

# Book Review: Personal Style Blogs: Appearances That Fascinate by Rosie Findlay

*In Personal Style Blogs: Appearances That Fascinate, Rosie Findlay analyses the development of personal style blogs from their early origins, situating this sub-genre of fashion blog within a 'lineage of feminine sociality' as a personal actor-based practice of mediated dressing. With a strong grounding in textual and ethnographic analysis, this will be an exciting read for students, professionals as well as academics interested in the fields of fashion, media, blogging, digital transformation and creative work more generally, finds David Khalat.*

**Personal Style Blogs: Appearances That Fascinate. Rosie Findlay. Intellect. 2017.**

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Nowadays, the novelty of blogs in the early 2000s seems to be a distant past. In the age of constant social media use through Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as image bookmarking tools such as Pinterest or Tumblr, anyone can perform an imaginary everyday online. Many bloggers such as [The Blonde Salad's](#) Chiara Ferragni or Aimee Song of [Song of Style](#) have superstar status today, publishing books, producing clothing lines and working as successful models. Today, style influencers also sit in the front rows of major fashion shows, supplying material to many long-established fashion outlets such as *W* and *VOGUE*, among others. In this regard, *Personal Style Blogs: Appearances That Fascinate* is extremely valuable in tracing the evolution of personal style blogging up until the present day and in depicting how fashion media has been revolutionising itself through a discursive process.



In *Personal Style Blogs*, Rosie Findlay analyses the development of personal style blogs from their early beginnings and identifies them as a sub-genre of fashion blog. Findlay's focus on blogs is firstly based on a performance studies approach and secondly identified within a feminist discourse. Thus, this book explores performances of the self through style and situates personal style blogs within the 'lineage of feminine sociality' (6). Alongside the most renowned personal style bloggers such as Susie Lau, Rumi Neely and Tavi Gevinson, the author also analyses many lesser-known bloggers, revealing their different approaches. This helps readers to understand style blogging as a personal actor-based practice of mediated dressing beyond the glossy high fashion world of today's influencers.

Findlay's research is based on participant observation and an autoethnography through the author's own style blog. Findlay conducted further interviews with bloggers, analysed their use of images and texts and also undertook a reader survey. Theoretically, the book makes use of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of social milieus, discussing in-depth the field of fashion, as well as drawing on Judith Butler's analysis of the performativity of the self. However, in my opinion, the study lacks a critical discussion of post-modern subjectivation practices in reference to, for example, Michel Foucault's conception of power exerted over bodies or how appearances can invent realities in relation to the work of Jean Baudrillard et al.

Image Credit ([pxhere CCO](#))

In the first chapter, Findlay introduces the general differences between fashion blogs: for instance, the distinction between independent and corporate blogs as well as between personal and street style blogs. Here, the author complements some of the interesting views found in the classic style blogging analyses offered by [Agnès Rocamora](#) or [Monica Titton](#). Focusing solely on personal style blogs, which treat the blogger as the product of the clothes worn, Findlay distinguishes between the first and second wave of style blogging. The former is described as more DIY, as early style bloggers were often crafting clothes themselves and, if buying, sharing detailed information with their audience; they had less connection with 'the fashion world', but instead acted as independent amateurs. In a fast-changing environment, the second wave of style bloggers (such as Gevinson or Lau), well-established since around 2008-10 and well known today, is more about the perfect-looking tastemakers and savvy marketers. Shaping the face of new fashion media, these style bloggers have teamed up with many fashion publications such as *POP*, *LOVE* or *Dazed and Confused* over time, and have introduced new high fashion trends, often in collaboration with major brands.

Balancing the analysis between these two different waves of personal style blogging, Findlay finds an interesting perspective in tracing the similar origins of both: namely self-expression through creativity in dressing practice. In Chapter Two, 'Blogging the Bedroom', the author demonstrates how blogs work in terms of providing 'alternative spaces for feminine subcultures' (59), drawing on [Angela McRobbie's](#) and [Jenny Garber's](#) seminal research into girls' personal, subcultural spaces in the 1970s. The author further elaborates how digital sites work by functioning as akin to material bedrooms with their artefacts.

As for presenting the private in public, Findlay captivatingly illustrates some case studies of the risks involved in the seemingly private spaces of self-performance, where bloggers negotiate the dangers of online bullying and accusations of overt narcissism. Notwithstanding, the interview responses in the book show that style bloggers are aware of the risks and rather see their blogs within the context of their right to self-expression, like Danielle Meder of [Final Fashion](#): 'I have been looking for this medium my whole life because [...] I always feel like I have a lot to say and I have a lot to express visually as well, and I never had the space to do that before' (63).

Another important part of showcasing private dressing practices to the public is the notion of partial belonging between bloggers and readers even though they mostly do not know each other. Starting a debate on the public sphere in reference to the work of Jürgen Habermas and Lauren Berlant, the third chapter outlines the notion of an 'intimate public' (107) within the style blogosphere, which fosters a co-presence of feeling. Further, Findlay illustrates how the style blogosphere is constituted through fluid membership, fostering a conversational tone through which fashion media has shifted from appearing an inaccessible, professionally staged and glamorous world toward a discourse of a fashionable everyday life.

Towards the second half of the book, the author analyses the performances of bloggers' selves in constituting new imaginary worlds for themselves and readers. Scrutinising stylised identities, the book characterises fashion blogging in general as a successful performance by bloggers that mostly eschews any imperfections. Notwithstanding, Findlay shows interesting aspects of bloggers' explorations of self and style, as they address various life experiences through the perspective of fashion, be it a severe illness or just discomfort with one's body or skin.

Herein, Findlay illustrates that blogs can function as reflexive spaces of one's choice, revealing a much more complex dynamic than simple self-expression through performative dressing practices. In this discussion, the book therefore understands blogging as an important form of agency, and argues that blogs are not merely occupied with the pure *look*. Moreover, Findlay shows that many style bloggers see their blogging practice as a way of honing their creative skills in writing, editing and photo/video-making for future employment. This argument, however, could have been further developed with an additional analysis of the political economy of blogging as a creative freelance work practice in a neoliberal working environment.

*Personal Style Blogs* is an interesting study that summarises and tracks many different aspects of personal style blogging, such as identity-building, self-expression and performativity through dress. The book also emphasises the gendered aspects of personal style blogging as a feminine subculture, and embeds the blogging phenomenon within the discourse of contemporary fashion media. In parts, it lacks some depth regarding classic theoretical works; however, this is compensated by its strong basis in textual and ethnographic analysis. *Personal Style Blogs* is an exciting read for students, professionals as well as academics interested in the fields of fashion, media, blogging, digital transformation and creative work more generally.

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*Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*