong are weak is essentially a common thread of discussion amongst many. I've discussed several times here on the blog (and in general) that conventional femininity seen as weakness is inherently misogynistic. In fact, the idea of weak characters should be linked to negative qualities. Or weak writing (or both). Belle (whilst this depiction of her tiptoes around the 'im not like other girls, I read' trope) is a good character; strong if you will.

The medieval village setting is important, and Belle's wit and her perseverance in her passion, loyalty, and kindness whilst also standing up for herself and what she believes in sets her apart from the town. It's a great depiction for young girls; her wit immediately means she can see past appearances - an important theme and message in the film.



So yes, Belle's arc - while tied to a love story - is decidedly a persistent reflection of her character. And unfortunately, those same qualities which victimise her with the beast and Gaston, help her regain her firmness later on in the story where she can set limitations and stand up for herself fully. Whilst her character could have had an arc especially linked to her "I want" moment, I don't think she is by no means weak or uninspiring. Arguably, the opposite.. she doesn't have many flaws or an arc...

Something I also love about the film is the use of appearances as a theme. The town loves Gaston based on face value, despite his pretty vacant character. In fact, the town is quite xenophobic (or naïve) as a result of relying on appearances especially when it comes to characters like Maurice and the Beast. It's also the same for Belle, who is seen by Gaston as viable due to beauty and not inner qualities.

It's a good theme, but unfortunately there is something incongruent here. The film circumvents its' own theme when it comes to linking characters like Belle with kindness, and Beast with lack thereof. And even with Beast's character arc, the cutlery and the Beast transform into humans at the end anyways, ultimately suggesting that appearances do matter to an extent. I mean in this case to also showcase that there's no bestiality involved (idk actually maybe not since the beast appearance is more of an analogy..). The same is to be said with the enchantress' story at the beginning of the film where her physical transformation proves her inner beauty.

There is also a disturbingly stereotypical representation of a Jewish-implied character that feels so random and offensive - following the common trend of using characters that look ethnic/Jewish and linking them to evil.

This is practically incongruent with the point of the film, and left me a bit confused. Why not choose a character from the town that we've seen before that would hammer in the theme? Ughhhh. Messy.

Nostalgia aside, this film has a lot of good, and also a bit of bad. But it in no way needed a remake that essentially stripped the character and the spirit of the original in order to make a point. It's nostalgia that is very very corporate, when the existing content is well, still there. And it can be learned from to make well, new original stories:)



Still from Beauty and the Beast cut off by me idk why tbh..

CONTEXTUAL NOSTALGIA AND CHILDHOOD HORROR IN ORPHAN (2009)

The film Orphan (2009) for me was just as uncharted territory as that PSA I referenced in a separate blog post that attached Oasis's 'Stop Crying Your Heart Out' to some seriously (at the time) scary context. I think what made Orphan so significant to me was the fact that it was perhaps my earliest interest in a horror film (and even then I was just looking at bits and pieces of it walking in and outside of the living room because I don't think I was allowed to stay and watch the full movie). Now, I look back and find it to be nostalgic in a weird way. It sounds weird, but that memory of Orphan was one of my only memories in my home country.. so context matters very much here - it's almost the opposite case to the Oasis situation. So yea, for sure, nostalgia can be completely arbitrary to what is attached to.

But now that it's October, and scary movies are on people's minds; does Orphan hold up? And why did I find it particularly creepy even just seeing bits and pieces of it (then watching it fully later on several times). To answer the first question; yes. Kind of. There's definitely a fanbase big enough that allowed it to have a prequel. Arguably, some people even liked the prequel better. But why does Orphan seem to feel like a classic?

For me, Orphan was not particularly scary. It was just unnerving and creepy. I'm not a huge horror fan because I prefer the creepy and unnerving, which I find to be notably more thought-provoking and interesting. The thing that made Orphan interesting was the switch up of the child archetype in horror. Usually children are used as a tool to create a juxtaposition between innocence and evil as children usually represent innocence.

And the twist here (spoilers of course), is that it was in fact not a child, but rather an adult pretending to be a child that was the basis of the film. It takes a common trope and changes it up, which is nice to see. The fear here seems to be derived from Esther as a calculating adult that uses the guise of childhood and innocence to get into people's homes. it's paradoxical.

Esther is also - according to the screenwriter - a possible reflection on kids becoming grown up too early, possibly conveyed with the unnerving and huge gap between adulthood and childhood that makes a difference here. The context of adulthood changes the entire character of Esther and everything she does. Instead of being a tortured child, she becomes a calculated serial killer. It's creepy and it works. The performance of Isabelle Furhman was also just *chef's kiss* You really see the inspiration behind the character of Esther wherein she represents how young girls are socialised to seek validation from (older) men too.

But, let's be honest here, it is not a perfect movie. Nostalgia can't change that. Cult classics can be horrendously flawed too... There is quite a bit of fault with the way the film depicts Esther, her otherness is seen as connected somehow to her condition and her background (her accent is not very good). But I must say deriving horror from mental illness/health conditions is something that several other films do, not just Orphan - however it should still be noted as a valid observation.



Considering the film is also linking the horror to her condition which seems to be very human, if it were not linked to a human condition, it would actually just be more horrifying and unexplainable (therefore horrifying). In addition to that, as a film, the parent characters come off as a bit naïve which is a problem) + the film could have definitely been much shorter. It also is quite cheesy and relies too heavily on that twist rather than relying on subtle tension and subtlety. It also wasn't as scary as it was un-nerving. So yea, a retrospective is useful when we examine horror movies of old. Because sometimes the tropes they hold are just as terrifying as the content itself... Anyways, I should probably watch the new prequel or something.



Still from Orphan (2009)

Unintentionally Creepy Uncanny Children Shows

I talk a lot about how nostalgia constitutes a kind of fictional re-imagining of the past. This can be splicing and trimming memories, or viewing them with rose-tinted glasses to fit whatever narrative it is you are trying to create in your mind. This can often mean self-censoring or downplaying negative aspects of the past. A big part of my childhood that I've kind of repressed is disturbing parts of childhood shows; a perfect example of this.

It's not like I forgot that these shows existed, it's that they are memories that are not accessed often when I do think of my childhood. And in the chance that they are accessed, they are not accessed with a fond attachment to them. What I find particularly unnerving about moments in these children shows is that they were intended to be child-friendly, yet end up often being unintentionally unnerving. I find that to be way more disturbing than something that is meant to be intentionally scary. It's like burning a cake, or putting too much baking powder or something... it was just meant to taste good...

Angela Anaconda is one of those TV shows I so valiantly tried to repress in my mind (but unfortunately I can't forget the sheer weirdness of that show). I do not really remember the story at all or what it was even about and I think that's really funny. All I remember is the immensely disturbing art style, and luckily I can understand why I found it unnerving back then and why I find it unnerving now. You see, it is what could be referred to as the uncanny valley theory; a theory that suggests that things feel unsettling to us when they very closely teeter towards the line of looking or seeming completely human.

Angela Anaconda is a perfect example of this theory, as it mixes a human almost photo-realistic drawing of a face with less human movements and body parts. It also doesn't help that her face has that weird saturated look that makes her look actually drained of blood.

It was also pointed out by a friend that she found Courage the Cowardly Dog pretty creepy as a child. This can also be partially explained by the theory as many episodes contained some threatening aspects towards Courage and incorporated photo-realistic elements to represent this. However, I do not understand why Courage is always being the target of horrible actions in a show that is supposedly targeted towards children ...

