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Voicing the Web: The Trajectories of Blogging in the United States and France

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Abstract

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The World Wide Web has turned into an important means to share voice, that is, the narratives through which individuals give a public account of their lives. This dissertation analyzes how this key cultural process came into being and discusses some of its main implications. To this end, it studies one specific technology of subjectivity that embodies this process in fundamental ways: the blog. This dissertation examines the processes that have shaped practices of subjectivity on the Web in two countries (the United States and France) from the mid-1990s to the early years of the 2010s. The focus is on three processes: the emergence of the blog; its constitution into a means for intervening in the public sphere and a commodity; and the identity crises triggered by the rise of novel media technologies (such as "microblogging") designed to replace or extend it. A theoretical framework is developed that makes four analytic contributions: (a) it considers media technologies as assemblages of both textual meaning and material artifacts; (b) it analyzes both the production and use of media technologies; (c) it adopts a process-orientation to make sense of the temporal development of the Web; and (d) it implements a comparative approach to identify the similarities and differences between the cases under study. Drawing on interviews with key actors, content and artifact analyses of websites, traditional archival research, and online archival research, this dissertation examines how users and software developers have enacted particular notions of the self, conceived the publicness of their Web appropriation and development practices, and built and utilized media technologies such as websites and software programs to these ends. The analysis reveals that the cultural

identity of blogging as a practice of subjectivity in these two countries is neither inevitable nor neutral. In the United States, particular liberal notions and neoliberal assumptions have informed the imaginary surrounding blogs in crucial ways. The study also shows how and why actors in France have gradually abandoned traditional makers of exceptionalism that were key in the development of the country's national identity and favored notions that characterize the United States instead.

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Chapter 1. Voices of the Web

In the fall of 2012, Facebook announced it had reached one billion users, 80% of which resided outside the United States (Facebook, 2013; Vance, 2012). According to the company, 4.5 billion "likes" and 4.75 billion content items were shared on the platform on a daily basis by mid-2013 (Constine, 2013). In early 2013, only seven years after Twitter's launch, over 200 million users shared 400 million "tweets" a day. This number, the company indicated, represented an increase of approximately 60 million messages from the previous year (Tsukayama, 2013). Originally designed to help users respond to the question, "What are you doing?", Twitter has also become a means to sustain conversations with others (Honeycutt & Herring, 2009; Humphreys, Gill, Krishnamurthy, & Newbury, 2013; Lenhart & Fox, 2009). On a related vein, an average of 55 million photos and 1.2 billion "likes" were shared each day on Instagram in late 2013 (Instagram, 2013). These photos, researchers associated with the Pew Internet and American Life Project concluded, have become the "social currency" of our time (Rainie, Brenner, & Purcell, 2012, p. 1). People across the planet use Foursquare to share their location, with approximately 4.5 billion "check-ins" for September 2013 (Foursquare, 2013). One post, "like," "tweet," photo, and "check-in" at a time, the Web has thus evolved into an important means to share a variety of thoughts, activities, opinions, feelings, and coordinates for a large and growing portion of the world's population.

Since the early days of its popularization, users have turned to the Web to put things "out there," that is, to bridge the interface between their private lives and the public world of others. As the Web has stabilized into a fundamental part of their daily lives, to provide others with a public window onto a self has become almost a *necessity* for many people (Cardon, 2010b;

Lange, 2007; Papacharissi, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; Schwarz, 2012; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011; Viégas, 2005). In Couldry's (2012) words, "To *have* a public presence beyond one's bodily presence, to construct an objectification of oneself [has turned into a] requirement in everyday life" (p. 50, emphasis in original).[1]

How did this crucial transformation, a defining cultural feature of our time, come into being? Why did the Web turn into a key means to publicly reveal the self to an extent and with an ease that were difficult to imagine only a few decades ago? What are the implications of this major cultural shift? This dissertation is devoted to answering these questions. It does so by studying one specific technology that embodies this sociocultural shift toward self-performance on the Web in fundamental ways: the blog.[2] I trace the evolution of the Web as a means to publicly perform a self through an analysis of the emergence, development, and transformation of blogging from the mid-1990s to the early years of the 2010s decade. I examine processes and dynamics that have shaped practices of subjectivity on the Web in two countries (the United States and France) over more than fifteen years. The United States and France constitute ideal cases for this comparative analysis because of the historically different ways in which individuals have enacted the boundaries between private and public, and the role that technologies have played in this process. I analyze how users and software developers have enacted particular notions of the self, conceived the publicness of their Web appropriation and development practices, and built and utilized media technologies such as websites and software programs to these ends.

My analysis reveals that the cultural identity of blogging as a practice of subjectivity in these countries is neither inevitable nor neutral. In the United States, particular liberal notions (such as a view of the self as singular, unique, free, and capable of expressing original ideas) and neoliberal assumptions (such as conceptions of individuals as entrepreneurs and social relationship as market partnerships) have informed the imaginary surrounding blogs in crucial ways.[3] This imaginary around blogs in the United States has functioned as a model for actors in other countries, most notably France. My study reveals how and why actors in the technology field in France, a country that has consistently positioned itself as an alternative to American domination in cultural life (Roger, 2005), have gradually abandoned traditional makers of exceptionalism that were key in the development of the country's national identity and favored notions that characterize the United States instead. In this way, this dissertation shows how the trajectories of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in these countries have undergone a significant process of convergence.[4]

Together, the analysis of the parallel trajectories of the blog in the United States and France challenges an established view in the popular and scholarly literature that tends to attribute the success of the Web in general, and the blog in particular, to the availability of certain technological capacities (Boehlert, 2009; Perlmutter, 2008; Pole, 2010; Rettberg, 2008; Rosenberg, 2009; Trippi, 2004). Instead, I demonstrate that the development of the Web as a technology of subjectivity required forging various articulations between specific conceptions of self, publicness, and technology. These articulations were responses to larger economic, political, and cultural processes, in particular neoliberalization. My comparative analysis shows that the blog's success was a product of how, against the background of these processes, actors made it "fit" within the histories of subjectivity practices, traditions, and cultures in both countries. In this sense, the blog's uptake in the United States and France cannot be mapped to or interpreted as the natural outcome of any particular feature or intrinsic capacity of the technology. Thus, the main features of the contemporary new media ecology should be considered a product of cultural and historical processes rather than technological imperatives.

Why Blogging?

The evolution of blogging from the mid-1990s to the present day affords a unique opportunity to examine the cultural necessity to construct a public objectification of oneself on the Web. The trajectory of the blog encapsulates the history of the Web as a technology of subjectivity expression in important ways.

Contrary to common assumptions (R. Andrews, 2006; Barlow, 2007; King, 2010; Melnick, 2009; Tremayne, 2007a), the blog was born not in the aftermath of 9/11 but rather in the late 1990s when the Web was still in its infancy. In this sense, examining the conditions of the blog's emergence allows understanding how early ideas and meanings about the potential of the Web arose, crystallized, and partially stabilized. Through a process that will be discussed in chapter 2, blogs came to be envisioned as an ideal "format" for capturing a range of practices of subjectivity that characterized the first decade of the Web. Studying the process of the blog's emergence thus helps to contextualize the "moment of arising" (Agamben, 2009, p. 89) of the belief in the Web as a suitable means for providing a public window onto the self.

Not only did the blog and blogging software survive the dot-com stock bubble, but in the first half of the 2000s decade they were also established as icons of the Web's reinvention in public culture. By 2005, blogs had become a symbol of the so-called "2.0" or second generation Web. In this capacity, the blog was envisioned as a key means to realize "the true potential of the web platform" (O'Reilly, 2005b), as a popular essay at the time put it. (This process is discussed in chapter 3.) The belief in the potential of the blog found wide resonance in both journalistic and academic discourse (Benkler, 2006; Bruns, 2008; Cardon & Delaunay-Teterel, 2006; D. Kline & Burstein, 2005; Lovink, 2008; Rodzvilla, 2002; Rosenberg, 1999, 2009; Tremayne, 2007b). In a typical account, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (2005) described the blogger as a "digital citizen," thus associating it with the possibility of political and cultural participation in public life. In a similar manner, scholars lauded blogs as the ideal embodiment of a capacity to transform important aspects of social life. Extending the increasingly long list of revolutions associated with the Internet (Sterne, 1999), in this period blogging was recurrently invoked to illustrate the potential that digital culture held for society. An account of the blog's development thus enables an analysis of dynamics that were fundamental for imagining the Web's cultural significance in the first half of the 2000s decade.

More recently, the creation of new media technologies (often tied to notions such as "microblogging," "social media," "curation," and "social network sites,") has challenged the prominence of blogs in the contemporary Web ecology. Yet, the belief in the potential of the Web to voice opinions and experiences, to open a window for others onto the self, has not disappeared but rather found wider resonance with the rise of these media technologies. (This phenomenon is the focus of chapter 4.) Moreover, the blog has played a fundamental part in shaping the understanding, design, and use of these technologies. Evan Williams, a software developer involved in the creation of both Blogger and Twitter, argued: "Facebook, Twitter, and blogging are really the same motivation. It's in a different package, but it's about people sharing things on a one-to-many basis and putting things out there. […] I think [they] are just the same concept in different permutations and often just more focused rather than all one big thing" (from an interview in Moggridge, 2010, p. 278). In this respect, Rettberg (2008, p. 156) argues, blogs have “spread” into social network sites. Similarly, Dean (2010) contends that social network sites and media technologies such as Twitter “traverse, extend, and include” blogs (p. 36). Terms such as “microblogging” also reveal the centrality of blogging in shaping the conception (at both cultural and technological levels) of more recent media technologies for making the self visible through short and varied forms of content. Therefore, an assessment of the blog’s recent evolution makes it possible to identify the various dynamics that have shaped the contemporary development and use of the Web for as a technology of subjectivity.

A French-American Comparison

A growing body of work has been devoted to better understanding the blurring of the boundaries between the private and the public entailed by the cultural imperative to construct an objectification of oneself on the Web. However, by privileging the study of single, specific locations (most notably the United States), research on this important issue has tended to adopt a uniform view of diverse notions of the self and how they are made public. Moreover, by situating and studying subjectivity practices in particular moments or during certain events, scholars have often posited views of self and public as relatively fixed in time. A typical expression of this tendency has been the prevalence of notions such as the “networked self” in this body of work (Cohen, 2012; Papacharissi, 2011; Rainie & Wellman, 2012).[5] As this notion suggests, research on selfhood on the Internet has tended to treat the self as ahistorical and universal.[6] Yet, as work on the formation of modern identity shows, what counts as a self and a public self-account are cultural and historical constructs (L. H. Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988; Prost, 1991; Seigel, 2005; Taylor, 1989; Wahrman, 2004). As Goldstein (2005) puts it in her history of the self in post-revolutionary France, “What passes for a self is not the same in all places and times” (p. 2). Thus, by limiting the analysis of technologies of subjectivity such as blogs to single locations and particular events, or by deploying all too general notions such as the “networked self,” research has mobilized largely ethnocentric assumptions to account for the uptake, development, and significance of these media technologies.

A comparative and longitudinal study becomes indispensable to consider subjectivity practices as culturally and historically situated. This kind of analysis renders visible the different conceptions of what publicly performing the self means in various contexts and at diverse moments in time. A comparative analysis of the trajectories of blogging as a set of cultural and historical practices also facilitates identifying the taken-for-granted assumptions and dynamics that have shaped the use and development of the Web as a technology for subjectivity and how they have evolved over time. This approach helps to contextualize the development of blogs in various national settings rather than to generalize or normalize its uptake by focusing on any singular case. This is the task set out for this dissertation.

The United States and France constitute fruitful research cases for making sense of the development of the Web as a technology of subjectivity. Both countries are liberal democracies and free-market economies characterized by similar levels of economic production. Media technologies have historically played a crucial role in shaping a sense of national identity in both countries (Alder, 2007a, 2007b; Benson, 2013; Czitrom, 1982; Feenberg, 1995; Hecht, 1998; Nye, 1994). In addition, these countries have rich traditions in the development of technologies of subjectivity, which allows for a consideration of how historical factors have mattered in shaping the development of the Web (and blogs in particular) (V. Schneider, 2000; V. Schneider, Charon, Miles, Graham, & Vedel, 1991). In this sense, the popularity of blogs and blogging software in these countries can be considered both an expression and an extension of this rich history.

In fact, the United States and France are two of the few countries characterized by both a burgeoning number of blogs and a local blogging software field. Software developers in both countries have built programs for the creation and management of blogs. This facilitates a comparative assessment of the role of software in shaping the trajectories of blogging. It also makes it possible to identify how different cultural values about the self and the public/private distinction might have been inscribed into software, and how these values might have shaped subjectivity practices on the Web in these two national contexts.

The boundaries between the public and the private have been historically demarcated in significantly different ways in the United States and France. Walter Benjamin (2008, p. 103) traced the emergence of what he refers to as the "bourgeois interior" to the July Revolution: "For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former constitutes itself as the interior. Its complement is the office." In his history of private life in France, Prost (1991) notes that this frontier between the private realm of the household and the public sphere of the workplace was more strictly protected in France than in the United States and England during most of the twentieth century (cf. Kuhn, 2007, 2010). Drawing on a diversity of cases, Thévenot and Lamont (2000) explain how this distinction has historically evolved in these countries: "In France the personal (or the individual) is often strongly construed as illegitimate and opposed to 'the public,' which is associated with the general interest. In contrast, American definitions of individualism, largely shaped by the liberal doctrine, conceive the individual as a kind of 'public being' who by definition contributes to giving birth to the public interest" (p. 313). These differences have also resulted in diverse rules and conventions for self-performance in both countries (Goffman, 1959, 1963).

A key characteristic of late modern societies is how the boundaries between the public and the private have blurred in various ways (Anderson, 1991; Brighenti, 2010; Butsch, 2011; Livingstone, 2005; Meyrowitz, 1985; Starr, 2004). In both the United States and France, media technologies have played a crucial role in this process (Fischer, 1992; Kuhn, 2007, 2010; Livingstone, 2005; Mehl, 2005; Prost, 1991). Williams (1975), for example, famously examined the process of "mobile privatization" illustrated by the domestic appropriation of television in industrialized countries (cf. Spigel, 1992).[7] In a similar manner, and considering the particular case of France, Feenberg (1995) noted how the use of the Minitel led to the partial blurring of traditional distinctions between privacy and publicness.[8] A comparative study of the trajectories of blogging in these countries thus makes the social and cultural factors that affect the use of the Web to enact the public/private distinction easier to recognize.

The stabilization of the Web as a technology of subjectivity coincided with the expansion of neoliberal politics in countries around the world. In this sense, another crucial dimension that makes these countries suitable cases for a comparative study is related to the distinct place that neoliberalism has held in political, economic, and cultural life. Neoliberal politics came to prominence in the United States during the 1980s (Hall, 2011; Hall, Massey, & Rustin, 2013; Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Rutherford & Davison, 2012). Yet, they have been much more contested and resisted in France. Prasad (2006) argues that, in contrast to the American case, France has experienced a much slower process of neoliberalization that she defines as "pragmatic neoliberalism."[9] A comparative study between the United States and France thus creates fertile grounds for understanding how frameworks that value the provision of self-accounts differently can shape the trajectories of practices and media technologies deployed to perform such self-objectifications.

The United States-France comparison has proved a fruitful one in sociological and historical research (Benson, 2013; Benson & Hallin, 2007; Downs & Gerson, 2007; Eko, 2013; Fourcade, 2009; Lamont, 1992, 1995; Lamont & Thévenot, 2000; Prasad, 2006). Given how the public/private distinction has historically evolved, one could expect to find a strong divergence in the trajectories of blogging in these countries over the past fifteen years. However, these trajectories reveal a remarkable process of partial convergence. During the early days of the Web in France, various users and software developers strongly resisted the values embodied in the discourse that surrounded the rise of the so-called "New Economy" (or *La Nouvelle Economie*) in the country. However, by the second half of the 2000s decade, these values (often associated with the imaginary of Silicon Valley) had found wide resonance in France as a model to bring about technological innovation.

This shift from resisting to embracing notions embodied in American Web development unfolded in a particular moment of transition in France's political economy. I argue that, in the context of the stabilization of France's "pragmatic neoliberalism" (Prasad, 2006), Web users and developers envisioned French exceptionalism as hindering technological innovation and their place in a global, technological world. Instead, American values and notions embodied in Silicon Valley worked for them as a model for *overcoming* exceptionalism and thus becoming "global." In this context, to be global largely meant to instantiate patterns of technological development shaped primarily in the United States. It also meant to participate in a conversation about the role of media technologies in shaping culture, politics, and the economy whose main terms were defined by values prevalent in the American context, even if this required abandoning some important markers of French exceptionalism. The transformation in practices of subjectivity in France illustrated by the trajectory of blogging was a response to this particular political and economic process. Therefore, by providing a detailed account of how and why this process unfolded, this dissertation also contributes to the discussion of whether France has Americanized over the past two decades (de Grazia, 1997; Gueldry, 2009; R. Kuisel, 1997; R. F. Kuisel, 2003; Lemieux & Schmalzbauer, 2000; Meunier, 2010).

By comparing the trajectories of blogging in these countries, this study demonstrates that the specific links between certain notions of the self, publicness, and technology established over the past decades in the United States are not inevitable but rather an expression of particular values and notions, variously mobilized to make sense of significant moments in the life of actors. Over its history, the blog has thus captured and materialized specific historical moments and ideological traditions in the country. More specifically, this comparative analysis reveals the liberal assumptions on which the imaginary surrounding these websites in the United States has rested and the significance of neoliberal values in their contemporary understanding.

Conceptual Grounds: Theorizing "Registers of Voice"

The notion of voice helps to make visible the connections between self, public, and technology enacted in practices such as blogging.[10] Voice has been a generative concept not only for Web users and developers but also for analysts from a variety of intellectual fields. Scholars have broadly defined voice as a fundamental expression of human agency (Appadurai, 2004;

Butler, 2005; Couldry, 2009; Lister, 2004; Watts, 2002). This agency is enacted through the capacity that humans have to project themselves in a specific time and space by the production of sound. Taking it outside the domains of sound and orality, researchers have deployed the metaphor of voice to conceptualize the narratives that individuals and groups produce in order to give an account of themselves. Drawing on Butler (2005), Couldry defines voice as: "[T]he process of giving an account of one's life and its conditions: […] 'giving an account of oneself.' To give such an account means telling a story, providing a narrative. […] Voice is a continuing process of reflecting back and forth between actions, experiences, and thought, an open-ended process of giving an account in which each person is engaged" (2010, pp. 7, 9). Scholars have widely considered the production of these narratives as a fundamental and basic dimension of human life (Cavarero, 2000; Ricoeur, 1984a, 1984b; Taylor, 1989).

This definition of voice is tied to the notions of interiority and individuality that characterize modern identity (Taylor, 1989; Wahrman, 2004). As Ong put it in his analysis of oral and written cultures, "The human voice comes from the inside the human organism which provides the voice's resonances" (Ong, 2002 [1982], p. 70). Accordingly, analysts have considered voice as a window into a human being's "interior." For Cavarero (2005, p. 8), "The human condition of uniqueness resounds in the register of the voice." Through voice, a person thus announces and enacts her unique presence in public space. Following Cavarero (2005), and against the objection that any sense of self-interiority and uniqueness is an illusion, Couldry notes that "voice does not involve a claim to a unique interiority, but only a claim that the way we are each exposed to the world is unique" (2010, p. 8). In this sense, he concludes, voice must be conceptualized as internally diverse and inherently plural.

Key in the process of giving an account of the self through narratives is the production of discourse (Cavarero, 2000; Genette, 1980; Mitra & Watts, 2002; Watts, 2002). As rhetoric scholars have noted, voice also functions as a "vehicle for a set of cultural meanings that come into play in a text" (Watts, 2002, p. 184). Voice is not only an expression of human agency but also a "capacity of language" (Mitra & Watts, 2002, p. 482). A narrative can thus voice a subject position occupied by a person, who is spoken by language (Watts, 2002, p. 192). In other words, sharing voice leads to the performance of specific identities—such as the "blogger"—that allow its practitioners to occupy certain subject positions (Butler, 1999; Cavarero, 2000; Hall, 1996).

In short, voice is the means to open the self into the public; it is enacted or actualized when it is publicly acknowledged (Mitra & Watts, 2002). Butler emphasized the significance of the other in self-performance when she argued, "An account of oneself is always given to another, whether conjured or existing, and this other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort to give an account of oneself. Moreover, the very terms by which we give an account, by which we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves and to others, are not of our making. They are social in character, and they establish social norms, a domain of unfreedom and substitutability within which our 'singular' stories are told" (Butler, 2005, p. 21). This situates subjectivity practices within a space of struggles for power and recognition (Ricoeur, 2005).

In light of the multiple ways in which the notion of public has been deployed, a few clarifications are in order. The public/private distinction is, as scholars have put it, "protean" (Weintraub, 1997, p. 2), or "porous and ambiguous" (Wolfe, 1997, p. 187). Weintraub (1997) identified four main ways in which scholars have distinguished between the public and the private: (1) the liberal-economic approach, which opposes state administration (public) to market economy (private) (Hirschman, 1970; Starr, 1988, 2004); (2) a republican-virtue model that equates the public to the notions of political community and citizenship, and differentiates it from the private realm of both market and state administration (Arendt, 1958; Calhoun, 1992; Habermas, 1989; Warner, 2002); (3) a view of the public as the sphere of sociability governed by specific rules and conventions, which stands in contrast to the private realm of the home and the family (Ariès, 1962; Ariès et al., 1987; Goffman, 1963; Prost & Vincent, 1991); and (4) a feminist demarcation between the public realm of market-driven relations and the private realm of domesticity, thus revealing the power relationships and gendered assumptions on which this distinction is built (Benhabib & Cornell, 1987; Elshtain, 1981; Rosaldo, Lamphere, & Bamberger, 1974).[11] Because of how they help to illuminate the particular practices of blog users and software developers, in this study I focus on the second and third conceptions of publicness outlined above: that which pertains to the collective life of citizens and/or the sphere of sociability. These conceptions reveal how actors in this study decided to make their lives and thoughts available to others and the implications of their practices.[12]

I underscore the fractality of the public/private distinction. Rather than conceiving it through cartographic metaphors that posit the private and the public as mutually exclusive places, spheres, or domains, I emphasize their situated, relative, and co-constitutive character. Drawing on Peircean semiotics, Gal (2002, p. 80) defined this distinction as a “communicative process” and conceived of public and private as “indexical signs that are always relative: dependent for part of their referential meaning on the interactional context in which they are used.” By fractality, Gal referred to the possibility to variously articulate this distinction in order "to characterize, categorize, organize, and contrast virtually any kind of social fact: spaces, institutions, bodies, groups, activities, interactions, relations" (Gal, 2002, p. 81). In this sense, as Nippert-Eng (2010) contends, how individuals enact the public and the private is a product of "boundary work," that is, situated strategies and practices through which they render aspects of their lives relatively more private or public.

In order to summarize the conceptual gains that come from these different strands of research, and to further theorize the Web as a technology of subjectivity, I posit the concept of "register of voice." This notion is meant to render visible the various ways that actors employ to give an account of themselves, conceive of their self and publicness, and build and appropriate certain media technologies to enact voice. Conceived in this way, technologies function as both crystallizations and material expressions of cultural formations and values, such as a neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 2008).

Registers of voice are conceptualizations for performing and revealing the self through certain practices and media technologies. To study the identities and trajectories of blogging thus means examining the shifting webs of articulation established between various practices of Web development and appropriation, particular media technologies, and situated conceptions of the self and publicness over time, that become possible under certain political, economic, and cultural contexts. Taking a cue from Fourcade's (2009, p. 13) "critical organized comparison" method, I envisioned registers of voice as heuristic devices and "contingent, culturally defined categories" to interrogate the historical and cultural conditions that shaped the use of the Web in two cultural contexts over time.

Analyzing the Voices of the Web

The cultural imperative to have a public presence by using media technologies such as blogs can be tied to fundamental transformations in traditional understandings of the public/private distinction. Scholars from a variety of fields have argued that this distinction is now characterized by multiple relationships that have rendered it increasingly fluid, mobile, and complex (Gergen, 1991; Papacharissi, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2003; Urry, 2007).[13] The Internet, researchers argue, has played a fundamental role in this process. First, it has enabled novel ways to perform the self by structuring and defining a space in which publicness can be variously redesigned (Baym & boyd, 2012; Ford, 2011; Lange, 2007; Lasén & Gómez-Cruz, 2009; Lundby, 2009a; Papacharissi, 2011). Second, and tied to the previous point, researchers have argued that performances of the self on the Internet have led to a blurring of the boundaries between the public and the private (Lange, 2007; D. Miller, 2011; Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011; Sheller & Urry, 2003; Sloop & Gunn, 2012). Considering the public/private distinction as a continuum, authors have suggested the Internet has opened up numerous opportunities for performing “subtle dimensions and numerous intermediary positions” (Cardon, 2009, p. 64) that can’t be captured by traditional understandings of this distinction.

This body of work on how the Internet (and the Web in particular) challenges traditional understandings of public and private has made valuable contributions towards understanding subjectivity practices in the digital age. Yet, it has also been characterized by several important shortcomings. Scholars have tended to study media technologies such as blogs by privileging either their textual or material dimension rather than investigating how these two dimensions connect and why that matters for performing a self. They have also focused primarily on users and largely neglected the significance of software production and the role of intermediaries. As noted previously, research has also been limited by a lack of sufficient attention to subjectivity practices in longitudinal and cross-cultural perspectives. To overcome these limitations, this study develops a theoretical framework that makes four main analytic contributions: (a) it considers media technologies as assemblages of both textual meaning and material artifacts; (b) it analyzes the production and use of media technologies, and the interfaces between these activities, as fundamental for the study of subjectivity on the Web; (c) it adopts a process-orientation to make sense of the development of the Web in temporal perspective; and (d) it implements a comparative approach to reveal the similarities and differences between the cases under study.

First, this study brings together work in science and technology studies (STS), communication and media research, and cultural studies to conceptualize blogs as "texto-material" assemblages (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012a). In this respect, this dissertation provides a supplement to dominant approaches to study how voices are expressed on the Web that privilege either materiality or content as the focus of analysis. Researchers that privilege materiality issues have defined blogs as medium and thus favored the analysis of how users take advantage of certain features (as "affordances") in their typical appropriation practices (Dean, 2010; Garden, 2012; C. R. Miller & Shepherd, 2009). Alternatively, scholars who highlight content creation practices tend to define blogs as a genre. This view connects blogging with a variety of previous practices of subjectivity (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, & Wright, 2007; Herring et al., 2005). Although both strategies are valuable, in this dissertation I argue that they are insufficient by themselves. Rather than defining the blog as either medium or genre, this study demonstrates that both dimensions are not only necessary but also mutually constitutive. In this sense, by focusing on the practices through which materiality and content are variously articulated, this dissertation blurs important traditional dualisms in the study of media and technology (cf. Boczkowski, 2010; Gillespie, Boczkowski, & Foot, 2014; Hayles, 2002; K. B. Jensen, 2010; Silverstone, 1994; Williams, 1975).

Second, by combining an analysis of production and use activities, this study helps to overcome a relative inattention to the work of software developers in scholarship on the use and development of the Web. Research on blogging, for example, has been characterized by a dominant focus on user groups (Fuller & Holland, 2011). A major drawback of this approach is how it limits the types of factors considered to account for the use and development of the Web. By neglecting to study how the tools that users appropriate came into being, researchers have tended to espouse a view of technology as a neutral “background” or “architecture” against which users simply perform their identities. Alternatively, in this study I directly examine the work of a variety of actors, namely software developers, blog users, and intermediaries between production and consumption activities (such as salespeople, entrepreneurs, consultants, journalists, and commentators). I consider both technological production dynamics *and* user appropriation practices as crucial dimensions of sharing voice. This strategy enables an examination of the technological means that have made blogging possible in certain ways and the values inscribed in the tools that practitioners utilize. It also provides an important supplement to the traditional study of user agency dynamics.

Third, I adopt a longitudinal perspective to explore the development of the blog over more than fifteen years (from the mid-1990s to the early years of the 2010s decade). This approach stands in contrast to studies that have privileged the investigation of media technologies in one particular moment, context, or event. Adopting a present orientation has been crucial for identifying important dynamics that shape the use of media technologies (blogs included) in a given context. However, it also runs the risk of overemphasizing certain variables to explain major outcomes. In a similar manner, this dominant perspective might lead to downplay or ignore potential factors that led to a particular state of affairs. Alternatively, a historical, longitudinal approach illuminates the processes that have characterized the emergence, development, and transformation of media technologies such as blogs in temporal perspective (Beaudouin, 2012; Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993; Hyysalo, 2010; Pollock & Williams, 2009; Van de Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 1999). By comparing how blogging practices and technologies have evolved over time, it also becomes possible to identify the dynamics that have shaped the life cycle of these practices and media technologies in various contexts.

Finally, as noted previously, the fourth strategy deployed in this dissertation is a supplement to the tendency to investigate the development of media technologies in single national contexts. Most research on cultural practices such as blogging has been conducted within the confines of specific countries. As a consequence, we know little of how distinct cultural, political, economic, and social contexts shape the emergence, development, and transformation of these practices. According to Russell (2009), "Blogging, like digital communications more generally, 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, to conduct public relations, and so on and so forth. By looking at local contexts, we can develop more nuanced assessments of how blogospheres variously serve communication needs" (p. 8). Despite the popularity of this technology in countries with different political and cultural traditions, international comparative studies of blogging have been rather scarce. Moreover, as Schmidt (2007, p. 1421) notes, not only "there is still a profound lack [of] internationally comparative research designs," but researchers have barely examined the place of blogging "within the larger landscape of media and social software." To actually investigate the significance of these contexts in the use and development of the Web, I examine the *transcultural* trajectories of blogging in the United States and France.

The notion of transculturality helps to analyze this process in productive ways. As Welsch (1999) has noted, "[Cultures] no longer have the insinuated form of homogeneity and separateness. They have instead assumed a new form, which is to be called transcultural in so far as it passes through classical boundaries. Cultural conditions today are characterized by mixes and permeations" (p. 197). A focus on transculturality invites an examination of the dynamics that characterize the trajectories of blogging in various national cultures *and* the ways in which actors have enacted these dynamics in local and specific ways (Couldry, 2012; Esser & Hanitzsch, 2012; Hepp, 2009; Hepp & Couldry, 2009). Concurring with Hepp (2012), "A transcultural approach breaks down the binary choice between international and intercultural, without excluding state and nation as possible points of comparative reference" (p. 140). In this sense, this comparative study examines the trajectories of blogging at both the levels of the deterritorialized and the territorial: it considers both the global processes that cut across the trajectories of blogging in the United States and France *and* the local dynamics through which these processes acquired specific configurations within national frames, cultures, and traditions in these countries.

How the Research Was Done

Borrowing from Gitelman (2008, p. 1), this dissertation provides a detailed and original account of the "novelty years, transitional states, and identity crises" of blogging in the United States and France. It analyzes how various groups of users and software developers turned to the Web from the mid-1990s to the early years of the 2010s decade in order to give an account of their lives through a transcultural examination of the trajectories of blogging in these two countries.

To operationalize this approach, I conducted a "transcultural comparison" (Hepp, 2012, p. 138) that combined data gathered from a mixed-methods research design. (The appendix provides an extended discussion of this research design.) I carried out traditional archival research (of sources such as news articles, trade publications, handbooks, manuals, published personal accounts, and other print materials) and Web archival research (of websites such as blogs, news sites, online forums, and Wikipedia articles, among others). In addition to numerous conversations in person or over email, I conducted 105 interviews with relevant actors—most of them in person—between 2009 and 2012, in cities such as Chicago, Lille, London, Los Angeles, Lyon, Marseille, Milwaukee, New York, Paris, Portland, and the San Francisco Bay Area. I interviewed actors such as blog users, software developers, entrepreneurs, consultants, journalists, public relations officers, and commentators, by alternating fieldwork in both countries.

I supplemented these methods with an analysis of both the content and the materiality of a sample of websites, particularly sites created during the mid- to late 1990s. This method allowed me to fill a dearth of information about the early days of blogging and other Web appropriation practices. For this analysis, I coded a total of 2,887 posts in order to determine the main content features of these websites. I also coded relevant material features of this sample of sites. Finally, and in keeping with the "ethnographic sensibility" (Star, 1999, p. 383) that inspired this research design, I attended meetings of blog users and Web developers in 2011 and 2012, and visited software companies and other organizations that have appropriated blogs in both countries (particularly news organizations). Overall, I adopted the STS dictum of "following the actors" (Latour, 1996, p. 204) to define blogs. In other words, I traced how actors themselves formulated definitions of and ascribed meaning to blogs rather than deciding in advance what did or did not constitute a blog.[14]

Three Registers of Voice: An Overview of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation reflects the gains that come from a transcultural comparison to analyze three particular registers of voice. Each chapter focuses on the dynamics that cut across the development of blogging in the United States and France. Yet, the discussion of each country shows how broad transcultural processes such as the blog's emergence, development, and transformation also acquired local configurations. In this way, the analysis helps to identify important patterns of similarity and difference in how these processes unfolded in the United States and France.

Chapter 2 focuses on how the weblog acquired a particular material and symbolic form—a process often described in STS scholarship as partial "stabilization" (Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987). It examines how early users and developers turned to the Web to share their voices in the mid- to late 1990s in both the United States and France. The chapter describes different types of websites created during this period (including weblogs) and thus presents a partial landscape of the early Web ecology in these two countries. It discusses how blogs came to absorb the identities of previously existing websites and traditions to share voice on the Web. The result of this process of the blog's partial stabilization was its redefinition as a plastic "format" for sharing an expansive variety of content types. The chapter reveals the particular register of voice that underlay how this process unfolded. It shows how a context marked by the dot-com bubble, the rise of the New Economy and its associated set of values, and the implementation of neoliberal politics, shaped the co-construction process through which weblogs and their users acquired particular identities in both countries. Specific conceptions of the self (as "average Joes and Janes") and the public (as communities of like-minded practitioners) informed this process.

By examining each country individually, Chapter 2 also shows major differences between the United States and France in how Web developers and users experienced the rise of the New Economy and the establishment of neoliberal politics in the mid- to late 1990s. In the United States, early blog users were part of a larger software production field where many notions associated with the New Economy were widely celebrated and welcomed as opportunities for innovation. Although *La Nouvelle Economie* found many adepts in France, it also triggered important resistance efforts—often seen as intrinsically French—such as particular websites and software applications, which shaped significantly the use of the Web in the country.

By contrast, in the early years of the new millennium, users, software developers, and commentators hailed blogs not only as a tool for self-transformation but also as a means for bringing about social change. They enacted blogs as a novel mechanism to intervene in public life and make the voices of citizens be heard in society. The goal of these practices, they contended, was none other than the transformation of the public sphere outside of established power centers, such as the mainstream media. Various collective actors (namely news organizations, political parties, and corporations) gradually embraced blogs as a means to personalize their endeavors. Users also sought to monetize their blogging practices by implementing various mechanisms (such as advertising). As a result, the definition of the blog in public culture progressively shifted from notions of self-revelation to its conception as a self-sufficient and ideal media outlet for shaping the public sphere (and gaining some income in the process). Chapter 3 is an account of how this process unfolded. It traces the significance of certain political and cultural moments in the life of the United States and France in making this process possible. It also reveals the centrality of newly developed technologies in the transformation of blogging practices. Practitioners performed specific conceptions of the self (as an informed and militant citizen) and the public (as an interconnected "blogosphere") in this new register of voice.

The comparative analysis carried out in this chapter also begins to trace an important transformation in the cultural valence of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in France. It reveals how, rather than resisting the values embodied in concepts such as the New Economy, many users and developers in France gradually "Frenchified" the imaginary surrounding blogs in the United States as a means to resolve problems and extend traditions that they considered as intrinsically French. Thus, practices that were partially resisted at the end of the 1990s were more openly welcomed in the mid-2000s decade, creating a more similar scenario in both countries than the one encountered in chapter 2.

Chapter 4 examines the creation of new media technologies in the second half of the 2000s decade that sought to replace, extend, and traverse blogging in various ways (such as tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter). It discusses how these media technologies came to be associated with specific keywords—in Raymond Williams' (1983a) sense—such as "microblogging" in the United States and "curation" in France. The chapter discusses the implications of this development for the identities of blogging and its practitioners and thus studies the tensions and opportunities tied to this process in both countries. The emergence of "microblogging" and "curation" media technologies involved an important transformation in conceptions of the self and publicness. Building on the trajectory of blogs, software developers built tools that sought to make visible the self as an always-present and always-available entity. In this specific register of voice, publicness referred to the space of sociability formed by the constant sharing of one's availability, presence, location, activities, and statuses in real time, through various forms of technologically mediated content. This process unfolded in a context marked by a partial dissatisfaction with the ways in which blogging had developed over the previous years and a cultural turn to simplicity as a means to overcome the blog's shortcomings. The chapter discusses the strategies deployed by both software developers and users to cope with and make sense of this reconfiguration of the Web ecology in both countries.

In addition, the chapter demonstrates how certain values and notions deployed to make sense of the use and development of Web, advanced in the United States and primarily illustrated by Silicon Valley, which were once rejected as "anti-French," turned into a model for technological development in France in the second half of the 2000s decade. It shows how software developers and users in France sought to extend the history of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in the country by explicitly adopting values and notions with neoliberal undertones put forth in the United States. The goal, for many of these actors, was not to be uniquely or exceptionally French but rather to finally be global.

What are the implications of this transcultural comparison of blogging in the United States and France? The final chapter begins answering this question. To this end, it summarizes the empirical and theoretical contributions of this study. In particular, the chapter addresses the implications of this analysis for thinking about the Americanization of France. I conclude by discussing the main cultural, social, and technological implications of this study for understanding the contemporary reconfiguration of public and private lives. I elaborate on three particular issues that are central to the rise of the Web as a technology of subjectivity: the significance of technology in how we share voice; the neoliberalization of subjectivity practices; and the consequences of transforming a particular register of voice into a regime that demands us to provide others with a view of an always-present and always-available self.

Chapter 2. From Private to Public: The Emergence and Stabilization of the Blog

In December 1997, Jorn Barger started Robot Wisdom, a website devoted to sharing annotated hyperlinks to other sites on the Web. This computer programmer and James Joyce aficionado 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 launching (Barger, 1997b). In his first post, Barger reflected on information he had found online about gangs in Chicago and linked to another site where his readers could discover, he assured them, "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. As he put it, "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 ... so I recommend that all enthusiastic surfers take a shot at maintaining such a 'weblog'" (Barger, 1997b).

In the following months, several users would fulfill Barger's ambitious prophecy. Throughout 1998, many "enthusiastic surfers" of the Web created their own weblogs, sharing comments and hyperlinks to other online sources. By 1999, weblogs (or blogs) caught the attention of mainstream media organizations. Scott Rosenberg (1999), a journalist writing on digital media at *Salon*, maintained that "[the] phenomenon known as the weblog is one of the fastest-growing and most fertile creative areas on the Web today." Similarly, Ben Auburn (1999) wrote in *The Atlantic*, "What really makes [a weblog] valuable is the combination of frequency, timeliness, and editorializing that coalesces around the blogger's voice. […] The notion that a 'regular person' is separating the truffles from the rest of the fungus is a powerful one, and it's the real reason for the Weblog's success as an identifiable Web phenomenon." These press articles are significant in various related ways. First, they illustrate the growth of this online activity in the course of a short period of time. Second, they suggest that by 1999, the weblog was recognized as a particular type of website with a specific set of features. Finally, they reveal that by the end of the twentieth century the "blogger" had established as a keyword in the media for referring to a "regular person" whose public voice was of invaluable help for others to navigate the Web.

The co-emergence of the weblog and the blogger constitutes one of the most important developments in the short history of the 1990s Web. Perhaps more than any other practice, blogging came to embody widespread ideas about the potential of the Web in various countries at the turn of the twenty-first century. This chapter traces how the weblog emerged and stabilized in the United States and France.[15] It tells the largely untold story of the blog's arising and situates this story not only within the context of the Web's early uptake in two countries, but also within the particular sociocultural contexts marked by the development of the New Economy.

By so doing, the chapter illuminates the main patterns of similarity and difference that characterized the rise of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in both countries. The chapter thus reveals the similarities in conceptions of the self (as "average Joes and Janes" who could use the Web to open a window onto their unique self) and publicness (as communities of like-minded practitioners) that characterized both countries. The focus on the sociocultural context that shaped the emergence of blogging helps to account for the main differences encountered in the United States and France. Although developers, entrepreneurs, and investors in both countries took advantage of the availability of funds during this period to finance new projects and services, an important group of users in France turned to the Web to react against the values of the New Economy. This group played a key role in shaping the imaginary that surrounded the use of the Web in France.

