



Figure 1. "New Wave Party Girl Prepares for Work at the Record Shop after a Long Night at Madame Wong's (An Homage)" (2010). Courtesy Fiona I. B. Ngô

# Blog Ambition: Fashion, Feelings, and the Political Economy of the Digital Raced Body

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In 2007, the Pulitzer Prize-winning fashion writer and former blogger Robin Givhan praised the fashion blog for democratizing the fashion industry.<sup>1</sup> In an article for *Harper's Bazaar* magazine, she wrote: "The rise of the fashion blogger . . . has evolved [fashion] from an autocratic business dominated by omnipotent designers into a democratic one in which everyone has access to stylish clothes . . . the average person, too often estranged from fashion, is taking ownership of it."<sup>2</sup> Several months later, she would take a conflicting position on fashion blogging in her review of the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition called *blog.mode: addressing fashion*:<sup>3</sup> "It's precisely when people feel ownership over an art form or craft that their opinions about it become suspect. They're too invested. They're biased. Passion gets in the way of truth-telling."<sup>4</sup> Givhan's divergent attitudes articulate two poles framing debates about the meaningfulness of fashion and style blogging that are the primary concern of this essay.

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Not surprisingly, her perspectives about fashion blogs fall within the dominant discourses about the meanings and effects of the Internet in general. Techno-enthusiasts view the widespread access to these new technologies as democratic; techno-skeptics perceive the massification of knowledge and communication these technologies enable to be a danger to the overall quality of public discourse. Still others take a more nuanced position, arguing that while ostensibly anyone (with a computer and a high-speed broadband connection) has access to these technologies, the very structure of networking systems, including the logics within which data is produced and by which it is distributed and made available in Web searches, is fundamentally antidemocratic (for example, well-financed users can make use of expensive search engine optimization services that artificially drive up the ranking of one's blog or Web site by manipulating the number of hits the site receives). In this discussion, I will offer a cursory review of the primary terms, issues, and limits of these technocultural debates, focusing on blogging in particular. I do so not to position myself on any one side but rather to argue for a shift in the focus of the discussion. That is to say, I am persuaded by arguments that the blogosphere is structurally antidemocratic, especially as it is increasingly integrated into and pervaded by capitalist logics that are imbricated with colonial and imperialist histories. However, I am not convinced that its limitations are absolutely repressive. A zero-sum approach to cultural and social practices amounts to throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. It discounts the potential of blogging for reimagining the terms and histories within which subjectivities are produced and performed in the digital age, even as the configurations of knowledge, communication, and social relations in the blogosphere operate within admittedly restrictive and inequitable conditions. Indeed, cultural and social practices, especially those that enlist and produce racial, gender, class, and sexual subjects, have always been enacted under restrictive and oppressive conditions. The second part of this essay investigates the politics of several fashion-themed blogs maintained by Asian American and British Asian bloggers. In particular, I analyze the ways in which these blogs create new subject formations, reveal hidden histories,

and reconstitute public culture at the nexus of computer-mediated communication technologies and consumer culture through a radical politics of sentimentality that refuses neoliberal fictions of freedom and/through disembodiment. How do these “digital subject formations,” to adapt Lisa Nakamura’s constructive term, supplement and challenge dominant understandings of race, gender, and sexuality as they are imagined in fashion and online in this era of neoliberalism?<sup>5</sup>

Technocultural scholars and pundits will be familiar with the discursive history of and debates about the Internet’s democratizing capacity. Briefly, Vice President Al Gore’s 1994 address at the International Telecommunication Union conference in Kyoto, Japan, is understood as an early articulating moment that established crucial links between the Internet and neoliberal democracy.<sup>6</sup> The core principles of the “information superhighway,” as Gore enumerated them, were: “Private investment. Market-driven competition. Flexible regulatory systems. Non-discriminatory access. And universal service.”<sup>7</sup> This rational network of systems, as Gore and others imagined it, would negate the embodied particulars of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. To quote Mark Poster: “The salient characteristic of Internet community is the diminution of prevailing hierarchies of race, class, age, status and especially gender.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Michele Willson asserts that “race, gender or physical disability is indiscernible over the Internet. Any basis for enacting embodied discrimination is removed, freeing access to participation and granting each participant equal status with the network.”<sup>9</sup>

Such cyberdemocratic perspectives are rooted in and reproduce neoliberal assumptions about bodily transcendence and freedom. The rhetoric of digital disembodiment assumes that (1) social markings, hierarchies, and passions would be negated by scientifically rationalized network systems (such a belief is connected to the neoliberal racial agenda of color blindness) and (2) the disappearance of the body in cyberspace would effect the disappearance of the desire to consume difference. The explosion of pornography sites, particularly those that traffic in racial and colonialist fictions and fantasies, demonstrates that racially sexualized bodies not only

continue to circulate through the Internet but have proliferated as a result of it.<sup>10</sup>

Internet studies have only just begun to focus on blogging, a mode of computer-mediated communication that has become popular in recent years. One study estimates that there are 133 million blogs worldwide.<sup>11</sup> However, a precise count of blogs does not exist because there is no standard definition of the form and function of blogs and because blog surveys usually miss those that do not use host systems like Blogspot or LiveJournal while accidentally counting abandoned blogs and spam blogs (splogs).<sup>12</sup> We do know, however, that most blogs are published from the United States and that most are in English,<sup>13</sup> perhaps confirming Verna-dette V. Gonzalez and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez's claim that the Internet is "the domain of the first world."<sup>14</sup> A tiny fraction of these blogs are dedicated to varieties of fashion and style that might be grouped as celebrity, street, couture, luxury, indie, mass-produced, *masstige*, vintage, and eco or green.

Blogs might be personal, informal, public, referential, and participatory (through link trackbacks and reader commentary), or they might be commercial devices of promotion and marketing operating as information clearinghouses that are restricted to registered users, or they might encompass some combination of these qualities. Typically, though, blogs operate through horizontal communication or what is sometimes called "distributed conversation" between bloggers and readers. These social categories are hardly discrete since bloggers read other blogs and readers often have their own blogs or are inspired to begin them in short time. Blog posts usually consist of text, links, photos, and, with increasing frequency, videos. They are time- and date-stamped, ordered in reverse chronological order, and published on a nonregular schedule. Past entries are searchable and grouped by subject keywords, so that readers' blog experiences can be individualized. Reader commentary, linkages to other Web sites, blogrolls of favorite or comparable blogs, and cross-posts maintain the open, participatory, and dialogic nature of blogging that, for many, exemplifies the Internet's democratization of knowledge and communication.

While relatively little popular and, as yet, no academic attention has been focused on fashion-themed blogs, political blogs—blogs that attend to and provide links (or “filters”) for political news and current events—have had generous coverage in recent years. Prevalent subjects within blog studies are the blogs that posted during and about the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions, including Blog for America, Howard Dean’s presidential campaign blog that, at its peak, received up to one hundred thousand hits per day.<sup>15</sup> Among the top-studied political blogs are private ones such as Instapundit, CalPundit, and the Volokh Conspiracy (all created by men) and corporate news blogs in which prominent journalists like Andrew Sullivan, Bruce Bartlett, Gregg Easterbrook, Kevin Drum, and Mickey Kaus are the primary contributors.

