The Impact of Y2K Nostalgia on Contemporary Visual Culture

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Y2K is commonly referred to as the time period from the 2000s into the 2010s where a new wave of fashion and music emerged and became popularised by icons such as Britney Spears and Paris Hilton, known for their diamante, blonde and bubblegum pink aesthetic. This also coincided with the time when technology advancements within the World Wide Web became more popular and available to the public where they could access social media sites and keep up to date on the new trends and publicity of Y2K culture, known as Web 2.0. There is a lack of texts and academic writing available that accurately represent the notion of this subject and its position as a subculture; partly due to the current contemporary advancements of pop music which is ever changing and the sizeable impact and exponential growth of the internet at a rapid rate. This serves as the impetus and inspiration behind this article.

This article will cover a range of topics which all contribute to the manifestation of the conceptual expression and influence of the Y2K movement and its impact due to the resurgence of popularity within recent years, in addition to the personal effect it has had on art, fashion and technology. The main discussion points include musicians such as Kim Petras, Paris Hilton and Slayyyter; all artists inspired by nostalgia of music from the Y2K period, or in Paris' case, part of the Y2K era through until today. The resurgence of Y2K and its sub genres such as McBling has been successfully resurrected through a hunger for nostalgia from social media and the users of Web 2.0/3.0. The impact of this has changed our outlook on 2020s trends and fashion, as the popularity of the Juicy Tracksuit began to rise and the demand for Y2K inspired fashion, especially form online websites such as Shein, ASOS and Dolls Kill; and music which successfully transported listeners from modern day back to the sound of 2000s music from artists such as Kim Petras, Slayyyter and Ayesha Erotica.

To inform this writing, the secondary research has been drawn from *Paris Hilton: Life on the Edge* (2007) and *Confessions of an Heiress* (2005). Ultimately, these books frame and inform the structure of this essay, with Paris Hilton being a key figure in the documentation of Y2K through her books. These books describe Paris' involvement and heavy influence on the 2000s. These books also have primary writing from Paris herself which is important to include in an essay outlined by her influence. Throughout these books there is honesty and personal views on the way Paris was depicted by the media when her sex tape 'One Night in Paris' (2004) was created. This book allowed the research conducted to be enriched with Paris' truth and her untainted views on these negative responses from the public and how she was treated. *The Practice of Everyday (Media) Life: From Mass Consumption to Mass Cultural Production?* (2009) published by Lev Manovich discusses the evolution in from media to social media from Web 1.0 into the developments into web 2.0; the creation of social media and its importance to nonprofessional consumers becoming creators themselves.

At the time of writing this piece, Barbie (2023) a film directed by Greta Gerwig is newly released, contributing extensively to pop-culture phenomenon, and providing a strong, real-time influence on this article. Barbie, as an entity, is a pop cultural phenomenon. Gerwig's film, Barbie (2023) included a lot of hyperrealist colour palettes and pink in *'Barbieworld'*, the fictional world where the Barbie's and Ken's live in the movie. The movie aims to address the unfair treatment to women in the *'real world'.* Once Barbie arrives in the real world she's confused as to why women aren't as highly respected as they are in Barbieworld. This sparks discussion of feminism and the unrealistic expectations placed on women in real life. This also relates to my research on ideas and trends that involve a lot of Barbie motifs, especially in Y2K fashion and its influence on the resurgence of these franchises such as Hello Kitty, Playboy and Bratz, also. The Hyper-realism of Simulation (1976)

was important to research for this article as it informs the reader of the critical theory underpinning the topics highlighted throughout. Jean Baudrillard's critical analysis of mass consumption foreshadows the advancements of social media today. Social media has advanced immensely since 1976, therefore providing the reader an overview of change in media from an untainted view; untouched by the creation of the Internet and popular culture that followed.

