

Social Interaction Design Reading Notes (SxD)

Social Media, Mass Media

Readings of:

Modernity and Self Identity by Anthony Giddens and

The Reality of Mass Media by Niklas Luhmann

First draft
Tuesday, January 9, 2007



© 2007 Adrian Chan
Adrian@gravity7.com
<http://www.gravity7.com>

<i>Summary</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	6
<i>Excerpts</i>	12
Quotes: Anthony Giddens	12
Quotes: Niklas Luhmann	15
<i>Reading Notes on Giddens and Luhmann</i>	17
Further excerpts from Luhmann's views on news	18
Notes on placing new media in Luhmann's work on news	18
Topical organization of news:	19
Online media and news:	21
Questions:	22
Further excerpts from Luhmann's views on advertising	24
Notes on placing new media in Luhmann's work on Advertising	26
Qualifying selections	27
Truthiness	28
Risks to Advertisers	30
Social marketing	32
Advertising's logical paradoxes	33
Further excerpts from Luhmann's views on entertainment	33
Notes on placing new media in Luhmann's work on entertainment	38
Games	39
Online as form of entertainment	39
Fictional world construction	40
Narration, the narrative form, and social media	42
Social media are not mass media	43
Entertainment as property	43
YouTube	44

Summary

These reading notes describe a systems-theoretical view of mass media and web and social media that posits a) that users, regardless of their individual intentions and interests, engage mass media in form and in content, and that b) the social web extends the domain and reach of mass media while also presenting it real challenges, and c) that this exchange occurs through the social practices of online communication and interaction as well as through the structural and functional coupling (e.g. business) of web media and mass media. In short, the social web offers users a chance to communicate and interact around cultural narratives, news and events as told by the mass media, and more *without themselves belonging to the mass media*, and the mass media, by observing this *user generated content*, can inform itself and adjust accordingly. But the social web and the mass media are doing more than observing one another (blogs on movies, cited in newspapers or on TV, and so on): the very forms in which many new online phenomena (call them social media, social software, web 2.0, etc.) take shape implicitly, if not explicitly, refer to forms of mass media communication. In other words, the social practices users engage in refer as much to the mass media as to daily social interactions. This, if it were accurate, would offer an interesting view of social media, for it would suggest that people understand and can engage with the online world through the mass media world and can make the mass media their own. To suggest that users don't simply take what they do in every-day life and adapt it to the online world, but refer also to the how content is produced on the radio, on TV, in films, in advertising for examples of form and representation if not also narrative construction and distinctions between truth and fiction, truthfulness and falsehoods, would be to suggest that *the way forward for social interaction design should involve merging direct and immediate communication interests of individuals with the indirect or mediated means of production of media's abstract forms*.

The above thesis is constructed in these reading notes from the sociologies of Anthony Giddens and Niklas Luhmann. It offers a bridge from user-centric design to media theory and avoids the weak subject position common to many structuralist theories by suggesting that users put their understanding of the mass media to their own use. Mass media constructions of a world can equally serve individuals who, engaging in mediated communities and social interactions, need forms of representation with which to package their communication so that it can be understood by those who come across it. Unable to be there when

communication occurs (online), users rely on the familiarity of packaging to provide context for their communication. Packaging provides the promise of control over the reception and interpretation of their communication. (Utterances uttered in face-to-face interactions don't serve users of online social media insofar as users can't be present online to utter the utterance in the presence of others in the first place.) And what better source of forms of presentation than the media, which invented the possibility of representational languages and systems in the first place? Media theory takes a functional view of mass media, claiming that the production of stories and events not only sustain business, industry, politics, law, and so on, but connect to consumers by producing news of interest to them. These reading notes suggest a view of new media that connects online and web media to mass media with the difference that users are involved in social practices that engage the Self in relations of trust and trust commitments. Seen from a business perspective, then, social media extend the fictions, and to some extent the functions, of realities constructed by mass media. This time, however, individual users are the systems' "producers," storytellers, journalists, and so on. Communication and interaction extend mass media distribution, and accelerate and extend the reproduction of news and events. Social media also contribute the truth and authenticity that belongs to interpersonal communication, and which can only be emulated by mass media.

Investigation

Social software systems vary in theme, or genre, as well as in their UI and design. Dating sites (match.com, eharmony.com) focus on personal information; their users are interested in *people*. Career networking sites (linkedin.com) focus on *people* also, but present the professional in the context of professional networks and histories. Both dating and career networking sites are thus biographical and representational. Myspace and Facebook also deal with people, but this time more actively than dating and career networking sites, for they not only capture social networks but produce them. In many ways they resemble interactive mass media: they're involved in creating social scenes, they spawn and promote bands, clubs, events, news, and so on. Blogging and discussion sites also engage in the creation of news, but this time emphasizing news, viewpoints, perspectives, and expertise more than member personality. There are recommendation sites and systems too, which tend to subordinate the biographical presentation of a person (e.g. personality and character) to the objects reviewed: books, movies, music, restaurants, web sites, travel, products, and so forth. All of these systems engage similar technologies, user interface techniques, and user practices. It seems highly likely that as users, our use of these sites is informed by our understanding not only of the genres of mass media programs, but also their means of production. In other words, we know something about how to present news, we get the difference between news and advertising, we know a lot about celebrities and why we're interested in them, what makes them popular, and how to talk about them. Social practices of social

software use, in other words, are informed by existing mass media. But now we can participate in a world online that is coupled to the mass media through observation of it, at a minimum, and structurally, at a maximum (where social media are functionally, economically, and structurally coupled to the function, economics and structural organization of mass media). Mass media do not permit two-way communication with their audience; social media of course do. These reading notes cover two sociologists (Anthony Giddens and Niklas Luhmann), whose work can help us unpack the social practices emerging around social software and social media within a higher-level analysis of mass media (media theory).

Reading My Reading Notes

These reading notes are an exercise in thinking through arguments and ideas I find interesting. As they say before the commencement of a DSD title, "the following opinions do not represent..."

I often don't know if I agree with the authors and ideas I take up in my reading notes. In fact I'm often more uncertain after writing these notes than I was before writing them. They are written quickly and on the fly, and I edit them as little as I can. These reading notes are engagements, conceptual meals conjured from a basket of sacrificial ingredients offered by their authors to the god of food-for-thought. And with that in mind, bon appetit and enjoy the meal.

Keywords

YouTube, MySpace, media theory, social software, social media, social interaction design, sxd, ui, ux, ixd, interaction design, online, web 2.0, social interface, Adrian Chan, communication theory, media ecology, McLuhan, social systems, systems theory, cybernetics, web design, internet culture, cmc, online community

Introduction

The sociologies of Anthony Giddens and Niklas Luhmann, though radically different, offer me a Venn of hope that a sociology of technically-mediated social and communication practices may be grounded by an understanding of daily practices and social interaction, and yet demonstrate that those practices are structurally or systemically coupled to macro-sociological functions and social operations such as those that explain the social function of mass media. Giddens allows us to claim that individuals, as self-reflexive actors (subjects), interact with each other through blogs, social software, community sites, dating services, and jobs sites, etc., with a conscious understanding of how media tell the news, report events, provide opinions, produce trends, and market, advertise, and sell companies, events, people, products and much more. Luhmann gives us a detailed analysis of the representational and functional forms of mass media's construction of (a) reality.

My aim here is to connect my previous efforts to describe a social interaction design discipline with theories of mass media, and to justify user interface design techniques with the claim that users understand how to produce and present themselves to and in front of others through their understanding of mass media. Though I could also claim that the mass media revises its own techniques of communication through its observation of social media (user generated content), my interest is in the design of social media, and thus my focus is on leading a field oriented towards user practices to one based on social practices.

Web 2.0, the "live" web, is built on a communications network (the internet plus its devices), but has inherited browser-based commitments and design decisions. Much of web 2.0 content thus is presented within a web 1.0 context. YouTube looks less like TV than it does a web page, though its content is television. iTunes looks more like software than it does a radio or stereo. Browse, search, drill down, expand and close — these are often how we negotiate our way through online content. UI designers value convention, and yet most web application and UI design comes out of software design. It privileges information, navigation, and transaction processing over the psychology and sociology of human interaction. As designers we are loathe to depart from conventional means of presenting and interacting with content. And for good reason: there would be little to gain in a presentation of content that itself made no sense. Familiar navigation schemes include:

- Publishing as an mode of presentation
- Discussion as mode of public interaction
- Directories as organization of content
- Search as a means of drilling into content
- The link as a means of navigation

- Etc

Though the web may look more or less the same (conventions have been established), what we're doing with it is changing dramatically. And those changes pile up and soon confuse the medium's design. How far do those changes go? How deeply have we integrated technology into our daily practices, for example? If we get our news online, watch sports highlights online, listen to music online, are we still using "the web?" Clearly, the hybridity of applications that connect to the internet and the web has blurred line between mass media and online media.

I sometimes think of web 2.0 design as social interface design. I prefer "social interaction design," but for the same reason: the web is no longer just an online publishing platform. As communication and interaction tools become integrated into web sites and online applications, interactions between users change the nature of online content and information. Communication is ongoing, and insofar as it involves conscious actors, it's in constant production. Print and broadcast media are not: their messages are finished when they are distributed. To revise the patron saint of media theory's own central tenet, online media are an "extension of man," but with a difference. They not only extend the human senses, they extend existing media: broadcast media and communication media.