In favoring political blogs (which comprise only about 11 percent of the blogosphere), current blog studies skew our interpretive frames for understanding the state of the blogosphere and the political function of blogs in several ways.<sup>16</sup> First, this literature suggests that the blogosphere is dominated by men. Although the most popular blogs (political blogs, by and large) are indeed those created by (white) men, researchers have shown that slightly more girls and women create blogs than do boys and men—though most agree that the numerical difference between female- and male-run blogs is so small that it is statistically insignificant.<sup>17</sup> Further, the blogosphere is much more racially and ethnically diverse than current blog studies would have it. In fact, the Pew Research Center found that “bloggers are less likely to be white than the general internet population.”<sup>18</sup> Further, females under the age of twenty-nine are the most prolific bloggers and maintain their blogs for longer periods of time, which is to say that a larger number of static or abandoned blogs are those created by males. As Susan C. Herring and her colleagues at Indiana University have argued, “by privileging filter blogs, public discourses about blogs implicitly evaluate the activities of adult males as more interesting, important and/or newsworthy than those of other blog authors.”<sup>19</sup> This effectively “relegate[s] the participation of women and other groups to a

lower status in the technologically-mediated communication environment that is the blogosphere, and more generally, to reinforce the societal status quo.”

To be sure, women do create political blogs. (Arianna Huffington and Michelle Malkin are two well-known, if incongruent, examples.) It is not merely the critical emphasis on political blogs that makes women invisible in the blogosphere and in blog studies. Instead, it is the operating logic of search engines that denies or diminishes the digital presence of many female-run political blogs. On the Internet, only the most popular Web sites and blogs are likely to show up in Web searches.<sup>20</sup> Thus, while the Internet may democratize communication systems, it is a democracy of popularity rather than equitability. The same Web sites and Web logs appear in the top three to five results of every Web search; all other sites and blogs are “drowned in the massive flow [of commercialized data].”<sup>21</sup> And as the political scientist Jodi Dean rightly observes, “That’s a logic of capitalism, not democracy. Rather than a rhizomatic structure where any one point is as likely to be reached as any other, what we have on the web are situations of massive inequality, massive differentials of scales where some nodes get tons of hits and the vast majority get almost none.” Female political bloggers have noticed and have spoken out against a sexist pattern of linking among top (that is, male) bloggers. When Drum (CalPundit) surmised wrongly that the lack of female political bloggers had something to do with the fact “that men are more comfortable with the food fight nature of opinion writing . . . [and] I imagine that the fundamental viciousness and self aggrandizement inherent in opinion writing turns off a lot of women,” women bloggers quickly corrected him. Commenting directly on his blog, one blogger writes, “even though you’ve said you read me every day you don’t have me on your blogroll. It’s things like this that make me tear out my hair when people wonder why women are underrepresented in the top-rated weblogs, or journalists, or whatever.”<sup>22</sup>

Third, dominant trends in blog studies define political participation in excessively narrow terms. By limiting critical examinations of blogs’ political function to political blogs, they miss the heterogeneous and informal modes of cultural politics in which many

people who feel disenfranchised from formal politics participate. They also deny the organizational and mobilizing power of blogs and related computer-mediated communication technologies for youth, artists, and marginalized and diasporic communities. Thus, blog studies inadvertently represent bloggers as politically efficacious subjects only when they are blogging about formal or “serious” politics (such as electoral politics and so forth)—a domain that is historically and structurally male-dominated. In so doing, blog studies tacitly reinscribe the political sphere with white masculinity and, as such, reify the concept of the ideal political subject as male.

Culture-themed blogs (which encompass entertainment, hobbies, and “my life and experiences”) comprise nearly 50 percent of the blogosphere and are most often mentioned—when they are mentioned at all—by detractors like Andrew Keen, a vociferous critic of the Internet’s democratizing effects. In his book, *The Cult of the Amateur*, he rails against “Blogs, MySpace, YouTube, and the Rest of Today’s User-Generated Media [for] Destroying our Economy, Our Culture, and Our Values.”<sup>23</sup> However, he reserves his most vicious attacks for bloggers who, as he puts it, are at “the heart of this infinite monkey experiment in self-publishing” (3). He accuses them of “blogging with monkeylike shamelessness about our private lives, our sex lives, our dream lives, our lack of lives, our Second Lives” and blames them for “delivering . . . superficial observations of the world . . . rather than deep analysis, shrill opinion rather than considered judgment” (3, 16). Another critic disparages the blogosphere for facilitating “mass exhibitionism.”<sup>24</sup> And Dean argues that while bloggers may “[believe] in the importance of their contributions,” they fail to realize that such practices, though pleasurable, actually “displace political energy from the hard work of organizing and struggle.”<sup>25</sup>

The collective denigration of culture bloggers as alternatively self-absorbed and superficial, “shamelessly” open and public (“mass exhibitionism”), and finally cultural dupes who misrecognize pleasure for real political work is achieved by associating blogs with femininity. Note that Keen characterizes blogging as “shrill opinion rather than considered judgment.” Thus, not only is the

political work of culture (or, for that matter, the cultural work of politics) unintelligible in the popular and scholarly discourse about blogs; culture is also linked to the private and domestic spheres of life and thereby imagined as feminine. In the prevailing discourse about blogs, politics/culture and work/pleasure are bifurcated across gender differences and organized around the abjection of femininity.

Exemplary of the feminized abjection of culture blogging is a study by Perseus Development, a research firm and maker of software for surveys. Here, the cultural and social impact of blogs is brushed aside by this sweeping statement: “The typical blog is written by a teenage girl who uses it twice a month to update her friends.”<sup>26</sup> Perseus’s generalization and snide dismissal of bloggers as culturally or politically disengaged “teenage girls” demonstrates, among other analytic blind spots, a blatant disregard of the demographic data, which, as I have already noted, suggests that the numerical difference between female and male bloggers is statistically insignificant. Further, because as many as 55 percent of bloggers use pseudonyms and visual avatars, gender data with regard to the blogosphere is ultimately unreliable.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the creation of stylized online alter egos that are absent of or ambiguous about gender markers should demonstrate the problem of gender as a stable or coherent category of identity.

In focusing on fashion-themed blogs, my purpose is to demonstrate the political and discursive functions of precisely the kinds of culture blogs critics dismiss or malign. To be sure, I am not asserting that all fashion and style bloggers are engaging in progressive politics—bloggers across the digital field are fragmented in numerous ways, including their political commitments, fashion interests, status, and access. However, I do argue that the fashion blogosphere is an important and severely undertheorized site of cultural political struggle that can counter technolibertarian discourses about disinterested disembodiment (and all the neo-liberal procedures and logics of rationalized self-governmentality it entails) by reembodying fashion and technology discourses with a crucial difference. By emphasizing the ways in which some fashion-themed blogs can rearticulate the relations of race and fashion *and*

technology and *as* technologies of subjectivity, my discussion builds on Lynne Joyrich's and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's critical formulation of *race and/as technology*, which "shifts," as Chun explains, "the focus from the *what* of race to the *how* of race, from *knowing* race to *doing* race."<sup>28</sup> Likewise, I underscore not the *what* of race and fashion as biology and material object but rather *how* race and fashion are instrumentalized to enable and enact an oppositional political economy of the body. Such a political economy does not traffic in the neoliberal rhetoric of rational disembodiment but rather animates the material realities of race, gender, generation, sex, and class that frame the (digital and real) production and consumption of fashion objects, images, and knowledge.

