Using the New to get hold of the Old:
Self-representation, visual representation, and identity creation through new media

Kristina Gavhed
Abstract

My BA-thesis deals with the matter of identity, and how the use of convergent and new media construct a prerequisite for identity construction. In what ways are socio-cultural exchanges visible within these media? How do convergent and contemporary media help with representation of self and self-expression? I wanted to investigate how online social networks such as Facebook and blogs affect identity and if it changes the conditions under which identity is created. Through denotations and connotations others absorb this information and appropriate it before they in turn share it. I have performed interviews with four main sources who’ve all revealed how they interact online. In an anonymous online survey five informants offered responses on their social networking habits as well, confirming that most people do not randomly search for information but are instead given information through already established contacts.

The artistic presentation of my work began as a series of portraits of myself in various outfits. I then altered this to a brief film, where I copied my face onto bodies of models, similar to paper dolls – a way to represent the idea that by altering clothes my identity changes in the eyes of others, while on the inside I remain the same as I ever was. I then made two short films, about 5-6 minutes in length where I give two lessons: one on how to do a Victory Roll hairstyle, and one on how to put on a 1940’s inspired make-up, similar to the tutorials one can find on Youtube.com. I then turned all three movies into a DVD, which I showed at the Konstfack Spring Exhibition. I created a small dressing room with the intent of having visitors try on clothes they might not otherwise wear. During the process of writing this essay I have come to the conclusion that we are constantly affected by input from sources around us. We are all part of a network, online and away from the keyboard, of a never ending flow of information. However, with the ever expanding availability of social media our sources increase and even a person who never leaves his or her city has many more options of broadening their horizons, of finding information possibly not available to them before. In regards to how this affects students and teachers it offers more freedom but also responsibility. Teachers must stay on top of new developments, as well as be up to date on new findings. Students now have the freedom to search for information outside the classroom, as well as outside their social cultural setting. Also, as contemporary and convergent media is largely image based even those who are illiterate can with the help of friends, or on their own, find many image sources and via this visual medium be part of the chain of information and expand their knowledge.
Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 4
1.1 Background and Purpose .................................................................................................................. 5
1.2 Research Questions ........................................................................................................................... 6
1.3 Delimitations ...................................................................................................................................... 6
1.4 Empirical data .................................................................................................................................... 6
1.5 Methodology ....................................................................................................................................... 7
1.6 Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................................... 7
1.7 Prior Research .................................................................................................................................... 9

2.0 Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 9
2.1 Spreading information and Interactivity ............................................................................................ 9
2.2 Convergence Media and remediation ............................................................................................... 11
2.3 Interviews .......................................................................................................................................... 13
   Maria................................................................................................................................................... 13
   Adam.................................................................................................................................................. 15
   Nina.................................................................................................................................................... 16
   Charles ............................................................................................................................................... 17
2.4 Online Survey .................................................................................................................................... 19
2.5 The Blogs ......................................................................................................................................... 20

3.0 Further Analysis .................................................................................................................................. 20
3.1 Retro-outfitting the future .................................................................................................................. 21
3.2 Interactivity ....................................................................................................................................... 21

4.0 Final Analysis and Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 24

References .................................................................................................................................................. 26
Appendix .................................................................................................................................................... 27
1.0 Introduction

As contemporary media spreads so does information. Those of us who live in the western and developed countries have near constant access to the internet, television, mobile phones, satellite radio and many other media outlets. Online social networking has rapidly expanded in the past five or so years. In September 2009 the number of unique registered Facebook users was reported to be over 300 million users worldwide.\(^1\) It is available in multiple languages – including English Pirate. On this site users can share interests, photographs, videos, personal information and connect with old and new friends, as well as receive messages from Social Groups and become members of ideological interest groups. Users are also given suggestions on who to get in touch with and where to shop online through the use of changing adverts and a software that allows Facebook to cull data from its users and find appropriate interests, common friends, and adverts. The second largest social networking group, MySpace has an estimated 100 million users.\(^2\) At the same time blogging has also increased. In 2008 Universal McCann – a global media specialist – reported that 184 million people had some form of registered blog. There were 346 million active readers of blogs. Out of these, a random search on Google provided me with more than 2 billion results for the word “blog”, and 30 million results for the term “Blog vintage fashion”. The search term “Vintage blog” resulted in more than 70 million hits in 0.18 seconds.\(^3\) There are millions of people who have registered some sort of online presence where he or she shares bits of information regarding themselves. How does this affect users? Does it affect them? Is it easier or more difficult to sift through the information, and how does this affect someone with regards to identity? In this new media setting how do personalities who prefer alternative representation manifest online? How do they present and represent themselves? What use do they have of blogs and online social networking sites? As I have investigated online presence, social networking sites and the vintage clothing subculture more and more questions have been raised, about clothing and identity, and how come when we are nearly in the future as shown in Blade Runner there is still a yearning for things and styles that have long since passed.

1.1 Background and purpose

...Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meanings – the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ – between the members of a society or group.¹

At the start of the project my investigation was meant to investigate the importance of specific articles clothing themselves and how it made the wearer feel, if clothing could boost confidence or heighten an experience. However, during my original interviews several people expressed that the look they were after was that of the 1930’s and 1940’s. I began to wonder why this was, why they want to wear retro-styled or clothing rather than more contemporary clothing, and what it was about this style and aesthetic that they identified with. It made me wonder about identity and the way we present our identity visually, through our clothing, to others, more than the personal aspect. After this I came across a few texts on nostalgia and certain aesthetics pertaining to nostalgia. I thought it was interesting how people now, in the present, seek out an aesthetic that went out of style nearly 60 years ago – a lifetime ago. My interview subjects also gave me links to online stores where they looked for clothing, good sources of finding things that fit their style. At the same time I was given a link to an illustrator who also runs a style-blog, and who wears almost nothing but vintage clothing. Following these trails and the fact that they had mentioned the 1940’s as an aesthetic I went online and found more blogs and forums where people can exchange information and tips on styles and clothing. There is a vast online vintage presence. In a way it seemed that by using modern media there is a group of people who are outfitting themselves in retro-fashions, using the New to get hold of the Old. They are in essence, retro-outfitting the present, via futuristic media, or rather the more apt description New Media. Going back to how we present and represent ourselves, I became more interested in investigating how individuals seek out forums and online social communities, and perhaps how these communities help these individuals in shaping their identity. My focus became people who desire a certain look, the aesthetics of the 1940’s. I wanted to investigate these cultural exchanges that occur through the use of media, where media and the person using them are both the mediators and the re-mediators and how, via these media-exchanges, identity is formed.

