Portuguese Representations of 1950s American Rock ‘n’ Roll (Sub)Culture

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Luso-Retro

By

Andrew Nunes

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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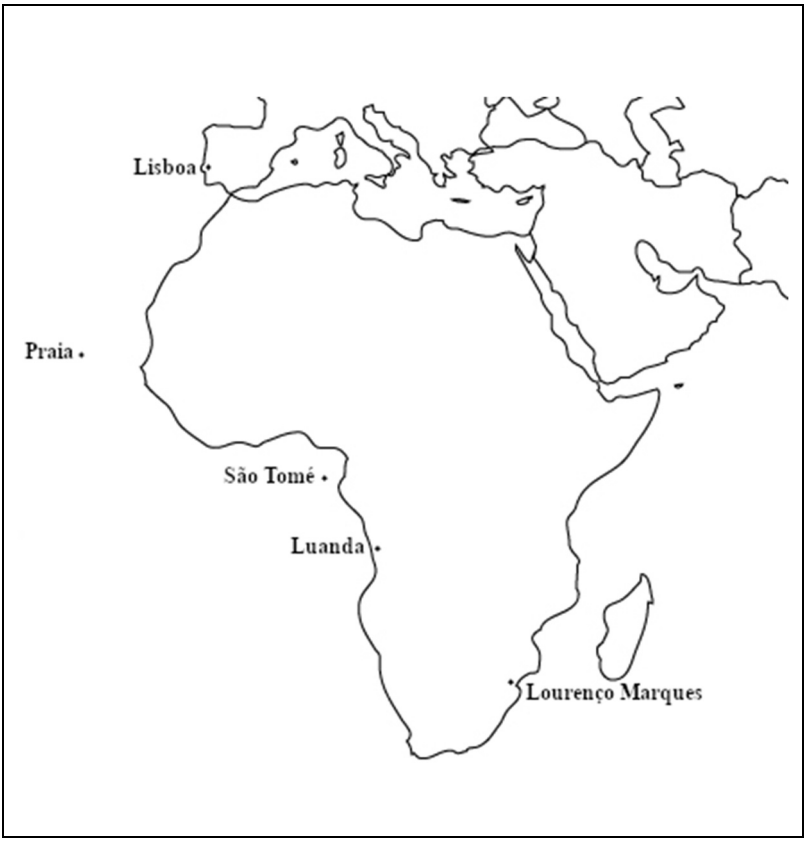
Map



Map showing the capitals of Portugal and its African colonies during the mid-twentieth century.

PREFACE

This book analyses the Portuguese 1950s vintage community. A brief summation as to why it may be that many seem to adore certain aspects of the 1950s within the present. It is this matter that is the focus of this book in its context of Portugal and the Portuguese and, by extension, the larger international fifties revival scene. As there is little known outside of Portugal of this type of culture, this book attempts to include the Portuguese 1950s vintage scene in a wider international discourse on subcultures. Moreover, this book aims to make us think more deeply about cultural revivalism, that despite our forever more technological and modern forms of life, it is the past that is continually sought out, retrieved, and (re)performed culturally and artistically. Overall, I arrived at this topic due to my interests in 1950s-era music, namely rock 'n' roll, along with its associated fashions, including my interests in Portuguese history, culture, and politics. These joint interests led me to research the contemporary revivalism of 1950s culture in Portugal, which was my Master of Research dissertation in 2018. Since then, this dissertation has been expanded in the form of this book.

Andrew Nunes
April 2019

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

Luso-Retro was first published in 2019. This revised edition retains the main arguments of the original book while maintaining its short length. Given its size, it might be more appropriate to describe this book in the way Christopher Hitchens did with his smaller published works: as "pamphlets". Nevertheless, as, certainly, a small book, much of the 2019 edition has since been thoroughly scrutinised. This resulted in many passages being removed and rewritten, as well as new supporting information being added. This process, however, was still not enough of a change to the overall book to warrant it as a second edition. Instead, this book, in retaining the original dissertation, focused on addressing the previous written language, correcting errors, and making the ideas presented clearer, remains my analysis of the Portuguese 1950s vintage scene and its community, set at the time of its first publication, although with some small updates due to changes that have occurred in Portugal. In this way, my analysis remains: to contribute an understanding of the cultural work of contemporary actors in Portugal, as well as the broader effects of the 1950s American rock 'n' roll subculture within it.

Among the examples I use to demonstrate the contemporary revisitation of the 1950s are those that parallel Simon Reynolds' observations (in *Retromania*, 2011). However, different, I acknowledge that there were many more cultural (re)occurrences in music and fashion that I could have included but did not, which could have further supported my arguments. This includes what I missed by not engaging with Mark Fisher, whose views largely echo my own concerning contemporary culture and the adoption of past aesthetics. In recognition of this gap, I must acknowledge Fisher here in agreement, that rather than anticipating the future, I believe we remain at a cultural impasse he argued (in *Ghosts of My Life*, 2014) due to the conditions enabled by neoliberalism and evidenced in the way popular culture from the 2000s onwards, has resorted to recycling past styles whilst presenting them as "new". Therefore, although in terms of 1950s rock 'n' roll enthusiasts engaging with a past that is presented as not new, the general critique of contemporary culture by Fisher as "hauntological" – insofar as our present is haunted by lost futures that have been unable to materialise because of the continual retrieval of the cultural past – indeed shadows a reading of this book, to which I accept and disclose here. Moreover, I admit

that the absence of images (figures) in the book is a notable shortcoming; their inclusion would have strengthened it, as this omission is surprising in a study that addresses material representations, alongside the sonic, and such images would have greatly helped to illustrate just how American-styled certain aspects are in Portugal.

