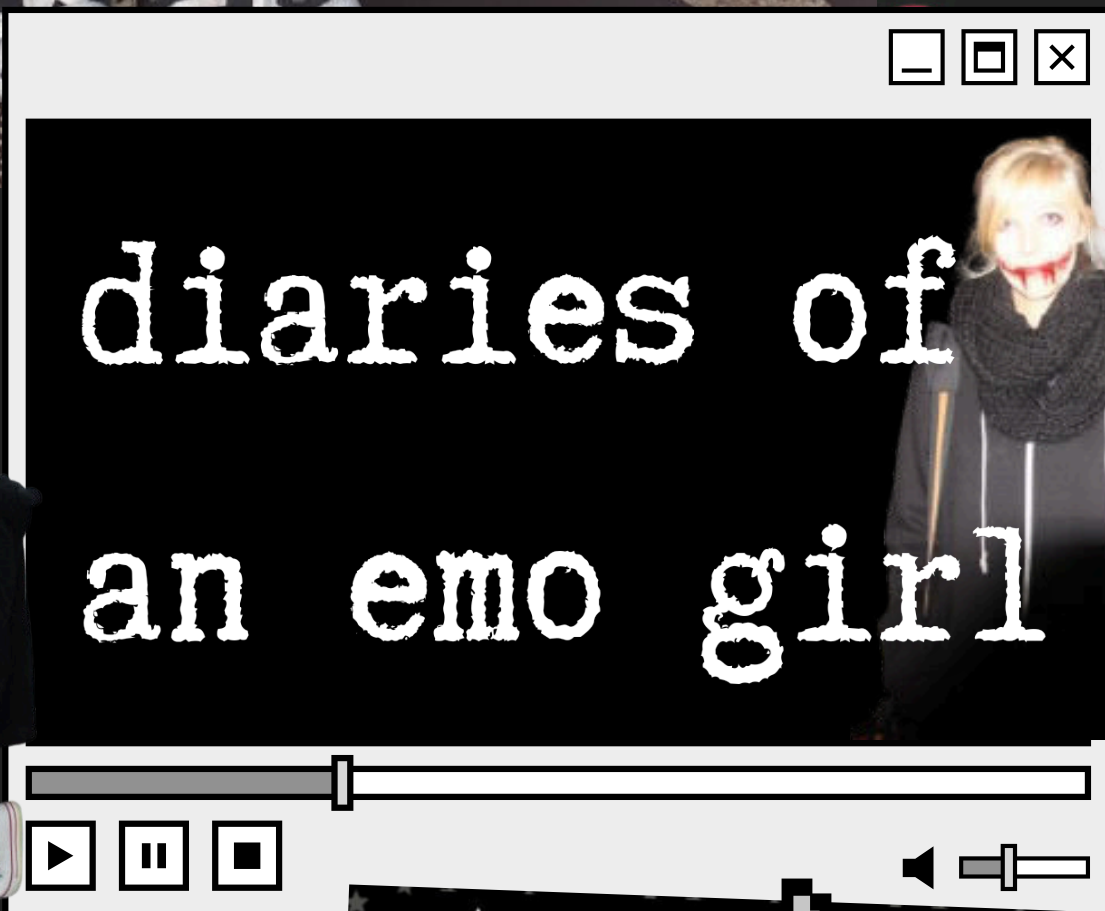
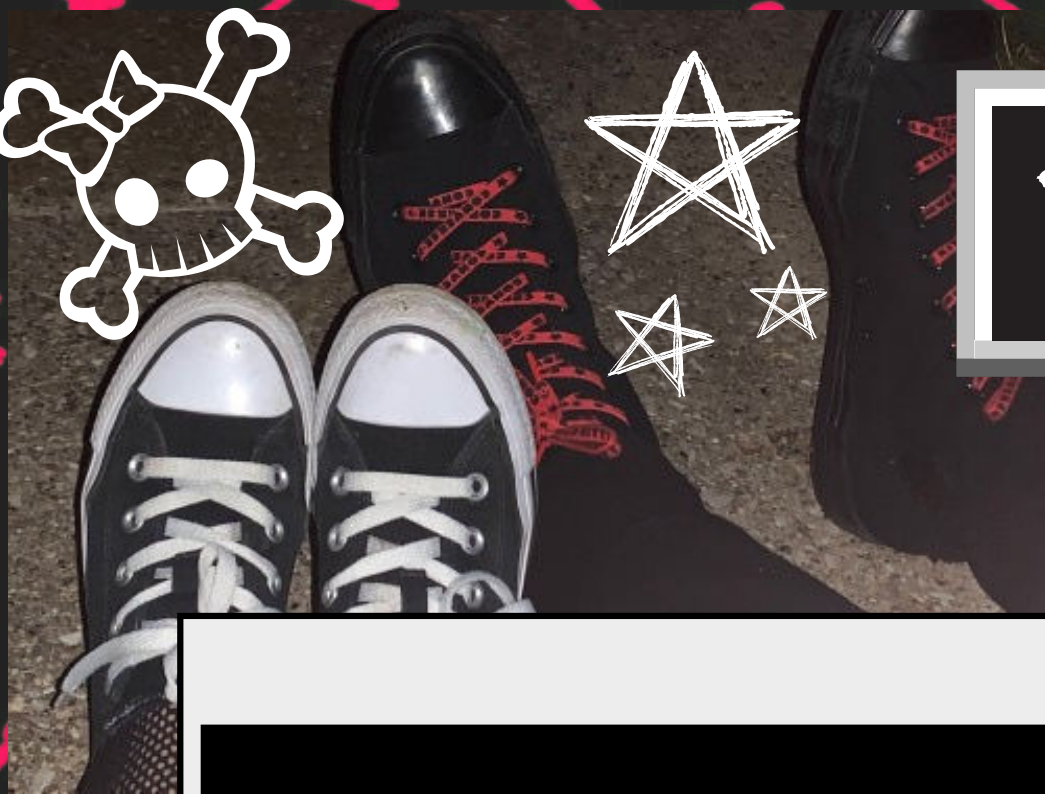
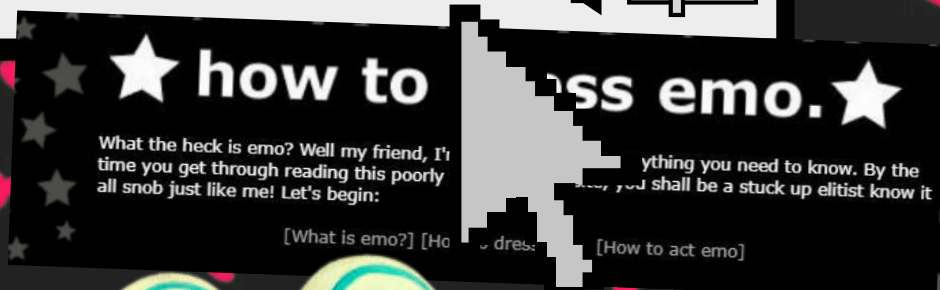


