

Presenting the Self in Social Media

A study of a self presentation
in a community of bloggers

Master's thesis



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Author:
Janne-T. Lauritzen
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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the representation of self in new and social media such as blogs. The research question is: How do bloggers express the self in multi modal representations? The thesis objects of study are five blogs kept by five women preoccupied with interior decoration and life style projects. The blogs are self representational narratives and personal “push-button” publishing, hosted by the same blog host (*Blogger*) and the study looks at the affordance of the blogging software. “Push-button” refers to the software’s affordance involving the user interface which makes publishing feasible for people with no prior knowledge of the medium of blogs.

Theoretically, the approach is interdisciplinary involving sociology, social semiotics, multimodality and media science. Social semiotics constitutes a major part in the theoretical framework and the study explores the semiotic practices within the particular culture of interior bloggers. Social semiotics is also concerned with the situational context in which the activity of blogging takes place. The case study explores the use of different modes, their affordances and their prominence in the blogs’ multimodal ensemble.

The thesis argue that people enter the blogosphere for various reasons, and the fact that creating and maintaining a blog is fairly easy and user-friendly is a major incitement. Another important incentive is that the bloggers want to say something; they have stories they want to share with their fellow-beings. The intersection of private and public is noticeable in all of the blogs in the case study.

The aspect of story telling is important and the bloggers engage in a narrative-of-self in which life style identity is closely related to the ideology of a particular decoration style and the items associated with this style. The case study show that the bloggers share a cultural identity and that the multimodal discourse in the blogs reflects this.

Identity and presenting the self are related to sociologist Goffman’s theory concerning staging the self in everyday life. The thesis claims that the bloggers foresee a model reader or a model audience when they create their blogs and that their performance reflects this.

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This thesis is the result of hard work and hours in front of the computer screen, scrutinising blogs set up by five enthusiastic women dedicated to interior styling and decorating. The bloggers willingly share their expertise and experiences with anyone who might be interested. These women have devoted a lot of time and energy to creating appealing blogs worth reading.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This master's thesis sets out to explore self presentation in social media represented by blogs. Blogs are digitally constructed texts consisting of multiple modes such as written language, still and moving images, sound, and layout. Furthermore, blogs are sites of display and mediated representations of social interaction. Blogging is personal "push-button" publishing made possible by digital technology through the medium of web. Digital technology has become 'increasingly embedded in everyday' (Carrington 2009: 16). Given their wide dissemination in Western society, blogs hold a central position in the public sphere. In October 2009, 453 500 Norwegian blogs were registered (Haloblogg¹). Blogging is a way of getting people's voices heard. Most bloggers' favourite topics are their own lives and experiences (Lenhart and Fox, 2006).

This thesis views blogs as inherently personal and as an expression of the self. Bloggers present themselves through and by the medium of blogs. Here, the presentation of self refers to the disclosure of personal information, whether given intentionally or not, in a particular social context. Also, the blogs are viewed as representations of the self per se. Blogs are social media. Social media are characterised by the integration of a range of modes. Modes are understood as representations of meaning used in communication and the act of meaning making (Jewitt, 2009). 'It can no longer be assumed that textual meaning is held entirely in [the mode of] print' (Carrington 2009: 12, my insertion). Modes such as still and moving images, layout and colour, sound, and written narratives each have their distinctive features or individual properties and potentials in the process of making and communicating meaning. The term *modal affordances*, refers to 'what it is possible to express and represent easily with a mode' (Jewitt 2009: 293). The affordances of the digital technology encourage and support multimodal texts. The master's thesis aims to inquire into how multimodal texts are used in semiotic² practices and how the texts are specific to the publishers of interior blogs. Furthermore, the thesis will take a close look at semiotic resources, signs and modes and inquire into factors such as modal choice and multimodal discourse which are associated with social semiotics.

In this thesis' study the blogs are the physical representations of human interaction and the media technology used to substantiate the communication or the signs that are produced by the participants. Consequently, images, speech, written text, music, and film become the

¹ <http://www.halogen.no/om-halogen/publikasjoner/undersokelser/bruk-av-sosiale-medier/> [Accessed 17/03/2010].

² Semiotics is the science of the life of signs in society (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

digital embodiments of the physical interaction. Blogs are results of sign activity or semiosis, that is, the activity of meaning making. The thesis explores how the self is presented and constructed in the blog's multimodal discourse.

This thesis' theoretical approach is interdisciplinary. The aesthetical dimension in online multimodal expressions is central and a part of self presenting which brings in a socio cultural dimension into the thesis. All human activity takes place in a sociological, ecological, and cultural context (Halliday and Hasan, 1985).

The activity of blogging can be viewed as digital storytelling, that is, self expression as narrative. This thesis will apply the term narrative-of-self when referring to the construction of self in multimodal representations. The case study looks at four selected blogs in general and one blog in particular. All blogs are in some ways connected to each other and this thesis argues that the blogs share a cultural identity. The main blog is kept by a woman in her early thirties with a keen interest for interior decoration and photography. She uses her self representational blog as a showcase for interior decoration preferences and life style closely related to identity. The multimodal representations are central in her narrative-of-self. The thesis asks: In what way do the affordances of digital technology influence the construction and shaping of identities in blogs and contribute to the narrative of self?

1.2 Structure of the thesis

In addition to the introduction, this thesis' chapter one gives an account of the motivation and background for the thesis' case study.

Chapter two presents the theoretical features and related literature concerning new and social media in general and blogs in particular. The thesis' focus is on a community of bloggers dedicated to a particular interior decoration style and its underlying ideology explicitly addressed in the literature of Rachel Ashwell, the founder of the interior decoration style known as *Shabby Chic*. The blogs are multimodal and the multimodal representations thus enter into a multimodal discourse. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis places emphasis on the social context in which a text gets its meaning. In establishing the social context, the study makes use of the three features of the context put forward by Halliday and Hassan. The thesis employs the multimodal approach related to Kress and van Leeuwen's work, particularly the Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The texts in the blogs are seen in a social semiotic perspective, and the thesis bases its theory on the work of Halliday and Hasan as well as Kress and van Leeuwen.

The thesis looks as the staging of self in blogs by utilising the dramaturgical

perspective and the theory of sociologist Goffman. The intimate relationship between identity and life style products are described by Dokk-Holm and the notion of self harbouring multiple identities is generated by Turkle and Prieur. In addition, this thesis has chosen to bring in the narrative aspect of constructing the self by regarding the blogs as self-narrative.

The blogs are composite texts consisting inter alia of bits and pieces taken from other media, brought together and thus becoming bricolage. Keeping a blog entails an audience and expectations of continuously updating. The role of the reader is central in the blogs. The thesis has used the perspective of Eco when describing the blogs' Model Readers.

Chapter three looks at the theoretical and methodological tools for the multimodal analysis including methods of data collection and analysis, referring specifically to the blogging software and more particularly to the blogs. The objects of research are blogs observed in a period of three months. By conducting a case study, this thesis looks closely at the affordance of the blogging software. The study assesses the multiple modes, their prominence and their affordances as well as the semiotic resources. Moreover, the study explores the social context and the cultural identity of the bloggers. The staging of the self is viewed against the theoretical background of Goffman and the close knitting of lifestyle and identity indicated by Dokk Holm is investigated.

Chapter four discusses the findings and the interpretations of the case study. This thesis' objects of study, the interior blogs, are personal narratives brought into being by young women with a keen interest in home decoration and life style products and accessories deriving from a particular interior decoration style. The influence of the *Shabby Chic* ideology is tangible and evident in the narrative-of-self. Although not explicitly expressed in the narrative, the multimodal discourse is characterised by the bloggers preference for and adherence to the ideology. The mode of still image is most dominant and the semiotic resources are part of a semiotic inventory deriving from the interior trend. The role of the reader is central in the construction of self-narrative. The blogger is to a great extent dependent on her readers in order to continue her narrative-of-self and continue her ongoing performance. The dialogical relationship is de facto the foundation of the blog and the condition of existence.

Chapter five sums up the discussion and views the blogs from a meta perspective.

1.1 Motivation

Today, any media message from writing a text to making an advanced audio visual presentation, typically involves the use of digital technology such as a computer. These

activities not only presuppose the mastering of the computer as a tool, but also the knowledge of its properties and potential or its affordances. The first generation of young people, referred to as *screen agers* or the *digital natives*, are growing up with 'the computers as a natural medium' (Nygård 2008: 1).

The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research's programme for ICT in education, called 'Digital Literacy for all', establishes ICT competence as a basic skill per se, on equal terms with skills such as writing and reading. A central part of being digitally literate is the ability to handle a person's own presence in online media by presenting oneself (Hoem, 2006). Society is becoming increasingly textualised. Moreover, texts have sponsors. This master's thesis puts an emphasis on the interpretation and critical evaluation of the mediated texts in order to comprehend the process of shaping the self by multimodal representations. Presenting and shaping the 'self' has been made feasible by digital technology and the medium of web. Neither face-to-face interaction nor texts on paper share this self publishing medium's properties. 'The Web is a medium ideally adapted to the dynamic purposes of identity maintenance' (Chandler: 2009, no pagination). The web is also a perfect medium for creating identities (Hoem, 2006; Turkle, 1995). Given the fact that access to reality is mediated by language, we have to resort to ways of thinking as well as on concepts and ideas in order to make sense of the world around us. These factors are, in their turn, dependent on language and the social context in which we find ourselves. This is referred to as social constructivism (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland, and Larsen, 2007). This thesis emphasises the need to take the social context into account in the construction of an identity in a community of bloggers.

Many people seem to possess considerable competence in building multimodal self presentations on web pages, but the boundaries between public and private or even business and pleasure are often blurred. In many cases, it is not self evident whether the texts are fiction or not. As far as this thesis' writer is concerned, the interweaving of the public and the private in the blogs calls for a critical assessment of the texts. The blogs in this thesis case study are syntheses of business and pleasure, of advertising and the promotion of particular life style products and interior decoration styles; all embedded in a multimodal text appearing as personal trivia. This thesis critically assesses the narrative-of-self in relation to the intersection between the public and the private when life style products and interior decoration styles are concerned.

1.2 Background

Blogs are diverse and people enter the blogosphere for various reasons. Technorati³, a search engine designed to search the blogosphere for blogs of particular interest, informs in the annual 'State of the Blogosphere' that 'self-expression and sharing expertise continue to be the primary motivations for bloggers, and 70% of all respondents say that personal satisfaction is a way they measure the success of their blog' (See example 1). The motives for keeping a blog will be elaborated in the discussion subsequent to the study in this thesis.

Blogs have become popular because they provide an easy, flexible way for people to communicate that which they care about with friends, network of friends, colleagues, and broader audiences as well. The blogs are 'mediated by the variety of tacit rules, social relations and the subtle framing of the software used to publish it' (Lundby 2008: 13). This thesis argues that the bloggers in the case study share a cultural identity, that is, they share the qualities that epitomize the interior decoration style by the name of *Shabby Chic*. The founder of this particular and very popular style is Rachel Ashwell. Her ideology shines through the blogs in this thesis study and has a substantial impact on the bloggers' way of expressing the self-narrative and how they present their world.

Self presentation in the blogs is, in simple terms, what the bloggers want to say about themselves and how they present their world. This master's thesis aims, in equal simple terms, to explore *how* they say it.

1.3 Area of research

Blogs are social media and representations of multiple semiotic modes. T. Rasmussen's book *Nettmedier* as well as A. Fagerjord's *Web Media*, provide some of the theoretical framework concerning the social medium of blog. The article "Participation, remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture" by Deuze (2006), has identified the principal components in the digital culture, and the components of remediation, participation, and bricolage are discussed. The components are also presented in this thesis as part of the digital culture in the blogs. Furthermore, articles relating to social media such as Carrington's article "From blog to bebo and beyond: text, risk, participation" (2009) are central. Carrington asks for a debate concerning the 'core' literacy skills on the literacy curricula. Literacy skills must reflect the role of the changing textual practices in today's media.

³ 'Technorati is an extraordinary tool for tracking the rise of stories on the blogosphere as well as cross-referencing posts. If I want to see who is commenting on Hugh Hewitt's latest post, for example, I type my URL into the Technorati search engine and presto, a list of blogs referencing my own appears' (Hewitt 2005: 110).

Texts must be viewed in a social context in order to convey meaning. This thesis approaches the notion of texts in a sociological context. The major theoretical perspective is social semiotics, that is, the semiotic practices in a specific community or culture. Social semiotics is concerned with the creation of texts and meaning making in various social and cultural contexts and situations. Influential developers of social semiotics presented in this thesis are M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan, G. Kress, and T. van Leeuwen. This thesis is based mainly on their work; however, articles by Constantinou (2005) and Walsh (2006) together with Gripsrud (2002) as well as Berkåk and Frønes (2005) have also been important. Central in this research are the multimodal representations found in blogs, and C. Jewitt's *Handbook of Multimodal Analysis* (2009) along with *Multimodal Discourse Analysis* (Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) constitute the basis and conceptual framework in this field.

Creating the self-narrative involves making a good impression and creating a representative image of the self, suitable for the purpose. In E. Goffman's terms, the intention (deliberately or not) is to stage the self. Goffman's perspective is dramaturgical, and in his seminal book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, the theatrical stage is metaphor used to explain how people manage the impressions they want to convey to the surrounding world, even referred to as impression management. The perspective of sociologist A. Giddens, professor of media studies and culture K. Drotner, and professor of the social studies of sciences S. Turkle are also involved in this thesis.

The role of the reader is pivotal in the blogs, and U. Eco, semiotician and literary critic, provides the theoretical base together with H.R. Ewald, professor of rhetoric and professional communication at Iowa State University. Ewald has written the article "The Model Reader: Audiences within genres" (1986). Ewald's article explores the 'interrelationship between audience and discourse type' (Ewald 1986: 3). Eco's book *The Role of the Reader* underscores the need for taking the 'role of the addressee' into account when looking for meaning in texts (Eco 1979:3).

The aspect of storytelling is essential in the narrative-of-self. This thesis employs the work of Dokk Holm (2001) and Hansen (2001) when relating consumption, identity, and lifestyle.

Chapter 2 Theoretical focus

When a new medium appears on the social scene, existing cultural and social standards are likely to be discussed and even adjusted. This process constitutes the framework in which the

media are understood and developed (Drotner, 1999: 33). The web log or the blog is a relatively new medium. The blogging software which facilitates the process of making texts and publishing the blog became available to the public at large around the year 2000. The following chapter aims to present the blog by placing this medium in the context of New Media and Social Media. Exploring the narrative of the self in the medium of blogs involves looking at the multimodal representations and the underlying theory of multimodality as well as the semiotic resources used in the processes of making meaning.

This chapter will outline a theoretical and conceptual framework involving media texts and the notion of discourse, relevant in this thesis study. The understanding of discourse in relation to social and situational meaning brings in sociologist Erwin Goffman's theory of staging the self in human interaction as well as Umberto Eco's notion of the role of the reader. Also, the social semiotic perspective is important in this thesis study.

2.1 New and Social Media

New Media is a generic term for many different forms of electronic communication rendered possible by digital technology. Sound, text, images, and data are transmitted electronically through transmission media such as the computer and the mobile phone. Digital technology's capacity for transmitting huge amounts of information has led to the development of the World Wide Web. The World Wide Web can be regarded as a technology holding media such as newspapers, television, radio, film, and magazines. The fact that different media share the same technology is nothing new in itself; newspapers and books are examples of two different media sharing the same technology (Fagerjord, 2008). The novelty, in broad terms, is that whereas traditional media's representations of text and graphics such as magazines and newspapers can be regarded as a static and one-way communication, new media such as mobile phones and the Internet appear as dynamic and interactive with unique properties such as flexibility and the potential for manipulation. Here, traditional media refer to media that are not mediated through and by the technology of web.

One of New Media's main features is the possibility for people 'to capture and share content' (Deuze 2006: 64). Kress (2003) emphasises that New Media has facilitated the simultaneous use of written texts, still and moving images, and sound in an online medium. What is more, new media has also enabled almost anyone to mediate their daily lived experience by publishing personal narratives such as blogs (Fagerjord, 2006). The features of New Media noted above will enter in the study and the subsequent discussion in this thesis study. Of equal relevance in the forthcoming study and discussion is New Media's relation to

traditional media. New communication technologies alter not only the distribution channels of information, but also possess an inherent capacity to radically change the hegemony of the mass media (Hewitt, 2005).

Hewitt maintains that media's information and distribution monopoly is decreasing because today's users of the Internet are able to publish whatever and whenever they want. Information can be accessed at any time and the users are free to determine what is to be considered relevant news from their own perspective. Traditional media's function as the gate-keeper, that is, the right to decide what is considered news and how, where, and when to present them, is facing a great challenge (Hewitt, 2005). This thesis will look at the relationship between the interior design magazines and the interior design blogs.

New media has given anyone with access to a computer and the Internet the possibility to say something and thus express the self in digitally mediated representations. The underlying motives for establishing a web site are not always altruistic and noble and, hence, reliance becomes very important in the society of web users. The intimate relationship between bloggers based on mutual trust becomes especially apparent in the blogs in this thesis study. Bloggers and creators of others web sites are typically engaging in dialogues. Furthermore, it has become increasingly customary 'to bring in the social network online' (Fagerjord 2006: 104, my translation⁴).

2.1.1 Social media: taking part in the digital culture

Blogs are social media. Social media refers to a technology and the use of this technology characterised by the user's interrelations and the exchange of information, content, subject matters, experiences, opinions, and media. The most important features of social media are 'the online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online' involving 'collaboration and participation' (Newson et al., 2009: 49). Social media comprise technologies such as social networking sites, web forums such as blogs, wikis⁵, podcasting and videocasting, virtual worlds, and social bookmarking (ibid.) Other social media categories are places for sharing photo, music, and video such as Flickr and YouTube, social bookmarking such as Delicious and micro blogging such as Twitter (See example 2).

On the basis of users being the creators of the agenda and the content, social media are often referred to as user-directed media (Fagerjord, 2006) or participatory media (Rettberg,

⁴ '...å ta med det sosiale nettverket sitt på nettet' (Fagerjord 2008: 104).

⁵ A Wiki is defined as 'A website or similar online resource which allows users to add and edit content collectively' (http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/SARC/E-Democracy/Final_Report/Glossary.htm , accessed 19/04/2010).

2008). Blogs, online communities, discussion forums, and other media sites are examples of social media. Today's media users, according to Deuze (2006), tend to view mass media as 'constructed, assembled, and manipulated' (ibid: 66). In some people view, mass media are not credible. What is more, the motives of the people controlling mass media cannot always be trusted. When mass media appear as impersonal and distanced from reality, the only way to make sense of the 'mediated world' is to intervene and become an 'active agent' (participant) in the process of meaning-making (ibid: 66). People who keep blogs are typical examples of active agents making sense of the world by publishing their personal narratives.

Although the active agents adopt the properties of media, these properties are modified and manipulated or, in Deuze's approach, they become reconstituted. Features of traditional media are recreated in new media, and thus the participants 'reform consensual ways of understanding reality' (Deuze 2006: 66). Online newspapers are examples of remediation as are blogs. Blogs have few if any immediate equivalents in traditional media; however they are frequently compared with the diary. This may be due to the dated entries appearing chronologically and, most likely, to the personal style. The glossy interior magazines serve as sources of inspiration for the bloggers in this thesis case study. The forthcoming study will discuss the relationship between the magazines and the blogs. Although the blog differs from the magazine by being user-directed and personal, the close relationship between the two media renders the notion of remediation relevant

In order to personalise their blog, the bloggers have a number of tools and instruments at their disposal other than the blogging software. The bloggers can create their own particular versions of the reality by using items or ideas and integrate them in their own creations. The term bricolage refers to the making of something new by means of something that is already there (Levi-Strauss, 1962 in Ridderstrøm, 2005). In this thesis study the bloggers are adherent to styles of interior known as *Vintage*, *Shabby Chic*, and *French Country Style*. The interior blogger in this thesis study has taken bits and pieces of each style and created a particular blend. The bricoleur possesses a repertoire of small units in order to form a whole (Ridderstrøm, 2005). This thesis study will look at the blogger as bricoleur the construction of the narrative-of-self.

In blogs, different media converge into one medium, that is, the blogging software allows the blogger to embed media such as films, music and television in the same medium. The blogs are reconstitutions of media converged in one medium. The three 'principals of digital culture', Deuze argues, are the concepts of participation, remediation, and bricolage (2006: 67). The notion of culture will be discussed later in this thesis.

2.1.2 The blog and the activity of blogging

The neologism ‘blog’ is a derivative of the words web and log⁶. Blog means ‘a web page that is made up of information about a particular subject, in which the newest information is always at the top of the page [= web log]’⁷. The keeper of the blog is called blogger and the groups of blogs are informally termed blogosphere. These terms will be used in this thesis. In simple and broad terms, the blog is a personal website site with ‘time-dated postings’ maintained by a blogger or a poster⁸ (Hewitt, 2005). Blogs are hosted on different sites such as *Blogger*⁹ which constitutes the blogging system represented in this thesis. (See example 3). Free blogging software has made blogging easily accessible and simple for users of the Internet and thus opened up publishing for ordinary people. Blogs are typically linked to ‘specific communities of interest’ (Hoem and Schwebs 2005, no pagination).

Blogging can be viewed a kind of personal publishing where the blogger is an active producer of information (Hoem, 2004). Contrary to traditional media’s printed diaries and autobiographies, blogs are first of all published without the approval a publisher. Not only that, the “off-the-record” information or the personal styled information is made entirely on the bloggers’ premises. The blogger decides when, how, what, and if the information will be published. In other words, the bloggers are free to set their own agenda. Hewitt characterises blogging as ‘...a relentlessly opinionated world of first-person open journalism’ (2005: 104). Deuze (2006) consider blogs as individualised online storytelling. Stone (2004) on her part, claims that blogging is

‘self-expression, personal publishing, a diary, amateur journalism, the biggest disruptive technology since e-mail, an online community, alternative media, curriculum for students, a customer relations strategy, knowledge management, navel gazing, a solution to boredom, a dream job, a style of writing, e-mail to everyone, a fad, social networking, and more’ (ibid: 34-35).

Katz (2006) compares blogs to the pirate radio stations of the 1970s and 1980s. These radio stations broadcasted ‘unfiltered perspectives self legitimized by their existence outside of, or in opposition to, mainstream news media cooperations’ (cited in Deuze 2006: 65). Stone argues that the blog can be viewed as ‘...a more direct, low-barrier broadcasting medium’ (2004: 69). All thanks to new media and the software provided by various blog sites on the

⁶ A log is an official record of events often used in connection with sea voyages.⁶

⁷ <http://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/blog>, retrieved 2009-11-19.

⁸ In this thesis, the person or persons composing the blog is called a blogger.

⁹ <https://www.blogger.com/start>, accessed 16/05/2010.

web. The following section will look at the general features of blogs and blogging. The blogs subjected to this thesis study, the interior blogs, will be presented in the subsequent case study.

2.1.3 The features of the blog:

Blogs are websites; however, they differ from other websites by being inherently personal. Publishing a blog does not ‘rely on any editorial staff’ (Hoem and Schwebs 2005, no pagination). Whereas updating websites requires a certain expertise or knowhow, blogs can easily be edited and updated anytime by almost anyone (Newson, 2009). One significant feature of blogs is chronology, that is, the site consists of dated entries where the most recent entry appears at the top (Engebretsen, 2002).

The hosting site *Blogger* provides search options to help readers find previous posts, but it is the present not the past that is quintessential. The principle of the sinking importance referred to as the ‘inverted pyramid’, involves putting the most important information on the top followed by the next important post below in a diminishing order of importance.¹⁰ In other words, the blogging software’s inherent properties typically seem to favour the posts of current interest.

Technorati does not regard links ‘older than six months in its ranking of blog results, and other blog search engines likewise prioritize the new’ (Rettberg 2008: 65). The innovation is appraised most valuable, older blogs fade into oblivion. Active blogs are frequently updated; in fact, the hallmark of a blog seems to be immediacy, that is, the blog must undergo changes and revisions continuously. If the blog is to be taken forward and the blogger wants to keep his or her readers, regularly and frequent publishing is an absolute necessity.

Blogs are driven by an inner dynamic insisting on a constant stream of updates (Rasmussen, 2006). Failing to comply with the persistent, however covert, demand of updating, can represent the blog’s certain death. If the blogger is making money on his or her blog, failing to update is bad for business indeed. Linda’s blog called *Lindas Skattkammer*, are also driven by loyalty to their readers. Linda has not updated her blog for a couple of days, and to make sure her readers do not disappear, she explains:

Advent is a nice time, but this year things didn’t go as planned. The last days have mostly been spent in hospital due to a seriously ill member of the family. But I had to drop in here [the blog] to show the lovely prize I received from Villmarkstausa.blogspot.com [another interior blog]. [...] Thank you very

¹⁰ http://www.nettskriving.no/-/bulletin/show/21178_den-omvendte-pyramide?ref=mst

much, you kind-hearted. Everything was to my liking! (Lindas Skattkammer 29/11/2009, my translation and my insertion¹¹).