1.2 Research questions

How does the use of convergent and new media construct prerequisites for identity construction? In what ways are socio-cultural exchanges visible within these media? How do convergent and contemporary media help with representation of self and self-expression?

1.3 Delimitations

As mentioned above, individuals can find others with similar tastes in clothing in online communities. How does this relate to the Visual Arts area, and specifically to the teaching of Visual Arts? As teachers we have an opportunity to meet individuals still shaping their identities, individuals who in some cases might attempt to do so by altering their appearance. Fashion blogs are a large part of the internet, and it’s been my experience that many, teenagers, children, adults, follow them for varying reasons. Many of the communities and forums I’ve looked at – in particular personal blogs – put more emphasize on women’s fashion and post images of women’s clothing or cleaning and washing, dresses and feminine hygiene. However, I have deliberately chosen not to focus on this aspect in my investigation since it seems there is quite a lot of focus on these issues at the moment. I’ve also stayed away from gender theories and psychological analysis of my subjects and the communities, and instead chosen to solely focus on socio-cultural exchanges via new media, as gender theories would have needed its very own research and essay. In regards to fashion, it is certainly part of this essay, but it is not the sole focus. Rather, what I am looking is how via media people remEDIATE a particular aesthetic. To limit my area of research I’ve chosen to focus on a group of individuals whose focus is what we by early 21st century standards might refer to as vintage aesthetics. Men and women must clothe themselves, but how does a group create their own style and aesthetics by searching through online communities for these bits of their identity?

1.4 Empirical Data

My main data is interviews gathered from four interview subjects, referred to in this essay as Adam, Maria, Nina and Charles. These are not their real names, but pseudonyms. I have kept personal information about them general in this essay, but their ages and genders have not been altered. I was introduced to Nina and Adam via Maria link, and through an online forum I contacted Charles. I have also performed a virtual field study online in three blogs and one

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5 Appendix A and Appendix B
internet forum, and performed an online survey of five informant’s online habits via online social media.

1.5 Methodology
When I first began interviewing my sources I asked mainly general questions, which then turned more specific as I found common denominators with each of my sources. I tried to find out as much as possible about their media and social networking habits. For instance, how do they use online media? What do they use it for? What do they attempt to find? Who do they get in touch with, or attempt to get in touch with? What have I discovered by observing these blogs, and people? Do they really shop online, and what trends are they after? Are they really after a nostalgic trend, exclusively, or mixed? To find out about these habits I communicated with my sources through MSN, Facebook and email. I also performed an online survey which they could fill out anonymously. All of my findings led me to the question of how do we represent ourselves, both online and off-line, or as we used to say, IRL. I’ve done virtual field studies where I’ve visited many blogs belonging to those with an interest in nostalgic and vintage aesthetics. I then analyzed the results and answers with the help of supporting literature.

But these styles have a deeper social basis. The very preoccupation with the image of the self is important – pleasing, though often taken to extremes. Dress has become, for the teenager, a kind of minor popular art, and is used to express certain contemporary attitudes. There is, for example, a strong current of social non-conformity and rebelliousness among teenagers.

1.6 Theoretical Framework
I am going to cover theories relating to socio-cultural ideas, theories on media communication, convergence media, and some postmodernism as it applies in part to the questions and answers from both the virtual field studies and my interviews. In socio-cultural theories are based on Vygotsky’s theories on human development and her learning processes and development. Vygotsky theorized that humans use what he referred to as tools and signs in everything we do and by appropriating these tools humans gain both perspective and

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6 IRL – In Real Life.
collective knowledge. These semiotic tools help us understand the way we go about performing these activities in the world around us as well as re-mediate – forward – our activities to others. In essence, humans learn by communicating and exchanging information and by extension our identities are shaped by society. His contemporary, Jean Piaget’s theories on cognitive development are similar but differ in the way that Piaget argued that humans are born with an inherent personal core, and that this core personality is the basis on which the rest of us through time is shaped. It is because of this core personality choices are made – what we like, what we will do, what tools we will appropriate. Applying these socio-cultural theories on my investigation and to media – another tool created by humans based on shared and exchanged knowledge – I have looked at the way media helps and aides people, how we meet people, in what ways these exchanges occur. On the subject of identity I have used Jonas Stier’s book *Identitet – Människans gåtfulla porträtt*, where he outlines the various theories of what identity is, how it might be categorized, theories on group identity and ways of showing group affiliation.

*Convergence media* can most easily be described as two separate media entities fused into one – the camera and the telephone together create a mobile phone with a camera. There are plenty of theories on how we use convergent media today, but very few on how people use them in connection with their identities. I am using the articles and theories on convergent media to show how people connect today via convergent media and through them make a socio-cultural exchange of histories, culture, ideas, ideals, thoughts and expressions, and thereby creating their own identities. I’ve looked at media theories as discussed by John B. Thompson in his book *Media and Modernity*. Though Thompson never states that he uses Vygotsky or Piaget’s theories he works on a similar assumption that humans exchange information to learn and to create their identities, but in his case he explains how this occurs through new media. He also explains the history of media, ranging from books to modern television, how culture spreads, and what power media gives the user. I will also use *postmodernist theories*, relating to the individualism I have observed on some of the online

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journals and in the interviews. Post-modernism is difficult to pin down, as it changes from field to field and so I will go more in depth with the postmodernist theories and how they apply to this study further on in this essay. In regards to theories on visual and popular culture, I have used literature and theories written by Stuart Hall and John Storey. I have particularly drawn on articles in John Storey’s book Cultural Theory and Popular Culture – A reader, 4th edition. In his book, various authors discuss subjects such as youth culture, visual culture and representation, including clothing and style, and various forms of representation.

