

INVITE ONLY

The debate continues: who is welcome at New York Fashion Week, and who shouldn't make the cut?
BY NICOLE MALICK

FASHION \ THE WALK



Bloggers Scott Schuman, Garance Doré, Tommy Ton and Bryan Grey-Yambao sat front row at the Dolce & Gabbana show in September of 2009, each equipped with a laptop and ready to immediately document the elusive experience in Milan for their readers. Just a few days earlier in New York City, 13-year-old "It girl" Tavi Gevinson sat in the same coveted row at Marc Jacobs. This continued a developing trend from previous seasons, with prominent fashion bloggers gaining increasing access to major shows. Reveling in front row after front row, fashion bloggers appeared to have successfully climbed the ranks, warmly welcomed by designers as an instantaneous advertising medium and championed by readers as proof that the fashion world's dividing line could be crossed.

Fast forward to 2013. New York Fashion Week had gotten a little out of hand. Crowds of aspiring fashionistas would descend for the 10-minute shows, vying for seats amongst buyers, celebrities and the infamous Anna Wintour herself. Getting in sans official invite took just a dash of creativity from the determined guests. Some turned to Craigslist, where last minute tickets were resold for hundreds — some upwards of \$1,000. More brash individuals might just arrive and attempt to talk their way in, to varying degrees of success. Others were content to strut designer digs outside the tents — peacocks for the sea of photographers — and never actually made it inside. Although these affairs occur in a separate sphere from that of the real invitees, the fashion elite isn't looking to share the space or fight through the assemblage any longer. As a response to a call for less chaos, IMG Fashion, which produces Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week, is adding new venues but scaling back audience sizes for 2014 — notably excluding the aforementioned celebrity-status bloggers from invite lists.

Managing hectic schedules as they run from show to show, fashion insiders and big names are looking for a hassle-free viewing of each designer's new collection. Their seating isn't a game of luck, but a reflection of a complicated hierarchy. It's a puzzle of sorts, to organize who deserves a better seat: Anna Delo Russo of *Vogue Japan* or Stefano Tonchi of *W*; a representative from Bergdorf Goodman or Barney's; former *New York Times* fashion critic Cathy Horyn or Beyoncé? The hordes of viewers may not have directly threatened the places of these names, but bloggers

suddenly encroaching on their territory signaled a perceptible shift: the competition for viewing room had become even fiercer.

Something doesn't add up, though. Aren't these shows for the spectacle? For the beauty of ready-to-wear and couture and shoes? To an extent, yes. But they are not for anyone and everyone. From the perspective of the industry, fashion shows, like the collections themselves, are meant to be exclusive. If the clothes were meant for mass consumption, they wouldn't carry such expensive price tags. Luxury brands produce garments for those who can afford them — why should just anyone have access to see the creations modeled down the runway if they don't have access to purchase them? Fashion writers promote (or criticize) collections, and buyers select what their stores will offer to shoppers in the coming months. Those privileged to view the shows, whether from the front row or the 15th, are meant to serve as the channels to bring the fashion to the general public. Thus, to some, IMG is simply pushing back against the increasing chaos that inhibited that overall goal.

Where does this leave up-and-comers? Those who aspire to join the fashion ranks? Our own Penn students who, after producing and participating in Penn Fashion Week, wish to experience the real deal? Sure, fashion diffuses through stores and online outlets, but a true "in" to the industry is far more desirable. Is there a balance that can be reached, with corporate fashion and the common people enjoying high-fashion presentations in unison?

For now, Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week is directing other interested parties online. Options such as viewing virtual shows or perusing subsequently published slideshows, insufficient for the media and the fashion elite, are the more obtainable options. The focus, it seems, is shifting back to a more removed bubble, separating the fashion haves from the have-nots. For the foreseeable future, bloggers and savvy individuals have been relegated to a lower fashion echelon, lacking the selectivity the industry seeks.

Neither laptops in the front row, nor the calm of Fashion Week pre-street style blogs, are likely to be the norm in coming seasons. But don't lose hope; elitism is so last season. As Fashion Week continues to evolve (a move to yet another new location is predicted by 2018), new opportunities may become available yet.

(Left) A star-studded front row featuring Grace Coddington and Anna Wintour. Image courtesy of huffingtonpost.com.
(Right) Image courtesy of thecitizenoffashion.com.

(Opposite page, top) Image courtesy of wmagazine.com.
(Opposite page, bottom) Stylish ladies pose in bold prints and chic silhouettes for eager street style photographers. Image courtesy of bjonessstyle.com.