:3



diaries of an emo girl



a tribute to emo/scene culture around

2010





A brief cultural history

Emo was a popular youth subculture that had its height during the 2000s. It emerged out of previous subcultures of disillusioned youth like punk and goth, and developed its own distinctive fashion and music. Musically, emo developed out of emotional hardcore, a more melodic and emotive form of music coming out of the post-hardcore scene. But the actual popular spread of emo as a culture and a way of life included music from a much wider collection of genres, ranging from nu-metal to pop-punk.

Fashion-wise, emo was, for better or for worse, a child of the 2000s: it followed the humble wisdom of jeans and t-shirt. Band merch and skinny jeans were important staples of every wardrobe. Emo's real power lay all in the accessories: Converse with neon coloured laces, black clothing and hair with coloured (often red or pink) highlights, a **heavy** emphasis on eyeliner, and quirky accessories often referencing pop culture, especially from horror and gothic genres.

Like every subculture, emo certainly attracted people who, for whatever reason, didn't fit in - the weirdos, the rebels, the gays, the severely disillusioned, the neurodivergent. Often all at once. Emo was one of the most common "alternative" ways of life of the 2000s, and had ties to several other subcultures: most notably scene, a more colourful sibling to emo that took inspiration from rave culture and Japanese street fashion. Both emo and scene were heavily intertwined with Japanese popular culture. Manga and anime were widely read and watched among us, and some of us went to cosplay conventions. Emo was close to what I'm going to call nerd culture, which involved a preoccupation with pop culture that was, at the time, considered somewhat lame (video games, the internet).

The internet was an indispensable part of emo culture. Most of us got fashion inspiration from popular bloggers, and I meticulously maintained my iTunes library of pirated music. Scene kids famously developed their own internet accent, and we would organise irl meetups in web forums. I made this zine partially in the style of the old internet, because that was basically where we lived.



How I became an emo

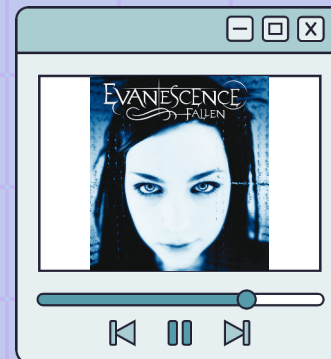


When I was maybe around 11, I discovered the song Bring Me To Life by Evanescence. I was completely in love. When I got the album I immediately wanted more music like it. And I wanted to dress like Amy Lee, with her eclectic mix of Gothic Victorian garments and y2k street style. She encapsulated that perfect mixture of edge and whimsy, a gothic theatricality that I would come to appreciate in bands like MCR much later. But she was my gateway drug, and her music led me to everything else.



Bring me to life <3

I thought Amy Lee was the coolest person alive. I wanted to be her. She was one of the few women in the emo music scene, and I'm kinda glad I was introduced to the scene by a woman.



not that kinda girl

gender & sexuality in the emo scene

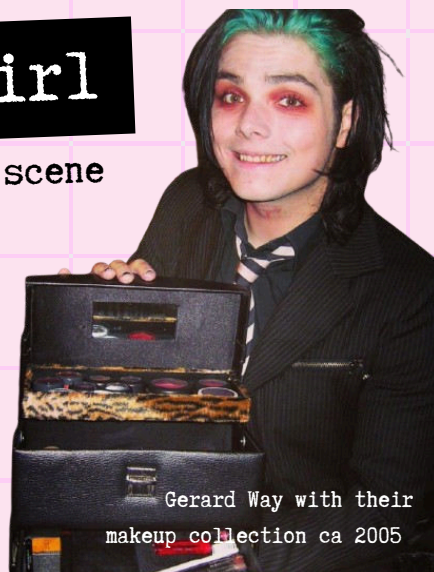
Emo existed in the midst of the truly insane homophobia and misogyny of the 2000s. Its relationship to gender is accordingly ambiguous - while the fashion and forms of expression of emo were an early playing ground for deviant gender expression, the scene and its music were also ripe with sexism and gendered oppression.



Emo itself existed as a somewhat gendered culture. Men in particular were often at the receiving end of homophobia since their expression was read as feminine - the eyeliner, the skinny jeans, the long hair. The emphasis on being emotional was yet another affront to masculinity, the domain of hysterical girls rather than hardened boys. This gendered dichotomy was even visible in music tastes. Men would certainly take you more seriously if you listened to Linkin Park than if you listened to My Chemical Romance, and you would only admit to listening to the latter if you were a girl, or if you were ready to be called a fag.

I remember trying to be not like other girls because I wanted to be taken seriously by men, given that I felt alienated from other women because of the gendered expectations imposed on me. So I tried to be 'one of the boys', I emphasised my #gamergirl credentials and my ability to list every song on Hybrid Theory. Unfortunately none of this made men take me more seriously, it only led to several unwanted advances by sad nerds who couldn't take no for an answer.

There was a lot of misogyny in the scene. Women were objects of desire and men's accessories just as much as anywhere else. Our interests were frivolous and inferior, and a lot of male musicians couldn't write a single fucking song without calling their ex-girlfriend a whore and blaming her for everything that's wrong with the world. Sometimes I'm glad I didn't understand english very well back then, because there's a lot I can't listen to anymore purely due to the lyrics. Many of those singers were facing sexual assault allegations years down the line. And of course you could count the female musicians in the scene on one hand.

