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Flow Conference 2008 – Television, Technology and Everyday Life

The general trend toward seamless mobility heralded in the research and development of new technologies (the integration of multiple feature-rich media devices and operating platforms—in the home, in the car, and at the office) is part of a larger projection of the future of liquid media (taking media and shaping it to the various circumstances that people find themselves in) that also wants to embroil the subject in the technology. New media industries are drafting biographical practices that can be subsequently attached to individual authors. The aim is to create new media frameworks that replicate subjectivity and merge the lived context with an apparatus of production, fostering the development of "technobiographies" that write the self through the post-industrial logic of new media. Responsive technologies seem to situate end-users as unique social actors, as inscribed data accumulates and becomes symptomatic of our presence. New technologies may seem to operate freely, to the extent that they act intuitively, but their intuition is by design; it is inherently the result of a script (of a coding activity brought to fruition by developers).

The technobiographic subject is constructed through multiple frameworks; it may be useful, as a start, to outline the following actions, which I believe are central to the life technobiographic: 1) anthropomorphizing technology; 2) humanizing technology; 3) using autobiography as a signature content referent; 4) helping individuals put autobiography into practice. These actions are given form within a number of institutional spaces, narrated by each institution's respective discourse. We see them

given form in advertising, industry, and in education; they are militarized and they are often politicized. In the most general sense, the technobiographic subject may be approximated by examining its encounters with technology; it is, in essence, written through them, and recorded and shaped by them.

   To become more active and engaged with the communicative process, we need to move beyond any fixed engagement with a localized interface. We need to pay closer attention to movement and migration. Yet we still need to examine micro-contexts, especially as the fluid nature of new technologies seems to erode their distinctions. What happens as any enunciation traverses space? Consider, for example, the haunting underground pictures taken by transit passenger Alexander Chadwick moments after the July 7, 2005 bombing at King's Cross Station; Chadwick's photographs did not simply circulate through the commercial news circuit, they also appeared on the public photo-sharing site Flickr, where they were variably tagged and copied into personal photo albums, and became part of the site's larger rubric. The images were woven into a broad tapestry, inserted into a composite of terrorism throughout the city, narrated through multiple perspectives, registered as part of a national memorial, and though grouped together in an album, easily redeployed as geographic markers using Flickr's virtual mapping. As part of both traditionally centralized broadcast fare and the more open conduit of Flickr, Chadwick's photos became readily lodged in a narrative web, one that seems all too satisfying, perhaps as it moves us toward meaningful wholeness. For publicly malleable image sharing sites, as openly collaborative endeavors, readily invoke their readers, creating an engaging psychical space. But when hosted on Flickr, the transiency of images and texts is concealed by the simultaneous display of their

accumulated tags and trails. The images become a meaningful text in their own right; what is evidenced here is not a trail of social actors but rather a quantity of blissfully active readers. This leads me to two related questions. What is revealed in this set of signs and what has escaped transcription?

As we send our images into public spaces, following YouTube's imperative to "broadcast ourselves," the consciousness that we bring to praxis needs to inform our post-praxis tactics.[i] Now that we have been invited to participate, we need to consider the unique dimensions of any public forum, as well as the trail of outcomes that will most likely follow our otherwise spatially and temporally bound acts of recording. My goal here has been to call out a series of questions concerning media mobility, about losing control, about the allure of technology, and about the latent intersections between democracy and technocracy. As conversations intersect and media pathways pass through each other, breaking each other's flow as they play across the most exquisite of touch screens, consider how synthesis has re-contoured self-expression in the age of the iPhone. How might we more purposefully act through an interface, even as we fetishize it?

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[i] I use the term "post-praxis" to highlight those activities that are productive, but less explicitly producerly. While shooting and editing might be positioned as primary practices, we also need to consider other facets of production, distribution and exhibition that are equally meaningful (for example, embedding, hyperlinking, sharing, reading and replying).