The temporary networks of the unknown

An essay on the question why human beings are creating social relationships between templates and databases and how new subjects and powers are evolving online. I want to examine how visibility is defining our views on privacy and intimacy on screen-based social environments. I will discuss how the grey zone between public and private is perceived when a machine acts as the mediator of our multiple identities.

Note: Notes are kept within the text in italic + there will be more pictures/screenshots added +not-yet shaped following chapters and thoughts are left in the document for the overwiev-purpose

Table of Contents (pending...)

How to fit a person in a template

(much does it take to be part of a social network online? How are we becoming a databased individual?)

On Signing Up

> "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life." (Facebook Startpage, 2011)

> "People treat Facebook as an authentic part of their lives, so you can be sure you are connecting with real people with real interest in your products." (Facebook Advertising, 2011)

These are the headlines of each the regular startpage of the current social network giant www.Facebook.com and their starting page for advertising www.Facebook.com/advertising/. The first catchline addresses the regular user who can sign up at to the social network platform at no costs - "It's free and always will be."(Facebook Startpage, 2011) – while the second one is aiming at the paying customer. The promise to the not-yet registered user on the startpage includes the ability to connect with people around the world for free. The same is presented as an "authentic part of their lives" to the prospective advertiser, in order to further connect the mentioned "real people" not only with each other but also with products. In other words, we see how the ones, whose desire it is to connect and share, are fulfilling the promise that is made to those, who are eager to pay Facebook

in order to make profit.

On Facebook's Ads page it becomes clear how Facebook presents itself as an optimally performing online marketing platform, where an advertiser can "reach over 500 million people where they connect and share". The effectiveness of campaigns via Facebook result from Facebook's ability to target the exact demographic audience of the clients. "Reach the right people at the right time." (Facebook Advertising, 2011) It is no news, that the product Facebook is actually selling is the user-data that is voluntarily filled in by every person who registers to their service. Facebook as a service not only mediates the relationship among people but also the relationship between people and products, and can therefore be seen not only as a social but also as a highly commercially oriented network that is able to optimize marketing achievements by giving businesses the opportunity to get to know their customers within their social surroundings and relationships, from the perspective of a friend, family member, colleague etc.

At this point I might briefly mention Nissenbaum on "Behavioral Advertising"

The first step to become part of a social network, or mostly any free service on the web to share personal content is the registration. Full access to most website's content and all its features is only possible through creating one's own profile through signing up.

As Boyd formulated it in 2007 a Social Network profile is generated through basic information as age, location, interests, and an "about me" section, and the encouragement to upload a profile picture. In the case of Facebook, you have to provide the full name, email address, a desired password, gender, and the date of birth. After this information has been provided, the new Facebook-user is prompted to let Facebook automatically import the contacts from their e-mail address book, enter Highschool, College/University and Employer. This information seems an convenient choice for people who quickly want to get started with connecting and sharing, but also pictures how Facebook gradually asks their users to provide more personal data step-by-step.

> "**Express Yourself: Set up your Facebook Profile**. Now that you've created your account, it's time to set up your profile. Your profile allows you to share your interests, activities, and anything else you want to include with people you connect to on Facebook. Your Facebook profile is about representing yourself and sharing what's going on in your life with your friends. Each profile information section represents what people will see when they arrive at your profile. Start by filling out the info that will help people identify you—Basic, Education, and Work.

> **Smile, you're on Facebook.** Having a profile picture makes it easier for friends to identify you as being the real you, especially if you have a common name. In addition, the picture you select is another way to express who you are to your friends and family." (Facebook Guide, 2001)

This data in the end makes it easier to be found and also to be identified as the "real person" behind the profile. Here the internet user voluntarily and explicitly abandons the anonymity online by declaring real-life attributes such as name, sex and birthday to an online database. This also means the adaptation of personal data to the norms of the databases. By filling in a form for registration the user agrees to the structure and requirements of text fields and drop-down menus in order for the network to make a compatible set of data out of you. Lanier compares this "personal reductionism" as something that has always been present in information systems.

