

# Nostalgia in Visual Communication Design: Magazine Making and Creative Inquiry

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Is nostalgia a muse for creative works? Examining a historical-themed DIY magazine made as a seminar project, this case study explores how magazine creators may intuitively and mindfully harness nostalgia in their design and editorial work. In this case study, I use the insights of psychological research to define a working schema of nostalgia for visual communication design, discuss observed design strategies for visualizing nostalgia in the collectively designed magazine sections, and analyze how the individual creators activated nostalgic thinking to create the reading experiences in their respective sections. Through this analysis, I develop the view that the visual communication designs represent idealized reading experiences which invite readers to engage in nostalgia. The idealized reading experiences came to life when we shared the magazine at a school event. Looking at how readers and the creators interacted with the magazine, I consider how nostalgia might also be harnessed as a form of creative inquiry.

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## Introduction

Ellen Lupton, a multi-talented designer, writer, teacher, and curator begins the “Overture” to her book *Design is Storytelling* by questioning the approach to design education she received as a student where, “We were taught that in order to solve visual problems designers should apply simple forms in a rational manner.” (9). Instead, she has come to view design practices from a wider perspective as a creative process where the forms of designed objects can reflect, engage, and transform our lived experiences in the world. As a practical approach, she suggests design practices which are guided by understandings of the ways that people experience design through physically sensing, responding emotionally, thinking, and acting in the world. She uses the term storytelling to represent the form-experience relationship embodied in visual communication design. With Lupton’s quest to ground visual communication design in human experience in mind, this case study explores ways that the creators of an original historical-themed magazine transformed their experiences as storytellers in the real world into the visual storytelling on the pages of the magazine through tuning into experiences of nostalgia.

Googling for a definition of nostalgia, my search engine pulled up this one, “powered by the *Oxford Dictionary*”. It said nostalgia is “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.” The dictionary writer kindly added, “1. something done or presented in order to evoke feelings of nostalgia: ‘an evening of TV nostalgia’”. After “1” my search engine was no longer helpful. But these snippets suggest some

common perceptions about nostalgia and design: nostalgia engages our emotions and thoughts, directs our attention at time and space, and nostalgia can be made visible and experienced through created media.

Nostalgia design refers to design practices which are centered on fostering nostalgia through user experiences with designed objects, and connecting people through design which references particular times. Nostalgia-themed print and online magazines like *Nostalgia Magazine* and *BOOMER Magazine* for example, feature reader-submitted photos and essays about their special memories and researched articles, photos and artwork about the community of readers' shared history (Edelen, *BOOMER*). For do-it-yourselfers, *Canva* has a page on their website dedicated to nostalgia design with links to online templates and editing tools (*Canva*, "Secret Power"). Here you might download "Yellow Oldschool Birthday Invitation", an editable card that looks like an old video game arcade screen with bit-map style fonts and arcade game characters; a design approach I'll call skinning, or "Class Reunion School Media Post" you can populate with old photos from school days and current photos and send out to old classmates; a design approach I'll call twinning. The skinned template, using a recognizable theme from the past is designed to evoke happy childhood memories and the twinned template, juxtaposing old and new is designed to get people thinking about their special times. The assumption behind these magazine concepts and templates is that nostalgia can powerfully engage readers emotionally, cognitively, and socially.

This study investigates the creative engine underlying nostalgia design through a case study of *Rives Magazine*, a historical-themed zine-making project done in one of my storytelling seminars. Three questions frame this study: How do people experience nostalgia? How do creators transform experiences of nostalgia into reading experiences in a magazine's visual communication design? How does nostalgia work for people experiencing a magazine? These questions are both theoretical and practical, so I've designed this research as a qualitative and introspective study exploring the dynamics of nostalgia in the magazine making process and the magazine's visual communication design.

The first part of this study delves into the psychology of nostalgia, identifying the dynamics of nostalgia experiences and phenomena that designers might attend to when designing in a nostalgic frame of mind. The second part of this study analyzes nostalgia in relation to actual design experience. The concept of *Rives Magazine*, looking back at history to live fashionably today, set up conditions for creators to design in a nostalgic frame of mind. Looking at each magazine section, I describe creators' perceptions of nostalgia, design choices and background experiences surrounding the magazine making, and analyze how nostalgic thinking was used to structure the magazine reading experience, developing the view that the visual communication designs represent idealized reading experiences which invite readers to engage in nostalgia. The third part of this study explores the magazine project as a context for nostalgic thought. Considering pivotal experiences from the magazine-making experience and observations from a school event where we presented the magazine, I discuss ways the magazine appeared to foster nostalgia for readers and for creators looking back on the project. Then in the spirit of Ellen Lupton who critically reflects on her design practice, I reflect back on nostalgia as a means of creative inquiry.

At 24 pages made over two semesters of seminars, a lot of hard work went into making the magazine. I would like to thank my three students for bringing the magazine to life and for giving me permission to reprint and discuss their work in this study. Thanks also to Kanako Shibuya for digitizing my mask pattern. Thumbnails of the magazine pages are found in the sections where

they are discussed. In the study, I'll abbreviate the title as *RM* when citing the magazine pages. The Works Cited page has a separate section for works cited in the magazine. Now to nostalgia.

## Experiencing nostalgia

“Do Japanese Feel Nostalgia?” is the title of a study by two researchers, Masato Nakamine and Miki Toyama who investigated Japanese university students’ perceptions of nostalgia. Their study was in response to a body of Western research that investigates the psychology of nostalgia (23). More recently there is a growing body of multicultural research in this field, psychology and other fields that are achieving a deeper understanding of how nostalgia works in our psychological, social and cultural systems. In their review of multicultural psychological studies (including those with Japanese subjects) “Nostalgia Across Cultures”, Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut have found similar conceptions, triggers, and functions of nostalgia across many cultures. In the abstract to their research, they summarize the main similarities found in their review:

“Laypeople in many cultures conceptualize nostalgia similarly: That is, the nostalgizer reflects on a fond and personally important event—often their childhood or valued relationships—relives the event through rose-colored glasses, yearns for that time or relationship, and may even wish to return briefly to the past. Also, triggers of nostalgia (e.g., adverts, food, cold temperatures, loneliness) are similar across cultures. Moreover, across cultures nostalgia serves three key functions: it elevates social connectedness (a sense of belongingness or acceptance), meaning in life (a sense that one’s life is significant, purposeful, and coherent), and self-continuity (a sense of connection between one’s past and present self). Further, nostalgia acts as a buffer against discomforting psychological states (e.g., loneliness) similarly in varied cultural contexts.” (Sedikides and Wildschut 1).