1.7 Prior research

Media research and research on social interaction via online media is a large and extensive field. Two of the most recent sources I have drawn from are Elza Dunkels of Umeå Universitet in Sweden, more specifically her Doctorate publication relating to the online habits of youths and youth culture. Elizabeth Wilson and Jim Collins have both written essays on fashion and postmodernism, as well as retro-forward theories. John B. Thompson has written extensively about new media and its role in society. Neil Perryman has written about Convergence Media in regards to the Science fiction program Doctor Who, but also focusing on the habits of users in regards to Convergence Media.

2.0 Data Analysis

2.1 Spreading Information

I have followed two blogs which I shall call Vintage Blog 1 and Vintage Blog 2. I found these blogs through networking – links on the blogger’s site, or via friends who mentioned them to me. So even before I started analyzing my findings I myself am part of a network that links one person’s findings to another and yet another. Not only that, but I am taking part of knowledge that isn’t necessary fixed to the area I live in. John B. Thompson wrote that media opens up possibilities for non-local knowledge, broadening ones horizons and options. While constructing one’s self, the access of this knowledge- both more and of different social cultural origins - means a person has greater options and choices and is not limited to past

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local experiences. As with Piaget, Thompson writes that it also forces a necessity to be more conscious of one’s choices.\textsuperscript{15} With more information available, it is simply not possible to absorb every single scrap, but the person building their identity must sift through the information for the bits that suit them and reject other bits that they find less appealing, revolting or unsuitable. But as we construct ourselves we are using past experiences to shape a fleeting present personality while preparing for the future. Blogs functioning as diaries have the ability to record the present but only once we’ve passed it. For instance I can take a picture with my camera in the here and now that I will, in the near future, upload to my blog. But to do this, I had to plan the taking of the picture in the past with the idea that in the future I would upload it to my blog and share it with others. This is the way how I imagine some of the bloggers – the \textit{senders} – accumulate their semiotic content. In turn readers, going by past experiences of updates on the blog, know that a new entry will be written sometime in the near future. The readers – the \textit{receivers} – wait and when the entry appears (in the reader’s present) they can sift through the information and choose whatever aspects of it they like. Readers can choose to comment on the entry if they like it or if they want to know more or even get negative comments. But most importantly as they sift through the experiences of the writer the readers they can choose aspects of the experience, appropriate it to their own personal needs, and absorb it into their personality.\textsuperscript{16} In essence, they are truly consuming an experience not their own. The readers are a bit like in that by allowing or following someone else who experiences an event and writes about it half the job is done. The readers can read the text and images, interpret the semiotic content without the necessity of having to go through the experience themselves. For example, if one goes onto the Vintage Blog 2, one can see that the author has offered to explain to others how she does her hair and make-up in a 1940’s style. There is therefore no need to go through an excruciating set of attempts and multiple failures. All one has to do is follow the actions of the author of Vintage Blog 2, as a sort of fact-checking to see if this method truly will work for them and if it will suit them. However, a large and very important aspect of this information sharing is that the writers, the bloggers themselves are forwarding or passing on information that they have learned from others previously.\textsuperscript{17} The fashion, style of the hair and make-up have already been in vogue once before, and as such it is nothing new. The writers and wearers of blogs and vintage clothing are – similarly to the readers – using someone else’s former experiences to create a

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. Pp. 58
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. Pp. 31
personality in the present. They are not creating anything tangible or any object that is new, but what is newly created is their personality, even as they appropriate past experiences, habits and aesthetics, and through remediation they pass this information on to others. In a way, it is not just the computer, the internet or the blog that is the media. The narrator of the blog becomes a media as well, and a medium of the past and as such they are a continuation or a variation of the older tradition of orally passing on information. The terms and conditions have changed but not the purpose. 18 My interview subjects have their own personal – though not necessarily private – web spaces where they share information about themselves and their habits. 19 Bloggers are the receivers, searching, finding, absorbing, appropriating content which they might then forward without conscious intent that someone else will make an active choice to read and absorb these second hand experiences. Perhaps bloggers, unlike commercial vintage stores, do not intend for others to appropriate the content of the blog, but it seems to me that this purpose is implied by the simple fact that bloggers blog – they take a photograph, they write something and they post it in a public forum. Humans are creatures of an oral tradition as well as tools. 20 Through evolution and necessity we have always shared information via this oral tradition and our tools, newly learned or newly created, with others. 21 It is good sense to share the information that lightning is dangerous with your close friends, or others, so that in the future they can in turn warn you when lightning approaches. In a similar way, though not necessarily a life or death situation, by sharing your interest in vintage with others on a blog you inform them that you like vintage. They (the readers) might then spot a vintage store, log onto your blog and return this new information, saving you the act of having to search for the store on your own. Essentially, it is a co-dependent relationship. There is always someone willing to read and comment, and always someone willing to write and inform.

2.2 Convergence media and remediation

Convergent media is a new concept in media theory that can most easily be described as two media combined to make one new media. 22 There are many ways to do this – for instance one

19 Ibid. Pp. 152-157, Pp. 159
can write with both coal (graphite) and sticks, but combining them will make a new media, a pencil. One can contact people via telephone and one can send a letter. Combining a text based media and a voice based media will perhaps give you a mobile phone with text-messaging functions. If you add a camera to that, you’ll have a camera-phone. I could say that the internet is convergent media in that it at first combines text, images and signs, but that the parts (sites) of the internet are also convergent media. Facebook combines images, the idea of the telegram, calendar and memos, and it is a media within the media. Youtube.com is similar in that it is mainly a visual website but also uses text and interaction to keep people connected. Both Youtube.com and Facebook.com are also a sort of forum, where people can stay connected without ever having to leave their houses. Not only do they allow people to stay connected, but these sites can also remediate or reproduce, especially in regards to Facebook.com. Facebook.com has a function that gathers information from users – friends, age, political views, interests and more – and through this causes remediation where Facebook.com makes a selection of people and interests that might interest you as a user. For instance, if you know a man named Dave, and Dave knows a woman named Sue, Facebook.com would look at your information, come to the conclusion that because you know Dave it is entirely possible that you know Sue and would want to get in touch with her, regardless of whether or not you actually know Sue. This is remediation. Our computers (and the software inside) are not just separate entities; they themselves have become ‘socialized’. They solve problems for us on their own and they forward and reinterpret content and information.

