THE SOCIAL LIVES OF UK FASHION BLOGS

Susan Eldred

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of St Andrews

2013

Full metadata for this item is available in Research@StAndrews:FullText at: http://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/

Please use this identifier to cite or link to this item: http://hdl.handle.net/10023/4207

This item is protected by original copyright
THE SOCIAL LIVES OF UK FASHION BLOGS

by Susan Eldred
1. Candidate’s declarations:

I, Susan Eldred hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 68,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in [September, 2008] and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in [September, 2009]; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2009 and 2013.

(If you received assistance in writing from anyone other than your supervisor/s):

I, …., received assistance in the writing of this thesis in respect of [language, grammar, spelling or syntax], which was provided by ….

Date …… signature of candidate ……..

2. Supervisor’s declaration:

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date …… signature of supervisor ……..

3. Permission for electronic publication: (to be signed by both candidate and supervisor)

In submitting this thesis to the University of St Andrews I understand that I am giving permission for it to be made available for use in accordance with the regulations of the University Library for the time being in force, subject to any copyright vested in the work not being affected thereby. I also understand that the title and the abstract will be published, and that a copy of the work may be made and supplied to any bona fide library or research worker, that my thesis will be electronically accessible for personal or research use unless exempt by award of an embargo as requested below, and that the library has the right to migrate my thesis into new electronic forms as required to ensure continued access to the thesis. I have obtained any third-party copyright permissions that may be required in order to allow such access and migration, or have requested the appropriate embargo below.

The following is an agreed request by candidate and supervisor regarding the electronic publication of this thesis:

Add one of the following options:

(i) Access to printed copy and electronic publication of thesis through the University of St Andrews.

Date …… signature of candidate …….. signature of supervisor ……..

A supporting statement for a request for an embargo must be included with the submission of the draft copy of the thesis. Where part of a thesis is to be embargoed, please specify the part and the reasons.
The Social Lives of UK Fashion Blogs

Susan Eldred

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of PhD at the University of St Andrews

11 July 2013
Abstract

This thesis is the result of twenty-five months of ethnographic fieldwork, both online and offline, in the United Kingdom working with London-based fashion bloggers. This research aims to examine the ways that bloggers negotiate between style and identity through the presentation of self in online environments, more specifically fashion blogs and corresponding social media websites, as well as offline spaces, including London Fashion Week, industry events, and regular social interactions with other bloggers and blog readers. It also address the relationships between bloggers and members of the fashion industry, as the industry struggles to define a place for them. Furthermore, this thesis hopes to contribute to growing debates regarding the potentiality of media anthropology to influence the creation and production of ethnographic texts.
Acknowledgements

This ethnography owes a great deal to the fashion bloggers and their families who so willingly welcomed me into their lives over the past three years. I would especially like to thank Sherin Malick, Reena Rai, Daniela Moronsini and Milana Saric for their ongoing support, whether this was advising me in blogger etiquette, sharing tickets to London Fashion Week shows and events, or responding to my frequent calls, texts, or emails whenever it was that I needed to ‘check something.’ I would also like to thank Lucy Williams, Michael Ford, Charlie May, Jennifer Inglis, Alexsia Elizabeth, Natalie Hughes, Lucy Nicholls, Carrie Harwood, Matthew Zorpas, Rosalind Jana, Jazmine Rocks, and photographers Ed Thompson and Adam James Richardson for kindly granting me the permission to print their photographs here.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Adam Reed for his invaluable guidance throughout my PhD. I couldn't have asked for a better supervisor or quicker feedback on chapters! I would also like to extend my thanks to Stephanie Bunn and Ilana Gershon for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Additional thanks to Holly Patrick, Nina Holm Vohnsen, Anna Gustafsson, Christopher Hewlett, Victor Cova, Priscilla Santos da Costa, Juan Pablo Sarmiento Barletti, Ole Thomassen Hjortland for their comments on earlier chapters or help along the way.

Finally, I would like to thank my Mom, Dad, and big sister Elizabeth.

July 11, 2011
## Contents

**Abstract** ............................................................. ii  
**Acknowledgements** ............................................. iii  
**List of Figures** ................................................... v  
**Get off the Internet (I'll Meet You In The Street)** ...................... 1  
Entering 'The Field' ................................................... 6  
What is Fashion Blogging? ........................................... 16  
The Production of Texts ............................................. 20  
Chapter Outline ...................................................... 22  

1. **Anatomy of a Fashion Blog** .................................. 27  
1.1 Introductions ................................................... 30  
1.2 Different Publics ................................................. 39  
1.3 What's Blogable? ................................................ 41  

2. **The Social Lives of Fashion Blogs** .......................... 46  
2.1 Friendship ....................................................... 49  
2.2 Remediation ..................................................... 53  
2.3 Etiquette .......................................................... 58  

3. **Fashion Me Now** ............................................. 61  
3.1 Talking About Fashion ........................................ 65  
3.2 Styling ............................................................. 68  
3.3 Exchange .......................................................... 75  
3.4 Authenticity ...................................................... 79  

4. **Smile With Teeth** ............................................. 81  
4.1 Self-portraits .................................................... 87  
4.2 Taking Pictures .................................................. 95  
4.3 Feedback .......................................................... 112  

5. **London Fashion Week** ....................................... 115  
5.1 The Collections ................................................ 130  
5.2 Everyone Hates Bloggers ...................................... 134  
5.3 Catwalk ............................................................ 139  

**Conclusion** ........................................................... 141  

**References** .......................................................... 143
List of Figures

i  Screenshot of one of my published blog posts from October 2012.  11
ii  Screenshot of the Typepad blogging platform.  12
iii Screenshot of a blog post in progress.  12
iv  Screenshot of the Google Analytics overall site statistics for my blog.  13
v   Screenshot of Google Analytics demographic information.  14
vi Screenshot of Google Analytics demographic information (UK).  14
vii Screenshot of a Twitter conversation with my informants.  15
1.1 Screenshot of Carrie’s blog, Wish Wish Wish.  23
1.2 Screenshot of Natalie’s blog, Canned Fashion.  24
1.3 Screenshot of Michael’s blog, Anastasia and Duck  25
1.4 Screenshot of Sherin’s blog, Hi Fashion  26
3.1 The Take 10 feature in the December 2011 issue of Company Magazine.  73
3.2 Natalie from Canned Fashion’s Pinterest page.  77
4.1 Photographer Tim Walker, photographed by Carrie Harwood  99
4.2 Carrie holding one of her cameras, photographed by her boyfriend.  99
4.3 Charlie (Girl a La Mode) outfit photograph.  100
4.4 Jazmine (Jazzabelle’s Diary) outfit photograph.  100
4.5 Michael (Anastasia and Duck) outfit photograph.  101
4.6 Rosalind (Clothes, Cameras and Coffee) outfit photograph.  102
4.7 Natalie (Canned Fashion) outfit photograph.  103
4.8 Kristabel (I Want You to Know) outfit photograph and details.  104
4.9 Matthew Zorpas (The Gentleman Blogger) outfit photograph.  105
4.10 Alexxsia Elizabeth (My Labyrinth) outfit photograph.  106
4.11 The author being photographed by a professional photographer.  107
4.12 Photograph of bloggers projected on The National Gallery.  108
4.13 Lucy Williams (Fashion Me Now) outfit post.  109
4.13 Lucy Nicholls (Snippets of Shiny Thoughts) outfit post.  110
5.1 Mulberry models.  121
5.2 Street style photograph, taken outside of Somerset House.  122
5.3 The author, streetstyled by photographer Adam Richardson.  122
5.4 Street style photograph taken at Somerset House.  123
5.5 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.  123
5.6 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.  124
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>London Fashion Week show invites, badges and tote bag.</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>From the Bora Aksu SS12 runway show.</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>From the James Long SS12 runway show.</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>Bloggers working at the Blogger Bar at Somerset House.</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>Bloggers street style each other (February 2012)</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Get Off the Internet, I’ll Meet You in the Street

One thing to think about particularly when conducting research about internet: When is it that my fieldwork starts? When does it end? To further complicate things: When should I consider the first ‘meeting’ of my informants? Is it the first time that we make contact online, or do we count it as the day that we first met in person? If we are to go with the latter, then how should I interpret the weeks prior to that which were spent talking online, clearly an important part of our initial introduction, a time spent chatting back and forth in a virtual space? Or, suppose that we weren’t chatting during those initial interactions, perhaps I should consider that time spent as something different altogether. I was reminded of this by Ava, my key informant and self-described ‘blogger BFF’ (that’s ‘blogger Best Friend Forever’) when, eight months into fieldwork, I mentioned that I remembered the first time that she commented on my blog and she had absolutely no recollection of it. ‘When was it? What did I say?’ she asked me and I recounted the several short lines from my memory to her right then and there. ‘Really?’ she said, ‘That’s so funny. I don’t remember writing that at all.’

Bloggers use different categories to describe the kinds of relationships that they have with each other. These categories relate to the way that they self-identify as bloggers, how they differentiate between relationships (including kinds of friendships), as well as how they understand and follow particular codes of practice (e.g. blogger and industry etiquette, as will be discussed in the following chapters). How they distinguish between their relationships with other bloggers can depend on a number of things: shared interests, taste and aesthetics, proximity to each other, brand relationships (e.g. if they work with the same brands), and ‘bigness’, as well as other factors (as will be discussed later). Yet, while bloggers have different classifications to describe these relations, they are in no way formulaic. A relationship that is likened to a pen-pal dynamic by one blogger, for example, may be referred much more impersonally by another. This is particularly noticeable when describing the dynamic between bloggers who have very different ideas about what their relationship to each other is like, a knowledge that is usually based on how they communicate, including the frequency and perceived quality (e.g. personal nature, length of contact) of their interactions, and how it compares with their other relationships. These disconnects are mirrored by the way that bloggers

1 From Le Tigre’s “Get Off the Internet”, From the Desk of Mr Lady (EP) (2001).
use social media to communicate with each other which, to draw on Gershon (2008, 2010), is
demonstrative of the different media ideologies that they hold and may result in
miscommunication. ‘Most of the comments that I leave I’m just returning,’ Ava explains me,
‘they comment on my blog and I’ll write something back on theirs. It’s not that I don’t mean what
I’m writing it’s just...it’s probably going to be a short note about something that I liked in their
post. I’m not going to remember it. And since bloggers tend to post about the same kinds of
things, a lot of the comments you’ll write will end up being quite similar, like “Nice shoes,” you
know? They don’t really stand out.’

In this case, Ava uses metaphors of reading and writing when she talks about leaving
comments; she does not make a comparison to chatting. Different forms of mediated
communication do draw comparison to in person communication, often to such an extent that
‘face to face’ may be viewed as an additional form of mediated communication, (c.f. Gershon,
2008: 14). However, fashion bloggers consider reader comments to be a part of the production of
their blogs. The exchanges that occur in these spaces are one of the collaborative elements of
blogging and one important factor in the reciprocal relationships that develop between bloggers.
While Ava has no recollection of the first comment that she left me, several read-throughs of my
blog and a series of tweets exchanged between us were key factors in her decision to meet me in
person. These correspondences allowed her to gain insight about me as a person and a fellow
blogger. By viewing my photographs, she was able to ascertain what I looked like and what kind
of things that I was interested in. She could also gain knowledge about who I publicly interacted
with through my blog (e.g. readers who left comments, blogs that I linked to on my blogroll).
When doing this, she could also see any followers we had in common. The narrative
accompanying the images in each post also allowed her to gain some insight into my personality,
although most of my informants admitted that they pay less attention to the text than they do to
the images. However, it is this first in person or ‘in real life’ meeting that Ava considers to be ‘the
day we met’ and the beginning of our friendship. She does not discount the initial mediated
communications we had as anything ‘less real’ than any other kind of communications, but they
were not as important to her at the time. She had less invested in them because she didn’t ‘know’
me.

Bloggers differentiate between the kinds of knowledge that one might gain from a person’s
blog and the kinds of knowledge that one garners from meeting people (and objects) in person.  

---

2 Ava describes this initial ‘in real life’ meeting like this to me, other bloggers, and her friends who are familiar
with blogging as when we met. However, when others ask Ava about how we met, particularly non bloggers,
she has told them that we met at an industry event ‘because we both run fashion blogs’ or fashion websites.’
Her answer to this question has to do with a perceived stigma about meeting people online,’ and a
subsequent reluctance to talk about it, which will be discussed in Chapter 2.
However, they do not articulate too much anxiety about the disconnects between how someone or something may appear in both contexts. It seems as first that this might be a contradiction, but bloggers explain that they are able to determine the kind of relationship that they would like to have with other bloggers and whether or not they would like to maintain this relationship with them online, offline, or both. Similar to Reed’s (2005) webloggers, my informants claim that, if anything, regularly meeting with other fashion bloggers makes more evident the consistencies between persons and their blogs, rather than emphasizing the disconnects (p. 236). Ava tells me, ‘For the most part, the people that you meet are just as you expect them to be. But if I met someone in person and found them annoying, I might try to avoid that person at future events or I might stop reading their blog, especially if I was only so-so about it to begin with. I’m definitely not going to start making plans with them outside of the blog.’ While bloggers often read each others blogs before meeting in person, the reverse is also likely to occur especially in London where there are frequent industry-coordinated meet-ups for bloggers. Ava mentions an instance in which she had developed a friendship with a blogger but disliked reading her blog. In this case, she read the blog for the first time after meeting the blogger one of these industry events and exchanged blog links with her there\(^3\). She says, ‘Sometimes it’s the tone, you’ know? It’s how she came across through her writing. ‘On her blog, she seemed kind of...well, she seemed really full of herself but she was such a lovely person in real life. I keep hanging out with her, I love hanging out with her, I just don’t read her blog that much, to be honest.’ It is also common for bloggers to follow a blog for a short amount of time or to only visit it on a sporadic basis. Given the number of fashion blogs in existence on a global level\(^4\), let alone within the UK (In 2012, Cosmopolitan UK reported that it received over 40,000 nominations in the ‘Best UK fashion blog’ category for the Cosmo Blog Awards). ‘In the end,’ Isla, 18, explains, ‘you don’t read most blogs forever. Sure, there are some old favorites that you’ll stick with and you’ll keep checking in on your close friends, but as for the rest of them...You just don’t have the time to keep up.’

I should mention here, that when distinguishing between online and offline or ‘in real life’ kinds of communication, I am not implying that bloggers’ knowledge of the internet is based on the understanding of a virtual and actual dichotomy\(^5\). Bloggers use these terms to distinguish between mediated and unmediated interactions. In doing so, they demonstrate their understanding of the limitations of mediated communication and the level of construction and

---

\(^3\) Bloggers commonly exchange blog links at events by introducing themselves as ‘from’ their blog or by exchanging business cards that they have designed specifically for their blogs.

\(^4\) According to Corcoran (2006) Technorati estimated that there were 2 million fashion and shopping related blogs worldwide in 2005.

\(^5\) See Bartle (2004) for a comprehensive history of virtual worlds (p. 4-31).
curation that occurs when presenting one’s self online, whether this is on a blog or another form of social media, such as Facebook or Twitter. They extend this knowledge to objects as well; they know that colors, textures, and other physical qualities of garments are likely to appear differently in photographs than they do in person, for example. Even more so than the average consumer, fashion bloggers are well-versed in the ability of editing software to transform objects and persons and they are also privy to the way that the presentation and arrangement of images and text may have an impact on a person’s perception of an object or person. While I will describe this process in more substantial depth in later chapters, I would like to first note the way that I structured my fieldwork and how this affected my meetings with my informants, our knowledge of each other and their role in the ongoing collaborative production of this text.

In total, my fieldwork was conducted over a period of twenty-five months. The first seven months were spent blogging from St Andrews beginning in May 2010, followed by ten months (while still blogging) of fieldwork conducted in the London area. I continued to blog for an additional eight months after I returned to St Andrews before closing my blog in late June of 2012. I did not intend to complete twenty-five months of fieldwork when I began my project, and certainly not in this manner. Yet, while the lines between where my fieldwork begins and ends are blurry, the methodology of this project is essential to its argument. As Hine (2009) writes, ‘A set of fieldwork boundaries is the outcome of a project, rather than its precursor. The decision about when to start and stop, and where to go in between, is for ethnographers not made independently of the field, but is an intrinsic part of the relationship to it (18).’ My fieldwork strategy was constructed by my own reluctances: my initial reluctance to relocate, followed by my reluctance to stop blogging once I returned. When I initially developed this project, I debated the possibility of remaining in Fife and conducting my research primarily ‘over the internet’ with a series of comprehensive in-person interviews thrown in for good measure. At the time, it seemed like this might be a possibility, especially given the arguments that have been made for investigating online communities and virtual worlds using their own parameters (e.g. Boellstorff, 2007; Pearce, 2011). As anthropologists, we take it that ‘the field’ that we visit is not clearly bounded by geographic parameters, but when we extend this conversation to media anthropology we are afforded additional difficulties. The way that one might situate his or her research is largely dependant upon the question at hand and how that question comes to evolve during the research process. The idea that a ‘virtual world’ can be examined as an entirety in

---


itself is an argument that can be made, but only if there is a virtual world in question. To draw on Miller & Slater (2000), if should virtuality be the case, it is something that should be looked at as a practical accomplishment, rather than a starting point (p. 5).

I quickly learned that any ethnography about fashion blogging in the United Kingdom would warrant substantial ‘deep hanging out’ with bloggers offline because that is what fashion bloggers do. They are not unique in this, others have chronicled the way that online relationships have continued in offline environments (See Rheingold, 1994, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 2006; Reed 2008, Golub, 2010.) My informants do not see fashion blogging as something that exists as part of a virtual world, but as a series of practices that are deeply embedded within their daily lives. They do not appropriate their fashion blogs into their everyday lives, but center these practices around the curation, construction and performed presentation of self in public spaces, whether these spaces are virtual or actual. In doing so, they continually reinvent themselves through the appropriation of material culture and the development of personal style. I quickly came to see that blogging permeated into many areas of their lives, even when they expressed initial reluctance to keep things separate. While blogs might be viewed as cultural objects, blogging is an activity that is not so neatly compartmentalized especially given the different social networks that result, which influence the way that bloggers experience life on an everyday basis (See Mitchell, 1996).

My initial reluctance to relocate, while seemingly ironic for an anthropologist, ended up being beneficial to my research. The first seven months allowed me to familiarize myself with blogging and to undergo the conversion of becoming a blogger. I often suggest to people who are interested in starting a blog that they ‘keep at it’ diligently for at least two months, as it can take time for blogging to come naturally to them. Many people begin blogs but promptly abandon them after a few sporadic posts (one reason that blogs are such difficult things to count). When reflecting on this initial period, many bloggers have told me that there comes a point when blogging starts to seem like less of a chore and more of a habit or hobby. For some, this period is only a matter of days but for others, like me, it can take months to ‘get into it.’ Of course, there are still moments when blogging is tiring, when bloggers grow exasperated with writing posts and all of the different activities that lead up to them. Yet, many blogger milestones provide encouragement and excitement along the way, such as first comments, press coverage, freebies (or gifted goods), being street-styled, advertising contracts, London Fashion Week press accreditation and invitations to London Fashion Week catwalk shows. These milestones

---

8 See Geertz (1998).

9 Drawing on Goffman’s (1990) theory that the identity is constructed through the ongoing performance of self, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.
contribute to the feeling that a blogger is ‘building something’ through their blog, a growth that they are able to measure mathematically by viewing their site statistics (see Figure v. for an example of Google Analytics site statistics for my blog). They are also able to measure this growth socially, given changes in social status, the relationships that they develop with others, and access to different opportunities and events. For me, the gifted goods, show invites, and other major milestones came much later, once I began doing fieldwork in London. Access to these different items and opportunities were facilitated by the relationships that I developed with my informants, especially Ava, who brought me along as her ‘plus one’ to different industry blogger events, passed along the link to my blog to different press contacts and introduced me to many of her ‘blogger friends.’ Furthermore, when writing about our excursions, my informants facilitated the growth of my blog socially by introducing me to their readers and social networks, as well as in terms of site statistics. I should mention that my initial, more ‘remote’ experience of blogging from Fife is one that many other bloggers likely share, as those who blog from less urban locations are less likely to meet up with other bloggers with the same frequency as I did once I began my fieldwork in London. When the time came for me to meet Ava in person, she knew me as a blogger first, the ‘anthropology bit’ as she would say, was something that she became more familiar with as we got to know each other in real life.

**Entering ‘the field’**

Returning from the field, I soon discovered that my own computer was a distraction. It seemed as if I was barraged with constant disruptions in the form of Tweets, Facebook messages, and Skype chats with my informants (not unwelcome by me) and an ongoing desire to keep blogging. Blogging ‘gets under your skin,’ especially if someone has an affinity for it. I found, as many bloggers claimed that I would, that it can be difficult to stop. As with many of my informants, the documentation, production and presentation of daily events - whether this might be the acquisition or review of a new item or coverage of an industry event, became a regular part of my life. I came to enjoy the creative process through which I could construct or transform a moment using my camera, image editing software, accompanying text and, of course, Typepad, the blogging platform that brought it all together. (See Fig. 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3 for examples of the blogging template and what one of my finished blog posts looked like.) At the same time, my blog was also a fieldnote, one that I could easily search to find information about particular outings, conversations, and other events. My other fieldnotes were scattered in notebooks, napkins, and other scraps of paper, but the fieldnote that I found most useful and that I always returned to was my blog. It was organized in reverse chronological format, searchable, but also
an archive that could be read by anyone with interest and internet access, including my informants, as it developed. The blog captured both my transformation into a fashion blogger and my fieldwork experience, for while the geographic locations varied (Anstruther, Reading, London, and St Andrews), the blog provided the continuity that linked all of these different places together. What bloggers do is not unlike what anthropologists do when they are conducting fieldwork. They, to quote Rapport (1993), ‘select, translate and narrate “a day’s impressions” in each of their posts (p. 10).’ I came to see that their blogs were as much fieldnotes as mine; that I could also experience our different encounters from their point of view, in their words, through their camera lenses. At the same time, their ‘fieldnotes’ were not texts that would direct towards a different kind of writing at a later point, as mine would.

For several months after I returned from England, I wrestled with the idea of whether or not I should stop blogging. A few of my colleagues told me that I should stop, while others argued that I should be able to continue. The debate largely centered on whether or not the internet was my field site and to what extent it is necessary that anthropologists leave the field in order to gain perspective. ‘It’s not really your field site after all,’ one colleague said, ‘plus, what about all that free stuff? You don’t want to give that up.’ I doubt that I would have been able to form the same kinds of close relationships with my informants had I not spend time with them in person over a period of ten months. Yet, our mediated communications were just as important, as were the periods of time spent blogging from two small Scottish towns in Fife. Or perhaps, it is more accurate to say that the internet serves as part of my field site, along with a series of networks that I developed within the Greater London area (and, if we are to be more specific, primarily within zones 1-2). That is, the ‘place’ that composes my fieldsite is a serious of locations, which were determined by the relations that I developed with my informants, whether these conversations were mediated or not. Starting my blog in May of 2010 set the stage for many of the relationships that I would develop with my informants when I moved. However, as mentioned earlier, it did this primarily by beginning my conversion to a fashion blogger. Many of the people who commented on my blog at this time did not become informants when I relocated, or at least not in the way that I expected. This was due to a number of factors: some of them did not live in the Greater London area, some returned comments mainly as an act of reciprocity, and some stopped reading my blog after a few months for whatever reason, whether this was due

---

10 See Appadurai’s (1996) ‘ethnoscapes’ (Chapter 2), which considers different kinds of spaces that might come together to constitute a fieldsite.

11 See Gotlub’s article about World of Warcraft (2010) in which he argues that anthropologists should ‘imagine its subject to be systems of meanings and commitments which are spread across multiple locations, rather than discrete places which have a ‘culture.’” (p. 20).
to a lack of interest, other priorities, etc. In other instances, we continued to ‘return comments’ to each other but did not meet in person, or met only a few times - hardly enough time to develop an ongoing relationship. At the same time, the interactions between these bloggers and I also informed my thesis, they are - as with the close network of bloggers that developed in the London area - very much involved in the production of this ethnographic text.

My initial period spent blogging before relocating helped me to decide where it was that I should go, as the greatest percentage of my blog readers were from the Greater London area (See Fig. v, Fig. vi). As London is the location of a major biannual fashion industry event (‘London Fashion Week’), as will be discussed in Chapter Five) and home to scores of iconic fashion designers and design schools, it also seemed to be a sensible choice. Furthermore, many events for fashion bloggers are located in central London, although this was not something that I was aware of until I began my research in London. Some of these events are created by public relations representatives (PRs) of clothing brands specifically for bloggers, while others are fashion events for buyers and press that have only recently extended invitations to some fashion bloggers (e.g. press days, clothing launches and industry parties). While conducting my fieldwork in the London area, I chose to spend eleven months living in Reading, which is a large town 58 km west of Central London. By train, it was twenty-five minutes from Paddington Station, so I was able to meet with most of my informants given less than an hour’s notice. Some might argue that the location for my fieldwork was not ideal. It could be argued that as I was to be meeting London-based bloggers on a regular basis, it would make more sense to be located more closely to them. When I left for my fieldwork, I probably would have agreed with this, as the circumstances led me to Reading were largely due to necessity: mainly, the need to find a dog-friendly place to accommodate myself and my terrier travel companion Bogart, and a university acquaintances’ offer of an extra room. I quickly found when living there that I was not particularly attached to Reading. For me, it was a commuter town as it has been to many others who are unable to afford living in London. My knowledge of Reading was limited to the path I traveled on my way to the train station every morning: down the main street, over the canal with the ducks sleeping on the bank, past the library, and dozens of city center shops, including two of three Starbucks, through the automatic doors of the train station to one of the automated ticket stalls. It was here that I bought my daily travelcard, which, for £13.50 (with a student railcard) granted me off-peak access to and from Central London by way of Paddington Station, as well as fare for all Zones (1-6).

---

12 In London Voices, London Lives (2007), Hall cites Reading as a ‘commuter town’ where he found almost American style mobility and lack of attachment (p. 317).
I soon learned that to live closely to London bloggers, was not only unnecessary, it was impractical. I had little way of knowing which bloggers would become my informants before I made my move, or where they would live within the city. While most of my informants lived in Central London, within Zones 1 and 2, they came from a variety of backgrounds and none lived particularly close to each other. Furthermore, while I visited many of my closest informants at their homes, the majority of our meetings were at other locations throughout the city. Most of our time in London was spent ‘doing something’, whether these were activities that were directly blog-related (e.g. press days, previews of new collections, blogger events) or other electives, such as picnics in Hyde Park, gigs in Camden, drinks in Shoreditch or brunches in Soho. While most of our time was spent ‘hanging out’ in central London, several bloggers also came to visit me so that they could stay at my house during Reading Festival (August 2011), which we attended together. (‘Camping? No way,’ Ava had exclaimed, ‘I’d have nowhere to plug in my hair straightener.’) Furthermore, in February of 2011, I took a ‘bloggers trip’ with Francesca, 25, to Berlin, so that we could attend the Bread and Butter trade show at the Airport Berlin-Tempelhof. Yet, most of the stories that are told in the following pages occurred took place in London and many are the result of conversations made while walking from one spot in London to another, while seated on the tube or articulated by text as I returned we returned to our homes later in the evening.

Of the fifty-three bloggers that I spoke with over the course of my fieldwork, seven became close informants that I met up with regularly. While other bloggers will make appearances in the following pages, it is these seven that I will refer to most frequently. Before I introduce them, I would like to provide some brief demographic information about my larger group of informants in order to provide context. While this demographic information is specific to my informants, similarities are evident with other types of bloggers. For example, not unlike Reed’s webloggers (2008), most of my informants are either University students (56%) or hold job that require them to spent a significant amount of time online (e.g. social media, public relations representatives, online marketing managers) (41%). Two of my informants, including Ava, were unemployed at the time that I did my fieldwork. My youngest informant was eighteen and just starting her first year of University and the eldest was in her mid forties and a stay-at-home mum. However, the majority of the bloggers that I spoke with are in their early twenties and are either attending university or recent university graduates (77%). Of the young professionals, only four work in jobs within the fashion industry; others hold positions as accountants, bankers, social media managers, publicists, and sales assistants. Two of my informants were pursuing PhDs in physical sciences, and eight others had completed masters degrees. Most identify as
middle class (62%), although several come from low income households. Violet, 18, for example, lives in a council flat in Battersea with her mother and works part-time at a local charity shop.

The majority of my informants are from the greater London area, mostly living within Zones 1 and 2, although I have also interviewed bloggers from Oxford, Glasgow, Nottingham, Birmingham, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Brighton, Canterbury and Leeds at times in which they have been London in order to attend blogger events or London Fashion Week. I should also mention that most of the fashion bloggers that I met are women, only three of them are men. There is arguably a gender divide in fashion blogging; the majority of fashion blogs are written by women and are about women’s fashion. However, given the difficulty of counting blogs in the first place, an exact (or even approximate) percentage would be difficult to obtain. Male fashion bloggers are not represented in this ethnography to the degree that I would like them to be. This is only due to the fact that I did not meet as many men who run fashion blogs as women during my fieldwork. I should also note that while I will address issues of gender as they arise in the following pages, this is not the trajectory of my project. Gender remains an area that warrants additional research which I would like to pursue, especially pertaining to concepts of sexuality, the body and desire. These topics were occasionally addressed by my informants during my fieldwork (and are subsequently briefly touched on in Chapters Three and Four). However, I intend to revisit them in greater depth in a future project. This thesis sits at the brink of several large bodies of literature, but it was my time spent with my informants that directed this ethnography. Our conversations about blogging led to discussions about social media, consumption and fashion, often focusing on the different anxieties that occur when negotiating between multiple forms of media and different kinds of relationships in online and offline environments. It became evident that while fashion blogs may be looked at as indexes (e.g. Reed, 2005) or records of what people wore, they are also a vehicle through which bloggers may, to draw on Goffman (1990), focus on the performative aspects of the presentation of self.
Hi guys! How are things? Well, here I am, strolling around Camden on one of my last days in London before the big move. I'm wearing one of my favorite floral dresses by Yuki over black opaque tights and my new French Connection coat. (The coat is c/o of Zalando—a review of that to come shortly). I absolutely love the coat. I always feel a little like Paddington bear in a toggle coat! I am really loving the wonderful Autumn weather that is finally upon us too. Walking through piles of brightly colored leaves with a warm cup of coffee in my hand...yes, London has never looked more beautiful to me.

I also added a little bit of pink to my hair when I was at Percy & Reed the other day. It's pigment only and begins to fade out after five washes, so it is not too much of a commitment. I'm looking forward to when it fades out to the perfect candy floss hue (like some of the images in the moodboard I did last week), but I'm having fun with it right now in it's more vibrant stages.