Theoretically speaking, broadcast media and one-to-one communication are usually treated as separate and mutually-exclusive technologies. The fact that they may use the same hardware or software is secondary to the distinction between their uses. The former involve a system of ownership, a selection of information, and some means of presenting and circulating it. The latter require nothing of the kind. They require only a speaker and listener, or sender and receiver. Clearly though, if we seek to make distinctions on the basis of media themselves (the hardware), we will fail. Just as we will fail if we seek to distinguish broadcast from online media on the basis of message distribution and communication. As technologies become connected, applications, too, interface with one another, and domains once isolated become interconnected. And all of this of course is happening now in the world of web 2.0 and social media.

And why this preamble and back story? What's the point here of interest to web 2.0 interaction designers? Well, new practices must emerge, by necessity, around the use of these tools and applications. And we need to design for them, and in addition to designing them to meet the usual goals of success, efficiency and effectiveness, we need to anticipate their second order effects and design with those in mind also.

New practices must assimilate new understandings (of what's going on, of how something works), even with and sometimes in spite of their being presented by

old technologies. Sometimes new technologies open up new possibilities of perspective and understanding (look at what Google has done to mapping earth). New applications then emerge to take advantage of the new paradigm (news programs now often use Google's "flying" descent; social software sites now offer Google maps so that members can place themselves geographically; etc...) And then at the conventional and more conservative end of the spectrum, tried and true means of navigation will come to assume new functions and operations: we still use back buttons on web sites, still pause and fast forward audio and video files. So on the one hand, new functions are mapped to existing interface features. And on the other hand, respect for convention tempers our ability to invent. All of which is to say that *changes within the medium's capabilities* unfold within the context of existing user practices and expectations. *It is not technology itself, but the practices—individual and social—in which it is embedded that constrain its own progress.* And this is, frankly, a good thing, for designers as well as users.

As the social interaction designer is interested in social media, he or she must look in two directions at once: at a changing set of technical tools and applications (call it web 2.0), and at an emerging set of social practices. Social practices emerge around a user's own understanding of a) the domain, as technology; b) its content; c) how it is produced; d) it's connections to other technologies (and their social practices). If video blogs and video posts are a hit online, it is only insofar as users see *what can be done* with them. What users can do with them is not just a technical matter (e.g. videos must be small enough to play without too long of a download; they must look good; and they must have controls; they must be send-able; they must be online and not just on my machine; etc.). The *user practice* of recording, making, editing, posting, watching, commenting on, sharing, distributing, and mashing up video must have a *social function and refer to social practices*: to get attention, to show off, to get a job, a date, or more hits, to get dugg, bookmarked, rated, or linked to in another way. And again, each of these social functions refers to and extends an existing practice: looking good (dating; jobs sites); looking smart (bloggers, experts); looking authoritative (news; corporate training or online education); and so on. And those conventions come from none other than an existing media environment: movies, television, radio, print, advertising, and so on. I could go on (a job candidate records a resume to look good or to look authoritative, depending in his/her strengths, his/her understanding of what qualifies him/her for the job, of what the employer values most, of how to distinguish oneself from a sea of applicants...) and on... The point here is that there is a self-reflexivity of user behavior (we are able to see what's going on, and to adjust our actions to that knowledge) and the production of technologies, uses, user practices, and social practices is reflexive. In short, we would be fools if we didn't think in terms of mass media when we design for YouTube!

Social media engage users in their content. Let's take our previous example: YouTube. At YouTube you will find television shows cut up and their clips posted: as favorite scenes, funniest jokes, best performances, amazing goals scored, and so on. You will find amateur videos made in the style of TV shows, and TV shows made in the style of amateur videos. You will not see many hour-long programs, and if you do, they'll be chopped into bits for easier consumption. This begs the question, of course, of whether YouTube is built to serve the new prime time (which Mark Burnett has called "9 to 5" because internet video is watched at the office), whether we have shorter attention spans or shorter periods of time available when we're online, whether online video is less immersive and theatrical than TV, or whether this is a social and technical workaround for the fact that YouTube doesn't have a chapter selection function (e.g. DVD do). Edited and sampled video clips, as presented at YouTube, clearly show that the short form trumps the long form of the original video when the mode of consumption involves a social dimension: interaction, communication, sharing, editing, competing for attention, commenting, and all of that... For now, it seems, the communicative relation trumps the original (commercial consumption) relation. And when a new mode of consumption emerges, a transformation occurs within the businesses affected, as they in turn respond to new consumer habits: soon enough, the funding, casting, writing, development, production, editing, marketing, advertising, and finally distribution of film and video content have all been affected.

These transformations would result from what Luhmann calls structural coupling. Coupling of distinct systems through technical connections as well as through feedback loops created by the mutually-observing domains: news media watch online media and vice versa. Politics watches political blogs and vice versa. Movies trend upwards and become hits on netflix, which in turn draws attention to documentary films, attracting talent, money, and Hollywood. And so on.

Luhmann's analysis of news media is particularly interesting. Is it possible that social media (online) add a fourth category to his three (news, advertising, entertainment): *links*? Let's take a look. As we already know, the web requires that associations be made among its objects for the simple reason that it is limited in space and time. It is visible, that is, it exists, only insofar as it can be accessed. Navigation is a necessary means of encountering content online, for we cannot move through the space of the web or the internet physically. There is nothing we can achieve by changing our position vis a vis *it*: we must change the *it* we have selected. (The whole attention economy thing comes out of this basic fact.) Nothing is selectable, that is, nothing is accessible and nothing can be selected, unless it is linked to something else. Links are what the web bring to mass media: relations chosen by anybody and on the basis of anything.

The decentralized nature of these links makes the basis of the relationship they establish even more important. For unlike domains in which values are organized hierarchically, the battle for validity, for legitimacy, and for visibility online is not easily solved. The medium's flatness is a constraint on any one thing standing out. For this reason relations created among online contents are tried and tested; those that succeed often foster imitation, and those imitations in turn become conventions: of navigation, of selection, of presentation, of action, of practice. So we now have recommendations, rankings, ratings, top ten lists, and much more. Each is but a means of linking content: products, people, companies, places, celebrities, etc. Links establish a relation. But where a connection in the mind is bidirectional: if A refers to B, B refers to A, this is not necessarily so online: A refers to B but B is not linked back to A. Is this a bias in the link? What is its directionality? It is twofold: a choice or selection, and an action, both of which explicate the faculty of *human interest*. Interested in A, I choose B. B follows A in my course of developing and pursuing a line of interest. Human action has the direction of human interest (which is subjective); information does not (which is another reason we describe it as objective, and "disinterested"). (It is perhaps this that confuses the associations created by recommendation engines, which create bidirectional links.) And so in the world of social media, we qualify links by legitimizing their social validity.

- *Who* creates these lists and associations? Here, it matters less who than whether the individual is qualified: by his or her network, expertise, past consumption, credibility as a ranked reviewer, and so on.
- *How well* do these associations stand inspection? Here it matters less whether they are accurate in any objective sense as whether they are reaffirmed by audience traffic.
- *How long* do these relations hold up? It depends on the production of new information, for anything that is news is easily replaced (news is that which is new). Politicians know and use this to their advantage: new stories are literally invented to displace and replace attention paid to unwanted stories.
- *How many* people find something interesting, draw a conclusion, make a similar connection or choice, is a matter of audience or market share, traffic, and trend.

Relations, among objects and people, between individuals and groups, between groups and a community, based on "objective" relations (two documentary films) or "subjective" relations (people who liked this documentary like that documentary) are all constructed by participating users, and are for the most beyond the controlling reach of commercial interest. There may be a deep structural analogy between systems theory and social and communication practices. Or there may not. Either way, it should be clear that social interaction design must account for design choices and commitments that exceed the simple logic of the rational actor. Needs here are not simply met; objectives not simply

achieved; and transactions not finite. Communication is ongoing, and the user always interacts not only with a device and its functions, but with the whole social context of which s/he is aware and in which s/he is a competent and social actor and participant.

Excerpts

Quotes: Anthony Giddens

Quotes from [Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age](#), by Anthony Giddens. Stanford University Press (August 1991). 256 pages. ISBN: 0804719446

“Besides its institutional reflexivity, modern social life is characterised by profound processes of the reorganization of time and space, coupled to the expansion of disembedding mechanisms — mechanism which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances. The reorganization of time and space, plus the disembedding mechanism, radicalize and globalize pre-established institutional traits of modernity; and they act to transform the content and nature of day-to-day social life.” 2, *Modernity and Self-Identity*

“Modernity is a post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge. Doubt, a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, permeates into everyday life as well as philosophical consciousness, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world. Modernity institutionalizes the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses: claims which may very well be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned. Systems of accumulated expertise — which form important disembedding influences — represent multiple sources of authority, frequently internally contested and divergent in their implications. In the settings of what I call ‘high’ or ‘late’ modernity —our present-day world — the self, like the broader institutional contexts in which it exists, has to be reflexively made. Yet this task has to be accomplished amid a puzzling diversity of options and possibilities.” 3, *Modernity and Self-Identity*

“Modernity is a risk culture. I do not mean by this that social life is inherently more risky than it used to be; for most people in the developed societies that is not the case. Rather, the concept of risk becomes fundamental to the way both lay actors and technical specialists organise the social world. Under conditions of modernity, the future is continually drawn into the present by means of the reflexive organization of knowledge environments. A territory, as it were, is carved out and colonized. Yet such colonization by its very nature cannot be complete: thinking in terms of risk is vital to assessing how far project are likely to diverge from their anticipated outcomes. Risk assessment invites precision,

and even quantification, but by its nature is imperfect. Given the mobile character of modern institutions, coupled to the mutable and frequently controversial nature of abstract systems, most forms of risk assessment, in fact, contain numerous imponderables.” 4, *Modernity and Self-Identity*

