Fixity: Identity, Time and Durée on Facebook

Richard Harper
Microsoft Research Cambridge
UK
r.harper@microsoft.com

Eryn Whitworth
University of Texas, Austin
USA
erynwhitworth@gmail.com

Ruth Page
University of Leicester, Leicester
UK
rep22@leicester.ac.uk

Abstract

The purpose of social network services (SNS) is to enable new ways of making contact and staying in touch. The finessed use of SNS can enable people to manage their social connections with fluidity; enabling change of social grouping and evolving identity. Key to this performance is that it is enacted through time. Certain aspects of SNS may of course create a fixing in identity and its performance, trapping people, for example, in a display of identity in the past that they have come to regret. In this paper, we shall report evidence that suggests that the temporal experiencing of Facebook with regard to this aspect of time and identity needs to be placed alongside another feature of the way the service is used. This leads people to feel as if they are always acting 'in the now' and that their history - as well as that of others they connect to – seems to disappear from view. We shall suggest that the performance of identity through time is thus constrained. Users seek but cannot find adequate ways of adjusting their identity by crafting past and future performances outside the envelope of identity in the present, in the 'now', the one facilitated and emphasized by Facebook design and use patterns.

Keywords

Time; durée; identity; networked society; social networking.

Introduction

It is a truism to say that social network systems (SNS) are about identity. It is equally true to say that they are about bringing people of similar identities together. It is hardly surprising therefore that most of the research on SNS examines who connects to whom and why, or looks at how people assemble a model of themselves that leads them to make the right connections, either with friends or with the a professional group (Castells, 2009). Though this is to treat the research in broad brushstrokes, at a similar level, a proportion of this research can also be said to look at how the creation of links through identity can go wrong. From time to time connections are made between people and or groups that have no affinity – the matching of identities is not always successful. Sometimes it is not just a matter of affinity; sometimes mistakes occur when malign parties enter the world of SNS. As many have noted, making connections can be a risky business: a hurtful public at large might appear and sometimes a stranger might create connections that appall and frighten. One cannot guarantee that the individual lurking in a Facebook account is one that ought to be there (Boyd, 2008; Harper, 2011).

Despite the apparent dominance of one social network at the current time, people are likely to have several human networks enabled by SNS. Doing so allows them to create dynamic patterns in their relations, patterns that allow them to converge around one aspect of their identity in one SNS sphere, and diverge from that with regard to another SNS enabled sphere (Papacharissi, 2011). All these connections are bound by the nexus of 'who they are', but this 'networked identity' or identities have, as a consequence, more inflection and dynamic properties than might otherwise be possible. In short, and although 'who one is' remains concrete and real, the expression of this identity through diverse performances. Of course, despite the ease with which fictional identities can be created on SNS, most research shows that the essential person behind an SNS identity remains true, albeit that this might be inflected on different sites. One remains the same person, but may emphasise different aspects and facts in different virtual places. Nevertheless, because identity is much more deeply embedded in sociality, the implication is that there is more fluidity in social connections (Papacharissi: 305). One can make connections with one set of persons and then, as these ebb and flow, remake connections with others through another set of web-enabled bonds: the trick is the adroit management of SNS. Whether this turns out to be true in the long term is yet to be ascertained; some research has suggested that though there

might be more fluidity in the periphery (in what are often called 'weak ties' in honour of Gravonetter), primary or close friends remain so for longer (Hamill, *et al*, forthcoming). Time will tell.

However, this concern with the 21st century self, the one that is allowed to evolve and change as well as connect through SNS, might draw attention away from the opposite, how certain aspects of social networking create a 'fixing' of this self. Considerable research (and public concern) has focused, for example, on how past behaviours documented on social networking sites can come to haunt an individual later on in their lives. Pictures taken when people were larking about at university are discovered by potential employers and referred to when interviews are undertaken. Thus who a person *was* is used to constrain and judge them in the current time, *now*. Of course just as this is so, so the reverse also applies: a person can use the same or similar resources to manage and adjust views of themselves, creating a preferred self. Just how they might manage this will depend not just on the affordances of the SNS but also on their management of other resources too, such as their skill at presenting themselves via other digital media as well as face to face (Retterberg, 2008; Harper, 2011).