Hope you all have a great weekend!
**Figure i** Screenshot of a published blog post from October 2011 (previous page).

**Figure ii** Screenshot of the Typepad blogging platform that I used to compose my blog posts.

**Figure iii** Screenshot of a blog post in progress.
Figure iv Screenshot of the Google Analytics overall site statistics for my blog during the extent of my fieldwork (May 2010 to June 2012).
Figure v Screenshot of the Google Analytics demographic information for the duration of my fieldwork (May 2010 - June 2012).

Figure vi Screenshot of the Google Analytics demographic information over the same period, specific to the United Kingdom.
An example of the ongoing collaborative production of a text. Here is a screenshot of a Twitter conversation with a few fashion bloggers and a “random” thrown into the mix. (Also illustrates a fairly liberal/questionably incorrect use on my part of the #phdchat hashtag.)
What is Fashion Blogging?

In an article for *The New York Times* entitled ‘My So Called Blog, (2004)’ journalist Emily Nussbaum chronicles the ‘obsessive online habits’ of a LiveJournal blogger. She describes his habits as ‘hardly exceptional; he is one of a generation of compulsive self-chroniclers, a fleet of juvenile Marcel Prousts gone wild.’ Steven March argues in the May 2012 issue of *The Atlantic*, that, ‘curating the exhibition of the self has become a 24/7 occupation.’ During a T.E.D. talk filmed in February of 2006, Moveable Type founder (and blogger) Mena Trott likens personal blogging to Norman Rockwell paintings, ‘they’re not “high art,”’ she says, ‘but they’re a record of who you are.’ While the number of blogs has grown exponentially over the past ten years, blogs are still difficult things to count. Software programs have difficulty distinguishing between active, inactive, (e.g. blogs that people start but abandon after several weeks), and spam blogs, which are generated for the sake of creating affiliate traffic or improving Google (organic) search engine results (Rettberg, 2008: 28-29). Differentiating between genres of blogs further complicates things, as fashion blogs are likely to share popular keywords with beauty blogs or celebrity blogs, for example, which also makes them difficult to distinguish between (Shields, 1996:1-3). To compound this, ‘locating’ a blog is equally problematic, as the descriptors ‘British Fashion Blog’ and ‘UK fashion blog’ refer to the content and geographic location of the blog. However, the criteria as to what determines a ‘British fashion blog’ lends a certain flexibility as it implies the locality of the blog, the nationality of the blogger, or both. As an American blogging from the United Kingdom, for example, my blog is considered a ‘British blog’ or ‘UK blog’ by all of my informants, as well as brands and print publications (e.g. I was nominated and longlisted for ‘Best British Fashion Blog’ by Marie Claire in 2011). As Francesca, a twenty-five year old knitwear designer and blogger from London once explained to me, ‘You’re American, but your blog is British.’ Furthermore, UK-born bloggers who are living and working abroad may also consider their blogs to be ‘British’ as much as belonging to the particular place where they are currently living.

While I have highlighted the difficulties in counting fashion blogs, fashion-based social networking sites are able to provide some information. In a presentation on September 10, 2010 at the Independent Fashion Bloggers (IFB), Evolving Influence Conference in New York City,

---

13 Moveable Type is a blog publishing software program, developed by the company Six Apart.
Lookbook.nu company founder Yuri Lee, stated that Lookbook\textsuperscript{14} boasts over 3 million unique views a month and has 200,000 registered members. In 2010, online community styling site Polyvore, averages 6.6 million unique visits per month and web-based fashion network, Chictopia, in which users regularly comment on each others posted “looks” or complete outfits, has over 100,000 registered users and growing. The members of these websites are predominantly fashion bloggers, both men and women (although, the majority are female) from different countries.

The ‘British fashion blogging community,’ can best described as series of networks that develop as a result of hyperlinks and blogroll exchanges, as well shared brand partnerships, collaborations, and public relations contacts. While events may ground these networks within the London area, British fashion bloggers see themselves as belonging to a global network of fashion bloggers. All of my informants regularly read blogs from different countries and interact with the bloggers who write them, occasionally scheduling meet-ups if they are in the same area. The first blogger that I ever met was Antonia who writes Swedish Love Affair, a Swedish fashion and lifestyle blog based in Gottenberg. Antonia and I corresponded through our blog comments for a couple of months. (An interesting example of a blog to blog interaction that can be viewed as a dialogue, unlike my initial exchanges with Ava, as mentioned earlier.) Shortly after I moved to England, Antonia was visiting London with her boyfriend and we made plans to meet in Soho for drinks. A different story to tell, perhaps, but I soon discovered that as many of my own London blogger networks developed, they extended into other parts of Europe and the United States.

The United States is particularly dominant in the fashion blogger scene. It is here, that the origins of fashion blogging (also called ‘style blogging’ in the U.S.) are often accredited, even though these origins are difficult to attain. American fashion blogs were the first to garner mainstream media attention during 2002-2003, with journalists citing Primp (2001), She She Me (2001), Gina Snowdon (2001), The Budget Fashionista (2003), No Good for Me (2003), My Fashion Life (2003) Catwalk Queen (2003), and Manolo’s Shoe Blog (2004) as some of the first fashion blogs on the scene. However, while these blogs were among the most prominent at the time, they were not necessarily the first. Many of them have been reluctant to accept the title, claiming it was inspiration drawn from other, earlier bloggers that propelled them to write in the first place.

\textsuperscript{14} Lookbook.nu is a fashion social networking website (originally invite-only) that allows members to upload, share and rate ‘looks’ (photographs of their outfits. Polyvore is a fashion social networking website allows members to create and share collages featuring different combinations of outfits (similar to a ‘paper doll’ approach.) Chictopia is another fashion social networking site that is similar in concept to Lookbook.nu.
'Ayyyyy! The Manolo has never claimed to be the first fashion blogger, indeed the Manolo has only claimed to be the first shoe blogger, and perhaps, if pressed, the first person to have the blog about the ladies accessories...there were already several blogs which focused on the fashion...which influenced the Manolo’s decision to take up the fashion blogging.'

As fashion blogs are a particular genre of web-based publications or blogs, it is their content that differentiates them from other types of blogs, as fashion bloggers focus their attention on fashion-related topics, with emphasis on the documentation of personal style. Their entries, which are composed of a combination of text and images and organized in reverse chronological order, may include impressions of new trends, collections and fashion shows, documentation of personal outfits and recent purchases, thoughts on advertising campaigns, coverage of street style, among other topics. As with most blog, fashion blogs are highly interactive and in this sense, collaborative. It is important to mention that while the primary focus is fashion, it is common for bloggers to integrate other aspects of their personal life into their blogs as well. UK blogger Leia of Leia’s Delights, for example, reserves a section to explore South Asian culture and style, a celebration of her Bangladeshi heritage. Jane, the American blogger behind Sea of Shoes, often showcases her creative projects, as well as favorite music and films (Currently: Isao Tomita and Dario Argento). On another American blog, Atlantic Home, it is common to find recipes for homemade biscotti and Mexican tortilla pie among posts documenting fashion design projects, daily outfits and emerging designers. British blogger Rachel of Mon Polkadot Cheri incorporated a forum entitled ‘Miss Polkadot’s Kick Arse Ladies,’ into her blog, hoping to provide a place for her readers to discuss topics including women’s health, feminism, body image and self-esteem. As is evident here, there are not substantial differences in the kinds of topics between American and British blogs, they influence each other.

Most blogs are run by one person, although it is also common for several bloggers to collaborate, either by sharing posting responsibilities, such as Sherin and Leia of Hi Fashion (UK), or by taking on different roles, such as Joe (self-described ‘tech guy’) and Katie (subject of the blog) of What Katie Wore (UK). Sea of Shoes initially started out as a collaborative effort between Jane and her mother Judy in 2003, who started her own blog a year later. Additionally, many bloggers collaborate by orchestrating and participating in regular group-based initiatives, which they highlight through their individual blogs. Project Take 10, for example, is composed of a group of ten British bloggers who offer their own unique ‘take’ or styling of a particular garment on traditionally the first Friday of each month. The group creates a collage of all of their different ‘takes’ on an outfit, which features their unique stylings that each member of ‘Take 10’ posts individually on her blog, along with the rest of their personal photos for the project.
Fashion bloggers interact with their readers and each other through their blogs, most notably through the ‘comments’ section. This section provides readers with the ability to leave feedback on blog posts and for bloggers to moderate and respond to those comments. Social networking websites including Facebook and Twitter as well as fashion-specific networking sites mentioned earlier (e.g. Chictopia, Polyvore and Lookbook.nu) are also used by many fashion bloggers. These websites allow bloggers to connect with others worldwide who share similar interests, and subsequently helps them to expand their reader base. While some bloggers say that they blog for ‘the fun of it’ or for personal reasons (i.e., ‘to see how my style evolves’), many are interested in cultivating potential career opportunities from their blogs, or at least gifted items and invites to Fashion Week shows in New York, London, Milan and Paris, which have been made available to famous bloggers, such as Susie Lau (also known as ‘Susie Bubble’) of Style Bubble (United Kingdom), Rumi Neely of Fashion Toast (United States), Carolina Engman of Fashion Squad (Sweden), Chiara Ferragni of The Blonde Salad (Italy) and Emily of Cupcakes and Cashmere (United States).

Many high profile fashion bloggers have begun to collaborate with designers and brands on design opportunities, as writers for magazines and commercial websites, and models and brand ambassadors. Of these, Jane of Sea of Shoes, is arguably one of the first. In 2009, she launched a capsule collection of shoes for Urban Outfitters. Following this, she and her mother, the blogger behind Atlantis Home, collaborated with Gryphon to design a Mad Max inspired trench coat with kimono sleeves. In autumn of 2008, Designer Marc Jacobs released a mens handbag entitled the BB, inspired by Filipino blogger Bryan Boy. In 2010, Kelly Framel of The Glamourai and Rumi Neely of Fashion Toast will serve as models for Twenty Eight Twelve and Forever 21 respectively. Luxury brand Coach recently partnered with four bloggers to design a set of limited edition handbags available for online purchase only. In 2011, top rated British blogger Susie Lau of Style Bubble scored a job as stylist for rock group the Ting Tings; they contacted her with the opportunity as fans of her blog. These high-profile bloggers, who have garnered significant media attention, are among the most-read blogs by fashion bloggers internationally. Their career success stories inspire many of my informants who are just starting out, desiring a change in career, or are students in the process of sorting out directions for employment.

While for some fashion bloggers, the idea of making a career out of their blog is appealing, others are emphatic about keeping their blog separate from their occupation and ‘everyday life.’ In her first vlog (or video blog post) Leia of Leia’s Delights spoke out to her readers about privacy in the blogosphere. She highlights her strategies for maintaining some level of anonymity as a
blogger, by not using her full name, mentioning friends or family members, disclosing location information until after-the-fact, or revealing any information that could identify her to the general public, especially potential employers. For Leia, her blog is a place where she can ‘escape and surround herself with beautiful things,’ something she intends to keep separate to some degree from her everyday life. Even among her network of fashion bloggers, she is cautious to reveal too much personal information, typically reserving her Facebook profile for good friends that she has known for a period of time, usually declining ‘adds’ from bloggers that she has never met in person or only encountered briefly.

Regardless of the hours spent carefully composing a blog entry, most bloggers are conscious of the image that they project. For those interested in cultivating their blog as a “brand,” as well as those conscious of their reader base for other reasons, crafting a blog post can be a very deliberate, time consuming, and carefully edited activity. Even bloggers who focus their energies foremost on providing original content of personal interest, often display an awareness that the blog personality their readers are familiar with is a partial representation, (c.f. Reed, 2005). As Judy of Atlantis Home tells Above the Fray magazine, ‘I think people tune into our blogs because they like a certain lifestyle that we project. It’s certainly not what we actually live, believe me.’

The Production of Texts

Writing Culture (1986) marked a significant paradigm shift for anthropologists as it brought to awareness the possibility that during the production of ethnographic texts, we are capable of creating ‘cultural’ realities through language. As I began the writing up process, I was interested in what approach would best convey ‘what blogging is like’ through ethnography. I returned to the blog that I worked on during my fieldwork and debated how I could best mimic the layout, tone, and ‘feel’ of a blog in an ethnography. Taussig (2012) writes, ‘This is not a plea for exact reproduction of the fieldwork notebook but, rather, a plea for following its forms and its mix of private and public in what can only be called, as in cinema, a ‘dissolve’ or ‘fade out’ that captures ephemeral realities, the check and bluff of life (p. 516).’ One of the ways that I found that I could best achieve this was to remain consistent in my writing style, that is, to write in the same conversational or ‘bloggy’ tone as I did when I was writing my blog. When writing the blog, the tone was not something that I intentionally crafted or forced, but a style of writing that developed over time as I found my own narrative voice. As many bloggers will admit, I placed more emphasis on the images, but I did spend some time crafting and editing the text in each
post. As is common with many fashion blogs, I kept the text minimal, usually writing an average of a hundred words per post. Before publishing each post, I looked for spelling errors (the most memorable one that ever went to print was 'burgandy'). However, grammatically, I was afforded more leeway as it is generally acceptable for bloggers to take more liberties with those kind of things than journalists, for example. If my narrative voice on the following pages comes across as somewhat informal, it is intentionally so.

Furthermore, as images are a crucial element of fashion blogs, they make a strong presence in the following pages. While the images that I have included in each chapter serve to further illustrate key points and provide necessary contextual information to the reader, they also contribute to the overall aesthetic of this ethnography. As will be discussed in Chapter One, fashion bloggers like the images on their blogs to be big and of good quality, and I have kept this aesthetic preference in mind when incorporating photographs into this body of work. Many of the images that are used here have been taken by my informants and, in several cases, professional photographers that I met during my fieldwork. Each image has been reprinted here with the permission of the original photographer and the owner of the photograph. (That is, I have received permission through the appropriate legal channels as well as permission from others based on my informants' idea of ownership, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.) When appropriate, I have also included scans of material culture (e.g. London Fashion Week passes, catwalk tickets, business cards, notes from PRs and designers) for reference.

Most of the bloggers that I write about in the following pages use pseudonyms, while those that are pictured appear as themselves with the corresponding blogs listed when appropriate (See List of Figures). The decision to provide anonymity for many of my participants was interesting in that many of them did not initially want it. Bloggers tend to be very comfortable ‘sharing’ some information about themselves on the Internet and many were eager to appear here as themselves. As Patrick said, ‘It’s free press, isn’t it?’ Yet, my informants also articulated that they preferred to be in control of what is published about them, as will be discussed in following chapters, and anonymity provided them with desired privacy, especially when speaking about personal information that they did not wish make public or when talking about other bloggers (particularly if such conversations were unfavorable) within our networks. In most cases, the pseudonyms used here are names that we picked together, names that Ava likes to describe as ‘alter-egos.’ Finally, I should mention that the production of this text was a collaborative one and my informants were very much involved in the process. I was in contact with my key informants frequently in order to address specific questions, to share ideas and to run some of my thoughts by them. There are also contributors who I am less familiar with on a personal basis, but who were willing to share their thoughts in response to broader social media inquiries, usually asked
by me through Twitter on an ongoing basis (see Fig. 1.7 for an example). These inquiries, often retweeted by some of my Twitter followers, were able to extend past my immediate network of 1,163 followers in larger networks of fashion bloggers, within the United Kingdom and worldwide.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is structured into five chapters. The first chapter (‘Anatomy of a Fashion Blog’) will describe the main characteristics of fashion blogs, highlighting commonalities in content, layout and structure. I will also pay attention the key relationships that develop and what kinds of knowledge one may gather from blogs as texts. Drawing on Gershon (2010) and others, the following chapter (‘The Social Lives of Blogs’) will focus on the ways that different forms of social media facilitate the creation of networks within the ‘UK fashion blogger community.’ Drawing on Gershon (2010), it will also examine how bloggers negotiate between different kinds of social media use and the impact that this has on their relationships with others. The third chapter (‘Fashion Me Now) will discuss the distinctions that bloggers draw between personal style and the fashion industry, paying attention to relationship between the accumulation of clothing and anxieties about self presentation. Drawing on Goffman (1990), Chapter Four (‘Smile With Teeth’) discuss the performance and presentation of self through photographs in ‘outfit posts’ on fashion blogs. It will also examine the role of bloggers as both subject and object, by highlighting different kinds of photography and portraiture that are used in the creative construction of these types of blog posts. The final chapter (‘London Fashion Week’) will examine the way that stories are able to transform space and place, with a particular emphasis on London Fashion Week, a biannual industry event.
Or not, as it happens.

Psssttttt! Can I let you in to a little secret? I’m not really a cat lady. Yup, I’d much rather a big dog curled up next to me, but apparently the amount of feline paraphernalia in my wardrobe says otherwise. It all started when I fell in love with Vivetta’s famous cat skirt, then my obsession led to the purchase of a pair of Charlotte Olympia Kitty flats, that I don’t believe I’ve ever really introduced you to...
Figure 1.1  Screenshot of Carrie’s blog, Wish Wish Wish (previous page).

Figure 1.2  Screenshot of Natalie’s blog, Canned Fashion.
THURSDAY, 4 JULY 2013

Trekking
Wednesday, 2 July 2015

FOUNTAIN DANCING

Every once in a while it's nice to slow down a bit, I've had some pretty full on few weeks, with more coming, so on a recent day off, I went out with Danielle and we had some fun times, first at Afternoon Tea, then at a book launch.

Figure 1.5 Screenshot of Michael’s blog, *Anastasia and Duck* (previous page).

Figure 1.4 Screenshot of Sherin’s blog, *Hi Fashion*.
If you were to ask my informants when a blog begins, they are likely to describe the moment when the first post ‘goes live’ and it is made public. We can consider this point of time the birth of a blog, the moment that it makes its introduction to the world. My informants would not use this word to describe that particular moment, but they make this analogy in other ways. They measure the age of their blogs in years, for example, and regularly celebrate ‘blog birthdays’ with cupcakes and giveaways in its honor. Those who have been blogging for less than one year might celebrate monthly landmarks leading up to the first birthday, especially at the third and six months. Even more interesting, perhaps, is the responsibility that bloggers claim to their blogs. Each post that follows the first is driven by necessity, a necessity to remain engaged with their readers but also to keep the blog alive. This momentum is imperative; any interruptions in regular posting are subject to apologies. While bloggers might direct these written apologies to their readers, any ruptures are described in terms of abandonment or neglect of the blog, not the audience.

Drawing on Appadurai (1988) and others, it is my intention to examine fashion blogs as material things that are sites of exchange between bloggers and their readers. As outlined in the introduction, the following chapters examine the ‘social lives’ of fashion blogs, highlighting the different ways that they can be socially situated over time and within different networks of relations. As a starting point, this chapter will focus on the moment that a blog is introduced into the world as a new material thing, and more specifically, what this means in terms of ‘being public.’ Keeping this in mind, I will examine the relationship between ‘being public’ and personhood by focusing on the different publics that bloggers address, how they negotiate between what is made public and kept private, and how these processes might enable them to
redefine what it means to 'be public.' Given that ‘being public’ is a key skill that bloggers must learn and one of the fundamental elements of a fashion blog, this seems to be a sensible starting point. However, before I embark on this trajectory, I would like to first clarify what I mean when referring to a blog as a ‘material thing.’

In *Being Alive* (2011), Ingold distinguishes between the material world and the ‘world of materials’, noting the absence of ‘tangible stuff’ in contemporary studies of material culture (p 26-31). Anthropologists, he argues, tend to focus their attention on objects, neglecting the stuff that comprises these things themselves. He writes, ‘bringing things to life, then, is not a matter of adding to them a sprinkling of agency but of restoring them to the generative fluxes of the world of materials in which they came into being and continue to subsist (Ingold, 2011: 20).’ Following along these lines, Ingold suggests that we examine things as sites of convergence between different materials, stressing the continuity between them and, at times, the difficulty distinguishing when and where things stop and start (c.f. Ingold, 2011: 30). This approach is particularly useful when looking at the materiality of fashion blogs as they are capable of being experienced in different forms (e.g. printed out, displayed on mobiles and computers), and lack a physicality that one might typically associate with material things. Additionally, such an approach allows us to avoid contextualizing fashion blogs as part of a ‘virtual world’ (e.g. Fischer, 2006; Boellstorff, 2007; Malaby & Burke, 2009) or drawing dualistic distinctions between internet-based (virtual) and physical (actual) social interactions (c.f. Hine, 2009: 9-14). Rather, we may examine fashion blogs as part of a larger material culture, as things that are deeply embedded within complex social relations and capable of functioning as substitutes or extensions of persons (c.f. Reed, 2005: 223).

When adopting Ingold’s approach it becomes apparent that the ‘stuff’ of fashion blogs is not limited to internet technologies, photography, and text, but extends to any material that is involved in its production, whether this is a piece of clothing or accessory, or a brick wall that serves as the backdrop for certain images. Fashion bloggers are not unlike other artisans, they must learn a set of skills in order to work with different materials as they build their blogs. By examining the different skills that they learn, such as the time spent learning HTML language so that they may customize the layout of their blogs to their liking (See Fig 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 at the beginning of this chapter) or familiarizing themselves with blog hosting platforms, their cameras, or camera phones, the material elements of fashion blogs become more
accessible. We are able to understand the practical connections drawn between different materials and, in doing so, to extend our knowledge of how blogs are situated within the material world. This understanding of materiality is something that my informants reflect on; it is evident in their conversations about ‘building’ their blogs, their belief that blogs are not shells or templates that one feeds content into over a period of time, but things that are continually constructed and reinvented through the manipulation of different materials. In meeting with my informants for various excursions, I found that they frequently considered the way that the different materials that we came across could be worked into their blogs, something that arguably influenced their desire to acquire certain items, eat at specific restaurants or explore particular areas of London in the first place. It was common to hear a blogger say, ‘I can’t wait to blog about this!’ and to follow this comment with musings about how the item in question could become a part of his or her blog using different skills such as styling or photography. Blogs provide a way for them to organize the world around them, influencing the way that they distinguish between materials and group different materials together. In this sense, a great part of blogging is collecting. To draw on Clifford (1988), it is through a process of organisation that bloggers are able to exoticise and assign different values to different consumer goods, a process that will be discussed later on. At the same time, this process demonstrates my informants’ understanding that consumer goods are materials that are just as important as any of technological materials that they use in the production of their fashion blogs. It is through this process that they are able to preserve and exoticise particular things, places, or moments.

Bloggers’ knowledge of these materials develops through practice, by consulting each other and by referencing tutorial guides on various online websites or social networking communities. Over time, different processes are refined and become more automatic. Bloggers may become specialized or skilled in particular areas, such as in taking self-portraits, street style photography, styling items, or image manipulation. I have watched bloggers edit their photographs with the same attention to detail as I have watched my father, a woodworker (one of his many hats), dovetail together two pieces of wood. Engaged in conversation, they shift their attention from me to the task at hand and then back again, displaying in their actions a quiet confidence as they work. Many of the skills that they learn are tactical: writing blog posts, styling clothing (See Chapter 5), posing for photographs, taking their own por-
traits or ‘training’ others to take their portraits (skills that will be discussed in depth in Chapter 4). Other skills are behavioral and pertain to self presentation within different online and offline environments (e.g. the adoption of new jargon, learning appropriate etiquette, and developing an eye for ‘what’s blogable’). Many of these behavioral skills can be contextualized within the larger scheme of learning how to ‘be public’ in a ‘fashion blogger way.’

I should mention that bloggers speak differently about ‘being public’ than they do about having an audience or a readership. When bloggers talk about their audience, it is usually in reference to blog growth (e.g. how many readers they have, demographic information about their readers as well as specific interactions that they have with them). Bloggers talk of ‘being public’ in a different way, recognizing it as an important property of a blog and a necessary skill that they must learn. Publicity suggests the potentiality of having an audience, while readership is, in their eyes, a measurable response to this. Yet, while being public informs the content and aesthetics of particular blog posts and the behavior of bloggers in different social environments, it is also a quality that my informants unanimously agree brings blogs to life.

1.1 Introductions

Ava, and I are sitting in a booth at The Diner, an American-style restaurant in Soho. The Diner is one of our favorite places to go for an all-day breakfast, especially when filling any ‘down time’ that we have between events. It is one of those hipster haunts that is popular with the fashion blogging crowd, with cherry red leather booths, Johnny Cash blaring on the stereo, and cutlery casually kept in tall glasses at the center of each table. There are two other branches, but we always seem to end up at this one: ordering huevos rancheros and pancakes off the menu and splitting an Oreo milkshake. On this particular day, we are just hanging out; the only thing on our itinerary is a trip to Camden in search of vintage Levi plaid flannel shirts. We plan to take ‘outfit photos’ somewhere along the way. The brick walls that make up many of London’s landscapes are some of my favorite backgrounds for these types of images and Ava is an easy subject to photograph. She is, as they say, ‘a total ham.’ She is completely comfortable in front of the camera and not ‘precious’ about the photographs that are taken of her in the least. She’ll twirl and pose, alternating between big bright smiles and making silly
faces. She never asks to ‘check’ the images once I’ve taken them, as many bloggers often do. ‘It’s fine, I trust you,’ she says.

Today, she is wearing a slouchy black tee shirt that keeps falling off one of her shoulders and a pair of dark blue denim skinny jeans. Her boots, ‘the most comfortable things ever,’ are brown checked with a shearling lining and have bright red laces, a recent ASOS find. She is wearing a knuckleduster ring, a small bronze skull necklace and a series of friendship bracelets that were gifts from friends. Her jet black hair is carefully straightened with a long sweeping sideways fringe that nearly covers her left eye. The ends of her hair are a reddish ombre, something that she has grown tired of, although ombre or dip-dyed hair is very ‘in’ at the moment. Ava is not one to wear much make-up, but she wears eyeliner and mascara on a daily basis. ‘Oh, I won’t go anywhere without my eyeliner,’ she says, ‘I like to play up my eyes.’ A reader once wrote to her in a blog comment, ‘You are so pretty that you look like you’d be a total bitch to hang out with,’ a witty remark that remains one of her all-time favorites.

‘Do you know, I remember the first time that you commented on my blog.’ I tell her.

‘Do you really?’ she says, looking up from her menu. ‘What did I say?’

‘I don’t remember exactly. It had something to do with a blog competition you ran. What was the company called... Sock Theory?’ Although I downplay it, the company’s name is easy for me to remember. Ava’s comment was among the first that I received when I began blogging and I had not entered many competitions since then. On the other hand, I do not expect her to remember it, I know that she has been blogging for three and a half years and may ‘return’ upwards of thirty comments a day. Given the volume, she does not remember exactly what she writes for the majority of the comments or many of the blogs that she has commented on. Of the twenty or thirty reader comments that she receives on an average day, she cannot recall the specifics of many of those either, just the ‘stand-out ones.’

‘Sock Theory? That’s so funny!’ she says, ‘I don’t remember that at all. Did you win?’

‘Of course not,’ I laugh, ‘although you did tell me that you liked my entry.’ Ava and I frequently joke that I am not ‘allowed’ to win any of her blog competitions. While we kid about it, there is truth to it as well. ‘They’ll think I rigged it if you win,’ she always says, referring to her readers, ‘because we hang out so much.’

‘Because we are Britain’s next great blogging power duo?’ I joke.
‘Dream team!’ she adds, ‘Hey, remember that time when you introduced yourself as “Susie from Boston” at the Most Wanted event?’

Ava, my key informant and ‘blogger BFF’ introduced and educated me in all things relating to the London fashion blogging scene. I called her with questions about various matters: how to respond to particular comments, whether or not I should post certain pictures, how I should respond to tweets, what time she was arriving to an event, how I should get there and what I should wear. During the first few months, I called her with such frequency that she admitted to me that her mum (who she lived with at the time) was starting to become annoyed. While I learned to tone down my questions to some degree, I considered myself fortunate in that I was able to shift back and forth from anthropologist to fashion blogger in situations like these. I was able to ask questions unabashedly with less fear of judgement, while many of my informants were much more reluctant to solicit advice from anyone who was not a close friend.

Fashion bloggers love to talk about blogging but many are reluctant or unwilling to give advice when it comes to blog content or style, especially to those who they do not know well or those who have just started to blog. In an interview with Grazia Daily, Daniela Morosini, who blogs for Couture and Crumpets gives a classic example of this. When asked to share advice for bloggers who are just starting out, she states, ‘An internet connection helps and in time, a camera.’ While bloggers may share tips conversationally, most agree that blog content and design should not be advised; they are things that blogger must learn on their own. Bloggers generally associate asking for content or promotional advice with laziness, especially if one is just starting out. ‘I will usually direct them to the IFB (Independent Fashion Bloggers) website if someone emails me about that,’ Ava tells me, ‘I mean, there are some good resources there but... I learned everything on my own really and so should they.’ Patrick expresses a similar reluctance to provide help. He says, ‘I just delete those emails or I send them to spam. I don’t have time to deal with all of that. I didn’t send out emails like that when I started.’

While my informants assert that the individuality of the blog is vital, they often conform to certain stylistic conventions. There are several reasons for this. It is partially a result of the blog platforms that they use, in which the placement of certain features is already defined for them. The blog title, for example, is always located at the top of the page and the blog content in the center (See Fig.1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 for examples). While bloggers may manipulate the
margins of these attributes, the place where each item is generally located within the context of the blog is usually the same. Additionally, while everything is meant to be learned or developed individually, many bloggers mimic the design and content of the blogs that they regularly read. ‘I drew a lot of influence from my favourite blogs, a lot of Swedish ones, when I was doing my redesign,’ Isabella explains. “I really liked the clean look of them, you know, the plain white background with plain black lettering on the header... I think that it looks really crisp and fresh.’ Imitating other blogs is not something that my informants claim to do intentionally. They consider it a somewhat unconscious effect of regularly reading different fashion blogs and ‘absorbing ‘some of the qualities that they value in ‘really good ones.’ Of course, the criteria for what constitutes a ‘really good blog’ is subject to their interpretation, as is what makes a ‘good outfit,’ for example. Drawing on Bourdieu (1992), these similarities can be understood as class habitus or a series of learned aesthetic preferences that reveal much about blogger’s social positioning in relation to others.