It seems that people are hardwired for nostalgia. But there also appear to be non-standard kinds of nostalgia. BBC reporter Erika Hobart, who spent time with Japanese relatives when she was growing up) says that *natsukashii*, the Japanese word for nostalgic feelings, has a typical past-oriented, mainly positive, but bittersweet connotation. “*Natsukashii* derives from the verb ‘*natsuku*’, which means ‘to keep close and become fond of’ —indicates a joy and gratitude for the past, not a desire to return to it. . . The fact that you can’t return to these [past] experiences makes them all the more poignant.” (Hobart para. 4). But Wing-Yee Cheung reports finding a type of future-oriented nostalgia called “anticipatory nostalgia”, which is described as an expectation of feeling nostalgia in the future (Cheung para.4). “One more year to go...I want to become a respectable member of society without leaving any regrets behind.” is an example of anticipatory nostalgia that appears in *Rives Magazine* (23). Future nostalgia in a magazine about the past? That seems a bit of an anomaly.

In his essay “Reimagining Nostalgia”, psychologist Felipe De Brigard offers a theory of nostalgia as a kind of imagination. He examines so-called anomalous cases where people feel genuine nostalgia in for things that don’ t involve their fond personally lived memories, like the high school he hated (para.2) or the curious nostalgia that comes on when reflecting on a time that has never been experienced”, like the modern day character Gill in the movie *Midnight Express* who becomes overwhelmed by nostalgia when thinking about 1920s Paris (para.8) or perhaps like my students when making the magazine.

De Brigard notes that in traditional psychological theory, nostalgia is generally accepted to be a

complex mental state with cognitive, affective, and conative (goal-directed) components. Challenging the commonly accepted view that the cognitive component involves personal memories and past orientation, he suggests that cognitive processes associated with nostalgia states such as memories and imagining past times, as well as imagining future times and other kinds of hypothetical thought are all processed by a broader common neural and psychological system for projection and mental simulation (para.9). He observes that both the act of simulating and the contents of a simulation can elicit emotions. According to his theory, when we attend to the simulated content, positive feelings ensue. When we attend to the act of simulation (associated with negative feelings) our neural system may have mechanism to motivate replacing negative feelings with positive feelings (those generated by the simulation contents). Emotionally, nostalgia brings about a change in our present affective condition and lets us move forward in a new state. De Brigard's theory explains why it may possible for people to experience nostalgia when reminiscing about personal memories or imagining situations which have never been experienced, and offers an account of the positive and bittersweet feelings of nostalgia (para 16).

Seeing nostalgia as a form of imagination suggests that nostalgia might be a creative muse. Cognitive neuroscientist Arne Dietrich identifies four types of creativity based on different kinds of brain activities. Among them spontaneous and cognitive creativity happens when we temporarily remove a problem from conscious thought and let our unconscious mind work on it with existing knowledge, opening different ways in the brain to process the problem resulting in flashes of insight and "out of the box thinking". Deliberate and emotional creativity happens when we are consciously trying to figure out a problem but instead of using knowledge, we are focused on emotions. Creative ideas come with insight into ways of resolving emotional tensions (Dietrich 1018-1020). According to De Brigard's theory of nostalgia outlined above, it seems that both of these creative systems may come into play when in a nostalgic frame of mind.

One recent experimental study considered the relationships between the between nostalgia, openness to experience, and creativity. In four experiments the research group compared the experiences of a creative writers, one group with nostalgia in mind versus another group writing with ordinary experience in mind. According to their findings, they suggest that nostalgia not only produces positive, motivating feelings toward doing the creative activity, but also provides opportunities for mining ideas from the past and becoming open to imagining future possibilities (Van Tilburg et al.). In visual communication design, designers are also applying the insights of nostalgia research, here to bridge theory with design practice. Designer Haiyan Xue did just this in his dissertation "On Design and Nostalgia: From the Perspectives of Culture, Experience and Design Strategy" where he mined his own understanding of nostalgia research to develop design strategy that goes beyond simply applying historical design styles, in his case, for advertising (Xue 22). Focusing on the creative side, I will do something similar, considering how nostalgia might work in magazine making.

### **Nostalgic design thinking**

Editorial design is a process of finding, selecting, arranging and presenting information and ideas across multiple pages of printed (and digital) publications. If the main concept for the magazine is nostalgia, then we might expect that the magazine creators would work with a conscious perception of nostalgia, such as the idea that it is a wistful look at the past, as well as their intuitive experiences of nostalgia when planning and making a magazine. Considering both of these aspects and drawing on the discussion above, a magazine-maker might be focused on these concerns:

1. Temporal focal point  
Selecting and arranging information that directs attention at time
2. Mental cues  
Choosing elements that signal nostalgia like sensory triggers, memories, and experiences
3. Cognitive space  
Considering arrangements that nudge curiosity and tease the imagination  
Creating moments in the reading experience where readers can slow down and ponder
4. Navigation  
Considering readers' temporal and emotional journeys through the design
5. Affective elements  
Accentuating the positive and developing contrasting bittersweet moments

This nostalgia design schema is not intended as a template recipe for creating nostalgic designs. Rather it reflects what an idealized designer might be attending to when working in a nostalgic frame of mind. In other words, it represents a set of parameters or design decisions that might facilitate designers thinking about how they could transform the experience of nostalgia into forms on pages. Using these parameters as a guide, let's see how nostalgia works in *Rives Magazine*.

## Magazine-making

*Rives Magazine* is a do-it-yourself lifestyle magazine. Self-made and self-published works are often called zines, but to stay true to the title, I will be calling it a magazine. We made it for prospective new students as a sample of the kind of projects some of the students in our department engage in, looking forward to actually meeting our readers at a later school event. Zine or DIY magazine, it may be said to embody the creators' various experiences in a visually graphic form. The three magazine makers researched times and trends in American pop culture in the 1930s, 1950s, and 1970 and also enjoyed other experiences like baking, eating out, listening to music, and watching movies for the magazine making. From concept-making to research to contents creation, three students did almost everything: individually making a 6-page section about one of the three time periods, and as a group designing the front cover, contents page, and two back pages. They even sewed cloth masks. They asked me to make a page introducing the magazine project and contribute an original mask sewing pattern for the back cover, for a total of 24 pages. There are a lot of memories in those pages.

