

ALAN PHELPS

Alas Grunge, we hardly knew ye

Grunge is dead. It was sick for some time, gasping for breath, struggling under the weight of overexposure. As fashion designer after fashion designer came out with "grunge" lines, as models skipped through magazines in bandanas, grunge grew weary.



That guy from Nirvana could give the Grunge eulogy, although we wouldn't be able to understand what he was saying. "Smells like yesterday's clothes," perhaps.

It started in Seattle, apparently. From there it spread through the bars and wardrobes of the country. Grunge was a living, breathing entity, soft as flannel yet tough as the street.

But Grunge grew up. It aged. The alternative became mainstream. Little bead necklaces sprouted like flowers on necks across the spectrum.

These days you can read about grunge in newspapers or get fashion pointers on television. Even Dr. Martens are on sale at the Half-Price Store.

I think a funeral should be held for Grunge. I liked him. He was nice to me, anyway. I bought the CDs. I had always worn the occasional flannel shirt, but I bought my favorite brown one in honor of the movement just last year.

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I picture a burial at sea, in the Puget Sound just off Seattle. The guys from Pearl Jam would be sniffing, grieving for a lost friend.

"For God's sake, man, use this bandana," someone will tell them.

Then Grunge slides off the deck, deep into waters made deeper by tears from the new college radio pantheon.

Or maybe Grunge should be put to rest in space, encased in a photon torpedo tube like Spock in "Star Trek II." That way Grunge could come back as a young vulcan. Then, in "Star Trek IV," when the crew visits Earth in the 1980s, Grunge would be ahead of its own time. Crazy.

Actually, Grunge probably would

come back without the Genesis Effect. Styles have a way of evolving rather than fading away. Don't throw out those Long Johns yet.

It's not like Grunge was disco or something. Disco was a giant that fell hard, and his big, pointy collars pierced his flesh upon impact. But the spirit of Grunge lives on.

If anyone doubts the staying power of clothes, just witness bell bottoms—the Richard Nixon of fashion. Both tell lies, whispering at night from your closet: "I am once again fashionable. Wear me — no one will laugh. I promise."

Just like Superman, Grunge will come back to life. For a time, perhaps, there will be imposters, both good and evil. Followers will be divided. Tempers will flare. If we're lucky, nostrils might flare as well. There's just nothing like a room full of wavy nostrils. And a jar of mayonnaise.

Eventually, the clamor will die down. A new king will be chosen by the twin gods Spin and Rolling Stone, and the masses will celebrate with Bacchian revelry.

"We know what clothes to buy again! Hooray!" they'll shout, relieved that they can again look like Cool People. That is, Alternative Cool People, who are the only Real Cool People anyhow.

It won't be Grunge, exactly. The Post-Grunge era will be influenced by today, sure, but differences are bound to arise. After all, style is one of the most unpredictable, difficult aspects

of human society to understand, on par with the stock market or the NU Board of Regents.

The most important thing to realize is that even in the days After Grunge, when winds of change howl across the wastelands of popular culture, people will be able to wear just about anything. Society is pretty accepting of clothes these days, and if you want to look stupid no one really cares.

That may not have been true in the more straight-laced days of, say, the 1950s. But times are different, and even Republicans sometimes do their own thing, such as wearing baseball caps backward.

Today, whether you're Liver Eatin' Johnson or Six-Pack Drinkin' Joe, you can walk the streets without worrying someone will call you a fashion weenie.

But the horizon of the future is mysterious and hazy. No one knows exactly what clothes will fill closets of tomorrow. When and if Grunge resurrects, he probably will mutate into some new, strange form the likes of which we can't begin to imagine.

It might be comforting, or it might be scary.

And while I'm no soothsayer or fortune teller, here's a phrase to keep in mind: Fish Heads. Rolly-Polly Fish Heads.

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