

THE DUAL NATURE OF THE PERSONAL STYLE BLOG:
TOWARDS A NEW INTERPRETATION OF FASHION THEORY IN THE DIGITAL ERA

by

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the personal style blog from a philosophical perspective in an attempt to understand its implications for fashion diffusion theory. Starting from an evaluation of Georg Simmel's trickle-down theory of diffusion (1904), the paper goes on to dissect the rhetoric of democratization that has come to define fashion blogging in the media and previous scholarship, only to show that the success of bloggers both reaffirms and challenges the notion that fashion is elitist. Phenomenologist Martin Heidegger's concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity are then used to gain a better grasp of how the personal style blog reflects the dual nature of fashion and of the Self. Tavi Gevinson's *The Style Rookie* was selected as a case study to demonstrate the personal style blog's potential to act as an authentic means of expression, while still being a part of the inauthentic media complex.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my mother, Adelina Di Lullo, whose love for fashion and intellectual rigour has shaped the person that I am today.

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Appendix 1. An Overview of the 25 Most Influential Personal Style Bloggers

INTRODUCTION

The face of fashion is changing. Globalization, the economic downturn coupled with the growing importance of emerging markets like Brazil, Russia and China, and the narrowing of the gap between high end and fast fashion have all affected the industry. Yet, like in other economic sectors, it is the digital revolution that has had the greatest impact on the fashion system today. In the trade magazine *Industrie*, journalist Jessica Michault published an essay on the future of fashion, in which she writes, “Already, the power that the web wields on the industry is considerable. With its 24/7 news cycle, a growing global fashion fan base and insatiable need for the new – be it information, clothing, or entertainment – the Internet has transformed the way the fashion world does business” (153). The digital revolution is no longer a trend that publishers, designers, and PR firms are preparing for: it is their reality.

This claim is especially true when one considers how fashions are disseminated to the public. For most of the twentieth century, magazine publishers, buyers, and designers would work together to promote seasonal trends (Blumer 278; McCracken, “Meaning” 77). Today, the Web has given consumers the opportunity to actively participate in the production of the cultural discourse that shapes fashion. For example, the style blog has created a new class of influencers that have emerged from the masses to dictate the course of the season. It is a change that can be related to new new-media technology, in general, and its ability to shift the balance of power from publishers to the audience (Burns 23). Indeed, the Web 2.0, with its endless social networks, can be characterized by an increased focus on participatory activity, where users generate the content themselves (Beer 986; Malin 188). Some have thus been led to the assumption that we have entered an era of democratization, but new media scholars like David Beer, Brenton Malin, and Scott Lash warn that web technologies might not be the great equalizer

that we perceive them to be (Beer 996; Malin 188-191). Within the fashion industry, this debate is well illustrated by the way in which we evaluate the rise of the fashion blog, and in particular of the personal style blog. Over the last eight years or so, bloggers have been catapulted from anonymity towards genuine celebrity status. They collaborate with designers to offer personalized collections, have handbags named after them, are photographed for the most important publications, and stand as ambassadors in the front-rows of fashion week. Consequently, an analysis of the topic offers valuable insight into the impact that technology has had on fashion's diffusion.

A review of the literature on blogs, short for weblogs, defines them as highly personal, a kind of "diary" or "memo to the world," in which the author publishes textual and / or visual content in online posts that appear in reverse chronological order (Lahm 27; Maratea 142; Pham, "Blog Ambition" 4; Rickman and Cosenza 609; Turngate). Blogs are also interactive, operate on the basis of "hyperlinks," and together make up a network, referred to as the blogosphere (Farrell and Drezner 17-18; Pham, "Blog Ambition" 4). Initially, they were used primarily as a tool in the political realm, providing an outlet for a new kind of citizen journalism at a time when people were becoming sceptical of traditional media. But, by 2005, cultural blogs, like those about style, started making their mark. Statistics show that from 2004 to 2007, the number of blogs in existence doubled five times, with the majority of them being classified as offering cultural content (Pham, "Blog Ambition" 7; Rickman and Cosenza 610; Lahm 30). In effect, during this time period, a large portion of the most recognized fashion blogs today were created: Scott Schuman's *The Sartorialist*, Tommy Ton's *Jak and Jill*, Yvan Rodic's *Facehunter*, Susie Lau's *Style Bubble*, and Garance Doré and Bryan Boy's eponymous blogs. Their initial popularity then prompted the creation of more blogs, including Tavi Gevinson's *Style Rookie*, Kelly Framel's

The Glamourai and Emily Schuman's *Cupcakes and Cashmere*, which in turn led to more blogs being created and gaining success like Leandra Medine's *Man Repeller*, Chiara Ferragni's *The Blond Salad*, and Ari Seth Cohen's *Advanced Style*. As it can be seen, the fashion blogosphere has grown in a snowball-like manner over the past eight years. Of course, fashion blogs come in a variety of formats. Online magazines like *Refinery 29* and *Hypebeast* are considered blogs. Print magazines have their own blogs embedded within their websites, as well. Though, it is the street style blog, like *The Sartorialist*, and the personal style blog, like the *Style Rookie*, that retain the most attention, especially since their success have turned their authors into celebrity fashion figures.¹

In fact, the popularity of personal style bloggers has become undeniable and can be demonstrated by the legitimacy and notoriety that they have gained within the industry. It can be seen in their growing presence at fashion weeks, in the countless endorsement deals that they have developed with brands and designers, and in their frequent contributions to mainstream media (Pham 11; Frenner). There are even dedicated agencies, like Digital Brand Architects, and organizations, like Independent Fashion Bloggers (IFB), that aim to promote their work and increase their revenues (LaFerla). Some people in the fashion industry have called their arrival on the scene refreshing, saying that the bloggers bring a more “democratic,” “approachable” and “accessible” perspective to fashion (Zhukova and Ha). That being said, not all have been enchanted with the blogging phenomenon. Many articles, like Troy Patterson's “Critical Mass” from the September 2011 issue of *W* magazine, have critiqued bloggers as presenting an assault to serious fashion journalism, the kind that goes beyond “‘hems are down this season’

¹ For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the personal style blog. It can be defined as being associated with one author and features he or she in an “outfit of the day,” musings about various inspirations, and personal commentaries (Pham, “Blog Ambition” 10-11). Given its inclusion of both textual and visual material and its deeply individualistic spirit, it is best suited to this inquiry.

cheerleading” (290). In contrast, Patterson describes the blogger as “the teenager from Oklahoma modeling the latest hem length for her cult of personal admirers, [who] can exist as a one woman advertorial for the major labels” (290). In other words, the quality of most blogs’ content does equate with the fame that they receive. They are but mouthpieces for the brands that they wear. Yet, presently, even the most respected fashion journalists and insiders, including Cathy Horyn of *New York Times*, have their own blog. This seems to suggest that the blogging medium has become a staple within the fashion industry and a preferred way for the general public to obtain the latest fashion news and information.

This paper takes up the debate about the personal style blog and examines its theoretical implications for fashion diffusion, from a philosophical perspective. It starts with an examination of classical diffusion theories, in particular Georg Simmel’s (1904) trickle-down theory. In the simplest terms, Simmel explains the fashion cycle by stating that an elite group sets trends that are then adopted by subordinate groups, which subsequently prompts the creation of new styles for the elite (545). He comes to this conclusion on the basis of what he designates as the two principles of fashion: fashion acts as both an equalizer and as a tool for differentiation (541). His theory laid the foundation for understanding how the fashion system works. However, scholars have countered that trickle-down theory is too limited because it relies too much on the idea of class and is a product of the historical context in which it was developed (Blumer 276; Breward 102; Crane 17-22; McCracken, “Rehabilitated” 94-95). My evaluation of Simmel’s work will also address these weaknesses. Then, in Chapter 2, I will determine whether the advent of bloggers, as the new gatekeepers of fashion, presents a challenge to this theory, or whether it rehabilitates it from previous critiques. The attempt to answer this question will reveal the inherent contradictions within the way that we have come to view personal style blogs. From one

side, they defy the dominating hierarchies of fashion and media since they give anyone, with access to the Internet, the power to share their views with an audience and are a product of the changing dynamic in the producer-consumer relationship discussed above. On the other hand, as we will see, the most recognized style blogs reinforce traditional standards and structural inequalities, because their success depends on established principles of selection that regulate who gets publicity and access in mainstream culture. As a result, we are faced with a conflict in establishing the personal style blog's exact role in the so-called democratization of the fashion system, and trickle-down theory proves to be an insufficient framework for answering the question at hand.

In Chapter 3, then, I will turn to the writing of philosopher Martin Heidegger to enhance my analysis of the personal style blog. His concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity as two modes of being² will be used to complement the work done by Simmel and other academics and will allow for a more complete appreciation of how the personal style blog and fashion function. In his seminal work *Being and Time* (1926), Heidegger defends the thesis that humans, who he calls *Dasein*, move within two modes of being. He defines authenticity as the moment when we clearly see the world and ourselves for what they are and how they are interrelated (BT129).³ Meanwhile, inauthenticity is the mode in which we usually live, solely focused on the world that others give to us, without questions, lost in what he terms the "They:" that indeterminate, general public that fixes the average opinion on literature, art, culture, and mores (BT127, 176).

² Throughout this text, I use the Heideggerian capitalized expression "Being" in lower case to reflect the new discussion about whether or not capitalized "Being" still denotes an entity, which is what Heidegger precisely wants to avoid. He distinguishes the term "Being," the ontological expression of how *Dasein*'s "Being" unfolds, from "beings" which are entities which exist in actuality. This distinction is rooted in the difference between that which is ontological and ontic, and Heidegger wants to emphasize that *Zein* is not an ontic entity, but an activity exclusive to *Dasein* (Heidegger, BT11-12; Scott 60).

³ For the citations pertaining to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, I have followed convention and included the page numbers from the original 1927 publication, preceded by the abbreviation BT for the title. The version read though is the Macquarrie & Robinson English translation (1962).

Authenticity can be associated with the act of creation and the appreciation of art (Heidegger, “Origin of the Work of Art” 144-146), and as expressive endeavours, blogs allow their authors to purposely reflect on the way in which they are affected by their environment thus opening up the possibility for an authentic moment. The same can also be said about the fashion designer who creates new garments that must reflect the spirit of the times. Indeed, in the third chapter of this paper, I will demonstrate how the personal style blog can act as impetus for a moment of authentic understanding with a close reading of a particularly salient post from Tavi Gevinson’s *The Style Rookie*. In the last chapter, I will thus be able to open up a dialogue between Heidegger and Simmel’s work. Heidegger’s concepts will be used in two ways. First, the modes of being, authenticity and inauthenticity, will be shown to be akin to the principles of fashion that Simmel identifies, equalization and differentiation. Second, Heidegger’s modes of being will also help us to understand the cyclical features that both the blogosphere and the fashion system share, which is something that Simmel’s theory is unable to account for. As such, I hope to bridge some of the gaps in classical diffusion theory, so that it becomes relevant to the contemporary context.

Ultimately, I argue that the ambivalence that marks the personal style blog is representative of the paradox that is essential to fashion. In the seminal *Adorned in Dreams*, Elizabeth Wilson (1985) situates fashion in terms of a threefold ambiguity that decomposes capitalism, art, and the Self (15). Inspired by her work, I argue that the dual nature of the personal style blog reveals how fashion is about the constant struggle between personal expression and promoting commercial interests. By making this conflict explicitly visible, the personal style blog highlights the power that fashion has to reveal the duality of our shared existence. Consequently, the fashion blogosphere has given us a body of evidence that can be used to reassess the philosophical significance of fashion theory.

Finally, as briefly mentioned earlier, to narrow the scope of the paper, its theoretical argument will be illustrated with one key example: Tavi Gevinson's *The Style Rookie*. As a personal style blog, it is atypical and Gevinson stands out in a crowd. To start, she first published her blog in March 2008 when she was just eleven years old. A year and half later, Tavi was sitting front-row at New York Fashion Week: she was thirteen (Gevinson "unless you follow"). She has continuously received extensive coverage by the mainstream press and has been the subject of in-depth profiles such as Lizzie Widdicombe's feature article "Tavi Says," which appeared in the September 2010 issue of the *New Yorker*. Gevinson has become an icon and is considered a child prodigy by some, but she has also been a subject of controversy and of critique by others. Her success is often cited as the archetype of how bloggers have diluted fashion criticism (Patterson 286). Still, though her age in and of itself is cause for notice, it is the quality of Gevinson's work that is most remarkable. Her insights on fashion, culture, and the feminine condition express wisdom far beyond her years. Gevinson provides a worthy case study, because she is a highly mediatized and contentious figure, and as such a prime example of how personal style bloggers have been cast in the press and within the fashion industry itself. Additionally, since she is a child who has become an "authority" on fashion, she leads us to reconsider how we define the elite when trying to comprehend diffusion theory. Moreover, academics who study personal style blogs, like Minh-Ha T. Pham, Tara Chittenden, and Agnès Rocamora have all argued that the medium plays an important role the identity formation process, especially for young teenage girls, who are more likely to read and create blogs (Chittenden 518; Pham, "Blog Ambition" 3; Rocamora 410). *Style Rookie*'s posts and comments offer ample proof for this last argument, which in turn helps to show the blog's authentic potential. Lastly, the blog finds itself in a unique position since Gevinson no longer updates it

regularly. In September 2011, Gevinson launched *Rookie*, an alternative, online magazine for young girls. Her time is now dedicated to her role as founder and editor-in-chief of the magazine, and to her schoolwork. This shift reveals that, unlike other successful blogs, *Style Rookie* is a somewhat finished product, making it a complete body of work that can be studied and evaluated in its entirety. That being said, to paint a comprehensive picture of the fashion blogosphere in relation to fashion, it will be necessary at times to contextualize Gevinson's work by comparing her to her contemporaries. In the end, by examining what can be considered as one of the most well known and publicized personal style blogs, I hope to demonstrate the way in which the medium has become an entrenched embodiment of the fashion system today.

CHAPTER 1

Fashion Diffusion and Simmel's Trickle-Down Theory: Setting the Context to Evaluate the Impact of the Blog

This project raises many questions about the state of the fashion industry, about who its actors are and who has the ability to disseminate fashions to the public. Yet, to be able to assess the fashion system today, we must first determine what it is and how it works. How does a particular style or item of dress become fashionable? To answer this question, it helps to turn to classical diffusion theory. Here, the work of Jewish-German philosopher Georg Simmel (1904) has been considered as the starting point for most scholars who have attempted to systematically study the fashion system. It will therefore also be my point of departure. In this chapter, I will briefly look at Simmel's philosophy in general, explain his famous trickle-down theory and assess its limitations as they have been presented by fashion academics. Simmel's work has also been examined from the philosophical and the sociological perspective, but here I have chosen to restrict my comments to secondary sources that deal exclusively with his treatment of the topic of fashion. Once the account is complete, I will be in a position to evaluate how the personal style blog either challenges or reaffirms Simmel's claims.

1.1 Fashion Diffusion

Before I begin, it makes sense to comment on fashion and diffusion theory in general. The dissemination of fashion by the media as we know it is a modern phenomenon associated with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of the Bourgeoisie (Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 12). In *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (2000), fashion scholar Ulrich Lehmann argues that in its current form, fashion is in fact the paradigm for modern culture. The relationship between fashion, *mode* in French and German, and modernity goes beyond their shared etymological roots: they hold a common spirit in thought and in aesthetics, expressing progress (Lehmann xvi). Lehmann writes, "Fashion is the supreme expression of [the] contemporary spirit. It changes constantly and remains necessarily incomplete; it is transitory, mobile, and fragmentary"

(xii). Wilson supports this definition herself, “Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles,” she states. (*Adorned in Dreams* 3). As such, fashion cannot be fixed. It is of the now. Nothing remains fashionable. Things fall in and out of fashion, and diffusion theory studies this process of how something becomes fashionable.

In Chapter 5 of *Fashion-ology* (2005), Yuniya Kawamura defines diffusion theories as explanations of how fashions are transferred amongst individuals and their social networks. These theories look at how fashions are legitimized and at who holds the power in setting trends. She goes on to explain that the media, interpersonal connections, the influence of consumer leaders, and technology are seen as the main factors in the diffusion process (Kawamura). Grant McCracken (1986), who specializes in consumption theory, situates it in function of person-object relations and the transference of meaning. According to his view, meaning is constituted by cultural institutions and systems, like the fashion complex, and then transferred to individuals through consumer goods from which they appropriate it (“Meaning” 71). Both authors agree though that diffusion greatly depends on “gatekeepers” or opinion leaders, who create, validate, and spread trends (Kawamura; McCracken, “Meaning” 76). McCracken describes them as “individuals who by virtue of birth, beauty, or accomplishment are held in high esteem” (“Meaning” 76). They are the first to endorse new styles, and the public willingly follows their lead, which allows a particular fashion to spread. Conventionally, the group has included product designers, social observers, those in artistic circles, celebrities, market researchers, intellectuals, forecasters, and members of the fashion media (Kawamura; McCracken 77). The latter are the most noteworthy. Kawamura explains that editors are particularly important since they work with writers, stylists, and photographers to create a fashion image that meets the demands of buyers and wholesalers, with whom they have previously conferred (Kawamura). McCracken emphasizes the role of the journalist as well: they must sift through the cultural cannon, decide what is best, and circulate that information to the public (“Meaning” 77). Moreover, when journalists uncover real, unique innovation, which can originate on the margins of society, product designers will then use it as inspiration and bring it to a larger audience (McCracken,

“Meaning” 77). Yet, ultimately, it is the consumer that decides what to adopt and what to ignore, and fashion theorists do point to the mutually dependent relationship that exists between producers and wearers (Breward 159; McCracken, “Meaning” 77). Finally, growing media exposure allows fashions to travel more quickly, which means that they are adopted and adapted faster as well (Breward 102; Crane 15). From what has been seen, then, we gather that the diffusion process sets itself up as collaborative and deliberate, albeit complex, effort on the behalf of many actors to the push the adoption of a season’s particular trends. Moreover, theorists like Diana Crane (1999) and Christopher Breward (2003) have argued that fashion has become more and more decentralized, especially in recent years, and as result it is increasingly difficult to pin point its source (Breward 161; Crane 16). Breward writes that, “The twenty-first century consumer experiences fashion as a more fragmented, competitive, simultaneous, and potentially confusing cultural phenomenon that some commentators have likened, rather apocalyptically, to the spreading of a virus” (102). This is especially true with the advent of digital media, which diffuse fashions quicker than in the past. Alas, it can be said to be a difficult subject to study, but some writers have attempted to analyze fashion from a more abstract perspective to arrive at the overarching principles that govern its function. Georg Simmel’s writing on the topic is considered the first analysis of this kind (Lehmann xv, 126). His philosophical take on fashion attempts to go beyond the confusion and intricacy of the system to reach its fundamental essence. Therefore, the evaluation of his theory should allow us to set the ground for the question at hand: understanding the fashion system in the digital era.

