

BLOGGING DEPT.

TAVI SAYS

Fashion dictates from a fourteen-year-old.

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SEPTEMBER 20, 2010

In Paris in January, after the Chanel couture show, Karl Lagerfeld greeted well-wishers on the runway at the Pavillon Cambon. The theme of the show had been silver, and Lagerfeld was wearing a variation on his usual black uniform—thin silver tie, slim gray jacket, gray motorcycle gloves, white hair in a tight ponytail. He was surrounded by handlers, photographers, and other people eager to have a word with him, but he spent a notably long time with a guest who, from a distance, looked like a little old lady. She wore glasses and a droopy black sweater over a gray silk dress; a black pillbox hat covered most of her hair, which was silver, too. The top of her head was about even with the designer's elbows, and she was being followed by a camera crew. A French assistant presented her to Lagerfeld: "*La plus jolie blogeuse.*" A blogger.

By now, most people in the fashion industry recognize Tavi Gevinson, a fourteen-year-old girl from the suburbs of Chicago, who has been writing a fashion blog, *Style Rookie*, since she was eleven. It is an enthusiastic chronicle of her thoughts on fashion, ranging from reviews of runway shows (on Marc Jacobs's floral prints: "Nostalgia creeps up on you and puts you in a haze, and this collection did the same thing") to reflections provoked by her bat mitzvah ("the Nazirites wore just enough to keep them warm"). There are also more than a hundred photographs of Tavi modelling outfits, most of them taken with a camera set on a tripod in her back yard.

Tavi is tiny for her age—four feet ten—and appears prepubescent, with pale skin and a wide, doll-like face; for a while, she had a haircut that made her look like a child dressed up as Anna Wintour for Halloween. She favors busy, outlandish ensembles that mix items of different styles and periods, as if she'd been rummaging through the wardrobe closet at a Hollywood studio—clear-frame "Tootsie" glasses, a turban, a cartoonishly large chain-link-shaped scarf. Though the fashion world is accustomed to both youth and eccentricity, Tavi is a rare spectacle. Seeing her moving through the scrum backstage at a fashion show, elaborately costumed and surrounded by paparazzi, brings to mind a religious procession involving a Buddhist child deity.

In Paris, the camera crew trailing Tavi was from "Fashion Television," a Canadian TV show. Lagerfeld shook Tavi's hand. "She has a fresh eye," he said to the camera. "She's not ruined by zillions of bad collections."



Tavi Gevinson at home. John Galliano, Rei Kawakubo, and the Mulleavy sisters all follow her blog. Photographs by Josef Astor.

"Thank you very much," Tavi said.

Lagerfeld placed his fingertips on her hair. She had dyed it ice blue, but it had faded to silver. "I like your hair color," he said.

"Oh, thank you," Tavi said.

"Normally, children—young people—don't have this hair color," he continued. "It's great to have it."

"I think so, too," Tavi said.

Lagerfeld put a hand on her shoulder and said, "Good, good. It matches your eyes." They chatted for several minutes, until he was interrupted by an aide, who whispered that Madame Chirac was still waiting.



"It's a period piece."

Bloggers have played a role in political journalism for nearly a decade, but only recently have they become important in fashion. In the past few years, Scott Schuman, who created the blog the Sartorialist, and Tommy Ton, of *Jak & Jil*, have become celebrated for their scrapbooks of stylish outfits photographed on the street. Last winter, personal-style bloggers, like Tavi and Bryanboy, a twenty-three-year-old from the Philippines, were placed in the front rows of fashion shows and were asked to vote on awards given by the Council of Fashion Designers of America.

Much like a magazine editor, a fashion blogger highlights standout clothes, but the presentation is more intimate and idiosyncratic. Tavi's blog is proudly cluttered.

"Inspiration" images culled from the Internet are jumbled together with chirpy, informal writing that is studded with far-flung pop-culture references ("Harold and Maude," Tony Danza). In a recent post, she imagined talking to a handbag:

Me: Do you ever get the feeling that it's all a lie?

Bag: . . .

Me: Oh, Bag, that is *so* like you! Pass the popcorn!

Her amateur modelling photographs show an eye for frumpy, "Grey Gardens"-inspired clothes and for arch accessories—too-big jackets, towering platform shoes, clusters of brooches, goofy sunglasses. Colors and patterns often clash, giving outfits a curdled look. Her taste in designers runs to the cerebral—Rei Kawakubo, of *Comme des Garçons*; the Mulleavy sisters, of *Rodarte*—and she has borrowed from them, as she wrote one day, "the idea that clothing can be art."

