How Visual Novels Employ Nostalgia: A Comparative Analysis of *Tokimeki Memorial* and *Butterfly Soup*

Nostalgia's etymology begins and ends in the 17th century, in which Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer combined the words *nostos*, or a return to your native land, with *algos*, meaning pain (Routledge). Since the word's inception, it has carried with it the bittersweet feelings of a time that has long since passed, a culture that has evolved and moved on, and memories that only continue to grow cloudier each time we remember them. Recently, both societal pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Huang) as well as political movements whose goal is to place the United States back into its past position of global dominator (Rodriguez) have caused individuals from around the world to collectively put nostalgic thought on a pedestal. Because of nostalgia's newly formed popularity in a plethora of different discourses, it's become imperative to give nostalgia a more nuanced definition than it had for nearly 400 years. This definition defines two different types of nostalgia: reflective and restorative, and it is with this refined definition that any discourse referring to nostalgia can now be looked at more effectively.

Richy Srirachanikorn, in his essay titled *Lost Again: Refractive Nostalgia and Video Games*, describes the two main forms of nostalgia by stating, "Reflective nostalgia is a yearning for something personal that has been lost to time, such as one's childhood, while restorative nostalgia is a socially defined loss of something collective, such as a bygone era or 'the good old days'" (26). Here we can differentiate the two examples described previously, the COVID-19 pandemic and President Donald Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," as reflective and restorative nostalgia respectively. However, these examples only work for those

who were in some way culturally embedded within the United States during either time period. That is either the time period that Trump himself is referring to, or the time period that constitutes pre, during, or post pandemic. The individuals would then implicitly understand what Trump is referring to with his slogan or be able to recall their individual experiences during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nostalgia is culturally dependent on wherever it originates after all, or is it?

Many people born in the United States in and around the 90s have, or have had, nostalgia for the era known as "Cool Japan," which was the 00s decade in which Japan purposely promoted their culture to Western audiences. One such promotion was the genre of visual novel games. Visual novels are a video game genre that focuses on guiding a player through a narrative while giving the player choices to impact that narrative. They are solely narratively driven, with the mechanics of the genre being limited to dialogue choice and not much else. Mark Kretzschmar and Sara Raffel write about the visual novel marketing campaign in their book, *The History and Allure of Interactive Visual Novels*. In it they summarize the four cycles that influenced visual novels' acceptance in the West. These are: "introduction of visual novels to the West, primarily through *anime*; the attempted but unsuccessful promotion of *eroge* (erotic) visual novels in the West; eventual popularization of certain subgenres like the mystery visual novel; and the current landscape, in which older titles are being rereleased while new content is translated for an increasingly Western audience." (p. 59). The two here are summarizing the fact that visual novels have always had a bumpy acceptance in the west. They struggle with both being "too Japanese and not being Japanese enough" at the same time (p. 59). Nostalgia for "Cool Japan" is largely based on this tension filled relationship that media coming across the Pacific Ocean had during the time. The media proliferated both publicly and privately via

bootleg video tapes and burgeoning file sharing websites.

A lot of Americans' first introduction to Japanese culture was either through these outlets, which often featured poorly dubbed over voices, or through publicly accessible media, such as the original Pokémon series. Unfortunately, even studio made dubs had their issues with dubbing. The original Pokémon anime's 1998 episode, "Primeape Goes Bananas," is a prime example. The episode features the rather infamous line spoken by the character Brock, "These donuts are great! Jelly filled are my favorite! Nothing beats a jelly filled donut" (3:24) while he's holding a handful of onigiri, which are just rice balls wrapped in seaweed. This odd example of cultural censorship highlights the overly weary nature that American companies had when it came to importing Japanese media. Pokémon was so popular in America partly due to its unique anime style, a style inherently Japanese, and yet aspects of it were deemed "too Japanese" for American children to handle. The struggle of both being "too Japanese and not being Japanese enough" was directly responsible for a generation of children believing that onigiri was a weird looking jelly donut. Just think, if onigiri was deemed too much for audiences to handle in the 90s, how do you think American companies felt about importing a dating sim and/or visual novel set in a Japanese high school?

Tokimeki Memorial is one such game. It's a dating sim that's set in a Japanese high school in the 90s and made by Konami: an entertainment company who, as of September 30th, 2024, employs 9,045 employees. The game never made it outside of Japan as well as being an example of a game garnering enough recent attention to grant it an English fan translation (a translation of an emulated copy of the game not affiliated with the original company) (Orselli). *Action Button Reviews*, a YouTube channel run by ex-*Kotaku* writer and video editor Tim Rogers, has a six-hour review of the game that has 1.8 million views (as of March 2025), and he is probably

the single person responsible for the resurgence of interest and eventual release of the fan translation version of the game. In his review he plays the game in its native language, translating all relevant dialogue into English as it's displayed on screen in Japanese, and so can be fact checked by native Japanese speakers if they so choose.

