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**Title:** The Short, Passionate and Close-Knit History of Personal Style Blogs

**Biography:** Rosie Findlay is a Postgraduate Teaching Fellow at the University of Sydney, where she recently submitted her PhD dissertation on personal style blogging. Titled 'O HAI GUYZ: Between Personal Style Bloggers, Their Readers, and Modern Fashion', this work examines what the practice means for bloggers and their readers, and its implications on wider theories of readership, publics, performativity, identity, and fashion communication. She has been published by *The Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* and *Vogue Australia*, and she is the fashion theory columnist for The Conversation website.

rosie.findlay@sydney.edu.au

**Abstract:** Most media histories of style blogging commence their narrative in 2009, at the moment when a select few fashion and personal style bloggers were invited to sit front row at a number of shows on the Spring/Summer Ready-to-Wear 'Fashion Month' schedule. Yet that moment, symbolic of the 'arrival' of fashion bloggers in the industry (albeit a partial and contested one), was precipitated by years of fashion blogging. This developmental period has not yet been mapped. This article, then, presents a historical narrative tracing the development of personal style blogging through the archive. It engages with the earliest independent fashion blogs (which predated distinct sub-genres of fashion blogging) to map how they, along with early digital and print media, influenced and led to the emergence of personal style blogging as a distinct sub-genre of the wider fashion blogosphere. I draw on oral history from bloggers as well as the archives of their (and other) blogs, as well as the digital archive of early fashion websites,

online articles and blogposts from current style blogs. I also draw on prior studies of personal style blogging by Rocamora and Luvaas, among others, as well as work by Lévi-Strauss and Butler, to contextualize this discussion.

**Keywords:** Personal style blogs, fashion blogs, digital history.

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## **Introduction**

For the casual reader of fashion magazines, it must have seemed that style blogs came out of nowhere. There were a few, scattered reports on this growing phenomenon between 2006 and 2008, but nothing to rival the widespread media coverage prompted by the front row placement of a select few style bloggers during the Spring/Summer Ready-to-Wear (RTW) season in 2009. (1) That season – during which the fashion industry migrates from New York to London to Milan to Paris over four consecutive weeks to view the latest collections – marked the moment when style blogging as a genre first moved from its position on the fringes of the fashion media to literally being invited into the industry.

Since that highly publicized moment, the style blogosphere has grown exponentially, both in the number of blogs of which it is now comprised and in its reach and visibility - the total number of fashion-related blogs on the blogosphere numbered 2 million in 2006 (Corcoran 2006) whereas by 2010, there were 2 million fashion-related blogs hosted on blogging platform Blogger alone (Rocamora 2011). Yet that moment, symbolic of the ‘arrival’ of fashion bloggers in the industry (albeit a partial and contested one), was precipitated by years of blogging on fashion and personal style. This history is rarely acknowledged in the media coverage that such blogging attracts, nor has it been mapped within the burgeoning

body of theoretical work on the genre. Moreover, that time instigated a widespread shift in the values and motivations underpinning the practice, which bears unpacking.

A detailed examination of the historical development of style blogging reveals the dynamics driving the practice, both in terms of its origins as an alternative, creative means of identity play through fashion (see Palmgren 2010) and in its contemporary iteration as a genre imbricated with the commercial practices and values of the fashion industry (see Luvaas 2013 and Pham 2013). As such, this article provides a foundation for an appreciation of this sub-genre of fashion blogging as well as a contextual basis for existing academic work on it. This history is complementary to many of the theoretical discussions already circulating within studies of style blogs as sites of identity negotiation and performance (see Palmgren 2010, Rocamora 2011 and Findlay 2014) and as new spaces for communication about fashion and style (see Allen 2009, Khamis and Munt 2010 and Rocamora 2012).

This article, then, will map the origins of personal style blogging through the archive, tracing the earliest fashion blogs and drawing on the oral histories of two of the first fashion bloggers to sketch a portrait of the early days of fashion blogging. From there, it will outline the multitude of websites and forums that influenced the development of personal style blogging as a distinct sub-genre of the fashion blogosphere. Finally, I will identify the two distinct periods of personal style blogging – which I call first and second wave style blogging – to demonstrate the mutable nature of the style blogosphere’s composition, ever-shaped as it is by the contributions of the people who blog it into being as well as the digital environment within which it originally flourished. The way that people ‘do’ style blogs is

not fixed but has and will continue to change. This is only to be expected from a medium, which, like the Internet that made its existence possible, as well as fashion itself, 'lives on the principle of permanent change' (Lovink 2008: xi).

### **The first blogs**

Blogging first emerged as a distinct genre in the mid-1990s, in the wake of other communicative digital technologies such as personal web pages, forums and e-mail lists (Blood 2000). Geert Lovink argues that blogs initially remained 'off the radar because they had no e-commerce component' (Lovink 2008: x), a status challenged by the increasing internationalization and massive proliferation of Internet users that took place in subsequent years. There were reportedly fifty blogs in existence in 1999 (before the launch of ready-made blogging platforms), a number that escalated to 8 million by 2005 (Kaye 2007: 128).

