

FASHIONING PROFESSIONALS

**Identity and Representation at Work
in the Creative Industries**

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THE LABOUR OF FASHION BLOGGING

Agnès Rocamora

Introduction

Much writing has been devoted to the words and images of fashion discourse however studies investigating the work of those agents involved in the discursive construction of fashion, including stylists, makeup artists, photographers, remains scant. The present chapter attends to this neglect by focusing on the labour of fashion bloggers. The ideas presented here are part of an ongoing project on the professionalization of fashion blogging, in which I am interested in questions including: What kind of labour is blogging? How does one become a professional blogger? How can fashion blogging help us better understand the nature of work in digital culture?

Some scholars have started to address the idea of professional fashion blogging (see Duffy and Hund 2015; Luvaas 2016; Pedroni 2015; Pham 2015) and I share some of their interpretations, some of which I return to in this chapter, further elaborating on some key points while also attending to other ideas and teasing out new avenues for analysis. I do this through the lens of 'immaterial labour', which I briefly introduce in the first part of the chapter. This notion is useful for mapping out and interrogating fashion blogging, and in particular for looking at the forces bloggers have to negotiate to go about their practice, to legitimate as well as to invent it. Indeed, as I discuss in a second part, bloggers have encountered a barrage of criticism, to which they regularly respond on their own sites. For blogs are both a platform of expression of the bloggers' take on fashion, but also one on which they actively participate in the discursive production of fashion blogging. In the third part I look at the strategies bloggers develop to negotiate the ideals of trust and authenticity central to the logic of blogging and to their fashioning as professional or hobbyist bloggers. I then move on to the ideas of immaterial labour as free labour and then as invented labour to elaborate on the issue of bloggers' relation to brands and the idea of commodification.

I draw on a series of semi-structured interviews I have been conducting with bloggers since 2013. Twenty-six interviews took place in 2013 and 2014. In late

2015 I started conducting follow-up interviews and had met again with eight bloggers at the time of writing this chapter. All the bloggers were based in the UK, bar one, living in Ireland. Thirty two interviews have been face-to-face; one on Skype; one on the phone. I have met with a broad range of fashion bloggers: male; female; mainstream fashion; 40+; plus-size; vintage fashion; fashion for mums. Some were very popular, others were less well known. Some were professional or in the process of becoming professional, some were hobbyists. All the interviews have been anonymized.

Immaterial labour

In this chapter, I draw on Maurizio Lazzarato's notion of immaterial labour, a notion useful for thinking through digital labour (see Cardon and Casilli 2015; Coté and Pybus 2007; de Peuter and Dyer-Witherford 2005). Lazzarato (1996) developed this concept to point to a redefinition of work in the post-industrial economy. Immaterial labour, he argues, is a defining feature of post-Taylorist production and of the skills needed in new communications technologies. It is also a type of labour that includes: 'the activity that produces the "cultural content" of the commodity, immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work"; in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion' (132).

'Immaterial workers', Lazzarato adds 'work in advertising, fashion, marketing, television, cybernetics, and so forth' (143). While it might be argued that fashion as a whole, defined here as a 'field' (Bourdieu 1993) made up of a broad range of materials, individuals, institutions and practices, might not easily be subsumed under the category of immaterial labour, the term certainly is applicable to fashion blogging. Indeed, by virtue of participating in the production of the cultural content of fashion and in their capacity as taste makers, which the marketing term 'influencers', used in reference to fashion bloggers, reinforces, fashion blogging can be seen as immaterial labour. It is also a form of labour, following Lazzarato (1996: 133), whereby the split 'between author and audience' is transcended, an idea which the notions of prosumer or pro-user captures, and fashion blogging exemplifies (see Rocamora 2012).

Immaterial labour is not bound by the walls of the factory, nor is it the preserve of a small number of privileged workers. Rather it is to be found across the whole of society. Lazzarato talks about 'mass intellectuality', an idea fashion blogging also captures. Indeed, although many fashion bloggers have attained a high status, often correlated to financial wealth, it is an activity that has been embraced by a wide constituency of individuals, from a variety of social backgrounds, whether as a hobby, or as a possible career. This is not to

subscribe to 'the idealistic cyberdool of the digerati' Terranova (2000: 44) warns against, and deny that hierarchies inform the fashion blogosphere. Indeed, many of its successful members, such as the bloggers behind *seaofshoes.com*, *manrepeller.com* (who also both come from economically privileged families), for instance, display the hegemonic young, thin, white body still favoured by the fashion industry. Rather, it is to recognize that the fashion blogosphere is also populated by a broad constituency of social groups, including amateur bloggers many of whom are members of the 'long tail' of bloggers that may, or may not want to, generate profit but nevertheless blog actively.

