

Siles, I. (2018). Blogs. In N. Brügger & I. Milligan (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Web History* (pp. 359-371). London: SAGE.

The emergence of the blog (originally known as ‘weblog’) constitutes one of the most important developments in the history of the Web. Perhaps more than any other practice, blogging embodied widespread ideas about the potential of the Web for self-expression at the turn of the twenty-first century. By the mid 2000s, blogs were the icon of the ‘Web 2.0’ discourse, the key example that revealed the dynamic nature of the Web, the new kind of business models it entailed, and the challenge the Web posed to social institutions such as the mainstream media (O’Reilly, 2005). More recently, blogs have played a crucial role in helping to conceptualize the emergence and development of other Web technologies. The term ‘microblogging’, typically employed to label technologies such as Tumblr and Twitter, suggests that the relationship between blogs and other Web artifacts is of continuity and refinement. In this sense, the history of the blog encapsulates the history of the Web as a technology for self-performance.

Scholars have historicized blogging in several ways. Some studies have situated blogs within the wide history of practices and technologies that predate them. The main insight from this strand of research is that the blog’s most defining features and use practices can be traced back to multiple sources (Herring et al., 2005; Miller and Shepherd, 2004). Another line of work has investigated how blogs acquired a recognizable set of characteristics at the end of the 1990s (Blood, 2002; Lovink, 2011; Siles, 2012a). Ammann (2009) thus studied the role played by Jorn Barger in the rise of an early group of users. Other scholars have investigated how, after its origins in a close community of practitioners, blogging was widely adopted in a variety of fields. For example, Rosenberg (2009) discussed how blogging developed into political and commercial phenomena. Finally, there has been a growing interest in documenting the specific configurations that the development of blogging has acquired in national settings (Locatelli, 2014; Moe, 2011; Russell and Echechaibi, 2009; Weltevrede and Helmond, 2012).

This chapter contributes to this body of work by tracing how blogs emerged, stabilized, and developed in the United States from the mid 1990s to the present day. I focus on the United States not only because blogging emerged there but also because of the significance that the

country has played in shaping an imaginary around blogging that has been influential in other contexts.¹ Although negotiated in important ways, the evolution of blogging in the United States provided Web users and developers in other parts of the world with a framework for making sense of the cultural meaning of this practice (Siles, 2017). This is not to suggest that the international uptake of blogging has been uniform. As Russell and Echchaibi (2009) remind us, blogging ‘is being conceptualized differently in distinct cultural contexts. A blog can be more things that we are presently imagining, a vehicle of democratic expression, yes, but also a means to revive tradition, to explore identity, [or] to conduct public relations’ (2009: 8). The role of blogging in non-liberal democracies or during major political events attests to the importance of this remark.

To account for this historical process, I draw on the theory of ‘articulation’, or the notion that meanings are partially established through the connection between elements with no necessary relation, such as ‘values, feelings, beliefs, practices, structures, organizations, [and] ideologies’ (Slack, 2006: 225). I argue that the identities of blogs in the United States developed as Web users and software developers established links between certain kinds of websites, metaphors, and practices of content creation. This approach allows me to depart from a ‘heroic innovators approach’, that is, the idea that ‘behind every successful innovation in human endeavor is likely a champion, an articulate visionary, an inventor perhaps at the margins of the social institutions of the day’ (Neuman, 2010: 8). Thus, rather than focusing on events and figures, I make my focus the historical *processes* that these important cases illustrate.

I begin by examining how blogs emerged in the second half of the 1990s. I look at how blogs absorbed the identities of other existing websites and content-creation practices on the Web. The result was the stabilization of blogs as a malleable ‘format’ for sharing an expansive variety of content types.² Second, I analyze the evolution of blogs in the early years of the new millennium. It was during this period that practitioners in the United States and abroad adopted blogs in a variety of ways and began speaking of sub-types of blogs, as opposed to the generic format that characterized the early days. I also illustrate how users adopted blogs internationally through the example of France. Third, I discuss how technologies created in the second half of the 2000s that sought to replace or extend blogging came to be associated with the notion of

‘microblogging’. The final remarks bring this chapter to a close by discussing recent evolutions in the history of blogs. I argue that blogs are ‘paradigmatic’ in the sense that they shaped the terms for understanding the history of the Web as a technology for self-performance.

My historical analysis draws on a mixed-methods research design conducted in two countries: the United States and France.³ The study on which this chapter is based integrated findings from 105 interviews with Web users, software developers, investors, entrepreneurs, commentators, and analysts, among others (conducted between 2009 and 2014); traditional archival research and Web archival techniques; both content and material analyses of a sample of websites; ethnographic participation in meetings of Web users and developers; and visits to numerous software companies and organizations that have appropriated blogs.

Creating a Format for Self-Performance on the Web

In December 1997, Jorn Barger started *Robot Wisdom*, a website devoted to sharing annotated hyperlinks to other sites on the Web. This computer programmer referred to his new project as a ‘weblog’ or ‘a daily running log of the best webpages I visit’, as he described it in an online forum one week after its launch (Barger, 1997b). In his first post, Barger reflected on information about gangs in Chicago and linked to another site where his readers could discover ‘a ton of details – names, symbols, alliances – you never see anywhere else’ (Barger, 1997a). Barger was not shy about making predictions about the impact his new online venture would have and invited other Web users to join the inescapable expansion of weblogs. In his words, ‘I suspect that in a year there’ll be hundreds of people maintaining pages like this, and that this will allow good URLs to spread much more quickly’ (Barger, 1997b).