Much of the early press on blogging focused on those concerned with politics and current affairs rather than those that published content primarily based on the events of bloggers' personal lives. (2) Many of the blogs that were the subject of such coverage were authored by men, even though a blogging survey conducted in 2003 indicated that over half of all bloggers were women (Perseus UK 2003). This gendered inequality in the representation of who was blogging led to the misconception that there were few women bloggers, and that the blogs that were written by women were 'less noteworthy than men's by virtue of their often domestic and personal sphere of reference' (Gregg 2006: 151). However, not only were women blogging, they were doing so about a range of

interests ranging from feminist analyses of daily news to family life (Gregg 2006). These included blogs on fashion; indeed, contrary to Rocamora's assertion that the first fashion blog was started in 2003 (Rocamora 2011: 409), the earliest fashion blogs date back to 2001.

Among these were *She She Me* (started in January 2001), *Primp* (created in November 2001), and *DFR: Daily Fashion Report*, the only blog of these three created by a male blogger, started in February 2002. These early blogs do not cohere with one another in terms of style and content, and they bear little resemblance to personal style blogs, despite being their generic precursors. The writers of these blogs are partially visible at best, more present in the direct and informal address of their writing rather than any visual representation.

*She She Me* reads as a series of diary entries penned by the fictional She She Me girls who live lives reminiscent of those of the characters from the HBO television series *Sex and the City*, and fashion comprises only one aspect of the blog's girl-about-town content, rather than constituting its central focus. The content of *Primp* mainly consists of brief sentences recommending fashion products and accessories, accompanied by links to sites where they are available for view or purchase. *DFR: Daily Fashion Report* reads as a series of opinions on the happenings of the fashion industry, written in a critical, gossipy tone by Schmatolla, who writes in his Blogger.com 'About Me' profile that before launching the site '(he) was for many years a New York fashion photographer'

(Schmatolla 2002). He alone amongst these early bloggers appears to have had a professional link to the fashion industry prior to establishing his blog.

### **‘I wasn’t the only one out there’: fashion blogging in the beginning**

Although fashion blogging has had a ‘relatively short lifespan’ (Oliver 2012: 14), it has rapidly developed and expanded since it appeared on the Internet. As such, it is difficult to appreciate what it must have been like to fashion blog into the abyss, so to speak, and so I interviewed two of the first fashion bloggers to find out: Danielle Meder of *Final Fashion* and Julie Fredrickson of *Almost Girl*. (3) I will refer to the responses of both women in this section to weave an oral history of sorts of fashion blogging in the mid-2000s.

Danielle started her first blog on Blogger in February 2005, and in so doing, found that there were other people who, like her, were

interested in fashion from more of a philosophical, theoretical perspective, and for the first time in my life I experienced the kind of affinity you get when you find people who are interested in the same things that you are [...] it was amazing to me that I wasn’t the only one out there (Meder 2012).

The two aspects of this experience – the opportunity to discuss fashion from a particular perspective not accounted for by other media, and the affinity with other like-minded

bloggers – was also central to Julie’s experience of early fashion blogging. She, too, started her blog to have a conversation about fashion online, interested as she was in

starting a dialog with people who had similar interests around fashion as I found that the fashion media rarely spoke about the issues of interest to me and that the existing blog community that was publishing at the time tended to focus on other topics (Fredrickson 2013).

The focus was more theoretical than sartorial, then – that is to say, ‘no one was outfit blogging or talking about must haves in the blogosphere [... fashion bloggers were] mainly people interested in wider issues around fashion as opposed to being strictly about consumptive experiences’ (Fredrickson 2013).

Unsurprisingly, the fashion blogosphere of this time was characterized by long-form written posts, only rarely punctuated by images. Such a blogosphere is hard to imagine for a contemporary fashion blogger, as original, high-resolution images are a cornerstone of the two most popular fashion blogging sub-genres, streetstyle and personal style blogging. Yet according to Meder, early fashion blogs ‘were much more about writing than about images’ (Meder 2012). In fact, if images were posted at all, they were often single photographs taken by bloggers themselves to illustrate the post’s written content, a visual support rather than a focal point (see Figures 1 and 2). In part this is attributable to the dominantly text-based user-generated modes of digital communication that preceded and influenced blogging – chat rooms, forums, MUDs and so on – yet, at the same time,

‘images were harder to [get]: it used to be that on Google Images you’d hardly find anything’ (Meder 2012)

*\*Figures 1 and 2 see attached\**

In the ‘small community [that] began to galvanize around fashion blogging’ (Meder 2012), bloggers engaged in lengthy discussions through the comment threads and participated in ‘carousels’, in which a number of bloggers write about a subject – here, a specific aspect of fashion – and link to the posts of all the other participating bloggers. For the community in which Danielle and Julie took part, this was called ‘Black Friday Blogging’ and it began in November 2005, as

kind of an experiment to see if fashion writing could focus on something that was a little different because obviously back then the fashion media landscape was a lot less various than it is now [...] without the financial obligations of the mainstream media we could sort of take on topics and write about things that were still about fashion but didn’t have anything to do with the type of media that we were familiar with seeing (Meder 2012).

