

## **The (Non)Local Body: A Transductive Measure of Affect?**

**Dr. Mark Coté**  
**School of Communication and the Arts**  
**Victoria University**  
**Melbourne, Australia**

When I first tried to visualize the affective fabric of digital culture, obliquely, my mind got stuck on those giant balls of yarn. You know, the ones that OCDs start in their rooms in their early teens. By the time they finish high school it has taken over their room, and eventually, it becomes a tourist attraction for their town. Here is one in Kansas: it is 4m high and contains 2.3M metres of fibre. Supposedly it is the biggest in the world, although there are competing claims for the crown of fibrous grandeur from Minnesota and Illinois. I'm not in a position of expertise to suggest what kind of equation might measure that relationship between yarn and OCD in the American Midwest. But what I can say is that it shows there is more than one way to measure a big ball of yarn.

Now we could also imagine the fabric of Facebook as a giant ball of yarn; well, we could *if* it were more of a dispersed distributed network than a ball, and with the further caveat that the yarn is made out of affective fibre. Finally, that fibre would have to be i) organic (the physiological filaments of the human sensorium); ii) discursive (the enframing of social relations and desires); and iii) communicative (thus always mediated by technics/technology). This affective fibre can be measured in myriad manners. For example, from a political economic perspective, we can measure the market value of social networks. Witness the current privacy imbroglio with Facebook which, for me, is primarily a struggle over *actualizing* the *potential* value of all the sundry social relations. Those affective relations provide a measure of value of that social network ranging anywhere from \$15 B (value at which Microsoft purchased its partial stake in 2007)

upward to \$35 B (being floated by some analysts for the supposedly immanent IPO of Facebook). In previous research with Jennifer Pybus I developed the concept of ‘immaterial labour 2.0’ to emphasize how the affective fabric of social networking is tightly interwoven in both ‘work’ and ‘play.’ But while the ‘immaterial’ was building on an Italian autonomist paradigm that foregrounds the increasing importance of cognitive and affective processes for labour, it inadvertently effaces the *materiality* of such practices. Today, in part what I would like to do is remedy that unintentional effect and think about the affective fabric of digital culture in the more basic terms of its complex relation to the body—again with a caveat: that this body is a heterogeneous ensemble of organic and non-organic elements.

I’d like to begin by suggesting some terms of relation between affect and body: affective fabric is corporeal. Affective fabric is equally virtual. Affective fabric is of the body, interior to it. Affective fabric also exteriorizes the body. Affective fabric comprises actual relations—that are corporeal and virtual, *intensive to* and *extensive of* the body. Affective fabric also manifests a field of *potentiality* not yet traversed by the body but always already there in advance of actual paths followed and connections made. Finally, that affective fabric is also constitutive of technology, meaning that while it is of the body, it is subject to constant extension and recalibration by technicity.

I hope my saying all this does not leave you feeling somewhat like a conceptual extra in an alternate *Wizard of Oz*, back in Kansas, your mind jumbled under the massive weight of this giant ball of affective fibre. Not to mention rendering the body so enmeshed as to leave it opaque. If so, I hope I can offer some small remedy. The remainder of my talk will seek to untangle the body from that enormous mass. I will

proceed as follows. First, I propose rethinking the body via a lesser known Foucauldian concept, the *dispositif* which offers the model of a heterogeneous ensemble of elements, none of which are originary nor the source of determinant causality. This more expressive methodological frame gives view to affect as *both corporeal and virtual*, thus as fleshy but always imbued by technicity. Second, this allows me to moot transduction as a *conceptual* measure of that body. Transduction, taken from French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, can be posited as a dynamic of the *dispositif* as it emphasizes relations over the elements related. Indeed, transductive elements only take form when expressed in relation, making it useful for considering the body which is composed both by corporeality and technology as is the mediated affective fibre. We might then see affect as constitutive of an archive of technicity which acts as a vector of exteriorization, structurally coupling our bodies to environments, *actualizations* both *material* and *immaterial*. Finally, I will put forward a *dispositif* of the (non)local body. Therein the body is disparate and discontinuous, both corporeal and virtual, subject to radically different measures of Cartesian time and space and quantum super-luminous action at a distance. The constitutive technicity of this (non)local body see affect and discourse flow differentially across both domains and as such are less *discrete elements* and more part of an *interconnected wholeness*. To clarify, there is a double articulation of (non)locality. Corporeally, affect is non-local to rational thought and discourse—that is, it proceeds much faster than either. Immaterially (I won't say virtually, as that does imply disembodiment), ICTs proceed at what seems. from the Cartesian coordinates of our material frames, to be super-luminous speed. A question raised by Patricia Clough, in reference to the quantum theory of David Bohm, is whether this entails affect actualizing