Content and design aside, most tips that bloggers share manifest in the form of ‘what not to do,’ in different online and offline contexts. It is here that I will focus my attention for the time being, returning to the material skills that they engage with (e.g. photography, the styling of clothing) in subsequent chapters. I found that my informants loved to discuss disconnects and ‘cringe-worthy’ moments that they experience or witness along the way. It is a favourite topic of conversation because behaviour that clashes with what is deemed socially acceptable or preferable among fashion bloggers often manifests in a public space and is privy to witnesses. As Patrick puts it, ‘everybody likes to watch a good train wreck.’ At the same time, I realised that social norms and etiquette are things that are continuously being redefined. It is a kind of knowledge that, to draw on Lave & Wenger (1991), is learned and constructed through experience (See Chapter 2). Of course, there are certain established ways of communicating that have remained consistent during and after my fieldwork. One of these is the blogger introduction. Bloggers typically introduce themselves using their first name followed by the name of their blog. One of my first ‘epic fail’ moments took place at a ‘Fashion’s Most Wanted’ event sponsored by Vouchercodes.co.uk. As it was my first event (Ava had brought me along as her ‘plus one’), I was unsure of how to introduce myself. When greeted by one of the organisers and asked where I was from, I responded, ‘Originally? Boston.’ Immediately after
saying this, I looked over at Ava for guidance. She grinned, while the event organiser replied, ‘Um...your blog?’

Following that experience, many of my informants would jokingly refer to me as ‘Susie from Boston’ and still do to this day. However, I began to learn how to make proper introductions and carry myself in different social settings, eventually becoming comfortable to such an extent that I would blag my way into events where I wasn’t invited and regularly carry blog business cards with me in my purse. I made plenty of other mistakes throughout my fieldwork but I eventually learned more about what it means to ‘be public’ as a fashion blogger and I became more comfortable presenting myself as such. Put plainly, my day-to-day conventions were challenged; I realised that fashion bloggers had created a new space to frame their conduct and it is one where many of the rules are markedly different. I found that fashion blogging required the ability to translate things that were previously considered private or inconsequential to much more public arenas and, in doing so, to make these things relevant. The acquisition of a new bag or the adoption of a new haircut, for example, became an event that was worthy of a blog post and would generate feedback in the form of comments, Tweets, Facebook messages, texts or emails from blog readers. Many of these different happenings were things that I previously considered fairly mundane and might mention in passing to my sister or a close friend. I also found that being a fashion blogger required a familiarisation with new forms of association, vocabulary and idioms of practice that are specific to fashion bloggers and their readers and carry over into offline contexts. How bloggers negotiate between these different contexts is something that I will examine in depth in the following chapter.

Now, I would like to return to the beginning, to the moment when the first blog post goes live. We can look at this moment as another kind of introduction, it is the first time that the blog meets the public. Following Ingold we might consider it ‘the moment at which rehearsal ends and the performance begins. From that point there is no turning back (Ingold: 2011: 54).’ The action of making a post public or (‘publishing posts’) will be repeated many times, but there is a striking difference between the initial post and the ones that follow. The initial post

---

15 We can look at this stage as a shift from pre-production (preparing the blog for publication) to production (working on the blog as a ‘live’ thing) while taking into account the ‘processional quality’ of these stages, which are not ‘beginnings and endings’ but ‘stops and starts’ (c.f. Ingold: 2011: 53).
denotes a new stage in the life of a thing; it marks the transformation from one phase of blog building to another. It is also the point where one can first begin to consider him or herself a blogger. I remember this moment well; I met it with anxiety when I clicked the ‘publish’ button for the first time. Once I published the post, I was greeted by a Typepad prompt that asked: ‘Would you like to view your post?’ and my eyes quickly scanned through my newly published blog hoping that I would not find a typo or any other kind of technical flaw. I second guessed the content too: Was this interesting? Was this a good idea for a first post? Was it too long? Was it too short? The material did not appear any different then it had when I previewed it earlier, but the context had changed. As I was aware that my blog was now public, I found myself curious about what others’ perceptions of it would be. Like my informants, my initial understanding of making something public was primarily that, ‘strangers would be reading it’ and the vagueness of this perception of ‘the public’ was something that I found disconcerting. I already had ideas about what kind of behaviour was appropriate in public or private settings, but I was uncertain about this new territory. ‘I felt like that at first,’ Ava explains to me. ‘Everyone does. It was part of the reason that I didn’t post photographs of my face for a while... I felt weird about it, but...now I don’t really think about it as much, it’s much more automatic.’

Yet, what are bloggers talking about when they refer to a public? As Warner points out in Publics and Counterpublics (2005), ‘people do not always distinguish even between the public and a public, though in certain contexts the difference can matter a great deal (Warner, 2005: 65).’ In one sense, publics are groups that bloggers imagine; it is the very ambiguity of the word ‘public’ that made my initial introduction to blogging a fairly daunting one (a sentiment shared by many of my informants). However, my growing knowledge of my audience eventually helped me to frame which public I was addressing. As with my informants, my knowledge of readers was limited to site statistics (or ‘stats’) that are made available through blog analytical tools. It is here that information about my readers is presented in terms of daily, weekly, or monthly unique page views (‘uniques’). My readers were viewable as dots on a

16 Typepad is the name of the blog publishing software that I used.

17 Drawing on Bourdieu (1993), normalized views of ‘public’ or ‘private’ can be looked at as part of habitus, which describes knowledge that is culturally and symbolically produced that informs all that one must learn into to assimilate into a particular society world, (p.29-73)

35
global map that highlighted their locations by city; they were described as Mac users or Windows users, repeat visitors or first time visitors. Other information was made available as well: the language of my readers (or at least which language they had set on their computers), the internet browser that they used, the referral source or Google keyword that directed them to that particular blog page in the first place. As the potential extent of a blogger’s readership is indefinite, many bloggers use this information to visualise the different people that they might be communicating with and to see how their blog is ‘growing.’ Receiving blog comments is another way that bloggers may gain insight into their audience, as most commenters will link to their own blogs in the body of the comment. Commenting can be looked at as part of a reciprocal relationship that exists between bloggers—many bloggers give comments to receive them or to gain more followers (See Chapter 2). Yet, the number of comments as compared to the number of readers per post is normally quite low. Although, the majority of their audience will likely remain strangers to them, the people that fashion blogger reach are potentially ‘socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse (Warner, 2005: p. 120).’

It is here that I would like to draw on Warner (2005) and consider fashion blogs as a counterculture. This is a useful category when examining the kind of ‘community’ that develops among fashion bloggers and the way that membership in that group influences the potentialities of behaviour in particular contexts. I should mention that I am reluctant to describe fashion blogging as a ‘community’ or ‘subculture’ as this can imply a homogeneity or cohesion that is not the case. The term ‘fashion blog’, for example, is commonly used as a blanket term that more generally describes different niches of fashion-oriented blogs, including personal style blogs, fashion and style advice blogs, street style blogs and beauty blogs, among others. Moreover, while ‘fashion blog’ may be used in a general sense, it is also used more specifically to describe a particular type of blog that focuses mainly on industry coverage, including emerging independent designers, Fashion Week catwalk shows, as well as the documentation of personal style. My informants’ blogs are a mix of these different niches and to different degrees. Some focus on personal style by the way of outfit posts while others are

---

18 I should note that while I met countless fashion bloggers, stylists, designers, public relations representatives and others during my fieldwork, I did not speak with many readers who were not bloggers themselves. When I speak of fashion blogging as a potential counterculture here, I am considering it in terms of fashion bloggers who participate in this particular discourse, focusing on the ways that their involvement has transformed them and the potentialities of different kinds of relations and interactions.
more concerned with sharing wish lists or reporting high street trends. Additionally, most of the bloggers that I came to know belonged to multiple networks of fashion bloggers (or ‘blogger friend groups’) that often further distinguished themselves with particular neologisms, opinions about etiquette and stylistic preferences that were specific to the group (See Chapter 2).

As discussed earlier, as much as fashion bloggers strive to be unique, they can be fairly conventional in their idiosyncrasies, demonstrating notable similarities in content, aesthetic qualities, and subject matter (See Chapters 3 and 4). Having said this, when looking at the potentially of fashion blogs as counterpublics, we are able to grasp the different situations in which bloggers might possibly redefine what it means to be public and, in doing so, challenge more dominant discourses and redefine what is considered acceptable public or private behaviour in different social spaces (c.f. Warner, 2005:41-65). Publics have long been examined as ‘large-scale political subjects..that are thinkable and practicable by means of mass-mediated communication (Cody, 2011:38). Warner does not emphasise the political stance of counterpublics, arguing that, ‘publics more overtly oriented in their self-understandings to the poetic-expressive dimensions of language, including artistic publics and many counterpublics, lack the power to transpose themselves to the generality of the state. (Warner, 2005:116)’ Rather, Warner focuses on the way that publics and counterpublics frame behaviour, arguing that both are flawed and are capable of being oppressive as each is organised by a series of conventions (c.f. Warner, 2005:41-65). Warner defines a public using the following criteria:

1) A public is self organised; 2) A public is a relation among strangers; 3) Public speech is both personal and impersonal; 4) A public is constituted through mere attention; and 5) A public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse (Warner, 2005: p.67-90).’

While Warner’s counterpublics share many of the same characteristics of a public, they have a few key differences. First, they must be marginalised in some way and go against ‘the norm,’ a norm that he rightly does not consider to be any kind of monolithic entity, but a plurality of

19 While Warner is concerned with the role of printed publications, public speaking and live performance in social transformation he does not extend his analysis to include internet publications, reasoning that they were ‘continuous’ rather than ‘punctual’ and that it was too early to know much about them as a ‘discourse’ per se (Warner, 2005: 94-95), it is here that I hope to pick up where he left off.
different discourses (c.f. Warner, 2005: 55). Initially, it might seem a stretch to speak about fashion bloggers as a marginalised group, as self-display or self-promotion on social networking websites such as Facebook and Twitter are fairly common social practices among their peers. As Pete Cashmore, CEO of Mashable writes in an article for CNN in October of 2009, ‘But what about the cost of not sharing? In the online realm, that might mean that you simply don’t exist. Privacy is dead and social media holds the smoking gun.’

Yet, one of the things that sets fashion bloggers apart from their contemporaries is the kind of self-presentation that they engage in. Fashion bloggers borrow skills from various fashion industry roles (journalists, stylists, models and designers) and make them their own as they work with these different materials to craft their blogs (See Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). This is not to say that we could not consider social media users to be kinds of artisans too (although my informants would find this idea laughable), but that the way that fashion bloggers put together different materials in making their blogs is something that is unique to them and very different than other kinds of self presentation that social media users engage in. Fashion bloggers spend hours taking photographs and then carefully editing them: airbrushing spots, under eye circles and wrinkles of clothing out of each frame. They regularly post about new purchases (or ‘hauls’), beauty tips and coveted items on their wish lists. In doing so, they must field criticism from those outside of the fashion blogging realm who are privy to their posts, whether these are work colleagues or university friends who deem their pursuits ‘narcissistic’ or ‘shallow’ or fashion industry professionals who consider it ‘amateurish’ and ‘laughable.’ As Patrick, a twenty-five year old PhD student and fashion blogger tells me, ‘No one in Oxford gets it..the blog, the dip-dyed hair, the clothes...but obviously at London Fashion Week no one turns a head.’ In another conversation, Ava revealed, ‘I received a comment on Facebook from a friend who had seen me tagged in a bunch of my blog’s Facebook page pictures...I do that sometimes so that I can get more likes... Anyway, she wrote something like, “Please tell me how you always look so good in your pictures!” but I didn’t have the heart to write back and tell her that it was because they were photoshopped!’ When I mention to Ava that she would still look great without any photoshop, she laughed and agrees with me, ‘but it makes the pictures look so much better!’ she says, ‘they look much more professional.’ Isabella, a 27 year old marketing manager for a fashion brand tells me, ‘At work everyone hates bloggers, well, except for the big ones but there’s only a handful of those. You know the
kind...with the fashion lines, sitting front row at London Fashion Week, but I feel like they’re a part of something else entirely. They’re more like “personalities.”

1.2 Different publics

‘I would not share anything on my blog that I would not tell my grandmother or a stranger,’ Isabella tells me, explaining her criteria when crafting a blog post. ‘Although sometimes I forget...well, I do when I am writing sponsored posts,’ she muses, ‘because I know that I have to include particular links and that the post might need to be a certain length [for SEO purposes], you know, things like that...but otherwise, I just blog.’

‘Oh, I hate that,’ Patrick says, reaching for his bag, ‘I hate when they want specific keywords.’ The five of us are sitting in Hyde Park having just attended a press event around the corner. We had stopped at Pret a Manger along the way and alternate between tucking into our food and comparing what we received in our goodie bags. Isla and Ava express disappointment that Patrick does not want to give away any of the complimentary beauty items that he received in his bag. ‘No way,’ he says, ‘I save these for gifts for family and friends. They love ‘em.’ Our conversation moves from polarizing fashion trends (‘What do you think about the new Marant wedge trainers?’ ‘Hideous.’) to talking about blogging. We share our worst comments with each other, which is a favorite topic of conversation among my close informants, and we tell stories about our favorite ‘keyword searches.’

Fashion bloggers often show a great interest in the different paths that people take to get their blogs, especially if they are unusual ones (e.g. ‘random keyword searches’ and unexpected links from blogs or websites). Some bloggers make a game of this by googling each other’s blogs and typing this person’s blog name along with a few ridiculous keywords into Google Search or they will leave joke comments under pseudonyms. In both cases, the prankster who leaves the comment is identifiable in some way to the blogger who is the recipients—it is done in jest rather than malice, something that they will both laugh at later. It is an interesting way that they use this technology, a deviation from the intended use. As our discussion moves to reader comments, we continue to talk about the outrageous ones, the ones that stand apart from the normal responses that we get, the ‘Nice shoes!’ or ‘Cute bag’ types of comments that many of the bloggers that I know find boring. Ava tells us that someone
once compared her to a gremlin, something that elicits some chuckles and sympathetic ‘Awws’ from the group. ‘Ava, honey, you look nothing like a gremlin!’ Isabella says.

‘Oh, I know, I don’t mind,’ Ava replies, ‘that comment cracked me up. I know I look good. Plus, it’s [blog] traffic, right?’

‘Traffic is traffic.’ Isabella says.

‘You know, the only people that I ever really think about reading my blog are the people who leave comments,’ Isla says. ‘In the beginning, I could check [Google Analytics] to see if ex boyfriends were reading it or coworkers or family members or whatever, but once it got bigger it was much harder to tell. I don’t think that I get too many weirdos though...or if I do they’re lurkers.’

‘I’m at a point where I just can’t tell [who’s reading] anymore,’ Ava says, ‘not for the most part anyway. Although people in my family will tell me... My brother will make fun of some of my posts, although lately he’s been willing to be in a few [pictures in her posts].... My mum takes my outfit pictures for me in my garden most of time though and, you know, she’ll tell me if she likes certain posts or not.’

‘My mom comments on my blog,’ I tell them, ‘she does this regularly, but she likes to do it under a nickname. I think that she wants to appear as another reader in the comments, not as a supportive parent.’

‘That’s hilarious,’ Isla says.

‘So cute,’ Ava adds.

My informants are similar to Reed’s (2006) bloggers in that while they assert ‘I blog for me’ (p. 231) they are conscious of their audiences and often take this into account each time that they press ‘publish’ on a draft of a blog post. One of the ways that bloggers differentiate between public and private is in terms of ‘online’ (what’s on the record) and ‘offline’ (what’s off the record) behavior, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Yet, one of their main concerns is to find ways to make what was previously ‘private’ more ‘public.’ As bloggers engage in this activity in a different way that many of their peers do (e.g. on various social media channels), they often look to each other for guidance. In this sense, one could argue that fashion bloggers blog, at least in part, with an audience of fashion bloggers in mind, even though the percentage of those as compared to the overall readership is likely to be fairly low.
‘I don’t really think about the anonymous readers,’ Isla says, ‘mostly just the ones that comment. But then again, a good percentage of those are my blogger friends so I don’t have worry too much about what I’m posting for them,’ you know.

‘Yeah, we’re low maintenance.’ Ava jokes.

What information that they chose to make public is up to them, but regardless of how they decide which information to include, they must navigate between different audiences, dealing with overlapping social media networks and potential conflicts at points of convergence. As mentioned earlier, most of their readers will never be known to them, as only a small percentage of blog readers will leave comments or interact with them on various social media channels. Ava, for example, averages 11,000 unique page views per month but normally receives an average of twenty comments on a daily basis, sometimes less depending upon the week or the season (‘Nobody comments during Fashion Week’). Bloggers make distinctions between the readers that they interact with on their blogs and various social media channels and those who remain anonymous. The different levels of interaction that they may have include commenting, ‘liking’ something on Facebook, Tweeting links or sending emails and there is a hierarchy that exists among fashion bloggers pertaining to how these different forms of media are used and how to appropriately switch between them (See Chapter 2).

1.3 What’s blogable?

Ava’s room is fairly large, with one big window that overlooks the street. From the window, one can see the bus stop and several local shops, including a fish market, a pizza restaurant and a small family run grocery. Her walls are covered with different photographs, signed memorabilia and images of her favourite bands, including a large Good Charlotte poster. It hangs above her bed and is signed by each of the band members in bold, black permanent marker. Ava collects autographs from bands and celebrities and frequently attends in-store book signings and music performances where she obtains the majority of these autographs. She lives with her mother and older brother in a two-story house in the Crouch End area of North London. Upon entering her room, the sheer volume of her possessions is staggering. Each surface is completely covered with various knickknacks, cosmetic products, papers and
magazines, among other objects. Her closets and cabinets are filled to such an extent that many of the doors cannot be shut. ‘I know it’s like an episode of ‘Hoarders’ in here,’ she once joked to me, while rummaging through her closet for a particular jumper to wear to an event that evening. When Isla, entered this space for the first time she expressed a similar sentiment, exclaiming, ‘Oh, Ava… It’s like Grey Gardens!’ a reference to the 1975 documentary film by Albert and David Maysles about reclusive socialites, Edith and ‘Little Edie’ Beale.

Each of the objects in Ava’s room has a story that comes along with it, one that she is happy to share, if she is asked. To draw on Clifford (1998), collecting these different material things allows Ava to relive different memories, in doing so, they take on a new importance (c.f. Clifford, 1998: 231). This is evident in the way that she talks about them and the stories that she is eager to share. The first time that I visited her, I spent a good amount of time pointing at different objects, signed images and pictures adorning her wall and asking different questions about them in almost rapid-fire manner.

‘Where did you get these?’

‘How long have you had this?’

‘You have three hair straighteners?’

‘I think I have the same sweater at home.’

‘Is that a signed photograph of Daniel Radcliffe?’

‘Oh, my brother got that signed for me,’ she answered, ‘He met him when he was working at a charity event at a golf course. This one (pointing to signed liner notes for British band Young Guns), I got this signed at an in-store gig. Do you know them? They’re not massive or anything, but I really love them.’ She pointed at the fedora we bought together during one of our trips to Camden Market, now resting on the head of a stuffed koala. ‘I got that koala when I was seven. That was when we still lived in Hong Kong. We lived in one of those closed compounds and my mum used to take me for walks around it during the day. On one of those walks, a neighbour’s dog attacked, me... Well, it didn’t bite me or anything, but it attacked me, and the next day the neighbour brought me this stuffed koala and a bag filled with chocolate.’

Ava has photographs of family and friends taped to the wall, along with caricatures and sketches drawn of her from different blogger events and parties. Her bookshelf is completely filled with books, with an autographed copy of Wonders of the Universe by Dr. Brian Cox and Andrew Cohen on prominent display. The rest of the books that fill the shelves are a mix of
alternative future and science fiction novels, which are her favourite genres. She also has ‘all of the classics’ which she describes as, ‘you know, all the books that were essentially banned like fifty years ago.’ *Catch 22*, her personal favourite, can be found sandwiched between copies of the *His Dark Materials trilogy* and *The Hunger Games*, alongside books by Dan Brown and Carlos Ruiz Zafon, her favourite writers. Ava points out her fashion books to me as well. She owns three: *Style* by Lauren Conrad, a book about GHD (a company that makes hair styling products), as well as a copy of *How to Walk in High Heels*, which I gave her on her twenty-third birthday.

A twin bed is located in the corner of her room, pushed up by the radiator against the wall. A small black Toshiba laptop rests on the brightly coloured blankets that cover the bed. While she also has a desktop computer in her room, she does most of her blogging on her laptop, sitting cross legged on her bed with the computer placed in front of her. On average, she spends at least two or three hours a day working on her blog, and an additional two hours responding to reader comments. All of the comments that she responds to are written by other bloggers, who leave a link to their blogs as part of their comment on her blog. She usually responds to these comments while watching television, anything from *The Big Bang Theory* or *The New Girl* to Formula One car racing. She sets aside time specifically to respond to comments, usually an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. ‘I’ve just made it part of my routine,’ she says. Under her bed are boxes of shoes, neatly stacked, some still unworn, and several are duplicate pairs. She describes herself as ‘definitely a shoe person’ and, as of April 2012, owns approximately ninety-five pairs of shoes. Of her shoe collection, seven are different kinds of Converse trainers and nine are different kinds of Vans. The rest are an assortment of court shoes, flats, wedges and ankle boots that she has accumulated over the past three years. Many are the result of ongoing partnerships that she has with various online retailers, including Spartoo, Schuh, and Sarenza. She receives shoes in return for coverage of their website on her blog, as well front page advertisements, and SEO text links.

When she first began her blog three years ago, Ava’s daily ensemble was regularly a pair of skinny jeans, trainers, a graphic tee shirt and a hooded sweatshirt. While she still has the same love for slouchy tees and trainers, she notes that her style has changed since she began her blog. The size of her wardrobe has grown exponentially, as she receives free clothing, shoes, and accessories from different brands to style and review on her blog on a regular basis.
On average, she receives between one to three items a week, although some weeks she receives much more than this and others: none (‘I hate those weeks.’). Ava chooses many of these items by attending in-store events, or from the brand’s website or lookbook. Others are hand-picked by company public relations representatives (PRs) and sent to her through the post. She usually wears at least one free article of clothing or accessory on a daily basis. She is quick to point out which items are free most times that we meet, often disclosing the retail value for the items and the company that provided them as well. Yet while her wardrobe has grown exponentially as a direct result of her blog, she notes that the particular items of clothing that she picks, as well as the way that she ‘styles’ or combines them with other pieces in her wardrobe to form an outfit, has also changed. She says, ‘I take more risks now, you know?’

In part, she credits this to the fact that she receives many items for free and often chooses items to review that she would not ordinarily buy for herself. She jokes, ‘When you’re picking out four or five new pairs of shoes each month, there’s no need to be practical, really.’ Some of these items become regular fixtures in her wardrobe, while others are worn once for the purposes of a blog post and then tucked away in the depths of her closet. Looking over some of her earlier blog entries with me one day, she covered her eyes and exclaimed, ‘Oh God, this is horrible! I can’t believe I wore that! I think I’m going to delete this now, actually... Do you think I should? I would never blog about something like this now.’ Tonight, Ava tells me that she plans to upload and edit her photographs from the press days she attended earlier during the day. Press days are events where journalists and bloggers may preview a particular designer or brand’s collection for the upcoming season. Bloggers are invited to attend, usually by email, by a particular brand’s PR, who may be located in-house or from an external agency. Some bloggers will also ‘crash’ or ‘blag their way’ into these events, if not invited. Typically, bloggers attend press days on a ‘drop-in basis,’ and will stay for an average of twenty minutes; photographing the various garments or items on display and briefly speaking with a PR about the collection. At most press days, bloggers receive a goodie bag before they leave, which contains a white paper (detailed press information about the collection), as well as a few free items or a gift card. Based on the value, uniqueness, and number of items, some goodie bags are deemed better than others by bloggers. In an effort to appear noncha-
lant, most bloggers will wait until they have left the event to look inside the bag and see which items they have received.

‘I don’t know if I’m going to write a post about it,’ she tells me, ‘or maybe I will and I’ll just leave the comments off? I could also just upload them all to Facebook?’ As many fashion bloggers do, she has a Facebook page for her blog, which is separate from her personal Facebook account.

‘I know, people never comment on press days,’ I say.

‘I know, but I always feel so obliged....’ Ava reaches into her brown leather shoulder bag and pulls out a small black digital camera. She removes the memory card and inserts it into her laptop computer. ‘The pictures are uploading now,’ she says, ‘I’ll show you them in a sec. Should I put on some music? Foster the People?’

Each of Ava’s blog posts provides insight into her daily life, each is a part in a compilation of stories centred on Ava, who is the narrator, curator, and subject of these tales. Each blog post may be viewed a collected moment, carefully crafted and placed on display to share with her readers. Unlike her home space, which is a private space to which visitors must be invited in, her blog presents an alternative public space in which many of the different artefacts she has ordered in her room are rearranged and become socially relevant among fashion bloggers. In doing so, she exoticises these things and contextualises them in a new way (c.f. Clifford, 1998). Continuing to draw on Clifford (1998), we may consider individuals as ‘possessive selves’ who are encouraged to discern differences between particular kinds of objects and then order them appropriately within the realms of convention (Clifford, 1998: 219). When we extend Clifford’s analysis to fashion blogging, it becomes clear that many of the conventions within different networks inform their decisions about ‘What to post?’ and ‘What not to post?’ As argued earlier, fashion bloggers’ knowledge of different things is further developed as they learn to manipulate the different materials that they use, whether this is or by determining which things are ‘blogable’ or how these things should be worked into their blogs.
The Social Lives of Fashion Blogs

One month into my fieldwork, I was sitting in Le Péché Mignon, an independent French cafe in Highbury, waiting to interview Susie Bubble. She suggested the cafe, probably out of convenience, as it was just around the corner from her flat. I arrived early, took a seat at one of the tables and ordered a cappuccino as I waited. Le Péché Mignon is a small cafe with limited seating space, the kind of establishment where necessity dictates that strangers share small tables. The shelved walls display different products for sale: artisan breads, fresh juices, organic cereals, and ethically friendly KeepCups in assorted sizes, the cafe’s logo emblazoned across them in its signature shade of brown. While I brought along a tape recorder to document our conversation, I quickly realised that the noisy environment was likely to render it useless. I was skeptical about using a tape recorder to begin with: experience had taught me that they were capable of changing the tone of conversations, that they often brought a stiffness to dialogue. My memory, along with scattered notes on the pad of paper would have to suffice. Unfortunately, due to a sudden bout of food poisoning, Susie had emailed me that morning to reschedule, but I did not receive her message in time. I was still using one of those ‘old school’ mobile phones that is capable of very little other than making phone calls and sending and receiving texts. Since we had not exchanged telephone numbers, she had no other way to reach me. I sat there waiting for an interview that would not happen, and it struck me then that a smartphone might be a sensible investment for the duration of my fieldwork.

From that point, a BlackBerry was a constant companion. With my phone in hand, I became adept at multitasking during commutes to and from Paddington Station. I read blog posts, responded to emails, and checked Twitter and Facebook to see ‘what people were up to.’ I made contributions to social networking sites whenever I came across something that I thought warranted sharing. The variety of topics that seem worthy of a tweet is incredible—anything

*Shoshanna: She doesn’t really know how to text. She calls it a ‘word alert.’*

-From HBO ‘Girls’ Season 1, Episode 2
from a brief description of what I was wearing during the day (accompanied by the blogger appropriate #todayimwearing hashtag) to an image of a man, who, likely exhausted by a long work day, accidentally fell asleep with his head on my shoulder on a Reading-bound train. I sent texts back and forth to some of my closest informants throughout the day. I used Facebook chat to conduct many of my informal interviews, which was their idea. ‘It records everything so that’s probably most convenient for you,’ Patrick said. The constant flow of information kept me informed about what was happening within my different social networks. It was almost addictive, a growing need to be among the first to know what was new, to be ‘in fashion.’ At the same time, it was ‘productivity at its finest,’ as Isabella would say.

Yet while mobile phone use filled many momentary gaps between activities: time spent during daily commutes or waiting for someone by an underground station, it was also a constant source of disruption. In the middle of conversations, the blinking red light would appear the upper righthand corner of my BlackBerry and momentarily capture my attention, notifying me of incoming messages. Whether or not I chose to ignore them, the different beeps that coordinated with each kind of message: Blackberry messenger, Facebook notifications, Tweets, emails, texts, and regular phone calls as well as the constant blinking red light would distract me, even if just for a second, before I could continue with whatever I was doing.

Acquiring a mobile phone was a fairly monumental moment during my fieldwork, more than I initially anticipated. It allowed me to connect more easily with my different networks of London-based fashion bloggers and to network more effectively with my blog. Ava and I coordinated our initial meeting over a series of Tweets, for example, and Patrick and I engaged in a similar routine, although over a much longer period of time before we met in person. As our relationships developed over these platforms, I learned more about new forms of association, vocabulary and social practices that were more generally established codes of conduct among fashion bloggers, as well as practices that were specific to certain networks. Drawing on Warner (2005) I have positioned fashion blogs as counterpublics, arguing that fashion bloggers have created a social space in order to frame their conduct and that it affords them different possibilities to be public than were previously available to them. Continuing along that path, I would like to further break down the key relationship between bloggers, their readers and fashion industry members, highlighting some of the disconnects that occur within different social situations. As I found through my fieldwork, it is primarily through disconnects and faux pas that appropriate behaviour in different contexts is revealed. First, I would like to pay attention to the different kinds of friendships that develop between bloggers and the way that they differentiate between these kinds of relationships. Following this, I will draw on Gershon (2010)
and others to focus on issues of remediation, paying attention to new forms of association, vocabulary and practices that emerge among fashion bloggers.

2.1. Friendship

I met Violet at the Vouchercodes.co.uk ‘Fashion’s Most Wanted’ party, which as mentioned earlier was my first blogger event. Our introduction was my second faux pas of the evening. (The first was the ‘Susie from Boston’ moment that I described in the previous chapter.) Violet was one of the first faces that I recognised among the sixty or so bloggers in attendance because I was a regular reader of her blog. I forget exactly how I found it, but I must likely stumbled upon it by clicking through someone’s blog roll. At the event, she was wearing a casual grey jumper, dark denim skinny jeans, and brown boots, her hair pulled up into knot with a patterned scarf wrapped around it. She looked very much like she did in the pictures on her blog, images that I remembered well as I admired her personal style, especially since she buys most of her clothes in charity shops and car boot sales in her neighbourhood. I had been struck by the quality of her photographs as well, which were all edited in the same sepia tones. The majority of them were outfit posts that depicted her posing in front of the same brick wall.

I would later learn that her mother took the majority of her pictures for her and that the wall that served as a backdrop was right around the corner from the council flat where they live in Battersea. She would tell me that they initially picked that particular wall out of convenience one day (‘We were in a rush’), but liked how the photographs looked and kept going back there. She would tell me that she loved the deep sepia tones of the brown bricks, to her they were almost iconic in her neighbourhood. I would visit her at her home in Battersea for Sunday roast one evening and while we prepared assorted gluten-free dishes with her mother in the kitchen, she would make a comment that I was closer in age to her mum than I was to her. We would go charity shopping at her local haunts and it is here that I would witness first-hand that Violet seems have an ‘eye’ for that kind of thing, a talent that I certainly do not share. Many bloggers will liken thrift shopping to a ‘treasure hunt’, but most of my charity shop finds came with, what she called ‘a serious case of buyer’s remorse.’