Overall, the revised edition is still a reflection of an earlier time, when I was learning to do independent research as a postgraduate student. Therefore, I hope not to be judged too harshly without this context in mind, acknowledging that parts of this book are perhaps too descriptive – hopefully never repetitive, except for where I thought it was necessary or due to discussions taking me over previous issues (and you will forgive) – all of which may be frustrating to some readers, as I now realise that other approaches could have been taken. Nonetheless, let this be evidence of just how far my writing has progressed since 2019, remembering that the product of this book arose from my master's dissertation, with its advancement and revision – a process that, as with all research and its dissemination, remains open to improvement. As such, being research from an earlier time, with its primary discussion areas laid out, I invite others to develop them further.

As it stands, this revised edition continues to cover a range of topics, from memory and nostalgia, material culture – its revival and commodification – to the spread of the music of rock 'n' roll, set against the backdrop of mid-twentieth-century politics in the Portuguese-speaking world. It also addresses Portugal's transition to democracy through the lens of rock music, extending to contemporary representation of American 1950s music and fashion in Portugal. In doing so, this book remains a resource for those interested in music and related (sub)cultures within Portuguese-speaking geographies, as well as for those who are not. For example, readers only interested in the politics of the Portuguese Estado Novo will likely find parts of this book helpful as supplementary reading. In general, this book will be of most interest to researchers in Portuguese cultural studies, a field I wish to promote.

Andrew Nunes
Cambridge, England
September 2025

INTRODUCTION

This book presents a brief understanding of past and present mid-twentieth-century American rock 'n' roll subculture by the Portuguese. In this book, various theories by academics and critics are brought forth concerning historical and cultural revivals, as well as the implications of this past used in the present. In addition, the history of Portugal, which experienced an authoritarian regime for forty-eight years and yet still engaged with the rock 'n' roll boom in the 1950s, is also a matter discussed to better understand the greater significance of Portugal's political situation and its legacy; one that has affected contemporary revivals of the 1950s in Portugal by the Portuguese.

The existence of contemporary Portuguese revivalism of the 1950s and its material culture is not dissimilar to its existence elsewhere in the world, where many other countries have had their own experiences with this phenomenon. However, in the Portuguese case, this book brings to light an interesting debate concerning Portuguese vintage revivalism that has rarely been discussed, in addition to the emergence of rock 'n' roll music and its evolution in Portugal and its colonies in the mid-twentieth century. Much is already known about the never-ending fifties revival in America and Britain, which looks upon their own pasts and the cultural expressions they enjoyed. However, in the Portuguese case, this same revival of the 1950s music, fashion, and more is not a direct continuation of Portugal's cultural history of the era. Instead, it is a later copy and greater adoption of another's – specifically, Britain's cultural past of the 1950s, but predominantly America's cultural experience during this era. This difference in a cultural connection with the 1950s is interesting since Portugal did engage with rock 'n' roll during the 1950s simultaneously as it occurred elsewhere in the world, although it was a circumscribed phenomenon within Portugal and Portuguese Africa. The documented existence of rock 'n' roll in these territories during the mid-twentieth century means, however, a revival of the 1950s is also not necessarily that of an American vein but instead, Portugal's interpretation and experimentation with American culture during the 1950s itself, that had its own rock 'n' roll stars and its own but smaller scene. However, the Portuguese 1950s is avoided, for the most part, in contemporary rock music and fashion, in preference for an American image and style. As such, this book considers this cultural-historical break and

reluctance by contemporary Portuguese 1950s enthusiasts to recite their country's cultural past of rock 'n' roll. Nonetheless, the existence of revival subcultures in Portugal and elsewhere is real and well-documented, regardless of subjective particularities.

Currently in Portugal, like elsewhere, there is a large interest in the material culture of the past. Pop culture critic Simon Reynolds argues that,

> "...there has never been a society in human history so obsessed with the cultural artifacts of *its own immediate past.*" (Reynolds 2011, xiii.).

Reynolds demonstrates this phenomenon in modern pop culture. I too, in this book, explore such an occurrence, however, focused on Portuguese efforts that galvanise mid-twentieth century rock 'n' roll and American culture, demonstrated through prominent Portuguese figures, some I was lucky enough to interview, that exhibit the aesthetic of the American 1950s and evoke it within the present-day for personal preferences, but also to commodify it through business and products, from restaurants and diners, barbershops, artworks, music recordings, and reproduction clothing. However, assessing this aesthetic in Portugal presents difficulties since there is little literature on Portuguese 1950s rock 'n' roll culture. Unfortunately, instances of youth subculture in Portugal pre-1974 have been relatively ignored in favour of later (1980s) movements in rock music. As such, this book attempts to fill in this gap, although I do not explore explicitly how early rock 'n' roll changed Portuguese society, this can be generally inferred through the history and discussions I provide. Nonetheless, research presented in this book will recount and analyse the not-well-known origins of Portuguese rock 'n' roll, its leading figures, and their historical context. In so doing, it connects the past of the 1950s to contemporary Portuguese revivalism of this era, and its implications in the present and future.