Immaterial labour also involves the investment of the personality of workers, a call to 'become subjects' being 'The new slogan of Western societies' that serves the interest of capitalism (Lazzarato 1996: 133, 134). As Hearn notes, in the post-Taylorist era 'we see a shift from a working self, to the self as work in the form of a self-brand with reputation as its currency' (2010: 425). Titton (2015) and Duffy and Hund (2015) have commented on the way fashion bloggers can be seen as brands involved in self-branding. Indeed brand is a term nine of my respondents used when referring to their blog or to themselves by way of their blog. In that sense too can fashion blogging be seen as immaterial labour.

Lazzarato's definition also points towards an idea that is useful for teasing out the ambivalences and tensions involved in fashion blogging while underlining the many ways through which it is approached. In the quote cited above Lazzarato refers to immaterial labour as 'activities that are not normally recognized as work'. This begs the question, 'activities that are not recognized as work by whom and why?' There is, for instance, the case when it is not recognized as work by other fashion players such as fashion journalists; the case when it is not recognized as work by the bloggers themselves; or the case when it is not recognized as work by the brands and companies that work with them. Thus, when Lazzarato notes that at the start of 'immaterial labour' is 'a social labour power that is independent and able to organize both its own work and its relations with business entities' (1996: 138), what are the implications of the lack of recognition he also talks about on immaterial labour, here blogging? That is, when it comes to fashion blogging, how do bloggers organize their relation with business entities such as fashion brands? A question I turn to later in this chapter. For now, and looking at the first instance of lack of recognition of blogging, I comment on the idea of the discursive construction of fashion blogging.

The discursive construction of fashion blogging

Foucault invites us to treat discourses 'as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (1989: 49). Discourse is performative and

has tangible consequences. It shapes ways of seeing and doing. Objects of discourse may come into existence through processes of material production but they also come to reality through the words and images (and arguably, even, the sounds) that are attached to them and produce their values and truths (see also Rocamora 2009). In that respect the blogosphere, and the fashion blogosphere in particular, cannot be seen outside of its discursive construction. This includes the statements of bloggers during the interviews I conducted. For not only are interviews invaluable in providing accounts of experiences and feelings, they are also interactions during which respondents actively construct themselves.

The discursive construction of blogging also includes the words of bloggers on their own blog as well as the discourse of media commentators and scholars, on and off-line. Indeed, the emergence and development of the blogosphere has been concurrent with the proliferation of discourses on bloggers. Many are dismissive, Lovink (2008: xxiii), for instance, referring to the 'cynical spirit of the blogosphere'. A parallel is often made between journalism, seen as authoritative and informed and blogging, depicted as unreliable and subjective (Carlson 2015). Notwithstanding the fact that journalism itself is a fairly newly invented profession and one with unclear boundaries (Carlson 2015) blogging has faced difficulties being recognized as a legitimate occupation, not least by journalists.

This is true of fashion blogging, which has been greeted with much criticism, including by established fashion journalists (Rocamora 2012; Rocamora and Bartlett 2009; see also Duffy 2013). Stephanie (2013)¹ says 'people, they don't take you seriously'. Oscar (2014) argues 'there is some anti-blogger feelings in the industry, in the press industry'. In July 2014, *mademoisellerobot.com* reads: 'About Time we Respected Fashion Bloggers.' In 2016 Sarah acknowledges the growing legitimation of blogging in the field of the media (see Carlson 2015: 11) but also thinks that 'not everyone really understands what we're doing and why we're doing it'.

Among the many articles criticizing fashion bloggers, Suzy Menkes' (2013) 'circus of fashion' has become well known in the blogosphere. There, she contrasts bloggers with 'fashion pros' and derides them as peacocks 'gagging' for attention. The article went viral not least due to fashion bloggers commenting on it. Fashion bloggers not only blog about fashion, they also blog about fashion blogging. Within a single textual space – a blog – blogging is both discursive practice and object of discourse; it is both occupation in the making and occupation being made by its makers through practice and discourse on the practice itself. In that respect fashion blogging is discourse and meta-discourse, and the two tightly intertwine in the bloggers' discursive construction, and invention, of blogging. Its performativity is internal; it is naming itself into being.