1.2 Simmel’s Trickle-Down Theory of Fashion Diffusion

Lehmann does an excellent job at contextualizing Simmel’s work on fashion. Writing at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, Simmel’s oeuvre centers on the contemporary phenomena of his time and on social observation, and was subsequently easily appropriated by sociologists. Yet, first and foremost, he was a philosopher (Lehmann 126). His interest in everyday occurrences, in fact, reflects his philosophical allegiances. As a Neo-

Kantian, his goal is to show the interrelation of all things by relying on teleological principles (Lehmann 129, 154-155). He sees society as a fabric, a web, and its phenomena as its threads. His role as a thinker then is to show how the threads connect to weave the whole (Lehman 130). In other words, he studies fragments of life to view the overall structure of society. Fashion is an apt topic in this venture because of the historical context in which Simmel completed his work. At the turn of the century, fashion had grown in importance. Lehmann explains that at the time of Simmel's writing, a greater concern with fashion was indicative of society's growing interest in appearances and objectivity. Moving away from a philosophy of character then, the study of fashion was exemplary of the direction in which society was advancing (Lehmann 154-155). It made sense then for Simmel to choose this particular phenomenon as an object of study since it was the fragment that represented the whole at that particular point in history. Further in accordance with his aim, Simmel also fuses human psychology with sociology, using principles of the psyche to explain social phenomena (Lehmann 138-139). Finally, a constant theme that emerges from his thought is the dual nature of being. According to Simmel's worldview, the fragments of life make up heterogeneous wholes in and of themselves as well (Lehmann 141). In the unfolding of existence, these parcels compete with one another as we search for patterns to unite them. Lehmann explains how this relates to human understanding by stating that, "society is formed by the constant attempt of its members to unify homogenous segments from all these heterogeneous worlds or circles, an attempt that causes the social conflicts that provide the background of existence" (133). It follows that Simmel's social tenets are in continuous strife. In sum, Simmel's philosophy rests on the belief that society is made up of distinct fragments, that they oppose one another, creating dualities, and that recognizing the relationship amongst them discloses the principles that govern the whole. These three ideas lay the foundation for his theory of fashion diffusion.

Simmel completed four treatises on fashion: "On the Psychology of Fashion" (1895), "Fashion" (1904), "The Philosophy of Fashion" (1905), and "On Fashion" (1911). Yet, only the second was published in English in the American journal *International Quarterly* in 1904. This

essay, however, does provide a full explanation of what has come to be known as “trickle-down” diffusion. Simmel’s theory rests upon what he defines as the two principles of fashion: fashion acts as both an equalizer and as a tool for differentiation (541). Following his method of using psychology to explain sociology, he comes to these principles by way of our physiological make-up, which is characterized by the duality of motion and rest (Simmel 542). Thus, our desire to be unique corresponds to the principle of differentiation, which parallels the active urges of our soul, whereas our desire to conform corresponds to the principle of equalization, which parallels the passive urges of the soul. Our lives are then predicated on the constant struggle between the two, and fashion recreates it through the interplay of setting us apart from the crowd and allowing us to fit in (Simmel 542-543). As we can see, the key elements of Simmel’s *Lebensphilosophie* are already in effect in his analysis of fashion. It is from his two principles that Simmel then develops his famous “trickle down” theory of diffusion. He begins by arguing that the functions of fashion – to differentiate and to equalize – allow it to demarcate both class and time (544). Consequently, classes, especially the elite, use fashion to show their shared wealth and elevate themselves from the lower classes (Simmel 544). The lower classes, then, out of admiration and aspiration for the wealth of the upper classes, strive to copy their styles (Simmel 545). Yet when it has reached the point where the elite is no longer distinguished by its dress, its members must adopt a new style to separate themselves from the masses. So a new fashion is born, while the old one dies (Simmel 545). Thus, the trickle-down theory relies on the presence of a class system, defines the financial elite as the upper classes, and places them as the gatekeepers of fashion.

Simmel has been criticized for his emphasis on class in the fashion system, but it is an appropriate depiction of his period and his locale. Lehmann offers that in late nineteenth century Germany, contrary to in France or in England, the only way to tell a cultured man from his working class counterpart was through his dress (155). Yet, obedience to strict dress codes was the social norm all over Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Diana Crane, in her survey of fashion diffusion theory, writes that, “Identification with social class was

a major factor affecting the way individuals perceived their identities and their relationships with social environments” (17). People obeyed sartorial rules about when to wear white, when to wear hats, when to wear gloves and so on. Similarly, there were also rules about who could wear such items of clothing. Conformity was more important than individualization, and this remained the case until the mid twentieth century (Crane 17; Lehmann 155-158; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 6-8). The urban setting also provided the right backdrop for fashion and elitism to take center stage. Breward states that, “In the drift towards anonymity and alienation that followed the rise of industrial capitalism and urbanization, the communicative power of clothing emerged as an important tool, both for guaranteeing a sense of belonging and as an aid for identification” (217). When a population increases and social roles begin to shift, the need to find one’s place in society becomes all the more critical. Indeed, Lehmann agrees that the city, with its proximity of social groups, enhances the power of Simmel’s fashion principles (158). It is in this setting that the fashionable citizen, like the dandy, can become a social luminary, a spokesperson for his class or of his time. He can distinguish himself while obeying the rules of the system (Lehmann 181).⁴

In essence, trickle-down theory is really about how individuals negotiate their levels of visibility in the social networks to which they belong (Crane 14). When viewed from this angle, the theory moves beyond its historical context and begins to reveal its true potential. Grant McCracken believes that it is progressive because it rationalizes fashion’s “self-perpetuating cycle of change” (“Rehabilitated” 93). Simmel not only successfully explains how fashions move from one group to the next, but he also gives the reason behind the need to continuously create new trends. McCracken goes on to identify the theory’s strengths: it shows how a given social situation dictates the flow of fashion, and it actually predicts the exact type of change that

⁴ The rise of the Regency dandy, usually represented by Beau Brummell, offers a telling example of how fashion was used in the urban setting of the late 19th century as a means for social distinction. For more on this, see Rhonda Garelick’s *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and performance in the fin de siècle* (1998).

is about to occur. By looking at what the proximate class is wearing, we can deduce what the subordinate group will be wearing next (“Rehabilitated” 94-95).

Of course, these advantages stem from the two mutual, fundamental principles of fashion that Simmel identified: imitation versus innovation. The competing drives are intimately related to Simmel’s metaphysical understanding of the tension that exists between the fragment and the whole (Lehmann 141-143), and fashion in-and-of-itself reveals many paradoxes of this kind. Throughout Lehmann’s account of Simmel’s work on the topic, he highlights the contradictory forces within the fashion system: assimilation against differentiation, new against old, ephemeral against sublime, stability against change, freedom against dependence, classic against relative beauty... Fashion is ambiguous, but all of these terms are necessary. To be more exact, fashion requires the reciprocity of terms: each one of the pair must act on the other and vice versa for fashion to occur. In cultures where one principle overtakes the other, fashion does not exist. Lehmann gives two examples. In fourteenth century Florence, there was no fashion in male attire because it was thought that style ought to be as individualized as possible. Conversely, in Venice, it was decreed that all men had to wear black so that the populous would not realize how small the ruling class was (Lehmann 175). Therefore, the trickle-down theory does more than explain the trajectory of diffusion; it accounts for the dual nature of fashion as well.

To review, Simmel’s theory of diffusion stipulates that fashions are born amongst the elite. The styles are then copied by a proximate social group who wishes to emulate the upper classes, because of their high standing in society. When the masses have adopted the original style set by the elite, the latter must move on to a new trend to maintain their distinctiveness. The theory rests upon two human inclinations: that of imitation or equalization and that of differentiation or innovation. These principles lie at the core of Simmel’s philosophy and reflect the nature of fashion, which mirrors that of our existence. They also give the theory its power to account for fashion’s mobility and uninterrupted cycle and its ability to foresee the content of future trends.

1.3 Critiques of Simmel's Theory

Up until the 1960s, fashion was highly centralized in Paris. Styles originated in its couture houses, designed for the city's elite, and were then copied exactly by manufacturers in the United States and elsewhere (Breward 169; Crane 17). Trickle-down theory perfectly described fashion's course at this point. We only have to think of Dior's post-war New Look, and the way it took over women's closets worldwide (Breward 101). Yet the 1960s and 1970s were a period of transition both in fashion and in society at large. With the baby-boomers in their teens and twenties, youth revolted against social hierarchies and norms (Crane 20). Fashion's *raison d'être* could no longer be viewed in terms of class assimilation. Instead, it became a means for the young people to express their individuality and distinguish themselves from older generations. The mod and punk movements in Britain are often cited to illustrate this new kind of fashion that contested Paris' authority (Breward 107; Crane 18-22; McCracken, "Rehabilitated" 95). It represented an important change in the consumer market too. Teens were now the ones driving the trends. Simultaneously, improvements in production, growing competition, and new communication technologies were also affecting industry (Breward 109; Crane 18). All of this brought the applicability of Simmel's trickle-down theory into question and created a new opportunity for researchers to study the structure of the fashion system.

Ted Polhemus (2007) is associated with the trickle-up or bubble-up theory of diffusion. The "Youthquake" of the nineteen-sixties brought the baby-boomers to the forefront of fashion. Following this movement, Polhemus argues that trends first originate amongst working-class, teenage subcultures, are then taken-up by an elite, and are subsequently disseminated to the masses, reversing the path traced by Simmel (327-331). Although the strength of the youth market is considerable, Crane indicates that popular culture, as found in film, television, and music, is responsible for disseminating trends to teenagers, and that broadcast technology speeds up the process (18-19). Trickle-down critic, Charles King (1963) further suggests that increased media exposure, of the kind that we have witnessed since the mid twentieth century, has caused fashion to spread simultaneously across all directions and all classes (McCracken,

“Rehabilitated” 95). Such observations do point to the weaknesses in Simmel’s theory: mainly, gatekeepers can no longer be strictly defined as the upper class. Crane emphasizes the role that adolescents and young adults play in the diffusion and adoption of trends, which suggests that they are Simmel’s elite and that age, not class differentiation, motivates our sartorial decisions (15-22). To put it differently, the hierarchies of fashion did not disappear overnight. Rather, the reigning fashion elite shifted to be determined by its age and not its wealth. Still like Breward and Crane point out, though inspiration might originate on the margins of society or amongst its youth, innovation is nevertheless co-opted by the industry and advertisers to be marketed and sold to the masses (Breward 109, 161; Crane 23).

With this in mind, I turn to one of the most famous critiques against Simmel, which can be found in Herbert Blumer’s seminal paper “Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection” (1969). Blumer argues that Simmel’s theory misrepresents fashion as irrational in how it depicts it as merely being about class struggle and not applicable to the post-modern era (276). Following field research in the industry, he develops a theory based upon the idea of “collective selection.” He examines the process of how from hundreds of designs, buyers in the industry, and then ultimately consumers converge on a select few pieces that form the must-have styles of the season (Blumer 278). He explains this convergence from the fact that buyers are all immersed in the same fashion environment, and that designers always aim to satisfy them and to create designs that reflect the spirit of the times (Blumer 278-280). This last point is of particular interest to Blumer who underscores the role that the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, plays in creating fashion. Blumer thus argues, “It is not the prestige of the elite which makes the design fashionable but, instead, it is the suitability or potential fashionableness of the design which allows the prestige of the elite to be attached to it” (280). Fashion is not created by the elite; their ability to set trends only comes from the fact that we recognize them as fashionable (Blumer 281-282). We recognize them as such because they represent the spirit of the time (Blumer 287). For Blumer then, time takes precedence over class, whereas for Simmel, the opposite is true and proves to be the greatest weakness of his theory. Nevertheless, collective selection is an industry-

focused account. It describes the fascinating convergence that is visible in fashion, but it cannot explain the rationale behind its never-ending cycle of change, nor does it give any indication of why a particular style is recognized as being of the now (McCracken, “Rehabilitated” 96).

However, Simmel’s theory does not explicitly answer this last question either.

Grant McCracken recognizes the limitations of Simmel’s work, but he maintains that it is better than other theories. Other attempts at deciphering fashion’s code have all concentrated on determining who sets the fashions, but only Simmel offers a framework that has the potential to be applied regardless of the response (McCracken, “Rehabilitated” 96). McCracken contend that the trickle-down is incomplete though. First, it does not consider the semiotics behind fashions, which give the principles of equalization and differentiation their lure (“Rehabilitated” 98-100). For example, when a young, Chinese woman buys her first Louis Vuitton purse, chances are she is not purchasing it for its design but for the prestige and history associated with the LV logo. For her, it is a representation of what previously had been considered the unattainable upper echelons of Western culture. Its value is symbolic. While this new consumer might walk around branded from head to toe, the Parisian *fashionista* opts for a minimal, understated look where logos are reserved for hidden labels. What McCracken is expressing then is that fashion is not about copying a given aesthetic; it is about claiming a style’s mythological meaning for one’s self (“Rehabilitated” 97).⁵ Simmel does not specify this caveat in his work, but it can explain how trickle-down can be valid even if women are not all clothed in the same hemline. It even divorces it from its dependence on a class system. In fact, in his rehabilitation of the theory, McCracken uses women’s “Power Dressing” to show how it can apply gender relations. In his

⁵ Any discussion of myth requires a nod to Roland Barthes’ work on the semiotics of fashion. In *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes explains how myths come to hold meaning in popular culture. He says that myths speak, that they function like a language that is open to interpretation and appropriation (212, 224). Myths further function to resolve the inconsistencies in culture. In and of themselves, they are metanarratives constituted of signs that already hold their own meanings (Barthes 217-219). Yet, within the myth, its *signifying* term – the sign from which it is derived – loses its former significance to leave room for new interpretations that make up what is *signified* by the myth itself (Barthes 221-223). Still, Barthes believes that the initial senses of the *signifying* terms remain present, and it is only when we allow ourselves to consider them in conjunction with the overall meaning of the myth that we are able to uncover their truth as ambiguous and living (235). In other words, it is the symbolic meanings implanted in fashion that can be appropriated and reinterpreted to create new styles that are still a part of fashion heritage that changes through time.

example, the superordinate group is men, while the subordinate group is women. In the eighties, women began to take on a more masculinized style in the workplace. Without cross-dressing, their look aimed to be more sombre and authoritative. Their goal was to emulate the qualities of men's dress to attain acceptance in the business arena. Meanwhile, men's fashion took a turn towards flamboyance as a way to reinstate their heroic valour (McCracken, "Rehabilitated" 97-99). This case illustrates how two groups engage in a battle of equalization and differentiation even when they are both of the same social class. Second, McCracken also claims that "trickle-down" is a misnomer. When studied more closely, it becomes apparent that fashion does not travel in a linear way. "What drives the dynamic is an upward 'chase and flight' pattern created by a subordinate social group that 'hunts' upper-class status and a superordinate social group that moves on in a hasty flight to new ones," writes McCracken ("Rehabilitated" 94). His interpretation implies that, even according to Simmel's analysis, fashion moves upwards. However, it might make more sense to argue that it is circular. Lehmann, for his part, believes that Simmel embraces fashion's inherent paradoxes, and in his 1911 essay on fashion, he even provides for the likelihood that the upper class might look elsewhere for inspiration (Lehmann 191). Historical precedence suggests that they may very well have turned to the *demi-monde*, with its prostitutes, its dandies, its transvestites, and its artists (Vinken 14-15). Theorist Barbara Vinken even defends the argument that *haute couture*, supposedly reserved for the social elite, is a form of exaggerated cross-dressing that imitates the style of the transvestite (21-23). In this case, fashion really does trickle-down to the depths of society only to be plucked out and return to its heights. Such a statement reinforces the paradox of the phenomenon. However, Simmel does not readily address its circular trajectory. Coming from the neo-Kantian school of thought, Lehmann finds that Simmel's view of time as the continuous accumulation of moments prevents him from admitting that fashions resurface, whether it is from obscured subcultures or more importantly, from the past (194-195). Nonetheless, if Simmel's theory is read in conjunction with other works on fashion – particularly Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project* (1929-1940) – this feature can still be deduced from his framework in a way that is not possible in other diffusion

theories. Therefore, with certain revisions, “trickle-down” can offer a complete account of the fashion system. For McCracken, these modifications include: broadening the concept of a social group so that it is not merely defined by class, allowing imitation to be selective, and supplementing the cultural context for imitation and differentiation with a theory of the symbolic meaning of goods (“Rehabilitated” 102). For Lehmann, the solution lies in taking a more phenomenological approach to the study of fashion that sees its relation to the broader human experience and to a history of thought on the topic (195).

From what we have seen, by harnessing Simmel’s theory it is possible to construct a complete framework of fashion system. An analysis of his writing explains how trends move from one group to the next, determines who sets them, justifies their permanent cycle, and acknowledges the ambivalent nature of fashion. Yet, recent studies of diffusion, like the ones completed by Blumer, Crane, King, Polhemus, Horowitz (1975), and to a certain extent McCracken, all suggest that Simmel’s work needs revision. In North America specifically, freedom of choice prevails, and social categories are more fluid in the process of self-construction (McCracken, “Meaning” 72). In this context, class distinction does not seem to lead fashion forward. It seems equally doubtful that differences in gender or age continue to influence personal style in the manner that they once did. Instead, scholars have all pointed to the industry, the media, and advertisers to explain the gatekeeper’s function in fashion. Traditionally, they have formed an elite: controlling the technical and financial resources to publish, broadcast, and transmit information to a mass-audience. In this sense, trickle-down has remained an apt description of the diffusion process despite the fluidity of notions of class, gender, and age. However, the advent of web technologies, and in particular the blog, challenges that structure. The blog gives anyone the power to share their opinion with a like-minded audience and as such transcends the constraints of communications theory (Coady 291; Farrell and Drezner 17; Lahm 28-32; Maratea 139-143; Pham, “Blog Ambition” 8-9). Hence, a twelve-year-old girl, like Tavi Gevinson, for example, can become a fashion insider from the basement of her parent’s home in Suburban Chicago. Initially, it seems to defy fashion’s hierarchies. It suggests that the

gatekeeping function can come from anywhere or anyone. The media filter is no longer present when lonesome teenagers in the Midwest can advise an audience of thousands on the best collections. This means that Simmel's theory of an elitist fashion system no longer applies to fashion in the digital era. Yet, to confirm such a hypothesis, it is necessary to proceed with an in depth survey of the blogging phenomenon.

CHAPTER 2

Superficial Challenge? Do Personal Style Blogs Defy the Trickle-Down Theory?

The previous chapter provided the theoretical and historical context required to be able to fully understand the impact that the personal style blog has had on the diffusion process. I was able to establish that Simmel's trickle-down theory and its reiterations offer the most complete explanation of the fashion cycle, despite their shortcomings. Now, I must determine whether or not the blog renders them obsolete. In doing so, I will first discuss the cultural and technological changes that have allowed fashion blogging to take hold of the industry as a tool for democratization. Next, I will turn to examples from the fashion blogosphere itself to show how bloggers rely on what I call the "rhetoric of the Outsider" to distinguish themselves from the fashion press. From this perspective, fashion as a function of elitism does seem to fall apart. However, I will then demonstrate how the most successful blogs still reaffirm hegemonic standards. Their symbiotic relationship to the mainstream media and their relations to issues of class, gender, and ethnic representation help to uncover the innate contradictions that define personal style blogs and question the "rhetoric of democratization" that surrounds them. Indeed, this analysis of personal style blogs brings forth the ambivalence that is characteristic of fashion, where the idea of the outsider breaking into the industry only operates within the realm of the fashion system itself and the principles of selection that it already promotes.

