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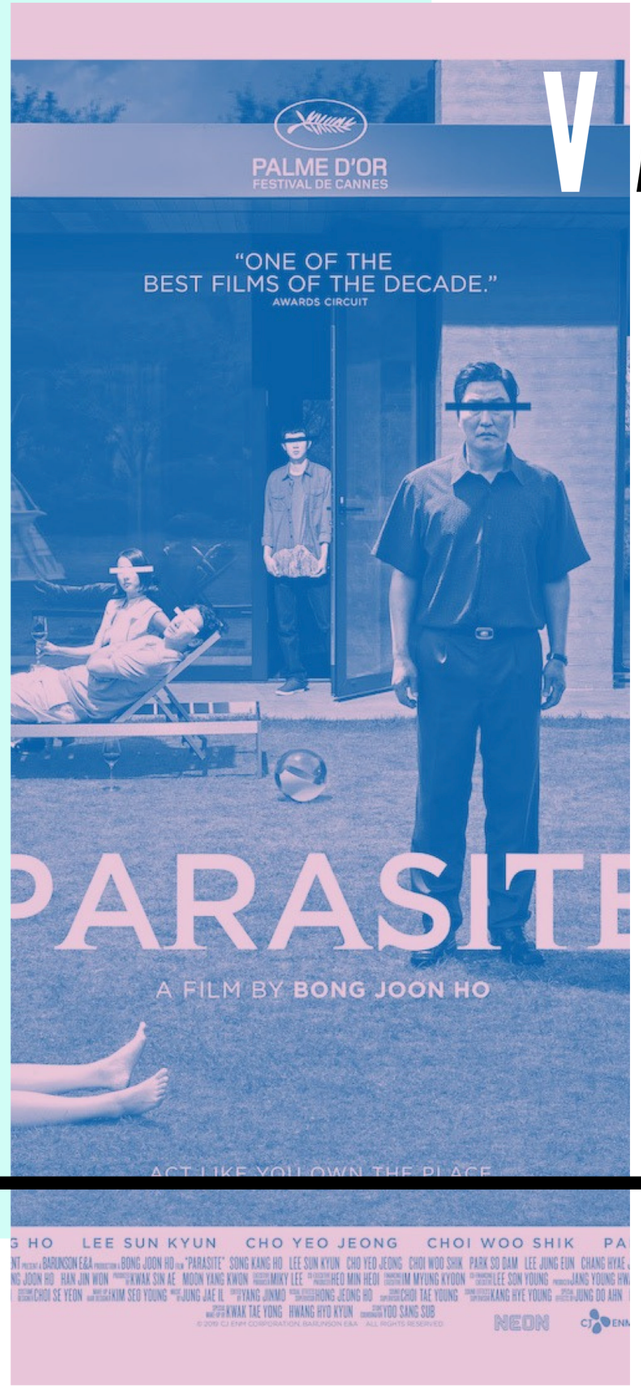

THE VAULT

PUBLICATION

University multimedia publication and discussion club

Mcmaster

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The Vault Publication

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

If you’re reading this, you have in your hands—or on your screen, or held up for you by your butler with a fake English accent who’s secretly a vampire—a copy of our second ever physical publication. This was a labour of spammed group chats, an untouched $50, corrupt student government, balls attached to strings, Sunday round table chats, and one too many PowerPoint presentations to really be justified in a single year. Above all, however, it was a labour of love during a time of disconnect, and I can’t be prouder than I am in saying that the team that put this issue together is a family that has persevered through the strangest year and come out flourishing.

Putting this issue together was no easy feat, nor was picking up the pieces of the club and building something new. Many thanks should be given to Jesaya Tunggal, who got this club back up on its feet and sprinting. He’s a clotpole at times, but he’s one of the best men I’ve ever known; the Vault will miss him dearly as he departs on to Life Beyond University. As well, we owe so much to Vicky Xie, our Editor in Chief, without whom our words would read incomprehensibly. Her proofreading work has been invaluable, and as she moves on from us to attend the University of Toronto, we wave our handkerchiefs in bittersweet farewell. Also, where would we be without our art and promotions team? David Marcuzzi and Van Tran are responsible for spreading the good word and organizing many of the lovely designs you’ll see throughout the issue. Last, but certainly not least, a big thank you goes to our Treasurer and future Vice President, Adrian Wong, whose delightful taste in the arts and indomitable spirit on rainy days and Mondays have kept us afloat. You challenge me, Adrian; I can’t wait to work with you next year!

That all said, I can’t end this letter without acknowledging the privilege that has allowed us to relish in our successes this year. Our home base is McMaster University, an institution located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations. We’re within the lands protected by the “Dish With One Spoon” wampum, an agreement among all allied Nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This year, we looked at our history and the serendipitous occasions that led us to where we are today in an effort to define ourselves. I’d like to contribute with this: the land did not only give us a place to gather for meetings pre-COVID; *it gave us the Vault*. For that, I am forever grateful.

I must also acknowledge the opportunities that our backgrounds as students at McMaster have afforded us. We enjoy the ability to speak our mind without fear of reprimand or dire consequences. We are able to critically analyze the media that pervade our everyday lives because we are equipped with the tools to do so when so many are not. The truth is that our triumphs are mounted on a mantle built from bloody, violent history, and we would not be where we are today without the mountain of bones imbuing our stairway to success.

That’s a rather maudlin way to end a letter, so I’ll go back to the question that defined our year. What is the Vault? We are a product of our time; a group of friends; a community; a team. We are a history. We are a family.

And we are so happy you’re here to read this year’s issue.

AMY HUANG, VICE PRESIDENT 2020-21

MEET THE WRITERS

Adrian Wong
Just some guy who likes writing about stuff he enjoys. Also enjoys listening to music (mostly progressive rock, classic rock, and classical these days), discovering movies, trying to code different things, and occasionally being a poet.

Vicky Xie
Vicky likes books, writing, anime, and being the best at cooking. She don’t have a sleep schedule, but she knows how to sit in a chair for 15 hours straight!!!!!!

Affaan
Affaan spends his free time reading and playing video games. He is currently making his way through the SciADV visual novel series after slogging through the second volume of Goethe’s Faust.

William “brightbier” Huynh
Will *really* likes Gundams. He is an aspiring plastic modeller. He occasionally draws, though he doesn’t do it often anymore. He plays mostly Japanese RPGs. He watches anime. Follow his Instagram for more robots.

Amy Huang
On the cusp of “eureka!” at any given moment. Word butcher. Insectophobe. Communications Studies and Multimedia major. Long, long walks on the beach.

Zane Grant
Just a geeky, anime-obsessed guy who’s seen so many shows he thinks he’s some kind of expert. He love movies, cartoons, manga, and critiquing everything he enjoys.

Jesaya “Modknight” Tunggal
Interested in gaming and otaku culture, Jesaya has aspirations to be a creative director at a major video game publishing studio. He wishes the club his very best.

REVIEWS

Bohmee Kim - *Perfect Blue* Movie Night Ad

TIGHTROPE WALKING..

What's in a review? That which we call criticism by any other name would sting as sweet. It's a delicate balancing act, a game wherein the reviewer must judge according to their tastes while afflicting the object of review with words that can either cripple self-esteem or inflate ego beyond cloud nine.

... do we judge too much? Perhaps.

Left:
"Evening"
Zain Siddiqui
@GeneratingArt on Instagram
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PUNISHER: LIFE IS GOOD

Characters are driven by conflict, and some of the best are driven by internal conflict. In an era where superheroes are finally being taken seriously by mainstream audiences, writers everywhere are desperate to prove that their character is the most multi-layered, complex, and human comic book hero. There's Batman's angst-ridden ethical dilemmas, clamouring for attention; Iron Man's rampant alcoholism; Captain America's eternal battle with belonging and nostalgia; and Spider-Man's need for atonement for a single moment of negligence. And then there's Frank Castle...

How does one even begin to describe a character like Frank Castle? The first thing to do would be to clear the air and state that Jon Bernthal's rendition of the character, while wonderfully satisfying to watch and hear, isn't actually much like the Punisher insofar as anyone reading comics would know him. Where Bernthal was conflicted and tortured, Frank Castle knows no such anguish. In fact, the Punisher is the single most content and stable person alive in the Marvel Universe.

