Digital, material, affective

Since the 1990s, the particularities of digital culture and online communications have been extensively theorized in terms of immateriality and virtuality. As that which does not factually exist yet has effects, the virtual has been defined as the opposite of the actual, the real, or the material. Images or text on a computer screen become perceptible when computers are attached to modems and when files are read with the aid of correct software. As binary code, files are ephemeral in their immateriality, yet tangible in their perceptibility and effects. Encounters with them involve tactile interconnection of technological objects with the fleshiness of the human sensorium, and such encounters are in fact highly material. In fact it can be argued that any clear distinctions between the material and the immaterial, the actual and the virtual grow leaky in the "material virtualities" (Sunden 2003) of online communication.

The intensities of online romance or sex, for example, encompass showing and telling, fantasy, investment, and projection, as well as sensations of connection and disconnection, absence and presence, proximity and distance facilitated by network technologies (Hillis 2009). Online platforms gain in affective stickiness as users stay on, return to, and refresh web pages, and as they read, comment, tag, upload and download. Such examples point to networked communications as comprising and as contributing to affective encounters between people, technologies, texts, sounds, images, and ideas. These encounters give rise to attachments, antagonism, as well as to both persistent and fleeting intensities that further drive and orient the movements and actions of users across networks.

The three presentations in this panel explore the interconnections of the digital, the material, and the affective in online communication. The individual case studies addressed range from the affective investments of steampunk culture as cutting through the categories of the analogue and the digital to the political potential and affect of Turkish sexual confession sites, and the heated twists and turns of a Finnish Facebook discussion thread. While clearly distinct in their aims and scope, all three presentations investigate the intersections of the material and the virtual in networked exchanges by asking how intensities move, how they move users, and what they affect. Furthermore, each presentation explores the role and meaning of online platforms and technological objects in and for their individual and collective users. Rather than approaching platforms as instrumental tools to an end, or as passive "stages" for the

actions and attachments of users, they are conceptualized as facilitating and even conditioning particular uses, forms of interaction and sensation.

Affectivity then becomes an issue of connectivity and contact between and among human and nonhuman agents, and an effect of the circulation of digital files that communicate and help to create rise to ideas, values, and intensities. Philosopher Sara Ahmed (2004: 10–11) argues that, "emotions do not circulate among people, objects of emotion do." On online platforms, such circulation is "virtual" in the sense of comprising immaterial objects (computer files, documents, and code) and symbolic depiction. At the same time, the circulation of objects gives rise to intensities -- of enthusiasm, rage, curiosity, or lust -- that are tangibly felt in the body. Such sensations are personal and individual yet, as networked, simultaneously shared and collective. Consequently, the networked circulation and accumulation of affective intensities can also give shape to, support, or facilitate collective political action.

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Technologies of Feeling: Affect Between the Analog and the Digital
Jenny Sundén

"It is the physical nature of SteamPunk that attracted us to it in the first place […]. We love machines that we can see, feel, and fear" (Ratt, 2007).

In the midst of the affective networks of contemporary digital cultures and communities, built on endless technological upgrades to increase computational speed, power, and performance, something seemingly of the opposite order is taking shape. It is a culture that contrasts speed with slowness, displaces the new with the old and the used, and replaces supposedly immaterial streams of data with highly material, tactile technologies, materials and fabrics.

These turns to the analog are evident in, for example, craftivism and Do-It-Yourself movements, employing strategies such as reverse engineering, recycling, reuse, hacking, and modding. Laura Marks (2002: 152-153) speaks of a desire for indexicality among digital videomakers that she terms "analog nostalgia," "a retrospective fondness for the 'problems' of decay and generational loss that analog video posed […] in a sort of longing for analog physicality." But while there is a growing movement of neo-luddites, highly critical of as well as distancing themselves from digital cultures and technologies, most "analogists" appear to be digital natives (cf. Marks, 2002), moving back and forth between different modes and codes as a manner of inhabiting communities that are as locally rooted as they are digitally connected.