Tavi's look is frequently described as cute, but there is also something jarring about it. This is partly an accident of her youthful appearance, and partly calculated. She is drawn to things that combine the

Discussing Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland," she said, "'Alice in Wonderland' was never really a children's story. It was written for people, like Tim Burton, who are afraid of teachers or parents or friends or normal people. And they're sort of enchanted by darker things."

In many of her outfit pictures, she keeps a severely straight face, like a child in a nineteenth-century portrait. One picture, from Christmas Eve, shows her standing in the snow, wearing a lacy jumpsuit from American Apparel and a black Rodarte top that is printed with a silk-screened skeleton. She is wearing joke-shop glasses—with hologram eyeballs suspended in a neon liquid—and a slack facial expression. The caption: "Hello there! This is what I wore on the day of Christmas Eve."

From the beginning, Tavi's blog had an element of mystery: Is it for real? And how did a preteen suburban kid develop such a singular look? Her readership quickly grew to fifty thousand daily viewers. Magazine editors envy her touch. Amy Astley, the editor of *Teen Vogue*, told me, "Sometimes I say to my staff, 'Wow, I had more fun reading the blog of this teen-ager than reading professional copy that we wrote.'"

Not everyone in the fashion world is enthralled. Valerie Steele, the director of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, said that she approved of Tavi's taste—"The designers that she admires are the designers I focus on"—but added that the blog "would be unremarkable if she were not thirteen years old. If she were twenty-three, we'd say, 'Yeah. Who cares?'" Like a clever child who is paraded around at a party, Tavi charms and repels adults in equal measure. And it's not clear if the fashion world will want its prodigy once she's grown up.

Tavi recently turned fourteen. This summer, she performed in a community-theatre production of "Ragtime" (she played the little boy) and dyed her hair Raggedy Ann red. Dyeing your hair a weird color "acts as a nice filter," she told me. "Based on people's reactions, you kind of know who's worth talking to."

Tavi lives on a leafy block in Oak Park, Illinois, with her parents. She has two sisters, who are in college: Rivkah, twenty, is interested in film and recently enlisted Tavi to star in some short movies she made with a Flip camera; Miriam, eighteen, is involved with the local synagogue's youth group. Tavi blogs a few times a week. She just shifted from a large public middle school to a public high school where her father was the head of the English department, until his retirement, last year. She has a gravelly voice, and her conversation matches the tone of her blog. Talking about her social life, she said, "I go between a Daria mind-set"—a reference to an old MTV cartoon about a proto-hipster—"and an Atticus Finch, 'Everyone's nice once you get to know them' mind-set." After school, she said, "I hang out with a friend sometimes, but that's just easier to do on weekends. Then I do homework." She recently read "The Outsiders" and is getting into Hitchcock films. At home, she often makes collages, cutting pictures out of fashion magazines that she can find at the local Borders—*i-D*, *Russh*, *Pop*. She seems uninterested in

attracting attention beyond the fashion world, and has turned down offers to appear on “Oprah,” the “Tonight Show,” and morning news shows. “It’s so cheesy,” she said. “The ‘Good Morning America’ audience—I guess that’s just not a crowd whose eyes I want on me.”

As Tavi’s fame has grown, however, her fan base has expanded, and she has joined the speaker circuit. This summer, she spoke at a marketing conference in New York, where businesspeople paid a thousand dollars to hear her discuss the purchasing habits of Generation Y, and at Idea City, a Canadian version of the TED Conference. Her Idea City conference speech—about a magazine she wants to start, based on *Sassy*, the teen title from the nineties—was called “How We Can Apply What We Learned from the Teen Girls of the ’90s (More Specifically, Those Who Read/Interned at/Worked for *Sassy* Magazine) to Create a Good Magazine for Teen Girls Today, Also, This Is a Really Long Title.” (She got a standing ovation.) She says that she often is not paid for these appearances, beyond having her expenses reimbursed: “Maybe I’ll feel differently when I’m older and have to pay rent, but right now I just want to do it.”