*Final Fashion* and *Almost Girl* were only two of the first fashion blogs to bring the fashion blogosphere into being. Written out of Canada and the United States of America, respectively, theirs were published alongside *Spirit Fingers*, a chatty fashion blog written out of Hong Kong, created in July 2004, *Manolo the Shoe Blogger*, by an anonymous

New Yorker who writes posts on celebrities and shoes, which has been active since its creation in October 2004, and many others. (4)

### **Influences on the development of personal style blogs**

Such was the landscape of the early fashion blogosphere, yet the development of personal style blogging as a distinct genre was shaped by a number of enmeshed and concurrent influences, not simply its blogging forebears. This is perhaps appropriate for a genre centered on fashion, itself an industry that draws inspiration from a number of sources to create original designs. As such, there were a number of forums, social media networks and fashion-based websites frequented by user communities interested in fashion and shopping that influenced the development of style blogs. This is evident both in the similarities between style blogs and these predecessors, and that bloggers would credit these sites and communities as influential in the creation of their own blogs.

A number of online forums were operational in the early 2000s upon which registered users were able to discuss their interest in fashion and upload editorial images for the appreciation of others. One of the first such forums dedicated was the Fashion Spot (or tFS), created circa 2001. tFS was a forum at which registered users could write about fashion on shared discussion boards. Some early style bloggers have noted the influence of tFS and its community in the development personal style blogging. In her foreword to *Style Feed*, UK style blogger Susie Lau wrote that

[t]he Fashion Spot was [...] where I first discovered the act of sharing your personal style, something that would rapidly spiral into today's phenomenon of fashion blogging. I'd take a picture of my outfit in the mirror, palms sweating, because it seemed such a preposterous act of narcissism at the time. A quick upload [...] and my self-image would be out there for members to bestow virtual karma points and encouraging comments on. The Fashion Spot was in effect the gestating cocoon for the beginnings of my own fashion blog and arguably the start of fashion blogging's explosion' (Lau in Oliver 2012: 7).

Another early fashion-based forum was *foto decadent*, a blog created in 2004 as 'a community dedicated to avant-garde fashion photography' (according to the site's 'about' page) and hosted on blogging platform LiveJournal. Users would upload complete scans of fashion imagery - usually comprised of editorial spreads and advertising campaigns from then-current and past issues of fashion magazines - resulting in a user-generated online database for public viewing, downloading and sharing.

The influence of these early fashion-based forums on style blogs is evident both in their shared subjective mode of discussing fashion and practice of presenting a stream of externally produced fashion imagery down a page. Style bloggers often upload whole photo shoots that reflect their personal taste in fashion or that feature models whose personal style 'inspires' them. However, whilst personal sharing was central to communication on these forums, when participating in them, users would engage in discussion with one another rather than presenting their own unmediated perspective in a

continuous stream as is the custom on style blogs. Neither were these forums sites at which users catalogued the daily events of their lives. However, there were already other sites on the World Wide Web at which users could – and were – doing just this.

One such site was Myspace (previously 'MySpace'), which was the top-ranking social networking site in the United States in 2006 (Olsen 2006). Although ostensibly a social networking site, Myspace offered users a basic page that they could modify to reflect their aesthetic preferences, decorating with images and information about themselves and interests. It also let members include blogs on their pages (Olsen 2006) and interact with one another by leaving comments on one another's 'walls', a precursor to other social networking sites such as Facebook.

This social interactivity based on sharing personal interests is a commonality between the practices of networking on Myspace and blogging. As Boyd Thomas, Okleshen Peters and Tolson outline in their analysis of the communication of fashion knowledge on the site, online communities such as Myspace 'provide a free public forum where users can connect with friends and share information' (2007: 588), a function mirrored by personal blogs.

Significantly, Myspace also offered a number of content categories, which organized the interests of its members. One of these was called 'Fashion and Style', which by 2006 contained 34,127 public groups, all displaying 'some level of interest in fashion' (Boyd Thomas, Okleshen Peters and Tolson 2007: 590). Indeed, Boyd Thomas, Okleshen Peters

and Tolson concluded their study by observing that ‘the most common topic of discussion within the FashionLOVERS subgroup is personal style [... in which] many members of the community are anxious to share their own sense of fashion’ (2007: 601).

This desire of users to engage with one another online by sharing their personal interest in and perspective on fashion was also met through websites that facilitated outfit sharing. One of the earliest examples of this was a group on photo-sharing website Flickr called wardrobe\_remix, created by Tricia Royal in September 2005. Initially described on the ‘about’ page as a ‘DIY street fashion community’, Royal thus directly addresses potential members of the group,

[I] believe the best stylists walk the streets, not the photo sets, nor the backstage of the runways. [T]he real style innovators are you and me: real, fashionable people, men and women alike. [H]ow do \*you\* put it together? [...] [W]hatever you wear, wherever it's [sic] source (designer, mass-market/high street, thrift/charity, handmade--it's ALL good): show us how you CREATIVELY put your everyday duds together! [P]ost your photograph in wardrobe\_remix, and tell us about what you are wearing and why (Royal 2005).