However, at this particular event we were strangers, or at least I was still a stranger to her. Ava knew Violet from other blogger events and eventually brought me over to meet her. I discovered early on that Ava was a great host at these kind of gatherings, always making introductions and never leaving me to fend for myself. At the beginning, I wondered if this was a result of her feeling responsible for me, as she often brought me along as her ‘plus one.’ Later on, I came to realise that this was just the kind of friend that she was. In meeting Violet, I
mentioned to her that I had read her blog a few times but never commented. I did not realise at the time that lurking is something that bloggers never share, at least not to the recipient of that activity. Lurking, according to my informants, is ‘creepy.’ Yet as I told her this, Violet smiled and gave me a great big hug and I would like to think that this moment marked the beginning of our friendship. She would eventually tell me that she normally hugged people after they introduced themselves to her and mentioned that they read her blog. ‘It buys me some time because I always feel quite awkward about it,’ she would say. When I asked her why she feel so awkward, she answers ‘I don’t know...I guess that I never know what to say to them at first.’

As anthropologists, we often neglect to address friendship in our ethnographies, but it is a very important part of the relationships that we form with our informants and the way that they relate to each other as we get to know them. As outlined in the introduction, this work is very much a collaborative text with the different fashion bloggers that I came to know throughout my fieldwork; many of them became close friends. When I refer to them in other contexts, I always describe them as ‘friends’ and they would be offended to hear otherwise. At the same time, I was an apprentice of sorts; it was through my friendships with fashion bloggers that I was able to learn many of the technical and social skills needed to be a blogger, even if their instructions were not always explicit. It was opportunity for me to blog with them and to realise when doing so that, ‘the apprentice’s ability to understand the master’s performance depends not on their possessing the same representation of it, or of the objects it entails, but rather on their engaging in the performance in congruent ways (Lavie & Wenger, 1991: 21).’

When talking about friendship, we are describing a very specific kind of affective relationship that requires an understanding of the self as autonomous (c.f. Bell & Coleman, 1999: 20-21). In most cases, friendship between bloggers arises through participation in organised events rather than by deliberate arrangement and in this sense it is a semi-spontaneous development (c.f. Allan, 1996: 88). Many of my informants expressed surprise in the depth of the relationships that they formed with other bloggers. ‘Some of my best friends are bloggers,’ Violet tells me, ‘and that is the best thing that I’ve taken from blogging, hands down.’ This is not to say that friendship cannot be strategic in different situations. As friendship between bloggers is very visible and closely linked, it can function as a tool for social positioning within different networks (See Chapter 6). Furthermore, the terminology used to describe different kinds of relationships varies depending upon the social networking site, which can result in bloggers believing that they are closer friends with others than they actually are, often resulting in conflict.
Blogs have ‘followers’ or ‘readers’, blog Facebook pages have ‘likes’, while personal Facebook pages have ‘friends and Twitter has ‘followers.’ (The same terminology between Twitter and blog followers is interesting, given that Twitter drives the most blog traffic, according to Technorati’s *State of the Blogosphere* in 2011.) At the same time, those terms further serve to denote a ‘kind’ of reader to a blogger, readers that they may interact with but do not consider to be members of their friend groups or blogger networks. Many bloggers are picky about who they follow, often claiming that it ‘looks cooler’ to be following less people than the number that follow them. As Patrick stresses that he is choosy about who he would follow. It is only ‘after a series of interesting correspondences, that he may decide to ‘follow’ someone. ‘I do try to keep my number under two hundred though,’ he tells me, ‘anything more than that is just difficult to manage. So, you know, if I add someone, I’ll probably delete someone.’

However, there are significant differences in the ways fashion bloggers categorise their ‘friends’ as different kinds of relationships. Ava’s opinion on this topic has much to do with how bloggers understand ‘closeness’ and intimacy. In one sense, we might look at this as a form of kinship—a way that bloggers create close connections with each other, by drawing distinctions between certain bloggers within their ‘blogger family’ or ‘blogger friend group’ and the larger mass of followers. While these connections are made public, they are still personal. For bloggers, ‘friends are not followers,’ and those who consider themselves particularly close may nickname each other ‘blogger bff’s’, ‘sisters’ or ‘sisters from another mother.’ In my case, I was given the nickname ‘blogger bff’ by Ava, ‘sister from another mother,’ by Isabella (aged 27, and a marketing manager for a high street clothing brand) and ‘Momma Bear,’ by Isla, largely due to our discrepancy in age, as I was thirty at the time of my fieldwork and she was nineteen. Bloggers also differentiate between ‘blog friends’ and ‘actual friends’ to the point that when I unknowingly referred to one of my informants as a ‘blog friend’ of mine, she was insulted and demanded that I amend my statement. ‘Blog friendships’ describe the way that bloggers meet each other, either by interacting on each other’s blogs, meeting at blogger events, and corresponding through social networks. When my informants compare these different types of ‘blog friendships’, they rank friendships with those who they see regularly at events first, followed by social network interaction and finally blog interaction (primarily commenting). In addition to how they met, a ‘blog friendship’ describes the way that bloggers continually interact, and most notably the separation of these blog friendships from their other friendships with university or work colleagues, for example. In this instance, this particular blogger was insulted by what she perceived as an inaccurate labelling of our relationship, as we spent time together
outside of the blog, had personal conversations, and mingled within each other’s greater groups of friends.

While I would not like to argue that friendship between bloggers is formed primarily for advantageous circumstances. Social media, in part, is what creates a fashion blogger ‘community’ and different friendships; it is through these links that a series of extended networks between individuals is drawn. Links between bloggers are defined by the way that they connect with each other through different social networking websites, even more so than blogs. As mentioned earlier, fashion bloggers use different categories to describe different kinds of relationships with their readers and each other. If these categories are inconsistent (e.g. one blogger has a different perception of a friendship than the other), these disconnects are especially evident through social media use. Furthermore, many of these communications are public exchanges that may be viewed and judged by others. Before highlighting some of the disconnects, I would like to pay attention to the way that my informants assign value to different forms of social media.

In the Pilot episode of the Lena Dunham’s HBO series Girls, Hannah and Marni debate different forms of mediated communication in what Marni calls ‘the totem of chat.’ Marni ranks the lowest form of chat as Facebook, followed by Gchat, texting on a mobile phone, email, and then the telephone. ‘Face to face is, of course, ideal,’ she adds, but it’s not of this time.’ The way that Marni talks about different forms of mediated communication is not unlike how bloggers do, they talk about these forms of contact in relationship to each another and, in doing so, they order them within particular hierarchies dependant upon the situation (c.f. Gershon, 2010). Bloggers’ knowledge of a hierarchy of mediated communication generally moves from more public forums of communication which have a lower ranking (e.g. blog comments, tweets, and Facebook page messages) to more private ones (e.g. Twitter direct messages, adding someone on Facebook, texting, and then telephone calls), which they rank higher on the scale. When it comes to blogging, email is something that bloggers consider very formal, so formal that Ava insists, ‘Oh, I would never email another blogger!’ Yet, when I point out that we email each other frequently with short links to video clips, images, or simply as a form of chat, she says, ‘Right, but that’s different because we’re actually friends. I would never just email a blogger that I did not know.’

2.2 Remediation

Two months into fieldwork, I was sitting with Ava at a small table in Ladurée in Covent Garden. The interior was decorated in colours that coordinate with the macarons displayed in the
storefront below: pastel green walls with pale blue woodwork and rosy accents of gold, along with deep red velvet cushioned chairs, and mahogany tables covered with crisp white tablecloths. There were umbrella-covered tables arranged on the balcony as well, but we chose to sit inside to escape the hustle and bustle from the crowds below: the people traveling between the surrounding shops, the sounds of the street performers as they balance bicycles on their heads and announce by megaphone each upcoming feat. ‘I could practically live in here,’ Ava said, slouching back in her chair, ‘It’s just so relaxing.’ I nodded my head in agreement. As we sat in the red velvet chairs, we talked about the different activities that we have planned for the day: vintage shopping in Soho, followed by ice skating at the Tiffany & Co. rink at Somerset House. Occasionally, if one of us said something noteworthy, the other one would tweet it. Sporadically, one of us might think we heard the phone buzzing and reach for it, only to find that we were mistaken. Perhaps, the ‘phantom’ buzzes and blinking lights of the phone were a testament to the fact that we are continually awaiting these little ruptures within the course of the day, whether we greeted them with curiosity, excitement or ambivalence; even if we lamented the inconvenience of it all.

As the tray of different sandwiches and cakes arrived, Ava carefully photographed each of the delicacies with her camera. ‘Do you mind if you wait [to eat] until I photograph this one?’ she asked, ‘Here, try these first. I’ve already gotten them.’ One small cake in particular catches her attention: a chocolate cake with a dark chocolate ganache. It is decorated with a single red rose petal, which has a gold Ladurée sticker attached. She takes a photograph of the cake with her camera, and then with her mobile phone. She shows me the photograph after she takes it, impressed with the quality of the image. ‘Look how good this came out!’ she says, as she tweets it to her followers along with the caption: *Casual brunch at Ladurée with @takeoutcouture.*

Style for bloggers is not something limited to clothing or accessories; it extends to anything that one might consider aesthetically pleasing from food to landscapes, to floral arrangements and shop windows. Smart phones are considered fashion accessories: they often make an appearance in ‘What’s In My Bag’ posts, displayed beside Chanel lipsticks, Alexander McQueen keychains, oyster cards, and favourite novels that fill the ‘down time’ spent on the tube. Ava, for example, has assorted phone covers: zebra print and florals, solid blue, green, and several shades of pink. Among the different models is her current favourite which is a glittery gold. *You know you’re a blogger when you coordinate your phone with your nails,* she tweeted one day, attaching an Instagram image of herself holding her phone. The image is cropped at her hand, which wraps around the phone so that her painted fingernails are also on display. A spin on the
traditional French manicure, the tips of her nails were painted a glittery gold, coordinating with the same shimmery golden tones of her smartphone case.

A phone may or may not be ‘in fashion’, but while some of my informants were not concerned with whether or not they own the latest model, certain types of phones allow them access to programs that others do not. (The most notable of these is Instagram, a photo sharing program that, at the time of my research, was available only to iPhone users.) These phones, whether they are iPhones, BlackBerrys, Androids, or other models, are adorned with decorated covers and accessories. The decorations are practical: they protect the phone from damage. However, they also give bloggers an opportunity to personalise their phones. The way that one personalises a smart phone is often consistent with his or her own style of dress, to such an extent that some phone decorations will appear as street style trends, as is evident with the Rabito iPhone cover (a plastic cover that features large bunny ears), and oversized pom pom charms in neon colours. Both of these appeared on numerous street style blogs during the AW2012 London Fashion Week, as well as many fashion websites. Natalie, of Canned Fashion owns one of each and uses them simultaneously, as she has two mobile phones—one that she uses for personal calls and blogging and the other for work.

As with Gershon’s (2010) North American University students, bloggers often speak of a face-to-face communication as an additional form of mediated communication, especially when it pertains to meeting someone for the first time. Many bloggers develop friendships as readers of each other blogs. Eventually, through further communication using social networking websites, especially Twitter, they continue the conversation on a more personal note, they move up, as Marni would say, ‘the totem of chat.’ Blog comments usually relate to some sort of compliment about a particular outfit or post in general. There are also plenty of ‘nice blog, follow me’ comments, which the more seasoned bloggers typically despise because they are so impersonal. However, many of the communications that occur over Twitter are more personal: they may pertain to the sharing of information that might be of interest (e.g. ‘Thought you might be interested in this link’) or in response to a statement that is not directly blog related. Additionally, Tweets do not demand the same level of reciprocity as a blog comment.

Having communicated through their blogs and social media over a period of time, bloggers may make arrangements to meet should they be in the same area, or have a shared interest. This is how I met Ava for the first time. After several weeks of exchanging regular blog comments and Tweets, I sent out a Tweet expressing interest in attending a Marc by Marc Jacobs book signing by Robert Duffy. I was curious to see if any bloggers would be willing to
attend with me, and Ava responded that she would. Although the book signing never came to fruition, we did meet outside of the store on Mount Street that day, an experience that she considers to mark ‘when we really first met.’ From that point onward, the way that we used social media and our blogs to communicate with each other changed: our level of contact exponentially increased, and I found that we spent more time texting or tweeting each other than interacting with each other through our blogs as we used to. At the same time, the hierarchy of mediated communication between us became much more lax. Ava would email, or tweet, or text me, depending whatever form of communication was most convenient at the time. Tweets or texts were reserved for times when she was with her family—anything from small snippets of conversations that she overhead while out and about in London, to quick summaries of her daily activities with a promise to ‘call me later’ to fill me in.

Emails were usually sent if there was a private link or image that she wanted to share, whether I was helping her to choose a new pair of shoes for an event, or she was emailing me an image of a handsome guy that she was ‘currently crushing on.’ It took several weeks from our initial meeting for us to graduate to telephone usage; when talking about this we often joke that I called her ‘before she was ready.’ Yet, as our conversations took on a more relaxed approach: we became less concerned with offending each other by using the ‘wrong’ form of media, and more amused by situations when others did. ‘Did you see that tweet?’, she would text me to tell me on numerous occasions, pointing out some sort of social media disconnect by a new user, someone who, for one reason of another, appeared to be completely clueless to the nuances of mediated conversations. The blogging community that emerges out of social media use, allows it subjects to denaturalise face to face or in person communication, such as that with friends, work colleagues, and so on. Face to face communication is reserved for ‘meeting up’ and social media communication fills the intervals between these meetings. For those that do not meet up in person, these different forms of social media provide continuity between blog posts.

Drawing on Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) theory of remediation, we may understand that individual ideas about social media are constructed through comparison—that the way that persons perceive and use new media directly correlates to their relationship with older forms of media. Furthermore, the introduction of new media forms impacts the perception and usage of older media forms, and vice-versa (p). Gershon draws on this concept of remediation, when discussing the different media channels that individuals may use to disconnect, to break-up, highlighting the miscommunications that occur when individuals have different media ideologies and idioms of practice, or diverse levels of knowledge pertaining to how particular technologies work and how to use them. She goes on to examine instances in which technology users, and in
her case, college students, ‘switch media’ and their thoughts about appropriate and inappropriate usages of different media forms, depending upon particular situations. Often, she draws comparison (as do her participants) to how closely a conversation may resemble an ‘in person’ one, as well as perceived different levels of formality, and different kinds of exchange (i.e. how closely a particular method would resemble a monologue as opposed to a dialogue) (Gershon, 2010).

While bloggers sometimes consider in person communication as another form of mediated communication (as mentioned in the example above), this is not always the case. In person communication is not always the prime mode of comparison, especially if they have not met the person in question in the first place. Many of the mediated exchanges that occur between bloggers would seem out of place in ‘real life’ or in person situations. An obvious example of this would be tweeting someone who they do not know. Twitter also has the capability of putting bloggers in touch with celebrities and industry figures. Receiving a response to one of her tweets by renowned fashion critic Hilary Alexander, Isabella captured a screenshot image of the conversation and posted it to her personal Facebook, with the caption: *Casually tweeting with Hills.* Furthermore, while a blogger may send out a tweet, this does not always mean that they expect a response, or that they intend to engage in a dialogue. Many will say that they share for the sake of sharing, similar to how many bloggers would argue that they blog for themselves. When speaking with bloggers, I soon learned that not every form of social media interaction should be looked at as a conversation, and especially in comparison to an in-person one.

However, bloggers do find ways to ‘mirror’ each other, when interacting through different forms of new media (Gershon, 2010: 57-58). As body language is something that is impossible to read between two people that are communicating through email, text, telephone, chat, or blog comments, bloggers often replicate spoken word through the pauses, line breaks, emoticons, and other structures in order to augment the way that they communicate. They may spell words that they would like to emphasise with long, drawn our vowels (e.g. ‘heeeey!’), or adopt similar jargon between members of a friend group (e.g. Isabella’s use of the word ‘casual’) or other bloggers that they follow on Twitter. Social media memes, such as *Shit Fashion Girls Say,* also popularizes particular terms, which bloggers may engage with on their blogs or social networking sites. Following the first two episodes of *Shit Fashion Girls Say,* for example, marked the use (and rapid influx of use) of #totesamaze (also spoken as ‘hashtag totes amaze’) between fashion bloggers and members of the fashion industry.

Bloggers use these new media forms in different ways among each other and when communicating with ‘bigger bloggers,’ ‘blogger friends,’ fans, public relations representatives,
advertising executives, personal contacts, and so on. One of the things that is most evident on Twitter and other social networking sites is when someone is not familiar with how to use it. As twitter is a relatively new form of social media, these kinds of ‘disconnects’ are fairly frequent and interesting from an anthropological perspective. The common errors on Twitter, include: not crediting others for their information the appropriate ways (via a RT or a HT) ‘butting in’ to conversations between two persons that the third party is not familiar with, or tweeting ‘at’ (@) to themselves by accident rather than the intended target of conversation. Each is an obvious blunders to someone more familiar with the codes of practice, a ‘cringe’ moment that is likely to be more uncomfortable to those who are familiar with the website, than those who are not; they have yet to learn the acceptable uses and may not realise that their behaviour is inappropriate in particular contexts. Rudeness, is not technically a faux pas, but bloggers frequently speak about it with each other.

Similarly to what Gershon found with her students, many of the bloggers that I spoke to considered email to be a fairly formal method of communication, at least when contacting other bloggers. Violet said to me, ‘Oh, I was just talking to Ava about this! We were both saying that we would never email another blogger!’ Ava added, ‘We have phone numbers, Twitter, and Facebook. If you really wanted to make plans with someone, you would just call or text.’ When I pointed out that we often email each other throughout the day, she added, ‘Well, yeah, but that’s just links and things... And we’ll email when I am away in Qatar, because I can’t use the phone. Plus it’s different because, you know, we’re friends. The only people that I would actually ever email are PRs [public relations representatives].’ At the same time, Isabella related an occasion when she was contacted at home by a PR representative that she had given her business card to. Isabella had listed her phone number on the card, but never expected to hear from a public relations representative that way, as most PR companies typically contact bloggers by email. ‘It was so strange!’ she explained, ‘she called me around 10:30 in the morning, asking if I would be willing to write a post about something. Why didn’t she just email?’ She related similar annoyance with a different PR representative from Marks and Spencers, who she was working on a project with. Since she was collaborating with this particular brand, she expected to be in contact with them over the phone, but was perplexed and annoyed by the times that they would contact her. ‘This PR is so intense!’ she told me, ‘She calls me on my cell at close to midnight, asking when I am going to email her the photographs for Friday’s post. Um, it’s Wednesday! I have no idea why she feels the need to call me like that. She’s so crazy! I am going to be so happy when this project is over.’

Over the course of my fieldwork, I have spoken to bloggers in substantial depth about blogger conventionalities and the things that irk them that other bloggers say, do, and write in
their blogs. ‘There’s so much,’ Ava tells me, ‘tweeting while watching TV, sharing information too often, sharing random stuff as if they have nothing better to do, tweets about relationship stuff, depressing tweets...’ When I ask them why they do not stop reading a particular blog or ‘unfollow’ someone on Twitter or Facebook, many point out that those particular bloggers will be able to tell, using different technologies. ‘Someone unfollowed Gem Fatale and then she tweeted about it. She said something like ‘I thought so and so was my friend’, ‘ Ava explains, ‘and sure enough by the end of the day, that person was following her again.’ ‘You’ll follow them because you know that they’re following you and you have to.’ Isla adds, ‘You’re following as a chore, just because they’re other bloggers.’ Ava goes on, ‘Luckily, I am following a lot of people, so a lot of that gets lost in my timeline. I rarely see it, really.’

2.3 Etiquette

‘Twitter makes the people that I do know extremely annoying and the people that I don’t know seem fascinating.’ Isabella tells me. Isabella has been blogging for four years and is always one to call people out on Twitter. A candy company once sent her a tweet her asking if she had any marketing advice for them. She retweeted their comment promptly to her 3,146 followers, attaching: How about you pay someone for it? I work hard at what I do, a response that garnered chuckles from several of her friends. Immediately after seeing her response, the company offered to send her some free samples, but she declined. Thank you, she tweeted, but I’m watching my figure. She told me later that she would have liked to receive the candy samples, but it was ‘the principle of it all’ that stopped her. ‘I’m not going to sell my soul for a few packs of free gummy bears,’ she said. The bloggers within her friend circle often refer to Isabella as a ‘honey badger,’ a term of endearment drawn from a popular youtube video that (as of 12 October 2012) has over 52 million views. Put plainly, Isabella speaks her mind and those that know her are well-aware of this.

Speaking to bloggers about how they use and switch between these different forms of media is quite fascinating, especially when talking about etiquette. ‘There are no established rules, of course,’ Ava explains, ‘it’s like an unwritten code, you just know.’ Yet, while Ava claims that there are no rules that can be easily referenced, it is apparent is that there are different ‘rules’ depending upon particular kinds of relationships and social contexts and this is something that bloggers must learn as they go along. Drawing on Lave & Wenger (1991) we can consider knowledge as learned and constructed through experience. This pertains to ‘blending in’ as a blogger, but also within the larger fashion communities, as there are often different ‘rules’ for different kinds of situations. Media ideologies to draw on Gershon (2010) are also constructed
in this way. At the same time, bloggers have created a space in which to frame the potentialities of their interactions. Different blogger neologisms and jargon reveal knowledge of the appropriate use of different forms of media and how to appropriately switch between them given the context (Gershon, 2010). To draw on Warner (2002), many of these neologisms and practices are unique among bloggers and assert their identity within a particular group.

While we may look at ‘fashion blogging’ as a counterpublic, we must also consider the smaller groups of bloggers that exist a series of networks based on geographic location, gender, aesthetic preferences (style); connections made publicly evident through blog rolls, shared attendance at particular events. Many bloggers relate stories from when they first started out and ‘didn’t know better,’ or will point out faux pas committed by others. ‘Ooh, remember the time that you met Violet and told her that you had been reading her blog and never commented?’ Ava will remind me ‘Awkward!’ Bloggers have often called each other to share experiences during which they were on the receiving end of the ‘awkward’ or ‘creepy’ behaviour. Shortly after I had returned to Scotland, Isla called on my mobile to relate an awkward encounter between herself and another blogger that occurred at a press day event. She said,

I was speaking with the PR and she brought me over to this other blogger; briefly introduced us and then said, ‘I’ll leave you to it.’ Um... leave us to what? It was really awkward, Swieie, because I was just getting ready to leave, but then I had to sit down with this other blogger that I didn’t know at all and it was her first time at an event... She got her notepad out and started asking me all of these questions... I was really uncomfortable, and then she just went ahead and took my picture, you know, right while I was sitting on the sofa, without even asking! I just don’t get why someone would do that! It was just so bizarre... And then, right as I was leaving, this girl asks me to let her know about future blogger events and press days. I didn’t even know what to say to that! I mean, who asks that? I think I just said something along the lines of, ‘oh, right...’ and then walked off.

Both Ava and Isla’s examples are interesting in that they describe ‘awkward’ exchanges between individuals that have a different knowledge of blogger etiquette (what is appropriate to say, appropriate behaviours, and so on). In both cases, the blogger committing the faux pas: me, in the first case, and an unnamed blogger in the second, simply lack the frame of reference to understand that telling a blogger that you’re a lurker, or spontaneously interviewing and photographing someone that you have never met before is inappropriate. What is also interesting about these examples, is that they highlight the connection between communication using new media and in person communication. That is, it was the combination of reading Violet’s blog, not commenting and then telling her about it, that made the situation uncomfortable, as was the ‘over-friendly’ behaviour of another blogger to Isla. This blogger
unfortunately assumed that ‘blogger camaraderie,’ which is evident on many different blogs (as bloggers link to each other, attend events together, tweet inside jokes to each other and so on) would develop in a particular way, in this particular case, during or immediately after an initial meeting.

To draw on Goffman (1990), we may understand that learned behaviour is presented and performed to the public through the blog and in different public settings on an ongoing basis, something that will be discussed in later chapters. Blogger neologisms and jargon reveal knowledge of the appropriate use of different forms of media and how to appropriately switch between them given the context (Gershon, 2010), and when demonstrated in public settings one is able to position him or herself socially. To draw on Warner (2002), many of these neologisms and practices are unique among bloggers and assert their identity within a particular group, but can be specific to particular networks of bloggers, whether these networks exist as a result of geographic location, gender, aesthetic preferences (style); connections made publicly evident through blog rolls, or shared attendance at particular events.
My eyes scan the room: matte pink lips, fake tan, stacked bracelets, platforms, animal print and velvet creepers, nail art, bright color-blocked outfits, and ombre hair. Ava has brought me along as her ‘plus one’ to this event, which features an acoustic set by X-factor star Diana Vickers, as well as a preview of the singer’s new clothing line for Very.co.uk. ‘It’s a sea of ombre in here.’ Ava says. We see a group of bloggers sitting on a large leather couch, chatting while sipping from tall champagne flutes filled with prosecco. Other bloggers are receiving complimentary manicures and makeovers, as part of the event. Still others are walking around the room examining the collection that Vickers has described earlier during the Q&A session: snakeskin print skinny jeans, oversized sweaters, sheer billowing tops, and dresses with radishes and parrots printed on them. Ava describes the singer’s Q&A session as a ‘PR nightmare.’ When one of the bloggers in attendance asked the celebrity designer what her inspiration for the collection was, she had responded, ‘I heard that vegetables and fruits were really in right now...And I was really inspired by sixties and sixties vintage, you know, stuff like that.’ What Ava finds especially ironic is the moment when Vickers, clad head-to-toe in her own pieces for the event, is asked what her other favorite brands are and rattles off a list of high-end designers in response. She said, ‘Oh, my Acne pistol boots...those are the one. I also love my Cheap Monday skinnies and my Burberry leather jacket.’

‘Are you serious?’ Ava whispers.

‘Even her favorite high street shop was expensive,’ I note.

‘I know, right?’

As with most presentations of new collections, each of the garments on display is a sample size garment, normally a UK 6 or 8. The tags, which are fastened to each of the pieces with safety pins and ribbon, display the retail and sizing information. As we examine the clothing, Ava
pulls a few of her favorite garments off the rack and asks me to hold each item up, so that she can take pictures. This has become our routine—it is fairly standard for me to show up in some of her pictures, my hand clutching a hanger on the top of the frame. She photographs a few oversized knit sweaters and a pair of skinny jeans. She flips through the hangers as a shopper might, pausing now and again when she comes across something that catches her eye: a pair of burgundy corduroys, a dress with radishes printed all over it. Some of these favorites she ‘likes ironically’ meaning that she would never wear them, but she finds them amusing for some reason or another. While she prefers not to post negative reviews on her blog (‘I like to keep it a positive space’), she will likely tweet images of those items or post them on Facebook (‘I’m more snarky on social media.’) I will admit that I am even more snobbish than Ava at this event, my camera does not ever leave my bag. The novelty of the press days has worn off and I am looking forward to heading to our next destination. Ava is much more professional than me. She knows that if she does not post anything about this event, it is unlikely that they will invite her to future ones; as this PR company handles multiple clients, that could be a bad move for her. At the same time, she is having as much fun as I am: after she takes a few photographs, she tells me that she is more than ready to go. We say goodbye to the PR representatives, who hand us goodie bags as we walk toward the exit. Many of my informants consider goodie bags to be one of the best things about attending press days—they usually include a few samples from the designer and sponsors. It’s typically considered good manners to wait until one has left the event before examining the contents of the goodie bag (‘otherwise, you come across a little desperate’), but Ava peers inside once we are out of earshot of the PRs. She reaches into the bright pink plastic bag to find glitter nail polish and an assortment of sweets. ‘Wow,’ she says, ‘even the candy is chavy.’ Right as we turn to leave, a girl runs up to us. ‘Did you see?’ she says, motioning to long blonde streaks in her hair, ‘Hair extensions! They’re free! And you get to keep them!’

For fashion bloggers, style is of the utmost importance; it is not limited to clothing or accessories but extends to anything where one may have an aesthetic positioning. As Ava and I attended an event that featured different clothing than what we normally gravitate toward, we found it challenging to greet each item without some sort of judgement. We associated the garments with qualities or styles that we desired to distance ourselves from; we tried to create that distance with humor. Fashion bloggers try to maintain a cohesion in their aesthetic by attending certain kinds of events and avoiding others, buying certain brands as opposed to others, and socializing with particular people while ignoring others. Drawing on Bourdieu (1994), these can be considered strategic choices that allow bloggers assert their social position. Keeping this in mind, it is evident that fashion bloggers have created their own kind of class system, which emerges from
groups of overlapped networks that, while a part of the same overall kind of community, have a social hierarchies and different levels of access. There are class structures in different networks that may have different value systems; this can be a sort of tension. Tensions also develops as bloggers negotiate between 'blogger styles' and creating their own looks through which they may assert 'different combinations of self' (cf: Miller & Kuchler, 2005; Woodward, 2011). I will argue that gifted items are at the center of this conflict, as they exist as part of a complex system of exchange through which the blog enters in and out of what Koptoff in *The Social Life of Things* (1986) describes as 'commodity' state. While this marks a new stage in the life of a blog, it also marks a time where bloggers must negotiate their level of ownership with their desire to acquire new material goods and augment their social ranking.

**Talking About Fashion**

In an interview with Ashley Olsen for *Influence*, American model, actor and style icon Lauren Hutton argues that there is ‘no such thing’ as fashion. ‘Fashion,’ she says, ‘is an idea to make you think that you’re not in it at all times. Fashion is what you are offered four times a year by a designer, and style is what you choose.’ Hutton's statement echoes a common sentiment among bloggers, and perhaps more generally (c.f. Woodward, 2010: 67-69), as they continually negotiate between what the industry presents them (fashion) and the pieces that they choose (style). For fashion bloggers, the ongoing accumulation of clothing is crucial to self-presentation: they know that what they wear mediates their interactions with the surrounding world, and in doing so, it affects how comfortable they are ‘in their own skin’. It is through the ongoing consumption of material goods that bloggers are allowed to maintain and further develop a performative construction of self. How they present themselves is something that they must continually deliberate, it is ever present as they ask themselves questions such as, ‘I like this, but is this me?’