In this respect, the potential fixing of identity via (or partly through) social network sites and resistance to this fixing asserts the correctness of Gidden's view (1990) that contemporary identity (or selfhood) has greater reflexivity than hitherto. People have to manage various ways of presenting themselves and their control is contested by (and with) others (Shirky, 2007). Resistance and control – the reflexive acts of identity production – can entail, for instance, replacing old pictures on social networking sites with 'more suitable' ones; it can lead people to find that pictures they have decided ought to be removed from their 'homepage' have in fact already been copied by others. These might have already been circulated. Or it can entail tagging pictures with new lines that give the images and thus the person represented a better accord with due propriety. Likewise others may impose their own tags on pictures which offer a different and (perhaps) less appealing meaning. One could add to this list of tools and means for articulating identity. In these ways, then, what a person would like to suggest about themselves can slowly transform; what comes to be understood as what was said in the past might thus be plastic or reflexive, as Gidden's would have it. People can manage how they present themselves in the present and likewise they can

control how they are presented in history. And all of this can be resisted and contested; identity is produced through interaction; reflexively.

However, when Giddens was writing – *The Consequences of Modernity* came out in 1990 - he was not thinking about the age of networked connectivity. It was a time before the likes of Facebook became commonplace. And, accordingly, he was alluding to a tempo of sociality that reflected the now seemingly slow steps of reflexive action that were then possible. Giddens was talking about how people managed their identity through weeks, months, years, or even a whole lifetime. As it happens, commentators then thought life was fast, liquid, as Bauman argued this in his (1995) book *Liquid Life.* Today, in contrast, we like to think that the tempo of our lives has sped up considerably – Bauman's views notwithstanding. Our reflexive management of identity will likely be more fraught as a result, one can hear the likes of Clay Shirky exclaim.

Giddens, Bauman and Shirky aside, research on the relationship between SNS and identity shows that the rhythm of managing one's networked identity is linked to the rhythms of real life. As Bayn notes (2010), 'most online communication happens against a background of shared history' (p. 71). Consequently, there is more stability through time than one imagines given the ease with which one can, say, set up a new Facebook account. The use of SNS reflects the kinds of social relations that Giddens had in mind when he wrote *Consequences:* issues of geography, profession and employment, family and sexuality are all part of the equation. We might have networked identities, but these are bound to the culture of the real.

Nevertheless, much of the discussion of identity both before the widespread take -up of SNS and latterly, where the technology has almost become 'domesticated', tends to, in our view, hypostasize the nature of identity. As Gergen notes (2009), the view one finds in many sociological texts on the topic turns around an eighteenth century philosophy, one that implies an essence to identity, one inside the head, the body, or isomorphic with a romantic sense of the soul. In the networked society, this might no longer apply, and identity might be better thought of as relational, as his eponymous book suggests.

Even so, this alternative view, the idea that identity has no singular source but is networked, a production of social acts between a web of connected persons, might simply be offering another exaggerated notion of identity. Both views might disregard the detailed ways in which identity –whatever it is – is managed, facilitated, or

‘worked’ Simple notions of identity, that ‘it’ is singular and essential, for example, or that it is a product of connection say, both might hypostasize the complex acts that constitute ‘who one is’ into a conceptual box that does not necessarily allow the kinds of ambiguities and contrasts constitutive of a ‘real person’ or the performativities that manifest that person’s identity. All the more so of those performativities are diverse or contradictory – indicating one thing about identity in one context, something else in another . Someone might be both singular and connected, and much else besides. It might depend on when and where, what and why, and, of course, on the ways that this is done. Consider how little about these properties one finds in, say, Castells (2009) whose views focus on ‘connecting informational circles in social arrangements’ but offer little insight into the organization of self in those circles. Think of Wellman and his ‘society beyond the garden gate’: this too shows little observation on the ‘who’s’ that do the connection outside of the envelope of geography (for a discussion, see Harper, 2011). And here we begin to get to the topic of this paper.