Thus, Menkes' article was in turn criticized by bloggers, allowing them to become active in the discursive construction of the subject position 'fashion blogger'. In a post entitled 'Blog is a Dirty Word', *manrepeller.com*, for instance,

observed that 'reducing an entire generation of sprouting professionals (the bloggers) to the perpetual black (well, actually neon) sheep of fashion just doesn't seem very open minded', adding, 'Many of us couldn't land the jobs we wanted, so we just made our own' (Medine 2013).

In September 2016 a new fashion journalists vs. bloggers row erupted following *vogue.com*'s (2016) dismissal of professional fashion bloggers as 'pathetic [...] girls' with 'borrowed outfits' on 'paid-for' appearances, to which bloggers such as Susie Lau (Twitter, 26 September 2017) responded by pointing at the equally commercial nature of the ties between brands and print fashion editors.

The struggle that opposes established journalists and bloggers is typical of the struggles that, following Bourdieu's (1993) field analysis, opposes established players and newcomers in all fields of cultural production. Here the newcomers are bloggers, established players, and traditional journalists (Pedroni 2015; Rocamora 2016). Chalaby reminds us that 'texts are weapons that agents in a struggle employ in their discursive strategies' (1998: 65). Posts on blogging, like the statements bloggers use during the interviews I conducted with them, are weapons they employ in the discursive construction and legitimation of fashion blogging.

Strategies of authenticity

Immaterial labour is labour not recognized as work, and this includes the case when bloggers themselves do not recognize blogging as work, as an active desire to blog as a hobby, and keep it separate from their main occupation. In that respect a distinction can be made between hobbyists and pro-bloggers. However, a further distinction can be made among hobbyists along the lines of monetization. Susan (2014), for instance, states '[blogging] is still my hobby, I haven't looked to make it into my career, it's something to do for fun and the benefits I get are just benefits, they're not earnings for me'. Juliette (2013) refers to the money she makes through her blog as a 'bonus'. Vivien (2013) is not against monetization but 'would never expect to be paid for' her reviews: 'I write about companies that have never sent me anything that have never spoken to me, but I like them, so it's not always about getting paid or getting something for free.'

Some hobbyists are opposed to monetizing their blog, a decision they explain by mobilizing the ideas of independence, honesty and trust. Julia says 'I want to maintain the total ability to say and do as I please without somebody thinking that somebody's paid me to do it' (2013). Emile (2014) 'refuse[s] to accept money' as it 'puts limitations on what you can write or what you can't write'. Blogging, he argues, 'needs to be sincere, because if it's not then what's the point', while John (2014) states that: 'I think part of me not allowing any sort of advertising is to be true to the reasons why I did it. I didn't do it to make money' [...] if I

monetise it [...] I don't think people would trust it as much [...] I'd like to think I treat my audience with more respect than that.'

When invoking trust and honesty, the respondents are mobilizing ideas at the heart of the logic of blogging. Indeed, the success of fashion blogs is largely premised on the related notions of honesty, truth, realness and authenticity (Duffy 2013, 2015b; Luvaas 2016; Rocamora 2011a, 2012), notions that recur in the discourse on my respondents, whether hobbyists or pro. As Monica (2014) puts it: 'I want to write as me, like how I would speak, honestly, to my friends and how we talk, not in the style of a magazine.'

The ideal of 'authenticity' has underpinned capitalism for decades (Guignon 2004). Boltanski and Chiapello (1999), for instance, have discussed the way it was first mobilized in discourses against consumerism in the 1960s, but was then incorporated in, and neutralized by, capitalism through its very commodification. Bloggers have been able to tap into the ideal of authenticity, and, when monetizing their blog, have participated in its further commodification.

