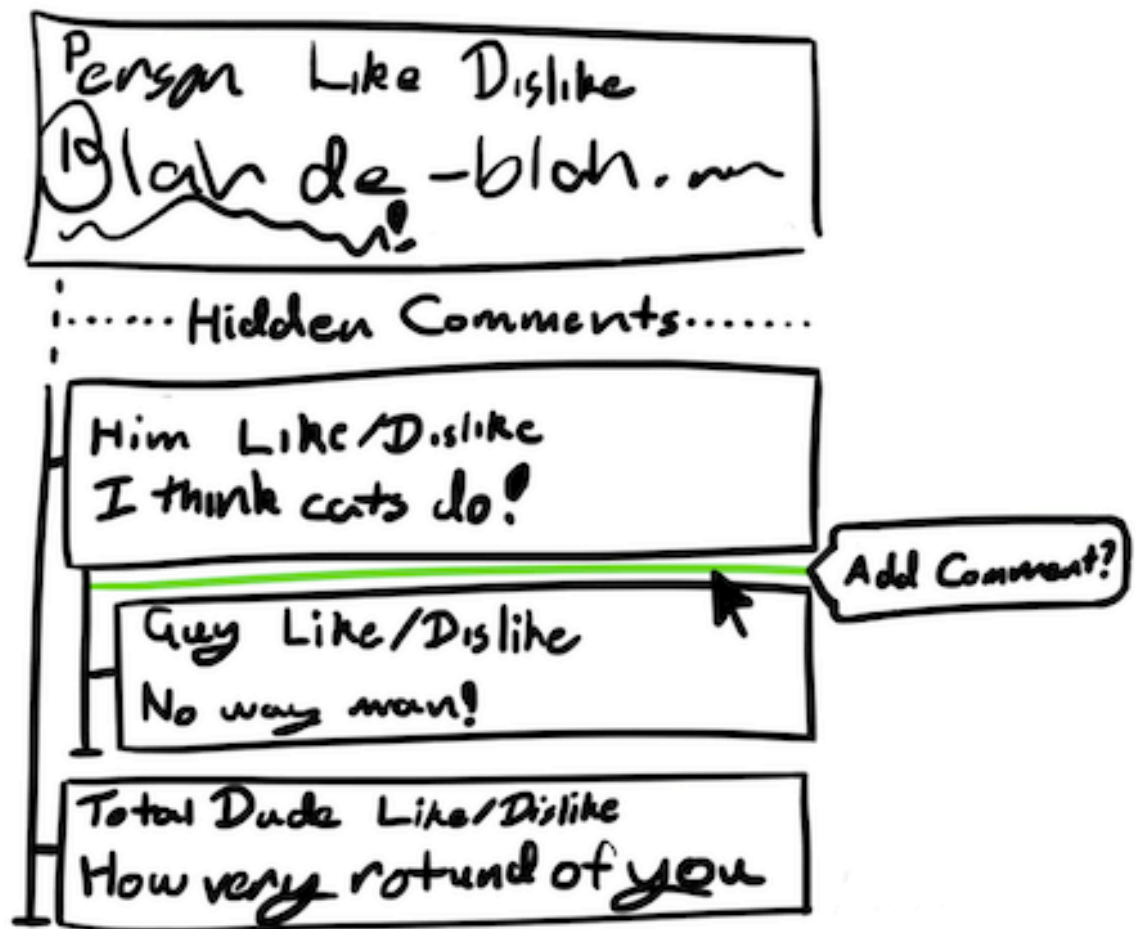Here's some doodles of a new visual style I'm thinking about for comments. It has line-like branches for sub comments linking them all up, and little end caps. The lines become dotted to represent missing (hidden) content. Every comment is it's own little contained box, and you can click between two comments to insert another comment at that point.

Jenna is still opposed to having a very nested system of comments, but if that's a requirement this seems like a way to do it.

Some comments

Inserting a comment in the middle of a tree

Reasons to have the nesting

Discussions can shoot off on tangents and we don't want to artificially restrain people from communicating ideas when they strike.

Reasons not to have the nesting

Comments have been becoming defacto forums, because our forums are poor and not contextually relevant. A feature of a forum is that it has OP's (original posts) and replies to that OP, in a list. Some replies refer to the original post's content and some refer to content of other previous replies. It has a natural tendency to stay on topic and to have a clear topic.

Anyone can create a page with comments enabled under their own user page, which is functionally the same thing as creating a new forum.

Including nesting necessarily forces comments design to be more complex than a forum approach. Complexity in design is often intimidating, disorienting, distracting. The purpose of nested comments is to enable discussions shooting off on tangents organically. Those 'shoots' could travel in other dimensions – i.e. in to other wiki pages (user generated throw away forums, etc..)

To think about

What are the ways we can have a commenting system which is as expressive and direct as nested comments, but with the interaction simplicity of a discussion forum?

Passing thoughts

You're reading a bunch of comments and people start talking off on a tangent. You're a pretty keen user and you know lots of advanced tricks. You select the comments which went off on a tangent and with a click and a title entered, you moved the bunch of them in to a thread forum page somewhere else, created instantly, and replaced them in the comments stream with a little notice saying where they'd been moved to, providing a link, and a list of a few of the people who are involved over in that discussion.