The question of recency, that is how often the blogger needs to publish entries, does not necessarily involve the aspect of exact timing. The study ‘Exploring the Role of the Reader in the Activity of Blogging’ by Baumer et al. (2008), found that the readers experienced the blog posts in ‘temporal order’ and that this mattered more than the exact time of publishing. ‘The recency of a blog has more to do with the number of other posts that have occurred since the post in question than with the amount of time that has passed’ (ibid. no pagination).

The entries or blog posts can be produced anytime and there is no deadline for publication. Some bloggers are content with writing down a few lines, others are more communicative. Fagerjord (2006) points to the fact that reading on screen is different from reading on paper. People seem to be skimming through a webpage in search for something more interesting or some other links. It is harder to concentrate on reading a large amount of text on the screen; the longer the text appears, the more restless the reader becomes. Not only that, the certainty that there is a lot more ‘out there’ waiting to be explored, is a powerful incentive to hurry along without dwelling upon the current page. Hence, many people remain cautious with their verbosity and tend to use subheading and images to facilitate reading the webpage (Fagerjord, 2006).

The blog’s narrative is generally fragmented and the posts tell brief and episodic stories that can be read independently (Rettberg, 2008). Deuze (2006) refers to blog posts as petit narratives. Read together, the dated blog posts or petit narratives ‘create a larger story’ (Rettberg 2008: 111). Although it is possible to view each text individually, it may be useful to conceptualise each individual text as part of an ensemble of connected texts. These connected texts together create a much larger, dynamic networked text (Carrington 2009: 10).

Blogs are typically related to other blogs by various kinds of links. Presentation links indicate that the text is continuing on another page. Navigation links are intended to helping the reader to find his or her way on the blog, and the relation links are links between corresponding blogs (Fagerjord, 2006). The most common is referring to other blogs and recommend or comment on them. Another is response or a reaction to something appearing on a blog such as comments following a blog post. Links to alternative versions or ‘more of

¹¹ Advent er en fin tid, men i år gikk ikke ting som planlagt, desverre. Jeg har de siste dagene stort sett tilbringt tiden på sykehuset pga. alvorlig sykdom i familien. Men må jo innom her for å vise den fine premien jeg fikk fra Villmarktausa.blogspot.com [...] Tusen tusen takk snille deg, alt falt i smak og var midt i blinken for meg! Note: The spelling and grammatical errors are authentic.

the same' are very frequent (Fagerjord 2006: 85, my translation¹²).

Interaction with other blogs is important if the blog is to maintain its current interest and attract new readers. Bloggers are very often inclined to recognise and give complements to corresponding blogs. 'Crediting your sources makes you look more legit and builds a better network of information' (Stone 2004: 73). The editor typically comments on the links (Blood, 2000).

Eventually in this entry, I want to [give] these roses to *My White House*. I was the lucky winner of a present. I look forward to receiving it through the mail. Kjerstin has a very nice blog that brings pleasure. Congratulations with 20 000 visitors (*Shabby Charm* 30/11/2008, my translation¹³ and my insertion).

To provide the reader with a chance of leaving the blog and entering another may seem paradoxical or kind to a fault, but this courtesy pays off, as this thesis will show later. 'You're better off doing that [link back to someone's blog] anyway because links are the currency of the blogosphere' (Stone 2004: 73, my insertion). With reference to social media, blogs are social software and 'peer-to-peer building' (ibid: 35). Once bloggers find a blog they have a preference for, they are likely to find others. Consequently, as Blood points out, the blogs 'provide a valuable filtering function for their readers', that is, the readers do not have to search all over the web themselves (2006, no pagination). Also, this reciprocal recognition of blogs within a particular group of interest is peer-to-peer building per se (ibid).

Blogs can be viewed as a kind of 'word of mouth referral', that is, they refer to other blogs either by mentioning or praising, or by listing the blogs by virtue of preference in a list of blogs referred to as a blog roll (Newson 2009: 11). The blog offers opportunities for the readers to post comments to each blog entry. The possibility of interacting, on of the software's affordances, enables the readers and the editor to participate in a ceaseless, asynchronous dialogue. The dialogue appears as asynchronous because the blogger and the commentator cannot communicate synchronously. The commentator must respond subsequent to the blog entry. 'Comments, challenges, personal anecdotes can all be added to the initial post to build an accumulative textual history that links a number of sites and people' (Carrington 2009: 11).

¹² '...mer av det samme' (Fagerjord 2008: 85).

¹³ 'Til slutt i dette innlegget vil jeg disse rosene til [Mitt Hvite Hus](http://mitt.hvite.hus). Jeg var den heldige vinneren av en gave. Gleder meg til den kommer i posten. Kerstin har en veldig fin blogg som gir nettopp GLEDE. Gratulerer med 20.000 besøkende!
<http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>

The blogs are marked by their creators' personality and the focus is generally personal. With the 'particular mixture of links, commentary, and personal observation unique to each individual site' gives the blog 'its distinctive voice and personality' (Blood, 2006, no pagination). Most bloggers are not professional writers and their 'voices' appear as authentic and real. This thesis argues that the notion of authenticity and personality is a key concept in the blogs and, hence, this will be discussed later in this thesis.

2.1.4 Medium or genre?

Is the blog a medium or a genre? In the field of media research, the notion of genre is typically viewed in relation to either the socio-cultural, intertextual, or aesthetic (sometimes also the psychological) dimension. What is more, 'genre is perceived as a concept that refers to dimensions within as well as outside the text' (Knudsen 2004: 13). Knudsen refer to 'the ever more floating borders' between genres and media: 'Genre and medium construct one another and merge e.g. when we operate with computer games, the Internet, and e-zines electronic magazines, Net journals)' (Knudsen 2004: 15). In and through the medium of blog, 'a variety of different activities and interactions can occur' (Baumer et al., 2008, no pagination). Baumer et al. maintain that 'blogs are not a genre but a medium for multi-directional communication among bloggers and readers' (ibid.). However, the discussion whether the blogs are genres or a medium is beyond the scope of this thesis. This thesis confines itself to viewing blogs as medium and within this medium there are types of blogs.

2.1.5 Types of blogs

Blogs share some similarities but are, nevertheless, different. Rettberg (2008: 9) speaks of 3 main styles of blogging:

- Personal Blogs: <http://dooce.com/> is an example where blogger is using her blog as a diary. 'Her primary subject is her life [...] the blog is written deliberately to be shared' (ibid: 11).

The blogger writes the posts in a witty, carefully directed style. These blogs are often created just to be read in a "social" circle of other blogs. That is, they communicate with each other.

- Filter blogs: <http://www.kottke.org/> . The main objective for the blogger is to share and reflect upon web experiences and finds. Links of current interest are often followed by commentaries.

- Topic-driven blogs: <http://www.interiorblogger.com/> . The bloggers limit their blogging to a pre-defined topic and continuously share information and ideas such as the interior blogs presented in this thesis. Like the personal blogs, or even more so, these blogs are reciprocal by

being created and read in a circle of other corresponding blogs. Moreover, these blogs are often participants in an ongoing dialogue taking place in a network of blogs. ‘Often such blogs prioritize debate both between posters and between posters and commentators’ (Rettberg 2008: 15).

Generally, blogs are categorised according to their main topics such as politics, health, interior design, literature, travel, sport, music and so on. Online version of the English newspaper The Guardian’s page Blogposts, links to selected blogs. The most recent blogs are presented and given the most prominent place. The other blogs are grouped into content-focused categories such as News & Sport, Business, Culture, Environment, Life & Style, Media, Science & Technology, and Others.¹⁴ The web site Blogger’s Choice Award 09, <http://bloggerschoiceawards.com/categories/37>, also categorises the blogs according to their content, and the list of categories is long. In his book about blogging and other Social Media, Alex Newson categorises the blogs into the main categories of academics, arts, blogging (how to blog), business and professional, entertainment, financial, food, jobs and careers, technology, personal, politics, and sports (2009: 4).

The blogs in this thesis study are categorised as Interior blogs (Interiørblogger). The search-engine google.no places the blog Norwegian Interior Blogs (Norske Interiørblogger - NIB) on top of the search result list if one searches for “Interior blogs”.

NIB is a filter- and topic driven blog that acts as a kind of an umbrella organisation for many interior blogs mainly hosted by Blogger.com. The interior design blogs have elements of all the three types mentioned above, but they are most of all personal. The blogger invites the reader into her private sphere, displaying her home and her lifestyle through a text.

2.2.0 Text, language, and discourse

In blogs, meaning is conveyed in multiple modes. Halliday and Hasan (1985: 4) argue that meaning is not confined to written and spoken language. In fact, any culture has ‘many modes of meaning’. Blogs have more than one mode, that is, they all display ensembles of modes such as written language, still and moving images as well as sound. Put together, these modes constitute a multimodal text. As far as Kress (2003) is concerned, communication always happens as texts. The message the blogger wants to convey must be shaped into a text in order to get through to the addressees. Hence, texts become socially constructed and are outcomes of social actions. Moreover, texts are materialisations of ‘what is at issue’; what is being

¹⁴ The Guardian <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tone/blog>, accessed 07/12/09.

talked about. (Kress 2003: 47).

Texts are forms of exchanging meaning, an ‘interaction between speakers’ or dialogue (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 11). Texts are always created in particular situations and hence must always be understood in the perspective of context. According to Halliday and Hasan, texts include ‘non-verbal goings-on’ and, consequently, texts must be interpreted in the context of the situation or in the total ‘environment in which the text unfolds’ (ibid.). Texts are artefacts ‘produced within specific contexts’ (Carrington 2009: 16).

In order to find out how the self-narrative is constructed and expressed in blogs, this thesis investigates the construction of multimodal texts in a social context. In a social semiotic perspective, the construction of texts in blogs becomes a social practice. The actions people perform in the interplay with others and the recognisable patterns deriving from these actions become social practices (van Leeuwen 2005: 286). The social practice of constructing texts takes place in a communicative event (Fairclough 1995: 41). This thesis will use the term communicative event when referring to the activity of blogging in which the social practice of constructing texts happens.

By all indications, people keep blog for a purpose, that is, they set up a blog because they have something to communicate. The blogging software and its affordances (to be discussed in the subsequent case study) as well as the motive of the blogger, provide the context in which the communicative event is unfolding. The female bloggers in this thesis study all have motives for keeping a blog. Moreover, their starting point is a preference for a particular interior decoration style. These factors, the affordance and the motivations for blogging, are parts of the context. In real life, argues Halliday and Hasan, ‘contexts precede texts, that is, the situation is prior to the discourse that relates to it’ (1985: 5).

Discourse is language as social practice. Linguist Norman Fairclough postulates that in media such as blogs, any text will simultaneously be representing a world, setting up identities for those who are involved in this world as well as setting up relationships between the involved. Fairclough has merged the linguistics and the social science together in the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The study is concerned with texts and practices viewed in a discursive and sociocultural perspective (Fairclough, 1995). In this approach, the notion of discourse refers to language as ‘a form of social practice’ (ibid: 2005, no pagination) which, as shown earlier, is in accordance with Kress’ view. Also, Fairclough claims that for social events and social structures to become ‘coherently articulated’, they depend on mediating categories (ibid.). In this thesis, blogs are such mediated categories. Fairclough views discourse as ‘a social practice articulating, making visible elements such as social relations

and ‘social subjects with beliefs, knowledge, values’ (Fairclough 1995: 2). The discourse is a manifestation of the text expressing opinion, development and the exchange of cultural expressions in particular fields over time. Discourse is a kind of conversation (Berkaak & Frønes, 2005). In the narrative-of-self, discourse refers to how the story is told. What elements do the blogger emphasise and how does the blogger arrange the elements of content in the narrative.

In accordance with the view of Hasan and Halliday (1985), Fairclough underscores that although the term generally refers to both spoken and written language, he wants to extend the notion of discourse to include activities that produce meaning (semiotic activity) such as visual images, that is, photography, film, video, diagrams and non-verbal communication such as gestures (1995: 54). According to Kress and van Leeuwen, discourse is ‘articulated in’ various practices and various modes (2001: 25).

The particular discourses in this thesis study of blogs are realised in various semiotic modes such as layout, written texts, and images. Accordingly, the term ‘multimodal discourse’ will be used in this thesis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Also, the multimodal discourse involves articulating the self-narrative, represented through the various semiotic modes in the blogs. Furthermore, the self is constructed and expressed in a social context and in the context of a culture deriving from a specific group; the interior bloggers. The aspect of culture, will, however, be discussed later in this thesis. If text and context are treated as ‘a semiotic phenomena’ or as ‘modes of meaning’, Halliday and Hasan suggest a way to systematically relate the ‘social environment and the functional organisation of language’ referred to as ‘The three features of the context of situation’ (ibid: 11).

‘How can we characterise a text in its relation to its context of situation?’ ask Hasan and Halliday (1985: 12). The three features of context the field, the tenor, and the mode, will provide a conceptual framework in interpreting the social context ‘in which meanings are being exchanged’ (ibid.).

THE FIELD OF DISCOURSE - refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which the language examples as some essential component?

THE TENOR OF DISCOURSE refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the type of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved?

THE MODE OF DISCOURSE refers to what part is the language playing, what is it that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organisation of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, exploratory, didactic and the like (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 12).

The three features of context of the situation are applicable in establishing the context in which the blogger shapes the multimodal representation of the self-narrative. Being a social medium, blogs exist in and depend on a social context. Rather than existing in isolation, blogs are intended to be read and commented upon. An analysis of the multimodal discourse in order to look at multimodal texts in relation to context is relevant in this thesis study.

2.2.1 Multimodal discourse

Multimodal discourse refers to how the self-narrative is told by multiple modes. The underlying theory of multimodal discourse is semiotics (Kress and Jewitt, 2003).

‘A social semiotic approach to representation and communication sees all modes as meaning-making systems, all of which are integrally connected with social and cultural systems. The multiple and often contradictory logics of multimodal texts can be explained plausibly and satisfactorily only by bringing them into an integral relations with other social and cultural systems’ (Kress 2003: 123).

This thesis multimodal approach draws upon the social semiotic theory involving the works of Halliday (1978, 1985), van Leeuwen (2005), Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), Fairclough (1995), and Kress (2003). The semiotic theory will be discussed later in this chapter. In their approach, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) emphasise the social interpretation of language by looking at the modes or semiotic resources used to communicate and represent meaning in a culture.

2.2.2 Mode and medium

Modes are carriers of meaning used in communicative events. What constitutes a mode? In the perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (to be discussed in chapter 3) modes are understood as representations of meaning used in communication and the act of meaning making (Jewitt, 2009). Modes are carriers of semiotic resources used in communication and are also termed semiotic modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). This thesis, takes the position of Jewitt, 2009; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2005 and 2009, which postulates that a mode is a resource for meaning making, shaped by society and culturally

given (Kress 2009: 54). Still, the question of what is a mode is not always 'explicitly and purposively' defined (Constantinou 2005: 609). This thesis regards modes as means of representing meaning disseminated by media such as books, newspapers, web sites, television and mobile phones. A blog, for example, is a medium for expressing various modes such as still and moving images, layout and colour, sound, and written narratives. A distinction between mode, connected to the content side, and medium connected to the expression side is relevant here.

Modes are resources used in recognisable and stable ways 'as a means of articulating discourse' (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 25). The notion of discourse has previously been discussed in this thesis. Most importantly, discourse is a manifestation of what is at issue or what is being talked about in a text. Multimodal texts communicate meaning 'through a synchronisation of modes' (Walsh, 2006, no pagination). Digital technology as a tool for making meaning, offers a diversity of modes. Bloggers, for example, make use of some (still and moving images, writing, layout, music, gadget¹⁵s) depending on the affordance of the mode which in its turn depends on factors such as the conventions understood by other member of that culture (other bloggers). Equally important for the blogger is the affordance of the current software. In blogging software provided by blog hosts such as Blogger.com, affordance is connected to the user interface, understood as what is possible to express readily and easily for most. 'The facilities of media are the parallel to the affordances of the mode, and answers to the same type of question: What is readily and easily possible to do with this medium?' (Jewitt and Kress 2003: 16-17).

Traditionally, Western society has regarded writing as the major mode (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996). However, with the screen being the dominant medium in contemporary society, writing has become 'subordinated to the logic of the image' (Jewitt and Kress 2003: 16-17). This thesis study will explore the blogs from the perspective of the prominence¹⁶ of the modes presented in the text and aims to investigate whether the images on display 'have primacy over the words in the sense that the events related happen first visually (e.g. we see a missile thrown before we hear a shower of missiles)' (Fairclough 2005: 7). In other words, what attracts the eye and what is the point of entry on the blog web site. Besides, the study will also be concerned with the reach of the various modes, that is, the blogger's modal

¹⁵ 'A gadget is a self-contained piece of content or functionality (such as a poll gadget) that can be "laid-out" on a page in the site'. <http://www.mywebfront.com/previewarticle.aspx?articleid=599> [Accessed 25.03.2010]. 'Gadget - A prebuilt piece of code that interacts with a third party website(s) to provide added functionality to a website. Sometimes referred to as a Widget'. <http://libraries.idaho.gov/page/glossary> [Accessed 25.03.2010].

¹⁶ Prominence is concerned with what the viewer's attention is attracted to when it comes to moving the attention from one space to another. Salience is an analogous term.

preferences depending on purpose and cultural belonging. The reach of a mode varies from one culture to another depending on the society's modal preference (Kress 2009:57).

2.3.2 Multimodal communication theory

Meaning making in blogs comprises the articulation of multiple modes. This thesis adopts the view of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and maintains a view of multimodality based on semiotic principles operating 'in and across different modes'. The digital age has made multimodal presentations more feasible and hence, modes can operate at the same level of representation. Because all modes convey meaning, what mode to employ in a representation is a matter of consideration, of preference and the affordance of the mode, depending on the communicative situation. Kress and van Leeuwen approach multimodal theory by placing emphasis on the semiotic rather than the technical aspect, by asking how the possibilities of digital technology 'can be made to work semiotically?' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 2). This multimodal discourse theory of communication focuses on the ever changing multimodal practices and the use of available resources.

As discussed earlier, Kress and van Leeuwen regard multimodal texts as 'making meaning in multiple articulation' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001:4). Meaning making in blogs are multiple articulations by different modes and the multimodal practice or can be categorised into four domains or strata in which meaning is 'dominantly' made (Jewitt 2009: 306). Jewitt refers to these strata as 'four layers of media practice' (ibid). The non-hierarchical strata or layers of media practice are discourse and design (the content strata) in addition to production and distribution (the expression strata) (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 4). This thesis is mainly concerned with the design and the discourse in relation to constructing the self-narrative in multimodal media practice such as blogs. The analysis will thus place emphasis on the content side.

Discourse involves expressions of opinion, development and the exchange of cultural expressions in particular fields over time; a kind of conversation (Berkaak & Frønes, 2005). Discourses are developed in specific social contexts. The particular discourses in this thesis study are realised in various semiotic modes such as layout, written texts, images, and sound. Here, discourse refers to a 'particular knowledge about some aspect of reality' (Jewitt 2009: 306). The interior bloggers stand out from other bloggers by creating and taking part in a discourse specific to them and their fellow interior bloggers.

When discourses are realised, the semiotic resources (and their use) in all semiotic modes constitute the 'design stratum' (Jewitt 2009: 306). Design in this perspective is the way

the communicative event is planned and shaped based on the recourses available to the participants (ibid.). The medium of blog is a design for communication per se. Also, the design is related to the blogging software and the resources available to the blogger.

The third stratum or layer of media practice is the production or ‘the physical realization of the design’ such as reciting a poem, performing a musical composition as well as making gestures whilst talking to another person (ibid.). In the blogs, the physical realization refers to multimodal representation on display; what we actually see and hear on the website made possible by digital technology.

The fourth and last stratum is distribution which involves ‘the technical recoding of the message for purposes of storage and/or distribution, for instance the broadcasting of a film’ (ibid.). Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 21) point to the fact that distribution and production in the digital age become ‘technically integrated’. Blogs are published by various blog hosts or publishing platforms such as blogger.com and Wordpress.org. Browsers such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, make the medium of Internet available for people with a computer and internet connection. If blogs were to be printed out and thus appear on paper they could, theoretically, still be distributed. The affordances of the medium of Internet are factors such as the swift and far reaching possibilities for distribution. Once published, the blog reaches out to every internet subscriber who is interested in reading the blog. Not only that, the blogger is at any time free to edit or even remove the publication.

2.3 Semiotics

Signs are representations and carriers of meaning. This thesis discusses how meaning is generated and conveyed in blogs by asking how the narrative-of-self is constructed through multimodal representations. The communicative event described in section 2.2.0, involves the use of signs as carriers and representations of meaning. Being a communicative event, the meaning making process of expressing the self in blogs not only involves using the mode of written narrative, but also modes such as still images, colour, gadgets and layout. As noted earlier, there are ‘many other modes of meaning, in any culture, which are outside the realm of [spoken and written] language’ (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 4, my insertion). In semiotics, meaning is not inherent in things, but constructed through mutual agreement or a contract (Gripsrud, 2006).

A sign is ‘something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or

capacity' (Gripsrud 2006:118)¹⁷. Semiotics is the study of the way in which people communicate through signs and images, sounds and gestures, and how signs are used and what they mean with special regard to function and origin. In this thesis perspective, semiotics subsumes the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behaviour as well as the analysis of systems of communication (Gripsrud, 2006). The word 'semiotics' originates from Greek: semeiotikos (observant of signs), adj. form of semeiosis (indication), from semeion (to signal), from sema (sign)¹⁸.

Semiotics subsumes two scientific approaches: French semiology and American semiotics generally associated with the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and the American philosopher Charles Saunders Peirce (1839-1914) respectively (Berkaak & Frønes, 2005). Whilst de Saussure's approach is based on spoken and written language, Peirce's view on signs is not confined to the field of linguistics. Moreover, the world is full of signs and that is why semiotics, according to Peirce, is so important.

Halliday & Hasan want to reconceptualise or modify the definition of semiotics by viewing semiotics as 'the study of meaning in its most general sense' (1985: 3). Rather than viewing the sign in relation to other signs or as a system of signs, which it should be, the sign tends to be viewed in isolation 'as a thing in itself'. Signs, however, must be seen in 'a network of relationships' (ibid: 4). Meaning in a multimodal text is shaped by semiotic resources and the shaper of the text, the sign-maker, constitutes a part of a social system, or a culture. Here, culture can be perceived as a system of meanings and, hence, involves in the social aspect of semiotics.

2.3.1 Social semiotics

Signs must be seen in a social context in order to convey meaning. In semiotics, meaning is not inherent in things but constructed through mutual agreement or a contract. In order to assemble the signs into comprehensible and meaningful communication, some codes (regulations, conventions, or norms) must be followed. These codes are not natural endowments; they have to be experienced, acquired, and learned (Gripsrud, 2006.). The study in this thesis study aims to investigate whether the bloggers' discourse reflects the implicit mutual agreement within the group of interior bloggers.

¹⁷ 'Et tegn er alt som på en eller annen måte står for noe annet for noen i en eller annen forstand' (Gripsrud 2006: 118).

¹⁸ Online Etymology Dictionary: <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=semiotics&searchmode=none>, accessed 11/11/2009

Signs are bearers of meaning, and different cultures apply different meaning to the system of signs.

[Social semiotics as practice is oriented to] opening our eyes and ears and other senses to the richness and complexity of semiotic production and interpretation, and to social intervention, to the discovery of new semiotic resources and new ways of using existing semiotic resources (van Leeuwen 2005: preface, my insertion).

Social semiotics is concerned with the way people ‘regulate the use of semiotic resources in specific social situations’ (ibid.). The subsequent study inquires into what part social semiotics plays in the narrative-of-self.

In the approach of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) signs as means of communication are never arbitrary. In fact, signs are ‘motivated conjunctions of signifiers (forms) and signifieds (meanings)’ (ibid: 8). Here, motivation must be seen in relation to the sign-maker and the context, that is, why, how, and for what purpose the sign is produced. The artefacts, material, and actions used in the communication process are also referred to as semiotic resources. Furthermore, the social reality constructed ‘within its cultural context’ or the sign-making process by the use of the semiotic resources such as language, gestures, images, and sound, is referred to as “semiosis” (Jewitt 2009: 304).

This thesis uses the term “affordance” when referring to what is possible to express and represent easily with a mode and a medium (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1999). “Affordance” is used to refer to both ‘the material and the cultural, and their connection’ (Jewitt 2009: 293). The affordance of a semiotic resource is based on provenance, or the origin of the sign (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). People are born into different social positions in the social structure; they have different experiences and histories in relation to the semiotic resources that surround them.

2.3.2 Semiotic regime

Signs work differently in different contexts. The affordance of a semiotic resource is based on both past and possible use which will be ‘actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of semiotic regime’ (van Leeuwen, 2005a: 285). The term “semiotic regime” alludes to the control of the semiotic resources that people persistently are trying to control and fix in social life. The meaning of red as a traffic sign is fixed by a precise rule, a code. The red traffic sign means stop; nothing more, nothing less (van Leeuwen, 2005).

A general view is that in order to play successfully together, there is a need for certain rules of the game. In traditional semiotics, the same need for rules applies to the ‘game of language and/or the semiotic modes’ (van Leeuwen 2005: 47). The rules or codes have been regarded as the key to understanding. This view, however, is different in social semiotics. Here, the suggestion is that unwritten or written rules ‘are made by people and can therefore be changed by people’. Although rules are not left out altogether in social semiotics, certain explicit and detailed rules are used to describe how semiotics works in specific situations. ‘Therefore social semiotics works not only with an inventory of past, present and possible future semiotic resources, but also an inventory of different types of rules, taken up in different ways in different contexts’ (ibid: 47-48).

