



THE 19A0S & GENERATION X: WHAT, WHEN, AND WHERE ARE/WERE WE?

Todd Richard

2023 – 2024 Humanities Seminar

HI.

This is me.

This is not Instagrammed.



INTRODUCTION

In the 23/24 Humanities Seminar, we have been exhaustively exploring canonical and recent works to re-vision what a more equitable and decent future might look like for the human race.

Thus far, we have touched on issues of race, nationality, ethnicity, sex, gender, political affiliation, wealth, power, and the millennia-old struggles for equality and equitability that represent human history.

My perspective on these topics and in this class are inexorably shaped by the fact that I am rapidly approaching 50. This, combined with a present cultural awareness of Generation X, and my own multiple personal crises that have met me at my advancing age, have me examining the additional issue of Generationism, and how people of various ages view themselves in comparison to other age groups.

In my application essay to join this class, I stated clearly that I did not believe a complete and meaningful futurist worldview could be had by Generation X. Simply put, we are completely at odds, as we all now cluster around a half century of age, with the future we were promised, and what actually shook down.

In other words, my age cohort is presently living in the period we understood the future to be, but not living the future we all thought we were supposed to have.

It's not looking great for us. We are either apoplectic with anxiety and depression, or living a life of complete denial, in which we believe we're not affected by those circumstances. Either way, we have become extremely isolated, from each other, to ourselves, and from society at large. It has become a self-fulfilling prophecy from our childhood that we just wanted to be left alone. I can't imagine this was what we really had hoped for.

The background of the slide features a complex, abstract pattern of wavy, parallel lines. The lines are primarily red, with some blue lines interspersed, particularly on the left side. The lines curve and flow, creating a sense of movement and depth, similar to a tunnel or a vortex. The overall color palette is dark, with the red and blue lines standing out against a dark purple or black background.

WHO IS GENERATION X?

Definition and Differences

Generation X is largely regarded as people born between the years of 1965 and 1980, although the bookends of these dates seems to be one of discussion and contention.

Who were GenX? Markers of GenX.

- Called the Latchkey Kids in the early 80s
- Called the MTV generation in the late 80s and early 90s
- Post-Boomers
- New Lost Generation (referring to the original, the children who came of age during WW1)



AUTHOR NEIL HOWE
NOTED THE DELAY IN
NAMING THIS
DEMOGRAPHIC
COHORT SAYING,

"OVER 30 YEARS
AFTER THEIR BIRTHDAY,
THEY DIDN'T HAVE A
NAME. I THINK THAT'S
GERMANE."

WHO IS GENX NOW?

“... a youth-obsessed generation that is busy fine-tuning its 401(k) plans, while still getting tattoos, curating hip-hop playlists, and outfitting its children in Black Flag T-shirts. The journey from golden youth toward golden years is a tough one for any generation, of course. But it is uniquely complicated for members of Generation X, who, in a way, have never wanted to grow up.

A relatively small cohort sandwiched between baby boomer and millennials, this demographic consisting of Americans born between 1965 and 1980 seemed to dominate the cultural conversation for only a brief stretch of the 1990s, when Seattle seemed like the music capital of the universe and “Gen X” served as shorthand for all things edgy and cool.

Mention “Generation X” these days, however, and a lot of people picture Winona Ryder rocking thrift-store chic in “Reality Bites,” that Fugees CD that everyone had, shirtless grunge rockers wearing knee-length cutoffs with Army boots, “latchkey children” and ... not much else.

So far, Gen X has not produced a president (Beto, we hardly knew ye), although Vice President Kamala D. Harris, born in 1964, fits within looser definitions of the demographic. Stars who helped define the generation like Kurt Cobain and Tupac Shakur died long before they could join the oldies circuit.

If Generation X is considered jaded and aloof, you can see why.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/24/style/generation-gen-x-aarp-oscar-ad>



INFORMATION, LANGUAGE, & COMMUNICATION

Recently, I heard an etymologist and linguistic scholar say something to the effect that written language has always historically been a set of promises and fulfillments.

Without fully understanding the meaning of this and the intent behind it, I began to give it some consideration personally. This idea is amazingly familiar to anyone that has even a basic understanding of Abrahamic religions.

