Flâneurs of Fashion 2.0
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The development of information technology and its effect on the fashion industry is still to be quantified. While it is evident that technological change alters the way we experience the world it is also clear that these changes are eventually incorporated into the conventions of everyday life. This appears increasingly true of Web 2.0, which is characterised by increased interactivity, file sharing and social networking (Lindgren 2007). Web 2.0 offers new forums for watching, discussing, promoting, selling and consuming fashion brands. Of particular significance to the fashion industry is the impact of weblogs, or blogs, on the way fashion is produced and consumed (Abrams 2009 & Wilson 2009).

Blogs are a frequently updated personal journal made available on the Internet. Increasingly, street style blogs such as The Sartorialist and Facehunter establish what is considered fashionable within globalised networks.

In understanding the role of blogs as arbiters of style this paper will adopt the familiar figure of the flâneur as a model through which to consider conceptions of fashion in the era of Web 2.0. The flâneur has been explicitly positioned as a male rambler of nineteenth century Parisian streets. He has many guises, conceived as poet, painter and dandy by Baudelaire (1970) and a journalist and writer by Walter Benjamin (Shields 1994 & Frisby 2001), yet above all he is an observer of urban life and metropolitan spaces. Recent scholarship by fashion theorist Elizabeth Wilson (2002) has identified the existence of a flâneuse or female flâneur in the form of fin-de-siècle Parisian prostitutes and Peng Hsiao-yen (2010) has considered the flâneur within the urban context of Shanghai in the 1930s. Such investigations suggest that the act of flânerie is not necessarily a gender, culturally or period specific activity. As sociologist Keith Tester suggests, "the flâneur is used as a figure to illuminate city life irrespective of time and place" (1994:16). Thus the flâneur in the context of this paper will be used to describe a person, male or female, from any culture, whose relevance extends beyond that of the historical figure of a designated place and period to be an observer of the city, its people and its fashion within contemporary culture.

While the discursive construction of the flâneur might be over-used within scholarly discourse the figure continues to be a useful analytical tool with which to consider the practices of observation, discriminatory taste, consumption and production. Just as the flâneur offered an insight into the vast industrial changes that occurred in nineteenth century Paris through his observations of the city, this paper argues that the flâneur and the activity of flânerie can offer a method for interpreting the conditions of modernity in the twenty-first century. As theorist Caroline Evans argues, modern fashion continues to bear a relationship to the "nineteenth century commercial relations, urbanisation and technological developments" and that by comparing the two "the past can resonate in the present to articulate modern anxieties and experiences" (2003:11). In particular, this paper contends that the rhetorical figure of the flâneur remains relevant to contemporary society as an observer of social space, however this space has extended beyond the actual boundaries of a particular city, to include the limitlessness of a networked society linked globally and virtually through the internet.

This paper will adopt social theorist David Frisy's (2001) view that the act of flânerie is not just a form of observation but a method for reading and constructing the city where the flâneur is also a producer of illustrative texts, narratives and social reports. This distinction is relevant to the analysis of the flâneur within the context of fashion blogs where the actions of photographers who post blogs, as well as in the comments posted by blog users, can be interpreted as acts of flânerie. It will be argued that both the flâneur as photographer and the flâneur as blog user (or commentator) observe fashion and its social contexts. Furthermore, in their production of visual records and textual analysis they both participate in the social and cultural construction of style. Case studies from The Sartorialist and Facehunter will be provided as prominent examples of the many fashion blogs that engage with the persona of the flâneur and will be examined in order to consider the extended democratisation of fashion in the twenty-first century.

Democratic Fashion

In order to examine the role of blogs in the further democratisation of fashion it is first relevant to articulate how fashion might be considered 'democratic'. According to Elizabeth Wilson fashion has become more democratic since the industrial period of mass production "at least as far as style is concerned- for differences in the quality of clothes and the materials in which they are made still strongly mark class difference" (1985:12). Her statement highlights the relationship between fashion and social status and suggests how twentieth century fashion increasingly witnessed a collapsing of the boundaries between haute couture and high street, with style becoming increasingly affordable to the masses. To be more specific, in the twentieth century, factors considered to have contributed to fashion's democratisation include: the mass production of clothing; the copying of haute-couture models; the accessibility of fashion images in magazines that could be duplicated; the ready availability
of ready-to-wear fashion in department stores and the 'bubble-up' influence of youth sub-cultures and street style.