If rules in social semiotics are man made and subjected to changes over time, what kind of system imposes these rules? How can a rule change and for what reason? As noted earlier, the semiotic regime is in control of the semiotic resources. Van Leeuwen (2005: 285) speaks of five different semiotic regimes, - five different types of rules: 1) Personal authority 2) Impersonal authority 3) Conformity 4) Rule models 5) Expertise. This thesis’ objects of study, the blogs, are subjected to all of these semiotic regimes; however, the role models and the expertise (semiotic regime nr 4 and 5) are predominant in the Western consumer society and, hence, will be discussed further.

One aspect of the semiotic rule of expertise is colour. Preference of colour has often been viewed in relation to personality and to the expression of character (van Leeuwen, 2005). ‘All societies have a strong sense of the meaning of colour, even though most of their members could not articulate what these meanings are’ (Kress 2009: 59). Pink is persistently connected to the female sex, especially babies and little girls. Greeting cards given in connection with the birth of a child for example are typically pink for girls and light blue for boys. In Western societies, black is the colour of death, and green has come to signify environmental and ecological issues.

In the field of home decoration, glossy magazines and television make over programmes explicitly and persistently call attention to the allegedly close connection between people’s identities and lifestyle, and the way they decorate and furnish their homes. The role models, the semiotic rule regime, are of two kinds: First, celebrities such as actors, authors, and television personalities who willingly display their homes in magazines so that the plebs can get what kind of people they are. These role models use their home to signify ‘lifestyle identity’. Second, ordinary ‘people whose homes are shown as examples of “best practice”’ (van Leeuwen 2005: 63). The succeeding study will pose the questions of what

kind of semiotic regime (if any) is in control of the interior blogs' multimodal texts. Additionally, if such a regime is traceable, what impact does the regime have on the multimodal representations? The study will also inquire into if there are any role models in the interior blogs.

2.4 Constructing and representing the self in social media

Multimodality involves the use of different modes in all social practices. Gestures, speech, pitch of voice, glance and body language are modes used in human face to face interaction (van Leeuwen, 2005). So far this thesis has discussed discourse in relation to social practices in communicative events such as the activity of creating multimodal texts in blogs. However, the notion of “multimodal discourse” can be applied to social interactions such as a face to face conversation.

The multimodal representations in this thesis are mediated by the medium of blog and, hence, the self-narrative is constructed and expressed through the multimodal representation of the blog. The notion of “representation” needs to be expounded. Here, “representation” refers to something that stands for something other than itself, that is, representation can be compared with a sign or a semiotic resource (Gripsrud 2002: 26). Moreover, representation is a way of presenting something in a particular way in order to communicate a particular meaning or as a means of expressing the self.

The blogs in this thesis study represent the bloggers who publish them, that is, the people who construct a particular narrative, representing themselves and their world. How is the self constructed? First, a clarification is needed. Although closely connected and often used interchangeably as terms, the notions of “self” and “identity” must be distinguished. The self *holds* an identity or indeed even multiple identities. This thesis is not focusing on identity as such, but rather on the self *displaying* and *narrating* the identities through the multimodal representations in the blogs. Moreover, the disclosure of self as a social construction and identity as an important factor in this construction is most relevant here (Prieur, 2004).

2.4.1 Identity – a relative notion

The idea of one person holding one identity is crumbling. Psychologist Sherry Turkle (2005) argues that digitally mediated communication has extended the notion of the self, that is, the self holding a unitary identity. In social media such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and in online computer games technology has made possible the constructing of multiple identities. There are no limits to the number of blogs a person can keep or how many user profiles to be

set up in social networking web sites such as Facebook. Digital technology has rendered possible the construction of a number of ‘selves’ holding multiple identities and, hence, the ‘computer culture’ of the Internet reflects on the issue on identity as multiple rather than unitary (Turkle 1995: 179).

Now, in the postmodern times¹⁹, multiple identities are no longer so much at the margins of things. Many more people experience identity as a set of roles that can be mixed and matched, whose diverse demands need to be negotiated. A wide range of social and psychological theorists have tried to capture the new experience of identity’ (Turkle 1995:178, my footnote).

Identity in this approach becomes ‘self-fashioned’ and ‘self-created’ (Turkle 1995: 180). The social construction of the self or self as a sociological project, involves issues such as choice of lifestyle, fashion, language, preferences, political stand; depending on the on the context or the current arena. Gran maintains that ‘identities can be exchanged and performed; one can buy them and sell them as branded goods’ (2004: 41, my translation²⁰). Prieur (2002: 4) views identity as socially constructed ‘through culturally determined ideas’²¹. Identities are not necessarily authentic and unitary, genuine and loaded with integrity. Moreover, identity as a coherent and stable entity seems to be breaking down into various identities.

Claiming that private consumption plays a central part in the changing of identities, Dokk Holm (2001) introduces the term “instant identity”. Here, the general claim is that instant identity is heavily dependent on ‘the immediate accessibility of commodities and lifestyle products’ (Dokk-Holm 2001: 124, my translation)²². In this perspective, products become semiotic bearers of meaning or semiotic resources. Shopping is not only intended to provide basic subsistence, it also meets a semiotic demand, that is, a demand of making a statement by signalling what you are, who you are, and where you belong by using semiotic resources. Dokk Holm refers to this as ‘semiotic fingerspitzgefühl’ and the semiotic power of goods. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 35) claim that ‘the shift from social organisation around class to a social organisation around lifestyle is semiotically, as well as economically and socially, of greatest significance’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 35). Moreover, like Dokk Holm (2001), Kress and van Leeuwen underscore the need for training of the semiotic knowledge.

¹⁹ Post modernity is the designation of a historical period emerging approximately from the end of World War two and to date (McKee, 2005). One hallmark of post modernity in an identity perspective is the view of personality as fragmented, complex, and partly contradictory (Gripsrud 2006: 18)).

²⁰ ‘Identiteter er noe man bytter ut og spiller på; man kan kjøpe dem og selge dem som merkevarer’ (Gran 2004: 41).

²¹ ‘...gjennom kulturelt bestemte forestillinger’ (Prieur 2002:4).

²² ‘... den umiddelbare tilgangen til varer og livsstilprodukter...’ (Dokk Holm 2001: 124).

2.4.2 Cultural identity

Bloggers in a community tend to share a cultural identity. In social semiotics, culture refers to ‘a set of semiotic systems, a set of systems of meaning’ (Halliday & Hasan 1985: 4). Culture in this perspective is compared with a social system. Drotner (1999) analytically differentiates identity between three dimensions: the social, the cultural, and the psychological. The concept of cultural identity is used analytically to look at phenomena and processes dealing with the cultural dimension of human existence (Drotner, 1999). Not only that, the notion of cultural identity reflects the ways in which people make use of ‘the various repertoire of signs - including the media- in order to define oneself in time and space’ (Drotner 1999: 20, my translation)²³.

In this thesis, the interior bloggers constitute a culture of women using a particular repertoire of signs or semiotic resources represented by various semiotic modes in order to define themselves through the medium of the blog. Moreover, the interior bloggers share a cultural identity, formed ‘at the unstable point where the “unspeakable” stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture’ (Hall, 1987 in Drotner 1999: 20). Culture, according to Halliday & Hasan (1985: 4) is a set of semiotic systems, ‘a set of systems of meanings, all of which interrelate’.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, the self is constructed and expressed not only in a social context but also in the context of a culture coming from a specific group. This thesis argues that the blogs in the study can be associated with a distinct cultural group: the interior design bloggers. The analysis aims to explore how the interior bloggers display their cultural identity in their multimodal representations, that is, how they “stage” the self in the blogs.

2.4.3 Staging the self

Metaphorically, the blog is a stage where the blogger can direct her performance. Canadian sociologist Erwin Goffman uses the terminology (and the perspective) of the dramaturgy in his seminal theory of self presentation in daily life (1959). Goffman’s theory is applicable to the presentation of self in Social Media. Although Goffman’s theory is based on a physical event such as face to face communication, it may be compared with a non- physical communicative event such as blogging. As is the case in face to face communication, the participants in the blogging community similarly need to relate to the context of the situation. In Halliday and Hasan’s approach (see section 2.2.1) this is referred to as ‘the field of

²³ ‘...forskellige tegnrepertoier – herunder medierne – til at definere sig selv i tid og rum’.

discourse' (1985: 12). When a person enters a room full of people, Goffman claims, the people present will always try to find out what kind of person this is or, if they have previous knowledge of him or her, they will bring out the information they already hold. In Social Media such as blogs, a new and unknown blog will arouse a certain curiosity as to what kind of blog this is, who the blogger is and the motives for publishing the blog. Put in Halliday and Hasan's terms, they need to know the tenor of discourse (1985: 12).

In Goffman's perspective, apart from satisfying an inherent curiosity, the need for investigating the newly arrived and obtain information is due to practical reasons. The information is used to prepare for human interaction, that is, the role play in the communicative event, and render possible a situation in which they know what to expect from this person and vice versa. 'The people present have considerable sources of information at their disposal and are able to build on many sign-vehicles when they obtain it' (Goffman 1959: 11, my translation)²⁴. If, by any chance, there are no apparent sign-vehicles, people often resort to using stereotypes and making overall generalisations. In case of the blog, chances are that the blog fails to make any impression and becomes ignored and eventually falls out of a possible network or society.

This thesis focuses on the "sign-vehicles" or, in the social semiotic perspective, the semiotic modes used in a non-verbal communicative event and, in a contextual perspective, can be compared to the mode of discourse or 'what part the language is playing' (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 12).

In order to make an impression, a person needs to make an expression and this is what most bloggers are continuously attempting to do. In fact, one could argue that this is what blogging is all about. In a communicative event, the expression can be given intentionally or unintentionally. However, the focus in Goffman's approach is either way on the signs given in the processes. In social semiotic terms, the sign are semiotics resources represented by different semiotic modes. Gestures and body language are examples of semiotic modes used in face to face interaction whereas colours and pictures are examples of semiotic modes used the blogs. When the interior blogger produces signs, she plays a role; she presents herself and thus enters into performances on various stages (the blog being one stage). This role play gives the interaction stability and at the same time flexibility, and creates prediction from one situation to another (Goffman, 1959). The strategy employed is to make sure that the players know their parts or else the performance play will become a failure.

²⁴ 'De tilstedeværende har atskillige kilder til disse opplysningene og kan bygge på mange meningsbærere ("sign-vehicles") når de skaffe seg dem' (Goffman 1959: 11).

The play (the communicative event) takes place within certain frames of interpretation, established and approved by the participants. A frame is a hermeneutic remedy utilised to understand and interpret a situation and perform adequately (Rasmussen, 2003). The frame is abstract and formal and refers to situations built through implicit principles and rules. Culture and discourse constitutes such frames. The basis of a performance is the interpretation of the frame in a particular situation (Rasmussen, 2003). The activity of blogging is confined to the frames of the screen; the software is based on frames and the layout must adapt to the restriction of frames provided by the software. Blogs are constructed representations of human interaction within frames. The narrative-of-self takes place within a pre-defined format and the blogger must act in accordance with the affordance of the software.

In the communicative event, the role or the character or, here, the blogger acts according to a predefined behaviour 'unfolded in the performance' (Rasmussen, 2003, no pagination). The characters are preoccupied with the act of playing whilst the director is concerned with the staging of the play (Gran, 2004). Or, put differently, the senders and the addressees are busy interacting with each other via the medium of the blog; however the sender's major concern is setting up a blog that is attracting an audience and at the same time represents the blogger.

The façade is a part of the character's performance or the blog's self impression management, that is, how the blogger wants to be perceived. Here, the façade is parallel the presentation of the self as the result of a social construction or a sociological project, involving issues such as choice of lifestyle, fashion, language, preferences, and political stand; depending on the on the context or the current arena. The performance is [seemingly] fixed and often has influence on the others (Rasmussen 2003, my translation and my insertion)²⁵. But what goes on behind the façade, how does the blogger prepare for the play? In Goffman's terminology, back stage and front stage refers to what goes on in front of the public and what happens behind the curtain or off stage.

Back stage is an abstract entity associated with the preparations made prior to a performance. In blogs, backstage is the 'place' where the choices of semiotic resources and semiotic modes are made (or at least reflected on and considered) depending on the role models or the semiotic rule of regime.

The front stage is a concrete entity. Here the physical and material manifestation of the performance and the performer takes place, involving appearance and manner (Rasmussen,

²⁵ 'Fasaden er den del av ens opptreden som fremtrer på en fastlagt måte og som har innflytelse på de andre' (Rasmussen 2003, no pagination).

2003). The front stage can be compared with the blog, materialising all the choices made back stage displayed on the screen.

2.4.4 The story about the self

Blogs can be viewed as narratives-of self. Storytelling and narrative have become central vehicles of today's communication. Marketing organisations increasingly use storytelling as means of convincing and persuading people. Moreover, storytelling management is a well established concept (Salmon 2006, no pagination). Stories or narratives are brought to people by various media such as television, the medium of film, the book, the Internet, and the theatre. Stories or narratives are part of every day life. 'The human brain has an enormous capacity for creating multisensory syntheses of information when presented in a narrative form' (Salmon: 2006, no pagination). Well-told stories evoke feelings.

In blogs, the narrative-of-self is constructed and told through and by multimodal representations; as part of an ongoing process. The blogger is both the narrator (the producer of texts) and the storyteller. Every blog post constitutes a piece of a never ending story or pieces of a larger narrative (Walker, 2005). The story typically begins in medias res, that is, there is no apparent beginning and no predictable ending. As long as the blogger feels inclined to continue her narrative-of-self, the narrative goes on infinitely.

This thesis explores the presentation of the self by looking at aspects such as identity and life style. The construction of identity presupposes reflection and evaluation. In this perspective, a person's identity is to be found in 'the capacity of narrating the story of self' (Giddens, 1991 in Østerud & Arnseth 2008: 47). The bloggers in this thesis study are continuously elaborating their self-narratives by regular publishing of entries.

The blogger's identity or identities are expressed in the narrative-of-self. The construction of identity presupposes reflection and evaluation. People have to organise their lives and make plans for how to live it. A person's identity is to be found in 'the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (ibid.). Drotner applies the term digital storytelling to cover 'the ongoing processes of social narration through digital means' (2008: 62). New media has a considerable capacity for digital storytelling. Social media such as blogs provide software, purpose-made for creating narratives. The affordance of the software allows the storyteller to include modes such as sound, still and living images in order to make the story or the self-narrative more vivid and readable. The personal, small-scale stories take place within the frames of the blogging software and within the social context of other bloggers with corresponding interest (Lundby, 2008).

This thesis uses the term “narrative” when referring to digital storytelling in relation to blogs. According to Ryan (2003) “narrative” is defined as ‘...a mental image, or cognitive construct, which can be activated by various types of signs. This image consists of a world (setting) populated by intelligent agents (characters) (ibid, no pagination).

The world or setting in this thesis’ objects of study is represented by the blogs and the agents or the characters represent the bloggers and their readers. The bloggers participate in ‘actions and happenings (events, plot), which cause global changes in the narrative world’ (ibid.). Ryan continues: ‘Narrative is thus a mental representation of causally connected states and events which captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members’ (ibid.).

This thesis has defined the blog as a communicative event and, hence, the narrative or the “segments” in the blog appears as communication. The communication between the bloggers, sharing a cultural identity, happens within the frames of the blogging software.

2.4.5 Impression management and the role of the reader

The blogger must prepare the performance or the narrative-of-self. This thesis takes the view that the activity of blogging can be viewed as an expression of the self by constructing a narrative-of-self. Rettberg (2008) emphasises self-representational aspects in blogs. One could argue that blogs are staging of the self per se. The blogger’s main objective is to be noticed, to attract attention, to share his or her world view with similarly disposed people preferably. The bloggers wants their narrative-of-self to be read and are craving for comments; in fact, the blogs’ continuation depends on feedback from the audience.

Because the blog is not a synchronic medium, the blogger has plenty of time back stage to prepare the performance before she meets the public (Rasmussen, 2003). The medium of blog allows the blogger (the sender) to prepare her message before it reaches the audience (the addressee) or appears on the front stage. The blogger needs to convince her readers (the audience) that her performance makes a difference and hence worth while watching and commenting. The reaction from the audience or the comments always happens subsequent to the publishing and, on most occasions, the comments are directly related to the latest post. The blogger then prepares for the next entry, the next performance or the next message and awaits new comments. In fact, this ongoing process of post and comments characterises the blog as a medium.

To the blogger’s advantage, she is never interrupted in this communicative event. Still, she has to bear in mind who she is addressing, that is, she must consider the role of the reader.

In his book *The Role of the Reader*, philosopher, literary theorist, and semiotician Umberto Eco (1979: 4) argues that every 'act of communication' must be understood in the perspective of categories such as 'sender, addressee, and context'. The addressee is 'an abstract and constitutive element in the process of actualization of a text'. When looking for meaning in blogs, the blogger and the context in which the activity of blogging takes place as well as the audience must be viewed simultaneously. Eco's arguments are in accordance with the view of Halliday and Hasan (1985) as well as that of Fairclough's (1995) presented in section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. In Goffman's dramaturgical terms, the blogger's performance becomes in a sense meaningless unless the performance brings about a reaction from the public, be it applause or hooting out. Consequently, the audience must be taken into consideration when preparing for the performance backstage.

In her paper 'The Model Reader: Audiences within genres', Ewald (1998) aims to explore 'the interrelationship between audience and discourse type' (ibid: 3). Ewald postulates that each type of discourse²⁶ have 'a distinct readership' or "model" audiences (ibid.). In the case of blogs, the model audience exists within the frames and the conventions of the blogging software and within the community of bloggers. More specifically, the model audience in the interior blog community act in accordance with the 'rhetorical conventions' of that particular discourse type (Ewald 1998: 3).

In order for the blogger to continue the ongoing process of constructing the particular self-narrative through the multimodal text, the interpretation of the text 'calls for the cooperation of the reader' (Eco 1979: 4). A text typically contains a message or indeed 'a network different messages depending on different codes and working at different levels of signification' (ibid: 5). The act of communication depends on the relationship between the sender and the addressee. The process of meaning making in a blog presupposes the cooperation of the reader. Who are the addressees and what is their contribution in the process of actualising the text? In Eco's perspective the addressees are abstract and their purpose is to act as a constitutive element in the meaning making process.

'To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter the Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them' (Eco 1979: 7).

²⁶ Ewald uses "discourse" and "genre" interchangeably. Inasmuch as this thesis maintains that the blog is a medium and not a genre, this thesis uses the notion of discourse.

The creator of one of this thesis object of study, the *Shabby Charm* blog, could not know who would find exactly her blog appealing and interesting, when she published her first blog entry in April 2008, but it is likely that she had a model reader in mind when she publishes her blog entries. What kind of reader do the interior blogs presuppose? Having defined blogging as communication and meaning making by the use of semiotic resources and multiple semiotic modes, the blogger becomes a communicator who produces signs according to a sign system known by the members of a given culture. The role of the reader is to decode, that is, the reader must know the codes or the sign systems within the culture.

The question concerning the role of the reader in the interior blogs will be discussed further in the forthcoming study.

2.5 Summing up chapter 2

This chapter has attempted to place the social medium of blog in a theoretical context. The blog's characteristics and the activity of blogging have been presented. In looking at the types of blogs, this thesis has pointed out that the object of this thesis study, the interior blog, is a hybrid of a filter and a topic driven blog. Furthermore, the text, language and discourse have been discussed in relation to the blog. Blogs like other web sites are typically multimodal, that is, they consist of more than one semiotic mode. In order to characterise a text in its relation to its context of situation Halliday and Hasan (1985) has proposed three features of language in context in and these features will be utilised when establishing the context in the forthcoming study is concerned. The multimodal discourse in the interior blogs involves the use of semiotic resources. Communication does not only involve spoken and written language. Semiotics is the study of the way in which people communicate through signs and images, sounds and gestures, and how signs are used and what they mean with special regard to function and origin. Social semiotics is concerned with the way people regulate the use of semiotic resources in specific social situations and that is why social semiotics plays a central part in establishing how the blogger represents the self and the multimodal texts. In this thesis, semiotic modes are resources used to construct the narrative-of-self in the blogs. In expressing and constructing the narrative-of-self, the notion of identity and staging of the self is relevant. Goffman's approach to how the self is presented in daily life can be compared with Halliday and Hasan (1985) notion of the three features of language in context. The narrative-of-self must be seen in a social and a cultural context. Umberto Eco's *The Model Reader* has been discussed and will be elaborated in the study and subsequent discussion.

Chapter 3 The case study

3.0 The case study

This case study focuses on the self-narrative in multimodal representations in Social Media by investigating a representative sample of digitally constructed multimodal texts such as blogs. The research question is concerned with how the bloggers present themselves by constructing a narrative-of-self through the multimodal representations in this medium. It must be reiterated that this thesis views blogs as inherently personal and as narrative of the self per se. The methodological approach is founded in the theories and approaches of the field of social semiotics and multimodality as well as sociology.

As noted in section 2.4., semiotic resources are products of social processes. The blogger or the sign maker chooses from a system of resources or signs available to her or him. Meaning, in this perspective, is a choice of system (Jewitt, 2009). The choice of system is always determined by the social context (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). This study will look at the blogger's choice of semiotic system by establishing what kind of resources the blogger have at his or her disposal and the cultural context in which the blogger find herself. This will include the affordances of modes and the digital technology in which the media of the blog are implemented. This study will consider the field of discourse and text in the perspective of Fairclough (1995) and Halliday and Hasan (1985).

The multimodal investigation in this case study aims to give accounts of the available modal resources and their use in one particular blog. The analysis will use some aspects from the Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) suggested by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001). MDA involves the core concepts such as mode, semiotic resource, modal affordances, and intersemiotic relationships (Jewitt 2009:21-26). Intersemiotic relationship refers to the semantic (meaning) relations between 'the different semiotic systems such as writing and images that constitute a multimodal text' (Jewitt 2009: 299).

The thesis study employs the sociological perspective deriving from Erwin Goffman's theory presented in the previous chapter. The analysis will utilise this theory in the analysis of the communicative event of blogging. Goffman's notion of back stage, front stage and the façade is applicable to the bloggers' efforts of constructing and expressing the self in the multimodal representations. Central in the perspective making meaning and expressing the self is the role of the reader. This thesis' study will look at the role of the reader of interior blogs.

Blogs are media of semiotic resources and sites of display. Digital media technology is used to substantiate the communication or the meaning making process. This case study observes some selected blogs among several categorised as Interior blogs (Interiørblogger). The search-engine *Google*²⁷ places the blog *Norwegian Interior Blogs (Norske Interiørblogger - NIB)* on top of the search result list if one searches for “Interior blogs”. (See example 6). *NIB* is sponsored by the interior magazine *Boligpluss*.

3.1. Method

In research, data and/or analysis are typically quantitative (they are quantifiable) or qualitative. (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland, and Larsen 2007: 59). This thesis study takes place within the qualitative research paradigm, involving an interpretive approach to the subject matter. ‘Qualitative researchers treat the uniqueness of individual cases as important to understanding Particularisation is an important aim, coming to know the particularity of the case’ (Stake 2005: 39).

The starting point is the observation with a systematic approach such as the hermeneutic. The hermeneutic approach is based upon the interpretation and understanding of a text as well as the social situation or society connected to the text. The answers to the research questions are often found in the collection and analysis of data, referred to as empirical data (Østbye, Knapskog, Helland, and Larsen, 2007). Here, the empirical data are found in the blogs. The focus in the case study is exploratory and descriptive and the intention is to clarify and understand the construction of the self-narrative in a Norwegian interior blog in the period December 2009, January 2010, and also February 2010. The data collection is carried out in the natural setting online.

The study’s obligation, based on observation and interpretation, is to understand one case in order to substantiate and throw light on the theory presented (Stake, 1995). The choice of a case study as research method is also due to the fact that there is a plethora of corresponding blogs in the blogosphere in general and among the Norwegian Interior bloggers in particular and, hence, a wide selection would have been unhandy and too far reaching in this study. The over all goals are to focus on the case itself, that is, the uniqueness and the context of this particular blog. However, in order to establish the social context and the multimodal discourse, the study will make comparisons and generalisations by looking at some other corresponding blogs recommended by the blogger herself.

²⁷ <http://www.google.no>, accessed 16/05/2010.

3.2 Data

The data of this case study is gathered from the Internet in the period between 09.12.2009 and 12.03.2010. The sample is *Shabby Charm* <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/> (See example 4). This interior design blog stand out from the other blogs by being highly praised among the bloggers in this particular field. *Shabby Charm* is one out of many interior blogs and hence it is relevant to assess corresponding blogs in order to trace a pattern and make comparisons. The blogs presented in this study all uses the same blogging software provided by blogger.com. The creator of *Shabby Charm* follows a number of corresponding blogs. The study will look closer at the following:

[Hespe](#) (See example 5)

[Lobelia](#) (See example 6)

[Malivas verden](#) (See example 7)

[Mias Interiør](#) (See example 8)

NIB – Norwegian Interior blogs have categorised the blogs under five headings: Blog shops, Miscellaneous, Nostalgic, Modern, and Interior/Everyday. *Shabby Charm* and *Maliva sverden* are categorised Nostalgic, whereas *Hespe* falls into the category of Miscellaneous, *Lobelia* and *Mias Interiør* into the Blog Shop category (*Norske Interiør Blogger*)²⁸.