The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, I situate the rise of blogs within a wider ecology of subjectivity practices and websites that characterized the mid- to late 1990s Web in the United States and France, respectively. The chapter thus describes how users in these two countries created websites such as diaries, journals, webzines, and blogs to provide a window onto the self. Second, I provide an original account of how blogging absorbed the identities of these various practices and websites in each country. I thus consider how blogs stabilized as a suitable "format" for the purposes and practices of diverse user communities in both countries at the turn of the twenty-first century.[16] As a result, the "blogger" came to identify the subject position of the "regular person" who made her private self publicly available through certain technologies and practices.

Blogs and The Early Web Ecology in the United States

It is difficult to overstate the excitement that the uptake of the Internet and the World Wide Web caused in communities of early adopters. For amateurs, the Web created new grounds for vernacular innovation. Even for programmers in Silicon Valley, accustomed as they are to endless dynamics of innovation and technological hype, exploring the possibilities of Web publishing represented "a spectacular time," as Chris Gulker, a programmer working in new media development at the *San Francisco Examiner,* put it (personal communication, August 20, 2009). The first half of the 1990s was characterized by the fervor that surrounded the early popularization and commercialization of the Internet. A collective vision or *imaginaire* developed around the Internet and the Web that blended tropes inflected by 1960s countercultural values (such as "the electronic frontier"), policy oriented notions (such as Al Gore's "information superhighways"), and terms derived from science fiction work (such as "cyberspace") (Flichy, 2007a; Streeter, 2010; Turner, 2006). The Internet *imaginaire* further diffused in public culture after the launch of *Wired* magazine in 1993 and the increasing attention paid to the network by the mainstream media.

In this particular context, early Internet users ventured into "cyberspace" and built websites with specific features. I begin this section by examining three kinds of websites created in the second half of the 1990s and how users performed specific identities for their sites and for themselves: the online diary, the journal for personal publishing, and the weblog.[17] The second section focuses on stabilization dynamics, that is, on how blogs absorbed the identities of these websites and turned into a preferred "format" for sharing voices on the Web.

The Early Web Ecology in the United States: A Genealogy of Precursors

Online diaries.

After 1995, a significant number of users turned to the Web to extend the centuries-old practice of writing a diary.[18] Online diarists came from a diversity of backgrounds and differed in their ages, levels of education, occupations, and places of residence. Most users were "amateurs" who explored the technical underpinnings of the Web in their households or work places. Thus, the creation of diaries may be defined as a matter of appropriation in Eglash's (2004) sense: a challenge during the boom of the dot-com era to the increasing colonization of the Web by corporations and their professional websites.

Before the 19th century, diarists commonly shared their writings with readers such as friends and family members (Bunkers, 2001; Lejeune, 2009). In a similar manner, online diarists used the Web as a means to open their private world into the public through the description of their own daily lives and thoughts. Willa Cline (1998), an early user, thus noted: “I truly love this medium. […] [I]t’s allowed me to get my writing out to a small segment of the public and get feedback on it, something that would be pretty much impossible any other way.” Many users kept offline diaries where they continued to write about what they considered private reflections. Online diary writing, on the other hand, provided a window for others onto the self.

This public disclosure of the self was accomplished through the discussion of various themes. Many users appropriated the online diary to register mundane events, such as conversations, activities, future plans, and memories of past events. Steve Schalchlin (1996), a singer and songwriter, chronicled details of his medical treatment for AIDS and the process of producing a musical based on this experience. The diary allowed him not only to keep a record of his symptoms, but also to share important information about his condition with his relatives in different parts of the country (Schalchlin, personal communication, August 19, 2009). Diarists also appropriated the Web to write about personal thoughts and feelings in order to provide others with a view of what they called their “inner world.” A look at the “inside” of the diarist was usually the first step in this process of public introspection. Recalling the early days of her site, Carolyn Burke (2000), an early Web user in Canada with a background in Philosophy and Linguistics who is credited by many as the first online diarist, wrote: “[I] felt […] I could give back to society something important: a snapshot of what a person is like on the inside. […] I exposed my private and intimate world to public awareness.” Online diarists also used their websites to quote, comment, and expand upon emails they received from their readers. In this sense, websites functioned as a key means of establishing relations with readers, some of whom were diarists themselves. Reflecting on the meaning of her diary, Mary Anne Mohanraj (1995), a writer who had recently finished an English major, asserted: "[E]nough people have written to me (I get about 10 letters a day) that it seems clear people actually do read (and enjoy) the rest of my ramblings." The online diary was a means both to share voice and to be listened.

Websites developed by Carolyn Burke and Justin Hall functioned as sources of inspiration and models for new users. Hall's website, *Links From the Underground,* a mix of recommended hyperlinks and reflections about his personal life as a student at Swarthmore College, became a model for many diarists and for users from other communities who first ventured into sharing events in their lives and personal thoughts. Diarists wrote almost daily and devoted a particular time of the day to this activity. In this sense, diary writing had a ritual value for practitioners, allowing them not only to structure their daily life but also to build and sustain a sense of community with others (Carey, 1992). This community dynamics crystallized in the creation of "rings" of online diarists who read each other's sites continually. Email and Internet Relay Chat channels were common forms of communication among them.

Most diarists taught themselves HTML, and the majority of their sites were hand-coded. Only a few diarists used early HTML editors. Although some users bought their own domain, most online diaries were hosted on free services (such as AOL, Geocities, Tripod, or Xoom). Online diaries usually presented the most recent writing on a new page and often included the date on which the content was posted, the title of the most recent entry, monthly archives, and occasionally a time stamp. On many occasions, users titled particular months or periods of their life. Some diaries included visitor counters, and most incorporated a navigation menu which linked the main page to previous entries and other sections of the website.

Users associated the most defining practices of creating a diary on the Web with a new kind of self, commonly defined as the "online diarist." As *diarists*, users conceived of themselves as authors who wrote about the same type of content that typically characterized offline diaries. Yet, as *online* diarists, users claimed to be artists who created a new aesthetic form for public expression. After two years of keeping her site, Burke (1997) had adopted a more authoritative stance that allowed her to classify online diarists: "There are really different sorts of diarists around nowadays. […] 1) those who 'made up the idea out of the blue' […] ; 2) those who saw the phenomena as a reader of online diaries and really thought they should become an online diarist too; 3) those who wanted to put their existing diary writing efforts online." Online diary writing thus functioned as a Foucauldian "technology of the self" that helped its practitioners to manage a particular relation to the self, based on the constant exploration of its interiority and grounding in daily life (Foucault, 1989, 1990a, 1993; L. H. Martin et al., 1988). According to practitioners, online diary writing offered a privileged opening of their inner world to others, helped them discern new aspects of themselves, and afforded a new capacity to transform themselves as a result of these processes of public disclosure and self-discovery.

In his cultural history of network computing, Streeter (2010) shows how romantic forms of selfhood have shaped the use, definition, and regulation of the Internet over the past decades. Streeter argues that "romantic individualism," which he defines as a view of the self as an intrinsically expressive entity that constantly seeks self-transformation, allowed early developers of the Internet to imagine themselves and their relationship to capitalism and society. From this perspective, the "online diarist" may be considered an enactment of romantic individualism that reveals how this particular form of selfhood also shaped the early appropriation of the Internet among amateurs, outside of the professional computer culture.

Personal publishing journals.

Another community of Web users emerged in the second half of the 1990s under the banner of "personal publishing." Personal publishing was an ambiguous concept that users purposively deployed to characterize a wide range of projects linked mainly by a common interest in appropriating the Web as a means for creative writing and artistic design. Before turning to the Web, most members of this group or movement had developed other forms of publishing, such as fanzines, newspapers, magazines, and mailing lists. Some users had formal training in fields such as English, journalism, literature, photography, and theater. For them, the Web provided a new opportunity to expand their creative activities and gain a wider audience.

Personal publishing was a twofold concept that involved both the creation of several types of content and a particular approach to the design of the Web as an artifact. Personal publishers avoided the term "diary," which they associated with writing exclusively about real events and thoughts inspired by daily life, and often referred to their websites as "journals."[19] In this sense, they combined definitions of journals as both chronicles of personal thoughts and as publication venues for texts of various sorts. Users wrote many kinds of texts that included essays, fiction, poems, reviews, and journalistic pieces. An important proponent of personal publishing, Lance Arthur, recalls, "I was writing about day-to-day events, but also writing commentary, journalism, and fiction, along with creating community spaces, producing an HTML guide and juggling it all in the same place" (personal communication, September 29, 2009).

Users also created other types of websites to share their various forms of writing. Online magazines, such as Leslie Harpold's *Smug,* Alexis Massie's *Afterdinner,* and Derek Powazek's (1996) *Fray* were important sites for personal publishing, which some users called "personal narrative publishing'" (Sippey, 1996) or "personal stories" (Powazek, from an interview in Zeldman, 1998b). Personal publishers founded these magazines to establish a collaborative venue, unlike with websites that were primarily created by individuals. For Michael Sippey (1996), a Web developer with a background in American literature, "[T]he true beauty of [such a website], versus the slew of personal diaries and online ramblings, [lay] in its collaborative nature." In this sense, personal publishers envisioned themselves as forming a loose community that coalesced around a similar approach to sharing voice. Discussions about website development also took place in mailing lists such as Sippey's "thelist" and Steve Champeon's "webdesign-l." Having met other users online mostly through their Web projects, personal publishers soon translated this sense of community into efforts to meet in person.

In addition, personal publishers devoted significant attention to the website as an artifact. For them, according to Harpold, "The design [was] part of the content" (from an interview in Zeldman, 1998c). Whereas some users hand-coded their sites, others turned to early HTML editors, such as BBEdit and Homesite, to automate part of the creative process. These sites were often characterized by sophisticated graphic designs and the use of a wider range of elements than most online diaries, such as images, illustrations, colors, and animated GIFs (Graphics Interchange Format). Some users employed graphics editing software, particularly Photoshop, to alter images in artistic ways, and some incorporated music as an integral part of the website.

Many personal publishers owned one or several domains to host their sites, and they often consulted the source codes of other websites to explore their technical underpinnings. According to Web designer Steve Champeon, "We fed off each other and pushed each other to do more, newer, cooler stuff […] The whole thing never would have happened at all if it hadn't been for 'view source'" (personal communication, February 2, 17, 2012). Through these practices, users thus aimed to take the Web into a new phase of development. Arthur maintains, "We were attempting to explore the boundaries of Web and browser capabilities. [Our] goals extended the medium into other areas, and brought in outside parties to participate" (personal communication, September 29, 2009).

Users saw in this singular combination of creative writing and Web design a new way to give an account of themselves on the Web. When assessing the merits of Powazek's *Fray,* Sippey (1996) stated, "Without the excellent writing, the design would mean nothing. And without the design, the stories wouldn't be as powerful." Accordingly, the goal of developing this new, public mode of publishing also required rethinking the subject position of the Web user. The online personal publisher, users suggested, was a blend of a writer, designer, and artist. Massie, for instance, defined herself as "part writer, part designer, part publisher, part manager, part evangelist, part reader, part collaborator, part warlord" (from an interview in Zeldman, 1998a). For Champeon, a personal publisher was characterized by her "generalist tendencies." He elaborates: "To really take advantage of the Web, you needed to understand something about markup, images, content, user interaction, how to properly structure hierarchies that the end user could understand without familiarity with a corporate org[anizational] chart or culture" (personal communications, February 14, 2012). In this view, the Web afforded users with aesthetic sensibilities and tinkering capabilities an opportunity to propel subjectivity practices into a new era of development. The personal publisher identity was a means to occupy the subject position of those individuals carrying out this revolution.

As both online diary writing and personal publishing further stabilized, between 1997 and 1999 a radically different approach to the appropriation of the Web developed: weblogging.

Weblogs.

Since the mid-1990s, another group of users created websites with a common objective: to sort the rising amount of content found on the Web.[20] Fascinated by the increasingly vast volume of data available on the Web, users (mostly, but not exclusively, white, professional young men) related to the technology development field, such as software producers, computer programmers, and Web designers, created sites devoted to sharing the outcomes of their Web explorations.[21] Some of these users had close links with the personal publishing movement. In December 1997, adapting the term "web log" from the name given to the reports of websites' activity generated by Web servers, Jorn Barger (1998a) named these sites "weblogs."[22] Barger, a computer programmer with experience in the field of artificial intelligence, explains, "I coined the term [weblog] about 30 seconds before posting it, after a quick search to see whether it (and a few others) were 'taken.' I don't remember the others, but 'weblog' was only used with one obscure technical meaning" (personal communication, April 7, 2012). Barger described the purpose of his weblog as an attempt "to scour the Web, compiling a library of URLs that […] could refer people to various topics" (1998c). In his view, his *Robot Wisdom Weblog* extended the history of various media technologies: "The 'scouring' aspect goes back to the 'zine scene of the 80s and 90s, and to the Whole Earth Catalog of the 60s, whose subtitle was 'access to tools.'

Applying it to the Web was natural. On Usenet I proposed a best-of-Internet group for the same purpose. By 1997 I was gradually building up a set of bookmarks for sites I visited regularly looking for new content, and also search-engine queries I could bookmark that would detect new pages of interest" (Jorn Barger, personal communication, April 3, 2012).

Most of these websites were characterized by relatively short comments on recent news about technology, the Internet, and Web design. Another important characteristic of these websites was the frequent use of hyperlinks to point 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" (personal communication, August 20, 2009). Steven Bogart (1998), who created one of these sites in 1997, thus referred to those who used the hyperlink as a key element in their websites as the "merry band of linkers."[23]

The majority of these websites shared a particular interface design: the most recent updates were posted on top of previous ones, creating a reverse chronological order. This design was intended to foreground the newest content on the website and make it easier for others to read. According to Wesley Felter, an early weblog user and software developer, "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" (personal communication, September 24, 2009). Most users owned a domain to host their site. For the most part, 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.

Users employed certain metaphors to conceptualize these sites. Barger characterized them with a metaphor that evoked 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, 1998a). Users also employed the metaphor of "pre-surfing" the Web for their readers (Graham, 1998). Similarly, in 1997 Michael Sippey, a key participant in the personal publishing movement, created a section on his website called *The Filter* (later named *Filtered for Purity*) devoted to sharing links and comments on news related to technology. Using the slogan, "All meta, all the time," Sippey's website centered mostly on "what it was actually to use technology as opposed to the technology itself and what it mean[t] to use technology as opposed to the actual bits and bytes" (Sippey, personal communication, August 21, 2009). The notion of filtering the Web would prove to be a resilient one.

Many early users turned to a scripting software named Frontier and employed various programming scripts to create this singular type of site. Frontier was designed by Dave Winer, a well-known software developer in the Bay Area, and his company, Userland. In February 1997, Winer transformed his own site—devoted thus far to discussing Frontier's news—into what he referred to as a "news page" and called it *Scripting News*. An avid promoter of these websites, Winer played a crucial role in gathering what Gulker (personal communication, August 20, 2009) describes as a "group of users that grew organically" around news pages and Frontier.

Throughout 1998, the number of websites sharing these traits increased. Once they had identified a similar type of website, users usually exchanged hyperlinks with their creators. In addition, they constantly wrote meta-commentaries in which they reflected upon the nature of the shared features of their sites. They also constituted lists of sites with common characteristics. For example, Gulker identified twelve similar pages throughout 1997, which he listed on his site, calling it the “News Page Network.” In a similar manner, in January 1999 Cameron Barrett posted a list of sites that another user, Jesse James Garrett, had compiled when looking for what he judged were “sites like mine” (Blood, 2002b; Rosenberg, 2009). These lists allowed users to discover new websites, assess their resemblances, and exchange links and emails with their creators. In this sense, these lists, which came to be known as “blogrolls,” functioned as what Web developer and blogging practitioner Matt Haughey called “hubs to daily bookmarks” (personal communication, July 13, 2011).

The result of these practices and features was the formation of a sense of community between users. Early references to a small set of “sites like mine” or a “merry band of linkers” evolved into recurrent invocations of a “weblog community”(Winer, 1999a). In July 1999, Haughey launched *MetaFilter*, a “community weblog,” that is, a blog updated by multiple users. Jessamyn West, a librarian who created one of these sites in 1997, explains the significance of *MetaFilter* for the development of a sense of community, “[It] was really one of the places where you could kind of hang out, like your corner bar, and show up whenever, and there’s people there talking about stuff. [It] [became] a real community. I [felt] like it provide[d] support. I [felt] like it provide[d] companionship” (personal communication, February 6, 2012).

Like other user groups, practitioners envisioned the creation of weblogs as a means of discovering the self and revealing it to others. On the one hand, they expected that linking and writing comments would unveil to themselves hidden aspects of the self. One year after creating his pioneer weblog, Barger (1998b) wrote: “One thing I really like about keeping a weblog is how it mirrors aspects of my personality I couldn’t see any other way.” Barger used the metaphor of the mirror to foreground the role of blogging in producing a new image of the self through its illuminating technologies. On the other hand, weblog users envisioned the selection of hyperlinks and comments as a window for others into the self. Cameron Barrett (1999), a Web designer and influential early weblog user, asserted: “You see, [my weblog] is about me. It’s about who I am, what I know, and what I think. [It] is a peek into the subconsciousness that makes me tick. […] [It] is an experiment in self-expression.” Thus, whereas online diarists usually provided readers with an explicit description of their “inside world,” weblog users often preferred to reveal the self through the selection and annotation of Web content.

Users suggested that blogging revealed a specific part of the self: personality. Early blogging practitioners employed this concept to denote an encompassing blend of qualities that characterized each user. In this sense, they considered the weblog as a material imprint of personality that distinguished this artifact from other types of websites. Thus, wrote Barger (1999a), “Part of the reason I’ve been encouraging more weblogs is that I’m sick to death of scanning *impersonal* lists of headlines, and want to be able to get the same coverage via a handful of *personal* sites” (emphasis added). As with other material goods, users envisioned the weblog as a symbol not only of identity but also of a way of being. As these links between blogging and conceptions of the self further stabilized, they put forth new concepts to define what seemed to them a novel type of identity as Internet users. Dave Winer (1999b) thus asked in July 1999: “Is the person who does a weblog a weblogeer? A weblogster?” More precisely, by 1999 users began referring to themselves as “webloggers” (or “bloggers,” when they adopted the term blogs as a short for weblogs).

This self-definition tied a set of practices of sharing voice with a new kind of being. Winer (1999b) thus suggested, “A weblog [is] a collection of links, updated frequently, often several times a day, that represent the interests of a single *web person*” (emphasis added). According to Barger (1999b), “A weblog […] is a webpage where a weblogger (sometimes called a blogger, or a pre-surfer) ‘logs’ all the other webpages she finds interesting.” In both cases, blogging was associated with a particular type of subject, a sensible, unique individual who was able to transform her personality into meaningful online navigation sequences for readers. In this sense, the practices of linking and writing short comments accomplished what Foucault (1997) defined as an ethopoietic function: they helped users transform deep knowledge of the Web into *ethos*.

Early blogging manuals and handbooks reveal how the experiences of early users were transformed into normative standards for others to constitute the self. For instance, Rebecca Blood (2002a), one of the first female weblog users, argued in her *Weblog Handbook* that constant blogging could contribute to “build better writers” (p. 28), “build critical thinkers” (p. 30), “build reputations” (p. 32), and “deepen […] creativity” (p. 61). Handbooks specified the norms and rules required to become a “better” and more “creative” self through blogging. Above all, authors argued, self-transformation required constant practice and self-discipline. In his manual, software developer Biz Stone compared blogging to a spiritual manner of living. He asserted: “Blogging is an information-saturated lifestyle filled with contemplation and expression […] [Its] cumulative effect is smartening” (Stone, 2004, p. 116). The regular observance of blogging, practitioners argued, would help individuals to enhance and shape the self.

To sum up, weblog users proposed a model for developing a relationship with the self based on the creation and annotation of hyperlinks to other sources of content on the Web. They argued that these techniques could lead to self-discovery, self-transformation, and the revelation of the user's voice to readers of their sites. In this sense, the blogger identity was tied to central notions of liberal subjectivity that conceive the self as intrinsically stable, free, creative, and unique. Users envisioned the weblog as a material marker of identity that signaled their technical proficiency, provided a window into the self, and allowed them to distinguish themselves from other user groups (such as online diarists).

A "Format" for Multiple Voices: The Stabilization of the Blog

The websites created by these different communities coexisted for a good part of the late 1990s. By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the blog gradually stabilized as the main means to share voice on the Web. Through this process, the blog absorbed the identities of other websites (such as diaries and journals) and the blogger identity became a key point of attachment to the subject positions of various Web users in the United States (such as diarists, personal publishers, and early webloggers). I discuss three particular dynamics to account for this partial stabilization process: (a) the expansion of the range of content published on weblogs, (b) the creation of automated blogging software applications, and (c) the symbolic redefinition of blogs as a "format" that accompanied these dynamics.

To be sure, the distinctions between diaries, journals, and weblogs remained significant for a number of users in the late 1990s. Yet, as the decade came to an end, many users expanded the range of content published on weblogs by combining the practices of recording personal events or thoughts, creative writing, and filtering the Web, as they appropriated weblogs to integrate different types of content that previously had remained separate. Some pioneer weblog users, for instance, ventured into writing about personal thoughts and mundane events in their lives, a practice that they had mostly associated with online diarists. An early blogger, Steven Bogart (1999), thus analyzed his own tendency to comment about daily activities on his website: "Are there rules for web logs? I'm talking a lot more lately instead of pointing to other places on the web. Maybe I'm turning this into a journal. Maybe this is a phase. Maybe what I call it doesn't matter that much." Similarly, when writing about personal thoughts instead of annotating hyperlinks on his website, Dan Lyke (1999a), a member of the technical staff at Pixar Animation Studios, asserted: "It's a weblog! No, wait, it's a diary!" Some months later, Lyke (1999b) concluded: "Flutterby is as much journal as it is weblog, and as such I want to make sure that the critical times and feelings in my life get recorded." Early bloggers thus reimagined their sites as a means to respond to and keep an archive of specific events in their lives, in addition to their Web exploration practices.

New users appropriated blogs to share diverse kinds of content as well as linking to other sites on the Web. For these users, the reverse chronological order that characterized weblogs provided an ideal framework for organizing different kinds of writings and for sharing them with others. For instance, Jack Saturn, a self-taught Web developer, enacted blogs to integrate comments about music and reflections about his personal life. Saturn interpreted his appropriation of weblogs as part of the larger history of his publishing practices. He explains, "Since I was a teenager, I produced paper zines. To me, websites, or personal websites, and then weblogs [were] just an extension of that. […] I posted on music that I liked. And I posted [about] more personal stuff that would be maybe considered more like a journal or a diary" (personal communication, July 15, 2011). Similarly, for Heather Anne Halpert, an architect at a software design firm who started blogging in April 1999: “[This website] fit exactly this sort of impulse that I had to connect to people online. [My blog] had to do with putting half-baked ideas out there as a way of starting to communicate with other people” (personal communication, 26 August 26, 2009). As these statements illustrate, throughout 1999 users appropriated the weblog as an interface between thoughts of different nature and the public, where these ideas could be the subject of further debate. By using this singular kind of website for sharing multiple types of content, users expected to enroll others in exchanges and discussions of their writing.

During this period, many online diarists and personal publishers also turned to blogs as a means to combine several kinds of content. Derek Powazek, whose online magazine *Fray* had been a central venue for personal publishing since its creation in 1996, changed his originally negative view about blogging and reconceptualized it instead as a versatile form of sharing voice: “I love weblogs because they’re yet another way for people to express themselves online. Sure, they’re full of links. They’re also full of lives […] Diary. Weblog. Portal. Blah. You can call it whatever you want” (Powazek, 2000). From this perspective, diaries, journals, and weblogs were linked by the common motivation of their users to give a public account of their lives.

As online diarists and personal publishers turned to weblogs, these sites also inherited the creative impulses of these communities. Brigitte Eaton, a Web designer who updated the most comprehensive list of weblogs in early 1999, stated: “having looked at over 550 blogs, i can only say that the one consistent thing between weblogs is a time-based organization. some people just list links, some people just keep journals, and others mix the two, but, they all update regularly”

(Eaton, 2000; punctuation in original). As Eaton's comment illustrates, the content of blogs expanded as a result of how members of various communities used these sites. In parallel, users developed new ways to conceptualize the blog that could account for this content transformation. Throughout 1999, definitions of the blog thus started to shift towards a conception that centered on formal features (such as "time-based organization"), rather than a unique way of sharing voice on the Web (such as, "pre-surfing" it). The weblog thus acquired a new set of identities.

The constitution of blogs into a privileged interface between the self and the public was tied to their material stabilization. The creation of software crystallized the efforts of communities of Web users (such as online diarists, personal publishers, early and new weblog users) to communicate with others. In 1999, software developers designed the first automated computer programs for creating blogs. Andrew Smales released software for weblog users called Pitas in July 1999 and, 4 months later, Diaryland for online diarists. Paul Kedrosky, a business school professor at the University of British Columbia, launched Groksoup in August 1999.[24] For their part, Pyra, a three-person company in San Francisco interested in the development of software programs for collaborative management, launched an automated Web application named Blogger in August 1999. Originally conceived as an internal blog for the company (called *Stuff*), Blogger evolved into a side project intended to supplement Pyra's online management program—known, for lack of a better name, as the Pyra app—until it was finally released as an independent product (Rosenberg, 2009). The name Blogger was suggested by Pyra's co-founder Evan Williams. This name evoked the vernacular term blog, which had become increasingly popular after Peter Merholz coined it in May 1999, and thus distinguished the software from other competing alternatives that referred to these sites as weblogs.

Blogger's developers had specific conceptions about the ideal, virtual users of their products (Akrich, 1992; Bardini, 2000; Woolgar, 1991). In the case of the Pyra app and Blogger, users were defined as "Web people," that is, people for whom the Web represented their primary means of social interaction. Blogger's designers adopted their own identities as a typical representation of these users. According to Paul Bausch, one of the tool's developers: "[Blogger] was designed for people like us at the time. We considered ourselves 'Web people' as opposed to email people, phone people, or other types of communication. We wanted everything on the Web, and we wanted our interactions to take place there" (personal communication, September 19, 2009). Blogger's putative user thus encompassed the identities of diarists, personal publishers, and webloggers. Through its design, Blogger's developers sought to crystallize the practices of Web users who championed the ability to communicate with others online and make their contributions to the public available in various forms of mediated content. The blogger identity, as an embodiment of Web people, thus provided a unique point of attachment and articulation of these various forms of selfhood.

Accordingly, Blogger's developers attempted to transcend the blog's definition as centered exclusively on the use of hyperlinks. They incorporated other forms of sharing voice, such as diary writing and personal publishing, into the range of legitimate practices afforded by the software. According to Bausch, "We consciously wanted Blogger to be a blank canvas for people" (personal communication, September 19, 2009). For Pyra's co-founder, Meg Hourihan, "Blogger could help publish a [diary] or a blog. It [didn't] really matter" (personal communication, August 26, 2009). Thus, Blogger's purpose was primarily to automate the publication of different types of content in reverse chronological order. The use of hyperlinks, previously considered the hallmark of blogging, receded in prominence, as a blank box in which users could post text became the central component in Blogger's interface. According to Hourihan, "Blogger was all about this box. It [made it] easy to post whatever. It removed all the complexities. You didn't have to know HTML. Eventually we made a button to put the HTML and help make the links, but at first it was the box" (personal communication, August 26, 2009). A file transfer protocol (FTP) automatically transmitted the content written on the interface of Blogger to the server that hosted the website. This feature distinguished Blogger from its immediate competitors, which provided hosting for their users' websites. Blogger's designers insisted that users could greatly benefit from their appropriation of software to produce these sites. Evan Williams argued, "[T]hese days I fully embrace [the personal publishing label]. To me, that's what is important and exciting about Blogger—it empowers personal publishers" (quoted in Turnbull, 2002, p. 81). In this view, the capacity to integrate various forms to share voice made weblogs a unique option in the Web ecology.

The significance of automated software cannot be overemphasized. First, it provided a means to integrate previously disparate forms of sharing voice. Users from various communities embraced Blogger for what seemed to them a more flexible and efficient way to post online. According to online diarist Steve Schalchlin, "Blogger ha[d] more tools that I didn't know how to build. It [gave] me more capabilities. The electronics ha[d] caught up to the art" (personal communication, August 19, 2009). In this view, the automation of website production practices helped to multiply the possible combinations of various types of content with the weblog artifact. Lance Arthur, an important member of the personal publishing group, recalls: "Blogger automated many if not all of those laborious coding functions that were otherwise being done by hand" (personal communication, September 29, 2009). For well-known weblog users, Blogger's features for Web publishing became a sign of its superiority. In light of the success of the software, Pyra abandoned its original application and focused exclusively on Blogger.

Second, software applications contributed to the standardization of the blog. To further automate content-production dynamics, developers implemented templates with a specific set of predefined elements and features that were automatically reproduced by every blog created through the software. Blogger's templates allowed users to customize their blogs by filling particular blank spaces on the interface. As noted earlier, new entries on each blog were automatically published in reverse chronological order. Other standardized features included the time stamp, archives, and search functions. Users could also create a sidebar to list other blogs (that is, a blogroll) and add hyperlinks to their posts by filling a blank space on the interface. Thus, by appropriating Blogger, users such as online diarists and personal publishers could incorporate into their websites and practices various features that had previously been limited to weblogs. After the development of these templates in 1999 and 2000, sites produced through the software shared a more consistent set of characteristics. In September 2000, Blogger also offered users the ability to host for free the websites created through their templates on the company's server, with the subdomain name, blogspot.com. As discussed above, several users, particularly online diarists, had opted for this solution instead of owning their domains. In this way, Blogger became an important option for users who wanted an automated system for updating their websites and a free solution for hosting them.

The renewed identities of blogs and bloggers further stabilized over the following months. As this process unfolded, the definition of the blog as a "format" replaced most of its previous descriptions. As users expanded the range of content possibilities of this website and software programs redefined its characteristics, the identity of the blog significantly shifted from an online filter to a "format" suited "for publishing all kinds of information on the Web," as Evan Williams described it (quoted in Turnbull, 2002, p. 83). Technology and media producers have consistently worked to set up the terms with which to interpret their products and identities. As Gillespie (2010) shows, this process involves discursive work to define what a technology is and what its proper functions are. Following a similar strategy, Blogger's designers and users redefined blogs as the "native format" of the Web. Meg Hourihan (2002) recapitulated this notion in an essay posted on *O'Reilly's Networks:* "[A]s the Web has matured, we've developed our own native format for writing online, a format that moves beyond the page paradigm: The *weblog,* with its smaller, more concise, unit of measurement; and the *post,* which […] is a self-contained topical unit […] [I]t's the amalgamation of multiple posts—on varying topics—on a single page that distinguishes the weblog from its online ancestor, the home page" (Hourihan, 2002; emphasis in original).

The notion of "format" played an important role in the redefinition of blogs. Users and software developers utilized it in three important ways that exploited the plasticity of the concept to bridge multiple meanings. First, they deployed it to suggest that weblogs were a content-agnostic *medium.* For Williams, "What was significant about blogs was the format—not the content" (quoted in Turnbull, 2002, p. 82). In this way, users shifted the focus of blogging from a singular end such as online filtering, to the necessary means for creating, storing, and sharing content online. Posts on daily events and personal thoughts, largely associated with diarists and personal publishers, thus became legitimate content of weblogs. Second, "format" tied the blog to the notion of *genre,* a crystallization of recurrent practices through a particular arrangement (or "amalgamation") of technological features embodied in software templates. Hourihan (2002) stated, "When we talk about weblogs, we're talking about a way of organizing information, independent of its topic. […] Weblogs simply provide the framework, as haiku imposes order on words." Finally, "format" also designated the particular *size* and *shape* of the blog as a publication outlet, which users and software developers described in opposition to the "page paradigm." Blogs, they argued, revolved around the "post," a unique, smaller unit for producing meaning. For Hourihan, the shift from the page to the post "liberated" users from the limitations of the page, particularly its size. The notion of format thus helped to stabilize weblogs by allowing its proponents to reconcile the expansion of the content of blogs with the standardization of the artifact through software.

Users tied these conceptions of format to the concept of nativity. In this way, they reconceptualized the weblog as indigenous to the Internet or a product of the evolution of the Web as a technology of subjectivity. The concept also provided weblogs with a history that connected them to their precursors (that is, online diaries, personal publishing journals, and online filters) and linked their emergence to the foundation of the Web itself. Referring to Marc Andreessen's original *What's New* page, early blogger Jesse James Garrett stated: "In the beginning, there was only one weblog. We are all coattail riders" (Garrett, 1999). Redefined as a "native format," the blog thus represented for users the culmination of the maturation of the Web into an ideal assemblage of material features and types of content to give accounts of their lives.

Users from different communities helped this singular conception of blogs-as-format achieve wider resonance. Derek Powazek (who worked at Pyra as Creative Director during 2000) wrote in a handbook for developing communities on the Internet: “The year 2000 saw the rebirth of a very old web idea, repackaged in some new technology, and unleashed as the weblog […] The recipe for a weblog is simple: Make a [website] and put microcontent (short blurbs and blips) on it. […] The content of [this] site could be anything […] the tool is content agnostic” (Powazek, 2002, pp. 264, 269). Similarly, early blogger Peter Merholz (2000) asserted: “I think there is a new form of communication/publishing taking place. It’s not necessarily about annotated links, or diary entries, or whatnot. It’s simply about putting form to thought and getting it out there.” For these users, weblogs had become an ideal means to “repackage” (as medium) and give “form” (as genre) to “blurbs” and “thoughts” of different kinds and to publicly display them (or “getting [them] out there”).[25]

At the turn of the twenty-first century, as the dot-com bubble reached its phase of euphoria, the mainstream media increasingly hailed the blog as a novel means to democratize voice. Considering how journalists portrayed the stabilization of blogs provides insight into the transformation of the identity of these websites and their users in public culture. In one of the first articles published on weblogs, Scott Rosenberg (1999) defined them as “chronological lists of links” and situated them within the larger history of information classification systems. Blogging, he argued, exemplified the rise of “tools and strategies for helping Web users cope with the vast media terrain we all now inhabit.” One and one-half years later, Mead’s article, *You’ve Got Blog,* published in *The New Yorker,* signaled the change in the nature of blogging. Mead (2000, p. 104) argued that “[m]ost of the new blogs are […] intimate narratives rather than digests of links and commentary; to read them is to enter a world in which the personal lives of participants have become part of the public domain.” She chronicled the relationship between two early bloggers, Meg Hourihan and Jason Kottke, and the role of their weblogs in how their relationship developed. Thus, Mead portrayed blogging not in terms of the evolution of information organization devices, but rather as an “intimate world” where ordinary people shared with others the mundane experience of falling in love.

Only a few months later, *Yahoo! Internet Life* (2002), a monthly magazine devoted to news about the Internet, declared weblogs the 2001 “trend of the year” (p. 58). Various years before news magazine, *Time*, adopted a similar strategy, *Yahoo! Internet Life* celebrated “You,” “John and Jane Does of the Net,” as the 2001 “person of the year” (2002, p. 57). It also celebrated the blog as the ideal format for sharing voice online: “If this is the year of the average Joe, big props to his soapbox: the weblog. Known as blogs, these do-it-yourself online diaries are arguably the easiest way to make a wave in the Web’s ocean. Feeling really lazy? Type your profound thoughts into ready-made blog form; a site such as Blogger or Pitas.com will build a Web page and put it online for you. […] [W]ith a galaxy of participants weighing in—from high school students to professional writers and artists—blogging supplied the Net with the freshest voices of the year” (2002, p. 58).

This article is revealing in a number of ways. First, it shows how by the early 2000s the blog had absorbed the identities of previously different types of sites (such as diaries and journals) and was defined as an encompassing format for a variety of purposes. Furthermore, it illustrates how the blogger identity had become a privileged point of attachment to a multiplicity of forms of selfhood that stressed the use of the Web as a public window onto the self. The article also points to the significance that automated software had taken in the appropriation of this format for creating various types of content. Finally, it reveals how blogs came to be gradually articulated with the notion of voice, a concept commonly invoked to refer to the uniqueness of the ordinary person. Many expectations about the potential of the Web in turn-of-the-century America crystallized in this article. The Web, users and media commentators argued, had found an ideal form of sharing voice: the blog, the soapbox of "average Joes and Janes." As this process unfolded, users in other parts of the world also began appropriating the Web to share aspects of their lives with others. It is to the case of France that I turn next.

Early Voices on the French Web

To account for the emergence and stabilization of the blog in France, I follow a similar strategy to the one deployed in the case of the United States. I begin by discussing some of the main kinds of websites that characterized the early French Web ecology (such as personal pages, online diaries, and webzines). I then analyze how blogs stabilized as a preferred means to support these practices through an expansion of their content types and the creation of software applications. I supplement these discussions by looking at the symbolic redefinition of blogs that accompanied and informed these processes.

The Early French Web Ecology

Of *Pages Persos* and Online Diaries.

The quintessential embodiment of voice on the 1990s French Web is the *page perso*, a short for *page personnelle* (personal page). *Page perso* was a generic term used to describe heterogeneous websites created by individuals from a diversity of backgrounds on a multiplicity of topics. These websites varied not only according to their content but also on their level of technical sophistication. As the name suggests, users appropriated these sites to give an account of themselves by presenting, discussing, and elaborating on their different interests and what they often called their "passions." Whereas some discussed their hobbies, others portrayed their bands of preference, created sites devoted to literary works, or wrote extensively about different areas of knowledge.

The content of these websites varied over time as users sought to increase their number of readers. According to Licoppe and Beaudouin (2002), "Breathing life into the [*page perso* became] a more salient and daily issue" for users (p. 81). Many users wrote about news and events related to their topic of interest in order to "breath life" into their sites. Personal pages also varied according to their technological features. Users commonly coded their websites with HTML. Whereas some emphasized the creation of texts to give an account of their lives and passions, others incorporated hyperlinks to various websites as an intrinsic part of their *pages perso*s.

Creating content that could be publicly consumed by others on the Web was a guiding motivation in the development of these sites. Many *pages persos* included visitor counters and features that allowed readers to contact their creators. In this sense, personal pages helped to render visible the public to the creator of the website. In parallel, websites provided readers with a public window into the personality of the site's creator. Users envisioned themselves as unique individuals and sought to reveal their singular personality through both their writings and their websites.

A similar, yet not equal, type of website that populated the 1990s French Web was the online diary. Often inspired by online diaries created in French-Canada (a region with much higher Internet access rates at the time), some users in France turned to the Web to share with others mundane events in their daily lives. The creation of these sites was based on some of the same values and assumptions mobilized by online diarists in the United States A well-known and early online diarist known as Mongolo (1999) asserted, “The online diary not only allows the expression of a part of oneself that is usually suppressed, but also enables the projection [of the self] […] and self-contemplation on [a] support, and allows others to recognize this projection, which inevitably increases the feeling of gratification.” By extending the history of the diary, users argued, the Web provided them with a means to reveal the self through the discussion of their daily lives and thoughts, and allowed others to publicly recognize and value this self-projection. To engage others in the discussion of their writings, users constituted webrings and created various online outlets for the collective publication of texts.

Although some users acquired their own domains to host their *pages persos* and online diaries, many turned to free services. Free hosting servers played a crucial role in the evolution of these websites and the early development of the Web in France. A graduate in informatics and early Internet user in France, Valentin Lacambre, established a highly successful free hosting server named Altern.org in 1992. Lacambre had previously implemented a service called “3615 Internet”—3615 being a common code used to access services on the Minitel—that allowed users to connect to the Internet through a Minitel. With Altern, Lacambre sought to “give citizens a tool to mobilize […] They have a great means of expression at their disposal. And I want to give it to them in the best possible conditions” (from an interview in L'Humanité, 1999). In 1996, Frédéric Ciréra, a student at the Université Paris VIII, created a similar service named Mygale. Not only did Altern and Mygale become popular hosting options for users, but they also turned into iconic embodiments of voice as a *right* in France. Following their success, French ISPs and emerging start-ups established free hosting into a regular component of their services.

The rise of sites such as personal pages and online diaries helped the Web acquire new visibility in a culture still defined by the symbolic universe of the Minitel. In numerous articles, the mainstream media expounded the dangers and excesses of venturing into the public, obscure world of the Internet. Online diaries, for example, were repeatedly tied to notions of exhibitionism. *Télérama*, a popular weekly magazine on media and culture, suggested, "[Diarists] found the ideal compromise to reconcile their need for exhibitionism and their desire to share. […] For those looking for either a support or a means to vent, the Internet provides diarists with a sound box. Their inner thoughts find a second life with readers who are constantly called upon to intervene and who constitute in the end the first justification for creating a journal" (1999).