Discussion

Y2K was the impact of fashion trends and technology in the 2000s and the era of new styles and clothing made popular by celebrity icons of the era such as Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian, and Britney Spears, forming the influences behind the McBling sub-trend popularised between 2000 – 2008. McBling was a sub-trend to Y2K which filtered into the 'flashy' side of the Y2K era, focussing on the advancements in technology and bedazzlement of technology such as flip phones – especially pink Motorola phones. With Y2K underrepresented within an academic context by literature, the development of Y2K was becoming broadcast through other platforms, disseminated through social media, including msn and myspace. This influence was also seen through movies and magazines, for example Paris Hilton's appearance in horror movie House of Wax in which she brought her 2000s fashion and style to the screen within a subcultural context.

In Paris Hilton's book *Life on the Edge* (2005) she spoke about her star guest appearance in the horror and her involvement, describing that: '*I got over 100 scripts and turned down every one until House of Wax…it's a summer movie with teenagers going into the woods and having a crazy psychopath kill them* (Newkey – Burdon, 2005 p.149).

Figure 1: Performance Piece: Paris Hilton, House of Wax (2005)

Paris Hilton's bright blue zip-up jacket and fun fashionable outfits she wore in the film became extremely popular in the 2000s, especially in 2005 when the film released. Paris has always been noted as one of the icons of 2000s popular culture and her influence on fashion and trends in the 2000s. Upon thousands of other articles, The Sun (2021) dubbed Paris as '*iconic 2000s party girl*'. Paris Hilton credits her success to being young and successful although she was a part of the Hilton family and their fortune, she spoke about her success in her career and her passion for work; for example travelling to make appearances and her work on *The Simple Life* where she co-starred with Nicole Richie in the early 2000s, completing tasks and working regular jobs where she acted a certain way for entertainment *'I haven't had free time in, like, two years. It's hard, it's a lot of work, but I love it.'* (Newkey-Burdon, 2005 p.xviii) she said, *'…people might assume it's [The Simple Life] real. But it's fake.*' (Newkey-Burdon, 2005 p.xxi)

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Paris used inspiration from *Legally Blonde'*s Elle Woods, a character played by Reese Witherspoon before her shoots, she says *'It's a character I like to play. I think its carefree and happy'* (Newkey-Burdon, 2005 p.xxi). Celebrities like Paris Hilton created a huge commotion within the 2000s, as people began taking note of her style, fashion, and demeanour, simultaneously through the tabloid press and social media. It's not hard to wonder why she was so popular. These people make the Y2K trend possible, offering what they could to inform people of the movement and what this meant for fashion and the media, creating a framework for the movement's success.

As Y2K began to transform into the technological advancements of McBling, scholars including Lev Manovich began to communicate his knowledge on '*a new media universe*' (2009) p.319 and the mass consumption of the internet following mass cultural production. Manovich (2009) stated that:

> *What is important, however, is that this new universe is not simply a scaled-up version of twentieth-century media culture. Instead, we have moved from media to social media*

The progress and development from the mass-media to social media became a huge part of the Y2K philosophy and McBling movements, as there was now a platform to showcase their personalities and build a relationship with their fanbase, in turn, developing fandom communities. This marked a change in dissemination, with fans and communities able to upload their own images and statements onto social media platforms, with the rise in flip phones and designer cell phones becoming popular and fashionable because of this.

Figure 2: *Paris Hilton's Cell Phone Evolution Will Delight and Inspire You*

Manovich (2009) continues:

> Today social media is often discussed in relation to another term, web 2.0. This term refers to a number of social developments for our purposes. Two commonly held ideas about Web 2.0 are most relevant

Web 2.0 is essentially the move from Web 1.0 which was the original basic framework; having a search engine and hosting pages, morphing into social media platforms and user generated content. The term was coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, within the development of the Y2K movement. Manovich explains how the internet was taken from just being a small number of professional producers that uploaded their media onto the internet which was accessed by non-professional consumers, the public. This changed when social media platforms were introduced, and users could generate their own photographic content at a rapid rate.

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Figure 3: Molly Soda is Paris's
Favourite (Gif)

With this, over time the action of *photo dumping* or *shit posting* has become popular for social media users that have mobile phones. Social media and digital artist Molly Soda authors a blog which explores the multiple ideas and knowledge she collects whilst completing her own work. Molly Soda's work focusses on web archiving and the notion of posting onto social media, for example Soda's work (Figure 3) portrays the ability to edit and distort images due to the advancements in internet culture through the 2000s and into the present. Soda's work here admits the less serious side of social media which Soda expresses through both her art and her blogs highlighting her use of social media and how her art communicates her own use of the internet.

