Teenage Dreams

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Introduction

Although the linearity of time and the world's history is commonly understood through Before Christ (BC) and After Death/Anno Domini (AD) (Declercq, 2000), there is perhaps good argument to be made that contemporary history could even be further segmented with Before Internet (BI) and After Internet (AI) (Bonus points for having the same abbreviation as Artificial Intelligence, another fast growing and influential system, and extra bonus points for the potential added confusion in speech when AI is referred in the time of AI). The argument will be made in this essay that the continuing growth of the internet has altered our perception of time and thus compacting it, causing a *glitch in sensory perception* affecting the way we look at history, time and conform a meaning for our individual selfs in the terms of a creative output in fashion. We will look at nostalgia as the glitch and how the internet has affected it.

The image of a child listening to his or her grandparents' stories, pains, struggles, joys of the yesteryear and being in absolute fascination is not a strange image. In fact, many of us might have had the exact same memories as a child listening to stories about the wars that plagued their youth or perhaps how they worked up a new life. But that was a time of BI, when the stories people told us is all we had between a pancake breakfast and playtime. Today, however, with a quick search on the internet, we are able to find stories of the same timeline in the multitude, pains, struggles and happiness of many who lived in the same time period, beyond and after. The stories that can fascinate us is not just ones from our grandparents but everyones grandparents and there are a lot of stories to be in awed by, to be learnt from and to experience. We have effectively compacted time and history to a seemingly flat circle where every time is instantly available with the access of the internet. The awe of an untold or unimaginable story is eroding as a myriad of 'untold' or 'unimaginable' stories are available. This flattening of vast history spanning thousands of countable years to an immediate form of return (Leong et al., 2009) renders *stories* more problematic that it already is in terms of factuality, just as a grandparent through no fault of his or her own may contain memory bias (a condition when a

recalled memory may be different from what actually happened), the internet will also contain this but almost institutionalized. In a strange but not so strange way, the past revives itself like no time has passed at all. This coupled with how we as people relate with the past as a form of analysis to a future and fuel in creativity (van Tilburg et al., 2015) can pull us deep into an un-experienced past.

Fashion in the 2020s

Fashion as an artistic field and commercial business has for a long time been defined, in one part, for its circularity in designs, concepts and trends (He & McAuley, 2016). The commercial concept that fashion has its trends cycling like clockwork is not a strange one to anyone old enough to notice how there are many similarities in how people dress in everyday life to a bygone era, either experienced by the self or seen via imagery. For example, the year 2020 has seen a revival of fashion from the 1990s, from combat boots to cargo pants to denim, many remnants of the 90s have been *returning* (Adhav, 2020). One such example is Dr Martens, an English boot manufacturer that in the '90s was a staple in the grunge fashion scene, who made exceptional growth in 2020 with revenue rising 48% and direct-to-consumer sales recorded an even higher rise of 51% (Permira, 2020). Apart from the growth and revival of influential fashion companies from the 1990s, we have seen trends from large and traditional fashion houses invoking and validating the return to the 1990s and beyond.
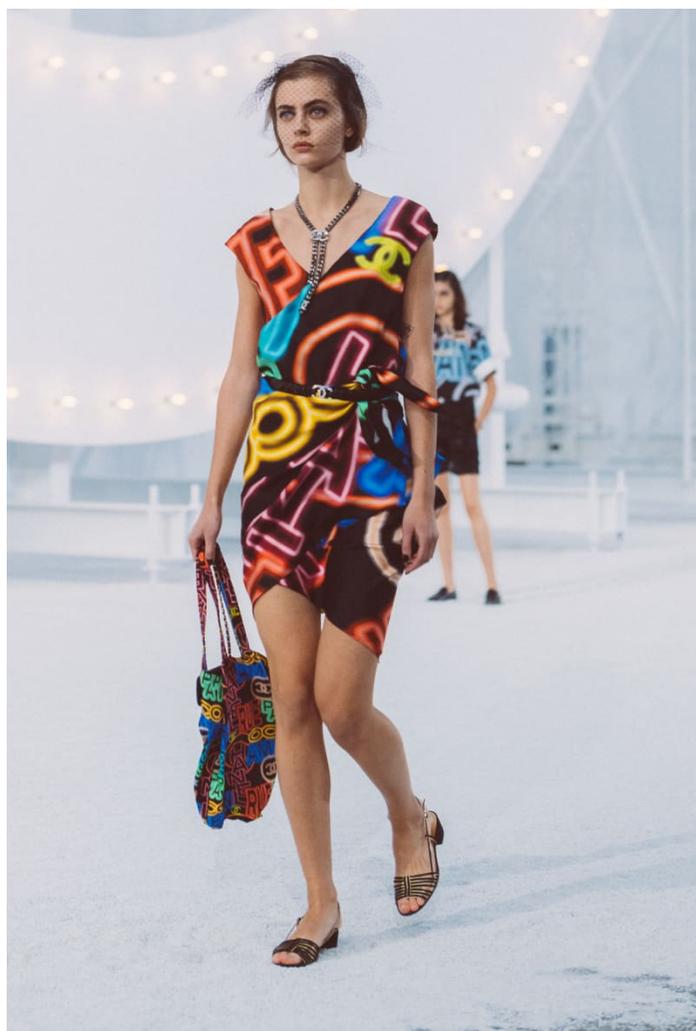
Figure 1: Chanel (2020) SS21 https://www.chanel.com/images/c_scale/c_crop,h_3015,w_2040,x_1028,y_148/q_auto,f_auto,fl_lossy,dpr_auto/w_802/FSH-1602007826156-spring-summer-2021-033.jpg