A way of finding out what a person might be should entail, in our view, looking at or acknowledging how each method or mechanism of identity production might have its own unique properties in addition to the assembly that is provided together. These individual and corporate properties might emphasise not just different concepts of the essential or connected self, but might also draw attention to the properties of the mechanisms themselves. Hence a concern with the human aspect of identity will become connected with the properties of the mechanisms used to perform that identity. In this way, a concern for the thing that might be self or identity, for the theoretical and empirical topic that this constitutes, can be combined with a concern for materiality, the real things that allow this virtual thing (as it were), the self, to be mediated.

We take our cue here from de Certeau (1984). As he notes, all technologies offer sets of affordances that ‘organise an ensemble of possibilities and interdictions’ (p. 98). The performative use of these need investigation before there is a rush to more encompassing theory - such as about identity. So for example, individuals will manage SNS by taking heed of what is possible and leveraging or thwarting that as necessary when they undertake to perform, create and manage their ‘selves’. How they do so might be bound to small details, and to the prismatic effects of the affordances in question.

This leads us to the rub of this paper. If it is the case that there are, broadly speaking, two sides to research on the networked society and its impact on identity, the one emphasising how individuals can create more connections with others and do so more fluidly than before, and the other emphasising how networked connection can leave traces that constrain and limit identity, then, and to put things broadly, both these approaches assume the status of identity to start off with. Neither emphasise nor allow a careful examination of the specific ways that articulation of individual actions through SNS might frame specific possibilities of identity production, possibilities that do not so much encompass identity in the whole (however it might be conceived) but only aspects of it, particular instantiations of its performance, particular kinds of identity 'work'.

There are, needless to say, many sites of such investigation available. Here we focus on one such site, or rather one locus of interacting sets of performativities: the use of Facebook to maintain contact and identity production as a routine feature of daily life. Our evidence will not be of the large scale but qualitative and focused; a small ethnographic type approach meant to be illustrative rather than definitive. Daily existence, de Certeau tells us, is an unconscious navigation which involves leveraging the affordances of space, technology and human connection. The affordances of Facebook, this paper will assert, can facilitate many things, but when appropriated, 'navigated through' in particular ways by users (ways we shall come to describe), they can emphasise an especial way of experiencing how time is connected to the ability to perform self-hood. This can result in people finding their ability to articulate selfhood and/or identity through the adroit management of self is time constrained. What they were cannot be adjusted; what they will be cannot be controlled; what they are 'now' seems to dictate all the prismatic effects on selfhood that Facebook enables.

To put this another way, the affordances we will focus on relate to the interaction between what Facebook status updates and postings allow and encourage, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the way these opportunities for connection are exploited by users in such a fashion that the performance of identity through these acts and affordances has constraining features. Postings about 'what is on your mind' encourage a certain articulation of contemporary topic, we shall assert, and the management of these articulations through 'likes' and other related commentaries (often also in the 'What is on your mind' dialogue box) produce a particular temporal ordering of experience, or, rather, come to emphasise a particular sense of time as experienced

and relatedly, self as expressed and expressable in that kind of time. This leads to a peculiar fixing of identity in one moment of time, in an ever present 'now'. Thus the title of the paper: *Fixity.*

Evidence

Evidence for our explorations were collected through qualitative interviews in the summer of 2011. Twelve participants (seven female and five male) were recruited through email and word of mouth advertisements using a gift card as an incentive. Our goal was to encompass a diversity of people within this small group, varying in age, gender, location and of course, in practices. At the same time we selected individuals who treated Facebook as an important element in their repertoire of social connection.

Of the twelve participants, eight resided in the south eastern region of the United Kingdom, the other four lived in the southern and western regions of the US. Their ages were as follows: (Teenagers [P7 and P8 aged 14], Early to Mid-Twenties [P3 aged 21, P2, P10, and P11 aged 26], Late-Twenties and Early Thirties [P4 and P5 aged 28, P1 aged 30, P12 aged 33]; Forties [P6 aged 42 and P9 aged 44]. Occupations included: students (secondary school, university and graduate), shop attendant, teacher-in-training, law consultant and land management officer.

The interviews were audio recorded. This resulted in 19 hours of recording. During the interviews with participants screenshots of discussed digital objects were also captured, with participants' permission, and these were added to the research corpus. Follow up interviews were conducted as needed.