a field of potentiality. My hope is that these methodological inquiries enable a measure of the body which can better gauge its political potentiality in our age of ubiquitous connectivity.

### **Dispositif**

I have focused on affective fibre because it is both interwoven throughout the ‘natural’ body, and extends beyond the corporeal boundary literally around the globe through the filaments of ICTs. I’m suggesting the *dispositif* as a means to conceptually house this coupling of the human and technology. The *dispositif* has been largely ‘lost in translation’ (being rendered as assemblage, apparatus, deployment and mechanism) and hence its conceptual importance obscured. Foucault used it in the mid-1970s as a means to decisively move beyond the paradigm of structuralism—hence his inclusion of both discursive and *non*-discursive elements in this heterogeneous ensemble. Elsewhere my research has suggested its importance in linking the more politicized Foucault of that era to Italian *autonomia*. Both were looking for more expansive methods beyond both an originary subject and determinant causality. Equally, Foucault developed it as a socio-political analytic of power wherein power is not just a repressive force but is productive (*dispositif de sexualité* in **History of Sexuality**). In turn, he deployed the *dispositif* to initially develop his understanding of biopower and the biopolitical.

Rather than as an analytic of power *per se*, I want to use the *dispositif* to methodologically house the disparate and discontinuous elements of the (non)local body. In doing so, I want to shift the register of non-discursive elements. For Foucault that might have included the *materiality* of institutions, the *regulation* of juridical processes, or the techniques and practices of, let’s say, medical science. These non-discursive

elements, in turn, are functionally linked to the discursive, allowing their attendant subjectivities to signify. This was an explicit maneuver beyond the symbolic order—as Foucault stated “For the logic accorded today to the signifier and its chains, we must substitute tactics and their *dispositifs*.” But absent here was affect. Instead, the body gained its functionality through discourse. My suggestion is that in the Foucauldian *dispositif*, it remains discourse which *in-forms* the body. For the *dispositif* of the (non)local body, it is affect which *in-forms* the body and discourse, and technicity, in turn, which *in-forms* affect. In short, for the *dispositif* of the (non)local body, a critical non-discursive element is *the variegated affective fibre*, in both its neuro-biological and technological modes.

One last point about the *dispositif* before moving on. The *dispositif* is non-representational; that is, it does not merely give form to pre-existing matter. It does not operate on an Aristotelean measure of matter and form. In other words, it is not that naturally calibrated matter takes form in the *dispositif*. Instead, it offers an anti-hylomorphic perspective. The heterogeneous matter comprising the *dispositif* is precisely a matter of *cohesion* between disparate and discontinuous elements. It is in their coupling that form takes shape; it is in this resonance that the Foucauldian ‘truth’ of a *dispositif* gets expressed. It is, then, a matter of fabricating something new and never one of verisimilitude vis-à-vis *a priori* elements.

It is curious that there was not more interaction between Foucault and Simondon given the profound resonances between the *dispositif* and the latter’s concept of transduction. Deleuze, of course, was deeply influenced by both, as is manifested in his untiring focus on the process of becoming. One last word on Foucault and the *dispositif*.

Recall that the *dispositif* was the work of a more politicized Foucault—what elsewhere I have termed ‘the Italian Foucault’—in search of a more diagnostic analytic of power. As such, the *dispositif* enables us to ask not simply how and why we are trapped by power but in how we might become something else. The *dispositif*, then, is *ontogenetic* in that it gauges the development of being or its becoming. This is equally central to the concept of transduction, to which we will now turn.

