



360: DOCUMENTARY AND THE AESTHETICS OF NOSTALGIA

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Figure 1: Micha Osuchowski in "360."

360 is a short documentary film I produced over the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. The film follows Micha Osuchowski, a young woman obsessed with the culture of the late 1990s and early 2000s, also referred to as the Y2K era. *360* weaves together two aspects of Osuchowski's life, her occupation selling Y2K clothing and skateboarding, a sport she has been enamored with since her childhood. By utilizing the portrait style and emulating Y2K aesthetics, *360* reflects the essence of Osuchowski and functions as a loose exploration of identity and nostalgia.

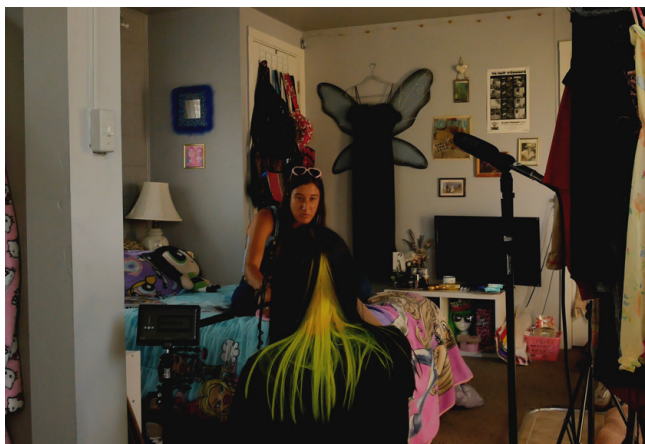


Figure 2: The laid-back interview setup with myself and Osuchowski.

The initial idea for *360* was to represent the unsustainability of the fashion industry. However, it later morphed into a portrait film after Osuchowski's casual demeanor and interest in skateboarding and Y2K aesthetics, in general, made it clear that nostalgia would more accurately be the film's focus. Documentaries often represent big ideas through the lens of a singular subject. In activist filmmaking, the subject acts as a stand-in for the beliefs of the filmmaker. This approach reduces the

subject to an ideology, complicating the ethics of the nonfiction filmmaking process. Because Osuchowski, as a social actor, did not have the sole goal of discussing issues like sustainability, or any of the other social issues that crop up in *360*, it would not have been a fair representation to frame the story from an activist lens. I wanted to do my best to get as close to truthfully representing the essence of Osuchowski as I could in an eleven-minute timespan. To do this, I had to sideline the political topics in favor of centering Osuchowski and her nostalgia for Y2K. Through focusing on a person over an ideology, *360* becomes a laid-back look into young women's spaces that simultaneously addresses social issues without letting any of them define the subject.

To create a portrait of Osuchowski and represent her Y2K nostalgia, I structured *360* like a collage. The film balances the narrative plotlines of skateboarding and vintage clothing by transitioning between the two rhythmically. Putting the two storylines together emphasizes their similarities which are Osuchowski as an individual and her love of Y2K. The film is not just about how Osuchowski sells clothes or skates, but how her nostalgia for Y2K fuels her passions, which happen to be skating and fashion. The collage feel's technical purpose was to make jumps in the location and the story feel natural. The aesthetic intent was to create an arc that resembled literal Y2K collages and music videos. With that Y2K inspiration, *360* gathers several different visual and story elements to construct a film that resembles the version of Y2K that people like Osuchowski have curated.

The content of *360* matches its form. While the narrative structure is reminiscent of Y2K aesthetics, so too are the visual qualities. Half of the footage in *360* uses a Y2K-era Hi8 camcorder. The fuzziness of the picture, 4:3 aspect ratio, and glitches native in the footage reflect the technology of the Y2K era. The intent of using this camera was to mimic the look of old skate videos. Skate videos are emblematic of Y2K skate culture and were responsible for getting Osuchowski into skateboarding in the first place. In addition to the Hi8 camcorder, I also used a fisheye lens when shooting digitally to maintain the old skate video look. The skate video look exemplifies the romanticized vision of Y2K that people like Osuchowski have and, thus, was a perfect fit for representing the general Y2K nostalgia that recurs in the film.

Stop motion is also used in *360* to reflect the nostalgic Y2K aesthetic. The stop motion segments have a narrative purpose of transitioning between scenes and providing expositional details about the story. Visually, they add to the Y2K collage look of the film through their bright colors and small scale. The clothes Osuchowski sells, cell phones, letter beads, and magazine pages, dance in and out of frame against pink, blue, and yellow backdrops. Their crafty look and vibrancy align with the general aesthetics of the rest of the film. Their childlike quality is similar to the children's clothing and iconography adorned by Osuchowski. A significant portion of the



Figure 3: Scene transitions in "360." (Top) Stop motion depicting Y2K fashion → (Center) Micha Osuchowski at the thrift store demonstrating that Y2K skate fashion is popular → (Bottom) Skate sequence where Osuchowski explains skate culture.

nostalgia associated with the resurgence of Y2K comes from children's media, so I wanted this aspect of the film to represent that same adolescent spirit.



Figure 4: Hi8 camcorder footage of Micha Osuchowski.



Figure 5: Stop motion clothing.

Finally, the color grade of *360* also represents Y2K aesthetics. The first passes on the color grade imitated the look of old photographs and magazine pages. These images, which through natural aging took on cool tones and pink tints, are the basis for the co-opted Y2K aesthetic. This initial color grade read more like a natural flat look in the vein of realism, though, instead of a distinct stylistic choice. So, I shifted my focus to Y2K music videos which were a lot more saturated yet still emphasized blues and pinks. The resulting color grade prioritized cool tones, as I had initially aimed for, and it also matched the vividness of Y2K media and the youthful mood of *360*. I applied the same color grade to all of the footage in the film to maintain cohesion between the collaged together elements. The color portrays a nostalgic look in line with the themes of *360* while also visually connecting the film's parts.



Figure 6: Process of the color grade. Uncolored (left), pass one (center), and final grade (right).

Making *360* was a continuous process of discovery. From conceptualization to reflection, I learned more about my subject, filmmaking, and artistic goals than I could have predicted. The film went through many different phases during the two semesters it took to produce it. What started as a project aimed at exploring sustainability transformed naturally into a more personal look at the aesthetics of nostalgia. Even though the finished film did not match my initial vision, ultimately, it was better off for it. The ever-changing nature of nonfiction filmmaking is part of what makes the medium engaging and fulfilling to me.

I believe the film I created around Osuchowski's persona reflects how nostalgia shapes our identities. Through its content, structure, and appearance, *360* demonstrates how a rose-colored vision of the past informs our lives. Nostalgia is part of the human experience, and documentary is a medium ripe for portraying that experience. The cherry-picked elements we recycle from our past inspire our present and future selves. The cherry-picked moments in a film inspire our perceptions of the past, ourselves, and the world around us. *360* does not call the viewer to any specific action. Rather, it creates an aesthetic world emulative of the Y2K era, as well as 2020-21. It is lighthearted, reflective, and personable, and sometimes that is all a film needs to be.