

both sides now

pondering
the
generational
x-factor

by dan maccormac

On more than one occasion, I have been called a flighty person. I take this to mean that I may appear to jump from one interest to another rather quickly. Personally, I think that it's more a matter of having a lot of different stimuli in my environment and being the type of person who is pretty slow in understanding where I'm at and what I'm about. It's called being human and being confused.

I do a lot of soul-searching (I wish there was a less drippy term to use than "soul-searching". I'm O.K., you're O.K., hang loose everybody). Inevitably, I sometimes come to a realization. Not always easy. And although it may look like a molehill to you, it seems like a mountain to me.

The latest and perhaps most monumental realization I've come to is that this generation is beautifully dysfunctional and that I'm part of it. I'm speaking of our generation, you know, the "twentysomethings", the offspring of the baby boomers. This subject cannot be news for anyone not living in a cultural time capsule. The media, from the CBC to our own humble X-Press, have done their share of identifying and proclaiming the state of Generation X.

I admit that for a long time I was totally opposed to the whole notion of generational potency. My cynical nature didn't allow me to look at anything deeper than the crazed Nirvana fans who had probably never listened to Husker Du or The Ramones and the fact that suddenly there were fashionably dressed bohemians everywhere. Basically, I thought a large-scale fad was happening and the time was ripe for bandwagon-jumping.

It was over the past year that my contrary little mind began to dwell on the whole idea and it seemed to make sense. This generation is a little baked and it's carrying a very unique set of baggage. Here I must tip the proverbial hat to some of my friends. Many a recent conversation has turned to the subject of being passengers on a trip (no pun intended) unlike no other. We, as members of this generation and culture, are the sons and daughters of a lot of intense influences; the discovery of AIDS, the arms race (remember the "Day After"?), wide scale famines in Africa and other countries (although here we got the news via musical moments like "USA For Africa"), the whole "Just Say No" hysteria, mass homelessness, the Gulf War, meagre

job opportunities and a myriad of other elements and events.

These things make our generation unique in the same way that the Cold War of the 1950's, the civil rights movement of the early 1960's, the Vietnam War and Watergate, among other happenings, made the preceding generations unique, and in turn, they had their pop trends and icons as we have ours. Perhaps these elements of pop culture are some of the most tangible signs we have of who we are, as compared to what they were. Rather than Phil Ochs in a coffeehouse, we have Kurt Cobain in a gym. Instead of the Jefferson Airplane, we have Sonic Youth. Today, we find Jack Kerouac in the Classics section while novels by Douglas Coupland rest on the Popular Authors shelves. I once read that the blood of a pop culture should never be sucked dry. I agree with this. Generation X's pop culture will not be forgotten, but perhaps it should be let go to an extent to make room for something new. This "something new" should be empowering and affirming, not merely in terms of music or fashion, but in emotion and identity.

It's true that we twentysomethings can no longer "tune in, turn out and drop out". It's been done and we don't really need it anymore anyway. It is difficult to predict what the catchphrase of this generation will be; maybe something like "oh well, whatever, never mind". Regardless of its future legacy, I believe this generation is unique; whether that is cause for alarm or celebration is up to yourself. I have chosen to celebrate.