### Cover: Recording Memories

Ted Spiker, journalism teacher, editor and magazine writer, observes a magazine cover "is the most valuable piece of real estate for any magazine. Like no other medium, magazines rely on this singular page to do two crucial things: one, send a message about the personality and voice of the magazine, and two, sell issues." (Spiker 377). "Why did you name it after me? And why did you go full typography?" I asked. I wondered if this mysterious Rives person and the "wall" of English could entice our target readers, Japanese high school students, to pick up the magazine and read it.

According to the seminar students, what they wanted to "sell" was the learning experience in the seminar. Aware that the magazine would be shown at Open Campus among posters, projects and theses from other seminars, they figured the most efficient way to identify it as coming from my class was to name it after me. The information hierarchy is set up like a conventional

commercial magazine to make it easy to read, with the magazine title on top, straplines in the middle and their names and teasers about each section on the bottom. The two straplines “seeing changes” and “TIMES & TRENDS” [sic.] summarize the magazine contents. The front cover of *Rives Magazine* is shown in in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. *Rives Magazine* front cover

The typography choices and embellishments tell the story of the seminar. The magazine makers wanted to emphasize their social learning experience so they used English, typography and colored marks to do this. Referencing a retro sewing experience, they surrounded the letters of my name with fabric and ribbon-looking borders. Highlighting being mentored by an American teacher, they listed their first names only as section chiefs which is how I address them (unlike the Japanese practice of using surnames) and how they’ve come to address each other during the seminar time. Their names are set in capitalized type following Japanese conventions of typography. They also embellished their names with colored lines, each choosing different colors from the embellishments surrounding my name, showing their both individuality and connections to the group. At the same time, they said, embellishing the insides of normally solid typefaces show how they have changed through the magazine-making experience. In their design choices, the creators draw attention to their memories and feelings of nostalgia, but they leave it up to the reader’s imagination to puzzle out who the people are, a potential moment in the design where a reader might pause to ponder before diving into the magazine.

#### Front matter: Invitations to nostalgia

Open the magazine and you will see two invitations to engage in nostalgia (*RM* 2-3). This spread is shown in Figure 2. Page 2 has a mysterious red party dress and a literal invitation to approach the magazine with a nostalgic frame of mind. Going into the text which is written as a letter, a reader might be wondering about the dress. Is it something from a vintage clothes store? a movie costume? an image we found in our research? Who put it there anyway? Instead of explaining of the image and motifs, in the letter we offer readers our memories and ask them to empathize with our emotional journey making the magazine: encountering interesting materials, having fun experiences, watching movies where heroines challenge their dreams, and putting in some hard work. Considering the past in relation to their personal experience, we conclude the letter by asking readers to read imaginatively, searching for their own moments of nostalgia:

“We thought we made a magazine, but actually we made a time machine. Opening the 1930s pages, you can encounter the chic cultures of music and food. Turning to the 1950s pages you can discover the charming influences of movie culture. And browsing the 1970s

pages, you can find cool connections of fashion and music. We hope you encounter old favorites and discover new ideas for making your own fashionable lifestyle in the 2020s! And for your 2020s lifestyle, check out the mask pattern on the back cover, too!!!

In the time machine, Benny Goodman, Audrey Hepburn, and Freddy Mercury are waiting for you. Have a great trip back in time!”

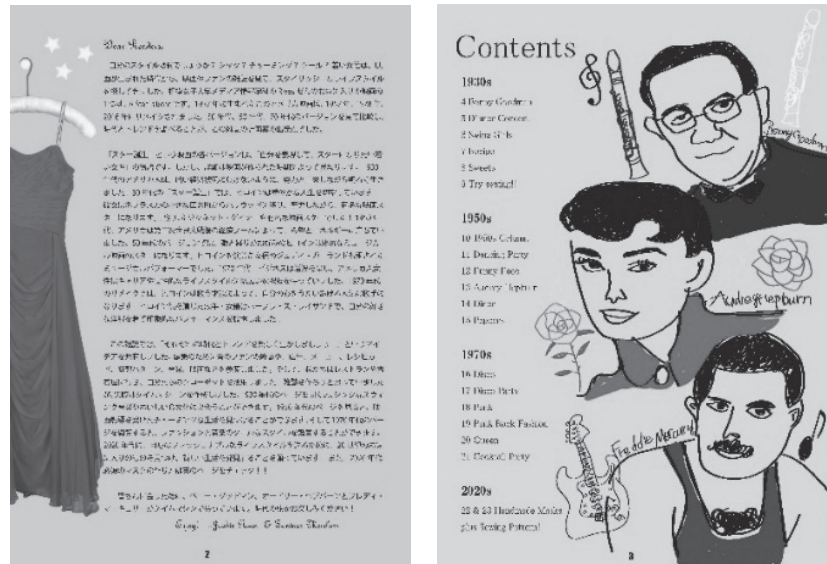


Fig. 2. Rives magazine page 2-3 spread

The facing page, page 3 shows a figurative invitation to nostalgia. Depending on what the reader is attending to and relating to, there are various ways the page might be experienced. The English title list, the illustrated portraits, the motifs; even small details like the fonts or color choices may attract people’s attention. Any of these elements might evoke different memories such as a disliked English class, a movie seen and enjoyed, attempts at drawing, or a person easily recognized. The page 3 design prioritizes three performers, whose illustrations take up about two-thirds of the page. The magazine makers decided to do this, not only because they are personal favorites, but also so that any reader could skip over the English contents list and quickly grasp the main content of their feature stories. The illustrations function as a navigational aid to readers. At the same, the iconic historical figures, are well-loved celebrities, familiar to many Japanese, so these illustrations might also act as mental cues to trigger readers’ memories and feelings of nostalgia.

And it seems that readers were experiencing that. Showing people the magazine, I heard readers search for shared memories. The most frequent comment was about the illustrations, especially along the lines of, “That looks just like Audrey Hepburn! Nailed Benny Goodman and Freddy Mercury, too—delightful!” While it can’t be guaranteed that all readers will experience nostalgia looking at these illustrations, the design represents a space where the designers, working with their own nostalgic frame of mind, predict it may occur. As visual communication, for the creators, this page represents an idealized interpretation of nostalgia. To readers, the visual communication design works as a figurative invitation to engage in nostalgia.