### **Transduction**

Transduction is a key concept from Simondon as it allows for a radically reconfigured methodological imaginary. Namely, by emphasizing the relations rather than elements related, it facilitates a focus on immanence and wholeness and a complex recursive dynamic. Thus the transductive measure of a (non)local body inherently entails organic and non-organic elements which are only ever meaningful, functional, and affective in their constitutive relations.

Elsewhere I have written about an archive of technicity. This is a useful trope in further explicating what is unique about the *dispositif* and how it addressed the structural aporia of the archive—namely the role of affect. Typically, one attributes a discursive or representative function to the archive. But with an archive of technicity, what is most significant for me is its pre-discursivity. Thus instead of an ‘archive of feeling’ it can be a *dispositif* of feeling, and one that is in originary relation to the body *becoming human*. Let me take a step back here. In using the term archive of technicity what I am emphasizing is the transduction between organic human corporeality and the array of technology and technics with which it is related. In other words, a critical element in this *dispositif* is not just the non-organic of technology and discursively functional technics

but the *affective relations* therein. Affect as always already calibrated by technicity. Following paleo-anthropologist Andre Leroi-Gourhan, we could say that an archive of technicity is comprised by a *veritable syntax of gestures*. Imagine for a moment the hand *and* a simple stone tool; archival information contained in that tool provides both what one observer called “the functional architecture of human technical skills,” and an extension of the sensorium. Beyond that are affective capacities, that is, both contained within the form of the tool, and, in conjunction with the hand moving outward from the body, there is a logic of the sequencing of acts that extends and differentiates its ability to act, and thus to feel/experience the environment. The latter takes it out of the strict realm of the Foucauldian archive—“a condition of reality for statements.” Transductively positioned in a *dispositif*, it entails the (non)local body’s ability to act and to be newly structurally coupled with its environment.

Perhaps a word on technicity would do here. Again Simondon offers a more expansive understanding wherein technicity marks the transductive domain of technology and culture. What is so critical is that when they are constitutively related, borders between the strict Greek categories of *phusis* and *tekhne*—between life and technology—break down. Herein lies the broader *dispositif*: an ensemble of the human and *technical* objects, riven with affective fibres, both human and technological, which actualize the potentialities of environments.

### **Ontogenetic *dispositif* of the (non)local body**

There is, then, a measure of becoming here. Adrian Mackenzie names technicity as a “way of understanding the mode of existence of technical objects ontogenetically, that is, in terms of how they come to be rather than what they are.” Ontogeny, to clarify,

is the study of an organism from the fertilization of the egg to maturation; but it is applied widely to study structural change in a unity. Relevant here is the human and technology as such a unity. Time permitting, we could again recall Leroi-Gourhan's vast work on the archive of technicity and its deep recursivity. His reading is not just that technology has an archival function exteriorizing memory, but that the very threshold of being human is marked by this transductive relation. In short that *technicity* is the *originary supplement* to the *human*.

But today I am meant to be speaking on the measure of the affective fabric of *digital culture*. Yet is it, as Mark Hansen has suggested, that our contemporary condition of ubiquitous connectivity makes visible that which has always been the case? It's not just originary technicity, but originary (non)locality (vis-à-vis scale and movement).

As such, I must return to the extra-discursive stakes of ontogenetic technicity—that is, its affective fibre. That those filaments are both organic and non-organic suggest that we have never been human, not in a *pure* or *natural* sense, from the wellspring of *phusis*. Those waters were well contaminated by *tekhne* before we could ever emerge. Always already, then, we are becoming human via an originary supplement—the *archive of technicity comprising technology*. Such an archive turns our understanding of technology on its head. It is not that technology is discursive, but that discourse, the symbolic, and meaning in general were always already technical. As Mackenzie pithily notes, “Originary technicity implies that the non-technical entity, the ‘who’ or the human, also has the need of the ‘what’, the technical supplement, in order to become who he or she is.”

