

MY

GENERATION

BY

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Often dismissed as phases, the manifestation of youth cultures and their function within wider society has been both indicative of, and influential to, broader culture, trend, and social life.

Through exploring a narrative of past and present youth cultures, I became interested in how the manifestation of youth culture has changed over the past 10 years, coinciding with the rise of the all-consuming screen of the smartphone.

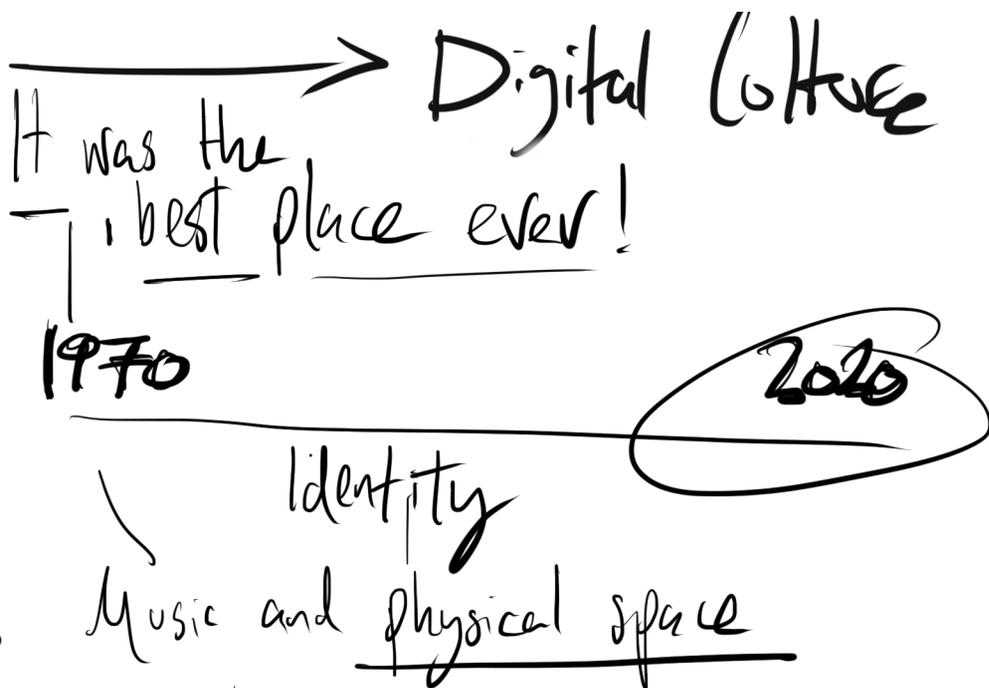
The digitally inclined youth cultures and trend setters which have been prevalent over the past decade on social platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram and TikTok, quickly caught fire and became commodified among wider society. More so since March 2020 when the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns persuaded us not only to become digitally reliant, but to completely embrace the digital realm as a new landscape of social and cultural places.

