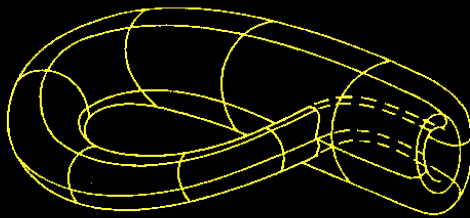


LIVE PLAYERS



8

The generation of new tactics, strategies, coordination mechanisms, and so on entails the production of new, useful knowledge. Thus, a live player must have a living tradition of knowledge. For the tradition of knowledge to be living, it must have at least one theorist, among other things. An individual live player may fulfill multiple roles in themselves, including being one's own theorist.

SAMO BURJA

■ □ □ □ □ □

In the first part of this report, we noted the social stack is in flux. New hyper-agentic forces—at present, mostly human (brands, corporations, NGOs, internet personalities, cults, intelligence services), but increasingly post-human (memes, algorithms, LLMs, AI, drones, UFOs)—are overturning the status quo.

Not everyone knows what to make of change. Grill-pilled boomers aren't interested in the future. They can barely grok the present. Movie-brained millennials just want a happy ending to...whatever is going on. Or for the apocalypse to hurry up and happen already. The suspense is killing them! For the children of the end of history (and their parents) it's hard to get back in the historical flow. Wasn't this stuff all figured out already?

In this report, we address the aesthetic trajectory of our current moment. Which trends are stuck in a doom loop of nostalgia? Which offer a path forward?

ZOMBIE TRENDS



What will the twenties look like? Now, you may be saying—“But, it’s almost 2024! We already know!” But like Andy Warhol said, it takes a few years for the aesthetic of a new decade to cook. The early nineties looked like the late eighties—neon, spandex, and hairspray on the low end, yuppie sophistication on the high end. The early eighties looked like the late seventies—post-disco, post-punk. And the early seventies looked like the late sixties—shaggy-haired hippie shit. I could go on...

This happens because trends that began in the last decade don’t hit a brick wall whenever the ball drops on a year that ends in zero. Case in point: I recently introduced a French friend to *Seinfeld*. I chose a 1992 episode, “The Contest”—the one where Jerry, Elaine, George, and Kramer have a no-fap competition. Ten minutes into the show, he pressed me on the airdate: “Are you sure this show is from the nineties? It looks very eighties to me.” IMDb confirmed I was right.

If there are two trends which fight this description today—the early twenty-twenties mostly looking like the late twenty-tens—it’s hype dads and bourgeois normcore moms. Both aesthetics are at such a late stage of commodification, many would grimace at even describing them as such.

And yet Seth Rogen and Jonah Hill both paired grey hair with tie-dye fits on streaming shows this year (Apple’s *Platonic* and Netflix’s *Those People*, respectively). Balenciaga is showing yoga pants. Bottega Veneta is selling mom jeans for five thousand dollars—each exploring the limits of post-inflationary, superluxe price points.

Last year, I got a number of interview requests concerning the “return of normcore.” But I’m not sold on the idea that it’s back. Are the trend’s early adopters looping back? Or never moving forward? Millennials are unironically adulting now. It’s not a revival, just more of the same.

The style was never interesting in and of itself. Light wash denim, tennis shoes, and athleisure are more symptomatic of anti-style, if anything. It captivated the press because of who was wearing it: art kids, fashion kids, socialites, and the like. Dressing like an ur-suburbanite is edgy if you’re a 23-year-old club kid in New York. But wearing dad shoes as a dad? The irony has folded in on itself.

As we age, the meta of the social status games becomes money rather than style. When you’re young you express yourself with your clothes. When you’re old, you express yourself with your house. Thus, we see millennial taste migrating to affluent suburbia—the place trends go to die.

Eccentric homeware products address this demand: a Carhartt WIP x Rocket espresso machine, Loewe tomato leaf scented soap, the Kith x Bugaboo stroller, a \$250,000 custom Chrome Hearts door, for sale by its original Malibu owner. (Hat tip to Virgil Abloh, whose 2019 IKEA collab pre-figured all this.)

Like art in a white cube gallery, these oddities live comfortably amidst the plaster walls, blonde wood, and streamlined accent furniture of the bourgeois normcore interior. Following the high-low logic of street style, decorators offset the classic with the kitsch.



LIVE PLAYERS

**to freeze
yourself in
time is the
obvious choice**



On the exterior of newly renovated suburban homes, a for-everyone-aesthetic is imposed by real estate flippers: pale stucco, black-framed windows, gunmetal grey roofs. Market optimized homewares that can be resold on StockX. Market optimized homes that can be rented on VRBO—in a pinch. Minimalism is an architectural expression of economic precarity.

Not much has changed as far as clothing goes for hype dads. The big brands here are obvious: Online Ceramics, Nike, and Supreme. The references are obvious too: teenagers, streetwear, nostalgia. We see a lot of “going out” hoodies (as a designer once told me he calls them), bomber jackets, and techwear. The hype dad loves his Apple Watch. He loves racing to buy the next drop on Nike’s SNKRS app. He’s probably on Ozempic, too. (If he can afford it, that is.) How else can he fit into all his classic fits?