As the discussion of the front cover and first two pages illustrate, the creative team tapped into collective memories and experiences to develop their visual communication designs. Individual students created the following historical sections. Going into the visual communication design work, each person had a special experience to report on: making sweets with 1930s recipes,

visiting a 1950s- style diner, and doing a 1970s-style fashion photo shoot. Diving deeper into the magazine, let's take a look at how each creator transformed these personal nostalgic experiences into invitations to readers to engage in nostalgia.

### 1930s Section: Nostalgia and sensory experiences

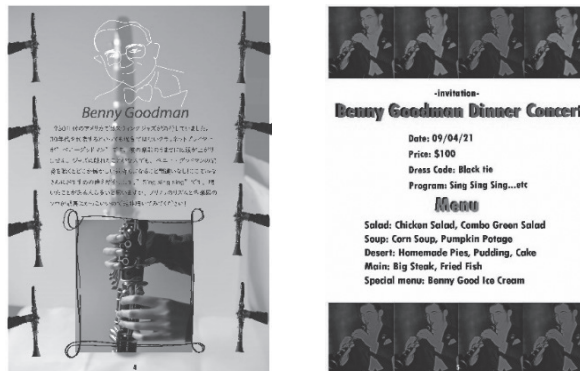
After browsing the Contents, turn the page and find yourself in the 1930s in the swinging, sonic world of Benny Goodman (Figure 3). Here, creator Izumi invites her readers to have a vicarious nostalgic experience by listening to her recommended song, *Sing, Sing, Sing*. Leading up to the song, she writes:

“Swing jazz was popular in America in the 1930s. It is no exaggeration to say that the clarinet player who represents the 1930s is Benny Goodman. I can't get my head around the skill of his instrument. Even if you've never been exposed to jazz, there is no doubt that anyone and everyone will feel nostalgic when listening [to his performance]!” (RM 4).

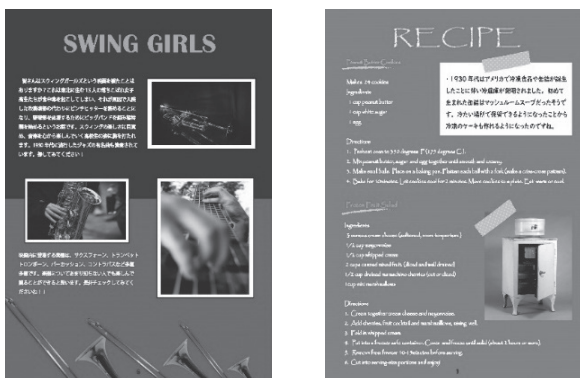
This passage introduces Izumi's perception of nostalgia as an appreciation of the past which goes beyond words and can best be enjoyed through sensory experience.

Fig. 3. 1930s section  
Rives Magazine

page 4-5 spread



page 6-7 spread



page 8-9 spread



“Sensory” describes Izumi’s personal style. The 1930s section, is visually packed with different sensory experiences. In images, we are invited to “hear” Benny Goodman play clarinet and enjoy the sounds of a swing band (RM 4-6), “feel” jazzy rhythms of musicians playing their instruments (RM 6) and savor” the tastes of freshly baked cookies, hot tea, and a frozen fruit dessert (RM 8). Izumi evokes chills and heat, introducing inventions from the 1930s that we use in our kitchens now: the refrigerator and canned mushroom soup (RM 7). She invites us to “touch” the past with photo of a highly textured piece of needlework and vintage sewing pattern from the 1930s and make a physical connection with the past by sewing something today (RM 9).

When making her designs, Izumi made used historical material and her own experiences. Historical material includes a Benny Goodman photo which she colorized (RM 5), a monitor head refrigerator photo (RM 7), a sewing pattern package (RM 9), the dishes listed in the Dinner Concert (RM 5 ) chosen from a 1930s popular Hollywood restaurant menu and recipes from my grandmother’s Depression era recipe box (RM 7). Actual experiences inspired her graphic designs. For example, she saw a photo of a green monitor head refrigerator made in the 1930s, so she made her background green and “taped on” her text card and photo, with cute masking tape, just like she does at home.

There are other traces of lived experience in the designs. There are comic-like sound lines surrounding the text, “eat! eat!! eat!!!” which echoes everyone’s “yum! yum!! yum!!!” when gobbling up the unused sweets after the photo shoot. And if you look closely at the trombones on page 8, you’ll find they are placed at different angles, with one butting against another. Trombonist Izumi (who in fact was playing swing with her bandmates when the piece of the photo she used was snapped) said that trombone players always fight for space, so she placed them askew. She also liked how the layout showed the energy of the players and expressed the power of swing music for readers.

On nearly every page, Izumi offers ways readers might enjoy connecting the past and present. In addition to the sensory visual experiences in the graphic design, Benny Goodman’s *Sing, Sing, Sing* “solo is the best, so please try it!” (RM 4). In the movie *Swing Girls*, “Famous 1930s jazz tunes are also performed. Look for it!” (RM 6). “You can make frozen cakes!” (RM 7). Look at these peanut butter cookies, “Very delicious!! Do you like sweets? Try cooking!!!” (RM 8). And if you’re inspired by 1930s fashion, “Why don’t you make your original mask?” (RM 9). Since these are all experiences which might be new to readers, Izumi’s editorial and graphic contents aim to invite readers to imagine having a pleasant experience in the future, an experience, what might be called anticipatory nostalgia.

Izumi also tries to build a sense of anticipatory nostalgia directed at the reading experience of her section. While she tries to engage the readers’ senses and uses some specific nostalgia triggers like music and comfort foods, she is also aware that her high school student readers may be more into J-pop and snacks they grab at a convenience store, rather than listen to “swing jazz,” let alone try making a sweet dessert with mayonnaise. So, she invites her readers to step outside their comfort zones and try something new. She addresses this gap with empathy, especially in her choice to introduce the movie *Swing Girls* which is about a group of high school girls who by accident and no previous experience get roped into forming a swing band and skeptical at first, through hard work “Wake up to the fun of swinging.” (RM 6).