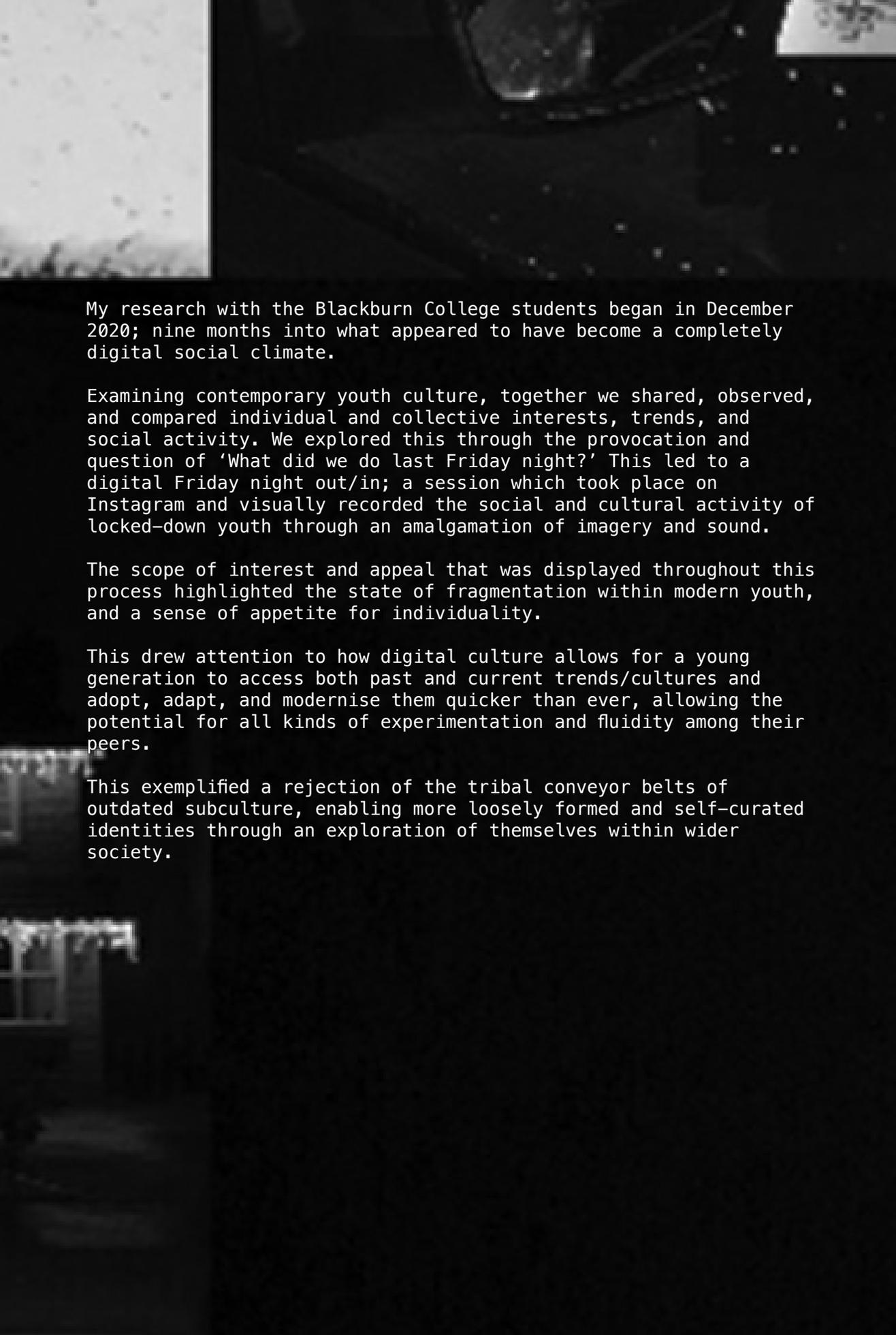
The inherent link between digital culture and contemporary youth culture became the main subject of exploration throughout a research project I undertook with a group of Blackburn College students.

Youth Culture ↙

The provocation of exploring sub-cultural youth scenes of the past and present within the context of a completely digitized modern society alluded to a broader cultural and social context.

Where have all the subcultures gone??





My research with the Blackburn College students began in December 2020; nine months into what appeared to have become a completely digital social climate.

Examining contemporary youth culture, together we shared, observed, and compared individual and collective interests, trends, and social activity. We explored this through the provocation and question of 'What did we do last Friday night?' This led to a digital Friday night out/in; a session which took place on Instagram and visually recorded the social and cultural activity of locked-down youth through an amalgamation of imagery and sound.

The scope of interest and appeal that was displayed throughout this process highlighted the state of fragmentation within modern youth, and a sense of appetite for individuality.

This drew attention to how digital culture allows for a young generation to access both past and current trends/cultures and adopt, adapt, and modernise them quicker than ever, allowing the potential for all kinds of experimentation and fluidity among their peers.

This exemplified a rejection of the tribal conveyor belts of outdated subculture, enabling more loosely formed and self-curated identities through an exploration of themselves within wider society.