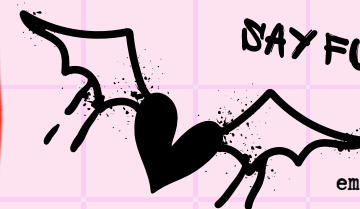


Gerard Way in 2022



The first time I saw two women kissing was in the blog post of a local scene queen I was following at the time. She had posted some pictures of her with her girlfriend, in full scene attire with neon coloured hair of course. It was probably the first time someone showed me this was even an option.

IN THE FACE OF EXTERMINATION
SAY FUCK YOU!



emo_boys_kissing.jpeg but
it's just 2009 dan and phil

Many were introduced to queer relationships through watching Dan and Phil, who were in fact so gay that they were consistently clocked by teenage girls around the world despite staying closeted for the first 10 years of their youtube career. They were like the patron saints of weird emo gays, awkward and quirky and loved for that.



I would say that MCR and Dan and Phil probably had the widest reaching impact on queer emo culture. Both provided fan spaces where women and queer people felt safe to be themselves and to celebrate their identities. Both also eventually started embracing queerness explicitly and loudly.

how to dress emo

I'm using emo as a loose term here. From my experience, there was significant overlap between emo and scene fashion, even if they're technically two different styles. So my style guide contains a lot of scene influences :3

Colours

Obviously all black is fair game. Most common colours other than black are pink and red, sometimes green. Strong contrasts is where it's at, so go for bold colours contrasted with a black base. Colour blocking can be cool, especially if you lean more scene. Anything with a checkered pattern or stripes is a must-have.

Wardrobe staples

- black skinny jeans. very important.
- BLACK CONVERSE. with neon coloured laces for bonus points!
- band shirts and other merch
- goth inspired skirts or pleated skirts

Accessories

- arm warmers or fingerless gloves
- striped knee high socks
- candy bracelets and wristbands
- studded belts
- chains and safety pins
- patches and badges
- ties



me and my best friend <3



Hair and makeup

- bangs!!
- A LOT of eyeliner
- dyed hair is a bonus. black or any bright colour
- lips are usually pale, pastel coloured, or black
- black nail polish

Influences before emo was emo

The history of emo fashion is somewhat murky and contested. It partially goes back to the 1990s Geek Chic look of a few bands in the emotional hardcore genre. Geek Chic is actually closer to something like the 2010s hipster look than to anything we would consider goth or punk. At the time, the look was a reaction to the hypermasculinity of hardcore punk. The style was associated with nerd culture, and with introspective guys reading poetry in cafés. At least musically, this is where emo has its roots, and the skinny jeans and shirt look possibly remain from this era. It was probably modified into its most recognisable form by bands like My Chemical Romance, who incorporated influences from horror movies and theatre, and thus popularised the visually striking aesthetic we now recognise as emo. A lot of elements of emo fashion also go back to 1980s punk and 1990s mall goth styles, such as chains and studs, chokers and wristbands, ripped skinny jeans, pins and badges.