Steampunk cultures provide compelling examples of a contemporary affective investment in the analog, coupled with intense digital connectivity. In this paper, I perform affective readings of steampunk as a way of thinking affect in analog and digital media and forms of embodiment in contemporary technological cultures. Firstly, I will evoke affect as a manner of not only recognizing steampunk as visual spectacle, but to better understand the appeal of the analog in terms of a desire for technologies that can be felt powerfully, even feared – as expressed in the indtroductory quote by Margaret Ratt. A productive way of thinking such feelings of awe before the exposure of glimmering brass and the mechanical under-workings of cogs and cogwheels is through the "turn" to affect and materiality in cultural theory. Secondly, I will critically engage with Brian Massumi's (2002) notion of the superiority of the analog, which at first sight may seem to play straight into the hands of steampunks and their passion for the analog. Then again, his moving in and with an analog register as dynamic and transformative depends on a digital register that is almost completely immobile and lifeless. This polarity fails to address how steampunks tend to shuttle, intensely, between the digital and the analog according to a logic that remains to be made explicit. Finally, and in an attempt to think differently about affect between the analog and the digital, I will suggest that steampunk, rather than being characterized by a return to the analog (in a manner that requires a turning away from the digital), is more aptly understood in terms of the *transdigital*. Within this paper, then, steampunk is used as an especially intriguing example of a broader tendency toward transdigital modes of using and sensing media in contemporary media landscapes. Steampunk has been described as an "aesthetic technological movement" (The Catastrophone Orchestra and Arts Collective NYC, 2007), incorporating science fiction, art, engineering, and a vibrant 21st century subculture. It is characterized by a retro-futurist take on the steam-powered technologies of the Victorian era. Rather than being re-enactors, steampunks are re-

imaginators with a punk Do-It-Yourself ethos, organized around the question: "What if we continued as an analog society instead of a digital one?" Steampunk is certainly not one, but many, as well as replete with ambiguities and contradictions. There are those who emphasize the "steam" in steampunk, and tend to read as fairly romantic, Neo-Victorian, with an emphasis on aesthetics. And there are those who are more critical and "punk," invested in the political potentials of technological anachronism.

In Brian Massumi's (2002) affect theory, the intimate connection between bodily movement and sensation is crucial. Interestingly, "the digital" in his argument seems to completely short-circuit the body in movement and as movement. Massumi writes of the virtual as an exceedingly real, yet abstract, uncorporeal dimension of the body itself. To him, there is nothing more disturbing for thinking virtuality than to conflate the virtual with the digital and its ways to systematize, measure, and code. Digital technologies, then, have connections to the virtual as potential only through "the analog." But is it productive, or even possible, to speak of the analog as that which always proceeds, envelops and grounds the digital? And does the digital, by necessity, equal the machinic? There seems to be something of a slippage in Massumi's argument between modes of embodiment and affect on the one hand, and modes of technologies or media on the other. Technically, it is reasonably easy to distinguish between analog and digital communication, between a many-valued continuum and a two-valued dis-continuum (even if every such distinction is not without its own problems and slippages). But in matters of the human, organic body, the question is much more complex (see Sedgwick and Frank, 1995). As has been clear from the first wave of cybernetics, without the digital, there would be no analog. In other words, it is only after the advent of the digital computer that previous generations of mechanical, analog computers could be named accordingly (for example, Wilden, 1972).

To conclude, I suggest the term *transdigital* to account for analog passions that are shaped through the digital in ways that concretely activate, but also move across the borders of, or beyond the digital. The transdigital gestures at such media practices that are digital at heart, but simultaneously transgress or challenge the category itself. In working with "trans," I take the cue from transgender studies, and in particular Susan Stryker's (1994) way of understanding transgender. To queer or trans the digital, then, is to transcend, transgress, or otherwise bend the boundaries of media and bodies. Steampunk, rather than merely being a re-turn to a bygone era, is a re-consideration, or transing, of the (digital) present. Time in steampunk is not linear, not chrono-logical, but tangled through temporal loops and folds,

through a play with future (virtual) possibilities by an intricate entanglement of the analog and the digital. This is not mere analog nostalgia. This is transdigital affectivity in an anachronistic vein, a looking back with a twist as an attempt to inhabit the present differently.

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Affective Politics or Political Affection: Online Sexuality in Turkey
Veronika Tzankova

Sexuality in Muslim societies has for long been functioning under the prescriptive norms of social institutions and religious principles of conduct (e.g. Ilkkaracan 2008; Shannahan 2009). For more than a decade there has been a significant effort for the political revitalization of Islam in several Middle Eastern countries and most overtly in Turkey (Kadioğlu 1994). The politico-religious dynamics involved in the re-introduction of Islamic values have played a significant role in the normative cultivation of affect, sexuality, and body politics. In this

presentation, I explore the political potential of networked affect in the context of contemporary Turkey through the analysis of Turkish online sexual confession sites kirmiziitiraf.com ('redconfession.com') and erotikitiraf.com ('eroticconfession.com'), social network sites explicitly dedicated to the public sharing of sexual adventures, fantasies, and reflections. By situating the social dynamics mediated by these online platforms within the broader context of political Islam in Turkey, I argue that networked affect facilitates alternative forms of social and political counteraction.