For decades, Britain's youth was defined by tribalism. Recognised by the semiotics of clothing, there was a time when youth culture was sub-categorised by identification with music and the use of physical space. No longer constrained by the social and political regulations of subculture, young people are breaking down the barriers of time, trend, and space through a complex relationship with digital technology.

X PUNK
X MODS
X ROCKERS
X INDIE
X EMO
X TEEN BOYS
X CURE HEADS

A digital generation meant that youth culture no longer needed to rely on underground scenes, physical spaces, or intimate interaction to manifest. Through algorithmic gatekeeping and virtual interactions, youth/subcultures are developing faster than ever through a process of compulsive trend setting.

The vast number of trends which are streaming through social media, as well as the speed at which they are realised and reciprocated, makes for a faster development of new kinds of subculture. However, the passive nature of these trends within contemporary youth culture makes it difficult to resonate or identify with a particular scene for long before it becomes outdated.



identity & authenticity

This type of volatility surrounding digital culture and its ability to appeal to our own consumeristic impulses was a concern among the Blackburn College students. The use of social media and self-exposure for trend setting was something which the group also felt conflicted with.

This raised questions around trends such as online make-up tutorials, and whether we perceive these as empowering or as an unhealthy bar-setting of beauty standards. We interrogated other ideas such as whether we are witnessing a progressive generation of young entrepreneurship? Or is this all simply a stream of contagious narcissistic practice? This was encompassed by a sense of apathy toward the selfie culture and a desire for complete authenticity within daily life. This was about fathoming a clearer understanding of each other's peers; rather than constructed identities which are being produced and cloned on social media.

Acknowledging previous generations and subcultures, we realise such social constructs have always existed in various forms within youth culture. Social media and in particular meme and emoji culture are simply amplifiers of these social constructs and the gatekeeping which surrounds them.

Be it right or wrong, cultures and identities are being developed and validated through social media no differently to how they were developing through the sub-cultural music scenes of the 1970s and 80s. The search for validation, however, seems much more prevalent.



Tik Tok

NOSTALGIA





christianbell91 Tier 3- Digital Night Out.

The compulsive behaviour of self-promotion through social media, which has over recent years been widespread within youth culture, has gradually spilled into wider society. It was in March 2020 with the implementation of lockdown that this digital culture was wholeheartedly embraced by the majority.

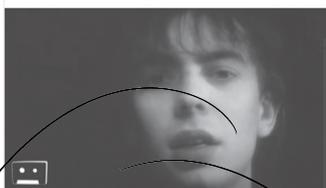
The overall state of human interaction magnified by lockdown, was something which was a concern within our research. It was recognised that contemporary youth culture is in fact beginning to diverge from phone culture and social media culture. Young people are instead turning to disposable cameras, embracing vintage fashion, and becoming avid collectors of vinyl records.

We noticed that even those within the TikTok culture were casting themselves in their own mini music videos, using the platform to rejuvenate past music and fashion.

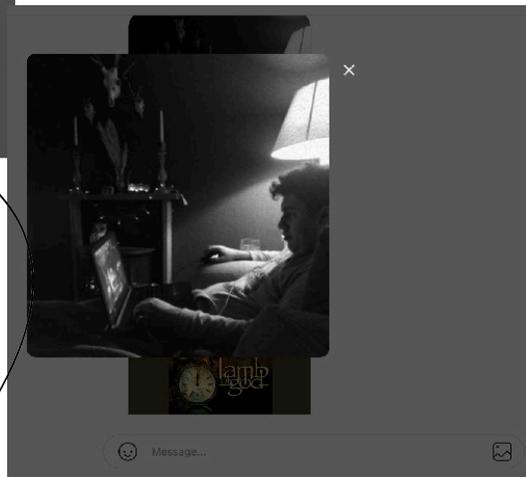
We interrogated what this means; how young people could be overwhelmed by a nostalgia for periods of time in which they hadn't even been born, as well as the awkward irony of how these past scenes and cultures are found and explored by young people through the digital culture of which they are attempting to deviate from.