Like Bryan Johnson, the anti-aging influencer, hype dads want to stay young forever.

For those more concerned with being ageless than being youthful, the ambiguity of high-end basics holds a special appeal. Aimé Leon Dore is the high-end brand that provides expensive—but not ostentatious—looks for the sartorially cautious. They won big when stealth wealth became the watch word during the last season of *Succession*. Cream knits make everyone look rich, so long as you can keep them clean. Unlike its thrifty predecessor, bourgeois normcore desperately wants people to notice its subtle status signaling.

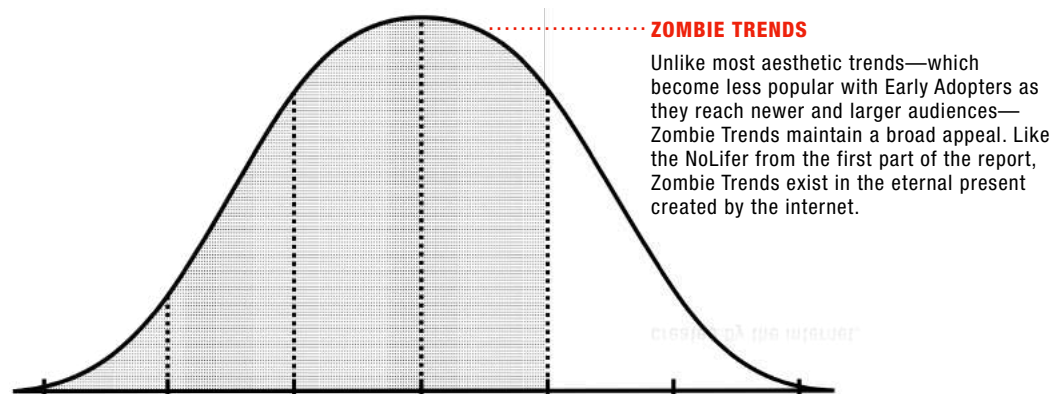
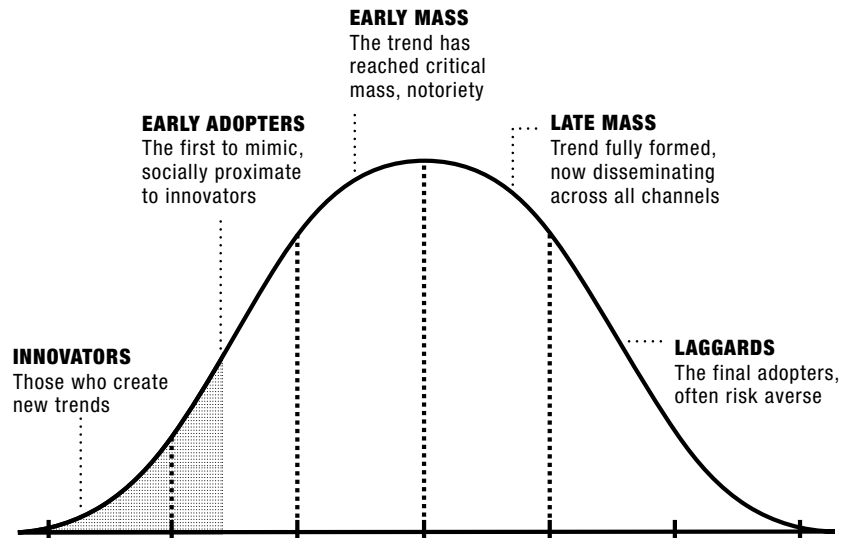
For millennials, the most economically anxious demographic of the moment, the implosion of formal status codes presents a problem. Putting on a suit is no longer perfunctory. If anything it’s transgressive. To freeze yourself in time, style and all, is the obvious choice. The ideal is to

remain the same, but with more money. Youth and beauty are more important indicators than clothes could ever be. The rich have plastic surgery, trainers, GLP-1 agonists, and more. We have commodified the previously uncommodifiable.

Elites can buy immortality. So why haven't you?

This is the contradiction of our era: we want an ever-changing dynamic culture, but we want to remain the same.

LIVE PLAYERS







HYPE DAD

BRANDS



Online Ceramics



Nike



Marni

REFERENCES



Teenagers



Streetwear



Nostalgia

STYLE



"Going Out" Hoodie



MA-1 Bomber Jacket



Techwear

GEAR



Ozempic



SNKRS



Watches



BRANDS



Pattern Brands

AIMÉ LEON DORE

Aimé Leon Dore

BOTTEGA VENETA

Bottega Veneta

REFERENCES



Minimalism



Nineties



Stealth Wealth

STYLE



Monochrome



Sportswear



Mom Jeans

GEAR



Homewares



New Balances



Camping

BOURGEOIS NORMCORE

HIPSTER DITCH

LIVE PLAYERS

We're addicted to 19th century myths. We presume the present is more alive than the past. Industrialization did cause a break with the past. We called it modernism. We expected the big breakthrough of the 20th century, digitization to have the same explosive, creative effect.