For Gilles Lipovetsky the evolution of fashion from the domain of the upper classes toward a mode of expression for the masses follows the rise of democratic values in society. He states that, "as fashion was centralised and internationalised, it was also democratised" meaning that while this lead to the "disappearance of diverse regional folk costumes" it also contributed to "attenuation of heterogeneous class differences in dress" (1994: 59). Throughout the twentieth century fashion became accessible to a wider range of people, where "as soon as the display of wealth became a sign of poor taste...fashion entered the era of democratic appearance" (Lipovetsky 1994: 59). Fashion evolved in such a way that status was no longer clearly marked by ostentation but rather through nuanced differences that muted the appearance of social distinction.

The fashion industry has continued its trajectory toward the democratisation of style through the technology of the internet. However, where the democratisation of fashion was responsible for the collapse of social class differentiation in the twentieth century, in the twenty-first century the democratisation of fashion appears to be directed toward the collapse of geographical style distinctions. Fashion has become increasingly accessible to global markets as a result of new media. Specifically, fashion blogs have offered an arena to make street-style trends readily available to the fashion industry meaning that consumers can have an increasing impact on style. More significantly perhaps, street-style fashion blogs underline the social aspects of fashion and demonstrate that the democratisation of fashion in the twenty-first century has allowed blog users to provide the narrative and meaning for fashion that had previously been the domain of the traditional fashion media.

**Street Style Fashion blogs**

Fashion blogs cover a diverse range of topics including runway trends, shopping advice and celebrity lifestyles. They offer instantaneous access to fashion from around the world and have influenced the way traditional forms of fashion media cover events. Eric Wilson of the New York Times (2009) cites the presence of bloggers at major fashion weeks, the attraction of advertising revenue to blogs and the recruitment of bloggers to write for newspapers and magazines as evidence of the wide spread impact of new media. In particular, Wilson notes that sites that allow users to engage with online fashion dialogue are particularly popular for "democratising the coverage of style" (2009).

Scott Schuman's The Sartorialist and Yvan Rodic's Facehunter are amongst the many sites that allow blog users to make comments on posts and are consistently cited as amongst the most popular of their kind on blog ranking sites such as Style99 and within the traditional fashion press. The visibility and power of these forums is also demonstrated by the impact that Schuman and Rodic have had on influencing fashion trends (Abrams 2009). Both blogs share fairly similar histories and accolades. The Sartorialist blogspot was initiated by Scott Schuman in 2005 and has since been nominated as one of Time magazine's top one hundred design influences (Schuman 2005). Schuman's is a professional blog that had the initial aim of providing designers with images of inspiration and has resulted in a monthly page in GQ, videos for Style.com and a coffee table book. Schuman posts a photograph almost daily, providing the viewer with fashion images of people on the streets of fashion cities around the world including New York, Paris, Moscow, Milan, London, Tokyo and Sydney. Yvan Rodic's Facehunter blog began in 2006. It too has inspired a coffee table book, a weekly column in The Observer and numerous citations in the fashion press. Like Schuman, Rodic posts daily photographs that are commented on by users. He covers a diverse range of cities including those covered by Schuman as well as St Petersburg, Amsterdam and Madrid amongst others.

Schuman's and Rodic's blogs utilise a ready-made layout offered by Blogger and as such have similar interfaces. Each entry follows a conventional format with date, title and location under which appears a photograph of the subject. The photograph is sometimes accompanied by text posted by Schuman and Rodic on their respective websites and underneath the photograph is a link to comments. This is an additional page where blog users can post their views. Schuman and Rodic see their blogs as social documents, exploring how men and women express their individuality through fashion. They both provide images of a diverse range of people spanning different socio-economic groups, ages and nationalities. One of their shared underlying strategies is to demonstrate how fashion is expressed in the city rather than on the catwalk. Arguably, part of the reason fashion blogs are popular with users is that the photographs of people in everyday contexts offer a view of how fashion is worn on the streets and in 'reality' rather than the fantasised situations imagined by designers and magazine stylists and, as such, offer a democratic view of fashion compared to those portrayed by the traditional fashion press. Furthermore, fashion blogs provide an alternative urban space to observe fashion that expands the boundaries of the city into cyberspace, to be experienced by visitors from across the globe. In this way fashion bloggers and users might be considered *flâneurs* of fashion in the age of Web 2.0.