“In high modernity, the influence of distant happenings on proximate events, and on intimacies of the self, becomes more and more commonplace. The media, printed and electronic, obviously play a central role in this respect. Mediated experience, since the first experience or writing, has long influenced both self-identity and the basic organization of social relations. With the development of mass communication, particularly electronic communication, the interpenetration of self-development and social systems, up to and including global systems, becomes ever more pronounced. The ‘world’ in which we now live is in some profound respects thus quite distinct from that inhabited by human beings in previous periods of history. It is in many ways a single world, having a unitary framework of experience (for instance, in respect of basic axes of time and space), yet at the same time one which creates new forms of fragmentation and dispersal. A universe of social activity in which electronic media have a central and constitutive role, nevertheless, is not one of ‘hyperreality’ in Baudrillard’s sense. Such an idea confuses the pervasive impact of mediated experience with the internal referentiality of the social systems of modernity — the fact that these systems become largely autonomous and determined by their own constitutive influences.” 5, *Modernity and Self-Identity*

“In the post-traditional order of modernity, and against the backdrop of new forms of mediated experience, self-identity becomes a reflexively organised endeavour. The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems. In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. Of course, there are standardizing influences too — most notably, in the form of commodification, since capitalistic production and distribution form core components of modernity’s institutions. Yet because of the ‘openness’ of social life today, the pluralisation of contexts of action and the diversity of ‘authorities’ lifestyle choice is increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity. Reflexively organized life-planning, which normally presumes consideration of risks as filtered through contact with expert knowledge, becomes a central feature of the structuring of self-identity.” 5, *Modernity and Self-Identity*

“At one pole of the interaction between the local and the global stands what I call the ‘transformation of intimacy.’ Intimacy has its own reflexivity and its own

forms of internally referential order. Of key importance here is the mergence of the 'pure relationship' as prototypical of the new spheres of emotional life. A pure relationship is one in which external criteria have become dissolved: the relationship exists solely for whatever rewards that relationship as such can deliver. In the context of the pure relationship, trust can be mobilized only by a process of mutual disclosure. Trust, in other words, can by definition no longer be anchored in criteria outside the relationship itself — such as criteria of kinship, social duty or traditional obligation. Like self-identity, with which it is closely intertwined, the pure relationship has to be reflexively controlled over the long term, against the backdrop of external transitions and transformations." 6, Modernity and Self-Identity

"Pure relationships presuppose 'commitment', which is a particular species of trust. Commitment in turn has to be understood as a phenomenon of the internally referential system: it is a commitment to the relationship as such, as well as to the other person or persons involved." Modernity and Self-Identity 7

"The reflexive project of the self generates programmes of actualization and mastery. But as long as these possibilities are understood largely as a matter of the extension of the control systems of modernity to the self, they lack moral meaning. 'Authenticity' becomes both a pre-eminent value and a framework for self-actualisation, but represents a morally stunted process." 9, Modernity and Self-Identity

"Disembedding mechanisms are of two types, which I term 'symbolic tokens' and 'expert systems'. Taken together, I refer to these as abstract systems. Symbolic tokens are media of exchange which have standard value, and thus are interchangeable across a plurality of contexts. The prime example, and the most pervasively important, is money. ... Money brackets time (because it is a means of credit) and space (since standardized value allows transactions between a multiplicity of individuals who never physically meet one another). Expert systems bracket time and space through deploying modes of technical knowledge which have validity independent of the practitioners and clients who make use of them. Such systems penetrate virtually all aspects of social life in conditions of modernity — in respect of the food we eat, the medicines we take, the buildings we inhabit, the forms of transport we use and a multiplicity of other phenomena." 18, Modernity and Self-Identity

"The degree to which a medium serves to alter time-space relations does not depend primarily on the content or the 'messages' it carries, but on its form and reproducibility." 24, Modernity and Self-Identity

Quotes: Niklas Luhmann

[The Reality of the Mass Media](#) by Niklas Luhmann, Kathleen Cross (Translator). Stanford University Press (July 2000). Paperback: 154 pages. ISBN: 0804740771.

“However, we can speak of the reality of the mass media in another sense, that is, in the sense of what appears to them, or through them to others, to be reality. Put in Kantian terms: the mass media generate a transcendental illusion. According to this understanding, the activity of the mass media is regarded not simply as a sequence of operations, but rather as a sequence of observations or, to be more precise, observing operations. In order to come to this understanding of the mass media, then, we have to observe their observing. For the approach introduced first above, first-order observation is sufficient, as if we were dealing with facts. For the second approach, it is necessary to adopt the attitude of a second-order observer, an observer of observers.

In order to hold on to this distinction, we can speak (always with reference to an observer) of a first reality and of a second (or observed) reality. What we now observe is a doubling of reality which takes place in the observed system of the mass media. It does indeed communicate — about something. About something else or about itself. What we have, therefore, is a system which is capable of distinguishing between self-reference and other-reference (Fremdreferenz).” 5
Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

“The more complex the system becomes and the more it exposes itself to irritations, the more variety the world can permit without relinquishing any reality — and the more the system can afford to work with negations, with fictions, with ‘merely analytical’ or statistical assumptions which distance it from the world as it is.” 7
Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

“What is needed in order to resolve this paradox of the confusion of two worlds is imagination or creative ideas which refer reflexively to the state of the system just reached, but which are not determined by it. The state of the system enters further communication as an irritation, as a surprise, as a novelty, without this mystery of the source, the origin of the novelty of the new being able to be clarified by the operations of the system. The system presupposes itself as a self-produced irritation, without being accessible through its own operations, and then sets about transforming irritation into information, which it produces for society (and for itself in society). That is precisely why the reality of a system is always a correlate of the system’s own operations, always its own construction. It is the topics of communication which ensure that the mass media, in spite of their operational closure, do not take off, do not take leave of society. Topics are

an unavoidable requirement of communication. They represent communication's other-reference. They organize communication's memory. They gather contributions into complexes of elements that belong together, so that it can be discerned in the course of communication whether a topic is being retained and carried forward or whether it is being changed. At the level of topics, then, other-reference and self-reference are constantly being coordinated in relations to each other within the system's own communication. Above all, recursive public discussion of the topic, the prerequisite that it is already known about and that there is a need for further information, is a typical product of and requirement for the continuation of mass media communication; and securing this public recursivity in turn has a retroactive effect upon communication in the environment of the mass media. Topics therefore serve the structural coupling of the mass media with other social domains; and in doing this they are able to use their topics to reach every part of society, whereas the systems in the inner social environment of the mass media, such as politics, the economy or law, often have difficulty presenting their topics to the mass media and having them taken up in an appropriate way. ... An observer (and this might also be organizations within the system of the mass media) can distinguish between topics and functions of communication. For example, he can say to himself and to others: if we don't run this or that news item, if we cancel the weather report or, say, the 'bioscopes', we will lose our readership." 11-12 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

Reading Notes on Giddens and Luhmann

Sociologist Niklas Luhmann describes the role of the mass media as creating a reality *constructed* from second-order observations of the real world (real events). He divides the content of this mass media reality into three primary functional domains: news, advertising, and entertainment. News is a representation of the events that comprise this constructed reality (news makes its own news); advertising claims to be false but is effective nonetheless, and entertainment creates fictional narratives. Each is affected differently by online media. Insofar as the web handles text and talk well, and as it has historically served as a publishing medium, it perhaps bears closest resemblance to Luhmann's analysis of news. Entertainment, as temporal experience in which an audience gives its attention for a period of time, was until Google's remarkable acquisition of YouTube, least affected by online media. (The web is a distracted and distracting medium, not to mention is user-driven, and seems least likely to fight with mass media's talent in creating entertainment.) Advertising is interesting, because much of the commercial world's investment in social media obtains from the medium's importance to youth culture, with its obvious strength in combining advertisements with interpersonal communication. (Whether we think that talk about advertisements subverts the power of advertising, or does the opposite by embedding it in everyday speech perhaps matters little. Advertising gains market share, and increases its changing but nonetheless demanding presence in our lives.)

What is the relationship between online/internet media and mass media? The online world references culture as presented by mass media — actual events as well as the telling of them — but then mass media often reports these online commentaries back. There appears to be a feedback loop at work between the two media, insofar as the online audience's observations of the mass media are relevant to news, advertising and entertainment companies, and the mass media's coverage of online content constitute events relevant to bloggers (etc.) online. Luhmann would probably note this as a phenomenon of mutual observation, but it becomes structural coupling if both media derive business from the relationship.

There may be an objection here to the notion that we should separate mass media and online media, if we're going to then couple them. But by Luhmann's definition, communication cannot occur between the mass media and its receivers/audience. Two-way communication among members of the audience is the distinguishing feature of online media, and is the means by which they are reproduced. So we should keep them distinct, theoretically at least, *if* communication is a feature of type (technologies that permit it vs those that don't). (Good thing there's no communication possible through those city-wide sirens.)