This book attempts to address questions arising from the following thoughts: why is the American 1950s continually revived for its music, style, and sense of "coolness" – particularly by Portuguese people, whose country experienced that era in a markedly different way? Thus, why do these people attempt to replicate and bring back to life a past that was never their own? Is the aesthetic appeal of the American 1950s embraced purely for its niceties, or does it stem from deeper existential crises? Could this, therefore, be politically motivated – a form of protest against modernity? In other words, is the cultural reuse of the American 1950s by contemporary Portuguese vintage enthusiasts merely a matter of personal preference, or is it a reactionary stance against modern forms of existence? Furthermore, is this revival of an American rock 'n' roll past driven by a kind of non-experienced nostalgia?

For clarity, it should be noted that individuals and communities that inhabit, exhibit and work with the culture of the 1950s likely do not consider themselves any different from the rest of society. Nor do they believe they are partaking in anything special or definitively retro, or vintage, terms that are used to detrimentally codify their lifestyles. Considering this, more clarification should be made to avoid confusion over the terms I employ. Wording from the title of this book, for instance, "1950s", of course refers to the period from 1950 to 1959, but also – in this book – to occasionally mean the early 1960s, which was a continuation of rock 'n' roll before significant sonic changes to the music genre with psychedelia and so forth, from the mid-1960s. The term "Luso-Retro", however, the subtitle of this book, needs to be clarified the most. In short, it refers to Portuguese retro culture. Unpacking this in reverse, the word "Retro" is used throughout largely instead of "vintage", as the former is – arguably – part of the same notion concerning material objects from the past.[1] Addressing "Luso", this term comes from the name of Portugal given to it by the Romans during the Roman Empire. The former province of what is still most of Portugal today, in the Iberian Peninsula, was named Lusitania. The Lusitanians were the inhabitants of this region and the ancestors of modern Portuguese people. Therefore, the abbreviation of "Luso" means the Portuguese. "Luso" also refers to Lusophone (the Portuguese-speaking world), all countries in the world that speak Portuguese as a first official language.[2] The Portuguese, therefore, who are "Luso-Retro", are people from Portugal or of Portuguese heritage, who belong to a retro or vintage scene of any kind. In the case of this book, a contemporary 1950s revival scene and its community, but moreover, also something much larger, a *Retro International*.

In this book, I propose the existence of a *Retro International*, a union of all contemporary proponents of the 1950s vintage scene from not only Portugal but also from many other nations. The term, *Retro International* is an adaptation of "The International", political international organisations that span various countries. However, my intention with the use of such a term is concerned with its wide geographical range and less with a political philosophy or doctrine. The term is, instead, akin to a simplified version of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Jeff Greenfield's ideas in his chapter, "The Rock 'n' Roll Audience: But Papa, It's My Music, I Like It", in Theo Cateforis' book, *The Rock History Reader*.[3] Both Anderson and

[1] This point between "retro" and "vintage" is one that I will return to in the introduction of chapter one.

[2] A language that was introduced through colonialism, mainly from the sixteenth century onwards.

[3] See Anderson (2006) and Greenfield (2007).

Greenfield go on to describe a community of people from different walks of life, who are all united through common interests; a shared engagement with the same media. Although Anderson's concept is used in the context of nationalism and national identity, it is not difficult to see some of the same principles in the context of subculture groups vying for their own identity. The *Retro International* that I propose in this book is, nonetheless, a community where all its members share a common interest in the aesthetics and material culture of the American 1950s. An interest that leads them to engage with this past through the consumption of its cultural products.

This book consists of four chapters and a conclusion that goes as follows. Chapter one proposes some of the theoretical background concerning this topic, the obsession with the past, nostalgia and its problems and uses, and the commodification of the 1950s in the present. This first chapter aims to help with current understandings of this revival phenomenon. Namely, why it may be occurring, engaged with a collection of recent debates. Chapter two explores the political environment and the historical context of Portugal during the mid-twentieth century, and its relationship with American and British rock 'n' roll music and its later evolved forms. It also attempts to outline some of Portugal's rock music history. The third chapter of this book analyses the contemporary manifestations of an American 1950s aesthetic by Portuguese figures. The possible meanings behind this culture in contemporary society and the individuals that partake, forming a wider international vintage community, a *Retro International*. This third chapter will also address why the use of an American past, rather than that of a Portuguese past, might be occurring within the present. Chapter four concludes, firstly by considering all the earlier chapters, to bring everything together to address and clarify the major questions of this book. As well as suggest possible future considerations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTROSPECTION AND OBSESSION WITH THE PAST

1.1. Introduction

When the 1950s are discussed, at least in the West, we often think of this period through a commercialised perspective long presented by American films and music of the era. This reflects the dominance and influence America has had culturally in the world since the Second World War. A country that not only helped rebuild Europe after the war with loans it provided many countries, but also the entertainment it continually exported to Europe from Hollywood and the American music industry. The imprint of this can still be felt today, which has led to the manifestation of an international veneration of the 1950s, heavily influenced by American culture.

