We live in a world–or so we’re told–in which we’re obsessed with the new. Shopping malls, glossy magazines, and catwalk parades encourage us to buy more new, shiny stuff. But the famous song line, “Hey, Macklemore! Can we go thrift shopping?” by American rapper Ben Haggerty (a.k.a. Macklemore) suggests that fashion on a different trajectory.

To put it simply, Macklemore’s song suggest that what’s old is new again. It is only by wearing kitschy material culture from the ’80s and ’90s found in a thrift shop that one can be considered fashionable and–as it is often said–cool. What ten years ago would have been discernible as a sign of a lack of good taste is today an ultimate example of being fashionable. In short, non-fashion is its own fashion today. The only new things are from the past.

Macklemore became a world-renowned musician after the astonishing success of Thrift Shop, which was performed with his producer Ryan Lewis and vocalist, Wanz. As most of contemporary artists do, they posted the clip on YouTube. From 29 August, 2012, until 15 September, 2013, at 11:30 am to be precise, which was the moment in which I was writing these words, the music video was viewed 421,776,827 times. 2,145,337 viewers expressed their enjoyment by choosing “I like this,” whereas 81,624 customers chose “I dislike this.”

So, it can be said that the music video has been a huge success. Most people have heard the clip at least once. I assume that the video has been such a hit because it succinctly grasps something that is characteristic of contemporary times. What is this “something”? To answer this question, a short analysis of the clip is necessary.
The opening scene shows a group of people wearing outdated and, to put it simply, kitschy things from the ’80s and ’90s. In the foreground, Macklemore wears a fur coat and cycles on a child’s bike. After that, a grey DeLorean DMC-12 from the ’80s appears. This is a clear reference to the Back to The Future trilogy (1985, 1989, 1990) directed by Robert Zemeckis, where the very same model of the car had been customized into a time machine.

Then one hears the voice of Wanz singing, “I’m gonna pop some tags, only got $20 in my pocket, I-I-I’m huntin’ lookin’ for a come-up.” Mackelmore wearing the fur coat enters the night club. His appearance is extraordinary. His clothes are very fashionable. But his fashionableness does not rely on the idea of having new, expensive clothes that nobody else would have in the club. Rather, Macklemore raps about a new trend in which being new and trendy is no longer about new clothes, new material culture.

![A thrift store and a mecca of dreams. Photo by Dawid Kobialka.](image)

We know who embodies this attitude today. They are called hipsters. From this point of view, the music video is about hipsters and the ways they use and re-used material culture from the recent past.

Macklemore does not directly refer to hipsters, though the whole song is about them: what kind of material culture they adopt; what is considered fashionable; how one cannot simply live one’s own life, but rather must re-enact it through material culture (e.g., clothes). This is why, in the following scene, he visits a thrift shop. It is a place in which old new things can be found and bought; or, as he himself claims:

Whatcha know ’bout rockin’ the wolf on your noggin
Whatcha knowin’ about wearin’ a fur fox skin
I’m diggin’, I’m diggin’, I’m searchin’ right through that luggage
One man’s trash that’s another man’s come-up
Thank ya granddad for donating that plaid button
Up shirt ’cause right now I’m up in her skirts

Look what I found! A 1980s stereo in a thrift shop. Photo by Dawid Kobialka.

After a few interior shots of the thrift shop, we are back in the club. Once again, Wanz is singing about how “this is fucking awesome. I’ll wear your granddad’s clothes.” He sings this wearing a kitschy pink suit. The last scene takes place once more at the thrift shop.

Macklemore is like an archaeologist, so to speak, when he sings, “I’m diggin, I’m diggin,’ I’m searchin.” I think that this point has to be especially highlighted. Archaeologists are “diggin, diggin’, searchin’” all the time. What do they search for? It is our common heritage that is usually dug up by archaeologists.

By the same token, thrift shops are, as it were, cultural heritage sites in which are staged and saved artefacts from the past, usually from the ’80s and ’90s. They will soon certainly become of interest for archaeologists too. They are places in which the past meets the present. They are about inclusive heritage where most of us can afford to buy something from the past. In the same sense, such heritage sites are vastly so-called inclusive landscapes.

Thrift Shop embodies some dilemmas of contemporary humankind. On the one hand, the music video is about a quite recent social and cultural phenomenon: hipsters. It shows how they attentively create style through an everyday material culture. It is not a new style that can be bought in an expensive Prada or Gucci gallery. It is, rather, the old and outdated material culture that becomes genuinely new.
By the same token, hipsters are like historical re-enactors who are recreating the past through performance—only of the late 20th century. They re-enact, bring to life a lost and dead past. Along these lines, they show the significance of the past and material culture for contemporary humankind.

On the other hand, the video touches upon another very relevant point for an archaeologist. It is a premise according to which thrift shops are cultural heritage sites. Entering a thrift shop is quite literally time travel. One can buy things which were out of use for a few decades; they are landscapes where the past is translated into the present. There is no coincidence in that fact that the grey DeLorean DMC-12 from Back to the Future appears in the clip.