Further excerpts from Luhmann's views on news

"The programme strand of news and in-depth reporting is most clearly recognizable as involving the production/processing of information. In this strand the mass media disseminate ignorance in the form of facts which must continually be renewed so that no one notices." 25 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Using all the methods at the disposal of a journalistic writing style specially developed for the purpose, the impression must be given that what has just gone into the past is still present, is still interesting and informative." 26 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Events have to be dramatized as events — and they have to be suspended in time, a time which thus beings to flow past more quickly. The observation of events throughout society now occurs almost at the same time as the events themselves." 26 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Just as maps cannot correspond exactly to the territory they depict in terms of size and details, and just as Tristram Shandy was not in a position to tell of the life he lived, so also it is not possible to have a point-for-point correspondence between information and facts, between operational and represented reality." 27 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"In other words, the point is to introduce into a determined, even if unknown, world an area of self-determination which can then be dealt with in the system itself as being determined by its own structures." 27 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

Notes on placing new media in Luhmann's work on news

A great deal of what appears online, in discussions, blogs, commentary and so on, can become news. Online "talk" (it's a form of talk, it's a "talking" in spite of its being online) is news if it is received as news. News events online are not unlike news events in the mass media: the source may be different; the news deliverer, or writer, may be different; the means by which it is picked up may be different. Without the distinctions by the mass media among professions in the news business (anchors, journalists), we need to look elsewhere for credibility and integrity online, as we also need to be more flexible about the presentation of news. Now that news travels online and is validated by the speed and depth of its pickup, audience participation has become valuable. If a blogger is quoted at cnn.com, whose story is it? Whose opinion is it? And where is the blogger in

relation to professional journalism and news distribution? The fact is that because news is simply that which is news, the distinction between media here fails to make the distinction between what's news and what's not.

The greatest impact the online world has on the news is probably in its mode of distribution and communication. As was true of advertising, the internet extends the production and telling of the news into the world, in the form often of non-professional narrations, opinions, commentary, and other kinds of talk. As a result, stories may go farther and perhaps gain more exposure. In fact, the impact the medium's speed and scope has on politics seems profound and is an oft-cited testament of the medium's democratic contribution and impact around the world. Most importantly, this reproduction of news that is an essential part of its distribution now occurs as a product of the participation of members of the audience. News is now produced by its consumers, not by the organs of news reporting. Validation of news now shifts away from "objective" or reality-specific criteria to audience criteria (quantity of impressions and views, number of citations and links, etc). It can easily fall prey to the simplest of metrics: popularity. News may now circulate because it is entertaining, it is tell-able, worthy of repeating, it passes the water cooler test... Depth of reporting may suffer from the audience's interest in sound bites or consumables that can make for cultural references or interesting morsels in conversation. The very domains then that provide news shift from news as facts to news as human interest stories.

According to Niklas Luhmann's analysis of mass media, news is produced along topical lines. In *The Reality of the Mass Media* he identifies the following topics for news. Note that these topics don't organize advertising or entertainment:

Topical organization of news

- Surprise
- Conflicts
- Quantities
- Local relevance
- Norm violations
- Moral judgments
- Actors
- Topicality
- Expressions of opinions
- Available time/space w/in media

If we had the space and time for it, we could examine the way in which each of these topical categories is transformed online. Clearly, normative violations offer a great opportunity for people to speak their minds, and we ought to (and do)

find a lot of that occurring on discussion boards and in blogs online. The medium's tendency to flatten utterances and render "speech" with equality and parsimony that's characteristic of machines but not of people, produces another interesting effect. How do we know when news is being told by a credible source? How do we distinguish the speaker from what is spoken? Sincerity is a quality of interaction that we establish within the context of interaction itself, with another person and around the content of what's being spoken about. But this kind of interaction doesn't happen online. We use *persistent attributes of credibility* as a substitute for the sincerity that we can read from a person's utterances (their speaking and speaking style). Links, references, blogrolls, community, and so on may help us to establish the credibility of the person's presence online. But the medium's flattening effect goes farther still. It reduces the distinctions present in richer mass media by which we delineate news, opinion, commentary, entertainment, satire, and so on. As it reduces the differences among speakers, it reduces the distinctions between speeches. It's not yet clear to me the degree to which this might be troublesome or problematic. Currently, we seem engaged with the medium's speed, breadth, and accessibility. And with enough effort, most things can be found out by searching.

The claim made here is that we understand our actions within a context that is saturated by mass media messages. Though we live in an ocean of information, our relationship to information changes the moment we become participants in it. The production of that information then reintegrates its own reception; news organizations begging to use their online metrics as a means of assessing their performance, their success in finding and telling the right stories, with the right degree of entertainment value, for how long, and so on. All of this is observed, as are the observations themselves. Or in the words of an old KFOG radio bulletin: "if you don't like the news, go out and make some of your own."

The online world offers little granularity by which to measure and qualify its meanings. Here's a list of questions concerning the medium's presence for us. These questions are not specific to news, but do touch on the production of news:

- How does the online world "exist?"
- What's its role in our daily lives?
- How do we see our own participation in it?
- What is our understanding of it?
- What is our sense of others online?
- What is our sense of their relation to us?

- Would you read content online if it weren't related to work, if you didn't think it might be related to work, or how it might benefit your performance at work?
- What motivates you to click the link for more?
- To what extent are your online habits based on the fear of missing out?
- What talk do you read for the sake of it?
- What do you read as research?
- Would you write if you didn't think it was read?
- Do you check digg, technorati and google to be sure it's read?
- Do we not know that authors often seek to convince?
- That there is manipulation in testimonials, friends, and other kinds of subjective forms of credibility?
- And that many authors understand how to work the system?
- Don't we use activity on a site to determine its value as a place to post?
- Don't we use the site's identity as a way of knowing if it's broadcast or user content?
- Doesn't identity tell us if the site is primarily brand/advertising, news, customer opinion, or commentary?
- Is it not true that any content online could serve product sales? News, advertising, and entertainment? But that consumers often know the difference?
- User generated content would be a mode of advertising that seeks to add credibility to brand identity (general) and product (particular), creating the sense that the company is good and/or that its works are good.
- Changing the image: by reputation, by acts, by products, by relations and associations (with celebrities; with trend-setters; with a target market at large; with experts; on basis of objective product comparisons/reviews)?

Luhmann's insightful descriptions of aspects of news stories suggest that news is transformed by its integration into a participatory medium. Examples follow:

Online media and news

- *Surprise*: increased contact with the world means more surprises; individuals report (whether they are journalists doesn't matter) on more information, creating more surprises; individuals can frame stories in their own words, producing the effect of surprise
- *Conflicts*: YouTube; social competition but less "action" than TV; perhaps not as good as TV or film because it's not an entertainment medium (see McLuhan here)
- *Quantities*: as shortcuts quantities are fast and effective (though not necessarily accurate or very descriptive)

- *Local relevance*: News is also perpetuated as its credibility and validity for an audience persists through its sustain and resonance within a culture
- *Norm violations*: Luhmann's reference here to norm violations, scandals, and the inevitable discussions of corrective action, punishment, discipline and so on, all perpetuate news by amplifying its relevance
- *Moral judgments*
- *Actors*: the web is well-suited to celebrity making, and in fact many social software systems are designed to capture personality
- *Topicality*
- *Expressions of opinions*: Insofar as blogs and online discussion forums are often organized around local news, community pickup of stories sustains interest and engages members of the community: the web then serves as a kind of townhall meeting
- *Available time/space w/in media*: Because news is news until it replaced, its durability can be enhanced by its persistence online. Links to online news stories, references to news in blogs, online discussions, wishlists, top tens and other lists of favorited items (e.g. tagged, linked, etc.) all extend the life of a news item.

Questions

- What kinds of topics do we find shaping the news which are particularly suited to new media?
 - Topics in which the discovery of news occurs in the field, on the streets
 - Investigative journalism
 - Local news
 - Human interest stories
 - Topics in which the medium tells its own story, is its own object of observation
 - Information-heavy topics
 - Self-referential news and topics
 - Science news
 - Technology
 - Business deals and news
 - Venture deals
 - News told through quantitative change
 - News about competition among software makers and the software marketplace
 - Jobs- and career-related topics based in new media:
 - Design, web, engineering, etc
 - Marketing news
 - Especially viral news
 - Types of advertising that blur the line between news and advertising

- Types of advertising that are easily picked up as topics of blogs and online discussions
- Types of advertising that affect the medium itself
- Types of advertising that merge with information search, where the form of advertising doesn't appear to be advertising
- Types of advertising that appear in a form that looks like regular content
 - Web advertising
 - Text ads
 - Google news
 - Yahoo news
 - Search engine optimization, changes to rankings in search engines, etc.
- How does the medium transform the news? How does it shape the consumption of news? What does the medium, because it is interactive and user-driven (users click their way through content), shape the consumption of its content, and the production and generation of user contributions?
- The presentation of the news as events in the world is shaped by the contributor's interest in having it read, in being known as its author/narrator/reporter/videographer/host, and it's up to the him or her to get this by seeking:
 - Credibility
 - Authenticity
 - Authority
 - Legitimacy
 - Etc.
 - The author of this news may seek to engage audiences in conversation, thus using the act of reporting an event to his/her advantage as storyteller
- What is the impact of the "link" as a means of navigating content here?
 - Is the link a reduction to simple and compelling call to action?
- What is the call to action in news, and does it represent a form of entertainment in news?
 - From objective to subjective:
 - Click to read more
 - Scandalous headlines
 - By editor/journalist
 - By bloggers
 - Comments that drive the news up
 - What kind of attention is this?
 - Does the user still own his/her attention?