As this article suggests, the creation of *pages persos* and online diaries raised important concerns and led to efforts to regulate voicing practices in France. These concerns became central topics of discussion for a group of users who created websites known as "webzines."

Webzines for an Independent Web.

If the *page perso* was a public window into the passions of early Web users in France, the webzine was its political cousin.[26] Webzine, in particular, stood for "Web fanzine"; it was the "natural evolution of the fanzine," says Cyril Rimbaud, a contributor to a collective webzine named *Les Ours* (*The Bears*) (personal communication, August 8, 2012). In a similar manner, David Dufresne, a journalist at newspaper *Libération* who is credited by many as the creator of the first webzine in France, situates the creation of his website within the larger history of radio and fanzines in the country. He recalls: "I ha[d] always been interested in means of expression. [...] When I was 14 years old, I started my pirate radio (*radio libre*) and I haven't stopped since.

When the Web arrived in the mid-1990s, it was a revelation; it was extraordinary! Suddenly, I could do a fanzine in color" (personal communication, May 1, 2012). From a political perspective, most webzine creators shared a leftist sensibility. Some had experience in programming. Like Dufresne, others were journalists or had ties with news organizations. Many worked in fields unrelated to technology but learned HTML as a pastime in the mid-1990s, the period when users outside of academic institutions started to appropriate the Internet in France.

Webzine creators shared a common motivation: to enact the Web as a technology of subjectivity. To this end, they constantly wrote long *éditos* or editorials where they gave their opinions about a range of political, social, and economic affairs; commented about current events published by the mainstream media; discussed the work of academic authors or intellectuals (most notably Hakim Bey); and assessed the entailments of the Internet's development in France. They designed their own websites and experimented with graphic design and HTML. Users usually referred to themselves as *webmestres* (webmasters), thus emphasizing the centrality of various technical skills for their self-definition. Each site constructed an imaginary through its singular name. Dufresne, for example, decided to name his site *La Rafale* (*The Flurry*). He explains, "The site [was] very simple but [was] actually offensive. […] Its logo at the time was a submachine gun that got me lots of criticism from French-speaking Quebecers" (personal communication, May 1, 2012). Other names included Arnaud Martin's (a.k.a ARNO*) *Le Scarabée* (*The Beatle*), Erwan Cario's *L'Ornitho* (*The Platypus*), Mona Chollet's *Périphéries* (*Peripheries*), and Pierre Lazuly's *Les Chroniques du Menteur* (*The Liar's Chronicles*).

Although the creation of these websites was usually an individual project, users envisioned their sites as part of a larger, collective movement. Accordingly, by 1996 they established an informal group of *webmestres* to discuss about the potential of the Internet for voice. The group came to be known as the "Mini-Rézo" [the Mini-Network]. Participants explained, "In recent months, some webmasters have begun to work together, most often by email, to discuss their visions of the Net and to defend the place of independent websites in the network. [...] Together, they try to identify ideas about the Internet, designed to preserve its largely voluntary and contributory character" (Mini-Rézo, n.d.). In addition to their individual websites, members of the Mini-Rézo created a collaborative webzine named *uZine* where they shared their writings and coalesced as a group. They elucidated the main idea and purpose of *uZine* as follows: "With uZine, we are hoping to propose a means to save the amateur and contributory Web against a professional (and commercial) Web that is increasingly more organized and costly" (Mini-Rézo, n.d.). *uZine* also welcomed articles written by readers. Some of these texts were published on the webzine after being collectively discussed and improved.

As this statement of purpose indicates, underlying the emergence of the Mini-Rézo and the foundation of *uZine* were efforts to resist the increasing commercialization of the Web. The final years of the decade were marked by the development of *La Nouvelle Economie*, a French version of the dot-com bubble. During this period, several Internet-based services and products, such as search engines, free hosting servers and free email accounts, were developed in France (Chemla, 2002; Garcia, 2011; Mauriac, 2002; Rebillard, 2012). "A delirium invaded all the minds, even though in France there was precaution against the Internet as a medium," says Annick Rivoire, a journalist and contributor to *Libération*'s technology supplement, *Les Cahiers Multimédia*. As the number of Internet users in the country increased, various groups invested important sums to develop these services while looking for business models that could help them recoup investments.

Members of the Mini-Rézo referred to these practices and services as the "commercial Web" (Web *marchand*) and contrasted it with what they called the "independent Web" (Web *indépendent*). Nowhere is this notion more eloquently put than in the *Independent Web Manifesto* released by the Mini-Rézo early in 1997. The manifesto stated: "The independent Web are those millions of sites that provide millions of pages made out of passion, opinion, information, created by users who are aware of their role as citizens. The independent Web is a new relationship between people, a free, available, open exchange of knowledge" (Mini-Rézo, 1997). Adherents to this movement identified themselves by including on their websites images of a magenta-colored nuclear symbol against an orange background or a submachine gun taken from Dufresne's *La Rafale*.

The definition of these two forms of Web appropriation—commercial and independent Web—rested on various distinctions. First, proponents suggested that the Web could enable subjectivity practices by being independent from commercial interests. In this view, the Web represented an ideal means for sharing voice; it provided users with an unprecedented opportunity to publicly share their views about the world, reveal the self through the discussion of their passions and lives, and enroll others with their writings. Proponents thus promoted a view of the Internet as "a tool that can allow everyone to speak, a possible community of citizens who can finally take ownership of the media space, a 'place' that could have functioned as a basis for renewing the libertarian (*libertaire*) ideal" (Cario, 2000).[27] In contrast, argued Mona Chollet (2001), a journalist at the satirical weekly newspaper, *Charlie Hebdo*, and creator of the webzine, *Périphéries*, the content of the commercial Web was "poor," "uniform," and void of meaning (p. 22). To resist the expansion of the commercial Web with its own arms, in 1999 some members of the Mini-Rézo launched *Rezo.net*, a portal for aggregating alternative information.[28]

Second, subscribers to this movement maintained that, as an expression of "passions, opinions, and information," *pages persos* and webzines allowed individuals to share their voices as *citizens*. According to French Internet pioneer Laurent Chemla, who in 1995 created an association devoted to promoting the Internet in the country (the Association d'Utilisateurs d'Internet), "Every citizen, duly informed by the Web, will be able to give her opinion, which is necessarily independent, to participate in collective decisions. It is like a resurrection of the Athenian agora" (Chemla, 2002, p. 26). On the contrary, they claimed, the neoliberal undertones of the commercial Web threatened the value and uniqueness of users' voices by reducing the self to a single definition: *consumers*. In his January 2000 editorial, Erwan Cario comically criticized some of the defining tenets of *La Nouvelle Economie* that were made visible by the introduction of a new term in French vocabulary: "start-up." He concluded his *édito* with a pessimistic rhetorical question, "Has the Internet become in a few months a tool that allows everyone to use his debit card, a community of consumers who can finally take control of their shopping cart, a 'place' that serves the purpose of the monstrous expansion of capitalism?" (Cario, 2000). In this sense, subscribers to the Independent Web movement lived the French dot-com bubble as an "intimate nightmare" (*cauchemar intime*), as David Dufresne described it (personal communication, May 1, 2012), a threat to everything that made the Web valuable.

Third, proponents of the Independent Web sought to change the symbolic imaginary of the Internet articulated by the mainstream media. From their perspective, news organizations had privileged negative accounts of the Internet that highlighted the dangers associated with public expression as opposed to its potential. In short, they argued, the media had portrayed the Internet as a space populated by three nefarious figures: pirates, Nazis, and pedophiles—or their monstrous aggregate, the "pedo-nazi" (Chemla, 2002, p. 139). Against this view, adherents to this movement advocated a view of the Internet as a site for the expression of unfiltered creativity. ARNO*, a key member of the group, maintained that, on the Web, "The citizen freely accesses public expression, with potentially the same audience that any institution has, without having to go through any human structure that constrains her, and with a minimum of resources" (2000). By providing users with means traditionally reserved to elites, ARNO* argued, the Independent Web represented a challenge to the media as institutions.

Finally, the movement embodied a resistance to what it construed as censorship of personal expression in certain law projects. Throughout the late 1990s, several politicians argued that France lacked appropriate laws to prevent and hold individuals responsible for copyright infringement and defamation online. Typical examples of the projects put forth to resolve this supposed "legal void" was Minister François Fillon's law amendment plan that would have held ISPs legally responsible for the content hosted on their servers, and his project to create a state organism (the Conseil Supérieur de l'Internet) with the capacity to examine and filter this content. After several lawsuits against his service, in 2000 Lacambre was forced to close the Altern.org server that provided users with free hosting for websites.[29] Chemla (2002) captures the sentiment of the Independent Web group against these legal initiatives when he stated, "That [the government] decided that the price to pay for freedom of expression is having to go through the gauntlet of prior censorship would have been intolerable, a drift from democracy towards a police state, which is capable to prohibit everything forever" (p. 179). Members of the Mini-Rézo sought to resist these initiatives and articulate alternative solutions.

The Independent Web movement lost strength as *La Nouvelle Economie* gained traction and its members moved on to other personal and professional projects. However, the movement left a long-lasting legacy. First, the *Rezo.net* portal continued to function as a popular aggregator of alternative information. Second, members of the Mini-Rézo developed one of the first and most used software programs in France for creating and managing websites. The idea to build this tool emerged when various *webmestres* sought to automate the publication of texts on their websites and their collective project, *uZine*. *Webmestre* Pierre Lazuly explains, "[We wanted] a publishing system to manage a website with various administrators, each having the right to publish, without having to rely on a single person to do whatever we wanted" (personal communication, May 15, 2012). The name for the tool came from Lazuly, a sailing aficionado who had spent various summers on a boat named SPIP. The name, he thought, could also work as an ideal acronym: *Système de Publication pour l'Internet* (Publishing System for the Internet). "The first three letters worked well. We never found a meaning for the fourth letter but, suddenly, [the system] had found its name" (Lazuly, personal communication, May 15, 2012).

In the Fall 2000, the Mini-Rézo launched a new version of *uZine* based on some of the systems developed primarily by ARNO* and Philippe (Fil) Rivière as they learned languages and technologies such as PHP and MySQL. Over the following months, ARNO*, Fil, Lazuly and Antoine Pitrou, another collaborator, worked on scaling up this system and tested it on three particular websites: *uZine*, *Le Monde Diplomatique* (a site for which Fil worked as a webmaster), and a magazine named *Vacarme*. Loyal to the values of the Independent Web movement, SPIP was officially released on July 1, 2001 under a free license and quickly found a large base of users. The software program was coded in French. This choice embodied a larger political view of the place of France in the nascent Web. Stéphane Deschamps, a Web developer who subsequently became a close collaborator of the SPIP's development team, thus compared SPIP to the French icon of resistance: Astérix.[30] In his words, "The French are Astérix [on the Web]. If we need to do something different to say that we're different, we go ahead and do it. That's why SPIP's code is in French" (personal communication, May 4, 2012). In this view, software captured France's historical exceptionalism.

As the twentieth century came to a close and the fears of the Mini-Rézo about the commercialization of the Web materialized, another form of sharing voice developed in France: blogging.

***Blogues*, *Jouebs,* and *Carnets*: The Stabilization of the Blog in France**

Over the next years, early subjectivity practices on the French Web crystallized in other formats, particularly the blog. In this sense, the blog absorbed the identities of the *page perso*, the online diary, and the webzine, and thus helped users occupy the subject positions of their creators. Like in the case of the United States, I discuss various dynamics to account for this stabilization process. First, I analyze how the discovery of blogs in France was based on an expansion of the range of content published on these websites. Second, I discuss the role of blogging software in the stabilization of the blog. I supplement this discussion with a consideration of how users, developers, and the media in France variously defined blogs and argued for their significance in French society.

Users began to discover blogs in France at the turn of the twenty-first century. Many early users were avid Web explorers who learned about blogs as they visited websites created in the United States and Canada. Some of them had a background in engineering or computer science. Many had previously created personal websites but enacted the blog as a specific kind of site to combine multiple types of content. For example, in April 2000, Frédéric Madre, considered by many as the first user of the Blogger software in France, developed a collaborative site called *2balles*. An early Internet user, Madre had experimented with a variety of practices of subjectivity on the Web. Influenced by the personal publishing movement in the United States, he built a website in 1994 that evolved into what he defined as "a literary and photographic netzine," called *Pleine Peau* (*Full Skin*). He recalls, "There were lots of websites that were run by individuals who were telling their life stories […] [W]hen I first started *Pleine Peau* with my friends, we wanted to do some kind of political, free expression magazine […] I am influenced by all those movements that were trying to use the page space as a tool and make the layout tell part of the story" (Bosma, 2000). Madre's *2balles* blog was part of a larger experimental project that was often referred to as Net art.

Also in April 2000, Karl Dubost, at the time the technical director of a Web agency in Paris, created a site called *Analphanet*. Dubost defined an "analphanet" as a person involved in the Net Economy but ignorant of the workings and the potential of the Internet. He saw his new website, which he coded using Frontier, as a way of "sharing my experience and my opinion regarding the Internet" and thus counteract this form of illiteracy (Dubost, 2000). Dubost had previously created various websites, such as *La Grange*, developed in 1998 as “a personal space for writings, thoughts, memories dust” (Dubost, n.d.) and *Normandie Web*, built in 1995 to present information and news about this region of France. Instead, *Analphabet* (also called *The Boring Weblog*) had a different purpose. Primarily written in English (as opposed to his previous sites), Dubost used his weblog to share his view on a variety of themes, from assessments of important milestones in his life, to impressions of his travel experiences, to comments on Web development and some current affairs.

Most early weblogs in France departed from the original notion of blogging as filtering the Web. Users enacted blogs to share a variety of content and organize their various writings. Although some users acknowledged the origins of this type of sites by referring to them as “weblogs” and constantly linking to multiple websites, many appropriated them as online journals or a new version of their *pages persos*. Stephanie Booth, a Philosophy and History of Religions student at the Université de Lausanne who later integrated the community of early bloggers in France, created a blog using Blogger in July 2000. On her first post, she announced, “Here we are. I have an online ‘journal’. Let’s see what happens” (Booth, 2000). Booth created three main categories to classify content on her site during its first months: “Web” (for news about the Web), “Site” (for meta-reflections about her own website), and “Life” (for discussions of her personal life). For early users like Booth, the blog provided an ideal means to give an account of the self by allowing them to share and integrate reflections on a diversity of aspects, such as interests and events in their personal lives. As they discovered new blogs, users created lists and added links to their sites. In February 2001, Emmanuelle Richard, a French freelance journalist based in Los Angeles, included a small sidebar on her site linking to five blogs in

French that she referred to as “froglogs.” This term also served as the name of an early gathering of blog users in France, organized by user Christophe Ducamp in November 2001.

Throughout 2001, blogs became a topic of discussion and reflection among some Internet users in France and other French-speaking countries in Europe. In June 2001, for instance, the subject was intensively debated at *C-est-tout.com*, a peer-to-peer journalism project created by Stéphane Gigandet in 1999. A computer scientist, Gigandet had developed a series of Web projects and had spent time in California in the late 1990s. Discussing an essay entitled, *Triumph of Weblogs*, Gigandet (2001a) noted, “Weblogs may be a triumph in the United States, but in the French-speaking world, they are in their infancy. Some exceptions aside, weblogs are unknown in France.” The following day, Gigandet (2001b) published an essay called *The Infancy of Jouebs* (*Les Balbutiements des Jouebs*), where he argued for the relevance of blogs on the French Web. He construed blogs as an opportunity to revive the world of *pages persos* where “everyone could express freely and share her passions and ideas with the world,” obscured by the transformation of the Web into a “giant hypermarket.”

Gigandet invited his readers to suggest possible translations of the weblog term into French. To launch its success on the French Web, Gigandet suggested that the “blog” term needed to be “Frenchified.” After considering different possibilities with readers, such as *blogue*, used in Québec and recognized by the *Office de la Langue Française Québécoise*, he suggested the term *joueb*, a contraction of the terms “journal” and “Web” that also pointed to the notions “*jouet*” (toy) and “Web page” (Gigandet, 2001b). Gigandet stressed the plasticity of the blog as a crucial aspect of its definition. “A *joueb*,” he wrote, “is a website where information is published frequently. This information is often presented in chronological order and in categories. […]

Information can take many diverse forms: articles, news, spectacle programs, album releases, club agendas, comics, are only a few examples. *Jouebs* vary greatly in their shape, the number of their authors and participants, their subjects, their updating frequency, their level of interaction with readers, etc." (Gigandet, 2001b). He illustrated his essay with a few early French blogs.A larger number of users in France turned to blogs in the first years of the new decade. These users benefited from the increasing availability of high-speed Internet connections in the country. The uptake of high-speed was accompanied by a rise of Internet access rates and the development of new services by providers (Beauvisage, Beaudouin, & Assadi, 2007; Moulaison, 2007). The group of early blog users appropriated these websites to open the private into the public. These sites provided others with a public window into the self. This window was built through descriptions of events, comments about a range of affairs, and accounts of their interests and passions. Laurent Gloaguen, the director of a communications agency in Paris, created a blog named *Navire* (*Ship*) in December 2002. Gloaguen had previously experimented with the Web as a site for self-performance. In 1996, he designed a website named *Le Monde de Laurent* (*Laurent's World*) that he described as "perhaps the first [site] of a French-speaking man evoking his homosexuality on the Web. A dark website that talked about the pain of losing a loved one, grief, death, and AIDS" (Gloaguen, 2006). Gloaguen construed *Navire* as an extension of these self-revelation practices. On his very first post, he wrote, "A soft and rainy day in Paris. So here I am with a *blogue* … The question is what to do with it. I don't know yet, we'll see. Maybe just note the things I don't want to forget, my indignations of the moment, quips, confidences to close ones on this little personal space lost in the vastness of the Web. In short, a small extension of myself, readable by everyone and entrusted to digital posterity" (Gloaguen, 2002).

Users also enacted blogs as a means to interact with others. These relationships were established through comments about and links to other users' sites. Early user Stephanie Booth recalls, "We were a bunch of early adopters and what made us cutting edge or exotic was that we were using this particular type of technology […] that, in addition to being technology, allowed us to express ourselves online [and] allowed us to connect" (personal communication, March 26, 2012). In a similar manner, Gloaguen contends, "It was this interactivity that hooked me. […] The experience of going after a readership was exhilarating and rewarding" (personal communication, October 25, 2011). By 2002, this group of users formed a loose community that utilized their sites to coalesce. In August 2003, Gloaguen—also known as *Le Capitaine* (The Captain) and who quickly established himself as a central node in this group—organized a monthly gathering of blog users called *Paris Carnet*, which helped them come together as a community.

In addition to this expansion of the kinds of content written on these websites, blogs also stabilized in France as the product of local software programs created to support appropriation practices. The discovery of blogs by individuals also resulted in efforts to build software applications that could enable subjectivity practices *à la Française*. Gigandet, for example, argued for using Niutopia, the tool he had developed to build the *C-est-tout.com* project, as a platform for creating blogs and news sites. Moreover, after discussing his essay on *jouebs* with readers, he decided to change the original name of his tool (Niutopia) and renamed it Joueb.com.

Another project to build an automated blogging tool came from a Web developer from Corsica named Michel Valdrighi. A college student in Montpellier, Valdrighi had discovered blogs in 2000 when a friend of his on Internet Relay Chat (IRC) recommended him to use

Blogger in order to automate the creation of his site. After dropping out of college and returning to Corsica in the Fall 2000, Valdrighi obtained a job developing a website for a local association. For this reason, he began to learn the scripting language, PHP. In this context, Valdrighi thought of developing a tool to create blogs that could help him learn this language and resolve some of what he perceived were important failures in Blogger. He explains, "I put two and two together, and said, 'I should create a blog software! At first, I wanted to call it 'Blog 2' because, at the time, I couldn't stop playing in a loop Blur's 'Song 2.' But then I thought that it would be too obvious. [And] I thought it would have been inappropriate to use the name and add the number 2 to something that you hadn't done. Therefore, I called it 'b2'" (personal communication, November 9, 2011). Valdrighi released b2's first version in June 2001 under the General Public License (GPL).[31] The creation of tools such as Joueb.com, b2, and SPIP (also launched in mid-2001) marked the beginning of a rich history of software development for sharing voice in France.

The nascent "blog phenomenon," as often referred to in the media, didn't go unnoticed by Pierre Bellanger, the founder and CEO of a successful radio station named *Skyrock*. Bellanger construed the rise of blogs not only as a revival of *pages persos* but mostly as an extension of the pirate radios (*radios libres*) movement that shaped the development of French broadcasting in the 1970s (Bellanger, 2006). Arguing against the state monopoly that controlled radio and television broadcasting since the end of World War II, pirate radios became an embodiment of freedom of expression in France (Lesueur, 2002). Bellanger, a biology student who had actively participated in this movement, launched *Skyrock* in 1986—five years after President François Mitterand put an end to the monopoly. By the end of the 1990s, the station had found a large following among young listeners between 15 and 25 years old, largely by becoming the spearhead of rap in France.

As Bellanger discovered blogs at the end of the 1990s, he saw an opportunity to help his radio station transition to the Internet age. He recalls, “It’s 1999 and 2000 and […] I stumbled upon blogs. [They were created] mainly [by people] who used them as a means to share their views. It was a way to connect ideas, communities of ideas, and also a tool for the transmission of opinions, an opinion vector. [I thought] it was a fascinating tool, and [that] I needed to incorporate it into the practices of the new generation. Couldn’t we create a software program, a service where people could publish an intimate journal?” (personal communication, October 13, 2011). In December 2002, *Skyrock* launched a tool to this end: Skyblog. As the use of technologies such as the Web and instant messenger by teenagers increased in France, Skyblog found a large base of adopters among this user group (O. Martin, 2004, 2007).[32]

The platform’s website originally described a “skyblog” in the following way: “It’s a perso[nal] (or intimate) journal on the Internet that you can fill daily without racking your brain! Do you have a rant (*coup de gueule*)? Ideas? Things you love (*kifs*) that you want to share but nobody hears you except for your dog[?] Create your skyblog! Give your daily impressions about your buddies, music, society, brands, news, sports, in short, everything that touches you and makes you revolt! […] Make yourself known on the Net and become a star!” (Skyblog, 2001). Building on the station’s experience in the “production of stars [by promoting] a culture of recognition, exposure, and visibility,” Skyblog incorporated various features to help users “become stars” over the weeks following its launch (Bellanger, personal communication, October 13, 2011).

Skyblogs users typically sought to give an account of themselves by sharing descriptions of their friends, interests, and meaningful relations in their lives, often accompanied by photographs. Adopting the language and the expressions that characterize SMS exchanges and French slang, they often described their interests and the things that made them *kiffer*, such as music, hobbies, films, or sports. These interests were largely defined in reference to representations provided by cultural industries. Although Skyblog, as a platform, provided users with highly standardized templates, users developed singular ways to modify aspects of their sites, such as textual symbols, background colors, and photographs. Pseudonyms were a key part of the self revealed by users. Bellanger describes the value of pseudonyms by comparing them to the democratic voting system: "Pseudonyms are a key for democracy. When you vote, they know your name but don't know you opinion. Inversely, [with pseudonyms] they know your opinion but don't know your name. It is also fundamental" (personal communication, October 13, 2011). Users chose specific pseudonyms to portray a particular dimension of their personality.

The centrality of pseudonyms also reveals how users made sense of the publicness of their practices through technology. Skyblog functioned as a closed platform that only let individuals exchange with other registered users. Users defined their public through a selection of friends, a practice that allowed them to exclude certain individuals (such as parents and professors) from their imagined audiences. Many users utilized skyblogs to engage in communication exchanges with pre-existing groups of individuals, both close friends and recent acquaintances (Cardon & Delaunay-Teterel, 2006; Delaunay-Teterel, 2008, 2010). A skyblog, from this perspective, was a "meeting and discussion place" between a user and her network of friends (Delaunay-Teterel, 2010, p. 117). Visiting other skyblogs and leaving comments on their sites was a key ritual practice among many users, even for those who had not created their own blog (Fluckiger, 2006). Through an expression that quickly popularized, many users constantly encouraged others to "leave your com[ment]s" (*lache tes coms*) about their posts. These networks of relations on blogs were typically supplemented by the use of other media technologies, particularly instant messaging and mobile phones (O. Martin, 2004, 2007).

It is difficult to overstate the fascination and puzzlement triggered by the rise of skyblogs in French public culture.[33] Members of the community of early blog users in France typically reacted by deriding skyblogs as "under-blogs" (*sous-blogs*) or a lower form of sharing voice because of their anonymity, trivial conversations, and the lack of hyperlinks to external websites (Fievet, 2003). More broadly, some concerns were raised in the mainstream media about comments made by teenagers on their sites regarding suicide, sex, or eating disorders. These concerns notwithstanding, blogs in general, and skyblogs in particular, prompted a new wave of media attention in the country.

Articles in the mainstream media, which began to appear in 2002, nicely illustrate the curiosity triggered by blogs during the first months of their appropriation in France. In March 2002, an article on blogs as a major "social phenomenon" appeared in *Télérama* (Courrier, 2002). The article's author emphasized the plasticity of blogs and the ease with which these sites could be created. Blogs, he noted, were sites where "the master of the house shares daily impressions, feelings, and actions, but mainly publishes information gleaned from the Web that he [sic] previously ruminated and that echoes his vision of the world, his interests or his expertise" (Courrier, 2002). The article sought to capture the cultural ambiance that surrounded the early appropriation of blogs in France. To this end, its author contrasted the experiences of early "*weblogueurs*" such as Dubost, Booth, and Richard, and the professional opinion of a psychologist for whom these sites were "full of banalities written by teenagers or adults who share uninteresting details about their daily life" (Courrier, 2002).

What the experiences of these early *blogueurs* conveyed was the enthusiasm that characterized the creation of blogs in the first years of the 2000s decade. Users envisioned blogs as a way to reinvigorate an intrinsically French inclination for personal expression, originally enacted through *pages persos* but eclipsed by the commercialization of the Internet. In this sense, Dufresne (2003) noted, blogs were "a sort of extension/revival/evolution of personal pages on the Web, the [*pages*] *perso* of yesteryear (and today)." Similarly, for Lacambre, "Blogs proved the persistence of the Internet as tool of freedom and that the Web didn't become a simple supermarket" (Deleurence, 2005). In this sense, blogs absorbed the identities of previous websites such as *pages persos* and online diaries. Over the next months, journalists in the media abandoned talk of blogs as a new "social phenomenon." Instead, they began referring to blogs as a "revolution" and "the madness of the moment" in France (Telfizian, 2004).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter documented the largely untold story of the Web's early development and appropriation as a technology of subjectivity in two countries. The analysis proceeded in two steps. First, I analyzed how early users in the United States and France turned to the Web as a means for giving an account of their lives. To this end, the chapter described how users in these countries created various kinds of websites in the mid- to late-1990s. As they discovered the Web, users utilized it to describe events in their daily lives, share creative writings, register their Web explorations, provide extensive discussions of their passions, and comment on a range of affairs. The Web, they argued, provided regular people, or "average Joes and Janes," with an unprecedented opportunity to share their voices with others. Second, I discussed how the blog partially stabilized in these countries, that is, how this website absorbed the identities of other websites and thus became a privileged means to enact various subjectivity practices. To account for this process, I examined how the content of these websites changed over time, how automated software programs to support blogging practices became available, and how the cultural meaning of blogs (captured by specific definitions) changed in tandem with these content and material transformations.

A comparison of the early Web ecology in the United States and France reveals both important differences and similarities between these countries. Although users in both the United States and France turned enthusiastically to the Web to give accounts of themselves, this process unfolded in relatively different ways. A further look at the political, economic, and cultural contexts in which early subjectivity practices were enacted helps to account for these differences. In the United States, these practices unfolded against the backdrop of enthusiasm that surrounded the dot-com bubble, particularly in the technology development field (Amman, Carpenter, & Neff, 2006; Ankerson, 2010; Cassidy, 2002). For many software developers and programmers, this enthusiasm translated in part into websites designed to filter the vast amount of information found on the Web. Neff's (2012) analysis of the fledging Internet industry in the United States demonstrates how users, developers, and investors in this country construed the New Economy as a novel opportunity for technological innovation and financial gain.

To be sure, the promises of an Internet industry also seduced investors, entrepreneurs, and software developers in France (Chollet, 2001; Garcia, 2011; Mauriac, 2002). Several developers took advantage of the abundance of funds with which to finance new services and technologies in this country. Yet, for certain users in France, the commercialization of the Internet posed a significant threat. In their view, the Web provided citizens with a means to resist and counteract *La Nouvelle Economie*. In this sense, the Independent Web movement can be interpreted as an expression of wider social movements in France that reacted against some of the first measures taken by the right-wing administration of Jacques Chirac. Chirac's arrival to the Elysée in 1995 constituted a defining moment in the consolidation of France's "pragmatic neoliberalism" (Prasad, 2006).

Two main concerns, articulated by Trat, motivated groups such as the Independent Web movement: "The first was the public's refusal to continue bearing the costs of neoliberal politics that had, since the 1980s, systematically favored employers and undermined workers' rights and entitlements. The second concern was defending fundamental citizenship rights" (Trat, 1996, p. 224). The websites and software applications of adherents to the Independent Web movement sought to capture and crystallize an alternative to both the inevitability of *La Nouvelle Economie* and the implementation of neoliberal politics in France. Arguably, the results of this resistance (that is, the *Rezo.net* portal and the SPIP software) have had a longer-lasting success than any product of the French dot-com bubble. Early websites and initiatives such as SPIP also worked as an inscription of French exceptionalism: they functioned as a reminder of what made France unique against the increasingly stronger pressure of neoliberalism on the world of the Web.

The analysis of the early Web ecology in the United States and France also reveals important similarities between both countries. These similarities center on specific conceptions of the self and publicness that underlay early online subjectivity practices. Users in both countries held liberal views of the self that emphasized the value of individualism and the capacity to express original ideas—what Streeter (2010) calls “romantic individualism.” Drawing on these liberal conceptions of subjectivity that conceive the self as intrinsically stable, creative, and unique, users saw the Web as a means to provide a window into their daily lives and to transform their voices into meaningful online navigation sequences for others. Grounded in daily life experiences and the constant exploration of the Web, they sought to provide a look of themselves from their “interiors.” In this way, they hoped to reveal their hearts, souls, passions, and personalities to both readers and themselves. The product of these self-revelation practices, they argued, was none other than self-transformation.

In this register of voice, actors also held a specific conception of the public that privileged the image of the community. Users envisioned themselves as individuals connected to each other in specific ways. Many recognized and valued the possibility that a public constituted by unknown visitors could access their writings and creations. Yet, they conceived of their public primarily as a community of like-minded practitioners. Publicness thus meant to be accessible by members of a community of practitioners in varying degrees. Accordingly, users implemented different means to communicate with other members of these communities, such as online forums, mailing lists, and lists of common websites. This sense of community also led to various efforts to meet in person in both countries.

The identity of the blog as a technology of subjectivity in the United States and France was formed at the intersection of these patterns of difference and similarity: the blog crystallized specific practices, cultural values, and traditions in both countries. In other words, users turned to the Web (and blogs in particular) as a means to materialize and revive long-standing subjectivity practices, cultures, and traditions. For example, many users in both countries saw their sites as an extension of fanzines, a cultural form produced by amateurs to share their interests in creative ways (Duncombe, 1997; Radway, 2010). In a similar manner, creators of online diaries in the United States sought to extend the centuries-old practices that defined diary writing into a new phase of development on the Web. To this end, they adopted self-forming activities often thought to be of a private nature and adapted their websites for the public performance of these activities online. They thus reproduced various features that have traditionally characterized diaries, particularly the notion of "pages" where personal thoughts and events in their lives could be recorded every day. Although it departed from its offline counterpart in that it aimed to transform the process of introspection into a relatively public performance, the online diary retained its form as a "series of dated traces" (Lejeune, 2009, p. 179), which has characterized this artifact throughout its history.

In France, the trajectories of the Minitel and pirate radios provided a symbolic universe to make sense of the rise of the Web in general and the appropriation of blogs in particular. Users and developers in France discovered blogs when they visited sites created in other countries, most notably the United States and Canada. When they began appropriating these websites, users sought not only to capture appropriation practices that characterized the early French Web (namely, creating *pages persos*, diaries, and webzines) but also to extend these practices into a new age of personal expression. To this end, they worked to translate key terms, such as blog, into French.

Early websites such as blogs functioned as interfaces between specific conceptions of the self and publicness. The notion of interface brings into light the role of technology in articulating mutually constitutive notions of self and public. On the one hand, blogs allowed users to provide a public window onto the self. For instance, as a key feature in early weblogs in the United States, hyperlinks allowed bloggers to manage a relationship with the self that was based on the constant search for external information and its continual interpretation. Users explored the possibilities of HTML and certain programming languages to reveal various dimensions of their selves. The materiality of the website was also crucial in the constitution of the identity of their creators in that they provided users in both countries with a marker to identify and distinguish themselves from other groups (as the cases of webloggers in the United States and *webmestres* in France illustrate). On the other hand, technology not only made the private visible to the public but also revealed to creators of these sites what it meant to be in public. Features such as visitor counters, contact forms, early analytics tools, emails, and link-suggestion boxes helped users to gain a better understanding of the public nature of their practices and the implications of their visibility. In turn, users translated this sense of publicness into new features on their sites such as webrings and blogrolls, and in outlets for collective publication.

By describing the fate of movements such as the Independent Web in France, this chapter introduced the theme of the political valence of expressing one’s voice on the Web. In this sense, as singular (or exceptionally French) as this example might seem, it nicely illustrates an early instance of the belief in the potential of the Web not only as a means for self-revelation and personal transformation but also to bring about social change.[34] The next chapter discusses how and why this notion gained traction in both countries over the following years.

Chapter 3. From Personal to Collective: Blogs as Media and Commodities

On September 26, 2004, a few weeks after the conclusion of the Republican National Convention, *The New York Times Magazine* devoted a lengthy article to the rising phenomenon of "political blogs" (Klam, 2004). For the first time, bloggers had received credentials to participate in the Democratic and Republican conventions. In this context, the article profiled several "political bloggers" and described the marvel of their practices. Far from "average Joes" writing about mundane events in their lives, bloggers were described as a new breed of political commentators whose influence was only beginning to be fathomed. According to the article, "This summer, sitting in the Tank [the room occupied by bloggers during the Republican convention in New York] and reading campaign blogs, you could sometimes get a half-giddy, half-sickening feeling that something was shifting, that the news agenda was beginning to be set by this largely unpaid, T-shirt-clad army of bloggers." One particular reason accounted for the triumph of political bloggers: the singularity of their voice. "The blogs that succeed," the author concluded, "are written in a strong, distinctive, original voice."

To illustrate this shift in agenda-setting power, the author stressed the increasing size of various blogs' audiences. He noted, "Together, [bloggers Markos Moulitsas Zúniga and Atrios] have more readers than The Philadelphia Inquirer." As a result, the author asserted, some blogs had become highly profitable ventures. "Since February, with the explosion of blog traffic and the invention of blog ads as a revenue source, a few elite bloggers have found themselves on the receiving end of a Howitzer of money, as much as $10,000 a month." The article introduced a term to describe individuals who had reached financial success through these practices: "blogging entrepreneurs."

Similar claims about the crucial influence of bloggers in shaping the public sphere were made at the other side of the Atlantic. The man typically chosen by the French media to represent this new breed of political actors was Etienne Chouard, a high-school (*Brevet de Technicien Supérieur*) teacher in Marseille. A self-defined "simple citizen with no party, no union and no [political] association" (personal communication, August 3, 2012), Chouard wrote an essay against the European Constitution in the context of the 2005 referendum. As Chouard's website gained notoriety and readers, his case was not lost on the French media. Journalists often portrayed Chouard as the major, single factor shifting public opinion towards the "no" (Renaudin, 2005). *Le Monde*, for example, referred to him as the "Don Quixote of the No" (Chemin, 2005). Calling him a "political novice," newspaper *L'Humanité* wondered whether "Etienne Chouard could make the 'no' win" (Lemahieu, 2005). Chouard blamed the mainstream media for unanimously favoring the Constitution and for denying a space to those who argued against it. In contrast, he suggested, the Internet provided "a means to short-circuit oligarchic filters" (personal communication, August 3, 2012). Chouard envisioned his website as a response to the lack of opportunities for citizens to share their voice in the media.

In light of the processes described in the previous chapter, how did blogging, an activity hitherto devoted primarily to providing a public window into the life and thoughts of users and to recording their Web explorations, turn into a political endeavor in the United States and France? How did their users come to be defined as a new breed of political commentators and entrepreneurs? This chapter begins to answer these questions by analyzing the process of the transformation of blogs and bloggers in the United States and France. It traces the transition of blogging from personal to collective, that is, its definition as a set of practices largely intended to shape the public sphere and bring about social change rather than personal transformation.

By studying this transition, this chapter reveals a partial convergence process in the significance of blogging as a cultural practice of subjectivity in the United States and France. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the late 1990s actors such as users and software developers in France resisted notions and values largely advanced in the United States (such as the New Economy) in their Web appropriation and development practices. Instead, actors featured in this chapter "Frenchified" the imaginary that surrounded blogging in the United States. They situated this imaginary within certain practices of subjectivity in France in order to intervene in particular contexts and resolve specific problems in the country. The conditions and assumptions of this imaginary were largely accepted as the premises for reaching the potential of blogging in politics, the economy, and culture, rather than questioned as "anti-French." In this way, the notion of blogging as an ideal outlet for discussing public affairs and eventually generating revenue gained prominence in both countries throughout the decade.

I follow a four-step approach to analyze the transformation of blogging in the United States and France, respectively. First, I examine the specific contexts and the technological conditions that made this process possible in particular ways in each country. Second, I analyze how and why certain users turned to blogs to share their voice as citizens and discuss public affairs. Third, I discuss how various organizations (such as news groups and political parties) began appropriating blogs. Finally, I explain how blogs were imagined as sources of revenue, thus tying self-performance and self-promotion together.[35] The product of these four processes was a redefinition of blogs in public culture. Users and developers conceived of blogging as a new model for shaping the public sphere and making income in the process, which translated into new kinds of websites and online projects.

The American "T-shirt-clad Army of Bloggers"

As shown in the previous chapter, a key dynamic in the transformation of the blog's identity from an online filter into a plastic "format" was the extension of the range of content published in these sites. This dynamic continued over the next years. To better understand how this process unfolded, it is necessary to situate the development of blogging within specific sociocultural and political moments in the United States and the availability of particular technologies. Combining genre and medium theories, Miller and Shepherd (2009) argue that changes in the nature of practices, such as blogging, are rhetorical responses to the conditions created by specific cultural moments. From this perspective, blogging changed as specific moments and events in the life of its practitioners and the use of certain tools created new conditions for its re-enactment.

A New Context for Blogging

The aftermath of 9/11 and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan constitute two major events that reconfigured the context in which blogging was practiced in the early 2000s. Users responded to these events by sharing their opinions and letting their voices be heard on the Web (K. A. Foot & Schneider, 2004; K. A. Foot, Warnick, & Schneider, 2005; S. M. Schneider & Foot, 2002). Blogs became a privileged means used to this end. The developers of the Blogger program recall that, following 9/11, "The Blogger weblog tool experienced some its strongest growth ever" (Bausch, Haughey, & Hourihan, 2002, p. 38).

Not only did the number of users increase as they appropriated blogs to react to these events, but the cultural moment created by these events also laid the grounds for reimagining the role of blogging as a form of voice enactment in the United States. Practitioners originally referred to this specific way of re-appropriating blogs as “warblogging.” In this new context, the blog represented an ideal means to discuss public affair issues, as opposed to only filtering the Web or sharing comments about their personal lives. This form of sharing voice also required a rethinking of its practitioners’ identities. According to Matt Welch, a journalist who created a website in September 2001 and is often credited as the inventor of the “warblogging” expression, the “blogger” was now to be contrasted with the “pundit.” He argued: “What do warbloggers have in common, that most pundits do not? I’d say a yen for critical thinking, a sense of humor that actually translates into people laughing out loud, a willingness to engage (and encourage) readers, a hostility to the Culture War and other artifacts of the professionalized left-right split of the 1990s, unchecked joy at discovering clever people, a readiness to admit error, tendency to write with passion and emotion, a radar attuned to personal responsibility, a sense of collegial yet brutal peer review” (Welch, 2001). In the context of the War in Afghanistan, the blogger was thus reimagined as a critical, humorous, reflective, humble, passionate, collaborative, and responsible subject who stood in sharp contrast to traditional pundits in the mainstream media.