Where the hobbyists opposed to monetization can draw on this decision to adhere to and convey the ideal of authenticity, pro-bloggers have developed strategies to reinstate this principle into their practice. There are aesthetic and linguistic strategies. The former includes posting outfit pictures that are not too glossy (see also Duffy and Hund 2015 on US bloggers). In that respect the mirrors bloggers use to take outfit selfies act as signifiers of realness and authenticity. They hark back to the early days of fashion blogging (see Rocamora 2009, 2011a,b) when the practice was not yet professionalized and photographs had an amateur aesthetic. Susie Lau and Caroline Blomst, for instance, still use mirrors to take selfies (see, e.g. their 16 April 2016 and 4 March 2016 posts).

With the professionalization of blogging and the concurrent construction of fashion bloggers as brands some blogs have become as lavishly glossy as traditional magazines. However, the ideal of authenticity has not disappeared from blogs. It is re-inscribed into them by way of the Instagram feeds that frequently feature on sidebars and which readers can access through hyperlinks. There, snapshots of the more mundane life of the bloggers appear, which, although edited, still inscribe them and their blog in the ordinary and the real of everyday experiences.

Linguistic strategies of authenticity and realness include the use of informal language in posts (Rocamora 2011a), as well as bloggers distancing themselves, during interviews, from the idea of commercialization. When I asked Nathalie (2013), for instance, what new skills she feels she will have to learn to consolidate her blog, she says:

Probably business skills. Which is sad.

Why is that sad?

I don't know, I have always thought of it as, you know, the doe-eyed hobby, somewhere I can escape to and something I can just feed into a couple of times a week that would just keep going, but you need strategies, you need budgets [...] you need like marketing and networking goals and things and it's just so sad.

This brings to mind McRobbie's (2011) comment on the creative workers scene in Berlin. With its art of making do it is 'seemingly non-commercial and under-capitalised' (17). She refers to it as 'a novel form of neo-liberalism which comes almost with apologies. As though the guys behind the bar are saying "we don't like to have to think or act in a commercial way. We are not in this for the money, we are doing it because we find it enjoyable"' (19).

All the bloggers I interviewed also insisted, a statement they regularly voice on their blog too, that they would never post about an item they did not like. This allows them not to be perceived as a 'sell out', as Duffy (2015b) also observes of American bloggers. When I ask Penny (2014) how she negotiates the balance between sponsored and non-sponsored posts, for instance, she says: 'it's tricky sometimes, but it's just kind of making sure that the brands you work with are brands that you actually like and the product you wear is product you'd actually spend money on. [...] it's just kind of staying true to your readership and your blog, even if there is money involved'.

Another discursive strategy involves the use of 'disclosure' to reveal when a post has been sponsored. Much of the criticism levelled at bloggers has involved the issue of lack of transparency with regard to gifting and monetizing. As part of the 'contemporary credibility contests' that informs the formation of the 'boundaries of journalism' (Carlson and Lewis 2015) journalists have responded to the rise of citizen-journalism and the threat it is seen as representing on their profession by invoking the ideal of transparency (Carlson 2015). Transparency is seen as that which guarantees truth and trust (Carlson 2015; Hermida 2015) and, in the process, the legitimacy and seriousness of journalism, in contrast, it is suggested, with the deceptiveness of blogging. When disclosing gifts and sponsorships, bloggers in turn mobilize the ideal of transparency, aligning their practice to journalism and hereby benefiting from the symbolic capital this alignment generates.

In the UK, the Advertising Standards Authority – the body in charge of regulating advertising – started approaching the topic of online advertising in 2011 and has since developed codes of conducts for bloggers and YouTubers. However, the practice of disclosure is still open to interpretation and not strictly regulated, followed and enforced. In a 2015 statement ASA's Chief Executive noted that bloggers and vloggers say 'they need more help knowing where the line is between advertising and editorial', adding, 'This is not an easy line to draw' (ASA 2015). And it is not always drawn. In 2016, for instance, *The Fashion Law* (2016) pointed the finger at US blogger Aimee Song for not sufficiently

declaring her collaboration with a brand. Commenting on the feature *British Beauty blogger* (2016) wrote:

Song is just one of many, many breaches that happen every single day. [...] The ridiculous ASA rule that as long as the brand has had no influence on the post, it doesn't need to be declared that it has been paid for needs to be changed as a matter of urgency. This anomaly is a get out of jail free card for both brand and blogger.

The lack of disclosure of payment or gifting, which unclear regulations support, muddies the distinction between blogging as an unpaid hobby and blogging as work. This is compounded by the lavish pictures bloggers often post of blogging as a glamorous life, which veils the labour that goes into the blog (see Duffy and Hund 2015 on US female bloggers, but a comment true of UK bloggers too, irrespective of gender).