This year, Tavi was chosen by Mattel, in conjunction with the White House Project, as one of “Barbie’s Ten Women to Watch”—a group of female high achievers that included the computer engineer Yoky Matsuoka and J. K. Rowling. The match might seem odd, given Tavi’s avant-garde sensibility, but it was deliberate. “Barbie is fashion forward,” Lauren Dougherty, a Mattel spokesperson, told me. As part of the program, Mattel executives had selected ten girls to be mentored by the female role models. Tavi was matched with an eight-year-old fashion enthusiast named Julia Catacutan, from Brooklyn.

Tavi hosted the mentoring session this spring, at her house. That day, I showed up at the Gevinsons’ front door, along with Julia, Julia’s mother, Dougherty, and a pair of cameramen. Tavi lives on a quiet street, in a 1910 American Foursquare house. Its exterior—blue aluminum siding, woodsy overgrowth, jungle gym—was familiar from the modelling photographs on Style Rookie. Inside, the house has the same hodgepodge look as the blog. Every inch of floor and table space is crammed with stuff: guitars, books, plaster-of-Paris sculptures, a loom. Tavi’s mother, Berit—a weaver and a part-time Hebrew instructor—came downstairs in bare feet. She was wearing purple stretch pants and a purple top; her hair, which is graying slightly, was in a loose side ponytail. She is fifty-five, short, like her children, and is from Norway. She pronounces her daughter’s name with a strong Norwegian accent—“*Taaa-vi*.” She is not particularly fashion-oriented, but she encourages creativity. Assessing the clutter, she said, “It’s a workspace. If the kids are playing with toys, I don’t think they should have to clean up the project until the project is done.”

Steve Gevinson, Tavi’s father, a tall, gawky man of about sixty, came downstairs, wearing pleated shorts and a polo shirt. (Everyone in the family wears glasses.) He shook hands with one of the Barbie cameramen, who introduced himself as Cameron.

“That’s a good name for a cameraman!” Steve said.

The plan was to go to the Salvation Army. “I shop at either thrift stores or Bergdorf,” Tavi said. She buys one new designer item each season, with money that she earns through writing assignments—last year, *Harper's Bazaar* published her assessment of the spring collections—or by licensing her outfit photographs to magazines like Japanese *Vogue*. Her allowance is less than ten dollars a week.

Tavi wore a baggy velvet dress that looked as if it had been made from a curtain, and a pair of red Comme des Garçons shoes with trompe-l'oeil toes drawn on the tops. Julia wore a fluffy blue skirt, a pink top, and a white cardigan. The girls climbed into the back of the Gevinson family van, a 2007 Toyota with bits of trash on the floor.

The Salvation Army had a couch out front, on which a woman in a nightgown was smoking a cigarette. Tavi views it as an excavation site. She explained, “Some people say, ‘It’s so gross. You don’t know who’s been wearing those clothes.’ And it’s, like, ‘Exactly!’ ”

As the adults watched, she and Julia wandered among the broken television sets and racks of old T-shirts. Despite the contrived situation, they grew absorbed by the clothes. They enthused over a four-dollar pair of Lucite heels the way a Barneys shopper coos over Manolo Blahniks.

“Oh, that’s like Edie Sedgwick!” Tavi said of a fake-leopard jacket.

“Tavi! It’s looking at you,” Julia said, of a toy troll.

Tavi examined a twelve-dollar polyester trenchcoat. “If you added that to the Lucite heels, you’d have the Prada collection from Spring 2010,” she said. “Everyone thought it was tacky, but I liked it.”

Later, Tavi led Julia and the cameramen up to her bedroom, which is accessible through her father’s study, a dimly lit area containing an ancient Dell computer, where she blogs. A plate of cold scrambled eggs sat on a shelf. Her room is about the size of a van, and the walls are lime green, a color chosen by her sister Rivkah. “I hate it,” she said. She had masked the offending color with “pictures of my favorite people: Lauren Santo Domingo, Giovanna Battaglia, Iman, John and Yoko, Wes Anderson, Gwyneth Paltrow, Courtney and Kurt, Tina Fey, Andy Warhol.” The floor was covered with fabric, Pez dispensers, and old issues of *Spin*—raw material for making things.

Julia, picking up an empty box for strawberry gum, asked, “Why do you keep this box?”

Tavi said, “In case I ever want to cut out the strawberry.” She pulled out a plastic drawer filled with clippings from fashion magazines.

“Let’s make different outfits for Barbie,” Julia suggested. They began assembling looks based on Barbie’s various “careers”: C.E.O. Barbie, Ballerina Barbie.