I also found the Teletubbies and Barney really scary and could not go near them without feeling endlessly unnerved. The sun baby and human beings dressed up in costumes that make them look dead inside (with those unmoving eyes) was not up my alley at all as a child (or now). I guess it could also fit under the uncanny valley as human movements/characteristics were mixed with non-human elements. I also just did not understand what Teletubbies was about and why there was a baby in a sun or a sun in a baby, I don't know; I don't want to think about it anymore.

I do not think that the majority of those shows were made with the purpose of feeling creepy, I mean that would go against its' purpose and target audience. However, I do think that we do talk a lot about how much better children's shows were "back then" and often do not mention the shows that frankly traumatised us, unnerved us (and were just generally low-quality).

Kids' shows right now aren't the best either but let's not completely romanticise past kids' shows eras either. Let's step back and assess how these obscure shows and moments had a subconscious impact on us.

Also, as we move deeper into CGI and visual effects, we should note that there is a point where animation and CGI just becomes uncanny. Maybe you should just fore-go the whole CGI/animation thing and opt for in-real life acting/sets if you want to achieve fully realistic visuals. It's creepy at worst, and soulless at best if it just looks human. The point of animation is to express what can't normally be expressed in photo-realistic animation so unless there is a purposeful use of photo-realism, we should also be careful of why and how we are using this very special medium.



Still from Angela Anaconda (1999-2001)

"The Most Wonderful Time of the Year"?

Holiday season is among us (well depends when this is being read). That can look very different for different people. Some people are back home with their families, some people don't really have the concept of a home, some can't or are unable to go home, and some are spending it completely alone. There's a sense of pressure to experience holidays (especially December/January holidays) in a certain way that is undoubtedly propelled by the immense amount of media content telling us that it is the best time of the year or the most festive time of the year. While content like "All I Want for Christmas" by Mariah Carey may be a source of nostalgia for many; it is not the representation of reality. Anyone who's watched a Lifetime/Netflix Christmas movie or even consumed a Starbucks Winter Special knows that it's practically an industry at this point.

As someone who doesn't really celebrate Christmas, I even feel the pressure to participate in holiday cheer and/or festivities even though I do not necessarily feel like it because of the volume of content I'm surrounded with that represents this time as a holistically festive time. Much of the holiday related content we consume is designed to be feel-good, like rom-coms. They are not supposed to be the ideal and they are certainly not the ideal. The hegemonic idea of Christmas time being the best time of the year or the most romantic or *insert positive sentiment* is simply just an idea and not based in reality. While it is true that it a very special time of the year for people for sentimental reasons and maybe even for religious reasons, like most holidays, its' temporal superiority does not reflect how everyone views it, and representing it through nostalgia and associative products is also profitable. That should be remembered.

Holidays can be difficult for people for many of the aforementioned reasons but there are so many more that I just haven't mentioned like how difficult it can be for people who have a difficult relationship with food, or have a difficult relationship with their parents.

Or even those who are single (so much of Christmas content revolves around romance). I'm not saying that holidays can't be enjoyed, I'm just saying that the nostalgic content we consume that represents it in a very glamorised fashion is not realistic. It is valid to have experiences that very much mirror the ones we hear about in media; but it is not a representation of everyone's experience. It just can't be. It's also valid to enjoy holiday-related content, but just like most rom-coms from the 00s, nostalgic content should be approached with a sense of wariness of definite subjectivity and the profit incentive in mind.

Forcing a feeling is never a good idea, it just feels awful. It's why I used to never enjoy birthdays. You expect an experience to look a certain way, it doesn't, and you end up feeling disappointed. So, this holiday season, let's remember that when we're revisiting holiday classics. If you don't wanna celebrate on New Years' because you have a migraine, that's fine. If your Christmas wasn't so festive this year, that's valid. Your feelings deserve to be validated, and it doesn't matter if it's in the middle of exam season, summer or Christmas Eve, if you don't feel good; you just don't feel good. And with that being said, if you are reading this during a holiday, I hope you can get some rest and recuperation during this time (because for me, that's what a holiday is).

P.S. I actually think "Home Alone" (both 1 and 2) are really interesting holiday films because they consider alternative ways that holidays can be experienced and while it they are feel-good films; they are more unique!



Still from Home Alone 2: Lost in New York (1992)

If My Life is for Rent, then is Stability an Option?

It's been a while. And I think that's okay. Nostalgia is something that re-visits me in times of difficulty. It tends to appear in a malicious way when I most need it; it's why this blog is so valuable to me. It's a way for me to reflect rather than wallow, to understand myself and the world around me. As many people in their early 20's often do, I feel pretty lost at the moment. At the same time, Caroline Polachek releases her new album *Desire, I Want to Turn Into You* (these two events are in no way related lol). One of the songs in the tracklist was a Grimes + Dido feature. You know, the strangest thing happened when I was listening - as soon as I heard Dido's voice I felt bouts of incredible nostalgia.

It made me realise something. You can also be nostalgic whilst adding a fresh elements to content. It is why the song works, and at the same time feels nostalgic. It's an example of taking nostalgia and evolving it into something new. Familiarity is comforting, and there's nothing wrong with that. I felt familiar listening to Dido's voice, and I went back to listen to more of her older songs (especially from *Life for Rent*).

Life for Rent as a song and as an album touches me and fills me with nostalgia in a way that not many other songs/albums can. Specific tracks like *Don't Leave Home* need to be approached with caution. In my first year living abroad, I haphazardly told myself it would be fine if I listened to it on my walk; I ended up in tears.

Songs like Don't Leave Home and Life for Rent do not just make me feel homesick and nostalgic because they remind me of the many car rides I had with my family as a child with the songs playing in the background; but because of what they symbolically represent to me. Life for Rent and Don't Leave Home are songs that quite paradoxically represent the comfort of being 'home' and yet also there being no stable 'home'. Life for Rent is a song that forever mirrors me symbolically, and for that I am extremely emotionally attached to it. I listen to it, and I feel seen.

This album ages well, and it's perfection to my ears <3 Perhaps, it is because I feel such a strong nostalgia for these songs, that the mere stimulus of Dido's voice takes me back. Anyways, there are Dido songs that I do not particularly love, and maybe remind me that songs are what we make of them. We attach our meanings to everything. Isn't that just so human?



"Life for Rent" (2003) Album Cover - Dido

'Dork Diaries', 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid' and Self-aware Adolescent Stories

The "Dork Diaries" book series is a book series that I just remembered I read like a few days ago while thinking about "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" (that which I definitely remember). The "Dork Diaries" by Rachel Reneé Russell was kind of like if "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" had an incredibly precise target audience of young girls (and also if it was written with much less subtlety and a lack of self-awareness in tone). It's important to note that I only had a few of these books - my nostalgia is for those ones only - and that it is still an ONGOING series (what!!). "Dork Diaries" represented all I loved and hated about a lot of stereotypically girly media - a sense of privilege and a lack of camaraderie between the female characters.

At the centre of "Dork Diaries" - at least the books I had - is an unlikable character under the guise of a "I'm not like anyone else" vibe despite her character being widely accepted and liked by most for the majority of the book series. Her rivalry with the also genuinely annoying Mackenzie who is supposed to be popular is incredibly rooted in jealousy (most likely) and just this outdated hyper-feminine stereotype of a Sharpay Evans-type figure. Both Nikki (main character) and Mackenzie are chasing the same guy, and this ends up in some shenanigans such as Nikkie being annoyed at Mackenzie for going after Brandon (love interest) despite actually doing nothing to show her interest towards him (this is in the first book though I believe Mackenzie tries to stir relationship drama later on). I do like that there is a focus on friendship overall though, it was wholesome and sleepover content in general makes me feel nostalgic.