"You have to declare your status in reductive ways when you file a tax return. Your real life is represented by a silly, phony set of database entries in order for you to make use of a service in an approximate way. Most people are aware of the difference between reality and database entries when they file taxes." (Lanier, 2010, Gadget, p. 69)

Through social networking digital reductionism becomes a casual element, mediating contact between new friends, what Lanier calls a "postpersonal" world. When regarding the registration process as the first voluntary contribution of information to the databases of a social network site the minimum set of data that has to be provided for creating a profile is similar on most services. It is the threshold that has to be crossed in order to be part of the social network. The e-mail address stands in as the unique identifier, so one e-mail address can be used for registering only one account.

– here I will provide a table of required registration data of the services I will finally talk about in detail and what information has to be provided in that case (Facebook, myspace, flickr(Yahoo), youtube, vimeo, Skype, Google, twitter, justin.tv, dailymugshot….)I will pick a limited set of social networks that in the end will fit my sequential analysis on exposure and visibility in later chapters but I have not completely chosen which services to finally really discuss so the below list of detailed registration-data will be adapted in the final version to those services

The most basic information that is generally requested during the registration process for a Social Network Site includes the full name, e-mail address, sex, birthday and a password. Besides the already mentioned fields for creating a Facebook profile there are various other fields of data required in order to sign up an account for other Social Networking Sites: The business websites LinkedIn and Xing additionally ask for the user's zipcode and country, their company, position and their jobtitle. Xing, moreover, includes an required field called "Career Plans." These fields are not visible on the starting page of Sign Up but slowly pop up during the process of registration, after having provided Name, e-mail and password. Some services, among them Skype and Youtube ask the user to create a unique username that then serves as the public ID of the profile, and is also requested for login instead of the e-mail address.

After having finished the process of registration most services motivate their new users to enter more detailed personal data or import contacts from already existing contact lists like the address book of their e-mail account or add a profile picture.

"After joining an Social Network Site, an individual is asked to fill out forms containing a series of questions. The profile is generated using the answers to these questions, which typically include descriptors such as age, location, interests, and an "about me" section. Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile photo. Some sites allow users to enhance their profiles by adding multimedia content or modifying their profile's look and feel. Others, such as Facebook, allow users to add modules ("Applications") that enhance their profile." (Boyd, 2007)

Through every form that is filled in the content of the database improves. As Poster puts it the database

"arranges information in rigidly defined categories or fields, (…) the agency that collects information in this database constitutes individuals according to these parameters. (…) The structure or grammar of the database creates relationships among pieces of information that

do not exist in those relationships outside of the database. In this sense databases constitute individuals by manipulating relationships between bits of information". (Poster, p.96)

These individuals are constituted, in the case of Facebook at least through to the basic data that is required for registration, and expands further through the encouragement from the agency to provide more and more data in order to connect and share more easily. Lanier sees in this possible manipulation that "a tiny group of engineers can shape the entire future of human experience within incredible speed." According to Lanier technology can be seen as an extension to a human being, like remote eyes and ears or expanded memory.

> "These structures connect you to the world and other people but at the same time change how you conceive of yourself and the world." (Lanier, 2010, p.15)

These structures, within Social Network Sites, can easily be influenced and changed when a re-design is introduced or new features are implemented. A good example is Facebook's New Profile launched end 2010. When Josh Wiseman, software engineer at Facebook, introduced the New Profile on the Facebook Blog the overall reactions of the Facebook users were negative. What has been announced as an even easier way for users to tell their story and learn about their friends received instant reactions like "atrocious", "a picture book for illiterate children" and "We want the old profile back!" (Facebook, The New Profile)

When describing the new features such as the overview of basic information or the bar with recent photos Wiseman always names examples, like his own wedding or his affiliation to Ultimate Frisbee, to emphasize his personal excitement of the new features, that he is responsible for. "All your interests and experiences are now represented with images, making your entire profile a more compelling visual experience."