Royal’s words encapsulate the ethos of groups such as wardrobe\_remix and others that peopled the Internet in subsequent years, such as *ilikemystyle.net* and *LOOKBOOK.nu*, both of which went live in 2008. That is, a celebration of the style of everyday people, with an emphasis on creativity, originality and individuality. Whether membership was

open or by invite-only, these sites published the self-taken photographs of users' daily outfits, and users could comment on the outfits of others, a practice that, similar to the contemporary style blogosphere, was uniformly positive and affirming in tone. So much is apparent in an article on LOOKBOOK.nu published in 2009, in which one user was quoted as saying 'looks rarely attract negative commentary' and that the kinds of comments 'top-rated pictures' received were gushing and uncritical ("you're beautiful!" "gorgeous", "amazing!") (Gardner 2009).

These user-generated websites reflected the parallel emergence of streetstyle photography blogs, some of the earliest of which were *The Cobrasnake* (2003), *The Sartorialist* (2005) and *Facehunter* (2006). As with these blogs, outfit sharing sites displayed the photographs of users in a blog-style 'flow' down the home page, but unlike streetstyle blogs – as is still the case with style blogs – these sites feature people making a claim for their own personal style rather than being scouted by a photographer. (5)

It is worth noting here that even though people were using the Internet in increasing number to connect with one another and write publicly about their interest in fashion, traditional fashion media outlets scarcely had an online presence. One exception was the website Style.com, launched in September 2000 in partnership with fashion magazines *Vogue* (US) and *W* (Style.com 2012). Style.com reports on the events, shows and news of the fashion industry from an insider's perspective, publishing reviews of the major fashion weeks as well as photographs of each 'look' sent down the runway. Moreover, it offers a catalogue of images of top models, coverage of fashion parties and reportage on

current trends and happenings in the fashion industry. In the words of current editor in chief Dirk Standen,

it opened up a fairly closed system to the world [...] it used to be only a few editors who went to those shows and they'd report on it three months later. Style.com wasn't alone here but it was first in that it did it in a very big way. It made everyone feel like a fashion insider [...] it opened it up in a way that makes everyone else feel like that they're kind of part of that world and have access to that world (Grede 2011: 32).

The notion of 'insiderness' is particularly important to a consideration of style blogs. Before the World Wide Web made searching for information more accessible for users, information about fashion was largely - if not exclusively - reported by fashion magazines and critics writing for respected newspapers. The speed at which information was made available on Style.com was unprecedented, as was the visual catalogue of each look on the runway, not to mention the reach of the site, accessible as it was to anyone with an Internet connection and a computer. This meant that not only could 'fashion obsessives' (Standen's characterization of Style.com's readership, Grede 2011: 32) read and see what was happening in the fashion industry that season, they could also gather information about what had been shown in past seasons.

In this way, a hitherto inaccessible stream of information became available for people with no prior access to fashion shows or studios: they could chart a designer's

development from season to season on Style.com and call to their fingertips editorials from foreign fashion magazines on *foto decadent*. Moreover, they could write about what they thought, liked and wanted to buy on tFS and upload photographs of themselves interpreting fashion for themselves on wardrobe\_remix. It was from this fertile ground that style blogs began to spring.

### **The emergence of personal style blogs**

Although the development of personal style blogs was incremental, the period during which they first crystallized as a distinct sub-genre of blogging was 2004-2006. Although the fashion blogs previously discussed were similarly focused on the person of the blogger and their perspective on fashion, this was the moment when a number of new blogs were created in which bloggers not only wrote about fashion but also visually documented their personal style (by which I designate their aesthetic taste in and preferred style of wearing clothes): this was the moment that the practice of ‘what I wore’ was taken from external sites and was embedded into a blogger’s own site.

A number of these early personal style blogs have been very influential on the development of the genre. These include *Bryanboy*, which Filipino Bryan Grey-Yambao started in October 2004, Susie Lau’s *Style Bubble*, created in March 2006, and *Kingdom of Style*, the blog of Scottish ‘Queens’ Michelle Haswell and Marie Thomson, begun in August 2006. All of these blogs feature their bloggers displaying their dressed selves through their ‘outfit posts’ and writing about fashion and their style in the expressive, subjective manner particular to personal blogs (see Rocamora and Bartlett 2009). Of

paramount importance on these early blogs, as well as those that followed them, were their ‘blogger’s personal style and their individual perspective on fashion as constituted in their own life; or at least that life as represented on the blogosphere’ (Findlay 2012: 198). (6)

While the focus of personal style blogs has remained constant throughout their short history, most can be categorized as being situated within one of the two distinct periods - or ‘waves’ - that have shaped the practice. The first wave began with the emergence of the first style blogs, an era that was superseded towards the end of 2009 as widespread fashion and news media coverage saw a second wave of blogs emerge. Second wave blogs employed the same characteristics as first wave but with a significantly different aesthetic and a different underlying ethos of blogging.

### **First wave style blogging**

Whilst there were certainly never any rules ostensibly laid out by an organization or collection of bloggers about what they were seeking to do, in each ‘wave’ there have been distinctive elements that have become characteristic of the practice. In first wave blogging, bloggers took the photographs for their outfit posts in the environs surrounding their homes, often in locations such as in their living room, their bedroom or their backyard, customarily using a tripod and their camera timer to take their shots (see Figures 3 and 4 for examples).