- What impact of video on user's attention span?
- Do we view calls to action as a form of entertainment, a reference to entertainment?
 - If it is a distraction?
 - If it refers to impulsive action?
- How do we treat structural coupling of news and industries? What happens online does find its way to:
 - organizational decisions
 - does include actual sales
 - does move products by extending advertising (voluntary customer marketing and promotions)
 - does shape currency of topics
- The talk generated is an amplification and extension that creates that many more points of contact, of attention, pickup, of communication, in short. It extends phenomena in time, also. Structurally relevant only insofar as it's reintegrated. Though, ironically, this may result in a feedback loop with production, cutting time to market. Speeding marketing itself as the system talks back to consumers to reflect their interests. If the online world makes a difference (to the mass media, to politicians, to production, etc).

Further excerpts from Luhmann's views on advertising

"After truth comes advertising. Advertising is one of the most puzzling phenomena within the mass media as a whole. How can well-to-do members of society be so stupid as to spend large amounts of money on advertising in order to confirm their belief the stupidity of others? It is hard not to sing the praises of folly here, but it obviously works, albeit in the form of the self-organization of folly." 44 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Everything we had always suspected anyway suddenly appears as truth here. advertising seeks to manipulate, it works insincerely and assumes that that is taken for granted." 44 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Advertising declares its motives. It refines and very often conceals its methods." 44 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Memory, which remembers things but actually prefers to forget them, is continually being reimpregnated. And the novelty of the information is more of an alibi for the intention to remind people that there is something to buy and that particular names or optical signatures there deserve special attention. But

that changes nothing about the fact that there is no deception concerning the aim of advertising or the motive for utterance.

In fact we can assume the opposite: precisely because advertisers are completely open about their interest in advertising, they can be even more uninhibited in the way they treat the memory and motives of the person targeted." 45 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"...they will recognize that what they are seeing is advertising, but not how they are being influenced." 45 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"This function of making the motives of the one being targeted unrecognizable is served above all by the trend towards formal beauty which currently dominates advertising, both visually and textually. Good form destroys information." 45 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Another widespread technique of 'opaque-ization' lies in the paradoxical use of language. For example, we are told that by spending money we can 'save'.... So this advertising technique amounts to an appropriation of the opposing motive." 45-6 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Or to withholding the object which is to be paid for. It is fairly common for the product being advertised to be tucked into the background..... Temporal sequences are dealt with in a similar way, where the thing being advertised only emerges at the end." 46 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Such techniques of bring paradox to the play of motives allow unlimited scope (or so it is thought, at any rate) for the paradox to be resolved by a decision for or against the transaction. But this itself entails expectations of success: what has to be done in the first instance is to break into a terrain in which interests are already fixed and to induce a specific uncertainty." 46 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"This of course is only true of advertising which has been rendered recognizable, and not for advertising which is not even perceived as such. In this case, advertising plays with the distinction conscious/non-conscious." 46

"One of the most important latent (but, as such, strategically used) functions of advertising is to provide people who have no taste with taste. After it was proved to be impossible to turn education into money, the reverse possibility — making money seem like education — does have a certain chance of success.... This function refers to the symbolic quality of objects which is partly, but not sufficiently, expressed in their price. With its help one can be provided, both visually and verbally, with the security of making the right selection in areas where one has no criteria of one's own." 46 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the*

Mass Media

"Taste itself serves in turn to structure desire. Whether or not he or she buys anything, the consumer reacts in the same way as the next person, without any direct imitation of others being required to do so. This too has to do with the fact that there is no longer any convincing upper social stratum to which one might look to see what is 'acceptable' and what is 'not acceptable.'" 47 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"The fact that advertising (and especially fashion) goes on at the level of the use of signs need not be repeated. Here, too, we are dealing with a construction of reality which continues its own reality — and insofar as it is concerned, its primary reality — thus being able to outlast enormous fluctuations in the market and indeed to profit from them. ...it is a matter not of subjectively attributable differences such as honesty/dishonesty or truthfulness/untruthfulness but always of pleasing appearances alone. The guiding idea for this form of mass communication can be traced back to the seventeenth century, in other words, to the time of courtly culture in which this first, operational reality of self-representation was still restricted to interaction." 48 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Perhaps the most important schema of advertising, however, lies in the relationship of surface and depth. As the divination techniques of wisdom once used to, it uses the lineations of the surface in order to suggest depth. To this extent it is the same as the art of ornamentation. But depth is no longer destiny, it is the vagueness of advertising instead. Advertising cannot determine what its addressees will think, feel or desire. It may calculate its chances of success and seek payment for it. In this respect it makes an economic calculation. In the system of the mass media it follows other rules. It occupies the surface of its design and motions from that position towards a depth which remains inaccessible to itself." 48 Niklas Luhman, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

Notes on placing new media in Luhmann's work on Advertising

Like news, advertising also benefits significantly from pass-along by consumers. Where news is "consumed" by the reading of it, the consumption of advertising is supposed to lead, eventually, to consumption of goods and services.

When we pass advertising and marketing content messages along, we do it within the form and context of our personal relations. We repackage the marketing with our own personality; we address it personally to friends. We make it our own, and for that, we don't feel captive to capitalist or commercial concerns even when our acts of talking lead to acts of spending. Of course

bloggers who, comment, discuss, recommend and otherwise propagate commercial plenitude are not mere actors in scripts written by marketing departments. Writing about companies, brands, and products, can be a useful way to qualify oneself and through distinguishing remarks.

Attention is short in today's world, and given the time and space constraints we're under, the advertiser simply has no choice but to enter all messaging markets and to use all channels available. The advertising world is driven by fear of missed opportunities, and because success in commerce is measured, ultimately, by the "yes" of a purchase, anything that leads to consumption may be worth trying. (If the "no"s were more obvious, were more easily measured, the balance would shift. In fact consumer backlashes have been propagated online and do possibly present a greater worry to advertisers now than before). But all it takes is for advertisers to succeed in social marketing for the risk of not participating to rise higher than the risk of losing message control.

Customers nowadays understand the production and distribution of messages and content about brands and their products. Even negative commentary can be seen as beneficial if the product becomes a topic of conversation or otherwise draws attention. Perhaps not surprisingly, many consumers seem untroubled by what appears to be commentary that draws attention to brands and products. Their words are still their own — even if they drive commerce.

Luhmann's observation that advertising creates the idea of its depth by activities on the surface may seem obscure to readers not familiar with the surface/depth debates that have occupied many a literature or human sciences department. His point that advertising cannot control the minds of its audience is more clear. Advertising cannot, ultimately, make us buy anything. Nor can our friends. But if advertising is in a struggle today for the hearts and minds, as it were, of its target markets, then again any mentions it gains through blogs, comments, discussions, vacation photos, book lists, create the exposure and extends the advertiser's fundamental goal of attracting attention.

Qualifying selections

Note that in the absence of face to face interaction, a number of event- and factually-oriented distinctions now come into play as substitutes for the sincerity and truthfulness of personal recommendations: numbers and quantifications (such as ratings, rankings, most popular, most viewed).

- Wish lists
- Recommendation lists
- Ratings
- Rankings

- Number of views (popularity)
- Photos of places advertised
- Descriptions of events advertised
- Descriptions of experiences advertised
- Social marketing directories of products, places, and services that use the personal and social networks of individual consumers engaged in reviews and recommendations
- Play lists (audio)
- Youtube channels, posts, and comments

Truthiness

By Luhmann's account, you couldn't have a bigger truth problem than the one faced by advertising. And yet paradoxically, advertising benefits by admitting that it makes no claim to truth in the first place. And this makes it free to advertise by any means necessary. While the advertising of actual products and services then unfolds by associations established among particular things and their concepts and claims (this vacuum cleaner cleans better > clean is good), advertising is not confused with actual experience. It's understood that there's a difference between the story told about the product or service, and the thing itself. Thus the world of online reviews grants advertising some claim to sincerity. It's said that sincerity is a communication that cannot be stated explicitly. The statement "I'm being sincere" is self-contradictory. While advertising makes no claims to truth in *fact*, *sincerity*, or *normative authority* (these being the three claims to truth raised in communication, according to the linguistic philosophy of Jürgen Habermas), it benefits from truth claims raised through interpersonal exchanges. A positive product review is an implicit recommendation.

Though we assume that an advertiser is presenting the best picture possible of his or her product in order to sell it, we don't make the same assumption of inter-personal communication. We'd be insulted to discover that friends were lying to us about their true motives, were they selling product without telling us. (I know this isn't the case for everyone; buzz marketers in fact claim that lying to create product buzz isn't a problem of truth or integrity for many people; that's sad and troubling). What's created when people speak well about a company but free of company influence, in their own words and on their own terms, is branding and image. Negative publicity, if handled well, reflects well on commercial interests by demonstrating company integrity. It may be only a passing illusion, but we do invest companies with the possibility of having personal character and integrity — even when this clearly isn't the case from a structural perspective. Companies profit to survive.