**Flâneurs of Fashion**
The relationship between flânerie and fashion is outlined in Baudelaire's text *The Painter of Modern Life* first published in 1863. He recognised the flâneur as an observer who "makes it his business to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory" (1970: 12). Similarly, Tester effectively describes the flâneur as, "a secret spectator of the spectacle of the spaces and places of the city" understood through his act of flânerie or the "observation of the fleeting and the transitory" (1994: 7). From these interpretations the flâneur is imagined as an observer of the passing parade of the city who decides which elements of fashion are worthy of his attention. He is recognised for having a discriminating taste (Gluck 2003) governed to some degree by the tide of consumer culture (Lechte 1995) and thus the flâneur as an observer of fashion can also be considered integral to the production of what is considered fashionable. Through his endorsement, clothing becomes style.

Fashion is an intrinsic part of the performance of urban life and therefore an apt spectacle for the gaze of the flâneur. According to Elizabeth Wilson, "the urban audience is necessary for fashion to flourish" (2006: 33), where the city promotes continual change and the space for experimentation. While Wilson's arguments are related to nineteenth and early twentieth century conceptions of fashion, the relationship between fashion, modernity, the metropolis and spectatorship continue to be relevant to contemporary life. Fashion would appear to grow out of the culture of the city; for it is what people wear in their daily lives on the streets that allows fashion to be understood in its social context. *Vogue Australia* editor Kirsty Clements articulated the production of fashion in her December 1999 editor's letter:

My enthusiasm wasn't entirely fired by the action on the catwalks...what was more compelling was watching the utterly chic men and women of Milan going about their business...For while the frenetic pace and hype of the shows is always intoxicating, its what people are buying, wearing and living in that provides the full fashion picture (cited in Gilbert 2000: 20).

Clements's description of this experience demonstrates how the sidewalk becomes the catwalk in urban contexts and also highlights the continued importance of flânerie to this relationship. Her act of observing the city and then relating this to her readers mirrors the role of the flâneur. This idea is explained by historian Mary Gluck, who suggests, "the flâneur brings alive and invests with significance the fleeting everyday occurrences of the city" and renders the "urban landscape legible and meaningful to contemporaries" (2003: 69). Gluck's paper identifies the identity of the nineteenth century Parisian flâneur as a writer able to "read the city as a text" and to "create texts about the city" (Buck-Morss cited in Gluck 2003:70). The performance of fashion on the city's streets provides the text for the flâneur to observe.

**Flâneurs of Fashion and Global Cities**

The flâneur's interest in daily life, the streets and the fashion that is paraded there is symptomatic of the democratisation of fashion that occurred in the late nineteenth century. The mass production of clothing directed toward a middle-class market would be the beginning of a trajectory that has seen fashion become increasingly available to the masses beyond the bourgeois wearers of haute-couture. As fashion historian Bonnie English explains, "the democratisation of fashion during the course of the twentieth century" is the result of a "multiplicity of social, economic and technological factors" (2007:153). She demarcates the rise of fashion directed toward middle-class consumers, the shift from high culture to popular culture, and the influence of American casual wear and the youth market as amongst the significant catalysts for this evolution. In the twenty-first century new media formats have seen the further democratisation of fashion. As fashion theorist Jennifer Craik contends, new media technology has developed simultaneously with popular culture making fashion increasingly available to a wider spectrum of people around the globe (2009: 270). This is especially true of the internet and the multitude of interactive opportunities that users have to engage with the fashion system on some level whether it be through on-line shopping, digital fashion gaming, the streaming of runway shows or the discussion of fashion through social networking sites.

