Original Article

(DE)CODING THE SUBJECT-IN-AFFECT

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Abstract

In these times, the times of control societies, the subject might be described as arising out of an attraction between affect and digital code. Since affect only registers at the imperceptible pre-conscious, pre-individual scale of measure, the subject-in-affect can only be approached through decoding the digital code by which it is made perceptible. Differing from interpretation, decoding however is not about language or meaning; it is about a relation among "dividuals". Without language as the method, or meaning as the end, writing the subject-in-affect is in search of itself.

Keywords

code; affect; protocol; dividuation; subjectivity; societies of control

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Are we here again posing the question of the subject again, seeking to communicate again, without knowing if the subject can communicate? Can the subject communicate?

Communicate!
COMMUNICATE affectively!

he told me that when she read what they said she had written, she could not imagine that it was she who had written it. She could not grasp its meaning. She worried if, in fact, someone else had written it. Or was it written in code? And if so, code for what or for whom? When



I asked her if these were the right questions, she told me she did not know for sure. And after a short hesitation, she told me that she wondered if she should not write what had been written. Again.

Having neither an emitter nor a receiver, code, some critics have argued, is not a language; it is not meaningful. Code is a reduction, a mechanism of power or domination. That's all.¹

It sounds like I ought not feel good about code. I should worry about it. And I do. I worry because I want to think about affect. I want to communicate affectively. And I think affect inclines toward code, not language, not the language of semiotics, of meaning. After all, affect, it has been argued, is autonomous of language. It is a preconscious, preindividual capacity, a bodily capacity, which, however, is expected to become conscious when put to language or when narrated, for example, as emotion. Yet, thinking about affect in this way leaves what we think about language unaddressed so that when the question of the subject is posed, it is the subject of language we still put to question. But, this might not be right. I mean it might not lead us right to why she does not know if it is she who has written or what the writing means. We might miss that she did not write to make meaning but rather to write what has been written again. And again. Not for meaning but to write in code and communicate not effectively but affectively.

Affect is potential, a pre-conscious bodily capacity to become, to act and to be acted upon. It is an emergence out of indeterminacy not a specification of a preexistence; it is a dynamism "prior to" the separating out of individuals or "prior to" individuation of any vital form. When there is a reflux back from conscious experience to affect, it is registered as affect, such that "past action and contexts are conserved and autonomically repeated", preconsciously reactivated as affectivity (Massumi, 2002, p. 30). There is bodily memory - "vectors" or "perspectives of the flesh" – but this memory is without form (ibid., p. 59). Or just as it informs, it falls back into indeterminacy. Affect participates in the virtual – not only the virtuality of the human body but the virtual of all matter. Affect is the quantum indeterminacy immanent to every scale of matter – the subatomic, the physical, the biological and the cultural - the quantum indeterminacy of what physicists call an implicate order.3 Affect is the nonhuman becoming of the human, the non-human becoming of all matter (Ibid., p. 59).

Cracks open on the surface wildly driven in every direction by the earth quake. Spitting tongues of fire, Once, in the old country,



Burning up bodies by the thousands
Now, from a mother's lips,
A devil's hissing kiss
Too close to the daughter's face
All but impossible to erase –
A body born. A body born
Again, where she sits to write,
Its ungodly rhythms erupting through the skin
Howling horrors, weeping sorrows
Projectile vomiting mortal sin.

Affect is infra-empirical, its dynamism below human perception. Affect points to a method of measure, a temporalization that codes or records and transmits at the preconscious, preindividual scale of matter – an artifactual presencing without human consciousness. Mark Hansen argues that it is digital coding that measures at this scale of matter, fundamentally transforming recording. Digital coding is no "mere technical inscription of a prior and independent movement ..." (Hansen, 2007, p. 5). It is a performative measuring; "the bootstrapping of movement into existence: a self measuring as ontogenesis". What the digital "... affords is access to the heterogeneity of time, or more exactly, to time as heterogeneity, as a virtual or preindividual source for divergent and potentially incompossible temporalizations ... Put another way, we could say that the digital inscription of time supports the actual infrastructural activity of our world today, which to a very great extent takes place at temporal scales far finer than those of human perception" (Hansen, 2007, p. 5).