A second main factor in the re-enactment of blogging in the United States was the availability of specific technologies. In the early 2000s, developers built new software programs for the creation and management of blogs.[36] Noah Grey, who released a software program named Greymatter in late 2000, describes the context that surrounded the production of his program: “I simply wanted to give myself more control and organization. I’d been blogging for several years by that point, handcoding the entire time, and it was becoming too unwieldy for me to manage that way. I couldn't find another tool to do what I wanted to do, so I wrote my own" (personal communication, March 2, 2012). A similar tale of experimentation and need for a tool that satisfied her specific requirements as a user is told by Mena Trott to account for the creation of a popular software program named Movable Type: "To make a better dollarshort.org [her personal blog], Ben [Trott, her husband] and I wanted to make a better blogging tool and in October 2001, we released the first version of Movable Type. Intended to be a fun way to pass the time while we looked for jobs after the bust, supporting and developing Movable Type quickly became a full time job for the both of us" (Trott, n.d.). Trott thus tied the production of this tool to a difficult economic context created by the burst of the dot-com bubble.[37]

Because these programs were built to respond to the specific needs of their developers (who conceived of themselves as sophisticated users), they each implemented particular features for allowing users to share their voices. In particular, these programs crystallized the sense of publicness as community that was crucial in the early appropriation of these sites (see chapter 2). Thus, in addition to the features implemented in early blogging programs (such as the automated publication of content in reverse chronological order, the categorization of posts, permalinks, templates, and the creation of archives), developers introduced several new features. In October 2001, Movable Type enabled the publication and management of comments as an integral part of blogging. In addition, in 2002 the program introduced the "trackback" as a method for notifying users when others had linked to their sites.

Another key addition to the technologies of blogs was the integration of syndication technologies for making content posted on a blog available across different platforms. By 2002, both Movable Type and Radio Userland had adopted RSS as a syndication technology. This allowed users to receive new content from various websites on a single device, as opposed to having to visit these sites to discover new content. As noted in the previous chapter, the development of new features also involves a parallel process of standardization. These tools were key in the standardization of the aforementioned features as blogging technologies (as well as others such as themes and plugins, which were subsequently developed).

Users perceived these features as affordances that enabled and constrained the practice of blogging in particular ways. Tom Coates, a key contributor to the personal publishing movement in London who began blogging in 1999, thus reinterpreted the history of his content creation practices based on the features of the various programs he used: "Blogging, when it started, was a box you could type stuff into and press the button [Blogger]. […] 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" (personal communication, July 17, 2011).

Together, the sociocultural and political contexts that characterized the early 2000s and the availability of a new generation of software applications created fertile grounds for redefining the identities of blogs and bloggers in the United States. Users found new reasons for blogging (marked by important events in the political life of the country) and new tools to accomplish their goals. In what follows, I explore in further detail how, in this particular context, users and various types of collective actors appropriated blogs in certain ways.

The Voices of Citizens: The Invention of "News Blogs" and "Political Blogs"

Over the first years of the 2000s decade, users re-enacted blogging as the collective discussion of public affairs rather than the individual description of mundane events or the filtering of the Web. To this end, they tied blogging to two established sets of practices: journalistic writing and political expression.

A group of users (some of them journalists) envisioned blogs as a means to both reinvigorate and transform longstanding practices in the journalistic field. For instance, James Romenesko, a journalist who in the late 1990s covered technology news at the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, created in 1999 a website to aggregate news called *Media Gossip*.[38] "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. […] It [was] just about throwing out information to media junkies like myself" (personal communication, August 4, 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. Recalling his early days of blogging, Gillmor described the articulation of journalistic writing and weblogs as "a natural fit" (2003, p. 79). He wrote: "I dropped mini-essays onto it without worrying about compromising the objectivity. […] Think of the blog as an ongoing Reporter's Notebook" (Gillmor, 2003, p. 80). Email exchanges between Gillmor and his readers soon migrated to his blog when he switched to the Movable Type software. Gillmor envisioned these exchanges with readers as "conversations" that transformed the nature of journalistic writing and turned it into a "seminar" (Gillmor, 2003, 2004b).

Like Gillmor and Romenesko, others argued for a reconfiguration of the journalistic field through the articulation of blogging and journalistic practices. In this way, they incorporated journalistic practices as part of the definition of blogs and included blogs as part of a new definition of journalism. They turned to various strategies to establish this link. First, users and commentators noticed the ways in which blogging and journalism differed but complemented each other. Establishing typologies of blogs was a key mechanism used to operationalize these complementarities. Rebecca Blood, who began blogging back in 1999 and quickly turned into an analyst and historian of the phenomenon, devised a four-type classification of blogs to specify the links that tied these sites to journalistic practices: "[T]hose written by journalists; those written by professionals about their industry; those written by individuals at the scene of a major event; those that link primarily to news about current events" (Blood, 2003, p. 61). These ideal types were also combined to create an encompassing type of blog: the "news blog" or "news-conscious blog" (P. Andrews, 2003, p. 63). The creation of the "news blog" rested on its use as a format to write lengthy essays about public affair issues, create hyperlinks to refer to other sites (particularly news outlets and other similar sites), and discuss content with readers using comment features.

Not only did users and commentators highlight the complementarities between blogging and journalism but they also hailed blogging as an extension of journalism. They argued that blogging prolonged journalism by enabling interactions between journalists and readers. For Gillmor, "The most worthwhile part of blogging is the conversation and the listening. I have regular readers who drop by my blog. […] In an era when the public has a pervasive distrust of journalists, listening strikes me as a good way to improve our relationship with the audience"

(Gillmor, 2003, p. 80). Furthermore, practitioners contended that blogging could extend journalism by operating as “a corrective mechanism” (P. Andrews, 2003, p. 63). In this view, blogs could accomplish this role by expanding the agenda of legacy media through new, alternative information; keeping alive news neglected by news organizations; and “put[ting] pressure on journalists to do a better job with their own reporting and evidence” (Alterman, 2003, p. 86). The identity of the “news blog” was thus established by distinguishing it from the newspaper and by conceiving it as a palliative to the deficiencies of traditional news production and circulation models.

Another key means to articulate blogging and journalism was to define blogs as only a part of a larger transformation in journalism. In this view, blogs were conceived as only the “most popular expression” (Lasica, 2003, p. 71) of a particular form of journalistic practice often called “participatory journalism” (Blood, 2003; Gillmor, 2004b; Lasica, 2001a). Law professor Glenn Reynolds referred to this as “ad hoc journalism,” that is, a “new journalism [that] resembles [the] ‘blog world’” (2006, pp. 95, 98). This larger shift in journalism, proponents argued, was made possible by the availability of specific software programs and marked by the increasingly important role played by readers. “The walls are cracking,” Gillmor contended, “The readers want to be a part of the news process” (2003, p. 74).

The transformation of blogging from personal to collective can also be analyzed through the arising of “political blogging.”[39] During the first years of the 2000s, several users (including some previously described as “warbloggers” and various journalists) turned to blogs as a means to share voice in a political sense, that is, to give an account of themselves as *citizens*. According to Jerome Armstrong, an environmental 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 […] [B]logging is simply the medium; what we blog about is politics" (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zúniga, 2006, pp. xv-xvi; emphasis added). Armstrong defined "independent due diligence" as "the process of investigation into the details and the verification of material facts" (Armstrong, 2001). Originally created with the Greymatter software, Armstrong provided extended commentary on public affairs from a liberal perspective by constantly linking to news articles published on the Web. In September 2002, he also helped launch a blog managed by supporters to promote Howard Dean's candidacy, named *Howard Dean 2004*.

According to these users, the mainstream media had constrained the capacity of citizens to provide an account of their collective life by privileging the financial and political interests of news organizations over their information needs. Put differently, these users argued that media organizations worked against voice by constructing an agenda that served the interests of their owners and sponsors rather than contributing to the democratic process. A self-declared libertarian, law professor Glenn Reynolds, who began blogging in 2001, thus maintained that blogs represented an ideal means "of supplementing, and challenging, Big Media coverage" (Reynolds, 2006, p. 95). Various cases in which blog users participated in either shaping the media's agenda or lead to results in the public sphere without the intervention of the media provided the ground for larger-than-life reflections about the blog's value in the democratic process.[40]

Practitioners argued that the limitations of the mainstream media also provided citizens with new opportunities for political expression. In particular, they tied the practice of blogging to the notion of empowerment. Journalist David Kline captured this view when he suggested that "[blogs] give people a voice and a forum with which to speak the truth to power or at least to reach out and touch someone. […] [B]logging's ultimate product is empowerment […] it can certainly produce a new and powerful sense of meaning in a blogger's life" (D. Kline, 2005a, pp. 247-248). The benefit of blogging practices thus shifted from a general notion of self-transformation achieved through the discipline of writing (analyzed in the previous chapter) to a form of political empowerment attained through the informed discussion of public affairs.

The articulation of blogs, journalism, and politics relied on a reinterpretation of the blog's history. According to users, the blog's antecedents were to be found not in the practices of diary writing or information classification devices but rather in the "nineteenth-century-style era of the political broadside and the 'penny press' (D. Kline, 2005b, p. 10). Thus, according to Eugene Volokh, a law professor at UCLA who began blogging early in 2001, "The most prominent prototype of the blog […] [was] the newspaper column" (personal communication, July 27, 2011). Andrew Sullivan, a self-declared political conservative who worked as an editor for *The New Republic* and created his site in the spring of 2000, thus explained the roots of his blogging practices: "Like any new form, blogging did not start from nothing. It evolved from various journalistic traditions. In my case, I drew on my mainstream-media experience to navigate the virgin sea" (Sullivan, 2008). By these accounts, traditional American institutions for political expression, such as the newspaper column and the penny press, provided a model for a self empowered through blogging.

The articulation of blogging, journalism, and political discussion not only extended key American political traditions and institutions but also entailed the performance of particular subject positions. According to users, the "political blogger" citizen (both from the left and the right) was characterized by a "commitment to active engagement in local, state and national politics" (Bowers & Stoller, 2005). In a similar manner, Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúniga defined these citizen bloggers as "an army of foot soldiers […] fiercely partisan, fiercely multi-issue, and focused on building a broader movement. […] We are educated, informed, up on current events, and speak our minds" (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zúniga, 2006, p. 146). In this way, practitioners—many of whom were white men with training in prestigious academic institutions, as Hindman (2009) has noted—extended the range of subject positions that could be performed through the blogger identity. In addition to the original notions of online diary writing and Web filtering, blogs came to provide a point of attachment to militancy and activism as forms of selfhood.

Tied to this reconfiguration of blogging in the hands of an "army of foot soldiers" was a transformation of the notion of publicness that informed users' practices. In this re-enactment of blogging, the public acquired the figure of a Habermasian public sphere. Accordingly, the notion of a "blogosphere" became the most common form to refer to the space of interactions among users. As an interface between privacy and publichness, technology played a key role in defining and re-imagining this public sphere. Practitioners described the public sphere as a network of websites, interconnected by several technological features: comment sections of websites, which enabled democratic debates; trackbacks, which served to recognize or respond to arguments made in other websites; the RSS feed, which aggregated content by other users and, like a newspaper, provided crucial information for the development of democracy; and hyperlinks, which represented a means to illustrate, refute, and support arguments and ideas in other sites.

Practitioners interpreted the rise of the blogosphere as a sign of a larger transformation in American politics. Bloggers in the progressive camp referred to this shift as the rise of the "netroots" (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zúniga, 2006; Boehlert, 2009; Feld & Wilcox, 2008). Originally coined by Armstrong in 2002, the term was meant to describe "[an] online grassroots community that has grown dramatically in the past […] years. […] [T]he netroots are bounded not by their allegiance to any single issue, but by their belief that only a broad-based progressivism will save the nation from the destructive influences of the [Bush] administration" (Armstrong & Moulitsas Zúniga, 2006, p. 146). The netroots notion also highlighted the collective nature of the political blogging enactment. Either by linking to other sites or by allowing a community to coalesce within a specific site (like *Daily Kos* did), many users worked under the assumption that "the power of a single blog is relatively small—it is the interlinking of blogs into a larger 'blogosphere' that is meaningful" (Bowers & Stoller, 2005).

The rise of bloggers as "a new breed of political observers" (Walton, 2004), as a news website described them, became a source of both concern and fascination for the mainstream media. From a coverage centered on the use of blogs as online diaries and early filters of the Web at the turn of the twenty-first century, in the first years of the 2000s decade news outlets shifted their attention to the potential contribution of blogs to the democratic process. Profiles and "success stories" of the most-read bloggers became common topics in the media (E. Jensen, 2003; Klam, 2004; Lee, 2006; Rosen, 2004). Not unlike amateur radio operators in the early years of the twentieth century (Douglas, 1987), news accounts hailed bloggers as populist "heroes" of a new political revolution because their supposed ability to defy traditional power centers, such as the mainstream media, and thus shape the public sphere (Banks, 2008).

Organizations Begin to Blog

In this particular context, several organizations turned their attention to blogs. To be sure, many users continued to appropriate blogs as online diaries or sites for sharing their writings outside of established organizations. By tracing how news organizations and political parties began to blog, I do not mean to suggest that these individual forms of appropriating blogs disappeared or were replaced altogether by the voice of some collective actors. Yet, both the identities of both blogs and users significantly changed as this process unfolded. This process culminated in the symbolic redefinition of blogs and bloggers in American public culture.

The turn to blogs by several collective actors took shape in several ways. First was the gradual appropriation of blogs by news organizations. Initially, practitioners noted certain opposition to the articulation of blogging and journalistic expression advocated through their writings and practices. Gillmor, for example, describes the original reaction of certain peers to his weblog: "I think people inside [news companies] were kind of baffled by it. [They] didn't know what I was doing." However, over the years that followed their enactment as "a form of journalism" (Lasica, 2001a), news organizations gradually abandoned their original skepticism towards blogs and converted them into standard features of their online outlets (Blood, 2002a; Braun, 2010; Nielsen, 2012).[41] Several reasons explain this turn of events. Many organizations embraced the assumption that blogs could provide them with a means of "re-personalizing journalism," as journalist Doc Searls described it (from an interview in Lasica, 2001b). In particular, they argued, blogs provided "transparency" to the news creation and circulation processes. According to Lasica, blogs “offer[ed] an opportunity for newsrooms to become more transparent, more accessible, and more answerable to their readers” (Lasica, 2003, p. 72). More broadly, the “crisis” of the newspaper institution provided a context to this appropriation of blogs (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012b). News organizations sought to intervene in a context of “crisis” by adopting blogs as a means to personalize their voice.

As these organizations turned to blogs, various users decided to host their blogs on these organizations’ online platforms. According to these users, an attachment to established news organizations provided them with credibility, resources, and a sense of stability. Explaining why he decided to move one of his websites to the Poynter Institute, Romenesko contends, “[It] gave my site instant credibility because [it] is well thought of in the journalism community. They offered benefits that, if I were on my own, I would have to pay for myself. I’m entrepreneurial but I wasn’t ready to completely dedicate myself to going out there and risking everything. I like some security and [they] offered some security” (personal communication, August 4, 2009). Some users adopted the organization model of news groups to produce their sites.

The appropriation of blogs by political parties also illustrates how collective actors turned to blogging as a means to intervene in the public sphere. As Foot and Schneider (2006) show, users had appropriated blogs in the context of political campaigns already in the early 2000s. Yet, it was Howard Dean’s campaign for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination that turned blogs into a common feature of Web campaigning.[42] Joe Trippi, the campaign’s director, explains the rationale behind the use of the Internet: “[W]e could all see that our only hope for winning […] was to decentralize the campaign, ease control away from the candidate and his handlers in Vermont […] and let the momentum and the decision making come from people.

[…] I knew without looking what our only hope would be: the Internet" (Trippi, 2004, pp. 82, 139). Both Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúniga collaborated in the development of Dean's online campaign (Armstrong, 2007; Kreiss, 2012). Inspired by sites such as *MyDD* and *Howard Dean 2004*, the campaign launched a blog in March 2003. In addition to playing a crucial role in fund-raising efforts, the candidate's blog became a site for expressing endorsement and for the self-organization of supporters. The notion of bloggers as "a new breed of political observers" further established when a group of them received an invitation to be a part of the 2004 Democratic and Republican conventions. Jessamyn West, a librarian and early blogger who attended the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in July 2004, recalls the experience of participating in this event, "There was a lot of content generated from this event, which was kind of good news for the DNC, because it made them look kind of hip and plugged in. It was great news for every blogger, because we got press coverage like we were the new hot thing!" (personal communication, February 6, 2012). Like news organizations, political groups turned to blogs with the hope that these would "re-personalize" them and help them transform into "participatory" endeavors.

"Blogonomics": Making Income out of Blogging

Motivated by similar goals, various companies and groups appropriated blogs hoping that these sites could help them acquire a personal voice. In their view, blogs could help them reveal "not the [invisible] hand [of the market], but the *heart* and *soul* behind it" (D. Kline, 2005c, p. 123; emphasis added). In his *Corporate Weblog Manifesto*, Robert Scoble (2003), a blogger at Microsoft who turned into an iconic advocate of the use of blogs in corporations, wrote: "Blogging has begun to saturate businesses on three continents. […] It's the first technology to enable a simple conversation to go instantly global. It's the first to decentralize corporate communications, wresting it from those who historically controlled it" (Scoble & Israel, 2006, p. 5). In the spirit of *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (Levine, Locke, Searls, & Weinberger, 2000), commentators such as Scoble envisioned blogs as an imprint of human personality that could help to personalize faceless and voiceless corporations.

For several users and organizations, enacting blogs as an outlet for discussing news and politics required securing financial means. As the number of readers of certain blogs increased and these sites gained wider media attention, many users tried to capitalize on their blogging practices.[43] Thus, some invited readers to donate money to their sites. Andrew Sullivan, for example, created a section for donations on his website, named *Tipping Point*. In February 2005, Jason Kottke, a Web designer who had created a blog since the late 1990s, wrote: "I recently quit my web design gig and—as of today—will be working on kottke.org as my full-time job. And I need your help. I'm asking the regular readers of kottke.org (that's you!) to become micropatrons of kottke.org by contributing a moderate sum of money to help enable me to edit/write/design/code the site for one year on a full-time basis" (Kottke, 2005a). In this way, Kottke suggested, he could focus on "blogging for blogging's sake" without loosing his independence.

As noted in the previous chapter, early online diarists and blog users held liberal views of the self that emphasized the value of individualism and the capacity to express original ideas. As blogs were construed also as sources of revenue, users reimagined the blogosphere, the archetypical representation of the blog's public, through a neoliberal logic of market-based competition. In an essay written in 2001 titled, *Servers Need a Soul Too*, Henry Copeland, a journalist and consultant based in Hungary who assisted news organization in their transition from print to digital, suggested, “To compete in this ecosystem, a publication’s web site must feel like a human expression rather than a corporate excretion. Right now, too many sites feel like the latter” (Copeland, 2001). Applying this logic to the particular the case of blogs, Copeland argued for rethinking the blogger self as an “entrepreneur.” In 2002, he wrote, “[T]he blogosphere will enable hundreds of thousands of new idea entrepreneurs to carve out local, ideological or conceptual niches and make a living. […] Bloggers are idea entrepreneurs, living in a clickocracy, risking their time and passion on writing” (Copeland, 2002). For Copeland, the most defining characteristics of the blogger’s self—what Foucault (1984, 1990b) would have called their ethical substance—that is, their “passions,” “hearts,” and “souls,” also had economic value. As this market logic further informed blogging practices, the lines between self-performance and self-promotion blurred.[44]

Commenting on Andrew Sullivan’s *Tipping Point* venture, journalist Matt Welch referred to the articulation of blogs and economics as “blogonomics” (Welch, 2003). Copeland adopted Welch’s notion of blogonomics to conceptualize what he saw as a new type of economic behavior. For Copeland, “Blogonomics was a model of economic and informational collaboration through cross linking that creates ad hoc networks and communities and […] the empowerment of the little guy, whether the blogger to sell ads to big advertisers or the little advertiser, to buy great ads anywhere” (personal communication, July 9, 2012). To further implement blogonomics and help “the little guy” make a living from his time and passions, Copeland developed an advertising model named Blogads. He explains: “Even though the Internet bubble had burst in 2000, it seemed clear that time spent online was growing steadily and that eventually online advertising would come back strong. So I thought, why not take the best new model of online publishing—blogging—and create an ad unit that was uniquely crafted to fit its strengths?" According to Copeland, users originally did not meet these ideas with enthusiasm. Key in the development of this advertising model was its adoption by news organizations and political groups. Copeland recalls, "In December [2003] and January [2004], we suddenly had a $10,000 ad buy from the [John] Kerry campaign, and then a $10,000 ad buy from *The New Republic*. […] That got a lot of advertisers on board fast. And a new wave of bloggers joined" (personal communication, July 9, 2012). As the use of advertising stabilized, corporations and communication agencies also began contacting users directly to convince them to write about specific products through sponsored posts.

Building on the notion of the blogger-as-entrepreneur and the stabilization of advertising as a model to generate revenues online, some entrepreneurs established companies devoted to building groups or networks of blogs. These networks functioned by exploiting the content and technological characteristics of blogs to obtain profits. Creators of these sites hired numerous bloggers-as-entrepreneurs to develop specific types of content (such as news about technology and celebrities). Furthermore, they deployed several strategies to gain visibility in search engine algorithms. In this way, these companies made important revenues from online advertising. Through this process, the blogosphere was redefined as a market of attention. Nick Denton, creator of Gawker Media, the parent company of the *Gawker* website—described as "a live review of city news [and] urban dating rituals, no-ropes social climbing, Condé Nastiness, downwardly-mobile i-bankers, real estate porn" (Gawker, 2003)—argued: "Our focus [is] building up our audience among eighteen-to thirty-four-years-olds so we can deliver a critical mass of them through one of our sites or a collection of our sites to big media buyers" (Denton, 2005, p. 154). Similarly, Jason Calacanis (2005, pp. 159-160), who co-created the Weblogs, Inc. network in the Fall of 2003, noted that his "focus [was] on "micro-niche blogs" and redefined the blog as "a tiny business" based on advertising.

Key in the reconceptualization of blogging relations as market partnerships was the development of mechanisms for determining their economic value, such as indexes, classifications, and rankings. Early in the history of these sites, developers had worked on systems that could help them detect constant content updates.[45] Building on these efforts, in November 2002 software developer David Sifry launched a set of services to track linking patterns between blogs, named Technorati. These services, Sifry announced on his website, were "layered on top of the wealth of current search functionality and tools available for bloggers" (Sifry, 2002). In addition to these services, Technorati included a "Top 100" ranking that classified blogs "by [the] number of blogs who link to the site" (Technorati, 2002). These rankings helped to turn relations and community dynamics between blogs into a market whose structure was measured primarily in terms of hyperlinks. They treated blogs as commodities whose potential in the market of attention varied according to their place on a ranking (cf. Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Sauder & Espeland, 2009). In 2004, Technorati released the first of a series of reports on "the state of the blogosphere." Consistent with the process discussed in this chapter, the first report analyzed the expanding "size of the blogosphere," the relationship between blogs and "Big Media," and the significance of "corporate bloggers" (Sifry, 2004).

Symbiosis and Synopsis: Blogging as a Model

The creation of *The Huffington Post* in 2005 illustrates how the process of the transformation of blogs from personal to collective, described thus far, crystallized in new projects. The website, its creators argued, emerged as a reaction to the political events of 2004, particularly George W. Bush's reelection (Huffington et al., 2008). These events motivated Arianna Huffington, a syndicated columnist, and Kenny Lerer, a former AOL executive, to discuss the possibilities to develop a site that "incorporated aggregated news and the powerful force of blogging" (Huffington et al., 2008, p. 116). They invited screenwriter Roy Sekoff, marketing specialist Jonah Peretti, and website developer Andrew Breitbart to join the project. During the following months, the group developed a conceptual and technological model to build what they hoped would be the first "big-name group blog" (Huffington et al., 2008, p. 117). Huffington approached a group of celebrities and ask them to turn into bloggers and thus collaborate with content on the site. *The Huffington Post* finally launched in the Spring 2005.

Like many actors described in this chapter, the creators of this project construed the impact of blogging as the possibility to bring about political change and set the news agenda. *The Huffington Post's Complete Guide to Blogging*, for example, defined the website as a "hybrid of old-style news and blogging […] a symbiosis" (Huffington et al., 2008, pp. 151, 154). The editors of the websites argued that this symbiosis had a revolutionary potential for American politics. In their words, "Blogging has been the greatest breakthrough in popular journalism since Tom Paine—and the blogosphere is the most vital news source in our country […] [It] is revolutionizing American democracy" (Huffington et al., 2008, pp. 8, 111).

Various users met the process described in this chapter with skepticism and resistance. Some of them reacted against the transformation of the blog into a new kind of news outlet and commodity. A post called *The Huffington Post is Not a Blog*, written by Jorn Barger, the programmer who originally coined the term "weblog" in 1997, nicely captures some of the arguments put forth by users for whom blogs had lost some of their original edge. Barger (2005) wrote: "[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." Barger went on to criticize the notions of "niche blog" and "blog aggregators" illustrated by blog networks and sites like *The Huffington Post* because, in his view, they fragmented the most defining trait of blogs: voice. Wrote Barger (2005), "*The Huffington Post* […] has become almost unreadable because it aggregates 100 different windbags with no common voice." Others criticized the blurring of the distinctions between self-performance and self-promotion that characterized this transformation of blogs. By enacting blogs as a means to generate revenue, they argued, bloggers had sacrificed what made these sites an ideal technology of subjectivity and thus turned themselves into mercenaries of voice. (The next chapter will consider some of the implications that this dissatisfaction had in the development of blogging.)

These concerns notwithstanding, by the mid-2000s decade blogging had come to be seen as a means to transform politics and cultural production in the United States. Early user Tom Coates' words capture the enthusiasm that surrounded the wider diffusion of blogs in public culture: "There are celebrity webloggers, expert webloggers, political dissident webloggers, prison webloggers… Weblogs are becoming 'Enterprise Solutions,' they're creating empires of 'Nano-publishing.' Across the world, faster and more randomly than anyone has yet been able to track and collate, webloggers are linking, posting, trackbacking, commenting, [and] aggregating […] their way through the first days of the 21st Century” (Coates, 2003). According to many practitioners and commentators, blogging had proved its value in a variety of social, political, economic, and cultural fields. In short, they suggested, blogging had matured. “Weblogs are growing up,” wrote journalist Dan Gillmor in the spring of 2004, “They’re infiltrating a variety of spheres from personal to corporate [and they are used] for social and political change” (Gillmor, 2004a). The “Web 2.0” (O'Reilly, 2005a, 2005b), as an embodiment of hopes for a new era in online communication, thus found one of its most defining icons.

For Gillmor, another proof of the blog’s maturation was its international uptake. In an essay titled, *Blogosphere Maturing*, he wrote, “Blogs will be a key tool in spreading free speech around the world […] The global conversation is growing” (Gillmor, 2004a). As the next section shows, these notions acquired a particular expression in France. Blogging as an attempt to shape the public sphere also had a “French touch.”

The French Republic of Blogs

By the mid-2000s decade, blogs came to be re-imagined as a means to intervene in the public sphere in France. Like in the United States, the process of the blogs’ transformation in France needs to be situated within the context of specific sociocultural and political moments, and particular technological conditions.

The Context for Blogging: New Grounds for New Appropriations

After their early appropriation at the turn of the twenty-first century, blogs caught the attention of more software developers in France. In addition to pioneering French software programs (Joueb.com, b2, and Skyblog) and applications developed in the US (Greymatter, Movable Type, and WordPress), a variety of new programs became available in France in the first years of the new millennium: Meta-Blog (2002, renamed U-Blog in March 2003), Dotclear (2002-2003), CanalBlog (2003), HautEtFort (2003), OverBlog (2004), BlogSpirit (2004), and ViaBloga (developed by Stéphane Gigandet, the creator of Joueb.com, in 2004). As Valdrighi gradually abandoned the b2 project (see endnote 36), developers worked on new forks, such as b2++, b2evolution, and WordPress. The developers of these programs shared a common motivation: allow users to give an account of their lives. For Frédéric Montagnon, a co-developer of the OverBlog software, his software was intended "to create a simple platform to publish information and share passions. That's OverBlog's DNA" (personal communication, September 27, 2011). For Olivier Meunier, creator of Dotclear, the software's slogan, "Take control of your blog," encapsulated the range of possibilities made possible by this new wave of tools: it invited users to "get outside hosting platforms, host your blog yourself; it's your data, it's your blog" (personal communication, March 29, 2012).

Most of these programs enabled users to utilize features that had standardized in the United States (such as the reverse chronological order, blogrolls, and comment systems). They also allowed users to appropriate tools with features in French. For many users, the availability of such tools made a great difference for their blogging practices. Referring to the case of U-Blog, early user Stephanie Booth wrote, "Setting aside any primal xenophobia or anti-americanism [sic], a great product designed in your language by a fellow countryman is not the same thing as another great product translated and adapted from English. […] And let's face it, one does like to support a local product" (Booth, 2004). In this view, local blogging software provided the means for enacting blogs *à la Française*.

Not only did blogs catch the attention of many software developers but they also attracted an entrepreneur who played an important role in the development of blogs in France: Loïc Le Meur. A graduate from the École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC Paris), France's prime business school, Le Meur had developed several Web-related projects since the mid-1990s, such as an agency, a hosting service, and a content management tool. The "passion for blogging," Le Meur asserted, was "transmitted to him" by entrepreneur Joi Ito at the World Economic Forum in 2002 (Le Meur, 2003). This experience placed blogs at the center of his attention and entrepreneurial efforts. In October 2003, Le Meur bought Stephane Le Solliec's U-Blog software, which had become a popular option among blog users in France. As U-Blog's new CEO, Le Meur started a campaign to spread the use of blogs and U-Blog in the country. Over the next months, he became arguably France's most notorious and outspoken blog advocate. In 2005, a news outlet referred to him as "the neuralgic center of the French blogosphere" (L. Dupin, 2005). Authors of a technical manual described him instead as "the pope of blogs" (Borderie, Chouquet, & Balmer, 2010, p. 14). Other interviewees for this study preferred the terms "a media beast," "the caricature of the careerist," or "a capitalist demon."[46]

In July 2004, Le Meur sold U-Blog to Six Apart, the company behind software programs such as Movable Type and TypePad, and became the executive vice president and general manager of the company's subsidiary in Europe. With the slogan, "Blogs are conversations," Le Meur promoted intensely the use of Six Apart's software in various fields in France, most notably journalism, politics, and the corporate world (Le Meur & Beauvais, 2005). In their study of the invention of the analog synthesizer, Pinch and Trocco (2002) showed the centrality of practices devised by salespeople to sell technologies and recruit new users. In this way, these authors show, intermediaries between the worlds of production and consumption can build entire markets from a series of practices and strategies. By relentlessly promoting the use of blogs, Le Meur played a similar role in the construction of a market for blogging software in France (most notably TypePad).

Together, the availability of software to blog in French and the rise of an entrepreneur willing to build a market for some of these tools created fertile grounds for transforming the identities of blogs and bloggers in mid- to late 2000s France. Combined with specific cultural and political moments in the life of the country (which I describe later), this singular conjuncture helped blogs occupy an extraordinary place in France's public culture.

The Voices of French Citizens

Throughout 2003 and 2004, users turned to blogs as a means for political expression and commentary on public affairs in France. Adopting some of the tools recently developed in France, users re-enacted blogs by conceiving themselves primarily as citizens (Vanbremeersch, 2005). Like in the United States, the notion of citizenship tied their blog appropriation practices to efforts to shape the public sphere. Voice, in this sense, referred to the possibility to give an account of oneself as a political subject. Says Nordine Nabili, the editor of *BondyBlog*,[47] a site about public life in the Parisian suburbs, "[Blogs] didn't invent democracy or citizen expression. It was the other way around. Citizen expression, the will to say things, already existed. And it appropriated blogs. It was a will to give voice to people who didn't have one. This is the real ideology of the agora, where everybody can speak and all citizens are equal" (personal communication, February 16, 2012).

Many of these particular users were highly educated, knowledgeable about Internet and technology developments, and had experience in journalism or political activism. For the most part, they were white men with professional careers, located primarily in Paris. In March 2003, for example, Nicolas Vanbremeersch, another HEC Paris graduate who in the 1990s had developed an online portal for parenting, launched a blog named *Versac* with the subtitle, *Attempts of Reflection* (*Tentatives de Réflexion*). Vanbremeersch discovered blogs as he searched for news about the 9/11 events (Vanbremeersch, 2009). As the subtitle of his website suggested, he devoted his site to what he called "diverse reflections on the news." Originally created with the Blogger software program, Vanbremeersch switched to U-Blog in March 2004. Three reasons accounted for his decision: the desire to "participate in a French blogging solution," "the lack of a French speaking community of bloggers [on Blogger]," and "features that seem[ed] to be more interesting on U-Blog than on Blogger" (Vanbremeersch, 2004b). (He switched to Le Meur's TypePad later in 2004). He defined blogs as "spaces for personal expression that allow comments, that thus are open, free, and without much defense. To be on the Internet like this is a sort of risk" (Vanbremeersch, 2004a). In the year following the creation of his site, Vanbremeersch discussed the proposals of candidates to the regional elections and the results of these elections; several articles and programs in French news outlets, such as *France Culture* and *Le Monde*; the French obsession with the American primaries; the war in Iraq; the terrorist attacks in Spain; and content he had found in other blogs, among other themes. He also wrote various meta-comments on blogs and their uptake in France.

Another example of a blog devoted to public affairs was Christophe Grébert's *Mon Puteaux* (*My Puteaux*). Grébert, a professional journalist, discovered blogs by 2002 when he visited French Canadian websites. He first designed a site that reproduced some of the blogs' most defining features by coding it with HTML. Convinced by Le Meur, he then switched to TypePad because it was "more practical" and "more aesthetical" to use a tool with features in French (personal communication, September 14, 2011). Grébert appropriated his site to talk about public life in Puteaux, a commune located in the western suburbs of Paris. Inspired by a blog in Québec that discussed issues related to the commune of Sainte-Adèle, Grébert construed his site as "a local newspaper" that could fill the lack of news about Puteaux in the mainstream media. He elaborates, "I wrote things journalistically, that is, fact-based texts that separated the fact from the commentary. The goal, from the beginning, was to allow Puteaux's habitants to have access to local information." *Mon Puteaux* soon turned into a controversial, political project. Grébert used his website to react against what he considered were threats to the democratic process by the town's city hall. The result, in Grébert's words, was "a war against my website." By "war," Grébert refers to attempts to close his site and lawsuits for defamation. When forbidden to assist to town meetings, Grébert turned once again to his site to narrate his experiences. As the mainstream media became interested in his experience, Grébert became an icon of what users and the media considered a new form of intervening in collective life: blogging.

Some existing websites devoted to the discussion of public affairs also adopted the blog format. In 2000, Stanislas Magniant, a Paris Institute of Political Science (Sciences Po) graduate who previously worked for an Internet agency on political and advocacy issues in Washington D.C., co-created a newsletter that turned into a website over the following year: *Netpolitique*. According to Magniant, the site sought to "archive, to look for news, to share new trends, new phenomena, new ways of doing political communication" (personal communication, December 12, 2011). As blogs began to popularize and new software programs became available, *Netpolitique*'s creators adopted French software program, Dotclear, to produce the site.[48]

French Organizations Begin to Blog

Like in the United States, what started as citizen efforts to share their voices quickly turned into projects carried out by several organizations. The Howard Dean campaign did not go unnoticed in France. Inspired by Dean's efforts, many commentators and bloggers, such as *Netpolitique*'s writers, suggested that blogs could provide much needed "personalization," "humanization" and "bonding" to various political groups (Netpolitique, 2003). French politicians also turned to blogs as a new element in their campaign strategies. Some of these politicians, such as Jean-François Copé, Alain Rousset, and André Santini, created their sites in the context of the 2004 regional elections in France. Others, such as former Minister of Economics and Member of Parliament, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who launched his website in February 2004, had the upcoming presidential election in sight. Advised by Loïc Le Meur, the team behind this blog also turned to TypePad to produce it. Strauss-Kahn's reflections about his website largely echoed a common conception of blogs—largely put forth in the United States—as an alternative to the mainstream media and a means to interact with voters. In an interview with *Netpolitique*, he stated: "The advantage of my blog is that people can talk to me directly. This creates a big difference compared to traditional media, which are not really interactive. […] I can also test some ideas on my blog, so that I can fine-tune them and make political propositions. […] I hope to establish a long-term, trust relationship with my readers, beyond the immediate electoral issues" (Netpolitique, 2004). Despite the promises, members of his staff and collaborators wrote most posts on Strauss-Kahn's site. Bousquet (2011) notes that, as the 2007 election campaign approached, posts on the blog revolved around news and events, accounts of Strauss-Kahn's trips, speeches, and issues related to the campaign. A relatively small but loyal base of readers contributed to the site and used it to discuss among them.

Users such as Grébert and Strauss-Kahn quickly situated themselves "at the center of the socialist nebula on the Internet" (Bousquet, 2011, p. 239). A similar process unfolded at the other end of the political continuum. In September 2004, former Prime Minister Alain Juppé created a site called *Le Blog-Notes d'Alain Juppé*. Like Strauss-Kahn, Juppé tied blogs to the possibility of establishing a real dialogue with citizens. He described the purpose of his blog as follows: "Beyond the contact I want to keep with the Frenchmen, I have two ideas in mind by commenting the news: to track all forms of conservatism that paralyze French society. […] [Second]: Show all the advantages that France has. […] To this end, your witnessing, experiences, propositions are obviously essential" (Juppé, 2004). In the following months, other politicians either created new blogs or turned their personal sites into blogs.[49]

If the mainstream media had hitherto presented blogs as a site for ordinary people to share their "vision of the world, interests or expertise" (Courrier, 2002), by 2004 they privileged a focus on blogs as "the logs of i-politicians," in *Libération*'s Florent Latrive (2004) words. For a writer in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, "Reserved for pioneers yesterday, [the blog] invades the Net today. Even Copé and Strauss-Kahn are into it. […] What's the point?" "None," the author replied. "In a blog, you tell your life, what goes through your head… Emptiness, say the pessimists. Except that blogs have become the madness of the moment" (Telfizian, 2004).

In addition to an interest on blogs as a topic of news, in 2004 some news organizations in France enacted these sites as journalistic outlets in themselves. Foreign correspondents who had witnessed the enthusiasm triggered by blogs in the United States played a key role in this process. For example, Corine Lesnes, who worked as *Le Monde*'s correspondent in New York, describes the events that led to the production of her blog for the newspaper: "I discovered blogs thanks to Howard Dean. I was in New York, covering UN [United Nations] and American society. I saw Dean in August 2003 in New York, almost by chance, in a rally in Bryant Park, and I felt he electrified the youth. […] Over the fall, I stopped by the newspaper in Paris and met with one of the creators of the website [Jean-François Fogel]. […] I told him that I would enjoy working on a blog. And they were working to release some blogs in the fall" (personal communication, April 19, 2012). Lesnes' blog on the presidential campaign in the United States was one of four blogs launched by *Le Monde* in October 2004.

In January 2005, *Le Monde* opened the blog platform to its subscribers (Salles, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Journalist Damien Leloup, who joined the newspaper's blog project shortly after its launch, explains the rationale behind this decision: "There was a will to open the newsroom to the readers… and [blogs] were also fashionable. I think management didn't want to miss on something that seemed like a major evolution" (personal communication, January 19, 2012). Correspondents also played a crucial role in the development of *Libération*'s blog platform. A blog about the race to the White House, created by a journalist in Washington named Pascal Riché; Pierre Haski's blog about China, where he was located at the time; and a site about the political life of the United States co-written by Riché and Fabrice Rousselot, reporter in New

York, were among the first blogs hosted in *Libération*'*s* platform (also known as *Libéblogs*), which was launched in October 2004.

In addition to key citizens and politicians, news organizations were a primary target of Le Meur's campaign to spread the use of Six Apart's software in France. Both *Le Monde* and *Libération*, the first news outlets to create blog platforms in France, turned to TypePad as their infrastructure of choice. As an early user, Laurent Gloaguen puts it, "[Le Meur became] the press officer of the phenomenon by dangling the ongoing revolution in the eyes of journalists" (personal communication, November 23, 2011). The central slogan of Le Meur's campaign, "Blogs are conversations," captured some of the main motivations espoused by journalists who created the first blogs of these organizations. For Laurent Mauriac, former director of *Libération*'s *Cahiers Multimédia* and correspondent in New York, "It was a journalistic desire to do things a little bit differently, to have parallel activities to the classic activities of journalists. I used [the blog] as a tool to collect witnessing experiences or to nourish my journalistic activity" (personal communication, March 22, 2012).

