

# NOSTALGIA

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*"IT'S ALL ABOUT WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD."*

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INTRODUCTION	4
A HISTORY OF NOSTALGIA	5
WHICH NOSTALGIA DO YOU HAVE?	6
NOSTALGIA IN FASHION	
COUNTER CULTURE	8
SELF-REFLECTION	10
IT'S ALL ABOUT WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD	12
REFERENCE LIST	14

What are you wearing now? How did you choose what to wear today? Did you buy it yourself or did anyone give it to you? Are there any stains on your shirt? Who did that? As Routledge (2015) points out, “*nostalgia today is mostly for things, not home, religion, or politics*”; clothes, for instance, bring back a lot of memories and make people feel nostalgic. According to a WGSN report, nostalgia is a megatrend in the 2020s fashion, especially for the young generation. There are many hashtags on social media which are related to memory and nostalgia; for instance, anemoia means nostalgia for times you’ve never known; kidult refers to a trend of fashion, entertainment, and events that can remind people of their childhood; and newtro is a portmanteau of the words combining “new” and “retro” and referring to the modernised retro design styles. It is believed that “[n]ostalgia is a universally understood concept” (Routledge, 2015), but why are people at present attracted by nostalgia even though they have their own life experiences and unique memories? And how does nostalgia affect fashion?

## A History of Nostalgia



The term ‘nostalgia’ was coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in 1688, referring to the pain caused by the desire to return home, and including “*constant thinking about home, sadness, anxiety, insomnia, physical weakness, disordered eating and fever*” (Routledge, 2015). The conceptualization of nostalgia has changed since then. Psychologists, in the 19th century, began to believe that nostalgia also evokes pleasant feelings, while scholars discovered that nostalgia is a highly relationship-focused experience which brings the feelings of belongingness with family and friends (Routledge, 2015). In the age of marketing, in the 20th century, researchers established that people were fond of the products they consumed in their late teens and early twenties (Routledge, 2015). Since the early 21st century, various industries from the entertainment sector to the food sector started to employ nostalgia-based strategies and products to attract customers. For instance, Disneyland has promoted old Western village experiences; Nintendo has brought back to the market the Nintendo Classic Mini NES which is a replica of a popular gaming system of the 1980s; and McDonald has revived the McDonald’s iconic retro character cartoon, the Hamburglar, which was also popular in 1971.

# Which nostalgia do you have?

## Communal Nostalgia

Communal nostalgia is an ache for the disappearing world of the preindustrial village and a longing for lost places and pasts due to the rapid revolution at the end of the eighteenth century (e.g., lost places and communities). By 1800, nostalgia affected the multitude of Europeans with a desire for lost places and pasts, and that emotional feelings for the past were strongly tied to communities. While everything was moving faster and bringing new things and new times in the industrial age, people's memories still stayed in many places; museums and monuments, schools, and public shrines through words, symbols, and artefacts.



## Fashion Nostalgia

Fashion nostalgia is the past fashion and style that represent a former era (e.g., art, clothing, jewellery, furnishings, architecture, and artificial landscapes). The objects of fashion nostalgia are products of a commercial culture, and there have repeatedly been “revivals of the styles of the past: neoclassical architecture in the late eighteenth century and renewed interest in American colonial furnishings in the mid-nineteenth century, for example” (Cross, 2015).

## Familial Nostalgia

Familial nostalgia is a longing for the past which is a more private, especially familial form (e.g., handcrafted heirlooms, family portraits, souvenirs). It is more domestic and personal than the other forms of nostalgia and is evoked and realised through personal possessions. Cross (2015) points out that “preserving and displaying heirlooms and portraits was a practice long associated with the aristocracy and their claims of ancient lineage and authority”.

## Consumed Nostalgia

Consumed nostalgia is a longing for the goods of the past that came from a personal experience of growing up in the stressful world of fast capitalism, which emerged in the twentieth century. The origins are in fast capitalism and personal memories of the ephemeral commercial goods first experienced in childhood and youth. Consumed nostalgia makes “there and then” into the “here and now” in pristine specificity and accuracy; the growing #Kidult trend on Tik Tok and Instagram preserves joyous and emotional moments in snapshots, neither professional nor iconic family-portrait photographs.