I am not a native Japanese speaker in the slightest, and I also know that fan translations, no matter the quality, still must take some liberties when translating the language. The act of translating anything comes with this decision making, and so I believe that using Tim Roger's lengthy review in place of a personal playthrough is good if not better. After all, what's important is understanding how the game represents high school nostalgically both reflectively and restoratively, not my personal opinions. Tim Roger's opinion actually matters more as he not only speaks fluent Japanese but also spent a lengthy amount of his life in Japan working for SONY Computer Entertainment.

Tokimeki Memorial is being compared with *Butterfly Soup*: a coming-of-age visual novel about four American high school girls growing closer together with the power of baseball. It's an indie game made by a single developer: Brianna Lei. The four girls featured are ethnically diverse with Diya and Akarsha being Indian-American, Min-Seo being Korean-American, and Noelle being Chinese-American. This diversity lends itself to analysis of the game's use of BIPOC characters, for example it promotes what Christopher Brooks calls "BIPOC-centric game design." It also lends itself to a discussion on how queer romance's niche in gaming is exclusively reserved for the Indie space (Salter), of which visual novels inherently are because of factors that include developer accessibility, budget, and a lack of mechanical depth. What hasn't been discussed, however, is how the game employs nostalgic remembrance of 2008 in a genre largely dominated by Japanese tropes, and how its use compares with a game whose focus was

also nostalgia in high school, but whose implementation were both similar and different when compared with *Butterfly Soup*. It should be noted that I did play *Butterfly Soup* extensively for this comparative analysis not only due to its accessibility when compared with *Tokimeki Memorial*, but also because it takes place within a culture that I personally experienced at a high school age (that being the United States in 2008), and so I have direct nostalgia for this time period, and thus can parse out which kinds of nostalgia are being used by the game.

As a surface level example: *Butterfly Soup* is what is known as a Yuri, or "girl's love" visual novel, in which a girl getting together with another girl is the win state of the game. Yuri is a term originating in the 1920s when author Yoshiya Nobuko published her short story collection titled *Hana monogatari*, translated directly as "Flower Stories" (Hemmann). As visual novels slowly became accepted in the West, American developers of visual novels borrowed terms like Yuri to tag their own games appropriately. This is, in part, what makes a comparison and contrast analysis of these two games so compelling. One is a game made when visual novels (and dating sims by association) weren't popular in the West, and the other is a game made after that time period. By comparing both games' use of nostalgia, we'll be able to see not only what each culture finds compelling enough to be nostalgic about, but also what was carried over from one culture to the next in the span of around 20 years of genre development. First, however, we need to understand the years in which these games are set in order to understand how they employ nostalgia in the first place.

Japan in 1995: A Bursted Bubble Trying to Find Its Shape

Japan during the 90s was known to be in the "Lost Decade" or the decade after the bubble economy that was first created due to the Plaza Agreement which doubled the value of the Yen when compared with the US Dollar. This bubble continued to inflate with more and

more people participating in the speculative real estate market until it finally burst in 1991 (Tao 2). After this, unemployment rates were high, and the economy remained stagnant throughout the decade. Japan spent most of 1995 recovering from a devastating 6.9 earthquake that happened in the Ōsaka-Kōbe (Hanshin) region of the country.

The popular music in the 80s was distinctly the genre of Japanese city pop. Carefree, up-tempo classics such as Eiichi Ohtaki's "Kimiwa Tennenshoku" (translated directly as "You Are a/the Natural Color") and Miki Matsubara's, "Stay with Me" filled the many lavish cars and expensive headphones citizens owned. With the decline of idol culture in the 90s (Rogers, 4:42:00-4:44:53), the sound of Japanese pop changed to more experimental, slower paced sound, creating a subgenre known as Shibuya-Kei, referencing the neighborhood from which it originated with the youth at the time (Harris). Near the end of Japan's bubble era was the monumental release of *Akira* in July of 1988, a movie so influential that movies like Jordan Peele's *Nope* continue to pay homage to it over 30 years later. **Figure 1** shows one of *Akira*'s iconic cityscape scenes, in which each individual window was hand painted (Akira: Production Report).

Figure 1: One of *Akira's* iconic cityscapes (Image from The Japan Times).

In the 90s, *Princess Mononoke* and *Ghost in the Shell* continued to prove that animated films in Japan still had worldwide appeal. However, this was the decade before the "Cool Japan" movement really kicked it off. As stated before, *some* media made it out of Japan during this time with uproarious fanfare, such as the original Pokémon anime, while other media had its enamored fans secluded in their own home country, such as the ever-popular *Crayon Shin-Chan* series. *Tokimeki Memorial* is another example, and it's a game whose inception was simply answering the question, "What if I could redo high school?" Despite never releasing outside of Japan, a New York Times article came out just after the game's release, and had one fan of the game reflecting, "I can do things I couldn't do [...] I wanted to tell a girl that I liked her but I couldn't." (Pollack). The game was released into a culture that begged for a second chance, a do-over, and a chance to celebrate a time in their lives in the past but set in the current day. The game marketed itself as restoratively nostalgic simply by offering its players the chance to return

to an idealized high school set in its present day. That high school being affectionately called Kirameki High School, or Sparkle High School.