The adoption of blogs by news organizations was not devoid of tension.[50] Some journalists suggested that colleagues often misunderstood the nature of their blogging practices. A journalist at *Libération* recalled, "I remember that my editor in chief once said to me, '[Your blog] is a thing for your ego.' He saw no journalistic interest whatsoever." In some cases, these tensions translated into more explicit controversies. According to Christophe Barbier, editor of news weekly, *L'Express*, "There was a big debate in the newsroom. There were the anti-blog people; in general, the most experienced journalists, who said, 'A blog is not possible. We don't know who is speaking: is it the journalist or the private individual? We don't know what is the blog's nature: is it a news article or a diary? Therefore, the [newspaper] cannot be associated with a blog.' On the other hand, there were others who held the opposite discourse, who said, 'Be careful, journalism is being questioned […] Let's colonize the blog with a journalistic spirit'" (personal communication, January 10, 2012).

As Barbier's comment reveals, the discussions about the place of blogs in news organizations were surrounded by a wider critique of journalism in French society. For critics, novel journalistic outlets, such as blogs, vividly revealed the shortcomings of the newspaper and the media as institutions. Writers suggested that tools traditionally reserved for professional journalists were now available to ordinary citizens (Ané, 2005; Nunès, 2005). As a result, they contended, amateurs were leading the way to a new age in journalism. The singular relationship between the mainstream media and blog users remained a key in the development of the identities of these websites and their users in France over the next years.

A New Context for Blogging: The Days of Glory of the "Political Blog" in France

Two specific events helped to cement the identity of the blog as a means to share voice in France: the 2005 referendum on the European Constitution and the 2007 presidential election. These events shaped the context in which blogs enjoyed their most notorious *jours de gloire* in France. *Netpolitique*'s Stanislas Magniant aptly described this period as "the perfect storm" (personal communication, December 12, 2011). In a similar manner, Benoît Thieulin, director of the Internet campaign of socialist presidential candidate, Ségolène Royal, in 2007, referred to it as the "golden age of the blogosphere" (personal communication, October 19, 2011).

The discussions surrounding the 2005 European Constitution referendum were central in further establishing the identity of blogs as a means of political expression in France. In the months prior to the referendum, the European Commission implemented an information campaign about the Constitution that Laroche-Joubert describes as "a global communication strategy devoted mainly to launching a dialogue designed to convince" (2007, p. 134). Despite some resistance led by former Primer Minister Laurent Fabius, even the opposition Socialist Party voted to support the Constitution's approval in an internal meeting held by members in December 2004. The campaign for the European Constitution unfolded in what many considered a clear bias for the "yes" in the mainstream media (Abélès, 2011). In this context, citizens who argued for the "no" turned to the Internet to express their views. Primarily situated on the left of the political spectrum, those who argued against the Constitution significantly outnumbered those in favor of the Treaty on the Internet (Fouetillou, 2007; Maarek, 2007).

The most notorious citizen voice against the Constitution was Etienne Chouard, who envisioned his website as an attempt to fill an information void created by the media. "The 'no'", he recalls, "had been discredited by the media, which belongs to banks and industrial groups" (personal communication, August 3, 2012). In response, Chouard recalls, "I summarized five points that were very problematic [about the Constitution]. Any one of them alone would have been enough to say 'no' without hesitation. I found five strong ones." Arguably no other website or text gained as much attention as Etienne Chouard's essay against the Constitution, a proposal he liked to describe as an "anti-constitution used to empty constitutions from the little power they contained." In his own estimation, during the website's peak of activity he received 12,000 emails and an average of 30,000 individuals visited his site daily. Chouard's case was good copy. Several news outlets in France and other countries recounted his story. These accounts marveled at his success and emphasized the ordinariness of Chouard's political background. In this way, Chouard, a self-defined high-school teacher “without political structure,” became an icon of a new type of actor that could shape the public sphere outside of traditional power institutions.[51]

When the French rejected the European Constitution on May 31, 2005, both bloggers and commentators considered it a clear sign of the democratic potential of the Internet. They attributed this result to the quixotic efforts of ordinary but committed citizens such as Etienne Chouard and to the grassroots campaign that sprung on the Internet.[52] The debates about the 2005 referendum were crucial in hailing blogs as key outlets for political discussion in France. For many bloggers and analysts, the result of the referendum signaled a new page in the history of political communication on the Web. According to these users, Howard Dean’s campaign had shown the way but had ultimately failed to reach the goal. In contrast, French blogs had proven that citizens on the Internet could alter the outcome of a voting process. In Benoît Thieulin’s words, “Howard Dean lost. But the “no” to the European Constitution won” (personal communication, October 19, 2011). In this view, a new page of political communication on the Internet had been written in French.

Throughout 2005 and 2006, more users created blogs to discuss public affair issues. Unlike users who enacted the blog as a form of online diary, a place to write about their passions, or a self-reflection outlet, these users privileged accounts of what Versac called “our *living together*” (Vanbremeersch, 2005, emphasis in original). Key in the establishment of the identity of the “political blog” in France was the performance of the blogger, or the *blogueur*, as a singular form of selfhood. The French *blogueur* was tied to the notions of citizenship and expertise. In his *Sociology of Political Blogs*, a series of posts where he analyzed the state of blogs devoted to public affairs in France and that helped him reach certain notoriety among users and commentators, Versac celebrated the arrival of blogs created by "competent people" who "shed light on social issues," among whom he distinguished "economists," "law actors," "some actors in the humanities," and "some specialists" in fields such as environment, education, geopolitics, and health (Vanbremeersch, 2005). Versac thus tied the notion of expertise to academic and professional training in a specific field. For his part, Chouard reacted against criticisms that his website was not a blog (but rather a simple website) because he didn't use blogging software to create it by suggesting that he shared the *blogueur* ethos: "A political *blogueur* means an active and free citizen. '*Blogueur*' doesn't mean, 'He who uses the blog technique.' It means, 'He who interacts with anybody on the Internet, who takes the risk to expose his voice to public criticism on the Internet'" (personal communication, August 3, 2012). In this view, it was his condition of citizenship and his willingness to make his opinions public what entitled Chouard to call himself a *blogueur*.

To perform this identity, users situated the "professional journalist" and the mainstream media within the "constitutive outside" of the *blogueur* (Butler, 1993, p. 3). In other words, for "bloggers," the "professional journalist" was the Other. Pô and Vanbremeersch (2007) summarize some ideas associated with this view: "The figure of the blogger combines positive traits: youth (as opposed to the usury that hits the 'professionals') […], freedom (as opposed to the tangle of political constraints that impede the action of the media); selflessness (as opposed to the 'tyranny of shareholders' exerted on private groups)" (p. 153). Underlying these conceptions was the assumption that the *blogueur* was everything that the journalist, with her constraining ties to media organizations, was not and could not be. The *blogueur*, they argued, was young but knowledgeable; "he" was a unique individual with a specific ability to comment on contemporary social and political life.

Furthermore, users tied the notion of the *blogueur* to aspects and traits of the self that they considered as intrinsically and historically French. For example, Grébert explained the success of blogs in France: "Maybe the French are individualistic, and maybe they liked blogs because it's where you speak in the first person, where you talk about yourself. The French love to talk a lot, love to polemicize; political debate is very developed in France" (personal communication, September 14, 2011). Luc Mandret, a user who created a site in 2005 to support the Socialist Party but who gradually shifted to the political center, put it more bluntly, "[Blogs succeeded because] the French are full of themselves! (*ont une grosse tête*!) (personal communication, September 28, 2011). In his view, the *blogueur* identity provided an ideal point of attachment to two typically French qualities: "pride" and "insolence." Accordingly, the duty of the *blogueur* was to extend these traits through his online practices.

Singular communication dynamics were established between *blogueurs* (acting as citizen-experts), journalists, and politicians. To characterize the set of interactions between these user groups, users turned to the notion of the "blogosphere" (*la blogosphère*). Technology played a central role in the constitution of this view of publicness. For Pô and Vanbremeersch (2007, p. 149), the blogosphere represented "a giant network of interconnected individual words" with its own set of rules, actors, and technological tools. These tools included trackbacks, comments, RSS, and hyperlinks. Together, user argued, these tools made possible to sustain public debates with important implications for the development of democracy. According to Magniant, "The RSS reader was the first destination of any respected *blogueur*. Then, there were stats. [But] the trackback was the best of the best. It mean[t] that someone ha[d] responded to my post to the extent that he decided to make another post. And it create[d] strong links between blogs. It was really an exchange device […] social currency" (personal communication, December 12, 2011). For these users, the main product of this combination of technological features was a renewed capacity to set the media's agenda and "the potential to bring out issues, to focus the debate on one issue or another, to provide new information" (Vanbremeersch, 2005). The sense of belonging to a new class of political actors soon translated into efforts to meet offline. In 2006, users launched a monthly meeting of *blogueurs* named The Republic of Blogs (*La République des Blogs*).[53]

The product of these interaction dynamics between users and news organizations was what *Netpolitique*'s Stanislas Magniant defines as "a mirror effect" (personal communication, December 12, 2011). On the one hand, the media expressed a fascination with bloggers. The *blogueur* thus gained significant visibility in the mid-2000s decade in France. In January 2006, for example, Nicolas Sarkozy, at the time Minister of the Interior, asked a group of bloggers to join his meeting with the press in January 2006. *Netpolitique*'s (2006) writers wondered: "[Is this] a historical moment? […] To invite bloggers to a ceremony ordinarily devoted to the press is, either [a] very good communications [campaign], provoc[ation], or both, to really make some buzz and, evidently, it works."[54] The fervor that blogging had generated in France was not lost on the international press. In a 2006 article in *The New York Times* titled, *France's Mysterious Embrace of Blogs*, the writer stated: "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).

On the other hand, users envisioned their websites as a means to decode public affairs in ways that the mainstream media could not. They defined the identity of their sites partly in relation to traditional journalistic practices. Users argued that, for various reasons, blogs were better outlets to accomplish this decoding function. They suggested that blogs were not constrained by self-censorship or the influence of shareholders but provided instead a place for the voice of citizens, a vital function for democracy, by sharing underrepresented themes and perspectives. Many users devoted significant attention to comments from readers and often participated in the discussions generated on blogs. Furthermore, as noted above, users argued that the technological infrastructure of blogs afforded another important means to further democratic discussions: it enabled hyperlinked conversations.

In addition to the 2005 referendum, the second major political moment that shaped the identity of blogs and bloggers in France was the 2007 presidential election. Blogs were variously involved in this election. Loïc Le Meur helped develop the Union for a Popular Movement's (UMP) blog initiative, first as a consultant and later as the coordinator of strategies to enable debates on the Internet.[55] Le Meur's strategy was twofold: to convince UMP members and politicians to create a blog, and to persuade established *blogueurs* to endorse Sarkozy and his commitment to neoliberal ideals. By the end of 2006, UMP members received an instructive video that explained to them how to open a blog using Le Meur's blogging software, TypePad. In addition, the campaign invited one hundred and fifty bloggers (associated with various political parties) to attend Sarkozy's *congrès d'investiture* in January 2007. Later in the year, the party's campaign bloggers began to meet every Tuesday night with a political leader from UMP. During these meetings, the campaign's directors instructed bloggers to use certain labels to create "buzz" and thus climb on Technorati's rankings (Bargel & Petitfils, 2011).

Despite his initial involvement in the campaign, Le Meur's view about the role of blogs in politics clashed with UMP's approach to the Internet. Whereas Le Meur argued for a central role for blogs, others within UMP promoted instead a more classic approach to campaigning that privileged meetings and rallies (Maarek & Wahnich, 2009). As a result of these differences, Bargel and Petifils (2011) contend, Le Meur gradually diminished his involvement in the campaign after February 2007. Up to 1,800 blogs were listed as part of UMP's initiative, although most were updated very infrequently. These blogs largely reproduced articles about Sarkozy that were available on international websites, and extracts from his speeches and content available on the candidate's main website.

In contrast to Sarkozy's campaign, the socialist presidential candidate, Ségolène Royal, espoused a radically different view of the Internet.[56] Scholars have attributed part of her political success to the use of the Internet and her notion of "participatory democracy." Illustrated by slogans such as "France for President" (*La France Présidente*), Royal promoted participatory democracy as a solution to the crisis of representation in France. In this approach, the Internet functioned as a means to transform citizens into active participants in the democratic process and to bring politicians and voters closer. Moreover, focusing on the Internet allowed Royal to partially distance herself from the media, which, as noted above, is commonly associated in France with the political elite rather than the interests of ordinary citizens (Dessinges, 2009).[57]

In mid-January 2006, Royal's campaign launched the website, *Désirs d'Avenir* (*Hopes for the Future*), to promote her candidacy and to operationalize the notion of participatory democracy. Unlike Sarkozy's strategy, which focused primarily on the candidate's figure and brand, Royal emphasized user contributions. According to Benoît Thieulin, who conceived and led the implementation of the website, *Désirs d'Avenir* drew both on the lessons of Howard Dean's campaign and the 2005 referendum in France. In Thieulin's words, "[Royal] had the intuition that the referendum had shown that the French wanted to debate and that the Internet had become an essential space to organize public debate. [Accordingly] we tried to have an open program that people could co-construct with her. We thus created a website that was a sort of huge collaborative forum where people could exchange" (personal communication, October 19, 2011). The key component of the website were forums that allowed users to post, comment, and interact with the candidate. By April 2006, the site registered 135,000 contributions (Dessinges, 2009). As the use of these forums stabilized, Royal's campaign exploited the enthusiasm around blogs and promoted the constitution of a support network (known as the "*Ségosphère*") formed by existing sites and new local blogs. The goal of this initiative was to help Royal's political message (in the form of campaign materials) find resonance on the Internet. By October 2006, 141 blogs representing 244 local committees (out of 612) had created a blog (Beauvallet, 2007).

Despite the emphasis on participatory democratic ideals, the campaign failed to meet some expectations. A book that was supposed to articulate the ideas put forth by citizens on the website was never published and was replaced instead by *Les Cahiers d'Espérance*, a disparate summary of these contributions. Royal's government plan presented in her *congrès d'investiture* bared little relation to user contributions on her website's forums. In this sense, Bousquet (2011) suggests, efforts to become a solution to the problems of representation through the Internet largely failed and reflected instead existing problems within the Socialist Party. The biggest disappointment for believers in the potential of Royal's participatory democracy came in May 2007, when Nicolas Sarkozy was elected France's twenty-third president.

The "perfect storm" between the 2005 referendum and the 2007 presidential campaign left most bloggers and commentators with the conviction that a new era of democratic communication had been reached in France. According to Pô and Vanbremeersch (2007), "Just like the 2004 campaign in the United States, the 2007 campaign in France signal[ed] the rise and structuration of [a] new political space" (p. 155). Web analyst Guilhem Fouetillou captured the enthusiasm that surrounded the place of blogs in this "new political space" when he defined France as "a country of *blogueurs*" (L'Expansion, 2007).

"Blogs for the Pros": Blogging for Income in France

Another dynamic involved in the transformation of blogging from personal to collective in France (and the third component of Le Meur's campaign) was the use of blogs to generate revenues. Le Meur's (2005) book, *Blogs pour les Pros* (*Blogs for the Pros*), illustrates his main arguments to convince the corporate world in France to adopt blogs. He promoted blogs as a means to "get closer to clients" (p. 127) and potentially make "more than $100,000 every year" (p. 178). Blogs, Le Meur argued, offered mutual advantages for both corporations and users: they provided corporations with a personal voice and provided clients with a window into the inner workings of corporations. "Blogs are a synonym of transparence," wrote Le Meur (2005, p. 71). His book was full of success stories, examples of companies in France and other countries (primarily the United States) that had reached new financial and communication goals by using blogs. To further promote the development of these sites in the corporate world, in 2004 Le Meur organized Les Blogs, "an international conference about blogs, in Paris" (2005, p. 108). (Le Meur renamed the conference LeWeb in 2006.)

After Le Meur's early efforts, this conception of blogs-as-commodities further developed through two particular dynamics. First was the creation of websites that sought to generate revenues by aggregating the content of blogs. For instance, entrepreneurs and former IBM collaborators, Laurent Binard and Pierre Chappaz, launched an aggregator named Wikio in 2006. Wikio aggregated news found on news sites and blogs. Revenues came from advertising, including Google AdSense, and a price comparator available on the website. According to Rebillard and Smyrnaios (2010), Wikio turned to the content produced by blogs when early agreements reached with traditional content providers, such as news organizations, soured.[58] In a similar manner, entrepreneur Nicolas Verdier founded a content aggregator named Paperblog in 2007. As opposed to Wikio, which reproduced only the title and first sentences of blog posts, Paperblog replicated the content of selected posts on French blogs in its entirety.

Second, by 2006 and 2007 several commercial regimes developed to enable users to make income from their blogging practices. Underlying the rise of these regimes was a change in perception about the economic value of *blogueurs*. Cyril Rimbaud, founder of an online communications consultancy start-up, explains, "What was interesting was the realization that small actors could make money. […] Brands were trying to buy traffic with banners and keywords, investing a fortune, whereas little *blogueurs* were achieving this simply by posting pictures on their blogs" (personal communication, August 8, 2012). Early strategies centered on organizing events for bloggers where they could learn about products and services in their domains of interest. In these events, users could test products before these were released. In exchange, bloggers were asked to write posts about these products on their websites.

During this period, various communication agencies also emerged in France that specialized in relationships between advertisers and bloggers. Frédéric Farrugia, founder of one such agency, explains, "In the beginning, we were bloggers ourselves. We believed that Internet users could influence other users. That's where the name of our agency came from: YouToYou. A blogger can potentially speak to many people during a day. People will listen to him [sic] because he has expertise in a given field and because he is independent" (personal communication, February 10, 2012). In a similar manner, eBuzzing, an agency founded in 2007, promised bloggers "the money, the glory, and the happiness […] by using your talent and your creativity. You will be paid for each article you write. Your expertise will be emphasized and you will have access to exclusive content made available by our advertisers" (eBuzzing, 2007). Agencies sought to help users monetize the most defining aspects of the *blogueur* self, such as "expertise," "independence," "talent," and "creativity." They presented themselves as intermediaries that could help bloggers gain income depending on their capacity to influence audiences. To this end, agencies implemented a variety of advertising formats (from banners to videos) and "sponsored posts," that is, reviews about a product or service where the name of the advertiser or agency that requested the review is indicated.

The case of Eric Dupin, a Web developer and blogger in Lyon, reveals how users adopted these various advertising formats in practice. To solve a lack of information on technology and Web development issues in French, Dupin argues, in 2005 he developed a blog to aggregate news on these topics: *Presse Citron* (*Lemon Press*). Over the next years, Dupin implemented a variety of means to gain income: Google AdSense, advertising from agencies, advertising from companies, and sponsored sections and posts on his site. In light of the success of these strategies, on June 20, 2008, Dupin publicly announced his decision to “become a full-time *blogueur*, or professional *blogueur*” (E. Dupin, 2008). He explained: “I felt that there were possibilities to evolve, that it was the beginning of something. Therefore, I went for it. I took a risk, because the blog was not bringing too much money. But I noticed that, over the past few months, I had been able to start getting what looked like an appropriate income” (personal communication, October 3, 2011). To supplement these incomes, Dupin kept working on Web development for a few clients.

Both content aggregators and communication agencies developed standards and measures to rank websites according to various criteria. In 2008, for example, Wikio implemented a blog ranking in a variety of fields, developed by computer science professor, Jean Veronis. Similarly, agencies such as YouToYou and eBuzzing created measures to determine the economic value of a blog. YouToYou’s YouRank, for instance, assigned a score to each blog depending on criteria such as the blog’s audience, its search engine optimization, the quality of its writing, and the level of activity of its community. The place of a blog in a ranking such as Wikio’s or the score they obtained in measures such as YouRank was used to calculate the cost of a post on each blog. In this sense, these mechanisms helped transform the main representation of the blog’s public (the “blogosphere”) into a market based on competition.

Symbiosis and Synopsis: The Blogging Model

Like in the United States, websites emerged that built on the development of the processes discussed thus far. News website, *Rue89*, launched in the wake of the 2007 presidential elections, provides a prime example.[59] Four journalists and bloggers who left newspaper *Libération* in the midst of severe financial difficulties and a change in management created this project: Arnaud Aubron, Pierre Haski, Laurent Mauriac, and Pascal Riché. The creation of this news site "was directly tied to our experiences as *blogueurs*," says co-founder Laurent Mauriac (personal communication, March 22, 2012). According to Mauriac, blogs in traditional news sites occupied only a minor position. "The idea of *Rue89* was to consider blogs an essential part of a site, and not to discriminate them." The name of the site invoked two institutions in social and political life in France: the street (*rue*) as the privileged public space (as sociability); and 89, a reference to the date when three key events occurred: the French revolution, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the invention of the Web.

Rue89 used the blog as a model for a new media organization. The news-production model espoused by *Rue89*'s founders incorporated the role of the *blogueur*-as-citizen-expert, which had gained recognition in France over the previous two years. The website's founders also stressed the significance of interactions with readers that characterized blogging practices. For co-founder Pascal Riché, "We decided to do journalism like blogging, like a blogger but with journalistic professionalism" (personal communication, March 26, 2012). In this sense, against the enthusiasm that the notion of "citizen journalism" had generated in France at the time, the site also vindicated the relevance of journalism as a profession. The website's slogan thus became: "Information in three voices," referring to journalists, users, and experts. Finally, the site implemented a blog-like interface where information was constantly published in reverse chronological order. Says Riché, "In the beginning, the *Rue89* project really looked like a blog. There was no information hierarchy, it was each article replacing another, just like on a blog." In this interface, content from blogs was integrated into the news feed produced by the website. *Rue89* thus functions as a metaphor for the process of the transformation of blogs in France. (Whether the site's model succeeded or not from journalistic and economic perspectives is a different matter.) Just like their content on *Rue89*'s interface, blogs blended with a range of media practices, organizations, and industries.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter traced a crucial transformation in the identities of blogging and its practitioners in the United States and France that unfolded broadly during the first half of the 2000s decade. From a practice centered on the personal, blogging shifted to the collective. For many actors, the goal of blogging practices and technologies became citizen empowerment and social change rather than self-revelation and personal transformation only. Whereas actors analyzed in the previous chapter emphasized the possibility to provide a public window to the inner self through blogging, for practitioners discussed in this chapter blogging embodied the possibility to become a notorious, influential, and authoritative voice (and perhaps make some income in the process).

I adopted a four-step approach to analyze this process. First, I situated this transformation of blogging practices within the context formed by particular moments in the political and sociocultural life of these countries and the availability of certain technologies. Second, and against the backdrop of this particular context, I examined how users in both the United States and France appropriated blogs to give an account of themselves not as "average Joes and Janes" but primarily as informed citizens. Third, I analyzed the relationship between the appropriation of blogs to give an account of the self as a citizen and collective actors traditionally devoted to organizing political discussion (namely, news organizations and political parties). Finally, I discussed how users in both countries adopted a variety of means to transform their websites into an economically profitable venture.

Together, these four processes reveal an important partial convergence process in the trajectories of blogging in the United States and France. Using the example of the Independent Web movement, the previous chapter showed how, like Web versions of Astérix, early users in this country resisted the French version of the New Economy as a serious threat to the development of the Internet. Users in France envisioned *La Nouvelle Economie* (and its associated set of values and practices) as antithetical to some of the most defining traits of their national identity, that is, as particularly "anti-French." The present chapter reveals how, by the mid-2000s decade, these resistance efforts gradually diminished as users, software developers, news and political organizations, entrepreneurs, and communication agencies in France appropriated blogs in ways that largely echoed the notions associated with this media technology in the United States.

I do not mean to suggest that actors in France enacted blogs to discuss public affairs as an explicit attempt to imitate their American counterparts. As discussed in the previous chapter, practices of political expression were fundamental in the emergence of the Web in France. Instead, I argue that the process of the blog's development in the United States (the American model, as it were) provided users in France with an imaginary to enact blogging in particular ways. Users in France interpreted the American blogging model as a solution to what they considered to be French problems (such as the close relationship between politicians and the mainstream media).

To be sure, users in France worked to localize this model by interpreting their practices through the lens of important traditions in the history of the country. French language, for example, was a key means to localize this imaginary. The blogger thus became the *blogueur*; the blogosphere was re-enacted as *la blogosphère*. Users and software developers in France also maintained that local blogging software provided a means to "Frenchify" blogs and thus express and preserve, through blogging, some of the most defining aspects of national identity. Yet, the ways in which this process took place had a particularly American flavor. Although users in France localized the imaginary surrounding blogs in the United States, the main assumptions of this imaginary were largely accepted rather than questioned (as they were in the late 1990s). In this respect, and paraphrasing Kuhn (2010, pp. 183-184), this chapter revealed how blogging in France shifted from being the icon of a "French model" of Web development (embodied in the websites and software programs discussed in the previous chapter) to "a French variant of a transnational template," largely defined in the United States.

The transformation of blogging from personal to collective in France began a few years after it started in the United States. However, this process unfolded in both countries in remarkably similar ways. This partial convergence can be illustrated with examples from the four processes examined in this chapter. For users in both countries, for example, specific political and sociocultural moments played a key part in their re-appropriation of blogs as outlets for the discussion of public affairs. In the United States, the 9/11 events and the War in Afghanistan created the grounds for the re-enactment of blogging as "warblogging." In France, users and communication consultants envisioned the 2005 referendum on the European Constitution and the 2007 presidential election as an ideal context to actualize the blog's potential for citizen expression, illustrated by Howard Dean's campaign. For this reason, they interpreted the victory of the "No" in the 2005 referendum as a French lesson to the American model.

How individuals and various collective actors turned to blogs to discuss public affairs also reveals the similitudes in the parallel transformation of blogging in the United States and France. Invoking citizenship as their primary form of selfhood, users in both countries sought to shape the public sphere outside of traditional power centers, particularly the mainstream media. They tied the performance of the blogger identity to important traditions, figures, and traits in the history of both countries. In the United States, bloggers were compared to muckrakers at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their posts and practices were equated to Tom Paine's writings. To Frenchify this identity, users and commentators in France tied the figure of the *blogueur* to traits that they defined as intrinsically national, such as insolence and pride. The performance of the blogger identity in both countries was grounded not in daily life experiences and the constant exploration of the Web but rather in a thorough analysis of current events and a capacity to translate this analysis into a unique voice, that is, opinions and perspectives that could contribute to democracy. In this sense, the blogger identity became a point of attachment to activism and militancy as subject positions.

In part as a response to the context of crisis in the newspaper industry and influenced by the experiences of early adopters, news organizations in both countries slowly abandoned their original skepticism towards blogs and turned them into regular features of online news outlets. In a similar manner, political campaign directors in both countries transformed blogs into a central component of their strategies. Underlying the adoption of blogs by news organizations and political structures in both countries was the assumption, largely advanced in the United States, that blogs opened a window into the inner workings of these organizations and offered a method to bring their readers and voters closer.

Finally, how users turned to advertising and other means to make income out of blogging provides another telling illustration of the centrality of the American imaginary in the transformation of blogging in France. In the United States, the conception of blogs as sources of revenue came from different fronts. A variety of actors argued for the performance of the blogger-as-entrepreneur and the enactment of the blogosphere-as-market: users who asked for donations to cover some of their costs, advocators of the use of blogs in corporations as a means to provide them with voice, promoters of advertising and other methods to generate revenues, and entrepreneurs who built networks of blogs to provide content to specific market niches.

In France, entrepreneur Loïc Le Meur worked intensely to legitimize this conception of blogs. In this sense, Le Meur's own trajectory from an early enthusiast to a fierce advocate of the blog's economic value functions as a metaphor for the evolution of blogging in France during this period. Although certain users (particularly pioneer journalists) in the United States played a crucial part in promoting the adoption of blogs in news organizations and in constructing a symbolic universe to hail the value of these websites for journalism and democracy, there is no American equivalent to Loïc Le Meur. This is because the media industry and political structure are much more centralized in France than in the United States (Benson, 2013; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Kuhn, 1995). As one interviewee for this study put it, "French Jacobinism makes that everything happens in Paris." This made it easier for Le Meur to target his promotional campaign towards strategic figures in the media industry and the political system. In a sense, Le Meur was exploring a green field. With his campaign for Six Apart's software, Le Meur shaped news organizations' and political parties' appropriation of blogs in important ways. Yet, that France's most iconic blog advocate worked for an American software company should not be neglected. Le Meur's promotional efforts, expressed by his often repeated phrase, "Blogs are conversations," largely crystallized the central values and assumptions of the imaginary that surrounded blogs in the United States.

This transformation of blogging in France coincided with the consolidation of UMP's right-wing administration during the 2000s decade in France. (In this sense, Le Meur's collaboration with UMP during the 2007 presidential is not accidental.) The previous chapter showed how important central notions of liberal subjectivity were in the stabilization of blogging practices and technologies, and the performance of the blogger identity. This chapter further extended this discussion by revealing the significance of neoliberal subjectivity in the re-enactment of this identity. In this neoliberal scheme, users were "encouraged to manage themselves as individual entrepreneurs allied with other entities also framed as entrepreneurs. Every relationship [was] a business partnership, some based on shared collective traits and others based on goals perceived as mutually satisfying" (Gershon, 2011, p. 540). Through the variety of forms implemented in both countries to turn blogging into a profitable venture, this set of practices became a point of attachment to a neoliberal self oriented towards a market rationality. This logic further blurred the distinctions between self-performance and self-promotion. France's late adoption of neoliberal politics—what Prasad (2006) refers to as "pragmatic neoliberalism"—partially explain its lag in adopting means to convert blogs into commodities that were more quickly implemented in the United States.

Blogs lived their days of glory in the early to mid-2000s decade in both the United States and France. However, during the second half of the decade the value and significance of blogging in these countries came under questioning for a variety of reasons. The next chapter discusses how this process unfolded and explores its implications for rethinking the use of the Web as a technology of subjectivity.

Chapter 4. From Blogging to Microblogging: Toward Simplicity in Self-Performance

On December 7, 2011, I attended the 101st edition of *Paris Carnet*, the monthly meeting of Parisian *blogueurs*. We met at *Quigley's Point*, a bar in the first district of Paris, close to the Les Halles metro station. Before entering the bar, I checked what users had said on Twitter using the #pariscarnet hashtag. In this way, I found out that *blogueurs* were "squatting"—as a user described it—the second floor of the bar (or what the French call the first floor). Twenty-three people had confirmed their attendance to the meeting. By the time I arrived, at least fifteen of them were already there. There were many *dinoblogueurs*[60] who seemed happy to see each other again. One attendee explained that there were so many people from the "old days" that it actually reminded her of the first Paris Carnet she ever attended. At least four people had brought their cameras, most of them professional or semi-professional. It certainly felt like a special occasion. Throughout the night, bloggers, food, and beers arrived continuously to the bar's tables. As the night progressed, I heard a conversation about Egyptian restaurants in Paris that quickly turned into a discussion about Egyptian politics. I also heard a few jokes about Loïc Le Meur.

Part of the reasons why the occasion was so special to many of the attendees, why one of them told me that it was "a great night to attend *Paris Carnet*," was that, among the twenty-three who had confirmed attendance, was Laurent Gloaguen, *Le Capitaine* himself (see chapter 3). Gloaguen (who moved to Montreal a few years ago) was in Paris in part to attend the LeWeb conference. On Twitter, an early blogger seemed surprised that *Paris Carnet* still existed. Mr_Peer, the *dinoblogeur* who helped coin the term *dinoblogeur*, claimed that not only it still existed but that the number of participants increased threefold when Gloaguen was in town.

"Have you ever met Laurent?" a blogger asked me before *Le Capitaine*'s arrival. I explained that, for the past two months, we had been exchanging emails and posts on Google+, discussing the history of French blogs. The blogger responded, "You have to meet him. He is… *the* French blogger." Others around us nodded with agreement. Gloaguen finally arrived and went on to say hello, with constant hugs and kisses, to every person at the meeting. When his turn arrived, an attendee showed him a piece of clothing that he was wearing in his honor: a green t-shirt with an image of the iconic Warp Pipe used in the Mario Bros. video games and, below the image, the phrase immortalized by Belgian painter, René Magritte: "*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*." It was a geek tribute to *Le Capitaine* and his habit of smoking pipes, well-know by other *blogueurs*.

In addition to Gloaguen's presence, another topic that seemed to cause interest among some bloggers with whom I talked that night was the subject of my investigation. One attendee described my research on the trajectory of blogs as "being a scientist who studies an endangered species." The blogger who had asked on Twitter whether *Paris Carnet* still existed seemed to share this view. He asked, "There aren't French bloggers anymore, are there?" Mr_Peer, once again, replied on Twitter, "I don't know: I don't have the time neither to read blogs nor to feed mine. I even struggle to find the time to microblog." When I joined a group of *blogueurs* outside the bar, while *Le Capitaine* smoked his legendary pipe, the topic sprung up again. One early blogger was surprised to see so many people at the meeting. (At this time, at least thirty-five people were inside the bar.) "Do you still write on your blog?", he asked another *blogueur*. "About twice a year," this person replied. The group began discussing the faith of many of those who had attended *Paris Carnet* at some point. One of them argued that many people started using Twitter and thus abandoned their blogs. Therefore, he suggested, many former bloggers could be found at Twitter meetings instead. Another person, a blogging software developer, suggested that some bloggers could also be found in private parties for product bloggers. The French blogging movement, they agreed, had structurally changed. The main cause of this structural transformation, they contended, was the emergence of new tools that had displaced the centrality of blogs. These users shared the view, also advanced in the United States, that the blog "empire," as news weekly *The Economist* (2010, p. 62) put it, was "giving way" as a result of the availability of "more simpler" tools, such as Twitter.

How did users and commentators arrive to this conclusion when, only a few months before, blogs had reached their peak of popularity in countries like the United States and France? In what sense did media technologies such as Twitter replace blogging technologies and practices? Moreover, what notions of the self and publicness did the use of these new media technologies entail? This chapter begins answering these questions by analyzing the rise of new media technologies that built, extended, or sought to replace blogging in various ways.[61] In so doing, the chapter illuminates three important themes. First, it confirms the increasing process of convergence in the trajectories of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in the United States and France identified in the previous chapter. Second, it makes visible the tensions and opportunities that characterized the transition from blogging to other forms of sharing voices on the Web, made possible by the creation of new media technologies in these two countries. Third, the chapter traces the rise of a particular register of voice, with its associated conceptions of the self and publicness, which has gained prominence in this reconfiguration of the Web ecology.

Inventing "Microblogging": Toward a New Web Ecology in the United States

In the mid- to late 2000s, the design of three specific media technologies created the grounds for a transformation of the Web ecology in the United States: tumblelogs, Jaiku (a technology developed in Finland but eventually bought by Google), and Twitter. I begin this chapter by discussing how these three media technologies became available and analyze then how a new keyword ("microblogging") was deployed to make sense of their emergence.

New Software for a New Web Ecology

Tumblelogs.

In March 2005, Christian Neukirchen, a young programmer in Germany, created a website called *Anarchaia*. He explained: "Since I found that I often stuble [sic] on links to interesting things, but never or only rarely blog about them […] I thought I'd create another blog, *Anarchaia* where I can keep links, quotes, lines of lyrics and pictures. Now and then I'll interspense [sic] some ramblings, but the editorial content will stay less than a paragraph" (Neukirchen, 2005a). Like a blog, *Anarchaia* displayed its content in reverse chronological order. Unlike a blog, each type of content had a specific visual aspect. Thus, a quotation from a book or a song had a different appearance than a hyperlink to another site, an extract from an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) conversation, a reflection on technology issues, or a piece of programming code. Neukirchen (2005c) referred to this mix of formats as "experimental, impressionistic sub-paragraph bloggin' (think obstalat [fruit salad])." Neukirchen coded *Anarchaia* in Ruby,[62] an "obscure programming language" at the time, as programmer Evan Henshaw-Plath described it (personal communication, August 23, 2011). Early members of the nascent Ruby community praised the programming language for its simplicity, aesthetics possibilities, expressive capabilities, and suitability for fast prototyping.

Neukirchen's "fruit salad" website soon caught the attention of a prominent Ruby programmer known as "why the lucky stiff" (or "why," for short). "Why" envisioned *Anarchaia* as a new form of blogging that allowed practitioners to curate and display long sequences of heterogeneous elements and types of content found on the Web; in other words, to build a collection of online items "tumbling" around. Accordingly, he referred to this site as a "tumblelog." In April 2005, he wrote: "Blogging has mutated into simpler forms (specifically, link- and mob- and aud- and vid- variant), but I don't think I've seen a blog like Chris Neukirchen's *Anarchaia*, which fudges together a bunch of disparate forms of citation (links, quotes, flickrings) into a very long and narrow and distracted tumblelog" (Why, 2005).[63] "Why's" reflections on tumblelogs triggered online discussions between various bloggers and programmers. A few months later, Jason Kottke (2005b), a Web developer and popular early blogger, celebrated the rise of tumblelogs as a departure from contemporary patterns in the development of blogging, particularly its mainstream development. He pointed to the increasing resemblance of blogs to magazines and the unnecessary length of their posts as main illustrations of these websites' bureaucratization.

As conceived by programmers such as Neukirchen and "why," the tumblelog redefined voice as the capacity to give an account of the self by articulating a variety of content types through specific formats. Rather than providing explicit descriptions of events in their lives or describing their thoughts about a range of affairs, practitioners envisioned this cascade of items "tumbling" around as a means to provide a simple yet diverse window into the self. These unique stream of items collected on their tumblelogs, they argued, thus functioned as a "quick and dirty stream of consciousness" (Kottke, 2005b).

Throughout 2005 and 2006, various programmers created new tumblelogs. In July 2005, Marcel Molina and Sam Stephenson, core contributors to the Web application framework, Ruby on Rails, and key members of the nascent Ruby community, launched a software development consultancy company in Chicago called Ionist. Inspired by Neukirchen's site, they created *Projectionist*, a tumblelog that, according to Molina, sought to "curate the Web rather than to produce original content" (personal communication, July 18, 2011). The second post on the website reproduced an instant messenger (IM) conversation where Molina asked Stephenson to clarify the concept of tumblelog. Stephenson replied: "you've seen [A]narchaia right? basically it's a blog where all the posts are short and are of a certain 'type.' e.g., link with description, or a picture, or an irc quote" (Projectionist, 2005, punctuation in original). Typical posts on the website included quotes, videos, and pictures that its creators found on other websites. Snippets of programming code were the only type of content produced by *Projectionist*'s developers. Just like the conversation on the definition of tumblelogs, most posts on the website were published devoid of context.

Tumblelog creators put forth the notions of simplicity and minimalism as a means to counterbalance what they interpreted as the excesses of contemporary blogging. By developing sites where "the editorial content will stay less than a paragraph," as Neukirchen put it, they envisioned tumblelogs as an alternative to the unnecessary length of blog posts. This simplicity, they argued, was made possible by the capacities of Ruby as a programming language. According to Patrick Ewing, a programmer who became a regular contributor to the *Projectionist* tumblelog, “One of the other things that Rubyists valued more than other programming languages that were available at the time was simplicity of syntax. Ruby felt like it was honed down into this gem, this thing where you didn’t have excess syntax, you didn’t have excess quotations” (personal communication, October 25, 2012). In this sense, Ruby provided a marker to define the identity of both tumblelogs and their users. According to Molina, “Both Ruby and tumblelogs appealed to people with certain sensibilities: an emphasis on visual design and on writing short content” (personal communication, July 18, 2011). From this perspective, the tumblelog materialized some of the most defining aspects of Ruby as a language.

The capacity to build custom software to create this type of sites functioned as a crucial aspect in the early definition of these websites and their designers. The idea that “every tumblelogger has to write his own software to do it [a tumblelog]” circulated on some of these sites as the “rule 1 of the tumblelogging manifesto” (Neukirchen, 2005b). In the case of *Projectionist*, Molina and Stephenson implemented custom Ruby software to automate the creation of specific types of content with specific types of formats. Users praised tumblelogs for the easiness with which they could combine and highlight various kinds of online content through specific visual formats. They also emphasized the graphic design of the tumblelog as a key aspect of what made it a unique kind of website. In contrast, they envisioned blogs as a standardized blend of lengthy posts and features displayed in a uniform manner.