In the Old Testament/Torah they called these kinds of promises and agreements “covenants,” And the verb used was actually to “cut” a covenant. This was a sacred practice that had a dual meaning, much like many other aspects of the ancient Hebrew language. It was the actual action of cutting the letters into the clay tablets to record the promise. And there was the sacred aspect of cutting a sacrificial animal in half and walking between the two halves, inferring that should I break this promise, may this happen to me.



INFORMATION, LANGUAGE, & COMMUNICATION

I began to think about the evolution of language in my own lifetime, the transition from learning how to write cursive with pencil, pen, and paper, to learning how to write basic code on the bulky computer that would be rolled in to my elementary school classroom. We took typing class in middle school. Bulletin board lingo, L33tspeak, and HTML would follow. I have seen the transition from analog to digital with my own eyes. I have seen the transition from physical books and objects to data and digital rights management software.

All of these things were the roots and trunk of what we used to call the digital age, then the Internet, and now we just call it everyday life.

What if the promise was broken? What if the very foundational nature of our language became violated? What if the transition from analog to digital left too much behind? What if the pervasive digital nature of things overreached to the point where memories could be controlled to the extent of being forgotten?



TIME - WHEN ARE WE?

The **Information Age** (also known as the **Third Industrial Revolution**, **Computer Age**, **Digital Age**, **Silicon Age**, **New Media Age**, **Internet Age**, or the **Digital Revolution**^[1]) is a historical period that began in the mid-20th century to the early 21st century. It is characterized by a rapid shift from traditional industries, as established during the Industrial Revolution, to an economy centered on information technology.^[2]

~ WIKIPEDIA



TIME - WHEN ARE WE?

“Time is relative, so time can be stretched, for me relative to you. So, time has multiple, sort of, parallel rates at which it flows, depending on the state of who’s making the measurement and the state of who’s in motion, and what conditions they are in,” said Tyson (0:53).

“Suppose you could move around in your timeline with the same flexibility as moving left and right, up and down, forward and backward. If that’s the case you can revisit your own timeline. Under those conditions you do not die. You are always dying. You are not born. You’re always being born. That’s another kind of interesting way to think about time,” explained Tyson (1:34).

“If it is being a prisoner of the present transitioning from the past to the future, I have the illusion of free will. And I’m happy to live in that illusion in the knowledge that I don’t.” (13:15)

~ Neil DeGrasse Tyson

<https://bigthink.com/hard-science/neil-degrasse-tyson-explains-the-strange-paradoxes-of-time-travel/>



TIME - WHEN ARE WE?

In the second half, the post Y2K, of most GenXers lives, there has been an implicit an undeniable discontent, malaise, and overall disenfranchisement.

Y2K began a period of confusion, followed by the nightmare that was the 2000 presidential election. Of course, it was September 11 that demonstrated definitively that things were not OK. The world was not what we thought it was, our future would be inexorably altered.

My math is nearly square; I have lived in this period of time warp and trauma for as long as I lived in my previous era of optimism.



TECHNOLOGY

As members of this information generation, or digital generation, we witnessed quite possibly every major evolution in technology over the past nearly 50 years.

- rabbit ear antennas to set-top push button cable boxes
- The Apollo program to the space shuttle program
- Rotary phones to push button phones
- Corded phones to cordless phones
- Land lines to cell phones
- Cassettes to CDs
- Movie theaters to VHS tapes
- Large cabinet arcade games to the Atari 2600
- The home stereo to the Walkman



TECHNOLOGY

For our first stretch and formative years, Generation X believed that we would always be right on the cusp of this progress, and always intimately involved in the leading edge of technology.