The thin line between blogging as work and blogging as hobby is also articulated in the discourse of my respondents. Karen (2013), for instance, defines her blogging as 'a part-time hobby' and 'hobby/part-time venture'. Her use of an adjective, 'part-time', usually mobilized in relation to work, underscores the blurring between work and hobby blogging often involves. Rose (2014) says of her blogging while at university 'I do see it as kind of a job almost.' Conversely, although Bill (2015) blogs 'almost the hours one would spend on a full-time job, including weekends', he insists that 'I wouldn't see myself as a professional blogger', although, 'In the sense of earning money, yes, I suppose I am heading that way.' For Oscar, full-time blogging is 'work, work, work, all the time. [...] But, I'm completely happy because once you try that one thing that you actually love doing, it does not feel like work' (2014). In its acknowledgment of the love of blogging, a love all my respondents share, Oscar's statement is also illustrative of the 'romance' of work which feeds into the neo-liberal ideology of self-governance and 'passionate work' and thereby serves the interest of capitalism (see also Duffy and Hund 2015; McRobbie 2016).

When not recognizing blogging as work bloggers also support the blurring of the distinction between work and leisure which, Lazzarato (1996: 138) argues, is characteristic of immaterial labour. In this context brands have been able to capitalize on the activities of bloggers by expecting them to promote their goods as a hobby, working for free, as I know discuss.

Immaterial labour and free labour

Much media attention has been paid to those bloggers who, it would appear, have become multimillionaires. If there is indeed a top tier of bloggers that can

demand high fees in exchange for their blogging there is also a 'long tail' of bloggers who get little or no remuneration. In the fashion blogosphere bloggers often complain about brands expecting them to work for free, a complaint my respondents also voiced (see also Duffy 2015b). Referring to the Facebook page she shares with other bloggers, Juliette says: 'everybody's getting a bit frustrated basically that we can't expect bloggers to do everything for free' (2013). Sarah states: 'It's a lot of experience that I've built up so I should be compensated. [...] They think, we're giving you something, that's your payment. But I'm at this point where I have so many things, stuff doesn't mean as much to me' (2016).

Furthermore, although starting a blog is relatively cheap it is not without cost. Jane (2013) explains:

editors are paid a salary [...] nobody pays us a salary. And so if we work with brands, you know, we've got to earn some money somewhere. Most of us can't afford to do it, because even if we have our full-time job you have to pay for your camera [...] line rental, web tech guy. [...] there are costs, it isn't all just free.

Boltanski and Chiapello note that 'A theory of exploitation must show that the success and strength of some actors is in fact due, at least in part, to the intervention of others, whose activity is neither recognised nor valorised' (1999: 444). By not being recognized or valorized blogging is not remunerated. This is part of a wider context of appropriation of users' work for free, which various scholars have commented on, not least in relation to digital work (see Bucher and Fieseler 2016). This is also where the notion of immaterial labour meets another recurring concept in scholarship on the digital economy: 'free labor' (Terranova 2000; see also Coté and Pybus 2007; de Peuter and Dyer-Witherford 2005).

Drawing upon the work of Lazzarato Terranova writes that free labour is 'about forms of labor we do not immediately recognize as such: chat, real-life stories, mailing lists, amateur newsletters, and so on' (2000: 38). It is 'the moment where this knowledgeable consumption of culture is translated into productive activities that are pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited' (37). All the bloggers I interviewed mentioned how much they enjoy blogging (see also Duffy and Hund 2015 on US bloggers). This is an enjoyment, which, digital culture scholars have argued, is seen as making up for precariousness and lack of remuneration in the job market, but in doing so also serves the interest of capitalism and the neo-liberal ideology of entrepreneurship and prosumption (Duffy 2015; Duffy and Hunt 2015; Fisher 2010; Gill and Pratt 2008; Hesmondhalgh 2010; Manzerolle 2010; McRobbie 2016).