In the following months, several users fulfilled Barger’s prophecy. Throughout 1998, many Web users created their own weblogs, sharing comments and hyperlinks to other online sources. By 1999, blogs caught the attention of the mainstream media. Journalist Scott Rosenberg (1999) maintained that ‘[the] phenomenon known as the weblog is one of the fastest-growing and most fertile creative areas on the Web today’. Press articles like this one illustrate

the growth of this online activity in a short period of time. By 1999, users and journalists recognized the blog as a specific type of website with a defining set of features.

How did the blog gain a relatively stable identity as a specific kind of website? To make this happen, users began by creating patterns of similarity between certain existing websites. Throughout 1997 and 1998, several Web users identified sites that seemed to share various characteristics. Male individuals related to the technology development field, such as software producers, computer programmers, and Web designers, created most of these websites. These sites were characterized by features such as relatively short comments on recent news about technology, the Internet, and Web design. They were also full of hyperlinks that pointed to other sources of information online. Bill Humphries, a programmer and early user, recalls, ‘The early mindset of [users] was to find interesting things and link to them. It was description or comment and link’ (interview with author, 2009).

Users posted the most recent information in reverse chronological order to make content easier to read for others. According to Wesley Felter, a software developer and early weblog user, ‘The idea was that someone was coming to read the weblog every day, and they wanted to see what’s new since yesterday, so [we would] put the more interesting or more important links at the top’ (interview with author, 2009). These sites also included a menu that linked the most recent entries to other sections of the website, options for allowing readers to configure the site’s color scheme, automated search functions of keywords, archives of older posts, and mechanisms for sharing a link with the creator of the site.

To conceptualize what they considered to be similar kinds of websites, users employed a variety of metaphors. For example, Jorn Barger highlighted their role in the distillation of the Web’s content: ‘We vacuum the Net for stories that the major outlets haven’t noticed yet, and pass along our sources so we can all get more and more efficient at this vacuuming’ (Barger, 1998). Other users also employed the notion of ‘pre-surfing’ the Web for readers (Graham, 1998).

Another dynamic of articulation that shaped the emergence of blogs was the adoption of a name to identify websites that shared this common set of traits. Throughout 1998, a set of competing names circulated among users. A small group of users adopted Barger’s weblog

concept. But this term was only one among other possibilities. Some users, for the most part associated with a community of developers that coalesced around a software named Frontier, had been naming these sites ‘news pages’ since at least 1997. This term described websites created with Frontier, organized in reverse chronological order, and devoted to sharing news, comments, and hyperlinks to other Web sources mostly about technology issues. Another common name at the time was ‘microportals’, defined by one of its advocates as ‘indy [sic] sites that change all the time [usually] run by one person, or a small group. Most of them belong to presurfers, or people who find links and share the best with others. Other sites are newsfeeds’ (Wallace, cited in Siles, 2017). Finally, other names included ‘filters’ – inspired by an influential website created by a Web developer named Michael Sippey that included a section called *The Filter* (later named *Filtered for Purity*) – or simply ‘personal websites’ or ‘homepages’.

The weblog became the standard name mostly because influential users (such as Barger and others) employed it as an articulatory concept to link existing approaches to Web publishing. By the end of 1998 and beginning of 1999, many users began referring to their websites as weblogs. In February 1999, Pete Prodoehl (1999), an early Frontier user, wrote: ‘I didn’t even know this site was a “weblog,” but now I do’ Similarly, in May 1999, John SJ Anderson (1999), a molecular biologist who created a site in 1998, announced: ‘I’ve decided: GeneHack is now a web log, as opposed to the mess o’ links that I previously thought of it as’. In addition to a common set of traits, this group of websites were now also linked by a common name. This name got shortened after one user, Peter Merholz, announced early in 1999 his decision to pronounce it as ‘wee-blog’ or ‘blog’.

Throughout 1999, users implemented different means to communicate with other practitioners. Early references to a small set of ‘sites like mine’ evolved into recurrent allusions to a ‘weblog community’. Certain users played a crucial role in the formation of this sense of community. According to Ammann (2009), Jorn Barger ‘shaped the concept of the weblog community [...] by setting a prolific and inspiring example in his *Robot Wisdom Weblog* and by meticulously crediting his fellow practitioners in its pages’ (2009: 284). Online forums were also a key dynamic of community building. In July 1999, Web developer Matt Haughey

launched *MetaFilter*, a ‘community weblog’, that is, a blog updated by multiple users. According to Haughey, *MetaFilter* sought to crystallize the sense of community arising from interactions between early weblog users (interview with author, 2011). By early 2000, this site had become a central site of discussion for many users. In August 1999, Barger also created a mailing list for weblog users that was established as an important mechanism to build a sense of community between them.