We were:

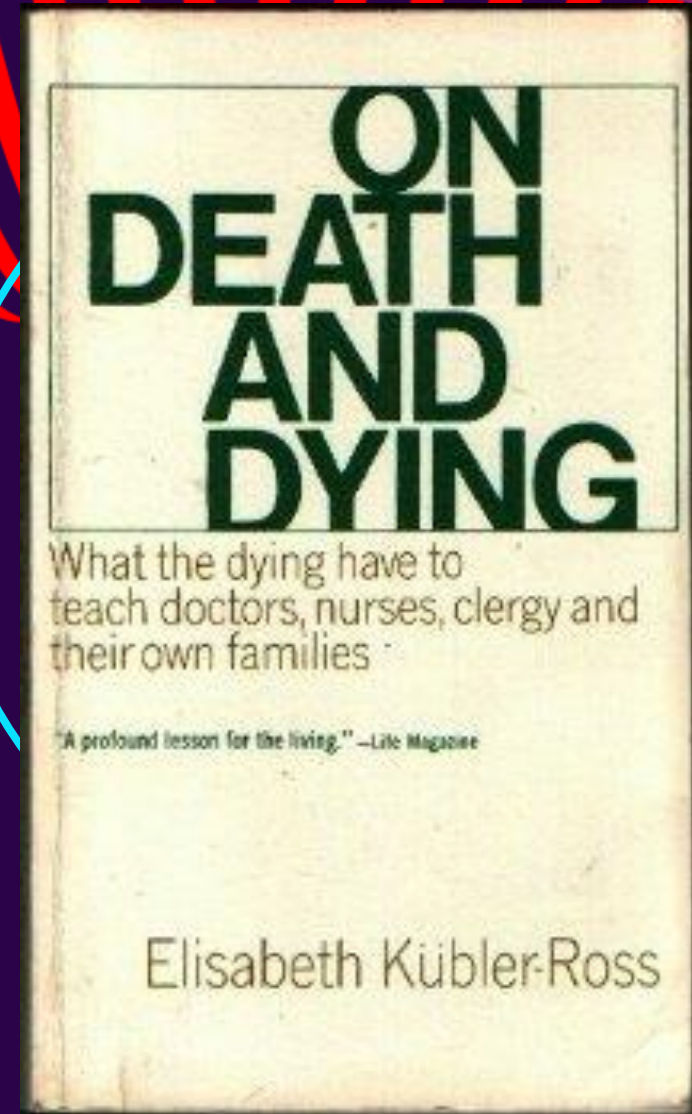
- the first home PC users
- The first to regularly utilize dial up Internet
- The first users of online BBS, or bulletin board services
- The first generation to secure personal email addresses
- The first users of virtually every form of portable/wearable technology, from watches that played games as well as FM radio, to portable music, to pagers

DR. ELIZABETH KUBLER-ROSS

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross was a psychologist, author, and expert on the subject of death and grief. Her groundbreaking book "On Death and Dying" revolutionized the psychology around grief, breaking it into five distinct stages: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance.

By identifying and allowing ourselves to understand these stages, Kubler-Ross suggested that those in support of the grieving individuals could learn much from how these people engage with and progress through expressions of grief.

As it has become abundantly clear that my generation is grieving a great many things, and has been for what seems like our forever, it felt abundantly appropriate to superimpose this struggle of a generation against these steps of processing grief, as a means to better understand where we are.



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THE PRECIPITATING EVENT: WHAT HAPPENED?

What is mass trauma? What is a mass traumatic event?

Is what Gen X is experiencing evidence of that?

If so, what happened?

Truly unsure as to what initiated or precipitated all of this. I am rather certain, however, that all evidence points to this strange intersection of time, technology, and communication discussed earlier in this presentation.

If unable to articulate what has happened, then what were the results of this occurrence? What are the effects?

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DENIAL AND ISOLATION: WHY AREN'T WE TALKING ABOUT THIS, OR ANYTHING ELSE, TO ANYONE?

“Denial functions as a buffer after unexpected and shocking news, allows the patient to collect themselves and, with time, mobilize other less radical defenses.

What I am trying to emphasize is that the need for denial exists in every person at times at the very beginning... More so than towards the end of life.” ~ EKR

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DENIAL AND ISOLATION: WHY AREN'T WE TALKING ABOUT THIS, OR ANYTHING ELSE, TO ANYONE?

"After a disaster, it is normal to experience a number of stress reactions that may continue for a significant period. And after the sudden, traumatic loss caused by disasters, it is normal for grieving and mourning to be uneven, more intensely felt, and extended over time. In all disasters, the experience of safety, security, and predictability in the world is challenged, and a sense of uncertainty becomes a part of life."