Moreover, free labour is never free. When not initially or sufficiently generated through the blog, income has to be relied on elsewhere to sustain bloggers

through everyday life and help them buy the time that goes into blogging. Bonnie (2014) would like to blog more but lacks ‘time and money’: ‘I don’t make any money from it [the blog], I want to do it much more than I do, but I have to think actually if I spend an hour doing that, I get a lovely post out of it but I’m still worrying about making money.’ Among the bloggers I interviewed some had a full-time or part-time job, some had waited for the blog to take off to leave their full-time job, some were still at university, some could also rely on their relatives, whether partner or parents, for some financial support.

Discussing one’s financial situation with a stranger (which I was to all the bloggers I interviewed) is delicate, and it was not always possible for me to ascertain to what extent my respondents may have been, or may still be, dependent on the financial support of someone else for the running of their blog. However, it is clear that in the fashion blogosphere as in most fields a privileged social background can facilitate access to the economic, symbolic and social capitals (Bourdieu 1993) needed for the development of one’s enterprise. Indeed many successful fashion blogs have been created by individuals from well-off families, witness the case of top tiers fashion blogs such as *manRepeller.com*, *seaofshoes.com* or *theblondsalad.com* which, being led by young, white, thin and pretty women, as mentioned earlier, also conform to the traditional canons of the fashion press (see also Duffy 2015, and Duffy and Hund 2015 on US bloggers). Betty (2013) notes:

if you’re putting all your time into something you need to make a living unless, you know, you’re very lucky and have a whopping great trust fund or something. But most of us don’t. But then yeah, it’s difficult because you don’t want to end up just doing paid stuff.

You cannot blog for free because you cannot afford to blog for free, but also because you might be seen as compliant with the capitalistic appropriation, and exploitation, of labour as free labour, and therefore compliant in the reproduction of the structural inequality free labour feeds off.

Free labour, then following Terranova, is ‘pleasurably embraced and at the same time often shamelessly exploited’ (2000: 37). However elsewhere she nuances this position when writing that ‘Free labor, is not necessarily exploited labor’ (48). It is often exploited but not necessarily so. Where, following the work of scholars such as Fuchs (2011), unremunerated digital activities such as blogging might be seen as exploited labour, unless one attributes bloggers a false consciousness hardly respectful of their sense of agency, when it is the bloggers themselves who do not wish to be remunerated can one talk about exploitation? As Hesmondhalgh (2010: 277) notes ‘There has been a tendency to bandy about the phrase “free labor” as if it describes one huge, interconnected

aspect of inequality and injustice.’ While a living wage is crucial, he insists, wages are not necessarily the only way of rewarding one’s work, and it would be a mistake to think that people who work ‘on the basis of social contribution or deferred reward’ are ‘duped by capitalism’. Rather, he observes, it would risk naturalizing ‘capitalism’s own emphasis on commodification’ (2010, 278).

Invented labour

In post-Taylorist society, Lazzarato (1996) writes, ‘it is no longer a matter of finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones’ (135). Or, more exactly, of inventing new ones, as is the case with fashion blogging, for in the process of blogging, fashion bloggers have gradually invented a new career.

This often takes place in improvised ways. When I ask Jenny (2013) ‘how do you acquire the necessary skills?’ She answers: ‘You kind of just make it up as you go along’, echoing the words of Karen who is ‘learning as I go along really’ and ‘Anything that I don’t know I just tend to google’ (2013). Sarah went on a business course in 2015: ‘I’m having to become more businesslike, which is a learning curve, because initially it wasn’t a business’ (2016). In 2016 Monica says of blogging: ‘I’m still trying to work it out. It’s all so new, isn’t it? [...] no-one knows how it’s going to pan out. [...] I think everyone has the same problem. How do you make it work. It’s a financial thing.’

There are various options for monetization, including sponsored posts, banner ads, affiliate links, brand partnerships. However, it is not necessarily the blog itself that directly generates income but the jobs that develop out of it, or are supported by it, such as styling, writing and photography for other platforms and brands, consulting on fashion or social media. In that respect the blog acts as a sort of ‘portfolio’ bloggers ‘can get work from’ as Monica (2014) puts it of her site. Although she does not directly monetize her blog, Bonnie sees it as ‘completely interwoven’ with her online business of selling vintage clothing, especially ‘now that it’s all linked to Twitter and Facebook as well’ (2014). Similarly Lucile observes that her blog ‘has been very important for getting me paid work. So people read my blog and they would ask me to write stuff for their website’ (2014).