The constitution of this community involved a parallel process of identity formation by which members of this group conceived of themselves as representative figures of a particular type of Internet user, expressed by concepts such as the Web’s ‘pre-surfer’ or the ‘weblogger’ (Siles, 2012b). Establishing a distinction between ‘webloggers’ and ‘online diarists’ allowed the former to further define themselves as a community. As participants of the technology and Internet development fields, early bloggers knew a variety of programming languages and technical skills. Users envisioned these skills as a marker of identity and a source of differentiation with respect to other users who coded their sites in HTML (most notably online diarists). This sense of community led to various efforts to meet in person. A memorable gathering of early bloggers took place in March 2000, at the South by Southwest conference. During this event, many users met each other in person for the first time and discussed in roundtables and informal conversations the possibilities and limitations of blogs.

In the final years of the 1990s, more users began appropriating blogs for a variety of purposes (Siles, 2011). A key factor in making this possible was the emergence of automated software. Unlike Frontier, which was ‘an integrated development environment for building and managing [...] websites [devised for] a webmaster or web developer with experience in system-level scripting’ (Winer, 1996), these new tools were specifically designed for a wide audience interested in automating the process of publishing a website. Andrew Smales released software for blogging called Pitas in July 1999 and, four months later, Diaryland for online diarists. Paul Kedrosky, a business school professor, launched Groksoup in August 1999. In San Francisco, a company named Pyra launched an automated Web application called Blogger in August 1999.

As users kept creating more and different content and software programs standardized these sites’ features, a notion gained traction that defined blogs as a ‘format’ suited ‘for

publishing all kinds of information on the Web’, as Evan Williams, one of the developers behind Blogger, described it (from an interview in Turnbull, 2002: 83). Users and software developers utilized the notion of ‘format’ to suggest that blogs were a content-agnostic medium (Siles, 2011). Meg Hourihan (2002), a co-creator of Blogger, suggested, ‘What we write about does not define us as bloggers; it’s how we write about it (frequently, ad nauseam, peppered with links)’. In this way, users shifted the focus of blogging from a singular end to the necessary means for creating, storing, and sharing various content online. ‘Format’ also tied the blog to the notion of *genre*, a particular arrangement of technological features crystallized in standardized software templates. Finally, ‘format’ designated the *size* of the blog as a publication outlet, which users and software developers described as being in opposition to the ‘page paradigm’. Blogs, they argued, revolved around the ‘post’, a unique, smaller unit for producing meaning. In this way, by the end of the 1990s, blogs had gained a new identity as a malleable means for publishing on the Web.

The Proliferation of Blogging

In the early years of the new millennium, the identities of blogs proliferated, that is, they multiplied quantitatively and transformed qualitatively. The generic concept of the blog format that characterized the early days was gradually replaced by the notion that blogging had a multiplicity of sub-types: the ‘news blog’, the ‘political blog’, the ‘video blog’, the ‘gadget blog’, the ‘fashion blog’... The identity of blogging was thus re-articulated: practitioners established a set of different connections between the blog format and other practices, metaphors, and meanings. Several factors worked as conditions of possibility for these re-articulations: the availability of software programs that afforded new, specific content-creation practices; transformations in the daily life of actors; and larger economic, political, and cultural processes. In particular, neoliberalization infused these re-articulations as it provided a framework for making sense of the purpose and nature of blogging. Users and software developers thus re-articulated blogs as a response to these factors.⁴

By making visible these factors, it becomes easier to understand how and why some of the most popular kinds of blogging developed. Thus, although in this chapter I focus particularly on the examples of ‘news blogging’ and ‘political blogging’, the goal is to provide an account of the *process* through which multiple blogging identities emerged. I concentrate on these cases because of how they captured public imagination in the early years of the 2000s in the United States. I also discuss briefly the case of France as an example of how the evolution of blogging acquired an international flavor.

The proliferation of blogging in the first years of the new millennium built on the availability of automated software that envisioned blogs as a ‘blank canvas’, as software developer Meg Hourihan described them (interview with author, 2009). In contrast to early popular applications, such as Blogger, these new programs required an installation on the user’s server. Noah Grey thus described the creation of a software program named Greymatter in late 2000: ‘I simply wanted to give myself more control and organization. [...] I couldn’t find another tool to do what I wanted to do, so I wrote my own’ (interview with author, 2012). In a similar manner, developer Mena Trott (n.d.) narrated the design of a popular software program named Movable Type as a tale of experimentation.

For users, the availability of novel software programs created fertile grounds for new content-creation practices that shaped significantly the identities of blogs. For example, these tools naturalized the post with several paragraphs as an important part of blogging. According to Tom Coates, a key figure in the development of blogging in the UK:

When it started, [Blogger] was a box you could type stuff into and press the button. And then Moveable Type came on. And the first implication [...] was that people felt much more compelled to write a lot of things. It’s like, ‘I’ve got to write; I’ve got a whole page just sitting there!’ I certainly felt the pressure to write more and more intelligently. (interview with author, 2011)

In addition to the transformation of software, the context of blogging changed at the turn of the century. The early days of blogging had been a fruitful period for self-exploration (Siles, 2011). But the political moment changed in the early years of the new millennium in ways that made

it necessary for users to share their voice online. A key example of this was the appropriation of blogs as a mechanism to intervene in public life and make the voices of citizens heard in society (a practice originally known as ‘warblogging’ and then ‘political blogging’) (Welch, 2002). The context of this phenomenon was the aftermath of 9/11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan. To give an opinion about these events became pressing for people who felt they had no place to go other than the Web. According to Jerome Armstrong, an activist who created a website named *MyDD (My Due Diligence)* in 2001, and Markos (‘Kos’) Moulitsas Zúniga, a journalist and political scientist who built his own site (*Daily Kos*) in 2002, ‘Both of us started our blogs because we wanted a voice in our nation’s politics’ (2006: vi–vii). Seen in this way, blogging was a response to significant events in the life of actors and larger cultural, political, and social processes.