Laird Borrelli supports this idea in *Net Mode: Web Fashion Now* highlighting the role that the Internet has played in promoting fashion from websites that act as "brand building vehicles" (2002: 6) to the success of on-line stores that redefine the shopping experience. Such websites have contributed to the globalisation of the marketplace, a consequence that is not always seen as entirely desirable. For example, Valery Garrett argues that western styles of dress have become the norm in markets such as China, where fashion consists of up-market boutiques catering to the upper-classes and mass produced designer imitations aimed at the aspirational middle-class, thus making Chinese dress "indistinguishable from that of any other community around the world" (Garret cited in Craik 2009: 90). This dramatic cultural transformation of dress is arguably the result of "the spectacular expansion of e-commerce [and] seems to suggest the approach of an homogenised world fashion culture segmented by purchasing power alone" (Kraal cited in Gilbert 2000:8).
Conversely the creator of the Facehunter blog, Yvan Rodic suggests that his street style blog demonstrates that "globalization is a myth" and that the belief that fashion has been standardised by international brands is countered by what he describes as the "New Creole Culture" where the internet has influenced the people he photographs to "share a lust for the customisation of their identities with fragments of culture from different parts of the world" (2010: 7). Rodic's photographs generally demonstrate his fascination with people who dress in eclectic styles mixing high and low elements of fashion with garments from different eras and cultures, however he also captures people wearing typical high-street fashions. Rodic's posts for May 2010 are indicative of the contradictory and complicated nature of fashion trends. Images and accompanying text for the posts included on this page demonstrate both the effect of globalisation and homogeneity on fashion and the customisation of individual style. In Figure 1, Rodic depicts a man wearing a military style jacket, pedal pushers, Doc Martin boots and a Sikh patka turban. The image demonstrates what Rodic feels is evidence of a customisation of different cultures with religious dress, current trends and sub-cultural styles being worn together.

Figure 1: Facehunter New York, james, crosby street, 05/10/10 posted on May 29, 2010

This is in contrast to the image below, Figure 2, which depicts a woman in black jeans and burgundy tank top. The commonality of fashion and homogenisation of style is demonstrated by an accompanying comment posted by Cordialia 4:45PM, "im [sic] wearing this tank while looking at it! Strange!" (Cordelia cited in Facehunter May 28, 2010).
Rodic's May 2010 posts suggest that mass produced fashion is ubiquitous across geographical regions, yet it also highlights that there are vast degrees of difference between the styles worn by people of particular cities and similarities between the clothes worn by people of disparate locations. Sociologist Armand Mattelart explores the idea that the globalisation of marketplaces demonstrates similarities between diverse geographical spaces more readily than differences. He argues that: Sophisticated marketers are recognising that there are probably more social differences between midtown Manhattan and the Bronx, two sectors of the same city, than between Midtown Manhattan and the 7th arrondissement of Paris. This means that when a manufacturer contemplates expansion of his business, consumer similarities in demography and habits rather than geographic proximity will increasingly affect his decisions (cited in Berry 2000: 57-58).

Whether or not fashion is in a state of global homogenisation due to the impact of new media influences has not been clearly established, though it would seem that new technologies might threaten the dominance of major fashion cities as centres for style. The study of fashion cities and their role in cultural and economic geography is a topic of interest for fashion scholars. Christopher Breward and David Gilbert's edited book *Fashion's World Cities* (2006) examines the roles of the major fashion cities Paris, London, New York, Milan and Tokyo within the fashion system alongside emergent cities Jaipur, Moscow and Shanghai. Not only does the book outline how fashion in many ways is dependant on the characterisation of fashion cities in culture and the media but also how emergent fashion cities are attempting to strengthen their role within the global fashion system. Across the course of the essays included in Breward & Gilbert's book (2006) a consensus emerges; fashion capitals that have dominated global fashion are reliant on the extensive representation of fashionability provided by the media in advertising, cinema and magazines. It can be extrapolated that the representation of particular cities in fashion blogs also contributes to this dialogue.
Street-style blogs, The Sartorialist and Facehunter along with other blogs of their kind, cover fashion in the traditional capitals, Paris, London, New York, Milan and Tokyo but also present fashion from Singapore, Jakarta, Istanbul and Sao Paolo amongst other places. Perhaps what occurs when observing fashion cities in cyber space is a conflation of these cities, where the style conscious people of Milan are visually represented in the same way as those in Moscow suggesting a democracy of fashion across global networks. For example, Schuman's post, in Figure 3, depicts a mid shot of a young man in Milan. He wears white pants, grey blazer, navy scarf and a blue collared shirt peeking out above a navy sweater and is positioned in front of an urban concrete background.