California in 2008: A Bursted Bubble Trying to Find Its Shape

California in 2008, along with the rest of the United States, was in the midst of "The Great Recession," a recession caused by a speculative real estate bubble bursting in the same year. As with Japan, the years previous saw a soar in housing prices due to speculation as well as loan accessibility. In 2008 specifically, California also suffered a 5.4 magnitude earthquake in Chino Hills (Lindsey). Both the climate and the economy were on rocky footing.

However, in 2008 American celebrity culture was in full swing. Music artists who represented themselves as singular entities despite having entire teams behind them dominated the musical landscape. Artists like Rhianna, Taylor Swift, and Katy Perry hogged the Billboard Hot 100 for tens of weeks during 2008 while genres that were once sensational such as nu metal and grunge found themselves being left behind for the more established musical genres of pop and rap. At the movies comic book heroes were starting their renaissance with the top two movies of the year being *The Dark Knight* and *Iron Man* (IMDb).

One of the pillars of "Cool Japan," the Toonami programming block that aired on Cartoon Network, ended in 2008 and wouldn't be back until 2012 (Valdez). While devastating to fans, the streaming service of Crunchyroll was just starting out and provided a similar niche to a slowly growing trend that would eventually blow up. As well as this was the fact that many libraries and bookstores still had, and still have at present day, within them a manga section. Manga and anime still had a while to go before they became mainstream, but a lot of kids growing up in the 2000s embraced anime as an alternative hobby that paired up nicely with their alternative music tastes.

This is the year that *Butterfly Soup* takes place in. Art and media were flourishing outside the home, but inside many homes the situation was tense and foreboding. Foreclosures were abound and many people forced to downsize or worse. Children in these families had to reorient themselves in a new school, make new friends, and try and discover who they were while the nation continued to shake around them. They ended up making friends through shared mutual interests, as children often tend to do. However, these shared interests heavily involved deeply personal experiences that were different from person to person. Speaking from personal experience as a high school student in 2008: I liked Linkin Park, Full Metal Alchemist (specifically Brotherhood), and my favorite Creepypasta (AKA a scary story shared around the internet) was Ben Drowned. People in my friend circle liked emo bands, anime, and Creepypastas, but all of them had different favorites. It was a time in which reflective nostalgia reigned higher than restorative. We actively shared our past stories about our first shiny Pokémon encounters, when we finally beat Ocarina of Time, and the first time we watched Adult Swim under our parent's noses. We weren't wanting to return to those times, but even as high school students we recognized what reflective nostalgia was. It's a personal remembrance that's specific from person to person, it's individualistic at its core, and it's most befitting of a country that also prides itself on its hyper individualistic culture.

Reflective Nostalgia: Or, "Remember that time in high school when we–"

How could a game possibly remind its audience of deeply personal experiences that they had? Truth be told there is no "one size fits all" to what people will find deep nostalgia for personally. For example, we could both smell the same brand of cigarettes and think of completely different memories involving people we knew who smoke that brand. This makes

that cigarette brand reflectively nostalgic for both of us, and doesn't make it restorative nostalgia because the cigarettes are reminding us of a personal memory rather than an idealized past to return to. Someone who used to smoke that brand could find the smell restoratively nostalgic as smoking to them could represent an idealized past. In short, some aspects of *Butterfly Soup* and *Tokimeki Memorial* could be seen as reflective nostalgia to some, and restorative nostalgia to others. The best way to ascertain reflective nostalgia, then, is by looking at just how many specific experiences either game provides, and what those specific experiences can potentially say about either culture during their respective time periods. Games are also collaborative mediums in which people put their own personal touches on everything. So, it requires no citation or research to understand that both the developers of *Tokimeki Memorial* and Brianna Lei embedded their own personal experiences in their respective games.

For his lengthy review, Tim Rogers played *Tokimeki Memorial* a total of fourteen times, though after finishing the editing he did play an additional six times (5:37:23). It was on his final playthrough in which he got yet *another* secret event in which Shiori Fujisaki, aka your childhood best friend in the game and the designated "True Ending" girl you can get with, accidentally gives everyone food poisoning during the school club's outing. This event can only happen if both you and Shiori are in the same club together, and that club is the tennis club, and is still seemingly up to random chance. In order for Shiori Fujisaki to be in the tennis club, you have to set her birthday to one of 34 random days (Tetracorp). Other extremely unique events that Tim Rogers includes in his review are when, if you and Shiori share the same birthday, and the birthday is on a holiday that doesn't already have an event, she will invite you over to share a cake that she baked for the both of you (3:56:35-3:57:31), and the event in which any girl you take to the same movie three times will remark negatively about it (3:11:18). All of these unique

events and more coalesce to create a game experience that's unique to each individual. Tim Rogers imagines that casual players of the game did a single playthrough, courted the girl they felt most attached to, and then never picked up the game again. However, because *Tokimeki Memorial* became such a phenomenon in Japan, it led to many, many conversations between friends who each all had individual stories to tell (4:23:10).