According to these users, the political and economic climate of the early 2000s made it imperative to transform the public sphere outside of established power centers, notably the mainstream media. This required a capacity to translate the analysis of current events into an opinion and perspective that could contribute to democratic life (Walton, 2004). The privileged notion to conceptualize the product of these practices was the ‘blogosphere’. It is possible to trace this notion back to 1999, when Brad Graham, an avid early user, deployed it half-jokingly to characterize the sense of community that was forming among blogging practitioners. In the early years of the 2000s, it was used in all seriousness to suggest that blogging embodied a possibility to reach the Habermasian ideal of the public sphere, that is, a symbolic space where citizens could meet to deliberate rationally about public affairs (Habermas, 1989). In the case of blogs, this was interpreted as the formation of a network of websites exchanging opinions and news to monitor the state and change politics from the bottom up.

Against the background of a crisis of legitimacy experienced by traditional institutions and organizations such as the state, the mainstream media, political parties, and large enterprises, actors from these organizations began exploring the world of blogging with the hope to reconnect with citizens. Already in 1999, James Romenesko, a journalist who covered technology news at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, had created a website to aggregate news called

Media Gossip. ‘My goal’, he recalls, ‘was to try to find things, journalism items, that most readers would not find on their own, and that meant going to some more obscure publications and media criticisms’ (interview with author, 2009). In a similar manner, technology journalist Dan Gillmor started a column in October 1999 as a weblog at the *San Jose Mercury News*. He appropriated blogs to expand the content of his newspaper columns. Based on the experiences of these precursors, early in the new century newspapers began blogging as they sought to bring transparency to their inner workings and thus provide a solution to the crisis of legitimacy (Nielsen, 2012). These efforts came to be known as ‘news blogs’. By the mid 2000s, news organizations had gradually institutionalized these practices and expectations.

The invention of ‘news blogs’ and ‘political blogs’ posed a singular challenge: to generate a steady income to turn blogging into a full-time activity. During the early years of the new millennium, users began experimenting with ways to generate this income, notably by inviting readers to donate to their sites and implementing various advertising regimes. Underlying these efforts was a transformation of the identity of blogging. Rather than being hailed as the ‘soapbox’ of the ‘John and Jane Does of the Net’ (Yahoo! Internet Life, 2002: 57–8), as an outlet described them at the turn of the century, blogs were re-articulated as a commodity. This, in turn, required re-imagining the blogger as the digital avatar of the neoliberal entrepreneur.

Henry Copeland, a journalist and consultant, emphasized the need for a new economic model to highlight the entrepreneurial dimension of blogging. He defined it as ‘blogonomics’: ‘a model of economic and informational collaboration through cross linking that creates ad hoc networks and communities’ (interview with author, 2012). Thus, according to Copeland (2002), bloggers were better described as ‘idea entrepreneurs, living in a clickocracy, risking their time and passion on writing’. Such a conception would ‘enable hundreds of thousands of new idea entrepreneurs to carve out local, ideological or conceptual niches and make a living’. Projects to turn blogs into profitable ventures and enterprises, such as *Gawker* (2003), *The Huffington Post* (2005), and *Weblogs, Inc.* (2003), were outcomes of this larger process of commodification. In this way, blogs became ‘enterprise solutions [...] [and] empires of nano-publishing’, as UK blogger Tom Coates (2003) put it.

To be sure, the proliferation of blogging was not exclusive to the United States (Russell and Echchaibi, 2009). The case of France illustrates how certain notions about blogging coalesced into an imaginary that acquired particular flavors worldwide (Siles, 2017). Like in the United States, the blog absorbed the identities of early websites in France, most notably the *page perso* (short for personal page), the quintessential embodiment of self-performance on the 1990s French Web. This was a generic term used to describe websites where users discussed their passions and interests. By mid 2001, some users were debating intensively about the success of blogs in the United States and how it could be replicated in France. A computer scientist named Stéphane Gigandet thus reflected: ‘Weblogs may be a triumph in the United States, but in the French-speaking world, they are in their infancy’ (Gigandet, 2001a). The following day, Gigandet (2001b) published an essay to argue for the need to Frenchify blogs: in his view, they represented an opportunity to revive self-performance practices that had given life to sites like *pages persos*.⁵

It is difficult to overstate the excitement that the discovery of blogs caused among Web users in France over the following years. This was not lost on the international press. *The New York Times* noted in 2006, ‘Already famed for angry labor strikes and philosophical debates in smoke-filled cafés, the French have now brought these passions online to become some of the world’s most intensive bloggers. The French distinguish themselves, both statistically and anecdotally, ahead of Germans, Britons and even Americans in their obsession with blogs’ (Crampton, 2006).

