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## Part One: Like,

@AnnaEBrown 2011/2012

# The endless book — exploring the online, offline.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
**Master of Design, Massey University,**  
**Wellington, New Zealand**

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The endless book —  
exploring the online, offline.

*To what extent can the affordances of  
social media be explored and embodied  
through the form of the book?*

# Contents



## Scope

In the context of this masters the term 'social media' refers primarily to Facebook and Twitter. These two currently dominate the landscape.

<http://www.facebook.com/>

<http://twitter.com/>

Facebook is a social networking portal providing a mashup of features such as email, instant messaging, image and video sharing. As the homepage states: "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life."

Twitter on the other hand encourages constant "linking out" to anywhere and anyone. Twitter is typified by rapid responsiveness and immediacy. The homepage reads "Follow your interests. Instant updates from your friends, industry experts, favourite celebrities, and what's happening around the world."

Their amalgam under the term 'social media' covers a number of diverse online affordances and provides the scope to classify them as exemplifying Web 2.0 in 2011/2012.



## #Hashtags

Hashtags are used throughout this book in the same way they are used on Twitter. In a Tweet the hashtag symbol # is used before a word to indicate relevant keywords. Like a hyperlink, the colour of a #hashtag term differs from normal text to indicate visually that the term is active. In a Twitter search, clicking on a #hashtag shows you all other Tweets in that category. A search in this book can occur in the same spirit, however the location of a #hashtag keyword must be made in a physical and not electronic way.

### #endless / #endlessness

Having or seeming to have no end or limit.<sup>1</sup>

### #book

A collection of sheets of paper or other substance, blank, written or printed, fastened together as to form a material whole.<sup>2</sup>

### #online

Controlled by or connected to a computer, available on or carried out via the Internet.<sup>3</sup>

### #offline

Not controlled by or directly connected to a computer or the Internet.<sup>4</sup>

### #affordances

“An action possibility available in the environment to an individual, independent of the individual’s ability to perceive this possibility” — James Gibson<sup>5</sup>

### #social media

A broad category or genre of communications media which occasion or enable social interaction among groups of people, whether they are known to each other or strangers, localized in the same place or geographically dispersed. Such media can be thought of metaphorically as virtual meeting places which function to occasion the exchange of media content among users who are both producers and consumers.<sup>6</sup>

### #embodied / #embody

Give a tangible or visible form to (an idea or quality).<sup>7</sup>

1. “endless.” *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*. 12th ed. 2008. *Oxford Reference Online*. Web. 3 Jan. 2012 [This and all subsequent terms were accessed on the same date.]

2. “book.” *OED*. I have added the word “traditional” (meaning long established) when referring to this concept of the book throughout this text as I consider this definition to be what most people would consider a book.

3. “online.” *OED*.

4. “offline.” *OED*.

5. This is one widely quoted definition of the term “affordance” from James J. Gibson’s 1979 book *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Another widely recognised definition of the term affordance is Donald Norman’s, who states that it “refers to the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used. When affordances are taken advantage of, the user knows what to do just by looking: no picture, label, or instruction needed.” As discussed by Mads Soegaard, “Affordances” *Interaction-Design.org* Web. 22 Mar. 2010. 9 Jan. 2012.

6. “social media.” *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*. (DMC) 1st ed. *Oxford Reference Online* Web. 3 Jan. 2012

7. “embody.” *OED*.

# Hypertext

Hypertext links are used throughout the text of this book, referencing HTML hypertext prevalent in the #online space. A hypertext word is underlined and takes on a different colour from the main body text. A hypertext word on this page specifies a term that the user might not know or has a particular meaning in the scope of this research. Definitions are sourced from the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, the *Oxford Reference Online (ORO)* or from an author in the literature review. Other definitions are given on the page where the word is used: these hypertext words are not underlined.<sup>1</sup>

In this book, the act of following a hypertext / hypertext link is conducted by the user physically engaging with the pages instead of the machine retrieving them as is done online.

The terms on this page are not alphabetised but given in an order that makes sense to the narrative.

## hypertext

a software system allowing extensive cross-referencing between related sections of text and associated graphic material.<sup>2</sup>

## user

A person who uses or operates something [in this case the book].<sup>3</sup>

## post / posted

Put up.<sup>4</sup>

## Web 2.0

The second stage of development of the World Wide Web, characterized especially by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social networking.<sup>5</sup>

## ecosystem

(Ecology) A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment.<sup>6</sup>

## performative

Of or relating to performance.<sup>7</sup>

## self-reflexive

containing a reflection or image of itself; self-referential.<sup>8</sup>

1. The two versions of hypertext embody the two states of HTML hypertext: the coloured link shows it *can be* activated, while the coloured and underlined hypertext shows that the hypertext is *selected*.

2. "hypertext" *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 2010. *Oxford Reference Online*. Web. 2 Jan. 2012. A further and most useful definition of "hypertext" is "an information medium that exist only online in a computer. A structure composed of blocks of text connected by electronic links in a nonlinear manner." in Ilana Snyder. "Beyond the Hype: Reassessing Hypertext." Ilana Snyder (ed.) *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 126. Print.