Yet, we find our fully digitized culture producing either stasis or churn, not progress. Change still comes but it feels more like a hack, a remix, a mash-up—which in and of itself feels like a return to the eclecticism of the early 21st century hipster.



The life cycle of a trend follows the same adoption curve a new technology does. Although unlike, say the iPhone (which went from something rich tech bros owned to something young parents use as a pacifier for their toddlers) aesthetic trends tend to become less popular with the demo that originally promoted them as they reach newer and larger audiences.

The first fall-off—let's call it the hipster ditch—happens when a trend transitions from early adopters to early mass market. Many trends fail to launch right here. One of two things happens.

Either they lack the commodification potential of other trends, i.e. they're too complex or avant-garde for a mass audience—NFTs are an example of this—

Or the first wave of commodification and promotion alienates the original audience too quickly and the trend loses cachet before achieving liftoff.

To start us off, let's begin by looking at some trends that are successfully making the leap: the Y2K aesthetic and white trash chic.

Like the hype dad and the normcore mom, they're retrospective in orientation. But unlike zombie trends forever stuck in the past, these trends are mining the past for inspiration and ideas.

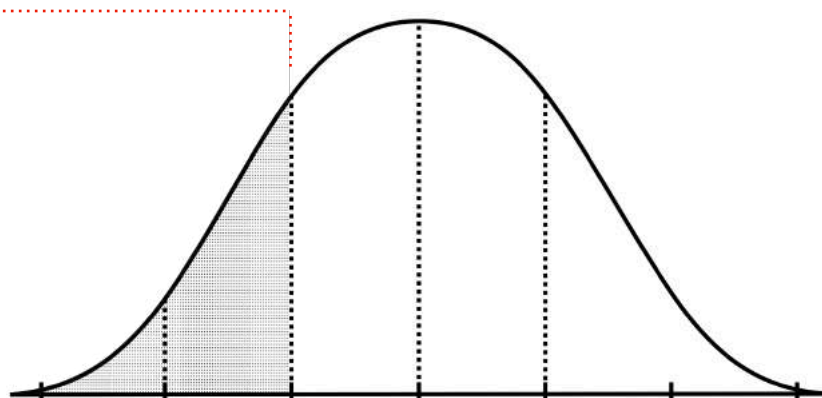
The combinatronic, synthetic style of the millennium was revitalized by the endless options of Shein. The authenticity-obsessed urban lumberjack has been re-rendered through the lens of polarized, transgressive politics.

If these trends are not promoting newness per se, they are certainly promoting neo-ness. We are dealing with two fundamentally different types of nostalgia here.

One involves zoomers looking back beyond the horizon of their own personal experience. The other involves millennials cosplaying their own youth. Personal nostalgia and historical nostalgia are not the same.

Being stuck in the past, is a new phenomenon enabled by advances in medical technology. Being inspired by the past, has been a hallmark of Western civilization since the Renaissance. So complaints about the latter seem far less well-founded...