This gives each player reflective nostalgia for the game itself while the game simultaneously pushes the narrative that this is a return to the idealized setting of high school, or restorative nostalgia. This is evidence of the game's goals centering on individual player's experience outside of the game and trying to account for everything a player could potentially want to fix about their own high school experience. Perhaps you weren't good at tennis, or maybe you didn't get the best grades, but that's alright because *Tokimeki Memorial* allows you to go back and fix those negative feelings you had about your failures in high school. Of course, this includes the failure of being unable to talk to a girl you had a crush on, but this aspect of the game is more restorative nostalgia than reflective, and we'll get to why when we talk about restorative nostalgia in both games.

Butterfly Soup, in contrast, is a linear game with very few choices for the player to make. You can choose a response option in dialogue, but the narrative quickly merges back into its main thread. However, this isn't to say that *Butterfly Soup* also doesn't have a variety of experiences that all attempt to invoke reflective nostalgia within the player. The game instead uses the era of "Cool Japan" in which it resides in as a means to invoke references of media that were popular at the time. Some notable examples are included in **Figure 2** below.
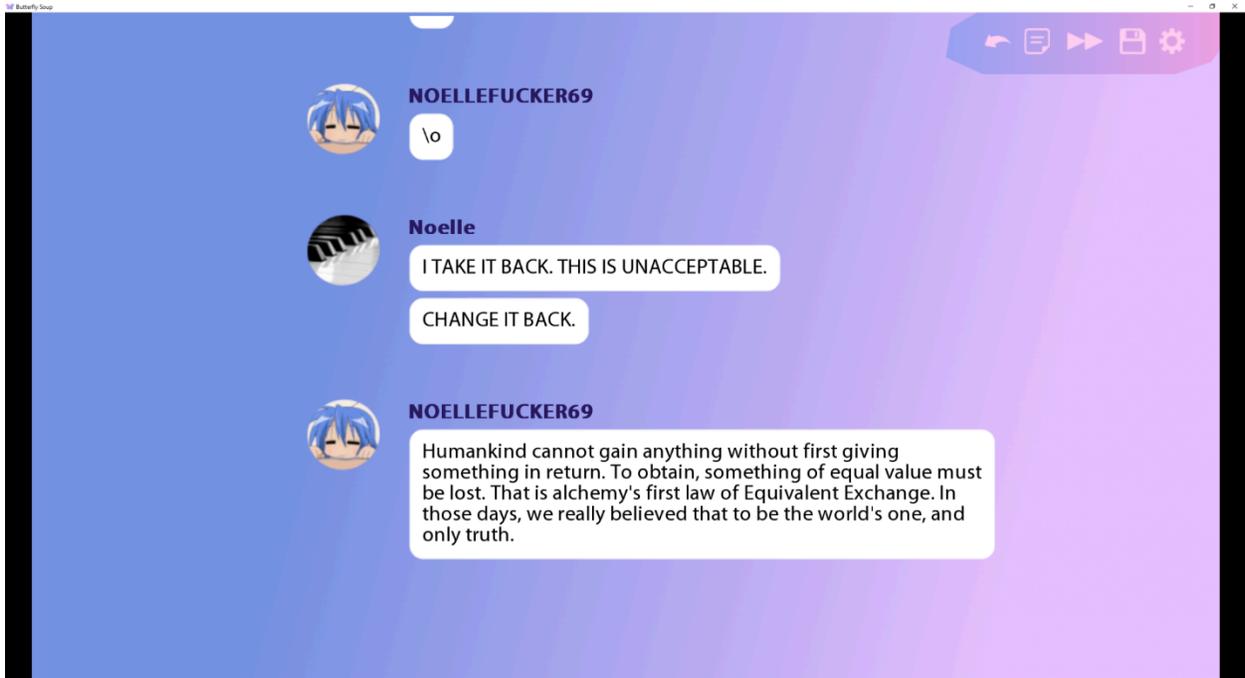
Figure 2: The first screenshot (above) shows an online chat between Noelle and Akarsha

(username NOELLEFUCKER69). The second (below) is a choice given to the player on what to name a caterpillar outside of Diya's house.

The first screenshot is two references in one. The first is Akarsha's profile picture, which is the character Konata Izumi from the *Lucky Star* series released in 2007 and the second is the text that is Akarsha's last message. This is a direct quote from the anime *FullMetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*, released in 2009 that outlines its magic system as well as hints to some of its deeper themes. The second screenshot is three references in one. The first is Yaoi Kurashiki, a pun on the name Aoi Kurashiki, who is a main character in the horror adventure visual novel game: *9 Hours 9 Persons 9 Doors*, released in 2009. Yaoi is the opposite of Yuri, meaning boys love, and this pun is in response to what the game's creator, Kotaro Uchikoshi stated when asked who Aoi would go out with. He responded, "Does Aoi even like girls? I have to start considering from that." This is explained and quoted directly in *Butterfly Soup*. The second is Yoite, a character from the anime *Nabari no Ou*, released in 2008. The final reference is actually another two in one. Miles "Tails" Prower is the full name of Sega mascot Sonic's sidekick, and Miles Edgeworth is the antagonist of the Phoenix Wright series. All of these references are of media that was prevalent at or around the time the game is set in. *Tokimeki Memorial* also has references like this in it such as the Final Fantasy Parody sequence, but it doesn't inundate itself with the references.