The recent Spring/Summer 2021 shows (that took place in October 2020) of Chanel showed blur neon-text prints (Figure 1, 2020), clearly inspired by the neon signs that were a symbol of 1960s Americana (let us also ignore the huge Hollywood sign recreation that further affirms the inspiration of vintage Americana).

Figure 2: Celine (2020) SS21 https://www.vogue.com/
fashion-shows/spring-2021-ready-to-wear/celine/
slideshow/collection#29

Celine had collegiate styled shirts under slightly oversized denim jackets and baseball caps (Figure 2, 2020). This preppy American collegiate style was what made Ralph Lauren popular in the 1990s, the movie Clueless and other artifacts of pop culture that mirrored onto the style of the era.

Valentino collaborated with Levi's (Figure 3, 2020), an iconic brand for many subcultures from the 50s to the 2000s worn by the likes of Marlon Brando to Marilyn Monroe to Kurt Cobain. Levi's helped define the look of the 1970s-90s with their iconic 501 jeans and denim jackets.

Figure 3: Valentino (2020) SS21 https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2021-ready-to-wear/valentino/slideshow/collection#44

It is important to note that the creative directors of all 3 companies lived through the 1990s, Virginie Viard of Chanel was born in the early 60s, Hedi Slimane of Celine and Pierpaolo Piccioli of Valentino in the late 60s. In fact all three were in their 20s, an influential age range in the forming of nostalgia being the 'prime of youth' (Munawar et al., 2018). It is related to a phenomenon called the "reminiscence bump" (Rubin et all., 1998) that informs of an adults ability to remember with clarity and fondness of their youth.

Nostalgia, as we have seen, can be a strong source of inspiration and a tool for fashion designers to craft a concept for a collection. It is can also form the basis of an entire design language like the case of Madame Grès, who used the nostalgia of an era she did not live in (Ancient Greece) to sculpt clothing much akin to sculpting pillars from marble (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Madame Grès Plissé at the Musée Bourdelle in Paris (2011) SS21 http://ououma.blogspot.com/2011/07/madame-gres.html

She became influential in the 1940s for creating a technique of fine pleating to create column like figure of a women. In the case of Madame Grès, nostalgia created an overall design language but in more contemporary examples nostalgia, as we saw with the 2021 collections of Chanel, Celine and Valentino, informs seasonal language otherwise known as trends.

What is Nostalgia?