2.1 Technology Undoing the Established Order

Over the last seven years or so, digital media has become the norm and blogging is now standard practice within the fashion industry (Pham, "Bubble" 7). For example, Google "Personal Style Blogs," and 294 million hits appear in less than a second. Obviously, this figure refers not just to the actual blogs, but also to articles about the topic, organizations for bloggers, and user guides that list the top of the crop. *Technorati*, the first online blogging directory, lists over 11 thousand fashion related blogs, while *Blogger* claims the existence of over 2 million (Technorati; Rocamora 409; Pham, "Bubble" 2). Feminist scholar Minh-Ha T. Pham, who has

done extensive research on personal style blogs, explains that the disparity in the figures is due to many factors including the lack of a standard definition of what constitutes a blog and the ephemeral nature of the medium. Some are abandoned, others are used for spamming, and some are overlooked because they are not published on a recognized platform (Pham, “Blog Ambition” 4, 10-11). Regardless, blogging has become an accepted practice within the fashion system. In the span of two years, from 2006 to 2008, the number of bloggers invited to New York Fashion Week doubled from 40 to 80 (Pham, “Blog Ambition” 11). Now, designers have blogging stations at their runway shows, major publications have their own “Blog” section on their websites, and both brands and magazines often collaborate with independent bloggers (Corcoran “New Fever;” Frenner; Pham, “Bubble” 7). Concurrently, print advertising has decreased while online spending only increases year after year (Magazines Canada). The other dimension to this phenomenon is the way in which personal style bloggers are now treated like celebrities, who have the power to influence shoppers with brand endorsements and who are photographed at every turn. Just this past February, esteemed fashion critic for the International Herald Tribune, Suzy Menkes, published a piece in *T, the New York Times Style Magazine* in which she harshly criticized the circus that now surrounds fashion week. Some of her most scathing words include: “two things have worked to turn fashion shows into a zoo: the cattle market of showoff people waiting to be chosen or rejected by the photographers, and the way that smart brands, in an attempt to claw back control lost to multimedia, have come in on the act” (Menkes). Essentially, the latest styles are no longer being paraded on the backs of models on the runway. Instead, they are being shown on personal style bloggers vying for the street style bloggers’ attention. A few years ago, it might have made sense to say that the industry was going through a period of transition unsure about where the blogger fit into the equation, but today the kings and queens of digital media have cemented their place in fashion’s court.

There are many reasons for blogging’s quick proliferation within the fashion scene. First, most authors agree on the features of the medium that have led to its influence on mainstream media culture. For example, the blog’s ability to transcend the time, location, technical and

financial constraints of traditional publishing and broadcasting is seen as its greatest asset (Farrell and Drezner 17; Lahm 28-32; Maratea 142-143). Blogs are easy to use, require little to no capital investment, target niche markets, and allow for an immediate reaction to current events (Chittenden 505; Lahm 30-32; Maratea 142-144; Meyers 1025, 1032). These are all strengths compared to the way in which media has functioned in the past. They are especially relevant to the fashion industry, which thrives on novelty and the need for the new, now (Lehmann xii; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* 3). Furthermore, blogs are also seen as having the ability to provide a voice to outsiders and as giving them a like-minded audience that grows through the interactive “network” nature of the blogosphere (Coady 291; Maratea 139, 141; Pham 8-9). Anyone with access to the Internet can start a blog about any topic that he or she might be interested in and in all likelihood find at least one other person, from anywhere on the planet, who shares the same tastes (Chittenden 515; Lahm 30; Meyers 1025). The practice of blogging also encourages reading and commenting on other people’s blogs, and the more an author interacts the more likely he or she will see audience growth (Coady 291; Chittenden 513; Maratea 145, 156). Thus, blogging has the distinct advantage of creating a sense of community and belonging that has not previously existed in common media consumption practices. This trait is only further enhanced by the personal tone and voice that is so characteristic of blog writing (Meyers 1031-1033; Stratis). All of these attributes help to frame blogs as a means for democratization and make them very attractive to the everyday citizen who wishes to actively engage with society. In sum, the blogging is inherently distinct from traditional media. It is easy to use, responds more quickly to change, and encourages audience participation in a more profound way than past media technologies.

Indeed, the popularity of fashion blogs is also a symptom of a more general rift in the producer/consumer relationship, as we have known it. Web theorists Robert Burnett and P. David Marshall (2003) have qualified the twenty first century media landscape as the “breaking down of barriers” and the convergence of the old categories of print, film, television, and radio into one multi-platform, digital experience (1-2). Media production has changed, but so too has

its consumption. In a study on the rise of the celebrity gossip blog, Erin A. Meyers describes the way in which the audience has taken active control of media production due to digital technologies. The audience is no longer passively absorbing the message, but are now helping to shape it thanks to blogging and social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest (Meyers 1022-1023). As such, there is no longer a strict division between the producer and the consumer. To varying degrees, we are all what Burns (2008) has dubbed “producers:” consumers who play a dual role as we comment, interpret, and share our views on culture (2). The new producer/consumer continuum presents a threat to the top-down structure that has previously defined the diffusion process (Chittenden 513; Meyers 1023). Meaning is no longer stably controlled by one source. It is created through a dialogue between the mass media and the audience (Meyers 1024). For instance, where as fifty years ago the editor-in-chief at *Vogue* would proclaim whether a designer’s collection was a hit or a miss; today her appraisal must contend with the opinions of hundreds of successful bloggers as well as everybody else’s 140 character verdict as it published on Twitter, the second the first look appears on the runway. Most of us limit our interactions to the occasional “Like” on Facebook or a “Pinboard” of favourite pieces on Pinterest, but bloggers fall more on the producer side of this new spectrum. They have an audience, which easily extends beyond their “real life” family, friends, and acquaintances. Yet, Meyers is quick to point out that they are not typical journalists. They are commentators, they share their personal opinions, and they do not feel bound towards objectivity in the way reporters are (1029). Their goal is to share and to create a dialogue. Many interviews with top fashion bloggers, like Susie “Bubble” Lau, Leandra Medine, Tavi Gevinson, and Garance Doré, will attest to this fact (Amed “Bubble;” Corcoran “Social Media;” Gevinson “50 year old man;” Kansara; Meyers 1034; Schiener). Their prose is thus more personal and intimate, and the style has proven to be extremely popular with audiences who feel like they have gotten to know the blogger firsthand. They are thus more accessible and perceived as “authentic” (Meyers 1025-1027). At a presentation on blogger-brand partnerships in Québec, speaker and founder of the province’s most viewed blog *Ton Petit Look*, Josiane Stratis, also emphasized this

fact. Stratis argued that it is this special, more open relationship with the reader that makes the blog such a powerful marketing tool. The blogger is viewed as a “digital friend,” and thus his or her opinion holds more worth. Moreover, this bond is what truly distinguishes the blogger from yesteryears’ faceless members of the press, but that too is changing. Six years ago, only a select group of insiders could tell you that Anna dello Russo was the editor-at-large of *Japanese Vogue*. Last year, she had her own fast-fashion collaboration with global retailer H&M (see fig. 1). Her newfound fame is a direct result of her exposure in street style blogs like *The Sartorialist* and *Jak & Jill*, which subsequently inspired her to start her own, very successful, personal style blog (Campbell 64). Indeed, the mainstream media has had to respond to the blogging phenomenon with its own version of the genre (Meyers 1036), which in the end only consolidates its predominance in the fashion industry. We find ourselves then in a situation where there is no real producer, no real consumer, or no real monopoly on communication. Instead, we are all interdependent on one another, waiting for the other party to respond so that we can “talk back,” to quote Meyers (1034). The audience now takes an active part in the cultural conversation. This change is quite a reversal of a diffusion theory that depends on an elite that dictates the trends to the masses.

Hence, in the news, it is not uncommon to hear, for example, the following statement: blogs have led to a democratization of fashion (Amed “Gevinson;” Corcoran “New Fever;” Givhan; Godwin; Walker). One 2009 article in the U.K. paper *The Independent* reads: “The fashion world might have once been elitist – but the rise and rise of the online commentator has injected a democratic and fresh perspective” (Walker). It goes on to refer to the online editor of *Vogue.com* as saying that blogs “encourage discussion and give everybody the chance to offer an opinion” (Walker). At *Women’s Wear Daily*, reporter Cate T. Corcoran quoted a panellist at the Independent Fashion Bloggers (IFB) Conference who believes that thanks to blogging, “The old pyramid has been turned on its head” (“New Fever”). Writing on the topic for *Harper’s Bazaar*, Pulitzer-prize winning journalist and critic, Robin Givhan states that, “The rise of the fashion blogger was inevitable. Fashion has evolved from an autocratic business dominated by



Figure 1. Mert & Marcus; *AdR Anna dello Russo at H&M Campaign; Digital photograph*; “AdR Anna dello Russo at H&M;” *accessories2012.hm.com*; H&M Hennes & Mauritz AB, 24 Sept. 2012; Web; 30 Mar. 2013.

omnipotent designers into a democratic one.” In the article, she traces fashion’s history from custom couture and one on one fittings for the elite to designer clothing at Target and the live streaming of fashion shows in the comfort of the “everywoman’s” home (Givhan). Pham also explores this transition in detail in her work and explains that the recession coupled with advances in digital communication technologies together have prompted the fashion system to adopt a new rhetoric of democratization (“Bubble” 6-7). The articles mentioned above are just some examples of a myriad of press that has been dedicated to the idea that fashion belongs to all. Pham also cites the approval of designer collaborations with mass retailers as evidence that the industry has embraced more democratic ideals, but also she points out that doing so serves its economic interests during times of financial crises (“Bubble” 5). For example, *Fashion’s Night Out*, an initiative spearheaded by *Vogue* and the CFDA, was a multi-city event that gave shoppers the chance to shop and to meet and mingle with celebrities, designers, bloggers, and even Anna Wintour herself (see fig. 2). Yet, its real purpose was to encourage spending during the recession (Moin). In fact, in 2013, the New York event was cancelled because it was not longer profitable for most retailers to participate in the festivities that often demanded paying for celebrity appearances and offering free gifts to attendees (Bischof and Vilensky). Blogging does seem to be a part of a growing movement to make fashion more accessible to average person. Yet fashion’s “rhetoric of democratization” is just that: rhetoric. As scholars, we must remain sceptical of such discourses, because behind the talk of inclusion and diversity, there often lurks capitalist motivations.

On the surface, it is easy to conclude that when anyone can control the “message” in a field that is no longer limited by time, space and advertising, the idea of a gatekeeper seems outdated (Burns 71-73). Without this figure who filters the content of what is promoted as the latest trend, how can one group push fashion forward in one direction, regardless if it is up or down? At this juncture, this element of Simmel’s trickle-down theory is brought into question. Without a doubt, technological changes have reconfigured the face of fashion. Blogging has become standard practice not just for enthusiasts, but for brands, magazines, editors, journalists, and



Figure 2. Ashley Sivil; *Anna Wintour at Fashion's Night Out*; Digital photograph; 9 Sept. 2010; Personal collection.

consumers alike. Yet, more importantly, the participatory activities of the Web 2.0 have altered our perception of the producer-audience relationship. This evolution supports the “rhetoric of democratization,” which has been adopted by fashion’s original gatekeepers. Their argument, however, is not based just on technical advancement. It continues to serve their commercial interests in a downward economy. This consideration signals another level to our analysis, and to truly discern whether or not the personal style blog presents a valid attack on Simmel’s work, it is important to examine specific examples of the democratization argument.

2.2 The Blogger and the Rhetoric of the Outsider

Fuelling the claim that fashion now belongs to the average person is the idea that an outsider can now become the ultimate insider. The personal style blogger has come to represent this fashion outsider. Authors defend this image in their actions, dress, and words. It has also contributed to the notion that blogging offers a more “authentic” dialogue than in magazines. A myth has been created around bloggers: they are seen as presenting a threat to fashion’s old guard and as offering an alternative voice in the media. They are diversifying the fashion landscape. This narrative, though, must be deconstructed because as we will see, successful bloggers have an interest in perpetuating this interpretation. The best way to do this is to start with a particular example. Here, Tavi Gevinson, who is continuously cited as an archetype for the personal style blogger, illustrates the myth to perfection. Her story has been well circulated and reads like a movie script.

It starts in March 2008 when Tavi takes part in a playful photo shoot for her friend’s older sister Stephanie who published the blog *Fashion Robot*. Tavi was intrigued, thought the idea of dressing up was fun, and started looking at style blogs and magazines that Stephanie had referred her to. Not too long after, she hastily begins *The Style Rookie* so that she can fully take part in blogging community. She was just about to turn twelve. At first, she admits, she wasn’t too sure about what she was doing: she had no experience, little fashion knowledge per se, and didn’t even have a camera of her own (Gevinson, “Q&A”). Her first self-portraits look like a

little girl trying to emulate her cool, grown sisters (See fig. 3). In a later entry, she explains that her audience first started growing as she commented on other blogs that she liked (Gevinson, “50 year old man”). Indeed, within a few posts, the pre-teen was being “tagged” by other bloggers to participate in their fashion questionnaires (Gevinson, “Tagging”). She had already built an online network of blogger friends. By July, she is more creative and bold with her looks and prose (See fig. 4), but more importantly, she is selected for a feature on teenage bloggers in the *New York Times* style supplement *T*; and her parents get first wind of what is really going on in their basement (Spiridakis 212). Before the issue hits the newsstands though, *New York Magazine*’s fashion website *The Cut* publishes an article about *The Style Rookie* and questions whether it is a hoax (“Meet Tavi”). From that point on, a media frenzy ensues about the infamous “Twelve-year-old Blogger” (Borrelli; Kwan; Schulman; Widdicombe; Wiseman). The blog receives extra attention, but Gevinson finds herself needing to defend her genuineness and that of her contemporaries on numerous occasions. Overwhelmed by the pressure, she decides to categorically ignore all future press inquiries (Gevinson “A lot of talking”). Meanwhile, she continues to strengthen her ties with other, young personal style bloggers and begins receiving gifts from them, young designers, and brands, which she includes on her site. Then, in January 2009, the sibling duo behind the label *Rodarte* sends her a pair of custom woven tights (Gevinson, “adrewstfkuiuyb87rstfgh”). It marks the beginning of a partnership with the designers that made Gevinson the face of their Target collection and also brought the teen back into the spotlight. She is subsequently profiled by *Interview Magazine* online and *Love* and begins contributing to British quarterly *Pop!* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. She attends in her first fashion week in September 2009 and catches the attention of most of the fashion press (Beker). Just a few months later, John Galliano personally invites her to attend the Christian Dior Spring 2010 Couture presentation in Paris. It is an honour usually reserved to a select circle of wealthy clients and industry veterans. Yet, the middle class teen sits first row with a pink bow atop her head. A *Grazia* editor who had been pushed back to the seat behind her tweets her disgust. A new controversy erupts, but this time it is framed as a war between editors and bloggers (Chetty;



Figure 3. Tavi Gevinson; n.t.; Digital photograph; “Photo Shoot – Me and my friends,” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 6 Apr. 2008; Web; 17 Feb. 2013.



Figure 4. Tavi Gevinson; n.t.; Digital photograph; “I wasn’t electrocuted xD,” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 5 July 2008; Web; 17 Feb. 2013.

Godwin; Measure). Cathy Horyn of *The New York Times* calls it one of the most important fashion stories of the year. Tavi Gevinson officially becomes the new face of fashion.

In less than two years, her fame easily surpassed that of the most seasoned fashion editors and critics. However, Gevinson was a child, the daughter of a high school teacher and a weaver, and her grasp on fashion was not earned through years of schooling. The title of her blog is *The Style Rookie*, a reference perhaps to a sports' team's latest recruit, but within two years people like Miuccia Prada and Karl Lagerfeld were hailing her as a "style expert" (Widdicombe). Observing Gevinson's story from afar, it is comprehensible for one to believe that the blog has given anyone the power to become a so-called "gatekeeper," even twelve-year-old children. Still, the teen remains an outsider on many levels. In her *New Yorker* profile, Widdicombe compares her presence backstage to a "religious procession involving a Buddhist child deity," which is more akin to how Lady Gaga or Madonna is received and not to the way journalists or even other bloggers are treated at fashion shows. Moreover, not everyone in the industry has embraced Tavi. Besides disgruntled editors who have had to hand over their first row seats, FIT curator and fashion scholar Valerie Steele has questioned the legitimacy of her role in fashion, and others often cite her as the prime example of how blogs have undermined objective journalism (Pham, "Blog Ambition" 12; Widdicombe). Designer Christopher Kane, despite being praised by the young girl, told *Vogue UK*, "No one who wants to read a serious review of a show is going to look at what a 14-year-old thinks" (as qtd. in Pham, "Blog Ambition" 12). In fact, the media reaction to "the Twelve-Year-Old Blogger" created Tavi, the phenomenon, which is a separate persona from the young girl who spends her days in French and Math class. So, though on the one hand, Gevinson has infiltrated the fashion scene, she herself has not been legitimized as a true insider either, which may suggest that the industry's hierarchy is still in full force.

At the height of her popularity, Gevinson also stood out because of her peculiar sense of style (see fig. 5). During her first trip to fashion week, she wore a spontaneous, hand-made headpiece and layered shirts, skirts, and pearls over pink and purple, tie-dyed tights ("unless you follow"). This outfit is representative of the psychedelic granny look with which Gevinson has



Figure 5. Tamu McPherson; n.t.; Digital photograph; “unless you follow derek blasberg on twitter and already read about my every move and outfit daily,” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 9 Sept. 2009; Web; 30 Mar. 2013.

become associated and which obviously separates her from her fellow pre-teens. Like Susie Lau of *Style Bubble*, she does not easily fit into categories like other bloggers nor does she blindly follow trends (Pham, “Bubble” 11). Gevinson is drawn towards the avant-garde work of Rei Kawakubo and Gareth Pugh. In her one hundredth post, she talks about her inspirations and writes,

The designers that inspire me don’t focus on designing clothes just to be clothes; the looks they design are art! WEARABLE art [...] My ignorance aside, it really bothers me when silly ideas like “Fashion Do’s” and “Fashion Police” are established, because that takes all the fun out of putting together an outfit. In my opinion, the most interesting fashion is the Anti-Fashion. No rules, no restrictions, no normalcy, no pleasing anyone (“one zero zero”).

Tavi purposely tries to set herself apart, and her originality and anti-conformist attitude have contributed to her blog’s success, because they have distinguished her from other bloggers and figures in the fashion media. From this perspective, there is a glimpse of Simmel’s principle of differentiation at work, and Gevinson embodies the kind of novelty that is necessary to create new trends. By going against mass-fashion and wearing avant-garde outfits, the young girl actually positions herself as a kind of elite.