The main interviews, conducted both in-person and remotely, and lasting 90 to 180 minutes, were devised to develop an understanding of participants' history of social network use (and not just Facebook); to gather recent examples of postings and post annotations ('likes' or 'comments') that would provide a feel for the kinds of daily expressive practices that the participants engaged in; and explorations of their beliefs about or understandings of such concerns as the relationship between these postings and annotations and the management of their identity.

Keeping in touch: a sense of Life with Facebook life

As should be clear, our evidence is only of a small scale 'sample', and should not be treated as necessarily representative of Facebook use in the general. What it does provide, though, is rich data about kinds of uses: and what we found in our subjects practices was diversity and similarity, though these words are somewhat too general to convey the richness of the acts in question. The social networking habits and contexts of "logging on" differed for each participant and the orientations and experiences varied. Some visited Facebook daily or multiple times (P1, P4, P5, P7, P8, and P9) for example; one even had over 1,000 photos tagged of himself (P4). Three had had difficult or 'negative experiences': two with sharing online (P10 and P12) the other with regard to a significant break up or broken relationship where Facebook played a role (P9).

These differences notwithstanding, one may note how much time was given to being on Facebook by all of our subjects. 'Doing Facebook', monitoring what is happening through it, was part of the fabric of their daily lives. "I guess I've spent off and on throughout the day probably an hour to two hours a day on Facebook." (P9). P9 explained that daily usage of an hour or two was not all at once, noting that she skimmed Facebook while eating lunch. In examining his posts during the interview P4 noticed that he tended to post when his workday at the office would began to drag, he remarked to himself, "Oh god this one was at?" Then continued, "See apparently I like to post around three o'clock in the afternoon on work days […]."

Such patterns of 'logging on' were evidently linked to patterns found in everyday life, like meal times, as these quotes make clear. This points towards what Levebrve (2004) might have called their daily rhythms. P8 and P7 mentioned, for further example, that they logged onto Facebook at regular times together with peers after school. P8 said of this, that he was on Facebook, "often when I've been at school and then I come home, basically it gives me an overview of what has happened, and the stuff that has happened, with the people at school which is quite nice." Likewise P7 explained her reason for using Facebook at this particular time of day saying, "Umm, it's good when I post on my wall or on Facebook and [see] lots of messages and things" attempting to explain why she continued, "I don't know, to see who is online, to talk to them."

Besides getting online at particular times of day, Facebook served as a buffer between other tasks on the computer. P9 explained, “a lot of that [hour or two hours] is while I’m doing something else, I will be waiting for something to download and I will click over to Facebook.”

The rhythm of checking, then backgrounding, then checking Facebook again, has a peculiar property however, or rather a kind of gravity. It pulls the user in. P8’s account of using Facebook after school demonstrates how. “I probably spend about half an hour, and if anything particular happens I’ll scroll down it quickly and then I’ll have a look down and see what happened, and leave it running in the background and if I run into something interesting I’ll leave a comment, and if other people comment on it as well then I will start using it, and sort of a conversation is going, and I’ll leave it running in the background.”

Expectations for Response

All of this has to do with our participants’ expectation of others being aware of their posts and their desire that others will respond to that content. The same holds true for the opposite, as is attested to by the problems that arose when posts were neglected; that is to say not noticed in the rhythm of looking and then looking again. In several instances, participants recounted how they had experienced disappointment that their most recent posts had not been annotated. P7 explained that if something she posted doesn't get a response, she would delete the original thread, evincing a kind of embarrassment at the apparent failure to stimulate some response from those in her network. Similarly participants P5, P1 and P2 each expressed surprise or disappointment when, during the interview, they found their recent posts had not garnered any likes or comments. P1 discussed one of his recent posts by saying “I’m quite upset that no one commented about this” and later explained why: "because it is actually really fascinating, and umm, I had posted it because I wanted people to know more about it."

P1's explanation points to a feature we saw elsewhere in the interviews, where commenting or liking posts is a means of communicating that content posted has been consumed or at least noticed by others. P6 explained what comments meant to her, “I know it [commenting] is nice, because, […] if no one commented on anything then it

would feel like no one is listening to me, […] so often it is not so much the comment it is the fact that someone paid attention to something that I said."