It is the indeterminacy, the virtuality of affect, which needs be cared for. There needs be a concern for it, in these times. In these times, what is called for is this: a caring methodology, a method that can be ever so careful to distinguish between the enabling and the disenabling violence of the measures deployed in the present conjuncture of economy and governance.

Who cares for the subject-in-code?

"I say affect rather than emotion", Lauren Berlant proposes, in order to emphasize that the children, the severely mistreated children, "do not know fully what they're doing flinging themselves at life in order to be in proximity to a feeling to a vague inarticulately defined pleasure". (Berlant, 2007, p. 277). Or just to have affect, affect enough, to live in this world. "Affective avarice", Berlant calls it (Ibid. p. 287).

What world is the world of such children? Is this the world of the subject-incode, trying to communicate affectively? What does this interest in code – mine but not just mine – have to do with these children? How are they a strange

attractor in the basin of the various interests invested in code – seeking a surplus value?

Deleuze and Guattari write: "We write not with childhood memories but through blocs of childhood that are the becoming-child of the present ..." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 168). "This writing block of childhood calls forth experimental writing that is not merely an experiment with a given form ... It is rather an invention that strives to capture a shift in thought that is happening to the writer and which the writer is inviting. The writer is thrown backward and forward to find the subject turned into parts, turned around parts of a new assemblage: an autobiographical-techno-ontological writing block"⁵.

There had been no one to read to her. Words were denied her by those closest to her. who had sensed her desire for words, and experienced it through a mix of envy and rage, like a vague memory of something they once knew, but no longer.

They had not had much chance for learning and had turned their deprivation into a mean way of life. She would only give them fresh reason to scorn every sort of subtlety and to resist the complexity of meaning. There was no one to understand the sweetness and blessedness of the words filling her mind and dancing in her thoughts.

There was no one who did not mean to make her despise words

and distrust their pleasures.

Finally she could only hold words in some terrible awe, while forbidding them to herself. (Clough, 2000, pp. 147–148)

Orit Halpern writes of the problematic of archive and interface, memory and perception. She takes up the works of Norbert Weiner setting them in relationship to Bergson's process-oriented philosophy of perception and Freud's psychoanalytics of memory in order to explore the cybernetic turn/turn-over of abstracted processes of memory and perception to a programmable form that produces action (Halpern, 2007). In this turnover, Halpern argues, there has been a shift in discursive authority from a philosophical discourse driven by unfulfilled desire for life or the present or self-presence to a discourse formed in

the joining of philosophy and engineering which is driven by a desire for programmable forms of perception and memory that produce action.

Programmable forms/abstract processes/ action!! Alexander Galloway defines code as hyperlinguistic, not sublinguistic, "a language that is executable", "a language that actually does what it says" - one that is "materially affective" (Galloway, 2004, pp. 165, 244). It is code then that transmits a desire for a programmable form of abstract processes productive of action and it is this desire that holds affect and code close to each other as they hold up a subject, the subject of the diagram of control. Rather than a subject of or for disciplining, the subject of control "... is the object of a neverending modulation of moods, capacities, affects, and potentialities, assembled in genetic codes, identification numbers, ratings profiles, and preference listings, that is to say, in bodies of coded data (including the human body as coded data), such that we no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair" (Clough et al., 2007, p. 19). Individuals, as Deleuze has put it "have become 'dividuals', and masses have become samples, data, markets, or 'banks'" (Deleuze, 1995). The diagram of control constitutes a subject in touch with a method of measure that "dividuates" and puts the subject in touch with the informational-ity of bodies of matter. The media no longer mediates by representing. Through temporary and deep coalitions with powerful forces of governance and economy, media transmits and modulates sensations, affectively producing a sensation of an already known fact – what Brian Massumi describes as an affective fact become an empirical one (Massumi, 2007).

The diagram of control and its method of measure shift subjectivity from an unfulfilled desire provoked by embodied memories thought to be constitutive of a traumatized personal. The diagram of control and its method of measure shift subjectivity to the desire for programmable abstract processes of perception and memory – the impersonal personal of the lives, loves and sexualities of dividuals.