"Dork Diaries" also has some unfortunate language that hasn't aged well. It isn't just the use of the word "dork", "fabulous" and "squee" unfortunately. Excerpts include:

"There is at least one mentally ill WEIRDO in EVERY middle school across America!" (This made me laugh just based on how actually horrid it is)

And uses of the R word of course.

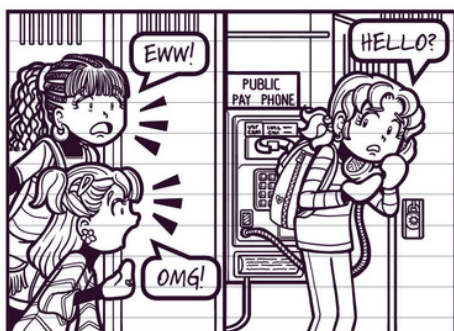
The thing is with "Dork Diaries" is everyone is annoying and horrible - but maybe that is the point (I hear this changes as the books go on). However, the books don't really have an ironic self awareness in the writing that makes it more of a funny and clever read rather than one that tries to create antagonism between naturally antagonistic characters in their own right. It's okay to have books about crushes, and high school drama - but this hyper-fixation on boy drama and mean girl dynamics feels slightly outdated today...

"Diary of a Wimpy Kid" by Jeff Kinney excels where "Dork Diaries" fails in my opinion. The series never quite indicates that Greg Heffley is a hero - he is a hero of his own DIARY - and even that is portrayed to be not representative of reality. While "Dork Diaries" is a diary, there's just no sense of that ironic, absurd tone. There are also several points where it is clear he is in the wrong, and sometimes he owns up (most of the times not). He is just a horrible person sometimes, but it comes off rather funny - as a representation of his own narcissism that is so exaggerated through doodles and storylines that it is indeed hilarious.

It's just a representation of adolescents' superiority complex in high school. It's unique art style also portrays this sense of irony and adolescent disinterest. It's so absurd sometimes, and it is clear that Greg is not supposed to be a flawless character - there is humour and empathy there that you feel in the tone - he's just a teenager.. I liked it because it was just a kid being a kid. Although, I stopped reading after Cabin Fever (these book series keep going on forever, man...).

Either way, I feel nostalgia for both of them - but one of them (at least the earlier books) have a sense of subtlety and self-awareness through the writing and art style.

Finally, I gave in, snatched open my locker, and answered the phone. Mainly to stop that AWFUL ringing....



I was like, "Umm . . . sorry. Wrong number."

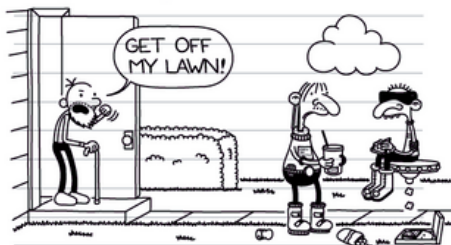
And when I turned around, both of the CCP girls were running down the hall screaming, "Make it go away! Make it go away!" I guessed it probably meant they DIDN'T want me to sit with them at lunch anymore, which was really HUMILIATING!

The most important lesson I learned last year was

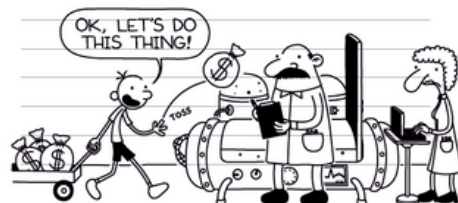
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Excerpt from Dork Diaries

But I'm not gonna wait till I'm old like that billionaire, though. The way I see it, if you freeze yourself when you're too old, then when they unfreeze you in the future, you're gonna be too grumpy to have any fun.



So if I win the lottery or something in the next few years, I'm gonna buy myself a one-way ticket to the future.



Excerpt from Diary of a Wimpy Kid

'THE X-FILES', CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND THE 90's

I HATE TO SAY THIS BUT I DO LOVE A GOOD CONSPIRACY. I THINK I HAVE A LOVE AND HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH MY 14 YEAR OLD SELF FOR MANY REASONS, INCLUDING MY WEIRD OBSESSION WITH CONSPIRACIES. I JUST LOVED READING ABOUT THEM, WATCHING VIDEOS ABOUT THEM, EVERYTHING REALLY - I WAS VERY WELL-EDUCATED IN THE SUBJECT. IT WAS INTERESTING. I GUESS AS A 14 YEAR OLD I REALLY WANTED TO FIND OUT WHAT THIS WHOLE THING GOING ON AROUND US WAS ABOUT. I DIDN'T REALLY FIND THE ANSWERS IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES (BECAUSE CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE NOT THE PLACE TO FIND LIFE ANSWERS). RECENTLY THOUGH, I'VE HAD A FASCINATION WITH THEM AS A CONCEPT, BECAUSE I THINK THEY'RE JUST VERY ENTERTAINING TO THINK ABOUT - NOT NECESSARILY TO BELIEVE IN - BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY ALSO REFLECT THE WAY IN WHICH WE AS A SOCIETY DELUDE OURSELVES BY FOCUSSING ON THE WRONG THINGS DUE TO OUR COLLECTIVE NARCISSISM. THIS RESURGENCE IN INTEREST IS PARTIALLY FUELLED BY THE X-FILES (AND NOSTALGIA FOR A TIME THAT I WASN'T IN - WE WILL GET INTO THAT LOL).

I'VE VERY OBVIOUSLY BEEN WATCHING THE X-FILES AND LITTLE ELSE BECAUSE OF MY BUSY BUSY SCHEDULE (YEA NO JOKE THIS UNI THING IS GETTING OUT OF HAND HEHE). I THINK THE REASON WHY I LOVED (AND LOVE IT, IT'S GETTING HARD OUT HERE IN THE LATER SEASONS) IS BECAUSE AT LEAST IN THE EARLIER SEASONS, IT FEELS BASED (AND ALSO BECAUSE OF SCULLY AND MULDER BUT A WHOLE SEPARATE BLOG POST CAN TACKLE THIS HELLOOOO). I MEAN, IT WAS A SHOW THAT WAS POSING A LOT OF QUESTIONS FOR THE FIRST TIME ON A MAINSTREAM LEVEL. CAN WE TRUST THE STORIES THE U.S TELLS US? IS DIGITALISATION A THREAT?



DO ALIENS EXIST? < THIS IS A BIG ONE... THEY WERE QUITE INTERESTING QUESTIONS AND I THINK THE SHOW (MOST OF THE TIME - EXCEPT WITH ALIENS) DOES A GREAT JOB OF TACKLING THEM IN A WAY THAT DEFINITELY TACKLES REAL-LIFE CONCERNS WHILST CREATING A HEALTHY DISTANCE USING TOOLS OF CAMP, SCIENCE FICTION VIBES AND SELF AWARENESS GIVING A TRUE 90'S FLAIR ON THE SIDE AS WELL. THE EARLIER SEASONS ARE BETTER IN MY OPINION BECAUSE IT FEELS LIKE EVERYONE THERE KNEW THAT THEY WERE THROWING STUFF AT A WALL AND SEEING WHAT STUCK (A LOT DID) AND THAT TAKES A LOT OF SELF-AWARENESS TO COME ACROSS THE WAY IT DID. WHERE THE SHOW FAILS IS WHEN IT TRIES TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS SUBSTANTIVELY ESPECIALLY IN LATER SEASONS.