As a result, what we describe above as a rhythm of use, a way of passing the time of day, turns into what can be better cast as a kind of coercive practice, though this is as much self-applied as it is externally imposed by others. This practice necessitates that one 'needs to look now'. One has to watch, that is to say, one has to see what has - is – happening. But this is mediated not by a real looking or a seeing, so much as a writing and a reading. These connections are textually mediated.

At the same time, one needs to watch to see if one has been noticed; if one's own postings have been commented on and brought to attention by others. If they have not been noticed, there is shame involved or implied, almost as if one is becoming 'invisible'. In some cases, neglected postings might need to be removed. Of course, they might not be if attention is drawn to the latest or newest posting, thereby burying that hurt in a neglected past, a moment before the latest textual connection, even if that moment is simply beneath the bottom of the screen, out of view.

Design and the affordances of Facebook

A cursory look at Facebook's interface will make it evident that its design privileges the present and near temporal past: one doesn't go to Facebook to see what happened days ago, but what is happening now, more or less. This is 'achieved' through users broadcasting updates and inviting more. As we say, this is textually mediated. We shall come back to the importance of this later on.

Meanwhile, the salience of the contemporary is evidenced by the problems users have when this is not achieved. P6, for example, pinpointed a difficulty experienced by several others (P1, P2, P3, P7 and P10). Once content has moved from being 'now' to some prior moment, some past, it is very difficult to find again. Scrolling through her wall, P6 said to herself, "Once again, how do I find this quickly?" She then remarked, "basically on these social networks these days are really, are like built for whatever is the most latest, and it makes it really difficult to find the stuff that you have commented on."

Facebook does not promote navigation of prior events. The search function, for example, indexes others' profiles but does not retrieve old entries. Techniques and

workarounds are required if a user wants to engage with things other than in the present; things beside the most recent postings and updates. One user, P2, developed a strategy to search his email notifications from the website to find links to old content friends had posted, as he described here, though as we shall see this became an option that came to be closed: "Umm, usually, for example, a link that I've shared that I cannot find any more […]. Maybe there was some comment or something that I want to remember what they've said and I can't find it [pause] so I used to use Gmail for this because I used to get notifications in Gmail but now they don't work well anymore, something changed on Facebook so that they don't send an email notification."

As P2 suspected, Facebook did indeed change its notifications feature, though we have no knowledge as to why. Nevertheless it is arguable that it did so to exploiting user's willingness to frequently click over to Facebook to attend to the posts of others. In doing so it further promotes the site as a place not so much to 'simply spend time' nor indeed a place to 'simply monitor others'. Rather it becomes a place to keep up to date, to see what is happening, to be, as it were, 'in the now'. This 'now' entails mutual monitoring and connection to be achieved, of course; a human effort, not merely a technological one; it is the user of Facebook who makes the now come to be, in their views, a textual, a literal, 'now'.

In these ways, the interface favours a particular treatment of the relationship people have with others. It also supplies a particular temporal framing of that relationship. Consider how a post is presented on Facebook: its centrality and its ordering. At the top of the newsfeed, on the default and non-configurable view of an individual's account, one will find a box in which to enter a status update, post a so-called "wall photo" or check in: a 'What is on your mind' dialogue box (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The primary dialogue box of Facebook

Updates in this dialogue are presented in the standard form of a blog, namely in reverse chronological order, the most recent therefore being the uppermost. Thus, if

someone glances at Facebook to see what is happening they will see first and foremost (uppermost as it were), the thing most recently posted by themselves and their buddies (Figure 2). They do not see a range of ‘things that have’ or ‘are happening’ placed equally; the timing of the post orders the display absolutely in chronological terms of when the post was made. Whatever the time outside of Facebook and indeed whatever the importance of the things reported, it is the time organization of data management (ie, reverse chronology) in Facebook that holds sway.

Figure 2: The privileging of status updates and comments on the Facebook default ‘homepage’.