Here trauma, unlike the melancholic version of it that dominated cultural criticism of the last decades of the 20th century, does not point to an epistemological rupture with the *Real*, followed by a repetition compulsion of a haunted flesh that is devoid of remembering but full of memories. The haunted flesh of the traumatized subject is suddenly beyond the threshold of the closed organism, and like a *brittlestar*, finds embodiment where connectivity does not require physical contiguity, or where physical contiguity refers to distances that extend across the universe, across all the strata of matter. In this sense, trauma is dispersed throughout the universe and as such points to a new vision, a real passage from matter to action, a vision of a dynamic matter that informs itself. *Repeat*: matter is understood to measures itself, to be informational, auto-affective, spirited – a matter of virtuality open to the digital.

Feminist cultural critic and physicist Karen Barad writes: "When in danger of being captured by one predator or another, a brittlestar will break off the endangered body part (and hence its name) and regrow it. ... When is a broken off limb only a piece of the environment, and when is it an offspring? Can we trust visual delineations to define bodily boundaries? Can we trust our eyes? Connectivity does not require physical contiguity.... Is the connection between an offspring regenerated from a fragmented body part and the parent brittlestar the same as its connection to a dead limb or the rest of the environment? Imagine the possibilities for lost limb memory trauma when it comes to brittlestars. Rethinking embodiment in this way will surely require rethinking psychoanalysis as well (Barad, 2007).

Deleuze writes: "Presence or insistence. Inderminable presence The insistence of a scream that survives the mouth, the insistence of a body that survives the organism, the insistence of transitory organs that survive the qualified organs Everywhere there is a presence acting directly on the nervous system, which makes representation whether in place or at a distance, impossible". (Deleuze, 2003, p. 44)

She practiced at erasing bits

and pieces of letters, breaking up each and every word, so that they might dance on in her thoughts, disabled, vet not forever banished from her mind.

She did read in secret,

searching page after page for new words words that were not yet broken, words that might make

her whole.

But no matter what she read,

eventually the words would go to pieces.

Flying free in her mind,

they joined the left over heaps of fractured letters,

endlessly giving way to monstrous shapes, never repeated

an internal poetry, born of randomness.

that frightened and fascinated her,

drawing her to the abstract expressionism of those unsettled minds.

destined for insanity. (Clough, 2000, pp. 147–148)

To imagine the living, loving and sexing of dividuals is a work of criticism that I barely have a method for or always have the stomach for.



Be careful! Take care to tell them that asking them to imagine the lives, loves and sexualities of dividuals is a playful and deadly serious invitation to see the necessity for a transdisciplinary critique of sociology that draws on but also shifts from the genealogical and deconstructive approaches of science studies and media studies. Instead a critique of sociology ought be a critical analysis of methods of measure, more specifically the method of measure entangled with technical solutions to what is labeled social and psychological problems

where there is a racist making of populations through data basing that puts populations at various scales of capacity or lack thereof, a data basing that constitutes social and psychological problems in need of technical solutions that depend on the very data basing processes that produce the problems as such, while making possible an investment in the different capacitities of populations making an economy producing a surplus of being a surplus value in code.

Up your meds victims of this and that, you severely mistreated children, given over to biotechnologized arrangements of living and dying, feeding strategies of securitization through the operative logic of preemption in this conjuncture of economy and governance. Affectively coding affect Affect, affect, Affect by the dollar.

Governance probability distributions measures futures of every aspect of life and thereby "life-itself" pulled into the present as possible or probable futures to be lived in the present as probabilities. Massumi proposes that this strategy of preemption now shared by governance and economy means that the potential of future outcomes are lived without the outcomes coming into being, where, rather, the future is held in the present affectively (Massumi, 2007). This affective hold of future probabilities in the lived present, however, is not merely a matter of the manipulation of individuals' affects but of a more general deployment of affect, a generalization of affect, a socialization of affect, what might be called an abstracted and accumulated *affect-itself* entangled with a method of measure that is ontogenetic or productive of surplus being, the surplus value in code: the lives, loves and sexualities of dividuals (Clough *et al.*, 2007).