*\*Figure 3 see attached\**

The outfits worn in these posts were assembled from an array of sources ranging from Etsy and thrift stores to ‘high street’ chain stores such as Forever 21 and American Apparel. Style bloggers were thus engaging in a kind of *bricolage*, to borrow from Lévi-Strauss: ‘[making] do with whatever [was] available whether perfect or imperfect, cheap or expensive, simple or elaborate’ (Lévi-Strauss, cited in Marion and Nairn 2011: 31) to craft creative outfits to blog.

For Lévi-Strauss (1966), the process of assembling different components is dialogic, the meaning of the object depending on its role in the final combination, an aspect frequently evident in the dressed appearance of bloggers. Here, as in second wave style blogging, style was a product of what they wore, and yet in first wave style blogging, the garment was not necessarily widely appreciated as stylish before a blogger wore it. On these style blogs, the clothing worn in outfit posts was rendered stylish by being woven into a visually cohesive look by a blogger. So much is apparent in an outfit post by then-12 year old blogger Tavi Gevinson, in which she poses in the backyard of her family home, wearing an outfit comprised of garments from a range of sources including Old Navy and Pamela Mann. Over the top, Tavi tied a ‘totally bonkerz blue basket cage thing’ to her hip with twine, ‘because last night I read an article about Gareth Pugh right before going to sleep and wanted to be all structured and reusing and stuff’ (Gevinson 2009a). This post exemplifies the qualities Lévi-Strauss identified as the characteristics of *bricolage*: a ‘creative design process’, shaped by a ‘vaguely defined project determined by what is

available and how it can be assembled', drawn from a finite array of materials redefined by their final combination (Lévi-Strauss, cited in Marion and Nairn 2011:32).

Of course, not all style bloggers of this period employed such a creative dressing method, yet the principle of being inspired by a collection or editorial and interpreting it through clothes one could afford - or already owned - was characteristic of early style blogs. In first wave style blogging, having the means to acquire the luxury items that one desired was the exception rather than the rule. More common was to recreate a catwalk look, as described above, to make a DIY version of a desired item, or to explore the possibilities of combining various previously owned items with recently purchased ones. Moreover, outfit posts used to catalog blogger's daily outfits as opposed to displaying clothes specifically donned for the post's photo shoot (which has become the most common practice for second wave style bloggers), reflected in the other title by which these posts were known, 'what I wore'.

The cumulative effect of these characteristics - the *bricolage* outfits, the culture of adaptation, interpretation and DIY, and the photographs of outfits worn to school or work that day - generated an alternative feel around style blogs. They were the domain of creative, expressive (mostly) teenagers who photographed their mix n' match outfits as a means of expressing their interest in fashion and to perform their style from locations outside the traditional city centers of the fashion industry (see Spiridakis 2008). Style blogs at this time, then, were permeated by a sense of outsiders looking in, and not necessarily with the desire to be included. Rather, style bloggers were having their own

conversations about fashion and dressing their style into view on a daily basis. The key concepts that the professional fashion media circulates each season - new trends, key 'investment' pieces and so on - were absent from these spaces, even as bloggers observed and commented upon the same collections that such seasonal mandates are based upon.

(7)

Yet the first wave of bloggers was not just positioned outside the fashion industry by virtue of their geographic location: they were also positioned as outsiders through the very activity of blogging itself. In the early days of fashion blogging, there was very little connection between the fashion industry and style bloggers. Blogs were widely perceived as an unknown entity, likened to the 'Wild West' by publicist Kelly Cutrone (see Ciarallo 2008), and bloggers were more likely to be characterized by publicists as 'pesky' and 'lowly' than to be considered as legitimate communicators with a relevant point of view (Ciarallo 2008). As such, bloggers were effectively writing from the sidelines. They were not people with journalism degrees nor were they former industry professionals 'crossing over' onto a digital domain: they were amateurs, fans with a keen interest in fashion and a desire to share it, both visually and through written content. Readers who enjoyed following blogs were inspired to start their own, the comments they left after the posts of others linking back to theirs, and in this way, the style blogosphere gradually grew, seeming, like Bachelard's forest, to 'accumulate infinity within its own boundaries' (Bachelard 1994: 186).

## **Second Wave Style Blogging**

The period of late 2008-mid 2010 can be understood as the threshold between first and second wave style blogging. The aforementioned news media coverage of style blogs from the Spring/Summer RTW season of 2009 had an ongoing ripple effect. Niche fashion titles (such as *POP* and *LOVE*) began publishing features on style bloggers, and bloggers were increasingly offered opportunities from parties within the fashion industry. In 2009, Susie Lau was engaged to be the commissioning editor for Dazed Digital, the website of *Dazed & Confused* magazine, based on the quality of the content of her blog, Texan style blogger Jane Aldridge was invited to the Crillon Ball at the recommendation of *American Vogue* and *Teen Vogue*, and in 2010, Tavi Gevinson blogged about the Haute Couture shows in Paris for *POP* magazine. (8)

This time also marked the beginning of lucrative opportunities for bloggers to collaborate with established fashion brands: Jane Aldridge, whose style blog *Sea of Shoes* details her extensive shoe collection, designed a range of shoes for American retailer Urban Outfitters, and independent t-shirt company Borders and Frontiers invited a select number of fashion and style bloggers to design t-shirts, which were then advertised in the sidebar of their respective blogs. (9) These two examples represent just some of the commercial opportunities being made available to bloggers as fashion publications and labels started to recognize style blogs as a platform for reaching potential customers. (10)

Of course, the terms ‘first wave’ and ‘second wave’ blogging are not prescriptive: there is crossover between these phases. There are bloggers who started their blogs in the first wave and whose work has gradually come to showcase more of a ‘second wave’ ethos –

Rumi Neely of *fashiontoast* and Jane Aldridge *Sea of Shoes* are two such examples. Both blog full-time, display advertisements on their blogs, have collaborated with both ‘big-name’ and niche fashion labels (including Forever 21, Urban Outfitters, RVCA and Gryphon between them) and have developed a style of outfit posting that is less closely aligned with the ‘when, where, how’ of their outfits and more resembles the glamour of a fashion editorial spread.