I start with the premise that although the Internet is generally considered an information technology, it could just as well be called an affective technology. This means stepping outside the pure technicality of information systems to address affect (1) as "the imbrications of somatic and social systems" (Protevi 2009, xiv) *within* and *as* (2) the medium which actualizes the potential of the virtual simultaneously as it virtualizes the body in a dynamic interaction filled up with indeterminacy (Hansen 2004). This is the perspective from which I examine the political potential of affect within Turkish online sexual confession sites as platforms where community members share their sexual confessions—experiences, fantasies, reflections—as short textual narratives (cf. Ogan and Cagiltay 2006: 803). The sites form a bricolage of sexual stories predominantly engaged with the explicit exploration of the body as a source of pleasure. I address this search for somatic pleasures in terms of the political affect that it involves, generates, and configures. Since networked political affect lacks a tactile or determinate form of presence (see e.g. Ahmed 2004; Gould 2010; Paasonen 2011), I appropriate John Protevi's compositional scales that capture political affect at personal, group, and civic levels of imbricate social and somatic interactions (2009).

With political affect, I refer to the mode, or layer, in which the members of Turkish sexual networks participate in the construction of particular and publicly observable body politics that are in an oppositional relation to the normative political physiology of remerging Islamic values. Here affect is what Deborah Gould describes as "the tension between dominant accounts of what is and what might be" (2010, 32). Sexual network members make their points by telling stories of how sex reflects and influences their somatic experiences. The sexual networks create spaces for political agency where personal accounts of body politics are exposed and made publicly available. Accounts of affective states—of desire, lust, and approval – evoked in the sexual narratives generate affective responses and intensities in the readers. Such affective states facilitate the reconsideration of deeply embedded patterns of thinking and feeling and thus open a channel for new imaginings (ibid).

More specifically, the group composition of political affect within Turkish online sexual networks is defined by the following three interlacing conditions: (1) existence of a supportive online community, (2) experiences of linguo-sexual pleasure, and (3) transgression:

1) The basic condition for the formation of the group layer of networked affect is the existence of an underlying online community where the sharing of sexual narratives and alternative body politics are constituted as social and intersubjective activity. Because online communities emerge from the indefinite web of social and intersubjective interactions between network members, they contain the potential for social impact. Jodi Dean (2010) argues that affective networks generate a feeling of community. If we reverse Dean's statement, we could argue that the feelings of community within online networks produce the condition for the existence of an affective network.

2) Turkish online sexual networks mediate affective states by providing the conditions for transforming the physical sexual body into a verbal abstraction. On an online platform where the verbal and the sexual interconnect, language induces no less sexual production than is induced by it. This assemblage of the sexual and the textual produces intensive linguo-sexual pleasure which—when shared and disseminated within a group setting—gains affective resonance through its capacity to "exceed what is actualized through language or gesture" (Gould 2010, 27). What is of significance here is affect's capacity to facilitate the experience of one type of thing in terms of another. It is precisely this interchangeability of experiences that unleashes the political potential of affect as the collective gathering of a sexual counter-public within the process of transforming one emotion into another (Collins 2001).

3) Turkish online sexual networks effect a double movement: on the one hand, they violate the socio-political (and religious) rules of sexual conduct. Following Georges Bataille (1986), this violation, or transgression, then adds to the intensification of desire. Yet the sexual networks aim to normalize sexual transgression, on the other. These apparently contradictory movements of transgression and normalization seem to function in symbiosis in the realm of networked communication. Their mutual dynamic can be best visualized as a circular relationship where social control is transformed into sexual pleasure and where sexual pleasure gives shape to alternative forms of social control. Whereas Turkish governmental politics have extensively reinforced morally conservative sexual norms for the last several

years, Turkish online sexual networks have been expanding sexual practice, expression, and understanding. The pursuit of liberal sexuality and sexual values within these networks involves a counteractive political investment.

Tiziana Terranova (2004, 2) observes that there "is a tendency of informational flows to spill over from whatever network they are circulating in and hence to escape the narrowness of the channel and to open up to a large milieu." Terranova's insight focuses our attention to the multiplicity of indeterminate experiences that information networks may provide or mutate into. Based on these possibilities for shift and mutation, I argue that Turkish sexual networks are indeed affective networks with real political potential. These networks have continuously organized themselves around two overlapping and mutually complementary fields of experience: namely those of sexual desire and political counteraction. These fields produce affect while also being produced by it.

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Fast flames: Affective intensities of online debate

Susanna Paasonen

Understood as intensities, sensations, and impressions created in encounters between and among people, online platforms, images, texts, and computer technologies, affect has been central to the uses and user-experiences of the internet since its early days. It can be argued that affective intensities drive online exchanges and attach people to particular platforms, threads, and groups, and that social media uses are indeed largely driven by a search for affective intensity -- a desire for some kind of affective jolt, for something to capture one's attention (Dean 2010). The desire for intensity provokes the interest and curiosity of users; it grabs their attention, and drives their movements across networks, sites, files, and discussion threads. The "grab" (Senft, forthcoming) of a discussion thread for example then depends on the intensities it affords.