When it comes to tariffs, bloggers have had to improvise too. Laura says: ‘this is where blogging becomes very confusing in the sense that there are all these mixed rules and it’s just a very grey area’ (2014), while Penny observes: ‘knowing your value as a blogger is so tricky when there’s no-one kind of saying, this is how much you should be charging’ (2014). For Bill (2015) ‘That’s incredibly difficult [to decide how much to charge]. I’m probably starting very low and

seeing what... I'm quoting a figure and seeing what response I get', and for Monica (2016) deciding how to charge is 'still a bit vague. People still think they can get something for nothing, they do'.

However, fashion bloggers can draw on a range of resources to decide how to best go about their activity and make attendant decisions. The bloggers I interviewed mentioned other bloggers themselves as well as online platforms such as forums, Facebook groups, Bloglovin, Independent Fashion Bloggers (IFB), where bloggers share tips and advice, as they also do on their own blogs. Users can find anything from information on blogging equipment, photography tutorials, tips on how to start a blog or increase traffic and followers, to advice on 'how the heck do you figure how much to charge?' (IFB May 2014) or 'How to negotiate as a new blogger' (Zanita 2016). A whole market has emerged aimed at teaching 'how to' blog, from magazines (e.g. *Blogosphere Magazine*), books, workshops to online resources such as tutorials and courses, including as developed by successful fashion bloggers themselves such as Zanita with her site Azalle.

The invention of blogging can be seen as an act of 'self-regulation' (Kennedy 2010), where the self, here, however, is not individualized but collective. It is that of the bloggers and their community – a term my respondents regularly used to refer to their peers – who exchange tips and ideas, and in the process invent their activity.

The invention of blogging has itself spurred the invention of new occupations, most notably perhaps bloggers' agents and agencies such as Socialyte, Unsigned GRP, IMA. Similarly, fashion blogging has created in its stride new job opportunities such as blogger photographer. When I interviewed them again in 2016 three of my respondents were working closely with their own photographer. Betty (2016) describes her experience:

I now pay her [her photographer] kind of a retainer to do, it's either one day a week or two days a month where we'll do a full day, we'll shoot a bunch of stuff. So we might shoot an editorial, two outfits, a beauty and then a restaurant, it would be in a day, so then any projects that we're doing within that, she'll get 20% of my fee.

The presence of on and off-line resources for blogging might make it less of an unknown venture than in its early days, but my respondents regularly expressed uncertainty about the future. When I asked Oscar 'How sustainable is it as a business, your blog?' he says: 'I don't think anyone can answer that. Nobody knows what the future is, how long this is going to last. [...] for all we know, [it] could just be one big bubble that may burst at any time' (2014).

Uncertainty can come with anxiety. When I ask him about his future plans, James (2013) says: 'I don't know. Once again, there is the scary thing with the

blog, you never know. You never know.' More recently Betty (2016) tells me 'I don't trust to have that much longevity [...] none of us know what's going to happen with it [blogging] and I don't know where I'm going to go with it.'

Precarity and uncertainty is endemic to creative labour (see Lazzarato 1996). In the case of blogging it is compounded by the fact that it is a newly invented occupation, which, furthermore, operates in the ever shifting and rapidly spinning sphere of the World Wide Web and social media. This invention also takes place in a context of a saturated labour market. Gaining secure remunerated positions in the fashion industry in particular can be challenging. James was not able to find a permanent job and decided to develop his blog full-time. After graduation Bonnie (2014) tried 'to do costume things', but 'you're not being paid', so she did some office work and started working for herself 'selling things on eBay and making quite a lot of money' alongside blogging. Monica (2014), who also freelances for women's magazines, was motivated to start her blog in 2008, with 'the economy completely tanking [...] the freelancer stuff, it had been so precarious I thought, you know what, I'm just going to write for myself'. The blog became the 'portfolio' that allowed her to gain further freelance work.

It is still early days in fashion blogging time. With both the field of fashion and the internet economy changing at such a rapid pace, whether the pro-bloggers I interviewed will be able to carry on sustaining themselves through their blog and build the 'longevity' Betty was referring to is uncertain. As she jokingly told me at the end of the second interview, 'we should meet again in 10 years!'