“We connect the camera to the computer and the computer senses it. It installs software and uploads our images for us.” (my translation)

Media is a mediator. Facebook.com, mobile phones, faxes and similar tools have the same purpose as letters and books and newspapers – we write them because we want to share bits of our lives, our identities, and read them because we want to learn new things. However, we seem to choose things that we are already interested in. The point I am making here is that the media is simply the tool. Through media – be it computers, mobile phones, digital cameras, faxes, telegraphs et cetera – we remediate. A person has a message that he or she wants to forward and share with others. Most often we share this information or message with people

that we know. The phenomena of uploading videos that instead of a written response, get another video as a reply. Then we have the blogs themselves, which can be communities, video-logs and personal journals, but never really private. Many blogs I have visited are personal journals where the users post images of themselves, events in their lives, purchases, thoughts on politics, work, and more. They are made public, and as such anyone can read them and comment. Diaries, instead of pasting images into ones diary, one writes online, attaches images and videos, and the diary becomes interactive. It is a private diary, but at the same time open to replies from others well-known and random people. As I mentioned before, media mediates messages.

2.3 Interviews

To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which will be understood by each other. Thus culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and ‘making sense’ of the world, in broadly similar ways.

I’ve interviewed four people, all via the internet – two through email, and two through Facebook.com. Maria put me in contact with Alex and Nina. I met Charles via an online science fiction forum – science fiction being our common interest. I began with general questions and then delved into more specific ones depending on my findings and as I found I wanted to know more. With Maria, Alex and Nina I performed interviews in Swedish and all their quotes are my own translations. Charles’ quotes are his original ones. Lastly, I have performed an online survey and based it on the questions I had previously asked my four informants in order to corroborate my findings with my interview subjects. I sent this survey out to a group of people I have come in contact with through Facebook.com. I received answers from five people, who did not leave names, but were between 20 and 40 years old.

Maria

Maria is 23 years old, lives in Edinburgh and studies textiles and fashions. She is a designer and runs a small business on the side creating feminine urban street wear, and she is also involved in the burlesque scene.

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During the summer of 2008 I became interested in the burlesque and rockabilly culture and began listening to jazz, rockabilly and blues, as well as watching 50’s movies, where I saw that many women wear fur. I wear a faux, second-hand fur. It reminds me of the rockabilly culture.”

Maria describes how music and films influenced her, and in this way it is the music and the films that are the re-mediators. Music and film is inspirational in a way but they also portray something that while it isn’t real, is a way we might want reality to be like²⁸. Like the statues from ancient Egypt they are a representation of an ideal, rather than the real.

“I’ve created a MySpace.com account for my Burlesque performance. Mostly, when I’m looking for inspiration, I go to Ministry of Burlesque.”²⁹

Maria makes use of online social networks to meet others with similar interests and ’befriend’ them online. By befriending someone on MySpace.com, on efficiently shows an immediate common interest and common culture. Maria is also finding more pieces of a puzzle that suits her emerging and the continuing creation of her identity.

Stier compares the “phenomena of identity” with the likeness of a portrait.³⁰ He writes that it is a kind of self-portrait that the creator is never quite finished with. He also, similarly to Piaget and Vygotsky, say that while the person paints his or her own portrait it is also added on by others, depending on who these others are and how they perceive the person they are looking at. After having gone online and looked at her profiles on both Facebook.com and MySpace.com, I saw that Maria appropriates things she likes and absorbs them, before she in turn remediates this information to others on these online social networking pages. Online her friends can use this information and appropriate it themselves if they find it interesting. But to add to this remediation of interests, personality and knowledge, Facebook.com also makes recommendations to her based on specific criteria and the information she fills in on her Profile Page. Adverts and tips on friends she might like to know are displayed on her page. Facebook.com itself is now a remediator, again leaving the choice of what she wants to appropriate up to Maria. People who receive the information are not passive individuals³¹.

Thompson writes, “Media-products are absorbed by individuals, interpreted by them and incorporated into their lives”.³² People interpret the messages they are given and based on each individual interpretation they then go on to make active and critical choices of what they

²⁹ http://www.ministryofburlesque.com
³² Ibid. Pp. 225-256
want to ‘absorb’. As Thompson writes, most forms of mass-communication is one-sided, one person or company or source provides a message that is then intercepted and decoded by the receiver. Maria is the receiver, she is left on her own to decide what to make of all this information she gets when she searches for it. Again, referring to Piaget’s theories, she is then free to make of this information what she wants, and incorporate it into herself, to absorb it and make it part of her personality, but as I said above she, and the social forum she uses, becomes the remediator, passing information on to others in an online cultural exchange.33

Adam

Adam is a 23 year old male. He lives in a larger city in central Sweden. He studies linguistics, and in his spare time he enjoys science fiction films and video games.

“I shop at tradera.com and buy t-shirts and jeans there. I’ll also buy something that looks nice. I’ll buy shirts, sweaters, anything, but usually jeans. I might go to fashion sites for inspiration – for instance, when army style was in I’d go to sites to look at jackets of that style, but then I would go into the city and search for similar jackets.”34

Adam refers to a style being ‘in’, and going by the theory that humans together create new cultures, something that is ‘in’ would be a tangible and very visible example of this. Currently, the style that is in is rockabilly and retro. He cuts his hairstyle in a rockabilly style, and wears clothing reminiscent of the members of the music cover-group the Baseballs.35 For instance, the basis of information are semiotic tools, but on top of that so are images. Something that is ‘in’ in the world of fashion is reported in the major fashion magazines around the world. As explained through Vygotsky’s theories, he is a recipient of forwarded and remediated messages. Casual observers strolling past the magazine stand in the local store cannot help but at least peripherally be aware of the images and words the magazines use to send messages. Adam describes how he does not look at magazines, but rather at fashion websites for inspiration. The digital media here has replaced the printed one, but a brief examination of both the InStyle Magazine and its online version, revealed that the content is similar in both versions. By going online, Adam is not missing out on any information; he is merely using another tool to take part of a cultural expression.36 The media here is an aide, or a guide to style. Adam shops for jeans on tradera.se due to price and style, if something is