![Figure 3: The Sartorialist February 28, 2010 On the Street Young Milano](image)

Schuman adopts a similar aesthetic in the image supplied for Figure 4. This portrays a young man standing in front of a similar background and wearing a similar colour scheme. The comments posted by users reinforce that these men are both considered fashionable within their particular urban street contexts but also within the global fashion network.
From these observations it can be determined that the domain of the fashion *flâneur* is no longer relegated to one physically bounded city, as was the case in the nineteenth century. Now the *flâneur* of fashion can simultaneously observe trends across cities globally and across numerous websites in a virtual network. As Rodic suggests, "the internet has ended the monopoly on information by the elite" where "a teenager in a small town in Serbia can be...well informed" and fashion blogs such as Facehunter offer a system where "there is no-more top-tier and bottom rung, no more high fashion vs. high street" (2010:7). Clearly the Internet allows for the further democratisation of fashion in the twenty-first century into rural areas and metropolises that are less readily associated with global fashion networks. It should be noted, however, that there is still an element of exclusion where only those countries, cities and people who have access to technology are able to engage with the global fashion community.

The internet has made the networks and social institutions of fashion increasingly accessible to users. The world's fashion cities, including their shops and their streets are available to people around the globe and thus as architect Paul Virilio suggests, "the screen becomes the new city square" (Virilio cited in Armitage 2000:6). Virilio's sentiment suggests that in the twenty-first century our conception of the city is shifting to include the virtual space of the internet. Mike Featherstone makes a similar argument stating that we need to reconsider the confines of the city outlining a shift towards a data city as "a means of construction to understand the contemporary city, the global city...as an increasingly significant mode of contemporary experience: the internet as an architectural and human interactional frame in its own right" (1998: 910). In his consideration of the internet as a virtual city Featherstone adopts the persona of the *flâneur* making the analogy that "the electronic *flâneur* is capable of great mobility...with the electronic media of a networked world, instantaneous connections are possible which render physical spatial differences irrelevant" (1998:921). Featherstone's views, if applied to
street-style fashion blogs, highlight how the flâneur can conflate fashion cities and make connections between styles worn around the world.

On one level the blogger flâneur's observations concerning the collapse of boundaries between styles worn in different geographical locations might be considered as another example of the homogenisation associated with global mass culture. However, as Stuart Hall suggests, global capital "cannot proceed without learning to live with and working through difference" (Hall cited in Berry 2000:57). This comment alludes to the idea that the standardisation of fashion within global contexts is transformed by individual style established through customisation and local uses of fashion. Street-style blogs through photographs and text can be seen to 're-socialise' fashion outside of the meanings provided by consumer capitalism and instead provide narratives that enable social communication.

Flânerie, Photography and Narrative

The history of photography reveals a clear association with the city. From its beginnings the photograph has represented the modern metropolis and its people. As curator Ute Eskilden states, "The city is the social milieu in which the studio, followed by the street, became prospering sites for taking photographs of the human subject" (2008:9). It is appropriate then that the gaze of the street photographer has been compared to that of the flâneur where Susan Sontag has argued that, "photography 'rst comes into its own as an extension of the eye of the middle-class flâneur, whose sensibility was so accurately charted by Baudelaire' (1977: 55). The camera is a tool of flânerie, especially in relation to street photography where the dynamics of the city are captured in snapshot immediacy providing the viewer with the photographer's mediated view of the metropolis. Florian Ebner similarly reinforces that the flâneur is an apt metaphor for the street photographer, for with the camera he captures "the fleeting encounter and gives concrete form to the gaze of desire" (2008:187). Ebner's comments underscore the connotations of consumption associated with the flâneur's actions; for the 'gaze of desire' that he refers to is directed towards shop windows, cafes and the street scenes of commerce.