In effect, the idea of the “fashion outsider” has a history that can be tied more broadly to Western culture’s obsession with the bohemian. Elizabeth Wilson’s (2000) work on the topic provides a useful analysis, which demonstrates how Gevinson, the oddball blogger, is not the revolutionary force in fashion that she might be perceived to be. A full history of the role of Bohemia in Western culture is beyond the scope of this paper, but Wilson ties its emergence to the advent of modernity and the crisis of change initiated by industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century (*Bohemians* 2-3). The bohemians stood in opposition to bourgeois society, and can always be defined by their resistance to mainstream culture (Wilson, *Bohemians* 1-2). Their myth was perpetuated due to their continual inclusion in literature, film, music, and art,

and it has been reinterpreted so many times that the idea of the bohemian artist as a “glamorous outcast” has become a stereotype (Wilson, *Bohemians* 2-6). As such, Wilson argues that the character is ambivalent in that it embodies both rebel and poseur, and its very presence points to the problem of authentic artistry in capitalist society (*Bohemians* 7-9). At a time when the machine is more proficient than people at creating art, the artist is forced to rely on shock value to appeal to the public. Therefore, he or she is no longer just a genuine creator but an entertainer as well (Wilson, *Bohemians* 9). When we look at Tavi Gevinson’s trajectory, it is easy to acknowledge how initially she played the role of the *ingénue*, the child prodigy, or the exotic curiosity, who was not appreciated so much for the quality of her work but for her ability to stir up controversy, much like the bohemian outcast. She can be compared to such figures as Beau Brummell, Nancy Cunard, Iris Apfel, and Isabella Blow. Consequently, it is too premature to argue that her presence in fashion signals the democratic reform of the industry, when in fact her persona reflects the industry’s ongoing cultural fascination with the artist being an eccentric Other.

Furthermore, Pham’s analysis of Asian blogger Susanna Lau (*Susie Bubble*) as well as youth scholar Tara Chittenden’s work on teen bloggers explain the appeal of the “fashion outsider” to the audience. As an outsider, Lau goes against pre-established rules and promotes the work of lesser-known designers, but there is also a humility, a lack of irony, and a genuine love for fashion about her to which the readers connect (Pham, “Bubble” 11). Hence, the *Style Bubble* appears as the “antidote to the homogeneity of mass commercial fashion” (Pham, “Bubble” 15). The same can be said of Gevinson with her unique, septuagenarian-like appearance and her ability to combine references to Marianne Faithfull, cult classic *Twin Peaks*, and Riot Grrrl feminism with personal anecdotes. Moreover, Chittenden, who uses the writing of Pierre Bourdieu to study the relationship between blogs and young teenage girls, claims that adolescents use blogging as a means to gain cultural and social capital (506). Although most teens realize that wearing “cool” brands helps them to gain friends and to fit in, some who choose blogging as an expressive outlet develop what Thornton (1997) has called “subcultural

capital” instead. They choose to associate themselves with more artistic, underground, and hip social circles and thus maintain their place outside of mass culture (Chittenden 510; Thornton 200-212). They remain different, but still fit in with a more select social group. An overview of Gevinson’s blog and of the network of bloggers to which she connects suggests that she is more interested in building such an alternative following and in being part of a community of people who share her interests than in fame and mainstream fashion. Her status as an “other” spills into her interpersonal relations too. On one occasion, she writes, “When Anons and Uggs wearing peers don’t like my outfit, I feel like something must be right” (“my heart is drenched”). The blog, as Chittenden argues, is thus an equally important space for teens who feel like they are outcasts in high school and other social settings. It is a safe haven where they can find validation through comments and interactions with other bloggers and readers who share their feelings, which in turn improves their self-confidence (Chittenden 515-518). It then also becomes an important tool for the teens who are in the process of shaping their identity (Chittenden 509). Young female readers go on to copy the styles that they see on their favourite bloggers. These considerations help to account for the popularity of blogging amongst teenage girls like Tavi, who view themselves as different.

Thus, bloggers have an interest in promoting themselves as “outsiders.” It allows them to appear as exotic curiosities to industry veterans, to develop a more “authentic” voice that differentiates them from the press at large, and to connect with readers who do not identify with conventional representations in fashion. This analysis equally shows how Simmel’s principles of equalization (associating one’s self to a like-minded group) and differentiation (distinguishing one’s self from the masses) are still in effect in the digital era.

2.3 Demystifying the Rhetoric of Democratization

Much of what motivates the discussion about blogging and the diversification of the fashion system is the fact that the medium can be used as a platform for minorities who have been excluded from fashion images in the past. One visible trend is the emergence of plus-size

bloggers who contradict the industry's prejudice towards presenting the fashionable subject as overtly skinny (see fig. 6). Plus-size personal style bloggers share images of themselves, reviews of plus-size lines, and profiles of inspiring women like singer Beth Ditto, who has also been a spokeswoman for the cosmetics company M.A.C. (Cochrane). In a piece from *The Guardian* published in 2010, reporter Kira Cochrane interviewed some of these bloggers who all agree that blogging has had a positive impact on their lives and their body image. It is even suggested that the rise of plus-size bloggers has helped to pave the way for more traditional outlets to include more diverse depictions of the female body (Cochrane). The very successful street style blog, *Advanced Style*, which shows images of stylish women over the age of 60, is another example of how industry biases are being challenged online. Asian bloggers have also gained prominence over the last few years, but the attention they receive has much more to do with the growing influence of Asian consumer markets (Pham, "Bubble" 10). Statistically speaking though, *The Fashion Bomb*, a blog dedicated to female, black style, has a larger readership than Asian bloggers Rumi Nelly's *Fashion Toast*, Bryan Grey Yambao's *Bryanboy*, and Susanna Lau's *Style Bubble*. Up until September 2009, even male, black style blog *Street Etiquette* was getting a comparable amount of visits to Gevinson's *Style Rookie* (Thomas). However, both of these titles do not receive a fraction of the recognition or the access that either *The Style Rookie*, *The Style Bubble*, or *Bryanboy* does (Thomas). Therefore, although blogs have the potential to redefine "fashionable personhood" in ways that transgress historical minority-majority relations, the asymmetries that exist between those that are viewed as successful and those that remain in obscurity must be addressed.

Returning to Gevinson's trajectory, which was described earlier in this chapter, it is obvious that the media attention *The Style Rookie* has received greatly contributed to her ascent in the fashion world. Despite the fact that blogs seem to be the great equalizer, some media scholars, like Farrell and Drezner, who have written extensively on the topic, argue that in reality the blogosphere is not democratic (Farrell and Drezner 17; Maratea 143-146; Pham 2, 6). Ray Maratea explains that as with all media, blogs must compete for limited audience attention.



Figure 6. Danisha; n.t.; Digital photograph;
“#OOTD – Have you met Ted;” *Danishaz* –
L’essentiel e(s)t l’accessoire; Danishaz, 1 Apr.
2013; Web; 2 Apr. 2013.

Consequently, to be successful they too must operate under established principles of selection, which include their ability to create drama, their novelty, their relationship to the current cultural climate, and their access to production resources (Maratea 146-148). These factors tend to determine whether or not they will be endorsed by an elite media source, which is crucial to a blogger's success (Farrell and Drezner 22; Maratea 155). Brenton Malin points out that media conglomerations are better equipped for promotional publicity: they have the scarce resources which are necessary to get the public's attention when too much information is at their disposal, which is especially true on the Web (190-191). Thus, the relationship between traditional media and bloggers shows itself to be symbiotic: media outlets go to blogs for the most up-to-date and specialized information, while blogs rely on the mainstream media to give them legitimacy (Coady 288; Farrell and Drezner 23-25). Without the controversy surrounding her in the press, Tavi Gevinson would not have become the household name that she is today, nor would she have been in a position to be able to launch her own online magazine for teenage girls and reach a million views in just six days (Schulman).

Furthermore, certain characteristics of the bloggers themselves help them to get the media's attention. First, as Pham argues well, it must be acknowledged that the locus of power of the Internet is in the Global North, where most media empires have their head offices and there is the highest concentration of online users. The first language of the Web is, therefore, English, and the audience is primarily white. As a result, blogs that are based in North America and Europe tend to get more exposure, but they must also have an English edition (Pham, "Bubble" 2-6). Garance Doré, who with Scott Schuman received a CFDA media award for her blog, is French but her readership only saw real growth once she offered an English translation (Scheiner). She is also white, and though she blogs about her fluctuating weight, she fits fashion's slim standard (Doré). In fact, a survey of the top personal style blogs shows that the majority of authors are young, conform to the beauty ideal, and write in English (See app. 1). Gevinson herself is aware of her privilege and acknowledges that she appeals to the media because she is young, small, and blond ("a tribute"). Her age was one of the main reasons that

she was recognized in the first place, but the relationship between fashion and youth has existed for quite some time. As Breward explains, the association of fashion to the pre-pubescent body became noticeable during the "Youthquake" and Twiggy's arrival on scene. At the time, it signalled a reversal of the established order, but it is common practice today to feature teenage models on the catwalk and in ads (Breward 107). So, though blogging has created a platform for alternative identities to be shown, the blogs with the most exposure reaffirm the age-old standards that have been present in magazines, film, and television for the last fifty years or so.

Additionally, the networked nature of the blogging format contributes to the success of some blogs over others. Farrell and Drezner explain that although the interaction inherent to blogging gives it communal advantages, it skews readership distribution (17-20). Indeed, Tavi was quick to partake in the personal style community – commenting on other blogs, passing along tagged surveys, linking and mentioning her blogger friends in multiple posts, and collaborating with them. These actions helped her to acquire her initial following, yet she had the added benefit of already knowing an established blogger (Stephanie of *Fashion Robot*) before she started to publish. Stephanie shared Tavi's work on her blog, which allowed her readers, including other experienced bloggers, to discover the "rookie." They then passed on Tavi's work themselves. In one post, Tavi even wears hand-me-downs that travelled from Rumi Nelly (*Fashion Toast*) to Stephanie to her ("i dress femininely"). Bloggers who receive the most comments and who are connected to the most people are more likely to see more page views, exponentially so even. Besides, Chittenden remarks that comments from popular bloggers are worth more than those from unknown readers, friends, and family (511). They help to push the author forward, to boost credibility, and to expand audience reach (Chittenden 514). Thus, hierarchical principles direct the blogosphere notwithstanding its more inclusive features.

Finally, there is a socio-economic dimension that perpetuates the asymmetry in blogging and it is the most apparent in personal style blogs. Although no article explicitly discusses it, scholars like Pham, Chittenden, and Malin suggest that class is a determining factor in a blogger's visibility. What they clearly state is that the blogosphere, and the Internet in general, is

governed by the logic of capitalism (Chittenden 506-507; Pham “Blog Ambition” 6; Pham “Bubble” 4; Malin 194), which can be deduced from its network-based functions and its relationship to the press. However, in the everyday lived experience, blogging requires time and money, to which not all have equal access. This fact may seem obvious, but it should not be ignored. Chittenden mentions that girls who can afford designer goods have always excelled at the popularity game, a consideration that is even more relevant to blogging (507). To be able to post a self-portrait everyday in a new outfit, a young girl needs quite a bit of clothing, even the thrifty teens who assemble their looks by combining vintage, with fast fashion, and the occasional designer piece. These photos must also be of good quality to ensure credibility, and this requires a camera and software capable of producing such images. Moreover, if the goal is to infiltrate the fashion system as much as possible, having the financial freedom to already afford designer clothing is an asset to a new blogger, as is already having connections to people within the industry. For example, *The Man Repeller*, Leandra Medine, is known for her humorous prose and her over-the-top, eccentric, and lavish styling. Her climb to the heights of fashion’s “It” list was faster than any other blogger, especially for one who started so late. True, her vision and approach were distinct, but it is unlikely that she could have realized this success without the support of her Upper East Side family; her journalist friends who publicized her work; her bountiful closet filled with designer pieces; and a clearly thought out business plan developed while at university (Kansara). She is not alone in this position, but a full investigation into how the success of other bloggers can be tied to their affluence or social position is beyond the scope of this paper.⁶ The fact remains though access to resources whether financial or personal has a tremendous effect on a blogger’s potential to be recognized.

Hence, the inequalities in the blogosphere are a function of a blogger’s ability to attract the media’s attention, to reflect the ideals of the majority audience, to build relationships within the blogging community, and to access the necessary resources to produce quality content. These

⁶ Other visible examples include: Chiara Ferragni of *The Blond Salad* and Jane Aldridge of *Sea of Shoes*.

factors also influence a blog's capacity to generate profit and hence further perpetuate existing asymmetries. For bloggers who wish to turn their website into a viable career, there are only so many ways to make an income. The most widespread method is partnerships with designers and brands, where a company will send a product to a blogger so that they can feature the item in a sponsored post in exchange for money or gifted merchandise. Sometimes, they will also take the form of contests, or the blogger will simply be the face of an actual ad campaign, or it will be a combination of all three (Burcz; Davies "Ask the Agency," Davies "Giveaway," Stratis). To attract such contracts, bloggers must have a sufficient following or influence in the press. As a result, the same, unbalanced rules of selection apply to the economic potential of a given blog. This practice is frowned upon especially amongst journalists, who think that it rips blogs of their objectivity, which has caused much controversy (LaFerla; Pham, "Blog Ambition" 1). In fact, further research about the business of blogging would be of the outmost interest to both the academic community and the fashion industry. However, with respect to the present inquiry, the "gifting culture" of the fashion blogosphere has its own set of implications. It suggests that bloggers should not be viewed as citizen journalists ushering in a new era of democratic and inclusive coverage.

Instead, I suggest that their role is similar to the one played by the socialites of yesteryear. Fashion theorists like Christopher Breward and Caroline Evans tell us of how during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, at the birth of couture houses, designers would dress the women of high society to parade around at public gatherings and effectively advertise the designer's name and wares (Breward 66, 103-104; Evans, "Spectacle" 273). Worth, Paquin, and Poiret even sent hired models to key locations to show off their work (Evans, "Spectacle" 274). Blogging has reinstated this culture of the "Parade," but personal style bloggers promenade on the Web instead of on the paths of Les Tuileries, thereby rendering the display of fashion both

digital and global.⁷ Though it may seem unethical to journalists, blogger-brand partnerships are very representative of how fashion has always functioned. Admired women show off the latest looks and their fans strive to emulate them. From this angle, Simmel's claim that trends trickle-down from the elite – in this case bloggers – remains perfectly apt for the current historical context, despite the illusion that bloggers emerged in the front row from the pit of the masses. Of course, acknowledging that bloggers are the new socialites unmasks the rhetoric of democratization as what it is: thoroughly inauthentic.

So, finally, do personal style blogs defy trickle-down theory? To review, Simmel's principles of equalization and differentiation are still in effect in the digital era and can be seen in the way bloggers negotiate their online identity and their status as 'fashion outsiders.' Furthermore, a chase and flight pattern that dictates proximate groups' behaviour, as described by McCracken, still exists ("Rehabilitated" 94). The superior group may not come from the upper classes or even the old guard of the fashion industry, but bloggers and their readers aim towards a kind of 'subcultural capital' that they gain by emulating and interacting with other, more successful bloggers. Even so, elitism remains ingrained in the fashion system. Despite appearances to the contrary, as we have just seen, the industry is still dominated by hierarchies that determine which bloggers are recognized as its new "gatekeepers." However, the shift in the producer-consumer relation brought forth by the Web 2.0 presents a real challenge to the top-down model that cannot be denied. The fashion image and its content are being diffused in all directions at all times, and so its source can no longer be traced back to the elite, the subculture, or the masses. It is also true that fashion is reported to be more accessible, and new avenues, like blogging, have been created to consume and interact with the system. The Internet has also changed the way that we "speak" about fashion, and bloggers are hailed for the more "authentic" discourse that they bring to the table. Simmel's work is unable to account for these changes.

⁷ Street style photographers can also be seen as being analogous to the figure of the *flâneur*, which was written about by Charles Baudelaire and discussed in Lehmann's *Tigersprung*. To properly develop this argument, however, would require further research which does not pertain to the exact topic of this paper, but that could be developed in the future.

In the end, a conflict emerges. From one angle, the personal style blog is part of an important trend in consumption that has shifted the locus of power into the hands of consumers, forcing the reconsideration of Simmel's theory. On the opposite side, the fashion world has yet to be fully appropriated by the general public, and so much of it still operates under pretences of elitism, as it has been shown. From this angle, then many of Simmel's claims continue to be significant to the study of diffusion. Still, what can be concluded, is that his work is insufficient in offering a complete account of the blog's role within the fashion system. Another theoretical framework can provide a viable solution to this problem and a novel way at looking at fashion as a phenomenon. Indeed, Wilson supports this approach when she claims that fashion must be studied simultaneously from a variety of perspectives and methods (*Adorned in Dreams* 12). The study of philosophy, with its various currents and thinkers, joined together by critical thought can then be used as template for fashion. Indeed, many contemporary theorists like Caroline Evans, Joanne Entwistle, and Barbara Vinken, to name a few, draw on existential and continental philosophy for their studies. They cite thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Simone de Beauvoir. Yet, in turn, their work is informed by phenomenology and by the writing of Martin Heidegger, for example. Although none have used Heidegger's work to study fashion explicitly, his philosophy and his writing on technology and art can be applied to understand fashion. In the present analysis, his understanding of inauthenticity and authenticity are most applicable to the personal style blog, which, as we have seen, already floats in an ambiguity; it is a source of empowerment, while simultaneously being an expression of the hegemony.

CHAPTER 3

The Blog in-and-of-itself: A Reading of the Style Rookie and the Authentic Potential of Blogging

In Chapter 2, we encountered a conflict in determining the nature of the personal style blog. Its role appears contradictory. Bloggers are portrayed as outsiders who have the capacity to present alternative and inclusive representations in fashion, but they can only do so by falling into step with the elitist norms of the fashion complex. However, because of their position on the producer-consumer spectrum, bloggers still hold a potential for authentic expression, and this is important because it is what makes them unique. Furthermore, the blog creates an opportunity for a new kind of communication and a new way to understand fashion, for which classical diffusion theory is unable to account. Hence, in this chapter, I will explore the dual concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity as defined by Martin Heidegger and illustrate how they can be applied to the analysis of personal style blogs. A close reading of a particularly compelling post from Gevinson's *Style Rookie* will be used to bring the true, authentic potential of the blog to light.

3.1 What is Authenticity? What is Authentic and Inauthentic Being?

Studies about consumer behaviour and attitudes towards blogs have indicated that “authenticity” is a key attribute for bloggers to have to be able to connect to their readers and promote brand offerings (Hauge 51; Meyer 1029-1034; Stratis).⁸ As shown in Chapter 2, beyond the commercial incentives, bloggers also have an advantage in providing an unfiltered and personal commentary on fashion because it differentiates them from corporate magazines and publications. Moreover, it increases audience loyalty. Yet, “authenticity” is more than just being honest, speaking one's mind and sharing one's tastes. If I ask what it means to be authentic, the common sense answer is: to be true to one's self. This perception finds its roots in existentialism, a philosophical current from the mid-twentieth century that was articulated by thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir (Guignon 322; Luijpen & Koren

⁸ See Rettberg (2008) and Wright (2006).

18-21). Sartre and de Beauvoir were influenced by Martin Heidegger, but he clearly sought to distinguish himself from the existentialist movement claiming that it was too subjectivist and failed to arrive at the essential truth of being (Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” 230-232). His concept of authenticity is thus not self-centered. Although Heidegger’s view has been qualified as a matter of self-determination by Michael Zimmerman in his book *Eclipse of the Self* (1981), his aim is to arrive at a fundamental understanding of authenticity as it relates to our being both individually and collectively (Guignon 323; Zimmerman 199, 447). Consequently, Heidegger’s writing on the topic offers a primordial account of authenticity that takes the term beyond honesty and genuineness. His interpretation can be applied to read the personal style blog at a richer level of analysis that relates it to the nature of existence. Moreover, he situates authenticity in terms of our tendency towards inauthentic living. By establishing an interdependent relationship between the authentic and the inauthentic, Heidegger’s thought is also able to account for the dualities that characterize blogging, which have been discussed in Chapter 2.