By the mid 2000s, ideas about the political potential of blogging, largely advanced in the United States, gained wide notoriety in France. These ideas emphasized the possibilities afforded by blogging to shape the public sphere outside of traditional power centers. Early users appropriated the American imaginary around blogging as a solution to a very French problem: the proximity between journalists in the mainstream media and the political elite. ‘Just like the 2004 campaign in the United States’, wrote Pô and Vanbremeersch (2007), ‘the 2007 campaign in France signal[ed] the rise and structuration of [a] new political space’ (2007: 155). This new political space, users argued, could now be occupied by ‘ordinary’ citizens. Like in the United States, although at a slower pace, the appropriation of blogs in France was also characterized

by commodification and neoliberalization dynamics. As the decade progressed, actors in France argued more explicitly for defining the blogger as an entrepreneur and defining the blogosphere as a marketplace of attention (Le Meur and Beauvais, 2005).

Rosenberg (2009) argues that, since the early 2000s, ‘blogging has fragmented [...]: there are not just craft bloggers, but whole cadres of knitting bloggers and weaving bloggers; not just foodie bloggers, but beer bloggers and sushi bloggers. [...] Each subculture has its own norms of behavior’ (2009: 263–4). It is these blogging ‘subcultures’ that have captured public attention since the mid 2000s. For example, referring to one specific ‘fashion blog’, a writer in *The New York Times* stated in 2017: ‘It paved the way for the fast fashion news cycle, creating an appetite for trade sites [...] [and] catwalk images [...]. For better or for worse, it was instrumental in the democratization of fashion as we know it’ (Taylor, 2017).

Underlying this evolution of blogging into a matter of ‘subcultures’, ‘niches’, or ‘communities’ are the factors outlined above: the availability of software to enact specific blog sub-types; transformations in the daily life of actors; and larger economic, political, and cultural processes. The promises of combining the cultural force of blogging and an entrepreneurial spirit – borrowing the expression from Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) – is the drive behind most sub-types of blogging that have emerged since the mid 2000s: ‘mommy blogs’, ‘video blogs’, and ‘fashion blogs’, to name a few. These phenomena need to be situated within a context marked by the prevalence of a cultural discourse – or a subject position – that compels users to think of themselves as neoliberal entrepreneurs who forge market transactions with others online (Duffy and Hund, 2015).

The Invention of ‘Microblogging’

By the mid 2000s, developers built a set of technologies that came to be defined as ‘social network sites’ and ‘microblogging’ tools. Although instances of these kinds of applications can be found from the initial days of Web-based automated software, it wasn’t until the mid to late 2000s that these services (and notions) stabilized.

These tools sought to both capture early blogging practices and enable new conceptions of what it meant to be in public online. In the months that followed the creation of tools such as Twitter and Tumblr, a specific concept emerged to refer to these applications and link (or articulate) them together: ‘microblogging’ (Waters and Nuttall, 2007). Before 2007, the term ‘microblog’ was occasionally used as a synonym of ‘niche blog’, a site devoted to discussing a specific topic (Rowan, 2003). Commentators also employed the notion of ‘miniblog’ to describe blogs about specific topics that were incorporated within larger websites (Faler, 2005). But as artifacts such as tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter further stabilized by early 2007, the term ‘microblogging’ acquired a specific definition.

The notion of ‘microblogging’ played an articulatory role in several important ways. It enabled its proponents to bring together a group of technologies that had no necessary relation.⁶ The possibility to publish short-form content functioned as the glue that tied these technologies together. As a concept, ‘microblogging’ also allowed advocates to link the blogging imaginary and this group of technologies. In this sense, the term ‘microblogging’ worked to suggest that blogging had been ‘remediated’ (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). David Karp, the creator of Tumblr, defined both Tumblr and Twitter as ‘blogging that favors short-form data’ (from an interview in Gwinn, 2007). Evan Williams, a co-developer of both Blogger and Twitter, argued that these tools were linked by an ontological property of the Web. He claimed: ‘[Twitter is] like we’ll take blogging, we’ll take out all these features and we’ll limit the size of the post and that will be a whole thing. [...] [It] is like a molecule that is everywhere’ (cited in Moggridge, 2010: 278). In this view, ‘microblogging’ technologies allowed blogging to be reimagined in new ways.

Underlying these assertions was the belief that blogging required a major transformation to maintain its relevance in a shifting Web ecology. A post called *The Huffington Post is Not a Blog*, written by Jorn Barger – the programmer who coined the term ‘weblog’ in 1997 – aptly captures the dissatisfaction of some users about the commodification of blogs. Barger (2005) maintained: ‘[I] was distressed to discover that the original intent of the expression “web logging” (to log your websurfing with public annotations) has gone entirely by the boards’.

Specifically, Barger criticized the notions of ‘niche blog’ and ‘blog aggregators’ illustrated by blog networks such as *The Huffington Post*.

For other users, blogs had standardized in unproductive ways and, at the center of this standardization, were unnecessarily long posts and certain technological features made to enable such form of writing. In the words of Tumblr’s creator:

The blogosphere [...] had matured to a place where it was really designed for editorial publishing. Everything after Movable Type had a title, several paragraphs of text, a footer, a permalink page with comments [...] but something that I really wanted out of my website, out of my blog, was much more freeform. (From an interview in Schonfeld, 2011)

In his view, the solution to this problem came in the form of the short post.