Before going on, learning the history of the word is key to understanding nostalgia's relevancy in contemporary society as it in its self is an etymological nightmarish walk in a linguistically relative culture with the word having cues from its origin of ancient Greek to what it means today in English and modern Greek. Deriving from two separate Greek words and first put together in 1688 by Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer as part of a medical dissertation while he was a student, *nostos* meaning the returning of home or homecoming and *alga* meaning pain, it was first used as a medical condition for soldiers longing to return home til they became ill. It was only in the 19th century when this medical condition of *nostalgia* was proven wrong and the word morphed into its second state as we know of if it today. Nostalgia, now, is not related to a medical condition that requires painful non-lethal shock treatments but more of a poetic description of ones state of being. As the Merriam-Webster dictionary says a wistful yearning for return to a past period, nostalgia is a feeling felt by any healthy person. ("nostalgia." Merriam-Webster.com. 2020. https://www.merriam-webster.com (29 Nov 2020)).

There have been many studies on nostalgia and how it impacts our mind and the findings have been nothing but positive, it is understood as being an important part of a healthy mind (Wildschut et al., 2006). Amongst it's many benefits to the psychological mind (Routledge et al., 2013), nostalgia is found to activate positivity in self, improve social interactions, provides positive reaffirmations and acts as an ongoing reservoir of memory (Wildschut et al., 2006)

If nostalgia is positive for the healthy mind and acts as a required reservoir of human memory that is constantly being deposited, then invoking nostalgia requires a reservoir of memory and there is no bigger reservoir/archive than the internet and thus the possible cause of this increasing temporal hook of nostalgia in fashion is that in young designers, unlike Viard, Slimane and Piccioli, who never grew up in the specific period their referencing.

The LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessey) Prize is a premier annual award of EUR 300,000, created in 2013, to give support to young fashion designers around the world. Since its inception, many of its finalists and winners have gone on to build firm careers in the fashion world. Some of the past finalists include Simone Rocha, Tim Coppens, Craig Green, (Rocha, Coppens and Green all have a successful brand under their name) Matthew Williams (now at Givenchy), Demna Gvasalia (now at Balenciaga) and Virgil Abloh who is now the creative director of Louis Vuitton. It is safe to say, considering none of the names mentioned actually won their respective years, that being a finalist alone for the award is an achievement worth celebrating. As part of the 2020 edition of the award, 8 young designers were selected as finalists and winners (Petrarca, 2020) (LVMH making the decision on part of the COVID epidemic affecting small businesses worldwide and chose not to just elect 1 winner but all finalists to share the prize) Priya Ahluwalia (27 years old), has said she references 1990s rave culture (May, 2020) (Petrarca, 2020) which she could not have been part of Cheraf Tajer (33 years old) clearly referenced the 1970s with Jacqueline Kennedys signature sunglasses worn in the late '70s. Nicholas Daley (25 years old) takes inspiration from the Raggae music scene that his parents were part of (Petrarca, 2020), and introduced to him, in the '70s.

While the other 4 designers, apart from Tomo Koizumi, in the shortlist, still referenced their own culture, there was no clear indication of a nostalgic swoop of another time period. If 3 of the 8 brightest young talents in fashion sought nostalgia of someone else's experiences, then it is worth exploring this phenomenon.

Like mentioned earlier, the internet being a core reservoir of nostalgia remains a strong interest. The internet has grown rapidly since the first web browser and website in 1991, the number of internet users in 2000 was a relatively minuscule 413 million and fast forward to 2016, that number jumped to over 3.4 billion (Bond, 2019). The rise of social media and Wikipedia has seen the archive that is the internet grow from 17 million websites in 2000 to 1.8 billion in 2020 (Internetlivestats) causing an information overload and for time to be bottled.

The internet has and is continuing to effectively pancake history and compacting time as we know it into a level plain to be searched, learned, referenced and invoke nostalgia. Before the internet, learning about a subject or time required research in libraries slowly combing through books, talking to people who lived through that period (if possible) and processing that information in text before coming to a conclusion or a feeling of that period. The internet, now, is making this much faster, easier, accessible which is good in its own way but perhaps it automates the final process of analytically thinking of a 'conclusion of time' as it also tends to form an opinion for the researcher (Wildschut, 2016). And this forming of an opinion means that its value as nostalgia is questioned. If what we gain with the internet is its ability to time-shift with as much clarity as needed, meaning learning about what we want to about a time period only fortifies our nostalgia and romanticizes then perhaps as fashion designers, there is a sense of seeing the 'greener side' of the garden because with fashion design there is always a notion of beauty or aesthetics preexisting any temporal trends (The idea of an fashion object being an aesthetic object (Venkatesh et al., 2010))

