PERSONAL ESSAY

The regressive cool girl: out with the new, in with the old

// BY LILY SCHECKNER

If there is one thing that is in style right now, it is what was once in style. Trends from decades ago are no longer considered archaic. They've been revamped, newly shiny and desirable. At times, it seems even cooler to own the scuffed relic than the fresh product — it means you put in a degree of effort instead of clicking "buy now" on the Shein trending page. You have earned bragging rights to the trend via vintage reclamation.

Whether they have embraced the movement in a pair of bootcut jeans or an '80s chart topper, young women in particular have grown to love the old. It's a form of escapism — a return to a simpler, sleeker and more stylish time. For some, this escapism is defiant, even radical in nature. It embraces times of social change and protest, subtly interlacing political undertones with vinyl records and neon pink sequin mini skirts. This specific "coolness" and progressivism historically go hand in hand, casually aligning on the premise of differing from the norm.

Beyond the political implications, it's fun and stimulating to participate in these trends. Girls pose behind brilliantly saturated filters and aviator sunglasses, listening to synth pop and swearing it's 2016 all over again. Others swallow themselves in vintage leather and rolls of camera film. A smaller number of people go even farther back, diving into the dress silhouettes and homemaker aesthetics of the '50s and '60s. Yet just as social media birthed this curated retro aesthetic, it is permanently connected to its seedier, more controversial cousin: regressive politics.

There's a strange push and pull between these sides — sides of social media, sides of politics, even sides of campus here at Yale. They are both strangely aligned and diametrically opposed. It is uncomfortable but necessary to recognize the seeds of conservatism in the same vintage aesthetics we praise for sustainability and perfunctory liberalism. It's fascinating to think, for example, of 2016, the same year that is having a stylistic comeback, as also being the birthplace of today's conservative MAGA landscape following Hillary Clinton's defeat in the presidential election.

Zooming in on specific trends yields particularly unsavory results. Alongside Y2K fashion, extreme thinness — so-called heroin chic — and the popularization of ozempic have come into the trend cycle. Yes, vintage shopping and supposed 'sustainability' are still in fashion, but there has been an increasing focus on boutiques and brands rather than Goodwill's endless racks. Endless examples present themselves when walking quickly around Yale's campus: the return of cigarettes, the old money aesthetic, the rising apathy towards social issues that once demanded online support — the death of wokeness in favor of nonchalance. This dichotomy forces us to ask the question: is coolness still progressive? Have all things vintage actually become another symptom of today's backwards political landscape?



ILLUSTRATION BY SERINA YAN

It's a grim thought, in more ways than one. By conflating these two hostile movements, the agency in our reclamation of the vintage is ripped away. While some, like the countless TikTok trad wives, might endorse the reemergence of both the vintage and the traditional, others have accidentally stumbled into the normalization of conservatism. What once made girls feel radical and unique has forced some into a sociopolitical movement they never agreed to, one that proudly champions the dismantlement of women's rights.

We live in a world undeniably run by appearances. From the smallest interpersonal interactions to the larger image we display to the public, so much depends on how things are perceived, not their reality. Deep down, the issue of regressive aesthetics depends on a correction of that discrepancy. For once, it's not something we must institutionally battle to fix. We can fix it simply if we care enough to do so. If we can dig beneath the shiny appeal of our own coolness, of our thinness, of our wealth, of our love of the past, we can attempt to peek into the future.

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What Homer and FIFA have in common

// BY AMELIA LEBLANC

I finished "The Odyssey" at midnight, the night after the FIFA World Cup Final. On my cheek, there was still a trace of a Spanish flag tattoo — I'd claimed allegiance after a summer abroad. I was barraged with questions all day. People asked who my favorite player was and what I thought of the referee's takes and on the winning goal. I didn't want to take it off because, in doing so, I'd be admitting the tournament was over.

After the final whistle blew, I wanted to talk about it immediately. I pulled out my phone to replay the goal, argue over the red card decision and question substitutions. The game was over, but I wasn't finished with it.

The next night, I was at the Alamo Drafthouse with friends to see "The Odyssey." Walking out of the theater, after almost three hours of intense combat, moving speeches and Christopher Nolan's Odyssean fantasy, my friends were already talking over one another, comparing observations from the Cyclops and the horse scenes to the actual poem and arguing about why Nolan made the change. I felt the same restlessness I had felt at the final whistle. The movie was over, but I wasn't over with it.

The match and the movie had left me doubly speechless and wanting to talk nonstop. I asked myself the following: why did two seemingly different experiences lead me to the same internal dilemma?

One thing I love about being a soccer fan is learning the intricate layers of a constantly changing world — the sports world — which is similar, in a way, to learning mythology. The longer you live in both worlds, the more a name begins to contain. Everyone knows Zeus, just as everyone knows Messi. Fewer know Hermes and fewer still know Haaland.

Further down the pipeline, there are names that acquire meaning only after you know the stories around them: Lamine Yamal, who was photographed as a baby with Messi and who years later defeated him on the field — pretty homeric? — or Maradona's Hand of God, controversial to this day. The people who live in these worlds begin to feel like friends, enemies, versions of ourselves. We feel ourselves pushing against or rooting for them in the same way we would with our siblings.

I had been an adamant Argentina skeptic throughout the World Cup, but watching the camera pan to 39-year-old Messi tearfully apologizing to fans after the final left a twang in my heart. The longer we watch them, the players on the world stage, much like the characters in homeric epics, are given a third dimension.

When watching "The Odyssey," I also empathized with someone unexpected. In the middle of the movie, Agamemnon tells Odysseus about his death in the underworld. He survived ten years of war, made it home and was killed at his own welcome feast before he was able to metaphorically unpack. I disliked Agamemnon more than I had "hate-watched" Argentina. He appears as a cold, tyrannical character in every context I've heard of him.

Listening to him weep over his homecoming made it hard to truly resent him. My surface-level judgement of both of these faces lacked nuance — nuance I only understood upon closer inspection. You don't have to like someone to recognize what they have lost.

One of my friends had never opened a work by Homer before this year. She bought Emily Wilson's GRD '01 translation of "The Odyssey" almost as a joke, something to have in common with the rest of my "nerd" friends in humanities programs. Shortly after her gag-purchase, she became furious with Odysseus. Twenty years, she argued over lunch, was nowhere near enough punishment for what he had done to his crew. She was furious with a man who had been dead, fictional or both for three thousand years. She had inherited the story, familiarized herself with it and formed fresh opinions.

The same thing happened in reverse with soccer. A year before Mbappé's first World Cup appearance, another friend couldn't pick him out of a lineup. The World Cup came around and with those games came the midnight texts. Why did Mbappé used to play wing and now play striker? Would Doué or Barcola start? What is an offside and how the hell does one work?

Eventually, the questions changed from basic queries on rules to more complex moves into the soccer world. The friend began sending me articles, tactical observations and references to Champions League finals from the early 2000s. By the World Cup Final, he had bought a jersey and had players he felt personally bound to; he felt he needed them to win because of his allegiance to them. He had inherited the stories, and along with them, opinions. Homer's works have had this effect for millennia; soccer does it every Sunday. Spectators join in age-old discussions, add their own spin and continue the oral tradition of sports — and poetry.

The lights came up at the Alamo, and my friends immediately started arguing. I thought about the final whistle the night before and about my peculiar need to find someone who had heard it too. Walking out of the theater and turning my phone off silent, I found I had already received a text sending me an article of a movie review, highlighting the Cyclops scene. I felt safe knowing the story wasn't done. The worlds of sports — and of poetry — are the ones we inherit, reshape and hand to someone else.

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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:
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