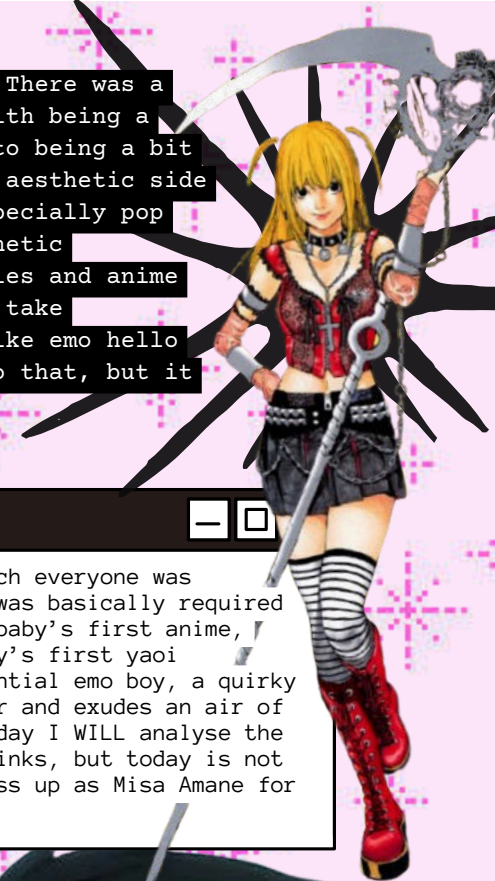
Harajuku fashion

The most important influence on scene fashion is Japanese street fashion from the 1990s to the 2010s. Made possible by the rise of consumerism in 1980s Japan, a number of distinctive subcultures developed in Tokyo's Harajuku district. A lot of these aesthetics were themselves inspired by 80s glam rock and gothic fashion. Harajuku fashion trends often emphasise extravagant haircuts, maximalist use of jewelry and accessories, distinctive colour schemes and striking contrasts. Much like punk, it was rooted in an anti-mainstream DIY ethos, but it also embraced maximalism and tacky consumer items as part of its experimental process. Harajuku street fashion had a huge influence on Western subcultures in the 2000s and beyond. While emo and scene are aesthetically distinct, they were found together so commonly that the term 'scemo' was invented to describe a mix of the two. Certainly my own style at the time is most accurately described by this term. I still prefer to use emo since I see it as the overarching and most well known subculture, and there was virtually no scene without emo.





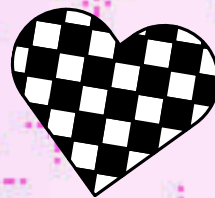
More often than not, being emo meant also being kind of a nerd. There was a strong connection to pop culture, especially media associated with being a weird nerd like anime and video games. You had to be committed to being a bit of a weird loser, and take pride in that. I also think that the aesthetic side of emo was very influenced by the rise of cheap consumerism, especially pop culture merch. Scene culture especially embraced a sort of aesthetic maximalism made of tacky mass-produced merch like pokemon plushies and anime key chains and anything you can think of. It was very common to take characters from childrens media and turn them into emo icons, like emo hello kitty or emo squidward. I couldn't tell you why people were into that, but it was inescapable. Emo squidward haunts me in my dreams btw.



Avril Lavigne

Some people accused Avril Lavigne of being a poser because her music leaned more pop than punk. Well I don't care because Sk8ter Boi slaps and she's one of like 3 women in pop punk. I still think her music holds up, and today she's pretty well respected as a musician. She was probably my biggest fashion inspiration and I had a dedicated folder of pictures of her on my phone, which I'm sure meant nothing.

Emo Time capsule



One of the most historically significant pieces of media to come out of emo culture at large is an infamous harry potter fanfiction named after the Evanescence song *My Immortal*. It's a sort of teen drama re-imagining of a group of emos going to Hogwarts. It's famously so bad that to this day there is an unsolved debate about whether it's meant to be sincere or satire. The main character, Ebony, is a self-described goth who constantly describes her extravagant outfits in excruciating detail, and takes Draco Malfoy to My Chemical Romance concerts where Voldemort is disguised as Gerard Way. Harry is a vampire with a pentagram scar on his forehead who hooks up with Draco behind Ebony's back, and Dumbledore is an Avril-Lavigne-merch-wearing posser. It's a delightful read.

My Immortal



Death Note

I cannot stress enough how much everyone was obsessed with Death Note. It was basically required viewing. Death Note was like baby's first anime, baby's first emo boy, and baby's first yaoi combined. L was the quintessential emo boy, a quirky twink who's also a weird loner and exudes an air of brooding melancholy. And one day I WILL analyse the lesbian obsession with emo twinks, but today is not that day. I did of course dress up as Misa Amane for Halloween.

I ♥ Emo boys

Alice Madness Returns

I got an older friend to buy this game for me because it was age restricted. This game was like grown in lab for goth girls. You play a fucked up goth Alice fighting monsters in a corrupted wonderland with her cool knife. The game has incredible concept art with really immersive fantasy worlds that combine fairy tales and horror. I still love this game, if not for the plot but for the beautiful art in it.