Fashion and style bloggers, no matter their sartorial sensibilities, share in the activity and enjoyment of producing, consuming, and exchanging the material and immaterial goods of fashion and beauty. Such practices have been traditionally abjected as too feminine. But while some posit pleasure and politics as mutually exclusive spheres, we know from feminist theorists that culture, pleasure, and politics are seldom discrete categories of experience. Nan Enstad's seminal study of the ways in which nineteenth-century working women used cultural practices like dressing fashionably and reading romance novels "to lay claim to dignified identities as workers . . . [and] to claim formal political status" is exemplary of how cultural practices and political praxis have long been intertwined.<sup>29</sup> For these women, as for the fashion and style bloggers I discuss here, political subjectivity is fashioned in and through the pleasures of consumption.

I emphasize English-language fashion-themed blogs maintained by Asian American and British Asian bloggers because I want to situate my discussion within larger conversations in feminist ethnic studies about race and cyberspace, specifically as they pertain to the digital representations of Asian femininity. By designating these bloggers as *Asian American* and *British Asian*, I do not argue that there is a racially determined political or aesthetic unity among their blogs or their style of blogging. It is precisely the heterogeneity of strategies and discourses they use to construct and represent the complexities of personhood in which I am interested.

At the same time, in tracking particular narratives and discourses across various blogs, I intend to illuminate global systems of racially gendered labor economies and systems of racial representations that give broad shape to many of these bloggers' experiences, politics, and practices.

The subjects constructed in and through fashion-themed blogs are articulated through techniques of the self that they invent and choose. Using clever turns of phrase, self-stylized poses, and individually chosen commodities that construct and display a unique mode of personhood, the fashion blogger is the agent (and object) of her own representation. In this way, the digital representations of Asian femininity constructed and circulating in and through these blogs differ from hegemonic and externally produced representations of Asian women and Asian femininity. At the same time, the fashion-themed blogs I discuss are not external to historical systems of representation, labor, and capital. They emerge from and critically engage with these systems that continue to shape and limit individuals' everyday experiences and cultural practices in relation to fashion and Web 2.0 technologies.<sup>30</sup> While popular understandings about fashion and the Internet are organized around neoliberal democratic discourses that posit social and somatic transcendence through the accumulation of fashion, beauty, and communication commodities, these bloggers make use of these commodities in ways that disrupt hegemonic relations among digital and visual technologies, consumer capitalism, and racialized femininity.

### **"If Not for Sentimental Value"**

As with all blogs, there are no strict or universally standardized definitions for the varieties of fashion-themed blogs. This, along with their ephemeral nature, makes it difficult to determine the number of blogs that exist at any one time. Some generally agreed-on distinctions between fashion blogs and style blogs (the two largest categories of fashion-themed blogs) are that fashion blogs report on and often "covet" fashion commodities, the fashion industry, and fashion celebrities. They emphasize the aesthetic dimensions

of fashion. Style blogs celebrate, critique, and at times criticize the aesthetic, cultural, political, and economic style or mode by which fashion forms are produced, expressed, and circulated across a wide range of industry and everyday sites. Often, fashion blogs are image laden while style blogs are text heavy. However, these categories tend to overlap and are often used interchangeably by the popular media and by bloggers themselves. In this essay I use the term *fashion-themed blog* to account for the heterogeneity and hybridity of these digital cultural forms.

Despite the relatively small number of fashion-themed blogs in the blogosphere, their impact on the fashion media complex and the larger fashion world is undeniable. This point is illustrated most clearly in the growing incorporation of bloggers into various sectors of the fashion industry. Many bloggers are now also credentialed news and fashion journalists. Eighty bloggers and so-called new media journalists received invitations for New York Fashion Week in September 2009—up from forty in 2006.<sup>31</sup> The fashion press has also embraced bloggers, featuring them as editorial subjects (i.e., *Harper's Bazaar*, September 2007; *Elle UK*, September 2009; and *Sketchbook*, October 2009), as well as hiring them as photographers and writers. Scott Schuman's well-known blog, *The Sartorialist*, has led to numerous jobs for *GQ* and *Esquire*, for example, and “the reigning queen of the fashion blogosphere,” the London-based Susanna Lau (*Style Bubble*), was recruited by *Dazed Digital* to be its commissioning editor.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, fashion and design companies are turning more and more to bloggers as insightful and discerning trend forecasters, cool aggregators, and unofficial promoters—some like Rodarte and Marc Jacobs have inducted bloggers as their fashion muses.

In 2007, the Chanel Company invited twelve bloggers to Paris for a weekend of discovering “the history and iconic places of Chanel.” Lau stresses on her blog that “there was no obligation to do blog reportage but for me along with most of the bloggers I think, it would have been criminal not to blog about the wonderful experiences we had.”<sup>33</sup> While there may have been no formal agreement to post (positive) comments about Chanel's traditions, products, and largesse, Lau clearly understands that there is an unspo-

ken social contract informally conditioning bloggers' access to the fashion industry. It was precisely the *New York Times* fashion writer and blogger Cathy Horyn's perceived breach of this social contract that led the legendary designer Giorgio Armani (and before him, Helmut Lang, Carolina Herrera, and Dolce & Gabbana) to ban her from future shows.<sup>34</sup>

When young and popular bloggers like Lau post about fashion institutions, they lend hipster credibility to the staid reputations of established fashion houses. In addition, bloggers provide these fashion houses and their designers relatively inexpensive and global public relations and marketing. Reciprocally, such recognition from a fashion giant like Chanel boosts the public and professional profile of bloggers, yielding a "prominence dividend" that increases the likelihood that people will read and solicit the blogger's future online and offline publications.<sup>35</sup>

While public discourse about fashion blogs mostly leans toward positivist interpretations about the burgeoning practice (I review some of these later), the fashion blogosphere certainly has its detractors. Much like Givhan in her later skepticism of fashion bloggers' integrity, prominent designers like Alber Elbaz and Christopher Kane have made clear their disdain for the blogging phenomenon. Kane told *Vogue UK*, "No one who wants to read a serious review of a show is going to look at what a 14-year-old thinks," and Elbaz has admitted to being "really scared of bloggers."<sup>36</sup> The celebrity hairstylist Tyler Laswell remarked disparagingly, "It's really sad that the fashion business has turned into a world of bloggers . . . everyone has become so taken up with living in a world of immediate satisfaction. Nobody wants to wait for the beauty in the magazines . . . where the editors truly do their homework and fact-check everything."<sup>37</sup> An article posted on the Web site *The Business of Fashion* expresses another common concern about the quality of fashion-themed blogs: "Are these bloggers really offering any unique expertise or vantage point that adds to the fashion dialogue? Some (though not all) of these bloggers appear to be more focused on themselves and on the celebrities in the front row than on the fashions on the runway. Unique opinions are few and far between."<sup>38</sup>

Most fashion insiders, however, have welcomed the mainstreaming of bloggers into the fashion industry. They view the presence of “citizen journalists” as a democratizing force in fashion criticism, in particular, and in the fashion industry, in general. Diane Pernet, a renowned fashion icon, designer, photographer, and blogger, is effusive about the role of fashion bloggers: “Blogging has democratized fashion . . . the Internet makes fashion available to anyone with a computer. It does not matter where you live; it is available to you instantly.”<sup>39</sup> And rather than lament the possibility of being “kick[ed] off the island” by up-and-coming bloggers, as one *New York Magazine* journalist put it,<sup>40</sup> Horyn offers this sanguine statement: “If fashion writers don’t know what to do with themselves, if such a day ever comes, then that’s their problem.”<sup>41</sup>