All blogs in this study are frequently updated. The *Shabby Charm* blog has been updated 68 times in 2008, 79 times in 2009, and 18 times in 2010²⁹. She has posted 11 entries in January 2010 alone which is a marked increase in frequency per month. The other bloggers also post entries on a regular basis and they are loyal to their followers. In 2009, *Hespe* posted 97 entries, *Mias Interiør* has posted 151, *Malivas verden* has posted 263, and *Lobelia* has posted 151 entries. Blogger provides an application called ‘blog archive’ where all the posts appear starting from the day the blog was set up. Hence, older posts are easy to find. Change in layout, however, is not possible to trace. Once edited, the layout of the past is gone forever.

3.3 The analysis

The five blogs in this case study are all categorised as interior blogs. They are kept by women and their major subjects are interior decoration, life style products and reflections about daily life. This case study comprises elements from the MDA as well as some of the questions

²⁸ <http://norskeinteriorblogger.blogspot.com/>, accessed 16/05/2010

²⁹ To this date (03.03.2010).

concerning multimodality based on the work of Løvland (2007) and Halliday and Hasan 1985. The multimodal analysis will explore the content strata in the blog by looking at mode involving discourse and design (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Also, this study involves aspects such as the role of the reader and the cultural identity of the bloggers which will show signs of discussion rather than defined analytical questions.

This study will look the affordance of the blogging software and the design of the communicative event by asking what is readily and easily possible to do with this medium and what available modal resources can the blogger draw upon in the context of the blogging software? Furthermore, by exploring the field, the tenor, and the mode of discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1985), this study aims to determine the context of the blog by posing the questions of: What is the social context in which meanings are exchanged? What is the cultural context in which the discourse is developed? This involves the notion of cultural identity and the choice of semiotic system. Are there traces of any semiotic regime? If so, how is this affecting the self representation? Moreover, are there any role models in the interior blogs? The study will also consider in what way is lifestyle identity signified.

The multimodal representation in the blog is central and the study will pursue what semiotic mode is given preference and why. Not only that, what is the affordance of the individual mode in the representation and how is the multimodal interplay? The study will also look at the linking practice in the blog by focusing on the kind of linking practice the blogger follows. What kind of links does she recommend?

The self is expressed and staged in the blogs. In Goffmanian terms: What constitutes the blogger's façade? What constitutes the front stage and how does the blog reflect the preparations done back stage? Furthermore, how does the blogger display her cultural identity related to lifestyle in the blog?

Bricolage and remediation are central terms in the digital culture. Is the blogger utilising a particular repertoire comprising the features of other media? Does the blog challenge the hegemony of the glossy interior magazines?

The role of the reader is pivotal in the interactive medium of blog. What kind of model reader does the blog presuppose?

3.3.1 The affordance of blogger.com's software

What is readily and easily possible to do with this medium and what available modal resources can the blogger draw upon in the context of the blogging software? Blog host

Blogger.com³⁰ invites people to create a free blog by listing up all the advantages of keeping a blog. It is a personal blog, it is free and it only takes a minute to create: 'Share your thoughts, photos and more with your friends'. It is easy to use: 'It is easy to post text, photos, and videos from the web or your mobile phone'. It is flexible: 'Unlimited flexibility to personalize your blog with themes gadgets, and more' (Blogger³¹). A scroll bar makes choosing language possible. Four hyperlinks on the right side offer to learn more about blogging by watching a video tutorial, taking a quick tour, discovering more features, and reading blogger buzz. Blogger Buzz (Blogger³²), a blog about blogging created by the blog host, deals with known issues among their users. On February 03 2010, for example, software engineer Shawn McCullough has posted an entry concerning how to create pages in Blogger. On December 05 2010, Blogger shows how to add the gadget *iLike* in the blog.

iLike brings music to your blog by letting you embed and share playlists that you make yourself. Using their simple interface, you can organize and arrange your tunes, then seamlessly integrate them into your blog's sidebar (Blogger³³).

As soon as the new user has signed in with his or her Google account, there are some choices that need to be made. After signing in, the first page appearing is divided in two major headings called 'dashboard', 'reading' and 'other stuff'. The dashboard is the location where the user chooses a profile, that is, information about herself, and a profile picture. This is, however, optional. The blogger has the opportunity to display additional information about herself such as favourite interests, favourite movies, favourite music, and favourite books. Besides, the blogger is free to inform whether she keeps other blogs and if she is following external blogs. The *Shabby Charm* creator administers two other blogs and she also is following a number of external ones.

At the bottom of the page, the heading 'Other stuff' alludes to a number of hyperlinks with subheading such as mobile devices (learn how to start mobile blogging), tools and resources (optional software such as *Picasa Web Album*), and help resources. The blog host provides various means of support for the bloggers. In fact, the user interface in Blogger is relatively user friendly and the software is both practical and comprehensible³⁴. However, there is always the possibility that too many alternatives, that is, too much text and

³⁰ Blogger is provided by Google, a multinational Internet search technologies corporation.

³¹ <https://www.blogger.com/start>, accessed 16/05/2010.

³² <http://buzz.blogger.com/>, accessed , 16/05/2010.

³³ <http://buzz.blogger.com/2008/12/ilike-add-soundtrack-to-your-blog.html>, accessed 16/05/2010.

³⁴ This thesis writer has set up a blog prior to the thesis in order to gain empirical evidence.

information, can make the user confused, impatient, and even frustrated.

The optional information is published and available as a hyperlink on the blog site. The blog host wants the bloggers to form groups and become members of a network, and the interior design bloggers are such a group. The ‘dashboard’, ‘reading’ and ‘other stuff page’ is a way of connecting bloggers and classifying them into groups according to interest and preference. Finally, after decided about how and if the blogger wants to publish any personal information, there are still some issues to be sorted out before the blog is published; the choice of design and layout.

The blogger needs to make an impression by creating a visual entry point, that is, something that catches the eye of the visitor directing him or her further into the blog. The visual entry point in a blog is usually the heading where the blog title appears, but before the blogger decides on what kind of heading she prefers, she must choose a template. The blog host *Blogger* requests new bloggers to customise the blog by choosing a template. Customising the template or making own custom template is done easily once the blog is set up, according to the blog host. After the template is chosen, the blog is per definition created and the activity of blogging can begin. The blogger is, at any time, free to customise the template and add various gadgets to the blog. Gadgets are small applications such as *RSS* feeds (Rich Site Summary³⁵), visitor polls, follower lists, search boxes, and subscription links. Many bloggers do want to customise their blog and the blogging software makes the operation attainable.

In *Blogger's* software each blog post can be labelled. A label or tag provides the reader with a clue to what the blogger's subjects are. The reader can choose what subject he or she finds interesting and by clicking on the link, every post concerning that particular subject is displayed. The tags are listed automatically in the sidebar of the blog. The narrative-of-self unfolds within the frames of the software. The blogger must act in accordance with the affordance of the software. The format is the ‘common ground all blogger's share’ (Miller and Shepherd 2004, no pagination). The blogger must decide whether or not she wants to include gadgets; she must decide on the background of the blog, the font style and colour. Finally, when creating the blog post, her modal preferences is made explicit. The software allows her to use still and living images, sound and written texts as well as hyperlinks.

³⁵ RSS (Rich Site Summary) is a format for delivering regularly changing web content. Many news-related sites, weblogs and other online publishers syndicate their content as an RSS Feed to whoever wants it <http://www.whatisrss.com/>, accessed 02/03/2010.

3.3.2 The design of the communicative event

Design in blogs involves the use of semiotic resources, the semiotic modes, and the combinations of these modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). How is the communicative event designed by the resources available to the blogger? Included in the affordance of the software of blogger.com is the possibility of integrating modes such as photographs, music, and film as well as written and spoken language. Whatever mode is given preference, the blogger is free to decide in what way she wants to display her message. She publishes the entry and waits for a comment from the audience. The blogging software automatically provides a comment link below each published blog post. Commentators must decide what identity they want to use: a Google account, an open ID (*OpenID* is ‘a safe, fast, and easy way’ to log in to web sites³⁶), or other blog hosts such as *Typepad*³⁷ or *Wordpress*³⁸. The commentator can also choose to be anonymous. In *Shabby Charm*, almost all of the commentators display their identity and the very few anonymous commentators do sign with their name or a link to their website. Layout templates allow the blogger to personalise her blog and if she is familiar with the code of hypertext mark-up language (HTML) she has the possibility of creating a blog that sets stand out from the rest.

3.3.3 The context of the blog and the communicative situation

The three features of the context are the field, the tenor, and the mode of discourse relate to how language is affected by the social context (Halliday and Hasan 1985: 11).

The field of discourse, referring to the nature of the social action taken place, is the activity of blogging which is a display of personal information published by the means of digital technology and the software of the blog host Blogger.com. The *Shabby Charm* blog displays the blogger’s preferences regarding interior design and lifestyle. The blogger’s intention is to inspire others. Simultaneously the blog promotes products related to the blogger’s preferences. The activity of displaying information involves the shaping of a multimodal text consisting of semiotic modes such as still images, written narratives, and layout. Inherent in the activity of blogging is the anticipation of a response from an audience. The *Shabby Charm* blogger, Maia, is addressing a particular audience of likeminded readers; many of them bloggers themselves. The participants are engaged in an asynchronous written dialogue between the sender (the blogger who displays information) and the addressee (the

³⁶ <http://openid.net/>, accessed 23/03/2010

³⁷ <https://www.typepad.com/>, accessed 16/05/2010.

³⁸ <http://wordpress.com/>, accessed 16/05/2010.

reader who comments or engage in a discussion based on the information displayed by the blogger after the post is published).

The tenor of discourse concerns the blogger and the audience, taking part in the communicative event of a dialogue. The status of *Shabby Charm* blogger Maia is to act as a role model or an example for other people with the same keen interest in interior decoration and design. The audience' role is to comment on the blog by declaring and acknowledging Maia's gift for interior design and her ability to inspire others. Maia is the authority by virtue of keeping one of the most visited blogs of this kind. The relationship between Maia and her readers is close and informal. She addresses her readers directly and in a personal manner and frequently rounds up her blog post with 'many warm hugs from Maia'. Her photographs support the personal style and add a feeling of intimacy and sincerity to the written text (See example 9). Maia's audience or followers constitute in a stable relationship. She knows her most persistent readers and also follows their blogs and comments on them in her own blog. The other bloggers typically addresses their readers directly and in a colloquial manner as if they know the reader personally. The keeper of *Malivas verden* shows her preference for food and has published a photograph of her lunch. She also reveals her plans for the coming weekend (Entry dated 28/10/2010). The Lobelia blogger is citing a conversation with her son concerning the search for a rocking-horse and a carousel that enter in the traditional Christmas decoration. She cannot find the items and her son tells her bluntly that she is not nice and how will Santa Clause react? (Entry dated 01/12/2009).

What is the mode of the discourse? Again, blogs are always multimodal. One of the software's affordances is its user friendliness and its capacity for adopting multiple modes. One could argue that the software insists on the implementation of multiple modes. The blogger and the audience expect the text to articulate a pleasant feeling and inspiration, and the multimodal discourse accumulates. The visual in Maia's blog is the 'central source of information' (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 30). Both the extensive use of photographs and the graphic layout impart what is Maia's aim: to create a blog that reflects her preferences regarding interior design, life style and the products that enters into these preferences. The modes of still image, layout, and written text articulate discourse related to Maia's style. All the modes, that is, the multimodal ensemble express Maia's preference and her conception of the *Shabby Chic* style. What the still images cannot express, the written narrative can. The still images show and the written narratives tell. The layout, that is, the choice of font style and background, strengthens the impression Maia and her fellow bloggers want to make (See example 10). The text is persuasive, that is, the text wants to convince that in creating a

beautiful home and adhere to a certain lifestyle, Maia has made (and is continuously making) the right choices. In fact, the photographs taken in Maia's domestic environment and the enthusiastic comments and awards are means of proving her point.

3.3.4 The cultural context of the blog

The bloggers share a cultural identity. All five blogs in this study are all connected to Norwegian Interior Blogs (NIB), a filter- and topic driven blog that acts as a kind of an umbrella "organisation" for many interior blogs mainly hosted by Blogger.com. NIB heartily welcomes new bloggers as members of their huge fellowship of interior bloggers. No matter style or shape or taste for design everyone is welcome as a NIB blogger provided the blogger fulfil certain requirements: The blog's main issue must be interior design and the blog's title must reflect this. Also, NIB makes it abundantly clear that they are not snobbish. There is room for everybody's taste no matter how special.

The interior design blogs have elements of all the three types of blogs – personal blogs, filter blogs, and topic driven blogs - introduced in section 2.1.5, but they are above of all personal. The primary subject is interior and lifestyle. One interesting aspect is that the bloggers are without exception women.

The thesis argues that the five blogs presented in this thesis study share a cultural identity. Here, cultural identity is used analytically to look at phenomena and processes dealing with the cultural dimension of human existence (Drotner, 1999). Not only that, cultural identity reflects the ways in which bloggers make use of the repertoire of signs to define herself in the blogs (Drotner, 1999). This approach is applicable in this thesis study based on the fact that the blogs are digitally mediated personal narratives associated with a distinct cultural group: the interior design bloggers. Also, the aesthetic dimension of the cultural identity is central in the process of digital narration (Drotner, 1999). The bloggers sharing the cultural identity described above constitutes a community within the blogosphere. In this community of bloggers, lifestyle is signified by the decoration style, by clothes and accessories, and by the blogger's conception of particular decoration styles, one of them known as *Shabby Chic*.

The bloggers show their appreciation of each other's blogs by sending award images created by the sender or copied from other blogs. *Mias Interiør* has been awarded 'creative blogger' by some of her followers (See example 11). The bloggers keeping a business blog often use 'give away' as means of promoting their blog. People commenting the particular blog, preferably followers and frequent commentators, and those who link the blog to their

own blog, participate in the prize drawing. The prize or the give away is usually an item related to the decoration style favoured by the blogging community.

The *Shabby Charm* blog is ranked as number 120 on the list of most visited blogs in Norway³⁹. On Monday, 01 March 2010, *Shabby Charm* has had a total of 86 010 visitors since it was set up in April 2008. In comparison, *Hespe* (set up in October 2007) has had 15 000 visitors, *Lobelia* (set up April 2008) has had 1 800, *Malivas verden* (set up in March 2008) 10 000, and *Mias Interiør* (set up in November 2008) has had 3 500 visitors.

The magazine *Vakre Hjem & Interiører* – Beautiful Homes & Interiors is championing the interior design style which has influenced and inspired the *Shabby Charm* and other like-minded blogs. The magazine's advertising information says:

'Vakre Hjem & Interiør (Beautiful Homes & Interiors) inspires and offers a wealth of ideas on how to create a beautiful home by taking our readers inside some of the world's most beautiful country homes. [...] Vakre Hjem & Interiør gives an artful presentation of interiors, architecture, gardens, cuisine and lifestyle. Targeted at affluent, adult people with a sense of personal style and a taste of tradition, Vakre Hjem & Interiør is an excellent choice for our advertisers (Vakre Hjem & Interiører 's website⁴⁰).

The interior magazine promotes decoration style trends such as *Shabby Chic*, *French Country Living* and *Vintage*. A short presentation of one of these trends is needed in order to establishing the cultural identity of the interior blogs presented in this analysis.

The founder of the *Shabby Chic* home decoration style, Rachel Ashwell, maintains that 'a home can be truly lived in and still be lovely' (*Shabby Chic* homepage⁴¹).

As a mother and the creator of Rachel Ashwell *Shabby Chic*, my thoughts about decorating are that a home can be truly lived in and still be lovely. I believe in cozy relaxed setting where kids are free to put their feet on the sofa and guests can place their cups on the coffee table without a care. For me, the secret to living well is to surround myself with beautiful things are practical and deliciously comfortable (ibid.).

The synthesis of lifestyle and aesthetics is an important aspect in Ashwell's philosophy. The home must reflect the lifestyle and the lifestyle is reflected in the interior design. The notion

³⁹ Beautiful Homes & Interiors declares that Shabby Charm is number 120 of the biggest blogs in Norway ('Nå ligger den på 120. plass over Norges største blogger) It is hard to establish what is meant by the Norwegian adjective 'største'. A search on Google.com gives a number of websites where blogs are assessed by a number of criteria. Biggest or 'størst' possibly refers to the number of visitors or readers.

⁴⁰ <http://www.vakrehjem.com/adinformation.html>, accessed 01/03/2010

⁴¹ <http://www.shabbychic.com/ourheritage.htm>, accessed 12.11.2009.

of cosiness and relaxation is pivotal as is the need to be surrounded by beautiful things that are ‘practical and deliciously comfortable [...] comfort, the beauty of imperfection, the allure of time-worn objects and the appeal of simple practical living’ (ibid.). It is worth noting that Ashwell’s philosophy involving ‘the appreciation of vintage and history’ provides the background of a very successful business concept as well as a decoration style that has become very popular in the Western world.

The *Shabby Chic* decoration style is characterised by the treasuring of things being used and worn; things with a history; ‘the faded grandeur’ of pieces of furniture (ibid.). Items that other people might find more suitable for the junk yard, the followers of the *Shabby Chic* truly embrace and find new uses for them. The ‘faded and decayed’ marked by past use is synonymous with beauty, comfort and function in the *Shabby Chic* discourse. The decoration style favours colours such as soft white, muted grey, pale pink, and faded green. Also, the style blends the old and the new in a personal mixture (ibid.). The most salient feature in the *Shabby Chic* trend is the praising of the well-worn and things with a history. The emphasis on the compassionate values such as family and friends, home and decoration as well the notion of nostalgia, of good old days is very tangible in the *Shabby Chic* trend. Rachel Ashwell keeps a blog in which her personal voice communicates the message:

Our relationships with our friends and families are the true benchmark of our success and happiness. Of course, what we do with our lives is another element that adds to who we are. Much to reflect upon. And for me, it is the authenticity of myself and people that are so vital (Rachel Ashwell’s blog, 27.12.2008⁴²).

3.3.5 The display of cultural identity related to lifestyle in the blog?

‘You cannot see or touch the most beautiful things in life. They must be felt in your heart.’⁴³ The saying appears at the top of Maia’s blog. The other bloggers have sayings such as ‘Create new memories each day’ (*Lobelia*, my translation⁴⁴), ‘Blessed be the simple things; that is happiness’ (*Malivas verden*, my translation⁴⁵), and ‘Life’s not a race, take it slower – Hear the music before the song is over’ (*Hespe*). The sayings are coherent with the cultural identity of the blogger described earlier. The cultural identity is displayed through the blog itself, that is, what is actually in situ. The multimodal representations constituting the blog *Shabby Charm*

⁴² <http://rachelashwellshabbychic.blogspot.com/>, accessed 06/04/2010.

⁴³ ‘De vakreste ting i livet kan man ikke se eller ta på. De skal føles i ditt hjerte’ <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/> [Accessed 06/05/2010]

⁴⁴ ‘Skap nye minner hver dag’ <http://lobeliahjem.blogspot.com/> [Accessed 25/03/2010]

⁴⁵ ‘Velsignet være de enkel ting; det er lykke det’ <http://malivasverden.blogspot.com/> [Accessed 25/03/2010]

largely agrees with the *Shabby Chic* trend and, as such, they enter in the endeavours of creating a cozy, intimate, and inviting atmosphere.

3.3.6 The choice of semiotic system

The choice of semiotic system can be traced to the *Shabby Chic* interior decoration style. The *Shabby Charm* blog is implicitly modelled upon the interior magazine *Vakre Hjem & Interiører* and whose main influence is the *Shabby Chic* decoration style. The choice of semiotic system reflects the philosophy of the founder, Rachel Ashwell. The provenance of the semiotic resources used in this thesis blogs stem from this particular context. The worn out and used items signify history and lived lives as well as a preference for nostalgia. The beauty of well-loved objects and time worn pieces are showcased in these blogs.

The photograph used as background for the heading in the *Shabby Charm* blog, two picture postcards featuring a zinc cachepot and a rose with the words ‘love’ and ‘laugh’ written on them, represents the visual entry point and strike the keynote of the blog thematically (See example 12) . The inherent meaning potential of this image, the semiotic resource, is the allusion to old black and white pictures with retouched and faded colours signifying nostalgia and former idyll. The photograph is very typical representation of the *Shabby Chic*, *French Country Living*, and *Vintage Style*. By using this photograph, Maia has signalled that this blog’s main theme and style is based on this particular interior design style. The written text on the cards (love and laugh) signifies the blog’s intention to bringing about a cozy relaxed setting. The words love and laugh signify Maia’s intention to inspire her audience by creating a favourable and positive atmosphere in her blog.

The back ground colour (grey) and the photographs used in the multimodal discourse are inspired by the *Shabby Chic* interior decoration style where the grey scale indicating faded colours a running theme. Grey makes a balanced impression and appears as neutral. Grey also accentuates Maia’s photographs in a favourable manner. Equally important, grey sets off the colour palette of the particular decoration style favoured by the blogging community. Two this thesis’ blogs, *Hespe* and *Mias Interiør*, have used backgrounds created by a blogger by the alias of ‘The Background Fairy’⁴⁶. This blogger is offering ‘Free Stuff for your Blog’ such as backgrounds, free vintage clipart, and other graphical elements mainly in the *Vintage* and *Shabby Chic* style. The choice of semiotic resources involves the mode of layout.

⁴⁶ <http://www.backgroundfairy.com/> , retrieved 03/03/2010.

3.3.7 Multimodal Representation in *Shabby Charm*

The layers or the strata of media practice in which meaning is dominantly made (explained in section 2.3.2) are the content strata and the expression strata. The content strata relate to discourse and design. The discourse in this thesis study is articulated through and by multiple modes. The use of various modes is limited in the blogs. The reach of modes, that is, the blogger's modal preferences in the blogs based on purpose and cultural belonging, consist of static modes such as written narratives, graphic layout, images, photographs, and colours. Neither of the blogs in this thesis study uses dynamic modes such as films, music, animations. In the *Shabby Charm* blog Maia's messages are addressed largely in the visual mode. The photographs are not only most dominant mode, but also the eye catcher, the point of entry in the blogs. Maia puts a lot of emphasis on the photographs she has taken herself. The motives are almost without exception connected with interior and life style products such as interior decorations, furniture, still lives of various interior items, accessories, clothes, and flower centrepieces, flowers in vases, table arrangements, and candle lights.

Maia has chosen the large image size in her blog, signifying the preference of the photograph as the most prominent mode. The affordance of the mode of still image in this blog is that this visual component of the text is not depending on the written narrative in order to convey meaning. The various interior related motives speak for themselves. They make perfectly sense to readers from any Western country familiar with interior decoration styles. Maia's intention is to inspire the readers and to share her personal experiences and feelings in relation to interior design and lifestyle.

The mode of written narrative is organised both as an amplification of the photograph's message and as a supplement, but also appears as independent entities with little or no connection between the narrative and the depicted. Food recipes and small poems occur occasionally. The written narrative changes from brief daily life reports to almost poem like reflections of daily living.

Warm and cold...

The soft against the warm, the rough against the romantic, the old against the new.

What would life be without contrasts? (*Shabby Charm* 22.02.2010, my translation⁴⁷).

⁴⁷ 'Varmt og kaldt...Det myke mot det varme, det røffe mot det romantiske, det gamle mot det nye. Hva hadde vel livet vært uten kontraster? <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, accessed 06/05/2010.

The written narrative in *Shabby Charm* contains features on topics such as interior design and children's clothes, interior accessories, daily events, and recommendation of shops and cafes. The style is personal, that is, Maia addresses the reader in a direct and personal way.

'Many, many thanks, dear Hilde-Gunn. I'm a great admirer of all the beautiful things you create and of your fine blog 'Hespe' (*Shabby Charm*, 27.02.2010, my translation⁴⁸)

The mode of layout holds considerable prominence. In this study the mode of layout includes features such as colour and font-style. Maia focuses strictly on the theme of the interior decoration style which postulates that less is more, and keeps her blog clean and relatively simple. She has not succumbed to the temptation of adding the increasing assortment of gadgets offered by blogger.com and other web sites. The blogging software provides ready made templates for those who do not master the system of html-codes⁴⁹. The interior bloggers in this thesis study all have customised their templates.

This thesis has observed the blogs over a period of approximately 4 months and the only blog that has edited the layout are *Malivas verden* who has changed the background colour from intensely pink (See example 7) to grey (like *Shabby Charm*'s background colour) and has also added a picture in the blog title frame.

The mode of layout includes the choice of font. Maia uses 'Courier New', a font designed to look like the outcome of a typewriter. Courier New was extensively used previous to the advent of digital word processing. The font, rarely used today, signifies nostalgia; the appreciation of the bygone and the things with a history. *Shabby Chic* originator, Rachel Ashwell uses this font in her blog.