Read any issue of Garth Ennis' seminal run on "PunisherMAX" and you'll see a man take to a life of dealing with the humanity has to offer with a workman-like efficiency. There's a kind of zen to watching Frank at work, unloading entire magazines into wiseguys, goombahs, slavers, and corrupt executives. All the dirt and slime of the human race, slammed into a reality with no quippy Spider-Men or righteous Captain Americas. In the MAX universe, everyone gets what's coming to them and all cheques are cleared one way or another.

There's a beautiful simplicity to all this, an ethos that reflects Frank himself and whatever he has that can come close to being called idealism. Here, no maniac gets a redemptive arc and rehabilitation is not an option. The reader knows exactly what's going to befall each and every single character that falls within Frank's crosshairs or anyone guilty of any wrongdoing whatsoever. Every story, be it centered around the slave trade, the war on terror, or child trafficking, is going to end with punishment. That's the world Frank Castle lives in, one over which he has sole dominion, free from the interference of the likes of Daredevil. And it is absolutely joyful.

There's a remarkable sense of catharsis to reading Ennis' issues. You finally get to see a mainstream comic book "hero" set out to achieve something and then actually achieve it, issue after issue. Characters like Batman suffer a long defeat, trying to hammer the world into something that makes sense, something they can control and master. They monologue and suffer, and spend countless nights in fancy costumes brooding over gargoyles. Frank, on the other hand, just gets it done.

Every issue sees a new evil brought into the spotlight, but at the end the world is right again. The bad men are dead and off goes Frank, wordlessly into the sunset, ever on the lookout for more who are deserving of punishment. It sounds absolutely juvenile, and it is. But so are superhero comics as a whole. This is a medium of varying levels of fascistic overtones, mirroring the angst felt by many adolescent boys and giving them a vicarious look into taboo lifestyles that involve, more than anything else, bending the world to one's own will. Batman does not submit to anyone, and will keep caped-crusading whether or not anyone actually wants him around. The Punisher is these ideas taken to their absolute conclusion: a man with a gun (likely several, actually) shooting other, arguably worse, men with guns. He does this and the world seems absolutely right. This is satisfying and it makes sense. It's hard to see a slave trader or child molester meet a horrific bloody end, choking on their own teeth, and feel anything but content.

Source: *Punisher Max* Vol. 1

The moment I realized this was when Garth Ennis truly shocked and unnerved me with whatever black magic he had enacted on his Punisher books. How does a comic book about an angry man with a gun turn a lifelong Superman fan into an incipient little psycho who thinks that a 12 gauge to the head is a solution to 90% of the world's ills?

Well, the answer is that it didn't. Ennis didn't take a starry-eyed boy and turn him into a ravenous, little murder machine. What he did do was something far more insidious.

He exposed superhero comics for what they really mean, to me and several other boys like me: a means to grapple with a world that feels like it is constantly spiralling out of control by taking it and making it our own. What is Gotham without Batman? Metropolis without Superman? Through theatrics and raw prowess, these characters rise from nothing to become masters of their surroundings and their universes. To become the single most important thing in the world, carrying and deciding the fates of millions. The world is hammered into shape, and that shape is our own. We make the world what we do in it.

So what is the essential nature of a world that only has a Frank Castle? Here Ennis takes that central edict of the biggest and greatest of the genre to its logical conclusion: Frank is defined by a compulsive need for never-ending vengeance, seeing in the world his family's killers and therefore a worthy candidate for punishment. We all knew where this was going. There was never any question that the eternal conquest for blood would beget yet more blood. For as outlandish and wild a departure Ennis' Punisher capstone "The End" is, it is the only way a world defined by a man's compulsive need for retribution could have ended. In the end, everything pays and all cheques are cashed. The books are balanced and there is no sin unpunished.

There's a wonderful sense of peace to all this. This grim conclusion is what Frank was heading towards the entire time. It is important to note that Frank never really cared much for saving anyone. This is not a man who sees good or innocence, all that left his world years ago; one could argue that it was never really in his world to begin with. If all the world is little more than a tumor, better to burn the whole thing, and him with it. Cauterize the wound. There's no anguish here and no internal conflict. Just the peace of knowing that the inevitable has come to pass, that the world has taken its essential shape and it is well and truly yours. It makes sense, and what more could you ask for?

All hostiles terminated. Mission Accomplished.

KID A AT 20: CHANGE IN A NEW CENTURY

ADRIAN WONG

Towards the very end of the 20th century, Radiohead were becoming one of the most acclaimed bands of their time. Their latest album, 1997's "OK Computer," had been hailed as a triumph, a tour de force that captured the spirit of the mid-to-late 1990s during which it had been recorded and released. It had been described by numerous critics and listeners as one of the best albums of the year, and was nominated for various Best Album awards on both sides of the Atlantic.

And as time passed, the world waited for the next release by the band; it desired an "OK Computer II," replete with the powerful, guitar-driven alternative rock that had graced the original. The magazine "Melody Maker" put it best: "If there's one band that promises to return rock to us, it's Radiohead."

Yet in October 2000, as critics and fans sat down to appreciate Radiohead's new album, titled "Kid A," they started to feel that something was... different. They didn't hear the dominating presence of guitars. They didn't hear a lot of clear vocals. They didn't hear anything that made alt-rock what it was. From the cascading piano arpeggios at the very beginning of the album onwards, "Kid A" was proving itself to be unconventional, completely shattering all previous expectations of what Radiohead could do.

And many critics complained. For them, "Kid A" felt like a series of unfinished motifs put together without any care of how the final product might sound. It just couldn't be called rock music. But for Radiohead–and as mainstream critics later realized–it was a drastically new step into rock, as new as the 21st century that was to come three months after its release. It proved that Radiohead were not just any mainstream alternative rock band that also happened to be politically minded; they were a band that was capable of change, capable of creating something truly different and progressive.

With "Kid A"'s 20th anniversary, I decided to take a look into the journey that Radiohead embarked on in preparation for this album, and the modern-day masterpiece that has emerged as a result.

After the release of "OK Computer" in May 1997, Radiohead went on a year-long tour of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan. Here, they saw the success that their work had brought them: they headlined the famed Glastonbury festival, which showed that they were just as good on the live stage as they were in the studio.

However, here was also where they started feeling burnout: after a concert in November 1997, frontman Thom Yorke found himself unable to speak, tired of the

rock musician's life. He felt that there was no way Radiohead could replicate their success with "OK Computer." (Not surprising when the role of "Guardian of Rock Music" was effectively plopped onto his shoulders.) That spiraled into a writer's block combined with feelings of self-hatred: not only could he not write music, but whatever he had already written—and even his own voice—annoyed him.

Yorke found solace in electronic music. It wasn't anything new for him: he had been in a techno band in university. With his romance with rock music on a break, he started listening to groups like Autechre and Aphex Twin, seeing them as a brief liberation from guitars and everything Radiohead had previously done. Even the concept of lyrics and melody bored him, and he gained an interest in using texture and rhythm to create soundscapes. The voice, which was traditionally front and centre in popular music, was to become just another component in these soundscapes, equal in importance to the other instruments.

The world was still expecting Radiohead to produce new music—and in February 1999, the band met in Paris to begin recording. Yet they didn't find themselves making any progress, even after they moved to Copenhagen in search for a change of space. While Yorke was enthusiastic about incorporating electronic music into Radiohead's work, the other band members didn't share that excitement. They worried that this would lead the band to create nonsensical music for the sake of experimentation, and they were concerned that not every member would get to play on every song.

Gradually, however, Radiohead started writing new songs, and with the help of producer Nigel Godrich—who split the band into a group that created motifs and another group that built on the motifs using electronic techniques—the other members became convinced that Yorke's vision was the way to go. The recording of what would become the album's first track, "Everything in Its Right Place," gave Radiohead the final confidence boost they needed to finish their next album. Everything was now in its right place. (Ultimately, the band would record enough songs to fill up not just one, but two albums—with "Amnesiac" being released in June 2001.)

Radiohead's new work was perhaps the most highly anticipated rock album since "In Utero," Nirvana's 1993 follow-up to their acclaimed "Nevermind." Yet the band avoided playing a major role in their album's promotion and decided not to release any singles. They emphasized listening to the album as a singular entity, rather than a collection of songs; for example, they requested that executives at Capitol Records listen to the entire album on a bus ride from Hollywood to Malibu instead of listening alone, which would have allowed them to select songs that they preferred.

"Kid A" was officially released on October 2, 2000. It debuted at number one on both sides of the Atlantic—in the UK, it sold more than 55,000 copies on its first day; in the US, it sold more than 207,000 copies in its first week. It became the most-sold item on Amazon, having been pre-ordered over 10,000 times. Being the next potential monument in rock music, those were very respectable numbers—and not at all unexpected. Another Radiohead album, another commercial success.