The phenomenon of the fashion blogger is not the first time that fashion has been linked to and articulated through democracy. Fashion histories are replete with the various moments of fashion’s democratization that many believe have been a part of fashion—in unstable fits and bursts—since its inception in 1675.<sup>42</sup> Key moments of democratization in fashion histories include the industrialization of fashion as a result of the invention of the mechanical sewing machine and standardized dress patterns at the turn of the twentieth century and, around this time, the introduction of prêt-à-porter fashion or ready-to-wear clothing that “transformed clothing ‘made for somebody’ into clothing ‘made for anybody’ and finally into clothing ‘made for everybody’”;<sup>43</sup> Mary Quant’s invention of the miniskirt in the 1960s, in which the “low” aesthetic sensibilities of go-go dancers were incorporated into high fashion designs and then produced for mass consumption; the “antifashion” ethos of hippies, punks, neo-punks, and cyberpunks in the 1970s and 1980s that leaked into fashion’s mainstream through designers like Yves Saint Laurent; the so-called masstige partnerships (in which a prestigious celebrity or celebrity designer teams up with a mass-market retailer to create a designer collection) between Jaclyn Smith and Kmart (1985), Martha Stewart and Kmart (1997), Randolph Duke and the Home Shopping Network (1998), Mos-simo and Target (2000), and Isaac Mizrahi and Target (2002); and, of course, the sartorial era of Michelle Obama. For her open and

enthusiastic support of independent designers and mass-market fashions, the fashion press has credited Obama with ushering in a new age of fashion democracy; in fact, countless magazine articles and no fewer than three full-length books have been written about Obama's "democratic" sartorial choices and practices.

The articulation of fashion through the language of democracy, as I have argued elsewhere, constructs fashion as an emblem and practice of "multiple neoliberal freedoms including the freedom to accumulate consumerist choices and, connected to that, the freedoms of self-expression and self-determination."<sup>44</sup> Thus widespread and unrestricted access to fashion and its related freedoms are fundamental to its democratic discourses. Likewise, the fashion or style blogger's broadened and immediate, if mediated, access to fashion objects, images, companies, and runway shows, as well as her appropriations of them in her construction of a uniquely stylized digital subject formation (an everyday practice of producing and performing the self), leads many blog proponents to embrace the fashion-themed blog as a tool of self-expression and self-determination, a technology that enables people to practice two of the most cherished rights in a liberal democratic society.

Blogs such as *Style Bubble*, *Fashion for Writers*, *Everybody Is Ugly*, *lipstickeater*, *That's Chic*, *The Fashion Void That Is D.C.*, *What's Her Tights*, and *Fashioni.st* confirm, in some ways, the democratic promise of blogging and fashion. First, they provide images and discourses of Asian women and Asian femininity that markedly differ from most of the cyber, digital, electronic, and literary images that continue to be produced and circulated in and through the global circuits of capitalism, culture, and commodities. Unlike the cyber Filipina "wives, workers, and whores" that Gonzalez and Rodriguez astutely argue are "symptomatic of [ongoing] US-Philippine neocolonial relations,"<sup>45</sup> or the "high tech Orientalism" of cyberspace narratives and virtual gaming communities that Chun and Nakamura foreground in their important work,<sup>46</sup> the Asian fashion and style blogs and bloggers I discuss produce hybrid and deessentialized, unstable and destabilizing representations of Asianness. These blogs not only underscore what Lisa Lowe calls "the noncorrespondence between the orientalist

object and the Asian American subject” but, more significantly, they also demonstrate the inadequacy of critical frameworks that only understand “Asian” in stable and static relation to Orientalist epistemologies.<sup>47</sup>

As well as challenging the racially gendered images of Asian women that dominate the Western cultural imaginary, these bloggers contest the civilizational logics that continue to prevail in fashion and technology discourses. In uneven and unstable ways, Asians, and people of color in general, are imagined as backward and primitive in relation to fashion and technology. “In these master(ly) narratives,” Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert observe, “women and ‘natives’ are placed in closer proximity to nature as resources to be tamed and exploited, and further from civilization, rationality, and technological authority. This same equation [of tools with culture, rationality, progress, and (modern/Western/colonizing) Man] is deployed for keeping the gates carefully policed as to which inventors and users are credited for making ‘progress’ and ‘civilization,’ and which are devalued or erased from the history of culture.”<sup>48</sup> When Asians are recognized as experts in these arenas, they are often represented as robotic and rote low-wage technicians or high-earning but socially inept techno-geeks. It was such that Chloe Dao, the Vietnamese American fashion designer who won the second season of the reality television show *Project Runway* (Bravo, US, 2005–6), despite consistently producing quality designs and ranking among the top three in six of the eleven weekly challenges, was described by one of her competitors as a “pattern-maker” rather than a designer (an opinion that continues to reverberate on fan sites). Thus, even while Asians have made significant inroads into fashion and technology, the perception of them as technical laborers rather than cultural innovators demonstrates the ways in which civilizing discourses continue to shape and limit their representation.

But through fashion blogs like Lau’s Style Bubble and Lulu Chang’s Everybody Is Ugly—to name two highly successful blogs—Asian women become not only fashionable (modern) subjects but taste-makers and arbiters of style. Interviews with these bloggers routinely include questions about their style rules, fashion “must-

haves,” and trend forecasts, a set of questions that casually but undeniably casts fashion bloggers (and enlists fashion blog readers) as neoliberal “entrepreneurs of the self.”<sup>49</sup> The focus on bloggers’ systematization of fashion and dress works to denature or disembody everyday embodied practices. This is an appealing, if normativizing, proposition that carries with it the promise of reducing the sartorial missteps and bodily flaws attached to embodiment and thereby increasing individuals’ efficiency as consumer-citizens. In this way, fashion-themed blogs are cultural-discursive forms highly compatible with the lifestyle politics of neoliberalism, which emphasizes rational consumption, privatized modes of self-care and self-management, and the optimization of individuals’ health, wealth, and happiness through the unregulated digital and global marketplace.

Critics of lifestyle politics argue that consumerism, epitomized by fashion, has become a shallow substitute for real political engagement. Civic participation, they lament, now happens in the marketplace rather than in city hall. Political practice is reduced to consumer choices: we choose to buy organic cotton or not to buy leather products, to shop at cooperatively run retail stores or boycott those that are reputed to sell goods produced in poor labor conditions. Such lifestyle politics have been criticized for being superficial and for weakening the traditional ties that bind members of a community by organizing people as market segments rather than as communities.