3.3.8 Semiotic regime

There are traces of semiotic regime deriving from the *Shabby Chic* founder Rachel Ashwell's philosophy both in the narrative, in the layout and in the semiotic mode of still image. Rachel Ashwell acts as a role model and an expert in relation to this particular blogging community deriving from this trend. Maia's blog has attracted attention in the blogosphere because of her personal interpretation and understanding the *Shabby Chic* decoration style, and thus appears as a role model for her blog followers. The title of her blog, *Shabby Charm*, connotes a less pretentious and more playful version of the original trend.

⁴⁸ 'Tusen, tusen takk kjære Hildegunn. Jeg er en stor beundrer av alt det vakre du lager og den fine bloggen din'. <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, accessed 29/03/2010.

⁴⁹ html stands for hypertext markup language.

The *Shabby Chic* decoration style persistently calls attention to the allegedly close connection between people's identities and lifestyle, and the way they decorate and furnish their homes by the use of things being used and worn; things with a history. Maia adheres to the 'less is more' saying of Rachel Ashwell and focuses on the photographs in order to pursue and visualise the particular trend. The motives of her photographs are reflecting the trend's values and philosophy. The motives, such as close up photos of flowers, a sun lit breakfast table, faded and worn pillows in a sofa, a still life of a basket made of steel wire containing scarves, and a kitchen unit with various kitchen utensils including vintage lemonade bottles, are signifying lifestyle identity (See example 13). One aspect of the semiotic rule of expertise is colour. Maia's blog reflects the *Shabby Chic* palette of colours. One of her followers, *Malivas verden* used to have a vigorous pink nuance as background colour, but she has recently changed to grey. Role models such as Rachel Ashwell, use their home to signify lifestyle identity. Maia is representing the ordinary people whose homes are shown as examples of "best practice" (van Leeuwen 2005: 63).

3.3.9 Linking practice and tags

The *Shabby Charm* blog is related to a number of other websites by various kinds of links and the blog host's software provides various possibilities for linking the blog to other websites and blogs. This possibility enables Maia to display her personal preferences as well as promoting her own products. Centrally located on the right side of the blog, is a link to Maia's latest creation; the inspiration guide. This guide, made by Maia and her friend Sølvi, is for sale. In falling order there is a link to the magazine *Vakre Hjem & Interiører* and an article featuring Maia's home, a 'give-away' from the blog Franciska's *Vakre Verden*⁵⁰, links to the interior shops *Lobelia* and *Boligfryd*, a link to *Designers Guild*, a link to *Norwegian Interior Bloggers*, links to her 343 followers, a link to *the Selected Norwegian Interior Blogs*, a list of tags related to her own blog post archive, links to inspiring blogs, links to 23 online interior shops, links to four interior stylists, a link to *Bloggurat*⁵¹, the provider of a gadget counting the number of readers the last seven days and the position of the *Shabby Charm* blog on the list of most visited Norwegian blogs. Finally, there is a link to the top blog list provided by *Blogglisten*⁵².

Maia's tag list reveals the subjects she is most preoccupied with. The tag 'inspiration'

⁵⁰ Franciska's beautiful world <http://franciskasvakreveren.blogspot.com/>, accessed 25/03/2010.

⁵¹ <http://bloggurat.net/>, accessed 16/05/2010.

⁵² <http://www.blogglisten.no/>, accessed 16/05/2010.

points to 40 entries about this subject. Other tags are interior, still lives, holiday, awards, flowers, bathroom, children, birthday, shops, the inspiration guide, details, everyday happiness, Christmas, competition, Madonna, adventures, Easter, spring, travel, spa, *Vakre Hjem & Interiører*. Hesper and Mias Interiør also have a tag list, and Lobelia has tagged her photographs.

The *Shabby Charm* blog is linked with the four other blogs in this thesis study. The four blogs are all followers of this particular blog. The other blogs are linked with each other:

Mias Interiør and Shabby Charm follow Hesper.

Hesper and Shabby Charm follow Lobelia.

Shabby Charm follows Malivas verden.

Hesper and Shabby Charm follow Mias Interiør.

Hesper recommends Shabby Charm and Malivas verden.

Mias Interiør recommends Shabby Charm and Hesper

Lobelia recommends Shabby Charm and Hesper

Malivas verden recommends Shabby Charm and Hesper

3.3.10 The staging of the self in the narrative: *Shabby Charm*– interior, everyday happiness, flowers and children⁵³

What constitutes the blogger's façade? The creator of *Shabby Charm* has been keeping the blog since April 2008. In her profile, she does not give away any personal information such as age, name and address, but reveals that her astrological sign is Aquarius, her gender is female, and she lives in Norway. She is, however, signing some of her entries with the surrogate name of 'Maia'. Also, she has published a picture of herself in the occasion of a birthday party. The creator of the *Shabby Charm* profile, for example, informs the reader that she is

'.....passionately engaged in interior and styling. I am married to the world's best husband and a proud mama of a little princess aged three and a little dog aged four. Welcome to my site, I hope it'll inspire you. I'll be happy if you leave a message. Mail address: shabbyogcharm@gmail.com' (*Shabby Charm's* front page).

Maia, as she prefers to call herself in the blog, has chosen to publish a picture of a floral

⁵³ 'Interiør hverdagslykke blomster og barn' <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, accessed 25.02.10.

centrepiece as her profile picture. The blogger has the opportunity to display additional information about herself such as favourite interests (Maia is interested in interior design, spa, exercising, spending time together in the cosiness of friends and family), favourite movies (Maia prefers *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Love Actually*, *Bridget Jones' Diary*, and *Mamma Mia*), favourite music (she likes listening to Nora Jones, Katie Melua, Café del Mar, Buddha Bar, James Blunt, Bjørn Eidsvåg, and Kenny D.), favourite books (Maia states that she has no time for reading, but she is fond of Jane Austen's books).

The blogger is free to inform whether she keeps other blogs and if she is following external blogs. The *Shabby Charm* blogger administers two other blogs as well as following a number of external ones.

3.3.11 What constitutes the front and the back stage?

The blog as it appears on the screen when clicking on the hyperlink [Shabby Charm](#), constitutes the front stage. The front stage is where Maia displays her preferences regarding interior decoration style as well as the products that enter into her life style. This is where the blogger publishes her self-narrative represented by photographs, written text and selected links to web sites Maia finds relevant and interesting in this particular context. The front stage displays everything the blogger thinks is worth sharing as a part of her self presentation and the comments from the audience is no exception. Everything that is accessible and visible to the reader in the blog is part of the front stage and also in the narrative-of-self.

The blogs the *Shabby Charm* blogger follows such as *Hespe*, *Lobelia*, *Malivas verden*, and *Mias Interiør*, all have provided their blogs with a profile and a profile picture as well as information about their preferences for movies, literature, music, interests and other blogs. The profile connects the off line and the online authenticity and provides the blogger with a 'coherent self-narrative' (Carrington 2009: 9). The bloggers do not, however, show their full name and address. The off site context is not prevalent in these particular blogs.

The blogs front stage reflects the choices made back stage by blogger Maia. She has published her blogs because of her keen interest in interior decoration and design. Her choice of semiotic system and semiotic modes are presented in the narrative-of-self as are the choice of life style closely connected to the philosophy of *Shabby Chic* founder, Rachel Ashwell. The blogger does have alternative blog hosts with affordances other than the software of *Blogger*. However, although the reflective choices Maia has made and continuously is making are manifested in the blog although the planning prior to the publishing is not visible as such.

3.3.12 Bricolage and remediation

Bricolage is the art of improvising, of making something new out of the old and known (Ridderstrøm, 2005). The bricoleur moves in the border area of plagiarism and innovation. The bloggers and other makers of web sites put small units together and create a whole. They choose from a certain repertoire; they cut and paste. Hyperlinks, extracts of written narratives, gadgets, font styles, backgrounds and templates, graphical elements are all components used in bricolage. In the interior blogger discourse, the bloggers employ a repertoire that show explicit signs of the *Shabby Chic* trend described earlier.

The particular decoration style foregrounded in this thesis is a convenient example of bricolage. Like many fashion and decoration style trends, the *Shabby Chic* trend is recontextualisation of the old and well known (ibid.). Things marked by past use, the faded and well-worn are brought together in a new context defined by trend maker Rachel Ashwell and, hence, appear as an innovation and bring about a regenerated interest and a valuation of the well known things with a history, of recycling and re-use. Rachel Ashwell is performing the art of bricolage. The bloggers, on their part, act as kinds of ‘sub-bricoleurs’ of this particular style. Although clearly influenced by Ashwell’s philosophy, Maia and her fellow bloggers attempt to make their own idiosyncratic versions by cutting and pasting not from the *Shabby Chic* repertoire entirely, but also from other decoration style trends taking after *Shabby Chic* such as *House Doctor*, a Danish based online interior shop. *House Doctor* serves as an inspiration for Maia and this decoration style is often reflected in Maia’s online showcase home. Like Rachel Ashwell, the owners of the company keep a blog: <http://housedoctor.dk.blogspot.com/>.

3.3.13 The role of the reader

3.3.13.1 The interior blogging community

The interior bloggers are part of a distinct community. The community of the bloggers in this thesis study is rendered possible by the digital technology supporting the software of the blogs. The bloggers are linked to each others blogs and hence constitutes a community similarly disposed bloggers. In developing a community, the ‘communication infrastructure’ allowing the blogs to connect is not enough, the notion of ‘interdependence among the participants’ is decisive (Dennen and Pashnyak 2008: 273). The linking practice described earlier displays the blog’s followers as well as the blogger’s preferences; however, these links do not constitute the blogging community as such. Moreover, the community of bloggers is manifested explicitly in the comments, that is, in the bloggers interaction. In Dennen and

Pashnyak's study of finding a blog community in the comments, the role of the reader and blogger responses are pivotal. As pointed out earlier, the blog's affordance is the possibility to communicate with other people easily and without effort. There is a notion of expectation connected to the publishing of blog post. The blogger cannot know if the reader will bother to comment on her blog post.

As pointed out in section 3.3.9 the linking practice in *Shabby Charm* is dominantly reciprocal. Together with the comments, the reciprocal links determine the blog's connection with other blogs (Dennen and Pashnyak, 2008). The blogs in this thesis study are part of a community; but they do, however, exist in a continuum. The membership of the community is not pre-defined nor is it tied to any particular presumptions other than affinity for the blog. The community members come and go at their own pleasure at any time. Although some of the blogs are categorised as interior design blogs by *Bloggurat.com*, the *Norwegian Interior Blogs*, and *Selected Norwegian Interior Bloggers*, this categorisation does not indicate a blogging community per se, but merely a clue to what types of blogs one can expect to find. The community exists within the category or the 'types of', at a point of tangency where mutual interests, values, preferences and viewpoints meet. The community in this thesis study is marked by affinity and mutual recognition as well as loyalty within the community. If one blogger is referring to Maia's blog in positive terms, Maia comments on this in her blog and send her thanks. In this community of bloggers it is 'considered appropriate to provide mention of and a link to the inspiring post and comment thread in this secondary post' (Dennen and Pashnyak 2008: 280). The recommendation of a blog, the acknowledgements expressed and the awards given by bloggers within the community are vital elements in the narrative-of-self construction.

3.3.13.2 The Model Reader

Who is Maia blogging for, who are the addressees and what is their contribution in the process of actualising the text? In Eco's perspective the addressees are abstract and their purpose is to act as a constitutive element in the meaning making process (Eco, 1979). Maia in *Shabby Charm* cannot know who will find exactly her blog appealing and interesting, but she does have a model reader in mind when she publishes her blog for the first time. The success of performance depends entirely on the public's feedback, preferably of a positive kind. The creator of this thesis' object of study, the *Shabby Charm* blog, readily admits:

I'm so proud and happy because the number of followers of my blog has exceeded 300. It's been nearly 2 years since I started blogging and I REALLY appreciate you all. If it hadn't been for you and all your nice comments, I would probably not blog! Many warm hugs from Maia (*Shabby Charm*, 27/02/2010, my translation⁵⁴).

Although the blogger is literally publishing her blog into nothingness, she needs the cooperation of a reader. Once her blog has attracted attention and obtained followers, and the moment she has become member of a blogging community, she knows if she 'on the right track'. The post to which the comments are attached set the stage of the nature of the comments (Dennen and Pashnyak, 2008). Maia typically involves the reader when she is blogging by addressing the reader directly:

The responses from the shops have been very good, but what do you think? Could such a little book that fits perfectly in the purse be useful? Excited hugs from Maia (*Shabby Charm* 10/12/2009, my translation⁵⁵).

By 'grammatically manifesting' the relationship between the reader and the sender, Maia creates private realm in which the sender is most welcome. She is inviting the reader to participate in a dialogue and take part in a project that she is working with. The success of the project rests on the reader's assurance that Maia's effort is worth while. Without the reader response, this particular text cannot be actualised (Eco, 1979). Maia needs the co-operation of the reader both in the interpretation of this particular narrative and in the construction of the narrative-of-self. The co-operation of the reader presupposes the notion of sharing a cultural identity as well as being part of a particular community. The plethora of pictures showing various still lives composed of things such as coffee cups, pastry, flowers, candles, examples of the Virgin Mary, crosses, and French church candelabrum 'calls for the co-operation' of the reader (Eco 1979: 4). In order for the text to make meaning, the reader must know the codes, the semiotic resources in this particular context. Here, the philosophy of Rachel

⁵⁴ Jeg er så stolt og glad over at antall følgere på bloggen min har passert 300. Nå er det snart to år siden jeg startet bloggingen og jeg setter STOR pris på dere alle sammen. Hadde det ikke vært for dere og alle de koselige kommentarene så hadde jeg nok ikke blogget heller! Mange varme klemmer fra Maia <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, [retrieved 18.03.2010]

⁵⁵ 'Respsen fra butikkene har vært kjempe bra, men hva tror du? Kunne en slik liten bok som passer perfekt i vesken være nyttig å ha? Spente klemmer fra

Maia' <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2009-12-17T01%3A26%3A00%2B01%3A00&max-results=50>, my translation⁵⁵ [Accessed 29/03/2010]

Ashwell enters in the blogger's cultural identity as well as the blogging community, although the reader may actually not be aware of the origin of the *Shabby Chic* trend.

When constructing the narrative-of-self, Maia foresees a reader, but what kind of model reader does the narrative-of-self presuppose? What kind of reader will benefit Maia's façade and performance? The model reader is activated by the blogging software, that is, by the posts and their corresponding comments. The model reader recognises Maia as a competent and inspiring blogger and immediately takes Maia's perspective in choice of life style and interior design. The model reader gives Maia the response she needs to continue her ongoing process of constructing her narrative-of-self in the blog. The model reader may well be one of the audiences outside the blogging community. It could be the role models giving Maia praise for best practice among the amateur interior decorators such as the article featuring Maia's home in *Vakre Hjem & Interiører*.

In their study called "Exploring the Role of the Reader in the Activity of Blogging", Baumer, Sueyoshi and Tomlinson (2008) have undertaken a qualitative and ethnographic study of 'the role, contribution, and significance' of blog readers (ibid. no pagination). The aim of the study was to understand the significance of the reader in the activity of blogging. The 23 participants in the study were people who had read at least five different blogs at least 2-3 hours per week.

In their study, the role of the reader of blogs were viewed against the reader-response theory fore fronted by Nardi et al. (2004), Dourish (2001), Crossman (2002), asserting that readers approach the texts from a subjective perspective. Blogging, the study points out, is interactional and hence both bloggers and readers need to be studied. The study argues that the 'type of reading practice' in which the blogger engage in is important in understanding the role of the blog reader (Baumer et al. 2008, no pagination). Baumer et al. emphasises the need to focus on blogging as interaction between blogger and reader. The study posed the question of how the reader participates in and contributes to the shaping of blogs. Also, the study explored how the readers perceive the identity of the blogger. The study found that reading blogs becomes a habit on equal terms with checking and reading e-mails. The routine of reading blogs is described as 'a part of an Internet ritual' (Baumer et al. 2008, no pagination). Inspiration, information, and entertainment are what the readers are searching for when they read blogs. This thesis' *Shabby Charm* blogger, Maia, maintains that one of her motivations for keeping a blog is to inspire. In addition, Maia informs and entertains her readers.

The study of Baumer et al. revealed that the reader and the blogger hold a reciprocal feeling of loyalty, that is, the reader feel obliged to comment on the blog posts and the blogger

must meet the expectations of updating the blog at regular intervals. Some readers feel strongly that they are part of the blog; they feel somehow connected to it. One participant declared: 'I guess sometimes I feel like they're writing to me' (ibid).

Blogs are typically grouped in clusters and, as shown in this thesis, in blogging communities which are linked reciprocally. However, not all readers are bloggers. What is more, being a part of a community does not mean that the reader is keeping a blog. A reader who considers him or herself being a part of a blog does not necessarily feel part of the blogging community. Baumer et al. found that 'being a part of a blog' involves 'regular reading, a feeling of community, and a sense of connectedness' (2008, no pagination). The motives for reading a blog can change, but the connectedness to the blog or being a part of the blogs is related to the reader sharing a personal experience with the blogger. The study of Baumer et al. does not make clear exactly what being a member of a community in online interactions means; however, this thesis argues that the notion of cultural identity may be of significance.

Baumer et al. argue that the diversity of approaches concerning how people read blogs is related to the diversity of types of blogs. The interior blogs, for example, belong in a cluster of blogs aimed at people who share the same preference for interior decoration and life style. The readers of these blogs (primarily females) feel part of a community and the response (the comments), habitually positive, reflects the way the reader perceives the blogger (the façade) as well as the *way* the blogger presents herself (her performance). The reader's inclination to give positive feedback is also due to the fact that these blogs evoke pleasant feelings and bring about a benevolent attitude towards the blogger who graciously shares her preferences for interior decoration. Maia's performance and façade evoke an exclusively positive response in the community wherein she performs.

Chapter 4 Discussion of findings

4.0 The case study – findings and discussion

The study has taken a close look at the *Shabby Charm* blog in connection with other blogs from the same blogging community. Some of the observations will be discussed in this chapter. This thesis writer wants to comment on the aspect concerning multimodality in the analysis. The digital medium of blog is inherently multimodal, and a monomodal blog is a contradiction in terms. For a digital storyteller such as the blogger, the question is not *if* she

wants to use multiple modes in her narrative-of-self. Rather, she must decide on *what* modes are most adequate in the creating of her self-narrative. By virtue of being composite, the blog's text enters into a multimodal discourse where each mode participates in the process of meaning making. Moreover, the affordance of each mode must be seen in relation to the whole multimodal representation and the semiotic resources prevalent in the communicative event. In connection with this, the significance of the multimodal aspect in the blog may seem slightly over estimated. Still, multimodality is an important part of the theoretical framework in this thesis. Literature concerning multimodality in digital technology, particularly in social media, is scarce. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) have investigated the multimodal discourse in interior magazines in their book *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* as well as proposed a theory concerning the design on web pages in *Reading Images: The grammar of Visual Design*. Jewitt (2009) have assembled articles written by leading figures in the field of multimodality in *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal analysis*. However, neither of them is concerned with the medium of blogs.

4.1 The affordance of the blogging software and the design of the communicative event.

The user-friendly interface is important. The bloggers have chosen the blog host *Blogger.com* because of affordance of the software. The software is simple to use and it is flexible. The bloggers have various modal resources available such as film, slideshows, images, gadgets, sound, and layout. Ready made templates facilitate the process of creating a layout. It is relatively easy to customise the template if the blogger wishes to do so and the bloggers in this thesis study have all customised their blogs; however to a limited degree. The software provides many possibilities if the blogger is willing to spend time on tutorials and investigating the various features of *blogger.com*. The *Shabby Charm* blog has confined her narrative-of-self to the frames of the software and chosen to leave out all the gadgets she could easily have embedded.

The view this thesis is advancing is that Maia has not made a deliberate choice of blog host. In fact, it is very likely that the choice is more of an accidental occurrence. Furthermore, the four other blogs also are also hosted by Blogger. Not only those, the blogs listed in *Norwegian Interior Blogs* and *Selected Interior Blogs* are also mainly hosted by *Blogger*. This may be seen as an indication of a user-friendly design of the communicative event. *Blogger* has adjusted their software in order to maximise the possibility to create networks and communities as well as interacting with other blogs. The 'dashboard', 'reading' and 'other

stuff page' is a way of connecting bloggers and classifying them into groups according to interest and preference and, consequently, *Blogger* acts as a kind of "match maker of the blogosphere". 'Social networking software is designed around the explicit notion of creating webs of connection (Carrington 2009: 11). However, the tendency of using the same blog host and choosing among a relatively limited set of templates indicates that the bloggers may be more engaged in expressing and communicating their message and show belonging to this particular community than of the affordances of the blogging software. 'Blogger makes it so easy to type in a thought or reaction that many people are disinclined to hunt up a link and compose some text around it', claims Blood (2000, no pagination). The bloggers in this thesis study (and many others) do not feel such a disinclination for choosing *Blogger*. On the contrary, the affordance of the software in this particular blogging community is its user-friendliness and the fact that *Blogger* facilitates linking with other blogs hosted by them, thus keeping the bloggers within the same "family" and ensuring that the bloggers do not go astray from the Blogger domain.

The narrative-of-self unfolds within the frames of the *Blogger*; confined to the limits *or* possibilities of the software (depending on one's points of view).

4.2 The cultural and social context

By looking at the three features of context concerning how language is affected by the social context the study has observed the field, the tenor and the mode of discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1985). The blog is a social medium characterised by participation and interaction. Blogging involves sharing and displaying personal experiences in the process of constructing a narrative-of-self. The bloggers take part in a digital participatory culture where technology has enabled 'new levels of participation' (Carrington 2009: 16).

The multimodal discourse takes place in a particular community of bloggers. The blogs in this study share a common interest of interior design and decoration deriving mainly from the philosophy of *Shabby Chic* founder, Rachel Ashwell. Although never explicitly expressed, the bloggers share a cultural identity, that is, they share a set of semiotic systems conveying meaning based on the aesthetics of the *Shabby Chic* style. The embracing of the well-worn, the faded grandeur of old furniture, meaningful items and the things with a history are reflected in all of the blogs in this thesis study. Maia, the *Shabby Charm* blogger, is also greatly influenced by the *House Doctor*, a Danish interior company claiming that their style is

‘provocative, personal and not too formal’ (Thoughts & Finds⁵⁶). Moreover, the company’s owners declare that ‘We believe that the time right now is a time for mixing the elements rather than matching the elements’ (ibid.). Like Rachel Ashwell, the three siblings behind the company *House Doctor* also keep a blog in order to share their ‘daily thoughts and finds! - Along with news from House Doctor’ (ibid.).

Maintaining the *Shabby Chic* and other related interior decoration styles entails choices of preferences, values, and lifestyle; a kind of ideology. Here, ideology is conceived in as ‘the collection of conscious or unconscious views of the world and what it is to be human [...] context always has to do with ideology’ (Herman and Vervaeck 2001: 8).

The history of fashion is the story about the eternal return and resurrection. Dokk-Holm (2001) has pointed out that private consumption plays a central part in the construction of an identity. The *Shabby Chic* trend has become very popular in Norway and the number of shops offering life style products and other commodities related to the decoration style is considerable. The semiotic demand, that is, the demand of making a statement, is very prevalent in this particular style. Besides, the bloggers in this thesis uses the products as elements in their narrative-of-self. As noted earlier, the blogs in this thesis study reproduces some of ‘the norms and values’ are deriving from the *Shabby Chic* ideology (Deuze 2005: 64).

The blogger, Maia, relates to this particular ideology when undertaking the activity of blogging. What is more, she engages in the multimodal discourse marked by bloggers adherent to the same ideology. The *Shabby Charm* blogger acts as role model and ideal for other bloggers. Relevant in determining the social context of the blogs, is the fact that some of the blogs engage in business like activities. Four of the blogs are not business blogs as such, but act as promoters of shops and products and links to their own or close friends businesses. Lobelia runs an online shop, but her blog is explicitly not marked by this. *Mias Interiør* stands out as being the most commercial blog, but even she mixes ‘business and pleasure’ in her blog. *Shabby Charm* blogger Maia and her friend have created a so-called *Inspiration Guide*, a project in which she has engaged her blog followers. She promotes the book in her blog and administers the sale and the guide in a separate blog. The over all impression, though, is that the blogs are most of all promoting the bloggers’ own choices of lifestyle and the products deriving from this.

⁵⁶ <http://housedoctor.dk.blogspot.com/>, accessed 16/05/2010.

4.1 The linking practice in *Shabby Charm*

Links are parts of the impression management and thus central in the narrative-of-self. The study has shown that are linked to each other, ‘individual pieces of content are often linked to individual pieces of content elsewhere’ (Newson 2009: 13). In addition, this possibility enables the blogger to display her personal preferences and hence show her evaluation as part of her self construction. This case study confirms that reciprocal links are the currency of the blogosphere. ‘Frequent commentators are often added to the list in recognition of the developing relationships and synergies, and to assign increased status of being listed on many blogs is a sign of status in the blogger community’ (Carrington 2009: 8). These affinity links are a vital part of the linking practice in the blogs. Also, frequent commentators are rewarded with ‘give-aways’ (small gifts) sponsored by the blogger (See example 14).