HOWEVER, FATIGUE STARTS TO SET IN AFTER SEASON 8 I THINK (EXCLUDING MONSTER OF THE WEEK EPS - THOSE CAN BE REALLY GOOD REGARDLESS). THE ALIEN SUBPLOTS' POOR WRITING REALLY STARTS TO SHOW, AND THE SHOW LOSES THE SCULLY/MULDER DYNAMIC THAT KEPT THE SHOW PARTIALLY SANE. CONSIDERING TECHNOLOGY HAS ALREADY STARTED TO SET IN, THINGS START TO GET A BIT HARD TO WRAP YOUR HEAD AROUND. AND SEASON 9 DOES NOT ACT SELF-AWARE ESPECIALLY WITH THOSE CHRIS CARTER VOICEOVER PROLOGUES AS WELL WHICH I NEVER LOVE :)))))) DELIVERY IS JUST VERY SERIOUS AS WELL AND NOT EVEN DOGGETT CAN SAVE US WITH HIS STRAIGHT EDGE BECAUSE HE'S NOT WELL-DEVELOPED (HIS RIGIDITY IS BASELESS AND OFTEN OVERLOOKED) AND HE IS ALSO NOT THE CORE OF THE SHOW.

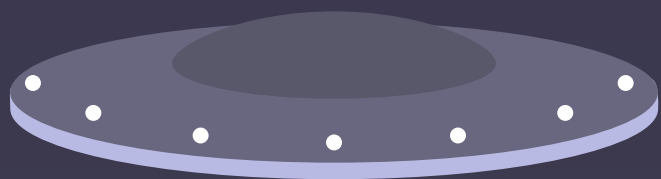
WELL, WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ANYTHING? I JUST GOT TO THINKING ABOUT CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND HOW UNEXPLAINABLE THEY ARE. THEY ARE UNEXPLAINABLE BECAUSE THEY ARE THEORIES AND THEY ARE THEORIES BECAUSE THEY ARE UNEXPLAINABLE. THE REASON I BELIEVE THE ALIEN SUBPLOT IN THE SHOW ULTIMATELY MAKES NO SENSE IS BECAUSE A LOT OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES ARE PRETTY UNSUBSTANTIATED - THEY DON'T HAVE A LOT OF BACKING AND THAT'S WHY THEY ARE SO DANGEROUS TO FOLLOW BLINDLY IN THIS DAY AND AGE. I AM ONCE AGAIN NOT SAYING X-FILES IS TO BLAME - FAR FROM IT. I AM JUST EXPLAINING ONE OF THE REASONS WHY I THINK IT FAILS IN LATER SEASONS BECAUSE IT DOESN'T HAVE THE SELF-AWARENESS THAT IT IS RIDICULOUS AND FANTASTICAL TO SPREAD WILD DANGEROUS CLAIMS WITHOUT SOLID EVIDENCE. I MEAN IT IS FICTION AND I WATCH IT NOW FEELING THAT I DON'T BELIEVE IN THE PLOT ITSELF - BUT IT REPRESENTS SOMETHING - MAYBE TO BELIEVE WE ARE ALONE IN THE UNIVERSE IS NARCISSISTIC BUT MAYBE TO BELIEVE THAT IF WE AREN'T ALONE THEN THE "OTHERS" AREN'T BENEVOLENT IS ALSO NARCISSISTIC. IT'S A RASH FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN AND THE OTHER DIALLED TO A 1000.

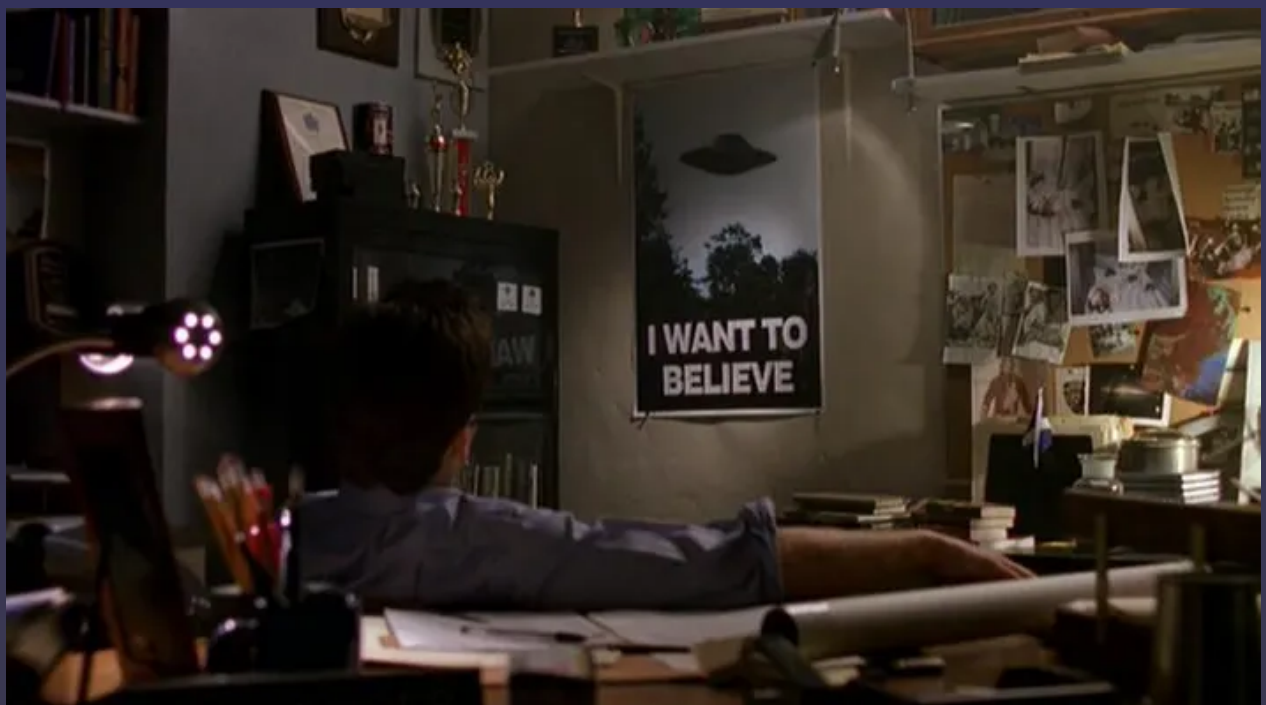
NOSTALGIA FOR THE 90'S IS DEFINITELY AROUND (AND FOR GOOD REASON, I HATE IT HERE - JUST KIDDING SOMEONE IN 10 YEARS WILL SAY THE SAME THING). BUT SOMEHOW, I KIND OF WISH I EXPERIENCED THE SHOW IN ITS HEYDAY AND WATCH IT TAKE A DOWNTURN IN REAL TIME (LOL). SO WEIRD TO FEEL ATTACHED TO A GENERATION YOU'RE NOT EVEN IN, IT JUST FELT LIKE THE WORLD WAS LIMITLESS AND IT WAS JUST CHANGING SO MUCH (WHICH IS WHEN THE BEST PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS GET ASKED :). HOWEVER, WE ARE ALSO IN A TIME WHERE WE ARE ASKING A LOT OF QUESTIONS (ESPECIALLY ABOUT AI) AND WATCHING THE X-FILES REMINDS ME (AND WARNS ME) THAT MAYBE IT'S BEST TO APPROACH THINGS FROM MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES WITH A GROUNDEDNESS/SELF-AWARENESS. I REALLY DO LOVE THE SHOW AND THAT'S WHY I TALK ABOUT IT SO MUCH (AND WHY OTHERS DO TOO) BUT LIKE ANY SHOW THAT DRAGS A BIT TOO LONG - IT JUST DOESN'T END IN A WAY THAT FEELS SATISFYING.

