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Reading Notes: Self-Presentation, Self, Presentation of Self

- What is the self? Why treat it as a thing? Why objectify “the Subject,” which by most accounts is a self-reflexive project, an unfolding, becoming, and undertaking as informed by social forces, discursive accounts and reasons, and social relations as it is by the subject’s self-understanding.
- I’m reminded of the being/becoming debate, and Hegelians/post Hegelians (read: French 20th century thinkers). Even the Donna Haraways, constructivists, cyborg and gender bending theorists lean more to identity than they do to difference.
- The net is viewed as a place in which users let down their hair, create alternative selves, anonymous selves, other-selves. But I don’t think we can draw that out and claim these as “identities.” Better would be to view them as tactics, possibly strategic, but play (encounters with social convention) either way. After all, an online identity that cannot be enacted/performed in the real world is use-specific. There’s an argument for a practice-based perspective!
- If self-disclosure is a form of play, is a self-referential project (I’m thinking of Giddens’ subject as self-reflexive project; the subject monitors his/her actions and reactions to them obtained from others) then this kind of activity wouldn’t seem to hold much promise for establishing relations with others. At least not in a Big Way (as two actors engaged in a back and forth, yes; but as a bond between two Selves, no). Again, we’re not left with much to take away: What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, as they like to say.
- What is disclosed in the self-disclosure attributed to online self-presentation?

- If we were to pursue this logic of subjectivity, and online is a place in which a particular kind of self is engaged, what particular to the technology brings out this self? There would have to be a connection between the technology and subjectivity... not likely. More likely: the social is stripped from the practice of socializing, and the absence of visual feedback from others is what liberates the “self” and enables users to act with less constraint...
- This approach begs the question: What is the “self’s” social context? What is society? What are social relations? If the author wants to investigate the particular kind of self-disclosure found online, and one of the claims involves the positive or greater disclosure of self, then we need to ask, disclosure to whom, and in what social context? I can disclose myself to a wall; that doesn’t make the wall an interesting technology....
- The views taken up by those interested in either the identity politics of online community and participation, or in the anonymity/self-disclosure/disinhibitions of online community members must consider the dynamics of online participation. I’m reminded of the contrast between monological and dialogical personalities. I don’t know where it comes from, but the gist of it is that some of us are monological (our identities built on self-reflection, we express them directly), some of us are dialogical (our identities are a product of dialog, interaction, expressed through the give and take of conversation, etc).
- Perhaps it would be helpful if we divided views of online self-presentation into 1) self presentation and 2) presence negotiation. The latter would cover aspects of presence management: one’s physical and emotional sovereignty; physical and communicative/interactional boundaries; access to oneself; handling and negotiating other’s interactions with us. Presence negotiation would then give us a handle on the issues produced by the high degree of access that connective technologies create, and which oblige us to participate with those not in our immediate physical space. Presence negotiation would supplement self-presentation by covering not the identity so much as the management matters of connected living.
- The question of society and social context would seem to have strong implications for online learning applications and theories of online learning. Learning is clearly a matter of social (possibly normative) reinforcement. Learning (we’re not talking people, places, dates) involves supplying reasons that others consider valid (we’re not talking tests and number two pencils).
- The big issue lurking behind all of this is trust.
- If we follow social presence theory and agree that the degree of social presence matters, any technical mediation that inserts a screen between participants obviously affects social presence (as a relation of user to user). Physical presence would be number one, as users not physically present to each other can neither stroke nor injure one another. What presence remains involves interactional and communicative cues. The degree that participants are bound to each other, in respect, interest, in