The invention ‘microblogging’ thus rested on the belief in the need for simplifying self-performance on the Web. This drive towards simplicity must be interpreted as an expression of a wider cultural concern with complexity (Maeda, 2006). By simplicity, software developers typically referred to the size of posts, the speed at which they could be made available to others, and minimalism in technological design. In short, simplicity meant reducing the number of technological features to the minimum required to enable social interaction (Siles, 2013). According to Evan Henshaw-Plath, one of the original developers of Twitter, during the creation of the tool ‘there was a discussion about what you could strip away. [...] What [was] the simplest thing that [could] possibly work as opposed to what [was] featured complete?’ (interview with author, 2011). These conceptions of simplicity found cultural resonance. In the media, ‘microblogging’ technologies were typically associated with notions of speed, simplicity, originality, purity, brevity, and minimalism (Glaser, 2007; Gwinn, 2007).

As the 2000s came to an end, the ‘microblogging’ notion reached the status of a keyword. For Williams (1983), keywords ‘are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought [that] bound together certain ways of seeing culture and society’ (1983: 15). As such, the concept functioned to fill what seemed like a semantic void created by the availability of software programs that extended the history of blogs through the prism of simplicity. However, the ‘microblogging’ keyword was not accepted unanimously. Some blatantly rejected it and the

assumptions on which the term relied. These critics contended that ‘microblogging’ was a vague and imprecise word with no major conceptual value that tended to freeze what were fluid and dynamic processes of technological design and appropriation (Selvitelle, 2008).

A History of Now

The rise of ‘microblogging’ and ‘social network sites’ technologies has led to a reassessment of the place of blogging in the contemporary Web ecology. Far from a linear evolution, this can be conceptualized a site of struggle. From this perspective, reconsiderations of blogging can be situated within a spectrum of positions that range from those who construe the rise of ‘microblogging’ as a threat to those who envision it instead as a spring of new possibilities for blogging and the Web.

For some, the rise of ‘microblogging’ technologies has signaled the imminence of the blog’s demise. In this view, the gradual commodification and standardization of blogging killed the merits of this practice. Nicholas Carr (2008), for example, argued that blogs had ‘become mainstream’ and thus ‘lost much of their original personality’. Instead, these commentators emphasize the virtues of simplicity and the technologies that enable it. *Wired*’s Boutin (2008) thus asked: ‘[W]hy bother [blogging]? The time it takes to craft sharp, witty blog prose is better spent expressing yourself on Flickr, Facebook, or Twitter’.

An alternative position in the struggle for establishing the blog’s contemporary meaning comes from users and developers, who argue for hybrids between both blogging and ‘microblogging’. In their view, the materiality of software programs makes this combination come to fruition in productive ways. Thus, blogging is not about to perish because of ‘microblogging’ but can be reinvigorated instead by integrating ‘microblogging’ into its defining set of technologies and practices.

Finally, some actors justify the importance of blogging by emphasizing its renewed singularity in the Web ecology. This view posits fundamental differences between blogging and ‘microblogging’ – as both technologies and practices – but argues for reconciling them rather than keeping them apart. Blogging and ‘microblogging’ are defined neither in terms of

competition nor hybridity, but rather as forming a symbiotic relationship: they supplement each other through their alternative strengths. According to WordPress's co-creator, Matt Mullenweg:

Blogging [...] is the natural evolution of the lighter publishing methods – at some point you'll have more to say than fits in 140 characters, is too important to put in Facebook's generic chrome, or you've matured to the point you want more flexibility and control around your words and ideas. [...] You don't stop using the lighter method, you just complement it – different mediums afford different messages. (Mullenweg, 2011)

For Mullenweg, then, to write long posts remains fundamental for self-elaboration dynamics in that it allows the short post to be expanded in more substantial ways. Blogging, as it were, is back (or never went away).

The processes and trajectories discussed in this chapter reveal the centrality of the blog in defining the history of the Web as a technology for self-performance. Put differently, the history of the blog is the history of how and why we have used the Web repeatedly to make ourselves 'public' to others. From this perspective, blogs may be defined as a paradigmatic technology in Agamben's (2009) sense, that is, they are the case that makes intelligible singular aspects of a whole set of artifacts (such as sites and tools for self-elaboration online). According to Agamben, 'paradigms establish a broader problematic context that they both constitute and make intelligible' (2009: 17). As a paradigmatic technology, the history of the blog is also the history of how its most defining features have become standard affordances of the new media ecology. Rather than technological necessities, these features are the result of specific historical contexts that need to be carefully interrogated.

References

Agamben, G. (2009) *The Signature of all Things: On Method*. New York: Zone Books.

Ammann, R. (2009) 'Jorn Barger, the NewsPage network, and the emergence of the weblog community', paper presented at the 20th Association for Computing Machinery Conference on Hypertext and Hypermedia, Italy.

Anderson, J.S. (1999) No title, *Genehack* (<http://genehack.org/1999/05/>)

Armstrong, J., and Moulitsas Zúniga, M. (2006) *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassroots, and the Rise of People-Powered Politics*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.