This compelling visual experience also changes the way the "edit profile" section has to be filled in. The fields "Current City" and "Hometown" can only be filled in with locations that are known to the Facebook database. Facebook's Help pages are flooded with complaints of users whose hometown is not available from the database and they either have to leave the space blank, choose a town that is closest to their actual location or they can fill in a contact form with a regional request and wait for Facebook to add their hometown to the database. Those fields are therefore not longer simple text-fields where any text can be typed into but they communicate in real-time with a database that contains known names of cities. Above that, all cities in that database have their own clickable profile, that contains a picture, a description inherited from Wikipedia, related posts of people that mention the city name, nearby places through Facebook's Places application and a Like-Button. The same problem of expression occurs in the field "Languages", where selections can also only be made from an existing set of data. The offered choices, however, seem to stem from a faulty implementation of the old, textual way of providing information to the new, database-driven one when looking at possible options that offer random choices such as "Jibberish" or "70s Jive" but miss out on actual languages like several regional Sign Languages. The results seem to link to random Facebook Pages labelled with the category "language". The response to this glitch on the Help-pages is relatively low, probably because the existence of additional pointless data is not as noticeable as the lack of essential data.
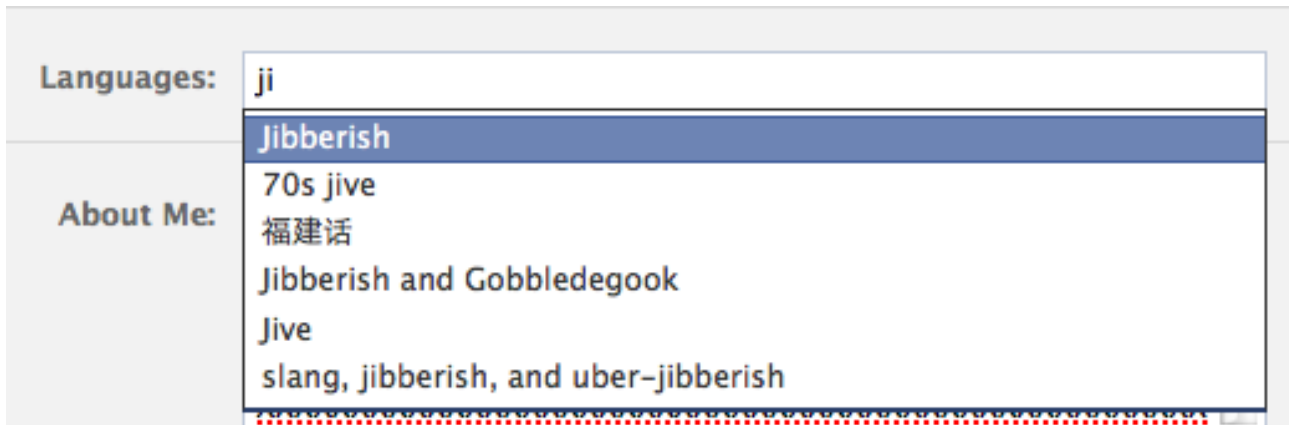
The visual way of representing profile-data makes it necessary that every term is linked to a picture. Therefore, every additional description filled in the fields like "Education and Work", "Arts and Entertainment" or "Sports" creates a new Page for it, in case the term has not yet been filled in by someone else.

"Pages are special profiles that may only be used to promote a business or other commercial, political, or charitable organization or endeavor (including non-profit organizations, political campaigns, bands, and celebrities)." (Facebook Pages Terms)

As every filled in item becomes a separate set of data, the text-based user profile, that allowed free descriptions and phrasings in a personal style is a thing of the past. That means, the user has a binary choice to either implement a preference on their profile or not. Additionally, the emphasis lies on the visual representation of the data in the form of a 100 by 100 pixel measuring image.

On Templates

(How the look and design on websites changes the feel of control and ownership of the content and on identity, digital being with S. Turkle's "Second Self" & "Alone Together", Negroponte's "Being Digital", Boyd's analysis of Social Networks, Christiakis "Connected" and Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulation")

The look of every Facebook profile is based on one fixed, clean Facebook style-sheet, as opposed to its preceding rival myspace.com where users had the freedom to edit the style of their page freely. Jaron Lanier argues that the design for a crowd means de-emphasizing the individual. He calls the web before 2.0-templates a web that had "flavor".(Lanier, 2010, p.15)
Like Myspace the Dutch social network site Hyves allows their users to customize the look of their profile page by adapting the colors of the page's elements and add upload a customized background picture. This function called "Pimp my profile" co-exists next to a button called "Show in normal design" - so that every customized profile can be reset to a standard clean design to and then switched back to the "personalized design". So the offered visual enhancement of ones profile can be turned off by the viewer, while a site like Facebook does not offer to change any style-sheet related design on the profile at all. This coherent look of every Facebook profile makes the appearance of every Facebook user more standardized and uniform than the myspace- or hyves-user.