Yet to situate fashion-themed blogs wholly within the discursive and institutional domain of lifestyle politics is to ignore the politically enabling work of the sentimental in some blogs. Meggy Wang and Jenny Zhang’s blog *Fashion for Writers* and Joon Oluchi Lee’s (aka Joony Schecter’s) *lipstickeater* are two examples of fashion-themed blogs that reroute the processes of producing, consuming, and circulating fashion objects, images, and knowledges through an oppositional political economy of the body. If neoliberalism, as Wendy Brown asserts, casts “all dimensions of human life . . . in terms of a market rationality” (and in so doing, disembodies individuals by reducing them to rational calculating entrepreneurial actors), then the sentimental mode of these blogs is radical insofar

as it introduces an “extramarket morality” into an exemplary consumer capitalist system, the fashion media complex.<sup>50</sup>

The multiple and complex relations of intimacy between individuals and between individuals and their clothes that these bloggers publicize through their blogs do not partake in the universalist rhetoric of sentimentality that Lauren Berlant critiques as a “sentimentality from the top down,” a system of governance that deploys emotions as normativizing technologies that interpellate individuals into the dominant order of feeling, virtue, and ideology.<sup>51</sup> This dominant structure of feeling reproduces and secures the hegemony of the privileged because such sentimental-political modes “always traffic in cliché, the reproduction of a person as a thing, and thus indulge in the confirmation of the marginal subject’s embodiment of inhumanity on the way to providing the privileged with heroic occasions of recognition, rescue, and inclusion” (35). Instead, the blogs I discuss offer examples of a radical politics of sentimentality, or “countersentimentality,” that “refus[es] to reproduce the sublimation of subaltern struggles into conventions of emotional satisfaction and redemptive fantasy” (55). A radical politics of feeling or the countersentimental creates new subject formations, reveals hidden histories, and redefines public culture in the context of digital media and consumer culture. In so doing, blogs, as Mimi Thi Nguyen aptly puts it in a recent Threadbare blog post, “permit us *to see what we have not been allowed to see.*”<sup>52</sup> Here, she is discussing how some of Wang’s outfit posts (Fashion for Writers) evoke the image of a “glamorous mid-century Asian American starlet,” even while the fact calls attention to the “historical absence of Asians and Asian Americans in American popular culture as fashionable bodies” (see figure 2). The cultural fantasy Wang’s self-portraits conjure is thus both ordinary and extraordinary: Ordinary because fashion (and now, blogging about fashion) has always contained the alluring promise of transformation through the care and management of one’s body and one’s image. By engaging in these gendered techniques of the self, “anyone” can become “someone” (but especially women, in the context of fashion), and a fashion outsider can become a fashion insider. Through fashion and fashion blogging, prestige and privilege are imagined as avail-

able to and accessible by everyone. At the same time, as Nguyen notes, the “glamorous mid-century Asian American starlet” Wang embodies is extraordinarily absent in the cultural history and imaginary of the US. The world of glamorous starlets, then and now, is a glaringly white one. Thus Wang’s appropriation of familiar past fashions and stylized poses “correct[s] this absence [by] creating another archive through which we might imagine otherwise.” It is as such that, in Nguyen’s words, Wang recalls “the familiar fashions of the 1930s, 40s and 50s, but with a significant difference.” The blog posts I discuss below take a similarly ironic or countersentimental position to the past.

The outfit posts by Wang’s coblogger, Zhang, also “permit us to see what we have not been allowed to see.” In a blog entry called “Looking Backward, Going Forward,” Zhang and Wang post photos of themselves “remixing clothes from our pasts that we haven’t worn in ages (and should probably be donated somewhere, if not for Sentimental Value).”<sup>53</sup> Zhang’s photos (figures 3 and 4) are typical examples of outfit posts found in most fashion-themed blogs. The amateur composition of Zhang’s photos, taken in a makeshift studio with rudimentary light sources (from the floor lamp and the camera flash) and improvised poses, visually captures the neoliberal ethos of DIY self-initiating entrepreneurialism that has made fashion and style bloggers exemplars of the democratization of fashion markets and media.

However, Zhang’s outfit posts do not entirely recapitulate fashion’s neoliberal ethos. Reading further through Zhang’s post about her mom working as a “seamstress for a tiny fashion label run out of this lady Lisa’s apartment,” we get the sense that this is a repetition with a difference. Zhang blogs: “Lisa was incredibly generous. She hired my mom even though my mom barely spoke English. In the mornings, she came down to help my mom parallel park our car because my mom was too scared to do it, gave us gifts all the time, and at one point, she hired my grandmother, who was newly arrived from China and living with us, to help with sewing and construction.” The labor history Zhang recounts is not an uncommon one among Chinese and Southeast Asian immigrant families, particularly in California and New York City. In the late



Figure 2. "Closet Purge, New Dress" (2009).  
Courtesy Meggy Wang, Fashion for Writers

1980s (the peak years of the US garment industry), around the time when Zhang's mother and grandmother were working for Lisa, 80 percent of garment laborers in New York City were "Chinese women, recent immigrants from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China."<sup>54</sup> By the mid-1990s, the neoliberalization of global trade marked by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing eliminated trade protections and tariffs on the US garment industry, driving what Christina H. Moon calls "the offshoring of garment production" to "Mexico and East Asia, then to the Caribbean, Central and South America, and finally to South and Southeast Asia."<sup>55</sup>

We also learn that both skirts Zhang wears in her photos are inherited from her mother and were likely skirts she and/or Zhang's grandmother helped make for Lisa's fashion label. Zhang's self-representation, like Wang's, draws together in productive tension the ordinary and the extraordinary, the visible and the invisible, and the economic and the affective. In the sentimental production of these outfit posts, Zhang's affective mode does not idealize the past. Instead, her nostalgia critically reveals the gendered patterns of racial labor and labor recruitment that are typically invisible in (but nonetheless constitutive to) the fantasies fashion tells. Appropriating the standard fashion blogging practice of outfit posting, Zhang reembodies fashion and labor histories against the neoliberal will to disembodied color blindness.

Zhang's self-portrait is situated not only within the global circuits of labor, bodies, and capital but also within affective economies. The emotions that connect Zhang to her mother, to Lisa, and to the clothes that are themselves the material signs of a hierarchal and dialectical social relationship between designer and sewer, innovator and worker, and citizen and immigrant, circulate, as Sara Ahmed puts it, "across a social as well as psychic field."<sup>56</sup> It is as such that Ahmed describes emotions "as a social form, rather than individual self-expression" (9). Here, the various forms of sentimental gratitude Zhang expresses through her sartorial choices in this blog post—to her mom as a fashion inspiration and to Lisa as a generous benefactor—reveal the complex circuits of senti-



Figures 3 and 4. “Looking Backward, Going Forward” (2009). Courtesy Jenny Zhang, *Fashion for Writers*

ment that interarticulate the labor histories, cultural histories, and family histories of many Asian and Latino immigrants who have themselves (or their mothers, aunts, sisters, or grandmothers) worked in the lower CMT (cut, make, trim) sector of the garment industry. Such circuits of sentimentality are complex because the very acts of kindness that Zhang attributes to Lisa and to her love for Lisa have historically functioned to reproduce and secure a relationship between female employers and domestic laborers that is framed by a dialectic of maternalism and racially classed deference.<sup>57</sup> It is precisely this kind of ambivalence and contradiction that “lacerates,” in Berlant’s words, the countersentimental.<sup>58</sup> But contradiction does not upend the countersentimental; indeed, the countersentimental works through contradiction.

Rather than constituting a reduction or reversal of the political meanings of Zhang’s digital cultural practice, its internal contradictions signal the need to theorize popular culture in relation rather than in opposition to the messy contradictions and imbrications of history and hegemony. Kath Weston’s point about the futility of pure discourse is instructive here: “No search is more fruitless than the one that seeks revolutionary forms of social relations which remain ‘uncontaminated’ by existing social conditions.”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the subjectivities Wang and Zhang construct

and perform in the pleasurable acts of dressing up, posing, writing, and posting online are new to the cultural imaginary yet, as these bloggers show us, they have histories.