Barger, J. (1997a) 'Robot Wisdom Weblog', *RobotWisdom* (<http://web.archive.org/web/20000817183237/www.robotwisdom.com/log1997m12.html>)

Barger, J. (1997b) "'Weblogs" are the best format for hotlists', *comp.infosystems.www.announce* (http://groups.google.com/group/comp.infosystems.www.announce/browse_frm/thread/7de977b747c34d3e/4af6ac27dad974fd?pli=1)

Barger, J. (1998) 'My weblog press release', *rec.arts.books* (http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.books/browse_thread/thread/a01e262d08703942)

Barger, J. (2005) 'The Huffington Post is not a blog', *Robot Wisdom Auxiliary* (<http://robotwisdom2.blogspot.com/2005/12/huffington-post-is-not-blog.html>)

Bijker, W.E., Hughes, T.P., and Pinch, T.J. (Eds.) (1987) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Blood, R. (2002) 'Weblogs: A history and perspective', in J. Rodzvilla (ed.), *We've Got Blog: How Weblogs are Changing our Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus. pp. 7–16.

Boltanski, L., and Chiapello, È. (1999) *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme*. Paris: Gallimard.

Bolter, J.D., and Grusin, R. (1999) *Remediation*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Boutin, P. (2008) 'Twitter, Flickr, Facebook make blogs look so 2004', *Wired* (http://www.wired.com/entertainment/theweb/magazine/16-11/st_essay)
- Carr, N. (2008) 'Who killed the blogosphere?', *Roughtype.com* (<http://www.roughtype.com/?s=who+killed>)
- Coates, T. (2003) '(Weblogs and) the mass amateurisation of (nearly) everything...', *PlasticBag* (http://www.plasticbag.org/archives/2003/09/weblogs_and_the_mass_amateurisation_of_nearly_everything/)
- Copeland, H. (2002) 'Blogonomics: Making a living from blogging', *Pressflex.com* (http://web.archive.org/web/20020802074241/http://www.pressflex.com/news/fullstory.php/a_id/54/Blogonomics:_making_a_living_from_blogging.html)
- Crampton, T. (2006, July 27) 'France's mysterious embrace of blogs', *NYTimes.com* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/27/technology/27iht-blogs.2314926.html>)
- Duffy, B.E., and Hund, E. (2015) "'Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers', *Social Media + Society*, July-December: 1–11.
- Faler, B. (2005) 'A Capitol Hill presence in the blogosphere', *The Washington Post*. p. A15.
- Flichy, P. (2007) *Understanding Technological Innovation: A Socio-Technical Approach*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Gigandet, S. (2001a) 'Le triomphe des weblogs', *C-est-tout.com* (http://web.archive.org/web/20010716062349/http://c-est-tout.com/infos/info_883.shtml)
- Gigandet, S. (2001b) 'Les balbutiements des joueb's', *C-est-tout.com* (http://web.archive.org/web/20010803181835/http://c-est-tout.com/infos/info_886.shtml)
- Glaser, M. (2007) 'Twitter founders thrive on micro-blogging constraints', *PBS* (<http://mediashift.org/2007/05/twitter-founders-thrive-on-micro-blogging-constraints137/>)

- Graham, B. (1998) No title, *BradLands* (https://web.archive.org/web/19991018212708/http://www.bradlands.com:80/archive/arc_120198.html)
- Gwinn, E. (2007) 'World gets 21st century totem poles', *Chicago Tribune* (http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-03-20/features/0703200287_1_blog-twitter-messaging)
- Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Herring, S.C., Scheidt, L.A., Wright, E., and Bonus, S. (2005) 'Weblogs as a bridging genre', *Information, Technology & People*, 18(2): 142–71.
- Hourihan, M. (2002) 'What we're doing when we blog', *O'Reilly Networks' Web DevCenter* (<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/javascript/2002/06/13/megnut.html>)
- Le Meur, L., and Beauvais, L. (2005) *Blogs pour les Pros*. Paris: Dunod.
- Locatelli, E. (2014) *The Blog Up! Storia Sociale del Blog in Italia*. Milano: FrancoAngeli.
- Lovink, G. (2011) *My First Recession: Critical Internet Culture in Transition*. Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures.
- Maeda, J. (2006) *The Laws of Simplicity (Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Miller, C.R., and Shepherd, D. (2004) 'Blogging as social action: A genre analysis of the weblog', in L. Gurak, S. Antonijevic, L.A. Johnson, C. Ratliff, and J. Reyman (eds.), *Into the Blogosphere: Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs* (http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.html)