Schuman's and Rodic's images do not have the immediacy of a captured moment of street photography. Their sitters are often posed in a 'straight-up' style rather than partaking in dynamic action. Both Schuman's and Rodic's photographs are characterised by a full-length immediate portrait in street situ, where the city provides an unobtrusive background to the central action of fashion performance. While Schuman's and Rodic's images continue to portray fashion and consumerism as desirable in the same way as traditional fashion photography, the urban setting and the diversity of sitters suggests an everyday element that is more akin to the realism of a social document. This is the antithesis to many traditional forms of fashion photography which Olivier Zahm considers to be "instinctively suspect of superficiality, inauthenticity and gratuitousness. People have always been suspicious of fashion photographs...they hyper-aestheticize the quotidian and conceal the world of consumption behind a glamorous surface" (2002: 129).In effect Schuman's and Rodic's images suggest a democratisation of fashion imagery for their ability to capture fashion in its everyday context.

The street-style fashion image has become increasingly accessible to the public via new media. Caroline Evans suggests that the availability of these types of images allows, "for the public...to acquire a high degree of familiarity with such contemporary fashions, even a kind of 'ownership' of them, through the power of the image" (2000: 97). This ownership not only equates with the democratisation of fashion but also allows blog users to express their views on what people are wearing in a way that challenges traditional forms of fashion media commentary. The Sartorialist and Facehunter provide users with the opportunity to comment on the images and text posted by Schuman and Rodic and forms an important part of their blogs. As Schuman describes, "the comments on the Sartorialist website make the blog a living fabric. The audience interaction made me realize the variety of interpretations the same look can provoke" (2009: 5).

In this way the blog user who comments on fashion photographs might also be considered a flâneur in adopting the activity of observing and analysing texts (images and accompanying captions) as well as producing texts (comments). In making the argument that the flâneur offers a model through which to consider social theory Frisby states: An investigation of flânerie as activity must explore the activities of observation...reading (of metropolitan life and texts) and producing texts. Flânerie in other words, can be associated with a form of looking, observing (of people, social types, social contexts and constellations), a form of reading the city and its population...and a form of reading written texts...the activity of flânerie, is also associated in Benjamin's work not merely with observation and reading but also with production...the flâneur can also be a producer...of literary texts...of illustrative texts...of narratives and reports...of journalistic texts...of sociological texts (2001:28-29).

A similar argument can be made concerning the significance of the comments made by fashion bloggers. In effect, the users who make comments connected to Schuman's and Rodic's images are
providing the narrative for fashion that makes it a desirable object of consumption. This is usually the domain of the traditional fashion media, where fashion photography provides the fantasies and meanings that fetishise the clothes displayed in advertising and magazines. Ulrich Lehmann outlines that, "in order to understand fashion photography it is important to recognise the significance of the narrative" (2002: T15). He outlines the typical scenarios of fashion photography as the model's metaphorical journey, erotic exploits, or transformation. The narratives provided by traditional fashion photography in magazines and advertising contributes to the discourse of how people define themselves through clothing.

Stuart Ewan argues that notions of style are inextricably linked to consumption and "the power of the mass media to convey, magnify, refract and influence popular notions of style" (1999: 10) and what might appear to the consumer an issue of democratic choice is, in fact, carefully dictated by the media. In the case of straight-up street photography employed by Schuman and Rodic often there is little supplementary imagery to provide meaning apart from the people and clothes portrayed so the onus is on the viewer to provide the narrative. The meaning of fashion in this context is less about how it is constructed as a consumer object of desire (though this is still present) and instead appears more concerned with how fashion can be interpreted in its social context.

The comments accompanying The Sartorialist post, in Figure 5, demonstrate how a fashion narrative can be built around a blog image.