The 1950s infers a rich amalgamation of the music, films, fashion, architecture, interior design, classic motor vehicles, and much more from the era, and its reproduction after that time, where it has been (re)sourced countlessly. Post-1950s television series, films, photography, music, and festivals around the world which host and celebrate 1950s culture are just some examples.[4] People who attend such events may be casual or serious enthusiasts, a *Retro International* constituting an international community bound together through a shared commonality of interests with the 1950s, this past and its material artefacts. Usually, the 1950s reflect a period not experienced by these enthusiasts, as most were not yet born to witness or experience the era firsthand. Nonetheless, it is still a past that is sought out, in ways, in which enthusiasts of the 1950s can vicariously experience the era through its commodities and material objects of music recordings,

[4] There are many events around the world that celebrate the aesthetics of the American 1950s, some are, England's, Rockabilly Rave, Rhythm Riot!, Atomic Festival, Hemsby Rock 'n' Roll Weekender. America's, Viva Las Vegas, and Spain's, High Rock-A-Billy Festival, that are all held annually, that gather masses of 1950s enthusiasts from all around the world.

clothing and accessories, films, present-day created vintage stylised photos, and classic American cars. This *Retro International* differs from the dominant society, insofar as generally, people do not recite a specific past in ways to reuse it for its material culture, but rather, they recite a chosen past for its pleasant and familial memories. Nonetheless, this *Retro International* I propose, in many ways, stems from a specific point and idea by Benedict Anderson's (2006) *Imagined Communities*. The point of similarity from Anderson is that each member of this vintage 1950s community consumes the same media; not the written text such as newspapers as Anderson describes, but the same music and films (and of course fashion) due to a similar global spread like the printed word, through greater technological advancements such as the internet, an international community is formed. For instance, 1950s vintage enthusiasts from all over the world tend to shop at the same, but limited vintage reproduction brands and vintage shops, in person or online. Furthermore, 1950s enthusiasts mostly listen to the same music circa 1950s, and not surprisingly, due to the time-frozen catalogue easily accessible and being updated by contemporary musicians following this era's music style, however, often never equalling it and thus, never surpassing past music icons. Moreover, these serious enthusiasts of the 1950s style attend the same 1950s-themed music festivals and events held around the world that cater to their chosen interests in 1950s culture.

These personal choices and interests that drive people to engage with the culture of the American 1950s, constituting an international community, are most interesting. This type of community, a *Retro International*, which is formed around the aesthetics and material artefacts of the 1950s, however, is still a modern community in terms of its member's daily life experiences and their day-to-day use of modern forms of communication and social interactions through the internet (a point I will return to). This prevailing modern element of the contemporary 1950s community means that potential concessions to modern forms of life are not generally made by its members. Insofar, there is no desire to live in the 1950s as it was, losing all the current modern comforts and gadgets of today. The fifties community today, for the most part, wishes to engage only in the material culture and visual appearance of the 1950s and this past, therefore, retaining the technological privileges of modern life. The *Retro International*, therefore, is a selective subculture community, even if its members are not trying to be as such, or see this as the case, but are so due to a significant interest in a now non-mainstream culture, a specific past rather than the present. A community that selects the best attributes of the 1950s (its material culture) and does

away with parts of it that its members do not want to associate themselves with, namely, the politics of the era.

This idea of a 1950s community, however, is not new, but one that has existed for numerous decades since the actual 1950s. Various fifties revivals occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, and this 1950s past is now further achieved and, more outwardly realised, since the later evolution of the internet from around 2010 onwards, where "cyberspace" has become an intrinsic part of daily life.[5] A space where the present is publicised and the past is circulated extensively.[6] Social media networks, for example, play a vital role in the self-promotion of one's vintage style, providing insight into the vintage world and its participating members. In this way, online networks offer communal digital spaces, where those engaged in a 1950s subculture can interact and share their interpretations of 1950s American style. The online community is not isolated (it works in tandem with the material social space outside of the internet) and is one that can filter out other cultures. This is to the degree that the contemporary can be circumvented and filtered out by the selection of people that one "follows" and thereby only sees. Therefore, a 1950s enthusiast's online social network can provide a cultural isolation against modern fashion and music, where anything differing from a 1950s aesthetic is banished. The impact of the online space is interesting in this regard. It represents a comfort zone that enables, to some degree, temporarily, an escape from reality. Moreover, it is an online social space where one can surround oneself with an objective and subjective but visually more appealing image of the past, blurring reality with the virtual and the past with the present – a *contemporeality*.[7]

Just as the case is with Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, likewise, many of the members of the *Retro International* may never meet one another face-to-face but may do so in the online space, in some form or

[5] From 2010 and beyond, correctly foreseen at the time, the internet and, "…online activity is increasingly a part of everyday life – not a separate sphere…"; Palfrey (2010), 991.

[6] The internet is full of the past digitally preserved and exhibited (made visual) where today, we are confronted with an unprecedented volume of artistic forms (be it, music, film, literature, fashion, and more) belonging to former historical moments and cultural movements.