- Miller, C.R., and Shepherd, D. (2009) 'Questions for genre theory from the blogosphere', in J. Giltrow and D. Stein (eds.), *Genres in the Internet: Issues in the Theory of Genre*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 263–90.
- Moe, H. (2011) 'Mapping the Norwegian blogosphere: Methodological challenges in internationalizing Internet research', *Social Science Computer Review*, 29(3): 313–26.
- Moggridge, B. (2010) *Designing Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mullenweg, M. (2011) 'Blogging drift', *Ma.tt* (<http://ma.tt/2011/02/blogging-drift/>)
- Neuman, W.R. (2010) 'Theories of media evolution', in W. Russell Neuman (ed.), *Media, Technology, and Society: Theories of Media Evolution*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. pp. 1–21.
- Nielsen, R.K. (2012) 'How newspapers began to blog', *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(6): 959–78.
- O'Reilly, T. (2005) 'What is Web 2.0. Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software' (<http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>)
- Pô, J.-D., and Vanbremeersch, N. (2007) 'La campagne électorale de 2007 et le débat politique en ligne', *Commentaire*, 30(117): 147–55.
- Prodoehl, P. (1999) No title, *Rasterweb* (<http://rasterweb.net/raster/199902.html>)
- Rosenberg, S. (1999) 'Fear of links', *Salon* (<https://www.salon.com/1999/05/28/weblogs/>)
- Rosenberg, S. (2009) *Say Everything: How Blogging Began, What It's Becoming, and Why It Matters*. New York: Crown.
- Rowan, D. (2003) 'Technobabble', *The Times*. p. 21.
- Russell, A., and Echchaibi, N. (2009) *International Blogging: Identity, Politics, and Networked Publics*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Schonfeld, E. (2011) 'Why David Karp started Tumblr: Blogs don't work for most people', *TechCrunch.com* (<http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/21/founder-stories-why-david-karp-started-tumblr-blogs-dont-work-for-most-people/>)
- Selvitelle, B. (2008) 'Why I loathe the word "microblogging"', *life.i.think* (<http://lukewarmtapioca.wordpress.com/2008/06/09/why-i-loathe-the-word-microblogging/>)
- Siles, I. (2007–2008) "'Blogueando" a la tica: Una mirada al uso de los blogs en Costa Rica', *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, 33–34: 325–57.
- Siles, I. (2011) 'From online filter to Web format: Articulating materiality and meaning in the early history of blogs', *Social Studies of Science*, 41(5): 737–58.
- Siles, I. (2012a) 'The rise of blogging: Articulation as a dynamic of technological stabilization', *New Media & Society*, 14(5): 781–97.
- Siles, I. (2012b) 'Web technologies of the self: The arising of the "blogger" identity', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 17(4): 408–21.
- Siles, I. (2013) 'Inventing Twitter: An iterative approach to new media development', *International Journal of Communication*, 7: 2105–27.
- Siles, I. (2017) *Networked Selves: Trajectories of Blogging in the United States and France*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Slack, J.D. (2006) 'Communication as articulation', in G.J. Shepherd, J. St. John, and T. Striphas (eds.), *Communication as...: Perspectives on Theory*. London: Sage. pp. 223–31.
- Taylor, T. (2017) 'Where fashion blogging began', *The New York Times* (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/fashion/fashin-where-fashion-blogging-began.html?_r=0)
- Trott, M. (n.d.) 'The beginning', *Six Apart/About* (<http://archive.li/7bw4C>)

Turnbull, G. (2002) 'The state of the blog part 2: Blogger present', in J. Rodzvilla (ed.), *We've got blog: How weblogs are changing our culture*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus. pp. 81-85.

Walton, M. (2004) 'Bloggers get convention credentials', *CNN.com* (<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/TECH/internet/07/23/conventionbloggers/>)

Waters, R., and Nuttall, C. (2007) 'Mini-blog is the talk of Silicon Valley', *Financial Times* (<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/d0ccbc46-daf7-11db-ba4d-000b5df10621.html-ixzz1I04qzm6t>)

Welch, M. (2002) 'Don't miss the Lileks response!', *MattWelch* (<https://web.archive.org/web/20020405100057/http://mattwelch.com:80/warblog.html>)

Weltevrede, E., and Helmond, A. (2012) 'Where do bloggers blog? Platform transitions within the historical Dutch blogosphere', *First Monday*, 17(2) (<http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3775/3142>)

Williams, R. (1983) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Winer, D. (1996) 'What is Frontier?', *Scripting News* (<http://scripting.com/frontier/beginning/whatFrontierIs.html>)

Yahoo! Internet Life (2002) *Top of the Net 2001*, 8: 56–58.

¹ In their analysis of the international uptake of blogging, Russell and Echchaibi (2009) also speak of an 'American blogging model'. Referring to the case of Italy, Locatelli (2014: 50–1) argues that 'the U.S. model remains a point of reference' and suggests that the 'imitation of the American experience' was a key factor driving the early appropriation of blogs. See also Siles (2017) for a comparison of the trajectories of blogging in the United States and France.

² In the vocabulary of Science and Technology Studies (STS), stabilization refers to the process through which groups of interest actors negotiate the identity and meaning of an artifact (Bijker et al., 1987).

³ The project from which this chapter stems began as doctoral dissertation research.

⁴ Drawing on both genre and medium theories, Miller and Shepherd (2009) provide a similar explanation. As an alternative, and inspired mostly by STS literature, I conceptualize the history of blogging as a mutual shaping process in which the technology of blogging acquired certain configurations (depending on the specific sub-type of blogs that users enacted to respond to their changing contexts), and cultural expectations have found recurrently in blogging a material expression.

⁵ In a similar manner, Locatelli (2014) refers to the ‘cultural adaptation’ to which blogs were subjected in Italy. Siles (2007–2008) also shows that blogs absorbed the identities of previous sites in Costa Rica and that localizing them (through names that referred to typical Costa Rican expressions) was crucial in their early development.

⁶ In this sense, the ‘microblogging’ notion functioned as a crucial link between what Flichy (2007: 82) calls a frame of functioning – ‘the body of knowledge and know-how mobilized or mobilizable’ in the design of media technologies such as tumblelogs and Twitter – and a frame of use – the ‘social activities proposed by the technology, the integrated routines of daily life, sets of social practices, kinds of people, places and situations connected to the technical artifact’ (Flichy, 2007: 83), in this case blogs. Flichy argues that it is precisely through the articulation of these two frames that technologies acquire social meaning.