Many Asian American fashion designers (including the prominent designers Doo-ri Chung, Phillip Lim, Derek Lam, and Vivienne Tam) are products of similarly convergent and contingent histories. In her book, *The Beautiful Generation: Asian Americans and the Cultural Economy of Fashion*, Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu persuasively argues that Asian American designers are embedded within a “broader history of labor and migration.” She writes, “Without [the] crucial experiences and social connections [forged in fashion school], designers lacking a formal education have had to rely on other paths of skills acquisition and social networking. For many Asian Americans the knowledges passed around and handed down [from parents, who often worked on the lowest rungs of the clothing industry] were at least in the beginning quite crucial, for it fostered in them a sense of ease and familiarity with the craft of fashion that made it possible for them to experiment with its forms.”<sup>60</sup>

Related to the informal technical knowledges Asian American designers draw from their families are the informal cultural and social knowledges that Asian American fashion and style bloggers—mostly consumers rather than producers of fashion—glean from the everyday experiences of being part of an immigrant family. An example of this knowledge is illustrated in my own inaugural blog post. I begin by recounting one of my first “shopping” memories in the US with my family in the Arcade Shopping Center in Ojai, California (we rarely *purchased*). “My mom, an amazing dressmaker in her own right who made most of her clothes and almost all of ours until we reached middle school age, studied the blouses and dresses that she would later make for herself. I never learned how to sew but what I did learn from those early ‘shopping’ trips was an appreciation for fashion.”<sup>61</sup> This appreciation is not an innocent one. Rather, it expresses and reproduces a pedagogy of domestic femininity that, as Tu incisively notes, is “part of a larger effort to situate women appropriately within the family and the state—not to enable them to pursue creative interests or entrepreneurial profits.”<sup>62</sup> As my mom scrutinized the cut, thread type, and seam construction of popular styles of clothing we could neither afford

to buy nor be left out of, she transmitted an array of social, (home) economic, and affective lessons that rarely form part of the “immigrant values” that scholars discuss in relation to Asian Americans. Such values not only mediate the processes of consuming fashion objects, images, and discourses in and through the fashion blogosphere but also bloggers’ everyday fashioning of their digital racial and gender subjectivities as well.

Today, particular articles of clothing are privileged memory objects for me: my mom’s tomato-red, three-quarter-sleeve tunic with the green, gold, and orange vines and flowers embroidered down the front and carefully placed on the sleeves; all her 1980s work blouses with the loosely attached ascot bow and slightly puffy shoulders (where shoulder pads used to be); and her red and gold Vietnamese wedding *áo dài* (which now has a boat neck collar, a necessary alteration to fit me). She made all these clothes at home, and in some cases, like the embroidery work, she handmade them. In and through such fashion objects, the material, cultural, and affective economies of alternative (and mostly unknown) fashion histories circulate. Through the practice of blogging, these neglected histories are moved into the “digital commons.” It is as such that the everyday loves and labors of Asian and Asian American women in relation to consumerism, digital communication technologies, and capitalism can be recognized as foundational to public culture. Indeed, the “Sentimental Value” of clothes that bloggers post about exceeds the personal; through their digital labors, bloggers publicize and politicize the sentimental.

The creator of lipstick eater, Joon Oluchi Lee, aka Joony Schecter (whose alias pays homage to the midwestern aspiring writer Jenny Schecter from Showtime’s lesbian drama *The L Word* [US, 2004–9]), also discusses the immigrant values he learns from his mother—or what he calls a “maternal pedagogy [that] doesn’t have anything to do with nurture, kindness, or warm milk.”<sup>63</sup> Such a pedagogy is a countersentimental mode of domestic praxis not organized around the emotional universalist rhetoric of a mother’s love but rather is constituted in particular histories and sartorial forms of struggle. In a blog post cleverly titled “maternamorphosis,” it is jeans rather than genes that link mother and child and their different but related struggles as artists.

The four scariest strung together words in the English language: “I’M BECOMING MY MOTHER.” Lately, I’ve been thinking without fear about becoming my mother, and not for the usual boring Oedipal reason. I’ve been having some trouble this year trying to get my book of gender-race theory published. While wallowing in frustration, I found that my mother was going through a parallel pain, trying to sell huge oil paintings in this particularly nasty economy. Before I think of this woman who birthed me as my mother, I think of her as an artist. . . .

In the above picture, my mother is about the age as I am now, except that she already has two children, the elder of whom is 9 years old. In my mind, this is how I always see my mother: arms crossed in defiance, hard eyes, jeaned legs in battle position. I don’t think it’s a bad thing to become, considering that physically, it is what I’m destined for anyway. Looking at this picture of my flannel-and-jeans clad mother, I realized that I already dress like her. . . . I want to turn genetic destiny into a personal style.

To evidence this, Lee/Schechter includes a photo of himself standing in the same pose, wearing a nearly identical outfit of blue flannel (sleeves rolled to the elbows) and blue jeans (figures 5 and 6). Sartorial objects and choices here again make visible images and ideas about Asian femininity that are not part of the formal and institutionalized epistemologies of the Western cultural imaginary. But in this blog post and through the feminine object of the “mother jeans” (distinct from but related to the much-maligned “mom jeans”), a radically different configuration of Asian femininity, which he terms “hard femininity,” emerges. Meditating as he often does in his blog about consumer objects, Lee/Schechter writes with elegant and incisive prose about mother jeans and about his mother:

I like to think that a woman who wore tiny miniskirts in 1960s Korea and fearlessly yelled back profanities to boys who made lewd insults would have gone in for some hard jeans. . . . Mother jeans are hard jeans designed to give a hard outline to a soft shape. My mother may not have worn hard jeans, but she’d weathered enough shit in her life to give meaning to their designation. Mother jeans . . . produce hard femininity.



Figures 5 and 6. “maternamorphosis” (2009).  
Courtesy Joon Oluchi Lee, lipstick eater

In previous posts, he has focused on handbags (“And please, let’s be clear about this: I was not carrying a man-purse or whatever [but] a straight-up lady handbag”),<sup>64</sup> lipsticks, and ponytails (that swing but also whip).<sup>65</sup> Lee/Schechter covets them not as objects of essentialized femininity but instead as the cultural tools with which

to practice, perform, and produce a new kind of femininity that is not opposed and subordinated to masculinity but is a queer subject position that refuses the binarization of gender. In “maternamorphosis,” it is a scene of radical transvestism in which Lee/Schechter dresses up in his mother’s (style of) clothes that enables him to embody her style of hard femininity.

