Kathryn Atherton

Reading Record

Stephen Duncombe

Chapter Three: Community, Chapter Eight: The Politics of Alternative Culture

from *Notes from the Underground*

Response:

I found most intriguing the paradox of the contradiction of mainstream society and the conformity to a group via zines. I was also interested in the author’s pessimism in the power of the zine in mainstream society. As was discussed in the last reading, Thomas Paine’s zine aided in creating so much change that a new country was formed following its publication.

Discussion Question:

Is the purpose of the zine to create real, meaningful change in society or is it just meant to be a means of criticism?

Outline of Argument:

* Chapter Three: Community
  + A club of our own
    - Individualistic but meant to communicate
    - Type of “social media”
    - Community of lonely people
  + Clubhouse
    - Institutions important without geography
    - Amateur press
    - NAPA began tradition of zine institution
    - Zine review zines enabled more readers to know about zines under a wider umbrella
    - Zines reach across social boundaries
    - Difficult financial issues for the zine “telephone books”
    - Zine culture peak in 1997?
    - Bonds of difference
    - Libertarian community
  + The Scene
    - Not a singular “scene”, connections all over the country
    - Physical bohemias overtaken by capitalism
    - Communication creates the modern bohemia
    - “Cafe” environment created by zine
    - Road trip to explore their view of America
    - Recontextualize works for new meanings
    - Change meaning of “loser” to something good
  + No Rules
    - Rules are definitions of the community
    - Laws ensure the community stays together as they cannot be geographically
    - Internal and external identities
    - Contributors help define what the rules are and aren’t, discourse
    - Punk paradox: against mainstream, but still conform to a group
    - Conflict between individual and community
  + Revolution Grrrl Style Now!
    - Conflict of women within punk community
    - Own space to create own punk community/culture
    - Sharing experiences of sexual abuse
    - Poor self esteem based on what society thinks women should be/look like
    - Want to be free from one singular definition to enable fighting mainstream culture
    - Appropriation of negatives into positives like “loser”
    - Again, recontextualize things into own ideas, stories
    - Community of women together, standing up for each other
    - Dialogue and discourse, not leaders and rules
  + Communities against Society?
    - Coming together makes ideas stronger against society
    - Define what is real for them
    - Underrepresented ideas and opinions
    - Virtual community leads to ability to meet people with different ideas or the exact same ideas
* Chapter Eight: The Politics of Alternative Culture
  + Introduction
    - Mainstream progressive movements shambles
    - Underground progressive movements at a high
    - Different way of life = political argument
    - Culture comes out of dissent and offers alternatives
    - Attack on culture is pre-political
  + A nonchalant revolution of sorts
    - Experiment with possibilities
    - History rooted in science fiction
    - Zines enable the questions what if?
    - Messy, unconventional language
    - Do it yourself, be your own boss, American dream
    - Questioning authority
    - Deviance, consciousness about society, outcasts
    - Politicization of issues without zine culture/subculture?
  + Haven in a Heartless World
    - Politics require planning
    - Underground negates
    - Negation not good for building unity
    - Ideal never imagined/conceived
    - Use communication to build
    - Zine scene political
    - Underground politics are more personal
    - About spreading the word of successful changes
    - Also against mass political movements
    - More sharing = more understanding
    - Rebellion via communication has no power
    - But are they supposed to create real change?
    - Offer magical resolution
    - Action in society
    - Capitalism requires cultural innovation
    - Underground culture is virtual, no effect on social change
    - Revolutions successful when there is no mainstream culture
    - Underground cannot be sustained
    - Must exist with the mainstream culture