Authenticity and inauthenticity are our two modes of being. While inauthenticity marks our everyday way of living, Heidegger describes authenticity as a “moment of vision,” or truth (BT410), when we come to see the nature of our existence as it is. While authentic, we choose to appropriate our existence as our very own while acknowledging the blinding influence of the “They” (*das Man*), the “Anyone:” that indeterminate, general public that establishes common assumptions about literature, art, culture, and ethical standards (Heidegger BT127-129). We are inauthentic, however, when we remain focused on this World that “They” have given us and fail to question it (BT176). Charles Guignon, a specialist on Heidegger and hermeneutics, paraphrases the philosopher to elucidate his comments. Guignon writes that “By maintaining an established order and insisting on the paramount importance of falling into step with all its latest fads and trends, the Anyone levels down our possibilities and keeps us from facing up to our unique responsibility for our lives” (334). In this context, the phenomenon that is fashion can be seen as one of *das Man*’s most inauthentic devices. Yet because we are “thrown” into the World, we are irrevocably tied to it. We cannot escape cultural and historical interpretations of

phenomena. They are part of how we apprehend the World and ourselves (Heidegger, BT176-178). Inauthenticity as “Thrownness” is thus part of the ontological structure of Being and cannot be ignored (Heidegger BT130). The person who realizes this truth and takes up his or her own possibilities in light of the fact is authentic. In the compendium *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, Charles E. Scott adds, “Authenticity is clearly not a matter of growing into an ideal identity. It means rather deciding to remain affirmatively alert to what one can change” (65). Authenticity is then also an attitude that we adopt vis-à-vis how we comport ourselves and how we shape our lives, and not a permanent state. Heidegger calls it “Resoluteness” (Heidegger BT299). This attitude expresses an openness to the arbitrariness of existence. For instance, at age ten, I could have wanted to be an actress, at fifteen a lawyer, and today an entrepreneur. Being resolute requires the recognition that my self-image is not defined by any one strict categorization. More importantly, when authentic, we are aware of how our own being is interrelated to that of others and tied to a larger history (Heidegger BT129; Guignon 336). We are able to take up the past and reinterpret it in light of ecstatic temporality. That is, we see the unity of time – of the future, of the past, and of the present – where one is constantly redefining the other (Heidegger BT328-329).⁹ From here, we are able to recognize our own possibilities as a self and as a people (Heidegger, *Ister* 158; BT348). We achieve an alternative way of thinking; new ideas emerge from our full vision of the truth. From Heidegger’s philosophy, then, authenticity can be recognized: by an awareness and acknowledgement of the power of the “They”, by resoluteness, and by a sense of indebtedness to one’s heritage and community. Subsequently, in the next section, I will use this framework to show how personal style blogs can be tied to the ambiguous nature of existence and Heidegger’s concept of authenticity.

⁹ An illustrative example is helpful here for the reader who is unfamiliar with Heideggerian terminology. We are oriented towards the future, which means that we think of our lives moving forward. When we are faced with a traumatic incident like the diagnosis of a fatal disease or being involved in a major accident, we come face to face with our end, our own mortality. In this instant, we recognize the inevitability of death, of how it is our only certainty but itself is unpredictable in its nature. Our vision of life changes as we now interpret elements of our past and of our present differently. For example, knowing that death is on its way, the anger felt when a driver cuts us off on our way to work seems futile. Likewise, the last time spending a holiday with loved ones takes on a more profound meaning than during the vacation itself. Your attitude towards the present changes, while the meaning of past events takes on new significance.

3.2 A Close Reading of a Post from *The Style Rookie*

The personal style blog's format, with its individual musings and inspiration boards, lends itself well to the kind of reflection that can lead to authentic understanding. The best way to demonstrate this claim is with a close reading of a particularly potent post from *The Style Rookie*. On July 1st 2011, Tavi Gevinson published an entry entitled "when i was just a little girl, i asked my mother, what will i be?" where she considers the way that she is affected by the "beauty privilege."¹⁰ Through both its textual and visual content, it steers towards a discussion about the relationship between fashion, gender, and the body as social constructs. Ultimately, it illustrates the way in which the female condition, and by extension fashion, operate within the realm of contradiction, a conclusion echoed in Agnès Rocamora's recent article "Personal Fashion Blogs: Screens and Mirrors in Digital Self Portraits" (421). Yet, I also contend that it is an example of how blogging can be authentic in the Heideggerian sense, given that Gevinson's work demonstrates the criteria set forward in the previous paragraph.

Rocamora's article points to the way in which personal style blogs can be used as vehicles for identity construction (410). Working from Foucault and Giddens, she argues that one's identity is created through a process that involves activities, regimes, or "techniques" (411). We are not born as we are; we become our selves, and these techniques build that self-image. Previous scholarship claims that fashion or the act of dressing can be seen as one of these "technologies of the body" that helps us to define who we are (Entwistle 21). The personal style blog is a tool that explicitly describes and enacts this process (Rocamora 411). It does so by documenting the author's interests, activities, opinions, and thoughts. It uses images and links. It becomes a diary that helps to tell the story of the self in evolution. Furthermore, the audience encourages the author, giving her (or him) a sense of purpose in their personal journey (Rocamora 411-413). Hence, Rocamora explains, "As one navigates through personal fashion blogs and their many entries, a portrait of their authors emerges, creating a feeling of intimacy.

¹⁰ For the full text, visit the following link: <http://www.thestylerookie.com/2011/06/when-i-was-just-little-girl-i-asked-my.html>

Thus, although posts constitute independent entries, they are related by the thread, which is the life of the blogger as revealed through time” (412-413). Rocamora’s comment is noteworthy because it establishes a link between the personal style blog’s format and the temporality of being as described by Heidegger. Time is made up of distinct moments: the “now,” the “now-not-yet,” and the “now-no longer,” but temporality unites them in the fullness of being,¹¹ which is understood when we are authentic (Heidegger BT421). Gevinson is conscious of this thread and of how she is creating her own narrative through her blog. At the end of the text of this post, she justifies herself by writing, “I do know I’m uncomfortable pretending, on a blog that is, on a certain level, about appearance and my personal ‘journey’ with it, that I can keep up with a set of principles developed when I was younger and different” (Gevinson “when i was just”). Thus, if the blog weaves the story of the author’s life through its posts, then it contains the material necessary for an ontological interpretation. In fact, the close reading of just one post can provide unique insight into how its author perceives his or her life and relation to the world. An analysis of the *Style Rookie* post in question demonstrates this point.

The essence of this particular entry revolves around the idea that Gevinson felt uncomfortable about publishing an image of herself because she thought that she looked too pretty in it. Drawing visual inspiration from both the 1989 film *Heathers*¹² and the 1990-1991

¹¹ Time is made up of distinct, separable moments, but they determine each other. The present bears the character of the past that brings forth the moment, while simultaneously looking towards the future. The meaning of the past changes in light of the present, and has the potential to change again in the future. The future, as a series of possibilities, is function of past decisions and events that limit our options and a function of the present which binds us to one said option.

¹² The 1989 movie *Heathers*, directed by Michael Lehmann, is an oddball satire of the social dynamics of high school and of teenage suicide. As a post-modern production, it plays with traditional stereotypes by using violence and fantasy. The goal of the film can be interpreted as a commentary on the cruel nature of social hierarchies, while the arch of its main character, Veronica Sawyer played by Winona Ryder, presents an interesting point of view on the feminine condition. Indeed, Sawyer is the perfect embodiment of the ambivalent nature of the female. Though she is guided by good moral principles, her disillusionment and anger towards the system allow her to become a killer, suggesting that she is not governed by reason. In fact, it is her love interest, the rebellious and sociopathic JD, played by Christian Slater, who drags her down this path to allow her most morbid fantasies to come true. In the end, however, Sawyer triumphs over JD, regains her own sovereignty, saves the school from an explosion, and befriends the overweight outcast.

television series *Twin Peaks*,¹³ Gevinson reluctantly posts the photo, in which she wears a red, Miu Miu skirt, a black t-shirt, a red cardigan, and backpack, and is made up in way that is reminiscent of the 1960s (see fig. 7). The look is simple and the blogger reminds us of a young schoolgirl or a cheerleader – note the “Cheer” pin she wears on her sweater – but there is also a gothic feel to the outfit which can be seen in her choice of colors (red and black) and the cross motif on her top. In effect, her style of dress here is very different from the depiction of her that we are used to seeing in the press. Tavi usually conjures up an image of a tiny, granny-like figure with grayish-blue hair, thick glasses, a complicated headpiece, layers of loudly printed clothing, and orthopaedic shoes (see fig. 8) By going against this preconceived notion of what she ought to look like, Gevinson is challenging the “they-speak” to a certain extent and the image of the outgoing eccentric that “They” created of her. Still, dressing in an unexpected fashion is not enough to qualify the post as authentic. The teen even acknowledges that her outfit and appearance in the photo highlight the “privileged” qualities that she possesses (Gevinson, “when i was just”). She wears her hair long and blond, her skirt is short, and her top is fitted to show off her slender frame. She displays designer clothing (the Miu Miu skirt) and has backpack that she has kept intact from when she was four. These last two elements hint to her financial wealth and her level of education. In effect, the outfit makes Gevinson look like a more typical, American, teenage girl, who appeals to the Western eye. It marks a desire to conform to the mass. Hence, the change in her style does not just signal a willingness to differentiate herself from her mediatized self-image by adopting a new style. It has a deeper significance in relation to

¹³ *Twin Peaks* is the critically acclaimed television series produced by David Lynch, which aired on ABC for two seasons during 1991 and 1992. Set in a remote American town, the show centered on solving the mystery of homecoming queen Laura Palmer’s murder and deals with the taboo issues of domestic abuse and incest. Characteristic of Lynch’s work in cinema, the show is a kind of visual oxymoron that does not follow the set rules of one particular genre: it is a mash-up of soap-opera, horror, and film noir (Hirschman). Public and academic opinion about the show’s cultural message remains divided. Some argue that it glorifies violence, rape, patriarchy and the false assumption that an idyllic America exists (Lafky 5, 17). Others, conversely, argue that, quite radically for the time, the producers do not lay blame on the female victim as being complicit in her abuse, and challenge the image of the “Seductive Daughter” that has been continuously reproduced in the cultural cannon (Davenport and al.) Furthermore, Lynch’ genre bending can be read as technique that subverts accepted discourses, allowing the series to explode the power relations that exist between men and women by making them obvious to the point of disgust (Davenport and al.; Hirschman).



Figure 7. Tavi Gevinson; n.t.; Digital photograph; “when i was just a little girl i asked my mother what will i be;” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 1 July 2011; Web; 30 Mar. 2012.



Figure 8. Tavi Gevinson; n.t.; Digital collage; “oh my god an alpaca,” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 2 Feb. 2010; Web; 5 Mar. 2013.

Gevinson's attitude towards herself, her blog, and the beauty ideal. She believed that by sharing the photo, she would be going against the tone of her blog, which has been critical of beauty standards, and was thus an outlet to question the ideals of the *das Man*. Eventually, though, she decided to share it because it was a more authentic enactment of her aesthetic and self at that moment. She writes:

The general voice of my blog has been very much against the idea of those (or, in a way, any) standards for a long time, maybe not in so many words, but definitely in spirit. I once relished in an email I got saying I was an ugly boy because it felt like proof that I hadn't given in to societal pressure to be pretty that girls usually feel affected by. I got all self reflecty on Tumblr about creating my own ideas of beauty. I wrote simply during September's No Makeup Week that I never felt the urge to wear any. I used to dress much more frumpily and goofily, on here and in public real life. Which was great, and I loved it. But, as is the point of this blog, my style has changed a bit.

The post then distinguishes itself from the rest of the blog. As Gevinson states, it marks a shift in the tone and attitude of her and her site. Yet, it can also be understood as depicting the young author as she reaches a turning point in her life.

From its content, the post is indicative of the time when a teenage girl steps onto the path of becoming "woman." Going through this phase, Gevinson is not immune to the norms that guide the female ideal and admits to this fact. In her seminal work *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir helps us to comprehend how the young girl typically deals with this phenomenon. Passively submitting to her body as it changes, the teenager typically waits: she waits for a man to come and fulfill her. The male liberator is thus idolized and his gaze establishes her sense of self-worth (de Beauvoir 89-92). Subsequently, despite reservations, she gives in and consents to her femininity as she discovers the power of her charm (de Beauvoir 100). De Beauvoir later goes on to add that once a woman accepts her destiny as the object of male desire, she takes

greater pleasure in the rituals of adornment (206). One may argue that de Beauvoir's point of view is out-dated in a post-feminist world, where a woman no longer seems to be defined by the man that she marries. However, "man" is not merely an individual. He stands for our patriarchal society—that is, the patriarchal norms that are active within our society, which can also be understood as a manifestation of, in Heideggerian terms, the "They." Although Gevinson clearly states that she is above social pressures on more than one occasion in the text, she admits that as she entered high school, she felt new anxieties and began to see herself differently ("when i was just"). She suddenly wished to be pretty and highlight her best features. She got contacts, sharing that she likes her face and no longer wants to camouflage it behind heavy frames. She now wears make-up. She no longer has the drive to dress to shock on a daily basis. Finally, she also decides to post this portrait of herself where, as she claims, she possesses a kind of "beauty privilege," meaning that she embodies Western beauty ideals, like being white, blond and thin, which give her an advantage in society (Gevinson "when i was just"). We begin to see how the averageness of *das Man* affects her, how she feels the pressure to conform to its standards. Additionally, in the 238 comments that follow the post, many readers claim to share the same feelings and experiences. As such, de Beauvoir's description is still valid today. The inauthentic sway of the Western patriarchy continues to plague the female condition, and women still feel objectified by the gaze. When young girls recognize the power of the female body to attract attention, they are forced to grapple with a newfound self: the self as object (de Beauvoir 101). In this situation, de Beauvoir argues that the mirror becomes the female's greatest ally. Here, she can discover herself from the outside, grasp herself as object, and control the image that she wants to present in attempt to reclaim her subjectivity (de Beauvoir 101-105; 528-429). Fashion then also becomes a tool for coping with this change. Rocamora takes up this metaphor in her article to suggest that the computer screen is the contemporary mirror (416). If we accept this assertion, then it follows that the personal style blog, with its regular self-portraits, has the same function as the mirror within the course of one's self-identification (Rocamora 418). That being said, in the digital sphere, self-portraits do not stand in isolation. They are placed next to the portraits of

others and the constructed images of the media. The process of self-identification then takes on a more collective meaning, which can be recognized in Gevinson's allusions to *Heathers* and *Twin Peaks*.¹⁴ The present-day mirror is then made up of multiple screens: the computer screen, the movie screen, the television, the smart phone, the tablet... Accordingly, it remains debatable whether or not these "virtual mirrors" – digital screens – allow teenage bloggers to use the blog to gain a better grasp of their own unique identity; or if they helps to perpetuate the pre-conceived notions of femininity already in place within society.

Indeed, underlying the importance of the role that the mirror/screen plays in our "becoming woman" is the idea that the traditional notion of the feminine is based upon appearances, our dressed bodies as they are mediated by the dominating culture (Entwistle 20-22; Rocamora 415). As Joanne Entwistle explains in her book *The Fashioned Body*, according to the rules of the patriarch, the female's natural inclination is to beautify and adorn herself (22). Today, one's happiness and success as a woman is secured by her ability to conform to accepted beauty and health standards (Entwistle 20). Consequently, Entwistle successfully argues, "gender is a social construct that dress helps to reproduce" (21). Gevinson is trying to reveal these social structures in her post. First, she links her readers to a feminist article on the subject. Second, her reference to *Heathers* and *Twin Peaks*, including her visual mood boards (see fig. 9), point to her desire to present alternative views of femininity because the two productions aim to challenge female norms through satire, violence, exaggeration, and genre bending. Nonetheless, Gevinson is using the available products of culture. More significantly, by giving into her own "beauty privilege" or by writing a blog even, she can also be seen as accepting the norms of the patriarch to a certain extent. Her success as a blogger is in part dependent on these rules. We must not forget that Tavi Gevinson is a young, white, thin female, who comes from an upper middle class, American family. If she were an overweight, Muslim girl living in an Iranian ghetto, I doubt that she would have ever been featured on *Fashion Television* or in *Vogue*, and would not have such

¹⁴ This idea is further developed in chapter 4.

a significant following as a result. In this sense, there is a thoroughly inauthentic dimension to her work as a blogger that harks back to my comments in chapter two. It confirms Heidegger's claim that authenticity is but a modification of the inauthentic.

It should also be noted that, historically, men have controlled the products of visual culture, which reinforces the interpretation of the female as the object of the gaze (Rocamora 415). Both *Heathers* and *Twin Peaks* were directed by men, for instance. Fashion theorist Caroline Evans also mentions how this image has been commodified to drive capitalist desire (*Fashion at the Edge* 113). The proliferation of blogs and their visuals as well as Gevinson's contribution to their growth helps to disseminate the female image and reinforce the traditional norms that clothe the "They." Here, Entwistle refers to Foucault's theory of control and surveillance, which suggests that institutions maintain a constant, seemingly omnipresent eye over us to influence our actions and beliefs. This, she claims, can explain how certain ideals, like that of the perfect woman, become entrenched within culture (17-18). The Internet and by extension the fashion blog are two of the institutions that act within this system of surveillance. They are part of *das Man*. The institutions pervade us, drown us with information, and force us to answer to them. For example, everyday we receive countless e-mails notifying us of our "social circle's" interactions online on Facebook and the like. We feel hounded and pressured to respond with "likes" and "status updates" of our own. The nature of the blogosphere, with its demands for constant interaction and for frequent updates, only further contributes to this phenomenon by stimulating the system's expansion.¹⁵ Therefore, the post in question continues to maintain the social conventions that mark fashion. Another way of outlining this argument would be to say that the blog already finds itself as part of the institutionalized media complex. Hence, it has been infused with all that characterizes inauthentic living.

Yet, Gevinson is different from other personal style bloggers. She is consciously aware of her privilege and willingly discusses it on her blog. This openness clears a space for a critical

¹⁵ The fact that Gevinson no longer publishes regularly on *The Style Rookie* can be read as another example of how she purposely tries to carve her own individual path online in defiance of the norms.

conversation to take place, which is what happened with this post. She writes, “Through the very narrow lens of mainstream media, pop culture, etc., I possess some beauty privilege,” and continues saying, “It’s not bragging to acknowledge your own privilege, and to point out that you meet certain society-dictated standards does not have to mean you agree with them” (Gevinson “when i was just”). The teen wants to be able to change and to redefine herself as she goes along. She does not want to be pigeonholed into a “convenient caricature” of herself (Gevinson “when i was just”). Yet, she is also taking responsibility for the person that she was and for the opportunities that her success as “The Twelve-Year-Old Blogger” have afforded her. From this perspective, the way that she engages with her blog is authentic. She demonstrates the kind of attitude that Heidegger qualifies as “Resoluteness.” To be resolute is to acknowledge that our realm of possibilities depends on the public world that we live in and to take a stance that embraces the inconsistency of existence, that we will always have to contend with the interpretations that “they” have given us (Guignon 333; Heidegger BT299; Scott 66). In this text, Gevinson clearly shows an awareness of the facticity of social norms, but does not allow her self to be defined by strict categorizations. She does not have to be Tavi, “The Twelve-Year-Old Blogger,” the genius outcast, forever; nor does she have to be Tavi, the pretty blond thing. She can be both. She can wear Miu Miu and hand-me-downs in the same outfit. She can listen to Taylor Swift while hunting down old copies of *Sassy*, the defunct, feminist, teen magazine.