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34 Appendix F
35 Appendix G
cheaper there than it would be in the store, or if it is easier to find it online, rather than in the store. He also goes to fashion sites for inspiration. He claims that he wants a particular style that fits his personality and his identity. In a way this heralds back to Piaget’s theories of people being born with one core identity which in turn is what controls all of our later findings. Adam searches for information via secondary sources, and receives it, and while the sender is not there to explain its choices or what the message really means, Adam has to make use of past experiences he has gained in a particular social setting to make his own decisions and as such those past experiences influence his choices in the present. He is involved in a process of interpretation, but also a self-creation process. As Thompson writes “by [...] routinely incorporating them into our lives we subconsciously create an idea of ourselves, an idea of who we are and where we are”. He goes on to say that we are actively creating an ‘I’, with the help of the messages we receive through media.37

Nina
Nina lives in central Stockholm, she’s 28 years old and she studies to become a sign language interpreter. N is firmly rooted in Stockholm, and likes musicals, movie-soundtracks and Enid Blyton books. She likes to find “pretty” clothing that “suits her shape”. Nina wants to find clothes that fit her. She does not have what most would call a conventional body type, nor, as she describes it “a body type that follows the norms of the fashion industry”. We are not just our personalities, we are our bodies as well, and we must clothe them. Stier draws a parallel to skin-colour but he also writes that a person’s identity project can be the same as wearing the right clothes.38

“I have a body-type that doesn’t quite follow the norm of the clothing industry, of how a body should look. My bum and my hips are a bit too broad, I have a marked waist with a belly at the front, and then breasts on top of that. It’s caused me to always have trouble finding clothes that fit my body.”

For her, finding clothing is more about practicality than anything else. She can’t find what she needs in the stores where she lives, so she goes online and searches. One could argue that through our assimilation and accommodation, and then remediation, we as a society have collectively agreed upon a certain desirable ‘look’ as far as body-types go.39 As an extension of that, the majority of clothes sold in (nearest store) all fit this desired body-type, a sign of an

37 Ibid. Pp. 60
increased homogeneity between cultures, wherein we dress more and more similarly.\textsuperscript{40} Nina prefers to wear dresses that fit an 1950’s aesthetic because they, in her words, “suit my body shape better with wider skirts and narrower tops, but not too narrow!” She says she likes that style because not only does it fit her shape better, but she feels pretty in it, preferring perhaps a more ‘feminine’ aesthetic that was more suitable in the 1950’s. “Red is good. Dots are good. I feel chic and generally pretty and just a bit 1950’s cocky. To this dress I often wear a hair ribbon …and a piece of jewelry-things I don’t normally wear otherwise.”\textsuperscript{41} She finds these clothes online and she does randomly use Google to find things. However, even if a person was to randomly Google that person would be exposed to what others have found more interesting, as the first displayed results are also the most popular results as \textit{chosen by others}.

\textbf{Charles}

Charles is 37 years old and lives in the London area in England. He works for a large company as a Data Officer. He has an interest in pop-music and science-fiction. Charles and I connected through an internet forum on science-fiction television shows. He’s been kind enough to send me information on his own social media habits via e-mail. Charles is very interested in fashion, and particularly in classic, sustainable looks that will last and won’t be outdated. He is not interested in ‘fads’, or the latest fashion.

“…recently I’ve mostly been wearing a tweed jacket, tweed baker's boy cap, cravats, shirts, driving gloves – and then mixing it up with jeans and bowling style shoes - kind of old fashioned forward. I like classic clothing but wear it with a twist.”

Charles is using a variation on my word retro-outfitting, old fashioned forward, implying that he is aware of this trend to use an older aesthetic to fashion an outfit. To him, old-fashioned can be good, and equal to vintage, again showing that we give words meaning and weight, and depending on the time and who uses it, that meaning changes.\textsuperscript{42}

“I do buy modern clothing if I like it ... I have some t-shirts with unusual designs on them. I like the t-shirts from here \url{http://www.threadless.com/} - I'm averse to stuff that's too fashionable, or one of the "hot" brands.” “I'm not one of the sheep. I'd rather stand out from the crowd, so wearing something slightly unusual does that. But on the other hand, I don't

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. Pp. 37  
\textsuperscript{41} Appendix F  
\textsuperscript{42} Säljö, Roger (2005) \textit{Lärande och kulturella redskap – om lärprocesser och det kollektiva minnet}. Norstedts Akademiska Förlag
wear completely period clothing, unless it's for a reason - you'll have seen my photo gallery on Facebook.com, and know that I'm not scared of dressing up.”

Charles spontaneously gave me a link to threadless.com where he buys t-shirts, and Adam mentioned tradera.se as the source for buying jeans and shirts. Both are using new media to find clothes that suit them and their identity. Charles expresses a desire to stand out of the crowd, specifying that he is not one of ‘the sheep’, or part of a mindless herd who only goes for the latest fads or what can be found in the nearest store. Relating to postmodernism, it has been since the mid 20th century more desirable to be more individual, what Charles explains as not being part of the herd. Still, even though he does want to stand out, he, Maria, Nina and Adam all share a common visual aesthetic, that of vintage retro fashion. Charles mentions Facebook.com and his gallery there – having looked at it I know that he does dress up in costumes, and that he shares this information with his friends, who in turn share the information with him. At the same time Facebook.com, via programming that appropriates the information given by users, reinterprets and remediates the information Charles has given the site and provides him with new adverts and friends and interest groups he might like. The new adverts can be clothes and shoes, based on his preferences.