I'M OK



suburbia is, perhaps deservedly, the subject of a lot of derision in art. a lot horror movies seem to take place in the suburbs. the whole premise of pop punk seems to be to hate your hometown. suburban gothic: the 90s indie films where teens try to kill themselves in the bathtub, and the oppressive brightness of the candy coloured houses and manicured lawns in Edward Scissorhands. and then there's green day's magnum opus Jesus of Suburbia, a song that encapsulates like no other the anger and restlessness of feeling stuck in the untethered non-places at the end of history.

to me, the suburbs were an inextricable part of my experience of emo. they didn't have to the american suburbs that featured in most of the art we consumed. i've never been to america, but i always knew exactly what they represented. suburbia is a feeling. it's the ultimate cliché of the misunderstood weird art kid surrounded by the most boring conformist people alive. living in an extension of the city without its own identity, the drained outskirts of the place where people commute to work. time seems to stand still there as people sleepwalk through the days.

JESUS OF SUBURBIA

it's the deadening monotony of school and the lack of places to go and that never-ending desire to *belong* somewhere, a feeling you desperately chase in the music you listen to and the clothes you experiment with. suburbia is a spiritual displacement. art and music were our tethers to the world of the living.



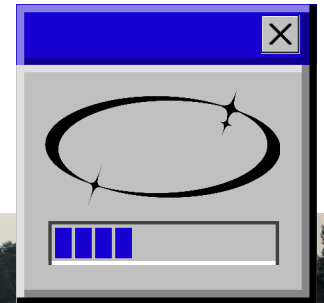
one of the few non-american representations of the suburbs is the german netflix show Dark. it takes place in a small town filled with secrets and lies. there's something so enchanting about its gloomy depiction of Winden. suddenly the dull streets i grew up in are transformed into something monstrous and threatening. and in that monstrosity lies excitement, but also a certain truth about repression and unspoken fears and unresolved history.

the internet was hugely important to me. it was where i developed significant parts of my identity. i hung out on the message boards dedicated to my favourite books, forums dedicated to gothic fashion, the blogs of local scene queens on blogspot, and later tumblr, which i still consider my digital home.

Run

Did you ever get the feeling you were just a little different?

Well here's our webpage, you finally found a home



we all sing the songs of separation

the politics of emo

For a subculture historically connected to punk, emo was never an explicitly political scene. To this day there exists a wide gap between emo genre purists and those who, in the purist's words, followed emo as a fashion trend. Even the term emo has been a site of controversy since its conception. The post-hardcore bands labeled with the term often felt it was derogatory and insulting. Genre purists decried the increasing commercialisation of emo as an aesthetic trend rather than a specific music genre, a genre that many of the bands that would achieve mainstream success under the emo label didn't even fit into. For them, emotional hardcore is a specifically delineated musical genre that has little if anything to do with what emo came to mean in the popular imagination.

And so the age-old subcultural politics of authenticity vs commercial success played out in the post-hardcore scenes that birthed emo. Post-hardcore was an expansion of and reaction to the crass hypermasculinity of hardcore punk, incorporating more introspective emotional elements and experimenting with other genres. This is arguably what enabled it to break into the mainstream, however with increasing commercial success the original punk ethos of anti-commercialism and DIY became mostly, if not entirely, lost.

Commercialisation was essential to the popular spread of emo as an aesthetic. Mass media like MTV and music magazines were integral to bringing bands like My Chemical Romance to the masses, and with it the fashion trends that would define a generation of rebellious teenagers. Once emo became a global cultural phenomenon, it had departed so far from punk's radical political roots that their only connection remained in the safety pins people would stick through their jackets.

There is nothing surprising about the commodification of subculture. And while capitalism is an expert at emptying movements of their social critiques by selling rebellion as an aesthetic, this doesn't mean that emo as a subculture is devoid of value. If anything, emo can tell us a lot about the society it thrived in, and the society it opposed.