"Kid A" was influenced by a wide range of artists, none of whom were conventional rock. Having become greatly enamoured with the work of Aphex Twin and Autechre, Thom Yorke took a great deal of inspiration from both groups. He was also informed by the work of 1970s Krautrock bands like Can, and the jazz of Charles Mingus, Alice Coltrane, and Miles Davis. Two particular albums that largely influenced the new record was Björk's 1997 album "Homogenic" and Talking Heads' 1980 album "Remain in Light;" Yorke said of the latter that Talking Heads frontman David Byrne's strategy of "just [picking] stuff up and [throwing] bits in all the time" became his own method in creating "Kid A."

As a whole, "Kid A" bears witness to Thom Yorke's progression as a musician, as Radiohead abandoned acoustics to create futuristic, texture-focused soundscapes that reflected Yorke's inner struggles and the band's determination in forming a new attitude towards music. Supported by unconventional instrumental sections (notably free jazz-inspired brass, the ondes Martenot, and harp and choir), these varied soundscapes allow each song to express

Source: Juice Magazine

"As a whole, Kid A bears witness to Thom Yorke's progression as a musician..."

a sensation of its own—warm and welcoming ("Everything in Its Right Place," "Kid A"), troubled and paranoid ("The National Anthem"), dreamy and liberating ("How to Disappear Completely"), relaxing and meditative ("Treefingers"), and lost and confused ("In Limbo"), among others. Woven together, they become a powerfully expressed patchwork of emotions.

Alongside the evocative flow of musical textures, the lyrics also provide an insight into Yorke's creative conflicts and their ultimate resolution. At multiple points throughout the album—the escapism-driven "How to Disappear Completely," the disorientation of "In Limbo," and the desires for detachment disguised as relationship problems on "Morning Bell" and "Motion Picture Soundtrack"—they detail Yorke's journey from the mute wreck that he had been in November 1997, through his burnout, writer's block, and dissatisfaction, to the radical musician that he became in 2000, as well as his departure from the life and musical style that he had formerly embraced.

Concurrent with this progression is a depiction of the gradual development of humanity as it approaches and crosses the temporal line into the 21st century. There's no better indication of this than in the album's electronic inspirations and futuristic sound, like in the techno-esque beat of "Idioteque" that invokes a dance club in a prosperous but doomed society of the future. And the subject matter of the songs further reveal Radiohead's hopes and fears about the century ahead: the first human clone (to which the album's title refers, according to Yorke), but also the inner human paranoia ("The National Anthem"), the proliferation and domination of capitalism ("Optimistic"), and the crisis that slowly emerges as we continue to let technology and decadence consume us ("Idioteque"). With the 21st century approaching, Yorke believed that the world must be cognizant of what humanity will face and how we should adapt and react to these events.

Upon release, critical opinion on "Kid A" was divided. While some reviewers praised the album's depth, imagination, and dreamlike nature, others were much more negative, criticizing the album for its deviation from guitars and conventional musical form, as well as its seemingly self-obsessed, egotistical view. Reviewers also noted that "Kid A" was confusing and sometimes incomprehensible, and that the electronic musical style was unoriginal and lacked fluency; after all, Radiohead were still a rock band, and no matter how innovative they tried to be, they didn't have enough knowledge to truly make novel steps in electronica. Even some praising reviewers noted that "Kid A" was not as revolutionary as "OK Computer."

Album cover for *Kid A*

Steven Hyden - "This Isn't Happening"

But as time passed, the majority of reviewers became convinced that "Kid A"'s lyrics and musical style were a worthy match for "OK Computer"'s radical outlook. In 2012, Rolling Stone magazine called it the best album of the 2000s; recently, it was designated the 20th best album in the history of popular music. The tumultuous times that Yorke warned of throughout the album somewhat became true in the 2000s, beginning with the September 11 attacks in 2001—in 2009, the Guardian noted that "Kid A" was "a jittery premonition of the troubled, disconnected, overloaded decade to come. The sound of today, in other words, a decade early." The album's concerns of paranoia, loneliness, predatory capitalism, climate change, and fearmongering remain pertinent to this day, twenty years later. In a way, Kid A has been successful in predicting the prevailing mood of the 21st century.

And perhaps Radiohead—a band that continues to attract commercial success and critical acclaim two decades later—would not be who they are today without embarking on "Kid A." They could have appealed to critics and fans by making an "OK Computer II," another guitar-heavy album focusing on the angst of the modern day. They could then have made even more variants of "OK Computer," each time slightly different from the previous, before slowly fading into obscurity as they failed to catch up with the times.

But they decided to take a giant step in the other direction, choosing to forgo everything that most people saw as "rock music." This radical shift in musical style showed that the band were willing to make changes however they liked, whenever they liked; they need not satisfy the musical press. At the height of their success, Radiohead ceased to be a conventional rock band, and instead became an innovative group of musicians, keen to tread paths that were either new or which groups like them had never taken before. And the timing could not have been more appropriate: this expectation-shattering musical outlook, combined with the pessimistic, perhaps prophetic subject matter, made "Kid A" an album perfectly suited for the coming 21st century.

Although they refused to recognize themselves as progressive rock, Radiohead had become another representative of progressive music. And as musical trends progressed through time, Radiohead were able to retain the spirit behind "Kid A," go their own way, and create unique albums that were sure to contain surprises for even their most experienced fans.

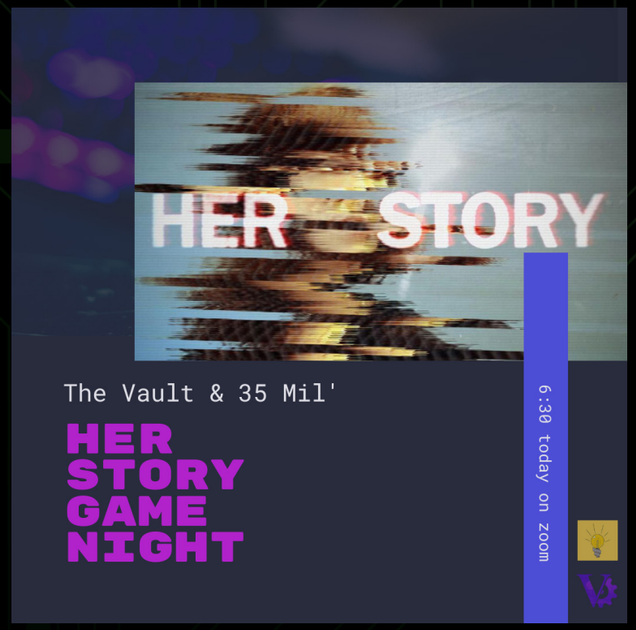
Critics and fans may have believed that "OK Computer" marked the pinnacle of Radiohead's career, yet "Kid A" became another, taller peak, a testament to both a renunciation of convention and an artist's embrace of creative freedom. "Kid A" became Radiohead's most defining moment, a symbol of change in a new century.

OPINIONS

"ME, ME, ME, ME,"

says the Strokes frontman Julian Casablancas at their 2019/2020 New Year's Eve show with Mac DeMarco, "what about *my* needs?"

That just about sums up our opinion pieces. By giving voice to any opinion regarding media, from emo music to obscure games, the Vault has created a place for even the most self-indulgent writer to fulfil their needs. Read on for a couple such pieces.



Bohmee Kim - *Her Story* Game Night Ad

AMY HUANG

CLASSICAL MUSIC IS DEAD

... Misconceptions and More

"...when someone has the audacity to say they enjoy classical music, it follows that they must be rich, pretentious, and an utter bore, if they like that *elevator stuff*."

Every now and then, I'll be reminded of the general public's perception of classical music. Among common words and phrases are the words "boring," "elitist," and most of all, "dead." While classical music—the study of it, at least—certainly has elitist elements and may very well be "boring" to the biased ear, it's not dead.

Take your average pop song, exemplified perfectly in "Pop 101" by Marianas Trench: verse, pre-chorus, chorus, verse, pre-chorus, chorus, bridge, chorus, and outro. This song is the perfect average pop song, and for good reason— Joshua Ramsay, the lead vocalist, explicitly hits us with the exact formula to get on Billboard's Top 100, then executes it flawlessly.

Ramsay comments on what the general public wants and loves to hear; that is, fast-paced, mindless, and catchy hits with commonly written tropes in the lyrics that fail to engage listeners beyond the ways that the words fit together sonically. In his words, "some things just go together like 'higher,' 'desire,' and 'fire'."