HIPSTER DITCH





BRANDS



Praying



Carhartt



Bass Pro Shops

REFERENCES



Hunting



Midwest



Religion

STYLE



Camo



Distressed Denim



Americana

GEAR



Kitsch



Trucker Hats



Oakley's

WHITE TRASH CHIC





BRANDS

SHEIN



Blumarine

Shein

Diesel

Blumarine

REFERENCES



Cyberpunk



Paris Hilton



3D Visuals

STYLE



Corsets



Miniskirts



Digital Prints

GEAR



Shield Sunglasses



It Bags

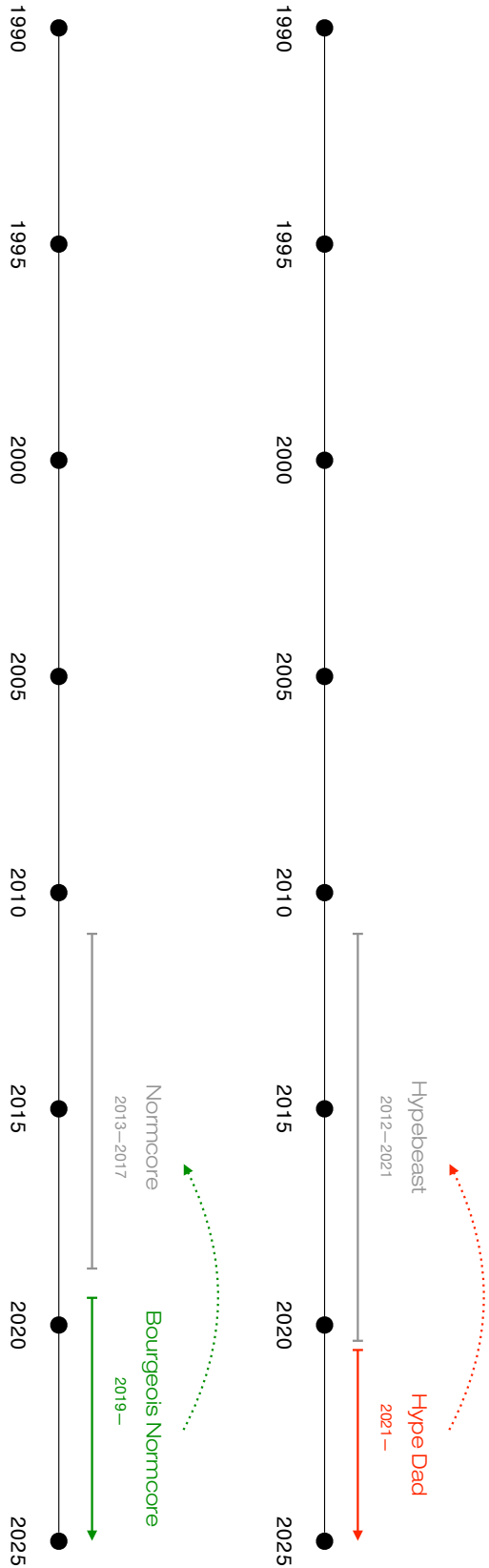


Retrotech

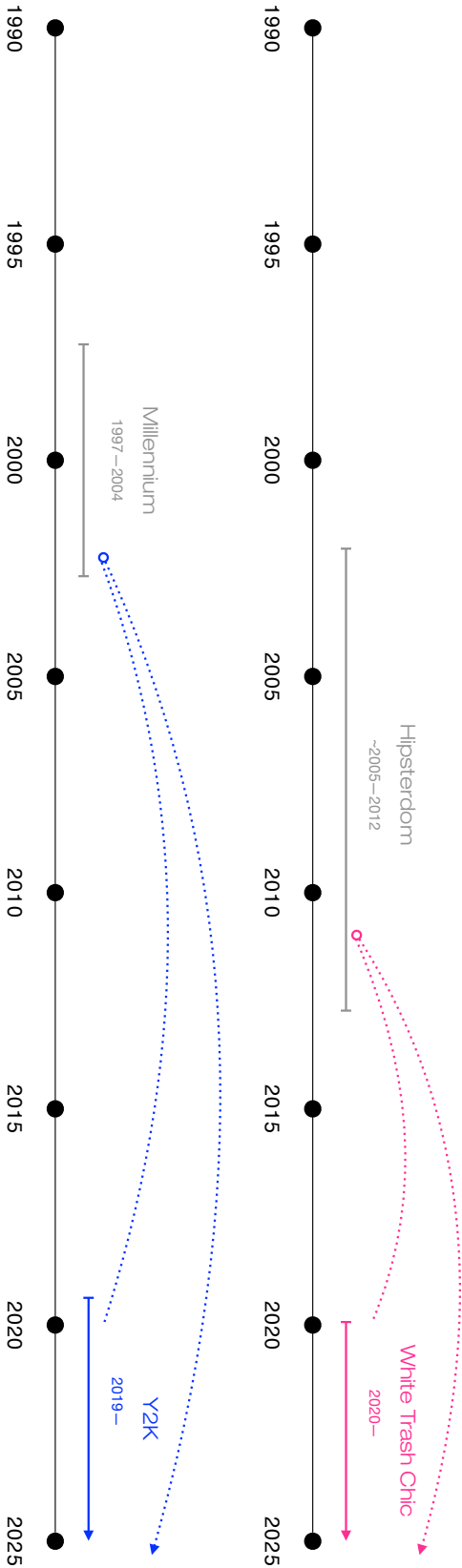
Y2K AESTHETIC



Stuck in the Past



Inspired by the Past



NOSTALGIA AS MEDIA EFFECT

LIVE PLAYERS



Nostalgia was first noted as a pernicious trend in the seventies. Why then? As the first generation raised with modern media and mass consumerism, boomers were the first demo able to revisit and reinterpret the iconography of their own past. There were reruns on TV and flea markets finds.

Post-war prosperity produced a surplus that fills vintage stores and dead airtime to this day. Times of plenty create lots of new things—and unearth lots of old things, too. Engaging with the frontier of culture has never been more of a choice and less of a requirement.

From the vantage point of their early adulthood, boomers could look back to the late fifties and early sixties and find inspiration in the teen trends they were too young to participate in at the time.

The contemporary condition seems to be endless fascination with the world just before we were conscious. This is the origin of the twenty year fashion cycle that we remain unable to break to this day. Why twenty years? That's about how long it takes to grow up.

John Travolta in *Grease* (1978) takes style cues from James Dean in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), but Travolta was only a year old when the film was released. Our cultural memory of the fifties is more inflected by the era's portrayal in the seventies than it is by the actual period.

