There was a British entertainer called Max Bygraves who used to begin his show by saying, "I wanna tell you a story". Well, I want to tell you a story but I'd like you to read it yourself. It's quite short. Keep it in mind; we'll come back to it shortly.

Here it is:

The tale of a mouse

"I was having dinner with a group of friends about a month ago, and one of them was talking about sitting with his four-year-old daughter watching a DVD. And in the middle of the movie, apropos nothing, she jumps up off the couch and runs around behind the screen. That seems like a cute moment. Maybe she's going back there to see if Dora is really back there or whatever. But that wasn't what she was doing. She started rooting around in the cables. And her dad said, "What you doing?" And she stuck her head out from   behind   the   screen   and   said,   'Looking   for   the   mouse'   ".

[from an edited transcription of a speech given by Clay Shirky at the Web 2.0 conference, April 23, 2008).

Before we come back to our story I'd like to briefly sketch some features of the social and cultural world brought into being by two Brits: John Logie Baird and Tim Berners-Lee.

Baird invented the first television system which actually worked, and although though his system was based on analogue technology and was quickly overtaken by digital systems, he was the first to broadcast colour TV pictures. Henceforth broadcasters would bring the world to your living room seven days a week. No need to do anything; just sit back and enjoy it.

By the early 1950s, a few years he died, the outlines of the TV business as we know it today was essentially in place.

Fifty years later, in March 1989, Tim Berners-Lee, an English scientist working at CERN, the European research centre in Switzerland, completed the first draft of the code for the WWW which envisaged people a world apart producing and sharing hyperlinked data. So at birth, the web was conceived as a read-write, ie, a two-way

system of communication. [For many years the "write" half of the web was nearly forgotten as researchers and institutions focused on sending unalterable documents with hyperlinks so you could "read" them but not change them. Thankfully, the growth of wikis and blogs restored the duality].

The structure and operation of the two systems have developed in ways which reflect the motives and impetus of their invention.

Let's compare them:

Organisation:

•   The world of TV is built on Aggregation—regulation—centralisation—control.

NB: This organisatiopn is not entirely political or driven by pure business motives. Eg scarcity of spectrum leads to rationing and regulation. BUT it is convenient for reasons of state. Control of the airwaves is one of the few beliefs shared by democrats and dictators.

TV achieves scale by mass marketing and advertising.

Since users/viewers are only consumers, broadcasters have to sell their wares to them; like Sisyphus endlessly pushing the boulder up the hill, they have to persuade you to buy day after day after day.

Thus the multiplier effect of a participatory culture is squandered.

In a world where almost all the personal, social, business and recreational transactions of daily life is moving to the web, this makes no sense.

The world of the web ie the networked world is built on:

•   participation—collaboration-- discovery—sharing.

•   Users as producers

•   An architecture of participation

It achieves scale by employing web-based network effects. Here friends send links, IM, URLs to each other. These cycles of re-inforcements add value no amount to advertising can achieve.

Management and distribution:

In the TV broadcast world, management is by an architecture of control exercised via regulation, licensing, franchising, IP enforcement, affiliation etc.

In the network world, productions are distributed by feeds, links, bookmarking, social networks and other social media tools. etc.

So why is TV not embracing social media when it's pretty cleat that

a) openness beats closed most, if not all of the time

b) participation beats control

Some reasons:

1) In the old media business, control is the surest way to win. Exclusive ownership of a chunk of the airwaves is a lucrative business. Lew Grade, one of the early British TV moguls, is reported to have boasted that his TV franchise in London was like owning a press to print his own money.

2) The brutal unbundling of the newspaper business by quick-footed web start-ups is not (yet) threatening the survival of the big TV conglomerates.

[NB: high quality Video production is hard to do. But the industry should not become complacent because of the (current) low quality of the fare on YouTube. Remember DTP? The early web sites? But YouTube is not the only kid on the block. There are other video networks with failry high production values, eg, Miro, Fireant, Meefedia. (GRAPHICS) which came out of the videoblogging movement.

3) there is a cultural bias that creativity and innovation are the preserve of a highly trained "producer elite", ie, that they come from the centre.

[Note on the core architecture of the net, which is built in such a way that most of the innovation comes from the edges. This is because nobody owns it, everybody can use it, and anybody can improve it. The expression used by network architects is that "the network is stupid"]

4) Social quantities such as collaboration, participation and sharing are not valued by media executives, because they are information values and not easy to monetize like "pay-per-view" or VOD.

So what happens when these two world's meet?

First, IMHO, there's bewilderment. How can a video site such as YouTube, barely two years old, become such a dominant force so quickly? It is the number one site and accounts for nearly four percent of all Internet traffic.

Second, the old methods –which worked so effectively against Kazaa and Napster--of meeting the challenge of upstarts who threaten to web-roll the mainstream media into oblivion no longer works. YouTube welcomed the protective embrace of the mighty Google and is now more powerful as a result.

Now Redlasso, a web TV and radio web clipping service for bloggers, which employs the now familiar social media elements (search, discovery, sharing), is threatening to napsterize TV and radio networks. It is the latest upstart to have corporate lawyers issuing "cease and desist" orders.