I'm not here to debate on the extent to which audiences are seen as brainless consumers. What I *am* here to do is offer a small number of reasons why the misconception that *classical music is dead* exists.

"Pop 101" came out in 2014, so while its accuracy regarding today's range of pop music falls somewhat short, it nevertheless touches on why other music may be considered "boring." The fact that this song exists at all is a pretty good indicator that today's media has molded our perception of a "good song" to fit this cookie-cutter pop hit. We've become so accustomed to hearing these sorts of songs in pop culture—upbeat, pleasing to the ear, easy to memorize and sing—that anything that doesn't fit this mold must either fall into our preconceptions of it (e.g. genres such as hip hop) or be dismissed entirely.

Our preconceptions/misconceptions of classical music seem to be thus: that it can only be enjoyed in person by shelling out hundreds of dollars per ticket in some grand, illustrious hall; that it is dreary, slow, and only used for studying or trying to fall asleep; that it is a small section of our extensive music history; that only old people like it. So, when someone has the audacity to say they enjoy classical music, it follows that they must be rich, pretentious, and an utter bore, if they like that *elevator stuff*.

There's quite a bit to unpack here, so let's go one by one.

1. CLASSICAL MUSIC IS EXPENSIVE AND ONLY FOR OLD PEOPLE.

Tickets to concerts with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra will set you back around $80 - $120 CAD. Whether that's affordable, or even accessible, is up to you, but regardless, the premise that you need to hear classical music live to enjoy it is inherently wrong—you can just as easily enjoy Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" by listening to recordings on YouTube. Experiencing music live has merit, but one wouldn't say, "you can only enjoy Frank Ocean when he's performing in front of you," right? Think of it this way: if music was a language (in some sense, it is), genres would be dialects of it, and not different languages entirely.

As for "old people:" music is music, and if you like it, then don't fight it! The idea that you have to be a certain age to enjoy classical music is absurd and is an idea perpetuated by mass media and the entertainment industry (see: any talent show on TV). If you're not already familiar with TwoSetViolin or their community, I highly recommend checking them out. One look at their Reddit page will give you a glimpse into the scope and size of the young classical musician community. And, at over two million subscribers on YouTube, nobody is doing it quite like TwoSet. They've taken the world of classical music and made it entertaining and accessible to the general public through humour.

The truth is, no one is gatekeeping, and contrary to popular belief, classical musicians want more people to listen to classical music, regardless of pedigree, social standing, or any number of superfluous things.

2. CLASSICAL MUSIC IS BACKGROUND MUSIC.

This preconception, I attribute to a lack of exposure. Classical music in pop culture has only been used as background music or sound effects to accent a visual scene, so that's all the general public knows it as. We hear Richard Strauss' "Also Sprach Zarathustra" in advertisements for toilet paper. "Einleitung"—the first part of this tone poem—is one of the most well-known "sound effects" today, but I can almost guarantee that while your average person will recognize it, they won't be able to name the piece, much less the composer.

Certainly, classical music can be used as background music or sound effects for popcorn ads; but take a minute to actually listen to Chopin's waltzes, or Tchaikovsky's "Violin Concerto in D," and you'll find that these pieces demand our attention. Just because music may not have a vocal part doesn't mean there are no soloists or no discernible melodies—it simply means that other instruments are singing.

3. THE LABEL, "CLASSICAL MUSIC"

I've been using it so far as the general public uses it:an umbrella term meant to encompass everything from the first Gregorian chant to the instrumental/orchestral music of today. As discussed previously, what we call "classical music" is so broad a term covering so many different kinds of music that I'm not sure it can even count as a genre of its own—what term could possibly describe both the atonality of Claude Debussy's "Prélude à L'Après-midi d'un Faune" and Claudio Monteverdi's "L'Orfeo" with any amount of accuracy? That's like saying that Justin Bieber's music sounds like Nirvana's.

There's something more to it, I think, and these misconceptions are just excuses. The word *expensive* might as well be replaced with *expansive*. The term "classical music" spans literal centuries, and there are hundreds of recordings for many of the same pieces. Unlike pop music (and here, I use the term pop very loosely), where a recording can be attributed to the original artist and where covers are extraneous, classical music is almost *all* "covers." Additionally, the celebrity aspect of pop makes up a significant portion of the music; for the everyday person who hasn't been exposed to the "stars" of the classical music community, all the names blur together. There are no, or at least very few, media giants dictating who you should be paying attention to. As such, the aforementioned everyday person can't know where to begin listening with ease.

I sympathize. I'm a classically trained musician, but when I think of the sheer volume of music I haven't listened to... well. "Classical music", or as we've slapped a huge label over it, is so overwhelmingly vast that the thought of it can be headache-inducing. As consumers in today's world, this obstacle of going out of our way to find pieces that we like is already too large of a barrier. Add that to the time it takes to listen to classical pieces, and you have yourself a recipe on how to get people to quit trying.

There's a certain fear to it, as well. When people say classical music is sublime, they're not kidding. You feel small and insignificant in comparison to the historical weight of any piece that is transcribed today. Remember—this music has survived centuries. You are but a fraction of a speck of dust in the history of the world, and these dots on a page have and will live on regardless of whether or not you're there to experience them. Classical music has reached this level of immortality that, to the everyday person, makes it unfathomable. Thus, it is "boring:" we don't like to think on it, so we simply don't think about it at all, and furthermore, the people who do—who think about classical music critically and take pleasure out of experiencing it for what it is—baffle us.

So, no, classical musical isn't dead. Our preconceptions and misconceptions about it are simply rooted in a lack of exposure and understanding. But if you feel as though you'll never get to learn, take heart; young musicians are constantly reshaping what it means to appreciate classical music, and pop culture icons like TwoSetViolin can serve as a great introduction. Once you get over the barrier of effort, a world awaits you.

Source: TwoSetViolin

"... no one is gatekeeping, and contrary to popular belief, classical musicians want more people to listen to classical music."

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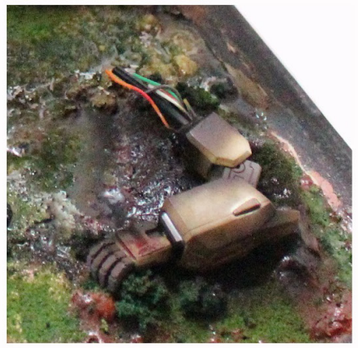
"EVERYONE IS MY ENEMY"

WILLIAM HUYNH 2021



"EVERYONE IS MY ENEMY" by Will Huynh
@brightbuild_workshop on Instagram
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The PARABLE of the good gamer

JESAYA TUNGGAL

Here's an interesting thought experiment: can you count morality? Could you tally all of the good and evil actions you've ever committed within some grand point system? And hypothetically, if one were to weigh their heart against a feather on judgement day, would God use metric or imperial?

These are questions that sound paradoxical, if a bit silly. It seems ridiculous to be able to "measure morality;" to compare one's status as a "good" or "bad" actor to arbitrary units on some cosmic scale. Nevertheless, they frame a school of thought which remains fundamental to our perceptions on ethics and justice. Take, for example, common law. How does one go about matching a punishment proportionate to a crime? No matter how you slice it, there needs to be some measure of value which guides the judge, whether that be in dollars confiscated or years sentenced.

Stranger still are the ways in which morality is framed by the media. From alarmist newspaper columns to fiery televangelists, all systems of communication eventually cross paths with systems of ethics. With this in mind, one of the more pressing issues we face as contemporary consumers has to do with how new forms of media handle the subject. As with any fictive outlet, video games have been used to both capture and resolve moral debates. In fact, they have in some ways become moral parables for a new generation of readers: a hotbed for novel ways of approaching issues. Nonetheless, there is a danger to the parable of the "good" gamer. After all, how can developers even begin to construct good and evil within their products? What are good and evil, anyways?

The big compatibility issue between games and ethics is that they aren't formatted the same. At its basis, a video game is just that: a game, given life by programming and accessed via an electronic interface. This means that video games, by virtue of *being* games, are made up of a set of rules or algorithms which dictate their form and content. Since all video games operate on some form of computer system, decisions at a basic level always employ binary code. Consequently, game systems (and by default their contents) operate on a dichotomous mode of thinking, sometimes resulting in mechanics which operate on a binary morality: one with a capital "B" Bad and capital "G" Good. This, of course, is a stark contrast to the subtle nuances of real life scenarios. As any decent ethics lecturer will tell you, right and wrong ain't a zebra (it isn't black and white)!