Hard femininity is neither male femininity nor female masculinity in the sense that Judith Halberstam uses these terms. While Halberstam’s seminal study, *Female Masculinity*, conceptualizes “masculinity without men” to “pry apart,”<sup>66</sup> as she puts it, masculinity and maleness, Lee/Schechter’s “hard femininity” is a multiple, contradictory, and inherently plural gender formation that clears a space for imbricated variations of femaleness and maleness. Indeed, this is the radical potential of transvestism. As Marjorie Garber writes, “*Transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture*: the disruptive element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself.”<sup>67</sup>

Garber’s use of crisis language underscores the peril and promise of transvestism that condition the possibility of Lee/Schechter’s own digital subject formation. Consider his biographical statement on lipstick eater: “I’m a girl who loves red lipstick . . . oh, sorry . . . I sometimes forget . . . I’m a boy who loves red lipstick, a boy who also loves to love boys.”<sup>68</sup> Red lipstick, in and of itself, occupies a distinctly ambivalent location in the Western cultural imaginary; its signification moves between normative and excessive femininity. It is as such that red lipstick suggests the danger of being dangerous. The femme fatale’s most powerful weapon is her red lipstick (often applied slowly in a strategic performance of exhibitionism that is the prelude to a kill). In his consumption of (red) lipstick, the lipstick eater invokes at least two dangers. The first is an everyday one: the danger of smudged red lipstick on white teeth. This is not trivial in the context of fashion and the fashion blogosphere in which an individual’s digital social worth and identity inheres with the carefully stylized construction of one’s image and body. Again, the talent for systematizing embodied practices to reduce, if not eliminate, fashion-related faux pas like smudged

lipstick is a skill granted to and expected of fashion bloggers. The second danger is signaled by the transvestic consumption of red lipstick itself: “I’m a girl who loves red lipstick . . . oh, sorry . . . I sometimes forget . . . I’m a boy who loves red lipstick.” Tranvestism here is figured as a critical forgetting. But this is hardly a failure of memory. Or if it is, it is the kind of failure that queer theorists such as Halberstam and Cathy Hannabach have compellingly shown produces enabling political effects.<sup>69</sup> In forgetting gender, Lee/Schechter refuses to remember and thus refuses to reproduce the two-gender system of heteronormativity. Such queer forgetting, Hannabach explains in “Untimely Forgetting,” “is not a passive process, but rather an active venture of tracing the edges of that which must be forgotten in order for subjectivity to be established and maintained.” In the hands of Lee/Schechter, red lipstick is more than a feminine commodity; it is an instrument for making “gender trouble.” Paradoxically, but productively so, it is in a drag context that Korean American femininity, a modality and form of “hard femininity,” is revealed as a self-defined and self-defining practice of subject formation rather than a fixed or stable identity. In both outfit post examples, Zhang and Lee/Schechter create fashionable bodies that connect rather than conceal links between fashion and racialized labor, citizen and immigrant, the personal and the public, and production and consumption.

In 2009, the fashion press declared it the Year of the Fashion Blogger. Worldwide enthusiasm for *The Sartorialist* book tour (Schuman’s print version of his blog by the same name) rose to rock-concert pitch, requiring Schuman to add more dates. Featured articles about fashion bloggers flooded online and print media publications: “Young Bloggers Have Ear of Fashion Heavyweights”; “Style Bloggers Bring Fashion to the Masses”; “Social Media + Blogger = The Democratization of Fashion”; and “Bloggers Crash Fashion’s Front Row.”<sup>70</sup> Against the uncritically festive perspective in these articles and others like them, the present discussion has attempted to demonstrate the ongoing—but hardly unmovable—asymmetries of historical, socioeconomic, and political power shaping the democratization of fashion media and markets. Indeed, the larger aim of the project from which this

essay is drawn is to put forth the critical significance of fashion's new technologies to the burgeoning field of digital humanities and the larger scholarship on the political economy. Such technologies, which must now be understood as everyday technologies, show how cultural practices and technological innovations are not only framed by the global dynamics of the political economy and of state power but can also reframe the terms and conditions in which culture, technology, and capitalism intersect. Far from a utopian site of social, economic, political, or technological democracy, the fashion blogosphere is nevertheless a significant cultural site in which the struggle over the meanings of race, gender, sexuality, and political action happen every day.

### Notes

Much appreciation goes to all the readers of Threadbared (especially Joon Oluchi Lee, Meggy Wang, Jenny Zhang, and Spencer Lum) — your intellectual curiosity and generosity are the very models of collaborative digital learning that exemplify the potential of new communication technologies to radically transform the production and practice of scholarship. Many thanks are owed, as well, to Mimi Thi Nguyen. Your steadfast critical, political, and collaborative passion makes a real intellectual difference every day. Finally, my largest debt of gratitude is reserved for my mom, Nguyễn Thị ThợĐa, who very early on instilled in me a love for the construction, consumption, and expressions of fashion, even if she now sometimes regrets it.

1. Givhan appears to have abandoned her own blog, *Off the Runway*, which has not been updated since 3 October 2008.
2. Robin Givhan, "Everyone's a Fashion Critic," *Harper's Bazaar*, September 2007, 316.
3. The exhibition (18 December 2007–13 April 2008), sponsored by the luxury shoe designer Manolo Blahnik, incorporated a participatory dimension by asking visitors to blog about their thoughts and experiences. Visitors might blog at home or at the "blogbar" of computer terminals set up in the gallery.

4. Robin Givhan, "Fashion-as-Art Is Watered Down by Exposure to Blogosphere," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 24 December 2007.
5. See Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).
6. It is Gore's early role in fostering political, legislative, and economic support for developing the technology that we now call the Internet that has led some to misidentify him as the inventor of the Internet.
7. Quoted in Nakamura, *Digitizing Race*, 3.
8. Mark Poster, "Cyberdemocracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere," in *Virtual Politics: Identity and Community in Cyberspace*, ed. David Holmes (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 224. See also Mark Hansen, "Digitalizing the Racialized Body; or, The Politics of Common Impropriety," in *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge 2006), 139–74.
9. Michele Willson, *Technically Together: Rethinking Community within Techno-society* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 59.
10. For more on cyber-racism, -sexism, and -homophobia, see the special issue of *Camera Obscura*, no. 70 (2009), on "Race and/as Technology," ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Lynne Joyrich; Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Race and Software," in *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*, ed. Mimi Thi Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 305–33; Vernadette V. Gonzalez and Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, "Filipina.com: Wives, Workers, and Whores on the Cyberfrontier," in *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*, ed. Rachel Lee and Sau-ling Cynthia Wong (New York: Routledge, 2003), 215–34; Lisa Nakamura, *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and *Digitizing Race*; Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu, and Alicia Hedlam Hines, *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); and Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert, *Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
11. Adam Singer, "Seventy Usable Stats from the 2009 State of the Blogosphere," *Future Buzz*, 10 December 2009, [thefuturebuzz.com/2009/12/10/blogging-stats-facts-data/](http://thefuturebuzz.com/2009/12/10/blogging-stats-facts-data/).

12. According to Sarah Pedersen and Caroline Macafee, 43–45 percent of blogs are abandoned and about 9 percent of blogs are splogs. See Sarah Pedersen and Caroline Macafee, “Gender Differences in British Blogging,” *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12 (2007): 1472–92.
13. Daniel W. Drezner and Henry Farrell, “The Power and Politics of Blogs” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 2 September 2004).
14. Gonzalez and Rodriguez, “Filipina.com,” 220.
15. Many journalists and scholars have attributed the 2004 spike in blog readership to these blogs.
16. Amanda Lenhart and Susannah Fox, *Bloggers* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2006).
17. Susan C. Herring et al., “Women and Children Last: The Discursive Construction of Weblogs,” 2004, [blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women\\_and\\_children.html](http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/women_and_children.html) (accessed 11 November 2009); Lenhart and Fox, *Bloggers*.
18. Lenhart and Fox, *Bloggers*.
19. Herring et al., “Women and Children Last.”
20. Search rankings are determined by several, and as I mentioned, manipulable factors such as the number of their unique daily and monthly visits or “hits,” the frequency in which blogs appear in top bloggers’ blogrolls, and the number and prevalence of reader commentaries.
21. C. S. Soong, interview with Jodi Dean, “Democracy via Technology?” *Against the Grain*, NPR, 26 October 2009.
22. Dustin Harp and Mark Tremayne, “The Gendered Blogosphere: Examining Inequality Using Network and Feminist Theory,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 83 (2006): 256.
23. Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet Is Killing Our Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
24. Robert J. Samuelson, “A Web of Exhibitionists,” *Washington Post*, 20 September 2006.
25. Soong, “Democracy via Technology?”