AMBITION' IS THE BEST THING ABOUT IT, BUT TRYING TO REASONABLY WALK INTO A ROOM AND TO FORCIBLY MAKE EVERYONE BELIEVE ALIENS EXIST IS MAYBE NOT THE BEST WAY TO GO (ALSO IN REAL LIFE). IN SOME SITUATIONS IT COULD EVEN BE DANGEROUS. WHEN PEOPLE ARE VULNERABLE, THEY COULD BE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF AND UNFORTUNATELY MAKE A CRUSADE OUT OF IT. AND BECAUSE IT IS NOT THE 90'S ANYMORE, PEOPLE WILL MAKE A BIG DEAL OUT OF IT AND IT WILL BE A HUGE DEAL ON THE INTERNET TOO (POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS). I THINK TODAY MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST REMEMBER THAT TIMES ARE DIFFERENT AND THAT A HEALTHY DOSE OF SKEPTICISM AND CLAIM-MAKING IS GREAT BUT IT HAS TO BE BACKED BY SOME SORT OF EVIDENCE IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO SHARE IT (AND EVEN EVIDENCE CAN BE MISLEADING) TRICKY TRICKY TRICKY. THE X-FILES GOES AROUND IN CIRCLES WITH ITS' OVERARCHING SUBPLOTS BECAUSE A LOT OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES TEND TO BE LIKE THAT AND IN THAT MOMENT IN TIME IN THE CULTURE - THAT WAS HOW IT FELT LIKE TOO. WE MUST REMEMBER WHERE WE ARE NOW, AND WHERE WE CAME FROM - ALWAYS. IT'S CULTURAL MEMORY THAT'S TAINTED WITH BOTH GOOD AND BAD.

MORE ABOUT THIS (ALSO WRITTEN BY ME):

[HTTPS://IBCOMAGAZINE.COM/2023/THE-X-FILES-AND-THE-FEAR-OF-EVERYTHING/](https://ibcomagazine.com/2023/the-x-files-and-the-fear-of-everything/)





STILLS FROM THE X-FILES (1993-2018)

Nostalgia in Hindsight, Affective Places and Moving Away

Although it looks like it, this post is not about liminal spaces (although it may as well be lol). The photo in the following page is an edited photo from a trip I had in class – we went to the Zoetermeer National Videogame Museum – and somehow it just reflects this feeling of lost childhood. I just thought to myself that I will never get to experience a birthday as a child again and something about that really made me feel existential or something...

Feels like I've talked about so much on this blog. It feels so personal to me in a really unparalleled way. I'm a very sentimental person if you couldn't tell that already – everything that impacts me sticks with me. I hold on to everything I can, whether that's a letter someone gave me 10 years ago or a movie that reminds me of blissful childhood evenings with no responsibilities. It's the worst part and the best part about my obsession with nostalgia. To be honest, it's been hard to write here – I'm in a weird stage of my life. Felt like sharing because I found that what I am experiencing is inextricably linked to nostalgia.

I'm wrapping up my bachelor programme and I feel like I'm distancing myself well – from myself. I'm feeling extremely sentimental for the NOW – which I realised is just as awful as nostalgia at its' worst. Nostalgia in hindsight... it's like a mix of sadness and a pressure to enjoy the present whilst being unable to. Everyone is moving on to a new stage, and I can't quite wrap my head around it or come to terms with it fully yet. Change is so scary to me – yet I always seek it, because instability is hard-wired in me (and in the world I guess) – I've never felt a true home and so people and media is where I feel most at home. It's the immigrant experience... best and worst part about it as well.

This blog post isn't about media as much as it is about me (or both!). It's about knowing – just knowing you will feel nostalgic for something – and it hurts a bit. I feel like this place I've been in that I felt stifled in – well, I realise that I'll miss it. I think I'll miss it so much it will hurt. It's a weird feeling, it's like nostalgia in hindsight – it's a new level of growth. And a new type of nostalgia.

When I left home for the first time, I was ready to experience new things. There was no doubt there. I was ready to move on to college, to new people. And now that I've found people I feel home with – and having to let them go physically is something I can't wrap my head around. Every time I go on a walk, I look at a place and I think "Oh, that's where I went to this place" or "oh, that's where I had that moment with this person". I also look at places and attach personal significance to them – even if I was alone in them. And I'm sure hearing Dutch singer Eefje de Visser in a year or two will also make me feel nostalgic... This place has left a mark on me more than I would care to admit. I hate and love this place – I know it inside out – isn't that admiration? Reminds me of that scene from 'Lady Bird' lol. I know when I come back here after leaving, I will feel very nostalgic. I just know it. Although I didn't grow up here, I grew here. I changed so much. I learned so much. I had so many good and bad memories and met the most amazing people in my entire life.

But maybe that is something to celebrate. The unknown is scary despite its assuredness. It's funny that we are scared of the unknown when our whole fate is genuinely unknowable. It's kind of like curling up in bed when you know you must face the day. You don't know what comes but you know the comfort of your bed – but ultimately, you got to get out there and discover what's there to be discovered and continue the growing process (I mean this in the least girlboss/capitalistic way everahaha) I'm sad for sure. Nervous. But I must remind myself that this is just the beginning, and the people I've met here – whether they stay or not – have left an insurmountable impact on me. And the place too. I wouldn't be the person I am if I didn't move here, and meet the people here. I'm so grateful for it and for them. Forever. But mortality and growing up is a heartbreaking yet important experience that reminds me that I should live more in the moment – something I struggle with on the daily. Nostalgia in hindsight is something I have to accept, because it's part of the affective human experience that shapes identity. It builds character – and isn't that what life is about?



Zoetermeer National Videogame Museum – Pic taken by me

NEED FOR SPEED, AND SECOND-HAND NOSTALGIA THROUGH MUSIC (MAKES A RETURN)

Need for Speed is one of those racing video game series that I have an affinity for just because I think it's so unique (or it was at least) and because it reminds me of my brother playing it when I was younger (NOSTALGIA BY PROXY OF COURSE!!!) The history of the game is quite interesting considering the amount of video game studios involved from the beginning to now - well there was a studio that was bought out by EA but whatever. I just wanna talk about the games' influence on my life because somehow I've experienced something so akin to my first ever FIFA blogpost on this page which described second-hand nostalgia.

Yes, I have created a playlist with songs from Need for Speed (NFS) - similarly to the FIFA soundtrack blogpost, but the circumstances are a bit different this time actually. You see, I've realised that I really really like drum-n-bass (breakbeat and Jungle too) this last year - The Prodigy's music specifically. Something about The Prodigy felt so sonically familiar to me when I first listened to it and I couldn't quite explain it. Then I got it. I showed a song by The Prodigy to my brother and he noted that it made him feel nostalgic for the NFS soundtrack - particularly Most Wanted's (2005) soundtrack - largely hailed as the best and most atmospheric NFS game by most people. Then I was like...? How does the soundtrack sound like then? Then I fell down yet another rabbit hole...

NFS: Most Wanted (2005) has a song by The Prodigy called "You'll be Under My Wheels" which was one of the most popular songs from the soundtrack (which sounded extremely nostalgic by proxy and familiar to me when I listened to it this week because I remember listening to it in the background a LOT as well due to my brother playing the game). The NFS soundtracks also have The Chemical Brothers (which I love at the moment) and Most Wanted/Undercover tends to have a lot of drum-n-bass songs in the soundtrack.

I thought to myself - maybe this is a stretch - but could hearing a lot of these songs in the background growing up have had an influence on me discovering that I love the genre these past two years (and The Prodigy specifically)?

Can secondhand nostalgia have that big of an impact on me that I realise that something I've kind of put away as "not for me" because of the gendering of a lot of these games become part of my identity as I learn that those things can actually be "for me"? Or is it a thing where I feel familiar listening to the genre because of this association I've created with my childhood without even knowing?? I think I'll never truly know actually. I just found it endlessly amusing. My obsession with the genre didn't come out of nowhere after all I guess... I will never know the truth...