The "Infamous" series by Sucker Punch Productions is a good example of this problem. In the first two instalments you play as Cole Macgrath, a super-powered mutant who must develop his super abilities either in the pursuit of Good or via the path of Evil. This concept is developed through a karmic system that relies on a minute categorisation of player actions. Did you kill that civilian? Whoops, that's +3 evil points! Did you heal an injured person? Great, that's +1 good. "Infamous" deals with right and wrong as if they were arithmetic, attempting to painfully count out the player's deeds. This system is not unique; many games, including "Fallout," "Fable," and "Dishonored," have all dabbled with karma-based morality. Nonetheless, while karma may function well for judging clear-cut cases, it falters when confronted with actual ethical dilemmas.

Take the trolley problem, a thought experiment devised to test one's moral leanings. In this scenario, you are a driver on an unstoppable trolley, zooming towards a contingent of five workers who can neither see nor hear your vehicle. As the train operator, you are confronted with the choice of either letting the trolley continue on its natural course to kill the five workers, or intentionally switching tracks, killing one worker on the alternative route.

If we apply "Infamous"' logic, the answer is really quite simple. After all, if one diverts the track they gain five good points for the lives saved and lose only one evil point for the murder, so there is a net gain of four points. Of course, any philosopher worth their salt would be quick to point out that this mode of interpretation is rather simplistic; counting morality can be a dangerously reductive exercise. Instead, they might urge us to consider what non-numeric ethical concerns might affect our perception of right and wrong.

Are the workers all in their 80s? Are they babies? Is the single victim of your track-switch pregnant? From these concerns, questions emerge about one's own belief system. What do you value most in your decision making process? For example, do you believe that failing to intervene in the natural course of events would make you responsible for the death of the five, or is the intentional murder of one more pressing? In any either, there's little room to brand one's decision as either Good or Evil.

In "Infamous," Cole finds himself in a similar situation when he discovers that he has time to only do one of two tasks: save the only woman who had loved him through his mutation, Trish, or disarm bombs placed in crowded areas around the city. As expected, if the player chooses Trish, Cole is heavily shunted with negative karma, changing the very trajectory of one's game. The point is, a binary system heavily tips the scales towards a rational calculus when matters are often much more complicated. It teaches players that, so long as their actions appear selfless or seem beneficial to a greater number of people, periphery concerns can be ignored.

Video games are parables; moral stories with lessons to be learnt. And, as bodies of knowledge which can teach their audiences, they should do better. If "Infamous" is any indicator, karmic mechanics do not set a good precedent for the ways in which people should respond to the world, even in spite of its fictive form. Ultimately, choices can be double-pronged, but this shouldn't automatically imply an ethical dichotomy. Maybe it's time to move on and hang up the karma system. Instead, greater emphasis ought to be placed on titles which explore choice and consequence, moving away from systems which bake morality into the fabric of the game's code and focusing instead on the complexities involved in confronting and resolving moral crises within a story. Titles such as "Undertale," "Until Dawn," and "Detroit: Become Human" are all great examples of this concept, wielding compelling narrative context and interesting new mechanics to propel the player's response beyond a right/wrong binary.

So, can you count morality? Well, in a short answer, no. Painting the world in blacks and whites instead of shades of grey will never adequately describe life's little quandaries. Nevertheless, communication and media technologies will still try, developers attempting to force circular pegs into square-shaped holes. It's up to us then, a new generation of producers and consumers, to take up responsibility for our readings. Let us seriously challenge the current paradigm and continue to pave new paths, and hope that one day, we can finally put to rest the parable of the good gamer.

SPOTLIGHT

DISCUSSIONS

WHAT IS A NOSTALGIC PIECE OF MULTIMEDIA FOR YOU? WHAT MAKES SOMETHING NOSTALGIC, AND WHY? MOST IMPORTANTLY, IS IT POSSIBLE TO GENERATE A SENSE OF NOSTALGIA WITHOUT HAVING "CONSUMED" THE PIECE OF MEDIA IN QUESTION?

I think my nostalgia for old works of multimedia can be calculated by (mainly) two factors: how many hours I poured into it, and how long ago it was. So a lot of old flash games, like coolmathgames.com, Poptropica, Fantage, Moshi Monsters, and things I can't remember the names of now. But I think it also matters how multimedia the media is: for example, if it's not just a visual game that I played with the sound muted, but a show with memorable visuals (characters, scenes) and sound (theme songs, soundtracks, even fan AMVs lol) then it kinda compounds how memorable it was, possibly even how emotional, which makes it so much more nostalgic because it evokes both general and specific feelings. I don't know if books count as multimedia, but if they are, then the Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, Skulduggery Pleasant, and Artemis Fowl series would definitely feature in the top ten of my most nostalgic medias.
I believe yes. Even if you haven't directly consumed it, it doesn't mean you can't be exposed to it. I never watched or played Pokemon, but through pop culture osmosis, I still know the characters and Pokemons and the theme song, and it definitely brings up a sense of nostalgia that I associate with its popularity in my childhood.

- Vicky

For me its got to be star wars, my dad got me into it early on with the OT; i made him re-watch return of the jedi 8 times. Every time I watch a star wars film it always ties me back to the time I was a kid exploring this new world presented to me and the joy of hanging with my dad. I think under the right conditions you can experience nostalgia without having a history with the item if it is similar to something you have a strong connection to.

- Arman

The first Gorillaz album brings me a lot of nostalgia. It's a great album - and if you somehow missed out on it you need to listen right now - but the nostalgia I feel doesn't come from the music itself, but where I was both physically and mentally when I listened to it most. I would listen to just a few albums on rotation in the summer of 2016, during the long bus ride home from a job I hated. It was my only escape during a very low point in my life and listening back now brings me that same feeling of peace I would get then. For the rest of the day I wouldn't have to worry about my boss or whatever pointless task he wanted me to do that wasn't in the job description.

So to answer the most important question - whether someone can feel that same nostalgia without having listened to the album - sorta? I'd argue that nostalgia is less about the trigger and more about the feeling. It's about re-immersing yourself in a time or place where you aren't anymore, and everyone can relate to that feeling. There are even common triggers. Collective pieces of cultural significance that give people similar feelings. Overall though, I'd say that the strongest feelings of nostalgia are personal. No one else took that bus ride home with me. Listening to that same album after working that same job. That feeling is mine and mine alone, and it means much more to me than that vague recollection of childhood freedom that SpongeBob or Pokemon have to offer.

- Aidan

hmm i think any multimedia i used to engage with/fixate on that i come across while i'm fixated on something else invokes feelings of nostalgia? like i'll remember the general era of my life when i listened to certain music or stanned a certain tv show and reflect on how i've grown since then, reminisce on lost friends, that kinda thing. tangentially related but the nostalgia factor is a strong one for when i'm deciding if i should buy something-- i will almost immediately dish out $$ for legend of zelda games bc windwaker on the gamecube was my first game, but i hesitate to get into newer games even if they claim to be similar. anyway, for the last question: i think you can get, like, fomo from "consuming" certain media, and you can wish you lived through a certain time, but idk if that counts as nostalgia or not.

- Amy

Jesaya Tunggal - Metal Gear Solid V(ault)

NOM NOM NOM!

Sometimes, we exercise critical thought and express (un)popular views on things that don't quite fit into a box. Expand your horizons and go in with an open mind as we discuss some food for thought.

FOOD4THOUGHT
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FANZINES

the awesome part of fandom

VICKY XIE

Fandoms sometimes get a bad rep. And, you know what, that's fair—in any fandom, there's always going to be those small but vocal minorities of die-hard followers who often make certain corners of a fandom unpleasant for casual fans. I would love to talk about fandom at large, and the various stigmas attached to it—but for today, I have something else on the agenda. Instead, I'd like to shed some light on a more wholesome, admirable aspect of fandom, one that isn't all that well-known, but should be: fanzines.

A fanzine, as you may be able to piece together from the name, is a portmanteau of "fandom" and "magazine". "Zines", as they're even more colloquially called, are non-official, non-professional publications produced by fans, for fans. And they're not a recent phenomenon—it may come as a surprise that they date as far back as the 1940s, to a time when the Internet wasn't available to instantly connect people to others who shared their hobbies. Instead of forums or Tumblr or social media, there were classified ads in the newspaper and local conventions at which you could buy or sell these zines.

