



# BORING OR INSPIRING:

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## A Look Into Derivative Fashion

Looking back at the recent history of fashion, it is clear that certain trends and clothing pieces tend to resurface over the decades. . While designers have spearheaded many throwback trends on the runway, fashion consumers have held control over their popularization through street style dissemination. The popular trends change every year, but one thing remains stagnant: fashion is derivative. Derivative or cyclical, fashion takes trends that originated in prior decades and re-integrates them into current times. Much of this repetition involves innovating and modernizing old styles instead of copying the trends exactly. A brief glance at recent fashion reveals overt nods to historically popular styles, but with a constant recycling of trends, when will the industry get tired? While our era’s creativity will certainly feel some consequences from its monotony moving forward, derivative fashion will likely lead to a renewal of former trends that are unrecognizable from the past.

We see derivative fashion everywhere. It’s inherent in many creative fields to recreate what once was popular — if it worked then, why can’t it work now and be made even better? According to classical fashion forecasters, such cyclical trends normally stick around for a few years in a decade, fall out of style, and circle back around 20 years later in an altered form, reports Grace Gordon at Savoir Flair. This is mostly due to fashion nostalgia, according to Nicole Kliet at The Zoe Report. The styles that we wore as kids or young adults hold a strong sense of nostalgia that when looking back on photographs or reminiscing on memories, we want to replicate.

In looking back and analyzing fashion history, this cycle can be clearly identified and is obviously

prevalent in the industry. The influx of tracksuits and low-rise jeans in Y2K fashion actually originated in 70s menswear. The 60s hatched the foundation for baggy clothes via men’s suits and mini skirts — both of which became popular again in the 70s, 90s, and 2000s. Baggy clothes are recycled today as staple pieces for androgynous fashion, contributing to a blurring of gender norms.

Crop tops, a beloved fashion trend from the late 2010s, that has remained popular are another great example of a cyclical trend. According to Emma McFall at Fashion at Brown, crop tops were born in the 40s as a result of fabric rationing. They resurfaced in the 70s and 80s in men’s gym wear to get around gym policies requiring shirts and in womenswear as inspiration grew surrounding Madonna and Cher’s midriff-baring outfits, according to Priya Elan at The Guardian.

In the rest of the art world, nods to past eras are often seen as well. Realism rejected Romanticism and derivative art intentionally, while Surrealism grew from Cubism in its emphasis on creative independence, reports My Modern Met. This pattern begs the question, does the prevalence of derivative art and fashion show that it is more accepted than pure originality? Some of the most shocking and memorable shows have been those that break through the norms and set new trends for the next coming years. In one famously flopped SS93 show for Perry Ellis, Marc Jacobs designed a grunge collection that got him fired. Models were draped in oversized grunge wear, which became