The power of the NFS soundtracks is incredible and I think that a lot of songs have a lot of influence on the games' atmosphere - very masculine-core I am not gonna lie. There's a lot of rock songs, drum-n-bass, hip-hop, and some metal songs as well. Some of these songs really soundtrack the ultra-fast and aggressive-rough-around-the-edges vibe that Most Wanted for example has. Some of these songs are real stinkers though, but as I mentioned in my first blog here - nostalgia is a reiterative process and at least I can use it as a relic of my cultural identity.

Much is to be said about how games like NFS can promote a sense of hyper-masculinity through speeding (almost supernaturally) in an environment where there aren't real life repercussions and what that essentially means for the aesthetic of cars and the implicit parallels it has with exercising and displaying masculinity.. however, we won't talk about that today as it is a behemoth of a topic.

Anyways, here is the Spotify playlist I've created! Enjoy..

I used to have it on Apple Music - have migrated to Spotify now

21:28



Search



i (dont) have a need for speed

Mayra Nassef

UPDATED MONDAY

▶ Play

↻ Shuffle

from the video games (mostly most wanted and underground) anyways drive safe while listen **MORE**



Kimosabe

BT



CHRISTOPHER LAWRENCE

Black House



Nine Thou (Grant Mohr...)



Listen Now



Browse



Radio



Library



Search

Gluten-Free Apple Cinnamon Cheerios, Childhood Breakfasts, and Nostalgia for a Healthier Mindset



Potential TW: Mindset towards certain foods

It's funny how on this blog I never talk about how nostalgia is an incredibly multi sensory experience that involves ALL the senses - I also realised today that I don't really talk about food here at all. Well, I understand why that could be the case because essentially it's hard to relate that to (pop) culture or media but in a way it really does relate. So today, I'm gonna talk about cereal. The item with no introduction, even though I did kind of introduce it...

I walked into a store today - which just opened on my street - that sells American/British products (products which I was very familiar with growing up) and literally stopped in my tracks and was almost moved to tears when I saw a specific cereal box (leave me alone I am PMS-ing). It's like ten memories were unlocked at once that gave me such nostalgia that I stared at the box for a hot minute. You see - I had just laid my eyes on a box of Apple Cinnamon Cheerios cereal.

So what's the big deal anyways? What is my affective connection to something so random? Well - a few years ago I was in a really dark place... because I had a gluten/wheat sensitivity which I needed to combat by essentially eating less products with gluten. Worse than the fact that gluten-free products are not as easy to find, they just were not as tasty as the real thing :(Even more tragic than cutting out bread from my life was the fact that I had to cut out one of my favourite breakfast items ever - cereal (especially my favourite cereal at the time - Cheerios). It was then when I was walking down an aisle at the Carrefour when I saw something that changed everything - GLUTEN FREE Apple Cinnamon Cheerios.

Besides the fact that there was a gluten-free version of my favourite breakfast item at the time - it was Apple Cinnamon flavoured (potentially one of the best dessert combinations known to man in my opinion). I was more than happy - I was ecstatic. I bought a box, had Cheerios every day again for breakfast. Then when I ran out - I bought another. I felt truly happy that I could eat something that I truly enjoyed each morning before going to school. But yet - despite this, I kind of forgot about its' existence and the memories surrounding it... until today.

Well, still, what's the big deal? Well, at some point I just stopped having that cereal because I stopped being sensitive to gluten/wheat (don't ask how, I'm just happy it happened). I also just moved on I guess... But in a way it represented that time of my life. A time where I couldn't imagine anything past school, and was just happy to have a breakfast I enjoyed in the morning without thought - it was a simple pleasure that I allowed myself without judgment or shame. I think a lot of that has changed.

It's an understatement to say I would give a lot to experience one of those mornings again. To have gluten-free cereal whilst watching reruns of Masterchef Australia with my mom before heading to school. It's a nostalgia for that particular experience that I will never experience again, but it's also a nostalgia and sadness for a mindset I feel like I don't have right now - just letting myself enjoy something because it brings me comfort and happiness.

Now because I kind of have limitless options for breakfast and have to literally decide what to eat and what to get for groceries literally all the time - it has manifested the worst parts of me in which I exhibit a toxic mindset towards food (the trauma runs deep unfortunately). I haven't bought cereal in ages because I barred myself from them as they're too "sugary" and "unhealthy"... even though I literally ate them regularly that school year until I eventually got bored of course (as people do).

I never ever ever once looked at nutritional information when I was a child (for anything!) and now it's practically the first thing I do as soon as I pick up anything - as I am the one that buys things now. It's not necessarily a horrible practice, it's good to be mindful - but not excessively so. I realised that along with the memory of my gluten-free Apple Cinnamon Cheerios, I had also forgotten the feeling of just enjoying food because it made me feel good, and that is what truly made me feel deeply sad and nostalgic.

The idea of having milk and cereal for breakfast is an American invention and cultural staple that continues until this day. And as kids we kind of get away with eating that stuff all the time without shame - but at a certain age cereal just feels like it's not made for you anymore... but who decides that? Media? It's like there are these random barriers that are socially created.

I mean, if there's something to take away from this strange moment I experienced today is not the negative nostalgic feelings attached to the inability to return to constructed elements of childhood but perhaps embracing elements of childhood that are actually quite healthy and symbolise emotional maturity in the long run - allowing yourself to enjoy foods that make you feel happy and knowing that when you get down to the details it's really not as bad as you think it is when consumed in moderation - like literally everything else!

If there's something to learn from this sad sad moment is that nostalgia can be a moment for us to reflect on our present self and ask: what is it that I am seeking from what I feel nostalgic towards? Is it the innocence and associations with childhood that milk and cereal culturally have or is it something that goes a bit deeper than that? Can I adopt the positive parts of that which I am seeking in those moments in my life today?

Anyways, I didn't get the Apple Cinnamon Cheerios today (sadly they did not have a gluten free version not like I CARE anymore HAHAHA) but I did get a Cinnabon flavoured cereal to try - and I know full well that because it's human to seek novelty I - like I did years ago - will get bored and move on to the next. But if it makes me happy, and I consume it in moderation - because nothing is truly as bad as my mind actually makes it out to be - so that I feel good, isn't that what life is about? Isn't that the takeaway from my nostalgia today? To enjoy things more? To trust my bodily cues? To know that restriction is not the answer? To adopt a childlike way of allowing myself enjoyment when necessary?



The picture I took



How the gluten-free version looked like (imagine this isn't family sized though lol)

“Oh. That Polly Pocket Video Game? That's Not Like a Real Game Though...”

What do I not remember from my childhood when it comes to the games I used to play? Because I feel like it is kind of a lot. You see, I played a lot of games as a child - but I played at the age where I feel I would at least remember their names and like have them be part of my identity because of that. I mean - boys do this all the time, they talk about their CS:GO obsession, their memories playing Minecraft, FIFA, Need for Speed, and to an extent even shared experiences such as Club Penguin.. but girls who grew up in the 90's/00s (who are now young women) do not just have the same openness or memory preservation that a lot of men have when it comes to games they played as children. I mean - I only last month remembered the Sue games - games that I legitimately played so much as a child - you'd think I would remember them or something...

Funny thing is, when I show it to other girls - now women - my age, they go OHHHH as if a memory they haven't addressed has been resurfaced. Why is that? Our experience as girl gamers has never been legitimised in hegemony because somehow dress-up and cooking simulators aren't real games but FPS games are? When you're consistently socialised into thinking that a certain cultural product (in this case a game) isn't a real cultural experience and is something to be ashamed of to an extent, doesn't it make sense that we've all kind of tried to erase it from our identity?