It might sound like a lot of effort for something that the creators of the zine sometimes don't even profit out of, until you remember that back then, without the instantaneous connective nature of the Internet, finding fellow enthusiasts of a niche group was far more difficult than it is today, and spreading fan content was much harder. And there's intrinsic satisfaction in creating and sharing fanworks, too, whether it's self-indulgent fanart or exploratory fanfiction. When you have niche interests, you want to be able to talk about them and share them with others who share your same level of passion—zines were, and still are, a way to do that.

Now, zines have changed a lot over the years—back in the old days, it was all science fiction zines, comic zines, and zines for things you wouldn't traditionally associate nowadays with mainstream or popular fandom (but definitely had respectable followings back then): punk and rock n' roll zines, sports zines, horror film zines, and so on and so forth.

Zines these days are centered much more around what you'd expect from "fandom": popular anime series, big movie franchises, TV shows with massive online fan presence, and so on. Smaller zines may exist to cater to smaller fandoms, lesser-known movies or manga or comics; zines may also exist to cater to niches-within-niches, such as those centered around a specific character or ship (meaning a relationship between two fictional characters, if you've been living under a rock for the past ten years) or a specific theme (steampunk, fantasy, summertime, Elizabethan; even especially if the original work never incorporated those elements).

But why do zines still exist today, you might ask, if you can find pretty much anything you want from a fandom with a single search query on Google? After all, you have sites like Tumblr, DeviantArt, LiveJournal, FanFiction.Net, Reddit, and AO3, all free and widely-accessible, and there within the click of a mouse. The answer is that it all circles back around to the concept I mentioned earlier: niches-within-niches. Sometimes, you're a die-hard fan, and sometimes, you have a little money to spare and want physical memorabilia of your favourite characters from your favourite show. It's a little (or a lot) like merchandise that you might see the official IP-owners selling through official channels—a bit worse in that the quality isn't professional, but a lot better in that it's bonus content in the form of art and stories (and even physical merch like pins, posters, and T-shirts).

You might have noticed by this point that I seem to have a very vested interest in this topic, and you'd be right. I've participated in the fanzine realm of fandom before, both as a consumer and as a producer. And, though I'll be the first to admit that I'm somewhat biased, I think the existence of fanzines is an amazing thing. It's an example of a group of complete strangers joining together and managing to achieve something real and substantial (that takes no small amount of time and dedication), purely based on a single shared passion.

It's hard to grasp just how much effort is put into zines until you've actually been there behind the scenes yourself. You need to set up your platform, whether that's Tumblr or Twitter or (often) both or whatever else; you need to recruit "moderators" in charge of promotion, visuals, layout, editing, shipping, finance; you need to filter through potentially hundreds of applications from artists and writers who want to be in your zine; you need to keep all your contributors on track throughout the creation process (and without fail a couple of them will drop out or just straight-up ghost you); you need to put together the final book itself, as well as order any added custom merchandise; you need to promote your zine to the fandom and get those pre-orders in; you need to manually package and ship out bundles to fans all around the world.

In short—it's not a walk in the park. But at the end of the day, it's an enterprise that brings a sense of pride, excitement, and community to what might be a very large and otherwise impersonal fandom.

If you're a contributor, you come out of it with something sleek and physical and real, that you can hold in your hands and flip through and enjoy, and in which you can see your own work. You may or may not have turned a profit (maybe you have, but it's a for-charity zine—those are extra-commendable), but all the same it's a testament to the effort you've put in, and knowing that other fans across the globe bought the zine for your art, or for your writing, is a thrill all on its own.

If you're a buyer, you nevertheless appreciate that the reason you can hold this zine in your hands (a zine that you've possibly been eagerly awaiting for months) is because of the dedication of fans just like you (but with a knack for the arts), who've volunteered their free time to help undertake this behemoth of a project. And for a fair price (around $20 for a physical copy, more for merch), you get to geek out at an anthology of talented content catering to all your favourite things.

The enterprise of fanzines is one that many people—even fans—still don't know much about. Most of the people I've mentioned zines to have had no idea what they were, but after an brief explanation would generally react with some degree of curiosity and an "oh, that's pretty cool!" Zines are a lesser-known aspect of fandom culture that provide a much-needed counterpoint to the common view that fandoms are a toxic mess of opinionated super-fans; something that detracts from the average fan's experience, rather than adding to it. But zines are the very definition of something that comes directly from fandom and that enhances one's experience—they're a true labour of love, and firm proof that yes, fandoms can actually be pretty damn awesome.

ZANE GRANT

How Can We Make Diverse and Progressive Media Work?

The eternal problem that producers are forced to face: If it's forced down people's throats by directors, writers, and producers, people often react badly to forced diversity. On the other hand, if it just happens naturally and is treated normal like any other case people can come to accept it far better.

The more common, subtle, and natural the diversity when introducing controversial topics, the better it is for audiences. However, these choices can also arguably be better for marginalized groups, as they get to see realistic portrayals of characters like them without feeling that these one-dimensional diversity characters are what's supposed to represent them. They aren't tokenized— subtle diversity choices acknowledge that these groups are more than just their gender, sexual orientation, or race.

This dynamic can be seen in the examination of two different media pieces. The first that we'll look at is the original animated children's show, "The Loud House," created by Chris Savino for Nickelodeon. "The Loud House" follows the life of a large family made up of 11-year-old Lincoln Loud and his 10 sisters. This series mostly focuses on the lives of the female characters but also chooses to portray a vast diversity of progressive themes and characters. For example, one of the sisters, Luna, is lesbian and in a relationship. Lincoln's best friend Clyde is a self-described Mulatto boy whose parents are two married gay men. Lincoln's female friend Ronnie Anne is Hispanic and was so popular they had a successful spin off of her and her family with a cast of primarily all Spanish characters.

Our second example is "The Eternals," an upcoming Marvel film which has announced an all gender, race, and sexual orientation swapped casting of the characters from the comics they are presenting, a good example of taking classic, already-established characters and making them "diverse" instead of creating new ones. The so-called "forced diversity route" "The Eternals" is pushing was touched upon in an article from the online news publication Cosmic Book News by author Matt McGloin. He noted that, "Again, the use of diversification or female representation isn't the problem, the problem is that Marvel is replacing characters for politically correct, or 'SJW,' reasons. Note: Tran, herself, says above, "We have so many characters in the Marvel Universe. "But then why are Disney and Marvel replacing characters? Why not either use existing characters or create new characters?"

The writing of classically white, straight, and male characters has dominated comic books, television and movies for decades, leaving little to no representation for all the fans of these media who didn't fit that description. Aside from these main showstoppers, however, there has equally been a huge variety of non het/cis/white characters to rise in comics over the years. We now have access to a very wide range of characters who fit many diverse worlds of representation, but somehow they are never picked to be in films or media. Even classically white character Nick Fury became African-American in all media forms after Samuel L. Jackson's likeness was taken by Marvel Ultimate artists Mike Millar and Bryan Hitch back in 2002. While this new version is great and not an example of diversification making characters shallow or lame, it does establish a baseline for good writing in my argument.

What I am touching upon when it comes to the forcible hijacking of characters by diversity agendas is the notion that it tends to be indicative of lazy writing and denotes that writers and artists aren't willing (or don't care enough) to create unique and interesting characters that represent marginalized groups positively. It's like McGloin wrote in his article, "Wouldn't you want a character to stand on his or her own with its unique identity instead of riding on the coattails of what came before or someone else's history?"

People do not enjoy it when characters are one-dimensionally created just to push agendas by studios. This is especially true when those same studios don't realize that if they want diverse groups of people to watch their film/tv-series, they have to also make the characters entertaining and well-developed, instead of having them exist only to be an affirmative action character whose sole personality is their gender/race/sexual orientation. I'm not saying this happens often, but when it does, the producer and/or director cannot blame audiences for not receiving their creation well. For example, we had the bad reaction to the recent "Birds of Prey" movie, which some have stated had marketing that portrayed it as "not for men" or was "overly politicized." An article from *Vox* writes: "Despite 'Birds of

Prey,' Warner Bros.'s Harley Quinn spinoff, earning great reviews, and despite making an estimated $81 million worldwide in its opening weekend, the film has already been labeled a commercial disappointment in the DC Expanded Universe canon."

The pressure to make this movie a feminist landmark or a political statement on the current climate in America may have hurt the film's appearance to its general audience of comic book movie fans, which is primarily male. This should not have happened, especially with the film being marketed by the director as more of a break-up flick about Harley trying to find herself in the world—not the overly-political anti-male propaganda piece some online article writers would say it is.