Figure 5: The Sartorialist April 30, 2010 On the High Street...High School Hooky Sydney

Schuman's title and photograph of two young women wearing vintage fake fur and hats in shades of red, black and brown provoked bloggers to make associations with paintings by Degas, Manet and Renoir and to the films Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid and Heavenly Creatures. Anecdotes of tea parties and skipping school are recounted and some comments conflate fashion and cities from around the world with comparisons made between Sydney, Paris, London and "Brighton art school girls of 30
The importance of the interactive narrative element to the Sartorialist is articulated by an anonymous blogger in relation to the post:

To the comment three or so above mine, i know them too, they go to my school and it is nice to see them on here, but... it takes some of the mystery away, the ability to draw your own conclusions and to make up your own story behind their lives when you already know theirs...but, yes, they are always like that, and yes, i envy them immensely (Anonymous 3:46AM cited in the Sartorialist April 30 2010).

Thus the commentary provided by the flâneur blogger of contemporary society mirrors the activities of the nineteenth century flâneur. The desire to construct a textual narrative around photographic observations means that fashion bloggers engage with the image in such a way as to provide numerous reflections on the social meanings of fashion. This can be compared to Gluck’s analysis of the fin-de-siècle flâneur whose imagination transforms the observation of the common man "into a coherent story of exotic adventure and heroic creation" (2003: 70). Thus Schuman’s and Rodic’s fashion blogs give expression to the flâneur as authorial creator of both visual and textual forms of fashion. This puts the flâneur into a position of power that usurps traditional forms of fashion press and suggests a further democratisation of fashion. The flâneur’s position of power is further underlined if the relationship between the city and narrative is considered for the pivotal role it plays in the consumption of fashion. As Glennie and Thrift argue, consumption is primarily driven by “quasi-personal contact and observation in the urban throng” rather than by instruction or advertising (cited in Gilbert 2006: 20). The importance of the flâneur's observations means that fashion bloggers engage with the image in such a way as to provide numerous reflections on the social meanings of fashion. This can be compared to Gluck’s analysis of the fin-de-siècle flâneur whose imagination transforms the observation of the common man “into a coherent story of exotic adventure and heroic creation” (2003: 70). Thus Schuman’s and Rodic’s fashion blogs give expression to the flâneur as authorial creator of both visual and textual forms of fashion. This puts the flâneur into a position of power that usurps traditional forms of fashion press and suggests a further democratisation of fashion. The flâneur’s position of power is further underlined if the relationship between the city and narrative is considered for the pivotal role it plays in the consumption of fashion. As Glennie and Thrift argue, consumption is primarily driven by “quasi-personal contact and observation in the urban throng” rather than by instruction or advertising (cited in Gilbert 2006: 20).

Gluck’s article concerning the nineteenth century Parisian flâneur outlines how the city became less aestheticizing vision of the modernist artist had been liberated from the constraints of geography, social condition and natural traditions. He had become a truly cosmopolitan figure, gaining the ability to inhabit not simply the city, but the entire globe through his imagination (2003:78).

In the age of Web 2.0 a similar observation might be true, where the city’s physical boundaries have been re-mapped by the contemporary flâneur to include a limitless, global network. Just as the nineteenth century flâneur was able to recognise a changing world in exploring the city by means of surveillance and interpretation, the twenty-first century flâneur extends understandings of a globalised world by participating in a virtual dialogue that reconsiders the social, geographic and cultural contexts of style.

This paper has considered a correlation between the activities of the nineteenth century flâneur and the fashion blog poster and user. This comparison has demonstrated that flâneurs of fashion in the age of Web 2.0 offer a space to observe fashion on a global scale and hence suggest the further democratisation of fashion in the twenty-first century. This appears particularly true in relation to the effect that fashion blogs have had on decentralising distinctions between fashion world cities (Paris, London, New York, Milan, Tokyo) and emerging fashion capitals around the globe. The experience of democratic fashion through blog sites is heightened by the possibility for observers to create their own narratives for fashion. These narratives are less visibly dictated by traditional fashion media suggesting that common observers have increasingly become fashion mavens. It would seem that fashion blogs have contributed to an extension of the democratisation of fashion in the twenty-first century toward a reconsideration of geographical aspects of style and the power of the medium to make everyday commentators increasingly important contributors to the fashion system.

References

Scan is a project of the Media Department @ Macquarie University, Sydney