Of course, Facebook would not be so appealing if this were all it showed; there is much else too (as shown in Figure 3). ‘a;’ marks the What is on your mind’ box; to the left (b) is a space designed for notifications and alerts, messages and event information; below the status update box and to the right are automatically updated columns of ‘featured content’ (selected by the SNS), with the most granular and most instantaneous content in what is referred to as "the Ticker" on the actions have been annotated or embellished upon by others’ likes, tags and comments (Figure 3b). Below the status update box and to the right of it are automatically updated column right. To the left is a space designed for notifications to alert one when any of their of featured content to the left (Figure 3c), with the most granular and most instantaneous content in what is referred to as "the Ticker" on the right (Figure 3d).

Figure 3: The privileging of status updates and comments on the Facebook default 'homepage'.

The point is that Facebook constrains the user, controlling what they can opt to see. The set-up of pages is not configurable, as we note above, and many 'features' (such as some of those items displayed on the right of the screen) cannot be disabled. The default screen, one's news feed, can't be changed. One can configure whose stories are featured on one's news feed, but the presentation of this is nevertheless always linear, reflecting the temporal order of the posting. Thus it is not the status of a feed that is important, it is its timeline. In other words, Facebook favours the most temporally current content, and always serves this to its users uppermost, as in the premise of a blog, most recent top. By doing so, users almost naturally come to focus on generating new content rather than reconfiguring the old; the system encourages them to (though of course the users are willing and compliant in this). Though some of their comments and responses to 'What is on your mind' prompts might allude to past events – to other's postings particularly - the experiential theme is the present. It has to do with 'what is happening 'now'. Little attention or encouragement is given to, say, altering the importance of some prior event, or re-crafting its interpretation historically.

Time and content

In our research corpus, a cluster of related stories, frustrations and incidences relate to the difficulties or 'inappropriateness' of posting of out-of-time content. P1 shares one such story: "I was tagged in some photo like a year after it was taken, because someone finally decided to put their photos up, and it was a friend of mine, but

I don't know what he was thinking, because it was a picture of me ummm, talking to a girl, at a Halloween party, and it seemed a little bit weird for it to be posted in the context of me being in a relationship," and he continued, "all of a sudden this thing appears and no one knows when it is from and umm, it was very surprising, it was quite annoying." By virtue of being tagged in an old photo P1 was presented an identity associated with a former girlfriend and thus not in keeping with his current presentation of self, nor his current mode of interacting with Facebook in the here and now.

It does not matter whether it is old Facebook content that has resurfaced in the news feed (through commenting say) or if it is new Facebook posts of old pictures. Both are out-of-time content and both are distributed through a system that focuses one's attentions on now. P11, sensitive of the incongruity of out-of-time content, discusses her transition from one social network, Bebo. She says, "I had them [photos from college] on Bebo, because they happened when I was on Bebo, and therefore I am sharing them on Bebo, right?!"

These last two examples are of content that is quite old, far from the present one might say, but as P11 expands on her comments, even photos captured a short while ago can jar with the here and now of Facebook. P11 explains that she even struggled with and ultimately refused to upload photos that a friend had been "pestering her to upload". About this she said "but it's too late now"; she explained that she would ask herself "why am I putting up photos from months ago?" She went on, "maybe if it were two weeks ago, max, no not event then." The photos were nothing alarming in content, just shots from a birthday party, P11 informed the interviewer. She then explained what she would like to do, "I'd rather give them, I should put them on a CD, but I don't know if she would then put them on Facebook."

These small pieces of evidence would seem to suggest, then, that 'out of time' content jars with the other content streaming from the actions of those in the network. It would appear that most of the content posted on Facebook depicts the present, though just what that means seems a little fuzzy: some things that occurred a little while ago seem to be allowed. The important point being not so much the specificities of this fitting in current time as whether their posting generates a timely response. It is this that is the anchor of the interaction that is sought for and enacted by our participants. It is, as we have repeatedly coined, about nowness.