[7] Alejandro Ball discusses *contemporeality* as the belief that the internet and its networks form an additional layer on the physical realm rather than a separate plane of existence. This is insofar as the advent of the internet merged physical reality with virtual reality, which with the combination of social media networks, connectivity and access to anything and everything, has blurred the lines between virtuality and reality in which a new term is needed to demonstrate this post-internet form of existence, see Ball (2015).

another. All members of this community belong in an "imagined" sense, of a group that is formed that differs from others. The internet, and the earlier music recordings: the recorded rock 'n' roll song, along with the mechanisms of promotion and distribution of it, is akin, in many ways, to the even earlier printed and widely distributed newspaper, taking from Anderson's original notion in his *Imagined Communities*. The point is that these communicative forms and devices equate with a *Retro International* too, transcending geographical borders of nation-states and doing so in greater ways than Anderson's conception of an "imagined community" due to later technological developments of the internet, mass media distribution and so on.

The consequence of the *Retro International* is, for the most part, an aesthetic differentiation from a "norm". It reflects a different personal preference for specific objects that are no longer ordinary or, more precisely, "mainstream": clothes, cars and motorcycles, home décor, arguably outdated music and more. As members of this conceptual but realised 1950s community, they are still people who must comply with their given nation's civil society and its laws, thus always engaging in contemporary life like non-members of this community who do not adopt a 1950s aesthetic. As a result, there is no consequence or risk in belonging to such a community, since it is not an act of activism per se, although differences can bring good and bad social attention.

While discussing the term "Retro International", what is "retro"? As noted in an early footnote, I will return to answering a point of differentiation between "retro" and "vintage". The term "retro", previously mentioned in the introduction of this book, is more precisely understood as "past pop culture", where the object in question was once popular. "Vintage", however, normally describes something much older, and something that may not have been popular or trendy in the past, but simply existed with its (own) history, which may still be interesting. However, a vintage piece of clothing, for instance, may not be fashionable today and, therefore, not worth reviving or remaking. Nevertheless, both terms "retro" and "vintage" are very much interchangeable.

Simon Reynolds dissects the meaning of "retro" as a reference to,

> "...a self-conscious fetish for period stylisation (in music, clothes, design) expressed creatively through pastiche and citation. Retro... tends to be the preserve of aesthetes, connoisseurs and collectors, people who posses a near-scholarly depth of knowledge…" (Reynolds 2011, xii.).

The term "retro", however, has been denounced by British designer Wayne Hemingway, who does not use the word to describe his Classic Car

Boot Sale event at London's King's Cross, outside the university Central Saint Martins. Instead, he prefers terms such as "vintage", "timeless design" or "classic", as "retro" for Hemingway means tacky, even to the point of tasteless fancy dress (Hemingway 2015). Although Hemingway's point is valid, I argue that the word "retro" does not have to be a derogatory term. Especially if it is possible for a greater understanding to be achieved about what the term refers to from the past, in contrast to the term "vintage". If "retro" is more widely understood about a specific past, which it can be, it therefore does not have to be a negative term associated with tastelessness as Hemingway suggests. "Retro" does not need to be seen as such, as when it is, it is rather unfortunate, as by confining the term into the category of something vulgar as Hemingway sees it, it then fails in referring to a past objectively due to a specificity of language. In other words, labelling "retro" as something inferior to "vintage" or "classic", and so on, adds to the disapproval of past revivalism under the "retro" name. If better accepted and promoted regardless of the word, communities that engage in past artefacts and past cultures that fit as "retro" would better prosper and grow, rather than face shallow criticism that does not explore or expand "retro" in greater depth. "Retro" as a term should be held in higher regard in this kind of case, as in essence, its aims are the same as other terms to describe a past that has had modern revivals. Therefore, to regard "retro" and "vintage" as the same is beneficial. Throughout this book, I use both "retro" and "vintage" interchangeably; however aware of different periods they may infer.

Concerning a past defined by the term "retro" or "vintage", they are mixed within the realm of fascination, and to some extent, the possibilities of obsession. However, this is not unusual, as throughout civilisation people have always had a preoccupation with the past, although not always in the same way. The Renaissance had a retrospective look at antiquity. The Roman and Greek civilisations with art and philosophy, and it seems that in modern times there have been many revivals and imitations of the past and its reworkings, but in rather smaller ways than what people had previously experienced of great reinventions, such as those that occurred during the Renaissance. Nevertheless, people continue to revisit specific pasts in the present.

1.2. Nostalgia: Problems and Uses

Nostalgia, according to Anna Laura Stoler is often about,

> "…which one has never known or ever seen. It also carries a sense that one is already always too late" (Stoler 2016, 375).

Any retrieval of the past may involve nostalgia or a nostalgic intent, which could present problems. The Homeric epic *The Odyssey* gave rise to the term nostalgia ("nostos" and "algos").[8] In the nineteenth century, the term was regarded as a medical disorder, however, in the twentieth century, it has always been associated with a form of longing or homesickness that many of the classics before expressed. According to Svetlana Boym, the twentieth century began with futuristic optimism and utopian aspirations but ended with a global surge of nostalgia – a longing for continuity, community and collective memory in an increasingly fragmented world. She argues that this nostalgia was a response to the rapidly accelerating pace of life, changes and historical upheavals (Boym 2001, xiv). Similarly, Fred Davis defines nostalgia's development, in short, as something that has become,

> "The means for holding onto and reaffirming identities which had been badly bruised by the turmoil of the times" (Davis 1979, 107).