In this way, nostalgia tends to daisy chain—confusing the provenance of specific cultural objects. (The concept of 'the classic' emerges from this.) The Schott Perfecto leather jacket has been a symbol of badboy transgression



since the fifties. Only with Hedi Slimane's Celine collections did the irony of a traditional form of transgression finally sink in. Has the leather jacket become more basic than badass?

Boomers may have been the first generation to experience modern nostalgia, but they're certainly not the last. Generations are the demographic encapsulation of a historical moment.

They share traumas, triumphs, martyrs, icons, festivals, and genres. They grew up in a specific time with specific media mixes, drug cultures, economic conditions, and political movements.

Whether or not they liked—or even consumed the fashion, films, or art of their time—they were aware of them. They shared the same delusions and confronted the same realities.

In short, they experienced the same vibes. Each cohort—due to living in a time where media and consumer goods were plentiful and durable—had a sense of what happened with generations past.

Nostalgia is a media effect with generational attributes.

BOOMERS

GEN X

MILLENNIALS

GEN Z

SCALE	69M	65M	72M	70M
BORN	1946—1964	1965—1980	1981—1996	1996—2012
IDENTITY	HIPPIES	SLACKERS	HIPSTERS	HYPEBEASTS
TRAGEDY	VIETNAM WAR	COLD WAR	9/11	COVID-19
TRIUMPH	MOON LANDING	BERLIN WALL	BARACK OBAMA	UNKNOWN
MARTYR	JIMI HENDRIX	KURT COBAIN	BRITNEY SPEARS	XXXTENTACION
IT GIRL	EDIE SEDGWICK	CHLOË SEVIGNY	CORY KENNEDY	BELLA HADID
FESTIVAL	WOODSTOCK	LOLAPALOOZA	COACHELLA	FYRE FESTIVAL
GENRE	ROCK	HIP HOP	INDIE	POP

50s/60s

70s/80s

90s/00s

10s/20s

FORMAT	TV	VIDEO	INTERNET	SOCIAL MEDIA
DRUG	MARIJUANA	COCAINE	HEROIN	PHARMACEUTICALS
ECONOMY	POSTWAR BOOM	DEREGULATION	GLOBALIZATION	RESHORING
MOVEMENT	CIVIL RIGHTS	FEMINISM	GAY RIGHTS	BLM
FASHION	COURRÈGES	RALPH LAUREN	MCQUEEN	VIRGIL ABLOH
FILM	THE GRADUATE	STAR WARS	TITANIC	AVENGERS
ART	ANDY WARHOL	KEITH HARING	JEFF KOONS	YAYOI KUSAMA
IDEAL	SPACE AGE	FREE MARKET	DIGITAL REVOLUTION	SOCIAL JUSTICE
REAL	POST-COLONIAL	POST-INDUSTRIAL	POST-MODERN	POST-TRUTH

**they shared
the same
delusions and
confronted the
same realities**

50s



60s

70s



80s

90s



00s

10s



20s

IDEOLOGICAL FUTURISM





Ideological futurism is the reactionary response to this scenario. It's a term I use to characterize people who think novelty is the most important aspect of aesthetics. Novelty at the expense of skill, taste, and vitality.