This is what separates the two games' use of reflective nostalgia. *Tokimeki Memorial* evokes reflective nostalgia through unique experience, showing that 90s Japan understood that individuals all have a different experience of high school, and if they could go back, each person would change something different. In contrast, *Butterfly Soup* only shares one narrative and

instead allows the player to reminisce over personal experiences over the media that they consumed in 2008.

Of course, *Butterfly Soup* doesn't just reference anime, but also games like *Mario Kart*, *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, and *Sonic Adventure 2*; cultural movements like "Beliebers," dabbing, and parkour; and music such as Linkin Park, *High School Musical*, and the purposely bad recorder cover of "My Heart Will Go On" that was uploaded in 2009 (Mulholland). References in *Butterfly Soup* are handed out just as often as unique events are in *Tokimeki Memorial*. Both games want you to keep playing to see what happens next, to see what high school memories they can get you to reminisce about. The goal is the same, but the methods of execution are very different.

Restorative Nostalgia: Or, "Man, high school was the best. Except for the exams, the weird cliques, the constant showboating, oh and—"

Tokimeki Memorial allows you to revisit a high school that has within it a tree of legend. It is said that those who confess their love under the tree of legend on graduation day will then go on to have a relationship that lasts forever. Tim Rogers says about the tree, "[it] stands in symbolically for the hypothetical grown up players pop culturally falsified rosy memories of a high school experience they might not have actually had." (4:40:07). When Tim Rogers is referring to "pop culturally falsified rosy memories" he's talking about the mutation of idol culture that happened in Japan during the 90s. *Tokimeki Memorial* styles each of its dateable girls after a real-life pop idol (4:42:00-4:44:53). You might've been afraid to talk to girls when you went to high school, but *Tokimeki Memorial* puts you inside the shoes of a high school student who never has to make the first move. Every girl comes to you in the game, all dependent on

how your in-game stats are (1:30:47). Once you've met them, they exist, and if you don't meet them, they never existed. The only exception is Shiori Fujisaki, your childhood best friend and true ending surrogate. Both the choice to include the likeness of 80s J-Pop idols and the choice not to have the player introduce themselves to the girls lets players of *Tokimeki Memorial* revel in the easy and delightful rememberings of a "good ol' days" version of high school. It's one in which everything went perfectly. You got the best grades, the best sports accolades, and the best girl. As one might've guessed by now, restorative nostalgia tends to objectify everything surrounding it, including people, and turns them into whatever the culture collectively "lost."

The game also features many events that take place in and around the school that people playing the game would remember fondly. These include Valentine's Day, complete with giri chocos being gifted to the player by girls who feel socially obligated (2:31:29); White Day, which occurs one month later and lets the player give a chocolate out instead (2:34:22); yearly class trips, of which the player gets to choose where the class goes by simply asking himself where he needs to meet his fellow students that day (2:49:58); a New Year's Omikuji ceremony complete with a coin toss adjacent fortune reading on whether or not the year will bring curses or blessings (2:31:29), club outings, athletics days, and perhaps most importantly, dates with anime girls who look strikingly similar to 80s idols. Talk about an idealized setting to sweep those bad memories of high school under the rug, eh?

We can't talk about how *Tokimeki Memorial* lures its players in without talking about its choices with its visual aesthetic. Its choice to turn the main character and the girl he's with into chibi versions of themselves (as shown in **Figure 3**) demonstrates how *Tokimeki Memorial* is quick to rush past the boring, slogging segments of high school, and instead focus on those

conversations between the player and the girl he's speaking with. In these visual novel segments, we get to see the subtle facial cues that teach the player how to tell if one of their responses either upset a girl, or made her happy. An example of this can be found in **Figure 4**.