*Swing Girls* is a funny, award-winning movie which high school students may have heard of, watched, or read the comic book it’s based on, or even reading the synopsis, may just generally relate to. This film is all about the unexpected pleasures of encountering something new. Izumi

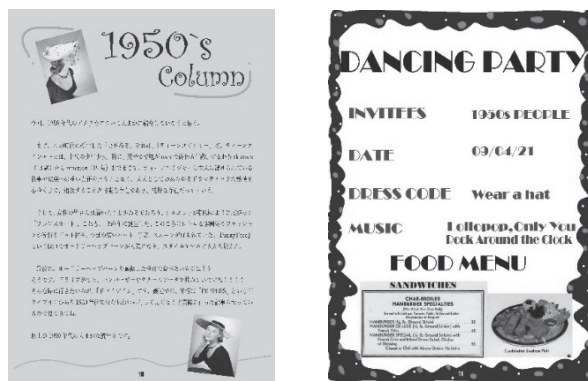
uses the page-turning experience to echo this. On pages 4 and 5 we are invited to Benny Goodman’s cool solo; turn the page and the whole band kicks in. On page 7, we might be struggling to read the recipes with their fancy typefaces; turn the page and we can almost taste what those recipes become. On page 9, ponder a sewing project; turn the page and . . .

**1950s Section: Retro vibes and curated experiences**

. . .and we are in a different time zone now, the 1950s to be exact and now looking at pages 10-15 created by Mami (figure 4). Page 10 opens with a column that tells us we are in a world of moody American teenagers living lives “pursued to their hearts’ content.” For women, this is a fashionable world filled with trendy hats, gloves and scarves and influenced by stylish Audrey Hepburn and her movie *Funny Face*. For everyone, it is a world filled with the tastes of fast food and drive-in diners, which can actually be experienced later in the magazine.

Fig. 4. 1950s section  
*Rives Magazine*

page 10-11 spread



page 12-13 spread



page 14-15 spread



The “1950s Column” offers readers an overview of this magazine section, and it also shows Mami’s perception of nostalgia. In the column she writes about flared skirts. “They were born in 1950. This is a time full of retro vibes. . .” (RM 10). In an earlier draft, she had used *natsukashii*, the Japanese word for nostalgia, which she replaced with *retoru funiki*, which I’ve translated as retro vibes. She coined this phrase to distinguish her column from Izumi’s, who used *natsukashii*. Mami explained that “retro” is a historical design style that Japanese identify with post-war Japan. The word retro itself doesn’t convey emotion like *natsukashii*, but we are moved when we look at things from those days. She added *funiki* which means atmosphere and also can imply mood. Taken together, the phrase which I’ve translated as retro vibes, conveys positive feelings looking back at a particular time in the past. More generally, Mami sees nostalgia is an appreciation of the past that we can consciously and actively cultivate through past-inspired experiences.

“Curated experience” describes Mami’s personal design style. Visually, there are two styles which I will call “retro” and “experience”. You can see Mami’s retro designs on the 1950s Column page (RM 10), and the pages introducing Audrey Hepburn (RM 12, 13). These pages use a palette that we found in 1950s promotional materials: pink backgrounds, black type, black and white photos (with gray tones) and white accents. The black and white photos are all images taken in the 1950s which are now in the public domain. Like a 1950s tailored dress, these pages are precisely laid out with clean lines and attention to details. Mami carefully set the type by hand inside the hexagonal boxes containing a plot summary and production information of the movie *Funny Face* on page 12 by to get a clean look. Altogether the retro pages show a formal, tailored style inspired by Mami’s information curation experience.

In contrast to the formal retro pages, the experience pages are more casual. The experience pages include the Dancing Party invitation (RM 11) and the Diner pages (RM 14). The invitation details are surrounded by a curvy, obviously hand-drawn frame. Inside is a cutout piece of an actual 1950s diner menu, from the public domain. In her background research for this image, Mami discovered the diner she later visited and reported about, Pepper’s Drive-in. The text on page 14 describes Pepper’s 1950s American diner concept and menu (featuring a popular Japanese comfort food, curry rice along with standard American diner fare). Page 15 is a full-page collage of photos taken on the seminar’s road trip to Pepper’s. The collage evokes the décor which is packed to the ceiling with 1950s diner and food-related memorabilia. Picking up the bright primary colors from the photos, on page 14 Mami drew in polka dots and dancing flowers to convey a sense of fun.

In the editorial contents, Mami offers an invitation to do nostalgia by providing information about historical context and suggesting concrete links to activities people can engage in today for “retro vibes”. For example, in the “1950s Column” she notes that many people have been inspired to imitate Audrey Hepburn’s fashion style. Then she asks, “. . .what would you like to eat while imitating Audrey Hepburn??” and speaking of eating, there’s a 1950s American style drive-in nearby “. . .so why not go and taste the 1950s atmosphere?”

Later, on page 13 Mami introduces another way to taste the 1950s. She writes about a Tokyo gelato shop which serves the same brand as the one “Crown Princess Anne of *Roman Holiday* also stuffed her cheeks with. . .” Two of the photos on page 13 show a concrete connection between the 1950s movie world and a real-world experience. The upper image is a publicity photo (public domain) for *Roman Holiday*. The two stars, Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck are shot on location standing on the Spanish Steps in the Piazza Spagna. One of the lower photos shows one of Mami’s classmates holding up a gelato cone in front of a wall that has been painted with a line illustration of the same location. For readers interested in going to the two eateries, Mami provides

basic information about the location of the gelato shop, and more detailed information about the diner including a link to their Instagram account.

As a whole, moving through the 1950s section, Mami invites readers on a nostalgic journey where we learn about ways to savor the times and trends today. Turn to pages 10 and 11 and learn about good fashion, a good movie, a good place to eat and good times. Imagine rocking around the clock with “1950s people” and chowing down a seafood platter. Hungry for more? Turn to page 13 and 14. That movie *Funny Face* sounds interesting and Audrey has some pretty cute shoes. Will you stay home this weekend and watch some old movies or go out for some shopping? And how about checking out that gelato shop? I don’t know about you, but those gelato photos are making me hungry. Turn to page 14 and 15, and more food! Are you tempted to take out your smartphone and find out how to get to Pepper’s, or are you busy perusing the collage and wondering if the girl in the photo is your time travel guide Mami, or are you ready to turn the page and . . .