“You should add a new one: Fashion Blogger Barbie,” Julia said to the Mattel publicist. “You should have Tavi design it.”

Tavi hesitated. “I don’t know how many people would want that instead of a real job,” she said.

“You can do the hair like yours!” Julia said.

“That’d be scary,” Tavi said, fiddling with a pile of magazine clippings. “I don’t think anyone wants a

doll of me.”

In 2005, when Tavi was in third grade, she was infatuated with Broadway musicals, not clothes. But she was already a tastemaker. “I was really weird at school because I was into ‘Wicked,’ ” she said. “Then, in fourth grade, everyone got obsessed with it, and I remember feeling like it was being taken away from me.” So she found a new hobby: pasting cuttings from fashion magazines into a black binder. She recalls liking “the theatrical idea of fashion—that you can make up different characters.” At a sleepover at her friend Caroline’s house, Caroline’s sixteen-year-old sister, Stephanie, let the younger girls play dress-up in her closet. Stephanie had a fashion blog, and she showed it to Tavi, who soon logged into Blogspot and started her own. Her first post: “Well I am new here. . . . Lately, I’ve been really interested in fashion, and I like to make binders and slideshows of ‘high-fashion’ modeling and designs. . . . I plan on posting pictures in the future, but for now, I’m just getting started. Yours truly, Tavi.”

Unlike music prodigies, or math prodigies, fashion prodigies—at least, the public recognition of them—is a recent phenomenon, and it can be credited to the Internet. When today’s stylists and designers and magazine editors were growing up, they had to trek to out-of-the-way stores to find copies of *The Face* and *i-D*. “Those magazines were like relics,” Mark Holgate, the fashion-news director of *Vogue*, told me. Today, there are vast archives of visual information online, and discussion forums where users share scans of vintage magazine spreads. Tavi spent hours combing through them. A forum called Style Registry had images, she recalls, of “every ad campaign ever: Balenciaga campaigns from the eighties, a Chanel one from the nineties with Kira Nelson, every Prada campaign.” She sifted through runway photographs on Style.com, and examined outfits on a Flickr group called Wardrobe Remix, where users evaluate each other’s looks.

The personal-style blog owes a lot to Susie Lau—known online as Susie Bubble—a former account manager at a London ad agency. In 2008, she pioneered the “outfit-a-day” genre on her blog, Style Bubble, taking a picture of herself every morning and posting it, along with a comment on the clothes. Her blog is viewed by twenty-five thousand people a day and has inspired thousands of imitators.

From the beginning, Lau said, Tavi’s blog stood out, because of its jokey yet oddly articulate tone. (“Let’s play middle school. You be my therapist, I’ll be the confused seventh grader!”) Tavi’s early posts suggested an unusually deep knowledge of fashion history. (“Dressed as a Vivienne Westwood-obsessed early Kate Moss mixed with a lacy witch.”) There were nods to books, movies, and Greek mythology. And her look was surprisingly experimental: in one post, she wore a jagged black outfit that recalls early Yohji Yamamoto. The caption said, “This morning I wore a top my mom’s friend gave me upside-down and as a skirt.” She had added shiny leggings and made a coat hanger into a necklace: “I was pleasantly surprised to see that people at school were grabbing at my shiny legs, rather than trying to strangle me

with the coat hanger.”

In an era when newspapers are full of hoaxes involving children—Balloon Boy, Lonelygirl15, J. T. LeRoy—Tavi's speedy ascendance was met with skepticism. After she'd been posting for a few months, *New York's* fashion blog the Cut ran the first of many items speculating about whether the blog was a hoax perpetrated by an adult. Tavi's sister Miriam posted a defense in the comments section: “Tavi's my little sister, and she's definitely twelve and definitely hasn't gotten any help from anyone.”

In her hundredth blog post, Tavi announced her fashion philosophy: “In my opinion, the most interesting fashion is the Anti-Fashion. No rules, no restrictions, no normalcy, no *pleasing anyone*. . . . I might only be less attracted to the entire ‘chic’ deal because, as a younger person, I do gravitate more towards tackier clothes. That being said, I'm twelve! I have no one to impress and I'm not concerned about wearing something flattering to my body. I will dress as ugly and crazy as I want as long as I'm still young enough to get away with it. Suckerssss.” Comments from readers indicated that it was working: “I'm twice your age, and hope someday to be half the eloquent grownup you already are”; “Must. Kidnap. NOW!!!”