"Mass Disasters, Trauma, and Loss"

International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies 2016



ANGER: CONFUSION, DISORIENTATION, AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

“When the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy, and resentment.

In contrast to the stage of denial, the stage of anger is very difficult to cope with...

The reason for this is the fact that this anger is displaced in all directions and projected onto the environment at times almost at random.” ~ EKR



ANGER: CONFUSION, DISORIENTATION, AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

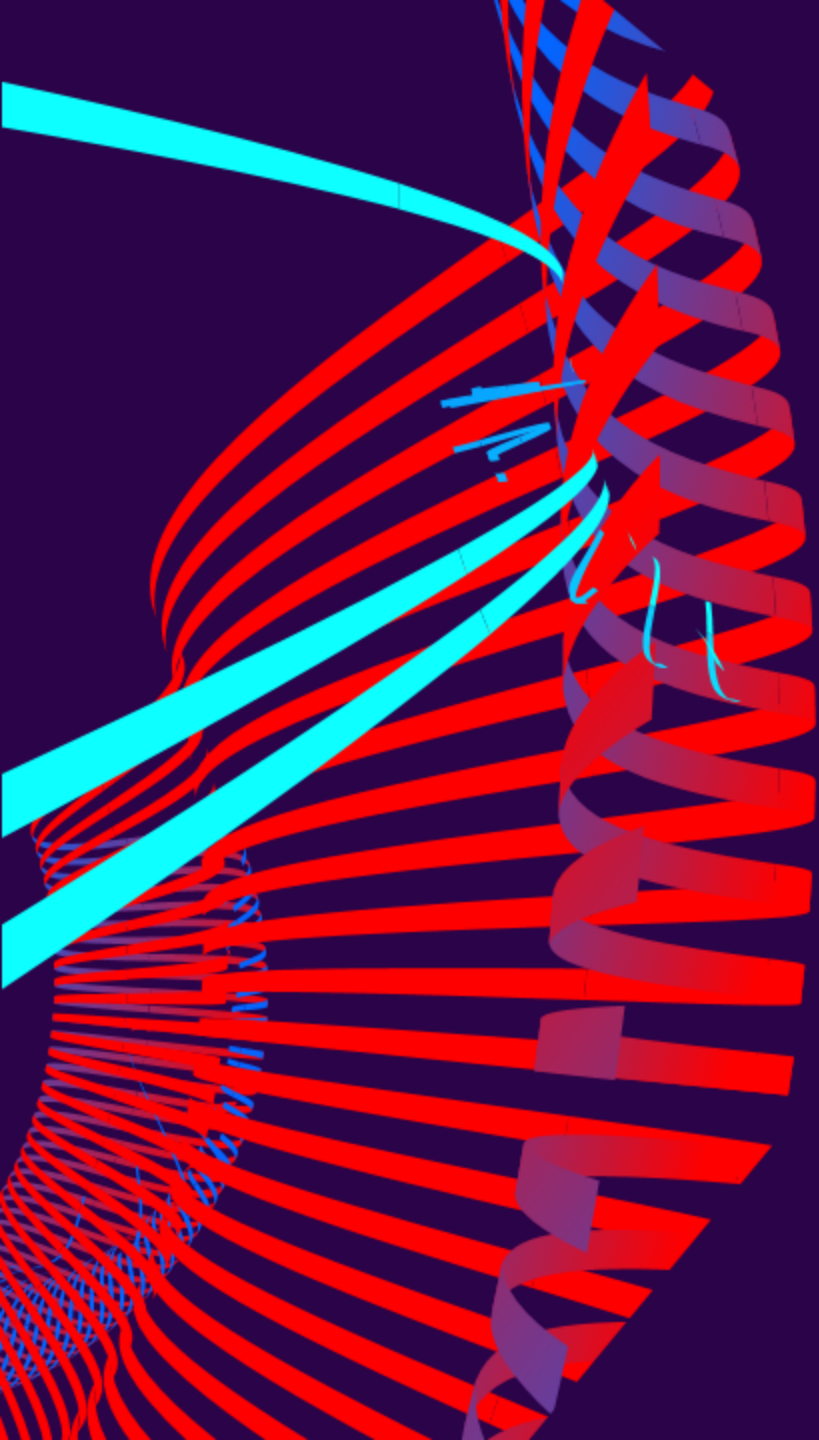
“After the 1990 publication of Douglas Coupland’s novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, and as many Xers were graduating college and entering the workforce, mainstream media was suddenly all over us like Tipper Gore on a pile of Prince cassettes.