---

27 See: Bell (1976), on ‘sartorial conscious’ (p. 18-19), where he asserts that if people are dressed in an inappropriate way for particular social situation, they experience discomfort and will actively attempt to avoid experiencing this discomfort insofar as persons not particularly interested in dress will dress well enough to only to avoid it. Also see: Clark & Miller (2002)’s ethnographic work on the different anxieties that result from dress, as this relates to ‘fashion advice’ that is made available to women and the increasing amount of choice that they are faced with as consumers.

28 Drawing on Goffman’s (1971) analogy between performance and social life, which he uses to explain the construction and presentation of identity, as will be discussed in the next chapter.
While there is substantial literature that addresses the clothed body, the terminologies that the different literatures use (e.g. ‘dress,’ ‘adornment,’ ‘fashion,’ ‘style,’ ‘costume,’ etc.), vary considerably. Many terms are used interchangeably, without specifying exactly what is meant for a definition; this can be problematic, especially when engaging in interdisciplinary dialogues (c.f. Barnard, 2004:8-26). I should note that situating this project within the greater literature of clothing and cloth would be an interesting framework for future research, but is not the direction that I will take for the scope for this project. Rather, I am interested in examining clothing and the fashion industry using the same categories as my informants, many of which have limited knowledge of the industry (other than media-based perceptions) before they start blogging. I realize that each of these materials can be traced further, that each carries with it a ‘history’ that is worthy of further exploration (c.f. Ingold, 2011:20). Here, I am interested in how these different materials have come together in the production of fashion blogs, which is where my inquiry begins. Furthermore, I am interested in the way that fashion bloggers’ knowledge of these different materials develops as they acquire different skills, something that, as I have argued earlier, is constructed and learned through participation. Taking all of this into account, I hope to explore the possibilities that fashion blogs allow bloggers to experience clothing in a different way.

In line with this approach, I will use the categories that fashion bloggers use, beginning with the distinction that they make between ‘fashion’ and ‘style.’ As mentioned earlier, ‘fashion’ is used to describe anything that correlates to the fashion industry (e.g. ‘What’s in fashion?’). However, bloggers also use it as an adjective (e.g. ‘That is so fashion,’ or ‘Your face is fashion’). These kinds of statements assert that the objects in question possess attributes that align it with the fashion industry, or, more specifically what my informants’ perceptions of the industry are. A ‘face that is fashion’ for example, might draw a reference to the kind of images that they see in magazine editorials, or a series of ‘desirable’ characteristics: high cheekbones, strong eyebrows, and interesting features, although what constitutes a ‘desirable feature’ is constantly in flux. Many of my informants’ perceptions about the fashion industry are media-based, the result of advertising, magazine editorials, television programs, and films’ depictions of the fashion industry (See Entwistle, 2000). When presented with these ideals, bloggers may come to see themselves differently, they may approach their reflections as if with new eyes (c.f. Thesander, 1997). Their access to the industry (which usually increases the longer that they blog) also provides them with an experience of ‘what it’s like.’ In this sense, many bloggers will admit that their understanding of fashion grows to include knowledge of the production, exchange and

29 E.g. Arnold (2001); Barnard (2004); Crane (1999); Entwistle (2001); Gilbert (2000); Harrison (1994); Hansen (2004); Muggleton (2000); McVeigh (2001).
styling of items as they become more interested in how different designs are made or involved with other brands.\textsuperscript{30}

However, I should note that while the blog is the vehicle through which they are granted some ‘insider’ status, it also limits their mobility within the fashion industry. Many of my informants have articulated their frustrations with the fashion industry for not taking them seriously, stressing that bloggers are ranked low in the industry scale. This is largely due to the fact that blogger’s roles are still being defined. At the same time, it is likely that industry professionals see aspects of what bloggers do as a reflection of their own occupations, although arguably ‘less professional’ or ‘less educated’ versions. Furthermore, fashion bloggers’ approaches are far more democratic as blogging appropriates characteristics and skills from different positions within the fashion industry. For example, bloggers function as journalists (covering London Fashion Week shows or press events), stylists (combining different items and clothing and accessories for ‘What I wore’ photo shoots), models (being the subject of their photographs) and photographers (taking their own pictures or photographing others). However, their understandings of these roles within the industry context are often limited. Moreover, the differences to be found between blogging and each of these positions is significant. Ethically, journalists should not be paid by the designer (cash or product) to write about a particular garment, as this would be a conflict of interest. However, bloggers frequently write about items that they are gifted, often in exchange for product or payment. In fact, most bloggers are adamant that they will not work for free. Furthermore, models would not be in charge of conceptualizing, styling and photographing their own photo shoots.

While the way that they incorporate these different skills is markedly different, many bloggers adopt the terminology that the industry uses, they speak of event coverage as if going on assignment, they consider the outfit photographs that they take to be ‘photoshoots.’ Prior to London Fashion Week, many bloggers talk about going on ‘fashion week diets’ to fit into the clothing that they want to wear over the course of the week. In one sense, bloggers see themselves ‘outside’ of fashion, it is something that they forge links to through their blogs and the adaptation of industry jargon, appropriation of clothing through consumption, and being granted access to industry events, the pinnacle of which is London Fashion Week. At the same time, bloggers engage in ongoing conversations with the fashion industry through their blogs in ways that were previously unprecedented to the general public.

\textsuperscript{30} I have seen several celebrity bloggers stress that ‘free stuff is not payment’, quite possibly a way that they emphasize distinction between themselves and smaller bloggers, as they wish to align themselves as professionals in the fashion industry.
‘Style,’ on the other hand, describes how bloggers present themselves through the sartorial choices that they make. It is how they make ‘fashion’ personal through the consumption or accumulation of goods, and the subsequent ‘styling’ of such items. Drawing on Goffman (1990) and Bourdieu (1984), we may understand that how bloggers arrange these things within their homes and on their bodies, provides information to whomever they come across. Furthermore, we may understand this process is a strategic one and we may examine the different aesthetic patterns and styling choices as they occur among particular blogging networks or groups, and the way that bloggers choose to dress given particular social contexts. These choices allow bloggers to differentiate or align themselves from others, and to present themselves in such a way that they may assert their role within the blogger ‘community,’ and the greater fashion industry, or within other social contexts. At the same time, these different social contexts are ‘structuring but not determining,’ they highlight a process through which bloggers are able to present and assert themselves as they relate to a given situation (c.f. Woodward, 2007: 20). This ongoing process is given continuity through different social relationships and their blogs, as well as in the way that they order each item within their wardrobes and personal spaces.

Yet, while the development of a personal ‘style’ is something that they consider an ongoing process and the result of a series of choices that are made on a daily basis, references to ‘styling’ garments are only made when talking about their blogs or, more generally, the fashion industry. The ‘styling of garments’ is an appropriation of an industry term. Its use has to do, in part, with how they acquire different items in the first place. As will be discussed, bloggers do not accumulate material goods only through consumption but also as a part of a reciprocal system of exchange between themselves and fashion industry professionals (mostly public relations representatives for brands). These items, whether they are ‘gifted’ or ‘borrowed’ are seen as separate from the other items that fill their wardrobes. Marin, a blogger who also works as a model and stylist explains, ‘Styling? For me it involves calling in samples and/or using items that I don’t own. But if the clothes are all yours it’s just called ‘getting dressed.’ Oh and dressing someone else, of course.’

Styling is one of the fundamental tasks of being a fashion blogger, and it is here that the challenge lies. As Patrick says, ‘Anyone can buy a pretty dress, or dress like the third Olsen, but it’s the people that do really fascinating things with clothing, people like Susie Bubble...those are the interesting people to watch.’ Patrick’s judgement concerns his take on individuality, something that he finds increasingly rare given the rapid rise in numbers of in fashion blogs. The kinds of blogs that Patrick is most interested in are those in which the blogger is styling clothing in interesting and creative ways. Yet, while Patrick is concerned with the uniqueness of blogs, other fashion bloggers prefer to read blogs that are more ‘relatable’ and showcase ‘wearable’
garments. These blogs provide their readers with fashion that is more commercial than editorial. As Ava explains, ‘I think that my readers like my blog because I wear normal things. I wear things that anyone could wear, but at the same time, since I work with different companies, I’m able to introduce them to new brands that they might not have heard of.’ Isabella adds, ‘I try to have a nice mix of high street and designer things. I can’t afford too many of the designer garments, of course, but I am able to find a lot of pieces that look much more expensive than they are...and, of course, you can never go wrong with a good investment piece now and again.’

For bloggers, style is largely dependent upon their knowledge of fashion and how they are able to combine items from what they are offered in an aesthetically pleasing way (c.f. Woodward, 2008). Even those who wish to avoid catering to popular trends must make themselves aware of them in first place so that they may consciously avoid them (c.f. Bourdieu, 1984: 377-379). Styling a garment is an embodied process: it corresponds to one’s knowledge of how to dress for one’s figure, how to identify appropriately tailored garments, how to make oneself appear taller, leaner, to put forth the best version of oneself given a particular social situation. At the same time, bloggers differentiate between styling for their blogs and styling for offline or ‘in real life events.’

Patrick continues, ‘Sometimes it’s difficult because beautiful pictures can trick you.’ He tells me that he visits certain blogs to appreciate the stunning photography alone. In fact, many readers will admit that they only skim through the text in most of the posts; primarily, they focus their attention on the images. ‘I love the way that the clothing is captured on film,’ he says, ‘but when you see the same clothes on these people in person, it’s not the same. Sometimes, I don’t care for it.’ Bloggers differentiate between the way that clothing appears on blogs and the way that they appear ‘in real life.’ Yet, for bloggers this is not a virtual or offline distinction, but a part of a creative process of representation. They are aware that the camera lens may distort the image, that, ‘no representation is natural (Warwick and Cavallaro, 1998: 4),’ that even a ‘natural look’ is a result of a serious of efforts to achieve a desired constructed result (c.f. Woodward, 2008: 84-90). As will be discussed later, bloggers are very familiar with the editing process. Many actively distort their photographs using image editing programs before they post them to their blogs: they are knowledgable of many of fashion photography’s conventions: that the colors may change, wrinkles may be airbrushed and particular angles may make them appear taller and slimmer, to name a few.

At the same time, they display an understanding that the clothing that they wear provides a boundary between the private and public; it both contains and connects them to their surroundings. As Strathern and Strathern (1971) write, ‘the act of decorating is symbolic: it is a gesture of self-display, and what is being displayed is a person in an enhanced or ideal state...in a
very real sense they are both the medium in which the message is communicated and the message itself (p. 59). As bloggers present themselves to different publics, one may wonder how this experience may affect the way that they experience their clothed bodies, a question that I will begin to address here (as it pertains to the way that they dress their bodies and the way that they experience clothing) and continue to address in the following chapter (See Chapter 4). As much as clothing may provide a border between the self (private) and the social (public), their blogs fill a similar role. Warner writes, ‘Clothing is a language of publicity, folding the body in what is felt as the body’s own privacy. Some bodily sensations—of pleasure and pain, shame and display, appetite and purgation—come to be felt, in the same way, as privacy (p. 26).’ It is in this space that bloggers are able to negotiate self-presentation, between what is kept private and what is made public. At the same time, it is clothing that creates agency when blogging—the garments determine what kind of a post that it will be and how they will pose for the photograph. This is unlike blogging events, in which bloggers will dress a particular way given the social context. (e.g. Bloggers may dress more outlandishly during London Fashion Week in hopes of being street-styled). The combinations of clothing that they wear allows them to assert different combinations of self (c.f. Miller and Kuchler, 2005: 21-40), and, when blogging, to try out different kinds of looks, different kinds of personalities, as if to curiously ask, ‘Is this me?’

**Styling**

‘From your social media activity, I can tell that you’re awake.’ Ava says. It just past 9:30 on a Friday morning, and she has called me on my mobile, having seen one of my tweets. ‘Did you get the dress yet?’

‘No, not yet.’ I say, ‘Did you?’

‘Yeah, it just came,’ she sighs.

‘Is it awful?’

‘So awful.’

‘Really? How bad is it exactly?’

‘First of all,’ she says, ‘It’s super short. I mean, ridiculously short. Second...just so you know... I was able to undo the hem of the dress with my bare hands.’

‘You’re kidding.’

‘Nope! Barely had to tug.’
A group of bloggers, including Ava and I, have been sent a dress to style for an upcoming issue of a popular high street magazine. The dress, which was selected by a person in the magazine’s public relations department is a ‘little black dress’ (or ‘LBD’) by a popular high street retailer. Ava dislikes the dress. ‘The fabric is so cheap,’ she says, ‘and the neckline really ruins it.’ I do not care for the dress either. For me, it conjures images of what a witch’s figure skating costume might look like. We joke that the PRs may have picked this particular dress because ‘otherwise, no one would buy it.’ ‘It’s probably the only one they had enough of in stock in everyone’s sizes,’ she says. Part of the difficulty when styling the same item as nine other girls with different body types was to ‘make the item look good.’ At the same time, we know that we are off the hook because we did not choose the dress. If any of our readers tell us that they dislike it in the blog comments, we are free to agree with them. ‘Oh, I didn’t care for it either,’ each of us can say, ‘but I had to make do with what I was given.’

As we talk over the phone, we debate different ways to style the dress for the magazine feature. She plans to pair it with a vintage plaid shirt that she picked up in Camden market, black opaque tights, and black wedges. I decide to contact Wild Swans, a small boutique in Islington that stocks primarily Scandinavian designers, to see if I can borrow a few garments and accessories. I think this might be a good opportunity to generate press for the boutique; one of the bloggers that I know works part-time in public relations for the store and I am keen to help her out. In addition, I cannot think of anything in my closet that will suit the dress and I hope that they will have some suggestions for me there. Styling garments is not my forte: it is one of the activities that reminds me that I am anthropologist in the midst of fieldwork. Usually, I have no idea what to do with the different items when they first arrive; I run my ideas by other bloggers for a second opinion.

As Ava and I converse about our styling options, we make plans to meet in Shoreditch later that day. We plan to wander down Brick Lane in search of vintage pieces and decide that we can take her photographs for the feature at some point. She puts me on speakerphone while she tries on the dress for the second time, now modified with a slightly longer hemline. ‘Yeah, maybe it’s not so bad after all,’ she says, before adding, ‘I’m still just gonna to try to cover it up as much as possible with things that I actually like, though.’

‘It’s really just a matter of making it look good in the photos, anyway.’ I tell her, ‘And we can definitely do that.’

As much as Ava and I complain about the dress, that particular piece of clothing is, in a few ways, insignificant to the task at hand. We make our initial judgements about the dress based on our prior knowledge of it: we may remember how it was depicted on the company website,
consider the blend of fabric, the brand name, the price, how it may (or may not) suit our body type, and we may draw comparisons between this dress and others of its kind. However, after the dress arrives, once we unpack it from the brown box, unwrap it and initially inspect it, we begin to make it our own. It is through this process that, as Miller might argue, a person ‘translates the object from an alienable to an inalienable condition; that is, from being a symbol of estrangement and price value to being an artifact invested with particular inseparable connotations (Miller, 1989:190).’ Drawing on Miller, we may understand that it is from this point that bloggers must reappropriate the item by incorporating it into their collection of things, by hanging it in the closet along with the other dresses that have been collected over time, or by neatly folding the dress and tucking it away into a chest of drawers (c.f. Miller, 1989: 191).

Yet, for bloggers, ‘styling’ is crucial to the process of reappropriation. This is how they are able to show their knowledge of ‘what’s fashionable,’ it allows them to demonstrate their ability to put together a ‘chic outfit’ to present their knowledge of ‘what’s in fashion’ to their readers. This is a process that people more generally engage in when getting dressed, when deciding ‘what goes together,’ something that can be understood in relation to different social and cultural circumstances that influence their upbringing and current place in society (c.f. Bourdieu 1984), However, for this particular assignment, this process is made explicit, public. The dress serves as a starting point; each blogger must make the dress her own through styling: layering other garments, adding accessories. Each blogger will also consider how she should style her hair and make-up to accompany the dress, as well as which aspects of her personality she would like to convey in the final image. While we may understand the process of dress to be an embodied one (c.f. Woodward, 2007: 67), the point of styling in this circumstance is to achieve a desired representation of a look. Some bloggers will choose to wear the dress as a skirt, others will belt it at the waist. Two will layer t-shirts underneath the dress, and one will pair it with knee socks, while three will opt for patterned tights. In looking at the final images, the dress will appear as if it is a different garment in each image as it conforms to fit different body types, personalities, and personal styles. The image editing software used by each blogger will additionally transform the dress. The quality of the photographs will vary, as will the landscapes that provide the background, the contrast and lighting levels. Technical competency will also play a role, as one blogger’s dress will appear navy blue in the final image by accident, rather than black.

The way that the dress feels on the skin or that the fabric moves while walking around the house or down a London street are things that do not matter in this instance, except for the sake of the photograph. Here, clothing is stripped from utility. As Baudrillard (1994) writes, ‘The
object pure and simple, divested of its function, abstracted from any practical context, takes on a strictly subjective status. Now its destiny is to be collected. Whereupon it ceases to be a carpet, a table, a compass, or a knick-knack, and instead turns into an ‘object’ or a ‘piece’ (p. 8). As will be discussed in the following chapter, photography grants bloggers the ability to further transform the garment through the image: to present the clothing on their bodies in a way that it appears lighter, fuller, or with more movement than it might ‘in real life.’ The process of styling is more of a challenge of transformation than it is one of accuracy in representation. For while the garment may be layered and altered for the sake of customization, bloggers are able to further alter the ‘feel’ of the garment through editing, to alter the perceived physical properties through presentation.

The twelve final images will be arranged in a two page print magazine spread (See Fig. 3.2). Although we do not realize this at the time, the editors will decide to have certain images printed significantly larger than others and placed in more prominent positions on the page. It is in this magazine article, that the competitive element of styling taste is clearly demonstrated as well, as this is a challenge that warrants an inevitable critique. Presented side by side in the same dress, some looks will be deemed more favorable than others. Furthermore, the size and placement of the images will suggest editorial favorites, whether this may be due to the aesthetic quality of the photographs or the actual outfit that each blogger is wearing, or the way that the garments appear on the body. Yet the conversation does not end here, at the top center of the page, directly below the article headline, the magazine will ask of its readers, ‘Tell us, who wore it best?’

Among fashion bloggers, there is a division between those who blog about high street items and those who focus on luxury and independent designers. Many bloggers are quick to recognize this. Isabella, for example, describes her blog as ‘more high street.’ ‘For the most part, I can only afford to buy designer accessories,’ she explains, ‘so I mix that with high street stuff.’ Isabella’s everyday assortment of jewelry is composed entirely of designer pieces: a YSL ‘arty’ ring, Isabel Marant bracelet, and a Dominic Jones ring. I noticed that she was wearing a skull bracelet once and immediately assumed that it was by Alexander McQueen. ‘Everyone thinks that,’ she says, ‘but no, Topshop. Can you believe it?’ Yet, while Isabella embraces high street fashion, she is careful about the stores that she would shop at. ‘I would never shop at Primark,’ she tells me, ‘absolutely never. Also: for the record, I can’t stand when people call it Primarni.’ On an blog article detailing ‘How to get papped at Fashion Week,’ Garance Dore also offers advice to Primark shoppers, ‘if you are wearing something and do not want to admit that it’s Primark, just say that it’s vintage. It does not even matter what season the item is from. Always say vintage.’
In Bourdieu’s (1984) consideration of society everyone is capable of snobbery and it is knowledge, occupation, and background that primarily dictate one’s taste. Fashion blogging is interesting in that it brings together men and women who have different educational and economic backgrounds, occupations, and various levels of knowledge, especially pertaining to the fashion industry as a whole. While some bloggers work within fashion, many are university students, young professionals, stay at home mothers, and PhD students, among others, as highlighted in the Introduction who otherwise have no knowledge of how the industry works. Bloggers demonstrate and refine their cultural competence through the overall aesthetic quality of the blog, the subject matter of the posts, the composition of mood boards on social networking sites such as Pinterest (see Figure 3.3) the bloggers that they associate with (digitally and in-person) and their personal style as presented through outfit photographs. Drawing Goffman (1971), the presentation of self is paramount, as it is through these images that readers gain a sense of the blogger’s personality, fashion expertise and ‘over-all look’ (See Chapter Four). Styling refers to how one wears a garment, and which items that he or she accessorizes each particular piece with. I should note that, ‘styling’ is also an industry term that bloggers use most commonly at fashion industry events or when referring to blog-related activities. Most bloggers are not likely to describe their everyday dress choices using the same vocabulary, especially to an audience outside of the fashion world. When putting together an outfit, a blogger may begin to demonstrate his or her personal style and cultural competence. However, it is not only the combination of clothing but the way that it looks on the blogger that determines how successful it will be. Particular outfits that a blogger chooses to wear may ‘work’ (or ‘not work’) with the garment, this is something that bloggers often decide when reviewing the photographs of the items. ‘The photographs are what taught me to dress [for my body],’ Isla explains, ‘When I look back at all of the images, I can tell right away if something works or not by how I look...you know, whether or not the proportions cut me up in the wrong places, whether or not the prints really look good together.’ Other bloggers claim to dress differently dependent upon where they are going and who they will be interacting with. ‘Well, of course I am going to wear different things to work,’ Harriet tells me, ‘and I usually change back into sweatpants after I shoot an outfit for the blog or...at the very least I change my shoes. Who can walk around in heels all day?’

Within the context of fashion blogging, style has its own rules, and these do not always ‘work’. What is especially interesting, however, is that bloggers submit these looks for feedback among their readers and it is through this forum that the readers may comment on what they like and do not like about an outfit and may make suggestions concerning how to style a particular
garment in the future. It is this final image that allows fashion bloggers to present themselves in, what they perceive to be, the best way possible. Styling is also a common happening at blogger events, where there are often make-up artists, hair stylists, and a rack of clothing for bloggers to ‘play with.’ Most of these events end in a photo shoot, the resulting images are posted on the company’s website as well as many of the individual blogs. At several events, however, styling is more casual, it pokes fun at itself. Racks of clothing are replaced by boxes filled with quirky props and wigs. Rather than a professional photographer, the night’s adventures are documented in a photo booth, resulting in mementos that might remind fashion bloggers of the spectacle of all, it to draw on Bahktin’s *Rabelais and His World* (1941), throws the experience on its head, as if poking fun at seriousness of it all.
Figure 3.1 The Take 10 feature in the December 2011 issue of Company Magazine.
Exchange

By the time that I had received the dress for the Company feature, I had been working with different companies for just under a year. During this time, I received a large number of material goods, which were sent to me with the intention that I would feature them on my blog. It was hard to not be enthusiastic about these kind of deliveries—they were usually packaged up in pretty paper and sent with an accompanying note. I was given high street and designer clothing and accessories, along with more ‘random’ goods, including dry shampoo and waterless bath foam for my dog and a professional juicing machine. Considering the kind of material that I posted on my blog, I thought that the juicing machine was a bit of a stretch, but I accepted it in return for a link to an appliance company on my blog. ‘I know it’s a little bit of a sell-out,’ I told Ava, ‘But I really wanted it!’ ‘Oh, don’t worry, no one is going to judge you,’ she replied by text, ‘We’ve all got one or two of those [on our blogs].’

I did not receive any gifted goods until I had been blogging for a full year. I found that, unless a blogger has very impressive stats or is really well known, one cannot contact companies to request free items but must wait to be contacted by them. As Woody Allen famously said in Annie Hall (1977), ‘I would not want to belong to a club that would have me as a member.’ Designers and PRs hear about new bloggers through blog rolls, word-of-mouth, and press contact lists. The best way for a blogger to get his or her name on a contact list is to attend various press days and to sign the register. While one is typically invited to press days by email, I soon discovered that these were easy events to ‘crash’ or ‘blag your way in’. ‘As long as you look like you’re supposed to be there, they usually think you are,’ Francesca explains, ‘plus, what’s it to them? It’s just some more free press.’ Once companies did begin to send different items my way, the amount of items quickly multiplied. Within the first month, I accumulated a total of forty-three items (primarily jewelry, cosmetics, and clothing). Considering my calculations, the cumulative retail value for all of these items was upwards of £1300. The longer I blogged, the contact I had with different public relations representatives. They sent me weekly updates about their collections, each time offering to send along higher resolutions of images or samples at my request. I soon noticed similarities in content between bloggers who were obviously receiving the same press releases and then translating them into subsequent blog posts.

One of my favorite ‘collaborations’ was what Ava, Isabella, and Isla refer to as a ‘shoe deal’ or ‘free shoe-of-the-month club’ with an online retailer. I should mention that bloggers and PRs use the word ‘collaboration’ to describe the work that they do together, whether that is styling, sponsored posts, or advertising links. Bloggers find the idea that a ‘link exchange’ could be considered a collaboration to be particularly funny; they do not think of it as an appropriate
category for this kind of exchange. For fashion bloggers, link exchange is not something that is obligatory or even reciprocal. My informants stress that their blogrolls are ‘reading lists’ that they would like to share with their readers, and in doing so they are able to align their blog with some of their favorites, many of which are ‘bigger’ or more established than they are.

The shoe deal was outlined in a contract that I signed by email: they gave me vouchers at the end of each month to spend in their store, in return for four posts (per month) that included three links to their website in each post. The posts, I soon learned, were expected to remain up for as long as my blog was. I password-protected my blog after returning from fieldwork and was contacted by the PR at the company promptly, reminding me of the contract. Should I want to remove or limit access to their posts, I would need to delete the entire blog. Legally, the posts that I had written linking to them, belonged to them. While I had come to see a blog as means of self-presentation, It became evident that through collaboration, brands were able to assert ownership over certain content on the blog. Most of the collaborations between bloggers and brands are not formalized as this one was, especially between smaller bloggers and brands. In most cases, while PRs may send clothing (‘gift items’) to a blogger, bloggers have no legal responsibility to mention or post about those items. The shoe contract, on the other hand, was much more formal. It dictated how frequently that I had to post, how long the posts had to be (minimum of two hundred words) and which kinds of links I needed to include. For example, of those links I used for this company in each of the sponsored posts, one of them always had to be ‘shoes’ with a link back to their main website.

Many of the bloggers that I came to know best worked with the same companies that I did. In one sense, it was the companies that brought us together, as we interacted regularly at many of the same events. For the bloggers that already knew each other, those events provided continuity, they knew that would see each other on those particular occasions, even if they were not able to make time for each other on a more regular basis. Additionally, some of these PR contacts would reach out to me after meeting me at an event where I was a ‘plus one.’ On other occasions, bloggers would pass my information to these contacts directly, especially if that particular company was looking for new bloggers. In return, we had many of the same clothing items and accessories. The similarities in our closets were so striking that Ava and I would often call to coordinate what we were wearing before we left our respective homes, so that we would not match. Months after my fieldwork concluded, and I was heading down to London to visit her, Ava said, ‘Well, don’t worry about packing too much. I mean, if you forget something, I’ll probably have it here, anyway.’

Many new bloggers will talk about wishing to receive ‘free stuff.’ However, those that have been blogging for a longer amount of time know that all material goods that they receive as
a result of their blog are not free. Rather, they are based on a system of exchange in which material goods are given in return for publicity (normally in the form of reviews or SEO links). To draw on Mauss (1967) this is a reciprocal exchange system in which the value of the item is assumed to be comparable to the good that is rendered; any discrepancy between the goods exchanged would create a debt relationship between the two parties, something that my informants frequently refer to as ‘blogger guilt.’ Of course assigning a monetary value to a blog post is process that relies on perception: PRs must guess based on the average number of comments that bloggers receive, how many followers that they have on their blog and related social networking sites, and by blog stats (although most of my informants will admit—if pressed — that they inflate them). Bloggers must negotiate as well and it can be a delicate process where they must figure out what value of goods it is appropriate to ask for: if they ask for too low a compensation than they devalue their blog, but if their aim is too high they are likely to lose a potential collaboration.

At the same time, we can look at this exchange between bloggers and PRs as marking a new situation in the life of a blog. Drawing on Appadurai (1985), we can define a commodity as ‘the situation in which exchangeability (past, present, future) for some other thing is a socially relevant feature (p.13).’ This is an interesting way to approach commodities as it assumes that commodities are but one stage in the life of a thing rather than things themselves, and that fashion blogs would be capable of slipping in and out of commodity states over time (c.f Appadurai 1985: 66-68). The ‘commodity state’ of a fashion blog occurs at points of exchange between brands and bloggers and manifests in the ‘sponsored posts’ that they write, sponsored posts that I would argue remain commodified over time. This is due to fact that bloggers are usually unable to take down these posts after they have written them without receiving complaints from the brands that they collaborated with. One an agreement is made, the post is intended to remain live for as long as the blog is. It is an interesting thought that a part of a thing (a post) could be a commodity, while other parts or perhaps the whole, may not.

This does not stop many of the bloggers that I know from describing them as ‘free’ especially when talking to people who do not blog. As Isla says, ‘Sure sounds a lot cooler!’ The idea that they receive ‘free clothing’ and the frequency of this is one of the more glamorous aspects of blogging, and something that is not available to every blogger, only those that have developed working relationships with different brands. Furthermore, the gifts that bloggers receive are based on a system of exchange between companies and bloggers that is structured around ‘bigness.’ Bigness (as will be discussed in Chapter 6) is nearly impossible to quantify, as it is based on a perception about the size of a blogger’s readership and subsequent influence.
Figure 3.2 Natalie from Canned Fashion’s Pinterest page. Note that the main page details the differently themed mood boards, which she may update continuously. At the top, it provides brief biographic information, as well as links to different social networking websites, namely Twitter, Facebook, and her blog.
Authenticity

Violet and I are spending a rainy Sunday in Battersea exploring her favorite neighborhood charity shops. As we walk, she points out a large brick wall that serves as the background for many of her outfit photographs. Large tree branches with dark green leaves peek out over the top of the yellow-grey bricks, casting a shadow onto the pavement below. To the side is a tall lamp post, painted black, with paint chipping off. It is her favorite wall to take photographs, the place where she first practiced with her mother, when she had grown tired of taking them herself indoors with self timer. ‘I like the color of the bricks,’ she says, ‘they show off the clothes really well.’ I ask if I can take her picture, but she declines. The rain, she says, is ruining her hair and her skin has just broken out. On this particular day, she wears her hair is up in a beehive, with a printed scarf fastened as a head wrap. She is dressed in black skinny jeans, a basic grey crew neck sweatshirt, and worn black leather flats. I mention that she looks very ‘Audrey Hepburn’ and she smiles. ‘All charity shop finds,’ she tells me.