In November 2010, Myspace announced that it is integrating itself into Facebook's login and social

tools. Kelleher found that this was the moment where it would be safe to say "that Facebook is social networking."

> "MySpace, like everyone else in 2004, wasn't sure what would make a social network click. So it let its members figure it out, offering them to design their own pages with widgets, songs, videos, and whatever design they pleased. The result was a wasteland of cluttered and annoying pages that were as garish as the self-designed home pages on MySpace's 1.0 predecessor, Geocities.

> Facebook, meanwhile, opted for a cleaner, Google-like interface that resonated with a broader audience. The design was predominantly blue and white, and the company rolled out features piecemeal: email, instant messaging and then live feeds of their activities. The platform was unadorned, intuitive, structured to reflect how people were already communicating online – and in contrast to MySpace's anything-goes approach, it was soothingly Spartan.

> So while MySpace appealed to the early adopters of social networking sites, Facebook resonated more with a more mainstream audience. (Kelleher, 2010, cnn.techfortune)

This mentioned mainstream-audience prefers good-looking clean templates that are ready-to-use and need no additional creativity and effort spent on. The "flavor" mentioned by Lanier is perhaps not what a mainstream-audience is aiming for. The clean design that allows no customization from the user side and consists only out pre-defined forms that can be filled in is a perfect condition for a machine to be able to read and process the information.

Bibliography (as far as actually used in this preliminary state)

Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), article 11.

Facebook Startpage (2011) http://www.facebook.com/

Facebook Advertising (2011) http://www.facebook.com/advertising/

Facebook Pages Terms (2011) http://www.facebook.com/terms_pages.php

Facebook Guide (2011) http://www.facebook.com/help/?guide=set_up_profile

Facebook The New Profile (2010) http://www.facebook.com/blog.php?post=462201327130 Wiseman J

Kelleher K (2010) How Facebook learned from MySpace's mistakes http://tech.fortune.cnn.com/2010/11/19/how-facebook-learned-from-myspaces-mistakes/

Lanier J. (2010) You are not a Gadget: A Manifesto, Alfred A. Knopf New York

This following section is still under construction and exists only as a parking space for quotes that have not yet fit in the above text but might play a role after the 2000-words-mark:

Computer-Mediated Gossip: Word-of-Mouth as an Algorithm

(Elaborating on how once "unwritten rules" are made into text, like how an individual becomes suddenly a public figure and how gossip is now expressed in a more physical, yet binary form like text and images – Mentioning for example Sennett "The Fall of the Public Man", Solove "The Future of Reputation")

"People who can spontaneously invent a pseudonym in order to post a comment on a blog or on YouTube are often remarkably mean. Buyers and sellers on eBay are a little more civil, despite occasional disappointments, such as encounters with flakiness and fraud." Lanier calls this anonymity transient. Second Life participants are less mean than posters on Slashdot or Wikipedia. He argues that the creation of a pseudonym on Second Life "the pseudonymous personality itself is highly valuable and requires a lot work to create." (Lanier, p. 63)

On making visible and the power of seeing

(How are social networking sites and other services for computer-mediated communication changing our subjectivity? On Governmentality, Privacy, Public, Voyeurism, Exhibitionism, Super-Panopticon, Synoptic or Invisible? - see W.H.K Chung "Control and Freedom", Simon B. "The Return of Panopticism", Read J. On "Neoliberalism and the production of subjectivity" M. Andrejevic "The work of being watched" et al. - This chapter can maybe be split into more parts elaborating on how visibility is defined i different services and to what extent we are more there in order to be seen or to see others e.g. on justin.tv one subject exposes itself to the multiple gaze of rather anonymous people that only express themselves through text while the person can talk and can be seen while the joy of "PhotoSwap" is to send images anonymously and receive images anonymously without necessarily showing any personal hints)

What desire lures us into this possible visibility to anyone, this voluntary exhibitionism that demands giving up ones personal data in order to be able to see other people's personal data?

The direct mediator in both cases is the device through which a person is connecting to Facebook's servers, either through a regular Web browser or through a Facebook application for mobile phones. In any case, the direct dialog partner of the user is a screen and not a person and personal information has to be provided in a form that can be read and processed by software.