Figure 3: The first screenshot (above) shows the main character and Shiori Fujisaki in a chibi art style (Rogers, 5:38:22). The second screenshot (below) shows Shiori Fujisaki as she appears in the visual novel segments of the game (Rogers, 0:09).
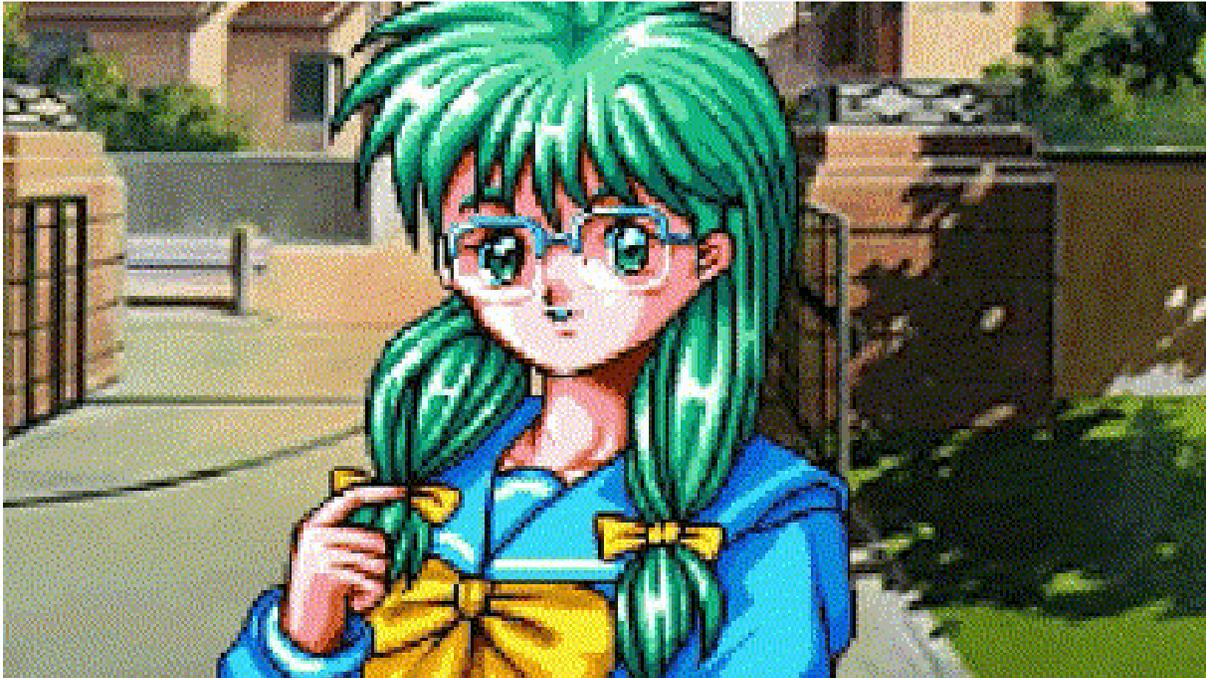
Figure 4: A demonstration of the facial cues that *Tokimeki Memorial* gives the player. In this example Mio Kisaragi is going from a slightly happy expression, to a neutral, and ending with an annoyed expression (Rogers, 40:41-:48). Each expression is tied to a different dialogue option in-game. If the GIF does not play, click the hyper link to watch the video directly.

While restorative nostalgia is all about a shared, idealized past, it only works if there's negative things to look past. *Tokimeki Memorial*, while allowing the player to fix their mistakes in high school, doesn't just hand the player all the answers and teleport them to the finish line. In some aspects, the game seeks to give the player the *full* high school experience, complete with opportunities to fail at high school *again*. Though, you could always load a past save this time.

One of the main ways the player can fail in *Tokimeki Memorial* is through its Bombing System, in which girls who are upset with you for one reason or another will spread bad rumors about you if you don't fix what's bothering them (3:24:41). The reasons range from denial of dates or denying a walk home with them after school, but a girl could also like you and still bomb you. It all depends on the girl in question. These bombs can be defused either by giving the girl a call, taking her on a date, or giving her a birthday gift if you time it right. While there's no denying the inherent sexism in having only the girls be the ones to cause these rumors, the act of spreading rumors in general seems more like a universal truth about the high school setting, as petty squabbles among teens are often at the forefront of high school drama, no matter the country. However, when we think of going back to high school as restoratively nostalgic, we conveniently forget just how contagious rumors were throughout our actual high school experience.

Butterfly Soup is a lot like *Tokimeki Memorial* in that it uses its visual aesthetic to invite the player into an idealized version of high school. All of *Butterfly Soup's* backgrounds are posterized real life photos (**Figure 5).** These representations of places are a lot like how our own minds remember places from our pasts. The natural obscurity of memories in general relates to what is called the Deese-Roediger-McDermott paradigm. Developed in 2017, this paradigm simply describes that through simple word association we can make up false memories, and that these extend to how we recall memories in general (Pardilla-Delgado). *Butterfly Soup* takes advantage of this by purposefully abstracting the backgrounds enough that we can project our own high school settings onto them.

It's kind of like Scott McCloud's theory of cartoon faces but applied to setting **(Figure 6).**

