Reviews

*N*etworked Affect is an edited volume of fifteen chapters by leading European and North American scholars of media studies, gender and the social sciences who share a common interest in affect and digital cultures. The volume came out of a conference by the Association of Internet Research (AoIR) in Seattle in 2011. It is a pioneering collection that analyzes a host of recent networked phenomena through the lens of affect theory—the affective 'stickiness' of Facebook comment threads, the epistemology of 'digital natives', the circulation of affect via Tumblr, GIFs, role-playing avatars and so forth. In doing so, the book pushes the boundaries of the increasingly influential paradigm of affect, problematizing and further developing its precepts in an analysis of digital, networked culture.

Rightly identifying that digital phenomena frustrate the vocabularies of mediation and signification that predominate in cultural studies, the chapters in this volume explore the 'more than' quality of intensities, sensations and corporeal experience so central to networked phenomena. The volume also serves as a good primer to affect theory. Its Introduction provides a useful, though brief, intellectual history of the 'turn to affect', remarking most notably the growing influence of non-Cartesian philosophical traditions deriving from Baruch Spinoza, critiques of the linguistic turn and social constructivism, feminist, queer, subaltern and other politically engaged work concerned with materiality, and the exploration of human-machine relations as part of the cybernetics, artificial intelligence and neuroscience traditions (4). The reader's prior knowledge is not assumed, and theories of Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, Brian Massumi and others foundational to affect theory are frequently summarized and engaged in the chapters,
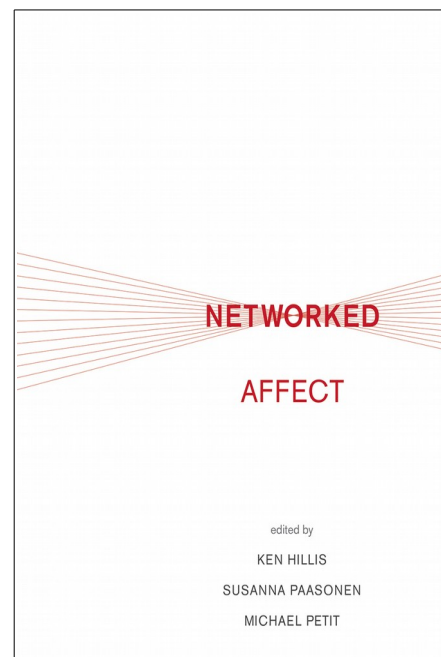
providing the reader with helpful background. The volume might therefore be incorporated into undergraduate classrooms.

Networked Affect is organized into three parts: 'Intensity', 'Sensation', and 'Value'. Part One is concerned with the intensities of affective experience on digital networks. In the opening chapter, Susanna Paasonen analyzes discussion threads on social networks, providing a case study of a particularly impassioned thread about heteronormativity in the 'We Love Helsinki' Facebook group. She convincingly demonstrates that the nature of online discussion threads leads to 'stickiness', or an accrual of affect, which is distinct from communication and rational exchange characteristic of an idealized Habermasian public sphere. Paasonen explores how the architecture of discussion threads lends itself to escalation, miscommunication, disjointedness and introduces the concept of the 'feedback loop' to describe how digital architectures are conducive to such accrual of affect.

In Chapter Three, Alexander Cho explores the way repetition creates affect and meaning on Tumblr, a visually oriented blogging platform. Invoking Deleuze's analysis of refrain, he argues that the copying and re-posting of media on Tumblr (usually with no context or description provided) creates an accumulation of affective force, a phenomenon he calls 'reverb'. Veronika Tzankova in Chapter Four considers Turkish *itarif*, or sex confession, websites. She provides a compelling analysis of how affective experience on such sites results both from sexual stimulation and an allegorical political dimension. In Chapter Five, Ken Hillis argues that users 'communicate affectively' through graphic avatars in role-playing environments such as *Second Life*. Engaging Jacques Derrida's notion of the 'trace' he argues that these avatars not merely represent but supersede their individual operators as they generate independent forms of networked affect through their indexical nature. In Chapter Six Jodi Dean provides an analysis of compulsive online behaviors and stickiness through Jacques Lacan's notion of drive. She argues that the paradoxical relationship of *jouissance* and anxiety that comprises Lacanian drive is the engine behind user behavior on affective networks.

Part Two, 'Sensation', consists of five chapters concerned with the technical and material dimensions of sensation on digital networks. James Ash in Chapter Eight examines the properties of the GIF image and its capacity to organize types of sensations. It is worth noting that Ash's use of 'affect' focuses on its material intensities, whereas later Chapters—such as those by Jarrett and Pybus—use it synonymously with feelings of community, phatic communication and self-fashioning on social networks—all seemingly 'cognitive' processes rather than pre-cognitive materiality (more on this terminological imprecision below). Invoking Deleuze's work on the painter Frances Bacon, Ash explores the way nonhuman affect is generated materially, and posits that affect and sensation are allotropic manifestations of the same force.