26. Business Wire, “The Blogging Iceberg: Of 4.12 Million Weblogs, Most Little Seen and Quickly Abandoned, According to Perseus Survey,” 6 October 2003, [findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_moEIN/is\\_2003\\_Oct\\_6/ai\\_108559565/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_moEIN/is_2003_Oct_6/ai_108559565/).
27. Lenhart and Fox, *Bloggers*.
28. Lynne Joyrich “Preface: Bringing Race and Media Technologies into Focus,” *Camera Obscura*, no. 70 (2009); and Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, “Introduction: Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race,” *Camera Obscura*, no. 70 (2009): 8.
29. Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 13.
30. Numerous scholars have argued that there is an invidious underside to creative and knowledge work that goes unremarked in neoliberal policy discourses about free trade and free agency in the new creative economy. Andrew Ross notes in his recent book, *Nice Work If You Can Get It* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), “Job gratification, for creatives, has always come at a heavy sacrificial cost—longer hours in pursuit of the satisfying finish, price discounts in return for aesthetic recognition, self-exploitation in response to the gift of autonomy, and dispensability in exchange for flexibility” (18). Elsewhere, I discuss how the asymmetrical conditions of the new digital work order are constituted by and internal to digital temporality rather than freed by it (“The Perfect You? There’s an App for That: On the New Digital Labors of Self and Selfhood” [unpublished manuscript]).
31. “Style Coalition Takes Fashion Fans inside the Tents of Mercedes Benz Fashion Week for Third Season,” *Newswire*, 11 September 2009.
32. Wafa Alobaidat, “The Fashion Blogger Issue—PART I,” MagCloud, 12 October 2009, [magcloud.com/browse/Issue/38767](http://magcloud.com/browse/Issue/38767).
33. Susanna Lau, “A Blogger at Chanel Part Une,” Style Bubble, 11 September 2007, [stylebubble.typepad.com/style\\_bubble/2007/09/a-blogger-at-ch.html](http://stylebubble.typepad.com/style_bubble/2007/09/a-blogger-at-ch.html).

34. Cathy Horyn, "My Invitation Isn't in the Mail," *New York Times*, 13 March 2008.
35. Eugene Volokh, "Scholarship, Blogging, and Trade-Offs: On Discovering, Disseminating, and Doing," *Washington University Law Review* 84 (2007): 1089.
36. Sharon Clott, "Christopher Kane Thinks the Blog World Is a 'Bit Mad,'" *The Cut*, 2 December 2009, [nymag.com/daily/fashion/2009/12/christopher\\_kane\\_thinks\\_the\\_bl.html](http://nymag.com/daily/fashion/2009/12/christopher_kane_thinks_the_bl.html); "Lanvin Gets Cash Money; Alber Elbaz Is 'Really Scared of Bloggers,'" *Fashionologie*, 18 November 2009, [fashionologie.com/Lanvin-Gets-Cash-Money-Alber-Elbaz-Really-Scared-Bloggers-6296198#read-more](http://fashionologie.com/Lanvin-Gets-Cash-Money-Alber-Elbaz-Really-Scared-Bloggers-6296198#read-more) (accessed 20 February 2010).
37. Adrienne Weinfeld-Berg, "Beauties, Freeks, and Geeks: Part Deux," *DFR: Daily Fashion Report*, 23 September 2009, [www.lookonline.com/2009/09/beauties-freeks-and-geeks-part-deux-by.html](http://www.lookonline.com/2009/09/beauties-freeks-and-geeks-part-deux-by.html).
38. Imran Amed, "Not All Fashion Blogs Are Created Equal," *Business of Fashion*, 14 October 2008, [www.businessoffashion.com/2008/10/fashion-20-not-all-fashion-blogs-are-created-equal.html](http://www.businessoffashion.com/2008/10/fashion-20-not-all-fashion-blogs-are-created-equal.html).
39. Grashina Gabelmann, "The Pernet Phenomenon," *Sketchbook Magazine*, October 2009, 38.
40. Janet Ozzard, "Cathy Horyn to Fashion Shows: Drop Dead," *New York Magazine*, 6 May 2008, [nymag.com/fashion/look/2008/fall/cathyhoryn/](http://nymag.com/fashion/look/2008/fall/cathyhoryn/).
41. Horyn, "My Invitation Isn't in the Mail."
42. The formation of couturieres' trade guilds in 1675 is understood by many historians as the inaugural moment of fashion as we know it. See also Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003); Joan DeJean, *The Essence of Style: How the French Invented High Fashion, Fine Food, Chic Cafes, Style, Sophistication, and Glamour* (New York: Free Press, 2005); Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the Twentieth Century: From the Catwalk to the Sidewalk* (New York: Berg, 2007); Gilles Lipovetsky, *The Empire of Fashion: Dressing Modern Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); Valerie Steele, "Anti-fashion: The 1970s,"

- Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture* 1 (1997): 279–96.
43. Nancy L. Green, “The Language of Modernization in the Production of Fashion,” *French Historical Studies* 18 (1994): 727.
  44. Minh-Ha T. Pham, “The Right to Fashion in the Age of Terror,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 36 (2011): 385–410.
  45. Gonzalez and Rodriguez, “Filipina.com,” 218.
  46. Chun, “Race and Software”; Lisa Nakamura, “Don’t Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft,” *Difference Engines*, March 2009, [www.differenceengines.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/csmcfinal.pdf](http://www.differenceengines.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/csmcfinal.pdf).
  47. Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 67.
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  54. Evelyn Hu-DeHart, “Asian Women Immigrants in the U.S. Fashion Garment Industry,” in *Women and Work in Globalising*

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  62. Tu, *The Beautiful Generation*, 42.
  63. Joon Oluchi Lee, “maternamorphosis,” lipstick eater, 7 August 2009, [lipstick eater.blogspot.com/2009/08/maternamorphosis.html](http://lipstick eater.blogspot.com/2009/08/maternamorphosis.html). It is worth noting that I have thus far emphasized style blogs. However, fashion blogs (which rarely include the mini-essays characteristic of style blogs) such as Style Bubble and That’s Chic have also dedicated digital archival space to their moms, often including glamorous photos of these immigrant Asian women who are described by the blogger or by readers who comment on the post as style icons and fashion inspirations.

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67. Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 17; emphasis in original.
68. Joon Oluchi Lee, “lipstickeater,” lipstickeater.blogspot.com (accessed 25 August 2009).
69. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*; Judith Halberstam, “Queer Forgetting” (paper presented at the University of Hawai’i-Mānoa Joseph Chadwick Lecture Series, Mānoa, 16 September 2004). Cathy Hannabach, “Untimely Forgetting” (paper presented at the UCLA Center for the Study of Women, Los Angeles, 1 May 2008).
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Figure 7. "Parts and Labor" (2009).  
Courtesy of Spencer Lum