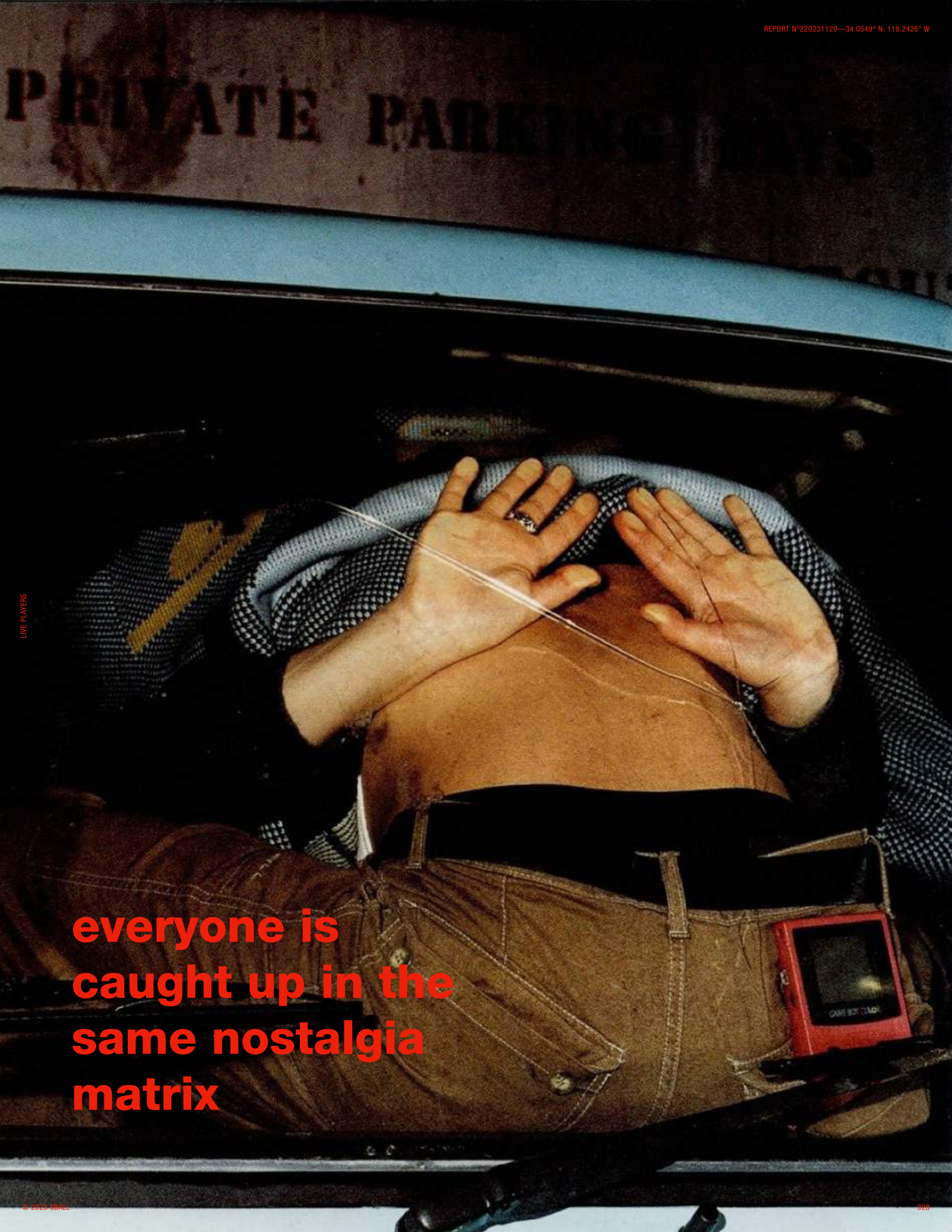
It's pro novel synthetic fabrics because they're new—endocrine disruption be damned. It likes screens because they're an omnipresent symbol of our contemporary moment. So what if the kids raised on them can't read! It likes vegan frankenfoods even if they made Robert Downey Jr. look worse sober than smoking crack. Ideological futurism is the fetishization of change without regard for the consequences, which is probably why the future got a bad reputation in the first place.

It's futuristic kitsch. Jetsons architecture, Star Trek politics, cyberpunk style, techno music: the greatest hits of the sixties, seventies, eighties, and nineties. It's the golden oldies station replaying twentieth century utopianism—one last time. If anything this perspective seems nostalgic for the heroic high modernism of mid-century America.

Ideological futurists aren't annoying because they're backward-looking. Everyone is caught up in the same nostalgia matrix. They're annoying because they insist that the only valuable things from the past are the failed predictions regarding our present.

Contrast this mindset with what actual futurists think. *The Daily* recently asked Sam Altman about a post-AI artisanal economy, to which he replied: "I expect that if we look forward to the future, things that we want to be cheap can get much cheaper and things that we want to be





LIVE PLAYERS

**everyone is
caught up in the
same nostalgia
matrix**

expensive are going to be astronomically expensive—like real estate, handmade goods, and art.”

In three years time, it will be the 200th anniversary of the birth of photography. Yet paintings are still worth more than photographs. Like Altman said, the great gift of technology is that it creates abundance. Only positional goods like the house Carey Grant lived in or the last Da Vinci on the market retain outsize value.

Facebook was once a positional good. You could only access it if you went to an elite university. To grow, it had to expand its audience to billions. (The same thing is happening with Tesla today as Musk pushes down the price.) For a digital product to reach its full potential, it must ditch any pretensions that it is an elite status marker.

The internet is for poor people.

The easiest way to understand this is by thinking about modern advances in food. Until recently, ultra-processed snacks, canned vegetables, and frozen meals were not low-status-coded. They weren't 'junk food'—they were the future of food. Nutrition was scientific and synthetic—just like everything else.

The preference for organic produce and free-range poultry only became a mass phenomenon this century. Although recently, ultra-processed foods have been reintroduced to elite palates via lab-grown meat and other vegan contraptions...

Similar to the way in which industrial farming flooded the world with calories, the internet has flooded the world with media. Both spurred on a mass amateurization of previously rarefied

fields. Everyone can be a chef if they just follow the directions on the back of a can! Everyone can be a celebrity if they just follow YouTuber best practices?

In the twentieth century, people worried about workers becoming alienated from their labor. In the twenty-first century, we should worry about users becoming disenchanted with their consumption.

As writing becomes posting and fashion becomes drop-shipping and art becomes AI, the aura and power they previously held dissipates. It's all far too easy. The old philistine quip—"My kid could do that!"—becomes true. Because today, their child literally can do that.