Isn't this the way memory functions? Memories deemed as unimportant are labelled as such. However, what we deem as 'important' intrinsically lies within what we are socialised into thinking is important. And when parts of our cultural upbringing are erased, that's collective cultural memory as well as individual identity being erased... Isn't that a real problem?

Like how deeply women are made to feel inferior when engaging with conventionally feminine games? These games also tend to be places in which girls can exercise agency in fictional worlds over fictional characters, allowing them to be less objectified as well. Why is that never mentioned? This problem extends to a collective sense when it comes to cultural memory. There are people - mostly women - doing good work preserving girl games because due to their aforementioned lack of hegemonic legitimacy by men (of course), they often tend to be forgotten and lost to the annals of time. An example of this is FEMICOM Museum. Now, more than ever, we must try to remember. We must use nostalgia as an act of resistance to the narrative, as an act of preservation of the very thing we are constantly shamed of - our cultural identity. If we're not careful, our history - like it historically has been- will be partially erased and/or skewed.



A screenshot from a play-through of a now officially defunct Flash Sue cooking game - I played this one a lot...



Cars (2006) and Disappearing American Towns

I think it is perhaps quite comical that I haven't made a blog post about Cars or How to Train Your Dragon just yet despite them being the two films I rewatch the most and possibly some of the most nostalgic films for me. I've watched Cars so many times (and I have such an obsession with the movie) that I even had doubts that maybe the film was behind my interest in actual real-life cars (aesthetically speaking).

It is shamelessly a nostalgia piece for me and I have full acknowledgement it is not one of the best Pixar films - some even would call it mediocre but I HIGHLY disagree because of sentimental reasons and that is okay! There is something special this film does and it's that it revels in small-town Americana and creates a parallel with what is commonly seen to represent America in the modern age (in the film that is California). In many ways, the film is a back-to-basics film that urges the main character to be more humble and to see things from a more grounded perspective. In a way it is a melancholic point of view about the potential disappearance of Americana (this is fictional but I will get to that soon). Maybe I loved the film so much because it was also partially about nostalgia...

Globalisation and modernity has changed so much. In the film, the Interstate was created to better the infrastructure of the country so that people could reach destinations and not necessarily experience a slower life of getting to just experience places.



There is a quote from the film that goes a bit like “Cars did not drive through to make a good time, they drove on it to have a good time”. Many towns (and this is a cross-national issue) feel the risk of disappearing from culture due to this - and the liveliness of rural towns in terms of finance is also put to the test. The film dotes on this, and it is quite upsetting if you think about it - the way in which our lives are designed currently to be about living fast and the way in which local cultures risk being diluted or erased...

It is a bit of a fear of globalisation but there is a solution that the film poses. It is not the best but it is basically finding a way to financially support and give PR attention to the uniqueness of these towns and the experiences there. It is very capitalistic but it is also very much a survival tactic. There just needs to be an acceptance that things have changed, and that culture has changed - and often older cultures may not all be glitz and glamour. In fact, their stories may be purely fictional. But perhaps we can appreciate that culture and nostalgia while still staying in the today and assessing the pitfalls of the past as well.

The solution to fix the fact that many decisions like the Interstate are partially short-term solutions that do not factor in aforementioned issues. However, maybe the move from rural cities to big cities is very much a capitalism/globalisation thing and it is just a symptom. It is a shame. Very much so. However, not much is being done to preserve those towns' legacies in the real world... so like nostalgia is all nice and well when profitable but when people's livelihood depends on it and they're being financially threatened it is not really as important... I hope that changes!



I won't talk about Cars 3 because it does not really tackle the same issues but it does tackle nostalgia and getting what's best out of it which is nice on its own!



Screenshots from Cars (2006)

The Last of Us (2013), Eco-brutalism, and the Disappearance of Nostalgia

I love atmosphere. It sounds terribly stupid but it is quite true. It's my favourite thing about games. While I don't have quite the same attention span as people who spend a longer time in game atmospheres, it adds many layers to a game – to the themes of the narrative/characters within a game, and the gameplay itself. The Last of Us's (TLOU) world is almost a narrative destined to be played and explored – that's not to say the adaptation is bad (its good as an adaptation of the original source material into a TV show) but it was always originally designed as a game to be played. I just finished playing it for the first time after watching the show and not only did I love it, I felt supremely more attached to it than the show (because of obvious gameplay character perspective reasons) but also because something about the world of TLOU struck me – it felt so... solemnly nostalgic and eco-brutalist.



Screenshot from The Last of Us video game

I won't riff too much about the game here because I feel that deserves a separate post, but there is a certain subtlety there in nostalgia within a game's atmosphere. As you go through abandoned places – universities, kindergartens, houses, etc. it feels like these places were lived in and that they were left reluctantly. There is a sadness there as you explore the environment and read survivors' last notes – it adds a layer of subtext to the game and makes sure you understand the brevity of what was lost from our world. It also makes you understand the true tragedy and often inevitability of getting infected. It's absolutely torturous and bleak nostalgia, because our characters (especially Joel who has seen the world before its downfall) aren't allowed to process it and grow from it – nostalgia as a tool for identity is a luxury that Joel cannot afford as a survivor and a tool that Ellie does not understand. His pessimism stems from seeing the downfall of humanity through and through but Ellie as a child sees all these remnants as almost alien (even hopeful) and only much much later in the game understands their significance as she forcibly matures.

The environment deepens the story and the world – it deepens our understanding of the characters as they react to the world. Joel often silently takes artefacts without discussing them much or sharing them, something that is central to his character – an inability/repressiveness towards processing his past and his trauma whilst Ellie is way more responsive to this environment (perhaps also stemming from her lack of traumatic nostalgia linked to it and her willingness to process trauma at the start acting as a foil to Joel). It's storytelling through atmosphere and it's done really well.

Another way in which the environment of TLOU tells the story is through eco-brutalism... hear me out. Eco-brutalism is an architectural aesthetic that combines brutalist architecture with nature. It's adapted pretty well in the show, but in my opinion – works so much better in an exploratory gameplay mode. It exemplifies the dichotomy of humanity and the themes of the game perfectly. Eco-brutalism aesthetically looks apocalyptic/post apocalyptic because the brutalist architecture often looks grey (due to it mostly being concrete) and drab with the greenery growing within/around it almost looking like moss – as if the building has not been taken care of for a while. Whilst many universities and buildings now try to adopt this aesthetic (including my own past university), it reflects the ultimate hypocrisy and naïveté of modern civilisation – concrete is bad for the environment and therefore the nature growing on/around it feels ironic.

In TLOU this feels visceral, as eco-brutalist structures represent the ruin humanity has wrought onto the world and onto itself whilst also signifying some hope for continuing life on the planet through nature. It is however the perfect architectural environment to pose the question and moral dilemma that the game leaves you with for a long time after you stop playing: at this point in humanity's existence and after all we've seen in human monstrosity – is humanity worth saving? Can we justify Joel's choice at the end? Is nostalgia even worth it when we as humanity have become so far removed from it? When it has become inconvenient?

It is these questions that are deepened due to the game environment we interact with, the characters, and our very own state of existence at the very moment in real life (inarguably in decline) that makes this almost usually unasked question more relevant and confronting.

It is due to this atmospheric storytelling that the game feels more visceral and fitting to the themes and questions it tries to convey – and that now, 10 years later and after a global pandemic – has become more relevant and poignant. And man, I didn't even talk about the music – almost like a melancholic western, with strings and guitar so barebones it represents the barren state of humanity and the world that TLOU has so iconically represented; one that serves us a warning and love letter to humanity.