It is also clear that because we don't consider word of mouth advertising per se, it falls into Luhmann's category of advertising that is not perceived as such. Benefits, then, of the extension of advertising into online domains include:

- Credibility raised by word of mouth marketing:
 - messaging
 - branding
 - products and services
- Legitimize methods of advertising
 - by assimilating them into daily practices
 - by assimilating them into creative reinterpretations
 - by referring to them in toto
- Word of mouth recommendations often speak to a product's "use value" and claim to utility
- Continues advertising in the form of interactions and communication that's not perceived as advertising (camouflaged advertising)
- Raises the credibility of the brand by making associations with personal views and perspectives that can claim sincerity and integrity
- Recommendations are advertising in the form of a disinterested vote of approval
- Personal recommendations (emailed, forwarded, and shared links to products, sites, services, offers, etc) extend the reach of advertiser's market, and again embed advertising in a message addressed personally by the sender to friends and family
 - Group discounts distributed personally
 - Invitations to events forwarded or posted by individuals

Taste and Fashion

Taste and fashion are an interesting topic here. Luhmann's almost quaint suggestion that social stratification grounds taste, that having taste means being high class, is clearly under threat if not obsolete. Residues of the relationship between class and taste survive and are clearly the basis of many brand value claims. However the media, by adding in celebrity, by mixing the world of actors and models, by celebrating new taste makers (from Silicon Valley 20-something year olds, to authors on Oprah, indie film makers and their non actors, street-raised and hip hop taste-makers, rebels of Olympian snowboarding, American Idols), and by literally creating new subcultures and then mixing them together, by mixing messages, the media have lifted tastes from their expression of social class. The media do, however, link tastes to cultures, or types (which is where Luhmann goes with fashion). Perhaps today tastes are fashions, and are as malleable, flexible, and as connectable as any sign. Online media then would extend the market in which tastes are created, deconstructed, assigned values, personalities, statements, expressions, and given other symbolic forms (music,

bands, movies, books, speakers, TV shows, etc.). And online media would be a place in which fans mix with artists, authors with their readers, celebrities with their amateur commentators and admirers, and so on. It would be possible to claim that engineering efforts take on the function of fashion system: look at the difficulties facing Microsoft, and at the popularity of coding languages like Ajax, Linux, and Open Source “movements” overall. Hackers are hip!

- Speed of information circulation
- Changing fashions
- Adding momentum to new fashions by
 - Identifying leaders
 - Myspace as a locus of new fashion trends
 - As a marketplace of latent trend leaders and trends
 - Testimonials, posts, comments, discussions all can serve to circulate references to fashionable people, places, things, ideas
 - The political as fashion... would there be anything wrong with Al Gore’s fashionability if it motivated ecological thinking and behavior?
 - If the key to fashion is production of signs, then the web’s publishing, editing, imaging, and animation as well as video and audio formats are well suited to creating, maintaining, and circulating the *character, choices, looks, sounds, locations, and other contexts that speak the cultural language and create a sign system around a lifestyle* that ordinary people can associate themselves with
 - Fashion statements
 - Fashion settings
 - Fashionable people
 - Fashionable products, places, etc
- Rich media like audio and video add information to the lifestyle, seen today and especially in:
 - Alternative cultures (which are under-represented in the mainstream culture, news, advertising, and entertainment)
 - Including alternative politics
 - And sexuality
 - And cultural objects
 - Such as books, films, authors, film makers and actors, musicians, comedians, TV show hosts, and political figures

Risks to Advertisers

The advertiser, of course, also faces a lot of choices, and thus risk. To cope with the vicissitudes of the marketplace, particularly during an era of rapid message circulation and re-interpretation, commercial enterprise must plan ahead. The future is the unknown, and today’s plan solves the problem of the radical uncertainty represented by the future. Online media, and user-generated content

in particular, presents these companies with an opportunity to reduce the system's complexity (though increasing it as a result). Companies can mine social media for emerging trends, talents, signs, messages, and so on. It's often been noted that mainstream culture feeds off the innovation of its marginalized and poor, off the street smart and off the youth at the edges of the commercial cultural field, where subcultures recontextualize the mainstream to make it more their own (to make a distinction out of what was the same before their modifications).

Advertisers can use the web for market research, competitive analysis, polls and surveys, not to mention online focus groups and product research. Many online communities are eager to use and test products, provide preliminary feedback, make suggestions and comments, and so on. But more than that, the data captured in the background from links, posts, comments, bookmarks and wishlists, favorites, and so on, is perhaps more honest for their not being explicitly provided to marketers. The music industry in particular, having lost its edge (Tower records going gone), and now Hollywood seem responsive to the bubbling of new interests, genres, topics, and the handling of them in online talk and conversation. After Flickr, mood boards are easy to assemble directly from user-generated content (read: real life). Similarly, blogs provide viewpoints that can correct corporate misperceptions. It's for this reason, that marketing assumptions may be mistaken, that interest in social media the purposes of political and special interests has grown massively. Talk online reduces the time it takes to refine decisions (though these are often broadcast back into society, resulting in further rounds of frenetic reevaluation). Social media manifest the modifications of mainstream culture, particularly among:

- Youth culture
- Alternative culture
 - Its politics
 - Its objects
 - Its cultural objects
 - Its talents and celebrities
 - Its values
- Special interests
- Long tail interests and communities of practice:
 - Hobbyists
 - Specialists
 - Isolated groups (like fans of Fawlty Towers, not stampeding across the Plains like great herds of wildebeast)

Social marketing

Social marketing is a form of advertising in which individuals pass along advertising messages online as well as face to face. In the context of regular conversation, advertising is sustained in the form of personal recommendations and promotion, suggestions as well as actual coordination of activities that result in purchasing or otherwise accepting the advertiser's campaign. And it works, because the translation of marketing speak into ordinary and everyday speech cloaks the advertiser's message. The individual may in fact speak the message word for word, but its delivery, which is now personal and which engages the trust people have for one another, hides behind what's taken to be sincerity. All this would fail if people lost their faith in the sincerity (and integrity) of others: and indeed this is the problem affecting most politicians, whose methods require that they conceal political motives behind factual and observations for which they provide normative recommendations. Political discourse runs parallel to advertising in today's political system insofar as it involves steering individuals towards a particular decision (a vote for the politician).

Among the reasons for adopting social marketing strategies are an expanded market and personalized messaging delivered often in the context of an existing relationship and through ordinary conversation. Water coolers ought to be placed on pedestals for their ability to spread messages and promote ideas.

- Social networks have the power of existing relationships, and all the trust, expertise, and every day logic that goes with them (marketing loves everyday logic for it resembles common sense, and the less argumentation necessary, the more convincing the message)
- Pricing discounts make sense when targeted to groups
- Information travels quickly in conversation and, more importantly, benefits from the confirmation of others
- Circulation and distribution costs close to nothing when it's word of mouth
- Increased visibility and mindshare
- Buzz marketing and viral marketing each have proven their benefit
- Long tail sales are obtained from connections consumers make when recommending and relating products using online review tools.
- The long tail is creates time, or rather, prolongs the relevance of associations and relations once read as new and interesting
- The web grants these relations a certain amount of interest by 1) preserving the relation (growing them slowly, as the links between associated objects gain in popularity, creating a feedback loop and resulting in an even more convincing association; note that the accuracy of the association is still only numerical though) and 2)

Advertising's logical paradoxes

Advertising's twists of logic, by which messages induce actions (purchases), create expectations that products/services offered will solve (non-existing or fictional/constructed) problems include the following (as noted by Luhmann):

- Opaque-ization of language
- Paradoxes and reversal of motives
- Withholding product mention
- Deferring the product mention
- Induction of uncertainty
- Advertising that is not perceived as advertising
- Two things that are alike are assumed to be similarly liked
- Greater numbers mean greater value
- And so on

In the hands of a media-savvy audience, and here we can invoke Anthony Giddens, the industry's techniques provide methods for their own personal promotional efforts. We find these methods find their way into the genre of online personals (dating systems), for example. Whether in their choices of pictures, video profiles, taglines and self descriptions, authors of online personals use promotional techniques to create a sense of wit, intelligence, and personality, *while* at the same time honoring advertising and marketing techniques and motifs. Members are wise to choose the most compelling picture of themselves for their personal profile. But more and possibly sexy pictures may be kept in the profile or revealed only to members who have made contact. While this addresses the issue of trust — controlling who gets to see what — it's an alluring means of creating interest: in Luhmann's terms, a form of withholding the product to the end... Members may also obscure their motivations, not only to protect their privacy, *but also* because deferring and concealing creates the probability of contact and conversation. "So what's a girl like you doing on a site like this?" In short, the advertising form, which plays with truth through paradoxes, offers numerous ways to get conversation started — conversation being the means of undoing the paradox.

Further excerpts from Luhmann's views on entertainment

"We are best served here by taking the general model of the game as a point of orientation. This will also explain to us why it is that sports programmes, especially where replays are concerned, count more as entertainment than as news. A game, too, is a kind of doubling of reality, where the reality perceived as the game is separated off from normal reality without having to negate the latter." 51 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"The difference to social games brings us back to the system of the mass media.

Just as in a game, so entertainment too can assume that viewers are able to observe beginning and end (unlike in their own life) because they experience things beforehand and still do afterwards. So they separate out, automatically as it were, the time of entertainment from the time which affects them themselves. But entertainment itself is by no means unreal (in the sense of not being there). It certainly does presuppose self-generated real objects, double-sided objects so to speak, which facilitate the transition from real reality to fictional reality, the crossing of the boundary. These are texts or films. On the 'inside' of these objects the world of the imagination is to be found, invisible in real reality. This world of the imagination, because it does not have to coordinate the social behavior of the observers, does not need any game rules. Instead it needs information." 52-3 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Let us reiterate that information consists of differences which make a difference." 53 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"In now coming to consider mass media 'entertainment,' we are getting into quite a different kind of programme strand again.

"We are best served here by taking the general model of the game as a point of orientation. This will also help explain to us why it is that sports programmes, especially where replays are concerned, count more as entertainment than as news. A game, too, is a kind of doubling of reality, where the reality perceived as the game is separated off from normal reality without having to negate the latter. A second reality is created which conforms to certain conditions and from which perspective the usual ways of living life appear as real reality. The constitution of a game requires a time line that is foreseeable in advance. Games are episodes." 52 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"The game always contains, in each of its operations, references to the real reality which exists at the same time. With every move it marks itself as a game; and it can collapse at any moment if things suddenly get serious. The cat jumps onto the chessboard. The continuation of the game requires that the boundaries be kept under constant surveillance.