Going back to "The Loud House" for a moment: the character Luna Loud was well-developed and it took quite a while for her to reveal her sexual orientation. It was only in Season 2 Episode 29 of "The Loud House," "L is for Love," that Luna Loud's sexuality was finally touched upon, in a very quick and subtle fashion. This also gave us another openly gay character, Sam, who became Luna's girlfriend going forward. Ronnie-Anne Santiago was also in the show for a long time and several episodes in the show focused on her and her extended family before pushing the spin-off. She first appeared in Episode 15 of Season 1, "Save the Date," back in 2016, and didn't get her spin-off until 2019, after the creators realized how popular she was.

Sometimes it is a better move to ease fans into things instead of dropping them off proverbial ledges. In order to make political points, consider instead slowly boiling the lobster, before it knows what's happening.

Writers and Director should not try to pull a J.K. Rowling and randomly drop bombs about the "politics" of their work, years after a story is over. Case in point, according to Rowling, two very important characters in Harry Potter, Grindelwald and Dumbledore, shared an "intense sexual relationship behind the scenes." The sheer audacity to pander in this way so late after the story ended is an example of forcing representation in stories just to be seen as controversial and diverse. Because, really, it only creates major backlash.

This brings me to the next topic in my argument: normalization vs. spectacularization.

Trying to make films into statements about the current political or social climate is a bold move that will obviously divide people and make fans of source material as well as general audiences apprehensive about going to see it. Making diversity and progressiveness the focal point of your plot will almost always turn off large groups who are tired of having these issues forced down their throats. As a result, when a film or television series tackles issues such as diversity, the message can and will be hijacked by critics and spun into some-kind of anti-(insert privileged group here) message.

Other times directors and writers will create bland one-dimensional characters under the premise of diversity, but whom are really harmful stereotypes that hurt the group they try to represent. Do you regularly interact with people who walk around announcing their gender, politics, or sexuality, as if it were their only redeeming quality? The answer is most probably not. People who are queer, feminist, and/or of colour usually have more to them than that one aspect. Characters in media should also have more depth to them than just being a mouthpiece for the rhetoric of an issue. They should be there to show how, just like everyone else, these diverse groups can help promote equality and give the underrepresented a decent character to be proud of.

The advertising of films and comics lately seems to be hurting the content it tries to promote. It presents it like the announcer at a freak show trying to draw people in with crazy comments and shocking or surprising information instead of presenting it like just another film for people to enjoy. This is not what "Birds of Prey" tried to do; all it wanted was for there to be another comic book film out there that took a stand for representation of strong-female characters like the well-received Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel.

Santos also wrote in his article on Vox that, "Viewers, in turn, want both someone to cheer for and a movement to cheer about. It's why these women-led movies are framed and sold in a way that champions female empowerment." People want a character that is representative, well-rounded, and a positive example everyone can enjoy. Is Harley Quinn really a good example of that though? She kills, beats people up, steals, and commits horrible acts. She is practically a female Joker except less chaotic and more self-serving. Is this someone we want women and girls to look up to? This is the reverse of arguments that action movies led by male characters present a bad example to boys of how to act in society.

The loudest voices on Twitter demanding for representation and diversity are ironically not 'representative' of the actual will of fans and audiences. People demanded for the "Bird of Prey" movie to be made. Actor Ewan McGregor even raved about his character Black Mask being an example of the misogynistic male we need to fight against and he was also going to be in a hinted "homosexual relationship" with his partner Victor Zsasz. In a recent article from CinemaBlend, Ewan McGregor is quoted stating, "What interested me with 'Birds of Prey' is that it's a feminist film. It is very finely written. There is in the script a real look on

misogyny, and I think we need that. We need to be more aware of how we behave with the opposite sex. We need to be taught to change."

In this interview, McGregor publicly announced the movie as "feminist" and "tackling" misogyny, which sadly stuck with it forever, creating a chasm to those comic book fans who don't enjoy political messages in their film and who sadly do still hold some inherent misogyny within them. The articles and marketing of this film had been forever intertwined with political feminist rhetoric. "Birds of Prey" originally wanted to simply progress the field of female directors and comic book films. Unfortunately, the marketing of films as progressive are often seen as disingenuous by people who wonder if the executive producers and directors really care about the issues they try and present in their films. This is contrasted with the long run of film and television that do present a progressive message in a positive way while also giving us great characters: "Onward" (2020), "Grey's Anatomy" (2005), "Do the Right Thing" (1989), "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" (1967), "Last Man Standing" (2011), and "Modern Family" (2009); the list goes on.

A good question I and many famous scholars have asked is, "has marketing and representation of/to marginalized groups really ended up only hurting the acceptance of those groups?" There is much evidence that would say yes. Academics have written many a thesis on the power of television and film to disseminate harmful portrayals of minorities to impressionable viewers, like children, warping their ideas of how these groups act, or should act, further hurting the progress those groups try to make in breaking out of their stereotypical mold. A recent example is the famous documentary, "The Problem With Apu" by Hari Kondabolu that tackled the negative stereotypes towards East Indians the popular character Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from "The Simpsons" presented viewers. The problematic nature of an East Indian man acting as a fool for millions to see, especially East Indian children, is that these children then think this is how they ought to be.

Back in 1999 there was an EDGE Seminar that tackled this question, conducted by scholars Yurii Horton, Raagen Price and Eric Brown. It began with a discussion on how the portrayal of African-American characters has been conducted through the existence of media. "The media sets the tone for the morals, values, and images of our culture. Many people in this country, some of whom have never encountered black people, believe that the degrading stereotypes of blacks are based on reality and not fiction. Everything they believe about blacks is determined by what they see on television. After over a century of movie making, these horrible stereotypes continue to plague us today, and until negative images of blacks are extinguished from the media, blacks will be regarded as second-class citizens."

Later in the seminar, they discuss the recent progress in television and the obstacles still faced in the medium. They touch upon what I was discussing about Harley Quinn being a possibly bad role-model for girls to look up to and how affirmative-action characters are the worst way to present diverse characters to audiences. "Considerable public concern has arisen over the issue of media diversity, as it is generally accepted that mass media has strong social and psychological effects on viewers. Film and television, for example, provide many children with their first exposure to people of other races, ethnicity, religions and cultures. What they see onscreen, therefore, can impact their attitudes about the treatment of others." A bland character, or even a harmful character, that is being presented as a spectacularized example of a minority group will only create one more case of a person identifying with a harmful stereotype and applying it to real life. Sadly, some people don't realize it is just a piece of fictional media, even if this belief doesn't hold water.

It's almost impossible to have full representation of all the intersections of religion, race, gender etc. without creating a cluttered mess of a story, especially in film. Stories are about specific topics and people, and a writer is not obligated to include a reference to every group in existence. The vocal minority is just that, a minority. All we can hope for is more original and innovative media garnered towards minority and marginalized groups to give them the representation they deserve. Everyone should have their own Iron Man, Yoda, Dante, and Naruto that they can look up to and connect with.

But then why do we have this recurring theme of *two steps forward one step back*? Media that may work to be progressive in one respect can be end up being regressive in others. Yet despite being regressive in some degree, these media work to pave the way for more progressively diverse works later on. Overall there is this question of the "burden of representation." Do media have to actively try and be as diverse as possible? Do we as a collective audience have to demand creators to work progressiveness into their media?

My final statement in conjunction with my previous sentence is this, make more new media for representation and diversity; don't go about forcibly changing pre-existing stories and characters. Be inspired and create something new. That's what stories and media are all about— representation and inspiration.

Source: The Spectator

NO COUNTRY FOR GOOD MEN

WILL HUYNH

Modern media has it drilled into us the idea of a dichotomy between good and evil—a binary pervasive in our perception of society. Whether it be black and white, male and female, truth and lies, the idea of the binary permeates. It is through this binary, this reductionist theory of the world, that we hairless, lizard-brained simians prove capable of interpreting the space that surrounds us. This simplification of complex matter allows us to digest otherwise complicated topics, albeit digested incorrectly—something which leads to constipations of half-truths and pseudo-facts. One such topic that is plagued by this binary is the topic of war. It is always depicted in media that it is "us" vs "them." The "them" in question is always dehumanized into monsters regardless of their stance, opinions, and beliefs. The purpose of this article is to review the campaign of "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare" (CODMW) considering this binary being extremely blurred.