Tumblelogs further stabilized when the first automated Web application to produce them became available. In late 2006, David Karp, a 19-year old programmer in New York, conceived Tumblr, a software program for creating and updating this kind of sites. Karp became interested in tumblelogs when he discovered them in 2005. Like early tumblelog users, he construed these sites as a departure from the blog's patterns of development identified in the previous chapter. In Karp's words, "I [pulled] a lot of inspiration away from what some of the avant-garde bloggers were doing at the time that had diverged from WordPress blogs. […] [These] avant-garde bloggers [were part of] the Ruby on Rails community, people that were hacking together tools to do that sort of stuff" (from an interview in Schonfeld, 2011). With the assistance of Marco Arment as a lead developer, Karp launched Tumblr in early 2007. The application automated the process of creating content, assigning a unique visual format to different kinds of posts, and publishing them in reverse chronological order. In addition, Tumblr refashioned features that had characterized other applications, most notably the possibility to "follow" other users of the software (as in social network sites).

Karp also emphasized the notion of simplicity as the guiding principle in the design of Tumblr. "Tumblr's appeal," he argued, "lies in its simplicity" (from an interview in Shafrir, 2010). The simplicity of tumblelogs was repeatedly framed in opposition to blogs. Tumblr's original FAQ section asserted: "Blogs are great, but they can be a lot of work. And they're really built to handle longer-form text posts. Tumblelogs, on the other hand, let you easily and quickly post and share anything you find or create" (Tumblr, 2007). The application's developers also emphasized how tumblelogs not only remediated but also improved traditional practices associated with blogging. "To make a simple analogy: If blogs are journals, tumblelogs are scrapbooks. You can also look at tumblelogs as slightly more structured blogs that make it easier, faster, and more fun to post and share stuff you find or create" (Tumblr, 2007). Tumblelogs are a key aspect of what came to be known as "microblogging." Another important part was defined by reference to an application named Jaiku.

Jaiku.

Throughout 2005 and early 2006, Finnish software developer Jyri Engeström worked to build a tool that could enable users to enact voice in ways that blogging could not. "Can anything disrupt blogs?" Engeström asked a variety of venture capitalists and investors in various presentations at the time.[64] One way of accomplishing this, he replied, was to "simplify" them (Engeström, 2007). In the spring of 2006, Engeström left his position as a product manager at Nokia in Helsinki to develop a project devised to "lower the threshold" of blogging as a practice (personal communication, October 24, 2012). The result was Jaiku.

According to the application's blog, Jaiku functioned as "a phone book that lets you share your real-time rich presence from the phone" (Engeström, 2006). Engeström and Petteri Koponen, Jaiku's developers, deployed the notion of "rich presence" to conceptualize voice in particular ways. Engeström envisioned a continuum of forms of sharing voice that ranged from what he called "particles," which he tied to occasional events in the life of a person, to "waves" or daily activities conceived as a continuous cycle that could be accessed at any point in time. The notion of presence was meant to capture the richness of continuous, real-time waves in the life of users, made available to others through specific forms of technologically mediated content. In the developers' words, "We invented the term 'rich presence' to describe the many relevant things a phone knows about you. Rich presence on Jaiku includes an IM-style away line, your phone profile (ring volume, vibrate), location (country, city/region, neigborhood) [sic], Bluetooth devices around, upcoming calendar events, and the duration how long your phone has been idle" (Engeström, 2006).

In this continuum, presence could be shared through a variety of content types. A software developer with training in the fields of sociology and science and technology studies, Engeström labeled these content units “social objects,” that is, an “atomic object” shared by individuals to interact with others and build sociability (personal communication, October 24, 2012). Once again, the blog post served as the model for a way of giving an account of one’s life that Jaiku sought to overcome. A blog user himself, Engeström envisioned the blog post as a means to share occasional events or thoughts (“particles”). Alternatively, he imagined the user’s status on instant messenger as an ideal sign of continuous availability (“waves”).

The name of the tool combined two specific meanings: Japanese haikus and *joiks*, an indigenous musical genre performed in Northern Scandinavia. Engeström explains: “These posts [on Jaiku] were about what’s happening now, presence, the present, which is what Japanese haikus are also about. And, then, it turns out that in Finland there’s an oral tradition. Aboriginal people or the reindeer herders call [it] a *joik*, which is about singing. [*Joiks* are] songs [used to] talk and tell each other [about] what ha[s] been happening. [Jaiku] was just a combination of *joik* and haiku” (personal communication, October 24, 2012). Thus, in addition to providing the name, Engeström interpreted these two cultural forms as main antecedents to Jaiku.

Launched in mid-2006, Jaiku functioned as a combination of the phone book (which provides information about a given person) and instant messenger (which signals the person’s presence and allows for interaction between users). An early version of the application’s website defined it as “the social phone book […] that displays the real-time presence and location of your contacts” (Jaiku, 2006). Using primarily the Nokia S60—a telephone with wide diffusion in Finland—Jaiku allowed users to display their “presence updates” and locations, find other users, and interact with them through text messages and comments based on the updates shared by contacts on the user's phone book. Engeström explains: "We lived in this bubble in Finland where everyone had Nokia S60 phones. We could take pictures with phones. We had access to location information. We could see who you were with based on [your location]. We knew what was on the calendar. We had access to all this information on Nokia phones. [Rich presence] was kind of a proxy for all these different things that we could allow users to theoretically share in real time using this network we built" (personal communication, October 24, 2012).

In addition to the application for mobile phones, Jaiku included a Web component. Consistent with the view of voice as the production of means to capture the rich presence of the self through various means, Jaiku's developers called this Web component the "Life Stream." Engeström recalls, "We realized it wasn't just about presence; it was also about the history. 'Life Stream' was the name for this kind of heterogeneous stream that involved pictures, location updates, calendar, and anything" (personal communication, October 24, 2012). Originally conceived primarily as a mobile application, Jaiku's "Life Stream" quickly turned into its primary communication means.

Jaiku found its main base of users in Europe. In the United States, where short message services (SMS) were only beginning to develop, the application was met with mixed reactions (Hamner, 2007; Muchmore, 2007). Despite these reactions, the tool triggered the attention of Google. In October 2007, Jaiku's developers announced Google's acquisition of the application (Jaiku, 2007a). Although developers hoped that the acquisition would allow them to "expand technology in ways we hope [users will] find interesting and useful" (Jaiku, 2007a)—particularly in light of Google's acquisition of the Android operating system for mobile devices in 2005—the deal failed to meet most expectations.

As Engeström and his collaborators implemented this project in Helsinki (with the help of programmers in other countries), a group of developers in San Francisco worked on Twitter, a similar tool devised to let users report their "statuses."

Twitter.

Twitter first developed as a side-project within a small company devoted to developing audio Web applications. Early in 2005, Odeo, a start-up company co-founded by Noah Glass, developer of the Audioblogger service, and Evan Williams, co-creator of the Blogger software, worked to build a program that could allow users to find, download, and record audio files through a directory (a set of practices known as "podcasting"). Various factors altered plans for developing Odeo's program. The program had not generated the level of uptake that investors and producers expected. Moreover, Odeo's developers recall gradually losing interest in podcasting as the project unfolded. Perhaps more significant, in mid-2005, as Odeo worked on its program, Apple announced the release of an iTunes version with support for similar functions. This turn of events forced Odeo to look for alternative projects. The start-up thus began hackathons and brainstorming sessions as a way to look for new projects (Moggridge, 2010; Sagolla, 2009).

An idea for an alternative project came from Jack Dorsey, one of Odeo's engineers. Dorsey envisioned a program that could allow users to describe and report the activities in which they were involved and the places at which they were located (which he referred to as "statuses"), and share this information with groups of selected individuals (or "friends"). He provided a narrative to account for the tool's genealogy: "One night in July of [2000] I had an idea to make a more 'live' LiveJournal. Real-time, up-to-date, from the road. Akin to updating your AIM [AOL Instant Messenger] status from wherever you are, and sharing it. For the next 5 years, I thought about this concept and tried to silently introduce it into my various projects. […] It was everywhere I looked" (Dorsey, 2006). Dorsey defined the purpose of the tool as the sharing of one's "status." He adopted this concept from instant messaging communications and from the dynamics he had identified when he was developing Web applications for courier and taxi dispatch services in the early 2000s. Accordingly, he named this early program Stat.us.

Not unlike Jaiku's developers, Dorsey envisioned a program that recuperated or "remediated" some communication dynamics that characterized other media technologies, namely IM, diary-writing applications, and dispatch services (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). As noted previously, by the mid-2000s decade the use of SMS was gaining increasing attention from operators in the United States. In this context, Dorsey thought of SMS as the ideal technology for updating statuses. SMS could allow users to exchange text messages sent through mobile phones to report their locations and activities.

Before settling on a name, developers jokingly referred to the program as "FriendStalker" (Henshaw-Plath, 2011; Sagolla, 2009). After consulting the dictionary for inspiration, Noah Glass suggested a new name for the program: Twitter. The name evoked "a short inconsequential burst of information, chirps from birds" (Dorsey, 2011). As developers worked on scaling up the project, they variously invoked their experiences, backgrounds, expectations, and views of potential users as sources to redefine the tool's primary purpose. For example, for some developers at Odeo the application's reliance on SMS had precedents in technologies such as

TXTMob, an alert system utilized to coordinate protests, particularly during the 2004 National Republican Convention. For Blaine Cook and Evan Henshaw-Plath, two developers at Odeo with a background in activism, the use of SMS in protests provided a key model for the type of uses that could be expected from the new application. According to Cook, “We built [Twitter] with things like protests in mind. […] [It] was explicitly about how to enable things like protest communications” (personal communication, October 22, 2011). Henshaw-Plath (2008) considered it “a model to be copied / learned from” in developing Twitter.

Another purpose for Twitter envisioned during its design derived from the experiences of developers who acted as early users of the application. Because SMS users had to pay for each message sent and received, exchanging these messages was causing certain financial concerns. Certain developers thus pushed for building a Web component as a supplement to the SMS infrastructure that could allow users to consult and manage their statuses online. The possibility to “follow friends” through Twitter also tied the application to the rise of “social network sites,” a notion that gained traction at the time this tool was under development. Thus, Twitter could also be envisioned as an early instance of this type of sites. This dimension resulted from previous work done at Odeo. According to Cook, “The ‘Twitter-as-a-social-network’ [was] pretty explicit; and ‘Odeo-as-a-social-network’ as well. You could sort of see what people were posting, and you could be friends with people on Odeo as well. Creating social connections was definitely present from day one” (personal communication, October 22, 2011).

Although these various conceptions of Twitter coexisted in its early production process, developers were also convinced that the tool embodied something that could not be reduced to any single definition. In other words, when these meanings and functions were combined, developers were convinced that Twitter constituted “something new” (Dorsey, from an interview in Sarno, 2009) and something that was difficult to describe. In retrospect, Dorsey claimed: “When I think of Twitter, I think of—it’s really hard to define because we’re still coming up with the vocabulary—but I think it’s defined a new behavior that’s very different than what we’ve seen before. [A] new medium” (from an interview in Sarno, 2009). Developers recall having multiple conversations about the best way to characterize Twitter throughout its development process.[65]

Twitter was publicly launched in July 2006 (at the same time Jaiku was released) amid a restructuration process at Odeo.[66] The application allowed users to update their status and read the statuses of others by SMS or via the Web. New “friends” had to be invited and had to sign up by SMS. The application’s launch was surrounded by some puzzlement (Arrington, 2006). Moreover, the exchange of SMS messages posed several technical challenges. Long status updates could be spread over multiple SMS messages that arrived in different order. Florian Weber, a programmer who coded Twitter’s prototype, explains, “Initially […] people could send longer updates [that] would just spread out over multiple SMSs. That caused all kinds of headache. In the U.S. [SMS] was still not reliable so you [would] get the second [message] first, and then the first one” (personal communication, October 28, 2011). In this context, developers adopted a constraint to define the maximum number of characters that could be used to share a status. SMS infrastructure worked with a unique 160, 7-bit characters standard. Because sharing status updates would require including the name of the user who wrote them (up to eighteen characters), a colon, and a space before displaying each message (one character for each), developers settled on 140 characters.[67]

How users appropriated Twitter is a key for understanding its development (Siles, 2013). Early users partially departed from Twitter's original purpose and enacted it in new ways. In the months following Twitter's launch, users began employing the application to sustain conversations with each other and to aggregate news, in addition to reporting their coordinates. In late 2006, they began incorporating the @ symbol as a way to reply to each other (Crosby, 2006). Users thus triggered important transformations in the technology of the application. As a response to user practices, Twitter's developers created features that helped users appropriate it as a conversational medium. In March 2007, when it received the Web Award in the blog category at the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference, Twitter began to gain more attention from users and the mainstream media.

Reconfiguring the Web Ecology: The Invention of "Microblogging"

In the months that followed the creation of tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter, a specific concept emerged to refer to these media technologies and link them together: "microblogging." Before 2007, the term "microblog" was occasionally used as a synonym of "niche blog," a site devoted to discussing a specific topic (Rowan, 2003). In a similar manner, commentators employed the concept of "miniblog" to describe topic-oriented blogs incorporated within larger websites (Faler, 2005). However, as tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter further stabilized early in 2007, various commentators, users, and software developers began using these concepts in a distinct way. In this context, as journalists in San Francisco proclaimed, "Mini-blogs [became] the talk of the Silicon Valley" (Waters & Nuttall, 2007). In his history of the term "technology," Marx (1997) argued that specific concepts emerge as attempts to fill semantic voids or sets of social conditions for which no concept seems to exist. In a similar manner, the invention of the "microblogging" notion can be analyzed as an attempt to fill a particular semantic void created by several social, cultural, and technological developments. I elaborate on three main dynamics to account for how this process unfolded: articulation, simplification, and remediation.

First, the microblogging notion allowed proponents to articulate or tie together a group of emerging websites and software applications.[68] Users and commentators invoked the cases of tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter, which were created independently for various purposes and in different conditions, as major instances of "microblogging." The possibility to publish short-form content (as opposed to the lengthy blog post) functioned as the glue that tied technologies with no necessary relation together. In journalistic pieces written throughout 2007, "microblogs" and "miniblogs" thus designated sites characterized primarily by the size of the post. Eric Gwinn (2007), from the *Chicago Tribune*, wrote in March 2007, "[A] mini-blog [is a] thought balloon via text message or posted on the Internet." Similarly, Glaser (2007) defined "micro-blogs" as "brief text updates about your life on the go [sent] to friends and interested observers via text messaging, instant messaging, email or the web." The concept of "microblogging" also allowed proponents to justify the value of these new media technologies in an increasingly larger market of Web applications.

A second dynamic in the invention of the "microblogging" notion was a belief in the potential of simplification for sharing voice. As noted previously, the developers of tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter had emphasized simplicity as a guiding force in the design of these media technologies. Programmers and designers at Odeo, the start-up behind Twitter, emphasized simplicity as a fundamental principle that guided the design of that tool. Programmer Evan Henshaw-Plath recalls how simplicity operated as a "background" and a "context" for Twitter's early design: “[We were] very much interested in [answering], ‘What can you strip away? How can you remove the barriers to communication? What’s the simplest thing that can possibly work as opposed to what is featured complete?’” (personal communication, August 23, 2011). Underlying this view of simplicity was the notion that limitations can function as a key stimulus for innovation.

Actors hailed the creative power of simplicity embodied in the types of short content that could be created with these tools. In other words, they argued, the key advantage of the short post was its simplicity. By enabling the creation of simple posts, commentators envisioned “microblogging” as a revival of a particular genre that, although not new, had taken on a novel life as a result of the emergence of certain software programs: the “short form.” In his *Style Guide for the Short Form*, a manual for creating content on applications such as Twitter, former Odeo employee, Dom Sagolla (2009), outlined a history of the “short form genre” that found major antecedents in the use of the telegraph and SMS, and a new instantiation on the Web. In a similar manner, the author of a guide for using Twitter’s application programming interface (API) defined microblogging as “the publication of short messages reporting on the details of one’s life” (Makice, 2009, p. 10). In this book, the author tied the rise of “microblogging” to how technologies such as Twitter combined “three main technological developments: Instant Relay Chat (IRC), IM chat status messages, and mobile phones” (Makice, 2009, p. 10). Authors promoted simplicity as a key virtue and principle for mastering the short form. For instance, Sagolla (2009) advised his readers to “say more with less” (p. 15), “Constrain yourself” (p. 16), and “be the middle point between minimalism and lush description” (p. 18). In this view, "microblogging" applications allowed users to explore and exploit the possibilities of simplicity for sharing voice.[69]

This drive towards simplicity may be interpreted as an expression of a wider cultural trend with resonance in multiples domains, from graphic and technological design to self-help guidance. Simplicity, as the author of a book on the subject put it, was envisioned as the fundamental quality and principle linking disparate realms such as "design, technology, business and life" (Maeda, 2006). In this view, simplicity represented a crucial intervention into a world of increasing complexity, part of which had been triggered by technology. In Maeda's (2006) words, "The need for simplicity ha[d] reached the tipping point" (p. 102). Despite being part of the problem, many users and software developers argued, technology could also become part of the solution by restoring simplicity in various realms of life.

Third, proponents employed the "microblogging" notion to link new media technologies designed to create "short" and "simple" content with the concept and practice of blogging.[70] Through this "remediation" dynamic (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), fertile grounds were produced for interpreting the emergence of singular technologies and content creation practices as means to extend blogging and salvage it from some of its contemporary problems (particularly the consequences of the process of bureaucratization examined in the previous chapter). David Karp, Tumblr's creator, thus defined both Tumblr and Twitter as "blogging that favors short-form data" (from an interview in Gwinn, 2007). For Evan Williams, the co-creator of both Blogger and Twitter, 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] something that seems really small but it actually is like a molecule that is everywhere" (cited in Moggridge, 2010, p. 278).

Actors invoked various reasons to justify the link between these new media technologies and blogging. Some of these reasons were formal or aesthetic: publishing posts with both blogging and "microblogging" applications was accomplished in reverse chronological order. Other reasons centered on the specific people involved in the development of blogging and microblogging tools, namely Evan Williams. Along similar lines, many early bloggers interpreted the use of tumblelogs and Twitter as a return to the origins of weblogs (Siles, 2012a). Meg Hourihan, a co-developer of the Blogger software, thus tied the design of Blogger to the development of Twitter: "In [the original design of] Blogger there was a [big] box that made it so easy to post whatever […] I think Twitter is like the early Blogger except for the character restraint. [You] type in a box, say what you're doing" (personal communication, August 26, 2009). In this way, Hourihan reinterpreted the emergence of both blogging and "microblogging" as part of a history of software applications devised to share voice. Finally, some commentators argued that "microblogging" technologies provided a solution to some of the problems associated with blogging in its contemporary form. In particular, they envisioned the short form as a palliative to the unnecessary length of the traditional blog post.

By 2009, the microblogging notion had reached the status of a keyword. According to Williams (1983a), keywords "are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought [that] bound together certain ways of seeing culture and society" (p. 15). For some developers and users, the "microblogging" notion provided an ideal way to define a novel group of media technologies. Thus, Tumblr's developers embraced the notion as a key way of making sense of these tools.[71] In a similar manner, in May 2007 Jaiku's developers changed the vocabulary used to talk about the application. Instead of motivating users to "create your live profile" (Jaiku, 2007b) they invited them to "create your mini-blog" (Jaiku, 2007c).

Users and developers did not accept the microblogging keyword unanimously. As Williams (1983a) noted, keywords also "open up issues and problems" (p. 15) because they rely on a set of implicit and explicit connections that can be challenged at all time. Twitter's main developers did not adopt this term to describe the tool. Quite contrarily, some of these developers blatantly rejected the term for its lack of precision. Britt Selvitelle, an engineer who joined Twitter in March 2007, claimed to "loathe the word microblogging" (Selvitelle, 2008). For developers like Selvitelle, the notion of "microblogging" was too restricted to capture the variety of practices and technologies involved in the design and use of tools such as tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter. In their view, although the "microblogging" concept was apt to describe how these software applications incorporated (or remediated) blogging in various ways, it left of out view other practices and technologies that were key in the development and use of these tools. Thus, actors contended, microblogging was a vague and imprecise word with no major conceptual value that tended to freeze what were fluid and dynamic processes of technological change.

Redefining Blogging: Tensions and Opportunities

The development of the set of practices and media technologies associated with the "microblogging" keyword led to a reconsideration of the place of blogging in the Web ecology in the United States. This redefinition of blogging unfolded within a spectrum of positions that ranged from those who envisioned the rise of "microblogging" as a source of tension to those who considered it instead as a spring of possibilities. Three broad positions can be identified in this continuum.

First, for a group of users and commentators, the rise of “microblogging” technologies signaled the imminence of the blog’s demise. Proponents offered various reasons to account for this decline. They argued that contemporary patterns in the development of blogging discussed in the previous chapter, such as their co-optation by traditional organizations and their transformation into commodities, were gradually killing the purity of users’ voices. Commentator Nicholas Carr (2008) thus asserted, “As blogs have become mainstream, they’ve lost much of their original personality.” In a similar manner, Chris Bowers (2007), a regular contributor to *MyDD* and *Daily Kos* who was later hired as campaign director for the latter, contended that “the major consequence [of the blog’s development process] is that [the blogosphere became] more professionalized, thus raising the entry costs to new voices to an almost unattainable level. [...] The days of the amateur blogger are over, so it’s no longer a medium that allows many new voices to emerge” (personal communication, July 7, 2011).

Users and commentators also suggested that, because of their simplicity, the new technologies associated with “microblogging” (and social network sites) provided a better outlet for self-performance than blogging. Accordingly, they argued, media technologies such as Twitter were replacing some of the most defining technologies of blogging, notably RSS and comment systems. Finally, some actors maintained that blogging had become the haunt of “the Net’s lowest form of life: The insult commenter” (Boutin, 2008). In this view, blogging was threatened by the presence of the “troll” and the spread of spam blogs.

For these reasons, commentators suggested, the blog had turned into a banal media technology. *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." As shown in chapter 2, early users performed the identities of the blog by distinguishing it from "old" media and previous approaches to publishing (such as the "page"). In the second half of the 2000s decade, blogs became associated with notions of old age, a serious menace for technologies whose market value is partly defined by their novelty. Blogging, an article in *Gawker* asserted in late 2010, "is an old person thing now" (Nolan, 2010). What once made the blog an attractive technology—the size of the post and the use of automated software to standardize the publication process—was now seen as a threat for its survival.

By contrast, some developers sought to help blogging absorb "microblogging" through changes in the technologies of software programs. In this view, blogging was not about to perish as a result of the popularization of "microblogging" but could be reinvigorated instead by integrating "microblogging" into its defining technologies and practices. For instance, Movable Type incorporated a product called "Motion," which, according to technology bloggers, could allow the software to "integrate […] microblogging" (Perez, 2009). Developers also implemented new features for the WordPress software (known as "post formats") that enabled users to assign specific visual formats to particular types of blog posts, a key feature of tumblelogs. "With the addition of Post Formats," a commentator argued, "WordPress is looking even better than ever to be the basis for a 'Microblog' or 'TumbleLog'" (Dale, 2011). Software developer Dave Winer, a key actor in the development of early weblogs (see chapter 2) carried out a project to explicitly reinvent blogging through the lens of simplicity. He wrote: "I wanted to revisit blogging tools in light of all that we now know about blogging, which is a lot more than we knew the first few times around, in the mid-90s to the early 00s" (Winer, 2011b). Winer thus built a prototype for a tool that he defined as "minimal blogging." He noted: "There's basically one way to do blog posting and it involves a description, title and link, at minimum, and a list of previous posts" (Winer, 2011a). In Winer's view, the rise of "microblogging" tools revealed that the reinvention of blogging required a radical return to its roots.

Finally, some actors opted for redefining blogging in ways that highlighted its singularity and thus justified the importance of its existence. From this perspective, the rise of "microblogging" was fraught with opportunities rather than threats. Blogging and "microblogging" were not defined in competitive terms but rather seen as forming a symbiotic relationship: they supplemented each other through their alternative strengths. Thus, WordPress's co-creator, Matt Mullenweg, asserted: "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, "microblogging" technologies could be utilized to share some forms of "light" content and to create links to blog posts that expanded that content in more substantial ways. In this view, the blog would be not on the verge of extinction but rather on the path of specialization.

Like in the United States, the rise of shorter forms of online publishing had important consequences in other countries where actors had widely adopted blogs. The next section discusses how users and developers reacted to this reconfiguration of the Web ecology in France.

Between Blogging, "Microblogging," and "Curation": The New French Web Ecology

The appropriation of the blog in the mid-to late 2000s decade in France was marked by the two processes discussed in the previous sections: on one hand, the appropriation of blogs by various collective actors and organizations (and the search for revenues to support online endeavors tied to this process) and, on the other, the rise of the set practices and technologies associated with "microblogging" in the United States. Together, these two processes created the grounds for a major transformation of the practice and cultural value of blogging in France. In what follows, I discuss these two processes in relation to a spectrum of positions ranging from those that emphasized tensions in technological change to those that envisioned these processes as sources of opportunity.

Redefining Blogging: The Tensions

The Threat of Bureaucratization.

For some practitioners and analysts, contemporary patterns in the development of blogging had altered its most defining aspects as a means to give an account of the self. Some users maintained that, in the process of becoming media and commodities, blogs had lost what made them an ideal outcome for sharing voice and expressing the uniqueness of the self. Referring to the particular case of blogs about music, a user known as Furtif, who collaborated with website *La Blogothèque* since 2004, argued in an essay written for the French version of *Slate*: "[Blogs] are now considered media in themselves, ingested by budgets and finally embedded—those that show audiences that are considered to be respectable—in promotion efforts that are kindly received. […] The promise of a liberation of speech and writing forms remained empty words (*lettre morte*). […] This is [blogging] without stomach. Formal and vain" (Furtif, 2011). In this essay, the author blamed bloggers for falling prey to promotional campaigns and efforts to frame their views and agendas. Through these campaigns, Furtif asserted, the uniqueness, passion, creativity, insolence, and pride of the *blogueur* were being compromised. According to an experienced online communications consultant in Paris, this was considered to be "the beginning of the corruption of the *blogueur*" and, as such, it evidenced that the blogging model was "exhausted."

For practitioners, another important consequence of the bureaucratization of blogging was the blurring of the formal boundaries between blogs and other types of websites, particularly news outlets. In this view, a major product of the co-optation of blogs by media organizations was the creation of websites that distorted the distinctions between blogs and news sites. Through this process, some actors argued, blogs were stripped away from their identity. *Netpolitique*'s Stanislas Magniant, who in 2009 joined Publicis Consultants as the managing director of its Web department, expresses this idea: "The media carried out their transformation, their evolution, and aspirated the essence and interest of blogging: the comments, the confrontation, the possibility for people to create blogs on media's platforms. We can say that they recuperated the traditional media sphere. They did a very good job at mutating and therefore the blogosphere is something like an empty shell today" (personal communication, December 12, 2011).

In a similar manner, Paul Ackermann, editor in chief of *The Huffington Post*'s French counterpart, argued that a central consequence of the blend between blogs and other journalistic genres was the transformation of conceptions of the blogger from a militant citizen—as discussed in the previous chapter—to a more traditional columnist. He maintained: "Blogs for us [*Le Huffington Post*] aren't really blogs; they are columns. The blog in its traditional mode, that is, the person writing a new post every day and entertaining a community, has past for a number of years […] [It] was a transitory model" (personal communication, February 23, 2012). In this view, the blurring of blogs and news sites, and the professionalization of blogging practitioners, had gradually divested blogs of their original edge rather than created a political revolution.

The appropriation of blogs by several traditional organizations also introduced a tension for users who wanted to achieve recognition, stability, and financial steadiness, without losing the personalization and independence of voice they associated with blogging. The case of *La Blogothèque* provides an ideal example of how this process prompted a tension in the identity of blogging in France. Conceived in 2002 by journalist Christophe Abric (a.k.a. Chryde), *La Blogothèque* was born the following year as "a collective blog about music" (Chryde, 2004). According to Chryde, the website sought to be a means to personalize the experiences of discovering, listening to, and writing about music. He recalls, "When I was a student, in Paris, there was a record store 200 meters away from my place. I went there every Tuesday, and the seller would say, 'Ah! Christophe! You need to listen to this, this, and this. You're going to love it!' I had the advise of someone who knew me. […] You could always read newspapers, but they were sellouts. [With *La Blogothèque*] I wanted to re-establish that. The best way to discover music is when someone speaks to you honestly about it" (personal communication, June 12, 2012).

From its origins, *La Blogothèque* experimented with a set of strategies to "personalize" the experience of discovering music.[72] Yet, no initiative compared to the success of the Take Away Concerts (*Concerts Pour Emporter*), a project launched in 2007 by Chryde in collaboration with photographer and filmmaker, Vincent Moon. Chryde reached agreements with record labels to record artists performing their songs in some of the most mundane places in Paris (from bars to elevators). He then posted these short clips on *La Blogothèque*'s site. The website's number of visitors exploded with the launch of The Take Away Concerts. The project gave a new visibility to *La Blogothèque* in the international music media landscape and became a source of imitation in several websites around the world.

In light of its success, the Take Away Concerts also motivated the website's developers to transform the blog into a media outlet. *La Blogothèque*'s creators recognized the tension triggered by this intention when they released a new version of the website in 2011. In this new website, producers asked, "Is [this website] still a weblog? Wouldn't it be best to call it a webzine? […] The answers are respectively 'yes' and 'yes and no.' Yes, *La Blogothèque* is still a weblog, if only because of the chronological organization of articles. Also because it relies heavily on links. […] Also because it often speaks about music from a very personal point of view […] Yes, *La Blogothèque* is a webzine. But a webzine adapted to the Internet. […] We will keep the weblog spirit" (Blogothèque, 2011). In other accounts, however, the website's developers abandoned the weblog label altogether and defined the website as a media outlet in itself (Mairé, 2011). Whereas they had originally defined it in opposition to the mainstream media, producers now preferred to describe the website as part of the media. Chryde explained: "I wanted record labels to stop treating us like little nobodies (*des petits rigolos*). When I said, 'We are a media outlet,' I wanted to say that we weren't a little website anymore. Everybody agrees that we are important, that we did something huge, that we are still relevant. And yet I still have to fight […] to receive an album in advance, to get a three-hour interview, to get record labels' help. […] Today, I don't want to say that we are a media outlet… today… I don't know anymore…" (personal communication, June 12, 2012). In the case of *La Blogothèque*, the blurring of blogs and media organizations had thus created a crisis of identity.[73]

The developers of *Bondy Blog*[74] similarly recognized the tension introduced by the gradual professionalization of the website and its consequences in the significance of blogs for sharing the voices of citizens in the Parisian suburbs. Referring to the agreements reached with several media organizations in France—a key part in the financial stability of *Bondy Blog* — Nordine Nabili, the website's director, noted, "What worries me is that, little by little, we are starting to become a sort of institution. That's a danger for *Bondy Blog*. We showed, after working for several years, that we were reliable partners. But when you sign agreements with other people there is a sort of [compromise]… it is somewhat like a couple" (personal communication, February 16, 2012). Serge Michel, *Bondy Blog*'s founder and at present *Le Monde*'s newsrooms assistant director, expressed a similar idea: "What threatens *Bondy Blog* today is its institutionalization. We do less disruptive things than before. It has become a little bit more well-behaved (*sage*). This is normal, because today there is a team of thirty or forty *blogueurs*, there are four people who work full-time for the blog. We need to finance all of this; it's not easy. To do an adventure for several months that shocks everybody and to work on something on the long term are different projects" (personal communication, February 10, 2012). Thus, for many actors the desire to turn blogs into a self-sufficient outlet created a tension between the promise of stability and the threat of selling out their voice.

The Force of "Microblogging".

As the story used to open this chapter illustrates, the rise of media technologies associated with the "microblogging" keyword created another source of tension in the development of blogging as a form of sharing voice in France. The words of Xavier Borderie, a *dinoblogueur* and core contributor to the translation of the WordPress software into French, capture this tension with precision. He argued: "Satisfying your thirst for sharing through microblogging killed the blog for me. […] I haven't blogged in one year. The need to express yourself […] is easily assuaged by a tweet. We used to talk about exhibits, books, bands, concerts; we published videos, photos, everything. Nowadays, it's lapidary: 'I'm at this concert. Really cool. Here's a video.' It responds to a need that the *dinoblogueur* has to express himself while removing the duty to spend two hours in front of your computer" (personal communication, December 14, 2011). Borderie thus referred to the possibility of replacing blogging with less time-consuming practices. For him, the availability of "microblogging" technologies also allowed users to perform the *blogueur* through other means. This became necessary in light of important transformations in the daily life of users. An early Web user turned into an online communications consultant thus asserts, "At the time [when I began blogging], I didn't have a wife and children. Therefore, I easily wrote one article per week. But then you start having a job, and have lots of work and responsibilities, and it becomes much more difficult.” The context, this user suggest, had changed, and new tools had become available that made it easier to share his voice in the context of new personal and professional obligations.

In a similar manner, Stephanie Booth, the early blogger in Switzerland who actively promoted the practice of blogging in the French language (see chapter 2), claimed: “Ten years ago, if you wanted to express yourself online, you pretty much had a blog. Now there are all sorts of tools or ways to do it. A lot of what we used blogs for in terms of communicating and connecting with one another, we now do through Facebook and Twitter, which work much better to give bits of information about how the day is going” (personal communication, March 26, 2012). In this view, media technologies associated with “microblogging” provided users with features to satisfy the need to give an account of the self. Even France’s greatest blog apologist, Loïc Le Meur, expressed a more modest but equally important concern when he pondered over the place of blogging in a Web ecology marked by novel media technologies. He wrote: “I’m not exactly sure how my blog fits in my online social life anymore with all those networks and I won’t promise I will update it daily anymore (as I can’t keep that promise!) but I like having a blog and I like blogging longer posts here. We shall see!” (Le Meur, 2011).

The tension introduced by the availability of other media technologies led to a significant transformation of the identity of blogging and the cultural significance of its practitioners in France. Considered key actors in the development of “participatory democracy” in 2007 (see previous chapter), the role of *blogueurs* in shaping the public sphere was regarded with much more skepticism by the time the next presidential election arrived. For example, Benoît Thieulin, the architect of Socialist candidate Segolène Royal’s Web campaign in the 2007 election, asserted: “[The year] 2007 was the moment of glory of *la blogosphère*, with candidates talking with an over-informed elite that are the *blogueurs*. Today, we are living a form of remediation and the public debate is done on the Internet, but with new types of journalists, who are more into decoding [the news] and into pedagogy" (from an interview in Ledit, 2011). By remediation, Thieulin referred to the renewed role of media organizations in shaping the public sphere. He explains, "The *blogosphère* lost a lot, because in the end the communitarian links of friendship and social relations migrated to a platform devoted to this end [Twitter]. There is no equivalent to what used to be the journalistic, editorial ideas of *la blogosphère* between 2005 and 2007. The bubble burst" (personal communication, October 19, 2011). In Thieulin's view, journalists had been able to reconquer (what he calls "remediate") the public sphere by adopting tools that were better suited to accomplish tasks previously done through blogging, such as interacting with readers, or commenting and linking to recent news.[75] In this way, he suggested, journalists had come to undertake the role played by bloggers five years earlier.

The tool that journalists used to reconquer the public sphere to which Thieulin referred was not the blog, but Twitter. For Romain Pigenel, member of the unit in charge of candidate François Hollande's Web campaign strategies in the 2012 election and who became Chief Digital Officer at L'Élysée once Hollande was elected, "The blog was a *has-been* thing in 2012, after being the star in 2007. Twitter was the star of the [2012] campaign" (personal communication, September 5, 2012). In other words, although Twitter did not replace blogs altogether, it seized their place as the key media technology in the French political imaginary. A key example of this shift was the invention of the "Riposte Party." First implemented by the Socialist Party and then replicated by the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), Riposte Parties were gatherings organized to bring together a selected group of *blogeurs* and *twitteurs* (also called *twittos*) to comment on an event, particularly the presidential debate, and make certain hashtags climb on Twitter's ranking of trending topics.[76] These events—rather than monthly meetings of political *blogueurs* such as The Republic of Blogs—became a source of fascination for journalists in the mainstream media, who gave them ample coverage (Curé, 2012).

The significance of the availability of novel media technologies for sharing voice is also revealed when the production of blogging software in France is examined. The rise of technologies associated with "microblogging" and social networking triggered new concerns for producers of blogging software. Pierre Bellanger, the creator and director of France's most popular blogging platform, Skyblog (see chapter 2), thus admitted, "When Facebook exploded, we asked ourselves questions because we weren't used to have competitors. We asked ourselves: 'What can we do? Is it over? Is this going to last?' We accepted death, I would say, which gave us an enormous freedom from a marketing perspective" (personal communication, October 13, 2011). Bellanger had always promoted a culture of innovation within the *Skyrock* radio station and the Skyblog platform. But the threat of new types of competitors required a major process of what Bellanger likes to call "netamorphosis." This threat materialized when an important number of Skyblog users migrated to platforms such as Facebook after 2007.

In response, the Skyblog team launched a large user survey and implemented a major redesign of the tool. Forced to give up the Skyblog name because of a legal process, the station renamed the platform Skyrock.com in May 2007. In addition to the name change, the developers worked to reconceive the tool's identity. Bellanger explains, "We [became] a hybrid between a blog platform and a social network site such as Facebook, [an interface] between the self and the crowd (*la foule*). […] [Today] we are probably the only *blog social network* that is profitable" (emphasis added). Skyblog's "netamorphosis" thus involved the creation of new features that blended the features of blogs and social network sites. Accordingly, features such as instant messenger, the possibility to follow "friends" ("*les amis*"), and the means to records users' actions on their profiles were added to Skyrock.com.

Yet, according to Bellanger, Skyblog's netamorphosis should not be reduced to an attempt to become a pure social network site (hence the terms "hybrid" and "blog social network"). In Bellanger's words, "[Users had] the idea of saying, 'You know, this is great, I will do on Facebook everything I did on Skyrock[.com]. But then they realized that there is a set of things you cannot do. There are things that I can't tell, do, and share in the same way. And it [Facebook] is also a sort of treadmill that everyone can see. So there was also a learning process about how to use the platform." Although Skyrock.com adopted the language of social network sites and some technologies associated with microblogging to reconceptualize the "crowd" (in terms of "friends" and "followers"), the platform's creator argued that a different way to interact with the public distinguished Skyrock.com from its new rivals.

Where did these tensions leave the blog in France? How did users and software developers cope with these increasingly prevalent tensions? The next section begins answering these questions.

Redefining Blogging: The Opportunities

This analysis of the reconfiguration of the Web ecology in France would be incomplete without considering how blogging practitioners and developers have coped with the tensions discussed previously. Actors in France have deployed a variety of strategies to exploit the opportunities created through the processes explained above. In this way, they have argued for the continued significance of blogs in France. These strategies have centered on two main issues: (a) the singularity of blogs in a reconfigured Web ecology, and (b) the value of blogs for specialized communities of practice.

Like in the United States, many practitioners in France have argued for the singularity of blogging as a practice of subjectivity. These users and commentators typically suggest that, although useful for a variety of purposes, media technologies associated with the "microblogging" keyword are not without fault. One limitation often underscored is the constraint imposed by the 140-character standard that characterizes technologies such as Twitter. "With Twitter," says blogging software developer and early Twitter user, Michel Valdrighi, "We are limited; and there is one effect: we only know what is happening in the village" (personal communication, November 9, 2011). Valdrighi thus suggests that, in addition to the size constraints imposed to share voice, Twitter renders possible a view of publicness that limits the possibilities to give an account of the self. Rather than creating the grounds for making the self visible to a vast public, users like Valdrighi argue, Twitter bounds it to a selected group of people (that is, the "village" of the "followers" and the "followed").

In contrast, many practitioners contend, blogs remains an ideal outlet for subjectivity practices because they are not necessarily constrained by their content or the public that has access to them. *Blogueuse* Stephanie Booth thus asserted, "I think that for anybody who is passionate about something, for freelancers, for people who like writing or even for businesses, I think that blogs clearly have a place. The blog has become more [a] place where you actually write stuff […] than a tool to communicate with other people" (personal communication, March 26, 2012). Although Booth recognized that users have turned to other media technologies to enact practices previously performed through blogging, she argued nonetheless for the relevance of blogs as an ideal means to express certain stable features of the self, such as “passion.”

In a similar manner, Nicolas Vanbremeersch, a major “star” of the 2007 blogosphere who stopped blogging in 2009 arguing lack of time, wrote two years later: “No day goes by without me having a desire to blog about something. I tweet, obviously, but to say what? Nothing, or almost. I point out [to things], but the answer is nothing but an echo and a share, not progress. I catch snatches of breath, but it doesn’t lead to anything. […] It is with humility, thus, that I am restarting this blog’s path. It will be a record of everything, breathing. […] [Posts] should be taken for what they are: sharing snatches of breath in order to breathe” (Vanbremeersch, 2011). “Versac” criticized the shortcomings of “tweeting” as a form of sharing voice. He deplored the lack of depth to give an account of the self through a short message and the difficulties to make communication progress through a short reply from someone else or a “retweet.” The solution, in his view, was to create a new blog that could allow him to materialize his need to express himself openly online. In other words, to “breath.”

