

## Flow 2.0

Williams contributed some critical concepts to the field of media research - like flow - but even more than that he demonstrated and cultivated a critical perspective on how we should think about the role of media in our lives, how we as critics and scholars should examine the cultural setting shaped by or populated by media, as well as its structure.

If Williams were around today, would he be a David Pogue, contributing technology reviews and telling us which cameras work best for certain purposes? A Walt Mossberg, taking companies to task for poorly designed and expensive phones? Perhaps a Howard Rheingold, critically assessing communication technologies and seeking ways to harness their power for social purposes? Or a Lawrence Lessig, exposing the often hidden aspects of our computer-based and network systems that serve to lock down ownership and control content?

Perhaps a little of all of these. However, his concern for structure and economy suggest to me that he would frame his work broadly and be cognizant not just of technologies and their histories but also of their broad, social roles. Just as the term flow is most often used as shorthand for a certain type of relationship with an older media form, an updated term might be *ubiquity*. But beyond flow itself, Williams' Television: Technology and Cultural Form volume also included that important phrase *mobile privatization* to refer to the environments of industrial capitalist society that conditioned the creation (and reception) of television. Although this phrase is still apt, albeit with certain different connotations, I might reword version 2.0 as *mobile spatialization* and add this as a coda to ubiquity.

Ubiquity does something more than flow. If flow conveys the sense of one continuous stream of content, and perhaps content directed in one direction, ubiquity conveys the sense of content everywhere. It is not so much a flow as an environment. Rather than it moving toward us as with flow, the environment is something that we plug into at will – with our phones, PDAs, laptop and desktop computers, our networked televisions, and many devices in between. Ubiquity reminds us that another communal “space” exists where all sorts of communications reside. We choose to contribute to it, to be part of it, or to simply watch it, or not. But it’s there. And we’re not audiences but rather users, both appropriating and creating something of value.

Ubiquity also has some unique implications for space and for time. Ubiquity reminds us (or should remind us) that boundaries between places get a little messy, and that time gets a bit porous. Fixity breaks down as the malleability and diffusion of content take hold. A curious archive of all sorts of content – the sanctioned, the owned and ostensibly protected, the free and shared, the historical, and on – exists on YouTube and its kin,

promising to maintain in perpetuity some documentation of a raft of important and unimportant events, comments, and ephemera. Places begin to resemble punctuation marks on a tableau of network-based spaces that attract and house our interests, endeavors, and thoughts, and...lives. Our doctoral student Chris McConnell points out that the transaction costs of posting and reposting is so low on linkblogs and recommendation/collaborative filtering systems (Twitter, Del.icio.us, Tumblr) that a sort of serendipitous system of cultural capital swells and circulates continuously, filling space and breaking time demarcations.

And if that seems a bit too postmodern, consider the political economy approach: ubiquitous, networked communication systems rely on a set of technologies and technological systems that in turn represent certain emphases and responses to an industrial system that values, or requires, 24/7 access to individuals and 24/7 business operations. Access to individuals and business operations are of course linked in that individuals both consume and produce; they are the labor in the business equation even as they are purchasers. Whereas in Williams' framing of broadcasting, one's home took on a new and unique significance as a private space that required new methods of staying connected to some "unified social intake" (a method of social control), an updated framing of media requires staying connected to people everywhere, at all times, not just in the home. If the "intake" is no longer unified, the sense of timeliness and urgency are. Indeed, one crisis in the notion that media function as a collective hearth (unified social intake) is that media content is so varied, the agendas so multiple, that there can be no unity in media.

However, a different way of thinking about this might acknowledge that the social geography of media is not so much about specific content as it is about simply being connected. David Harvey might argue that these networks are nothing more than another vehicle for a dominant class to further the cause of capital accumulation by facilitating ever more effective ways for us to work, for us to be reached, to be members of the social factory. Mobile spatialization is my term for version 2.0 of mobile privatization, the notion of spatialization suggesting that the private space of the home is no longer the dominant social organizer it once was. Rather, individualization has moved us out of the comfy, domestic space of the home where we were audiences and into our personal communication hubs that accompany us everywhere. Consequently, mobile spatialization requires ubiquity, and these twins compel us to consider a new raft of research questions about labor, about entertainment, and about social problems and the control wielded by a seeming innocuous system of "information" companies like Amazon, Google, and Microsoft.