Emo still had its political moments. Bands like Thursday and Green Day explicitly expressed dissent with post 9/11 American politics and the Iraq war in their music. And even in the most apolitical expressions of disaffection and despair, one could read the imprints of what the alienation of late capitalism was doing to young people. The disaffected despair of emo music fit perfectly into the growing social malaise resulting from decades of neoliberalism and the related increase in mental health conditions. Indeed, emo's relationship to mental health was an almost perfect microcosm of what happened when rampant individualism met crushing alienation in a depoliticised culture.

It's fairly obvious that emo attracted a lot of young people with mental health issues. There is certainly a part of the culture that glorified that stuff to an extent that was, admittedly, unhelpful. But at its best the scene provided a space for disenfranchised and marginalised youth to feel less isolated in their suffering. The music was known for its theatrical and exaggerated display of emotions, and emo culture probably played a substantial role in normalising the open discussion of mental health.

The use of the internet and early social networks was integral to this. People often aired their grievances online hoping to connect with others, when in real life they felt untethered and isolated from others, unable to talk about what was important to them. Back then if you spent most of your time on the internet, you were still seen as kind of weird. Today that desire to connect to like-minded people online and to escape from the real world into a world where one could belong has become normalised.

Ultimately, subculture is fulfilling a desire for belonging and being accepted for one's authentic self that the dominant culture, for whatever reason, can't fulfil. Emo, with its aestheticization of strong emotions, fulfilled a desire to have one's 'shameful' negative feelings acknowledged, to be seen as a person capable of suffering without denying that suffering. It met the fundamental human desire to be seen for who one really was.

We didn't have words for the alienation we were feeling, didn't even know what alienation was or that it was a word that existed. Who could've told us? But the music we listened to, that was what it felt like, whatever that feeling was. And the way we dressed and expressed ourselves was an attempt to establish meaning in a world that appeared inexplicably grey and inhuman, but we didn't have words for that at the time. It was just that nagging feeling that something was not right. That the life that was sold to us was no way to live.

Emo was perhaps a natural reaction to a culture that not only increasingly marketed happiness as a default state of mind, but also made individuals responsible for their own suffering - that you only had yourself to blame for your struggles. In a neoliberal society that at once fetishises happiness and turns its absence into a moral failing, is it any wonder that people embraced a culture that made an art of displaying their suffering? In a culture that demands your cheerful participation in oppressive norms and denies the harm they cause, is it not a welcome respite to drop the performance and show how you *really* feel?

Of course, the apolitical individualist nature of emo culture meant that many of the grievances we had with the dominant culture remained just that: personal emotions. I guess you're just sensitive, or depressed, or a tortured artist. It's just a phase! It didn't occur to us at the time that a huge part of what hurt us had to do with forms of marginalisation and oppression, and that we were seeking refuge in a subculture that allowed our authenticity, at least to an extent. I really do think that emo culture was a precursor to modern mental health discourse, because it existed in the same depoliticised privatised digital spaces that we're familiar with today.

The fact that emo was rarely explicitly political is a predictable result of a culture under the influence of decades of neoliberalism and rampant individualism. But even within those constraints, emo did create a space for alternative social forms to be explored: there was room for deviant gender expression and queerness, and there was room to talk about the emotions that everyone else was denying. And what else could we have done? We did our best with the tools that were available to us. And what we created went down in history as an iconic period of culture.

We all sing the songs of separation

And we watch our lives

bleed

out

through

our

hands

thx for reading :3 <3



more great emo zines

TELL ME WHERE WE GO FROM HERE: thoughts from adult emo kids. 2020.
<https://issuu.com/thegestianpoet/docs/zine-issu>

MCR SWARM zine. 2023. A tribute to MCR's 2022/23 world tour
<https://mcrswarmzine.bigcartel.com/>

SING IT LIKE THE KIDS THAT ARE MEAN TO YOU! a collection of works about what it means to exist as a person of color in emo/punk/alt-rock/etc.
<https://www.birdloaf.com/shop/sing-it-like-the-kids-that-are-mean-to-you-digital-zine>

find me on
my website: ratanarchist.neocities.org
tumblr: @ratanarchist
insta: @m0ral.panic



Emo's are
normal people...

find me on
my website: ratanarchist.neocities.org
tumblr: @ratanarchist
insta: @m0ral.panic