Violet is nineteen and lives at home with her mother in a two-bedroom council flat near Battersea. She works part-time in a charity shop in South London and volunteers for the Victoria and Albert Museum in her spare time; the museum is one of favorite places in London. Her closet is a combination of blacks, browns and burgundy garments, mixed up with denim, tweed and paisley pieces, vintage leather accessories and faux fur. She tells me that she ‘thinks in color palettes’—all of the colors and textures in her closet work in the same color story. Her wardrobe is not overflowing with clothing and the items that she owns are presented carefully, thoughtfully, as if on display. The color palette of her clothing coordinates with the colors of other belongings in her room: burgundy and orange plastic suitcases leaning against the wall, clean white tea cups and mis-matched floral printed bedding. The way that the items go together does not come across as affected or particularly intentional; one draws the opinion that they are merely her favorite colors, prints, and textures: that she was drawn to them, and that once she finds something that she likes, she sticks with it. On the wall by her bed is a large Breakfast at Tiffany’s poster, a nod to one of her style icons, Audrey Hepburn. Beside the poster, she has hung up a pair of black velvet shorts with lace detailing, a gift from Parisian brand, The Kooples. A sheer cream-colored blouse hangs to the right of the shorts. ‘I am really inspired by both of these pieces right now,’ she explains, ‘and I just couldn’t believe it when they sent me those shorts. I really like them.’

Violet has the kind of personal style that is often described as ‘effortless,’ the clothing that she wears looks natural on her, unaffected, authentic. Bloggers often speak about ‘wearing the
clothes, rather than having the clothing wear you,' a reference to how effortless the final look appears to others. Bloggers equate effortlessness with authenticity, they assert that an authentic look is one that appears 'easy,' without too many nuances. Authenticity is a perception of another, it is a judgement about how well a person and the garments that he or she wears seem to suit each other. For my informants, authenticity Violet is someone who is recognized for giving off this 'air.' She is a photographer favorite at London Fashion Week as well, having been snapped by Scott Shuman of The Sartorialist, Ivan Rodic of FaceHunter, and major publications, such as Cosmopolitan, and Grazia. Clicking through Vogue Italia’s London Fashion Week street style gallery on their website, one will find her portrait displayed between images of men and women wearing predominately designer garments. In that image, Violet, who picks out the majority of her clothing at thrift shops and car boot sales, wears head-to-toe black, topped with a floppy black hat. That entire outfit, she says, cost her 'less than a fiver.'

When speaking with fashion bloggers about style, one would imagine that a knowledge of fashion and more specifically designer labels is paramount. Such knowledge, Bourdieu would say, is cultural capital (c.f. Bourdieu, 1984: 74-75). In some circumstances, this is true. A blogger who arrives to London Fashion Week, for example, and has little knowledge of the designers that are showing, the purpose of the event as a whole, and event etiquette, would have a difficult time assimilating within the group. This person may find themselves in uncomfortable situations, or the subject of ridicule. Bloggers frequently talk about authenticity or 'effortlessness' in style. In fact, they talk about this matter increasingly so, given the scale of collaborations between bloggers and brands and the growing popularity of fashion blogging. Here, there is a delicate balance that must be observed between being paid to wear clothing and posting about particular pieces because they want to, regardless of any affiliation. There is a tension that bloggers identify between becoming an ambassador or advertisement for a brand and remaining original.

When talking about a blog, authenticity has to do with dedication and originality in content, but when speaking about personal style, authenticity conjures discussions about confidence, and 'not trying too hard.' This is similar to the style of the blog posts that they produce, which should also appear 'effortless' and not too labored. Most UK fashion bloggers will note on their blogs when a particular item that they are wearing is a free gift from a brand. This is something that they must legally disclose, but it also provides a sense of status. There is a delicate balance with this, for bloggers that frequently post about freebies are often looked at as 'sell-outs' or 'tacky.' Rather, one must exercise discretion as to which brands he or she will work with and which items will be presented on the blog.
However, Violet is the only blogger that I have come across who posts the prices of the garments on each post. As we enter the small charity shop in the corner, Violet is in her element. She walks over to the jumpers and examines each one carefully, checking for the perfect slouchy fit and making sure that the garment is free of defects or holes. ‘These are nice,’ she says, motioning to a group of bangles behind the glass countertop at her local charity shop. The colors of the bangles, each adorned with small gold studs, are very 1970s: pumpkin orange, cream, chocolate brown, and avocado green, with a few wooden bangles thrown into the mix. She takes some time to inspect them before she asks the assistant behind the counter how much they cost. ‘Ten,’ he offers. Violet thinks for a moment, turns to me and suggests that we keep looking, ‘We’ll probably be able to find something better at the car boot sale’ she says, ‘although, it might not be that good this week because of the rain. Not as many people will come out.’ Before we leave the store, she takes one last look at the jumpers and settles on an oversized charcoal grey one from the mens section.
The camera rests on the window ledge and once the small orange light starts to blink I hurry across the room and get into position. I stand in front of a blank wall on my tiptoes, place one hand on my hip, fix my hair, check my clothing for lint and loose threads and quickly try to usher my curious dog out of the frame. I have ten-seconds until I hear the ‘click! click! click!’ of the camera shutter opening and closing. Many of my blogger friends tell me that I should invest in a tripod and a remote, but I have grown accustomed to this self timer and window ledge method. I have a favorite room in my Reading apartment to take these kinds of pictures. The room is spacious and sparsely decorated, with hard wood floors, ivory walls and two big windows. During the early afternoon, the room fills with a bright warm light. The combination of this natural light and ToyCamera Analogcolor, which is the computer program that I will use to edit the photographs, creates a dreamy atmosphere in the final images, one that my readers have described as ‘chilled out’ and ‘relaxing.’ I like the privacy of this room too. I will not feel self-conscious as I take photograph after photograph, or be disturbed by any of my housemates, save for a pesky terrier who occasionally pushes the door open with his nose.

Once each set of pictures is taken, I walk over to the camera and check them. Are the pictures in focus? Do they show off the clothing as I intended? Does my face look okay? Do I look fat? These are general criteria that I’ve developed for determining if it’s a good shot, whether a picture will be ‘postable’ on my blog. Taking ‘postable’ pictures is much harder than I anticipate. The self timer on my camera only takes three photographs at a time. On an average day, I might take upwards of fifty until I find a few that I like. Considering my conversations with fashion bloggers, I know that this is not unusual; most take an average of forty
photographs for each outfit post. Only a small percentage of these photographs will end up their blogs. Occasionally, I may get a good shot in ten photographs, and on some days I am not happy with any of them, regardless of how many that I take.

Taking self-portraits is a skill that develops through the process of trial and error; it is something that bloggers must learn as they go. As I have been taking these kinds of photographs for over six months, I have experimented with different ways to angle the camera and position my body. I have learned which kind of facial expressions appear most flattering on film. I know that parts of the body angled more closely to the camera will appear larger, as those angled away from the camera will appear smaller. I know that positioning the camera lower, tilted upwards will make my legs appear longer, but can also make my face appear fuller, so that particular angle is a toss-up. I know that I tend to ‘tense up’ my mouth when posing for photographs and try to relax my jaw. I have also learned to relax my shoulders and stick my chin out (another slimming technique), that faces generally look better when photographed from a slight angle, and that no one, except a few professional models that I know, looks good jumping in a photograph.

Fifteen minutes and sixty-seven photographs later, I connect my camera to my computer and upload the images. I sort through them quickly, dragging the ones that I like into a separate folder on the desktop of the computer. There are seven that make the first cut, but I will further narrow them down to three or four after I edit them. There is no specific rule as to how many photographs it is ‘appropriate’ to include into a blog post, but most bloggers seem to think that it is narcissistic to use more than five photographs of yourself, especially if the images are similar in composition. Four or five photographs is the average number, although some bloggers include more, and others include less. Abby, for example, only includes two photographs of herself in each of her outfit posts: one that shows the entire outfit and a detail shot, which is a close-up of one of the items or accessories that she is wearing. ‘Any more than that is absolutely unnecessary,’ she says, ‘it’s pure vanity.’ ‘One is really enough,’ Olivia adds, ‘but I usually include three or four if I like them.’

Taking photographs can be looked at as a process of appropriation, a way to convert certain experiences, and in doing so to take ownership over a particular environment (c.f. Sontag, 2006: 175-177). There are, of course, levels of manipulation that occur in each stage of taking a
photograph: the choosing of the subject matter (largely based on aesthetics\textsuperscript{31}), the development process through which the image is manipulated, cut, cropped, and airbrushed, as well as the selection of the final images (c.f. Sontag, 2006). Yet, while we may draw comparisons between photographs and other forms of art, what differentiates them in this case, is that as a form of record, they are more convincing. That is, although ‘the picture may distort...there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture (Sontag, 2006: 175).’ Bloggers rarely talk about how they want to appear in those photographs in the first place: the way that they see themselves in each of the pictures, or how they want others to see them as a result. This is not to say that these are not things that they think about, but they are kinds of conversations that typically occur one-on-one in particular circumstances: if a blogger is second guessing a particular photograph that he or she has posted, for example, or receives negative feedback from a reader on a particular post. When I do ask them, bloggers agree that what they put forth is only a part of who they are, and it’s usually ‘the best version.’ As is the case with fashion photography, many of the images presented on fashion blogs often present an idealized version of the scene. As Isla says, referencing two popular reality television shows, ‘It's not Big Brother, it’s Made in Chelsea, you know.’

While we may recognize the capability of photography to construct or translate a moment, it is also an imperative mode through which bloggers present themselves to their readers and demonstrate their knowledge of fashion, and their stylistic preferences to others. Drawing on Goffman (1990), we may understand this as a type of performance. Yet, evident in our conversations is bloggers’ anxieties about self presentation, especially concerning the tension between the creative elements of photography (a photograph as art), and the idea of a photograph as a record (accuracy in representation). As described earlier, we might discuss how many photographs it is appropriate to include, if they should be edited, and to what degree. Is it acceptable to airbrush under eye circles and spots, for example, or to erase stains, wrinkles and other imperfections from garments? Is it okay to alter the colors of the photograph, to play with the contrast and brightness, to add warmer or cooler tones to the natural colors in the image? Each of the alterations and omissions may be perceived by bloggers as a

\textsuperscript{31} Following the discussion in the previous chapter, Bourdieu (1990) considers that the subject matter and style of a photograph ‘what’s takeable’ to speak volumes about the class values of the photographer (p.6).
correction to a flaw, the negation of a particular attribute that would otherwise 'disrupt' the intended aesthetic result.

Further anxiety is evident in shared concerns about the ‘naturalness’ of photographs, as bloggers attempt to construct candid moments through their shots, to be ‘caught’ by the camera in between poses (See Fig. 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.11). For bloggers, a ‘natural’ photograph is one where they recognize themselves, where the image that they want to see and the image that is presented before them is aligned. In this process, they draw heavily on the previous photographs that they have taken, as well as other blogs, street style photography, and fashion photography. It is through previous experiences of taking pictures (and having their pictures taken), that bloggers learn which particular poses and facial experiences they like best, which appear most natural or desirable, often meaning that the image is recognizably 'them.' I have often asked bloggers what their criteria is when determining whether a picture is 'postable.' Many place more emphasis on the presentation of themselves in the photographs, than the particular garments that they are featuring in each of the blog posts. ‘The most important thing is that my face looks okay!’ Harriet explains, ‘Second that it shows off my outfit well.’

‘Me too!’ Amy chimes in, ‘Am I gurning? Am I doing that weird face I always do? Then: Do the clothes look okay?’

‘Well, I can crop out the face for ‘artistic’ shots,’ Patrick adds, ‘but I’m always looking for weird stomach bulges. Claw hand too. Or penguin hand.’

‘I have claw hands!’ Ava laughs, ‘I was going back [through earlier posts] and I noticed that I have claw hands in so many pictures! I must be really tense in taking pictures... Come to think of it, that's probably where all of my tension goes...in my claw.’

Given the different anxieties about self presentation, one might wonder why bloggers choose to put photographs of themselves on their blogs in the first place. They could, for example, photograph the clothing on others, use hangers or a dress form, or photograph an arrangement of garments laid out as if on display. I should mention that bloggers do take these kinds of pictures. However, photographs that depict them wearing different garments from their wardrobes provide for the vast majority of ‘what I wore’ posts or ‘outfit posts.’ For them, there is little logic to a ‘what I wore’ post that does not depict a person dressed in a particular ensemble; the title (or tag) of the post stresses the capture of a single moment (or series of
moments) within the larger scope of a day. I should point out that while many of these photo shoots aim to capture ‘caught in the moment’ types of shots, they are more often than not clearly choreographed and deliberate. Furthermore, many of these photos are posted retroactively: days or weeks later. To add to this, bloggers do not always wear the clothing that they are featuring during that day: some will put on a particular ensemble for the sake of the photograph, before changing back into a previous outfit, or into a more comfortable one.

However ‘what I wore’ is essential to what constitutes a fashion blog. While these images do not usually provide a simple record of garments worn, what they do present is the potentiality of a person’s wardrobe, the combination of ‘not just colours, and fabrics, but fragments of her self (Woodward, 2005:33).’ This is what differentiates fashion blogs from their counterparts: from beauty blogs, fashion blogs that focus on reportage (rather than personal style), and celebrity blogs, among others. For fashion bloggers, outfit posts are a necessary part of self-presentation: it is through these images and the accompanying text that bloggers can tell stories about who they are, or, more accurately who they would like others to believe them to be (c.f. Gershon, 2010). Outfit posts demonstrate bloggers’ knowledge of the embodiment of clothing, their awareness how particular garments mold to fit their bodies. Through the final images they see their reflection, reflections that many would say is more accurate than that of a mirror, as they are able to see themselves within a particular context, outside of the bedroom doors. As discussed in the previous chapter, clothing is a middle ground, it forms a bridge between the individual and the world that she encounters, and it is these interactions that constitute a large part of her identity (c.f. Entwistle, 2000: 6-8). The act of dress is a daily ritual: it is something that men and women partake in on a regular basis, a mundane routine, a necessary act. Yet, for bloggers there is excitement beyond wardrobe drawers—different items hold various levels of significance, they come along with stories, they are carefully curated, appropriated, mixed, and remixed with each other. It is through the images on their blogs that they are able to tell these stories, and they are able to imagine how they appear to others in different social contexts.
Self-portraits

In the introduction to *Pictures*, British photographer Tim Walker describes a childhood experience of having his photograph taken in a passport photo booth. He says, ‘I remember thinking what a funny thing it is that no one is taking my picture, just a machine flashing four exposures. I still hate having my photo taken, and feel just as silly and express my awkwardness in exactly the same way (Walker, 2008: 11).’ A photograph is, in part, the result of a dialogue between the photographer and the subject of the image; it is through the final image that we are offered insight into the relationship between them. Yet, as Sontag writes, ‘a photograph is also ‘an event in itself, and one with ever more peremptory rights--to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on...Our very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera's interventions (Sontag, 2006:11).’

However, in taking a self-portrait, the subject is afforded a different experience. The subject must play both roles, the subject must ‘come to consider herself as both the surveyor and the surveyed (Berger, 1973: 46).’ For Berger, these two counterpoints mark an experiential difference between women and men, a way of being, and subsequently a way of being represented in art. He illustrates the different ways that, 'men act and women appear' and the social interpretations of such gendered actions (c.f. Berger, 1972: 45-47). Berger's gender distinction is problematic, especially when considering fashion bloggers who are both men and women, and regularly share aspects of their lives in public forums, whether this may be directly on their blogs or through connected forms of social media. One may argue that Berger's 'gaze' is applicable to social media users on a larger scale, individuals that are exponentially encouraged to 'be social,' to 'share' aspects of their lives through various interconnected digital platforms. In doing so, they learn to anticipate the reactions of others, they become increasingly occupied with the presentation of different aspects of their lives as different events unfold. In return, they are privy to other's perceptions and responses to the information that they share. They become aware, for example, that these different depictions, when lacking in context, may be interpreted differently by different viewers (c.f. Gershon, 2010).

Fashion bloggers are highly aware of how they present themselves within different social situations as well as how a particular image or 'digital presence' may appear to others.
While bloggers continue to assert that the images that they put forward are only a part of who they are (c.f. Reed, 2005:229-230), blogging leads to new ways of perceiving their surroundings and presenting themselves accordingly. Furthermore, the images that they construct, edit, and display through their blogs are accessed by a predominately anonymous audience, only a small percentage of their readers will provide feedback to them directly and, in doing so, reveal information about themselves. Bloggers perceive the digital photograph to be a mediated depiction of themselves, while the blog may function as an extension of them (as discussed in Chapter One). In order for fashion bloggers to conceptualize what the experience of reading their own blog is like for an outsider, they must use their imagination: they must view themselves as the subject. They must imagine how they may appear through someone else’s eyes.

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Goffman writes, 'to stay in one’s room away from the place where the party is given, or away from where the practitioner attends his client, is to stay away from where reality is being performed (Goffman, 1990: 45).’ Yet, for fashion bloggers, the taking of ‘outfit photos’ is in itself a type of performance, it is a performance in which they must act for an imagined audience. In this performance, the clothing sets the scene. It is the clothing that they wear that dictates which kind of performance it will be, how they will position their bodies in the frame, which kind of movements that they will make. The clothing also dictates which (if any) props that they may incorporate into the shots, the kind of expressions that may reveal to the audience, and how they will choose to edit the photographs once they are taken. The resulting photographs are the artifacts of this performance, a performance that the readers must imagine as they read the subsequent posts, as much as a blogger must imagine her audience present while she is taking her photographs. It is through the blog as an artifact that bloggers communicate with their audience, through a series of images with accompanying text that have been selected, edited, and contextualized before they are published.

The experience of taking self-portraits, as well as editing the images, and situating them within a blog post (as well as the greater narrative of the blog as a whole), allows a blogger to engage with that process, to consider how she wants to present herself and how that presentation may be interpreted. Reader interaction by the way of blog comments, tweets, or personal emails provides them with feedback. It is here that they able to see any disconnects or ‘dis-
ruptions’ between the impressions that they intend to give and those that they actually ‘give off’ to their readers (c.f. Goffman, 1990: 14). The constant expectation that someone may notice them and assess their style is potentially oppressive as bloggers must consistently keep in mind how they present themselves in public. This is not limited to industry events or London Fashion Week. On any given day, London’s streets are filled with potential anonymous readers, other bloggers, street style photographers, and members of the fashion industry (See next chapter), as well as the eyes of the general public and passing strangers. There are particular locations, such as Brick Lane or Oxford Circus (particularly in front of the flagship Topshop store), where bloggers are likely to be stopped and asked to be street styled by a photographer32. At the same time, they may encounter their readers in local shops, meeting these readers in person for the first time. ‘I never know what to do when they approach me,’ Violet tells me, ‘I always feel awkward about it, so I tend to give them a hug and this gives me a few moments to think of what I want to say next.’ Most of the time, she explains, her readers do not approach her directly, but will leave her a blog comment or send her a tweet later in the day to say that they saw her. ‘That’s always unfortunate,’ she says, ‘It’s unfortunate that they didn’t come talk to me. Plus, they always tend to bump into me on those days when I am just hanging around my neighborhood with my hair a mess and my skin all spotty.’ She laughs, ‘I think, ‘Oh no, you saw me today? I look like shit!’’

In Goffman’s world, the theatrics of social interactions are the basis through which individuals learn how to communicate with each other. It is during these encounters that people exchange invaluable information, and in doing so, are able to act in accordance within particular social situations and among different ‘audiences’ (Goffman, 1990). As part of this perpetual performance of self, Goffman discusses ‘idealisation.’ He describes the way that individuals focus on the ‘end product,’ or the ‘ideal self,’ ignoring and concealing any ‘correction of errors and mistakes’ that may occur in order to achieve this result (Goffman, 1990: 53-56). It is not a direct misrepresentation (which Goffman would describe as an ‘outright lie,’ for example), rather it is what a blogger may describe as ‘putting forth the “best me”.’ The criteria for this idealised aesthetic in images is dependent upon a blogger’s audience, as well as the

32 Photographers may be other bloggers or work for print and digital media publications.
audiences that they are a part of (e.g. the blogs that they read and the designers that they covet). They know that when putting together a particular combination of clothing, the body may be contorted to suit the clothes as much as the clothing should be tailored to the shape of the body. Clothing sets the mood for the images, it designates which kind of performance it will be. It determines how one must position herself in the frame, the way that the body should move to show off the garments. One may twirl around in circles in a voluminous skirt to capture the movement of the fabric, or one may settle on a quirky or edgy facial expression to accompany a pair of leather leggings, a tee shirt and a high ponytail.

The majority of the images that fashion bloggers post on their blogs are idealised: they are edited versions of the original. These photographs are cropped, the colors, brightness, and contrast are adjusted, and blemishes and under-eye circles are often retouched out of the photograph. Similarly to posing for photographs, editing the images is something that bloggers learn by doing. If one compares the first outfit photographs on a blog with those taken a year later, one is likely to notice a marked aesthetic difference in the quality of the photography and editing, as much as the evolution of the blogger’s personal style (if not more so). The image selection process also lends itself to this concept of idealisation, as only a selected few of the many photographs taken will end up on the blog post. A few of the leftover images may be tweeted or posted to Facebook as ‘sneak peaks’ of forthcoming posts, or uploaded as part of a Facebook album of ‘outtakes.’ In other instances, bloggers may share a few of these ‘reject’ pictures with bloggers who have become close friends, as Milana and I often do. We like to send each other our worst photographs and laugh about the awkward expressions and positions of our bodies in those shots. We might joke about the clothing that we are wearing too: different combinations of garments that, when captured on film, do not go together in the way that we intended. ‘I really thought that would look good,’ I would tell her, ‘maybe I was too ambitious?’ We evaluate clothing that cuts up our silhouette into unflattering proportions, resulting in long torsos and short legs. We also discuss different colors that do not go together as we intended, even in a deliberate color-blocking ‘color-clash’ manner.

Yet, the majority of these surplus photographs are either deleted promptly or kept away in a folder on their computer for no one to see. Readers are not privy to the selection process, and while many may be aware of the editing process, many do not realise the extent to which the images are altered. Here, we might draw distinctions between ‘on stage’ and
‘backstage’ behaviour (c.f. Goffman, 1990), a disconnect that is especially evident when bloggers are photographed in spontaneous circumstances by others, which commonly occurs at industry events. These others, namely: other bloggers, photographers and members of the fashion industry, subsequently post these images on their websites. As many bloggers are likely to have developed ‘standards’ or ‘criteria’ for posing, editing, and selecting their photographs, the portraits taken by others may give off a different impression than the one they intend to maintain. These images may capture candid moments or unflattering angles that the blogger would normally avoid when taking her own photograph or recruiting a friend to take one for her. Additionally, since these photographs are taken by others, they are assigned a certain validity to the readers. Readers are likely to assume that this may be what a blogger is ‘most like’ as it is a depiction of them by another, ‘in real life’ and outside of their usual environment (e.g. ‘I did not realise that she was so orange in person.’). Furthermore, these images are less likely to be retouched, although many bloggers choose to download these images, retouch them using their own editing tools, and then repost the edited images. Bloggers do not engage in too many dialogues about trust and antagonism concerning photographs that are professionally taken, although the expectation is that the photos are likely to turn out better than the amateur ones. However, when bloggers are taking outfit photographs of each other, it is under a general assumption that one will not post unflattering photographs. Disconnects here may occur if a blogger deems one photo ‘flattering’ and the subject of the photograph does not. Bloggers have ways to get around this. Many of my informants request that I use their cameras to take the pictures, rather than my own. ‘It has to do more with the immediacy of it all...you know, so I don’t have to wait to receive pictures,’ Isabella explains, ‘but it’s also a convenient way to see what the photographs look like and to have some control over what ends up online.’ If I were to post images of a blogger that he or she did not like, he or she would most likely contact me to take these images down. However, as it is general practice for my informants to ‘run the photos by each other’ in the first place, this happens less than one might expect, and was something that I never experienced during my fieldwork.

When I speak with bloggers about editing their photographs, their attitudes vary. I start my discussions by stating that I am considering any form of alteration to an original photograph to be a form of editing, and Jack disagrees with me immediately. ‘Cropping isn’t editing!’ he says, ‘People can crop away to their heart’s content for all I care!’ I mention to Jack...
that I frequently retouch my under-eye circles and an occasional spot in my photographs and asks him what he thinks about that. ‘Oh you!’ he responds, ‘Tsk, tsk!’ Yet most of the others that I speak with consider image editing as a necessary part of the process. ‘I use a series of photoshop actions,’ Jen tells me, ‘It only takes a few minutes and makes such a big difference in the quality of the photographs. They look much more editorial.’ Some go as far to say that they are irritated when other bloggers post images of them that are not retouched. ‘Your readers know that they’re seeing a more glamorous version of you,’ Isla explains. ‘As long as there is some semblance to how you actually look in normal life,’ Patrick adds, ‘it’s perfectly fine. Nothing is worse than those people that look nothing like their photographs in person though. That’s just ridiculous.’ The way that bloggers access the relationship between the edited idealised image of oneself and the way that they appear in normal life reflects their strong sense of the dynamic nature of appearance. Through the photographs, bloggers have the ability to transform themselves and the clothing that they wear. The difficulty of wearing particular kinds of garments and accessories is not something that easily translates in a photograph: the blog reader will not get a sense of how heavy a necklace or pair of earrings are, or how itchy a particular fabric feels against the skin. By positioning the body a certain way in the frame and adopting a particular facial expression, the most uncomfortable shoes are likely to appear easy to wear, overheating caused from a heavy fabric on a hot day (worn purely for the sake of the photograph) is not evident.

On the street, this relationship may be less obvious. Bloggers coordinate what they wear in anticipation of the weather, based on the different events that they are attending, as well as numerous other social and environmental factors. Furthermore, the way that a person dresses relates on a basic physiological level: skinny jeans are put on first thing in the morning ‘when you’re at your skinniest,’ so that they may stretch out for the duration of the day. Lightweight fabrics may be selected in anticipation of high profile events, so that one will not overheat or experience the embarrassment of sweat stains on garments due to nerves. As the clothing must be tailored to fit the body, the body must adapt to the garments. One of the ways that this transformation is most evident concerns new shoes, which must be ‘broken in.’ During this process, blisters may develop and the muscles in the feet and ankles must adjust to a different heel height. Eventually the ankle strengthens, the skin toughens and the shoes no longer pinch and chafe, but in the interim the wearer must ‘grin and bear it.’ She must put
herself forward in such a way that the pain of the shoes is inconsequential; she must negate the presence of pain in the first place (c.f. Goffman, 1990: 50). I remember walking with Ava through Oxford Circus on route to different events one day, her feet in so much pain that blood seeped out from the corners of her new flats. ‘I can't believe that flats can do this much damage,’ she said. We stopped at a chemist to purchase plasters and I watched as she carefully attended to her wounded feet, fastening the adhesive bandages the best way she could manage, even though the shapes of the plasters were a difficult match for the different curvatures of each foot.

A few weeks later I was in similar position, as I chose to wear new shoes to an event. My feet kept slipping in the sandals, which also pinched my toes. As we walked several blocks I could feel blisters developing. By the time that we arrived I frantically scanned the room for seating, but had no such luck, it was a predominately standing affair. We stood for the duration of the event, and while I engaged in different conversations with bloggers and PRs, all I could think of were my aching feet. I shifted my weight from hip to hip and tried to act as if I were not in pain, trying to ignore the throbbing soles of my feet. After the event ended, I hobbled home, eventually walking the final stretch of my journey completely barefoot, carrying my shoes in my left hand. Once I arrived at my flat, my feet were dirty, sore, and bloody from blisters and I could not bear to put anything on them, not even basic flip flops. Ironically, the shoes that were capable of causing so much pain also provided concealment from the resulting wounds in the days that followed. The light tan leather hid the bodily evidence of my defeat, the discomfort that I was so keen to conceal at the event and during the days that followed. Bloggers may mention whether or not an item is comfortable on their blogs, but rarely do they emphasize comfort over style and appearance. It is not that this would be completely inappropriate, some bloggers will sporadically post about ‘slouchy’ outfits or ‘comfy clothing.’

Ava tells me, ‘Within the fashion crowd, saying someone looks ‘comfortable’ is actually an insult.’ She is joking at the time, but there is some truth to it. Chanel designer Karl Lagerfeld famously described sweatpants as ‘the ultimate defeat.’ He said, ‘You lost control of your life so you bought some sweatpants.’ Clothing may or may not be comfortable for the wearer, but what is important is that while it may not look comfortable, the wearer must appear totally at
ease in the garments. As illustrated in the previous chapter, being comfortable in one’s skin lends an air of authenticity to personal style. There are many ways that bloggers will strive to accomplish this. During London Fashion Week [see next chapter], many will have a taxi drop them off a block from the entrance, or will change their shoes from flats to heels at the Pret a Manger just around the corner from the entrance to Somerset House, should they be walking in from the underground station. Flats are neatly tucked away into oversized handbags which have been picked to coordinate with their outfits in advance. Of these different ways to arrive, one element is key: unless a person has an official driver for the duration of London Fashion Week, the cars should be unseen by the public. ‘Last fashion week, I had a show at 9, 10, and 11, so I packed some wedges in my bag,’ Isabella tells me, ‘but I wore flats for the morning since I was running around from here to there.’ She continues, ‘I ran into Matt Zorpas in the street and he gave me a look of horror and said, ‘What is that on your feet? I don’t even want to talk to you right now’ and he told me to change immediately.’

‘Was he being serious?’ I ask her.

‘Yes, totally.’

‘And did you change?’

‘I did, but not right then,’ she says, ‘I did it later, you know, when I wanted to.’

Taking Pictures

‘Be still my beating blogger!’ Clive Arrowsmith exclaims, clutching his hands to his chest. Arrowsmith is a professional photographer who has photographed everyone from Yoko Ono to Richard Gere. As he welcomes us into his pop up studio in Southbank, he picks up a hardcover book of his photographs and quickly flips through it with us. ‘Are you familiar with my work?’ he asks, ‘No? Well, then let’s see it, shall we?’ He flips through the pages quickly, momentarily pausing to tell us personal stories that accompany some of the photographs. We learn that he took the last portrait of Yves Saint Laurent before the designer’s death, has photographed the Pirelli calendar twice (a rarity), and directed a Def Leopard music video. Daniela and I have been invited to have our portraits taken as part of Aviva’s Next Big Picture charity campaign. Facebook users may submit their own images from mobile applications or their home computers. For each image uploaded and projected, a donation would be made to
a selected charity. PRs have invited several bloggers and members of press to be photographed by one of two professional photographers, in hopes that they will promote the event in return. The final images of today’s photo shoot will be projected on the National Theatre later that evening. Daniela and I are rushed through hair and make-up and then led to the studio where we are introduced to Clive. He deliberates where to position us based on our proportions: ‘Hmm...Which one of you has the longer torso? And which one has the longer legs?’ Once he has seated us in a way that he likes, he steps back and begins to take our picture. During the entire time he is behind the camera, he talks to us. He asks us questions, compliments us and tells outrageous (and largely inappropriate) stories about his past travels and escapades with ex-wives. We find ourselves laughing our way through the photo shoot. At one point Daniela leans over to me and whispers, ‘Susie, this man is absolutely crazy. Such a legend.’

