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Reflective Silk — Behaviour change through better self-knowledge

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The Quantified Self is an increasingly wide-spread phenomenon, primarily—at present—manifested in the usage of wearable self-tracking devices. However, the limits of resolution and largely numerical data presentation, while presenting an air of authority, potentially tie us into cycles of focusing on the numbers, and self-documentation (Beckerman, 2012), at the expense of deeper understanding. In consequence, perhaps, we construct artificial, strange and false images of ourselves over time. Self-tracking, however, wasn't always mediated by digital devices: early forms of self-experimentation of scientists date back to the late 16th century (Neuringer, 1981).

Biomaterials, such as reverse engineered silk, have in contrast the capacity to facilitate greater understanding of an individual's bodily functions, due to an increasingly seamless interfacing quality between human tissue and digital readability (Tao, 2014, Hwang et al., 2012). As such, transient silk not only enables us to think of novel applications for transient electronics in the classic functionalist sense — it also affords us to rethink current modes of introspection and reflection, as well as mapping out a novel terrain for designers (Ranner, 2013).

Collection and reflection (Li et al, 2010) are two key practices of engagement with the Quantified Self, but a deeper form of reflection—"self knowledge through numbers" (Elsden et al, 2015), or personal informatics—afforded by much more intimate sensing, offers a new approach. Self-directed, adaptive behaviour change (Oinas-Kukkonen & Harjumaa, 2008) based around deeper insight into one's own physiology, habits, and emotions, would bring a tighter set of reflective feedback loops (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

The cultural value of silken biosensing and -interfacing (Tang-Schomer et al., 2014), offers a much wider spectrum for potentially non-numerical accounts of 'conversation with the self' (Glanville, 2008); could behaviour change through reflection in this way perhaps even allow us to extend Schön's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner towards a more holistic practice of everyday life?

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