Tavi soon became an object of interest to the people she was writing about. John Galliano brought her and her father to Paris to see his Spring 2010 Dior couture show. Months after she posted an online video rapping about her love of Rei Kawakubo (“Rei Kawakubo/Can I be your friend?”), the designer had her flown to Tokyo, with her mother, to be the guest of honor at the Comme des Garçons holiday party, where she was mobbed by Japanese fans. (Both trips were paid for in part by *Pop* magazine.)

Laura Mulleavy, one of the two sisters who design the Rodarte label, told me, “We said, ‘We have to send her something cool.’ ” They mailed a pair of black gnarled-wool tights from their Autumn/Winter 2008 collection. Tavi took a picture of herself wearing them with a pink outfit, in the snow, and gave it the caption “OHMYGODOHMYGODOHMYGOD.”

Later, the Mulleaveys enlisted Tavi to star in an online video promoting a line they'd designed for Target. They arranged for her to shoot much of the video herself. In the first half, she wanders around at the designers' New York show, interviewing puzzled-looking celebrities, such as Kirsten Dunst and Elijah Wood. She then accompanies the Rodarte sisters to the North Dakota prairie, to watch the making of their ad campaign. The footage has an intimate, dreamy aura: images of models in Rodarte are spliced together with shots of Tavi playing in the tall grass; her voice—shy and shaky—drifts over the sound of crickets. Describing Tavi's appeal, Laura Mulleavy said, “I always think, Oh, I wish I could read that book for the first time again. It's that feeling of someone discovering something.” She described Tavi's talent for creating outfits as “an innate thing.”

Under her bed, Tavi has a box of keepsakes—inside jokes from her best friend, Ella, and a homemade book called “Pigg Latin.” “It's mostly jokes involving poop,” Tavi said. Mixed in are notes from designers. From John Galliano: “Dear Tavi, Welcome to Paris. Yours Truly, John.” From Miuccia Prada:

“Dear Tavi, I’m sorry we couldn’t talk more.” Tavi paused before reading them aloud, saying, “I feel kind of gross, being, like, ‘*This is from Miuccia.*’ ”

(Miuccia Prada wrote, in an e-mail, “I am impressed by the comprehension that Tavi has of fashion. She’s very young and that’s why her mixed vision of old and contemporary fashion is so interesting and unexpected.”)

Although Tavi has been quoted in dozens of newspapers and magazines, she has an uneasy relationship with the press. Style blogs are seen as part of a democratizing trend in fashion. Whereas once a small group of insiders attended runway shows and pronounced judgments from on high, the shows are now live-streamed—broadcast on the Internet—allowing anyone to watch and critique. “It’s shifting the idea of what ‘expert’ actually means,” Holgate, of *Vogue*, told me.

As an embodiment of this shift, Tavi has irritated some members of the Old Guard. In January, during the Paris couture shows, Sarah Mower, of the London *Telegraph*, wrote, “At the Dior show, trying to fight my way backstage to get a quote from John Galliano, I nearly fell over a tiny, grey-haired woman who, from the back, I took to be a septuagenarian Japanese fashion fanatic.” She went on, “I saw with a sick lurch, that it was actually Tavi Gevinson.” Mower, the mother of a teen-aged daughter, added that she had fantasized about confronting Tavi’s father: “I would have asked Mr. Gevinson why he thought it was right to take his daughter out of school to go to haute couture shows, where she would be treated like a celebrity by paparazzi.”

At the same Dior show, Tavi sat in the front row, wearing on her head a gigantic Minnie Mouse-style bow given to her by the milliner Stephen Jones. A veteran British fashion editor complained, on Twitter, that the bow had blocked her view; the incident generated headlines. Tavi wrote a defense on her blog: “Dudes, it is a HAT.”

When *Harper’s Bazaar* assigned Tavi to review the spring collections, Anne Slowey, the fashion-news director of *Elle*, was irked. She brought up the question of whether there was a “Tavi Team” behind the blog, and wrote, “Is it gimmicky to hire a 13-year-old au courant ‘sensation’ to write about fashion when the mean age of your reader is over forty? Maybe.” During a panel discussion at F.I.T., she commented, “She’s been thirteen for, like, the last four years.”