3. "user." *OED*  
The term "user" is used in the scope of this book to replicate the online space. It replaces the more familiar term "reader" usually employed when discussing actions involved in reading a book.

4. "post." *OED*. My definition of this term for the purposes of this book is "the action of participation with the pages of this book, in particular the physical application of a page to the wall within an exhibition space."

5. "Web 2.0." *OED*

6. "ecosystem." *OED*

7. "performative" *OED*

8. "self-reflexive" *OED*

## How to

### Part One

This #book has a number of narratives and ways of being read:<sup>1</sup>

1. Read the text in the coloured text boxes.
2. Read the images. Beneath the coloured text boxes are images relating to the text or the concepts being explored within the text. This offers a 'visual narrative'.<sup>2</sup>
3. Each section of the text is colour coded (defined by the colour of the boxes) and has reference to a HTML cookie along the bottom of each page. This replaces the traditional folio (page number).
4. Numerous devices associated with the online environment are mimicked in the text in an effort to highlight their formal qualities and to #embody the #affordances of #social media.<sup>3</sup>
5. The footnotes are used beyond the normal scope of an academic footnote. As each page must function as an individual set of ideas, the footnotes allow space for the context to be explored in depth and for other voices to appear.

6. Each page that uses footnotes starts with number one and continues numerically. This allows each page to be experienced individually.<sup>4</sup>

7. The last footnote on each page is labelled **image** and provides content or context to the images being used and their authorship (when they are not my own).

### How to experience this book

Each user of this book has a number of ways they can interact with and experience this book:

#### Part One

As a traditional linear book in its bound form (adhered together like a post-it note pad).

#### Part One + Two + Three

As a physical manifestation of the affordances implicit in social media. Each page can be posted and interacted with (written on, stuck to a surface) as per Web 2.0.<sup>6</sup>

#### Part Three

SHARE: As the continuation of the conversation. Add your own ideas — join in, post, tweet, share, connect.

1. "narrative." A spoken or written account of connected events; a story. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th ed. *Oxford Reference Online*. Web. 5 Jan. 2012

2. A "visual narrative" tells a story through the use of visual media.

3. Eg. the use of the #hashtag is a visual and embodied reference to an online Twitter feed; the action afforded by a hypertext link can only be undertaken physically and not via HTML as it is online; and the HTML cookie references user authentication and allows the user to return to previously accessed page with ease.

4. Footnotes start from number one on each page. This allows for each page to be read independently and complete in itself. When the pages of each section of this book are adhered together, they work in a typical linear narrative. However if a page is posted, (thus embodying a social media post) with this footnote system it can still exist in its own right.

5. The participatory act of "posting" is shown in the image below where pages of the book have been interacted with, and posted to the "wall".

# Experiments

## Experiment 1

[Experiment 1](#) was a workshop conducted as a design facilitation — investigating ideas of participation, collaboration, communities of practice (COP) and co-creation. In this experiment I observed how the participants interacted, what they interacted with and the physicality of the interactions (in particular the use of pen, paper, post-it notes, and movable tables).

## Experiment 2

[Experiment 2](#) investigated whether a number of #affordances associated with Facebook could be transposed from an #online environment into an #offline physical space. I was interested in whether the users would engage with Facebook, how they would interact, what they chose to interact with and the physicality of the interactions (in particular the use of pens, paper, post-it notes, sellotape or Polaroids).

## Experiment 3

Experiment 3 was conducted in three parts.

### Experiment 3.1

[Experiment 3.1](#) builds on Experiment 2, and explores the use of a designed post-it note as a facilitated tool in a classroom situation. This experiment investigates what typographic approach allows users to understand the affordances inherent in the text on the post-it note.

### Experiment 3.2

[Experiment 3.2](#) expands on Experiment 3.1. The **Like, post-it, SHARE:** notes are placed in a new space, without facilitation. The designated space, the toilet-to-toilet-door aimed to replicate the face-to-computer orientation necessary for #online interactions.

### Experiment 3.3

[Experiment 3.3](#) was a variation on Experiment 3.1 and 3.2, and explored the use of the **Like, post-it, SHARE:** note within gender designated toilets and with the addition of a pen.

## Experiment 4

[Experiment 4](#) is *The Endless Book*. This experiment builds on findings from the earlier experiments (participation, interaction, online and offline, social media) and asks how these affordances can be mediated via the form of the book.

## Section One

When there is a harmony  
between ideas and  
methods then it is no  
longer a process but an  
object. The two are seen  
and experienced together.

PAUL KLEE

## Setting the scene

### Setting the scene

The intent of this Masters of Design is twofold: the first is an exploration of the form (and future) of the [#book](#) and the second an investigation of given [#affordances](#) of [#social media](#). This project seeks to visualise contemporary approaches to [#online](#) communication, in particular social media, and explore those actions (affordances) associated with it — time, locality, endlessness — in a experimental and [performative](#) process mediated via the form of a book.