"The system runs on life capital, 'human capital'. This form of capital is unqualified. It is whatever-activity measured not in labor-time but in lifetime. Productive powers shade into powers of existence. Production is no longer defined as 'work' in the ninetheenth-century dynamics sense of a local motive force applied to an object. Productive powers are now growth factors, powers to be, becoming" (Massumi, 2007).

Be alert be part of a generalized alertness. Affect has become a mobilizing force which is "future-invocative rather than predictive or representative." (Cooper, 2006). Be alert! Or be left unto death, the living dead born of selection processes meant to determine whose agony, whose agency, can be given over to witnessing become the stuff of media communication measuring measuring life affectively.

Write this again. And again: "With this form of war, a question is raised as to how bodies, life and death are related to power. This question is raised not only because the technologies of destruction are now 'more tactile, more anatomical and sensorial'. The question also is raised because the practices of necropolitics, as Achille Mbembe sees it, 'are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the "massacre". The war machine not only kills outright but it also takes possession of the resources for life in a given territory, an economic function of the war machine that either disperses populations or immobilizes them, leaving them to a life of living death" (Clough, in Clough and Halley, 2007, p. 27).

Round Bound Her body a bundle on the floor struck by a mother's foot again and again Struck In unkindly rhythm That makes her innateness Inhuman SHE IS STUNTED



And it is dangerous to write this
A stunt performance
Doing unbelievably difficult feats
Seeking truth
Now, only using chance procedures
Creating ever more complex rigors
To flee the misery
To free the mystery
In to reality

In a dialogue with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak about statelessness, Judith Butler argues "Surely a certain thematic for comparative literary studies has depended on the legibility of that transition and the stability of those territories that constitute the 'then' and 'now' as well as the 'there' and 'here' of emplotment, topology, and narrative line. But I think both spatiality and location have to be reconceived once we consider the departure from within, the dispossession that demands immobility. This seems to be the case for one who is newly, and at once, contained and dispossessed in the very territory from which one both departs and arrives. This would also be true of a corollary type of movement in which one is in a war precisely over a territorial claim, and so the question of 'where' one is is already in question, and then one is deported and incarcerated, without ever knowing where one has arrived. ... This is one way of understanding how one can be stateless within the state, as seems clear for those who are incarcerated, enslaved, or residing and laboring illegally. In different ways, they are, significantly contained within the polis as its interiorized outside" (Butler and Spivak, 2007, pp. 15–18).

We have to reconsider "the temporal and spatial dimensions of the here and there, the then and now when it comes to the literature of the stateless, and that these formations establish some distinctive departures from the literature of exile and repression as we have conventionally known it ... The question, 'where is she?' is not easily answerable " (ibid., pp. 18, 28).

What of care? What of concern? Alan Bass writes "Heidegger discerns two possibilities of concern. One possibility takes the other's 'care' away from him, *leaps in* for him. 'In this concern, the other can become one who is dependent and dominated even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him'. By contrast, there is concern which does not leap in for the other, but leaps ahead of him, 'not in order to take 'care' away from him but first to give it back to him as such" (Bass, 2006). This is "authentic" care in Heidegger's view: a life world where it is presumed that one person can understand another. But, I am worried: the life world is no more.

Nothing more than more life worlds, a proliferation of life worlds.

She gave me a fragment of a poem written by Sharon Olds. She asked if I would reprint it here:

"After punishment was done with me, After I would put my clothes back on, I'd go back to my room, close the door, and wander around, ending up On the floor sometimes, always near the baseboard, Where the vertical fall of the wall meets The level rule of the floor - I would put my face near that angle, and look at the dust and anything caught in the dust ... I would look at each piece of lint And half imagine being it, I would feel that I was looking at The universe from a great distance.Without desire or rage I would watch that dust celestium as the pain On my matter died and turned to spirit And wondered the cloud world of home, The ashes of the earth". (Olds, 2005)

She told me that she was trying to articulate the minimal timespace of relationality implied in what is called "the escape when there is no escape" of the severely mistreated child, 6 connecting it both to the wide-eyed seeing of the universe evoked by quantum physics and to the violence characteristic of the present conjuncture of economy and governance in the US become an "empire of indifference". ⁷

Write this again. And again: "There is a marking of populations, some as valuable life and others as without value. Increasingly it is in these terms that differences such as those of ethnicity, race, gender, class, sexuality and nation are materialized. Some bodies or bodily capacities are derogated making their affect super-exploitable, or exhaustible unto death, while other bodies or body capacities collect the value produced through this derogation and exploitation". (Clough, in Clough and Halley, 2007, p. 25)

Tiziana Terranova writes: "A population is not a collection of subjects of right – constituted by the partial alienation of their natural rights to the sovereign – but a dynamic quasi-subject constituted by a great number of variables (natural and artificial, in as much as a population is one with the environmental milieus that constitute and affect it)". (Terranova, 2007, p. 136).