- coordination, in fact, etc., involves their sense of commitment to each other. I don't see that coming up in "social presence" theory here. Here it's a matter of perceptual cues and markers (the standard meta and para-linguistic markers involved in physical and facial gestures and cues).
- It's not that social presence theory is mistaken, but that it treats society in terms of presence (and co-presence), where it's the stretching of relations across time and space that defines society. What's being mistaken here is an interaction for the social, group for society. People being in one another's company does not a society make (is a fight club a society? Interesting!)
 - To grasp the intervention of technologies of communication in social interaction, or greater, in the reproduction of society, we need theories of presence and of society that don't hobble one another in concepts like "social presence." (or should we propose this for CMC: "social presence theory meets physical absence theory"?)
 - Another thought... by this measure of social presence, Tribe is high, LinkedIn is low in social presence. But we know that that doesn't necessarily correspond to trust, or to the nature of relations among users of those systems. Members of LinkedIn, for example, know each other from real life. The system's ability to transmit a social interaction is relevant, but is not the key to the production of trust, forging relationships, creating intimacy, etc. It's one factor among others that have as much to do with the relations among members as with virtual co-presence.
 - The paper on Presentation of Selves on home pages is very old but contains the seeds of a genre that's been much studied since: self-presentation online as a reflexive move, an encounter with one's self, rather than as an encounter with community. There's certainly something to it. There are those who are more comfortable relating themselves to others as a narrative of their relationship to themselves (e.g. "this is how I think of myself"). There are those who might prefer to engage in an imaginary self. Online life would then give them a place in which to do this. There are those whose construction of self might be within a particular genre (musical, fashion, physical, ethnic, etc) or might be through encounters with "enemies" (these are the people who tend to speak against others, whose speech is directed, negatively and in opposition, to others, perceived as being opposed or in fact opposed.)
 - We don't know, and I don't know if we can know, whether or not the primary mechanism is self-promotional or play. The web is a medium, like print. Online communities, too, involve aspects of message boards, listings, classifieds, etc. High school yearbooks, newsletters, etc. In a culture as preoccupied with celebrity image as is ours, it's likely that for many users, online communities are a sort of experiment in marketing. Marketing the self; Self promotion. And then on the other side, there's the fact that assembling, writing, design the self is creative, introspective, and in some ways a personal pleasure in which users are quite oblivious to others. Sociologists look at meaning-based activities like self-presentation

- as intrinsically involving others. But in the absence of co-presence with an other or others, that encounter is filtered and suspect. I would imagine that those members of online communities who begin, perhaps naively, with a “thinking to myself outloud” kind of profile, tweak and edit over time as they get feedback on what it conveys to others. I guess my conclusion on this is that we can’t simply import notions of self-presentation directly from their role in f2f interactions.
- My work on proximities is a reflection on the new practices of communication and interaction enabled by connective technologies, and takes up some of the ways in which we should revise sociological thinking to account for “virtual” proximities (which are nonetheless real for us)...
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[Self-disclosure in computer-mediated communication: The role of self-awareness anonymity](#)

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Computer-mediated communication (CMC), and more generally the Internet, have become the focus of interest for social psychological research for a number of reasons. One reason is that the main use of the Internet in the home is for interpersonal communication (Kraut, Mukhopadhyay, Szczypula, Kiesler & Scherlis, 2000), suggesting large amount of social behaviour worth investigating. A second reason is that CMC contains two features, visual anonymity and limited channel (i.e. text only) communication, that have been implicated in a variety of interpersonal behaviours. Both visual anonymity and text-only communication have been used to predict that CMC will lack the richness of normal face-to-face interaction and hence be task oriented and low in socio-emotional content (Rice & Love, 1987). They have also been used to predict that CMC would discourage awareness of others (Kiesler, Siegal & McGuire, 1984) and encourage anti-normative, aggressive, uninhibited behaviour termed ‘flaming’ through a corresponding reduction in self-focus (Kiesler et al., 1984).

Self-disclosure is the “act of revealing personal information to others” (Archer, 1980, p. 183).

In one exception, Matheson and Zanna (1988) compared participants’ levels of self-awareness (using a four-item questionnaire) after they had discussed using computers or face-to-face. They found that “users of computer-mediated communication reported greater private self-awareness and marginally lower public self-awareness than subjects communicating face-to-face” (p. 228). In line with this, Matheson (1992) reports that users find CMC a highly reflective experience. Weisband and Atwater (1999) found that CMC users over-estimate their contribution to discussions compared to FtF, suggesting that they might experience heightened private self-focus.