This content, its enactment, its articulation as the negotiated object of discourse between the connecting parties of Facebook, has consequences for the performance of identity. Content from the past yanks an individual back to an earlier time, of course, but as it does so, it allows the articulation of an earlier self. But what we see above is that there appears to be little opportunity for such historisizing of the self; all there is, or rather what is privileged, is a singular self and that is the one in the here and now. Moreover, this self is also judged by the responses of others. If one makes a post and no-one comments one removes it quickly for fear of being ignored. One is, in these respects, only existing in the present and only insofar as one is a product of relational acts.

Comments: The articulation of identity through time

The philosopher Bergson was perhaps the first to suggest that there are two types of time, the first having to do with the experiential aspect, which he called 'durée'; and the second, contrasting with this, having to do with the objective measure and passing of time, which he called 'tempo' (1910). Following in this vein, Husserl and philosophers of social action (such as Wittgenstein, Heidegger and more recently, Schatzki (2011); for a good early introduction to this literature see Adam, 1990), as well as philosophers of the quotidian (such as the already mentioned De Certeau), have further delineated elements within the experiential form of time, durée. Attention has been drawn to distinctions between, for example, time as experienced chronologically and time as label for the organisation of recollection, memory and forethought. Distinctions have also been made between time as a term in language, one that can act in various ways to alter the experience of the speaker/hearer reader/writer of that language, and time as an empirical label for everyday experience. In this way, the experience of time as durée can be negotiated by the experience of time constructed by narrative, even though the narrative will unfold in chronological time.

When seen in light of these sorts of discussions, we can begin to see - even with the limited evidence presented above - that when people post a status update on Facebook, or, by the same token, when they read and comment on such a comment produced by others, they are not simply living in the durée but organising themselves, defining themselves, and the experience of themselves vis-à-vis their relations with others, in particular ways.

There are a set of possibilities here, not all of which are used concurrently or evenly by different social groups, but the amalgams of which will construct certain forms of experience. A great deal of research would need to be done to grasp all the ways that Facebook is used, all the more so when contrasts are made between this SNS and others. Consider Ito *et al's* collection on SNS (2010), the Papacharissi mentioned before; these are almost compendiums of diversity. There does seem however a certain unity of experience and use attested to in the evidence presented above amongst this small set.

First, the experiences we have highlighted here have to do with the moment to moment features of using social networking. 'Users' in this case are disposed to articulating (and presenting) themselves in ways that mediate their identity via a practice of reading and writing rhythmically (or rather persistently and continuously within rhythmic moments – at work, after tea, at the end of the day). This practice of writing/reading constitutes a narrative frame that privileges the most recent articulation of self.

This frame has other features. Acts of articulation only count when others note through their own textual manifestations the existence of that 'post'. In this sense, users of Facebook do indeed sound like Gergen's relational beings, only existing in terms of connection. But Gergen's vision also implies a fully blown identity; the scraps of text constitutive of a posting, an answer to 'what is on my mind', are hardly sufficient to do more than garner another's attention. As should be clear, Facebook postings don't even manage this, in all instances. But this also begs a question as to the relation between text and identity in the bigger sense. As Page notes (2011; 2012), theorists of narrative assume that this 'structural form' is sufficient to encompass the production of a self: in their view, following Jameson (1974), the 'prison of words' in which they operate might trap them within ideological frameworks but it does allow the delineation of a story, the narrative of their self. The tidbits offered on Facebook cannot do this; all they afford are details, pointers, parts. If a concern with theories of identity is that they over-theorise and rush to abstraction, hypostasize as we put it alluding to Hegel, then these faults are all the more valid when details is all that is available to the individual. Facebook affords little more.

Besides, there is one other feature that we want to mention that also threatens the credibility of Gergen's view and asserts not just simply the need to look at the details of

interaction but at how details might be all there is. His view, like the one that emphasizes the source of identity in some inner place, also presupposes that identity can assert itself through and across time. Both accounts treat identity as transcendental. Our research suggests that the articulation of the self on Facebook can sometimes result in struggles to reach beyond the instant moment, the now of the latest posting. Users endeavor to find ways of dealing with past content because the past is more or less out of bounds within the textually mediated practice of connection facilitated by Facebook. Things that happened that might allow users to assert some inner soul or, for that matter, actions that were valued by the connections that might define a person relational are all immaterial if they are historical. One is only as good as one's last posting.