At some point, the novelty of having ChatGPT create yet another personalized season of *Game of Thrones* will wear off. There will be no spoilers, no water cooler talk, no trivia nights. The whole social rationale for mass pop culture moments will have withered away. And that's when people will realize: it's no fun being an audience of one.

There will be unlimited novelty in the world. And just as every technological miracle is inevitably taken for granted...

Newness itself will become boring.

NEONESS

■■■■■

So how will we move forward from this moment? On the one hand, innovation will remain paramount in addressing the logistical problems of humanity. Will we solve climate change? Who knows. But we can be relatively certain that if we do, it will be the result of some breakthrough technology, like nuclear fission.

On the other hand, the problems that dominate public discourse are political, social, and cultural in character—i.e. they are fundamentally human. Here, technology has a spottier track record. Aviation 100% improved the speed and cost at which we moved people and goods across the planet. The Match Group has a much more mixed record at improving people's romantic prospects.

We have to accept that this is as much our fault as the fault of technology. Our self-knowledge as a species is much foggier and less objective than, say, our current understanding of aerodynamics. This uncomfortable fact brings to mind a popular quote from Canadian science fiction author, Donald Kingsbury: “Tradition is a set of solutions for which we have forgotten the problems.”

This summer, the writer Dean Kissick gave a talk at FWBFest called “Journey to the New Aesthetics.” In it, he said new traditions are possible once again. Hence the return of the prefix neo. After all, tradition is just a cultural version of compound interest. It's an intergenerational transfer of knowledge.

Tradition is nostalgia without guilt.





LIVE PLAYERS

**tradition is
nostalgia
without guilt**



I ran into Alex on the rooftop of the Ace in downtown Los Angeles, hair bleached, straightened, small bangs framing her face like a wave crashing on the beach. She was wearing a pink and maroon vintage Christian Lacroix tweed suit with square toed matching pumps. I told her I loved her look. You could imagine swapping her for Evelyn, Patrick Bateman's girlfriend.

It was neo yuppie. The male version looks like American Psycho cosplay—something I first saw at a gay birthday party in Silver Lake. Everyone was wearing silk suspenders, cuff links, Winchester collars contrasted with cornflower blue shirts. A client recently told me he was surprised by how many young men showed up wearing suits at their last sample sale. (We can probably blame Patrick Bateman meme pages for the suit's renewed Zoomer appeal.)

The neo yuppie is not to be confused with rock revival. Both wear wear ties and jackets, but the references are entirely different. One wears eighties power suits (or their baggier early nineties cousins). The other goes for the skinnier black varietal Hedi Slimane has been championing for ages.

On women, we see suits as well. Shoulder pads will likely make a comeback, too. Although, a friend informs me they are difficult to construct and most contemporary ateliers lack the knowledge. A shoulder pad comeback will require reverse engineering clothing from the past.

The Drakes of London partnership with Aimé Leon Dore will supercharge the trend. It's a bridge between the bourgeois normcore audience and a more sophisticated way of

dressings. Maybe it's time to stop competing with your children for swag and try a more adult look. Structured clothing looks better on aging bodies anyways.

In the twenties, neoneering suffused more than just clothes. Neodeco is seeping into home-ware and hospitality. Le Rock in New York and Decimo in London's The Standard both take their design cues from the streamlined early twentieth century movement.

That both restaurants are situated in retrofitted old buildings tells us something about this decade as well. Le Rock is fittingly in an Art Deco masterpiece, the Rockefeller Center. The Standard modded a Brutalist structure that formerly housed the Camden Town Hall Annexe. Building new and beautiful structures is mostly illegal in major Western cities. The only option then is to insert new and beautiful things into old ones.

This reality is mirrored by the restomodding movement for automobiles. As emissions and safety regulations conform every new vehicle to more or less the same design, the only way to have a beautiful, modern car is to retrofit an old one.

The Hyundai Grandeur concept car was a precursor of this. Boxy and black with an electric motor and LED touchscreens, the name says it all. It even includes a cigarette lighter. Though the Davidoff cigars are only for the promotional images.

Popular models for restomodding include Range Rovers and Ford Broncos: boxy, masculine cars that like the Hyundai Grandeur take their aesthetic cues quite literally from the Eighties and Nineties.



**the future isn't
the opposite of
the past**

It's not all old things though. Our Neo Space Age moment, pioneered by Elon Muck, has a similar interest in bringing traditional design vernaculars to icons of the future. Unlike the angular dystopianism of the Cybertruck, the smooth contours of Starship harken back to early space operas like Flash Gordon, itself a nostalgic eighties reboot of the thirties serial.

What neoness alludes to is a new interest in participating in living tradition—reweaving a thread to the past through the present and into the future. Unlike newness, which can only ever exist in the present. (Newness is always either purely theoretical or already old once its moment has passed.)

There is still pressure to participate in newness. Though the upside diminishes by the day. The internet is turning us into a post-geographic peasantry. Instead of villages, each with their own idiosyncratic idioms, festivals, and lore—we have fandoms and other online subcultures speaking in mutually unintelligible digital dialects.