Some of the blogs in the study enters in a closely knitted network and they even meet in social setting arranged by fellow bloggers. When Maia and her friend published the book *the Inspiration Guide*, both *Hespe* and *Malivas verden* were invited to the launching (See example 15). The links are customarily followed by the blogger’s commentary. Blood (2000) points out that the blogs take on the filtering function for people who have got neither the time nor the inclination to search the web for similar blogs. Also, the reciprocal acknowledgements among the bloggers serve as confirmations of a community belonging.

Giving a blogger an award is a subtle way of linking with other blogs. Blogger Rachel Margrete Olsen asks if blog award is a poisoned gift. Rachel has been given an award called “the Sunshine Blog Award”, a popular award in some blogging communities such as the interior blogging community (Entry dated 04/03/2010). Unlike other bloggers who have received this award, Rachel is not entirely enthusiastic about this. Although she courteously gives her thanks to the sender, she cannot restrain herself from reflecting upon the fact that the conditions for publishing the award in her blog resembles those put forward in chain letters.

The sunshine Blog Award is awarded to bloggers whose positivity and creativity inspire others in the blog world. The rules for accepting the award are:

1. Put the logo on your blog or within your post.
2. Pass the award to 12 bloggers.
3. Link the nominees within your post.
4. Let them know they received this award by commenting their blog
5. Share the love and link to the person from whom you received this award (*Rachel Spetakkell*,

16/03/2010⁵⁷).

Connecting blogs in this fashion is community building per se. When accepting the award, the blogger feels obliged to follow the rules. Even Rachel, although critical, follows the request of the sender and accepts the award and the conditions for receiving it. The award is nevertheless an appreciation of her blog, and she probably does feel flattered and pleased.

4.2 Mode and medium

Communication in the medium of blogs is intentional and goal-oriented by the use of multimodal representations. Meaning is the outcome of representation and communication (Hopperstad, 2005). Rather than the fixed structure of a written text, the multimodal representations appear as more dynamic and much more reader-friendly. How do the bloggers best articulate meaning through the multimodal representations? In this thesis blogs, meaning is conveyed through the semiotic modes of still images, written language, and layout. These modes are brought into an integral relation with the communicative event of blogging and the cultural identity shared by the bloggers in this particular community (Kress, 2003). As noted in section 2.5.0, the notion of multimodal discourse can be applied to social interactions such as a face to face conversation. The content and vocabulary of the written narrative reflect the ‘conversational nature’ of blogging (Baumer et al., 2008, no pagination).

As discussed earlier, Maia speaks directly to her audience. Inasmuch as this is a personal narrative, the use of the personal pronouns such as ‘I’ and ‘you’ is extensive. The use of evaluative adjectives is distinct. Phrases such as ‘my dearest friend, my lovely daughter, our darling dog, my beautiful son, my darling husband, and ‘you, dear blogger’ occurs frequently. ‘These markers trace out subjectivity in the written text’ according to Knain (2004: 150). Interior bloggers make abundantly use of evaluative adjectives such as ‘cosy’, ‘fantastic’, ‘inspiring’, ‘lovely’, ‘beautiful’, and ‘nice’ in their written narrative. This is particularly evident in the reader’s comments. The semiotic modes in the five blogs presented in this thesis study, articulate the discourse, that is, what is being talked about. The multimodal discourse in *Shabby Charm* is closely related to life style and the credo of the *Shabby Chic* ideology: the contrasts between shabby and chic, ‘casual and elegant, fresh and

⁵⁷ <http://rachelslekegrind.blogspot.com/2010/03/blog-award-en-forgiftet-gave.html> [Accessed 06/04/2010].

traditional, simple and ornate, plain and patterned, ruffled and tidy'⁵⁸. The multimodal discourse is rather consistent, that is, by and large it revolves around interior and life style related topics. The juncture of text, layout and still image align with the impression the blogger wants to create: an inspiring and pleasant blog, a breathing space in a generally busy everyday life, a place to enjoy and contemplate.

The analysis shows that the mode of written narrative does play an important part in the multimodal discourse. The written narrative sets the tone in the blog. Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that 'language-as-writing' may be used to provide a frame for interpretation, a particular pointing' referred to as 'a social/ideological deixis'⁵⁹ (2003: 32). The reference for deictic words is related to the situation in which they are expressed. The written narratives do not interact with the still images as a rule, but there is a distinct coherence between the two modes. Pictures depend on their context in order to convey meaning, argues Liestøl (2006). A picture rarely appears without being accompanied by some kind of text, usually a written text. What is more, 'a picture has the capability of representing indexical and iconic characters and thus a picture can communicate written text' (Liestøl 2006: 288, my translation⁶⁰).

Shabby Charm blogger Maia frequently writes a poetic-like narrative and her photographs also attempt to 'catch the moment and' and express a mood and communicate a particular feeling or an atmosphere. Rachel Ashwell, founder of *Shabby Chic*, stresses the need for slowing down, for reflection and peace.

Although the mode of written narrative is important in all five of the blogs in this thesis' study, this mode is subordinated to the mode of still image (Jewitt and Kress, 2003). Maia has chosen the photograph to represent meaning in her blog because she is an able amateur photographer. Furthermore, it is likely that her preference for the mode of still image is due to its capacity for expressing meaning in a unique way considering the design of the communicative event. All the blogs in this thesis study uses 'the visual as the central source of information' and are largely 'addressed in the visual mode'(Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 30). Maia's intention, to inspire the readers and to share her personal experiences and feelings in relation to interior design and lifestyle, is expressed through the photographs. The mode of still image is also the most prominent. Maia is a keen and accomplished photographer who

⁵⁸ A description of Ashwell's book *Shabby Chic Interiors: My Rooms, Treasures, and Trinkets*. <http://www.capris.no/product.aspx?isbn=1906525749> [Accessed 06/04/2010]

⁵⁹ **S:** (n) **deixis** (the function of pointing or specifying from the perspective of a participant in an act of speech or writing; aspects of a communication whose interpretation depends on knowledge of the context in which the communication occurs) <http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn?s=deixis> [Accessed 12/04/2010].

⁶⁰ 'Bilder er I stand til å gjengi både ikoniske og symbolske tegntyper; således kan et bilde formidle skrift' (Liestøl 2006: 288).

knows how to orchestrate the motives. She generally bases her written narrative on the photographs she has taken, but she also lets the photographs speak for themselves. The images on display have ‘primacy over the words in the sense that the events related happen first visually’ (Fairclough 2005: 7).

Most of the photographs are taken in Maia’s home and, hence, the visual communication becomes important in her narrative-of-self. The motives such as interior decorations, furniture, still lifes of various interior items, accessories, clothes, and flower centrepieces, flowers in vases, table arrangements, are mostly close ups. A picture of Maia’s breakfast table with the light coming from a window outside the picture frames of communicates the promise of spring. The detailed and complex photographs appear as realistic and authentic. Not only that, they epitomise the *Shabby Chic* aesthetics and philosophy by focusing on the items that constitute a part of this life style, and thus the pictures back up the ideology that Maia adheres to.

The affordance of the software facilitates the process of publishing photographs. By publishing two or three photographs, the constant demand for updating the blog are easily complied with. The photographs can be accompanied by a few lines of written narrative or simply just a headline. The most prevalent affordance of the mode of photograph is the property of communicating an atmosphere and describing a mood. It may well be that the bloggers prefer the mode of still image because communicating meaning in this context can be done effortlessly without having to produce large amounts of written text. What is more, for the reader the photographs in these blogs are easier to decode than the written narratives. Maia’s blog has been commented on by readers from other countries than Norway (Comments of entry dated 21/04/2010 and 27/02/2010).

The affordance of the modes of still image and layout lies in the showing, that is, for the interior bloggers in this community meaning is conveyed immediately (Walsh, 2006). The written narrative, on the other hand, needs decoding, that is, it must be read by somebody who is familiar with the Norwegian or the English language⁶¹. The photographs and the layout act as a kind of ‘Lingua Franca’ and can be read by anybody; even those who do not conceive this particular style. The *Shabby Charm* blogger’s aim is to inspire the readers and the multimodal ensemble aims to provide the readers with a welcoming and intimate atmosphere.

The mode of the layout plays an important part, but the blogging software and the format put restraints on the organisation of the multimodal text. Typically, the newest entries

⁶¹ Maia uses an English translation software provided by Google.com.

always appear on top of the blog. There is limited space for arranging the multimodal ensembles within the frames of the sequential blog posts. The blogger can decide whether she wants the image or the written text to appear left, centre, or right in the frame as well as deciding font and image size, but is otherwise confined to the software's limiting rules (unless she's familiar with the HTML codes). Maia has chosen grey as background colour and apart from the colour belonging to the palette of the interior style in question; the colour accentuates the photographs in an excellent way.

The affordances of the medium – the blog – are its capacity for publishing personal narratives, that is, people can speak with their own voices by using multimodal representations. Furthermore, there is the anticipation of an audience “out there” willing to read the blog as long as the content agrees with their field of interest. Keeping a blog is by and large inexpensive. Ready-made platforms such as *Blogger* provide possibilities to use the media for a number of purposes; commerce included (Newson, 2009). Besides, the activity of blogging raises people's profile and attracts attention from other people (ibid: 12). The blogger is given the possibility to ‘demonstrate knowledge in a direct manner’ (ibid.). In addition, the bloggers can interact with their audience and create or expand their social network. From a commercial perspective, blogging is an excellent way of collaborating globally. Sharing knowledge and experience is also facilitated by blogging, as is interaction with clients. Bloggers keep in touch with the digital technology too. Last but not least, ‘blogs are great tools for communication’ on many levels (Newson et al. 2009: 11-12).

This thesis wants to emphasize the aspect of aesthetics in the communicative event. Having said that the medium of blog is a social media in which the blogger and the reader can communicate, it must be reiterated that the blog also functions as a source for inspiration, entertainment and pleasure. Tønnessen asserts that she can think of ‘no (meaningful) text that will not in some way or other involve the aesthetic dimension, speaking to our cognitive understanding as well as our affective dispositions’ (2004: 36).

4.3 The choice of semiotic system

The choice of semiotic system is closely related to the particular interior decoration style. The *Shabby Chic* interior decoration style epitomises a lived-in look and the infatuation with old and worn-out interior items and furniture with a history. The shabby and the chic in combination with the personal and authentic voice is the hallmark of this style. Moreover, it could well be epitomised as nostalgia. For the bloggers this constitutes the framework in which the choice of interior decoration style is articulated. The multimodal discourse reflects

these choices. The photographs, the written narratives, and the layout manifest the choice of semiotic system. The colours can be found on Rachel Ashwell's palette of pale green, pale pink, pale blue, cream and ivories. The choice of motive in the photographs and the written narrative all point to the propensity to favouring the bygone and the compassionate values.

The items shown in the photographs showing ruffle textiles, flaky painted wooden furniture, old bottles with fading labels and fresh flowers in a vase are meant to be a reflection of the blogger's personal voice. Imperfection in beauty, Rachel Ashwell postulates, tells her readers that 'there is pride in uniqueness and there is soul, warmth and humour in the unexpected'⁶². *Shabby Charm* blogger Maia, has two picture postcards featuring a zinc cachepot and a rose with the words 'love' and 'laugh' written on them as background for her blog title. The foregrounding of items such as hearts, flowers, accessories related to the *Shabby Chic* interior decoration style are all signs of Maia's cultural identity.

The photographs, the written narrative, the layout and Maia's interests cohere and constitute an overall harmonic blog in accordance with her preference for *French Country* and *Shabby Chic* decoration style. She keeps to Rachel Ashwell's saying that less is more. The absence of gadgets such as awards and the calm, grey background are not only signs of restraint, but also of a sign of mastering the "tools of the trade". This control of the instrument at hand signifies Maia's competence and skill. What is more, it sets her apart from the many other bloggers and puts her in the interior blogger elite.

4.4 Traces of a semiotic regime

The case study pointed out that there are traces of semiotic regime deriving from the *Shabby Chic* founder Rachel Ashwell's philosophy in the blogs. In the blogging community of *Norwegian Interior Blogs*, Maia is a role model for her followers, but she has added her personal style and, hence, created an idiosyncratic version of the trend. However, the general is unmistakably inspired by Rachel Ashwell. Interestingly, Maia does not have a link to Rachel Ashwell's blog nor does she display any link to Ashwell's homepage. There is no telling what exactly inspired Maia to adhere to this particular ideology, but the title of her blog clearly indicates that whereas the *Shabby* is a source of inspiration, the *Charm* is replacing the *Chic* in Maia's own interpretation of the style. In fact, Maia's idiosyncratic interpretation of the *Shabby Chic* style has made her blog very popular and consolidates her position as a role model.

⁶² http://rachelashwellshabbychic.blogspot.com/2008_08_01_archive.html [Accessed 06/04/2010].

4.5 The staging of the self in the blog.

Blogs are metaphorical stages displaying an ongoing performance. The interior blogs in this thesis case study appears as a virtual domicile, a show case home. The most prominent resident of the home is the blogger herself. Some bloggers publish pictures of their children, but none of them have published pictures of their husbands thus far. The children presented are babies and toddlers or at children least in the pre-school age. For reasons unknown to this thesis writer, pictures of men and ungainly teenagers do not sit well with the interior decoration style of *Shabby Chic*. Pictures of bedrooms and bathrooms are also rare. There seems to be a tacit agreement among the bloggers that certain aspects of the private life are not to be exposed. The fact that the bloggers use a personal voice and lay open their homes to unknown people and simultaneously making efforts to protecting their private life may seem as a contradiction in terms. However, the bloggers in this case study are careful not to let the public into their most private domains.

In dramaturgical terms, the blog is analogue to the front stage and the blogger is the stage director. The blogger presents selected scenes from her daily life, focusing on valued items, and events (mainly of the domestic kind) that she feels inclined to share with her audience. The blog is the front stage of the ongoing performance, where the narrative-of-self is manifested and displayed. The staging of the scenes presented to the audience front stage is done back stage. Here, the blogger reflects on what she wants to share with her audience. Implicit in the efforts of creating blog entries and maintaining the considerable number of followers, is the ongoing impression management or maintaining the façade. This thesis argue, that the façade of Maia in the *Shabby Charm* blog leaves little doubt that she wholeheartedly and profoundly wants other people to have a liking for her blog and take pleasure in the carefully orchestrated narrative-of-self. Her motivations for keeping the blog in the first place were to share her experiences and to inspire others. The façade also involves the notion continuity and predictability. Maia has not done any changes of significance in the layout of her blog during the 4 months of observation in relation to this thesis study apart from changing the font style.

The preparations made backstage are in accordance with the cultural identity and the blogging community she is part of. Maia is continuously preparing her performance back stage based on the response from the audience. Maia's loyalty to her fellow bloggers whom she explicitly addresses is prevalent. In fact, all the bloggers in this thesis study all want their readers to enter their blog world and feel welcome and be inspired by their blogs. There is a

‘need to create and maintain a feeling of trust’ so that the readers will keep coming back (Carrington 2009: 8). The reciprocal relationship of trust is important in the construction of self-narrative because the blogger must appear as authentic and real. Her voice must reflect her personality and distinctive character. Goffman claims: ‘society is built on the principle that a person with certain social signs has a moral right to expect others to value and treat him correspondingly’ (1985: 20, my translation⁶³). However, the social signs, whether expressed ‘explicitly or implicitly’ must be authentic and trustworthy (ibid).

The positive response from the readers and the number of followers are important indications that blogger has succeeded in her efforts. Readers often give bloggers awards such as ‘Best Blog’, Blogger Award for Amazing Friendship, ‘Just for You’, ‘Creative Blogger’, ‘You have a Nice Blog’ (Du har en gullig blogg), and ‘Your Blog Is Fabulous’. The awards badges are ‘copy and paste’ graphics available on the Internet. They can be sent via e-mail and the receiver copy and paste in her blog if she so chooses.

Maia is keen to position herself as a role model and as an example of ‘best practice’ (van Leeuwen 2003: 63). The acclamation from her audience helps to maintain her performance (Prieur, 2004). Maia’s identity in the *Shabby Charm* blog is manifested in her choice of lifestyle project and commodities that confirms her cultural belonging (Dokk Holm 2001: 124). Again, the semiotic power of the items is very prevalent in the blogs of this thesis study.

Shabby Charm blogger Maia has an online and an offline identity. Some bloggers may create an online identity in order to ‘take a bolder stand on an issue while blogging than they would at a dinner party’ (Stone 2004: 41). Maia does not take on her online identity in order to make a bold statement. Rather, it appears as if Maia’s online identity is connected with the nature of the communicative event, that is, she is communicating with an unknown audience. Online Maia’s project can be seen as an attempt to shape herself and her home according to the ideology of Rachel Ashwell. Most importantly, Maia has made her own statement by creating her own idiosyncratic interpretation of the *Shabby Chic* concept which makes her different and adds a personal voice to her message.

In the aftermath of the named article featuring Maia’s home in *Vakre Hjem & Interiører* (Volume one January 2010, see example 16). Maia has achieved a kind of celebrity status in this part of the blogosphere. From a relatively anonymous existence in the blogosphere, as far as personalia is concerned, Maia the interior blogger has taken a step into

⁶³ Samfunnet er bygget opp på det prinsipp at en person som har visse sosiale kjennetegn har en moralsk rett til å vente seg at andre skal verdsette og behandle ham på en tilsvarende måte’ (Goffman 1959: 20).

another public sphere where the disclosure of personal information no longer is an option but an imperative and others are in charge backstage and front stage. In the magazine article 'Maia' transforms into the 'real' Marianne Haga Kinder, working as a marketing and public relation director in the hotel business sector.

The meta perspective of the interior blogger is interesting, but also unravelling because Maia has most definitely left the intimate and cosy atmosphere of her virtual blog domicile. She is no longer anonymous. What is more, the publication of the *Interior Guide* has also brought Maia in the public eye. Maia online and Marianne offline is not a contradiction although the online Maia does appear as more personal and is able to communicate with her readers and supporters. Baumer et al. (2009) maintain that 'offline and online identities are not completely separate and distinct from one another' (no pagination). The offline Marianne takes on the identity of the successful blogger who has fulfilled her dreams and made her hobby into a living. Maia's occupational career offline is of little or no interest to the popularity of her blog, because previous to the magazine article, Maia's blog had a good reputation, was popular, and had a considerable audience. The fact that Marianne Haga Kinder is a marketing director does not influence Maia's self presentation; her façade and her performances. The reader, one could argue, is mostly interested in Maia the blogger and her achievements related to her idiosyncratic interior decoration style and the *Shabby Charm* blog. The presentation of self revolves around Maia's role as the creator of a popular blog.

4.6 The Model Reader

Unlike the readers of the interior magazines, the readers of blogs take part in the construction of the self-narrative. The role of the reader is mostly going on backstage because the feedback from the readers renders possible the blogger's adjustment of the performance front stage. Owing to the reader, the blogger is thus able to maintain her impression management and façade. However, the reader is also performing at the front stage by acting as witnesses to the truth of the blogger's capacity to attracting readers and keeping a popular blog. Put another way, the readers are taking part in constructing the self-narrative. Carrington argue that 'the construction of a self-narrative is not necessarily a solitary pursuit' (2009: 10). 'Meaning and reality of a blog exists neither solely in the blog itself nor solely in the reader, but rather in the reader's active interpretation of and interaction with, the blog' (Baumer et al. 2008, no pagination). The affordance of the blogging software allows the readers to interact with the blogger thus participate in the construction of the self-narrative. It is unlikely that the blogger will disregard the comments from the readers entirely. Technologies and 'practices such as

commenting, linking, tagging, and trackbacks⁶⁴ enable a level of explicit interaction with both the text and the author not available in previous textual media' (ibid.).

In Maia's case, the readers have inspired her blogging activity and the comments are one of the reasons (or perhaps the only reason) why she continues her self-narrative. It is not possible to demonstrate whether negative comments would bring about any changes or made any impact at all. This thesis study has, however, not detected any negative criticism in the comments found in the *Shabby Charm* blog. As noted in section 4.4, all comments are more or less panegyric and enthusiastic with extensive use of evaluative adjectives. Moreover, this thesis argues that in the construction of the self-narrative, the bloggers in this thesis study depend heavily on their model readers to participate by commenting on their posts.

'Comments, challenges, personal anecdotes can all be added to the initial post to build an accumulative textual history that links a number of sites and people. All these elements may contribute to the author's own reflexive self-narrative as well as to establishing validity and relationships of trust' (Carrington 2009: 11).

The model reader plays the game of the author and thus demonstrates an implicit acceptance of the terms of the play (Eco, 1979). The readers of the interior blogs belong to the same 'interpretative community', that is, they are conversant with the semiotic resources used in the multimodal discourse (Ewald 1986: 5). Ewald (1986) emphasises that the anticipation of a model reader must be seen in relation to the purpose of the text. The function of the audience embodied in the blogs is commenting and participating in the narrative-of-self. Furthermore, the affordance of this digital communicative event involves the presupposition of active reader participation. The blogging software is adapted to facilitating the interaction between blogger and reader.

The study of Baumer et al. shows that the readers feel obliged to comment on the blogs. It is a matter of courtesy because 'a good blog post deserves a reply from the audience' (ibid. 2009, no pagination). What is more, many readers make the effort of formulating their comments in an insightful and coherent way. 'While bloggers feel pressures about the content and identity they present, readers feel pressures about ensuring that their comments make a significant contribution' (ibid.). This becomes particularly evident if the blogs are kept by the

⁶⁴ Trackback: A trackback is a notification when a blog links to another blog. The notification is sent between the two blogs letting the receiving blog's author know she is being linked to; implying that both blogs have the ability to send and receive trackbacks <http://www.searchenginepartner.com/SEO-glossary.html> , accessed 05.05.2010.

reader's friends or family members.

The study also shows that some of the readers feel a part of the blog which involves reading the blog regularly and feeling connected or 'a feeling of community' (ibid.). As noted earlier, the aim of *Shabby Charm* blogger Maia is to make the reader feel welcome in her blog world and share her experiences; a pivotal part in the narrative-of-self.

4.7 Bricolage and remediation

Blogger are bricoleurs in the construction of the self-narrative. In his article "The combination art of young people – bricolage for a new time", Ridderstrøm discusses the notion of homology, that is, 'the symbol based unanimity among the objects, values and life style within a group' (Ridderstrøm 2005: 76, my translation⁶⁵). The interior bloggers display a distinct notion of symbol based unanimity. Bricolage enters in the narrative-of-self and thus in the self representation. Furthermore, the self is staged and styled according to a number of role models such as Rachel Ashwell and Maia. Each individual has the possibility of displaying their narrative-of-self in digital publications. Bricolage, then, becomes not only a matter of common interest among the interior design bloggers as a group, but as a matter of concern to the individual blogger (Ridderstrøm, 2005). The bloggers can copy and paste according to their own personal taste and conviction.

The model of the interior blogs in this thesis study is the glossy interior magazine. Although the blog differs from the magazine by being user-directed and personal, the close relationship between the two media renders the notion of remediation relevant. The blogs, however, do not pretend to act as digital duplicates of these magazines. Deuze (2006) argues that the bloggers acts as participants by creating their own interpretation of the magazines. They become agents in the meaning-making process and active participants in the multimodal discourse related to the *Shabby Chic* interior decoration trend. Most important in this culture are the personal and the notion of close relations. When mass media appears as impersonal and distanced, the blogs appears as real and authentic and, hence, become supplements to the glossy magazines. Miller and Shepherd asserts that many bloggers find 'the ability to combine the immediately real and the genuine personal' a 'compelling combination' (2004, no pagination). In this respect the blogs represents a refreshing contrast to the traditional media' (ibid.).

This thesis argues that the interior blogs in the study does not challenge the hegemony

⁶⁵ 'Homologi gjelder den symbolbaserte samstemmigheten mellom objektene, verdiene og livsstilen innenfor ei gruppe' (Ridderstrøm 2005:76).

of the printed interior magazines such as *Vakre Hjem & Interiører*. The blog and the magazine are two media with different affordances. The magazine has the capacity of constituting and acting as an important unifying element and representing a kind of authority; a semiotic regime. The magazine's most important task is presenting role models and exposing the ever changing interior currents, thus assuming a form of declarative function. By virtue of being distributed nationwide (and even in Scandinavia) the magazine has a professional editorial staff and a business organisation attached to it. The differences between the blog and the magazine are certainly many; however this thesis confines itself with arguing that the most prevalent distinction is the blog's personal angle. This affordance of the medium of blog is principal and unique.

The blogging software allows the bloggers to display links of relevance to them, thus introducing other similar blogs and expand the community of similarly disposed bloggers. Additionally, the blogger can comment on other blogs and recommend them and refer to other sources. The magazine does not provide the possibilities for an interaction between readers and the editorial staff or the people in featured in the articles. Although communication surely is possible, the medium of magazine does not hold the intercommunicative properties so characteristic of the social medium of blogs. Moreover, the magazine, a traditional medium, communicates one way exclusively. Like the blogger, the magazine's editorial staff must act in accordance with their readers. However, if the magazine fails to please its readers, the readers cannot comment their discontent promptly. Displeased readers simply stop buying the magazine. The elapsed time from the magazine is published until the reactions from displeased readers becomes apparent is considerable. Maia, on the other hand, is able to adjust her narrative-of-self continuously.

