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Foreword

Susie Bubble

Some of the first self-shot images of Susie ever to appear online, posted on The Fashion Spot forum in 2005
I had a dirty habit from 2005 to 2006, coinciding neatly with my final year of studying history at University College London, when I was slightly terrified of what graduating would actually mean. Every day I would escape from lectures and seminars and log on to The Fashion Spot, a community forum where fashion lovers and industry insiders could pore over collections, models, magazine editorials and personal style. I succumbed to having a second life on the Internet, chatting to people I had never met in person and sharing parts of my life with strangers long before the explosion of Facebook and Twitter.

The Fashion Spot was also where I first discovered the act of sharing your personal style, something that would rapidly spiral into today’s phenomenon of fashion blogging. I’d take a picture of my outfit in the mirror, palms sweating, because it seemed such a preposterous act of narcissism at the time. A quick upload (without the now-standard Photoshop clean-up process) and my self-image would be out there for members to bestow virtual karma points and encouraging comments on. The Fashion Spot was in effect the gestating cocoon for the beginnings of my own fashion blog and arguably the start of fashion blogging’s explosion.

When I finally did graduate, the progression to starting an actual fashion blog was natural. In March 2006 Style Bubble went live quietly. I set out with a mission statement: I didn’t want to rehash Women’s Wear Daily news bites, I admitted I wasn’t a fashion insider, I said I had peculiar and particular tastes and I acknowledged that I could only write about what I know and love. In hindsight, outsiders would see this as a tactical move into self-publishing but initially I didn’t view Style Bubble as a media outlet. It was more of a hobby I could indulge in, a place where I could explore my own taste in fashion. It is that feeling of exploration, together with discovery, that – although Style Bubble has now become a full-time endeavour – I hope to emulate today.

The addiction to blogging was, and is, something of a guilty pleasure. At first there were few others that I knew in real life
who could understand what it felt like to rush home and geekily offload pictures from an exhibition or visit to an exciting store, or share a new designer discovery with readers. Only through following links of comments on the blog did I find myself a few allies. I count the likes of Michelle from Scottish fashion blog Kingdom of Style as an early cohort who could sympathize with the trials and tribulations, as well as the joys, that came with fashion blogging.

Not all blogs are created equal and it was precisely the multitude of differences that made it so exciting. When I first happened upon Style Rookie, a blog written by a then 12-year-old girl called Tavi Gevinson, it blew me away to read such a kindred and unique voice coming from a bedroom in the suburbs of Chicago. It’s no surprise that Gevinson has gone on to become an editor in her own right, with the successful teen-focused web magazine Rookie, an unimaginable feat when I first started blogging.
As the platform began to grow in popularity, sub-categories emerged under the umbrella term ‘fashion blogs’. There are personal style bloggers like The Blonde Salad, Amlul and Hanneli, who constantly share photos documenting their own clothing and, in part, lifestyle. This has subsequently led to celebrity status for a number of these authors, garnering them opportunities to collaborate with high-end fashion brands as models, spokespeople and, in some cases, designers.
There are street style bloggers for whom blogging is a vehicle to showcase their photography and their ability to capture a particular zeitgeist on the streets, at parties and, more recently, outside numerous international fashion week shows. Tommy Ton of Jak & Jil and Phil Oh of Street Peeper, for example, have become official street style photographers for Style.com and American Vogue’s website respectively. This is a notable act of official sanction by the fashion media establishment and has placed these blogger/photographers in a class of their own.

Then there are blogs that can be recognized as fully fledged websites or media outlets. They have infrastructures resembling those of print publications, but the content unabashedly sticks to their cornered niche. They have become well-respected sources of information for the industry and beyond, be it the latest in streetwear and menswear on Hypebeast, a light-hearted take on news on Fashionista, or detailed analysis of the industry on The Business of Fashion.
Finally, there is a string of indefinable but defiantly recognizable voices who comment on fashion in their own specific ways, from Luxirare’s incredible photography of mind-boggling DIY projects and food creations to Patternity’s clever observations of patterns that impact all design spectra. There’s also the more recent phenomenon of traditional print editors, such as Anna Dello Russo, editor-at-large of Vogue Nippon, turning to blogging as a form of personal expression and an extension of their own brands.