In social games involving several partners, this will happen by means of an orientation to a set of rules which people have in mind when they identify their own and others' behavior (within the game) as appropriate. Behavior both in accordance and in conflict with the rules is part of the game; but behavior which breaks the rules is only allowed as long as it can be corrected by being pointed out. Entertainment, on the other hand, is a different kind of game. It does not assume complementary behavior on the part of a partner, nor any rules agreed to prior to it. Instead, the excerpt from reality in which the second world is constituted is marked visually or acoustically —as a book, as a screen, as a

striking sequence of specially prepared noises which are perceived as 'sounds' in this condition. This external frame then releases a world in which a fictional reality of its own applies. A world! — and not merely, as in social games, a socially agreed sequence of behavior." 52 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"This difference to social games brings us back to the system of the mass media. Just as in a game, so entertainment too can assume that viewers are able to observe beginning and end (unlike in their own life) because they experience things beforehand and still do afterwards. It [entertainment] certainly does presuppose self-generated real objects, double-sided objects so to speak, which facilitate the transition from real reality to fictional reality, the crossing of the boundary. These are text or films. On the 'inside' of these objects the world of the imagination is to be found, invisible in real reality. This world of the imagination, because it does not have to coordinate the social behavior of the observers, does not need any game rules. Instead it needs *information*. And it is precisely this which allows the mass media to construct a programme strand called entertainment, on the basis of their information/non-information code." 53 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"...the problem then concentrates on the question of how, with the aid of information (instead of prescribed rules), a special reality can be excluded from entertainment." 53 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Let us reiterate that information consists of differences which make a difference. The concept itself, then, presupposes a sequence of at least two events which have a marking effect. But then the difference which has been generated as information can in turn be a difference which makes a difference. In this sense, items of information are constantly and recursively linked together in a network. They emerge from each other, but can also be arranged in their sequentiality with regard to more or less improbable results. ... in this case, we will be given the impression (no matter whether or not the process itself describes itself in this way) that what we have is not a calculation but rather a sequence of actions or decisions. It is only in the narrative context that it becomes clear what an action is, how far it extends into its past and into its future and which of the actor's characteristics are part of the action and which are not." 53 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"..the sequence of operations which process information *generates its own plausibility itself*. As is similar in the case of technologies, a closure of the process occurs in the face of uncontrolled environmental influences. Whatever has made a difference adequately accounts then for which further differences are possible. In this sense the process generates and transports an uncertainty, which it itself produces and renews again and again, and which depends on

further information. It (the process) lives off self-produced surprises, self-constructed tensions, and it is precisely this fictional unity that is the structure which enables real reality to be distinguished from fictional reality and the boundary from one realm to the other to be crossed." 54 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"However future-oriented the plot is, 'the knot is untied only by the past and not by the future' (as Jean Paul instructs the novelist). If the story aims to satisfy certain basic requirements for its own consistency (and fairy tales are a much discussed exception here), the way it unfolds must be able to refer back to the beginning of the story. In any case, the elements needed for resolving the tension have to be introduced before the end, and only the reader or viewer is left in the dark. This is why it is not worth reading something twice.... Every piece of entertainment must come to an end and must bring this about itself. The unity of the piece is the unity of the difference of future and past which has been allowed to enter into it." 56 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"As is always the case with operational closure, differentiation generates surplus possibilities in the first instance. Forms of entertainment therefore differ according to how these surpluses are reduced. The basic pattern for this is the narrative, which in turn has differentiated itself into a considerable abundance of forms." 57 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"It seems that knowledge which viewers already have must be referred to copiously. In this respect, entertainment has an amplifying effect in relation to knowledge that is already present. But that is not oriented towards instruction, as with news and in-depth reporting. Instead it only uses existing knowledge in order to stand out against the latter. By being offered from the outside, entertainment aims to activate that which we ourselves experience, hope for, fear, forget — just as the narrating of myths once did. What the romantics longed for in vain, a 'new mythology,' is brought about by the entertainment forms of the mass media. Entertainment reimpregnates what one already is; and, as always, here too feats of memory are tied to opportunities for learning." 58 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Films in particular use this general form of making distinctions plausible by having distinctions arise sooner or later within the same story. They condense them even further by including distinctions which can only be perceived (not narrated!). The location of the action, its 'furniture', is also made visible and, with its *own* distinctions (elegant apartments, speeding cars, strange technical equipment etc.), simultaneously serves as a *context* in which action acquires a profile and in which what is said explicitly can be reduced to a minimum." 58 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"The form of narrative entertainment gained as a result of the novel is no longer the sole dominant form today. At least since television became widespread, a second form has appeared alongside it, namely the genre of highly personal experiential accounts. People are put before the camera and asked all kinds of questions, often with interest focused on the most intimate details of their private lives....." 60 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"It seems that interest in such programmes lies in being presented with a credible reality, but one which does not have to be subject to consensus. ... One can make a choice oneself and is not even obliged to stand by what one thinks of oneself if things get serious. 60 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Entertainment performances, therefore, always have a subtext which invites the participants to relate what they have seen or heard to themselves. ... The issue here is not what impression the text, the programme, the film makes on the individual viewer..... One learns to observe observers, in particular, looking to see how they react to situations, in other words, how they themselves observe. At the same time, as a second-order observer one is cleverer but also less motivated than the one whom one is observing; and one can recognize that the latter remains largely non-transparent to himself..." 60-61 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"What goes on in each individual viewer, the non-linear causalities, dissipative structural developments, negative or positive feedback messages etc. triggered by such coincidental observations, can simply not be predicted; neither can they be controlled by programme choices in the mass media. Psychological effects are much too complex, much too self-determined and much too varied to be capable of being included in communication conveyed via the mass media. What is meant here, rather, is that every operation that goes on in the fictional sphere of the imagination also carries with it an other-reference, that is, the reference to real reality as it has always existed — known, judged and always having been there as the topic of normal ongoing communication. And it is above all this orientation of the distinction of real and fictional reality that produces the entertainment value of entertainment communication." 61 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"Psychic systems [persons] which participate in communication through the mass media in order to entertain themselves are thus invited to make the connection back to themselves. This has been described since the eighteenth century by the distinction of copy and authentic 'being oneself', and there are certainly imitational self-stylizations which are more or less unconscious, whose widespread existence can only be explained in this way —for example, a gesture of casualness or of brashness, expressing autonomy in the face of expectations.

But this imitation/authenticity distinction does not adequately explain how the individual *identifies herself* within this bifurcation *as an individual*. This seems to happen in the mode of self-observation, or to put it more precisely, by observing one's own observing. If the imitation/authenticity option is given, one can opt for both sides or sometimes for one and sometimes for the other, *so long as one is observing oneself and is looking to find one's identity therein*. Reflection can only yield up a characterless, non-transparent I which, however, as long as its body lives and places it in the world, can observe that it observes. And only thus is it possible, in determining what everyone is for oneself, to do without indications of a background." 62 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

"This discussion has made plain the special contributions of the 'entertainment' segment to the overall generation of reality. Entertainment enables one to locate oneself in the world as it is portrayed. A second question then arises as to whether this maneuver turns out in such a way that one can be content with oneself and with the world. What also remains open is whether one identifies with the characters of the plot or registers differences. What is offered as entertainment does not commit anybody in a particular way; but there are sufficient clues (which one would find neither in the news nor in advertising) for work on one's own 'identity'. Fictional reality and real reality apparently remain different, and because of this, individuals remain self-sufficient, as far as their identity is concerned. They neither must nor can communicate their identity in any particular way. Therefore, they do not need to commit themselves in any particular way. But when this is no longer required in interactions or when it fails time and again, one can resort instead to materials from the range of entertainments offered by the mass media." 62 Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media*

Notes on placing new media in Luhmann's work on entertainment

We don't need to read Luhmann to theorize the importance that observing the audience has for the entertainment industry. Entertainment companies live and die by their success in creating properties audiences love. After all, advertising appears on television only as a break in a show; and it is seen only if the show is popular. The appearance of entertainment content on sites such as YouTube, and Google's purchase of Youtube, only add credibility to a trend years in the making. The availability of entertainment properties online, be they at their studios'/distributors' sites or posted in clips by Youtube users, provides instant feedback to their creators. Distribution sites like Youtube can be watched for marketing trends and audience comments. Audiences can be more easily observed and their reactions to new programs, films, shows, dvds and so on mined for reactions both broad and narrow. In many cases some number of users will mashup a video: this gives producers insight into the ways in which their programming connects with an audience.

Should we then say that a primary function of video online is its embeddedness within the marketing and advertising functions of new media? Where would we draw the line between personal taste and commercial marketing of taste? Cultural trends, entertainment properties that become fashionable cultural reference points (bands, movies, actors, books and their authors, etc.) are all the perfect kinds of content about which users have a personal viewpoint. And that viewpoint is social: it communicates matters of personal taste to others. The associations operate by extension: if you like this, you might like me (because I like it also). If you are like me, you might also like this. And so on. There would be several ways of slicing the associations here between cultural objects, taste, fashion and trends, and how they communicate about those who have made selections. The taste-making efforts of long tail companies would offer interesting directions for research and exploration here.