Third, as Internet ad revenue is poised to overtake television ad spend in the UK, according to he latest Zenith Optimedia report (May 2008), most commercial TV companies will rush to build IPTV/broadband services. This promises to be the new front line in the battle between TV and the Web. Judging from past experience, the TV networks will lose the battle. According to ZO, of the £4.,36 billion projected UK Internet advertising in 2010, £2.46 will be from search advertising. And in this arena, Google is the undisputed champion, so the outlook for the companies is bleak.

We return to the story we began with.

What lessons did you draw from it? Here's what Shirky concluded:

"Here's something four-year-olds know: A screen that ships without a mouse ships broken. Here's something four-year-olds know: Media that's targeted at you but doesn't include you may not be worth sitting still for".

So I put myself in the place of this four-year-old ten years from now and imagines what she'd expect to see when she looks at a "TV" screen.

Here it is:
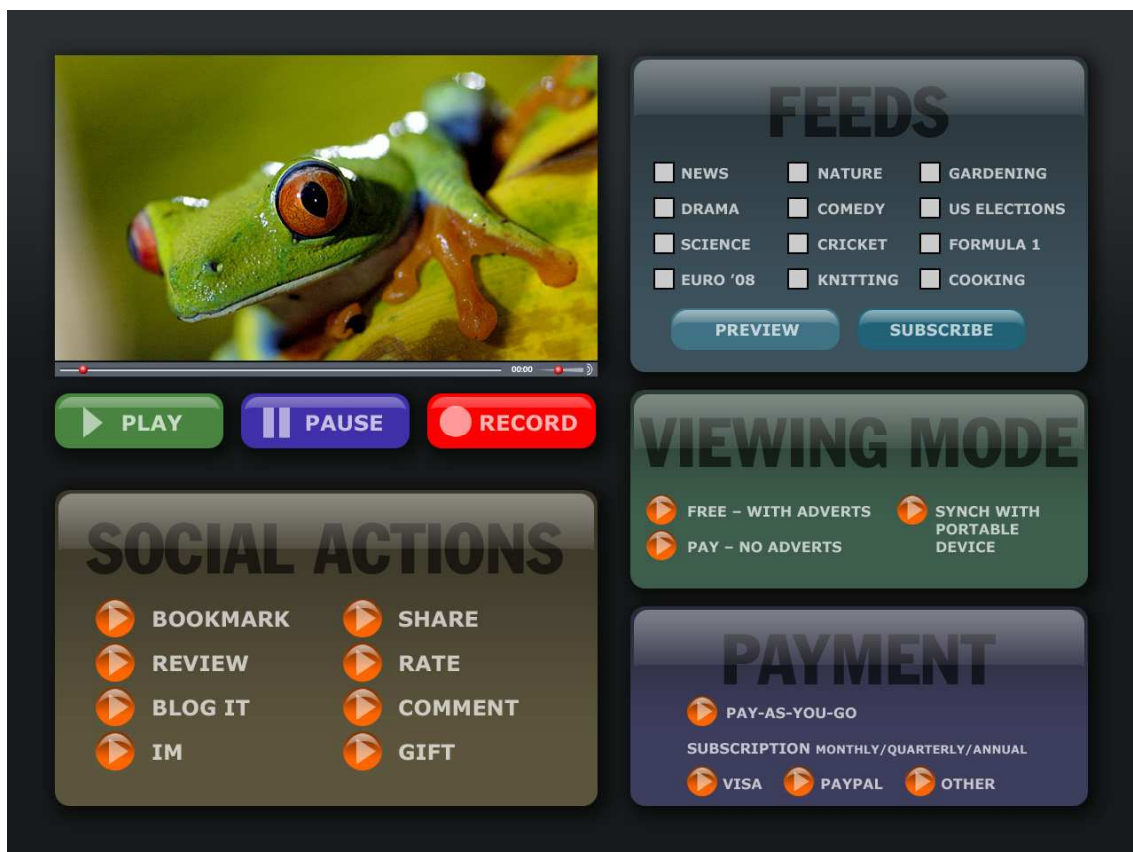
The thing to notice is that there's no brand. No BBC, No ITV, No TV3, No Canal Plus. Just feeds. Here the strength of the channel hinges on the quality of its offerings, not the power of its marketing.

Our 14 year-old doesn't care which brand supplies the programmes that make up the menu of things that interest her. She checks "nature", and the feed reader trawls the

network and serves up say, six items from various channels. She samples (previews) them and chooses the one which most closely matches her requirements and decides whether to pay for it or endure the commercials and watch it for free.

If it's good, she might share it with her friends, or blog it or bookmark it. If she has a critical issue with some aspect of the programme, she writes a review or send a comment to the programme-makers.

What's happening here? Each individual programme is wrenched from its corporate wrapper and stands or falls on its own merits in the marketplace.

Are the TV networks ready for this de-centralised world? Ready or not, this is the shape of things to come. The network favours plurality over monopoly; dis-aggregation over aggregation; sharing and networking over monopoly and control.

Oh brave new world that hath such features in it (begging your pardon, Mr Huxley).