### 1970s Section: Instant nostalgia and fan experiences

. . . and discover that time travel guide from the previous page is actually Yuko, who has just now brought us into the world of 1970s music and fashion. (Figure 5). On page 10, unlike the other two sections, this one has a title: “70s Stylebook”. Then, underneath, Yuko explains her concept:

“With the theme of the 70s, I pull out clothes from my closet. Using my own image, I tried to coordinate [outfits] by dividing [my clothes] into genres! For each genre, I’ll introduce some recommended artists and their songs!” (RM 16).

As we will see as we browse through her “Stylebook” (Figure 5 on the following page), Yuko is not only a time travel guide and fashionista, but she is also a dedicated music fan. Her section introduces disco, punk rock, and rock genres, and includes an invitation to a cocktail party where presumably her suggested songs would be played.

On page 18, Yuko introduces the notion of nostalgia through a memory of listening to the punk rock inspired song, *Basket Case* by Green Day. She remembers, “When I was in my third year of high school, I used to listen to it on the way to school. I really don’t get the lyrics at all, but the driving nostalgic melody is awesome!!” Rather than the complete work she draws attention to the part of it that anyone can immediately appreciate, the melody. Similarly, about the rock group Queen on page 20, she writes, “their famous songs still attract many people in the 2020s. I am one of them.” As a fan, Yuko’s perception of nostalgia not so much about appreciating music and fashion in their historical contexts, but more about incorporating the pleasures of oldies music and fashion into our daily lives today. We might call this perception instant nostalgia.

“Instant nostalgia” is a term designers use to describe both design styles from the past that evoke certain times and continue to be impactful (Boxer 267, qtd. in Poynor 268-269), as well as the experience of incorporating imagery from media into our imagined personal experiences. Speaking of typography, graphic designer Sarah Hyndman describes her experience:

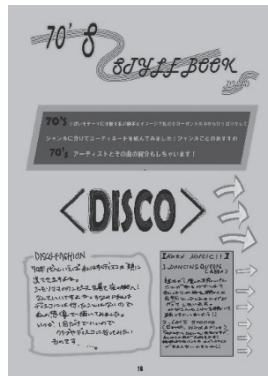
“Typography can transport you to an imagined nostalgia that you may not have experienced first-hand, but which has become real to you through the experience of film and television. *Grease*, *Back to the Future* and *Mad Men* have recreated the 1950s so vividly for me that I feel I ‘remember’ the 1950s the decade even though it was before I was born.” (Hyndman 76).

Organizing the 1970s section into musical genres suggests Yuko’s personal design style is connected to popular media of the time. In two words, “mediated experience” summarizes her personal style. On page 16, she writes, “I have never been to a disco, so I tried drawing one from

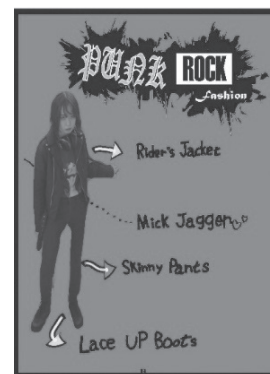
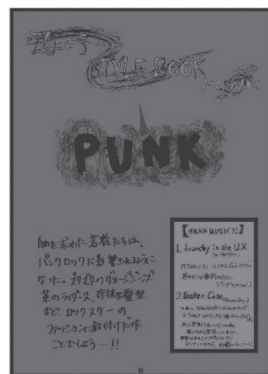
my imagination”. On the facing page 17, she has layered a cut out photo of herself in a short, knit dress, Western boots and permed hair over a handmade illustration of a mirror ball and colorful disco floor. Similarly, she describes punk inspired “rock star fashion” on page 18 and places herself now dressed as a punk rocker in a stylized handmade zine-like scene on the facing page 19. Layering real photos over stylized illustrations Yuko creates imaginary contexts that she seems to inhabit.

Fig. 5. 1970s section  
*Rives Magazine*

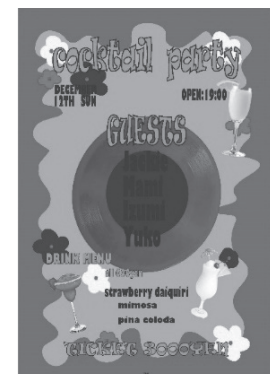
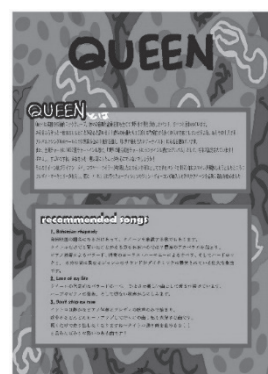
page 16-17 spread



page 18-19 spread



page 20-21 spread



When researching for her designs, Yuko looked at a wide variety of 1970s media to decide her outfits and find iconic imagery which would evoke the music and fashion scenes of the times. She watched movies like *Saturday Night Fever* and music videos of her recommended songs, scoured fashion magazines, and even found some punk fan-made zines. She also looked for ways to personalize her pages by recommending her favorite songs and putting together outfits with her own clothes. Repurposing iconic imagery with her own clothes and favorites, Yuko invites readers to experience instant nostalgia and join her in 1970s inspired fan experiences.

Yuko's writing style is social and she talks to her readers as potential fellow 70s fans. For example on page 20, she calls Queen a "legendary British rock group" and says, "I'm sure all of you have heard of them at least once!" And again, about *Bohemian Rhapsody* she says, "As well as the title of an autobiographical movie, it is also the song that symbolizes Queen. . .No doubt many of you have heard of the title alone." Some of her music recommendations such as Earth Wind and Fire's *Let's Groove* and Green Day's *Basket Case* were made after the 70s by artists who themselves were drawn to re-explore 70s disco and punk rock in new ways. As fan Yuko says about *Basket Case* on page 18, "This song isn't from the 70s, but I like it very much, so I'm going to write about it here (LOL)."

With Yuko's laughter ringing in our ears, in the editorial contents we are invited to feel what it's like to be a fan of the 70s and through the designs experience an instant nostalgia. The 1970s section sings with color and packs an emotional charge on every page. What kind of 70s fan would you like to become? A disco queen? Pop over to the disco world of pages 16 and 17 where you can groove to the sounds of Abba and Earth, Wind and Fire, dancing in a colorful disco. Or a punk? Pop on your headphones and pop into the punk rock world of pages 18 and 19. You'll know you're in the right place if the raging Sex Pistols are playing and everything looks gray, red, and black and splattered with paint and jaggedly mismatched fonts.