Games

- There are strong similarities here between game descriptions provided by psychologists, sociologists, and linguists insofar as we can use them to describe the organization of experience online.
- I'm thinking here of the manner in which a social practice takes form and becomes organized.
 - Posting video responses to YouTube
 - Inviting colleagues to connect on LinkedIn
 - Making friends on Friendster
 - Writing testimonials on MySpace
 - Tagging sets of photos on Flickr
- It's clear that these are social experiences, and that they are structured *loosely* by an understanding of acceptable moves, statements, responses, references, and so on.

Online as form of entertainment

- Are entertainment properties online extensions of mass media entertainments?
- What transformation occurs within the entertainment form when its consumers/audience members are able to communicate?
- How are the fictions constructed by the genre either undermined, adapted, sampled, or extended by online media?
- Insofar as mass media fictions double reality, creating possibilities for us by which to observe the world as well as to explore possibilities for our participation in it without actually participating — clear in other words of consequences...

- It is possible that social life has become so open to opportunity, fictionally speaking at least (if not in fact, but I don't want to make any sociological declarations here... class may not be real but there are constraints on what a person can do within his/her place in society) that social software sites like MySpace play a role in the organization of action, the self-understanding of social actors, in terms of integrating the operations at work in mass media entertainments (lives of celebrities, wealth, fame, sex, and the values that the industry uses to organize sales of commodities; products that serve to substitute for the real thing, desire; logics of sublimation, of projection, internalization, and other means by which we mediate our self-understanding through commodity/object forms and associated narratives) such that actors/users don't have to suffer the consequences of their actions/choices online directly (or with as much consequence as in real life).
- There is in other words the idea that what is presented online at sites like Myspace is a version of reality, is an extension of one's own participation in it, but in a thinner and lesser version. It has no immediate presence.
- An experience like MySpace permits interaction without face, one can insult without blushing, or (if it were conceivable) blush without being seen.
- What I'm getting at is that there are two dimension of online social interaction that connect with Luhmann's observations:
 - Game structure
 - There is a separation of the activity form "reality"
 - Rules/codes/expectations organize action and possible action
 - Things can get serious if the game breaks down

Fictional world construction

- Themes govern activity on social software sites such that themed action has more consistency, has been reduced so to speak, distilled into its principles forms and actions
- In the real world, or in daily life, of course, actions are not structured temporally in discrete runs (chains, series, sequences) as they are thematically online
 - Is the classroom more tight and defined than online learning? While it's true that students must commit themselves physically to a stretch of time in the school building, their interaction bandwidth enjoys the full range of possible expressions. Interaction is much thinner online. Which is thus tighter, more organized, structured, etc would depend on whether you view a social encounter's possibilities by the thickness of its organization or the richness of its interaction potential
- The online world contains double-sided objects, as Luhmann describes them.
 - In fact we might conjecture that the user is a double sided object. For example,

- The Other is a memory, image, projection or some other kind of virtual other. Since there is no face to face, no place, online, we're never face to face with the other (video excepted)
- The other is however a real other, and has real presence in the real world. S/he can be hurt, insulted, seduced.
- Does this not suggest that social media provide us with a splitting opportunity?
 - Split the world
 - Double it up as "virtual" online
 - Its users are virtual others, that is real but not actual (in terms of their presence to us)
 - And actions committed online walk a fine line between the real and the fictional
- Like the worlds created by entertainment, there is a strange blurring of the distinction event/information online. Events are information, information is the event. And I mean this not just because changes in information are the event horizon, the event organization of the world online. I mean also that the computing and software systems on which social software is built recognizes only that which it can select (differences that make a differences are those which it has chosen to see ahead of time). In other words, the world online is fictional insofar as it is constructed of engineered perceptions and selections. Nothing will happen in the world online that was not designed into it (Gibson, wish you were right, but you cant be)
- Luhmann's point on new information becoming a systemic difference itself is interesting because software works the same way. It authors its own world as it takes inputs from users (which are forced into the binary yes/no)... social software sites choose which actions to recognize.
- We are only at the very beginning of these kinds of social interactions:
 - What is it to look at somebody
 - And how is it recognized by the system
 - How is this seen by the other user
 - And their having seen it manifested back to us?
 - What is public and what is private
 - And is it in the context, setting, or definition of a communication or in its circulation and distribution
 - And so on...social software sites must commit to recognize certain kinds of actions and not others.
 - The meaning of an action is proscribed. Only talk (email, messaging) permits ambiguity. System actions cannot mean but what they have been set up to mean: ok, reset, cancel, check, uncheck, move, etc. In other words the system of communication at the system level is simply reproductive

Narration, the narrative form, and social media

- The narrative form is a prevalent and effective means of organizing reality, and one's self, online
- It's not hard to see how this might describe social software:
 - "Entertainment reimpregnates what one already is; and, as always, here too feats of memory are tied to opportunities for learning."
 - The idea that there is a recursive involvement of the user in the consumption of, say, a film, and also in her interactions on Facebook is simply a way of describing the distance and separation of the action from its consequences, choices from the bodies, faces, and materiality of the worlds they affect, information from its causes... *in other words both entertainment fictions and social software sites are built on observations.*
 - Users observe themselves observing, and observe themselves observing themselves online — this is the distance of mediation, whether it is mass media or communication-based media.
- And another description of the manner in which action becomes visible in fiction is interesting: "Films in particular use this general form of making distinctions plausible by having distinctions arise sooner or later within the same story. They condense them even further by including distinctions which can only be perceived (not narrated!)."
- And Luhmann's description of entertainment as a medium with which one engages self-reflective observations is much more interesting than descriptions of passive absorption or consumption of the same. I think social software engages users in a form of interaction which users recognize to be real, but not immediate, connected to consequences, but not here and now, populated with real people, but not ones that will truly suffer or get hurt by my absence, sudden disappearance, or other acts of rejection.
- Fictional entertainments and social software have in common their capacity to engage people in their worlds without (for the most part) presenting immediate risk or danger (credit card theft, stalking and such like being the exceptions, but exceptions that prove the point: what is not immediate appears to be less real).
- Luhmann's claims in favor of "observed self/self-observing self" over an "imitation/authentic self" are a perfect match for the modern subject project as carried out by Giddens. A profile on Myspace is thus not a "fake" self, or misrepresentation, but is instead a production, a self constructed within the context of a particular interaction regime online. It is thus:
 - a reflection of oneself
 - within a social practice
 - and "social scene" in which
 - participation in a "community,"
 - that is talk, in private (message) and in front of others (testimonials, posts, comments, message blasts etc)

- offers options and alternatives for and within the “conventional” biographical narratives and stories that shape identity insofar as identity is something we present to others
- the MySpace’s of the world, in other words, create alternatives for the production of self-hood

Social media are not mass media

Of course there are ways in which social media do not appear to be constructions akin to the entertainment form of mass media:

- They are not self-contained
- They are not temporally bound (they don’t end)
- They are real
- One can communicate with them
- Still, it’s tempting to describe them as a hybrid form, one whose combination of technology, communication practices, and mass media referencing gives us a hybrid of forms: interactive, sequestered from the immediacy of reality, organized and compressed in terms of interaction and communication, but connective (when the users follow through).

Entertainment as property

- Entertainment properties clearly gain market share from the talk they generate online
- Small time films, indie properties, and their actors, directors, and even writers, have all seen benefits from the long tail phenomenon
- There are shifts in the funding of many entertainment properties also, as the legitimacy and credibility of organizing and producing new entertainment properties shifts from organizations organized top down and according to hierarchical division of expertise — to flat, street, grassroots organization
- There’s a shift occurring here also in the ownership, the intellectual property and sales model of entertainment as a result of new media/social media:
- Partial consumption (songs broken out from albums)
- New kinds of sales: Rentals (videos, songs) subscriptions (netflix, itunes, podcasts)
- Both of which affect who is being rented or subscribed to:
 - Radio station
 - Publisher
 - Music label
 - Band
 - Producer
 - Director
 - Author

- Magazine
- Download site like itunes, Zune, betterpropaganda, live365, bit torrent, etc
- It's unclear in other words how the net as a new means of media distribution will shape the consumption of media titles
- Though there is clear interest at this point in the use of collaborative filtering and recommendation engines (anything that is long tail!) to create connections among properties
- Which is to say, to put them on the shelf next to each other so that they are easily found

YouTube

- The case of online video here becomes interesting in its own right. Online videos indeed fall into familiar categories:
 - Comedy and comedians
 - Music and musicians
 - Biographical profiles and confessions
 - Performances
 - Out takes and home video bloopers
 - Grotesque challenges and jackass games
 - Videos that serve to stand for a member's lifestyle/interests/character/personality
 - Sets of videos, channels, and tagged videos that capture emerging member characteristics
 - A Luhmannian reading would suggest that YouTube represents:
 - Opening the mass media to sampling
 - Which is quoting, and will manifest the kinds of cultural practice we saw with sampling of music (Hip Hop, Negativland, the Grey Album)
 - In which quotes produce a cultural reference
 - And to communication
 - Thus short-circuiting existing means of monitoring the consumption of televised and broadcast film/video content
 - Which means that the industry loses control over numbers that are important to the regulation of its advertising rates
 - But which produce a rapid, responsive and in some ways non-threatening network of videos distributed among consumers,
 - Thus unadulterated focus groups/test markets and representing honest and manipulation-free opinions
 - We can think there that members *play* with video content
 - Might we then hypothesize that YouTube's users have the media literacy and media programming competence to act as media producers, in their
 - Selections of content

- As well as production of their own video content (e.g. amateur vid, animations, performances, and digital video mashups)