Soda (2023) described the benefits of people posting photo dumps; the act of uploading a number of images or videos to a social media account:

> *There's something freeing about a space like this, a space where I can post and don't get the immediate urge to delete it if it doesn't perform well. I don't feel self-conscious about posting 10 images in a row,or posting a picture of myself simply because I think I look nice. Often, it's the first place I go to post new things I'm working on, where my ideas don't have to feel fully formed or official.*

Soda (2023) explains the benefit of doing this and how it feels freeing to upload these images onto social media. She describes these images as *'less formal/throwaway posts'* which she goes on to explain she feels like has increasingly become more popular with TikTok urging its users to post daily to increase engagement with followers. She goes on to explain her thoughts and feelings on why she enjoys *photo dumping.* Soda (2023) explains that:

> *Privately, I've examined why my compulsion to dump even exists. This is not something I can or want to answer within the confines of this blog, but I know I need an outlet. The public dump is different in that I don't feel like I'm forcing anyone to look. These posts are for everyone and no one. That's the beauty of dumping. I'm not concerned with who sees it, and honestly, I'd rather not know. No likes? No problem.*

These posts aren't for popularity or to engage with followers, they feel a lot more personal like a journal to the person that has posted it, it isn't for anyone else but themselves. At the same time, these posts aren't always as serious – some are just random memes that the author found funny. This is one of the advantages of owning a private account; there is privacy and comfort as there is no judgement purely

because these posts aren't for engagement and popularity. It could be viewed in a similar context to a digital online diary.

To further underpin the idea of social media and the impact of the nostalgic comeback of Y2K, Jean Baudrillard's *The Hyper-realism of Simulation* (1976) and how this employs itself to the hyperrealism of social media and platform included in posting and broadcasting becomes an early touchstone in the development of Y2K. Baudrillard (1976) stated that: *reality itself, as something separable from signs of it…vanished in the information-saturated, media-dominated contemporary world*

Drawing this back to modern day hyperrealism, this relates to the way in which social media and the effects of Web 2.0 on the population have been caused by the creation of a second platform, a social media platform; its own world. '*information-saturated*' (1976) relates to the constant reintroduction of information on the internet and the repetition of the action of posting from, as Manovich (2009) described, '*nonprofessional consumers*'. Cazan-Tufescu (n.d.) depicts that from Baudrillard's *The Hyper-realism of Simulation* (1976): *Photography, mass production, television, and advertising have shaped and altered authentic experience to the point that "reality" is recognized only when it is re-produced in simulation.*

This could almost exactly depict the use of social media. Photography is now a mass production on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram; its users uploading images of the same subjects just at different angles. However, it could be argued that this isn't such a bad thing, everyone gets to freely express themselves and their character through the use of a social media platform.

In order to extend research on the underacknowledged topics covered in this article, it felt essential to gauge the public's view on the relevance of these subjects to each individual to dictate whether this research is supported by other people's thoughts and opinions by asking them some relevant questions to collect data for the gaps where information is lacking.

To help put into perspective what 'shitposting' is and what it includes, The Daily Dot (2016) theorised that

> But that doesn't quite speak to the essence of 'shitposting' which encompasses content of aggressively, ironically, and of course, trollishly poor quality. Incoherent jokes, hasty Photoshopping, mashups, irrelevance, errors in spelling or grammar – all are hallmarks of the shitpost…

This relates back to Molly Soda's blog post and her view on shitposting, where it feels like a diary entry, an offload onto social media where you feel comfortable on a private account. 60% of respondents agreed that shitposting is enjoyable and gives them a sense of relief when they offload their thoughts and feelings onto a private account. The research conducted on these topics helped to highlight key moments of Y2K and the critical underpinning of the topics covered. In response, the next chapter will discover the impact of Y2K and what this time period has influenced two decades later; and continues to do so. Therefore, the research conducted informs the response which is generated through the concept of the artists outcome.