By the same token, there are bloggers who started blogging during or after the transitional threshold of late 2008-mid 2010 whose blogs embody many of the qualities inherent in first wave blogs. An example of this is *A Curious Fancy*, a style blog started in 2010 by Ragini Nag Rao, an Indian blogger who wrote in her first post that she’s ‘crap at following trends and just tend to follow my own script in my head’ (Nag Rao 2010). Ragini uploads outfit posts documenting what she wore that day, usually a mix of high street and vintage clothing that she styles into an outfit that speaks to her ‘somewhat loli inspired and mostly theatrical’ taste in clothes’ (Nag Rao 2010). (11)

What marks the difference between these two movements, then, is not necessarily when they were started but the ethos underpinning the blog. The mentality of seeing a blog as an opportunity to generate income, as an ‘online *curriculum vitae*’ or to establish a professional platform as an authority on style (as well as a kind of celebrity status) is one that proliferated post-2009. It is a subtle distinction, and one best articulated by Danielle Meder when she observed that rather than doing as she and her peers did, ‘[spending] years eking out small niches, figuring out the conventions of a new medium without a

rule book, and investing time into things that seemed impossible to develop a living out of' (Meder 2011), these bloggers were able to log on to a field whose conventions had been pioneered and make a profit from it. The subtext to their emergence was an awareness of the commercial opportunities and fame blogging could afford. As Meder noted in that same post, first wave blogger Tavi Gevinson 'represents the end of an era when it was still possible to start a blog without ulterior motivations. Her guilelessness is un-calculated – her memedom is unintentional, and she is just as ambivalent as she is ambitious' (Meder 2011).

Meder was here contrasting Gevinson to Bebe Zeva, a style blogger from Las Vegas, Nevada who started blogging in October 2010. In a profile by the *New York Times*, Zeva discussed her 'personal brand' and was quoted as saying that, in terms of style, she was 'trying to create a new cliché for the next generation to imitate' (Lorentzen 2011). This stands in direct contrast to Gevinson's own reflection on style and blogging, posted in 2009,

the idea of being a mad eccentric who is constantly slipping into different skins is so appealing to me. I started this blog because I wanted to explore my style. Now I have more of an idea of what it is and will just continue to try and apply it every day' (Gevinson 2009b).

The fluidity of identity inherent in Gevinson's post recalls Rocamora's work on the self *becoming* on style blogs, as bloggers undertake an ongoing 'identity performance'

which, Rocamora argues, is supported on fashion blogs by ‘dress’s performative quality’ (2011: 411). Style blogs, then, become a space for the display of the self in a particular moment, a lived lookbook of personal style always in the process of becoming.

The idea of a self ‘becoming’ is evocative of the work of Judith Butler, whose famous theory of gender posits that our gendered identity is an aspect of ourselves that constantly comes to be through the ‘stylized repetition of acts’, taking shape in the iterative moment of being performed (Butler 1989: 519). This is a process informed by societal expectations of gender normativity but one that is also mutable, negotiated by individuals as they transgress or reinterpret gender through their own performative behaviour (see Butler 1989). One’s identity is thus not prior, innate or fixed, but a phenomenon that is constantly constituted. Likewise, our dressed identity, or our ‘personal style’, is ever becoming through the intimate and everyday process of donning certain clothing, and as a corollary for style bloggers, as they perform that dressed self for their readers through outfit posts.

The intimacy this quotidian process engenders between bloggers and their readers as ‘a portrait of [a blogger] emerges’ (Rocamora 2011: 412) is subverted – and problematically so – in second wave blogging by the marriage, in blogged content, of ‘self and sales pitch’ (Banet-Weiser and Sturken, cited in Luvaas 2013: 57). For example, rather than being comprised of a creative *bricolage* of their own closets, the outfits that second wave bloggers blog often conform to the fashionable trends of the

season styled to their own taste. Problematically for readers, it is often difficult to discern the provenance of the clothes second wave style bloggers wear in their posts. Such bloggers rarely clarify whether the clothes were purchased, called in for the outfit post shoot, or were ‘gifted’ to them by a label’s PR representation, leaving them clad, like a model, in a world of fashion which is apparently their oyster.