This can make nostalgia in fashion little more than a plastering on of a concept. When the investigation, as a 20-30 year old designer about the 1960s, a period not lived therefore experienced by the person, the online archive is being scrolled through not because of homesickness but because it is just a new reality of a collective history. This means the view of the researcher/designer is no longer one of linear time but of a non-time continuum where

anachronistic details like mixing a 1960s inspired textile print on a 1980s silhouette is welcomed and negated because as Panchasi (2006) has questioned the assumptions of defying history being unauthentic.

It is no surprise then that prominent Belgian designer Raf Simons has returned, for the Spring/ Summer 2021 collection, to the past and concocted an amalgamation of references from the 60s to the 90s with music, the punk movement, movies (such as The Breakfast Club to Scream) and even returned back to his own work from the 2000s. The collection, aptly named (and inspired the title of this essay) "Teenage Dream" involved the oversized and heavy shoulder pads of the 1970s, the bell bottom pants from the 1980s (Figure 5, 2020), psychedelic space-age prints from the 1960s. A reference from the 1970s song by T. Rex, #2 on the charts in 1972 September, featuring Ringo Starr and Elton John was on multiple pieces of the collection with prints saying "Welcome Home The Children of the Revolution (Figure 6, 2020). Even old portraits from yearbooks were used as embellishments on jackets (Figure 7, 2020). The collection in a way personified the internet and its seemingly non-temporal archive of nostalgia, a compacting of various inspirations from various time periods put together for todays audience.

Nostalgia for designers like Simons gives people the ability to shift temporally to re-re-live, re-live and live through fashion and clothing but very often It is nostalgia for other peoples' feelings and experiences. The audience to fashion becomes the involved in unexperienced cultures via artifices of said culture, it represents the cultural collective memories of someone else. Kurt Cobain's grunge experiences may be personal and secret but the artifacts are visually present, the ripped jeans, sewing patches onto clothes and more.

Perhaps nostalgia in fashion is unavoidable because nostalgia universally sells and companies exploit this (Wildschut, 2006). Not just in fashion nostalgia is a strong pull, Ian Anderson, a senior research scientist at Spotify (a leading music streaming service) said using the concept

Figure 5: Raf Simons SS2021 Look 50

Figure 6: Raf Simons SS2021 Look 12

Figure 7: Raf Simons SS2021 Look 30

of two types of nostalgia, the generational ("I remember the fall of the twin towers") and personal ("I remember my first kiss") that "It became clear that if we could isolate a personalized nostalgic signal over a more generalized "Top 40 in High School", we could create a really powerful experience." and this thought and eventual experiment resulted in Spotify's Your Time Capsule feature — a playlist that is meant to trigger nostalgia from your personal listening of songs (Reynolds, 2017).

Nostalgia and the age of the internet is altering the meaning of before or a long time ago whilst ignoring any negative aspects of the same past at least when it comes to the fashion industry and instead it produces an romanticized and escapist dream of a bygone time via a manufactured commercial need and designers appeal.

The cures for nostalgia (as a disease in the 17th - 18th centuries) was non-lethal shock treatments or the best treatment was just to send the person back home. Nostalgia now is not a homesickness for a place but rather being time-sick, being sick of ones time and the only cure is escapism. It is not a place we can go rather a place we can only pretend to be in with artifacts of the past in fashion, movies, pop culture, music and the experiences of others. The internet constantly surrounds us with the past and the view of time increasingly becomes less linear bordering on messy. It is not a case of good or bad as nostalgia can very well produce thought provoking and time relevant work. Nostalgia can still be a tool to carry forgotten and lost cultural memory into the current zeitgeist. It can also make social and ecological change, nostalgia for a time when garments were made to last can allow a person to stand against the ecological and social issues generated by the fast-fashion industry.

With its ability to negate and break temporal barriers, can internet nostalgia prove to be the tool for a new understanding of contemporary fashion? A new understanding where *before*, *after*,

present & *future* can continually be blurred and out of that blur, focus into the actuality of teenage *dreams* where temporalities no longer exist? Time will tell.

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