As we continued to explore these questions, the relation between youth and digital culture appeared evermore paradoxical. However, what became increasingly apparent was a conscious awareness of broader societal failure.

Arriving at this conjecture within the research highlighted a commonly held fear for a potential future of virtual youth culture which would be completely indistinguishable from reality, with an inability to engage in meaningful interactions.



Echo & The Bunnymen - The Killing Moon (Official Music Video)
Echo & The Bunnymen - The Killing Moon (Official Music Video) from



Spotify Playlist

Life Without Buildings

Vintage
fashion
Research
past
culture
X
TIME
TRAVELERS
UNITS

This research project into the manifestation of youth culture within modern society led to a discourse on digital culture among a young generation. This direction within the research addressed a tension between young people and their smartphones - a tension which appeared to have become much more uncomfortable during the lockdown period.

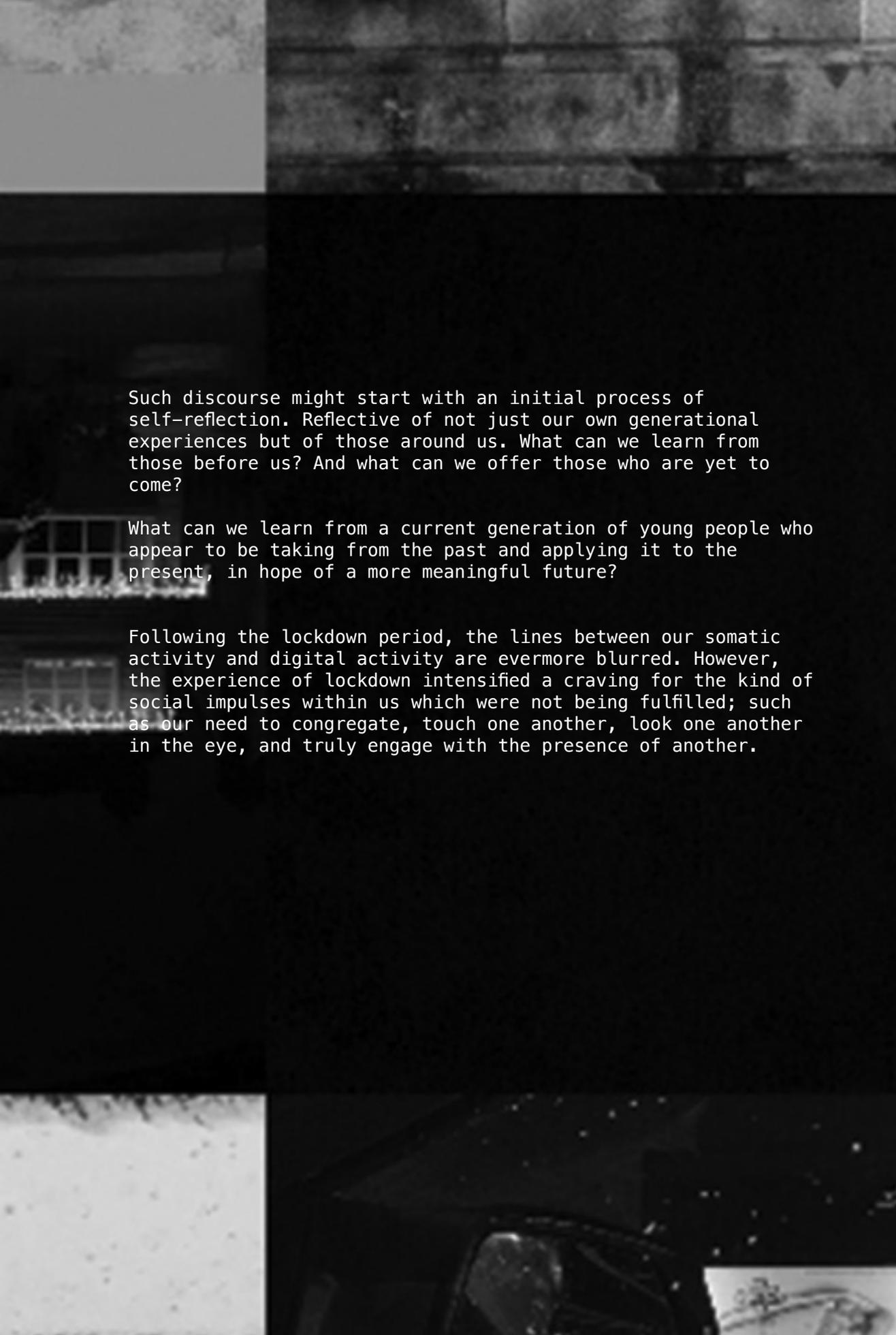
I was inspired by the students at Blackburn College and their critically engaged approach with digital culture. This not only debunked the often negative perception of young people and their relationship with digital technology; but pointed to a completely opposed narrative.