Joe Zee, the creative director of *Elle*, told me, “Let’s say Tavi’s fourteen, versus someone like Cathy Horyn”—of the *Times*—“who’s done this for x amount of years and can say, ‘When I was at the Galliano show ten years ago, this is how it was.’ Tavi can’t say that, because she was *four* ten years ago.” Slowey told me that, though she finds Tavi interesting—“all of her stuff is, like, layers of self-reflection”—she wonders if the fixation on her has gone too far. “She’s now a product,” Slowey said. “She very quickly turned herself into one. She was obsessed with an industry, and she turned it around so that they’re obsessed with her. She sells T-shirts online.” Tavi has sold five hundred shirts, imprinted with an abstract self-portrait, for forty dollars each.

Many fashion blogs have become sites of commerce, and are now viewed as marketing platforms by major companies, which recruit the bloggers with offers of cash and free clothing. Karen Robinovitz, a social-media consultant who works with brands like Juicy Couture and Club Monaco, told me, “These girls are sweeping it up. It’s like the Wild, Wild West.”

Tavi doesn’t consider her relationships with designers to be a conflict of interest, since she views her blog as “fangirling” more than as journalism. “When I post about something, it’s because I like it,” she said. Last year, an F.T.C. ruling required bloggers to note when they write about items that have been “gifted.” Tavi accepts gifts from designers, and regularly discloses the information. Miuccia Prada sent her two skirts from her 2001 collection, after Tavi wrote about it. More recently, Tavi became interested in a Miu Miu dress: “I e-mailed their P.R. director in New York and said, ‘Can I borrow some stuff? Because I want to take these pictures.’ ” She was sent the clothes, and returned them after the shoot.

The day after the Barbie mentoring event, the Gevinsons sat in their kitchen eating bagels. Tavi was drinking a glass of Nesquik, wearing her usual glasses, capri pants, a frilly blue little-girl’s dress as a top, and a yellow collar from Miu Miu. Berit was strumming a guitar.

“The first half year, I didn’t even look at the blog,” Berit said. “Tavi asked me not to.”

“I still wish you wouldn’t read it,” Tavi said. “It’s annoying. Then I have you in mind when I’m writing.”

“Maybe I shouldn’t read it,” Berit said. “But I always trust that she will use her judgment. We see what kind of kid she is. We never thought she’d post inappropriate things.”

“I’ve thought about it seriously, for sure,” Steve said. “The whole celebrity thing worries me. There are pitfalls to be avoided. The connection to money is a hard one to sort out.”

He thought for a second and recalled, “We were at Fashion Week. Tavi’d gotten a lot of attention, and we were having breakfast, and she said, ‘You know, I’m always going to be an outsider in this world.’ I said, ‘That’s great, but you never know. People go from being outsiders to insiders and don’t even realize it.’ ”

“People go from being outsiders to being *desired*,” Tavi said.

If you ask Tavi what she wants to do when she grows up, the answer varies. She once wrote a blog post, entitled “I Wish I Was a Cat,” which envisaged nine potential lives: “I would have a life to fulfill my fashion dreams, one to fulfill my acting dreams, one for guitar, one for writing, one for movie directing. . . . Also I could poop in a box.” In the meantime, being a fashion blogger has taken on grownup dimensions. Tavi recently hired a publicist, Dana Meyerson, a Chicago woman whose other clients include the rappers Diplo and Rah Digga. Meyerson is working on a plan to help Tavi sell advertising on her blog. “It seemed like the obvious next step,” Meyerson told me. Tavi assembled a list of the design houses she likes—Marc Jacobs, Prada, Celine, Balenciaga, Lanvin, Chanel—and Meyerson

has begun contacting them to propose advertising deals: running banner ads on Tavi's blog and, since many luxury design houses don't run ads online, setting up nontraditional forms of advertising, along the lines of the video Tavi made for Rodarte. "Ideally, it would be a collaboration between Tavi and the design house," Meyerson told me. She said this would require some imagination on the part of designers: "Most people don't want a fourteen-year-old at the helm of a creative campaign. But, then again, there's this power that she wields." Rates for such collaborative advertising projects vary, but bloggers can be paid up to four thousand dollars for posting about a product once, while photography bloggers, like Jak & Jil's Tommy Ton, can command freelance fees of up to twenty thousand dollars a day. This month, during Fashion Week, Tavi will guest blog for Barneys.com. She says she's not being compensated beyond having her expenses paid in New York.

