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Reading Record

Stephen Duncombe

Chapter One: Zines, Chapter Two: Identity

from *Notes from the Underground*

Response:

I saw a lot of Marcusian ideas in these two chapters. The ideas of criticizing and existing outside the mainstream as well as using words to express true, authentic thoughts rather than valuing making sense resonated with what I got out of Marcuse’s readings. I also found the comparison of zine authors to big-money politicians ironically interesting!

Discussion Question:

The author pointed out that a lot of zine writers identify as white and middle class. What enables this group of people to write zines and express ideas on the margins of society when white, middle class people are typically thought of as the “mainstream of culture”?

Outline of Argument:

* Chapter One: Zines
  + Author’s introduction to zines
  + Authors writing feelings, not for glory or money
    - Audience misfits
  + Decentralized, localized production
    - Make your own culture
    - Underground culture, against capitalism
  + New form of communication
  + Alternative, not a threat to mainstream culture
    - Different rules of society
  + What are zines?
    - Science fiction stories
    - Disgruntled with mainstream culture
    - Outlet to make up own rules
  + White, middle class
  + What do they believe?
    - Margins
    - Research for new ideas
    - Criticism, rants, comix
  + Half letter, half magazine format
  + Done by hand
  + Mail, person to person distribution
  + One-shots or volumes over years
  + Not for profit
  + Outlet of expression over anything else
  + Most from non-urban areas
  + Amateur
  + Thomas Paine
  + Book selling out the world of zines?
* Chapter Two: Identity
  + Loser, misfit
  + No face-to-face communication necessary
  + Readers are also losers/misfits
  + Unashamed of identity
  + “Revenge of the nerds”
  + Personal rather than societal identity
  + Celebrating regularity
  + Perzines: like diaries
  + Society in mainstream is a meritocracy
  + Reject “good life” of mainstream
  + Alienating views, alienating self too
  + Personal views and life inserted into every aspect of life
  + Thomas Paine first zine “heard round the world”
  + Political opinions
  + Public discourse, personal discourse
  + No statistics on politics, just stories!
  + “Preaching” persuasion
  + Gives authority to author, personal truth
  + Little faith in reality, politics, etc.
  + More emotion than anything else
  + Expression over making sense
  + Anarchism roots
  + Reject conventional communication, create own
  + Authentic selves, manufacture selves via zines
    - Identities formed through expression via zines
  + Not all zines have a “good” political motivation
  + Authenticity redefined
    - Posing as other people
  + Like politician getting money
  + Sharing everyday life
  + Negative thinking, negation