There is a third point that follows on. Though the centrality of posting also constitutes an opportunity – after all there is always a new posting to be made - the very fact that one is never more than the latest posting has the curious consequence of making one less, or rather somehow fixed. One is trapped in the now, reduced to the articulations of a few words and desirous that they solicit a response by others who are similarly fixed in the present moment. They too only have a few words to express themselves. For all users, oneself and those one connect with, what one was cannot be crafted again or adjusted through Facebook. Not only does its design de-privilege ways in which this might be done, but users – users in our study anyway – also show lack of desire for this: no-one looks back. After all, if one attempts to do so, one's efforts need to be accounted for in the present and that causes complexity and complaint. Thus one is brought back to heel; one is brought back to a fixed 'now', the endless durée of Facebook. No wonder people keep going to it, looking at it, monitoring it. The way it is used ends up ensuring that their use of it – their performance in and through it - is all they are allowed to be: a fleeting thing, made in a moment, forgotten in a moment, trapped in a moment, waiting for the next moment even as the present moments ends.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the subjects in this study and colleagues at Microsoft Research, Cambridge.

References

Adam, B. *Time and Social Theory*, (1990), Cambridge, Polity Press.

Barkhuus, L. and Tashiro, J.. 2010. Student socialization in the age of facebook. In Proceedings of the 28th international conference on *Human factors in Computing Systems* (CHI '10). ACM, New York, NY, USA, 133-142.

Baym, N. (2010) *Personal connections in the digital age*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Bauman, Z. (2005) *Liquid Life,* Cambridge, Polity Press.

Bergson, H. (1910) *Time and Free Will*, London: Swan Sonnesnschein.

Boyd, D. (2008) *Taken out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics*, PhD dissertation, School of Information, University of California Berkeley.

Castells, M. (2009) *Communications Power,* Oxford: OUP.

De Certeau, M. (1984) *The practice of everyday life*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Deuze, M. (2007) *Media work*, Cambridge: Polity press.

Ellison, N., Steinfield, C. & Lampe, C. (2007) The Benefits of Facebook 'Friends': Social Capital and College Students Use of Online Social Networking Sites, *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 12 (4).

Ess, C. (2008). Culture and global networks: hope for a global ethics? In J van den Hoven & J Weckert (Eds.). *Information Technology and Moral Philosophy* (pp. 195-225). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gergen, K. (2009) *Relational Being*, Chicago.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Hamill, L, Harper, R. & Gilbert, N (Under review) 'The impact of the internet on the duration of friendship ties',. *Sociology, the Journal of the British Sociological Association.*

Harper. R (2011) *Texture: Human expression in the age of communications overload*, Boston: MIT Press.

Husserl, E (1964) The *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, Trans J. Churchill, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Ito, M. et al, (2010) *Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking out*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

James, F. (1974) *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralist and Russian Formalism*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

Lefebrve, H. (2004) *rhythmanalysis: space, time and everyday life*, (Trans S,. Elden & G. Moore), London Verso Books.

Page, R. (2012) Re-examining narrativity: Small stories in Status Updates, *Text & Talk*, 30-4, pp423-444.

Page, R (2011) *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction*, Routledge, London.

Papacharissi, Z. (Ed) (2011) *A Networked Self: Identity, Community and Culture on Social Network Sites*, London: Routledge.

Papacharissi, Z. (2011), Conclusion: A Networked Self, in Papacharissi, Ed, *Op Cit.* pp304-318.

Rettberg, J. (2008) *Blogging*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Schatzki, T. (2011) *The Timespace of Human Activity: on performance, society, and history as indeterminate teleological events*, Lexington Books, Maryland.

Shirky, C. (2007) *Here Comes Everybody*, London; Allen Lane.

Sosik, V. Zhao, X. & Cosley, D. (2012) See Friendship: Sort of: How Conversation and Digital Traces Might Support Reflections on Friendships, *CSCW 2012*, Seattle, Washington, ACM-.

Stefanone, C. Lackaff, D. & Rosen, D. (2011) Contingencies of Self-worth and Social-networking Behaviour, *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking*, 14 (1-2): 41-49.