Youth culture is a powerful lens through which to look at the climate of wider culture. The tensions which we established between a young generation and the digital screen is indicative of a wider social dilemma; and the very cynicism which manifested through this research exemplified an aspiration for a shift within society as a whole.

Concluding this project, I found myself returning to the initial provocation of cultural shifts within past, present and future narratives of generational youth.

Generations are fundamentally about cultural change. Each generation has a different relationship with technology from the next, just as they encompass various other social and cultural differences. But how can we further explore these differences by engaging with each other across generations and conversing critically about past and present, and more importantly the journey in between?

By reflecting on our experiences within the evolution of youth culture and the emergence of digital culture; what can we learn from the changes and shifts that have occurred? How do we respond to the changes which are occurring presently? And could a cross-generational discourse and critical engagement around a narrative of past and present imply a potential future of the wider social, cultural, and digital climate?



Such discourse might start with an initial process of self-reflection. Reflective of not just our own generational experiences but of those around us. What can we learn from those before us? And what can we offer those who are yet to come?

What can we learn from a current generation of young people who appear to be taking from the past and applying it to the present, in hope of a more meaningful future?

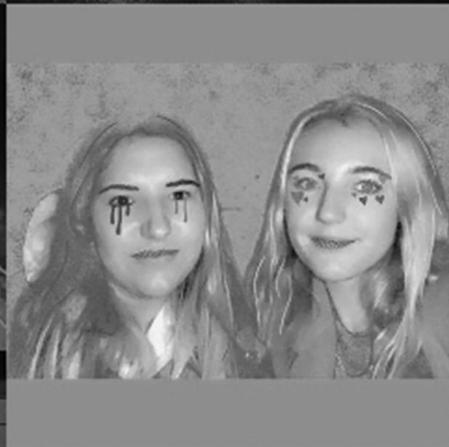
Following the lockdown period, the lines between our somatic activity and digital activity are evermore blurred. However, the experience of lockdown intensified a craving for the kind of social impulses within us which were not being fulfilled; such as our need to congregate, touch one another, look one another in the eye, and truly engage with the presence of another.

As we emerge with a shared diagnosis of screen exhaustion, we look forward to congregating in corporeal social spaces with a longing for more intimate and meaningful interactions. Whether this be through a resurgence of record stores, or a return to gigs, nightclubs, stadiums, and various gathering places; the future manifestations of youth culture may object to such an insular social climate of minimal interaction. This is by no means suggestive of boycotting social media and the broader digital culture. This research repeatedly reminded us how digital technology enhances the scope of youth culture, allowing for experimentation and fluidity within one's identity. However, the interplay between the compulsion of social media and the desire for something more authentic and organic was encompassed by the use of social media to rejuvenate historic artefacts and symbols of vintage youth cultures and trends.

The interconnection between the real and the virtual and the past and the present is evermore advancing. We should be vigilant, but not dismissive, and perhaps ask ourselves; how can we harness these platforms through our own critical engagement with them; and how can we learn from our experiences throughout the pandemic, a time that challenged us to find more meaningful ways of engaging with our screens.