Screenshot from The Last of Us video game

Unpacking (2022), Commodity Fetishism, and Identity in Objects

Unpacking (2022) is a cute little game about the emotions we attach to things. By "things" I mean literal things: tangible things. I played it in December but its' emotional significance feels more important to me now than it did before considering I feel the absolute weight of things as I move to a completely different country again and realise that I am no longer someone with no attachments.

The game sees you follow a character from her childhood room in her family house to her own student dorm to a full shared apartment, etc. The things she owns change, but some of them never do - illustrating how much we attach ourselves to the objects we own. It is most definitely a capitalistic situation: attaching emotion and identity to products (this is the premise of my entire page and I am very aware of that). The character we play as is a hoarder (she is worse than me and I thought I was bad lol). We see her keep the same teddy bear from the beginning of the game, adding new ones to her collection - but keeping that core. We see her souvenirs expand, her devices upgrade or become more plentiful, and we see her clothes consistently change or stay the same. She packs everything, and takes it with her (most likely this is a pain as I am now forced to discard so many of my things due to the cost of all of it).

The things we own (that we keep) remind of us who we are, and my current obsession with keeping things that remind me of my past is because I was so indifferent to these things when I was growing up (realising that throwing away all my "girly" things out of shame as a tween was a mistake years later).

The things the character owns tells us things about who she is - she likes gaming and sports for example. How we choose/not choose to display these things represents their importance to us or our pride in them as time goes on. Our growth is also represented by the expansion of the things we own (and what we choose to throw away) - I'm learning the hard way.

It is perhaps very clear due to the several times the character moves in the game that her life is physically unstable (as is the case for most people below the age of 30 these days). Young people are constantly moving and/or physically sharing a space. Because there is such an animosity and brutality about this act of constant instability, it is often objects that can provide this feeling of stability as they remind us of who we are. These objects make us feel at home with ourself, providing some familiarity in a status quo of consistent change. It is perhaps the greatest tragedy and most beautiful thing about this random inexplicable attachment we have to tangible objects. It's memory and nostalgia for sure - it gives us comfort of what once was so that we can move forward assured of that.

One of the things I did not like about the game (which is probably just because of the way the gameplay is) is how much distance it keeps from its' themes. The game never really explores the burden of hoarding so many things and how much cost (both psychological and financial) that can bring to the character. It's nice to keep some things, but it is a double-edged sword for sure, and I would have liked that to be explored.



The game gives you a lack of agency in that regard (and in many other ways) which can be frustrating - eh, I guess it was supposed to be played as a casual game. Still, think about it!

As a game, it is not perfect. But something is so mundane, beautiful, and tragic about packing/unpacking that this game taps in - which I am also experiencing - that speaks to how we choose to compartmentalise our experiences and identities in objects. Its' love letter to nostalgia is sweet and comforting, but not as self-reflexive as I would have liked.



Screenshot from Unpacking

Barbie (2023), Pop Feminism, and The Weight of Consumerist Nostalgia

Barbie (2023) is inarguably the biggest movie of the year, and may also be one of the biggest movies of the 21st century. This success may be surprising to some, but was a long time coming and shockingly predictable considering the large gap in the market that the film and its' IP has filled. However, has the film broken the nostalgia curse and expanded on the Mattel IP or has it regressed into the territory of playing it safe that many franchises now suffer from? The answer to the question is a bit more complicated than that, and both story/real-life elements have to do with why the answer is so muddled.

Barbie the FILM inarguably tries to reinvent the brand in a way that the brand has been trying to do off-screen in the past few years. The film addresses its' legacy but also criticises it, addressing the IP's cultural importance for millennial/Gen Z women in a comprehensive way. It is definitely not a subtle attempt, but it is an okay one - Barbie is represented as an important but troubled symbol for womanhood. Using Barbie as a centrepiece for the story of womanhood in the modern age is quite genius actually as the brand itself and women grapple with what it means to be a woman (and a brand for women) in this day and age.

One may say it is a clever use of nostalgia, it utilises nostalgic elements from the legacy of Barbie (including actual nods to the real history of Mattel) and tries to be critical about it. The attempt is admirable, important, and sometimes successful. The best and worst thing about Barbie (2023) is that it transforms Barbie into something of the past, as a symbol of childhood that people should get over. This is a fine concept, but one that is ultimately slightly hypocritical and not as critical as it wants to be.

It is clear the film wants to put an important message across (I love Greta Gerwig and she's one of my favourite filmmakers working today) but it feels like Barbie the brand really hasn't earned the right to assert that message. The reasons why the Barbie movies in the early 2000s (in my humble opinion) worked as a tool for current female empowerment is that women themselves could go back and address the importance of those movies whilst also criticising the parts of those films that haven't aged that well. Those films were a product of the brand and were for the intended audience, they were tailored to young girls – they had limitations on how to deliver that message. Yes, it was an ad but not in the way that this Barbie movie was. The environment was totally different and the films were not designed to be mainstream successes.

The problem with the Barbie film's manifesto on womanhood and nostalgia is that it directly parallels and opposes the film's marketing campaign and practically everything surrounding the film.

Funnily enough, the film that tries to deconstruct Barbie as a feminine icon, has probably one of the most aggressive, mainstream, widespread, localised, and successful marketing campaigns I've ever seen in my lifetime. Barbie was (and is) everywhere. Collaborations with every brand under the sun was (and is) available, some of them quite nonsensical too.. Barbie burgers, milkshakes, shoes, hair accessories, etc. A lot of these collaborations were in anticipation of the film and really utilised the Barbiecore craze (which I also argued and argue is culturally fundamentally empowering for women) and female nostalgia in order to really create an atmosphere of rampant consumerism. I bought into it big time, I am aware of that, but something deep down did not feel right to me. It wasn't a protectionist feeling per se, it was a feeling that I was being taken advantage of by the brand... That my feelings of nostalgia and empowerment were just... vacant.

The film's doll line prices Barbie at a higher price than Ken and does not have inclusive shapes (Barbie in general is not inclusive to size to this very day). It's hard for me to stomach Barbie (2023) as a staunch proclamation of feminism when it's surrounded by all this clutter. The only reason why I buy the story is because I know Greta Gerwig as a filmmaker and know what kind of stories she stands for. It's just perhaps not the right platform for such a story. It's hard to say that the film has indie sensibilities due to all that I've mentioned here as well as the way the film often resorts to sloppy writing to deliver a more digestible mainstream message.

Considering the SAG-AFTRA strikes which directly targets Warner Bros., and just the basic fact that many toys are indeed produced using cheap labour by women in faraway countries... it doesn't feel right that the same people are trying to suggest that Barbie is now a feminist icon. Pop feminism, sure - like a H & M t-shirt that says "Girl Power", or a 0.25 pound mug that says "GirlBoss" on it. It's vacant authenticity..

I'm not saying it's impossible to address feminist issues with a profit incentive, I'm saying that when the profit incentive is so glaringly large and opposes the very fabric of the story you are trying to tell, we run into a problem. There's a difference between women reclaiming their culture + utilising Barbie as a source of power due to its' shared value/meaning and Barbie ITSELF proclaiming that power and suggesting that meaning when really the brand is not in a position to do that. The weakest part of the film is the ending because Barbie does not really know what to do... how do you deconstruct your brand without... deconstructing your brand?? Maybe that doesn't make sense. But it does make sense when you see the 10 IP movies in the foreseeable future.



Margot Robbie at the Barbie (2023) premiere



THANK YOU FOR READING.

HERE'S TO NOSTALGIA, A MOTION WHICH TAKES US
BACKWARDS DIZZYINGLY BUT IS ONLY MEANT TO
CATAPULT US FORWARDS.



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