‘What’s that?’ he says, momentarily looking up but still snapping away.

Several hours later, we return to pick up the final photographs. A member of the event staff hands each of us an envelope containing the final 8x10 shot, which Clive has selected. We open the folders and study the glossy black and white photographs before us, our faces revealing our disappointment. ‘Oh dear,’ Daniela says, ‘Why did he pick this one?’

‘It looks like we could be in a sitcom.’ I tell her.

‘It really does. I wonder what on Earth he was saying when he took this!’ She puts the photograph back in the envelope, only to retrieve it a moment later. She studies the photograph again and then puts it away. We each do this several times, making observations about the image. The more that we look at the photograph, the more that it ‘grows on us.’ We hope that a closer or repeated viewing will reveal something that it wouldn’t when it comes to normal blog photographs because the photographer in this case is an ‘artist.’ Neither of us imagine ourselves to appear as we do in that picture and we talk about this, but we start to appreciate the moment that it captures. The photograph documents our reaction to the photographer, he is very much present in this image with us. As we come to understand this, the photograph is as much a moment captured as a summation of an experience. Later that evening, we sit on the rooftop adjacent to the National Theatre, drinking champagne that has been provided by the event organizers, out of plastic cups. We get our cameras ready to document the image as it appears on the building: a photograph of a photograph. When it appears, we greet it with
laughter and raise our glasses in a toast. ‘This is one of those moments that you just don’t forget,’ she tells me. ‘When else in life is your face ten stories high, splashed across the National Theatre? (See Fig. 4.11)’

Perhaps, Daniela and my initial disappointment stemmed from our previous knowledge of fashion photography, from hours spent reading *Vogue*, *Lula*, *ID* and other print high fashion magazines. Based on these experiences, we brought certain expectations with us to the photoshoot. We expected to be transformed through Clive’s lens as many of others in the magazines. At the same time, this was a photoshoot where we had relinquished control. Our make-up was delegated to an onsite make-up artist, and Clive was in charge of positioning us in the frame and choosing the final photograph, a photograph that was revealed to us only moments before it would be projected in a public space. Put plainly, the photograph that Clive took was not *ours* or ‘our best’.

When it comes to self-portraits, I have talked about the taking of pictures in terms of performance. Yet, while I have used self-portraits as a basis for this discussion, we may also extend this examination to the portraits that bloggers take of each other, or that they have their friends, boyfriends, or family members take for the sake of their blog. As discussed earlier, we may understand a photograph as dialogue between the person taking the picture and the subject of the photograph. Yet what is interesting when it comes to taking pictures of each other comes down to bloggers’ concept of ownership. Ownership is something that came up much further along during the research process, during a time when I was putting together the different chapters that would constitute this thesis and thinking about the different images that I would like to use. For the most part, the bloggers I contacted about using their images were more than gracious; many went so far as to offer me hi-resolution versions of each of the photographs that I requested before I even thought to ask for them. However, in some cases, I was uncertain about who I should ask permission from: the photographer or the person in the photograph. It seemed to me that the person who took the photographs would likely have some sort of claim over them, but the bloggers that I spoke to convinced me that this was not the case.

Isabella tells me that when a friend takes her picture for her blog, ‘They’re a human remote control.’ She says, ‘I am the one who thinks of the outfit, the concept for the pho-
tosshout, and the different poses that I want to do. All they do is press a button. Anyone could do that. Many bloggers that I spoke to had a similar view about the process, stressing that the photographs that they use are their own. Isla says, ‘It’s you, selecting the person, the setting, and taking the shots for a purpose. I guess it goes back to the intent or purpose of the pictures.’ However, while the creative direction and construction is one way that they assert ownership over a photograph, bloggers also make a claim to a photograph on the basis that they are the subject of the picture. Isabella continues, ‘I mean, if a friend took a pic of me on a night out, it’s not their pic, they aren’t going to put it up as their profile picture on FB [Facebook].’ For Isabella, many of the photographs in which she is the subject belong to her; this is evident in her belief that she has the right to ask someone to remove a particular photograph, should she not like it, or to request approval before someone may post that image on another blog. I have photographed bloggers many different times during my fieldwork, and following each of these instances, I usually edited each images and emailed the blogger a selection of my favourites so that she may choose from them. Some bloggers, like Ava, claim that they are ‘not at all ’precious’ about their photographs; she would use any (or all) of the images that I sent to her, edited or unedited. However, for the most part, bloggers stressed that the images I took of them should meet their approval before I would post them on my website, and before they would post them on their own. Unless the image is taken by a professional photographer or an established blogger, bloggers make a claim for ownership once the image is made public, once it is published on a blog or a Facebook page. The same applies when someone takes a photograph of them using their own camera, a common occurrence. ‘Mostly it’s so that you can upload them immediately, rather than having to rely on someone else,’ Ava explains. They might request to see them immediately on my digital camera after I had taken them, and remind me to send them ‘a bunch’ of images once I returned home. Having seen the selection that I chose to send them, bloggers might send me an additional email or text to see if I had more images to send along, or if I could potentially DropBox the entire album in case I missed something. Below the final photographs, my name and blog would usually be linked as a credit, a blogger courtesy. However, I soon learned that this credit did not serve to

---

33 When I ask her if there are circumstances when this is not the case, and she mentions photographs taken by professional photographers. Those, she says, require permission.

34 Dropbox is a popular file sharing service.
transfer ownership of the photograph, but acted to further contextualise the image. With my name linked below, I became a part of the photograph to the reader, my presence became known. The reader might imagine me taking the photographs, the dialogues that might occur between the blogger I was photographing and me. They might wonder about the relationship between me and the subject of the photograph, and click through to my blog in order to gain more information. Their understanding of ownership here does not align with UK laws of copyright, which typically grant ownership of the photographs to the photographer, unless that person was paid for his or her services.

A professional photographer once told me that her trick when photographing less photogenic people, or people who felt uncomfortable in front of the camera, was to give them something to do, to tell them to turn their head from the right to the left, for example, and to take the picture as the action was occurring, when his or her face was relaxed. A key to taking a good photograph, she told me, was to catch someone at the perfect moment. To do this, she used movement as a means to relax the person that she was photographing, to make her appear more natural on film. Many of the poses that bloggers use borrow from fashion photography to the extent that some bloggers will imitate looks that they see in street style images, magazines or on other blogs (See Chapter 6). Additionally, by reading other blogs, they may imitate poses of others and it is through this process that conventions emerge. Among these conventions: the inward foot (Fig. 4.12) or pigeon-toed stance (Fig 4.3), or a step forward (Fig.4.4), crossed legs (Fig. 4.4, hair fixing (See Fig. 4.3, Fig. 4.13 ), the head tilt (Fig 4.14), and the adjustment of garments (Fig 4.5, 4.7). Should you speak to bloggers about the images, they will agree that they are largely posed, that they imagined the image before they took it, that during the three-second delay between the camera remote and the camera shutter, they were able to conceal the remote in their hand or by quickly dropping it into their pocket. It is a photograph that exists to show a natural moment of their day, one as they imagine it from someone else’s point of view.
Figure 4.1 Photographer Tim Walker, photographed by Carrie Harwood at the Tim Walker: Story Teller exhibit at Somerset House in London.

courtesy of Carrie Harwood

Figure 4.2 Carrie Harwood (*Wish Wish Wish*) holding one of her cameras, photographed by her boyfriend.

courtesy of Carrie Harwood
Figure 4.3 Charlie (Girl A La Mode) wearing an Ann Sofie Back coat, Next shirt and knit, Monki trousers, KG shoes, Alexander Wang clutch, and rings by Dominic Jones and Maria Francesca Pepe. Photographed by her boyfriend, David Knight, who takes most of her outfit pictures.

*Image courtesy of Charlie May.*

Figure 4.4 Jazmine (Jazzabelle’s Diary) wearing a Zalando dress, charity shop belt, car boot sale bag, ASOS shoes, and sunglasses, which were a gift from a friend. Photograph taken by her mum.

courtesy of Jazmine Rocks
Figure 4.5 Michael (Anastasia & Duck) wearing sunglasses by Linda Farrow for Raf Simons, gloves by Raf Simons 1995. Self-portrait taken with tripod and remote. ‘I put my timer on five second delay,’ Michael says, ‘and then quickly drop it in my pocket before the camera takes the picture.’

courtesy of Michael Ford
Figure 4.6 Rosalind (Clothes, Cameras and Coffee) wearing vintage. In the text accompanying this image, she writes, ‘I like the very naturalistic feel to these images, with a vintage dress and second hand jewellery. It’s a pleasure to work with [my friend] Flo wielding the camera, and I can always rely on the results to be fantastic.’

courtesy of Rosalind Jana.
Figure 4.7 Natalie (Canned Fashion) wearing a Motel skirt, Boy. by Band of Outsiders shirt, Zara blazer, and Isabel Marant Bobby sneakers. Taken with tripod and remote.

*Image courtesy of Natalie Hughes.*
Figure 4.8a Kristabel (*I Want You to Know*) wearing a H&M coat, COS jumper, Topshop shorts and Dr. Martens. Photographed by me in Berlin, April 2012.

Figure 4.8b Detail shot: COS knit and Marc by Marc Jacobs necklace.

Figure 4.8c Detail shot: Worn oxblood Dr. Martens.
Figure 4.9 Matthew (*The Gentleman Blogger*) wearing a Reiss suit, Alexander McQueen shirt, Prada tie, Russell & Bromley boots, and an Oxfords Cashmere Blanket. Photograph by Adam Tannous.

courtesy of Matthew Zorpas
Figure 4.10 Alexxsia Elizabeth wearing Ann Demeulmemeester shoes and top, Topshop Boutique dress and bag, and Monki sunglasses. Photograph by Charlie May.

courtesy of Alexxsia Elizabeth
Figure 4.11 The author being photographed by a professional photographer, Derek James Miller at Paparazzi Studios, London.
Figure 4.12 Photograph of the author and Daniela Morosini (Couture and Crumpets) taken by Clive Arrowsmith as projected onto the National Theatre. This image was taken with a mobile phone camera.
Figure 4.13 Lucy (Fashion Me Now) wearing Zara shorts and top, Office boots and a Celine bag. Photograph taken by a friend.

Image courtesy of Lucy Williams
Figure 4.14 Lucy (Snippets of Shiny Thoughts) wearing a silk scarf by Kitty McCall, an ASOS blazer, Jaeger quilted pumps, Mercy & Wild t-shirt and New Look necklaces. Her friend, housemate and fellow blogger Carrie Harwood (Wish Wish Wish) took this photograph.

Image courtesy of Lucy Nicholls.
Feedback

Of each of the comments that I received on my blog during my fieldwork, the one that is most vivid in my memory is ‘smile with teeth.’ The writer of this comment, a regular reader of mine, followed her suggestion with a smiley face emoticon, most likely to assert the tone of the statement, in case I were to misinterpret her suggestion as a criticism rather than a thoughtful suggestion. The emoticon, might I add, did not offer a toothy smile either. This comment was of particular interest to me, as it was not a compliment or a criticism. Or, if I were to think of it as a criticism, it was certainly not in the vein of some of the more nasty (usually anonymous) ones that bloggers receive. Those kind of negative comments are rites of passage; after dealing with the initial unpleasantries of reading them, many bloggers will share these with others, especially on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. In one sense, the drawing of attention to these comments asserts ownership over them. ‘That’s how you know you’ve made it!’ I’ve heard on multiple occasions, with a score of Facebook ‘likes’ to follow. Bloggers often offer up the worst ones to each other. Some even have their favorites. Ava tells me, ‘I was called a gremlin once.’ She continues, ‘but my favorite, my absolute favorite was when someone wrote, ‘You know, I actually don’t hate this outfit.’

Bloggers and I often talk about ‘documenting an outfit.’ We discuss how we choose to style a particular garment and the end result of the images that we take. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is during this moment that, the idealised person women imagine they can be is faced with the actuality of what they have managed to construct from their wardrobes (Woodward, 2005: 83).’ The end result, ‘the look’ is something that bloggers often speak about among each other. These discussions can be complimentary (‘I loved how those photographs turned out.’), seeking approval (‘What do you think about those shots?’), self-critical (‘I can’t believe that I posted that.’) and critical of others (‘Why on earth would someone post that image?’). Critical discussions about blogs (and particularly blog images) are very common, they are something that almost every blogger admits to. While many are emphatic that they will not leave negative comments on blogs, they are willing to discuss what they do not like about particular blogs and bloggers in a more private arena, Goffman’s ‘backstage.’ They do this with the understanding that that information they disclose will not be shared with others. The key here is
that bloggers may be treated ‘relatively well to their faces and relatively badly behind their backs (Goffman, 1990: 173),’ and that all bloggers may be subject to this evaluation.

Isabella tells me that evaluating other blogs makes her ‘feel better.’ It is a way that she is able to reconcile with her frustrations, especially when her images do not turn out as she expected. Any disappointment that she may experience when looking at the final edited images before she posts them, or her blog in general, may be pacified or amplified through the act of comparison. While good blogs may inspire bloggers or leave them frustrated with their own content, clothing, and bodies, so-called ‘bad blogs,’ give them a positive boost. Bloggers are made aware of what they consider unfavorable or ‘bad blogs,’ by the writers themselves, who contact them as readers. Most commonly, bloggers are left comments by these (often new) bloggers and pay a visit to their blog in return. They may do this out of curiosity or to leave a comment in reciprocation. Linking when leaving a comment is one of the standard ways that a new blogger may promote her blog and try to gain more traffic, so it is very likely that new bloggers will comment on multiple blogs, unlike more established bloggers who assert that they ‘do not have the time’ to do so. Once a blogger is receiving upwards of thirty reader comments a day, returning these comments is simply not sustainable, it takes far too much time. Yet while the number of new bloggers exponentially increases, many older bloggers are critical of the ‘attitude of entitlement’ and level of fashion knowledge that the ‘newbies’ have. As I have mentioned earlier, blogging is a process through which a blogger presents herself through a process of transformation: she evolves her style of dress, learns how to pose and edit photographs of herself, and learns new modes of behavior. A blog is also in part, an artifact that is the result of a performance to an imagined audience, a performance that must be remain consistent with a fashion blogger’s behavior in public situations, especially in circumstances where she may interact with readers, other blogger, and members of the fashion industry. While their audiences are largely anonymous, bloggers do receive feedback in the form of blog comments, tweets, and personal emails. Yet, what is striking about the ‘backstage’ behavior of bloggers is that the gossip and critique illustrates their attitudes about some of their readers, as well as potential thought processes behind some of their own critics, who may engage in a similar activity when viewing their blogs.

Many bloggers will converse about different blogs over the telephone with each other, criticizing the photography, the outfit, or the overall ‘look’ in the post, among other things.
They may have favorites to view and evaluate (or 'hate read'), while others will claim that they ‘do not want to give that blogger any more views.’ Additionally, during social gatherings, bloggers may discuss what they like and dislike about particular blogs, often pulling up several as examples on their smartphones or iPads. I have been privy to discussions evaluating the personal style of a blogger (‘Her hair makes her look like a mad scientist.’), the choice of pictures that a blogger decides to post (‘She may have as well have drawn herself’) particularly if someone thinks that the outfit is too revealing (‘That girl never wears trousers!’). Bloggers will also comment on someone’s perceived lack of taste, (‘I guess chavs need something to read too’) or lack of originality (‘Oh look, it’s another Rumi’). In the moment, bloggers are aware that their behaviour is snarky and would describe it as such, but there is a shift from seeing themselves as the blogger, as the central figure in the show, to a member of the audience. In doing so, some will admit that they process is cathartic. ‘I hate to admit it,’ Isabella tells me, ‘but it makes me feel better about my own blog, you know?’ Bloggers know that when ‘putting yourself out there, one is subject to evaluation, but the critiques that occur through telephone lines and behind closed doors are much more damning than any comment from ‘anonymous’ that I have to yet come across.

‘PRs do it too!’ Ava tells me, describing an occasion when her boss (at a fashion PR agency) forwarded a particular link by email to everyone at work. ‘It was [a set of pictures] of a blogger who photographed herself in her underwear and then, using Photoshop, superimposed different outfits from a collection,’ she explained, ‘seriously, we were all dying laughing about it for twenty minutes!’
Belted jumpers, purple blazers, a yellow, vintage mac,
Beanie hats and umbrellas – a suitcase stamped in black.

Winding galleries display the trophies,
prize selections framed by screens.
Magnificent finery
draws praise for a feather’s breath,
while the hunters return to tread grey paths
and shoot under London clouds.

from *Shooting Party*, by Rosalind Jana
published 5th September, 2012 on *Clothes, Cameras and Coffee*

5 London Fashion Week

Drawing on Appadurai (1988), Ingold (2011) and others, I have discussed the materiality of fashion blogs and the different ways that they can be socially situated over time. Following Warner, (2005) the different networks of fashion bloggers that emerge have been looked at as a counterpublic, which provides them with a new way to frame their conduct in online and offline environments. I have looked at the potentiality of fashion bloggers to create a new system of class in which bloggers use materials to affiliate themselves with certain relationships while distinguishing themselves from others and to socially position themselves within the fashion world as a whole. Moreover, my informants must learn a combination of skills, behaviors, idioms of practice and aesthetics (or ‘style’) that ‘naturally’ develop through blogging and inform their relationships with other bloggers and members of the fashion industry. As discussed earlier, for my informants ‘the presentation of self,’ to draw on Goffman (1990), is of the utmost importance; it is a way that they are able to further position themselves within different networks (or as opposed to certain networks). In arguing this, I do not wish to present my informants as part of a ‘bubble’ that is oblivious to their surroundings or detached in some way. Similar to how they must switch between different forms of media, fashion bloggers must negotiate between different relationships and I have stressed many of the disconnects that occur as a result of this, whether this pertains to fashion related groups or other acquaintances. It is through these disconnects that we have been able to gain insight into the changing role of fashion bloggers and their positioning in relationship to others within the fashion industry and within a the larger public, a position that is constantly in flux.

I would like to move my attention to the way that they have come to know the city through stories and the way that, ‘being’ in the city informs (or reaffirms) particular relationships. There is a practical reason for this: given the importance that my informants place
on being London-based and the way that they weave London into their blog posts through photography and social media narratives, it would be a mistake to leave this out. As discussed in the first chapter, London is very much a material of their blogs—the different brick walls and skyscrapers serve as backgrounds in many of their photographs, and it on these streets that many of our conversations occurred. While fashion bloggers in London should be looked in terms of networks rather than a ‘subculture’ or ‘community,’ it would be difficult to argue that a London blogging scene does not exist. As I am interested in understanding London as my informants do, I learned that heavily identified with different areas and places for various reasons, but they were unanimously enthusiastic about London Fashion Week, a biannual major industry event that is located in Central London. For many of my informants, this marks a time when they are granted access to an event that is not open to the public and, in doing so, believe that they are cementing their position within the greater fashion industry in some way. It is here that one is able to witness the different interrelationships played out in a large-scale social space. It is a spectacle, there is something truly fantastical about London Fashion Week. It could be looked at as an exaggerated manifestation of the different relationships that happen among bloggers, press, stylists, and designers. Here there is arguably less room for error, and errors that do occur seem to appear on a far grander stage.

Stories, to draw on de Certeau (1988) can be looked at as ‘spatial trajectories’, narratives that are capable of transforming place and space. Stories, he writes, ‘organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time that the feet perform it (de Certeau, 1998: 117).’ It is through these narratives, de Certeau claims, that space and place are transformed, whether this is revealed through the simple act of relaying directions from one place to another, or more complicated anecdotes about past events, myths, or history (p.116). The way that bloggers talk about London is a specific kind of storytelling that allows them to organize and present London the way that they see it. For my informants, London is revealed to them through the trails they make as they pass through different zones, buildings, streets, and underground stations. Similar to the Reed’s (2008) early webloggers, knowledge of London is something that my informants claim that they do not actively seek out, but ‘half-anticipate’ (p. 395), and invitations to various press events often dictate many of the places where different networks of bloggers develop and congregate. Fashion bloggers rediscover London on a regular basis as they visit different places in the city and pass through the spaces in between, capturing ‘blogable’ moments. The narrative

---

35 de Certeau (1988) distinguishes between space, which is ‘composed of intersections of mobile elements and...actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it’ and place which he describes as ‘the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence’ (p.117).
that unfolds on their blogs demonstrates their knowledge of London and enables them to share this knowledge with others. More specifically, it reveals the ‘kind’ of London that they have come to know. This London, a personalized London, is largely made evident through the photographs that they post, images that depict, the different color palettes of neighborhoods, small cafes and local juice bars, the tartan lining of Burberry trench coats, brightly colored wellies, and quirky street signs. ‘That’s why I always bring my camera,’ Ava explains to me, ‘I never want to miss anything.’

When using London as a locale for my fieldwork, one might wonder ‘which London’ I met, and which London I am describing here. My initial experiences of London were spent as a visitor, as someone acclimating myself to the city. For the first few months, my main path through the city was guided by the Bakerloo line, beginning at Paddington Station and ending at Oxford Circus, where I would meet Ava, Isabella, or Isla in front of the Topshop, Selfridges, or Nike flagship stories right in front of the station. (We picked Topshop and Nike because they were convenient landmarks, but when we met at Selfridges, we usually planned to shop there first.) When navigating the underground, I relied heavily on the ‘London Underground Map’ for the first few months, which was a downloadable application available on my BlackBerry. The mobile application allowed me to type in my starting and ending points and it would calculate multiple routes based on criteria (e.g. quicker route, fewer tube changes). The application helped me to ‘look’ more like a Londoner, to avoid stopping to read over the underground maps that were located in various places in the underground station. Yet, for those that knew the city well, I was clearly not a Londoner. I mistakenly referred to it as ‘the subway’ on occasion, I stood to the right on the escalators, not one to walk briskly down the steps at the lefthand side as many locals seemed to. On one instance, I took my oyster card out of its pouch to tap it on the reader, something that garnered a few sniggers from the bloggers who were accompanying me at the time, and something that they still find hilarious. ‘That’s right up there with your “Susie from Boston” moment,’ Ava says. I watched others skip down the steps, steps that they were likely to have traveled many times before. They weaved in and out of the crowds at each of the underground stations, tapping their oyster cards on the reader in single fluid motions before they quickly passed through the gates to their next destinations. As a visitor to London, I associated a confidence, familiarity and quickness to what ‘being a Londoner’ meant. For me, knowing London was an absence of pauses or awkward moments, a person trotting down an escalator without looking at his feet, a head buried in a book that knew when to look up right as the tube doors opened at the appropriate station. It was not getting caught in the train carriage doors, knowledge of where all of the exits were in the station, being familiar with when the last trains ran and an apparent general nonchalance about it all.
My informants and I often talk about London as it is ‘our London’ based on the different experiences that we have shared, our favorite local haunts, and the regular routes that we walked as we headed to different events. This description of ‘our London’ is a literal one; when bloggers talk about London they assert ownership over it; they talk about London in terms of many different ‘intersections’ made, especially experiences with other bloggers (cf. Reed, 2008: 403). Fashion bloggers speak of London by telling stories that highlight their ‘insider knowledge’ of it. This knowledge may pertain to weather predictions, shortcuts between two places, underground routes and restaurants that are off-the-beaten path. Furthermore, the London that one encounters in each of these stories is a place with a ‘different personality,’ it is brought to life through the developing narrative of each blog. As Reed (2008) writes, ‘As a person, London is taken to absorb the actions that take place within it (or are enacted upon it) transforming them into aspects of its personality or character (p. 398).’ My informants also expressed an affiliation to the neighborhoods where they live, often eager to show me these neighborhoods and their homes, to have brunch at one of their local cafes or to wander through one of their favorite parks. ‘I almost feel as if I am cheating on The Diner in Camden if I go to the one in Soho now,’ Isabella laments, shortly after she moved from South London to Camden. The Diner in Camden and Soho are part of the same small chain of restaurants and offer the same menu, but Isabella, (who converses with managers from each of the branches to such an extent that she is allowed to order dishes that are not even on the menu) picks up a different ‘vibe’ at each one. She says, ‘Soho is great and it’s convenient if I’m coming out of work, but Camden is my hometown now, ya know?’

Neighborhoods are crucial to how bloggers identify with London and as ‘Londoners.’ Most bloggers have favorite areas, tube lines, or even underground stations that they frequent. ‘Piccadilly Circus has the best bathroom,’ Jack once told me, ‘you know, if you get stuck that’s the place to go....but I love the Victoria line...it’s never as crowded as some of the other ones get.’ Ava’s favorite London areas are Crouch End, Camden, Soho, and Oxford Circus and in that order. If you were to visit her blog you would find each of these places in the foreground and background of most of her blog posts, as the locale of different events, gigs, and outings with family friends and other bloggers, as well as the backdrop in many of her outfit posts. Similar to how she associates different possessions that she collects with particular memories, many of the photographs that she takes of different places serve to remind her of particular experiences, which is she is happy to talk about when asked. To refer back to Clifford (1998), it becomes apparent that in incorporating these different scenes into her blog, she is attempting to ‘rescue them’ or preserve them in a particular state, a seemingly impossible task as the ordering of these images provides a new context for them (c.f. Clifford, 1998: 251). As part of her blog, these
different backdrops create a new version of the events and places, while forging new links between them. These links may be literal in the form of HTML tags, which allow bloggers to organize their posts by keywords and, when clicking on a keyword, view all other posts in this particular category that the blogger has constructed. Other links are forged through their blog readers and the different connections that they draw between certain events, which are evident in their comments, Tweets, and other forms of mediated communication. Additional connections are made between the clothing that bloggers wear on different days and in different places, as these items are capable of providing continuity from one seemingly unrelated event to the next.

Bloggers identify with a ‘localized’ London, even those that moved to the city recently will ask other Londoners that they meet for the first time where they live. The answer might begin with a more general mention of ‘north,’ ‘south,’ ‘east,’ or ‘west,’ but my informants usually like to get to the specifics. They distinguish between different zones and neighborhoods and, more specifically, how closely one lives to Zone 1. Zone 1 is considered by many fashion bloggers to be ‘the heart of London’ and bloggers who live more centrally are often reluctant to trample out to the further zones. ‘By the time you get out to Zones 3 and 4,’ Ava tells me, ‘there’s really no point.’ Isabella tells me that she ‘doesn’t do East London.’ When speaking to Isla on a different occasion, she reminds me of a black box theatre production of Anna Karenina that we saw in Dalston on my thirtieth birthday. ‘Do you remember the time that we almost missed the show?’ she says, ‘We almost skipped it because we had to take the overground! Wouldn’t that have been a shame?’

For bloggers, there is a coherence between the London that they know and one that they share with their readers: the colors may be edited in photographs, the text may describe the day’s activities in a slightly more positive light than they recollect, but their stories are able to give London a voice (c.f. de Certeau, 1998: 127). Their London is also a fashionable one, particular places are capable of being ‘in’ or ‘out of style’ as much anything else, depending upon trends and their own aesthetic narrative (See Chapter 3). London is not always the main subject of a blog post or photograph, the different brick walls, parks, and city streets often serve as the background or ‘backdrop’ that provide context for the rest of the content. For example, many bloggers gravitate towards the tall brick walls as simple backdrops for their outfit posts. As Violet says, ‘I love the colors of the bricks in my neighborhood, and the simple brick wall over there (motioning to a tall brick wall) shows off the clothes well. It’s not distracting in the picture.’ Bloggers may have favorite areas that they gravitate to when taking photographs of their outfits: these scenes are preferred largely due to reliability (good lighting, less foot traffic) and their own aesthetic criteria (visually appealing and constructive to the intended photograph). Readers become familiar with these different locations, to the point that they may
bring up particular blog posts or images when they visit those places in person. Marin (an ASOS model, freelancers and self-described ‘part-time blogger’) and I were visiting Sherin, who blogs for *Hi Fashion* at her North London home. When walking into Sherin’s back garden (a regular locale for Sherin’s outfit photographs), Marin exclaimed, ‘Hey! This is just like walking into *Hi Fashion*!’

Blogs and correlating social media websites enable bloggers to map the city and share it with others continuously, whether this may be by ‘checking in’ to various places on Foursquare or Facebook, sharing photographs on Tumblr, or posting Tweets about things that they overheard along the way (as discussed in Chapter 2). Some of this mapping is literal. Susie Bubble of *Style Bubble*, for example, has a Google map that is accessible to the public and marks the locations of her favorite London shops with a small description accompanying each entry. Followers of her blog are encouraged to ‘step in her shoes’ and visit many of her favorite restaurants, thrift shops and designers. Hayley Constatine uses Google Maps to map the location of British bloggers. It is a directory of sorts that she hopes will encourage and facilitate potential blogger meet-ups in different geographic locations throughout Britain. The textual element of fashion blogs also creates a ‘map’ of London, the accompanying text and hyperlinks track the places that bloggers have been, so that readers might follow in their footsteps. The images of each location illustrate how that particular blogger experienced that place, or how they would like to remember it, as they are able to edit and present the images so that they correlate with his or her personal aesthetic and the overall aesthetic of the blog. Some bloggers photograph street style, which further adds to the character of this particular ‘London’. It is a part of a developing aesthetic narrative that emerges, which is based on ‘blogable’ subjects (including persons), with London’s many tall brick walls, lamp posts, or busy street corners frequently serving as a backdrop.

As I became a fashion blogger, I realized that what it meant to ‘know fashion’ was also linked to knowledge of London: of the different shops that were tucked away from the high street and the sporadic ‘sample sales’ that occurred in all of them, the different parts of the city where the ‘chic’ restaurants and cafes were. As discussed earlier, knowledge of fashion is also closely tied to industry knowledge and especially, levels of access that are granted, as opposed to public access. Additionally, access is often granted as part of a reciprocal system of exchange between bloggers and industry professionals: bloggers may be able to attend exhibits before they are open to the public or garner particular perks at restaurants and nightclubs as long as they are willing to mention them, very similar to the type of exchange that occurs pertaining to material goods (as discussed in Chapter 3). When organizing my farewell party (also known as
For bloggers, access and knowledge about fashion is closely linked to bigness, which can be best described as ‘social capital’ or, ‘the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 118–9).’ Drawing on Warner (2005) and Bourdieu (1984) as discussed in earlier chapters, we can understand that bloggers value these different resources and relationships within a class system that it is specific to fashion bloggers, and may have different views or priorities within other social contexts. Furthermore, many of the different networks that develop among bloggers have points of overlap. Bloggers are able to use their industry knowledge and different relationships to navigate their positions within social hierarchies that exist in the blogger community as well as the fashion industry, but a key element of this is being seen. While these social relations are regularly presented on fashion blogs and in different social media channels, they are especially evident during London Fashion Week, a biannual industry event that has been closed to the public since its inception in 1984. Fashion week is an event where the relations between different blogs materializes, as do the social relations between these blogs and the fashion industry. It is when attending London Fashion Week that one may see how ‘bigness’ or social capital is played out or performed in ways that are not evident on fashion blogs and social media. This is evident in terms of who is granted access, what level of access is granted, which catwalk shows one attends and where he or she sits (or stands) at them.