What I and all these other fashion bloggers discovered early on was the simultaneous power and vulnerability of putting yourself out there. My first negative criticism was something along the lines of ‘You’re not a journalist. You’re not a stylist. Stick to what you know.’ Wasn’t that the appeal of fashion blogs? It’s a criticism that has been levelled against bloggers since the beginning and continues to dog us. Questions of whether blogging is a passing fad or will threaten the existence of print magazines are common. The answer to both is currently a resounding no. Fashion bloggers haven’t blipped into a Web 2.0 black hole and don’t look like they will be going away any time soon. Magazines, especially those with a strongly independent identity or niche readership, are still going strong.
There seems to be a growing appreciation for taking in information at multiple speeds – slowly through style biannuals and monthly magazines and quickly through RSS feeds and browser bookmarks. Print and online publications can and do now co-exist, and blogs cross-pollinate with sanctioned fashion media outlets. Mainstream fashion publications feature bloggers or ask them to write columns, do guest styling or adopt the format of a street style blog, photographing clothes on non-models. Fashion PR agencies and brands have begun to tackle the question of how to deal with bloggers in their own marketing strategies. This is a reverberating recognition of bloggers as more than just renegades that will disappear and has resulted in many high-profile brand-blogger alliances.

In response to this collaboration between brands and bloggers, the professionalism of the platform has been scrutinized with ongoing fascination. After ‘What is the future of fashion blogging?’, ‘How do you make money?’ is the question I get asked the most, and is something that I personally don’t mind tackling. If you see an ad on my blog, it’s there because it’s paying my rent. For me, these questions actually skirt the main issue at hand, which is the content of the fashion blog itself.

The bottom line should be: are we still enjoying what bloggers do? The preoccupation with how professional, influential and financially well-off a fashion blogger is can make people lose sight of what makes fashion blogs such a fascinating source of inspiration. As a blogger myself, I have to keep asking whether I still have my original passion and whether it still shows in the content. Relishing the freedom over what you blog is an important part of that. As soon as it becomes a chore, it starts to show in the quality of the writing.

When I started the blog, I tagged it with the line ‘I’m a fashion outsider.’ People will say this proclamation doesn’t stand true anymore, but I like to think that maintaining perspective helps make me grateful for everything that Style Bubble has become. I still sit at fashion shows wondering whether a PR will suddenly ask me to leave. It’s savouring that newness and seeing things
in an unjaded light that spurs me on, and it is that untainted point of view that captures readers’ imaginations.

As a reader and observer of fashion blogs, it’s still about unearthing captivating sources to latch on to as new daily reads. There are hundreds of thousands of fashion blogs and there’s no denying there are plenty that are bad. A strong and distinctive identity has never felt more essential. For me, the most interesting voices and points of view do not necessarily come from blogs with 5 million monthly page views.

I joined the fashion blogging party in 2006, awkwardly shuffling my feet with a cup of punch. Over the years the party may have become increasingly busy, but the simultaneously good and bad thing about blogging is that everybody is invited. The blogs we have selected here represent the best of who is at that party, but that isn’t to say it is a definitive list of the most influential blogs or those with the biggest readership. Style Feed isn’t a hard-line ranking system, but a celebration of blogs we feel have longevity as valid voices in the ever-noisy world of the fashion media, and as inspirational forces to be reckoned with.
Introduction

Though style blogging has had a relatively short lifespan, it has rapidly developed from a series of disconnected online fanzines to become an integral part of the fashion business. Today it is easy to take their impact for granted but, in the beginning, bloggers were not always welcomed by some of the industry insiders they so admired.

Fashion is built on desirability and aspiration; on the creation of beautiful objects that people strive to obtain in order to enhance how they look, feel and present themselves to others. Brands are strictly managed and correct representation is key, with journalists, stylists and editors often working under rigid guidelines. To some extent, blogging shattered this notion. As unmoderated, independent voices, bloggers had the freedom to say whatever they wanted about the style, quality or relevance of any fashion ‘product’ they chose. They also had the ability to reach virtually anyone, anywhere.

At first, the fashion industry found blogging difficult to understand. Gradually, though, blogs established themselves as truly personal takes on style and their importance was recognized. They may offer different perspectives on fashion to the ones we are historically used to, but they highlight the excitement felt by real people who actually wear, or want to wear, the clothes featured. Over time this has become valued by brands and designers who regularly work with bloggers in a variety of ways, from collaborations on bags, shoes and clothes to using them as models and ambassadors, with the lucky few sitting front-row at catwalk shows.
While blogging may at one time have been seen as a passing fad, today it is not uncommon for high-profile blogs to reach an audience of 25,000 people a day. It is all too easy, though, to be wowed by the vast number of people that one blogger, often working from their own home, can reach and subsequently to put too much emphasis on the commercial effect they might have. What is important to remember is that at its root, fashion blogging is born out of an honest passion for clothing design. And, for some, blogging has become not only a way of commentating and discussing, but also contributing.