The journey of this Masters is [#embodied](#) in the physical object. The design of this book highlights the design process and research findings discovered over the course of this action research approach. This book is designed in the spirit of an [artists' book](#).<sup>1</sup> Its formal properties (pull-apart, post, comment, perform) direct the [user](#) to interact with it and experience it. As Clive Phillpot writes, one innovation of an artists' book is the use of the book's structure to make meaning and/or the use of the book as object, which alludes to the form of a book.<sup>2</sup> The term "book" is used loosely as a concept, where the idea of a book serves as a container for a system of ideas outside the book itself, as theorised by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Ulises Carrión distinguishes an artists' book as comprehensible without necessarily viewing the entire book: thus upsetting the linear narration implicit in a traditional book. They tend not to have a beginning, a middle and an end, but function sequentially or thematically.<sup>4</sup>

Drawing on these traditions, this book plays with the idea of the artists' book to foreground similar tendencies in social media: in particular that of nonlinear sequences, the idea of [#endlessness](#), and the usefulness of the book as an object to be participated in. Finally, this book, when participated in, evolves into a [ecosystem](#) which serves as a metaphor for social media.<sup>5</sup>

1. Dick Higgins, active in the Fluxus art movement, describes an artist's book as a work. "Its design and format reflect its content—they intermerge, interpenetrate... The experience of reading it, viewing it, framing it—that is what the artist stresses in making it." Dick Higgins 'A Preface' in Joan Lyons (ed.), *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook*. (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985) 11. Print.

2. Clive Phillpot. "Some Contemporary Artists and Their Books." Lyons, 106.

3. Robert C. Morgan. "Systemic Books by Artists." Lyons, 207–208.

4. In Ulises Carrión's essay, "The New Art of Making Books." Lyons, 31–43.

5. I mean here that the ecosystem of posted pages is meant to represent the interactions engaged with across social media sites like Facebook and Twitter where conversations build and die. The metaphor of an ecosystem is useful: this book, when interacted with is made up of a growing community of interacting pages and their physical environment. A visual metaphor is used to suggest a resemblance of one thing to something else, thus transforming meaning. This ecosystem has structural similarities to the *mhulenbechia*. (Also called a visual homology). Graeme Sullivan (ed.), *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2010) 196. Print.

**image** The native New Zealand *mhulenbechia* (or the wiggly wig bush). From an early stage the visual metaphor of the *mhulenbechia* has provided a useful image of how social media conversations might look if they were a physical thing. This plant grows in a tangled and interconnected fashion that reminds me of the diverse and interconnected relationships apparent on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. A user's connections/friends/followers build and weave over time, just like the branches of the *mhulenbechia*. As a natural ecosystem, the *mhulenbechia* is also a useful metaphor when thinking about the organic and flexible structure of Web 2.0 and social media conversations.

## Setting the scene

### A linking concept

Social / media / [ecosystem](#)<sup>1</sup> — these three terms provide a useful linking framework for this research project and this book explores how they can be understood as a single term: “social media ecosystem”.

They are useful in this [#book](#) as three distinct terms that can be joined together in various arrangements and loops: social, social ecosystem, [#social media](#), media, media ecosystem and finally as a social media ecosystem. The interweaving of these three terms forms the thematic basis of my project.

How can a social media ecosystem be represented and [#embodied](#) in the form of a book? This book offers an exploration of this idea while also providing the [user](#) with the ability to change or add their voice to the dialogue, in other words to [participate](#).<sup>2</sup>

This concept of participation both embodies the inherent characteristics of [Web 2.0](#) and draws on a strong tradition of participatory art that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular the ideas of Fluxus and the development of Relational Aesthetics theorised by Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

Through the narration of a number of experiments, woven together with my literary review, this book (as a narrative, a visual narrative, an object and a participatory performance) explores how the [#online](#) can be represented [#offline](#) so as to offer another way of looking at each space.

1. The term ‘ecosystem’ literally means a ‘biological’ community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. I am using the term ecosystem to mean a community of interacting pages (and participants) and their physical environment (the performative ‘posting’ aspect) which together act as an ecosystem. The post-it note, in particular, is a form that allows for flexible and organic use.

2. “participate” as defined by Rudolf Freling, drawing on the etymology of the word, means “to take part”. Rudolf Freling et al, *The Art of Participation: 1950 to Now*. (San Francisco: Thames & Hudson, 2008) 12. Print.

3. Fluxus art and events elude straightforward definition. Ken Friedman writes that the Fluxus idea transcends a specific group of people or a specific place, however he does list the following 12 tenets as the main ideas of Fluxus: globalism, unity of art and life, intermedia, experimentalism, chance, playfulness, simplicity, implicativeness, exemplativism, specificity, presence in time and musicality. Ken Friedman, “Fluxus and Company”, Ken Friedman (ed.) *The Fluxus Reader*. (Chichester: Academy Editions, 1998) 244. Print. And Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*. (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002). Print.

**image** Developed by Facebook intern Paul Butler in 2010, this visualization maps the connections of ten million Facebook users spread across the globe. As an image it shows an ecosystem of user-linkages. Paul Butler, “Mapping Facebook Friendships.” *Visualcomplexity.com*. N.p., 2010. Web. 5 Dec. 2011.