Similarly, Gevinson’s choice of title for this post is significant. “When I was just a little girl, I asked my mother what will I be” are the first two lines of the famous 1956 tune *Que sera, sera (Whatever will be, will be)*, first sung by Doris Day in the Hitchcock film *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. The structure of the song mirrors the course of life as we wonder about our unknown future. In the first verse, the singer is a little girl who wonders if she will be pretty and rich when she grows up. In the second verse, she is a young woman who hopes that she will have a happy marriage. In the last one, she is a mother giving advice to her own children. The message, as found in the chorus, is always the same: “Que sera, sera. Whatever will be, will be.” The song suggests that we must accept that the future is unpredictable. Gevinson’s allusion to it

in her title is interesting and can be read in two ways. First, it shows that she is thinking about her life as journey with its chapters still unwritten. Viewing our own history as undetermined is an important realization of the authentic moment. However, the lyrics and melody of the song tend to suggest that one should remain passive and accepting of this fact. Conversely, Heidegger's notion of resoluteness advances the claim that one should take an active role in shaping the course of his or her life. At this point, it makes sense to propose that Gevinson's choice of title is ironic, a reading which fits with the tone and direction of most of her blog. If she is being ironic with its inclusion, then the song's use is in effect representative of the very ambivalence which directs our lives: we can only try to take charge of our lives if we accept that nothing is certain and have an opened attitude towards the possibilities that lie ahead. Once again, the post indicates that the *Style Rookie* has reached a form of authentic understanding of her Self.

Publishing her point of view on her blog adds another dimension to this experience. It encourages other people to question the topic and to reflect on their own relationship to beauty standards. While many comments tell readers' stories of how they went from ugly ducklings to beautiful swans, one woman talks about how her attractiveness prevents her from being taken seriously as a scientist (Fraîche in Gevinson, "when i was just"). Another commentator confronts Gevinson, claiming that the topic is superficial, writing, "Selfhood is so multi-layered and looks really don't matter, even the most conventionally attractive amongst us are so much more than what they see in the mirror" (Me in Gevinson, "when i was just"). Meanwhile, yet another reader adds, "I think privilege (whether it be beauty privilege, racial privilege, social economic, etc.) comes with the responsibility of using ones power, so to speak, to challenge said systems of oppression" (Zoe in Gevinson, "when i was just"). Overall, the post and the reader comments together make up an account of a shared, collective experience of being.

This last point is crucial in our discussion of the blog and authenticity. It references the importance of community and historicity in authentic being one's self. According to Heidegger, the authentic "moment of vision" reaches its culmination when it is historically grounded

(BT385). That is, when they take one's heritage into account. In response to Zimmerman's work, Guignon emphasizes that this premise is necessary for Heidegger to be able to move authenticity beyond subjectivism (334). A closer evaluation of the contents of the post exhibits how Gevinson binds her own experience to a broader female heritage and thus clears the space for the truth of the authentic moment. Guignon writes that, "When authentic Dasein *does* have an explicit understanding of its basic possibilities as historical, then authenticity takes the form of a 'retrieval' or 'repetition' of possibilities that have come before" (337). Accordingly, Gevinson references to the cultural past such as the use of imagery from the movie *Heathers* and the series *Twin Peaks* are crucial to viewing this post as an authentic manifestation. Because their content deconstructs gender relations, Gevinson's use of the works' visuals demonstrates the way in which this entry offers "alternative versions of femininity" which the young girl has taken up as her own. This conclusion coincides with Rocamora's thesis that the personal style blog helps to circulate female representations that challenge the norm (410). The inclusion of such images on her blog designates Gevinson's comprehension that her personal struggle with her appearance does not occur in isolation. It is part of a collective destiny.

For example, one element of the *Twin Peaks*' narrative relevant to our discussion is the way in which it deals with prostitution. The show, which revolves around solving the mystery of homecoming queen Laura Palmer's murder, finds more than one female character, if not all, involved in some form of prostitution, using their body for gain, or stuck in a kind of servitude. Gevinson's textual reference to *Pretty Woman*¹⁶ also directs us towards this female symbol, just as *Heathers*' Veronica Sawyer's corrupt relationship to JD can be read with the objectification of women in mind¹⁷. As we are about to see, the argument can be made then that the underlying script of this post equates the beauty standard to the prostitute, or the commodification of the female body. Philosopher Christine Buci-Glucksmann writes about how the rise and veneration

¹⁶ In the text, Gevinson writes, "Of course, this is a general statement, but typically, *Pretty Woman* does not have to worry about missing out on opportunities because of her appearance."

¹⁷ See prior footnote 12 on *Heathers*.

of the prostitute relates to the growth of industrial capitalism (222-223). Industrialization, she argues, turned the female body into a mass-produced commodity, which resulted in a fragmented view of beauty (223-225). In the search to recapture the “aura of love,” male desire took on a perverse form, while ideal beauty became mystified, unattainable, and uncanny (Buci-Glucksmann 225). Buci-Glucksmann asserts that the figure of the prostitute is the ultimate “allegory” for this phenomenon. In a paper on fashion and female subjectivity in the post-modern era, Julia Emberley supports Buci-Glucksmann’s position, writing that women continue to be identified as “the unknown god, the no-body, the nobody” (49). Coming back to Laura Palmer, throughout her murder investigation, we find out that behind the costume of the popular, homecoming queen, she was a prostitute who was raped and finally killed by her own father. He is not the only male figure to abuse her though, and it is as if her beauty was ultimately a curse. She is a character who is not physically embodied: we meet Laura after she is dead. She is a ghost who haunts the obsession of an entire town. So, it is clear that she illustrates the female archetype as conveyed by Buci-Glucksmann and Emberley. This ideal is an expression of Heidegger’s *das Man*. “They” are anyone and nobody. “They” are removed from their subjectivity and therefore cannot be held accountable for their actions and their words (Heidegger BT127-128). When we blindly conform to the ideals “They” advance, we are disconnected from our own most selves (Heidegger BT128). In this sense, inauthenticity can be read as a form of disembodiment. If this is what the prostitute represents, then its appearance within this post highlights the dark side of female objectification. If being a woman is entrenched with such fleeting ideals, then women find themselves more likely to fall victim to the “They” and live inauthentically, especially if they have been blessed with the gift of beauty. Whether knowingly or not, Gevinson’s use of this symbol implies that a woman’s looks can be turned against her, as well. So, although the author is critical of the way physical attractiveness can make one’s life easier, she also seems to be aware that it can truly hinder one’s sense of self. She shows an appreciation for the fact that: no matter how hard we try, our agency must always face the preconceived judgements of others. Thanks to her quotations of past works, she arrives at a

point where she can disclose the ambivalence of her existence as being part of the complicated heritage of womanhood.¹⁸

Another aspect of this tale is how death and morbidity surface as a thematic for the vision of femininity that Gevinson endorses. Death is also omnipresent in Heidegger's philosophy. He defends the view that we are *Being-Towards-Death*: that our very existence is defined by the inevitable end which waits on the horizon and which we must encounter either positively or negatively. Dying, moreover, is something that we must do on our own; no "one" can take over our demise. Our death is the one possibility that is very own and cannot be buried by the "They," but we can still deny it by resorting to the familiar *they-speak* like when we remind our ailing relatives that "Everything is going to be O.K." (Heidegger BT266). Yet, if we are resolute, in this end, the fullness of our existence, the interpretation of our life's journey, comes to be realized (Heidegger BT283). I am unsure about whether or not Tavi is mindful about her own "Being" projected towards death. There is no textual evidence to support this claim. However, on several occasions (see fig. 10, 11, and 12) including this one, the visuals she includes on her blog have a spectral quality about them. She wears clothes with skeletons on them, she blurs her face to appear ghostly, and she stares anxiously into the void, nothingness. I can only assume then that the young ingénue is somewhat aware of her own temporality and the importance that death plays in understanding the whole of our existence. Actually, it is the trigger for authentic understanding. From this point of reference, it is possible to infer that the ephemeral quality of the visuals in the post combined with the violent nature of Gevinson's cultural references (see fig. 9) can only be interpreted as being part of an authentic reflection about a young girl's place in the World.

In the end, we can conclude that when Tavi Gevinson wrote "when i was just a little girl, i asked my mother, what will i be," she had encountered a moment of authenticity. Her personal

¹⁸ Interestingly enough, her decision to end her blog and start her web-magazine *Rookie*, was motivated by desire to create a community for young girls to read and share their experiences and was based on the response to posts like this one. It could be argued that she has chosen to carry the torch from the heritage of feminists who have preceded her, which reinforces my reading of her work as authentic in the Heideggerian sense.



Figure 10. Tavi Gevinson; n.t.; Digital photograph; “it’s for your own good;” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 14 Dec. 2010; Web; 17 Feb. 2013.



Figure 11. Tavi Gevinson; *Hello There!*; Digital photograph; “i’m bright orange and i love lasagna;” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 27 Dec. 2009; Web; 17 Feb. 2013.



Figure 12. Tavi Gevinson; n.t.; Digital photograph; “my heart is drenched in wine;” *The Style Rookie*; Blogger, 10 Dec. 2008; Web; 17 Feb. 2013.

account of how a teenager tries to come to terms with her changing self is evident. It acknowledges the pervasiveness of cultural norms that have come to define the female experience. It shows an acute awareness of how our self-definition must be formulated in relation to these standards. Yet, Gevinson does something novel by making her inner monologue explicit on her blog. She opens the space for her vision of the truth to be shared, and because of the context in which the blog evolves, she finds herself taking part in a larger experience that unites her with the heritage of women that have come before her and that will follow her. The communal aspects of the blogosphere then play a part in allowing it to be used authentically.

On a more general level, then, the personal style blog holds interesting dual functions. As it has been seen here, it can be used as a space for self-reflection for both the author and its readers. Its format encourages its authors to discuss their experiences, hunt down their most privileged inspirations and share them online, which incites the kind of thinking that can lead to an authentic moment. However, by being an institutionalized visual, digital based medium, the blog finds itself inscribed with patriarchal norms that it strengthens, especially with regards to femininity. This can be described in terms of Heidegger's account of the everyday nature of existence being regulated by *das Man*. This justification grounds the more inauthentic elements of the blogosphere in a fundamental account of existence, which is something that classical diffusion theory is not able to do. Nevertheless, Gevinson still manages to use her site as a platform for resisting mainstream standards because her attitude is "resolute," demonstrating the platform's authentic potential. She is engaged in the process of creating her blog and uses it as means of expression much like artists do with their paint and canvas, or designers with their cloth. The personal style blog can then be read as form of artistic expression as well. Hence, we begin to discover the possibilities that the blog has to rewrite our interpretation of fashion.

CHAPTER 4

Drawing the Bridge between Heidegger and Fashion Theory towards a new Interpretation for the Digital Era

Using Heidegger's philosophy to read an entry of *The Style Rookie* has allowed us to account for the personal style blog's potential for authenticity. However, Heidegger never published on fashion and diffusion the way that Simmel did. So, it is difficult to explain the emergence of trends and the fashion cycle solely based on Heidegger's texts. Instead, using Heidegger's work to complement Simmel's theory and revisions leads to a more comprehensive account of fashion that is rooted in the very nature of existence. Many parallels can be drawn between the two thinkers, which will now be explored. Namely, I will look at the relationship between Heidegger's inauthentic and authentic modes of being and Simmel's principles of fashion and how they pertain to fashion and temporality.

4.1 Principles of Fashion and Modes of Being

First, in Simmel's initial formulation of the Trickle-Down theory, people adopt new trends based on their desire to either associate themselves with a group of a higher status or to demarcate themselves from an inferior group (544-545). Simmel's understanding of fashion was limited to class relations. McCracken's reformulation maintains the principles of equalization and differentiation as the driving force behind changing trends, but widens the scope of theory so that one's motivations are based on the symbolic meaning of styles rather than on the socio-economic status of the wearer ("Rehabilitated" 97-102). Our close reading of Gevinson's work, however, reveals another dimension to the sartorial decision-making process that both of these authors missed, but that is encompassed in the importance that authenticity plays in blogging's success. A drastic change in one's dress is usually representative of other life changes. In this case, we saw Gevinson change her style because of a newfound acceptance of being pretty as she entered womanhood. True, other bloggers' style will evolve to include more and more expensive items as they become more popular (see fig. 13 & 14). For them, Simmel's theory does seem



Figure 13. Chiara Ferragni; n.t.; Digital photograph; “Cage Ankle Boots;” *The Blond Salad*; TBS Crew SRL / Kiver, 29 Dec. 2009; Web; 21 Mar. 2013.

Chiara Ferragni at the beginning of her blog *The Blond Salad*. In this picture, she wears a Zara top, Cage ankle boots, Nadine leather trousers, and Tiffany & Co. jewellery.



Figure 14. Chiara Ferragni; n.t.; Digital photograph; “Dior Pop-Up Shop – the Party;” *The Blond Salad*; TBS Crew SRL / Kiver, 22 Feb. 2013; Web; 21 Mar. 2013.

Four years later, she is dressed head to toe in Dior by Raf Simons, spring 2013 collection.

more applicable since they are looking to attach themselves to the prestige of wearing certain designer pieces. Yet again, for bloggers who have a more specific agenda, like *The Man Repeller's* Leandra Medine, outfits are always in line with their thematic. Medine, who purposely ignores the male gaze and the pressure to fit a sexy ideal, favours fashion-forward, outlandish looks (see fig. 15). If the latest trend or fashion's elite started dressing in skin-tight red dresses with perfectly coiffed, glamour-puss hair, I doubt that Medine would follow suit. If she did, she would probably receive backlash from her readers, unless she had provided some kind of deeply personal justification in the way that Gevinson did in the post "when i was just a girl..." discussed in Chapter 3. In any of these cases, the point is that the way one dresses must be aligned with the personal state of the wearer. A person will be inclined to follow a trend if and only if it provides a way of enacting a self that is aligned with his or her own personal situation and commitments. In fact, when someone blindly follows any and every trend, he or she is called a fashion victim and is not considered fashionable at all. Heidegger's concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity pick up on this subjective experience of dress. Meanwhile, trickle-down theory is too pre-occupied with the sociological aspects of fashion – perhaps a consequence of the modernist era in which Simmel was writing – that it fails to notice that clothing is an expression of the unique individual as well.

This critique may be unfair though, because there is something to say about the grounding of Simmel's theory in the principles of equalization and differentiation and their relation to Heideggerian authenticity and inauthenticity. The push and pull of the principles of fashion mimic the way we vacillate between inauthentic and authentic being. Simmel begins his theoretical discussion by referring to the active and passive urges in our soul (542). The principle of differentiation comes from our active need to stand out. It can be related to Heidegger's authenticity, which we feel as it tries to pull us out from everyday existence in the "They" (BT189). Our desire to be true to ourselves, to be different, that motivates Simmel's principle of differentiation, can be said to be the outcome of adopting an authentic stance. When we are



Figure 15. Naomi Shon; n.t.; Digital photograph; “Over All Corduroy,” *The Man Repeller*; *The Man Repeller*, 11 Mar. 2013; Web; 21 March 2013.

Leandra Medine of *The Man Repeller*. Here, Medine wears an Isabel Marant blouse, Confezioni Crosby overalls, and an American Apparel denim shirt.

authentic, we strive to stand against the assimilating norms of the “they,” yet it is not simply a question of rebellion, rather it is one of the affirmation of the individualized experience. As it was demonstrated in my close reading of Gevinson’s work, she is very much authentic and reaches true differentiation by being alert to the dangers of falling into step with the crowd. Simmel’s principle of equalization, then, on the other hand, is rooted in this passive need to assimilate. According to Lehmann, in Simmel’s view, conformity provides reassurance and the ability to understand the whole (156-158). Heidegger gives an explanation for this human tendency when he claims that *Dasein* is “thrown” into the World. We are born into a set of circumstances that we have no control over: is our family rich or poor, are we Black or White, are we physically attractive or not...Being “thrown” equally means that we are already predisposed to follow the values and norms that correspond to our specific situation. As African-American bloggers, Joshua Kissi and Travis Gumbs of *Street Etiquette* treat fashion differently from Scott Schuman, for example. They necessarily bring the Black experience to the discussion of their sartorial influences. Yet, if they were to blindly conform Black stereotypes than they would be adopting an inauthentic stance towards their work, but to completely ignore them would be inauthentic as well. In this sense, the push to conform to the “They” is indivisible from the world of meaning, which has been given to us (Heidegger BT167). Yet, Guignon points out that our conformist tendency – our failure to live up to our individualized possibilities – is the very basis for Heidegger’s condemnation of inauthenticity and reasserts the importance of assuming an authentic stance towards our ontological condition (329-332). The result is that a conflict between authentic and inauthentic living is ongoing within us. The “they” is normalizing and we are entangled in its web. “They” implore us to be just like anyone, the same, interchangeable, entity, but we are singular individuals. This struggle is apparent in fashion as we simultaneously try to fit in and stand out, which is what Simmel expresses in his work. Thus, Heidegger’s philosophy ontologically justifies Simmel’s principles of fashion, which explains why they are still valid in the digital era.

If Heidegger answers the whys, then fashion theory explains the hows. For example, drawing on Simmel, McCracken acknowledges the role that culture plays in determining fashions and explains how its messages are spread. He argues that culture is both the lens and the blueprint for the World: it fixes how we understand phenomena and how we shape our environments (“Culture” 72). It invests meaning into the goods that surround us, which is then conveyed to us to help transmit the values of the society at hand (McCracken, “Culture” 73). According to McCracken, these objects are imbued with meaning thanks to cultural organisms like advertising and the fashion system (“Culture” 74). Both institutions engage in a process that associates symbolic connotations to the specific properties of consumer goods (“Culture” 74-76). The fashion system’s structure is more elaborate though, and it also invests meaning into the world thanks to its gatekeepers and its drive towards radical change or innovation. Fashion’s role is to move trends forward by reinventing their meaning (McCracken, “Culture” 76). As consumers, we appropriate that meaning through rituals of transference that include: gift giving, adornment, and disinvestment and possession rituals such as cleaning, photographing and discussing one’s purchases (McCracken “Culture” 78-80). Finally, these activities help to construct one’s self-definition in relation to the world of others (McCracken “Culture” 79). McCracken was writing in 1986, but the practices that he discusses are all the more present today. Thanks to Web 2.0 technologies, possession rituals have become a shared, everyday experience. Beyond the popularity of blogging, social media applications like Instagram, for example, encourage consumers to photograph and publish their possessions online with hashtags that unite them to a community of like-minded individuals, but the picture also acts as a form of advertising (see fig. 16). The hashtag #OOTD (Outfit of the Day) finds users posting self-portraits of their daily outfits promoting every brand and trend that they are wearing. One Montreal blogger has even started selling a t-shirt with the tag written across its chest and used the platform to launch its release (see fig. 17). These new habits reinforce the ubiquitous nature of consumer culture. McCracken’s work thus details the process by which we are inculcated.