At the same time, Charles does not want to wear anything “too fashionable” nor complete period clothing. The clothes he wears must fit in with the style that is required both at his job and within his social circle. If he wears something that is considered too ‘far out’, he won’t fit in with the group, and risks ostracizing. He chooses a sort of middle-road. Looking at Piaget’s theories, this would be Charles making an active choice of what he likes, of what fits his personality – the one he was born with, but has since expanded upon – and looking at the theories of how we in a society exchange meaning and cultural this is where he makes a choice out of the various options he is given. Bruner writes that culture is changing, never solid. Culture in today’s industrial society has adapted to be absorbent – to soak up and apply new aspects. “We” can wear old-fashioned clothing because the society and culture we live in understands this and accepts it as a sub-cultural aspect, a small part of a larger. While the sub-culture then thrives on the fringes, the larger mass in turn soaks up, or absorbs parts of it and incorporates it into mainstream fashion.

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2.4 Online Survey

I performed an online survey on people’s social networking habits, interests and social habits. The reason for this was so that I could corroborate my findings on how information and interests are spread by asking questions of more subjects. All respondents have a Facebook account. Two of them also use MySpace.com, while one uses Flickr.com, one uses Photobucket.com and two uses other social networking systems. Mostly, they use these accounts for “social networking, getting invitations for IRL activities”, as well as “keeping up to date on events… going on within my social circle”, “keeping up with friends”, and for employment opportunities and promotion. All informants stated that they began using the networking sites because their friends were using it, or that they had been invited – presumably by friends. One person mentioned magazines as a source, but in combination with friends and colleagues. Yet one more person mentioned that they were made aware of blogs through their school. While this is not a large-scale survey, Facebook.com (since all of my survey subjects are part of that site) works on the method of word-of-mouth. Since humans are social creatures and are also good informants and “spies”, they forward information quickly and soon ‘everyone’ they know is part of the social networking system and the network has become a large part of their daily activity. Four of my five informants on the survey answered that when they need to find something they go by friends recommendations. Two of the five follow word of mouth. It was interesting to see that three of five do random searches, but the question did not require an answer to what they usually search for, or how they know what to search for. It seems that in this group they use these services to connect with and to people, places, things and interests that they are already aware of, and that they do not simply reach out at random into the ether and discover fantastic new things. They are given a message by someone, they follow the directions of the message, and find that they are interested to know more and do more research on the subject.

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47 Appendix H
2.5 The blogs

The blog as a phenomena has in a very brief time created many different sub-groupings both in regards to content and in expression.49

As I wrote above, I have followed two blogs that I call Vintage Blog 1 and Vintage Blog 2. I also explained how I came to find them through contacts online, and became part of a forwarding chain of information. In a similar vein, the writers of the blogs use digital media to share their interests in vintage and retro.50 Combining text and still-photographs and video to do share interests causes the blog to become on its own a convergent media. This is something that could not have happened before the introduction of convergent media such as mobile phones, digital cameras and the development of Web 2.0, a more interactive and more accessible internet where users are free to upload their own content and by doing so creating their own meaning. Before the emergence of convergent and digital media information took time to spread. A person would have needed to take a photograph, to wait for it to be developed and then to scan it into their computer. A blogger would also have known how to code web-pages in order to build one where they could share information. The blogger would then have needed to rely on either a search engine or friends with connections to spread the word about their webpage. Today, a blogger can take an instant picture, upload it, and wait for their community to spread the word for them – as in the case on Facebook.com where recommendations to get to know someone or to keep in touch with someone are made.51

Aside from owning new media and learning to take control of it in new ways, the bloggers are also constructing meaning within a specific social cultural setting, that is important to them and their readers.52 In a way the writers are exercising a sort of cultural power, a symbolical power, as Thompson describes it.53 But remove the internet and the digital media and we still have two or more people exchanging information on a particular subject. In a similar way, individuals searching for the 1930’s and 1940’s style fashion can use convergent media and other outlets such as Twitter, Flickr, Facebook.com, and message boards to find other people interested in the same style.54 Bloggers, or those interested in a vintage-aesthetic no longer have to travel very far to find vintage clothing, but can easily find the information at home, as well as share their styles with others. The authors of the blogs frequently make references to

49 Lisa Ehlin (2010) Bilden har blivit bruksvara, Svenska Dagbladet, March 17th
50 Appendix C, D, E
51 Appendix C and D
53 Ibid. Pp. 27
other blogs or online personalities and many of them have links on their sidebars where readers are free to browse further, connecting with yet more blog-authors who mostly prefer to wear vintage clothing. The authors also often respond to requests for more information, and in the comment section they are frequently given tips for other sites, shops or more hairstyles. Following the results of my survey, looking at the blogs and at the authors and the commentators – senders and receivers – I could see a link between sources. Both the survey and the exchange of information I witnessed on the blog confirmed that very few random searches occur within these networks. There seems to be a clear majority of people who rely almost exclusively on informants and word-of-mouth sharing. As such, no blog – or blogger – is an island.

3.0 Further Analysis

3.1 Retro-outfitting the Future

... postmodernism is marked by pastiche, depthless inter-textuality, and schizophrenia. It is a culture in which ‘real’ history is displaced by nostalgia. The result is a discontinuous flow of perpetual presents. His example is what he calls the ‘nostalgia film’. Such films set out stylistically and atmospherically, and in terms of audience experience, to provide a sense of the past, even when the film is set in the future; for these are not historical films; history is always effaced by ‘historicism’, the ‘random cannibalization’ of past filmic styles and past experiences of viewing.55

After speaking to them, my interview subjects mix old-style fashion with the new, the past with the present, and they do some of it via social media. Charles says in his interview that he does buy modern styled clothing if he likes it, as well as “/.../ then mixing it up with jeans and bowling style shoes”. Adam mentioned that it is a good help to browse online stores and websites for inspiration. Maria mentioned music and movies, and following that trail, comes Frederic Jameson and Elizabeth Wilson’s theories in regards to both remediation, fashion and popular culture, seen from a post-modernist perspective. When I read about their theories I was reminded of the movie Blade Runner and the way that the fashion in present time seems to echo the aesthetic of that movie.

Blade Runner, a film set in 2019 – the far future when it was released in 1982 – shows a slightly dystopian world with androids and flying cars, pill-sized dinners and lights, but which, to the viewer, brings to mind the 1940’s and film noir rather than the then far future.