Social Presence Theory and Implications for Interaction and Collaborative Learning in Computer Conferences

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Two concepts associated with social presence are: Argyle and Dean's 1965 concept of "intimacy;" and Wiener and Mehrabian's 1968 concept of "immediacy" (Short et al., 1976.) Short et al., suggest that the social presence of the communications medium contributes to the level of intimacy which depends on factors such as physical distance, eye contact, smiling, and personal topics of conversation. They observe that the use of television rather than audio-only communication makes for greater intimacy, other things being equal. Immediacy is a measure of the psychological distance which a communicator puts between himself or herself and the object of his/her communication. A person can convey immediacy or non-immediacy nonverbally (physical proximity, formality of dress, and facial expression) as well as verbally. A person making a telephone call may choose to speak in such a manner as to give an impression of aloofness and "distance" (non-immediacy) or he or she may choose to adopt an attitude of informality and comradeship (immediacy). Immediacy enhances social presence. Therefore, according to this argument, social presence is a factor of the medium, as well as that of the communicators and their presence in a sequence of interaction.

152 Gunawardena

Walther (1992) observes that Argyle and Dean's 1965 equilibrium theory posits that communicators adopt levels of gaze, physical proximity, and other behaviors indicative of intimacy and that these levels are derived partly from cultural norms as well as from a need for affiliation. Short et al., (1976) were aware of equilibrium theory and research although they did not embrace it, and speculated that language may substitute or even "overcompensate" for missing nonverbal information. Examining teleconference research, Short et al., observed that because of the reduced-cue situation, a participant will modify his or her behavior. Thus head-nods indicating agreement may be replaced by verbal phrases such as "I agree." Equilibrium theory supports the principle of cue substitutability, in that a communicator is likely to adopt other symbol systems to convey affective messages that are unavailable nonverbally. Therefore, Walther (1992) notes that those who communicate with each other using only a text-based medium such as CMC, will try to achieve desired levels of immediacy through the manipulation of verbal immediacy in the textual environment. Examining the concepts of "social presence" and "interactivity" Rafaeli (1990, 1988) observes that social presence is a subjective measure of the presence of others as Short et al., defined it in 1976, while "interactivity" is the actual quality of a communication sequence or context. Interactivity

is a quality (potential) that may be realized by some, or remain and unfulfilled option. When it is realized, and when participants notice it, there is “social presence.”

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Title: [The Presentation of Self in WWW Home Pages](#)

Authors: Hugh Miller and Russell Mather

“By using this, people can present many aspects of themselves simultaneously (or at least non-hierarchically), or their extended selves, or themselves as nodes within an extended community...”

“We identified four categories for self-image on the page:

- straight: an image which purports to be a straightforward likeness
- joke: a distorted or caricatured or unrepresentative image: cartoon, baby photo, author just after falling off bike into mudhole, author caricatured as frog, etc
- symbolic: an image which represents a human being, but not the actual person who posted the page. This is often a piece of clip art, like a cherub or a generic silhouette.
- none: no images of humans

<http://www.apa.org/monitor/apr00/mirror.html>

A mirror on the self
BY BRIDGET MURRAY

“But the few behavioral studies being started in this area suggest that the Internet can serve as a mirror, even a tool, that helps people with the search for self.”

“Along with the anonymity comes an effect that social psychologists have long known is associated with crowds: disinhibition”

Not only does the Internet spur self-expression, but it offers new ways of doing so, says Suler. On the net, he says, "you can create any combination of self-expression you want, slicing, mixing and matching."

"In their interviews with net users, Suler and Turkle find numerous examples of people who pose as members of the opposite sex."

But for many, says Turkle, "the Internet reflects the range of selves, the hidden selves you never knew you had. It gets you out of that box you're confined to in the real world."

These reading notes were taken while researching source material and conceptual frameworks of potential use to *social interaction design*, an approach I'm developing for use in the development and design of social software, interaction tools, communication technologies and their applications.