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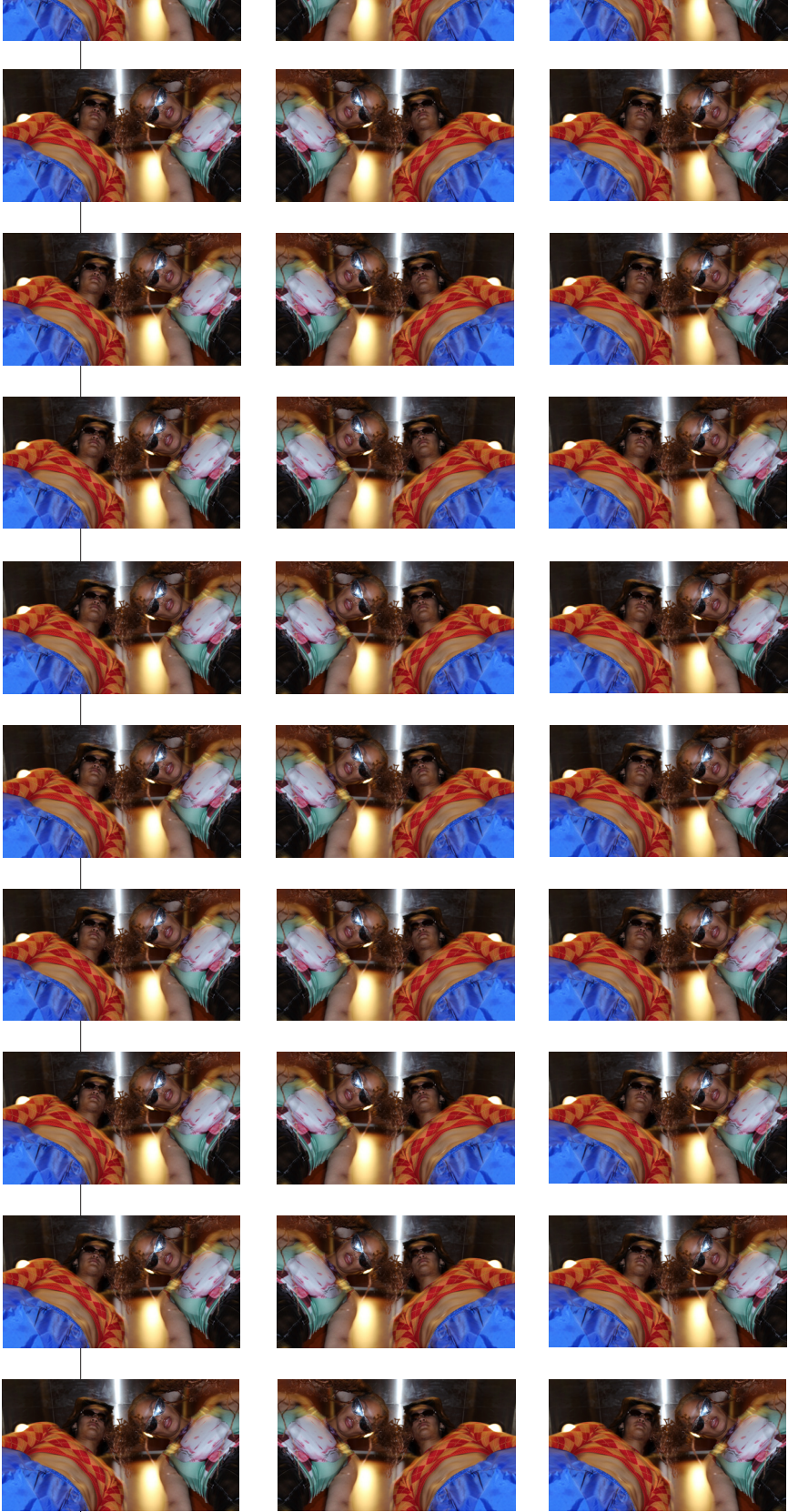


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popular later in the 90s but was originally bashed by critics, as reported by Hilary George-Parkin at Who What Wear. This show was uniquely non-derivative, which was primarily why it was so initially hated, so it is easy to understand why designers base new trends on something that worked before, rather than pushing fashion boundaries.

While Marc Jacobs was revered years after his show for being a leader in 90s grunge, the show flopped because it was not based on that ever-repeated 20-year cycle. Interestingly enough, the designs in his show have been echoed in similar styles throughout the 2000s.

Despite being derivative, cyclical trends often look completely new each time that they go through a resurgence and the new versions become individually referenceable on their own. Think thigh-high boots as high fashion, biker shorts worn for aesthetic and not athletic purposes, and Crocs as ironic fashion. The origin of some trends are often forgotten, but they do have historical bearing: thigh-high boots were used by the military in the 19th century, and YSL subsequently spearheaded women’s stocking boots in the 60s (according to Jessica Bucci at Startup Fashion). Biker shorts were used for actual racing, and crocs were popularized by 2000s kids for their functionality. These trends are derivative, but at the same time memorable because of their creative modernization.



The beauty of fashion is that it all holds a past, but each repetition of it is evolved to fit the needs and wants of the modern consumer. By that right, fashion will not get boring. The ever-altering of trends creates a form of creative fashion that is distinct from the past and uniquely a sign of the current times.

Going 30 years forward, sustainable and tech-driven fashion will probably take control. Think Etsy, thrifting, and Manus x Machina, all whipped into one. This push for sustainability will grow out of the increased transparency surrounding fast-fashion impacts, as well as the more environmentally conscious generation that will make up the majority of adult consumers. With the increase in second-hand shopping, derivative fashion will likely be even more amplified. Second-hand clothes mostly date around 10 to 20 years prior. People will increasingly mix decades together, formulating new trends defined by the old. It is difficult to hypothesize tech-driven trends, as that would require hypothesizing the future of the tech industry. One thing is certain though; as technology develops, fashion will follow alongside to remain updated and integrated with everyday-use tech.

Fashion will continue to echo itself with trend cycles. Maybe fashion will become more redundant and basic, but I believe trends will change so much that they are unrecognizable from the past. Putting on an outfit every day is creativity at its base, and even if those outfits are repetitive or an over-recycling of trends, they are new to us at the moment. Through derivative fashion, we can connect to the past, evolve it, and eventually create new trends through the unrecognizable morphing of the old; none of which I would classify as boring fashion.