On the profile: and prompt the user after registration to add more personal information like a profile picture and more detailed contact info like phone numbers an address, relationship status, religion, political views, income and preferences in music, film and sports. Among all this easily categorizable formal data there is often a more open field called "About me" that allows the user to add personal information more freely, without having to stick to demanded categories.
<textarea rows="5" name="about_me" class="profileEditText">.</textarea>

On temporariness

(Here I want to discuss the "eternity" of social networks and compare Granovetter's "strong" and "weak" it to "temporary ties", also in offline environments (the toilet walls) and how mediation is taking place there. I also want to elaborate on the need for "manufactured serendipity" as a way of escaping the illusion of permanent logics in social algorithms)

Behind the marketing-oriented networks

(What attempts have been made to online create social network platforms without solely marketing- and advertising driven thoughts into a more creative direction? And how is it imagined to be "different from Facebook" - some examples would be Diaspora, the PlatoonNetwork, the DeadDrop,etc)

Annotated Bibliography, 14.3.2011

(also available online http://pzwart3.wdka.hro.nl/wiki/User:Birgit_bachler/readings2)

- **1 Albrechtslund A. (2008) Online Social Networking as Participatory Surveillance**

  Albrechtslunds work is interesting towards my own research on social networks and participatory surveillance. The text could be interesting in terms of his views on surveillance practices and his ideas on challenging the conventional understandings of surveillance, on mutuality, empowerment and sharing.

- **2 Adams P. (2010) The Real Life Social Network v2**

  The presentation of P. Adams gives an insight on the marketing perspective of social networking sites. I am especially interested in his slides and notes on "temporary ties" and his view on these ties being the future of social networking, the future connections that marketers have to focus on. His views from a marketing perspective seem important for me to discuss what these temporary ties mean to us in a non-computer-mediated public.

- **Arendt H. (1972) Vita Activa. Vom täglichen Leben**

  Arendt's discussion on private and public space and on production and the question of permanency are an essential source for discussing social networking from a perspective of everyday life production.

- **3 Andrejevic M. (2002) The work of being watched: Interactive Media and the Exploitation of Self-Disclosure, Critical Studues in Media Communication, 19,2,**

  This might be an interesting work regarding the of Social Networks, in comparison how users of social networks are contributing to consumer labor, also drawing comparisons to Television in a historial perspective.

- **4 Baudrillard J. (1994) Simulacra and Simulation, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press**

  I am interested in Baudrillard's excersise on the concept of simulacra, which might be a useful concept to look at how identities on Social Networking Sites are being created and how profiles can be seen as "a copy without an original". Discussing his theories in relation to created identities and subjectivity in social networks.

- **5 Benjamin W. (1939) Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit**

  Benjamin's elaboration on the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction could be interesting to use when regarding the desired online identity a work of art, and discussing also the role of the audience.

- **6 Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13(1), article 11.**

  I use Boyd & Ellison's work for general definition of Social Networks, interesting also in terms of what has change in the time between 2007 and now.

- **7 Chun W.H.K. (2006) Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics, MIT Press Massachusetts**

How does power operate through the coupling of control and freedom? "Invisibility and uncertainty has invalidated deterrence and moved paranoia from the pathological to the logical." The emergence of the Internet as a mass medium epitomizes a new structure of power. In chapter 5 on Control and Freedom her writings on vision and the generated picture.

- **8 Deleuze G.(1992) Postscript on the Societies of Control, _OCTOBER_ 59, Winter 1992, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, pp. 3-7**

Deleuze's work is useful for the discussion of power and work, following-up the ides of Foucault and mechanisms of control.

- **Habermas J. (1989) The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, Blackwell Publishers**

I consider using the chapters on "Manufactured Publicity" and his chapter on the "social-structural transformation of the public sphere" for my research on "manufactured serendipity".

- **9 Haggerty K.D. and Ericson R.V. (2000) The Surveillant Assemblage British Journal of Sociology Vol. No. 51 Issue No. 4**

"The surveillant assemblage transforms the purposes of surveillance and the hierarchies of surveillance, as well as the institution of privacy" is an important resource for the discussion of works of Deleuze and Foucault and the abstractions of bodies into "data doubles."