Figure 16. Eadie, Blair (blaireadiebee); "<on the blog with @anntaylor> #pink #stripes # ootd;," 12 Mar. 2013; Instagram.



Figure 17. Lacasse, Gabrielle (dentelleetfleurs); "MisterDressUp X Dentelle+Fleurs T-Shirts are out! Check out the blog for links and details or find them at www.misterdressup.com #ootd #collaboration #tshirt #ootdshirt #forsale #onlinestore;," 10 Mar. 2013; Instagram.

Meanwhile, Heidegger's description of *thrownness* substantiates the process by demonstrating why it is that we can never entirely pull away from the influence of *das Man*, or the cultural complex described by McCracken. For Heidegger, to be "thrown" is constitutive of our Being. It comes from the fact that we are "already in a definite world and alongside a definite range of definite entities within-the-world" (BT221). In other words, we are "thrown" because we are Being-in-the-World (BT146). The Self does not exist in isolation, as a sovereign "I"; it is already part of a world of meaning that has come before it and that determines its possibilities (Heidegger BT179, BT285). In effect, Heidegger's argument boils down to the claim that we are dependent on others and our world to be our self (BT364). To illustrate, my self-concept is a synthesis of my experiences, my tastes, and my interpersonal relationships. I define myself as a Montrealer, an orphan, an academic, a fashion-lover, a spouse, and a friend. All of these terms relate to past events, to my environment, and to the people who make up my life or basically, my world. I have also inherited ways of thinking and acting that stem from these relations and experiences, which necessarily create a bias when I interpret phenomena. It is because of this very fact of existence that we cannot escape the public and dominating character of the "They" (Heidegger BT167). We comprehend the world according the interpretations that "They" offer us, which are for the most part inauthentic, veiled semblances of the truth; but in moments of authenticity, we come to see the nature of existence as *Being-in-the-World* (Heidegger BT222-223). This truth is re-appropriated by the cultural complex though and gets re-circulated in such way that its original meaning is distorted. Hence, we fall back into "their" inauthentic way of being (Heidegger BT224-225). This last claim is important to fashion, because as we will see in the following paragraph, it explains how style innovation gets co-opted by the fashion system. Moreover, our being as "thrown" can thus never settle still. It is always in movement, never reaching a full stop (Heidegger BT180; BT348). Under this light, our being in motion parallels the self-perpetuating fashion cycle. This overall description underlies Heidegger's understanding of the structure of existence. His conclusions give ontological significance to the processes

which McCracken discusses, but they also echo with the way that both the blog and fashion function, which is what we will go on to explore.

In the first chapter, I enumerated some of the critiques which have been made against Simmel's trickle-down theory, one of which stated that fashions can originate amongst innovative subcultures, "bubble-up" to the elites and then diffuse to the masses (Polhemus 327-331). Interestingly enough, Dick Hebdige's work on the punk movement in the U.K. found that subcultural groups employ *bricolage* to re-inscribe commodities in new and different ways that go against the capitalist interpretations of their use ("Style" 258-259). The styles become a form of oppositional dress that shock and cause controversy, but eventually, as Hebdige discusses, they are re-interpreted by mass media and big business to once again become normalized and sold in mainstream culture ("Subculture" 224-226). The initial *bricolage* that the members of the group undertake could be read as stemming from an authentic appreciation of their style heritage, while the industry's appropriation of the trends for commercial purposes is exemplary of the way the truthful expressions of human existence are inevitably re-concealed by the "they." Similarly, when starting out, bloggers are enthusiastic and earnest in their endeavour. Yet when they gain certain notoriety, they feel the pressure to post more frequently, to be more productive, and to be constantly synchronized with the ever-accelerating speed of the fashion cycle, which is compelled by the need for the new/now (Pham, "Bubble" 16). The trajectory of fashion, and by extension its blogs, thus mirrors the structure of our own existence as set out by Heidegger. As fractals of one another, blogs, fashion, and the Self are constantly falling in and out of authentic and inauthentic being. Fashion diffusion must henceforth be understood with this in mind.

4.2 Temporality in Fashion and the Self

Another criticism of Simmel's theory came in the form of Blumer's work on fashion which emphasizes the role of time in setting trends (278-280). Indeed, when fashion is at its best, it resonates amongst the whole of human existence (Lehmann xviii; Vinken 42). Garments become reflections and commentaries on social injustice, consumerism, and national history. In

her book *Fashion Zeitgeist: Trends and Cycles in the Fashion System*, Barbara Vinken analyzes fashion as a “poetological activity” and writes that, “Fashion not only confirms and economically functionalizes the division of gender and class; it constructs and subverts them by stripping them bare [...] and reveals them as an effect of construction” (4). Vinken’s thesis points to fashion’s ability to act as clue that unravels the ambiguity and superficiality of social norms. In other words, she hints at its potential for authentic understanding. Yet, fashion holds this special function because its temporal structure directed towards the future imitates our own.

In *Being and Time*, the formal existence of *Dasein* is qualified as a becoming (Heidegger BT192; Guignon 330). Fashion too shares this feature. If we remember, at the very beginning of this text, fashion was defined as unfinished, an ever-changing and incomplete phenomenon that articulates the now (see p. 9) (Lehmann xii). Moreover, in *Zur Psychologie der Mode* (1895), Simmel claims that, “The essence of fashion lies in the fact that it is always only a part of the group that practices it, while the great majority is still on its way to fashion. It never is but always becomes” (as trans. in Lehmann 177-178). In realistic terms, trendsetters like bloggers might be wearing their hair in Cool-aid colours, the glossy fashion magazines might feature the style in an editorial, but the herd of nine-to-five workers will be wearing coloured jeans instead. Behind Simmel’s quote is the idea that fashion is in constant movement and evolves from one group to the next. Hence, it is a “becoming.” This reflects the framework of existence that Heidegger proposes. As beings, we are always ahead of ourselves moving towards a goal that will never be complete and will change as it confronts different elements in the world (Heidegger BT193).

Heidegger eventually describes us as *Being-towards-Death*, a term that Simmel specifically uses to label fashion’s temporality in the revised *Die Mode* (1911) (Heidegger BT250; Lehmann 139). Once a fashion comes into existence it is already dying, and designers are developing the next trends. Similarly, our own lives are predicated on the inevitable and unpredictable end that we face. In his essay on authenticity in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, Charles E. Scott writes that for Heidegger death gives time its function and purpose: it

determines our understanding as projection (62). It means that the way that we comport ourselves, like the way fashion reacts, is always in relation to the future. As human beings, we are always projecting towards certain possibilities that want to become realities. These future goals determine our actions in the present and our interpretations of the past. Individuals choose to have these goals because they want their lives to be meaningful. They want their lives to be meaningful because they realize that their existence is finite. For instance, if a young woman hopes to become a successful blogger, a course once taken as an elective in photography suddenly becomes more valuable. Likewise, attending local fashion events becomes a priority in her current schedule. If this “blogger-in-waiting” postpones her activities for whatever reason, then it may be too late for her to make an impact. She can be viewed as being too old, or someone else may come along and take her place. Her potential to become the new “it” blogger slowly fades as time passes. This pressure creates a kind of anxiety that can only be relieved if the young woman in question realizes that the feeling is grounded in the structure of being, which is framed by death. She must deal with the facticity of her world, embrace the possibilities in front of her, and freely chose to make her life her very own (Heidegger BT187-189). In this way, she lives her moment of authenticity and becomes resolute in her decisions.

Always looking to what is next, trends too are already dying when they come into existence. Lehmann notes that fashion has a kind of obsession with death, which is a topic studied in Caroline Evans’ book *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity, and Deathliness*. For both of these authors, fashion’s relationship to death finds its roots in the development of nineteenth century consumer culture, which Evans argues commodified fashion into the ephemeral (*Fashion at the Edge* 8-9; Lehman xx). It becomes capitalism’s emblem propagating the logic of the need to buy into the latest fads, which are here today gone tomorrow. Fashion bears the mark of inauthenticity because it acts as a technique which *das Man* uses to dazzle us with false novelty and to impel us to follow to the economic paradigm (Heidegger BT391). When Pham discusses fashion blogging, she recognizes its compliance with these capitalist ideals writing that, “the blog’s temporal structures naturalize and secure industrial age valuations

of productivity, punctuality, and accumulation of (symbolic, cultural, and material) capital that are necessary to reproduce capitalism even in the digital age” (“Bubble” 16). The blog is arranged in reverse chronological order with a date and time stamp that elevates the most recent post and quickly forgets the last. Besides, the speed and ease with which one can publish on a blog further shortens the lifespan of its content, in a way that is obvious to the reader.

Consequently, the blog makes fashion’s trajectory all the more clear. It can subsequently remind us of our own limited existence, and Heidegger suggests that this can give the impetus for an authentic understanding of our being and its temporality. The recognition of our finitude requires us to take responsibility for our choices in such a way that our existence reveals itself as our very own. It means that there is the potential for authentic revelation even in the darkest, inauthentic phenomenon (Heidegger BT266). When we acknowledge the possibility of our own death, we came face to face with nothingness. It creates an angst that quiets the *They-speak* so that the framework of existence may come forth (Heidegger BT343). The evanescence of fashion, with its many fleeting imperatives, necessitates choice, and within this choice, a decision is made to live either authentically as an individual or inauthentically as anyone. It is a radical notion to apply to the study of fashion, because its frivolous connotations have relegated it to the periphery of academia for so long, but there is great value hidden in its structure.

At this point, it makes sense to recall and clarify Heidegger’s thoughts on time. He believes that the realization of what ecstatic time is happens when we hear the call towards authenticity (BT328-32). In this mode, the future, the past (have-been), and the present express their inseparability. An inauthentic view of time sees it as a mere sequence of “nows,” but in truth every now is what it is because of its particular past and future (Heidegger BT329). Our own being shows this because we understand ourselves as a whole, not as an entity, but as a being that is reciprocally determined by its past, future, and present (Heidegger BT318). In a summation of his argument, Heidegger writes that:

Only an entity which in its Being, is essentially **futural** so that it is free for its death and can let itself be “thrown” back upon its factual “there” by shattering itself against death – that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is equipromordially in the process of **having-been**, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its own *thrownness* and be in the **moment of vision** for ‘its time’. Only authentic temporality which is at the same time finite, makes possible something like fate – that is to say authentic historicity (BT385).

Underneath the Heideggerian jargon, the philosopher indicates that we have the unique ability to understand ourselves as having a fundamental relationship to both our past and our future, and we can only come to this realization when we recognize our unique specificity. Temporality is hence “already *stretched along*.” It is an interdependent whole (Heidegger BT391). What this entails for Heidegger is that authenticity requires the acceptance of time and Being as “together” (BT390). Our own future, past and present are constantly reinterpreting one another and cannot be understood in pure isolation. Such a position further leads to an appreciation of the interrelated and indefinite nature of history, which differs from a chronological conception of world events (Heidegger BT390-391). Heidegger calls it *historicity* (BT375). Conceptually, it entails that time and history should be analysed as interrelated and fluid, which can be consequential to how fashion is studied. This becomes clear when we look at how Simmel’s perception of time impacts his fashion theory.

Simmel’s grasp of time differs from Heidegger’s, and it ultimately limits the comprehensiveness of trickle-down theory. His view, which is inspired by Kant, suggests that the idea of the past and the future are constructed by consciousness. Time is but a series of points, and as soon as we speak of the present, it has already passed (Simmel qtd. in Lehmann 162). This assessment brings out the ephemeral, transitory, and continuous character of existence. Against Simmel, Heidegger argues, “Dasein does not exist as the sum of momentary actualities of Experiences which come along successively and disappear. Nor is there a sort of framework in

which this succession gradually fills up” (BT374, 426). Simmel misses the reciprocal and cyclical nature of time, even though he attempts to approach the study of history non-linearly. Heidegger accounts for this oversight by explicitly stating that Simmel is only concerned with the object of time not its subject (*Dasein*) (BT375). Lehmann does allude to a comment in *Philosophy of Money*, where Simmel calls for reconciliation of the subject-object relation in capitalist society by determining the mutual effect that they have on each other, but Simmel’s argument is never expounded in detail (168). Lehmann actually agrees with Heidegger’s attack when he writes that with regards to fashion, the philosopher-turned-sociologist arrives at an incomplete “pre-phenomenological philosophy” that does not recognize why fashions resurrect through time (194-195).

If we turn to even the reformulated version of trickle-down theory, fashions seem to move only in one direction, from the superior group (whomever they might be) to the proximate subordinate group. Change is motivated by a desire to move upward, and new fashions succeed the old as soon as these have become too popular (Simmel 545; McCracken “Rehabilitated” 94). Fashion is transient and continuous, just like Simmel’s conception of time. However, trends resurface. Past fashions always show up again, albeit in a slightly different interpretation. Today, the teenage members of the sea-punk digital subculture covet the platform heels that the Spice Girls wore in the nineties (see fig. 18 & 19). Vintage inspiration is a fixture on the runways. Fashion is caught up in time, and the styles of the past constantly resurrect to take new form. Contemporary theorists Lehmann, Vinken, and Evans, who have all studied fashion’s relationship to modernity, believe that fashion’s essence is distinctive because it articulates the now by quoting its *own* past and forwarding innovation at the same time (Evans, *Fashion at the Edge* 294-295; Lehmann xviii-xx; Vinken 42). By doing so, it negates linear chronology, represents the *Zeitgeist*, and holds time in a tension that has fascinated writers and thinkers from Baudelaire to Benjamin. In this way, it acts as a sign towards the authentic interpretation of time. Its self-reflectiveness or its ability to quote its past and redefine it is a key feature of fashion not fully appreciated in trickle-down.



Figure 18. n.a; *Jeffery Campbell Highlight Platform Sneaker- Rainbow*; *Nasty Gal*; Nasty Gal Inc., 2006-2013; Web; 19 Apr. 2013



Figure 19. n.a; *Spice World Promotional Shoot*, 1997; “Trend: Platform Shoes;” *UO Blog*; Urban Outfitters, 20 Mar. 2013; Web; 19 Apr. 2013.

Lehmann uses Walter Benjamin's work on fashion to move Simmel's theory beyond these limitations. In his *Arcades Project*, Benjamin was inspired by fashion to come to the conclusion that the past must be taken up in light of the present and be interpreted in terms of its broader social implications (Lehmann 238). It is through his analysis of 19th century fashion, as written about by Charles Baudelaire, that Benjamin comes to develop his concept of the "*Tigersprung*" or "tiger's leap," which can be defined as the way in which a dialogue with the past allows us to see the future (Lehmann 226, 251). In his analysis of "À une Passante" from Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Benjamin argues that the poem fixes the present as a moment removed from the continuum of history in which "time stands still and comes to a stop" (as qtd. in Lehmann, 226). This standstill allows for what Benjamin calls the "*Chock*," which Lehmann explains as "the sudden realization of the metaphysical element in the world" (227). It is when the eternal comes to be viewed in the fleeting moment. In the poem, the "*Chock*" is provoked by fashion: by the male who gazes upon the female passer-by whose leg appears from under the ruffle of her skirt. Moreover, fashion, with its constant quotations of the past, is particularly effective in creating these instances of "*Chock*" because of the way that it concurrently incorporates the past, the present, and the future (Lehmann 229). Lehmann describes this feature of fashion and writes, "It always appears as the most immediate present, affecting the future with its constant changes, yet it always quotes from the past" (xviii). As such, Benjamin suggests that it is in fashion that we witness the "*Tigersprung*:" the dialogue that exists within time. This then allows us to arrive at a greater comprehension of the nature of history as being more than a series of chronological events (Benjamin qtd. in Lehmann, 234, 247). In the "*Tigersprung*," each time period bears a relation to the next, much like in Heidegger's analysis of temporality. It is a return to the past that allows us to envision the future (Benjamin qtd. in Lehmann, 251). Fashion does this naturally, which ultimately explains why it is that it can always anticipate and create what is coming next. Thus, from Lehmann's reading of Benjamin's work, we are able to see how fashion can help to reveal a more complete

consideration of history. We also realize that this is the case because fashion is always in a dialogue with both the past and the future, while it expresses the very essence of the moment.

Heidegger's writing on *historicality* is aligned with Benjamin's. In his later texts, Heidegger claims that certain art forms such as poetry are a "naming" that is able to designate the structure of existence. Through the use of metaphor and symbolic language, the poem starts a dialogue between two disparate terms that brings the reader and the author on a journey that recreates the flow of time (*Ister* 29). As such, in his work on Holderlin's poem the *Ister*, Heidegger further elaborates his view of the role that history plays in authentic understanding. He shows that the discovery of the self and its on-going destiny can only happen if we step away from what is familiar and become "unhomely" by travelling into the past (*Ister* 50). He also calls this past "foreign" (*Ister* 160-161). The dialogue is then one that occurs between the self and the Other. This last point is particularly interesting because it can be related to the nature of fashion in the way that theorist Barbara Vinken describes it. She believes that embedded in fashion is the desire to be Other (50), which is the analogous to Simmel's principle of differentiation¹⁹. If through dress, we fashion ourselves to become Other, then it follows from Heidegger's point of view that fashion can act as a means to gain insight into our own being. Yet, what is most significant is the notion that a dialogue is necessary to uncover the truth of our being.

As such, it is clear that both the both Benjamin and Heidegger favour the use of dialogue in the interpretation of temporality. Hence, the dialectical image, a concept also developed by Benjamin, is a tool that helps to uncover how fashion construes time. In her book, Evans uses this method to juxtapose 19th Century fashion to the styles of today. Her aim is to show how "the past can resonate in the present to articulate modern anxieties and experiences" (*Fashion at the Edge* 9). She also provides an excellent explanation of how dialectical images work. They require the juxtaposition of two images of different time periods. Yet, by bringing these visuals

¹⁹ The principle of differentiation carries the lure of otherness, which explains fashion's love affair with the exotic. Meanwhile, the idea of the quotation is in effect an expression of the principle of assimilation, but in this instance it is to associate one's self to a historical heritage and not to just a class of people.

together, the goal is not to compare them, but to allow them to reveal the common themes that tie the past to the present. The placing of the images together then helps to create a moment of “*Chock*,” or recognition (Evans, *Fashion at the Edge* 33). Evans goes on to argue that the images are able to reveal a novel appreciation of the phenomenon because they are taken out of their original context to be interpreted in a new light (*Fashion at the Edge* 295). Dialectical images thus allow us to discern similarities between periods that, in the chronological understanding of time, would bear no close relation to one another.

