



What is the Moving Mind and How Can it be Captured?

A partial thought distributed across a longer conversation*

Gillian Fuller (riffs on Andrew Murphie's thread)

What is a moving mind? Like all forms, conceptual or otherwise, it's hard to tell where they begin and where they end. So let's take it as given that our moving mind was and is a complex thing – a series of connections and feedback loops differentially distributed across technical, biological, socialised, mediatised (and more) modes of perception and cognition. Let's therefore also take it as given that this moving mind is embodied, that its stability is formed through complex sensing across, and making sense of, the multiple worlds through which it lives – the industrial worlds of trains and past empires, the informational worlds of impending ones, through different people, histories, agendas, mother tongues. Let's also assume that this mind has been conceived in order to 'think', which in our case may or may not mean the same as 'to produce'.

I wrote the above paragraph to the mobicast team and a colleague, Andrew Murphie, as a way of starting conversation about networked media, mobility and 'minds'. The conversation begun with the question of production, because on the Trans-Siberian 'conference' it loomed large, and sometimes uncomfortably, in an event designed for emergent practice. Was production to be the method by which a moving mind would be captured? The coupling of capture and mind seems to evoke not just notions of thought, but also of production, which when so coupled, become increasingly implicated in the more politically charged concept of 'cognition'. What kind of cognitive model posits that a moving mind can be captured? I turned to a paper of Andrew's in which he frames cultural questions of cognition like this:

It is a framework in which politics – whether of the state or of everyday life – is increasingly colonised by a rapid cultural propagation of cognitive models and practices. This propagation is found in many new images of thought (Deleuze, 1994: 129). It is also found in the fever surrounding the many new archival *technics* – from cognitive devices such as databases to new systems of regulating human cognitive performance. These transform the very substance and

* The longer and ongoing conversation includes, Adam Hyde, Andrew Murphie, Netta Norro, Stephen Shukaitis, Sophea Lerner and Gillian Fuller.

experience of thought (Derrida, 1996). I will assume that cognitive science and philosophy are no longer just science and philosophy (if indeed they ever were).¹

This propagation of both new images of thoughts and methods of cognitive control suggests that the idea of capturing a moving mind is an emerging practical concern for politics and not mere keywording. On one level, the complex cognitive technics of the Trans-Siberian moving mind/s was strongly geared toward to capture on multiple levels. Bodies captured in trains, locked onto rails, an intense focus on digitally capturing the minutiae of the experience from every angle, and when technically possible, uploading the data to the web by mobicast, when not, saving for ‘the archive’. Documentation and distribution seemed to part of the ‘cognitive model’ of the ‘conference’ thus sharing with the digital economy, a technics of abundance – a situation which, Terranova notes, creates “an immediate interface with cultural and technical labour whose result is a diffuse, non – dialectical antagonism and a crisis in the capitalist modes of valorization of labour as such”.² It’s difficult to measure network abundance. And measures are increasingly tied to production. For many on the Trans-Siberian event, the measure would be publications, exhibitions, papers delivered, data captured. For others, it would be other. Production is a pretty complex thing. The train made it more complex. But, before one can ‘celebrate’ the complexity, Terranova reminds us that emergence is necessarily entangled with control.

The issue of cognition as ‘model of production’ of thought, not as thought itself, becomes pertinent if mind and capture are conceptually collocated in an experiment wishing to create as Deleuze and Guattari might say ‘something else’. If a moving mind didn’t consider the role of capture in cognitive models did it not risk being colonized by cognitivism? Andrew replied in one email.

* there is a lot of benefit in ‘capturing’ a mobile mind, or those aspects of it we feel we can – one can capitalise it’s flows, and so on. but there is perhaps as much benefit in at least looking like one can capture a mobile mind (telling it is not so mobile, that it is other than it is). this is perhaps one of the main game plans of contemporary cognitive science, and its relations with social science, media studies, education etc ...

* of course, this is not just a reactive politics, it is a question for all of us ...

A moving mind can be captured in many ways, but mainly by what it thinks itself to be. So how to capitalize on its flows? Perhaps it needs to encounter itself in the misrecognition of its movements, suggested a later email. That might be a start. The potential of mobicast, for instance, to upload and download from the web from ‘theoretically’ anywhere and thus create feedback into movement of ‘the mind’ from other ‘nows’ and other modes of mobility offered one chance for such an encounter which might rupture what Varela calls the ‘transparent’ routines of thought and movement. Firmly locked into a remote railway infrastructures and economies, such connections/ruptures remained however, logistically difficult for much of the trip. Place and space did not merge as smoothly in Siberia as it did in Helsinki.

1 Murphie, A. (2005) ‘The Mutation of “Cognition” and the Fracturing of Modernity: cognitive technics, extended mind and cultural crisis’, *Scan Journal*, 2(2) [http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=58].

2 Terranova, T. (2004) *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press, 96-7.

The chances for local feedback loops to form were, for most participants, never much more than those of the curious tourist passing through. In recognition of the misrecognitions, perhaps the conference should have pushed the connections with perpetual war and moving minds in its itinerary as well as thematics, and sped up. War is both thoughtful and thoughtless. It is capable of both thought as an operation that creates distance from the moment, and other perplexing, shocking encounters that deregulate the moment into something much closer and embodied and not quite thinking yet. In this moment, moving at logistical speed, new mobilities need to be invented on the fly. In the half haze of multiple time zone changes and strange constraints of being locked in movement, they may not entail much 'thought', but they may produce other 'nows', which may be sufficient production enough itself.

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