The scene breaks up into tiny bits of incandescent light

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like mica rubbed off the wall onto her finger tips rips reality asunder She cannot block the sun. She is no obstacle. The luminosity of every bit of light dispersed overwhelms her. Unfolding no living image, she is enfolded in the concave of a mother's life. Their bodies half moons one inside the other, shimmering the brightness of a black hole SHE IS SWALLOWED. The sound of a stomach/mouth, cave of tongue, no notes sung. Can you hear the tear in reality? Can you hear the dog's teeth ripping in entering skin? animal kin bearing her sin noise now audible without the human ear real connections of the virtual noisy connection of the infraempirical with the super-empirical made by matter's informational rhythms opening up to/bound up with digitized vibrations a techno matter a clock ticking life's times in these times through all matter no matter what time

Bass has proposed that the regularity of the appointments and the timing of each session allows psychoanalysis to bring forth the given-ness of the patient's in/humanity, that is, the very rhythm of the touch of the other in the patient's infant care which informs flesh with the difference of an inside and an outside of what is thus formed as body. There is, however, a surprising harshness in this tender thought that Bass offers when he tells of patients whose rhythm of infantile care appears for the analyst in the patients' complaints about the inconvenience of the time set for each session, and about the time allowed for each session – what Bass defines as an obsession with the clock in "concrete patients" who also are insistent about the objectivity of their complaints, and

it is. What time is it?

who are, as Bass describes it, resistant to the analyst's interpretation (Bass, 2006, pp. 68–75).

But are not the regularity of the appointments and the timing of each session up for questioning? A questioning about a certain rigidity symptomatic of the exchangeability of time, money and care, and more about temporality and the technical temporalization operated by the psychoanalytic clock ticktockticktock, carelessly informing a presumption about there being mutually constitutive signifying elements of a whole that is interpretable? How can we not question this regularity of care, this regulation of care? In these times, a questioning of time for these times.

The clock is ticking for the subject-in-code. Can you hear: ticktockticktock?

The subject-in-code does not speak a language of meaning or signification. Its subjectivity is captured in the ongoing modulation of the lives, loves and sexualities of dividuals, which is a matter of affective communication that is not about language and meaning, although not opposed to them. Rather the subject is born of a closeness of affect and code, without opposing code and language, or for that matter, digital and analogue. Code and language are different but the difference between code and language might be thought, as might the difference between digital and analogue, in terms of the method of measure, or the ontological effects of measure, variously productive of

code, **language**, **digital**, **analogue**. Each is produced by and is the production of an arrangement of matter, an arrangement in matter, which allows particular forms of life to subsist: both to exist and to mutate. As such we become aware of a method of measure which is ontogenetic, a performative measuring producing:

code, language, digital, analogue

If it can be said that the subject of the diagram of control, the subject-in-code, is an effect and transmitter of an ontogenetic method of measure, it is because it finds its sociality in the materiality of dividuation – the production of the lives loves and sexualities of dividuals, in the racist making of populations at various scales of capacity or affect-itself, producing a surplus of being, seeking surplus value. But it also can be said that dividuals carry with them the potential of the improbable in populations of probability. Larva egos larva bodies, as

Deleuze would describe them, living in the binding of contractions, excitation or energy in habit, the ongoing-ness of affect, which precedes the drives or instincts

and which is before the active synthesis productive of a global ego. For Deleuze the larva egos are passive but this passivity means to point to a pure immanence, *singularities* of an impersonal life, from which dividuals draw breath but where also larva egos go beyond probability to the chance of chance (Deleuze, 2001). **Rhythmicity to chaotic force to life.**

She might have been a brilliant student. But her teachers had quickly grown impatient. They gave no encouragement, finding her writing confused, if any meaning there, not worth the difficulty of piecing it together. Coded Dumb Coded Difficult Coded Deranged She felt such shame. Yet, even still, Standing utterly still, she could feel the pressure of the memory of words, and what held them up to moments of becoming, the stuff that moved words slow and steady, light and fast, from surface to surface.