Unambitious, unmotivated, disaffected, cynical, drifting, and lost were the kinder adjectives used; in a 1993 piece titled “The Whiny Generation,” *Newsweek* christened us “pusillanimous purveyors of pseudo-angst.” *Time*’s 1990 survey made more of an effort to both hear from actual Xers and explore the material realities that shaped us—divorce, stagflation, the twin shadows of nuclear war and AIDS—but still led with the negative, writing, “They have few heroes, no anthems, no style to call their own. They crave entertainment, but their attention span is as short as one zap of a TV dial.”

The one advantage we had only became apparent in hindsight: These eviscerations happened in a pre-internet world. No 24-hour news cycle, no right-wing echo chamber, no click-driven media apparatus pinging tales of our predetermined failure around the globe. *Time* was eventually gracious enough to correct the record and report that we had not, all things considered, turned out to be lazy, entitled losers. But yes, kids, we got our fair share of shit. We got analog shit. We got shit on microfiche, Skyler. Look it up.”

Andi Zeisler Nov 2, 2023

<https://www.damemagazine.com/2023/11/02/are-gen-xers-the-new-boomers/>



ANGER: CONFUSION, DISORIENTATION, AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Growing up in the media- and marketing- hungry early 80s, we believed that if you saw it on a screen, it would somehow eventually become real, like the cartoons we watched that somehow miraculously turned into action figures we could buy at the store. The space shuttle program lived in the same rarefied air as Star Wars, and the models and toys of each sat side-by-side on my shelves in my childhood bedroom.

I have many stories throughout my childhood of confusing television personalities and situations with real-world people and things.

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BARGAINING: DEVALUATION & OUTMODING

“The bargaining is really an attempt to postpone; it has to include a prize offered for good behavior, it also says a self-imposed deadline and it includes an implicit promise...”

Psychologically, promises may be associated with quiet guilt, and would therefore be helpful if such remarks were not just brushed aside...” ~ EKR



BARGAINING: DEVALUATION & OUTMODING

"We've become an almost-dystopian version of some of those dreams of the future, and there's no telling what's to come of it.

My one prediction, however, is that, whatever comes of it, it'll be done without thought of Generation X. Gen X has been neglected, forgotten, disregarded, and, overall, has been given little to no say in the way things are progressing. Our Boomer predecessors ignored us for their own goals, and our Millennial successors have too many of their own battles to fight to spend much time with regard to us. So, here we sit, and here we'll remain."

James Rigdon - July 28, 2023

<https://medium.com/@innoparticularorder/the-end-of-generation-x-57ef44ce2ec9>



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DEPRESSION: AMBITION & DISILLUSIONMENT

(In discussing reactive versus preparatory depression...)

“An understanding person will have no difficulty in eliciting the cause of depression and in alleviating some of the unrealistic guilt or shame which often accompanies the depression.

The second type of depression is one which does not occur as a result of a past loss but he's taking into account impending losses when the depression is a tool to prepare for the impending loss of all the love objects in order to facilitate the state of acceptance, then encouragements and reassurances are not as meaningful. This second type of depression is usually a silent one in contrast to the first type.” ~ EKR



DEPRESSION: AMBITION & DISILLUSIONMENT

“Mental illnesses such as depression are more stigmatized in older generation (Generation X) for whom the subject is a complete taboo attached with various misconceptions. The unfortunate complex of inferiority as a mental health patient is usually what widens the generation gap even further. This mind-set actually creates more problems as they choose to avoid accepting the existence of it, consequently setting an even longer path of suffering without therapy.