Chapter Nine by Jenny Sunden is an interesting discussion of the steampunk subculture. She emphasizes steampunk's paradoxical nature as a celebration of the analog in reaction to digital technology, but one that organizes itself within digital networks and moves freely between analog and digital culture. In Chapter Ten, Stephen Maddison deftly analyzes how user experiences on Alt-Porn websites involve both mediated and affective/corporeal processes: the 'grabbing content' of pornographic preview clips, the cognitive process of purchasing extended versions and an identity politics 'validated […] and linked through appeal to bodily sensation' (156). Engaging Michel Foucault's theory of self-discipline and Maurizio Laz-

zarato's work on immaterial labor, Maddison claims that Alt-porn users constitute themselves and their individual identity politics in the form of enterprise, or the exploitation of their latent immaterial creativity. Maddison's analysis is exemplary in its nuanced examination of the relationship between affective intensities and mediated, subjective processes. In Chapter Eleven Michael Petit makes a compelling case for the use of digital networks in the classroom as part of the affective experience of new generations of 'digital natives'. He posits a distinct 'digital ontology' characterized by learning through immediate and automatic associated links. Petit makes a compelling case that learning in such an environment produces 'positive affective responses' that outweigh the drawbacks (177).

The book's final section 'Value' focuses on the evolving and increasingly complex nature of economic value on digital networks. In Chapter Twelve Melissa Gregg examines self-management software applications in the corporate tradition of time management pedagogy. Gregg argues that such software dangerously valorizes the creation of superior, productive and independent individuals, mirroring neoliberal logic and producing an 'affect of efficiency' for their users (188). Chapter Thirteen by Kylie Jarrett, undoubtedly one of the volume's strongest articles, grapples with the challenging problem of defining value on digital networks such as Facebook. Using the economic category of 'immaterial labor', theorized by Maurizio Lazzarato and Tiziana Terranova as a point of departure, Jarrett demonstrates that value on digital networks frustrates the binary classification of gift or commodity exchange. Instead, she argues that affective and immaterial labor on Facebook requires a hybrid model of value, one that is at once characterized by gift exchange and commodification. In a similar vein, Tero Karppi in Chapter Fourteen provides a case study of how affect becomes economic value on Facebook through a close analysis of Facebook's 2011 Timeline feature. Like Jarrett, Karppi contends that value in this context has a 'double articulation', consisting not only of the commodified user data extracted behind the scenes, but also in the phatic and seemingly value-less exchanges that users enjoy, which perpetuate and amplify the affective network on which this model of value is based. Karppi analyzes how Facebook's Timeline and Open Graph architectures convert user events and shared materials—a news article, a song one listens to—into affect. They become objects that others may 'like', share and so forth. Thus, Korppi envisions the human user as a node in an assemblage of human and non-human (algorithmic, architectural) affect that creates value on digital networks. Jennifer Pybus in Chapter Fifteen characterizes self-fashioning on social networks as a form of 'archive fever' per Derrida. She argues that this drive to narrate one's personal history is the primary impulse behind social networks upon which so much economic value is predicated.

One weakness of the volume, in the view of this reviewer, relates to fundamental unresolved questions in affect theory itself:[1] How strong is the causal relationship between pre-cognitive affect and intention, meaning and cognition? Do the latter processes indeed occur 'too late', leaving the subject predisposed to a particular orientation based on affective forces and leaving conscious thought merely to supervise the results? Is '[o]nly the smallest part of thinking explicitly cognitive'—as one scholar claims?[2] In this collection, as in many other studies of affect, the distinction between what Massumi calls 'meaning' and 'intensity' sys-

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[1] For an interesting critique of such ambiguities in affect theory, see Ruth Leys, "The turn to affect: A critique." *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (2011): 434-472.

[2] See Nigel Thrift, 'Summoning Life', in *Envisioning Human Geographies*, ed. Paul Cloke. London, 2004: 90.

tems is often elided, begging greater terminological precision. At times authors in *Networked Affect* use the term 'affect' in a Massumian sense, as strictly pre-cognitive, separate from mediated 'emotion' and processes of subjectivity. At other times, 'affect' is simply synonymous with the emotional side of subjective experience. It seems to this reviewer that these issues of terminology are fundamental to understanding affect theory's relationship to psychology, sociology, identity theory, etc. In other words, is affect theory concerned with illuminating pre-cognitive intensities that have been hitherto neglected, or is it simply analyzing mediated processes that are traditionally the purview of social theory with a new (and somewhat opaque) language of 'intensity' and 'force'? These underlying questions are left unclear in the volume.

As the editors note in the Introduction, although *Networked Affect* aims to move beyond a 'logocentric' focus on mediation and representation alone, it also strives not to throw out cognitive theories altogether, 'given the fundamental entanglement of the material, the semiotic, and the political' (5). The stronger articles in the book (which are in the majority) stay true to this stated goal, teasing out the complex relationship between affect, bodily experience and mediated forms of meaning. A few less successful articles largely eschew conventional categories of representation and signification, discussing digital phenomena almost exclusively in terms of 'intensities', 'forces', and 'sensations'. This level of abstraction—while providing new potential for understanding the assemblages of human and non-human actors in digital networks—can result in a rather opaque analysis when not combined with a discussion of mediated processes. In other words the collection is further evidence that a post-logocentric analysis need not be logophobic. Surely the experience of pre-cognitive affective intensities is one piece in a larger puzzle and ought to be discussed in close connection with mediated subjectivity and signification.

Nevertheless *Networked Affect* is a remarkable and innovative collection of scholarship. It provides new and valuable insights into unexplored digital phenomena of critical importance today, illuminating elusive dimensions of corporeal experience and immaterial labor on digital networks. It is a thought-provoking read for the curious non-specialist and a must-read for specialists in related fields of media studies, gender, psychology and economy, who are concerned with the cultural implications of ubiquitous digital networks.

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