- **10 Laermans R. et al. (2010) Open 19: Beyond Privacy. New Perspectives of the Private and Public Domains, SKOR & NAi Publishers Rotterdam**

This is especially interesting to look at in terms of privacy and the changes on public and private space, from a recent source. I could be especially make use of the texts of Maurizio Lazzarato's "Pastoral Power" and the production of guilt, Armin Medosch "Margins of Freedom" and his views on freedom being something created by sharing knowledge and Felix Stalder's view on changes on an institutional level.

- **11 Lanier J. (2010) You are not a Gadget: A Manifesto, Alfred A. Knopf New York**

In his manifesto, Lanier, as a computer scientist, opposes the ongoing developments in technology, referring to the outdated standards that are still prevailing in any new technology. He criticizes the underlying UNIX in any application and gadget and its incapability of distinguish between a person or a program interacting. These misjudgment continues in the emergence of Web 2.0 and the hive mind, that oppresses the existence of individuals. Through cloud computing power, templates, databases quantity has to stand in for quality when a computer,a computer cloud or a user-cloud instead of a single human mind is asked to judge. The connections we make online are brittle as we accept the binary character of our online profiles. Linking to Virtual Reality, and how it has not yet landed in popular culture as imagined in the beginning Eighties, Lanier describes an octopus whose sole brain power is able to morph his body like a advanced 3D-animation. Lanier proposes the idea of "postsymbolic communication" and wishes for computers that are free of protocols and use facial recognition as possible input in order to serve people well and not make people the servants to the requirements of outdated "lock-in" software.

- **12 Lazzarato, M. (1997) Immaterial Labour**

Within my search for the (re)production of a subject and subjectivity I might be making use of his elaboration on how "new communications technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge" and the production of a subject from the view of a

worker.

- **13 Negroponte N. (1996) Being Digital, Vintage Books New York**

  Negroponte's outlook on how we will socialize in "digital neighborhoods" are an interesting reference in comparison to the critique of Lanier. His quite positive outlook on "being digital" is an essential antipode to the contemporary critique on social networks.

- **14 Poster M. (1990) The Mode of Information, University Of Chicago Press**

  Poster's description of the human in databases and how governmentality is applicable to the information economy is a central work for seeing how the forces that exploit us also construct us as subjects and how we can see participatory surveillance as one major influence on our identity online.

- **15 Simon, B. (2002) The Return of Panopticism**

  Simon tries to put Foucault's concept of panopticism in a more contemporary relation with surveillance studies, juxtaposing the role of the inmate and the supervisor in Benthams model and relates it to modern representations, mentioning "dataveillance" as a logical consequence of new technology and compares it to models of "surveillance". He mentions physical presence and vision as distinctions between "old" and "new". By making use of the Deleuzean "dividual", naming it himself the "databased self" he questions the existence of a superpanopticon, a sorting machine based on digital images of identities, that organizes and produces subjects. He proposes also to understand surveillance in terms of simulation and emphasizes "Interpellation", questions "interfaces" of surveillance and the willing participation of subjects.

- **16 Read J. (2009) A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the production of subjectivity, Foucault Studies Number 6: Neoliberal Governmentality**

  Read's paper is important for understanding the specific politics of neoliberalism and might is a helpful source for covering freedom as a form of subjection and on Foucaul's ideas on governmentality.

- **17 Rose N. (1989) Governing the Soul. The Shaping of the Private Self, Free Association Books London**

  I am still looking for a copy of this book...

- **18 Sennett R. (1992) The Fall of the Public Man, W. W. Norton & Company**

  Sennet's analysis on public life and modern societies is an important source for dealing with the contemporary grey zone between public and private and how social networks enforce a public life, and possible unwanted intimacy upon us.

- **19 Solove D. (2004) The Future of Reputation, Yale University Press**

  I am especially interested in the chapters on gossip and privacy in an overexposed world. His examples on confidentality might be a helpful way to write about the "unwritten rules" on social networking sites and how the structures of social networking sites embrace sharing and complicate distreetness.

- **20 Turkle S. (2011) Alone Together. Why we expect more from technology and less from each other, Basic Books New York**

  Juxtaposing Turkle's previous work "Second Self" and "Alone Together" the transition between division into an online & offline person and the resulting solitude might help on the way to work with the production of subjectivity online and how we try to shape our social lives and experience new forms of intimacies.