This presentation sets out to conceptualize the affective dynamics of online debate through the thematic analysis of a short-lived yet heated Finnish Facebook exchange during the summer of 2012. The incident began when a female participant of a midsummer dance club voiced her disapproval of heteronormative DJ announcements in a post on the club's openly accessible Facebook event wall. Her post inspired a wave of comments that trickled to blogs and online columns, and the incident soon became national news. The thread (consisting of 728 posts and comments made by 173 users between June 23 and June 28, 2012) marked a linguistically, regionally, and temporally limited peak of intensity in the flow of Facebook updates and comments. I nevertheless argue that it connected to, and even exemplified, themes central to online exchanges and their affective resonances more generally.

Before becoming national news, the thread focused (more or less) on: heteronormativity; discrimination against sexual and ethnic minorities; club and dance cultures; social relations of power; and the fairness of the critique targeted against the club organizers. As news items and blog posts circulated and accumulated, new people joined in to express surprise, amusement, and aggression, to add absurd comments and links, and to attack and support one another. As articulations of positive and negative affect layered, oscillated, and intensified, the debate grew increasingly antagonistic and fragmented.

Some participants discussed the equal rights of sexual minorities and the persistence of discrimination while for others the matter was one of singular DJ lines at a hipster club, and ultimately much ado about nothing. Some zoomed out from the incident to address social power structures while others zoomed in to address the events of the club night. Some discussed matters of principle even as others could not see the point. These zooms were fast and out of synch with one another. From these incompatible points of departure, the debate evolved into considerations of more inclusive clubbing practices, as well as to trolling aiming to provoke other participants. While it is possible to interpret the thread as an open forum for debating social equality and the politics of naming, it resulted in an increased polarization of views rather than democratic negotiation or resolution (cf. Robinson 2005). As Zizi Papacharissi (2002) notes, the Habermasian ideal of the public sphere as one of critical rational exchange can be mapped onto emotionally wired online discussions only with some difficulty. I argue that the thread in fact points to the degree to which online exchanges, once heated up, are animated by a search for affective intensity and by provocation rather than a desire for negotiation.

While disjointed, the debate largely revolved around the woman who started the debate and remained its most active participant with a total of 55 messages (and whom I refer to as "Korhonen"). Most comments referred back to those made by Korhonen: *she* became the sticky node of the discussion and it was to her that most affective intensities stuck. She was accused of both unwillingness to have fun and of willingness to intentionally spoil the fun of others with her criticism. Korhonen was gradually labeled a queer-feminist killjoy figure (see Ahmed 2010) and as the thread evolved, comments made to and about her grew increasingly personal and vicious.

It is noteworthy that both Korhonen's predominance in the debate and the disjointedness and sharpness of the thread owed to the affordances and limitations of Facebook as a platform. In

a Facebook discussion thread, users see the very first post and the newest comments made on it above a box asking them to write a response of their own. Getting to the very beginning of a thread can be cumbersome and requires some clicking. Since the midsummer thread soon consisted of hundreds of comments, participants entering it later on often stated their unfamiliarity with much of it beyond the first post. This owed both to the laboriousness of reading through the mass of comments and to the site architecture that encourages interaction with the most recent ones. As one new participant after another was provoked by the first message, or tried to provoke its author, the flames of the debate kept going: The platform itself helped the sparks fly.

All in all, the sudden height and bright heat of the midsummer Facebook flames seemed disproportionate. How did a comment on an open event wall create such a blaze? The question can be answered by examining the themes and discussion styles particular to the thread: the various frustrations and political affinities expressed, and the roles adopted during its course. I also suggest that explanations can found from the more general dynamics of online debate, as they tie into the particular affordances and limitations of online platforms. Affect both congeals and sharpens in online debates as readers and participants fill in the gaps of, extrapolate meanings from, and project values and assumptions onto the messages of others, reading some words carefully while skipping over the rest. The sharpness of affect grabs, appeals and disturbs, attracts and repulses, pulls users close and pushes them away again. The oscillation between different, often starkly posed and juxtaposing arguments is part and parcel of the overall rhythm of online exchange and social media use, of constant clicks and shifts from one page, site, video, and image to another, of refreshes and perpetual search for new documents, images, and intensities. These movements are fast inasmuch as they are persistent, driven by a desire for something that will grab and stick, rather than just slide by. Such attachments are, nevertheless, of the fleeting kind. Formerly viral videos are soon forgotten, sites lose their stickiness as users migrate elsewhere, and flame wars come to a halt. Fast to enflame and quick to die, online debates are fast in their rhythm and tempo, yet the resonances they evoke may live on in their effects that are difficult to foresee.

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