Utopia ————— Dystopia





The emergence of gatherings within the natural landscape after such a long period of being locked down comes with its own challenges. It also comes with new aspirations and a sense of embrace and realisation.

Throughout this resurgence, how do you intend to:

Socialise

Play

Party

Learn

Relax

Rebel

The challenges of exploring a completely digital social and cultural landscape throughout lockdown have tested and pushed us creatively to become individual innovators of digital technology.

Throughout this period, how have you used digital technology to:

Socialise

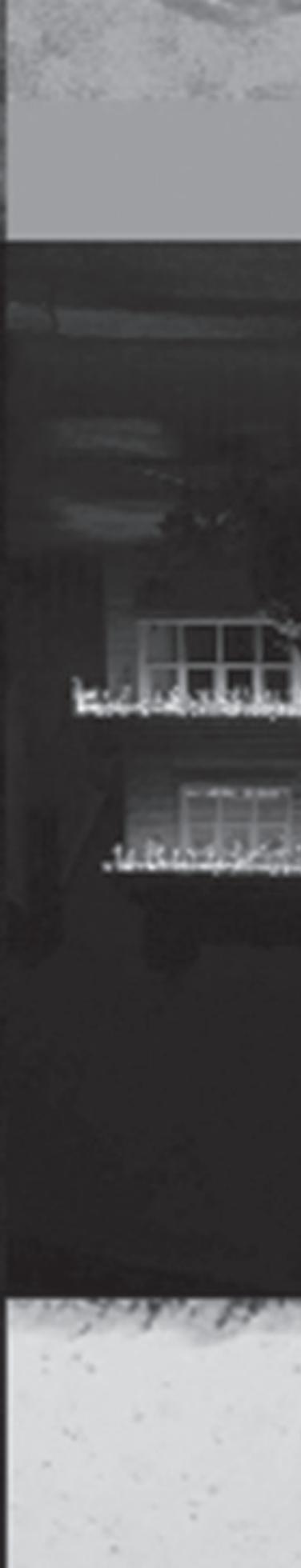
Play

Party

Learn

Relax

Rebel



The National Festival Of Making presents: My Generation by Christian Bell

Reflecting on social and cultural activity past and present, Christian Bell's research-based practice aims to explore the manifestation of youth culture, now and in the future.

The artist undertook a collaborative approach to research with a group of students from Blackburn College who explored, shared and observed local contemporary youth cultures. This was undertaken over a series of digital workshops inspired by a local youth disco of the late 1970's, and including the shared experience of a digital Friday night out/in during lockdown. Through his research, Christian explored how modern youth cultures are transcending the clearly defined trends and sub-cultural interests that are recognisable of youth cultures of the past.

Christian is a research-led multi-disciplinary artist and a 2020 graduate of the BA Fine Art (Hons) at Blackburn University Centre. Through his own personal interrogation of socially engaged and place-based research, Christian has developed a collaborative approach to delivering interventionist contemporary artworks. Christian's most recent work explores past narratives of youth culture within the context of both contemporary youth and technology; excavating and reimagining collective memories of place, youth, and cultural reference.

Special thanks to the 2020 Foundation Diploma in Art and Design and Textiles, Fashion and Design Extended Diploma students at Blackburn College for their contribution to research

In response to the pandemic the National Festival of Making launched an open call to commission three recent graduates of any Lancashire based university creative degree programmes. Graduates were invited to produce new artistic work responding to the festival themes and receive mentoring from industry professionals.

The aim of this commissioning programme was to ensure that those graduating during the pandemic had the opportunity to be funded and make new work during a period of significant global change.

The National Festival of Making is a unique celebration of UK making, from the kitchen table to the factory floor. Presenting a programme of work that combines Art, Manufacturing, Making and Communities, we commission international and national artists to create world class works, a year round programme and a participatory FREE FAMILY festival for all to enjoy.

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