In light of this view of “microblogging” and the singularity of blogging, many practitioners have adopted an ecological approach to redefine the spectrum of possibilities for sharing voice offered by the contemporary Web. By defining the Web as an ecology, these practitioners emphasize what they see as the alternative strengths and complementarities of different media technologies. Explaining the strategies adopted by the Socialist Party’s Web campaign in the 2012 election, Romain Pigenel noted, “[Blogging] became a very common practice, and therefore people speak less often about it. But for me it had equal weight [than Twitter]. Let’s say it is a part of an ecosystem. Twitter is the peak of the iceberg nowadays.

Tomorrow it will be something else. But the practices are the same and the same people remain" (personal communication, September 5, 2012).

Different sets of practices and technologies, such as those tied to both blogging and "microblogging," are made to coexist in a new ecology because of how they allow capturing different traditions and practices of subjectivity in France. Actors thus deployed a recurrent strategy to make sense of novel media technologies, discussed in the previous chapters: to make them "fit" within the history of traditions and cultures in France. In Pigenel's words, "The blog and Twitter have encountered a very French tradition. The French are literary people. The blog overtook this very French cultural gesture of wanting to write. Twitter worked very, very well with the political class because it overtook the French tradition of the short phrase (*la petite phrase*), [such as François de] La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*." Whereas the blog allows the French to connect with their literary past, microblogging is an ideal means to revive the French aphorism. Redefined as an expanded ecology with supplementary strengths, the Web is continuously construed as a means to seize, reveal, and revive various historical traditions to give accounts of the self in France.

In addition to their singularity, users who argue for the contemporary relevance of blogs have defined them as sites of specialization. In their study of various types of websites that populated the early French Web, Beaudouin and colleagues (Beaudouin, Fleury, Pasquier, Habert, & Licoppe, 2002; Licoppe & Beaudouin, 2002) noted that specialization is a common strategy used by website creators in France to keep their sites alive over time.[77] In a similar manner, some users contend that blogs occupy an important place in the contemporary Web ecology because of how they allow communities of practitioners to specialize in the discussion of particular issues and concerns. To support this interpretation, users and commentators typically turn to the example of communities of blogging practitioners in various fields with high levels of activity (such as cooking, fashion, and knitting, among others). According to WordPress collaborator, Xavier Borderie, "The blog is not dead, quite the opposite. It works better by niche: there are comic (*bande desinée*) blogs, fashion blogs, couture blogs… today, it works better by categories" (personal communication, December 14, 2011). Blogging rankings—analyzed in the previous chapter—, which are usually organized around main domains and fields of activity, also help to legitimize the view of blogs as ideal sites for writing about and discussing specialized issues and opinions.

The public of blogging practices acquires a different configuration in this re-enactment of blogs as a media technology devoted to providing specialized accounts of the user's life. Rather than the Habermasian public sphere often imagined around the time of the 2007 presidential campaign, users have redefined the "blogosphere" in order to implement an ecological approach and thus cope with the tensions tied to availability of new media technologies. They typically reimagined the "blogosphere" as a fragmented space formed by specialized communities and groups of users. For Benoît Thieulin, former Web political campaign director turned into Web communications consultant, "The generalist *blogosphère*, in my opinion, is dead. Today, what remains of *la blogosphère* are very specialized communities, which say things, produce content, and are organized around very precise themes" (personal communication, October 19, 2011). Accordingly, mentions of various *blogosphères* (in plural) have tended to replace definitions of a singular, unique *blogosphère*.

Beaudouin and colleagues show that users often deploy a strategy of specialization as a means to make their websites interesting to a public. This concern is of particular relevance for users who seek to capitalize on their blogging practices. Thus, it is not surprising to find users who aspire to make income with their websites among the strongest advocates for the centrality of blogs as sites of specialization. Consistently, many advertising agencies and intermediaries between bloggers and advertisers have also adopted this view. Online communications consultant, Cyril Rimbaud, notes, "In 2008 and 2009, there was one party for bloggers each night. This has started to dilute. There still are, but they are different nowadays. Today, [we] try will try to further target communities, to filter things down further" (personal communication, August 8, 2012). For a group of software developers in France, the rise of "microblogging" also created new opportunities to create novel tools for sharing voice on the Web in specific ways.

New Software for a New Web Ecology: The Invention of "Curation"

The analysis of the dynamics that shaped blogging in the United States began with a discussion of how software developers reacted to particular contexts by creating specific media technologies that could enable users to share voice in certain ways. In a similar manner, a group of French and French-speaking developers have sought to exploit the opportunities that arose from the availability of blogging and media technologies associated with "microblogging." In what follows, I use the examples of Pearltress, Scoop.it, SeenThis, and Storify to illustrate this specific type of software programs. A result of the development of novel software applications in the United States was the invention of a keyword with which to describe the resulting reconfiguration of the Web ecology (that is, "microblogging"). Similarly, developers in France posited the term of "curation" to characterize what they envisioned as the next frontier in the use of the Web as a technology of subjectivity.

Some software developers in France have opted for building tools that blend features and practices that characterize both blogging and media technologies tied to "microblogging." For example, in late 2010, Arnaud Martin, the co-creator of the SPIP software (see chapter 2), launched a Web application (in beta mode) named SeenThis. Martin defined SeenThis as "short-blogging without a character limit," primarily characterized for how it allows implementing various features: "Link recommendation. Automatized features for easily writing your posts. Forums on each post. News of the day. An advanced theming" (SeenThis, 2010). The tool, Martin noted, allowed users "to keep a personal blog composed of short posts" and was "primarily devoted to reading the news of the day" (SeenThis, 2011).

As these statements indicate, SeenThis sought to remediate both blogging (from which it incorporated practices such as reverse-chronological publishing and comments) and "microblogging" (from which it assimilated the short form). To characterize this blend of features, Martin coined the term "short-blogging." In his first description of the tool, he elaborated: "Seenthis posits the concept of 'short-blogging': blogging optimized for search engines (*référencement*) through posts whose size is not limited, thanks to automatized features that facilitate the insertion of real citations and developed comments. The system makes immediate three usual activities of this type of blogging: to reference a website, to present citations, to write one's own comments" (SeenThis, 2011). In this way, Martin suggested, SeenThis captured the main advantages of a redefined Web ecology in one single application that reinterpreted blogging through the "short form" and thus made a new range of practices possible.

However, unlike with SPIP—arguably the most iconic legacy of the Independent Web movement in France—SeenThis was not released under a free license. Since its launch, Martin has worked instead to build an economic model for the application.

Alternatively, an important number of software programs created in the late 2000s and early years of the 2010s decade in France have sought to resolve what developers consider to be some of the shortcomings of both blogging and "microblogging" by enabling practices that cut across both forms of sharing voice but that cannot be reduced to any one of them. Launched in 2010, a French Web application named Scoop.it illustrates this group of tools. French engineers, Guillaume Decugis and Marc Rougier, developed this application after working on a service named Goojet, which provided mobile phone users with the possibility to select from a variety of Internet services and exchange messages and content. Building on the team and the technologies developed for the Goojet project, Decugis and Rougier refocused their work. Decugis, the start-up's co-founder and CEO, explains, "There were two ideas. The first was to work not on a people-centric model, such as blog platforms, Twitter, and social network sites, where you connect with people, and move instead to a topic-centric model, where you follow topics rather than people. The second idea was to encourage people to be into the curation rather than the creation of content" (personal communication, October 19, 2012). The outcome of these ideas was Scoop.it.

These software developers worked to explore the space in between blogging and "microblogging" practices and technologies. Says Decugis, "There is blogging, which was great, and there is Twitter, which people have called microblogging and in a sense resolves a problem: it is stressful to think that we have to produce 800 words, a blog post […] With blogging it takes time to create [posts] and it is difficult to be discovered. With Twitter it is easier to create but it is difficult to be discovered. […] We [Scoop.it] are sort of in between" (personal communication, October 19, 2012). The most appropriate description of Scoop.it, Decugis concluded, is to define it as "blogging without blogging."[78]

The solution to problems in extant alternatives to share voice on the Web advocated by many software developers in France was content "curation." According to Patrice Lamothe, the creator of a French software program (Pearltrees) launched in 2009, curation is the "human organization of the Web." This practice, he maintained, is seated in "a very deep human need […]: the need to give a meaning to its [sic] own world, to keep at hand, organize and share the stuff one likes" (Lamothe, 2010a). As the analysis of the creation of early weblogs and tumblelogs revealed, content "curation" was not a departure from blogging and what came to be known as "microblogging," but rather a return to their common roots. "Curation" represents the exploitation of one specific aspect of these two practices, that is, filtering and classifying the Web. For proponents of "curation," both blogging and "microblogging" had created a vast amount of data; organizing this information in meaningful ways was another relevant and necessary means to give an account of the self and "increase [the self's] visibility" (Decugis, n.d.).

For Lamothe, "curation" represented a "third frontier" in the development of the Web, a necessary step to achieve its full potential as a democratic and democratized media technology. In his perspective, Web content "curation" tools supplemented the rise of technologies that allowed people to access information (the Web's first frontier, from 1995 to 2002) and tools that enabled people to create and disseminate content (the Web's second frontier, also known as the

Web 2.0, after 2002), typically illustrated by blogging. Lamothe writes: "Now that the [W]eb allows everyone to read and disseminate everything, it should also allow everyone to do what its first users were always able to do, the feature that lies at the heart of its radical originality: *organize everything*. The web's ecosystem should progressively build technologies, invent products, and develop methods of usage that will allow everyone to manipulate content created by others, gather material, edit it, prioritize it and give it meaning. The [W]eb should allow everyone to become a complete medium" (Lamothe, 2010b, emphasis in original). In this view, the definition of the Web user as an organizer of information is as important in the performance of her identity as are conceptions of the user a reader and content creator.

According to proponents, "curation" technologies helped users to find their voice by aggregating, organizing, and attaching meaning to Web content. In 2010, Belgian software developer Xavier Damman designed a Web application to this end, named Storify. This application built on a previous project that Damman had created in Belgium (Publitweet), which allowed users to publish and curate content published on Twitter. In association with Burt Herman, a former Associated Press journalist, Damman developed Storify as a means to aggregate not only tweets but also other "social objects." Like Jyri Engeström, Jaiku's creator, Damman defined social object as specific types of content available on the Web (from blog posts to images to tweets). Inspired by a term used in journalistic jargon to characterize the search for particular angles to write news articles, the name Storify evoked the major purpose of the tool. According to Damman, "Most people can't understand a stream of content, but they can understand a story. This is the universal way of shar[ing] information, telling stories. And this is what Storify is all about: turning streams of social objects into stories that matter, that can be seen and shared for the rest of us to see" (personal communication, October 19, 2012). In this sense, for Damman, "curation" practices and technologies allow users to find their voice by transforming social objects into meaningful stories. Accordingly, one of the application's slogans became, "Don't get lost in the noise. Discover the voices worth sharing" (Storify.com, 2012).

Software programs like Pearltress, Scoop.it, SeenThis, and Storify point to a significant reconfiguration of the software development field and the cultural significance of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in France, shaped in part by the rise of specific software programs and websites in the United States. According to developers, these media technologies created a particular void: the need for organizing the Web's content. This need could be filled with software programs designed in France. However, unlike early software development experiences analyzed in previous chapters, these developers suggested that the voids filled by "curation" media technologies were not exclusively French but rather "global." Scoop.it's CEO, Guillaume Decugis, explains, "We realized that the problem we resolve is not a French, Belgian, English, or American problem, it is global, and that if we want[ed] to stand a chance at resolving it, we needed to develop [a start-up] at the global level" (personal communication, October 19, 2012).

Accordingly, not only did these software developers turn to English as the primary language of their applications, but some of them also decided to move to Silicon Valley rather than staying in French-speaking countries in Europe. This shift can be explained in part as a search for a more favorable context for developing "global" software applications. Unlike Europe, these developers argued, the United States offers more funding opportunities. For Storify's co-founder, Xavier Damman, the possibilities to find investors in French-speaking countries like Belgium and France were slim. Therefore, he moved to San Francisco, a city that he likes to describe as "the Florence of modern days." In his words, "During the Renaissance, there was a dark age in the rest of the world and there was a bubble in Florence where all the artists and creative people gathered […] and their only goal was to dream a future, to define it. We live in an economic crisis at the global scale, but there is no crisis in San Francisco, we live in a bubble […] a bubble where all the engineers and hackers from everywhere in the world meet and are defining the future of our society" (personal communication, October 19, 2012).

French exceptionalism has historically functioned as a key symbolic discourse to argue for France's unique cultural and economic position in the world (notably in opposition to the American Other) over the past decades (Chafer & Godin, 2010; Eko, 2013; Godin & Chafer, 2005). In contrast, for a group of relatively young programmers, developers, and entrepreneurs who came of age as professionals, as it were, during a key period in the process of France's neoliberalization, the historical view of France as an exceptional country hinders technological development.[79] Unlike France, these developers argued, the United States provides them with a context that welcomes innovation and risk taking (cf. Neff, 2012; Saxenian, 2006; Takhteyev, 2012). In cities like San Francisco and New York, these developers have sought investment opportunities and business alliances that they deem as impossible in France.[80] In the early days of the French Web, software developers sought to create tools that captured what they considered to be the most singular features of the French Web and self.[81] By the late 2010s, they preferred to build applications for a "global" audience.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter analyzed how, a little over one decade after they started using blogs to give an account of themselves, actors in the United States and France reassessed the place and significance of blogging technologies and practices within the contemporary Web ecology. For these actors, the arising of a new type of technologies and practices (often associated with the notion of “microblogging”) structurally transformed the Web and turned blogs from a dominant “format” for sharing voice into only a part of a larger repertoire of media technologies.

The chapter discussed three main dynamics to account for how this process unfolded. First, I examined how software developers in the United States and France (and other French-speaking European countries) created various software applications in the second half of the 2000s and early 2010s. These applications functioned as a material response to particular contexts and situations in both countries. In the United States, developers argued that this set of media technologies were characterized by their simplicity and thus allowed to transcend and salvage blogs from the pitfalls of their bureaucratization (analyzed in the previous chapter). In France, they argued that a new type of software applications was needed to take the Web into a new era of development and finally reach its full potential.

Second, I considered how specific keywords were invented to make sense of this reconfiguration of the Web ecology. In the United States, proponents of the “microblogging” notion deployed it to fill what they considered to be a semantic void created primarily by the emergence of certain technologies such as tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter. In France, this conceptual work translated into efforts to fill the symbolic void left by both blogging and “microblogging” as forms of giving an account of the self. The privileged metaphor used to describe these new software applications was content “curation.” With these technologies, developers sought to allow users to exploit one foundational dimension of both blogging and "microblogging": not the production of original content on the Web but rather the organization of existing material into navigation sequences as a meaningful form of sharing voice.

Third, I analyzed the consequences that this reconfiguration of the Web ecology had for the identities of blogging and its practitioners in the United States and France. This analysis showed that the transition from blogging to other practices of subjectivity in both countries was not a linear evolutionary process but rather fraught with tensions and opportunities that shaped the use and development of the Web as a means to give an account of the self.

Taken together, these dynamics shed light on three important themes. First, they confirm the increasing process of convergence in the development of the Web as a technology of subjectivity in the United States and France, identified in the previous chapter. Chapter 2 demonstrated the importance of "Frenchness" in the design, use, and early development of the Web in this country. Developers built tools such as SPIP as an explicit attempt to capture values and practices that they envisioned as exceptionally French, such as resisting the transformation of the Web into a giant supermarket. Like Astérix battling the Roman Empire, software programs such as SPIP inscribed what was seen as an intrinsically French inclination for self-performance and defended it against the prevalent neoliberalization of the Web. Chapter 3 revealed instead how these practices started to change as certain values and notions associated to blogs in the American context, which had been partially rejected heretofore, found wider acceptance in France. This transformation of blogging coincided with the stabilization of France's "pragmatic neoliberalism" (Prasad, 2006). As a result, users and developers in France began conceiving of blogs as commodities and the blogger as an entrepreneur. Rather than building tools to express exceptionally French features, they mostly localized or "Frenchified" the imaginary surrounding blogs in the United States. Blogging in this country thus gained a French touch while retaining an American flavor.

Chapter 3 also demonstrated the centrality of figures such as Loïc Le Meur, France's most iconic blog entrepreneur, who worked to build a market for blogging practices and technologies. His approach was to develop a French audience for American products. In contrast, the developers of "curation" technologies featured in this chapter sought to build an international audience for products that were originally conceived in France. Accordingly, many abandoned French—a traditionally key marker of French national identity—and turned to English as the primary language of their applications. Many moved to Silicon Valley and other cities in the United States to build strategic alliances and to obtain financial resources that seemed impossible to them in France. Moreover, unlike previous applications they had built, the products they designed were proprietary and targeted to an English-speaking international audience.

Efforts to position France as a leading force of technological development have historically shaped the development of various media technologies. For example, as Fletcher (2002) notes, the Minitel had roots in a determination to help France find its place "in the new global game of high technology domination" (p. 108), particularly after the economic crisis of the 1970s. In the cases of the Minitel, the Internet, and the early Web, these efforts were fashioned by fears of Americanization (Chollet, 2001; Fletcher, 2002, 2003; Schafer & Benjamin, 2012). Nevertheless, the concern with the rise of the United States as a leader in the world's market of technological development seem to wane when the invention of "curation" technologies and the transformation of blogging in France are examined. As this chapter revealed, American methods for developing media technologies, embodied in the culture, ethos, and innovation dynamics of Silicon Valley, were often seen as the appropriate model for expanding the software production field in France.

This shift can be explained as a reaction against a common view of France as an isolated and exceptional country by relatively young individuals who developed professionally during one of the country's most important periods of neoliberalization. In this sense, what the American model and imaginary provided to software developers in France was an opportunity to be "global," rather than exceptional. To be sure, many software developers and users in France still adhere to the values that defined movements such as the Independent Web in the late 1990s. However, these values have, for the most part, shifted from the resistance to Americanization to the opposition to proprietary systems and control (Blondeau & Allard, 2007; Broca, 2012; Ricou, 2007).

To Frenchify American notions and technologies remains common practice in France. Twitter, for example, found a welcoming home in France when users situated the "short form" within the larger history of the short phrase (*la maxime*) in the country. Yet, the values surrounding the use of blogs and media technologies associated with "microblogging" in the United States have gained wide resonance in France. The acceptance of the "microblogging" notion is a case in point. As shown in this chapter, this keyword is a cultural product: its construction was embedded within particular cultural processes in the United States whereby the identities of a set of media technologies were shaped. For example, the articulation of tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter took place in a context of dissatisfaction by some users with the ways in which blogs had evolved. A cultural drive towards simplicity as a means to resolve the complexity of media technologies also played a major role in establishing the grounds for valuing the constraints of tools such as Twitter as a stimulus for creativity, and the need for shortness as a necessary and effective means of performing a self. These assumptions about the relevance of simplicity that underlay the invention of the "microblogging" keyword in the United States have been widely accepted in France.

The second theme revealed by this chapter also reflects the prevalence of values and notions advanced in the United States in shaping Web use and development in France. Against an understanding of technological change as a linear process, this chapter conceptualized the transition from blogging to other forms of sharing voices as fraught with tensions and opportunities. The chapter made visible a continuum of positions ranging from those who contended that blogs had become a banal technology in the verge of extinction to those who argued for their renewed significance.

In both countries, a neoliberal conception of blogging that privileges economic profit has gained prominence as a justification for the continued relevance of this practice. Thus, rather than conceiving the blogosphere primarily as a vast network of interlinked websites and informed citizens (as discussed in the previous chapter), users in both countries also speak of various blogospheres as specialized communities of individuals connected by a common interest and a set of shared practices. In this sense, the focus of blogging as a technology of the self partially shifted from social transformation to specialized communication. Users interested in utilizing blogs as a source of revenue have kept a neoliberal conception of the blogger as an entrepreneur. In this view, blogs represent a means to turn the public into an audience and thus create revenue opportunities. Blogospheres (in plural) function as niche-based markets. For a country like France, where the resistance to neoliberal conceptions of subjectivity was fundamental in shaping the emergence of the Web, this finding is not trivial.

Third, this chapter helped to trace the formation and development of a specific register of voice. It did so through an examination of how certain conceptions of the self and publicness have gained prominence as a result of the creation and use of the various media technologies associated with both “microblogging” and “curation.” As discussed in previous chapters, technologies function as an interface between privacy and publicness and thus give an expression to specific conceptions of the self. In a similar manner, developers and users examined in this chapter suggested that software applications created in the second half of the 2000s decade and early 2010s made possible to reveal the self in novel ways. They argued that these media technologies allowed combining a variety of content types (often defined as “social objects”) that could be used to give a more comprehensive view of the self. In contrast to blogs, which they defined as standardized blends of lengthy posts and features homogenously displayed, software developers redefined voice as sharing and combining a variety of content types through specific formats. By organizing a cascade of items—rather than providing extensive descriptions of daily events in their lives or sharing extensive thoughts about a range of affairs—users could provide others with a wide-ranging and dynamic window into the self. An important goal of this form of sharing voice was to provide a temporary and partial point of access to an always-present and always-available self.[82]

This set of media technologies also captured specific conceptions of what it means to be public. In this register of voice, publicness meant to constantly share one’s availability, location, activities, moods, statuses, and stories in real time. Like other social network sites and services (while simultaneously helping to define them), new software applications have implemented this conception of the public through terms such as of "friends," "followers," and "followed" individuals. Developers built features to make these categories visible to users and to allow them to enact the public/private distinction in fractal ways. Therefore, users could make their content available to specific groups of "followers" as opposed to the public in general. In parallel, they could also learn and reveal to others the composition of the public—the village of "followers" and "followed," as a user in France put it. In other words, the public of a user has access not only to the "social objects" deployed by a user to make her rich presence available at all time, but also to the list of individuals who have access to this content.

The rise, development, and transformation of blogging in the United States and France have important social, cultural, and technological implications. The final chapter considers the significance of the evidence featured in these chapters for theory development and for making sense of the cultural imperative to build an objectification of the self, encapsulated by the trajectories of blogging.

Chapter 5. Sharing Voice in the Digital Age

The previous chapters revealed the remarkable story of how the Web has evolved as a technology of subjectivity over almost two decades in the United States and France. Three crucial processes can be identified to summarize this story: the emergence of the blog; its constitution into a means for intervening in the public sphere and a commodity; and the identity crises triggered by the rise of novel media technologies designed to replace or extend it.

First is the process through which a variety of appropriation practices in the mid- to late 1990s crystallized in the creation of the blog as a novel and recognizable "format" category. This process unfolded in the context of the dot-com bubble in the United States and France. Users in both countries turned to the Web to share their lives, thoughts, writings and creations with others, and to construct meaningful navigation sequences of valuable information online. For them, the Web represented a privileged means to provide a window into their daily lives, transform their voices into meaningful accounts of their experiences and thoughts, and build online navigation paths. Grounded in daily life experiences and the constant exploration of the Web, they provided others with a look of their "interior" selves.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the blog stabilized to become a privileged means to enact this variety of practices in both countries. Key in this process of stabilization was the emergence of automated software programs to create blogs and the expansion of the range of content that users produced for these sites. As a result, the blog was redefined as a plastic "format" that could absorb the identities of different, existing websites. Users thus began appropriating blogs to combine a variety of content and website creation practices, such as diary writing and personal publishing in the United States, and sharing passions, hobbies, and political opinions in France. In this way, the blog became the soapbox of "average Joes and Janes" and an ideal means to connect with communities of like-minded practitioners.

In the initial years of the twenty-first century, the belief in the potential of the blog as an ideal means for self-performance and personal transformation combined with the hope that it could also help to bring about social change. This is the second main process examined in the previous chapters. The context that resulted from the availability of particular technological means and certain events (such as 9/11 and the War in Afghanistan in the United States, and the 2005 referendum on the European Constitution and the 2007 presidential election in France) served as the background against which this process took shape. In this particular context, the blog was reimagined as a means to intervene in the public sphere in ways that traditional organizations could not. Users in both countries envisioned their websites as means to fill the void left by news organizations to make the voices of citizens be heard. Invoking citizenship as their primary form of selfhood, they sought to shape the public sphere outside of traditional power centers, most notably legacy media.

This transition in the trajectory of blogging, from personal to collective, allowed for the formation of a particular register of voice. Actors enacted publicness primarily as that which pertained to the collective life of citizens. Accordingly, the concept of the "blogosphere" was used to tie together this view of publicness and notions of citizenship and political community. A process of bureaucratization ensued that built on the constitutive intertwinement of blogs and their appropriation by various collective actors. Blogging acquired organizational dimensions as news groups and political structures turned blogs into regular features of their online practices. Blogs also became commercialized as users worked to secure the financial means to transform their websites into sustainable economic projects. New websites emerged that sought to capture the essence of blogging (conceived in these terms) and turn this essence into a particular type of media outlet.

The third main process discussed in the previous chapters traced the relative banalization of the blog and the rise of various new media technologies that sought to both recover and extend the essence of blogging (namely, technologies associated with "microblogging" and "curation"). In a context of partial dissatisfaction with how blogging had developed, these new tools were designed in the second half of the 2000s decade to provide users with novel ways to reveal the self and perform it as an always-present and always-available entity through fragmentary posts. In this register of voice, individuals conceived of publicness as the space of sociability formed by the constant sharing of their availability, presence, location, activities, and statuses in real time, through various forms of technologically mediated content. As a result, they contended, these media technologies could help transcending and salvaging blogs from the pitfalls of their bureaucratization and help the Web to finally reach its full potential as a technology of subjectivity.

A significant reconfiguration of the identities of blogging and its practitioners characterized this process. Some users and commentators asserted that blogs had become a banal technology in the verge of disappearance. Others argued for their renewed significance as a means to communicate within specific communities of practitioners. Accordingly, they redefined the blogosphere as multiple interconnected groupings devoted to discussing specialized themes and issues. To accommodate this view of blogging and the tools they associated with "microblogging" and "curation," actors adopted an ecological approach that linked existing practices and technologies of subjectivity through a symbiotic relationship.

Blogs have thus evolved into a prime instance of a "fluid" technology (de Laet & Mol, 2000), an object enacted and appropriated in multiple ways. For users and developers, blogs represent a means for presenting introspective thinking, a record of daily events, a tool for political mobilization, a journalistic project, an open-ended literary experiment, a constant exhibition of images and videos, an attempt to make some income and, in many cases, a combination of all of the above. Users and commentators interested in the development of blogs quickly noted that these sites were not singular objects but rather a variety of things used to enact a wide range of realities (Conniff, 2005; Shirky, 2003).

Theorizing Voice Online

This dissertation developed a theoretical framework to make four analytic contributions: (a) it considered media technologies as assemblages of both textual meaning and material artifacts; (b) it examined the production and consumption of media technologies, as well as the role of intermediaries; (c) it adopted a process-orientation to make sense of the temporal development of the Web, and (d) it analyzed the trajectories of blogging in two national contexts through a comparative approach.

How blogs became a malleable "format" for sharing voices in different ways brings into focus the theoretical contributions that derive from considering websites as "texto-material" assemblages (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012a). This approach made it possible to account for the development of blogs in unique ways. It demonstrated that an analysis of either materiality or content would have given an overly restrictive account of the complex trajectories of these websites. On the one hand, a focus on the technology would have elucidated the blog's constitution as a medium, but would have made less visible the ritual practices of content creation and community building that shaped what the weblog became. Chapter 2 showed that several diarists, personal publishers, and weblog users explored the possibilities of weblogs for integrating different types of content months before automated software became available. On the other hand, a focus only on users' practices of content creation would have emphasized their interpretive agency in appropriating the Web in creative ways, but would have failed to highlight the significance of the weblog's constitution into a particular type of artifact. An exclusive focus on content production practices would have run the risk of overlooking how the materiality of these sites was crucial for the combination of the different types of content that shaped the blog's identities. Consequently, neglecting either dimension would have resulted in a failure to consider important factors that affected the development of the blog.

Studying the trajectories of blogs also illustrates the heuristic potential of bridging production and consumption activities. This approach allowed me to analyze both how users have enacted the affordances of media technologies in various ways *and* how these affordances crystallized certain practices and processes. Considering the activities of users was key to understanding the significance of technology in their practices. As shown in chapter 2, users responded to the availability of software programs such as Blogger by further integrating kinds of content that had mostly remained separate. They also appropriated the features of Movable Type to write longer posts, as noted in Chapter 3. Overall, technology acted as an interface between various conceptions of the public and diverse performances of the self. It allowed actors to provide a public window onto the self while also revealing to them what it meant to be in public. In this way, my approach made it possible to overcome a common view of technologies as neutral "backgrounds" or "architectures."

Yet, a look at the work of software developers revealed that these features of the Web are not technological imperatives but rather the product of particular values and processes. Blogger was an attempt to bring together the various subjectivity practices of "Web people." In a similar manner, developers of "microblogging" tools examined in chapter 4 sought to reinterpret blogging through the lens of "simplicity" and combine it with other media technologies in order to save blogs from the pitfalls of their commercialization. In this sense, considering the processes and dynamics that led to particular technological features was indispensable for understanding the significance of technology in enabling self-performance.

An examination of the blog's trajectories brings into light two analytical advantages of studying longitudinal dynamics rather than singular events or moments in the history of the Web. First is a capacity to offer an alternative rationale for how and why the blog successfully diffused in the United States and France. My account departs from invocations of the blog's supposed intrinsic capabilities or the heroic efforts of specific users as main explanations. Instead, I argue that a key factor for why blogs developed in these countries in the way they did was how actors made these technologies "fit" within their histories of practices, traditions, and cultures of subjectivity. Not surprisingly, at the peak of their popularity bloggers in the United States were compared to muckrakers and equated to Tom Paine, and *blogueurs* in France were tied to traits that they envisioned as fundamentally French, most notably insolence and pride.

Second, this longitudinal study created a fertile terrain for correcting a generalized tendency to characterize the blog as having a fully formed and stable identity from its inception

(Rosenberg, 2009). The identities of blogs are not steady but dynamic; they derive not from the intrinsic properties of the technology but from the contextualized enactment of a variety of practices. As discussed in chapter 2, the use of blogs to give an account of the self in the United States and France built on the experiences of users who had previously developed media technologies such as diaries, fanzines, pirate radios, and mailing lists. As it stabilized, the blog also absorbed the identity of early websites in the United States (such as online diaries and journals) and France (such as the *page perso* and the webzine). The identity of the blog further changed as new technological features were added to the templates created with software programs to crystallize the practices of early users. In the context of significant moments in the political life of these countries, chapter 3 demonstrated, users also enacted blogs by linking them to various traditional institutions for political expression, such as the newspaper column and the penny press. The tensions and opportunities introduced by the rise of novel media technologies (examined in chapter 4) also motivated actors to articulate certain conceptions of self and publicness, and thus perform new identities for blogs.

From Paris to San Francisco: A Story of Americanization?

The fourth building block of my theoretical framework centered on a comparative analysis of two national contexts. This comparative analysis helped to identify an important process of partial convergence in the trajectories of blogging in the United States and France. Chapter 2 showed that a resistance to the French version of the New Economy and the rise of neoliberal politics led to particular Web appropriation practices and products (such as websites and software programs) in this country. As the dot-com bubble gained momentum, a resistance to the transformation of the Web into a (super)market shaped how the Web emerged in France.

However, a gradual and relative waning of this resistance, analyzed in chapters 3 and 4, coincided with the stabilization of France's "pragmatic neoliberalism" (Prasad, 2006). Thus, neoliberal conceptions of the blogger as an entrepreneur and the blog as a commodity were more welcomed midway through the first decade of the twenty-first century in France than they would have just a few years earlier. Through this process, many software developers not only stopped resisting but also embraced modes and dynamics of technological development that they associated with the United States.

The convergence process identified in this study had one clear direction: actors in France adopted values and notions mainly advanced in the United States rather than the other way around. Thus, that blogs constituted an ideal window onto the self of "average Joes and Janes," a perfect outlet to transform the public sphere, or a prime tool for communicating with audiences in niche-based markets are ideas that were originally articulated in the United States and that have found a welcoming home in France over time. This imaginary largely embodied American notions of individualism shaped by the liberal doctrine. The trajectory of blogging in France thus confirms a wider process of cultural Americanization in France.[83]

This dissertation contributed to work on Americanization by considering the role of media technologies in this process. For the particular actors considered in this study—for the most part young, white, educated men—the United States offered a model for technological development. Blogging, as construed in the United States, provided French Web users and collective actors with a template to reveal the self and bring about social change. Silicon Valley, with its values of capitalist entrepreneurialism and risk-driven development, stood as an icon that revealed a way to overcome the burdens and constraints to innovation imposed by France's historical exceptionalism. To transcend this exceptionalism by enacting American technologies (such as blogs) and dynamics of technological development (such as those that characterize Silicon Valley) thus constituted a means to become global. In this context, it is not surprising that a group of 170 companies, supported by various public institutions, which has gathered since 2000 to promote digital development in France, adopted the name of "Silicon Sentier."[84]

The Reconfiguration of Public and Private Lives

How are we to make sense of the social, cultural, and technological implications of the main processes analyzed in the preceding chapters? To answer this question, in what follows I discuss three particular themes central to the rise of the Web as a technology of subjectivity: (a) the fundamental change of scale in how we share voice enabled by technology; (b) the significance of neoliberalism for contemporary practices of subjectivity; and (c) the consequences of turning registers of voice into regimes that demand the constant provision of self-accounts in daily life.

Technology and Subjectivity: A New Scale for Voice

The trajectories of blogs in the United States and France point to the centrality of technology in shaping contemporary practices of subjectivity. To be sure, using technology to share voices is not new. As noted in chapter 1, technology has historically played an important role in making possible certain practices of subjectivity. Nevertheless, what is particularly novel about the Web's development over the past two decades is how technology has enabled an immediate circulation and exchange of media texts within relatively large groups of individuals.

The Web has afforded a fundamental change of scale in how voice is shared. Early users in the United States (and Canada) built the first versions of websites such as online diaries, personal publishing journals, webzines, and weblogs. These websites in North America then functioned as a template for users and developers in other countries, namely France. It is through this circulation of media texts at a global scale that actors in France, a country with a relatively low Internet connectivity where the Minitel still played a central role in the symbolic imaginary that surrounded computer networks (Hargittai, 1999), in part discovered the possibilities of the Web in the mid- to late 1990s. As several organizations worked to increase Internet connectivity rates in the country over the next decade, websites available in the United States continued to play a key part in how French actors imagined themselves and the global place of France in the Web. In this sense, the circulation of voices online is patterned in particular ways.

This change of scale afforded by technology has important implications for how individuals conceive of their selves and publicness. Receiving email messages about their websites from users in different parts of the country helped early Web users in the United States to envision their public as a community of like-minded practitioners. Accordingly, they included visitor counters in their sites in order to further understand the nature of these communities and exchanges. They also built features to instantiate this view of publicness. In this way, “webrings” and “blogrolls” became available as means to signal belonging to different user communities. Technology, in the form of comment systems, trackbacks, RSS feeds, and hyperlinks, also played a central role in the constitution of the “blogosphere” as the preferred notion to conceptualize the publicness of those who used the blog to try to bring about social change. A conception of users as an interconnected “network” of informed citizens would have been practically impossible without these technological features. Actors also utilized these features to instantiate a view of the public as an audience with economic potential. More recently, users have enacted the affordances of tools associated with “microblogging,” such as @replies, the number of “followers,” “retweets,” and “reblog” posts, as crucial mechanisms to reimagine what it means to be in public. They have also used these features to conceive of themselves as selves that can be continuously accessed.

As the possibilities afforded by the Web to circulate and exchange media texts at a wide scale have multiplied, individuals have also encountered the difficulties of living in the “chiaroscuro” between publicness and privacy (Cardon, 2008, 2010a). Who exactly has access to the online records of one’s life is difficult to assess. Moreover, it is also problematic to determine whether all users care about what others do with the information they share publicly (Litt, 2013; Nippert-Eng, 2010; Nissenbaum, 2010; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011). Not only users live in public but the content they produce on the Web also has a public life of its own. In this context, many users have adopted certain measures to restrict the content they create to specific groups of individuals (Brake, 2009; Tufekci, 2012). Yet, Web users are increasingly required to give an account of themselves in a world where the conditions for sharing their voice online are not entirely their own.

Sharing Voice in a Neoliberal Age

The trajectories of the blog in the United States and France reveal the cultural grip of neoliberalism. Through the processes examined in this dissertation, neoliberal values have normalized as a fundamental part of subjectivity practices on the Web. To be sure, there are many actors for whom giving an account of the self online departs or even challenges a neoliberal governmentality. However, a conception of blogging that privileges economic profit has gained prominence as a main rationale to argue for the continued relevance of this practice in public culture. A view of blog users as entrepreneurs and social relationships as market partnerships has gained traction even in France, a country where "no social pact [had existed] to authorize neoliberalism as normal" (Couldry, 2010, p. 61).

There are important perils associated with the transformation of neoliberalism into "common-sense" (Hall & O'Shea, 2013) or the set of taken-for-granted assumptions with which to make sense of the identities of media technologies such as the Web. The stabilization of a neoliberal logic in public culture tends to legitimate a conception of practices and technologies of subjectivity, including blogs, as commodities, at the expense of other definitions. What might be lost in this process is a recognition of voice as a critical manifestation of human agency and experience. Neoliberalism, as scholars have shown, implies a fundamental disavowal of voice (Chomsky, 1999; Couldry, 2010; Leys, 2001). Thus, the prevalence of neoliberalism as a dominant governmentality might entail a threat to an important human need: the capacity of people to give a reflexive account of their lives. Neoliberalism affects how we make sense of the world (and how we don't).

If voice is envisioned as a fundamental need and part of a healthy democratic life, then imagining voice beyond neoliberalism becomes indispensable. This, however, might require more than a call for more voices on the Web, which has been a recurrent plea in contemporary research on people's participation on the Internet. It might also involve more than a push for new technologies. This is because technology can also inscribe and echo the fundamental logic of neoliberalism.[85] Moreover, technologies that receive wide global attention tend to be produced in Silicon Valley or places that, like France and many others, increasingly consider its dynamics of technological development as a model. Following the writers of the Kilburn Manifesto (Hall et al., 2013), envisioning voice beyond neoliberalism first might require changing the terms used to define the imaginary surrounding technologies (including blogs). Some alternatives to this imaginary might be found in countries other than the United States and France, or in the symbolic universe put forth by marginalized social groups in these countries to conceptualize these technologies.[86]

Another step to imagine voice beyond neoliberalism involves shifting the focus of concern from attention to recognition (Honneth, 1995). A neoliberal conception of voice tends to emphasize the strategies deployed to bring attention to the self (and thus reach financial profit in diverse forms). Instead, I suggest reconsidering the value of voice beyond the notion of self-promotion. Establishing a perfect boundary between self-performance and self-promotion might be difficult, if not impossible. But media technologies such as blogs still hold the potential for helping us recognize, in the sense of both identifying and appreciating, what others have to say.

From Register to Regime of Voice

The trajectories of blogging also matter because of how they allow us to capture a central cultural feature of our time: the increasingly pressing necessity to construct an objectification of the self on the Web. The previous chapter began to trace the rise of a resilient articulation between certain notions of the self, public, and technology. This articulation is encapsulated by the “microblogging” and “curation” keywords, as well as the development of so-called “social media.” In this register of voice, actors enact technologies to provide others with a fragmentary window onto an always-present and always-available self. In turn, publicness is typically performed as the space of sociability formed by the continual sharing of one’s availability, location, activities, moods, and stories in real time.

As increasingly more media technologies have integrated features to enact these specific conceptions of self and publicness, this register of voice has begun to acquire normative dimensions. From a *register* of voice, these specific notions have gradually turned into a *regime*. Considering the case of copyright technologies, Gillespie (2007) defines regimes as “the interlocking of the technological, the legal, the institutional, and the discursive to carefully direct user activity according to particular agendas” (p. 102). Applied to voice, the notion of regime points to the significance of these specific conceptions of self, public, and technology in public culture. It also brings attention to the difficulties involved in challenging or disrupting these conceptions and their articulation.