In his famous work about comic structure titled *Understanding Comics*, McCloud puts forth the theory of universality of cartoon imagery. This theory states that the more abstract a human face gets, the more people that it can describe. I believe that this is also true of settings as well to a certain extent. The more general a place is portrayed artistically, the more places it can describe. Brianna Lei allegedly went around her local town, took pictures, and then posturized them in photo editing software. Whether intentional or not, this causes the places in *Butterfly Soup* to look more general, and thus more familiar to anyone playing her game. Anyone could see their local baseball stadium or their local high school simply because their mind completes the gap that's made from the backgrounds being stylistically abstracted.
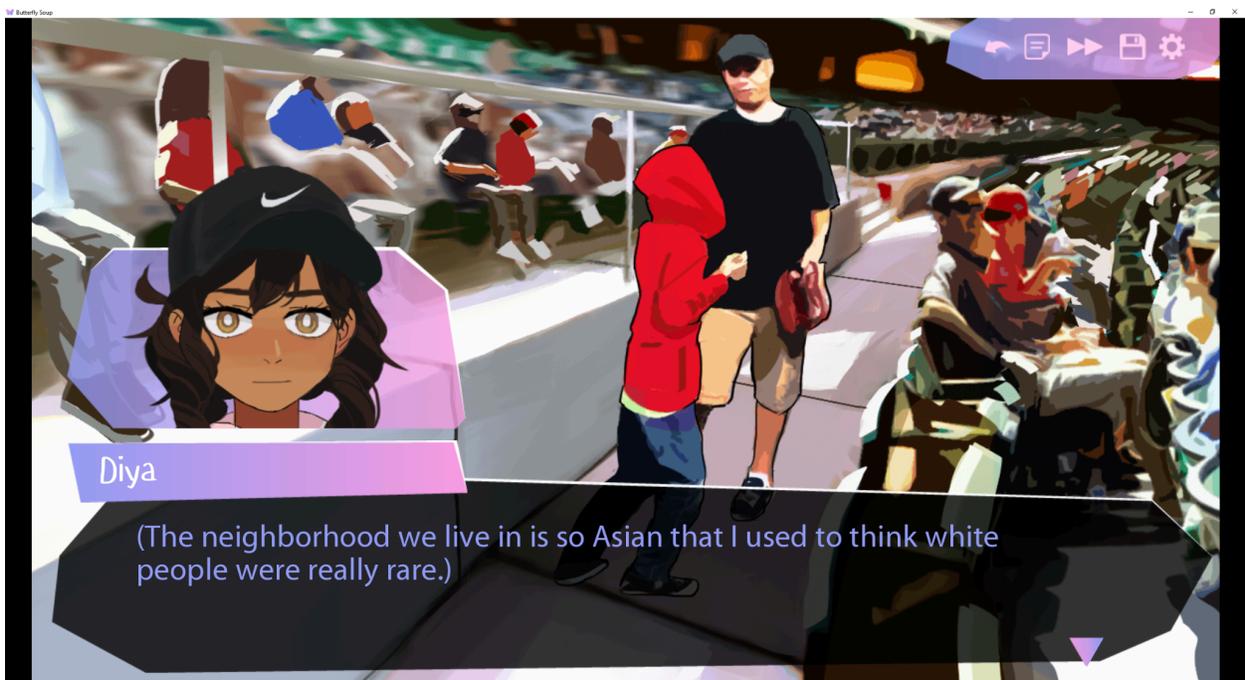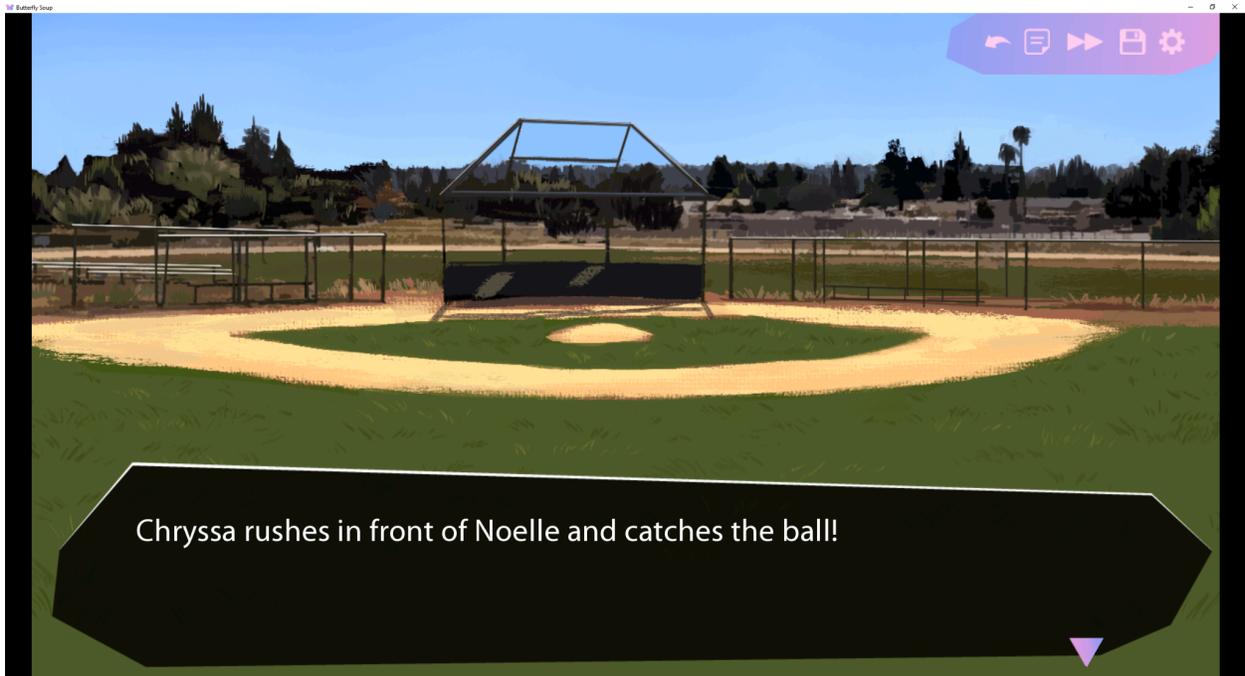
Figure 5: Screenshots of *Butterfly Soup* showing the posterized photos in the game.

Figure 6: The two panels in which Scott McCloud describes what he calls the "universality of cartoon imagery."