In CODMW, the player plays a soldier named Alex, unsurprisingly aligned with the American Special Forces, the CIA, and the British Special Forces. These three factions are typically portrayed as the "good guys". You are fighting against, also unsurprisingly, Al-Qatala, a Middle Eastern extremist group, and another faction, a terroristic offshoot of the Russian Army. Al-Qatala seeks to exterminate the Russian superpower inhabiting their country, citing that their land is their own. Their methods are extreme, going so far as to terrorize their own people. The Russian Army is manufacturing chemical weapons. The dichotomy is established with the Middle Eastern terrorists harming their own citizens and committing genocide and the Russian Army violating various treaties in creating chemical weapons. But the campaign holds nothing back in its depiction of war, and blurs the lines between good and bad. You see children executed in front of their parents, you play as a child refugee forced into warfare and murder, and you see the "good guys" do some very questionable things.

A section of the game that I would like to focus on is a very controversial interrogation sequence. You play as Kyle Garrick, accompanied by Captain Price. You are interrogating an Al-Qatala general. A quote that sticks out as heavily poignant in this scene is one that is ostensibly addressed to the main character, and yet ominously feels addressed to you, the player. As the player, you have seen the General do some truly villainous deeds such as murdering children, and as the player you would want nothing more than to get back at him. Though revenge is something of a wet dream, no one sane would want to go the distance to enact it, though no one would admit this to themselves. The game asks you if you are "up for it." Upon selecting *Yes*, you are ushered into the interrogation room. The quote that sticks with me is:

"You wanted the gloves off? They're off..."

You are faced with the General, with his wife and son held hostage. And you are to threaten him by pulling the trigger on the civilians. Upon making this difficult decision, you realize the gun is empty, prompting Captain Price to put the bullets on the desk. You load the gun and resume threatening his family, going so far as to firing warning shots at them. This is not the actions of a hero, but of a veritable villain. But for the ultimate pursuit of good, can these transgressions be overlooked? Do the ends justify the means? For these, I have no answer, but I can tell you this: as a human being, playing this sequence left me sick to my stomach. I wanted revenge, but not like this. But thinking about it... how else would you get revenge of the same magnitude of what the General has done? When all is said and done, you can choose to execute the man in front of his family or let him live. You have already extracted the information, the question becomes not how you can make this man suffer, but how much you can torture his family. And for this, I chose to spare the man, because to me, him living in guilt of what he put his family through should be more torture than death. The following cutscene involves Kyle asking Captain Price: "Where do we draw the line?"

He responds:

"We draw the line wherever you need it... when you take the gloves off, you get blood on your hands."

The CODMW campaign is one of the most memorable campaigns I have had the displeasure of experiencing in 2020. Not because of the badass action sequences, but because it shows us that in war, there really is no country for good men.

SPOTLIGHT

DISCUSSIONS

WITH THE ADVENT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY, THE WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER HAVE CHANGED RAPIDLY OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS. WITH THAT IN MIND, AREAS FOR DISCUSSION ON TOPICS SUCH AS POLITICS HAVE SHIFTED FROM THE IN-PERSON PUBLIC SPHERE, TO A MORE ANONYMOUS PRIVATE SPHERE. HOW DO YOU THINK THIS SHIFT HAS IMPACTED THE WAYS IN WHICH WE RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER, AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT OUR POLITICS?

FRANK

Online communication through text or even voice is bound to be less personal than in real life due to the lack of body language, proximity, sense that a real person is there. Our brains aren't accustomed to this to be honest, and it often takes mental shortcuts to discredit the other side as another human. As well, we like to cherry pick and record statements more than ever before so that they can be used against online people, politicians included.

DANIEL

Online communication presents new challenges less pressing in an era predating platforms like Discord, Reddit, etc. including, as Frank mentioned, a lack of information richness (non-verbal cues, proximity, eye contact, facial expression, etc.) making it slightly more difficult to have fulfilling or complex conversations online. In addition, it's much easier to attack a profile picture and a username rather than confronting a person to their face, creating situations of needless animosity or argumentation on an unhealthy level. Anonymous online communication, on the other hand, presents a whole host of new issues. Uncle Ben from Spiderman once famously said: "with great power comes great responsibility" and, I feel, we've seen some people demonstrating their ability to handle the power of anonymity better, more maturely, and more responsibly than others. Under the protection of anonymity, it can be easier for harassment, doxing, or threats to be made by someone who decides to abdicate their responsibility online. Although, when the power of anonymity is respected, it can lead to important conversations brought on by a vulnerability and openness not commonly found in a forum without said anonymity. In this way, online anonymity can, like many things in life, be misused but can still generally serve a greater purpose, and I feel it's important not to let the bad actors spoil the precious aspects of anonymity for those who choose to follow Uncle Ben's teachings and uphold the responsibility of being a decent human being online, even when one can somewhat easily do the opposite and suffer few to no repercussions. Just because there are no (or few) repercussions doesn't mean that you shouldn't still try to do the right thing, of course.

KELCY

The change to online communication especially in the time of a pandemic has impacted our communication positively in various ways. For example when everyone was online, black lives matter protests were gaining attention globally. People were being connected and supportive during the global issue and generally more aware because communication between people of different background and ideologies was facilitated through online communication making the voices of our neighbors, their pain and their experience more accessible and easier to relate to. This is especially true since online, your opinions and thoughts are stripped from any race, gender or social class because biases, because its clear than every account is just made of the same types of pixels. Because you can be private or anonymous online you can also choose to speak your mind on any political issue freely, and your thoughts are sure to be read no matter who you are, and so this freedom initiates important discussions that would be left unsaid, such as trump's doxxing leading up to his impeachment. Even though negative impacts do exist (like media manipulation, or cyber bullying) it's still fascinating how online communication makes it easier to relate to one another.

The Vault Publication

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hey there! Jesaya again.

What is a Vault?

At the beginning of the 2020 school year, I asked myself this question. Who are we? What do we do? At the time, newcomers to the site were likely to demand a response, and being a man of the people, I simply had to oblige.

However, for all the bravado of my early post, answers were never as forthcoming as I made them seem. Allow me to be honest; as the incumbent president, I continue to heave the weight of a club's uneasy future on my shoulders.

Indeed, 2020 was a year where uncertainty reigned. Whether by the hands of a global pandemic or MSU cutbacks, these last few months have battered our little club as a storm would a rowboat.

Raising the waves yet higher was my personal condition. As a graduating student, I began 2020 by entering one of those strange, liminal times in life. In front of me, the ebbing stress of an ill-defined future; behind me good memories of times near, yet definitively past. At the heel of university comes biting reality. Taxes, jobs, expectations, always a dull throb at the back one's mind; I too have seen the white-capped waves.

Yet, for all this trouble, I continue to have the strangest feeling. For all these hardships, all of the lonely nights and piercing budget slashes, there is nowhere else on Earth I would rather be but here.

I think I see this sentiment reflected in the Vault. We are, after all, the little club that could. For every uncertainty faced, we have offered a smile and trooped forward. When troubles came knocking, we rolled up our sleeves and played Minecraft. Not once have we sunk. That's the sort of club that we are.

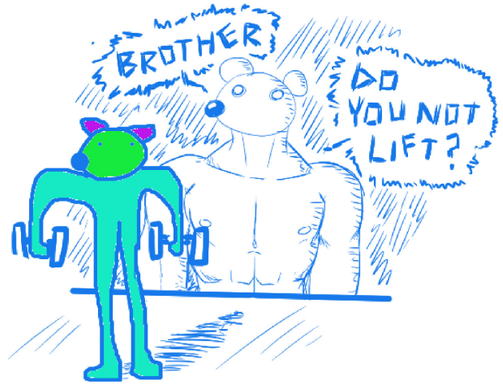
I think this publication is a testament to that courage, that resolve, the bared grit in the face of adversity. For all intents and purposes, these thirty some-odd pages should be an empty template in a google drive folder somewhere.

Yet, thanks to the incredible work of our writers, editors, and most importantly our VP Amy, we're still here, and we will remain.

To that end, I want to thank everyone involved for never keeling, never stepping back. The Vault is what it is because of you, and I'm grateful that I have had the opportunity to participate in this small triumph with you.

Perhaps this leads me back to my question: what is a Vault? Good times, broken bread, the warmth of friendship; all of these things go away. What matters most then is what remains when everything else is gone. After all, vaults are never defined by their shiny exteriors, they are defined by their contents.

I've weathered the tempest, and I'm proud to say that our club has too.

Always your friend,

Jesaya. T, *President of the Vault Publication*