This is not to characterize second wave bloggers as solely interested in fame or in exploring the opportunities for generating income and receiving free ‘product’ from PR companies. However, prior to this time, even the possibility of blogging with an eye for the opportunities that became increasingly a part of blogging post-2009 was inconceivable. Not only were the characteristics of style blogging in place – outfit posts, a language that blended everyday personal narrative of one’s life with thoughts on fashion and style – the genre was now ‘on the map’ in terms of growing recognition of what style blogs were, what they offered in terms of commercial opportunities for brands, and ways bloggers could be engaged to monetize their audience. This possibility has engendered a problematic ambiguity in the practice of second wave blogging, as readers are increasingly perceived as potential ‘uniques’, useful not necessarily for their capacity as an invested readership or intimate public, but as means to a monetized end.

If first wave style blogging was characterized by independence, second wave style blogging is characterized by aspiration. As noted by Danielle Meder, there was a ‘gold rush’ aspect to second wave blogging in that these bloggers ‘weren’t necessarily as enchanted with the format as a creative medium, than as one that seemed like an easy

route to attention [and] cash' (Meder, pers.comm. 2013). The ways in which second wave blogs differ from first wave blogs are numerous and subtle, and most stem from the blogger's desire to be seen as an aspirational figure. It is a shift away from sharing to showing, from an inclusive, collaborative display of individuality to the display of a particular kind of fashionability and prestige.

This shift is also evident in other sites connected with style blogging that began to gain prominence after this time. One of these is Independent Fashion Bloggers (IFB), a site at which style bloggers can create an account to promote their blog to others as well as read articles on fashion and style blogging written by the 'IFB' team, all of whom have their own blog. Although the articles on IFB range in topic, many share the central theme of offering fashion and style bloggers tips and advice on how to improve their blogs: that is, how to gain more followers, how to professionalize their content, and how to develop a more consistent brand. (12) This mentality – that there is a quantifiable list of things a blogger can do to 'improve' their blog – is second wave.

Another second wave development on the blogosphere are private blogging platforms. These platforms host the blogs of certain selected 'top tier' bloggers – often those with a large number of readers and with a certain commercially viable and yet still aspirational aesthetic – and act as their agents. They negotiate contracts with advertisers on behalf of bloggers (namely selling advertising space on their blogs) and acting as their PR representatives to garner bloggers invitations to international fashion weeks and exclusive industry events. Some examples of these include Now Manifest, launched by

Condé Nast in 2011, which hosts *fashiontoast*, *Bryanboy* and *Style by Kling* among other fashion blogs, and Australian network FelIt, established in 2012, which initially showcased eight blogs, of which six were personal style blogs.

What is unmistakable on the blogs of Now Manifest and FelIt is their conformation to the contemporary image of the fashionable figure: these bloggers are uniformly youthful, slender, attractive and dress almost exclusively in clothing by ‘designer’ labels. They are not indicative of the style blogosphere as a whole, but embody the characteristics of the model second wave blogger: beautifully dressed and thus both admired by their readers and acknowledged by the mainstream fashion media, enjoying access to industry events such as fashion weeks and parties, receiving ‘gifted’ product from niche and luxury labels and, ultimately, making a living whilst so doing.

## **Conclusion**

Despite first appearing on the blogosphere only twelve years ago, fashion blogging has rapidly proliferated from a small, close-knit collection of sites at which bloggers wrote long-form considerations of fashion, into a blogosphere comprised of many distinct sub-genres, including personal style blogging. Style blogging has also undergone a rapid transformation, from a cluster of experimental, indie blogs celebrating individuality and creativity into a blogosphere where certain bloggers are routinely granted media passes for international fashion weeks, partake in collaborations with international luxury labels, and gifted thousands of dollars’ worth of clothes to shoot for their blog (and keep). However, it is important to note that style blogs did not emerge fully-formed in their

current iteration, but were the incremental work of many people, blogging about their own interest in fashion and style and discovering, like Danielle Meder, that they weren't the only one out there.

## Notes

(1). For examples of the early news media coverage of fashion blogs, see Lara Zamiatin 'Let slip the blogs of wore', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 27, 2006, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/fashion/let-slip-the-blogs-of-wore/2006/07/26/1153816248787.html?page=fullpage>; Rachel Dodes 'Bloggers Get Under The Tent', *The Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2006, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB115801727410860002>; and Nova Style 'Meet Tavi, the 12-Year-Old Fashion Blogger', The Cut blog, *New York Magazine*, July 22, 2008, accessed March 22, 2014, [http://nymag.com/daily/fashion/2008/07/meet\\_tavi\\_the\\_12yearold\\_fashio.html](http://nymag.com/daily/fashion/2008/07/meet_tavi_the_12yearold_fashio.html). There were a multitude of articles published on the attendance and prominent seating of bloggers at the Spring/Summer Ready-to-Wear season of 2009, on media outlets from newspapers (*The New York Times*) to fashion magazines (US *InStyle*) to websites (*Mediaite*). For an overview and an online log of links to a number of such stories, see Foster Kamer 'I Hereby Declare The Fashion Bloggers' "Front Row" Status Trend Piece Over', *Gawker*, September 18, 2009, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://gawker.com/5434670/i-hereby-declare-the-fashion-bloggers-front-row-status-trend-piece-over>.