Harrison Ford’s character is a hardboiled detective à la Sam Spade – he even has a speech pattern reminiscent of detectives in films such as *Angels with Dirty Faces* and *G-Men* – and the woman he’s trying to protect wears *New Look* inspired fashion. Referred to as Neo-Noir, *Blade Runner* is an excellent example of a retrofitted future, a converging society where in the films’ – present the past meets the future, and the past is the future, and the past, in the future is what is desirable. Storey writes, “Elizabeth Wilson applies Frederic Jameson’s analysis to the world of fashion (‘the most popular aesthetic practice of all’, as she calls it). In the end, she wonders if Jameson’s analysis might in fact represent ‘a cultural myth of ‘our times’, extending to the present a stereotype after the fashion of ‘the thirties’ or ‘the sixties’, and so on.’

Meanwhile, Jim Collins claims that films are ‘quoting’ other films and referencing other films and borrowing from different genres. He also claims that the audience is familiar with these in-jokes, and like it. Basically, according to Collins, the old is not replaced by the new but is ‘recycled for circulation together with the new’. In a way, while attempting to create something in the present, we draw on the experiences from the past that has been tested and tried by past generations, while preparing for the future. Nowhere is this more obvious than on the fashion blogs I observed that are dedicated to vintage fashion, where the writers are completely immersed in an aesthetic that comes straight from the past. And while they do fill their online journals with written content, it is the images that get the most responses, the video-clips, the tutorials that teaches the followers what skirts to wear, how to shave, how to apply make-up, how to wear their hair or how to tie a tie. Those that are most affected, or wish to be, can immediately soak up this viral information, these visually represented aids and tips.

… Because of its high emotional content teenage culture is essentially non-verbal. It is more naturally expressed in music, in dancing, in dress, in certain habits of walking and standing, in certain facial expressions and ‘looks’ or in idiomatic slang. From this comes the idea of cultural exchanges via converging media (the computer – which is a writing tool, a camera, a telephone and more – the mobile – text and image – etc), a socio-cultural exchange of ideas, knowledge and culture. What used to be distinctive subcultures in

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56 Conard, Mark T. (2006), *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir*, University Press of Kentucky  
57 Retrofit – verb (retrofitted, retrofitting) fit with a component or accessory not fitted during manufacture, noun an act of retrofitting ORIGIN blend of retroactive and refit; http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/oretrofit?view=uk  
59 Ibid. Pp. 42  
a few areas can now meet on virtual platforms and discuss similar interests. For instance, back in the day there would be the skinheads and the punks, gathering at their local café. They’d be the loneliest people in the world. In the present, they can seek out others with similar thoughts and ideas and ways of dressing, and be lonely in a much larger group. Youths and adults alike can find individuals with similar interests, problems or ideals all over the world. They seek uniqueness through uniformity. Heterogeneousness becomes homogeneousness.

When I interviewed my sources they all made references to the 1940’s and 1950’s, and how they want their own personal look to mirror the look of those times. As mentioned in the interview above Charles prefers a classic cut that will set him apart but also allow him to blend in. Maria blatantly stated that she is interested in the burlesque and the rockabilly cultures, which aesthetics echo those of the 1940’s. Nina is searching actively for skirts and dresses that are ‘1950’s inspired’, while Adam cuts his hair in the rockabilly style of Elvis Presley and wears trousers in the same style of the 1940’s. All of them spontaneously mentioned these eras during my first interviews as inspiration for the way they dress, and after some research online I found that there are more groups, such as the Ministry of Burlesque, Rockabilly on Livejournal.com, as well as online stores selling vintage-inspired fashions. Elisabeth Wilson writes: “I turn now to look at what light fashion and postmodernism shed on each other. Today, there is a blurring between mainstream and countercultural fashions: all fashion has become ‘stagey’, self-conscious about its own status as a discourse, about its irrationality, about its message. … while Karl Lagerfeld at Chanel has produced outfits that parody the original styles, and ‘pudding’ hats that parody the surrealist motifs of the 1930’s.”. 61

3.2 Interactivity

In his book Lärande och kulturella redskap (Learning and cultural tools – my translation), Roger Säljö writes that that because humans use tools in their daily lives, people think in roundabout ways. Using a physical tool rather than our minds reconfigures the structure of our psychological processes “in the same manner that a physical tool reconfigures a working process”. 62 Continuing in this vein Säljö makes the point that we essentially experience the world in a secondary manner. The way we act and interact through the world is mediated

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through these tools which “describe colour, form, function and all manner of traits that are interesting in a certain activity” (my translation).\(^63\) Using these tools humans do not even have to be present or in the presence of another person to take part of these experiences. Still, they are secondary experiences, but through the use of modern media they become firsthand experiences because – using myself as an example – once I have logged on and seen the dress, the suit, the hat or the shoes that the others in my group want to share, I can then go out and find similar items. I take a secondary experience and make it a primary experience. When she attended a media conference at Kulturhuset, Stockholm, 2010 February 9\textsuperscript{th}, Elza Dunkels of Umeå Universitet spoke in regards to the web as an arena for the creation of identity and social networking amongst youths that people do not randomly search for facts.\(^64\) As I found out during my interview sessions and in my survey, people go through sources, or perhaps a sort of spy who already possesses the knowledge we want. Following these spies we then come across the original sources and make them our primary sources as we appropriate the knowledge and make it our own. This is how I connected with my sources. By knowing one person I was able to connect to a second, and then a third, creating a link of knowledge and exchanging of information.