# *Nostalgia in Fashion*

*Why is nostalgia a trend in fashion?  
How does nostalgia influence fashion?*

## Counter Culture

Like the hippie movement of the 1960s, which featured psychedelic prints, high-ligher colours, and mismatched patterns, and the grunge style of the 1980s, inspired by Punk and Rock music, fashion has provided a way of expressing political and lifestyle philosophies, both visually and by putting forward counterculture values. Also nostalgia has countercultural characteristics as “*consumed nostalgia often has been and remains a subtle protest against consumerism*” (Cross, 2015, PAGE). Collecting nostalgic items - such as vintage clothes, old toys, and vinyl records - means turning them into

something unique, to be admired in a world of mass production and information overload. The act of wearing vintage clothes and old accessories involves saving items of the past that some other people may deny or ignore. In addition, nostalgia has an aspect of the escapism from adulating, reconnecting with one’s own inner child. People today wear vintage clothes, rejecting the mainstream society and hectic lifestyles, whilst longing for past memories.

# Self-reflection

In the 21st century, nostalgia is more about micro-identities; it binds together scattered individuals around seemingly ephemeral things that are meaningful to them personally. This aspect of nostalgia gives people an opportunity to think about themselves. Nostalgia can be triggered by unpleasant emotions such as feelings of loneliness and social exclusion. However, when people delve into the past nostalgically, they tend to reflect on their own life experiences which were personally meaningful and could also be joyous (Routledge, 2015). Nostalgia, and looking back at memories, reminds people of be-

longingness, making them feel loved, supported and socially competent. For instance, objects of nostalgia are often reminders of people, and can inspire positive self-views and optimism about the future.

Naturally, people can be drawn to comforting and nostalgic reminders of a more innocent time. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance,



Bettina by Georges Dambier, Paris, 1953.

many people have tended to feel nostalgic when experiencing the unpleasant emotion of isolation. The Youth Trends Report shows that 84% of UK 16-24s, or the millennial and the Gen Z, have experienced mental health issues during the pandemic (Pinkett, 2021), and these people's nostalgic feelings have revived the four fashion trends: Y2K, which refers to fashion styles of the late 1990s and early noughties; indie sleaze and twee fashion of the early 2000 to 2010; and old money fashion of the noughties (Hoffowe, 2022). One of the reasons why nostalgia is a young people's fashion trend is because these people use the internet as a

resource to research nostalgia and nostalgic fashion. Routledge (2015) shows nostalgia Websites positively contribute to psychological and social well-being.

Objects of nostalgia, including clothes and accessories, support and maintain a story sense of identity which reinforces people's confidence that they know themselves.

# "It's all about what makes me feel good"

Interview with people in the street: What's your most memorable item do you still keep with you?



I'm a kind of hoarder, and I tend to save everything. The most sentimental thing is a necklace, which I bought when my cat died. My cat is gone, but its memory and this necklace keep being with me.



I had belonged to a tennis club team at that time for three years. When I was in a slump, I wasn't able to handle pressure and cried a lot every time I lost a game. One day, I found this pretty blue towel at a shop. I decided to carry and bring it to practice and all matches as a lucky charm. The towel always consoled me and brought me comfort and luck.



I am from the Twiggy era of skinny, go-go boots, and a shapeless mini dress with bright colours. The Twiggy's style makes me love myself more, boosting my body confidence.



I bought a gray shirt in the 1990s, and I still keep wearing it. I don't know why but I can't throw it away. It's just comfortable and it makes me happy.



I'm not a person who keeps stuff, but I do keep a few memorable things. My nanny gave me this simple and classic necklace. Personally, I like a bold design and bright colours like pink and purple, but I love this necklace because wearing it reminds me of the days my nanny and I had a good time.



I bought this coat at a vintage store in US. I love vintage stuff because no one gets the same item.

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Memories bring back you...