In these ways, nostalgia relates to looking back at the past for a sense of certainty since looking forward (to the future) is uncertain. In this manner, it is an antagonism of change and innovation, favouring stability, tradition, and so on (the old versus the new), enabling the breaks on the unstoppable treadmill towards the future in efforts of self-control and self-determination. Nostalgia could, therefore, be of help to alleviate contemporary anxieties brought about by the rapidly changing world, and its technological advancements are not always for the better, if only for a short while, until the process of historical change leads to inescapable futures.

Nostalgia, therefore, is a complex concept and can be better understood by using Boym's definitions in her dichotomy of *restorative* and *reflective* nostalgia. *Reflective* nostalgia is the type most known, a nostalgia that dwells in longing and loss, the patina of time and suffering in a rose-tinted remembrance. In other words, a remembrance that disproportionately evaluates the past as better than it was, but again, there may be some examples when something from someone's past was better than the present. For instance, personal health, happiness, or even former economic factors.

Restorative nostalgia is different; rather than a passive lamentation, it is the feeling of a need to assert and take action to rebuild a lost homeland. To restore tradition with a vengeance against those who are to blame for supposed misfortunes (Boym 2001, 41-3). This type of nostalgia is dangerous; it combines mythmaking and conspiracies, and thus, here lies some of its problems. The danger with this second type of nostalgia is evident in its uses throughout the twentieth century in fascist movements,

[8] "Nostos" (English: *Return*) and "algos" (English: *Pain*).

where it was put to work. Throughout Portugal's dictatorship led by Dr António de Oliveira Salazar, this type of nostalgia was used to some degree. Salazar cultivated and galvanised the "Portuguese Discoveries" as a unifying national symbol; he restored buildings, notably, castles and commissioned public works (statues and monuments) that celebrated a Portuguese identity, its people and their history. All of these are some examples of a *restorative* nostalgia that was capitalised upon that also scapegoated democracy and socialism as enemies of Portugal, and the causes of its misfortune. The United States of America during the Cold War, similarly operated in response to conspiracy theories against the radical left, with the Red Scare and McCarthyism: efforts to restore and secure the American homeland from the threat of communist subversion. There are many more examples, such as Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, that regardless of political systems of far left or right, all mobilised how Boym defines, *restorative* nostalgia. Nostalgia, however, as the result of right-wing nationalism that occurred before the Second World War, meant that after its fall, nostalgia was privatised and internalised to a longing for one's childhood, as opposed to a wider longing for home or nation (Ibid., 53).

Boym's dichotomy presents that there exists a good and a bad kind of nostalgia, but both have far less to do with the reality of a remembered past and range from the wholesome, romantic, and serv(ic)e for a national agenda to mobilise change. However, nostalgia is more complex than this; it is not the past alone that is the issue, but the attitudes nostalgists have towards the past, which they feel compelled to enact. Today, it seems most notably since the end of the Cold War, and in the twenty-first century, that history is more commonly remembered through cultural or sporting events, rather than political events. This reflects a sort of process of dissociation that has occurred with the concept of nostalgia due to its past problematic associations and uses. Nostalgia is now very much infused with popular culture and consumerism, and it is this form of nostalgia, or commercial nostalgia, that is most apparent regarding the revival and adoption of the material culture and aesthetics of the 1950s.

The implications of *reflective* and *restorative* nostalgias laid out by Boym are useful, as they help designate issues that may emerge in the use of nostalgia in modern times, aiding in defining them, especially concerning the commercialisation of the past. Anna Green states that cultural historians and theorists largely agree that contemporary society is currently in the grip of a nostalgia boom, evident at various times in music, film, television, photography and retro fashions (Green 2004, 36). This boom of nostalgia has involved many different epochs, for instance, the television series *Downton Abbey* (set in the early twentieth century), *Mad Men* (set in the