Tavi acknowledged that such arrangements could create complications. "I'll just have to be more critical," she said. "I've never been the kind of blogger that posts a bag and is, like, 'Gosh, this is so ugly!' But I'll just be more honest if I feel negative about a collection and it happens to be the collection of my advertiser."

One day, I went to school with Tavi. She wore two dresses, one layered over the other, mismatched yellow and purple socks, and work boots. We walked a few blocks from her house, past a CVS ("where everyone buys candy") and a gas station ("where everyone buys disgusting chips"). At a crosswalk, two girls with backpacks fell into step with her.

"Hey," Tavi said.

"We saw you in the paper," one of them said. "Congratulations."

Tavi looked embarrassed. "Thanks," she said.

Tavi's school friends turned out to be a pack of gangly alpha girls with long, shiny hair and braces. They were dressed in yoga pants and Abercrombie T-shirts. I asked them if Tavi's blog came up much. "Not really," one said. "I like that my friends don't really care about fashion," Tavi told me later. "They just like Justin Bieber and sports."

In applied-art class, Tavi was working on an independent project: making miniature plaster busts of fashion icons. "I did five for every decade," she said. "For the nineties: Winona Ryder, Daria, Courtney Love. For the sixties: Mia Farrow, Janis Joplin." She was working on the eighties. "This is Madonna," she said, holding up a wobbly, headless sculpture. "I have to glue her head on."

Tavi's teachers seemed unfazed by her extracurricular pursuits. Her art teacher, Joe Berton, said, "It's been fun hearing about where she's going, like her first trip to Japan." Her math teacher, Christy Parsetick, said that Tavi "doesn't try to be any different." Parsetick didn't mind that Tavi missed class to attend fashion shows, "because she's really good. She comes back with her work done." This month, Tavi is skipping her third and fourth weeks of high school to attend Stephen Jones's retrospective at a

museum in Antwerp and New York Fashion Week.

If there is a dissenting opinion, it seems to come from adolescent boys—a group that Tavi often portrays on her blog as hopelessly lame. In one post, she described an interaction with a boy (“O”) who made fun of one of the outfits she wore to school—an homage to a Gareth Pugh neoprene pleated body-armor top, which she tried to re-create using CD jewel boxes as shoulder pads:

O: Why are you wearing that?

Me: Because nudity is a public offense.

O: But you look like a football player.

Me: You look and smell like an awkward, disheveled seventh grader.

In Tavi’s homeroom, the students had arranged themselves in gender-segregated clusters. When she walked in, a jockey boy in sweatpants announced the results of what had apparently been a discussion at his table: “Tavi, we decided *you* were the first one to listen to ‘Jesus, Etc.,’ by Wilco.” (Tavi is a friend of Spencer Tweedy, another fourteen-year-old blogger, whose father is Wilco’s Jeff Tweedy.) The comment wasn’t mean, exactly, but it singled her out. Instead of responding witheringly, Tavi put her head down. Later, she told me, “I was just thinking, ‘O.K., this conversation is stupid.’ ”

At lunch, the talk turned to an upcoming dance. Tavi had told me, “I’m not going with anyone, happily. It’s going to be really lame.”

One girl said, “Tavi, you should ask—”

“No!” Tavi said.

Her friend explained, “That’s her ex-boyfriend.”

At one point, a boy named Alex approached me in the hallway. He said that he was a drummer in a band. “We are very jealous of Tavi,” he said. “I always hear about her going to fashion shows over the weekend. She used to hang out, but now she doesn’t have time.”

In the past year, Tavi’s blog posts have become less compressed, and less focussed on her own clothes. “In seventh grade, I’d come home from school and take an outfit picture, post it, write a little bit about it, and write a little bit about the day,” she said. “Now I want to write more article-y things.”

This summer, she decided that she also wanted to try styling—coming up with the concept for a real magazine photo shoot and picking out all the clothes. Her publicist pitched the idea to the hipster magazine *BlackBook*. Tavi wanted to use, as a model, the actress and sometime designer Chloë Sevigny, whom she likes for her rebellious vibe. She cited an article from this magazine about Sevigny that described her blowing off a photo shoot with Steven Meisel. “I think that’s kind of cool,” Tavi said, “even though I would be there bright and early.”