4.3 The Space that Fashion Blogging Occupies

The dialectical image forms the basis for the personal style blog. When publishing photos of their style inspirations, authors such as Gevinson are participating in a dialogue between different periods, designers, films, photographers, etc. and are re-inscribing their meaning for themselves. In one of her later entries, Gevinson posts images of the spring 2012 Prada collection next to: stills from *Ghost World*, *The Bad Seed*, and *Grease*, scans of *Glamour* editorials from the early nineties, pictures of L.A. architecture, and her own doodles (“heart n soul”).²⁰ The cluttered and almost incoherent mash-up helps her to create her own visual aesthetic and gives a new life to these past images (see fig. 20). Independent from each other the photos have a constrained meaning, but together they conjure up feelings of an idyllic yet ironic and corrupt American Dream. The dialectical images that personal style blogs feature draw out common themes, techniques, symbols and designs and interpret them into a new fashion. Although it may be less visible when a blogger merely copies a runway look, the vast majority of digital visual culture – certainly as it is present on platforms such as Tumblr – has taken the concept of the dialectical image into overdrive. This inundation can be overwhelming, but for the bloggers who are curating their online space, the practice leads them down a path that obliges them to engage with the cultural past and re-appropriate it as their own.²¹ For readers, it gives them the opportunity to latch on to a more “authentic” movement or idea that they may not have

²⁰ See post at the following link: <http://www.thestylerookie.com/2011/11/heart-n-soul.html>

²¹ This “past” does not have to be ancient. On the contrary, it is often quite recent.

encountered otherwise to live their own “moment of vision”. This is where the communal aspect of blogging becomes important. It can even provide an explanation for why the trend cycle has accelerated so quickly: there is more visible fashion than there has ever been before. Regardless, blogs have this effect because of the nature of fashion itself. If fashion did not have an ecstatic temporal structure similar to our own, then the dialectical image and the blog would not have the power to perpetually create new fashions that are historically grounded, and blogging would not be seen as an authentic means of communication.

In sum, this chapter established the links between Heidegger’s understanding of authenticity, time and being, and Simmel’s work on fashion in order to provide an ontological basis for Simmel’s theory that addressed its limitations. By looking at the relationship between the principles of fashion and the authentic and inauthentic modes of being, it is possible to bring the subjective experience into the fold of Simmel’s sociological theory of diffusion. The principles of equalization and of differentiation still offer an accurate portrayal of the forces that guide fashion, but it is because they are grounded in these modes of being. In effect, Heideggerian authenticity and inauthenticity justify the processes of the fashion system described by Simmel and McCracken. Furthermore, their inclusion in a theory of fashion allows us to explain how subcultural trends are reinserted into the mainstream by ultimately showing how fashion moves in and out of authentic and inauthentic being. Fashion is thus revealed as unstable and paradoxical. This instability led us to a discussion about fashion’s temporality, which was shown to be akin to our own. Like our own being, it is in constant motion. It is also projected towards its end; thus it holds the potential to be a clue for authentic understanding. Fashion actually stands in that very instant where the past, present, and future meet. However, Simmel’s own comprehension of time as continuous implies that this hallmark of fashion eludes him. As a result, his theory is unable to account for fashion’s ability to re-incarnate itself, which is actually its saving grace, the source of its potential to lead to authentic understanding and to not be a mere instrument of consumerism. Heidegger and Benjamin’s analyses of time as ecstatic

do help us account for this critical feature of the fashion system and reveal its very essence as being about reinterpretation. Once fashion's temporality was recognized, we were in a position to finally fix the personal style blog's role in the fashion system. As a space that encourages a dialogue with past currents and their appropriation, as well as the subsequent sharing of one's vision with others, the personal style blog stimulates the creation of fashions.

CONCLUSION

At the start of this paper, I set out to determine the theoretical implications of the impact that the personal style blog has had on fashion diffusion theory. In the first chapter of this project, I relied on an evaluation of Georg Simmel's 1904 trickle-down theory to show that the best way to have understood fashion diffusion thus far was through a chase and flight pattern of behaviour where one social group tries to capture the lure of another group's style, while the latter group creates new trends in an attempt to remain distinctive. Simmel's principles of fashion (to equalize and to differentiate) remain the strongest elements of his work and continue to apply to study of fashion today. The question of this inquiry was then reformulated to ask whether or not the advent of personal style bloggers as influencers in the fashion system presents a challenge to this theory.

The second chapter offered a first attempt at the answer, but only revealed the extent to which the personal style blog is cloaked in rhetoric. True, I reviewed how technological advancements, particularly the growth of interactive media on the Web 2.0, has altered the producer-consumer relationship in such a way that refutes the idea of gatekeepers who push trends forward in one direction. Fashions do in fact seem more malleable and inclusive when no one person fully controls "the message of the season." The result of this change, however, was the adoption of a rhetoric of democratization by the old guard in an attempt to keep the consumer enticed. Yet, the traditional gatekeepers are not the only ones who have something to gain by claiming that fashion belongs to all. As we saw, bloggers too have an interest in continuing to portray themselves as "fashion outsiders." This narrative allows them to appear as exotic curiosities to fashion veterans rather than their replacements. It also separates them from the media in a manner that makes them seem more "authentic" and allies them to their readers, especially those who do not usually see themselves in traditional fashion representations. Yet, the idea that the Web has brought forth the full emancipation of minorities in fashion is a myth. The success of a blog still depends on the pre-established principles of selection and publicity. To be recognized as an influencer in the press, bloggers must: (1) have the ability to create

controversy, (2) fit the depiction of the ideal subject in capitalist society (as someone who is young, White/Asian, thin, and publishes their work in English), (3) have established connections with a network of other bloggers or with members of the industry, and (4) have capital resources at their disposal. The capacity of a blogger to meet these criteria then impacts his or her ability to generate a profit from their online activities. Therefore, the hierarchy of the fashion hegemony actually does continue to be in effect in the digital sphere. Furthermore, I also showed how the principles of differentiation and equalization go on to determine our sartorial behaviour even in the digital era and amongst social misfits who, thanks to the blogosphere, chose to align themselves with subcultural groups and bloggers instead of with mainstream fashion ideals. Still, the personal style blog offers a new dimension to fashion communications: it is a more “authentic” and communal medium than those of the past. The implications of this facet of personal style blogging could not be fully explained by trickle-down theory. Consequently, the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger, specifically his description of authenticity and inauthenticity, was used to supplement our understanding of contemporary fashion.

In chapter 3, I used Heidegger’s concepts of authenticity and inauthenticity to explain how the personal style blog can still be viewed as “authentic” when it perpetuates the norms and structural inequalities of mainstream culture. Authenticity, in the Heideggerian sense, was defined as both a moment of truth and a modification of the everyday, resulting in an outlook characterized by an awareness of the threat of the “They” (*das Man*), an indebtedness to one’s heritage and culture, and “resoluteness” which requires an open and affirmative attitude towards the possibilities of one’s existence. A close reading of a singular and compelling post from Tavi Gevinson’s *The Style Rookie* showed how certain features of the personal style blog can be maximized so that the medium can act as a trigger for a moment of authentic understanding, as I have just explained it above. First, by effectively being a diary of sorts, the personal style blog documents and enacts the author’s life journey. It can then be employed by the subject and its readers as a space to reflect on our relation to ourselves and on how our self-concept changes through time. Second, the communal features of the blogosphere encourage others to partake in a

discussion that can question the norms of the “They,” or our common understanding of phenomena. This kind of critical conversation is crucial to authentic thought. Besides, it generates an account of a broader, shared experience, which highlights the realization that the self does not evolve in isolation. Finally, the practice of sharing one’s aesthetic inspirations in posts, a definitive element to personal style blogging, helps the author to appreciate how his or her tastes and experiences are shaped by a cultural heritage that has come before him or her. Of course, the personal style blog can do all of these things if and only if the blogger’s attitude is “resolute,” meaning that he or she chooses to engage with the medium and all of its individualized, expressive potential, and not simply reproduce the discourses readily available in the fashion system.

This analysis then allowed me to draw the broader conclusions and theoretical implications of the personal style blog’s impact on diffusion theory. Applying Heidegger’s philosophy to Simmel’s theory of fashion allowed me to do five things. To start, it brought into the fold an individualized interpretation of dressing that initially escaped Simmel in his work. The adoption of a style of dress does not just depend on social interactions and groupings; it is also a function of the wearer’s unique journey. Next, Heidegger’s argument for the two modes of being, authenticity and inauthenticity, grounds Simmel’s principles of fashion, differentiation and equalization, giving them an ontological justification. In other words, thanks to Heidegger, I am able to clarify why the principles of fashion have the appeal that they do. Similarly, Heidegger’s explanation of our being “thrown” in the world takes on greater significance since it provides the rationale for explaining why despite its more “authentic” features blogging still advances the average opinions and false truths of *das Man*. Since we are irrevocably tied to the world that we live in, we can never entirely detach ourselves from the discourses of meaning that it generates and promotes. Likewise, as a form of communication and advertising, blogs are a part of the media complex and evolve in that “world.” From Heidegger’s work, we are able to infer then that bloggers are bound to promote or at least take a stance on all that is involved in that system with an approach that corresponds to their own personal biases. Additionally, the

exploration of authenticity and inauthenticity was used to explain the self-perpetuating fashion cycle in a way that countered some of the critiques placed on Simmel's theory. Namely, it was associated to the notion that fashion innovations are born on the margins of society and get co-opted by mainstream culture, only to lose their original meaning. This trajectory follows the path that we take moving in and out of authentic and inauthentic understanding. Lastly, Heidegger's writing on the subject of time was discussed to bring a more fluid account of temporality into the study of fashion. This provided me with the tools needed to overcome the greatest limitation of Simmel's theory: its inability to recognize that fashions resurface.

Fashion as an expression of time proved to be a key point in my study of the personal style blog. In the final sections of this paper, I tried to show how our own temporality mirrors fashion's connection to time. Both humans and fashion are in constant motion, they are becoming; they are future oriented; and they are determined by their limited existence. Fashion is equally self-referential: it takes up its past and reinterprets it as the next trends. Innovation is created through this process. In tandem, our future possibilities are determined by our past, and our past takes on different meanings in the future. The dialectical image, an idea developed by Walter Benjamin and employed by Lehmann and Evans, was used to show how fashion reveals its relationship to this concept of non-linear, malleable temporality. When two images of different time periods or settings are placed together, they create a synthesis of meaning that had not previously existed: novelty. Hence, since the very basis of personal style blogs is the inclusion of a mash-up of images through time, basically dialectical images, it follows to suggest that they stimulate the creation of new fashions. Our conclusion then can be as simple as: the personal style blog, with its unprecedented growth, has placed the power of fashion on overdrive.

Ultimately, though, the goal of my work was to show how blogging illuminates the potential that fashion has to reflect our very existence. We dress, we look at ourselves in the mirror – or digital screens – and we gain a sense of self. Yet, fashion goes further than that, and blogging makes it obvious. When approached authentically, blogging allows us to reflect on and see the interconnectedness of being. It simultaneously calls attention to the arbitrariness of

fashion and its rules, while freeing dress up to be a creative manifestation of Being-in-the-World. Herein lies the appeal of the personal style blog. It is representative of the paradox inherent to fashion. Dual in nature, it vacillates between being an expression of the inauthentic *das Man* and being a tool for authentic understanding. It reminds us that fashion too finds itself in a constant struggle between its commercial interests and its creative ambitions. The personal style blog is able to expose this ambivalence because of the way that it has already been interpreted by the fashion press and because of the characteristics of its format. Blogging's popularity prompts a discussion about democratization and otherness in fashion, which drives us to the admission that fashion remains elitist despite protestations to the contrary. However, because the format of the personal style blog itself, the blog encourages its authors, and subsequently its readers, to reflect upon and share their fashion inspirations in a way that re-appropriates trends, currents, and images so that they align with the individualized experience. The blog can then also be viewed as an authentic and revolutionary means of expression.

Returning to Elizabeth Wilson, in the introduction to *Adorned in Dreams*, she offers that:

Fashion parodies itself. In elevating the ephemeral to cult status it ultimately mocks many of the moral pretensions of the dominant culture, which in turn, has denounced it for its surface frivolity while perhaps secretly stung by the way in which fashion pricks the whole moral balloon. At the same time, fashion is taken at face value and dismissed as trivial, in an attempt to deflect the sting of its true seriousness, its surreptitious unmasking of hypocrisy (10).

For years fashion has been dismissed as inconsequential, but this project shows that it is a complex social phenomenon that can impact how we understand ourselves and others, continuing a tradition of thought developed in the works of academics like Wilson. The aim of this paper was not to examine the practical implications of the impact of personal style blogging on the fashion industry. Instead, it demonstrates from a theoretical perspective how fashion blogging has given us a body of evidence that can be





investigated from a multi-disciplinary and critical approach so that fashion can be analyzed to reveal the spirit of our time.




APPENDIX 1

An Overview of the 25 Most Influential Personal Style Bloggers



Table 1

The 25 Most Influential Personal Style Bloggers Overviewed by Age, Origin, Language of their Blog, and Adherence to the “Beauty Standard”^a


Rank	Image	Blog	Blogger	Age	Blogger's Origin	Language of Blog	Beauty Standard ^b
1		Garotas Estupidas	Camila Coutinho	23	Brazilian	Portuguese	◆
2		Cupcakes & Cashmere	Emily Schuman	29	American	English	○
3		Fashion Toast	Rumi Neely	N/A	Asian (American)	English	◆
4		Garance Doré	Garance Doré	37	French	English / French	○

Rank	Image	Blog	Blogger	Age	Blogger's Origin	Language of Blog	Beauty Standard ^b
5		The Blond Salad	Chiara Ferragni	25	Italian	English/ Italian/ Portuguese	○
6		The Man Repeller	Leandra Medine	24	American	English	◆
7		The Cherry Blossom Girl	Alix Bancourt	28	French	English / French	○
8		Le Blog de Betty	Betty Authier	29	French	English / French	○
9		Camille Tries to Blog	Camille Co	24	Asian (Philippines)	English	◆

Rank	Image	Blog	Blogger	Age	Blogger's Origin	Language of Blog	Beauty Standard ^b
10		Atlantic Pacific	Blair Eadie	N/A	American	English	○
11		Street Etiquette	Joshua Kissi & Travis Gumbs	N/A	African American	English	■
12		Style Scrapbook	Andy Torres	N/A	Mexican	English	◆
13		Bryanboy	Bryan Grey-Yambao	31*	Asian (Philippines)	English	■
14		Sea of Shoes	Jane Aldridge	21	American	English	○

Rank	Image	Blog	Blogger	Age	Blogger's Origin	Language of Blog	Beauty Standard ^b
15		What I Wore	Jessica Quirk	N/A	American	English	○
16		Style Bubble	Susie Lau	29	Asian (Hong Kong / UK)	English	◆
17		Anna dello Russo	Anna dello Russo	50	Italian	English/ Italian	○
18		Depois dos quinze	Bruna Vieira	18	Brazilian	Portuguese	◆
19		The Glamourai	Kelly Framel	29	American	English	○

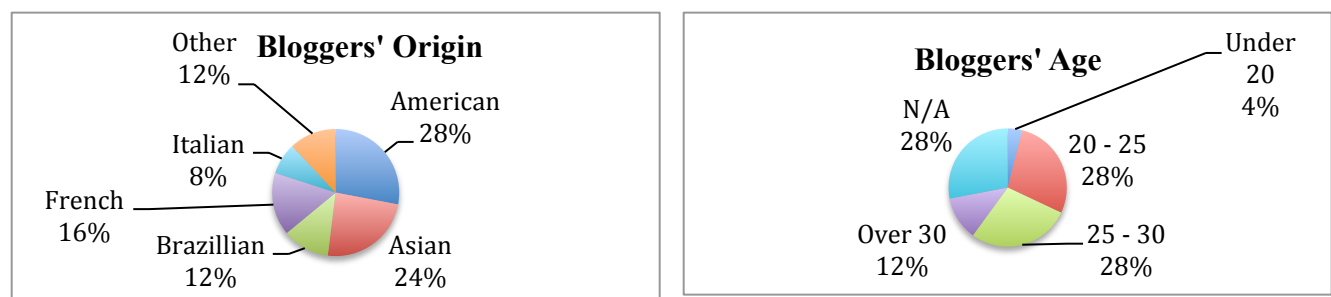
Rank	Image	Blog	Blogger	Age	Blogger's Origin	Language of Blog	Beauty Standard ^b
20		Gala Darling	Gala Darling	29	New Zealander	English	◆
21		Blog da Mariah	Mariah Bernardes	N/A	Brazilian	Portuguese	◆
22		Break my Style	Laureen Uy	21	Asian (Philippines)	English	◆
23		Miss Pandora	Louise Ebel	24	French	English/ French/ Japanese	○
24		Wendy's Lookbook	Wendy Nguyen	N/A	Asian (American)	English	◆

Rank	Image	Blog	Blogger	Age	Blogger's Origin	Language of Blog	Beauty Standard ^b
25		Kate Loves Me	Pelayo Diaz Zapico	24	Spanish	English/Spanish	◆

Source: Signature9; *The 99 Most Influential Fashion & Beauty Blogs*; Signature9/ Style99; Dindeo, Inc., 19 Mar. 2013; Web; 30 Mar. 2013.
<http://www.signature9.com/style-99>

Analysis of the Results

The overview of the top 25 personal style bloggers proves to be very insightful to the deconstruction of the “rhetoric of democratization” advanced by the fashion press. First, the distribution of the bloggers according to their origin proves that the majority of the authors are based in the “Global North:” they are American, French, or Italian. There is a significant amount of Asian and Brazilian bloggers too, which points to the growing importance of these new consumer markets. Furthermore, all Asian bloggers on the list publish their blogs in English. In fact, 60% of the blogs on the list are only in English, while the French and Italian blogs offer more than one edition. The Brazilian blogs, however, are just in Portuguese. In terms of the bloggers age, the majority are in their twenties, reinforcing the notion that bloggers are young. Yet, it should be noted that there is a good portion of the recognized authors who do not readily disclose their age. This omission could suggest that they may be older than thirty and feel a certain pressure to hide their age to conform to the youth ideal. There is only one teen on the list, which can perhaps be explained by the fact that women in their twenties have more resources at their disposal to dedicate to their work and turn blogging into a full-time career. Finally, the first African-American bloggers are Joshua Kissi and Travis Gumbs from *Street Etiquette* at number 11. The next Black blogger on the overall list of 99, *GabiFresh*, is number 88 and number 35 of the personal style bloggers. She is also the only plus-size blogger on Signature9’s rankings of the most influential fashion blogs. The number of featured African-American bloggers is limited compared to the number of Asian and even Brazilian bloggers on the list. This confirms the claim that the diversification of the fashion arena has more to do with the growth of emerging markets like Brazil and China, than with the democratization of the system.



^a The data from this table was drawn from The Style9’s index of the 99 most influential fashion and beauty blogs. Their methodology takes a database of over 5000 blogs and the quantifies each blog’s influence using analytical data from Google and Majestic SEO to evaluate their content’s reach and data from Facebook and Twitter APIs to evaluate the amount of social engagement that the blog generates. The blogs are then divided according to category: beauty, celebrity style, DIY, fashion films, fashion illustration, fashion news, fashion business news, men’s personal style, men’s shoes, men’s style, original fashion photography, personal style, republished fashion photography, shopping, and street style. For this paper, I took the top 25 personal style and men’s personal style blogs from this list and overviewed certain social characteristics of the bloggers including age, country of origin, and physical appearance, as well as the language(s) in which the blog is published by visiting each blog’s about/information page or post.

^b Adherence to the “Beauty Standard” can be a subjective evaluation. Thus, in my coding, bloggers were designated as challenging the norm if (1) they were not of Caucasian descent, (2) they were plus-size, or (3) they were offering an alternative take on gender representation. If they did not meet any of these criteria, they were coded with this symbol: ○. If they met one of the three criteria, they were coded with this symbol: ◆. Finally, if they met 2 or more of criteria, they were coded with this symbol: ■.

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