(2). See Steven Levy 'Living in the Blog-osphere', *Newsweek*, August 26, 2002, accessed March 22, 2014,

<http://www.bolender.com/Dr.%20Ron/SOC1023G%20Social%20Problems/Units/Unit%202%20Technology%20and%20Society/Living%20in%20the%20blogosphe.re.htm>; Farhad Manjoo 'Blah, Blah, Blah and Blog', *Wired*, February 18, 2002, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2002/02/50443>; Noah Shachtman 'Blogs Make the Headlines', *Wired*, December 23, 2002, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/culture/lifestyle/news/2002/12/56978>; and Peter Rojas 'Now Bloggers Can Hit the Road', *Wired*, February 20, 2003, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.wired.com/gadgets/wireless/news/2003/02/57431>.

(3). Unless otherwise attributed, all subsequent quotes from Meder and Fredrickson are taken from the following interviews: Danielle Meder (blogger of *Final Fashion*), in discussion with the author over Skype, June 2012; Julie Fredrickson (blogger of *Almost Girl*), in written communication with the author (email), February 2013.

(4). See Zamiatin, 'Let slip the blogs of wore', 2006.

(5.) I engage in more depth with the characteristics of the different sub-genres of the fashion blogosphere in Chapter Two of my PhD dissertation, 'O HAI GUYZ: Between Personal Style Bloggers, Their Readers, and Modern Fashion' (2014).

(6.) For further discussion of the characteristics of personal style blogs, see Rocamora and Bartlett 2009 and Findlay 2012.

(7). An example of the way in which style bloggers wrote about fashion in a different manner to the professional fashion media is evident in the archives of Laia Garcia's *geometric sleep* blog. Posts from September 2007, for example, depict reblogged

photographs of looks from the then-current fashion shows Garcia admired accompanied by her commentary. This commentary on the collections is filtered through her own admiration (for example, on a Missoni look, she wrote ‘Mondrian Broadway Boogie Woogie + Pixels= this dress. How could I not love it?, ‘Milan Spring 08 II’ 2007). Her writing is thus casual, enthusiastic and couched in her subjective perspective rather than offering an authoritative overview of the significance of the collections discussed.

(8). See *POP* Issue 21 (Autumn Winter 2009), *Love* Issue 2 (Autumn Winter 2009); Zoey Goto, “Susie Bubble Interview”, *ZoeyGoto*, August 2013, accessed August 22, 2013 (page no longer available), <http://www.zoeygoto.com/2013/08/susie-bubble-interview/>; Jane Aldridge, “More Pictures from the Crillon Ball”, *Sea of Shoes*, December 22, 2009, accessed March 22, 2014, [http://www.seaofshoes.com/sea\\_of\\_shoes/2009/12/more-pictures-from-the-crillon-ball.html](http://www.seaofshoes.com/sea_of_shoes/2009/12/more-pictures-from-the-crillon-ball.html); and Katie Hintz-Zambrano, “Tavi, a 13-Year-Old Blogger, Is the Fashion World’s Latest Obsession. Something Wrong With This Picture?”, *Style List*, February 8, 2010, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://main.stylelist.com/2010/02/08/tavi-a-13-year-old-blogger-is-the-fashion-worlds-latest-obsession-something-wrong-with-this-picture/>.

(9). See Jane Aldridge, ‘J. Aldridge by Sea of Shoes for Urban Outfitters’, *Sea of Shoes*, June 23, 2009, accessed March 22, 2014, [http://www.seaofshoes.com/sea\\_of\\_shoes/2009/10/j-aldrige-by-sea-of-shoes-for-urban-outfitters-holiday-collection.html](http://www.seaofshoes.com/sea_of_shoes/2009/10/j-aldrige-by-sea-of-shoes-for-urban-outfitters-holiday-collection.html); and Isabelle O’Carroll, ‘Fashion Blogger t-shirts courtesy of Borders and Frontiers’, *Catwalk Queen*, April 16, 2009, accessed March 22, 2014, [http://www.catwalkqueen.tv/2009/04/fashion\\_blogger.html](http://www.catwalkqueen.tv/2009/04/fashion_blogger.html).

(10). It is beyond the scope of this article to engage more fully with the commercialization of the style blogosphere. I direct readers to Boyd Thomas, Okleshen Peters and Tolson 2007 for an early discussion of the commercial potential for fashion of digital communities, and Luvaas 2013, Marwick 2013 and Pham 2013 for a discussion of the influence of capitalist logics on style blogging.

(11). ‘Loli’ is a term derived from anime and manga subculture. It refers to something that is young and/or cute, and is specifically linked in anime subculture to the look of pre-teenage girls, also known as ‘lolita’.

(12). For examples of some such articles, see Jennine Jacob, ‘Reality Check: 6 Reasons Why No One Reads Your Blog’, *Independent Fashion Bloggers*, April 10, 2013, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://heartifb.com/2013/04/10/reality-check-5-reasons-no-one-reads-your-blog/>; Jennine Jacob, ‘7 Common Traits of High Quality Fashion Blogs’, *Independent Fashion Bloggers*, April 29, 2013, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://heartifb.com/2013/04/29/7-common-traits-of-high-quality-fashion-blogs/>; and Jess Estrada, ‘What’s Your “Thing”? 8 Examples of Defining Your Blog’, *Independent Fashion Bloggers*, August 28, 2013, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://heartifb.com/2013/08/28/whats-your-thing-8-examples-of-defining-your-blog/>.

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