Or are you more of a rocker? Then pop into the world of Queen on page 20. Just like a flamboyant Freddy Mercury shirt, this place is filled with wild patterns and extraordinary music. Prick your ears for the sounds of *Bohemian Rhapsody* –acapella at first, then ballad with piano, then opera, and then unbelievably cool hard rock, "A spectacular song which dynamically develops the sounds of different genres in 6 minutes." (RM 20). While you're here, be touched "the heart-rendering singing" in *Love of My Life* and moved by *Don't Stop Me Now*, "a song with a lot of momentum". When you're ready to move again, pop into the party on page 21 to meet some other fans: Jackie, Mami, Izumi, and Yuko. We'd love to sip a cool drink with you (sorry, in the real world we will be serving mocktails), and chat about our favorite times and trends. Or you could pop over to the next page and . . .

### **Back matter: Nostalgia in the magazine experience**

. . . and oops! We've popped into the creative nostalgia engine instead.

How does nostalgia work in *Rives Magazine*? One way to answer this is to revisit the working definition of nostalgia given at the beginning of this study: "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations" and recall the nostalgia design parameters. Looking back at the magazine this way, on the surface, *Rives Magazine* shows signs of nostalgia in the visual communication design. Pages are clearly marked to signal time. There are mental cues such as sensory triggers like food and music, and nudges in the text which ask triggering questions. Each section has a distinctive visual style with its own rhythm and energy, generally upbeat and positive with some moody elements too. Each section combines old contents like historical information and some historical design styles with new contents that are clearly in the present and looking forward to new experiences in the future, offering food for thought and cognitive support for pondering changes in time.

There are five pages that seem to be especially designed for nostalgic reverie: Try Sewing, Pepper's, Cocktail Party, and Handmade Masks (RM 9, 15, 21-23). These pages are basically collages with little to no text that reference both then and now, and contain traces of people in images and handiwork. There are places that come at the end of each section of the magazine

where readers might be tempted to pause for their own nostalgic reveries, perhaps pondering what life was like back then or wondering about the people who made the magazine.

As *Rives Magazine* is the product of our seminar experience, it is also a reflection of gaps in our experiences. “Anemoia” is a term John Koenig coined to describe “nostalgia for a time or a place one has never known.” (168). The three magazine makers were in the position of reporting about what other people were experiencing “back then” without having actual life experiences in those times and cultural spaces. One of the recurring issues for the magazine creators during both semesters was figuring out ways to visually interpret some distant American cultural history in ways that would be credible, relevant, and interesting to Japanese reading the magazine now.

The magazine makers didn’t have design experience for solving this problem, but they did find practical solutions. Izumi cooks and plays trombone. She searched her personal memories of these experiences and projected nostalgic sensory experiences into her designs inviting readers to sensory experiences of nostalgia. This sensory approach professional writer Austin Hackney happens to recommend for people writing for nostalgia-themed magazines Use all 6 senses section. Mami made new memories. She became a reporter; finding eateries, recording her visits, and writing about them later. Then she invited readers to join her on a quest for new experiences that could later become potential experiences of nostalgia. Yuko constructed memories. After watching movies and other media, she went into her imagination and created a space for fans to appreciate nostalgic music and fashion. It appears that in each case, the magazine makers were engaging memories and nostalgia to work through their project challenges and visual communication designs. With this nostalgia engine in mind, let’s pop back to *Rives Magazine* and. . .

. . . and have a look at the masks on pages 22 and 23 (Figure 6). “Why did you make them?” Someone who was reading the magazine looked up and asked me that question. In the seminar, these masks opened a conversation about nostalgic thinking and creativity. At first the masks were an attempt to connect past design history with the seminar-time present situation where, as Mami wrote in her Editorial note, “Coronavirus is raging.” (*RM* 23). The inspiration hit when we were looking at 1950s Japanese fashion magazine that included sewing patterns. “How about doing something with masks? Mami suggested. “Yeah, we could buy some and decorate them with rhinestones and studs and stuff, you know showing the different times?” Izumi said. “Cool! But let’s make them ourselves.” Yuko suggested. A great plan, with one hitch: no one was confident about sewing. So, I offered to teach them about one of my hobbies: retro sewing.

Fig. 6. Retro sewing  
*Rives magazine*

left: page 22-23 spread

right: back cover



Retro sewing is the practice of making and wearing garments made to resemble those worn at a particular time in fashion history, or to adapt historical sewing techniques to new garments (Armstead and McKinney 1). We researched the history of cloth masks, fabrics, and fashion trends from the 1930s, 1950s, and 1970s. Then I designed and made some samples, curating a set of fabric and trims like buttons, lace, and appliques for each era. Before applying the trims, we looked at the collections and played around with trim arrangements. Then we critiqued the designs, asking, Do the masks look like something that might have been worn at that time in history? Would you have a cute and stylish impression wearing or seeing someone wear these masks? If the designs don't work as credible history or as something that resonates emotionally, what could we do to change that?" The critique questions focus conscious attention on aspects nostalgic thought: imagining other times, considering changes, and awareness of feelings.

In Rives Magazine, there are some explicit references to the retro sewing experience such as the magazine cover title embellished with sewing trims, the Try Sewing! collage (*RM* 8), one of my mask patterns on the back cover, and the students original handmade masks (*RM* 22-23). Inspired by the past, the mask designs offer a gentler, more pleasant way to view the stressful experience of the present covid 19 pandemic. Taken together, the mask-related contents reflect an understanding of the power of nostalgia in our lives, and visually summarize the magazine itself as an invitation to engage in nostalgia. They are also a tangible nudge towards nostalgic thinking in creative work.

## Nostalgia and creative experience

### Sharing nostalgia

On July 10, 2022, we held an Open Campus event to share our magazine and with prospective new students and their parents. Essentially, we re-purposed the magazine into the space of one of the student lounges (Figure 7). We set up three areas for reading, archive browsing, and experiencing graphic design. The magazine-making team mingled among the guests, talking about the magazine, the project, their school experiences and shared interests. They also led the graphic design experience, helping people make original recipe cards inspired by the magazine contents. It was a good opportunity to see and hear how people were actually interacting with the magazine, and engaging in nostalgia.