Where *Tokimeki Memorial* and *Butterfly Soup* split is through their music. *Tokimeki*

Memorial's music is pretty standard MIDI fare. It varies widely between genres of music, thus it's hard to really attach it to either form of nostalgia. *Butterfly Soup's* audio is thoroughly planted within the Lo-Fi genre. It's been described that Lo-Fi music is characteristically nostalgic because of its use of older instrumentation. This is most evidenced by its use of tape hisses, warbles, and the "muffled sounds of a poorly recorded sample." (Pageau). These layered effects create a sort of fuzzy remembrance that leaves the listener longing even if they're not sure what for. *Butterfly Soup* fills this gap in by supplying the memories of high school. The only two exceptions are Min-Seo's theme when she is angry, which instead is the exact opposite to all of the game's other themes as a screamo metal song; and the recorder version of "My Heart Will Go On" which plays during overly corny moments to emphasize their corniness.

In a more general sense, *Butterfly Soup* also features the growth of high school friendships as well as budding youthful romances (something it shares with *Tokimeki Memorial*). These themes also constitute restorative nostalgia because they represent the triumphs that we all have in high school. That time in our lives is about growth in all its forms, but typically we remember hanging out with our friends during lunch more than we remember that one quiz we got an A on in Biology.

Another thing that *Tokimeki Memorial* and *Butterfly Soup* have in common is how they both don't shy away from the more negative aspects of high school. While *Tokimeki Memorial* does this with the experience of high school directly, *Butterfly Soup* instead uses the surrounding events of 2008 to its advantage. In the game, the characters Diya and Akarsha are walking to school when they come across a group of protesters who are chanting their approval of Prop 8 **(Figure 7)**. Proposition 8 was an unusual step backwards in California's progressive nature as it

called into question whether or not marriage was valid only between a man and a woman. Gay marriage was already legal in the state, but when Prop 8 ended up passing, the civil right was taken away again. In 2010 it was called into question with *Hollingsworth v. Perry*. The advocates from Prop 8 during this time appealed this case all the way to the Supreme Court, who vacated the decision, thus making the district court's ban on Prop 8 the final decision (HUSL Library). This uneasy time in LGBTQIA+ rights history was felt by the entire population, and something most of them would like to forget.

Butterfly Soup could've very well ignored it and not much in the narrative would've changed, but with it included we get a more real story instead of a rose-tinted one. One could also argue that forgoing its inclusion would've gone against the LGBTQIA+ themes the game was going for. The game also grapples with the evolving nature of parent/child relationships that occur during high school. Near the end of the game, Diya simply comments on what her parents voted on the proposition, and without even meeting them we already know how they would feel if Diya came out of the closet to them (**Figure 8).**

Figure 7: Diya and Akarsha noticing the protesting crowd on their way to school.

Figure 8: Diya and Akarsha discussing the results of Prop 8 passing.

Conclusion

Tokimeki Memorial and *Butterfly Soup* took place during economic downturns that featured earthquakes, changes in music, and a mingling between both Japanese and American cultures. Both games seek to place the player in high school either by giving them an avatar (*Tokimeki Memorial*) or by placing them in the bodies of characters who, as a group, go through their own personal narratives (*Butterfly Soup*). By comparing them with one another, we can see that both cultures featured in both games value the rememberings of specific experiences that happened during high school. These examples of reflective nostalgia are specific to the time in which they occurred, but aren't necessarily tied to high school itself. The highlights of *Tokimeki Memorial* occur during dates outside of school, and *Butterfly Soup's* use of references allow the player to think on the media they consumed when not in school.

The use of high school as a setting then is from a purely restorative standpoint from both cultures. However, both games, and by extension both cultures, aren't afraid to remember the pain, the *algos*, that comes with all nostalgia. This is one way in which Richy Srirachanikorn's definition of restorative nostalgia doesn't fit in the way it's employed in either *Tokimeki Memorial* or *Butterfly Soup*. "The good ol' days" of high school exist as either an archipelago of moments that the player sails past one after another, or restrained to only existing in the atmosphere or background. They take note of restorative nostalgia, but they don't fall into the trap of reveling in it. In this way, both games are reminding us that to remember a past moment in life as pure bliss is to forgo all the negative moments and what those moments taught us. As a player this means avoiding the bombs of girls and being reminded of a bad piece of legislation. As a person it means understanding that, "When you make a game that feels like a person, you

make a player that feels bad to treat that person like an object," (Rogers 4:26:40) and recognizing the unease a court decision can have on your civil rights as you enter the adult world. These negative moments contrast the blissful ignorance that restorative nostalgia calls its idealized home.

These games both reflect their cultures by what they purposefully choose to both represent and leave out of an idealized high school experience. *Butterfly Soup*, as an American made visual novel, prefers reflective nostalgia to restorative, and it evokes this reflective nostalgia by jamming the game with as many references to 2008 American culture as it possibly can. *Tokimeki Memorial* on the other hand prefers restorative nostalgia because its main goal is to have the player do high school better a second time. Both games are careful in the ways in which they employ restorative nostalgia, however. In short, games treat nostalgic experiences with more nuance than we do when we reminisce, and that makes sense when we understand that good art is a true reflection of the culture in which it resides in.

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