This regime of voice renders the constant provision of a window onto the self into a *requirement* in daily life. Scholars who study inequalities in Internet use have already revealed the perils associated with believing that the possibility to meet this demand is equally distributed in society (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004; Hargittai & Hinnant, 2008). Combined with a neoliberal logic, this regime also imposes certain markers of identity. The notions typically invoked to speak of how identity is to be performed on the Internet, such as “online presence,” suggest that users’ own existence on the Web is conditioned to the appropriate use of particular technological features. These features include the number of clicks, “followers,” “likes,” or “retweets” a user is able to achieve. The blossoming of manuals and handbooks devoted to instructing users on how to “target” audiences, “write” appropriate messages for them, “engage” them with one’s writing, “explore” strategies to build a personal brand, and learn how to “track” the audience’s behavior online, attest to this process (Diaz-Ortiz, 2011). Tied to the imposition of building such kind of “online presence” is the risk of neglecting or muting voices that do not subscribe to dominant terms to make the self public.

Underlying the formation of this regime of voice is a cultural obsession with becoming a celebrity, if only for fifteen minutes or to fifteen people. Technology (in the form of specialized “social media” or “apps”) is fetishized as the ultimate means to achieve this end. For the most part, the days when regular users were required to code their own websites are gone. Instead, users are encouraged to give an account of their lives within the constraints and possibilities afforded by automated software applications, which have particular financial motives. Through technology, this regime of voice thus tends to legitimate certain practices while sanctioning others. It is under these conditions that our senses of self and collectivity, privacy and publicness, and the role of technology in making them possible, are taking shape.

In light of this diagnosis, one might be temped to argue that the blog has not lived to the promises it inspired in its early days. In a sense, the blog has fallen victim of its own success: becoming a “paradigmatic” technology (Agamben, 2009)—the privileged case that makes intelligible a way of appropriating and developing the Web as a technology of subjectivity—has diluted its singularity. It emerged as an attempt to provide the Web with personal voice but got caught in dynamics of neoliberalization. It started as an effort to sort out the content of the Web through meaningful navigation sequences but was co-opted by traditional content providers. It developed as an endeavor to transform the public sphere but was quickly transformed into a commodity. Promises of revolution gradually gave way to talks of banalization. Yet, it would be misleading to judge the history of the blog by considering only these apparent failures. For several people, including many individuals whose stories were told in this dissertation, having a blog has made a difference in how they give accounts of their lives. For them, the blog stands as a repository of their personal stories, an opportunity to discover their own voices over time. It is in the tension between these concerning social trends and the positive personal experiences that the story of voice in the digital age continues.

Endnotes

[1] This cultural imperative to have a public presence has also triggered efforts to better understand the implications for privacy of using media technologies to this end (Litt, 2013; Nippert-Eng, 2010; Nissenbaum, 2010; Trepte & Reinecke, 2011).

[2] The historical trajectory of blogs has drawn increasing attention from scholars, practitioners, and commentators alike (Blood, 2002b; C. R. Miller & Shepherd, 2009; Rettberg, 2008; Rosenberg, 2009; Winer, 2001). This body of work has largely concentrated on three main areas of research. First, some authors have focused on the relationship between blogs and other technologies that predate them (Dibbell, 2002; Herring, Scheidt, Wright, & Bonus, 2005; C. R. Miller & Shepherd, 2004; Rettberg, 2008). This strand of research has aimed to show how the blog's most significant features and appropriation practices can be traced back to multiple sources. Second, research has looked specifically at the process of the emergence of blogs at the end of the 1990s (Ammann, 2009, 2010; Blood, 2002b; Lovink, 2011; Rosenberg, 2009). The focus here has been on the dynamics that shaped the emergence of the weblog as a recognizable kind of website. Third, some scholars and commentators have looked at the wider adoption of blogs in a variety of fields of activity (Boehlert, 2009; C. R. Miller & Shepherd, 2009; Rettberg, 2008; Rosenberg, 2009). Thus, these authors have sought to explain how blogging transitioned from early conceptions to other kinds of definitions, most notably the discussion of public affairs.

[3] See Flichy (2007a), Mosco (2004), and Taylor (2004) for more on the notion of "imaginaries."

[4] Like Foucault's (1988) "technologies of the self," the notion of "technologies of subjectivity" points to the procedures and practices, available in all civilizations in different forms, through which individuals constitute, develop, and maintain specific identities with a particular purpose (Foucault, 1984, 1989). Although Foucault's concept is highly relevant for the purposes of this study, I preferred the notion of technologies of subjectivity to incorporate an analysis of the public/private distinction and the role of artifacts in self-performance, largely absent themes in work on technologies of the self. See Siles (2012b) for an extended discussion of these issues.

[5] The "networked self," an author claims, "communicate[s] across collapsed and multiplied audiences [and] seeks social opportunities for expression and connection. These opportunities take a variety of forms, organically generated by relatively autonomous social agents pursuing goals reified via the affordances of SNSs [social network sites]" (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 317).

[6] See Pooley (forthcoming) for a review of the literature on the "mediated self" that arrives at the same conclusion.

[7] Mobile privatization describes a fundamental shift in the ways in which the public and the private are experienced. According to Williams, "At most active social levels people are increasingly living as private small-family units, or, disrupting even that, as private and deliberately self-enclosed individuals, while at the same time there is a quite unprecedented mobility of such restricted privacies" (1983b, p. 188). Williams used the metaphor of car traffic to define the mobile privatization of social relations enabled by media such as television.

[8] The Télétel was a videotex system developed by the monopolistic, state-owned telephone operator, France Télécom (formerly known as the *Direction Générale de Télécommunications*, DGT), launched in 1982. It was accessed through terminals known as Minitels, which consisted

of a small screen and a keyboard. (The name of the terminal, Minitel, became a common way to refer to the network, Télétel.) The French videotex project extended France's "state-led capitalism" that characterized the implementation of previous media technologies in the country, such as radio, broadcasting, and cable (Fletcher, 1998, 2002). France Télécom distributed free terminals among telephone users interested in the service. The Télétel project centered on a particular service: a national, electronic phone directory (the *annuaire électronique*) that could be accessed exclusively through the Minitel. This directory became the system's most popular application in its first years of existence (Arnal & Jouet, 1989). Originally conceived as a centralized information system, users transformed the Minitel into a communication medium (Challe, 1989; Feenberg, 1995; V. Schneider, 2000; V. Schneider et al., 1991). The Minitel became, according to Schneider (2000), "The model of success for a 'people's telematics'" (p. 324).

[9] The gradual adoption of neoliberal politics in France, Prasad (2006) maintains, was largely shaped by the bureaucratic features of the French state, the major force of technocracy in the control of the state, the search for successful practices among other states, and the backlash to previous administrations, particularly François Mitterand's nationalization policies.

[10] In light of its potential, it is not surprising that a growing number of studies have sought to apply the notion of voice to investigate various Internet technologies and practices (Couldry, 2008, 2010; Gajjala, 2004; Grano, 2009; Mitra, 2005, 2008; Mitra & Watts, 2002; Tacchi, 2012; Vis, van Zoonen, & Mihelj, 2011; Zhang, Gajjala, & Watkins, 2012).

[11] According to Weintraub (1997), two "kinds of imagery" underlie the use of these notions: "visibility" or the distinction between "what is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open,

revealed, or accessible," and "collectivity" or the difference between "what is individual versus what is collective" (pp. 4-5).

[12] Following Nippert-Eng (2010), I thus define publicness as "the condition of (pure) accessibility" and privacy as "the condition of (pure) inaccessibility" (p. 4).

[13] Analysts have typically employed the metaphor of the "network" to describe not only the technical underpinning of the Internet but also the social reconfigurations introduced by its uptake (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999; Castells, 1996, 2001; Galloway & Thacker, 2007; Rainie & Wellman, 2012; van Dijk, 2006).

[14] What exactly constitutes a blog has been an important topic of concern and curiosity for practitioners, commentators, and scholars alike (Conniff, 2005; Garden, 2012; Treem & Yates Thomas, 2010; Winer, 2003). In this study, I investigated how actors arrived to certain notions rather than adopting a categorical, encompassing definition in advance. In other words, I allowed users and developers to decide what counted as a blog and traced how this meaning has evolved over time and in different cultural contexts.

[15] A key analytical concept in STS, stabilization refers to the dynamics through which "artifacts appear to have fewer problems and become increasingly the dominant form of the technology" (R. Kline & Pinch, 1996, p. 766). Stabilization, in this body of work, designates the process by which technologies acquire material form and meaning. Some scholars have challenged the sense of finality implied by the concepts of closure and stabilization. According to Law, "[T]here are often *practical closures.* […] But what there aren't are closures in general. […] [N]o objects are ever routinised into a reified solidity" (2004, p. 56; emphasis in original). In response, authors have argued that stabilization "need not be final" and that technologies can always be

reinterpreted in different ways and thus re-acquire new forms and meanings (R. Kline & Pinch, 1996, p. 766). Thus, the notion of stabilization is used here to describe a *process* rather than a final stage of technological development. By employing this notion, I point to the dynamics through which blogs and their users acquired certain identities that subsequently became the object of new transformations and enactments.

[16] Simondon (2001/1958) provides another useful way to conceptualize stabilization dynamics. He theorized the design and development of technologies as a process of "concretization." By this he referred to the mechanisms through which technological objects shift from being largely disjointed technical features and units (the moment of *abstraction*) to a coherent and unified system where sub-ensembles are subjected to relations of reciprocal causality and function in synergy (the moment of *concretization*). In concrete technological objects, "Each structural element [accomplishes] various functions rather than only one" (Simondon, 2001/1958, p. 31). As useful as the notion of concretization is, it is limited by its inattention to the use practices through which media technologies are enacted. Moreover, Simondon's approach centers primarily on the extension of the functional possibilities of an artifact, rather than on how they also acquire cultural meaning.

[17] Another community of Web users emerged in the late 1990s under the banner of "Everything/Nothing." See Blood (2002b) for a short assessment of this largely understudied form of Web appropriation.

[18] See, for instance, the Online Diary History Project at: http://www.diaryhistoryproject.com.

[19] In this study, I use the term "journal" to refer only to those sites created by personal publishers and thus distinguish them from online diaries.

[20] Jesse James Garrett listed some of the early members of this group of weblog users (or what he calls 'ye old skool') at http://jjg.net/retired/portal/tpoowl.html

[21] According to Rebecca Blood (n.d.), only five women had created sites like these before April 1999, when she developed her own website. Most of these women were involved in the Web development field, a condition that helped them identify this type of site and acquire the knowledge necessary to produce them. For instance, Brigitte Eaton, who discovered these sites in 1998, was an experienced Web designer. Similarly, Meg Hourihan, creator of Megnut, had been involved in Web development since the mid-1990s. Although no major difference in content was identified between websites designed by men and those produced by women, gender relations seem to have played a prominent role in constructing the early identities of these sites. The distinction in the types of content available in weblogs and diaries can be read as an extension of common assumptions about gendered spheres of activity (Wajcman, 1991). Whereas many weblog users characterized these sites with metaphors of "male" exploration and mastery of the Web, the online diary was linked to the "feminine" realms of domesticity and everyday life. Thus, various male online diarists opted for naming their sites "journals" to avoid being associated with the feminine notion of "diary" and at least one female weblog user created an online diary to post content that did not "fit" in her weblog. Boddy (2004) identified similar processes in the early development of other media technologies.

[22] Before the popularization of the weblog term in 1998 and 1999, users also referred to these websites as "news pages" and "micro-portals." See Siles (2012a) for an analysis of how these notions yielded to the weblog concept.

[23] See Siles (2011, 2012a) for a more extended discussion of how this group of users emerged and how this type of website acquired a specific identity as an "online filter" in the late 1990s.

[24] By the end of the same year, Dave Winer launched Edit this Page, which gave users access to his software Manila, and Jeff A. Campbell created VelociNews. Also in 1999, Brad Fitzpatrick launched LiveJournal to create diaries and journals. In addition, Noah Grey designed a blogging software program named Grey Matter in 2000.

[25] The process of early stabilization that resulted in the blog's definition as a "format" was not devoid of controversy. As these dynamics unfolded, some users resisted, sometimes vigorously, the combination of different types of content and the new uses to which blogs were put. Users primarily debated the nature of the content of weblogs and their differences from other types of websites. McNeill (2009) suggests that some bloggers (mostly male and members of the technology development industry) also refused to be associated with diaries—a cultural form that is commonly thought of as feminine. Nevertheless, as the use of automated blogging software further stabilized, users found new ways to rearticulate the weblog artifact with multiple types of content, thus expanding its range of legitimate meanings (Lenhart & Fox, 2006).

[26] See, for example, a list of early webzines created by a user known as *Homme Moderne* (Modern Man) at: http://web.archive.org/web/20000123130606/http://www.homme-moderne.org/societe/media/ezines/index.html.

[27] "*Libertaire*," Dufresne clarifies, "but not *libertarien*" (personal communication, May 1, 2012).

[28] Originally described as "the portal of buddies" (*le portail des copains*), the site became the "portal of the Independent Web" (Lazuly, personal communication, May 15, 2012).

[29] The most-well known of these legal processes was conducted by model Estelle Hallyday, who sued Altern after a user published naked pictures of her on a website hosted in this server. See Chemla (1999; 2002) for an extended discussion of these lawsuits.

[30] Astérix is the main character of a popular French comic (*bande desinée*). The comic narrates the adventures of a village of Gauls in Armorica that, using a magic potion created by the local druid, resists Roman occupation.

[31] By the end of 2002, when a new version of b2 made possible to host and manage multiple blogs with one database, Valdrighi decided to rename the program and asked users for suggestions. The name "cafelog" was selected and became a common way to refer to this specific version of the b2 software.

[32] See Bellanger (2006), Cardon and Delaunay-Teterel (2006), Delaunay-Teterel (2008, 2010), Fluckiger (2006), Henaff (2010), and Paldacci (2006), for research on skyblogs and blogs created mostly by teenagers in France.

[33] In November 2003, *Le Journal du Net* reported that approximately 67% of blogs in France were skyblogs (Karayan, 2003).

[34] To be sure, throughout the 1990s various movements in the United States also argued for the potential of the Internet as a means to bring about social change (Graves, 2011; Streeter, 2010; Turner, 2006). Chapter 4 focuses instead on the dynamics and processes by which these assumptions came to be articulated specifically with blogs.

[35] The process explored in this chapter is important for how it speaks to the fundamental issue of mediation, that is, the transformation of blogs into a means to make meanings circulate in the social life of countries such as the United States and France (Couldry, 2000, 2008; Hjarvard,

2013; Livingstone, 2009; Lundby, 2009b; Silverstone, 2005; Thompson, 1995). Many German and Scandinavian communication scholars have preferred the notion of "mediatization" to refer to similar processes (Lundby, 2009b).

[36] In contrast to early Web applications such as Blogger, these new programs required an installation on the user's server. Developers thus referred to these new packages as "second-generation weblog tools" (Bausch et al., 2002, p. 11).

[37] For their part, Matt Mullenweg and Mike Little, two early users of the b2 software developed by Michel Valdrighi in France (see chapter 2) forked this program, as Valdrighi had largely abandoned the project while he dealt with a period of depression. Mullenweg announced his intention to fork b2, an announcement to which Little responded enthusiastically. According to Mullenweg, "We wanted to continue the development of b2 […] There was no motivation. It was really just [that] I want[ed] a better software for my site" (Mixergy.com, 2009). This software program, named WordPress, was released in 2003. Like its predecessor, b2, the program remained a free and open source project.

[38] In 1998, Romenesko created a website as an online extension of a print fanzine, called *Obscure Store and Reading Room*, which practitioners often consider an instance of an early weblog.

[39] Authors have shown the diversity of practices that are usually grouped under the term "political blogging." In particular, they have focused on the differences in blogging practices that characterize conservative and progressive bloggers (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Benkler & Shaw, 2012; Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008; Karpf, 2012). In this study, I focus instead on the assumptions shared by these groups of users that underlay the articulation of blogs and politics.

[40] "Success stories" of political bloggers provided a compelling case of discussion not only for practitioners but also for commentators and scholars. It has become a common feature of the scholarly literature on blogs to find references to the role of bloggers in what Perlmutter (2008) refers to as "blogthroughs" or "events that are commonly ascribed as having propelled blogs to media attention" (p. 66), as a major proof of their influence. Some examples of these "blogthroughs" were Howard Dean's campaign, the resignation of Senator Trent Lott, and the departure of journalist Dan Rather from CBS. As a supplement, I here adopt a focus on process rather than on specific cases. For a more extended discussion of these cases, see Boehlert (2009), Feld & Wilcox (2008), Karpf (2012), Kreiss (2012), Perlmutter (2008), and Rosenberg (2009).

[41] By 2000, for example, news organizations such as *Congressional Quarterly*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*, *The Guardian*, *Toronto Star*, and a few alternative weeklies had created blogs.

[42] See Hindman (2009), Kreiss (2012), Meraz (2007), Serfaty (2006), and Stromer-Galley & Baker (2006) for extended analyses of the Howard Dean campaign.

[43] The rise of "spam blogs" or "splogs" can also be considered a prime illustration of efforts to exploit the economics of search engine optimization and online advertising (Brunton, 2013; Li & Walejko, 2008).

[44] For more on the links between self-performance and self-promotion, see Andrejevic (2004), Hearn (2008), Marshall (2010), Marwick (2013), Schwarz (2012), and Wernick (1991).

[45] Cameron Marlow, a PhD student at the MIT Media Lab who developed an early system of this kind (Blogdex), noted in his doctoral dissertation, "Towards the end of 1999, it became apparent that as a distributed set of tools, weblogs would need a way to let various weblog applications

know that their content had changed" (Marlow, 2005, p. 46). In 1999, Dave Winer implemented a system at Weblogs.com that "[read] each of the registered weblogs every hour and if it has changed, it's listed on the home page of the site" (Winer, 2000).

[46] Many blog pioneers in France met the rise of Loïc Le Meur with resistance. An early user explains, "French bloggers hated Loïc with passion, because he was this big entrepreneur who arrived and started trampling our delicate artsy, hippy, blogosphere with his big boots. [He bought] the hub that basically was becoming the soul of French-language blogging [that is, U-Blog]. I'm not sure he realized how offensive it was for us, old-school bloggers, to have this guy arrive and try to businessify all this" (personal communication). In 2008, early blog users in France adopted the measure, "days before Loïc Le Meur," as the ultimate standard to identify a blogging pioneer. A user known as "Mr. Peer" suggested to "create an association of blog dinosaurs […] Members would be *blogueurs*, real ones and mostly old ones who began in 2002 at the latest (that is, before Loïc Le Meur)" (Mr.Peer, 2008). Gloaguen (2008) responded, "Given that Loïc Le Meur started to blog on September 29, 2003, I suggest to allocate the label "Blog Dinosaur" (or "*archéoblogueur*") to every blogger who began before this date." The expression "*avant LLM*" (before Loïc Le Meur) can still be found on many of those sites to prove their legitimacy as pioneers.

[47] In November 2005, Swiss journalists launched a blog in Bondy, a commune in the northeastern suburbs of Paris, not only to inform about the riots in these suburbs but also to give an account of their daily life (Echchaibi, 2009; Michel, 2006; Sedel, 2011). When these journalists left France in February 2006, a few local residents kept producing content for *BondyBlog*, assisted primarily by journalist Serge Michel, the creator of the project. Since its

foundation, *BondyBlog* has established itself as a news outlet in France that seeks primarily to counteract a lack of information about the Parisian suburbs in the mainstream media and to give voice to their residents (Nordine Nabili, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

[48] Magniant contends that, although produced with this program, the site could not be considered a blog. In his words, “We were never able to become a real blog. We always were on a webzine [mode], because we produced content but people never commented. […] Not everything is defined by the platform, there is also the tone” (personal communication, December 12, 2011). Magniant’s reflections notwithstanding, readers largely identified *Netpolitique* as a blog.

[49] Greffet (2005) mentions, for instance, the cases of Marie-Nöelle Lienemann (Socialist Party, PS) who created a blog in January 2005, Jack Lang (PS) in June 2005, Pierre Bédier (UMP) in March 2005, Claude Goasguen (UMP) in May 2005, and Renaud Dutreil (UMP) in July 2005, among others. Analyzing the use of blogs by politicians, Vanbremeersch (2005) concluded in 2005 that these sites were mostly created by men (82%) and occupied political positions at the local level. A slight majority was situated in the right of the political spectrum (55%).

[50] It is important to note that, at this particular time, online newsrooms were often separated from print newsrooms in France. In *Le Monde*’s case, the print and online newsrooms were actually located in different districts in Paris.

[51] Another important site during the debate about the Constitution was a blog named *Publius*. According to its creators, *Publius* was a “collective blog, in French, initiated by some Internet users about the European constitution, from diverse backgrounds, who, for the most part, have a blog” (Versac, 2004). A group of nine bloggers, including Vanbremeersch (“Versac”) and a lawyer writing under the pseudonym of Maître Eolas, created the site in November 2004. *Publius*

aimed to "to illuminate policy debates related to the referendum on the Treaty establishing a European Constitution, through texts and comments, analyses of its political, economic and social implications, a monitoring of campaign news, and any other means that allows readers to help them decide their vote on election day" (Versac, 2004).

[52] Yet, as Fouetillou (2007) notes, "The referendum debate crystallized in a territory that, for the most part, preceded it" (p. 292).

[53] According to Vanbremeersch (2009), the group's founder, the meetings "ha[d] a simple purpose: to transpose and reveal a loose network. And, at the same time, to give it more fecundity. People from very different backgrounds, of all political tendencies, came. Their common ground: having the awareness of being players in a given space, and sharing a practice" (p. 44). For Vanbremeersch, a self-awareness of their significance as political actors characterized this user "network."

[54] In a similar manner, ParisWeb, a nascent conference on the "design, quality and accessibility" of the Web, invited some early bloggers (including Karl Dubost and Laurent Gloaguen) as keynote speakers for the first version of the conference in the fall of 2006.

[55] UMP's campaign centered primarily on Nicolas Sarkozy. First, a website, Sarkozy.fr (or Nicolas Sarkozy TV, NSTV) was launched in January 2007 after Sarkozy's official presentation as UMP's candidate. The site was conceived as an online television station for Sarkozy, where videos from his speeches and interventions were constantly reproduced. Lilleker and Malagón (2010) describe the site as "reinforc[ing] the idea of a unified France with a clear direction, and an integrationist view on the French culture through a monochromatic style with one font face and uniform positioning of the text across each page" (p. 33). Second, the campaign launched

other sites to encourage the debate around Sarkozy's ideas and to promote their support. For example, the site Debat-Sarkozy.fr allowed users to post questions, which were selected through votes for daily discussion. Another website, SupportersdeSarkozy.com, helped promote Sarkozy's initiatives and ideas among others, notably through the use of Google Maps.

[56] The socialist presidential seat opposed three contenders: Jack Lang, Ségolène Royal, and Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Often questioned by adversaries on the grounds of her qualifications and skills to become president, Royal became the party's candidate for the 2007 elections (Bousquet, 2011; Dessinges, 2009; Dolez & Laurent, 2007).

[57] Dessinges (2009) and Dolez and Laurent (2007) also consider Royal's use of femininity in the media and her particular ideological position within the Socialist Party as major factors that helped her build her political legitimacy.

[58] After mid-2009, Wikio aggregated exclusively the content of blogs.

[59] Another example is monthly magazine, *Netizen*, characterized by one interviewee for this study as "the French *Wired* magazine." Developed by blogger Cyril Fiévet, this print magazine was devoted to "understanding and deciphering the blog revolution" in France (Netizen, 2006). The project was short-lived and was discontinued after three issues.

[60] See chapter 3, endnote 46.

[61] This process can be considered as an instance of "remediation," that is, how a singular medium repurposes, refashions, and rehabilitates the "techniques, forms, and social significance" of previous media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 65). Hayles prefers the notion of "intermediation" or the process "whereby a first-level emergent pattern is captured in another medium and re-

represented with the primitives of the new medium, which leads to an emergent result captured in turn by yet another medium, and so forth” (Hayles, 2007, p. 100).

[62] Ruby was created in the early 1990s in Japan but gradually implemented in the United States and Europe at the turn of the twenty-first century. It significantly popularized after 2004 when a programmer named David Heinemeier Hansson developed a Web application framework called Ruby on Rails, which allowed users to significantly expedite the process of building applications on the Web.

[63] By 2005, “why” had become an emblematic figure in the Ruby community, a character admired by both his technical imagination and artistic skills, that is, as an iconic expression of Ruby’s own singularities. Henshaw-Plath, for instance, described him as a “hacker artist,” both a “supremely technically competent” programmer and “a trickster and an artist” (personal communication, August 23, 2011). Another interviewee for this study described him as “a Dadaist poet.”

[64] In an interview for this study, Engeström recognized that this formulation was “one way to language and put into words” the purpose of the tool, used to speak to investors in particular (personal communication, October 24, 2012).

[65] In one of those conversations, programmer Florian Weber recalls, the term “microblogging” was considered. Yet, he argues, the term was abandoned because some developers suggested that the notion of *micro* would not hold against the term *nano* in the context of the recent release of the iPod nano.

[66] Several employees at Odeo were laid off in the spring and summer of 2006. In September 2006, Williams bought Odeo’s shares from investors. He argued that in the shift from Odeo to

Twitter, the company had deviated from the direction and technologies that investors had originally envisioned. Williams named the new company Obvious LLC. See Bilton (2013) and Carlson (2011) for journalistic accounts of the controversy surrounding this turn of events.

[67] Sagolla (2009) suggests that Odeo's desire to reduce texting bills also motivated the adoption of this standard.

[68] See Du Gay and colleagues (1997), Grossberg (1986), Hall (1980), Laclau and Mouffe (2001), and Slack (2006) for more on the theory of articulation.

[69] The revival of the short form through microblogging can also be analyzed in light of recent scholarship on microfiction in literary studies (Ette, 2009; Gelz, 2010; Lagmanovich, 2009; Rabaté & Schoentjes, 2010). By microfiction, scholars usually refer to "a terse or fragmentary writing tradition that has produced countless forms in the past, both poetic and reflective or narrative, from maxims to haiku" (Gefen, 2010, p. 156). Research on microfiction has emphasized two defining aspects of this genre that can be brought to bear on the case of microblogging: the variety of content types that characterizes it and the fractal world this multiplicity of content produces.

[70] In this sense, the "microblogging" notion functioned as a crucial link between what Patrice Flichy (2007b, p. 82) refers to as a frame of functioning—that is, "the body of knowledge and know-how mobilized or mobilizable" in the design of media technologies such as tumblelogs, Jaiku, and Twitter —and a frame of use—that is, 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, 2007b, p. 83), in this case blogs.

Flichy argues that it is precisely through the articulation of these two frames that technologies (such as those associated with microblogging) acquire social meaning.

[71] See, for example, http://www.tumblr.com/press.

[72] For example, *La Blogothèque* implemented initiatives such as *les blogomix*, compilation CDs created by readers that were sent to the website and then distributed randomly among other readers; MP3 blogs, sites devoted to sharing songs in MP3 format before the release of the album; and *fightpods*, or iPod battles, among other projects.

[73] The tension triggered by this process caused a controversy with important consequences for *La Blogothèque*. Some collaborators decided to leave between 2011 and 2012 as a reaction to Chryde's conception of the website as a "media outlet." In their view, this conception betrayed and departed from the original definition of *La Blogothèque* as a blog, a notion that embodied the foundational idea of independence.

[74] See chapter 3, endnote 47.

[75] See Rieder and Smyrnaios (2012) and Smyrnaios (2012) for early analyses of the journalistic adoption of Twitter in France.

[76] The Riposte Party, says Romain Pigenel, the event's creator, built in part on experiences such as *La République des Blogs*, informal gatherings of blogging practitioners in Paris (see previous chapter).

[77] Cardon, Fouetillou, and Roth (2011) considered the cases of bloggers interested in the fields of politics and cooking to show how specialization remains a crucial means to establish "a path of glory," that is, to achieve certain recognition in these fields.

[78] This focus on blogging, however, was removed from the application's description once it was launched. Instead, the tool's developers tied Scoop.it to the notion of magazine. In November 2011, the application's website stated: "Easily publish gorgeous magazines. Leverage curation to increase your visibility. Give persistence to your social media presence" (Scoop.it, 2011).

[79] See Collard (2010), Hewlett (2005), and Lovecy (1999) for analyses of previous contexts where the end of French exceptionalism has also been argued for.

[80] To overcome this issue, alternatives have been proposed recently in both the public and private sectors. For example, in the Spring of 2013 Xaviel Niel, tycoon and founder of Free, a telecom, announced the creation of a free academy for developers and entrepreneurs in Paris. Almost at the same time, President François Hollande announced plans to implement a "startup visa" to facilitate the arrival of developers and entrepreneurs in the country. Commenting on the development of startups in Europe, Wired magazine concluded: "These measures are an indication that attitudes may be changing in France—after all, entrepreneurs know that embracing failure is usually a prerequisite for success" (Wired, 2013).

[81] See the Independent Web movement, discussed in chapter 2, for a prime example.

[82] This form of sharing voice may be interpreted as an instance of what Licoppe (2004) refers to as "connected presence." According to Licoppe and Smoreda (2005), "[T]echnologies of communication (in particular mobile phones) are not just substitutes for face-to-face interaction, but constitute a new resource for constructing a kind of connected presence even when people are physically distant. In the regime of 'connected' presence, participants multiply encounters and contacts using every kind of mediation and artifacts available to them: relationships thus become seamless webs of quasi-continuous exchanges. The boundaries between absence and

presence get blurred and subtle experiences of togetherness may develop" (p. 321). Licoppe focused primarily on technologically mediated interpersonal relations. Yet, essential for his analysis of connected presence is a consideration of the ways in which users give accounts of themselves through the use of media technologies. See also Hillis' (2009) notion of "distributed social centrality."

[83] Authors have seen various expressions of France's Americanization in the growing interest shown by the French in the public life of politicians—which had been traditionally relegated to the domain of private life and thus deemed unworthy of public attention—(Kuhn, 2007, 2010; Prost, 1991), the separation of Americanization and globalization in political discourse crowned by a large popular support for Barack Obama in France (Meunier, 2010), the espousal of American standards in professional fields such as journalism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Lemieux & Schmalzbauer, 2000), the gradual rise of mass consumption society (de Grazia, 1997), and the widespread adoption of American goods in French society—from McDonalds to Hollywood movies (R. F. Kuisel, 2003, 2012; Singer, 2013).

[84] Yet, as other authors have noted, Americanization is not an all-or-nothing process (Gueldry, 2009; R. F. Kuisel, 2012). The trajectory of blogging in France points to more than just the uncritical acceptance or imitation of an American model. For example, actors also "Frenchified" the American blogging imaginary by translating key terms of the blogging vocabulary into French. More importantly, they also linked this imaginary to important traditions practices of subjectivity in France in order to intervene in particular contexts in the country. In this respect, the cases of the United States and France provide a supplement to the notion that the Internet has fundamentally erased national boundaries in a globalized world. Instead, they point to the need to

contextualize the emergence, development, and transformation of media technologies (blogs included) (cf. Christensen, Jansson, & Christensen, 2011; Goggin & McLelland, 2009; Hafez, 2007; Halavais, 2000; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hepp, 2012; Thussu, 2009). By contextualization, I refer to the study of the shifting articulations—in this case, between specific notions of self, public, and technology—on which the trajectories and identities of media technologies such as blogs rest (Slack, 1989).

[85] See Marwick (2013) for a similar claim.

[86] Yet, the faith of initiatives that sprung in the French suburbs, which have followed similar processes of bureaucratization and commercialization to those described in chapter 3, or the experiences of queer bloggers in the United States who tend to perform identities consistent with liberal and capitalist ideologies (Rak, 2005), suggests that finding these alternatives might be a difficult undertaking.

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Appendix: Research Design

The investigation of the trajectories of blogs in two countries required assessing both the websites, their contents, the software applications produced by users and Web developers at different points in time, and the experiences, meanings, and interpretations put forth by these actors to make sense of their content and artifact creation practices. In short, it involved conducting what Hepp (2012, p. 138) refers to as a "transcultural comparison." To this end, this study relied on various research methods: archival research, in-depth interviewing, and content and artifact analyses of a sample of websites.

First, I conducted archival research in two main forms. On the one hand, this study considered websites (blogs included) as historical archives, that is, as a "set of […] events which can be recalled across time and space" (Bowker, 2010, p. 212). I drew on previous work on a variety of Internet-related phenomena (Ankerson, 2009, 2012; Brügger, 2010; K. Foot & Schneider, 2010; S. M. Schneider, Foot, & Wouters, 2009). For Foot and Schneider (2010, pp. 71-75), the analysis of Web archives consists of two processes: (a) the selection and representation of Web artifacts, and (b) the production and presentation of meta-data about these artifacts. Following this approach, in each country I purposefully selected a set of websites created during the period under study: various kinds of sites built in the second half of the 1990s, blogs created between 2001 and 2005 to discuss a variety of issues (such as political and journalistic reflections), and sites (often referred to as "microblogs") that were designed in the mid- to late 2000s decade. Many of these websites are still available online for consultation. I accessed others using the Internet Archive's "Way Back Machine" and the Digital Legal Deposit of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. These online databases allow retrieving sites that resemble the original version originally available on the Internet.

Once accessed, I conducted a close analysis of these websites by drawing on two techniques developed by Foot and Schneider: (a) categorization, which "involves researchers observing and analyzing all or a sample of archived objects, […] object features, and content as well as the annotation of objects" (S. M. Schneider et al., 2009); and (b) interpretation, that is, the production of "meta-data about collected artifacts […] to support sense-making acitivities such as discovery and search" (K. Foot & Schneider, 2010, p. 74). I assessed websites both as an object of study and a cultural source for understanding how actors created these sites to variously share their voice.

Second, I conducted archival research in more traditional sources, particularly articles published by mainstream media organizations and other outlets. I identified these sources by searching for relevant keywords in online databases, particularly Lexis-Nexis. These sources also included handbooks and manuals published to help new users learn how to create and update blogs. Most of these handbooks were written by early users— some of whom I interviewed— based on their experiences. I performed a textual analysis of these documents by identifying discursive strategies to characterize blogs and their most defining practices. Through the analysis of these sources, I traced the evolution of the cultural meaning of blogging (the *imaginaire* surrounding its trajectory) as articulated by users, software developers, and commentators in diverse contexts at the time both websites and software programs were created. After 1999, the number of journal and newspaper articles about the rise of blogging increased significantly (Farrell & Drezner, 2008; Jones & Himelboim, 2010). Journalists and users attempted to define a phenomenon whose main characteristics were still under development. Thus, these documents provided a privileged window into the discussions over the meaning of this online activity as many of its protagonists understood it. Archival research helped to analyze the “interpretive flexibility” of these websites as it shifted and mutated over time (Pinch & Bijker, 1987).

The third chief method employed in this study was semi-structured interviews with Web users, software developers, and intermediaries in the United States and France. Using a criterion sampling strategy (Patton, 1990), I conducted 105 interviews with actors (47 interviews in the US and 58 in France) between 2009 and 2012. Three criteria were used for selecting them. First, given the process orientation of this investigation, I interviewed early users and software developers, as well as actors who had appropriated blogs for a significant time (that is, at least since the late 1990s). Second, I supplemented this sample of pioneers with interviews with key actors that, through their innovative practices, played a major role in shaping the subsequent enactment of blogs. Third, I used a snowball strategy as another mechanism for sampling actors (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I asked interviewees to provide the names of other actors who not only met the criteria established for the sample, but who had also played a significant role in shaping the use of the Web. The group of interviewees included users, software developers, and intermediaries such as salespeople, entrepreneurs, consultants, journalists, and commentators.

I conducted most of these interviews in person, in cities such as Chicago, London, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Portland, and the San Francisco Bay Area to account for the case of the United States, and the Marseille area, Lille, Lyon, and Paris in the case of France. I also performed interviews via email, telephone, voice-over-IP software applications such as Skype, Google Hangout, and even Google +. I alternated interviews in the United States and

France to facilitate the incorporation of the findings in one context into the other and thus allow for a comparative perspective. These conversations lasted for an average of 60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed in their entirety.

Interviews with both users and software developers sought to get a better understanding of the rationale behind the practices of content and artifact creation of these actors. Following methods for ethnographic interviewing and oral history techniques (Spradley, 1979; Yow, 2005), I encouraged interviewees to recall experiences in relation to the emergence and development of their websites and software tools, describe their most significant practices of content and site creation, recollect particular details of their websites (such as writing certain texts, linking to another site, or using particular images), and explain the relationships with other users. Because some of the programmers that were involved in the design of the first software for blogging also participated in the creation of programs for "microblogging," conversations with these software developers in particular aimed at shedding new light on how they understood the transition between these forms of appropriating the Web.

Scholars have conducted studies of sizeable samples of blogs as these have diffused among larger segments of the public (Cardon & Delaunay-Teterel, 2006; Herring, Kouper, Scheidt, & Wright, 2004; Herring et al., 2007; Herring et al., 2005; Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Papacharissi, 2007). I drew on these studies to supplement the data from my analysis. However, few studies of this kind exist about websites created in the early days of this practice. To fill this void, the fourth set of methods I implemented was an analysis of both the content and the artifacts of a group of twenty-seven websites: eleven online diaries created between 1995 and 1997, six personal publishing websites established between 1995 and 1997, and ten blogs built between 1997 and 1999. I began by collecting a directory of various websites (such as online diaries, personal publishing journals, and weblogs) created between 1995 and 1999—the period when these websites first emerged—by drawing on lists elaborated by early users and secondary sources on the history of these sites (Blood, 2002a, 2002b; Rosenberg, 2009). Other websites were found through references and hyperlinks on previously identified sites. I defined two criteria to select this sample. First, I analyzed websites that had been identified by early users as key players in the history of online diaries, personal publishing, and weblogs. Second, only websites that kept complete archives of their older versions and posts were included in the sample. Based on these strategies, the study examined a total of 2,887 posts. Two months, separated by an interval of six months—usually January and July—each year from 1995 to 2001 were selected. I coded every entry written during those months in every website.

The artifact analysis consisted of an examination of the materiality of websites. Following scholarship on the study of software and digital texts, I defined materiality as "an emergent property created through dynamic interactions between physical characteristics and signifying strategies. […] [It defines how] physical characteristics are mobilized as resources to create meaning" (Hayles, 2005, pp. 3, 7). This analysis thus considered websites as the product of codes, protocols, formats, and standards used to produce a formal apparatus and a set of affordances (Galloway, 2004; Leonardi, 2012). The analysis included an assessment of each website's source code and hosting infrastructure. I also coded sites for aspects related to their interface layout, such as how elements were organized on the interface and whether recent content was posted on a new page, in chronological or reverse chronological order. The presence and type of automated functions (e.g., search mechanisms), sidebars, and archives were considered. I also coded the number of links on each site, and whether each hyperlink connected to an internal or external object on the Web. Both categories of links were classified according to the type of element to which they connected.

Finally, I undertook a content analysis of this sample of sites (Herring, 2010). This analysis sought to determine "the 'coherent' meaning structures in the text material" of these websites (Scheufele, 2008, p. 967). I coded posts in the following categories: subject matter; modes of address of the content producer; presence and type of symbolic representations (such as images); content meta-data (date, title, and time stamp); references to rings or communities of websites; information about the author; and frequency of content publication.

Although I did not conduct an ethnography, this study adopted an "ethnographic sensibility" (Star, 1999, p. 383) inspired by "multi-sited ethnographies," which aim to understand how meaning is produced or enacted in a multiplicity of settings (Hine, 2007; Marcus, 1998; Mol, 2002). In this type of research, "The identity of the technology, and thus where to start and stop in studying it cannot be decided in advance […] [A multi-sited imaginary] means accepting that there are many versions of what a given technology is and how it is bounded, and trying to address some of this complexity with our methodological approaches" (Hine, 2007, pp. 663-664). To implement this ethnographic sensibility and get a better understanding of the meanings, practices, and affect associated with the practices of blogging, I attended meetings of blog users in 2011 and 2012. In addition, I visited several organizations devoted to the development of software for blogging or other institutions (particularly news organizations) where the use of blogs had been implemented. This form of fieldwork allowed me to further understand the dynamics that have shaped the creation of software applications and the meaning tied to their appropriation in practice.

Overall, the study followed a grounded-theory research approach (Charmaz, 2006; Clarke, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Based on Glaser's and Strauss's (1967) "comparative analysis" method, I analyzed the data provided by online and offline archival research, interviews, and content and artifact analyses by identifying the main concepts, categories, and patterns in the data. The analysis of data continued until I reached conceptual saturation. In parallel, I developed theoretical schemes to account for these patterns and the relationships between them, and to relate these patterns to data analysis, as proponents of grounded theory suggest (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Once theoretical saturation was reached, I returned to the raw data to verify this framework.