Towards a New Cultural Paradigm

Fashion Blogging as a Metamodern Practice

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication & Media Arts, University of Newcastle.

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Statement of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Denise Mohan Tan
Statement of Authorship

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains a published contains one peer-reviewed published conference paper, and one peer-reviewed conference abstract authored by myself.


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Abstract

Fashion bloggers have overcome traditional media hierarchies to become new cultural intermediaries in fashion. Where fashion editors and journalists used to be the key players in the legitimation of fashion trends, fashion bloggers have introduced digital practices leading to a remediation of fashion journalism. However, while there are thousands of fashion bloggers on the Internet, only a select group of individuals have ever made it into the consciousness of two key audiences: the fashion industry and fashion consumers. As a starting point, this study applied a Bourdieuan framework to the field of fashion journalism through the mixed methods of content analysis, semi-structured interviews and direct observation. Two international and two Australian blogs were purposively sampled for this study, namely Susanna Lau, Bryan Yambao Nicole Warne and Patty Huntington. Notably, two distinct trajectories to dominance were found based on the acquisition of the various forms of capital, which are social, economic, cultural and symbolic. Given the currency of digital influence in fashion, this study further proposes the conception of a new field-specific form of capital called digital capital in the context of the emergent cultural paradigm, metamodernism. Metamodernism is characterised by a constant and dynamic oscillation between modern and postmodern sensibilities. This study found the metamodern strategy of performativity to be central to the conception of digital capital. Performativity encapsulates a dynamic tension between a modern authenticity and a postmodern artifice, and correspondingly a tension between self-expression and self-promotion. On the other hand, this study found that the metamodern sensibility of the quirky was not crucial the accrual of digital capital. The quirky refers to a tonal quality encompassing the simultaneous expression of a modern sincerity and a postmodern irony, highlighting the unique voice of the blogger. Most pertinently, the remediation of fashion journalism through the introduction of digital communication has paved the way for a new breed of fashion cultural intermediaries, whose metamodern approach to reportage should be a key consideration in the engagement of fashion audiences.