Referring to Paris Hilton as a trailblazer of Y2K, she wasn't just known for her Juicy Couture tracksuits and her *'that's hot'* catchphrase; she began her music career in

the early 2000s. Paris famously declared that *'I'm more talent than name'* Hilton (2017). Through the 2000s her music burst onto the scene with pop anthem *Stars Are Blind* (2004). Within recent years, her musical talent has been focussed on her thriving DJ career. With Hilton's career becoming inspiration to musicians, their inspiration turns to collaboration and interpolation. Interpolation in music is the act of an artist sampling or taking part of existing musical work and incorporating it into new work. This has become very popular from lyrics to a familiar beat or direct influence from another artist. This circles back to the relationship between the impact of Y2K nostalgia and the lasting impact the made by the era's music on artists and musicians of today.

Figure 4: *LDS and Paris Hilton*

Most musical artists become inspired by other artists; it's just fact. Artists such as Slayyyter take huge inspiration from her surroundings and rising to fame within Hollywood where Slayyyter (2023) explains *'I'm still myself but I still get to dip my toe into this very bizarre culture of Hollywood'.* This describes how artists small and rising to fame have their own experience of their musical experience; inspired by their environment and interests. She goes on to explain 'I'm not so famous, but I'm also not who I used to be – a hair salon receptionist' (2023).

Figure 5: *Pop Is Not A Dirty Word: Trash-pop star Slayyyter*

Pop musician Peach PRC and dance-pop artist Kim Petras have also made waves in today's music through the inspiration of other artists such as Paris Hilton's *Stars Are Blind* (2006) which Peach PRC interpolated into her queer representative song, *Perfect for You* (2022), adding a certain unity to the song and creating a community of people that all enjoy the same ideas and motives of these artists-past and present. By interpolating Hilton's hit, Peach PRC gained popularity by creating music relatable to a certain audience that enjoyed Paris' music when it was initially released, adding a sense of nostalgia for her fans.

Paris later re-recorded her hit with Kim Petras in order to gain the rights for her music from the original producer.

This was also common with Taylor Swift; her rights to her music were held by her former producer Scooter Braun. This creates a certain comradery of these women in music who use their platform to create inspiring music whilst sticking up for themselves and being independent and confident with their art.

Figure 6: *The cover of Kim Petras's 2022 EP Slut Pop*

Petras became very inspired by early Europop with her German upbringing and being an empowering transgender woman that is successfully making music today with inspiration from 2000s club music. This led her to record her EP *Slutpop* (2022), she explains her influence in this interview and how she interpolated Alice Deejay's

Better Off Alone (1999) in her new single, *Alone* ft. Nicki Minaj (2023), Petras (2023) explains:

> If you grow up in Europe, it's a classic song that plays (in the clubs) at the end of the night. I've had a lot of moments to that song in clubs – good ones, bad ones. (Laughs.) Every time I hear that song it does something to me.

Petras' *Slutpop* visualizers for her song *Slutpop* from the EP, Petras makes direct references to McBling and the technology progress of the time using a hand-held video recorder. This also links to Manovich (2009) and his discussion on technology advancements encouraged by *'…cheaper prices for professional-quality devices such as HD video cameras, and the addition of camera and video capture to mobile phones.'* (Manovich, 2009 p.319) This doesn't explain why Petras is using an older model of video camera rather than the newer, more advanced technology Manovich is referring to; other than for its popularity in 2022. Using a digital camera or video camera became the aesthetic for social media in the 2020s, ultimately inspiring the outcome inspired by video cameras.
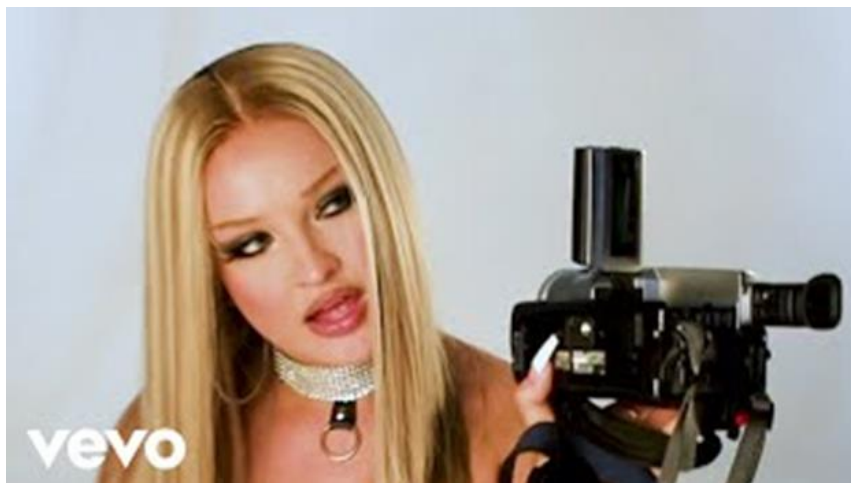