The narrative-of-self cannot be constructed in the interior magazine as such, but the magazine can participate in the self-narrative. Maia's narrative-of-self has benefited from the article in the interior magazine. Being presented in a popular interior magazine as an example of "best practice" has become a substantial part of her self presentation. Her position as role model among her community has been strengthened considerably. Moreover, her staging has proved to be successful and her performance gains words of praise. Although the blog remediates the magazine aesthetically by using the modes of writing and photography and maintaining a common interior decoration style, the two media does not challenge each other's hegemonic positions. Rather, it is this thesis assertion that the two media supplement each other.

4.8 Why venture into the world of blogging?

Why has blogging become so popular? Some people consider blogging as ‘a fad that will pass off once the novelty will pass off’, whereas others views blogging as an important contribution to a ‘participatory democracy’, and a kind of journalism (Deuze 2006: 68). It may be difficult to get a marginalized voice heard in traditional media. The blogs, however, create equal opportunities to make the voices heard and enables people to create their own narratives. The reasons for entering the digital public sphere are bisected, according to Hoem and Schwebs (2006: 100). They argue that one of the main incentives of publishing personal narratives is to reach a public outside the existing social network.

Stone claims that blogging software automates routine tasks and stores data, allowing the ideas and creativity of individual people to shine (2004: 36). Some people love to be the centre of attention and some are amazed when they find out that their blog is widely read (Miller and Shepherd, 2004). In an interview with British newspaper *The Financial Times Limited*, Caroline Taylor, these days a convinced and dedicated blogger was requested to start blogging due to her love for home decoration. ‘Why would anyone care what I had to say?’ she retorted. Her curiosity, however, led her to search the Internet for interior design blogs.

What I found was fascinating. I quickly realised that these dispatches, posted on simple websites, are a means to express yourself while discovering and interacting with like-minded people. Soon, I was gripped by the blogging bug. In October last year, I set up Patchworkharmony.blogspot.com and enthusiastically keyed in my first entry. *The Financial Times Limited*, April 8, 2009 (See example 17).

Blogging is inherently self-representational and blogs are deliberately written to be shared. One reason for venturing into the world of blogging is ‘to persuade and to leave a record of having been there’ (Hewitt 2005: 105). According to this view, there is a vast audience ‘out there’ seeking both wisdom and entertainment. Given a certain talent for expressing oneself, a blogger has every chance of attracting attention on the web. ‘For many, blogging is a foray into the world of broadcasting. For the first time, these otherwise unknown individuals are releasing personal ideas and opinions to the general public’ (Stone 2004: 69).

Blogs are regarded as personal publishing, amateur journalism, navel gazing, a fad, and so on. Miller and Shepherd (2004) pose the question if blogging is a kind of voyeurism. They argue that ‘the public's desire for information has helped to rehabilitate voyeurism: it has become synonymous with information access and the public's right to know. Seeing is knowing, not just believing (ibid. 2004, no pagination). Personal blogs are often styled as

diaries or, as Miller and Shepherd (2004) point out, they are of a confessional nature. The blog becomes a scene and the blogger expose to view his or her personal thoughts and attitudes, events and episodes in life worth sharing with an unknown audience.

In a relatively short time the activity of blogging has become immensely popular. Miller and Shepherd maintain that new media has created an opportunity for people with communicative and 'rhetorical needs' (ibid.). However, as Rettberg (2009) points out, most bloggers do not think of themselves as journalists. Deuze (2006: 69) agrees with Rettberg's view, however, Deuze adds: '...webloggers define that what they do as more or less similar to journalism, but consider their personal voice to be of added value'. This thesis has pointed out that the interior blogs do not seem to "threaten" the hegemony of the glossy interior magazines, but act as an extension and a personal affirmation of these magazines' message. Deuze emphasises the aspect of participation, 'enabled and amplified in the real-time connectedness of the Internet' (2006: 68). The public want to engage in certain 'aspects of society' and engagement means an expectation of participation, of contribution.

As shown in this thesis study, many bloggers share the view of the activity of 'blogging as a way of developing relationships, via linking back, with an online community (Miller and Shepherd 2004, no pagination). Some people venture into the world of blogging simply because they want to connect with similarly disposed people and share experiences.

4.9 The phenomena of interior blogging

Why do a lot of busy women engage in a time consuming activity such as interior blogging? The number of interior blogs has exploded the last year. In an article featured in the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang* (VG), Rettberg explains that the activity of interior blogging has become so popular is that the blogs are so inspiring. People often dream of a perfect and harmonious family life only to find out that their dreams are far from being fulfilled. Reading the blogs, however, make people happy (ibid.). The fact that they do not seem to have any immediate purpose other than inspiring the readers does not seem to lessen the enthusiasm for the interior blogs. Interior design and interior decoration are 'decidedly the most democratic and widespread form of expression and an important source of identity and belonging for Norwegians enjoying the pleasures of home' (Rolness 2007, no pagination, my translation⁶⁶).

'Every blogger finds their niche', states Taylor (The Financial Times online, April 18th

⁶⁶ 'Boliginredning er vår tids desidert mest demokratiske og utbredte uttrykkform, en viktig kilde til identitet og tilhørighet for hjemmekjære nordmenn' (Rolness 2007, no pagination).

2009, no pagination) ‘but there is quite possibly a blog for every interest and speciality imaginable’ (ibid.). The interior blogger has ample chances of showing her personal taste and creativity. By having attracted considerable public attention (passing by other points of comparison), the role models Maia and Rachel Ashwell are given the possibility to expose their unique personality in a flattering way by being talked about in other media than the blogs. Maia, starting out as an amateur in the field of interior decoration, has gained a lot of attention due to her blog.

Given the fact that these bloggers let people into their domestic environments, the disclosure of private life is in fact very superficial. Even though the audience is invited in the private domain of the blogger’s home, the blogger is totally in charge of the guided tour. She decides what to put on display and what she wants to share with her audience.

‘Why bring the personal into the public sphere?’ asks McKee (2005: 46). The answer to that question is many-sided, but one essential factor in this thesis study concerning the interior bloggers is that although some people may judge this activity of blogging as women’s trivia belonging in the private sphere, the worth of this trivia must not be underestimated. To the community of interior bloggers, the private issues, mediated through the blogs are real, important and valuable. The interior blogger is engaging in narrative-of-self confined to the homely sphere and the compassionate values related to lifestyle and daily living. What goes on outside this restricted area is more or less beyond the scope of the interior blogger. The positive feedback from the readers is greeted with undivided enthusiasm, some would even claim: with a sense of naivety.

The five bloggers in this thesis study rarely reflect upon anything that does not belong in the domestic atmosphere or in the close vicinity of the blog world. Awards are generally accepted without any reservations. The bloggers show their gratitude by taking great care in thanking the loyal readers for their support. The awards are ways of linking with other blogs and spreading the blogs across the blogosphere.

The interior blogs are marked by a distinct culture of sharing. The bloggers share links, photographs, interior decoration and shopping tip-offs and above all: They share the same passion for home decorating and the compassionate values.

‘It is quite clear that a range of interesting identity and community building work is taking place in these texts, carried by particular affordances of the technology and software, and the specific purposes of each blogger or social networker (Carrington 2009: 17).

Embedded (sometimes subtly) in the blogs are the commercial motives for keeping the blog. In this thesis study all five blogs are related to commercial activities. *Mias Interiør* is running an online interior shop as does Lobelia. Links to their blogs appear on the shops' homepages. *Malivas verden* is selling hearts made of moss (See example 18) and *Hespe* is keeping a blog called *Hespe lille butikk* (Hespe's little shop) (See example 19) Maia is promoting and selling her *Inspiration Guide* as well as paying numerous compliments to shops and cafes she finds worth while sharing with her readers (See example 20). The intertwining between the personal and the commercial is noticeable. However, the business aspect is subtle, that is, the message is wrapped up in the personal narrative. Neither of the blogs is explicitly commercial, however, they link to their own web-shop sites and occasionally to other corresponding sites. The *Shabby Chic* founder, Rachel Ashwell, is also keeping a blog and generously links her commercial web sites to her blog and vice versa. Miller and Shepherd (2004, no pagination) call attention to 'the peculiar intersection of the public and private that weblogs seem to invite'. In this view, the lines between the public and the private have become blurred due to the activity of blogging.

Blogs are social media (Rettberg, 2008). Creating an interior design blog is a gateway to an online social network. These bloggers constitute a specific blog community consisting of people with a keen and genuine interest for the subject. In that respect, 'the connections between blogs can be understood as digitally mediated social networks' (Rettberg 2008: 65). A deepening of the relationship between reader and blogger is no objective in itself; however, some of the bloggers do become close friends, at least in the blogosphere or in 'blogglandia' as the creator of *Malivas verden* puts it. As noted earlier, Maia invited two of her blog followers to her release party in connection with the publication of the *Inspiration Guide* in March 2010.

There is a strong notion of intimacy in all the blogs in this thesis case study. As noted earlier, the bloggers in this community appear as authentic and personal; or at least that it is what they are aiming at. The tone in the blogs is kept in a very friendly and informal spirit. It must be pointed out (without any further elaboration) that the blogs appear as utterly feminine.

4.10 The narrative-of-self – presenting and constructing identity in interior blogs

Blogs are personal narratives published by individuals who want to make a difference. Narratives, brought to us by various media such as the Internet, are part of every day life. The medium of blogs literally invites people to publish their own personal self understanding and

evaluation as well as ways of thinking and talking about personal feelings. The interior bloggers present procedures for managing ones personal life and present themselves as inhabiting the same common sense world as their readers.

In this thesis study the narrative-of-self is mediated through the blogs. ‘The medium of blogs share an infrastructure in which the narrative-of-self’ is constructed in a digital text’ (Carrington 2009: 10) .In this thesis objects of study, the blogs and the bloggers choose or even create (preference is a keyword) an identity by letting the multimodal texts represent and tell the story about who they are and what they stand for. By building digital elements such as text, images and sound into personal narrative, ‘aspects of an identity are intentionally being constructed’ (Lundby 2008: 5). Blogs, by virtue of being self-representational narratives, are typically displaying aspects of identity. ‘The authenticity of the digital story is not given. To play with narrative is to play with identity’ (Lundby 2008:5). Carrington points out that ‘the drive to create a sustainable narrative has become an important characteristic of contemporary life’ and hence ‘creates a space for individual agency to play an important role’ (2009: 15).

The study of Baumer et al. (2008) shows that the readers perceive blog posts as opinion or personal narrative. These two aspects are important components when the ‘perception of authenticity’ is concerned (ibid.). The narratives in the blogs are considered to be authentic representations of the personal voice and the reader feels part of the blogger’s world. *Shabby Chic* founder Rachel Ashwell defines the need for creating a narrative-of-self.

‘Being an artist, a romantic, and a dreamer, I find it very easy to reflect on my life experiences in a storybook setting. I often cut out the yucky parts and leave just the beautiful pieces in my memory. Sometimes this causes for repeat mistakes. But in the end, somehow I do think we all learn what we need to learn. I have been giving much thought to how we frame our lives. And that no matter what we say, or even think, it is our actions that show our authentic selves.’ (Rachel Ashwell blog, 07/12/2008).

Blogs are narrative-of-self ‘under construction’; an ongoing reflective process of presenting the narrative-of-self (Rasmussen, 2003). Although the blog entries are short fragments of texts, they are parts of a ‘larger self-narratives that evolve over time’ (Carrington 2009: 17). The fragmented narratives of the blog posts create an impression of a series, each entry implicitly or explicitly promising a continuation. Maia, apprehensive about losing the reader’s attention and support, frequently requests her readers to wait for the next blog entry when an interior project will be presented or some news broken (Entry dated 21/04/2010).

As noted earlier, the narrative-of-self is intended to be read by an audience. This thesis has

stated that blogs are ways of practicing and reflecting on identities. Not only that, the blogger's identity is confirmed by the readers commenting her blog posts, the people linking to her blog in their blog rolls as well as the followers of her blog. The self offline is different from the self presented in the blog because the online self can be updated, adjusted and improved continuously (Rasmussen, 2003). Texts on a website can be altered without effort and almost at any time. The text is dynamic, flexible and live. Rasmussen points out that previously the possibility of presenting the self has been reserved for the intellectuals (painters and writers of biographies). Digital technology has radically changed this hegemony. Constructing and presenting the narrative-of-self can be done relatively easy by anyone. This is commonly referred to as 'Do It Yourself' – DIY (Carrington, 2009).

Ryan (2003) refers to the narrative as 'a mental image'. This image is activated by 'various types of signs'. As noted earlier, in this thesis perspective, semiotics subsumes the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behaviour as well as the analysis of systems of communication (Gripsrud, 2006). The multimodal representations in the blogs, that is, the semiotic modes as resources, are used in recognisable and stable ways 'as means of articulating discourse' (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001: 25). The multimodal discourse is articulated in the narrative-of-self. The self-narrative or the mental image consists of a setting or a world represented by the blog; in this thesis the *Shabby Charm* blog (Ryan, 2003). The blog is populated by characters such as Maia the blogger and her followers commenting on her blog posts. In addition, Maia's daughter and husband are characters appearing in the setting as are shopkeepers and other bloggers Maia has taken an interest in. The blog, representing the world, is undergoing 'changes of state' caused by 'happenings or deliberate human actions' (Ryan 2004: 8-9). The changes of state are the continuous and steady flow of new blog entries. The blog posts or petit narratives create the larger narrative-of-self (Deuze, 2006; Rettberg, 2008).

If the text in the blog is to 'qualify as narrative', it must, according to Ryan (2004), 'allow the reconstruction of an interpretive network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrated events' (ibid: 9). As shown in the analysis, the bloggers in this thesis study all have set up a profile and hence presented themselves (the characters) and the setting (the world they want the readers to view). Within this framework, the narrated events (the blog entries) are added to the narrative-of-self and thus enter in the plot. In the setting or the world of the *Shabby Charm* blog, Maia is the narrator and she is in control of the events unfolding in the plot.

In advertising, the intersection of the private and the commercial is not unique, but the

explicitly expressed narrative-of-self in the personal blog is. This thesis study argues that the blogs constitute text that works in a particular way. The texts are persuasive in the sense that they promote a particular lifestyle as well as advertise the commodities that enters in this style. In the middle of this emerges the self, constructed and manifested by and through the products that signifies the style.

‘...individuation is achieved through consumption of commodities as sign, and the pressure towards individuation speeds up the dynamics of semiotic change in discursive practices as much as in modal articulations of discourses. There is pressure on social individuals to differentiate themselves in their individuality through semiotic practices’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 35).

Shaping and constructing the self according to an ideal becomes a project (Myklebust and Myrvang, 2001).

The narrative-of-self found in the interior blogs is the result of collaboration and participation from the readers. The texts in blogs reflect ‘individual agency and self-biography’, but as Carrington points out, ‘they are also strikingly enmeshed in a range of social interactions’ (2009: 16). The blogs as a communicative events do not ‘take on their full meaning’ without the audience participation (ibid.). Moreover, this could be said about all social media.

4.11 Narrating and storytelling

The medium of blog calls on people to publish their own story. The blog is an arena where feelings can be exposed and expressed (Dokk Holm, 2001). In constructing the self-narrative, the interior bloggers present themselves as inhabiting the same common sense world as their readers. The blogger participates in events and happenings which cause changes in the narrative world, that is, in “bloglandia”. As Ryan (2003, no pagination) explains, the narrative-of-self becomes a ‘mental representation’ of the changes and events going on the world. Here, the narrative represents the world of the interior bloggers. The homes of the bloggers are constantly undergoing changes due to events such as shopping, refurnishing, and the making of own creations. Moreover, these events can make a huge impact in the domestic world. It seems as if the bloggers feel inclined to present procedures for managing ones personal life by promoting their personal preferences. The general impression is that the bloggers explicitly address the need for purchasing certain commodities in order to obtain an optimal life style and a perfect home. More importantly, the bloggers must provide their

readers with something new and eye catching; a focal point in order to inspire and entertain. They simply need something to communicate. The items enter into the narrative-of-self by being important semiotic resources.

Shopping meets a semiotic demand of signalling who you are. As shown in the previous section, the narrative-of-self involves the semiotic power of items related to particular interior decoration styles as central elements. The items are closely attached to values, attitudes, lifestyle and identity. Moreover, the items are semiotic resources loaded with meaning. This thesis has emphasised the close relation between consumption, lifestyle and identity. The commodities appear as elements in the narrative-of-self because ‘they connect with other items and other signs and values’ (Hansen 2001: 80, my translation⁶⁷). In the narrative-of-self, the elements become semiotic resources conveying meaning. The *Shabby Charm* blog is an example of the narration of commodities. Here, the clothes, the flowers, interior accessories, the still lives enter in ‘narrative tableaux’ (ibid.). The owners of the companies *House Doctor* and *Shabby Chic* use their blogs in their promotion of items related to interior decoration and lifestyle. What appears as authentic and sincere by bringing in the personal voice in the blogs is in contrast with the readymade and seemingly artificial and distant narrative of an advertising leaflet.

The observer or the audience can view the items as ‘an airy weave of ideas and personal feelings in commodities’ (Hansen: 81, my translation⁶⁸). The items become expressions and manifestations of the bloggers personality and hence symbolically loaded with meaning. The definition of self happens through ‘forms of consumption accompanied by an ideological current in which individuation is more intensely emphasized’ (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001: 35). Influential bloggers such as Mia exert considerable influence when she displays her preference for certain shops in her neighbourhood, interior decoration accessories from an online shop and flowers from a particular florist’s shop. Advertising is about presenting a product by emphasising only the positive qualities. The negative qualities (if they exist) are disregarded simply by moving the focus on what the advertiser wants the public to see.

Whereas the reader moves her glance down the page of a book decoding the sign systems of written language, the shopper walks through the shopping centre’s decorations and ‘a landscape of items and decode the verbal and the non-verbal signs’ (Hansen 2001: 80, my

⁶⁷ ‘...fordi de forbindes med andre varer og med andre tegn og værdier’ (Hansen 2001: 80).

⁶⁸ ‘...et luftigt væv af forestillinger og betydninger.

translation⁶⁹). In this perspective, the notion of shopping goes beyond the acquiring of basic subsistence. Shopping meets a semiotic demand, that is, a demand of making a statement by signalling what you are, who you are, and where you belong by using semiotic resources (Dokk Holm, 2001). The bloggers put their most favoured items in narrative tableaux displayed in the blogs; thus using the items as central elements in their narrative-of-self. The readers of blogs decode both the verbal and the non-verbal signs in the self-narrative. Dokk Holm (2001) refers to the decoding of the non-verbal signs linked to items and products related to lifestyle as “semiotic fingspitzgefühl”. The bloggers in this thesis study exhibit their well developed semiotic fingspitzgefühl in their blogs.

The readers of the *Shabby Charm* blog may think that Maia’s self-expression and her cultural identity forever are attached to the decorations style of *Shabby Chic*. Chances are, however, that she and her fellow bloggers will convert to future trends in home decoration styles and attach the day dreams to new objects in the hunt for a harmonious family life, the optimal home, and the perfect life style.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore self presentation in social media represented by blogs. The analysis aimed to find out how the is multimodal discourse articulated in the blogs and how do the bloggers present themselves through the multimodal representation. Choice of style, colours, and images seems to be significant markers of identity in the interior blogs. This thesis has analysed the various modes, separately and collectively, and have shown how identities, values, and desires are expressed through the selection and configuration of modes used in the digital self-narrative. The case study has investigated the context of the blog and the common principals of the multimodal communication in the medium. The blogs in this thesis are social public writing spaces and showcases for life style choices.

The analysis have employed the three features of discourse put forward by Halliday and Hasan (1985) in order to determine the social context in which the activity of blogging is unfolding. There may be several discourses in play in the blogs, but most prevalent is the discourse that concerns preference for a life style and inclination towards an interior decoration style. The self presentation’s point of reference is the social context. There is a distinct notion of a shared cultural identity in all five blogs.

⁶⁹ ‘...et landskab af varer og aflæser verabale så vel som non-verable tegn’ (Hansen 2001: 80).

The multimodal discourse is consistent with a cultural identity based on the preference for an interior decoration style associated with trends such as the *Shabby Chic* style and its underlying ideology. The analysis shows that the semiotic resources and the relationship among these resources stem from this ideology. The blogs share the same blog host, the same digital platform. The bloggers in this particular community instantaneously recognise the large ornate candlesticks painted white with bits of the old iron finish showing through, worn mirrors in detailed frames, golden cherub lamps, candles decorated with laces, and vintage pictures hanging from knobs as the hallmarks of their particular style. Important signifiers are the color scheme, the written narrative and the photographs. All modes are interrelated and adapted to enter into the style. These items become signifiers of belonging and an inclination towards a life style ideology.

Digital technology offers many modes of communication such as word processing, drawing, animation, sound recording and film making. The software provided by blog hosts such as Blogger.com enables the bloggers to communicate their narrative-of-self in a unique and hereto unprecedented medium. At the same time the software puts certain constraints on how to express and present the self-narrative. One could safely say that the self-narrative is constructed on the conditions of the medium's software, but this situation, is nothing new. All media have their individual affordances and the users must act in accordance with this.

In what way do the affordances of digital technology influence the construction and shaping of identities in blogs? One can safely claim that digital technology renders possible the activity of blogging. The software, in its turn, is a prerequisite for those who are not familiar with html codes. Again, the blogger acts in accordance with the medium's affordance and within the frames of the blogging software. However, the bloggers in this thesis study do not make use of all of the software's affordances. In fact, the blogs in this thesis case study are static and fairly conformist considering the options offered by the software. The narrative is predominantly told by the mode of still image and written text.

Interestingly, the bloggers utilise much the same modes as the traditional magazine and they are emphatically nostalgic in the multimodal discourse. Photographic motives, font styles, theme, and style are reminiscent of "good" old times, celebrating the old and bygone. The narrative-of-self is constructed against this background, thus signifying the blogger's cultural identity.

As the analysis has shown, the blog rolls and the recommended links are also important signifiers. Maia is not only showing her identity through the choice of semiotic resources and through the multimodal representations; equally important is the display of

affinity links and links recommended by the blogger. It must be reiterated that links are the currency of the blogosphere; the more links to the blogs, the more attention is drawn to the blogger's personal projects.

In addition to the multiple modes, the use of personal voice is articulating discourse as well. The women appear as nice and warm-hearted and they take great care in showing their thankfulness and appreciation towards their followers. Moreover, the pronounced consideration and politeness plays an important part in the self-presentation and in the narrative-of-self.

In order to be a member as well as maintaining the membership of the community, the study show that it is imperative for the interior blogger to appear as honest, sincere, and dedicated to the "cause". The ambiguity of the blogger is that on one hand the blogger appears as honest, sincere, real, and at the same time she must, in Goffmanian terms, adjust the play according to the expectations of the audience. Maia and the other four blogger in this study foresee a reader when they are constructing the narrative-of-self. Although the unique self is the general project, the blogger must submit to the ruling semiotic regime within the community.

What are the blogger's agenda? By all indications, then, it seems that this thesis' bloggers have to *be* their own story; they have to construct a credible narrative-of-self. *Shabby Charm* evokes a response from women wanting to find out how other people decorate their homes and what kind of narrative encompasses the choice of interior decoration and life style. The interior blog showcases different rooms and details from the home, presents the latest purchasing or publishes photographs and inspiration from other blogs and web sites, and everything comes with a story; written in the narrative-of-self. Blogs become creative dreams of a perfect home in a perfect world narrated by the blog keeper. The interior bloggers seem to say: Look at me and my life and feel free to copy!

Written texts have authority and, most importantly, written texts have sponsors. The case study has disclosed a tension between the public and the private in the interior blogs. This does not seem to bother the interior bloggers, and the reason for this could be the feeling of blogging within a community of like minded people. Their blogs are not intended to be read by a vast audience, but by people sharing the same cultural identity.

Again, blogs are perfect media for self presentation and for constructing the narrative-of-self. As the editor of the media text, the blogger is de facto a personal publisher in full control over the and the director of the play, the blogger can chose what kind of instruments at hand she wants to use, what kind of performance she wants want to give,- without being

interrupted. Today's personal publishers decide for themselves what is regarded news, what sort of news they view as relevant, when to publish, and what angle they want to use in their presentation/publication uninterrupted and censored by an editorial staff.

Is social media a momentary fad to be abandoned after the initial burst of enthusiasm? 'Social media is not a fad; it's a fundamental shift in the way we communicate', claims the social media blog *Socialnomics*⁷⁰. Barton (2009)⁷¹ claims that social life has become increasingly textualised. Social Media, comprising social networks such as *MySpace* and Facebook, places for sharing photo, music, and video such as *Flickr* and *YouTube*, web forums such as blogs, social bookmarking such as Delicious, and life streams and micro blogging such as *Twitter* and *Jaiku* are all evidence of this.