Neoness aspires to reinscribe a new canon—even if that canon is cobbled together from pop culture references. (The dynamic pop culture of the twentieth century may not be new, but it is legible.) If newness demands we respond to our moment, neoness insists we consider our place in history. If newness finds itself tripped up by the speed of our informational flows, neoness zooms out, putting the larger patterns in perspective.

Only a view from 30,000 feet can put flash in the pan digital fads in perspective.



When we consider the archetypes from the first part of this report—the Nolifer and the Live Player—it's clear the former correlates to newness and the latter correlates to newness.

The NoLifer is stuck in the past. In the near term, he will use the infinite personalization of AI to endlessly iterate on novelties from his prime. (The churn of the hypebeast collab ecosystem is the precursor to this.) In the medium term, he will use whatever biotech innovations emerge to freeze himself in time. He is trapped in the permanent present.

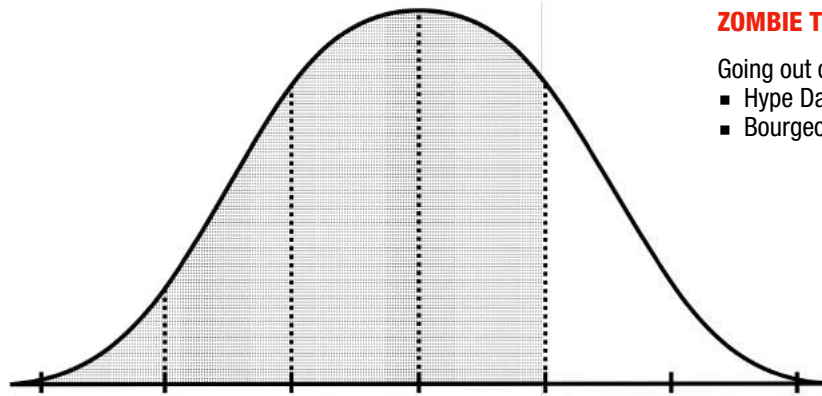
The Live Player is planning for the future. Like our greatest living science fiction writer, William Gibson, he will not see a contradiction between an interest in the past and an interest in the future. In the same way that love is not the opposite of hate (indifference is)—the future is not the opposite of the past.

To be trapped in the permanent present, is to be indifferent to both.

ZOMBIE TRENDS

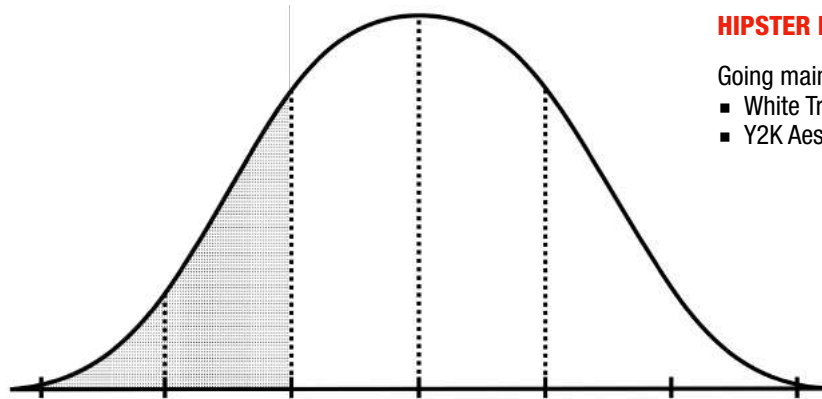
Going out of style:

- Hype Dad
- Bourgeois Normcore

**HIPSTER DITCH**

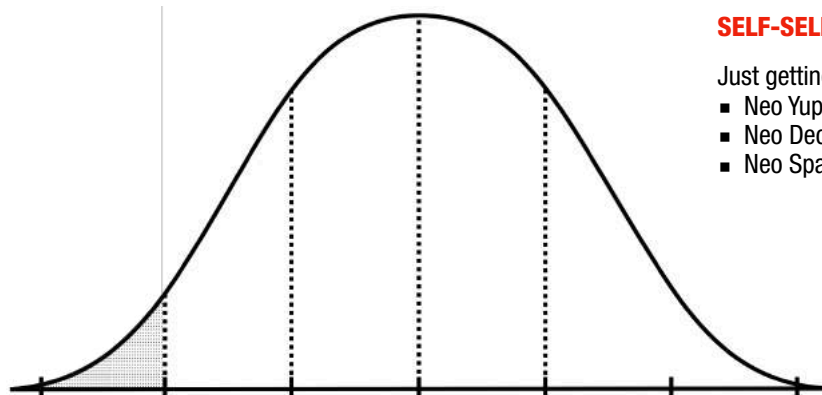
Going mainstream:

- White Trash Chic
- Y2K Aesthetic

**SELF-SELECTED AVANT-GARDE**

Just getting going:

- Neo Yuppie
- Neo Deco
- Neo Space Age



LIVE PLAYERS

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