4.0 Final Analysis and Conclusion.

Culture is constantly changing; it is as malleable as the human mind, and as difficult to define. As culture changes, so do we and while in search for the bits and pieces that will eventually make up our identity, we follow crumbs left by others in a process of receiving, remediating and reproducing. The use of convergent and new media helps in identity construction in that a person is no longer simply bound by his or her physical location. While we are locked in place by either our economic situation or other circumstances, the internet and other convergent media have opened up new possibilities for those of us fortunate to have access to them.\(^65\) Even though we cannot break free of our physical location (work, job, responsibilities to others) we are still free to go online or contact others via media and get a much faster result than we might have gotten fifty years ago. Socio-cultural exchanges occur in online settings when two or more people meet in an online social network and between them can spread information that they are all free to appropriate or discard or redistribute to their own social circle as they see fit. In short, one would need to move to some utterly remote part of the

\(^63\) Ibid. Pp. 27
\(^64\) Digital Turist, Elza Dunkels m.fl. 2010-02-09, Kulturhuset, Stockholm, Sweden http://medieradet.se/upload/dokument/Program%20Stockholm.pdf
world and cut all connections to escape completely – and one still might not succeed. But this new media is not only intrusive, it opens up a large window of opportunity for self-realisation and offers more choices that discerning eyes can sift through in order to find the things that appeal to and suit them. This offers up new opportunities for students. They, as individuals and as a group, are no longer completely dependent on the teacher as their sole informant or bringer of information. Students and youths may follow trails left by teachers and perform their own research into areas that interest them. This means that new media, convergent media and new online social media become very powerful tools as well as empowering tools. At the same time it forces the teachers to stay more on top of things, as well as to keep their knowledge on media and information up to date. Teachers cannot afford to fall behind and can no longer afford to consider themselves The Giver of Truth. While students and youths discover that they can find information on their own and that they are no longer limited to their physical social setting, teachers will have to redefine their role in school and society. Teachers will have to function as guides in a network jungle, to perhaps rather than give one piece of information or fact, show students how to make their own reasonable choices. At the same time teachers will have the privilege to observe a possibly much more rapid change in identity where students are concerned, perhaps much more dramatic and visible changes.

Individuals can with the help of new and convergent media get in touch with others, find information, pictures, download, upload and save and forward all these things to whomever they wish. They can more rapidly become aware of styles or things that appeal to them, and more rapidly try and discard or appropriate these styles and aesthetics until they find the one that is right for them. As one blogger described it she went through a gothic and rockabilly phase before via her rockabilly connections she found out about the 1940’s vintage style. In a way, the people I have followed and studied are not so much searching for utopia or attempting to escape reality, as they are creating their own culture, based on an earlier aesthetic. Wearers are trying to catch a sense of that time, the Zeitgeist, but not the reality. The reality is being displaced, as John Storey writes, “It is a culture in which ‘real’ history is displaced by nostalgia”. Wearers of the fashion are using the modern technologies available to them to attain a sort of idealized version of the past. They are not reaching for truth, but the glamour and beauty from that time, exoticising a version of the past. Today, using contemporary and new media we can incorporate that shimmer into what some might think of as a rather dull present, and turning the Old into the New.
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Appendix

Appendix A – Advertisement 1948, Alba Nylons

Appendix B – Advertisement, Maidenform

Appendix C – Blog

Another exciting giveaway!

So, last week I was contacted by the lovely Lana, who works for True Vintage, a lingerie brand based here in go-to of Eighty. She asked if I would like to come to their recently opened boutique, where a new show, do a crochet, and a chance to win a prize! I was thrilled to go! And the best giveaway for this week was an unopened box of about 100 items. I, of course, jumped at the chance and offered to have the first item to be auctioned off. But that’s where the bidding war started...
Appendix D – Remediation via Youtube.com

Appendix E - Blog

I wore a lovely 50s summer dress, which was safely recent - say, bargain of 50p. It’s covered in flowers and, best of all, little cats, all pastel blue, pink, yellow and green! It’s in such fabulous condition with the cotton crisp and that dark deep and unfaded... plus it fitted me brilliantly! Any suggestion on a better belt? This one came from a modern retro and it works OK, but I think it can be vastly improved upon! No photos from the floor down as all visitors to 40 Winks have to wear slippers, and mine totally didn’t match my French![1]

So that was Tart in pictures! If anyone is interested and would like some more information, please don’t hesitate to get in touch. I’m off to Sussex for the weekend, to help my beloved Nan run a conference. Have a super weekend everyone! XX

You might also like:

- [For Tart The Bell Tolls...](#)
- [We get Tattled up](#)
- [You Tart](#)
Appendix F – Adam and Nina

Appendix G - The music group *The Baseballs*
Appendix H - Survey Questions

1. Do you use any of the following online social networks?
   - Facebook
   - Twitter
   - Myspace
   - Badoo
   - Bebo
   - Classmates.com
   - Flickr
   - Photobucket
   - Other

3. What do you primarily use your online social network account for?

4. How did you find out about this networking site?

5. Do you have an account for the following?
   - Blog
   - Vlog (video log)
   - Youtube.com account
   - Podcast
   - Other, please specify

6. What do you primarily use your blog/vlog account for?

7. How did you find out about the blogging/networking site(s) you use?
   - Advertisement
   - Friend
   - Word-of-mouth
   - “Celebrity X talked about it in ---”

8. How much time each week do you spend on your social networking accounts?
   - 1-4 hrs
   - 4-8 hrs
   - 8-10 hrs
   - More

9. Do you shop online, and if so what do you buy?
   - Music
   - Food
   - Clothing
   - Furniture/Housewares
• Electronical products
• Personal products – hygiene, make-up etc.
• Movies and entertainment
• Travel and leisure

10, How do you find what you need?

• Friend’s recommendation
• Word of mouth
• Random search online
• Advert from company
• “A Celebrity told me about Product X in interview”

11, What style of music do you prefer and why?

12, What style of clothing do you prefer and why?

13, What type of movies/television programmes do you prefer/most often watch, and why?

14, Do you do one or more of the following?

• Mainly shop for modern clothing?
• Mainly shop for vintage clothing?
• Mainly shop for modern clothing online?
• Mainly shop for vintage clothing online?
• Mainly shop for modern clothing in your town/area?
• Mainly shop for vintage clothing in your town/area?
• Mainly watch “classic” or “nostalgic” movies?
• Mainly watch modern movies?
• Prefer to listen to “classical” or other “nostalgic” music?
• Prefer to listen to modern music?
• Other: please specify

15, If you prefer vintage to modern, nostalgic movies/music to modern, why?

16, If you shop for vintage, classic, nostalgic clothing and movies, how do you find it?

17, How would you describe your personal style/aesthetic?