1960s), and the Netflix series *Stranger Things* (set in the 1980s) are just a few examples of television productions in recent times which worked with a kind of commercial nostalgia, that incorporates vintage costume design, music, and more, in what have proved to be extremely successful productions, as evidenced by their numerous running seasons. Other television shows like *American Pickers* are also noteworthy, a show that tells the history of America through its material objects (antiques), mostly items from the mid-twentieth century that the "pickers" search across America for. Television shows like this exist because of public nostalgia and public interest in objects of the past. Other examples can be found in relatively recent pop music, a contemporary nostalgia for past forms of music, sounds, styles, and visuals. Charli XCX (Charlotte Emma Aitchison), for instance, has often engaged with retro sounds and visuals of pop culture's past. Two examples illustrate this. First, her album *Crash* (2022) is filled with audio elements and samples evocative of the 1980s and 1990s, with the album's visual aesthetic and title taking inspiration from the film *Crash* (1996) directed by David Cronenberg. In the first week of the album's release, it reached number one in the music charts in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia, demonstrating a positive public reception to contemporary music recycling old evocative eighties and nineties sounds (Smith 2022, Ainsley 2022, and the Australian Recording Industry Association 2022). Secondly, her 2018 song titled "1999" is another notable example of this pop-cultural nostalgia. The official music video for "1999" replicates pop cultural moments from nineties films (*Titanic*, *American Beauty,* and *The Matrix*), and music videos of largely the same era (by the Spice Girls, Eminem, and the Backstreet Boys). The lyrics of 1999 refer to this past, with a chorus that claims, "I just wanna go back, back to 1999". All these moments of a pop cultural past in the music and visuals designed and orchestrated by Charli XCX are interesting, since these pasts predate her existence, or were eras when she would have been only a child. How serious, therefore, is this nostalgia for these pasts? They are likely pasts which are romanticised through a rose-tinted lens of pop culture. Oddly, many of the references in the music video of "1999" were not even from this titled year itself (for instance, the film *Titanic* was released in 1997); however, all featured were of an era in Western popular culture that has somehow melded together in our collective memory. Other instances of nineties' nostalgia include the band Planet 1999's music video for "Party", another music video full of retro references featuring floppy disks and CDs. The band's name alone is a huge indication of a penchant held by its members towards this past. Another consideration is Dua Lipa's album *Future Nostalgia* (2020), which took inspiration from the 1970s-2000s to

create a modern but retro sound (Capital FM 2020). Anna Gaca states in her review,

> "Lipa and a team of career producers… tunnel deeper into retro-pop revival" (Gaca 2020).

Her cover art evokes sci-fi and yet vintage motor racing with what seems to be her driving a Porsche 550 (a 1950s sports car James Dean famously raced and died in). This reference is not deliberate, as the car is not a Porsche 550, but it is almost identical, from what little can be seen due to the car being mostly cropped in the cover artwork. Nonetheless, with the album title of "nostalgia" and her knowingly taking influences from a pop music past, she has made herself open to such reflections. Much more about this revisitation of the past can be discussed with other musicians. For instance, Lana Del Rey frequently employs a vintage Americana aesthetic and classic Hollywood glamour (its Golden Age, from the 1920s to 1960s). Earlier, Amy Winehouse was outright – both sonically and visually – inspired by 1960s soul singers. Further back, in the 1980s, The Cramps covered numerous songs from the 1950s and 1960s, helping to repopularise the genre of rockabilly through their harder-hitting reinterpretations. Around this time, Johnny Thunders and Patti Palladin's album *Copy Cats* (1988) consisted entirely of songs from the 1950s and 1960s, which they provided new renditions of. Before this, the New York Dolls (a band Johnny Thunders left), exaggerated the 1956 doo-wop song by The Jay Hawks titled "Stranded in the Jungle", making it the lead single of their 1974 album *Too Much Too Soon*. Overall, musicians' nostalgia goes on and on for bygone eras, such as the 1950s, and many more examples could be discussed.[9]

A nostalgia boom over 1950s pop culture is difficult to know precisely when it began, however, the popularisation of the era has been continually refreshed in the public consciousness due to the repeated representations of it by the entertainment industry. Evidence points to the likely beginning of a 1950s revival as early as the late 1960s, but most certainly it was in the early 1970s, throughout and into the 1980s, that saw its biggest resurgence. Simon Reynolds has described a continual recurrence of the 1950s and its nostalgia, that,

> "Pop culture in the first half of the seventies was in large part *defined* by this yearning to return to the fifties. The nostalgia craze spilled beyond music to movies and television. And it carried on into the late seventies and, fitfully,

[9] Simon Reynolds (2011) explores many more examples of musicians borrowing from the past. Also, see Duboff (2018).

> the eighties too. The fifties just kept coming back, wave after wave of never-ending revivalism" (Reynolds 2011, 277).

Nostalgia is big business, and the continual recycling of the 1950s and its aesthetics is due to its money-making potential. Nostalgia in this sense is harnessed through media and consumer culture, where the fifties are commodified for audiences. For example, during the 1970s-1980s there were dozens of manifestations of the 1950s with *Grease* (musical, 1971), *American Graffiti* (film, 1973), *That'll Be the Day* (film, 1973), *Happy Days* (television series, 1974-1984), *Sha Na Na* (television series, 1977-1981 and music group), *Grease* (film, 1978), *The Buddy Holly Story* (film, 1978), *Back to the Future* (film, 1985), *La Bamba* (film, 1987), and more. Literature and music too, during the 1970s-1980s were also in a nostalgia craze over the 1950s, and it still generally is. Furthermore, in the early 1970s, the film and music stars of the 1950s were further glorified even more than they had been during their respective time: James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, et al. (Cross 2015, 92). The canonisation of these movie stars was more about their cultural representation and the nostalgia of the era in which they existed, rather than who they were. For example, we know due to many interviews with people who knew James Dean personally, and semi-biographical films about the man, that he was very troubled internally, and the canonisation of him never necessarily covers these complexities. This is insofar as, generally, no one who idolises or idolised James Dean would want to be like him entirely and go through his suffering of loss and abandonment. It is more likely that people identify with his plight instead, and more so, they like his visual style.