Blogs can be highly creative visual experiments, diaries or resources and it is this aspect that shone through while putting together this book. Everyone featured and interviewed here has taken the idea of what blogging is somewhere new, whether they have a unique approach or a strong aesthetic sensibility, or are doing something that is genuinely inspiring and intriguing. Ultimately Style Feed is exactly as described on the cover: the world’s top fashion blogs, whatever form they may take.

William Oliver
The Coveteur

Erin Kleinberg & Stephanie Mark
Photography by Jake Rosenberg
thecoveteur.com

Chanel Paris-Bombay Collection, Métiers d'Art. Paris
Though it’s only been up and running since 2011, The Coveteur has already firmly established itself as a high-profile fashion blog. One of the most innovative examples of what can be done with the platform, the site provides an intimate view into the style values of notable scenesters, including Anna Dello Russo, Khloe Kardashian, Rachel Zoe, Simon Doonan and Jonathan Adler. Set up by stylists Erin Kleinberg and Stephanie Mark, with photography by Jake Rosenberg, it pulls together all three contributors’ creative backgrounds to produce intriguing content that goes beyond the industry facade. Using contacts established through their commercial styling careers, Mark and Kleinberg have garnered incredible access to the homes, handbags and closets of the fashion elite, artfully arranging and photographing what they find. Collaborations with Chanel, WhoWhatWear, Rachel Zoe and New York Fashion Week have all cemented the project’s respectability, as has being voted Blog of the Year by leading e-commerce site Net-A-Porter.

Erin Kleinberg & Stephanie Mark

‘We saw a void in the industry and that’s really what it’s all about – finding little cracks that need to be filled. We wanted to deconstruct the idea of street style and take it one step further and go behind the scenes – to show people how the tastemakers they have become obsessed with as a result of street style blogs get dressed every day, and to deconstruct their sartorial choices. We’re always inspired by our subject’s style, home or career; we really seek to showcase people who are influential in today’s culture and will have a lasting impact in decades to come. There’s always more to a person than meets the eye and we take pride in really getting to know our subjects. The anecdotes we get from them give our readers greater insight into who the person is and where they come from.

Our aesthetic is sleek, clean and modern; one of our major points of differentiation was establishing a site devoid of advertisers. We really wanted our readers to come to the site and not be bombarded with pop-ups and banners that took away from our exclusive content. The blogosphere is oversaturated with a sea of sameness but we’re dedicated to providing readers with images and information that they’re not going to be able to find elsewhere. When we go inside someone’s home, it’s not about showcasing that “It” bag or pair of shoes that every street style blog has snapped – it’s about showcasing a person’s style by curating individual pieces.’
Jennifer Fisher, jewellery designer, Jennifer Fisher Jewelry; outerwear designer, Wyler. New York

Left: Joanna Hillman
Right: Dee Dee Taylor Eustace, architect and interior designer, Taylor Hannah Architect Inc. Toronto
Jerome Dreyfuss, designer. Paris
2010
The Man Repeller

Leandra Medine

manrepeller.com
Originator of the terms ‘arm party’ for an extensive collection of bracelets worn at once, and ‘man-repelling’, defined on the blog itself as ‘outfitting oneself in a sartorially offensive way that will result in repelling members of the opposite sex’, Leandra Medine’s The Man Repeller is a witty read. One part social commentary on the collision between male and female tastes and one part personal style guide, Medine’s blog combines sharply written content with a deep appreciation for fashion. A journalism graduate, the New York-based Medine has previously written for publications including New York Magazine and Harper’s Bazaar as well as interning at Valentino and Phillip Lim. Her tongue-in-cheek humour and celebration of harem trousers, denim overalls and all things man-repelling have earned her both a loyal following and a good reputation in the fashion industry. In the first two years of her blogging career she collaborated on films with Michael Kors, Prabal Gurung and Simon Doonan, received a profile in the New York Times and secured her own book project, pencilled for 2013.
Leandra Medine

‘I was lucky to found The Man Repeller on the brink of changing times, when blogging was transitioning from hobby to sustainable career. When I wrote for publications I found that my work was edited too much and it lost the quirk and charm that I thought strung it together. By blogging I was able to publish whatever I wanted, maintain final say and be my own editor, which is a special thing. My blog started as a pretty simple “Would this repel men or not?” Now it’s more about questioning whether or not what I’m featuring is both aesthetically pleasing and wearable art.

Initially, The Man Repeller was a commentary on culture. I wasn’t the man-repeller; I was just making the observations. Over time, I started putting images of myself on the site, sort of took on this role and created a persona. It has expanded from just women’s fashion being repulsive to men to women consciously dressing for themselves and almost hoping that they will in fact achieve man-repeller status.

For me, fashion blogging brings an element of realness. The girls that read magazines and want to change the industry finally have an opportunity to leave a footprint and have their voices heard.’
Blog Around The Clock