To come up with a look for the shoot, she decided to make “mood boards”—essentially, collages. She

combed the Web sites of Seigny's fans for pictures. "It made me feel really creepy," she said. One mood board, which she described as "grunge hippie," included flower-covered shoes, a bean plant sprouting in a jar, and an actress in a floral bikini. She e-mailed the P.R. offices of various designers and asked to borrow thirty pieces. "I had all the collections in my head already," she said. "It's just from being obsessed."

The day before the shoot, Tavi and her father stopped by *BlackBook's* offices, on East Nineteenth Street, in New York. It was a hot day, and Tavi was wearing an Alexander McQueen jellyfish-print tank top over a star-covered Risto Bimbiloski dress. The dress was sleeveless, and you could see that her figure had changed dramatically since the earliest days of her blog: she had become curvy.

Chloë Seigny had cancelled, as she had with Meisel. And so Tavi sat in a conference room with the editors to cast a replacement. On a computer, they scrolled through pictures of stringy young models.

"For this story I don't want it to look like a teen-ager," Tavi said. She settled on a broad-faced girl, a mature-looking sixteen-year-old named Christine Staub, whom most high schoolers would likely recognize as the daughter of Danielle Staub, one of the original cast members of "The Real Housewives of New Jersey." Instead, Tavi homed in on her resemblance to Mariel Hemingway. "She could be Woody Allen's next muse!" Tavi said.

Next, Tavi put together outfits using the clothes she had chosen—a test of whether her creativity could translate into a professional forum. "There's a difference between being a fashion aficionado and being able to put together an entire twelve-page fashion spread that has consistency and builds a story," *BlackBook's* fashion editor, Christopher Campbell, told me.

Tavi went into a tiny fashion closet crammed with designer clothes. Hovering by the door were four interns, who towered over her. Her clothing selection was, according to Campbell, "a tight edit," and he was worried about whether she'd gathered enough raw material. "Why don't we leave Tavi to play around?" he said.

For an hour, she arranged the clothes in clashing layers that evoked the swirls of color in gasoline. A moss-green Missoni sweater jacket was paired with a neon tie-dyed dress. A gray wool Marc Jacobs A-line skirt went under a pink Missoni skirt that took on the look of an apron.

The resulting ensembles looked like outfits you'd expect to see in the pages of a hip magazine. And they were not nearly as strange, or as interesting, as the clothes on her blog.

Campbell, at any rate, was happy. "I love it!" he said, when he came back in. "It has a consistency. The unexpected layers, the colors, the clashing patterns. It's kind of hard to believe you've never styled a photo shoot."

Tavi generally seems calm about the possibility that, when she's no longer a child, the fashion world will lose interest in her. "I guess that's sort of a worry of mine," she said. "That I won't be relevant anymore, and then I just won't be able to do things like go to Fashion Week." She went on, "If I lost all

my readers tomorrow, I would still blog, just because it's a place for me to get my thoughts down. As I get older, no one will be able to do the 'Can you believe it? This kid's thirteen!' thing. That's fine. I'd rather get attention for any credibility I have, and if I don't get attention at all maybe that will tell me I never had any credibility. In which case I'll just watch the live streams. The main thing is the clothes."

Tavi had requested that the *BlackBook* photo shoot be held in a log cabin. The next morning, the fashion crew—editors, model, interns, photographer, hair and makeup artists—drove, in two vans, to an organic-moss farm called Sticks and Stones, in Newtown, Connecticut. Tavi was wearing a girly ensemble—a white dress and a black bow made of Miu Miu fabric. The farmer, a middle-aged woman in a straw hat, asked, "Who's she?"

Steve answered, "She's got a fashion blog."

The farmer nodded. "My daughter's twenty-two. She has a blog called Sexy Tofu. She writes about her two favorite things—food and sex."

Tavi dressed Staub, the model, in a hallway at the back of the barn. The shoot ranged across the farm, and Tavi shouted out directions to the hairdresser: "Wet hair's good with the Rodarte look, don't you think?" She considered the pink-and-gray skirt combo with a pair of black heels, and added pink socks. After a pause, she added purple socks over that. "We needed to balance out the pink and the other colors," she said.

"The socks make it!" Campbell said. He kneeled and adjusted the folds around Staub's ankles. Tavi plucked at the model's sleeves. "Scrunch it just a little bit," she said. "It gives it more texture." She stood back, pleased, and let the photographer snap away. ♦