Conclusion

The fashion blogosphere is in a permanent state of becoming, with new avenues for practices and monetization being consistently invented not least because of the constant creation of new social media platforms. New institutions and professions such as blogging agencies and agents are being created and participate in the transformation of the fashion blogosphere. To better understand it and the new forms of work that are emerging in digital culture interrogating the rise and establishments of such agencies as well as the ways PR and social marketing departments approach fashion bloggers would no doubt be useful. Other researchers may want to undertake this project to contribute to a better understanding of the process of fashioning professional bloggers.

Yet fashion blogging must be seen as a continuum of practices where hobbyists meet pro-bloggers and where the distinction between work and leisure is not always clear-cut. Understanding fashion blogging means understanding this continuum. There, as with much digital labour, 'hybrid relations [...] cut across the commercial and non-commercial social networks and markets' (Banks and

Humphreys 2008: 402), which problematizes the relation between hobbyists and pro-bloggers, as it does the equation of all free labour with exploited labour. This also points to the usefulness of fashion blogging for understanding contemporary forms of labour, and more generally, to the importance of fashion for thinking through social, cultural and economic practices.

Participants

Betty was a fashion student when I interviewed her in 2013. After graduating in 2014 she became a full-time blogger (personal style). I interviewed her again in 2016. Currently active.

Bill started blogging (40+ personal style) as a hobby in 2011 during his retirement while also teaching part-time. I interviewed him in 2014 and 2015. Currently active.

Bonnie was selling vintage clothes online when she started blogging in 2006 while also supporting herself through 'office work.' Her online vintage selling took off and she carried on blogging. She lives off selling vintage clothing. Currently active.

Emile is a student and has been blogging as a hobby (fashion news, designers) since 2008. Currently active.

James started blogging in 2012. When I first met him he was also teaching for financial support. When I interviewed him again in 2016 his blog (personal style) had become a Limited. Currently active.

Jane started blogging in 2009 as a hobby (personal style and fashion-related news). She has a PhD in bio-chemistry and was working as a lecturer when I met her. No longer blogs.

Jenny is a fashion blogger (fashion industry, fashion news) and freelance fashion journalist. She started in 2007. I interviewed her in 2013 and 2016. Currently active.

John works full time in a non-fashion-related company. He started blogging (menswear) as a hobby in 2010. Last post July 2016.

Julia is a personal style blogger and also freelances as a fashion journalist and stylist. She started blogging in 2001. In 2016 she stopped blogging on fashion and has been blogging on travel since.

Juliette started her personal style mommy blog in 2012 while working full-time as a civil engineer. Last post November 2014.

Karen started blogging on second-hand fashion as a hobby in 2008. She was working part-time in a library when we met. Currently active.

Laura started her personal style blog in 2006, aged 16. In university she started monetizing it. After graduation, in 2011, she became a full-time blogger. Currently active.

Lucile started her vintage fashion and personal style blog in 2008 while being a full-time marketing copywriter. In 2009 she became freelance marketing copywriter and social media account manager. Currently active.

Monica blogs (40+ fashion) professionally alongside her freelance journalism for women's magazines and is considering being a full-time blogger. I interviewed her in 2013 and 2016. Currently active.

Nathalie started her personal style blog in 2008 while in university studying graphic design. When we met in 2013 she was working freelance in web design while becoming a pro-blogger. When I interviewed her again in 2016 her blog had become a Limited. Currently active.

Oscar started blogging (product news, fashion events) in 2010 while working in a production company. He lost his job and decided to 'make a go of my blog' (2014) and became a full-time blogger. Currently active.

Penny started her personal style blog in 2010 while in sixth form. At university and working in a fashion shop her blog took off and she became a full-time blogger in 2013. Currently active.

Rose was a fashion student when I met her and had started blogging in 2012. She was 'trying to get established' (2014) as a blogger. Currently active.

Sarah started blogging in 2008 while at university studying knitwear. She then worked for two years in a fashion company while still blogging. She's been blogging full-time since 2015. I interviewed her again in 2016. Currently active.

Stephanie is part blogger part personal shopper and started her personal style blog in 2009. She was building it up as a business when we met (2013). Currently active.

Susan started her plus-size personal style fashion blog in 2010 while working full-time in a non-fashion-related company. Last post July 2016.

Vivien started her plus-size fashion blog (personal style) in 2012 and was working full-time in a call-centre when I met her. Last post June 2016.

Note

- 1 The date mentioned after a blogger's name refers to the year of the interview.

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