Figure 7: Kim Petras on Youtube, Slutpop (2022)

As part of my practice-based research responding to Y3K edited and created work reminiscent of 2000s instant images and images from digital cameras by taking images on a digital camera for their progression of their editing. The act of editing images became a new and important part of formulating the response to the research collected. Creating a digital depiction that relates to 2000s nostalgia was challenging until further research on key figures made point of the aim of the response: portraying the influence of 2000s subcultures through modern modes of art and 2020s trends and social media canons. Research conducted on editors such as Andy DeLuca were relevant to the reasoning behind the work he creates photographing bands and musicians on tour. DeLuca (2014) describes the context to his photography style and how this is relevant to the expression of how he chooses to portray himself as a photographer and artist:

> I try and get into the photographer's heads that took those photos and think how crazy it is that I am where they once were. So I'm a little inspired by the photography from the 70s – 90s.

DeLuca also draws inspiration from a nostalgic way of photographing; like capturing the essence of the 70s-90s almost as if it's from the point of view of somebody seeing this in real time. His colour and glitchy style of photography is what initially what gained interest in his photography; the way he edits his images by creating a sentimental feel to the subject that is being captured.

In order to capture a response to posting images online that are fun and with people that were present, I created a practice-based response, which responded to the hallmarks of Y2K culture. This where the idea of printing images rather than displaying them digitally in prints came from the idea that in the 2000s the technology was just beginning to develop therefore images were taken on disposable cameras and sent off to print. Inspiration came from *Mean Girls* (2004) and Regina George's locker where she has a mini collage of printed photos and other small memorable items. Pinning the images into a cork board references this moment in the film (Figure 8) and became an important part of the research.

Figure 8: Regina George's locker in Mean Girls (2004)

Figure 9: 'Serotonin Stew', acrylic paint and mixed media on canvas
by Nadene Micklewright, 2023

Conclusion

To conclude this investigation into Y2K culture, an area that was essential to the response to the theoretical underpinning of the practice-based research is the combination of a personal response to the relatable content made by the musicians, artists and personalities of the figures discussed in this piece. It's almost ironic; like one big Instagram *shitpost* that holds hastily edited lo-res imagery that reiterates the necessity of 2000s impact on 2020s people; especially those who identify as Millennials and Gen Y, influenced by each other's fashion and style causing the Y2K fashion trends to go viral.

Each colour and image displayed within the outcome is inspired by a number of people who create their own depiction of the topics through the lens of social media. This inspiration is derived by the artists personal experience with Y2K and the way that it has impacted their research and overall the concept of their work.

To conclude this essay, the impact of Y2K nostalgia to encourage and influence 2020s art, fashion and popularity is highlighted as an important subculture coinciding with the development and exponential growth of the internet, with theorists Baudrillard and Manovich homing in on critical theory surrounding mass consumption and advancements in technology; their texts coincide with the topics relevant to this research. Social media engagements are the main route of exposure to Y2K trends and musicians like Slayyyter and Peach PRC along with the other visual artists such as Molly Soda. Their engagements highlight their success through sharing, posting, and creating on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. Overall, Y2K nostalgia encourages and influences 2020s art, fashion and popularity by trending and highlighting nostalgic culture-defining features of the 2000s and bringing them back into popularity to bring back a sense of nostalgia from two decade ago and updating it by resurging the movement through the interpolation of song, fashion trends and visual art.

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