Time permitting, here I would cite at length the importance of this for Derrida in his early work on deconstruction in *Of Grammatology*. Instead, let's briefly rethink the affective measure of technicity. If we go back to prehistory, the trace or gramme are doubly articulated. Derrida's point here was *contra* logocentrism: that the trace of the beveled edge of knapped flint, its syntax in terms of the number of blows required to shape it, presuppose the possibility of a more complex, symbolic, non-technical expression. Thus the gramme of the stone tool is a precursor to the abstract symbolism of language. I want to emphasize a second extra-discursive manifestation: the sensuous qualities of this archival content. These are also the traces and contours of an affective fabric. These are the affective fibres of a sensuous syntax: seeing and feeling stones of proper size and density, striking the stone *thusly*, feeling the sharpness of its edge, and observing and remembering this operational syntax. The resulting dispositif in turn recalibrates the human sensorium and the ratio of sensory-perception. All along it differentially couples the human with its environment.

## **Conclusion**

I want to conclude by briefly outlining a political example of the (non)local body that was suggested to me by Jennifer Pybus. In gaining a measure of the affective fabric, we can see how rational thought, including political judgment, always proceeds amidst transductive mediation, imbued with and predisposed by sub-perceptual affect; in turn we can envision new political possibilities, especially in our contemporary condition of the increasing elision of the corporeal and virtual. Amidst possible polyvalent political strategies we might begin with a video on *YouTube* titled "In My Language" which has more than 800,000 views. Produced by and featuring Amanda Baggs, a young autistic

activist from Vermont, the first part of the video is a montage of the radical sensorio-perceptual difference of Amanda's world. In communication with her environment, it might seem from an outside perspective to be no more than a series of tics, incoherent vocalizations, and repetitive actions. Yet she confounds this dominant perspective when she sits behind her computer and begins typing. A computerized voice intones "It is only when I write something in your language that you refer to me as having communication." She continues, forcing the viewer to reflect upon and reconsider what they just saw, as she describes her actions: "My language is not about designing words or visual symbols for people to interpret. It is about being in a constant conversation with every aspect of my environment." This video demonstrates that her 'constant conversation.' includes everything from the feeling of tap water flowing over her face rubbing up and down on the pages of an open book.

Baggs and other autistics are part of a new political movement called the Autistic Liberation Front (ALF), established in 2005, which opposes the medicalization of autism through the search for a 'cure' and instead demands public acceptance of their radically differentiated sensorial reality under the logo "Celebrate neurodiversity." They meet every Tuesday, not in a community centre, but in the virtual reality of Second Life—they also have a page on Facebook. They are in the process of building up an area of Second Life called "Porcupine" and establishing the "Liberated Autistic Territories of Second Life." That space includes an Autism Museum, the Borges Library featuring actual works penned by autistic authors, a Memorial to victims of "autism hating" and the Einstein Auditorium which acts as a meeting room. Amanda inhabits Porcupine with other

activists, and she has painstakingly ensured that her avatar resembles her right down to the inclusion of her myriad tics and mannerisms.

The ALF emerged from a multilayered exodus, both corporeal and virtual. Regarding the latter, in 2005 a Harvard researcher established the private island of Brigadoon especially for those on the autistic spectrum. Some users, however, chafed at the therapeutic orientation and created ALF as a result. Their first act was on Second Life where they set about constructing Porcupine. The other exodus is corporeal, albeit one transductively related to the virtual. Can one read this movement in relation to the series of liberations highlighted by Leroi-Gourhan, remembering that these once biological ruptures became facilitated by *techne* with the emergence of the human? Witness Bagg's insistence on retaining her corporeal particularity in virtual form. It is precisely the immersion into a virtual world that makes Second Life such compelling technology for users from the autism spectrum. As one observer notes:

Internet communication—email, instant messaging, chat rooms—slows down communication and dispels with body language and the need to interpret facial expressions, all things which make it a particularly friendly form of communication for people on the autistic spectrum (Boundy).

There is much to learn from the rich, complex and little understood neurodiversity movement. I only wish to note how they use technological vectors of exteriorization as part of a collective, selective actualization of environments. In all instances, technics functions as a means to socialize and organize amongst themselves, *and* to demonstrate to others their humanity which is often overlooked in the *natural* world. These are indeed

'new organizations of life' which are clearly engaging a kind of Post-Cartesian politics of the material and virtual.