The life world is no more. Yet life is more. It is of the very emergence that probabalistic measure cannot help but induce or can only fail to reduce: the event, the improbable, the virtual, "non-organic life", to use Deleuze's terms. "Frightful life, which is oblivious to the wisdom and limits of the organism ... potent preorganic germinality which raised itself to the point of life and to a life which spreads itself through all matter ... The animal has lost the organic, as much as matter has gained life" (Deleuze, 1986, pp. 50–51). This liveliness is open to a controlled violence/a violent control of measure but also to the aesthetic comprehension of the impossibility of reducing measure to a measuring device or human consciousness. Measure always also is non-human thought of the indeterminate future and with digital coding, measure is closer to indeterminacy, to the event, to potential. Close enough to induce what it cannot reduce.

Incite a politic!! A politic is in-sight in making visible the extraordinary variability beneath the ground of every foundation of measure – the liveliness of non-organic life, its rhythm drawn to habit or to chaotic force.

Break ground, Heal the violent rhythm of control, open source the code Kick a habit. Lauren Berlant wonders if they should be called children given that from the very start they have been engaged in securing on their own their own survival. Still Berlant would differ with Judith Butler. She refuses Butler's proposal that these mistreated children will necessarily attach to domination, normative authority, structures of privilege (Berlant, 2007, pp. 294–295). Berlant sees something more complicated at the level of affect, the potential of larva egos laid out on tracks for the virtual to be at play with the coded probability, the becoming of the emergent something-else without significance or meaning which comes along with code, a de-coding calling forth a politic of measure, refusing to measure up to the tempo of probabilities.

When last I saw her, she told me that her mother had died and although long in pain, the mother's funeral had been hurried. Buried, buried deep within the bodily matter of the earth. Looking at me with what seemed like care, she told me that what she had written again and again, she now surmised, was in code. Again looking at me now with something more like concern, she asked me, "How do you feel about that; what is it you feel for me?"

About the author

Patricia Ticineto Clough is professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the Graduate Center and Queens College of the City University of New York. She is author of Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology (2000); Feminist Thought: Desire, Power and Academic Discourse (1994) and The End(s) of Ethnography: From Realism to Social Criticism (1998). She is editor of The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social, (2007). Clough's work has drawn on theoretical traditions concerned with technology, affect, the unconscious, timespace and political economy. Her current project is Ecstatic Corona, an experimental writing project about the place where she grew up in Queens, New York.

Notes

- 1 This is a somewhat generally accepted description of code in texts of cultural criticism. For words describing code which I am here paraphrasing (see Massumi, 1992, pp. 187–188).
- 2 My comments about affect are from what has become a canonical text on affect in the Deleuzian sense of the term: Massumi's *The Autonomy of Affect* (see Massumi, 2002, pp. 23–45).
- 3 Masssumi discusses the relationship of quantum physics and affect especially drawing on David Bohm's notion of implicate order (see Massumi, 2002, pp. 36–39).
- 4 Hansen has written extensively on digitization. For his work on digitization, time and bodies (see Hansen, 2004, pp. 584–626, 2006).
- 5 This quote from Deleuze and Guattari (1994) appears in this paragraph taken from (with some words changed) my introduction to Clough and Halley (2007).
- 6 This expression is drawn from a personal conversation with Bruce Reis. It is an expression used by him and other psychoanalysts who work with traumatized clients and who use the expression to describe processes of disassociation. See Reis (2006, 2007) for a view of psychoanalytic practice

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- befitting severely mistreated children which differs from the view of psychoanalytic practice presented below in my reference to the work of Alan Bass.
- 7 This is the title of Randy Martin's recent treatment of strategies of securitization in this conjuncture of economy and governance (see Martin, 2007).

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