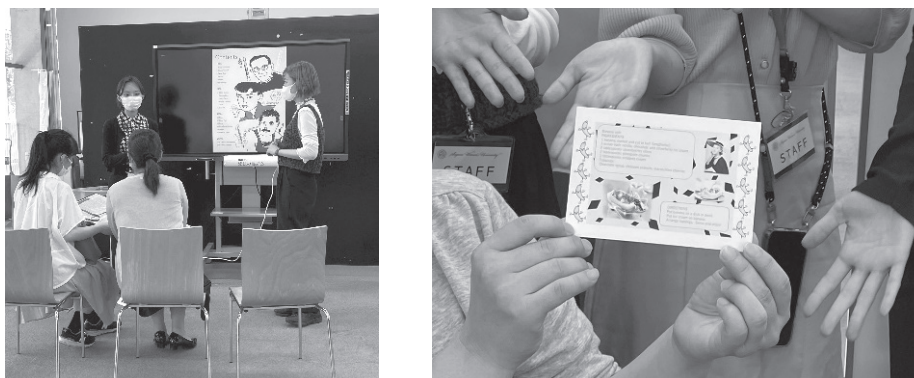


Fig. 7. Magazine-making event. Left: Reading corner Right Graphic design experience  
Photos taken by the author

In the reading corner with a large poster of the illustrated Contents page, “Did you draw it yourself?” was a common conversation opener. Responding to questions, students shared episodes about their seminar experiences, out-of-class adventures, attempts with the design software, and stories of their school life. We met Audrey Hepburn fans and very passionate Freddy Mercury fans, some good cooks, people who wanted to know how to go to Pepper’s Diner, and people who wanted to talk more about music and movies. In this social context, it seems that guests were drawing out students’ memories, or looking for something they could relate to in the magazine or wanting to chat about something they found interesting from the magazine. Occasionally readers pointed out something that was “*natsukashii*” (nostalgic) to them. And quiet readers, rather than flipping hastily through the magazine, seemed to settle in and read the magazine thoughtfully from front to back, kindly telling us how they felt reading it, “*tanoshii-so*” and “*omoshiroi*” (sounds fun, and interesting).

In the graphic design experience, participants could choose a recipe from the 30s, 50s, or 70s, and compose and print an original recipe card in the design style of the era. The magazine team helped them get started by explaining the connections between the magazine and the graphic design experience and showing participants how to find and use the things they needed to design their cards. Besides learning how to do the activities, participants seemed keen to know more about the project, related classes, and how the seminar students changed and grew. High schoolers shared their worries and hopes about the future and the magazine team shared their own stories about their hopes when they entered university, efforts to activate learning from other classes, episodes about the seminar experience, and plans for their future careers. For participants, the graphic design experience was an opportunity to imagine a possible future, and perhaps to look forward to realizing that vision; anticipatory nostalgia. For the seminar students relating their own experiences, it became an opportunity to engage in a kind of critical nostalgia; an opportunity to reflect on their past experiences and become aware of positive changes in their lives between now and then.

### Nostalgia as creative inquiry

Nostalgia invites us to reflect on experiences and their emotional impacts on us. Applied to the experience of magazine-making, nostalgia offered a schema for critical thinking. Reflecting on our relationships to the past and present, in this project we learned to ask ourselves about mappings of time, form and experience. In editorial work, we learned to ask, what information do I need make to my interpretations of the past credible? In design work, what can I do make nostalgic ideas visible? And as visual communication, how can I bring personal stories into the reading experience and what makes the reading experience memorable and compelling? Using our perceptions of nostalgia, we created a form: *Rives Magazine*. Reflecting on nostalgia, we created experiences: out-of-class experiences, the reading experience in the magazine, and the experience of thinking about design in relation to personal experiences.

Critical self-awareness and the use of personal memories are evident in the individual magazines each student made for her graduation research project in the following year. Yuko repurposed and edited artwork that she had done as a child, giving it a unique, fresh look that defines her magazine’s design style. Mami reviewed her *Rives Magazine* experience as a restaurant reporter to develop a guide to local eateries where she adopted a disciplined approach to the editorial design, paying special attention to the quality of her food photography, layout styles, and original typefaces. Izumi recycled the theme of nostalgia, creating a travel guide to places she has visited

in Japan. Using her existing photos, she re-imagined her personal memories in designs which reference Showa-era design styles, a time she has never lived through, creating designs that see the old in new ways. Reflecting on their sweet and bittersweet experiences with the *Rives Magazine* project, each student found a way to move their visions, personal styles, and visual communication designs forward.

Designer and writer Jessica Helfand has observed that in the design community, there has been resistance to using nostalgia as a form of creative inquiry and using personal memories as a design experience. She describes the mindset, “It’s as if a bow to history precludes innovation, that looking back prevents you from looking forward.” (para. 9), and questions commercial nostalgic design practices:

“Nostalgia is fuzzy and utopian, privileging an imagined past over a real one. And indeed, nostalgia can be kitsch — playing on the collective recollections of a generation and teasing the psyche through the occasional retro replay — but why can’t it be more than this?” (Helfand para. 7).

The perception of nostalgia she describes is rooted in our common understanding of nostalgia as a wistful look at the past, one that doesn’t look beneath the surface of design approaches like skinning and twinning. Coming into the magazine project, I thought of nostalgia as a kind of time machine, the kind of backward- looking thinking that Helfand describes. Through the magazine project I have been rethinking nostalgia as a kind of creative engine which lets us imagine connections between times, experiences, people and design forms, and contemplate their emotional impact; a stance that considers how we can bring our past experiences and our imagination futures into today’s designs. Looking back on the magazine project and looking ahead to the next one, I’m looking forward exploring the nostalgia engine more deeply with students in our next visual communication project. “Ah. . . *natsukashii*. . .”

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### Rives Magazine

*Rives Magazine* was a class project, mentored by Jacqueline Rives done in a Media and Information Studies seminar at Sagami Womens University in Japan during the 2022 academic year. Respecting the wishes of the magazine makers, I have not used their full names in this study and use this note as an alternative form of citation. All historical images used in *Rives Magazine* are public domain images, including the theatrical poster on p. 12, which contains a copyright mark. The copyright was not renewed. This image was sourced as follows: *Funny Face* Theatrical poster Copyright © 1957 by Paramount Pictures Corporation, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Funny\\_Face\\_\(1957\\_poster\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Funny_Face_(1957_poster).jpg).

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