Although all these examples exist above, which played on the nostalgia of the American 1950s in the decades that followed it, they were mostly sentimental treatments of the era that was heavily romanticised. In these representations of the 1950s, the "teenager" is a continual feature. A serious depiction, however, of juvenile delinquency, teenage alienation, and gang culture is demonstrated considerably during the 1950s itself, with *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) or *Blackboard Jungle* (1955). What is most evident in all films about the 1950s made after it is a lament of the end of the drive-through, neon-lit world of the fifties, which was dismantled over time. Post-1950, the troublemakers of the past, the so-called hoods, and juvenile delinquents, have been used in a mythical way. Their fifties style has been looted ad nauseam, to the point they have become stereotypes and cliché archetypes of their era. Whereas during their heyday, they were outcasts and feared in society, they were the result of unfortunate economic and environmental factors. Today, however, they are synonymous with the decade of the 1950s due to mass media's representations of them, which

have turned them into a dominant reflection and trope of the era, when they were, in reality, a subcultural phenomenon and not fully representative of all youth during the American 1950s.

Many nostalgic endeavours that are concerned with bygone eras like the 1950s in entertainment media's representation of it, also seem to be void of greater political realities and their ramifications. For instance, a political agency belonging to young people (teenagers) against authorities and elders in society is noticeable. Although still political, notions of "teenage rebellion" and depictions of the 1950s concerning larger politics of that time, namely, communist concerns (a serious threat post-Second World War), are something nearly always avoided in said media's representations. This is to say, it is youth culture and domestic stories rather than wider politics that are the main focus of the media's depiction of life in the 1950s. Martin E. Marty explains this kind of selective choice,

> "Today's nostalgia is at worst bittersweet, at least designed to bring some pleasure. Our fashions, decor, and happenings evoke the thirties without the Depression, the forties sans the war, the fifties minus McCarthyism" (Marty 1975).

Media representations of the 1950s in productions made after it are like this. They are not political beyond the activity of teenagers in revolt and their rock 'n' roll music, where these productions play on a potential nostalgia for this past. This nostalgia, however, is interesting, insofar as it may work to foster a community around a shared common interest in a past. Through this process, the effect of loneliness can be countered, and life can then be given a renewed meaning, which enables coping mechanisms against existential crises. Nostalgia in this sense is a people-joiner, whereby through nostalgic experiences and recollections of selective pasts by the media, an audience and community of sorts is formed – one that can gather around these reproductions, whether they have or have not had lived experiences of the 1950s.

Jeff Greenfield establishes an "imagined community" in a similar sense, albeit one during the 1950s itself. Therefore, it consists of people with firsthand experiences of this time, rather than those nostalgic for it (the 1950s). This community, Greenfield notes, unites a disparate group of rock 'n' roll fans during the 1950s, usually divided through class and race, but are brought together through rock 'n' roll music.[10] Greenfield's imagined

[10] Jeff Greenfield uses "imagined communities" in this sense that has similarities to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, see Anderson (2006) and Greenfield (2007), 23-8.

community is in some ways the present-day *Retro International*, which is no longer disparate or divided, largely in part, due to the internet and social media networks, in which members of these communities can find similar solidarity, but who are, however, scattered throughout the world perhaps more so, due to following a material culture and aesthetic no longer part of the cultural mainstream. A culture, or more properly a subculture, as it is not in the general consciousness of the masses, even if it is evident in contemporary mass media, such as films and television shows. In sum, fifties fashion and music from this era today are no longer as popular as they once were during their own respective time. Despite the entertainment industry, at times, recycling the 1950s, the general population is not concerned with this past for its aesthetic pleasures, unlike members of a retro community who are.

Fred Davis' *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979) is a text most scholars have sourced in their contemplations of nostalgia, so much so that it has become somewhat of a seminal text on the matter. However, Davis' flaw is that his ideas on nostalgia are limited to only considering an experienced past. He, therefore, fails to acknowledge that both experienced and non-experienced nostalgia share many similarities. This issue is criticised by Tom Panelas to the extent that even with a non-experienced past, nostalgia can still be strong.

> "Cultural practices, rituals, and representations create powerful collective archetypes which put the individual in close emotional contact with her or his cultural history and evoke feelings of attachment to these periods which may be experienced as vividly personal" (Panelas 1982, 1427).

This point illustrates well that, for someone who has not lived through the 1950s, to be nostalgic about it is not impossible due to the power of the aesthetics of that era that can evoke a sort of nostalgia in the present. Enabling a set of emotional connectives made personal, that when exercised in various forms in the present, be it filmic representations, images, art, rock 'n' roll dances, music, and fashion of the 1950s, in combination with a community, nostalgia for the 1950s can be evoked and the era experienced vicariously through artistic and material forms – a nostalgia and experience possible despite not having a lived experience of the era firsthand. In other words, the personal biographical past and the non-biographical past can be interwoven, making a complex and intermingled personal experience. A personal existence of a past not experienced within a person's present. The past and nostalgia for a specific past can exist in many ways in the present. Either shaped by personal choice, media, and the entertainment industry, or enforced by the prevailing ruling order for political means (a desire to