It is here that I would like to introduce the reader to London Fashion Week. Of the many different introductions that bloggers experience, their first London Fashion Week is arguably one of the most memorable and one of the most important to them. All of my informants attended London Fashion Week at one point at another, whether it was to promote their blogs (in the hope of being street styled), to see certain collections or catwalk shows, or simply to ‘hang out’ with some of their friends who lived in different cities but had traveled down to London to ‘cover’ the event.
Figure 5.1 Mulberry SS12 models.

*Courtesy of Kristabel Plummer.*
Figure 5.2 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.

Figure 5.3 The author, photographed outside of Somerset House during London Fashion Week AW12 by photographer Adam James.

Courtesy of Adam James
Figure 5.4 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.

Figure 5.5 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.

Courtesy of Adam James
Figure 5.6 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.

Figure 5.7 Street style photograph, taken at Somerset House.

Courtesy of Adam James
Figure 5.8 (previous page) London Fashion Week show invites: Bora Aksu, Cassette Playa, BFC press and blogger badges, and the coveted Mulberry LFW tote bag.

Figure 5.9 From the Bora Aksu SS12 runway show.

*Courtesy of Jennifer Palmer Inglis.*
Figure 5.10 From the James Long SS12 runway show.

*Courtesy of Jennifer Palmer Inglis.*
Figure 5.11. Bloggers working at the Blogger Bar at Somerset House.

Courtesy of Ed Thompson.
Figure 5.12. Outside of Somerset House during the SS2012 collections (February, 2012), bloggers street style each other.

Courtesy of Ed Thompson.
The Collections

It is late February 2011, the first day of London Fashion Week. Designers will show the autumn and winter prêt-à-porter collections for 2012 (AW2012) over the course of the next five days. The sixth day is reserved for AW 2012 menswear and will draw a smaller audience, as many buyers and press will have already headed off to Milan Fashion Week. The skies are grey and a chill has set in; it is an unfortunate climate for those eager to adorn themselves in pieces from next season’s wardrobes. Clunky umbrellas and heavy woolen coats do not mesh with many of the spring and summer ensembles, and bloggers anticipate frizzed hair, smudged mascara and rain soaked shoes as each day progresses. ‘It’s not even so much being cold,’ Isabella laments, ‘it’s those hours spent standing in the queues in the rain that really do me in.’ While the weather might suggest the need to seek alternative modes of dress, many choose not deviate from their planned outfits. Some have purchased new clothing for the occasion, others have borrowed clothing from PR agencies or directly from designers. Many emphasize that Fashion Week is a time where fashion trumps comfort. It is a time when ‘anything goes,’ an opportunity to wear the unexpected, to embrace it. As Anna Del Russo (editor-at-large and creative consultant for Vogue Japan) writes, ‘You must feel the weather every morning. Clothes live in the best context like actresses loving the amazing theater... Don’t match clothes and its own function: Like rain and trenchcoat, like snow and moonboot, forget it (sic) the umbrella at home!’

During Fashion Week, any lines that might be drawn between clothing and costume are easily blurred. Among many designer-clad attendees are brightly colored ensembles, dip-dyed hair in brilliant rainbow hues, larger than life accessories, and quirky hats and fascinators, including a large artificial bird, which one woman has fashioned on the top of a head as a statement piece. One may spot actors, models, and television presenters, along with well-known industry figures among the crowd. Although most public figures and celebrities will not need to queue for the catwalk shows as press, buyers, and bloggers do, many of them pass through the Somerset House courtyard along with everyone else, weaving in and out of the crowd on route to their destinations.The first time that I attended London Fashion Week in February 2011, I had a brief conversation with Marina Diamandis from pop group Marina and the Diamonds in the Somerset House toilets, not realizing who she was until I saw her photograph in the next day’s paper. There are also regular Fashion Week fixtures in attendance, lesser known celebrities, persons that the greater public would likely have difficulty identifying. Yet, within the confines of Somerset House and the surrounding venues, these individuals have become regular fixtures. This includes self-described ‘living sculpture’ Pandemonia. She stands seven feet tall.
and is fitted from head to toe in a plastic suit, which creates the illusion that she is a living inflatable doll. One garners a sense of how ‘big’ a blogger is or how an important a LFW attendee is by the fluidity in their motion, how briskly they walk from one catwalk venue to the next, with a temporary pause to appease street style photographers, all while sporadically checking a smartphone for messages while in route.

Before this trip to London Fashion Week, Ava told me not to stress too much about what to wear. She explained, ‘Even if you put together your craziest outfit, it will still pale in comparison to many of the over the top looks that you will see there. I mean, did you see Florrie last season?’ She paused for a moment, and laughed: ‘Although, definitely don’t wear a turtleneck again. It’s never turtleneck weather. I mean, really, that’s worse than wearing flats.’ Yet, on the train from Reading headed into London, I feel decidedly out-of-place. I have decided to wear a gold sequin minidress with chunky ankle boots and a faded green army jacket. In part, I am still trying to redeem myself from the aforementioned ‘turtleneck incident’ during my first trip to London Fashion Week (February of 2011), but I also hope to be street styled at Somerset House, as this is something that I have yet to experience. However, on an 7:30 AM eastern bound train filled with commuters on their way to work, my outfit garners stares and raised eyebrows. I get the impression that in this particular context, my overall look may appear more ‘walk of shame’ than ‘Fashion Week chic.’ Had I already registered and picked up my press pass, I might have worn it for the duration of this journey, or flashed it momentarily, if only to provide a point of reference to those around me. The light streaming in from the windows makes my dress even more conspicuous. As the light catches the gold sequins, they reflect against the walls of the carriage. The constant movement of the train makes these hundreds of little lights furiously dance: it is like being inside of a giant disco ball.

Leaving the Covent Garden tube station, I pass billboards advertising London Fashion Week, and more specifically three of its major sponsors: Vitamin Water, Vodafone and Canon. With an umbrella in hand, I make my way through the theatre district to Somerset House, past billboards for Legally Blonde and The Lion King, small delicatessens, pubs, and a Pret a Manger on the corner. In the sea of pedestrians, I notice men and women with light green London Fashion Week canvas tote bags slung over their shoulders. These tote bags are designed by Mulberry each season, and are given to members of press when they pick up their accreditation badges. The bags contain a ‘Black Book’ publication, which has collection and contact information for each designer showing at London Fashion Week. The Mulberry totes are coveted among members of the public with an interest in fashion; some totes may retail for upwards of £40 on eBay. Many bloggers collect them as well, for while they may accumulate dozens of different
totes from various events, these are among the most prestigious to posses, these totes contribute to the ‘bigness’ or ‘level’ of a blog, it is difficult to know how big a blog really is. These attributes concern access (whether this is access to events, gifted items, or prestigious relationships). ‘Bigness’ is a difficult thing to describe when it comes to blogging, for while one may consider the different attributes that contribute to ‘bigness’ they signify a level of insider access into the fashion that has only recently been granted to bloggers, they are ‘the material evidence of one’s presence in the field of fashion, a visible sign of belonging for others to see (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 741).’ Through the possession of these artifacts, bloggers may demonstrate their affiliation within the fashion industry during the confines of London Fashion Week. They may blend in amongst the journalists, who are there to professionally cover the event for various publications. Furthermore, in the days to follow, these artifacts serve to differentiate Fashion Week bloggers from those who are unable to attend. This includes other bloggers who lack the resources to travel to London, or the social capital, in terms of blog stats and blog followers that would grant them access to Fashion Week the first place.

As I walk closer to the venue, the Mulberry totes become more prevalent. I also note accreditation badges worn over necks and peaking out of pockets, with ‘London Fashion Week’ stamped in bold white letters along the black fabric straps of the lanyards. Professional photographers congregate in front of the main entrance of the Somerset House and throughout the courtyard. They carry black backpacks filled with camera equipment and hold large cameras in their hands or around their necks. Amateur photographers are present as well, with smaller digital point-and-shoot cameras. Many of the photographs that they take will end up on smaller websites, blogs or university publications. While a certain number of photographers cover catwalk shows as well, many are there for the sake of ‘street style,’ to photograph stylishly-clad London Fashion Week attendees, whether they are models, celebrities and other notable figures in the industry or members of the public. One does not necessarily need to be clad in head to toe designer goods to be street styled, one must simply appear ‘on trend’ or ‘interesting.’ Jazmine, 19, of Jazzabelle’s Diary, for example, was street styled by Vogue Italia wearing an all-black ensemble composed of pieces that she had picked up at different charity shops and car boot sales. Her entire outfit retailed for less than £5. Others are photographed if the garments they wear have an interesting (‘different’) texture (see Fig.5.7, 5.8), or if the overall look is very ‘modern.’ The iconic stone walls of Somerset House provide the backdrop for most of these images, which will be edited and uploaded later in the day or early the next morning. While some of them may be published in printed media, most of them are presented in digital photo galleries on the publications’ websites, as well as their Facebook pages and occasionally, Twitter. Many bloggers
document the street style scene for their blogs as well (See Fig. 5.13); they keep their cameras readily tucked away in their purses, or casually slung over one shoulder, ‘blogger-style,’ as Jazmine says, to differentiate themselves from tourists. The street style photographs that bloggers take are of each other and also attendees that they do not know. In Fig. 5.13, for example, Jazmine is photographing Daniela, another blogger and close friend. The photograph, was taken by a professional photographer who was working on a story about teen fashion bloggers.) Catwalk models (who refer to themselves ‘show girls’) pass on route to different shows. They are easily identified by their tall thin frames, and relaxed ‘model off-duty’ style: leather jackets, designer handbags, Alexander Wang tees, and Balenciaga jeans tucked into vintage motorcycle boots. Some are still in full-show makeup (See Fig. 5.2.), while others have their faces scrubbed clean. Many of their faces appear drawn and tired from jet lag, early call times, lack of sleep, and inadequate nutrition, early suspicions of mine that were later confirmed by several working models that I know. While they are frequently stopped to be photographed, most are explicit about their time constraints and quick to move on to their next appointment.

I reach for my mobile to text Ava and let her know that I have arrived. We both have seats for Paul Costelloe, which, at 9 AM, is the first catwalk show to kick off the week. This particular designer is one of Ava’s favorites, she loves his classic silhouettes and also crushes on his sons, who are in their early twenties and often help with the seating orchestration of the event. Paul Costelloe was also the first catwalk show that she saw when she first attended London Fashion Week in September 2010, ’You always have a soft spot for that first one,’ she tells me, and I agree with her. ‘I feel the same way about Bora Aksu,’ I say. While I wait for her to arrive, I feel the need to appear busy. As this is my third time to London Fashion Week, I know that the courtyard of Somerset House is a place of transit, it is a place where people rush between shows or appointments, often with a mobile phone in one hand, and an assortment of invite envelopes in the other. The pace by which people move suggests a degree of importance, the harder they are for photographers to catch the more desirable the images are likely to be. There is a nonchalance with which they present themselves that suggests that they are not caught up in what is publicly perceived as a ‘glamorous event,’ that they are not concerned with being watched; they are there are to work. I want to appear with the same nonchalance as a Londoner rushing down the steps of escalator, or the buyers hurrying between shows. For me, as with my bloggers, my nonchalance is a performance, a continuation of how I present myself on my blog.
Everyone hates bloggers

In a humorous article for *Vice*, Bertie Brandes gives several tips for those interested in being snapped by street style photographers at London Fashion Week. She describes different stereotypical industry personalities that one might encounter and ways that one may potentially emulate them. Her utmost suggestion for those eager to adopt the ‘blogger style’: ‘Don’t talk to anyone. Everyone who works in fashion hates bloggers. Fact.’ Drawing on Bourdieu, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) examine the way that London Fashion Week ‘renders visible, through its orchestration, wider field characteristics, such as field boundaries, positions, position taking, and habitus (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006: 736).’ They are interested in the physical structure of the event, the social relations that construct these spaces, and how these relationships constitute, reinforce and make legitimate different roles within the industry. The authors were granted access to Fashion Week by shadowing journalists who are covering the event. They reflect on their own limitations and social status as well, taking into account different circumstances in which they are made to seem ‘more legitimate’ within that space, and others where they find themselves marginalized (c.f. Entwhistle and Rocamora, 2006: 740). My research is interesting in that I was granted access as a blogger: first, as press, and in the following two seasons as a member of a separate ‘UK blogger’ category that was created. It was during these three seasons, that I was able to see how the spatial restrictions and levels of access granted to bloggers changed, and how these changes might signify a fluctuation in the perception and relation of bloggers to the fashion industry. I have illustrated in previous chapters that the bloggers assume different industry roles in what they do: they draw from models, journalists, and stylists, often adopting the jargon and drawing stylistic similarities. Ties drawn between the fashion industry and bloggers greatly influence the ‘bigness’ of a blogger. These relationships with members of press, designers, bigger bloggers, and public relations representatives are as important as the number of readers that a blogger has, the monthly stats. Given the importance of these different factors, one may appreciate the anxieties that develop concerning the maintenance and growth of the different kinds of relationships, a process that can be strategized (e.g., bloggers may ‘crash’ particular events so that they may get on mailing lists) as well as embellished, (many bloggers may lie about their stats, giving almost three times the actual number, or refusing to give them at all.)

London Fashion Week is a time where this is all made visible, and while some bloggers do not attend, many do. Recently, many of the catwalk shows have made available to the public digitally. Burberry was the first to do this, with other designers to follow. Yet, while the public
may watch live streaming videos of catwalk shows, bloggers place an important on being there. For many, being present in the room is more important than the quality of the photographs that they take, most will go on to use stock photography to show the collections anyway. Being in the room is what allows them to be seen (c.f. Entwhistle and Rocamora, 2006) and it is in being seen that they are able to validate their position among bloggers and in relation to the industry. In these ways, London Fashion acts as a ritual through which distinction in the industry concretized and consecrated in artifacts such as catwalk invitations, press passes and so forth (c.f. Bourdieu, 1979).

London Fashion Week is one of the ‘big four,’ along with New York, Milan, and Paris. On average, it is composed of roughly sixty on-schedule catwalk shows and thirty presentations (although this varies from season to season) which take place over a five day period. The exhibition at Somerset House, showcases a hundred UK and international ready-to-wear and accessory designers, both emerging designers and more established names. On the official website for the event, the British Fashion Council estimates five thousand visitors to Somerset House to view the S/S 2013 collections, including TV & radio crews, journalists and photographers, although they do not mention bloggers in this press release. Additionally UK media coverage of London Fashion Week exceeds £100 per season, and over £100 million in orders will be placed. While London Fashion Week is spread over multiple venues, Somerset House is at the heart of the event; this is where the exhibition and many of the on-schedule catwalk shows will be. It is also where buyer and press registration is processed, and it is additionally home to the press and photographer lounges, the MAC make-up studio and Toni and Guy salon. The latter two are complimentary services that are available by appointment for members of press.

I attended London Fashion Week on three occasions (February 2011, September 2011, and February 2012), and was granted access each time by the British Fashion Council as a UK blogger. I should note that February 2011 marked the last time that bloggers were formally registered under the blanket term of ‘UK Press.’ During subsequent seasons, bloggers were instructed to register separately from press as ‘UK bloggers’ as a new category was constructed specifically for this group. Yet regardless of whether ‘press’ or ‘blog’ was the term used, my first and last name, followed by the name of my blog was printed on each badge that I was given in bold. In line with Entwhistle and Rocamora (2006), I agree that the social organization of this industry event demonstrates not only the positioning of roles within the industry, but renders important performances of those roles within this social space. Yet, more specific to my research, I consider how bloggers are incorporated into this group of players, the levels of access that they are granted and the way that their social roles within the greater industry are gradually...
becoming more defined, and subsequently more segregated. Furthermore, different levels of access to London Fashion Week, highlight distinctions in social capital within the larger group of UK fashion bloggers, a group that is growing at an exponential rate. Continuing to draw on Bourdieu, we take it that social capital is always connected to an individual’s symbolic capital, the combination of which constructs what bloggers refer to as ‘bigness.’

Each season, the British Fashion Council sees a dramatic increase in blogger applications for accreditation, and must make decisions pertaining to who will be granted access. Over time, the requirements for accreditation become increasingly more detailed and rigid. Bloggers are required not only to provide their statistic information (monthly unique page views), but to submit screenshots of this data for the past six months (so that stats may not be embellished), along with their application, which states how frequently they blog and about which topics, as well as any previous fashion week coverage. Many bloggers are denied accreditation, such as Lizzie, a PhD student and fashion blogger, who attempted to register in person on the first day of London Fashion Week. She was asked to provide her stats to ‘some girl working behind the registration desk,’ who Lizzie later described as a ‘Gatekeeper.’ The woman proceeded to bring Lizzie’s blog up on the screen and ask her a series of questions about her intentions during LFW, before declining to give her a pass. Lindsay also recounted a tale of a blogger in the queue before her, being denied entry based on statistic information, ‘Her stats just weren’t high enough,’ she said, ‘you have to have at least 10k.’ Many bloggers that have previously attended LFW found this new procedure fairly daunting and it took Lucy, nearly half a day to garner up the courage to ask for a pass. After Lucy finally approached the desk and received accreditation, she described ‘how random’ the whole experience was. She said, ‘This woman asked me about my blog and then brought it up on the screen at the desk. After going a few pages back, she told me that she ‘liked the look of it’ and gave me my pass.’ Lucy’s fear of being publicly rejected prevented her from requesting accreditation earlier, it was only at the insistence of her friends that she was finally persuaded to give it a shot. Others talked of having to ‘blag their way in,’ or to ‘blag a Mulberry tote bag,’ as they were no longer available to bloggers, only registered members of press. Francesca ended up with three. Yet my conversations with my informants demonstrated that they were more concerned with being publicly denied access that attending in the first place. ‘If you think about it, you really don’t need it anyway,’ Ava said to me, ‘I’m not sure if I’m even going to bother to register next year. I might just contact the designers directly.’

While the BFC employee may determine who receives accreditation to the event, the social interactions that occur between bloggers within this space are indicative of social capital that is specific to, for the lack of a better word, the ‘world’ of fashion blogging itself (c.f. Bourdieu 1995: 73). In some ways, it mimics that of the industry: the more access is granted, the better. At the
bottom rung are the individuals wandering around outside Somerset House taking ‘street style’ shots without event accreditation of any kind. Next, are those with press accreditation, but who hold no tickets to any of the shows, followed by are those with printed electronic tickets or e-tickets, which usually designate ‘standing space.’ Some bloggers will go as far as to say that they ‘don’t do standing,’ but this depends largely on which designer show it is. The catwalk shows for the biggest designers are the most prestigious, and I have yet to come across a blogger who would turn down a standing ticket to Burberry, Meadham Kirchoff or Alexander McQueen. Those with seated tickets, then follow, the closer that one is seated to the front row the better.

Yet, bloggers also use each other as points of reference, often complaining to each other if someone that they think is ‘smaller’ than them has a better seat than they do. ‘You can totally write about the time I was in third row at an off-schedule [fashion] show, where Clara was front row,’ Ava tells me by text. She adds, ‘Fuming would be the word to describe me.

Tickets are coded with different colored dots, which specify where the individual is seated. (Those without a colored dot usually designate a standing space ticket.) Guests in the front two rows are typically given goodie bags from the designer, but it is rare to see bloggers in the front row at the on-schedule shows, unless they have achieved celebrity status. That seating is reserved for celebrities, editors from major publications, and potentially internationally known blogger celebrities such as Rumi Neely, Garance Dore, Scott Shuman, and Britain’s own Susie Bubble. Bloggers obtain tickets for fashion week shows and presentations by directly emailing the designers (or designers’ PR teams) using a database that can be found on the London Fashion Week website. Alternatively, they may receive tickets to the catwalk shows through the event’s sponsors, such as Vitamin Water and Clothing at Tesco. Many bloggers are not able to go to all of the shows that they are invited to and will share their remaining tickets with other bloggers within their group of friends. The move from press accreditation to blogger status, marked a change in the formal role or position of bloggers, at least in the eyes of the British Fashion Council (or BFC). Further distinctions between bloggers and press were made evident in the venue. Bloggers had a separate registration queue, and were no longer granted access to the to the press lounge. They were not given Mulberry tote bags upon registration, either, which contain the directories and designer contact information, and while some bloggers were able to blag the tote bags, they no longer carried with the same meaning. Furthermore, coinciding with this shift in the accreditation process, the BFC has restructured the layout for LFW as well. Many bloggers think that this new layout demonstrates a desire to curb bloggers from ‘hanging out’ around inside the venue, to move them outside to courtyard area, which is open to the general public. Previously, there were few places to Somerset House for bloggers to congregate between shows. Many bloggers that would normally have spent thirty minute windows of time
hanging out in the press lounge, or updating their blogs or social media account at the ‘blogger bar.’ Yet, in the following season they found themselves ‘thrown out’ and hunting for cover in nearby coffee shops, pubs, and restaurants amidst torrential downpours. However, one of the interesting things about this newly drawn distinction is that one does not need to be granted press accreditation to attend catwalk shows. Rather, all that is needed is an invite from the designer. As mentioned earlier, the press or blogger accreditation functions to grant access to the NEWGEN and designer exhibits in Somerset House, as well as the MAC makeover lounge (and the covetable goodie bags, which also come with this), as well as the Toni and Guy hair studio. On the other hand, the experience of attending London Fashion Week, is more than a series of catwalk shows. The accreditation process provides a sense of legitimacy, of social capital: it distinguishes between (as they would say in fashion), ‘Those who are in, and those who are out.’ This is also evident in the way that particular bloggers will group together, but snub others, the frequency of which bloggers are stopped and photographed by street style photographers, and how big those publications are. It also evident in the manner in which bloggers great other, by wave, hug, handshake or air kiss. Describing the ‘fashion air kiss,’ Entwhistle and Rocamora, write:

It is also an example of the way in which the body mediates social relations in this field. Two things are accomplished with this kiss. First, the air kiss requires a bodily proximity that signifies proximity between players in the field and, therefore, belonging and membership. In other words, it is a performative gesture that renders visible otherwise abstract field relations and positions, and, in the process, enacts and reproduces one’s social capital. When such an air kiss occurred between one of us and two important buyers, while waiting outside the Westwood show in Paris, it signalled a significant moment (at the end of the fieldwork). It demonstrated something about our position in the field that we were, at least temporarily, recognized and worthy of public recognition by these important players, visibly signalling we had acquired a certain amount of social capital (Entwhistle and Rocamora, 2006: 747).

‘Fashion Week...It’s like Vanity Fair out there,’ Isla tells me, ‘I’ll run into people that I’ve met many times before and they’ll act as if they’ve never met me.’ I recall an instance where I went to take a street style photograph of a blogger who I had met several months prior. I greeted her with a ‘hello’ and asked if she would mind if I took her photograph. We had on talked on several prior occasions and I knew that she was familiar with who I was. However, in that moment her answer to my question seemed uncharacteristically formal. ‘Sure, that’s fine,’ she answered, looking around quickly before she stepped out of the queue. ‘Where do you want me?’ I told her that where she was standing was perfectly fine. She posed for the photograph, thanked me, and then hurried back to her place in the queue where she began to play with her phone with
sudden urgency. I knew that this exchange between us was a part of a performance in which she asserted her higher positioning as blogger and for this reason did not take it too personally. I was not even surprised three days later, when I appeared in one of London Fashion Week posts. I was pictured within a group of five bloggers wearing a headband designed by one of her friends, a fellow fashion blogger and designer. In this post, she had named and linked to each of the bloggers, except for two. One of those was me.

Catwalk

The queue for the Cassette Playa show, which takes place in the BFC show space in Somerset House (the main venue for many of the on-schedule catwalk shows), was not as long as I anticipated. As we wait in the queue, we examine the invites, which were given to us earlier in the day by Ava’s PR contact at Vitamin Water. As they are one of the major London Fashion Week sponsors, they receive many complimentary tickets to catwalk shows from the British Fashion Council. From the small purple circle stickers on the top lefthand corner of each invite, we deduce that they are seated allocations, as most of the standing spaces either have no sticker on the invite or are email print-outs. ‘I think Jack is here,’ she tells me, ‘he’s somewhere in the queue.’

Jack is a fashion blogger who has covered London Fashion Week for the past three seasons. Unlike the majority of the bloggers that I know, he does not post about his personal style on his blog, he focuses on contemporary issues in fashion and reviews collections. He’s got a penchant for bringing his own stickers to some of the events, which he affixes to catwalk show tickets so that he may claim a better seat. While some may find it amusing when he relates this story to them, this is not the kind of behavior that will make one popular at fashion week. While seat stealing is something that my informants ever admitted too, I was privy to many a lament about ‘how some asshole stole my seat.’ He finds us and joins us in the queue, animatedly filling us with some ‘drama’ he is experiencing with the PR agency that represents fashion designer Jena.Theo. Having seen her catwalk show, he wrote a negative review on his blog and the PR agency has demanded by email that the take down the blog post, which he has refused. ‘They just emailed me back saying that they will no longer send me invites to any of their clients’ fashion shows,’ he tells us, pulling out his BlackBerry to show us the email as if we would not believe him. As we glance at the email, he laughs and says, ‘Next year, I’ll take a picture of myself holding a ticket to the one of their shows with a big fat smile on my face! There are other ways to get tickets!’ (It is possible to gain entry in other ways, as other organizations such as LFW sponsors have show tickets that they can give away to bloggers and press.)
As we enter the venue, we are seated in the fourth row by an usher. There is a white paper detailing the menswear collection that has been placed on each of seats along with a bottle of still mineral water. ‘What is this? Cassette Playa’s homage to Ken?’ Jack says, incredulously, ‘This should be interesting.’ The lights dim and music starts, and as the models walk out into the runway, we are all taken aback. They are edgy, hardly what we pictured as Ken, they are heavily tattooed and tough, clad in printed silk t-shirts with bold graphic designs, cricket jumpers, varsity jackets, shorts and metallic trousers. ‘Oooh, It’s Bad boy Ken,’ Ava whispers with a laugh. Jack looks at the two of us and says, ‘I’m actually... I’m speechless. I don’t know what else to say other than: Holy shit!’
7 Life After Blogging

My time as a blogger did not end abruptly, but was something that I gradually eased out of during the course of a few months. I started to make gradual changes to my blog before I decided to shut it down completely. First, I set the reader comments so that they would require approval. Two weeks later, I turned them off completely. One of my readers, likely confused by this sudden change, left a comment on Ava’s blog asking her to tell me to turn my comments back on. As Ava relayed the message to me, what I found most interesting was that this reader did not miss the ability to leave her own feedback on my posts, but that she ‘found it interesting to see what everyone else has to say’ on each page. It was an interesting revelation and I wondered at that point how many readers shared a similar sentiment and if this in some way accounting for the gross difference in number of comments one receives as opposed to number of readers per post. Previously, this was something that many of my blogger friends and I had chalked up to ‘lack of interest’ or ‘not having the time.’

My move to turn comments off was gradually followed by a decision to abandon all advertising, even the Net-a-Porter banners that I had been so excited about including when I first began blogging. Several weeks following this, I decided to stop all of my brand partnerships, even my ‘shoe of the month deal’ as we liked to call it, with online retailer Spartoo. A few days later, I wrote a post to let my readers know that I would be posting a lot less frequently, only to be followed by an ‘indefinite hiatus’ post several days later. ‘Wow, May 22 you were just thinking about doing lifestyle and design updates, today you’re on hiatus’ one reader commented, ‘please come back! This is one of my favs to read each day.’

There were several interesting things that I learned when I stopped blogging. First, I did not expect to feel as guilty as I did about receiving gifted items just prior to this date. Even though I no longer had a blog, I still felt a responsibility to compensate for these particular goods. As discussed earlier, when collaborating with different brands, the blog can be looked at as entering a ‘commodity state’ (c.f. Appadurai, 1985:), and in this sense one ‘gives a little bit’ of their blog away. Yet due to the regularity in which I collaborated with these companies, it started to seem as if my blog was permanently stuck in commodity state, one that I was not particularly comfortable with. When I stopped blogging, I felt a responsibility to let all of the different
brands that I worked with know and a slight guilt for any missed collaborations. Of these collaborations, I felt particularly guilty about a 180cm necklace made of beautiful baroque ethically sourced freshwater pearls. Even though I had written a post about this company previously, the founder had sent me the pearls in the hopes that I would become a brand ambassador. Once she read my blog and realized that I would no longer be blogging, she sent me several emails over the next few weeks asking me if I would reconsider or be willing to contribute a post about the pearls for their company’s blog. I wrestled with the thought of returning the pearls to her, although I never did. In the end, I decided that I had earned them with previous posts, and I was not sure if it would have been an insult to send them back.

The second thing that I did not expect was the feeling of ‘anonymity’ that came, the quietness of no longer needing to document experiences and share them, only to experience them. I was rethinking my ideas of private and public—things that were appropriate to share on my blog did not seem relevant on other social media networks. In one sense, this brought a loneliness with it. I would instinctively turn to capture and share a moment, only to realize that there was no longer an audience for it. At the same time, I found it difficult to stop editing what I saw. For months I still ran many of the photographs that I took through ToyCamera filters and occasionally touched up a spot or two on a friend’s face, often to their chagrin.

The third thing I realized was that only after I decided to make my blog inactive did I begin to see it as an archive. It was necessary for me to stop blogging to begin to translate my blog into fieldnotes and those fieldnotes subsequently into this text. It was the end of my fashion blog, or perhaps I should say that it moved to an inactive state as I began to work the different materials that held that blog together into this ethnographic text.
References


Coleman, E. G. 2010. ‘Ethnographic Approaches to New Media’ *Review Anthropol.* 39: 487-505


Vitak, J. and Ellison, N. 2012. “‘There’s a network out there you might as well tap’: Exploring the benefits of and barriers to exchanging informational and support-based resources on Facebook.’ *New Media & Society* 1461448124351566, first published on July 23, 2012 doi: 10.1177/1461448124351566