One of the factors that really affect the likelihood of conversation around mental health is the notion of choice. Mental illness is never chosen, it is a state of being that needs to be addressed, not concealed. The idea that you can just ‘switch off’ or ‘stop over-thinking’ about your psychological state still exists within the Generation X. Unfortunately, cliché religious and cultural remedies that were passed on from generations to deal with periods of distress were all they had at their disposal. The generation gap actually consists of a gap of misinformation and archaic solutions that need unlearning to understand the evolving mental health disorders of a digitally advanced world where scientific knowledge is easily accessible.”

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9129327/>

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ACCEPTANCE: AGING

“Acceptance should not be mistaken for a happy stage it is almost devoid of feelings it is if the pain had gone, the struggle is over, and there comes a time for "the final rest before the long journey. “ ~ EKR

THE 19A0S:

**ATTEMPTING
TO FRAME IN
AN UNKNOWN
EVENT**



WHEN ARE WE?

The 19A0s, also called the lost decade theory, is a parafictional hypothesis that, at some point between 1975 and 1985, we (as in humanity at large) lost an undetermined block of time in our collective timeline.

The theory is that the block itself is somewhere between 5 and 10 years in length, and the duration in which it was placed between '75 and '85 is perhaps 8 to 10 years long.

Thus, the theory posits there was about 20 years of time squeezed into the decade we believe to be 1975 to 1985. Thus, we are missing a whole heck of a lot of time. A decade, maybe? Where did it go? What have we forgotten? Why did this happen?

And, when are we?

POSSIBILITIES?

There are several angles and approaches used to describe and explain this phenomenon.

- The progress of technology from analog to digital. This is seen in every aspect of culture.
- The space aged ambitions of the 1970s giving way to the shuttle catastrophes in the 80s.
- The fast forwarding of analog magnetic tape to cd to laser disc to DVD. From typewriter, to massive computer console at school, to home computer, now to fully unwired life.
- Present-Day Mandela Effects.

How fast this progress seemed. How quick technology became outmoded in favor of the new product or new thing. How myself and my age cohort seemed perfectly poised to make all of these jumps from mode to mode, believing that all of ourselves would make the jump unaffected.

But, it's becoming more clear as time marches on that the space between the jumps contained multitudes, and some didn't make the jump intact. Like missing that last ring on the jungle gym.

Some peeled off of the pack and left us back then, and some later as a result of not being able to cope.

POSSIBILITIES?

If we allow ourselves, if even for a moment, to consider this possibility, it handily begins to address the dysphoria, dysmorphia, depression, and overall dissatisfaction of Generation X.

The 19A0s, and its adjustment to our understanding of our own personal timelines and recent history, easily connects to the ISTSS study on mass disasters, trauma and loss, in which it discusses the host of cognitive and mental issues caused by mass traumatic events.

PER USUAL, OUR AGE COHORT USES HUMOR AS A MEANS TO DISCUSS IMPORTANT TOPICS OR REVEAL IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OURSELVES TO OTHERS.



POSSIBILITIES?

Can we use this to explain the rapid acceleration of time that we felt throughout our childhood, thanks to the advances and profound changes in **technology, time, and communication**?

If that acceleration were actual and real, and the promises made by culture and media were honored, my ass would be on the moon right now. Or at least flying around in a Jetpack.

We have experienced a mass trauma

- > Mis- or dis- remembering
- > Massive indications of depression and anxiety.
- > Nostalgia as a coping tool.

CONCLUSION

ADDENDUM



[1990s: Everything is Going to Be OK - A DJ Todd the Rocket Mixtape](#)

ADDENDUM

There was a fantastic and fascinating, if a little too brief, period in the late 80s and early 90s when dance music and dance music culture were in the spotlight. House music, the evolved iteration of disco, had fully crossed over into the pop charts, and with that came obvious MTV rotation of the genres stand-out singles.

Before its crossover, though, house music was a humble if somewhat ambitious cultural movement signified by inclusivity, welcoming dancefloors, and PLUR, which stood for peace, love, unity, and respect.

Of course, when the market and the industry get ahold of a great idea, it inevitably turns into something else. So, there was the Hollywoodification of house music via things like Club MTV, the near daily dance music program that aired in the afternoons on MTV.

The singles that best represented this era, and its boundless crossover potential, are now ubiquitous, 30+ years on.

ADDENDUM



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