Since she started blogging, Maia has been met with many friendly and enthusiastic voices. 'Each kind of weblog empowers individuals on many levels', claims Blood (2000, no pagination). Maia's blog has attracted a great number of readers and she has many followers. The glossy and influential magazine, which acts as a role model, has given her coverage and, hence, the greatest award a blogger can achieve in this culture. Maia has gained much more confidence and has engaged in the creative project of publishing the *Inspiration Guide*. She is now administering two other blogs closely related to *Shabby Charm*. In addition, Maia has appeared on television, showing how her veranda is furnished and styled before the summer season. The television feature has been viewed by many of her followers and their responses have been utterly enthusiastic. Maia habitually expresses her humble appreciation of these supportive comments as an important part of a ritual within the community of interior bloggers:

Thank you very much for all the nice comments on the last entry! That's what's so fantastic about bloglandia. So many nice people supporting each other and giving inspiration and positive feedback to each other. Have been blogging for two years now and the [visitor]counter has rounded 100 000 visitors. Appreciate greatly every one of you who have been dropping in at my blog regularly! Without you, blogging would be pointless (*Shabby Charm* 17/04/2010, my translation⁷² and my insertion)

⁷⁰ <http://socialnomics.net/about/>, accessed 16/05/2010.

⁷¹ Barton claimed this in a talk given at the University of Stavanger in 2009.

⁷² Tusen takk for alle de koselige tilbakemeldingene på forrige innlegg.

Det er det som er så fantastisk i blogglandia. Så mange hyggelige mennesker som støtter hverandre og gir hverandre inspirasjon og positiv feedback! Har holdt på med blogging i 2 år nå og telleren har rundet 100 000 besøkende. Setter STOR pris på hver eneste en av dere som er innom siden min jevnt og trutt! Uten dere hadde det jo ikke vært noen vits i å blogge. (*Shabby Charm*, 17/04/2010).

This ritual is an important factor in the self presentation. Moreover, Maia's position as role model has been consolidated and her narrative-of-self has proven to be a success.

The self in the social media of interior blogs appears as autonomous when matters other than lifestyle and the compassionate values are concerned. The self is constructed and presented within the frames the homely sphere. Hardly anything but interior related issues appear on these bloggers' agenda. Aside from bringing the social network online, which is hugely important, the performer's personal credentials and status is of little or no interest to the readers in the particular community of bloggers. What matters most is the blogger's performance in the social media, that is, her presentation of self and her performance front stage. Relevant questions to be asked are thus: Is her performance credible and trustworthy? Does she appear as real and sincere? Is she showing "best practice" and does she decorate her home according to the culture's preferred style? Is she able to construct a narrative-of-self according to the ideal of the role model? Does the audience find her blog interesting, entertaining, and worth while reading?

The interior blogs are not representative of blogs in general. As mentioned earlier, the interior blogs do not attract interest from neither men nor women who dislike the *Shabby Chic* and *French Country Living* interior decoration style. There are types of blogs, and within the types, there are a diversity of "sub types". The blogging community which this thesis has investigated is popular and attracts many readers. Having recognized the medium of blog's affordances as a communicative event and a publishing platform, the women bloggers have created public showcase for their interior style preferences analogue to this. This thesis argues that the medium of blog is a publishing platform designed to satisfy anyone wanting to share their personal perspectives and thoughts, as well as their viewpoints, reflections, observations, opinions and interior decoration preferences. Whilst the interior blogger tends to give the mode of photography a focal position in her meaning making project, the *VamPus*⁷³ blog, categorized as a blog concerned with *society*⁷⁴, is dominated by the mode of written narrative. Both bloggers use blog host *Blogger* and, hence, utilizes different affordances of the same medium and the medium's software. The *VamPus* blogger is *telling* and the *Shabby Charm* blogger is *showing*, and the modes reflect this.

In closing this thesis, the writer maintains that it would have been interesting to investigate other kinds of blogs such as academic blogs from the perspective of how the narrative-of-self is constructed and how the self is presented. This, however, is beyond the

⁷³ <http://vampus.blogspot.com/>, accessed 18.05.2010.

⁷⁴ Bloggurat's categorization.

scope of the thesis. Hopefully, this thesis case study has pointed at some important features concerning the activity of blogging and maybe future research in this field will determine if the *type* of blog influences the presentation of self.

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Appendix

Example 1 <http://technorati.com/blogging/article/day-2-the-what-and-why2/>, accessed 21/04/2010.


Feature navigation: [Intro](#) [Day 1](#) [Day 2](#) [Day 3](#) [Day 4](#) [Day 5](#)

Self-expression and sharing expertise continue to be the primary motivations for bloggers, and 70% of all respondents say that personal satisfaction is a way they measure the success of their blog. Among Pros, however, the leading metric of success is the number of unique visitors. Hobbyist bloggers overwhelmingly blog about personal musings while professional and aspiring professional bloggers tend to be more topical. Hobbyists are also far more likely to discuss the political aspects of their topics while Pros and Self-Employeds do so very rarely. Tone is decidedly professional. Contrary to blogging's image as a circular firing gallery, the majority of bloggers describe their blogging style as sincere, conversational or expert. Snarky and confessional are the least popular styles.

The rise of the professional blogger continues. 70% of Part-Timers, Pros, and Self-Employeds are blogging more than ever, while Hobbyists are blogging somewhat less. The key driver of decreased blogging is an increase of work and family commitments (64%). 30% of those who are blogging less say it's because they are devoting more time to microblogging and social networks. Bloggers describe significant, positive impacts on their personal lives, but even more bloggers have experienced positive career and business impacts. 70% say that they are better known in their industry because of their blog.

Blogs continue to be defined in a sense by the

Interview



Arianna Huffington
Los Angeles, California
Blog: [The Huffington Post](#)
Age: 59

Mobilizing Citizen Journalism

"From the beginning I wanted to make sure that the community was going to engaged in a vibrant, spirited, but civil conversation."

[Read the entire interview](#)

Porn Star Won't Run For Senate Because She's A Porn Star
Healthy Earth, Healthy Earthlings
A Non-imist's Rebuttal to 5 Ways to Become an Optimist
Brand Yourself
[All Articles](#)



Over 50 gratis spill
Prøv PearlShooter på Playtopia.no & mangle andre morsomme spill - helt gratis!

Write for Technorati

Matt Sussman writes articles for Technorati. If you're a writer, find out how you can too!
[Find out how to become a writer for Technorati.](#)

Example 1 A picture of a new media map. Used with kind permission by Peter Ingman in Newsdesk (company) <http://www.mynewsdesk.com/no/> . The creator of the map is <http://www.briansolis.com/>. Accessed 21/04/2010.



Example 3 (P.12) <https://www.blogger.com/start>, accessed 21/04/2010

Language: English

Blogger™

Sign in to use Blogger with your Google Account

Username (Email): Password: (?)

Remember me (?)

Create a blog. It's free. CREATE A BLOG

It's easy, and only takes a minute.

Your blog. Share your thoughts, photos, and more with your friends and the world.

Easy to use. It's easy to post text, photos, and videos from the web or your mobile phone.

Flexible. Unlimited flexibility to personalize your blog with themes, gadgets, and more.

Learn more:

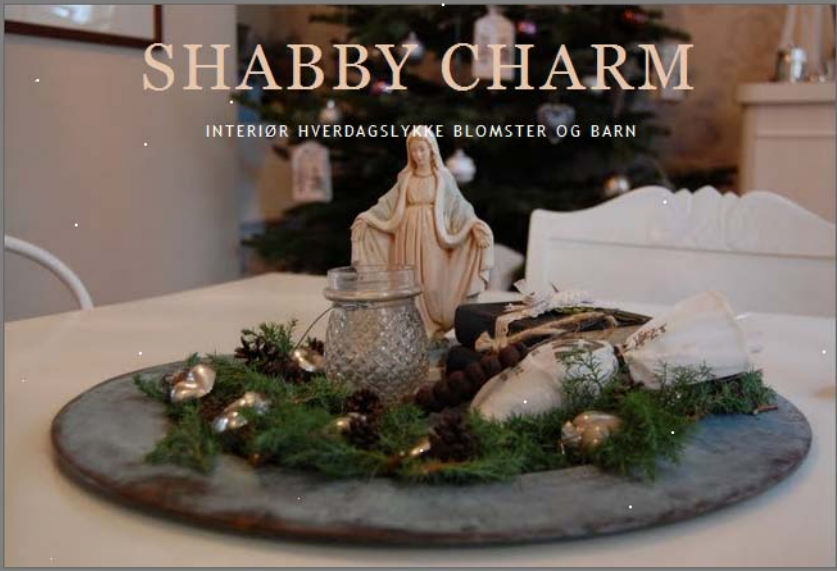
- Take a [quick tour](#)
- Watch a [video tutorial](#)
- Discover [more features](#)
- Read [Blogger Buzz](#)

Blogs of Note

[Ugly Overload](#)

Example 4 <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, accessed 05/12/2009

Share Report Abuse Next Blog»



SHABBY CHARM

INTERIØR HVERDAGSLYKKE BLOMSTER OG BARN

LØRDAG 5. DESEMBER 2009

Rosa jul


De vakreste ting i livet kan ikke se eller ta på. De skal føles i ditt hjerte.

Example 5 <http://hespe.blogspot.com/>, accessed 19/12/2009.


HESPE - blogg om ting og tang

Share Report Abuse Next Blog»

Create Blog Sign In



OM MEG




HESPE
I tillegg til kortproduksjon, strikking/toving har jeg mange andre hobbyer også: Er veldig opptatt av interiør og hjemmets "duppeditter". God mat og drikke i selskap med venner er et "must". Fotograferer ALT jeg kommer over! Liker også å bruke

LØRDAG 19. DESEMBER 2009

Like før nå....

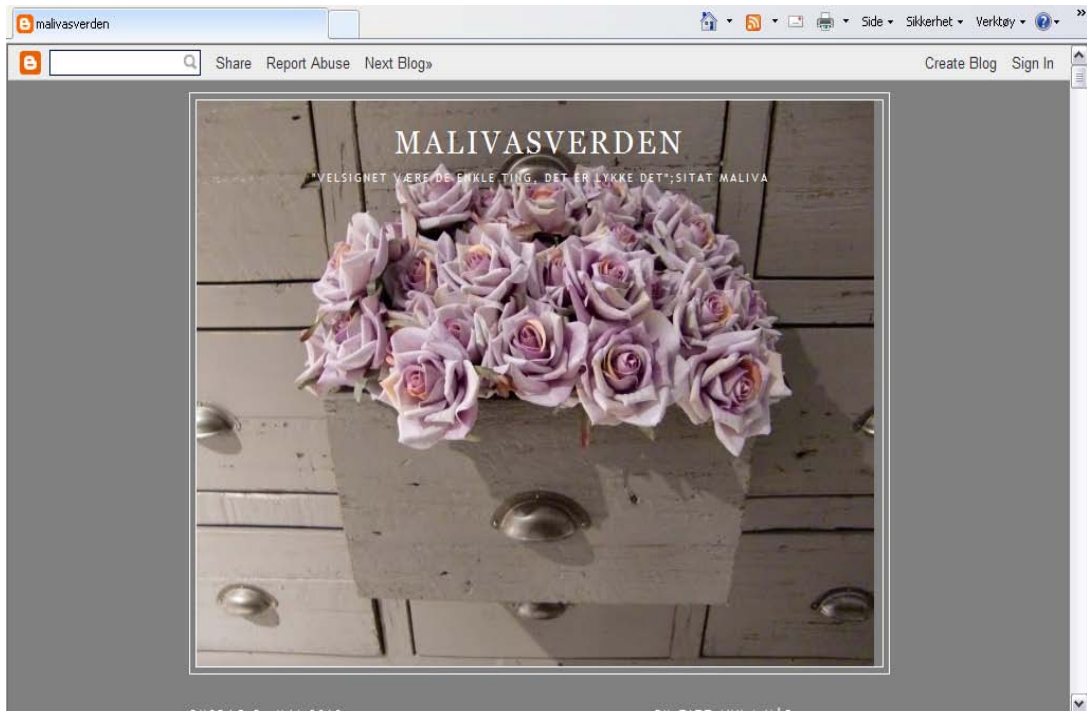
Helt utrolig, men da er vi kommet til siste helgen før jul! Jeg som hadde så god tid, føler nå at enkelte ting er begynt å haste litt - men nei, jeg stresser ikke - ikke enda iallfall... :o)



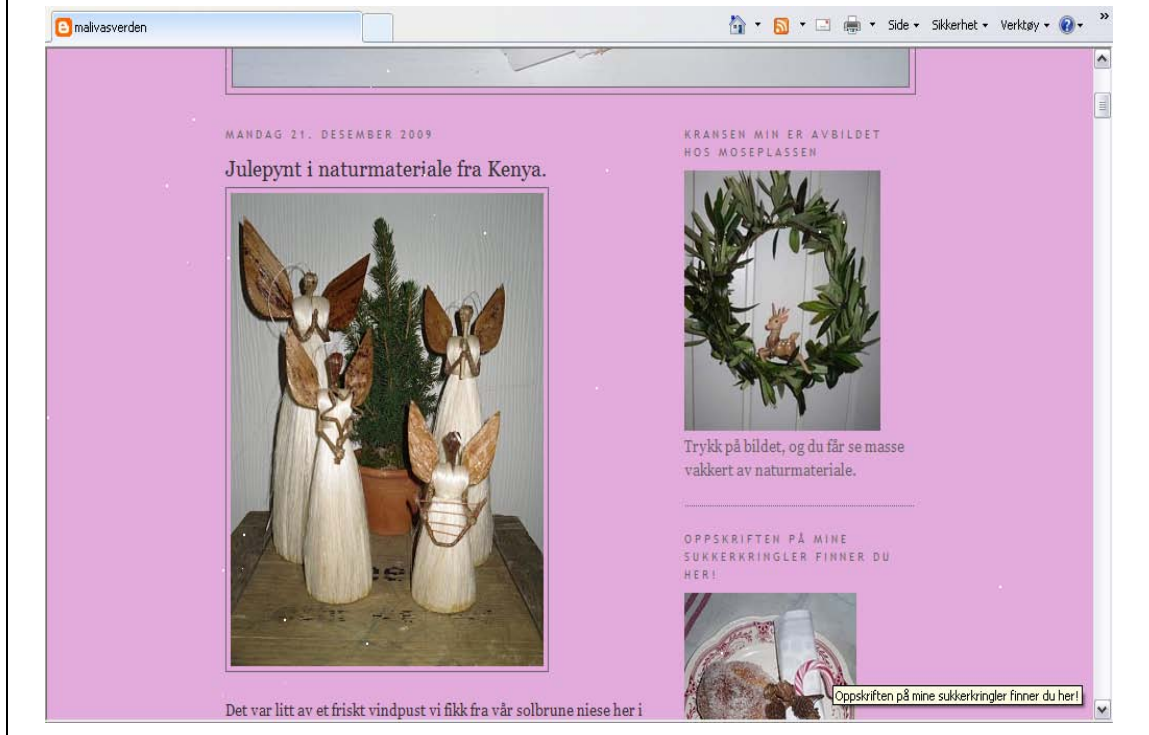
Example 6 <http://lobeliahem.blogspot.com/> , accessed 28/02/2010.

The screenshot shows a Blogger blog page for 'Lobelia'. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a search icon, a search input field, and links for 'Follow', 'Share', 'Report Abuse', and 'Next Blog'. On the right side of the navigation bar, the user's email 'jt.lauritzen@stud.uis.no' and links for 'Dashboard' and 'Sign Out' are visible. The main header features the word 'Lobelia' in a green, cursive font, accompanied by a small blue flower icon. Below the header, the date 'SØNDAG 28. FEBRUAR 2010' is displayed. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column has a post title 'Litt nytt fra JDL' in green. Below the title is a large image showing a black, tiered ceramic object on a surface with handwritten notes, next to a wooden spoon holder and a basket of bread. The right column has a section titled 'KONKURRANSE/GIVE AWAY'. It features a small image of an orange globe on a shelf, followed by the text 'Trekning 28 mars!'. Below this is a section titled '- SKAP NYE MINNER HVER DAG -' with a small image of a wooden box containing books and papers. The browser's status bar at the bottom shows 'Internett' and a zoom level of 100%.

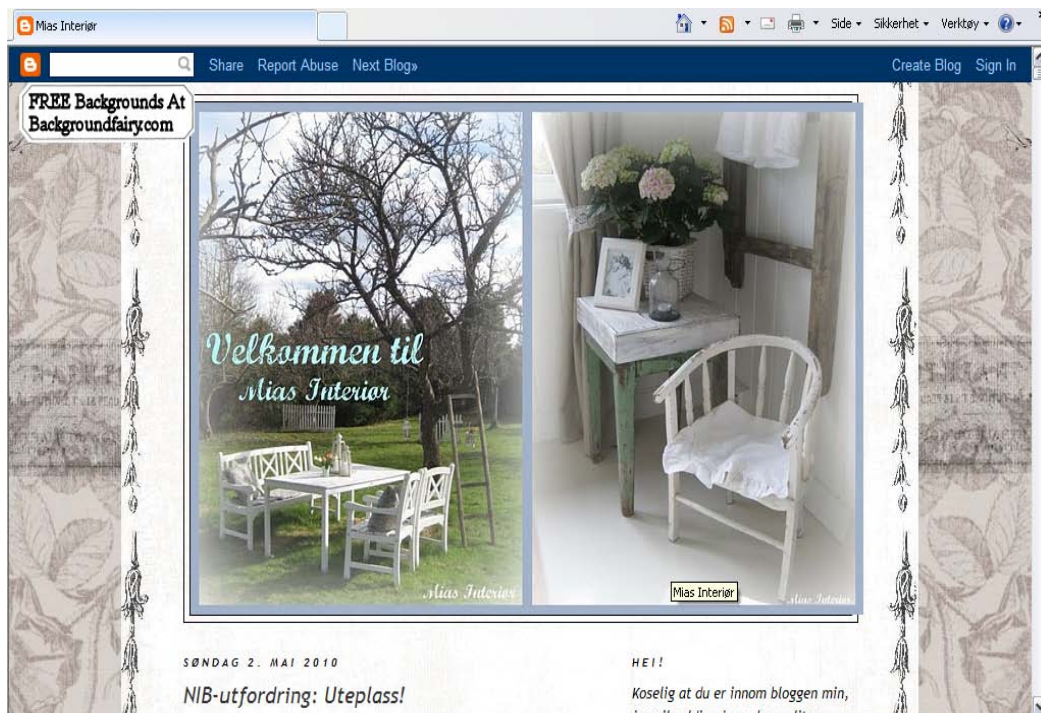
Example 7 <http://malivasverden.blogspot.com/>, accessed 05/05/2010.



Accessed 21/12/2009 ↘



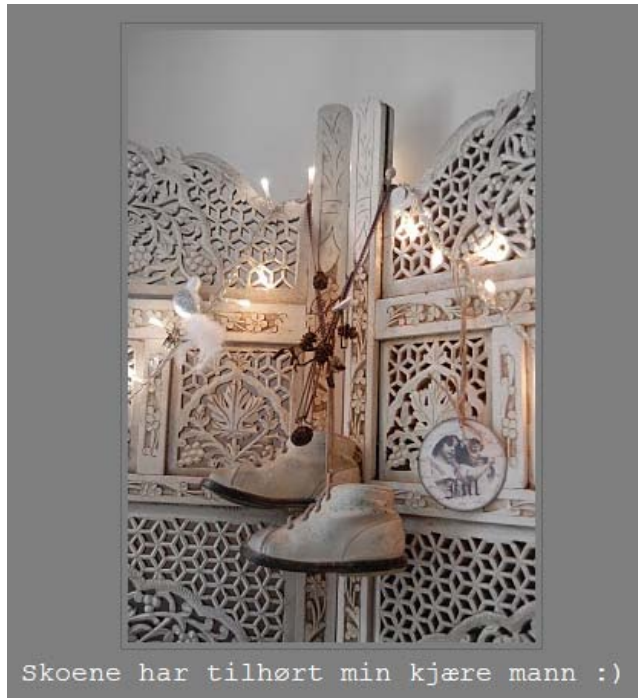
Example 8 <http://miasinterior.blogspot.com/>, accessed 05/05/2010



Accessed 21/12/2009 ↘



Example 9 <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/> retrieved 05/05/2010.



Date of entry 26/12/2009.

Example 10 <http://shabbycharm.blogspot.com/> retrieved 05/05/2010.



Dukkesengen er laget av min oldefar. Han gav den i gave til farmor når hun var 4 år. Den er 90 år gammel og er nok en av de lekene jeg er mest glad for at lilleemor har i dag.

Mange klemmer fra

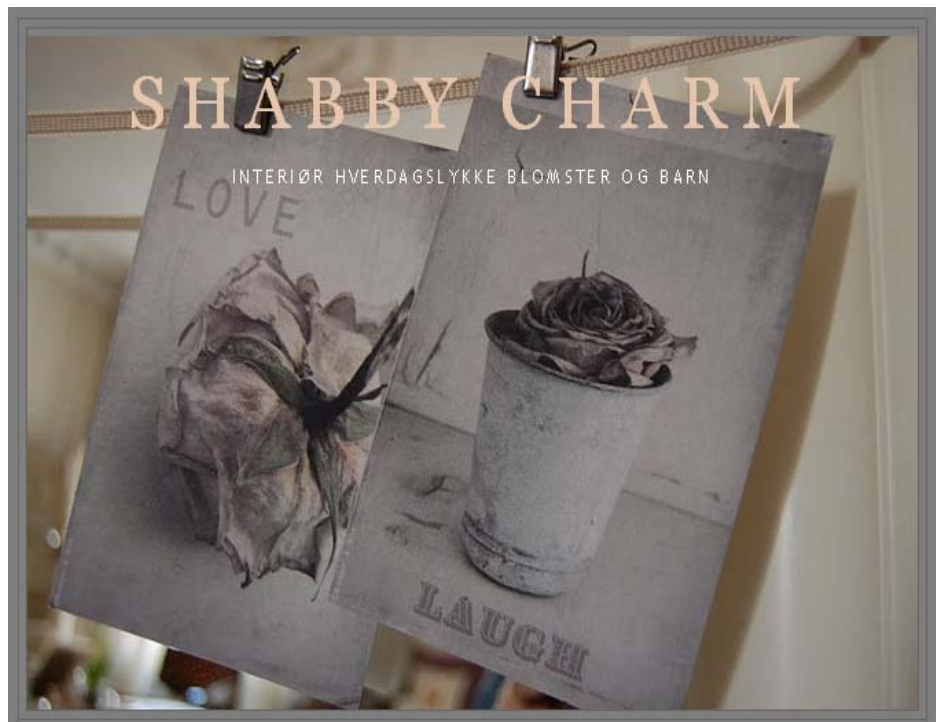
Maia

Date of entry 25/03/2010.

Example 11 <http://miasinterior.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010



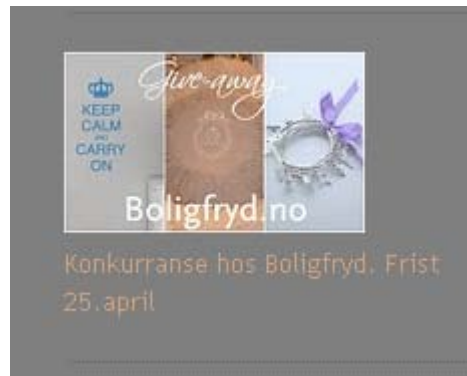
Example 12 <http://www.shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010



Example 13 <http://www.shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010



Example 14 <http://www.shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010



Example 15 <http://malivasverden.blogspot.com/> , retrieved 21/04/2010

malivasverden: mars 2010

ONSDAG 3. MARS 2010

En hyggelig kveld med lansering av
INSPIRASJONSGUIDEN!



Min mann har lagd et sitat; *Alt begynner med en tanke som kan blir til en drøm, og en drøm kan bli til en virkelighet.* Denne kvelden var jeg vitne til det. Marianne som er avbildet her, og hennes venninne Sølvi, har erfart nettopp dette. Det begynte

Date of entry 03/03/2010.

Example 16 http://www.bladkongen.no/abonnere-pa-magasinet-vakre-hjem-och-interi%C3%B8r.asp?gclid=CPOix97EvaECFcoqDgodn1u0_A, retrieved 06/05/2010.



Example 17 <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/849a0c38-2a1f-11de-9d01-00144feabdc0.html>, retrieved 21/04/2010

Wednesday Apr 21 2010
All times are London time

SEARCH Go QUOTES Go

FT.com **House & Home**
FINANCIAL TIMES FT Home > Arts & Leisure > House & Home

- Front page
- World
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- Global Economy
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- Management
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- Personal Finance
- Arts & Leisure
 - Arts
 - Food & Drink
 - House & Home**
 - Style
 - Books
 - Pursuits
 - Travel

A blog's life

By Caroline Taylor
Published: April 18 2009 01:10 | Last updated: April 18 2009 01:10

If you'd asked me a year ago what I thought about internet blogging, my answer would have been pretty negative. Why would daily updates about a stranger's mundane life – a tedious online diary – be of interest to anyone beyond their close friends and family (whom they could easily reach via e-mail, Facebook or MySpace)? When a friend suggested I write a blog about my love for home decoration, I laughed it off as a crazy idea. Why would anyone care what I had to say?



Example 18 <http://malivasverden.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010

MOSEHJERTENE MINE VIL BLI
SOLGT IGJEN TIL HØSTEN-10



Ved bestilling send meg mail...may-liss@maliva.no

Example 19 <http://hespeslillebutikk.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010



Example 20 <http://www.shabbycharm.blogspot.com/>, retrieved 21/04/2010

