NETWORKED AFFECT

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Counter to rationalised conceptualisations of network media as an issue of information management, retrieval and exchange; online communications are not merely about storing and sharing data but also about the spread, attachment, amplification and dissipation of affective intensities. Network media help to shape and form connections and disconnections between different bodies, both human and non-human. These proximities and distances, again, may intermesh and layer with the bodily intensities of sexual titillation, political passions or its abstraction in the creation of monetary value alike.

As the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected by one another (e.g. Spinoza 1992; Massumi 2015), affect cuts across, and joins together, bodies human and nonhuman, organic and machine, material and conceptual – across bodies of flesh and those of thought (Deleuze 1988: 127; Gatens 2000). Following Spinoza (1992), bodies and their capacities are constantly shaped and modified in their encounters with the world and the other bodies inhabiting it. Such encounters may then increase or diminish, affirm or undermine their life forces and potential to act. The notion of networked affect (Paasonen, Hillis and Petit 2015) is a means to address these interconnections as the circulation and oscillation of intensity in the framework of online communication that involves a plethora of actors. These include individual users, more or less emergent collective bodies, human and non-human and thus also devices, platforms, applications, interfaces, companies, files and threads.

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Addressing affect as being networked results in positioning it as always already in-between different bodies. It is something that emerges in encounters between them, that shapes these encounters, and animates the bodies involved. Instead of being articulated as an issue of individual capacity or property, affect, understood as networked, is that which makes things matter and gather attention. Additionally, it possibly, adds to the individual sense of liveliness as intensity that reverberates with personal embodied histories, orientations and values (Ahmed 2004; Cho 2015). Such a framing does not situate networked affect as either visceral gut reactions specific to the human or as nonhuman pre-personal potentiality. Rather, it allows for an examination of how intensities shape our ubiquitous networked exchanges, how they circulate, oscillate, and become registered as sensation by bodies that pass from one state to another.

As Jodi Dean (2010; 2015) argues, the uses of social media are driven by a search for affective intensity that orients and provokes the interest and curiosity of users as they move across platforms, click on links, share and comment, searching for a shiver of interest, amusement, anger or disgust. Intensity, or that which Dean discusses as 'the drive', is that which drives the movements across sites and applications. What the users encounter on social media platforms, however, are not only other people but equally image and video files, animated GIFs, emojis, comments, algorithms, information architecture and routines of data mining. Although their parameters are of human design, these nonhuman factors curate the shapes that our sociability may take, what we can see and in what kinds of constellations on these platforms – and, perhaps to a degree, how we may feel about these interactions. Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska therefore argue that, 'It is not simply the case that "we" – that is, autonomously existing humans

– live in a complex technological environment that we can manage, control, and use. Rather, we are – physically and ontologically – part of the technological environment, and it makes no more sense to talk of us using it, than it does of it using us' (2012: 13).

Tero Karppi (2015: 225) points out how Facebook, the currently dominant social networking site, aims to cater 'happy accidents' through its algorithms that are set to render visible things that users may not know to expect or actively search for. Similarly to the 'like' buttons, such designed serendipity aims at affective modulation, or amplification (Massumi 2015: 31) in the positive register. The controversial Facebook emotional manipulation study of 2012, conducted by a team of psychologists from Cornell, encapsulates much of this. The experiment involved the news feeds of 689,003 Facebook users, and analysis of some three million posts consisting of 122 million words, without the users' explicit informed consent (Kramer, Guillory and Hancock 2014). The research team tweaked the algorithms selecting the content visible in users' news feeds and manipulated them to show more or less positive or negative posts. The overall aim was to assess how this affected the users' emotional states. Their hypothesis – and finding – was that 'emotional states can be transferred to others via emotional contagion, leading people to experience the same emotions without their awareness' (Kramer, Guillory and Hancock 2014: 8788).

Without further unpacking the limitations or conceptual nuances of this specific study here, it points to the centrality of affective modulation in and for the operating principles of much commercial network media – from social networking sites to online newspapers and clickbaits. In other words, affective modulation is inbuilt in, and central to, the production of value as

'dependent on a socialised labour power organised in assemblages of humans and machines exceeding the spaces and times designated as "work"' (Terranova 2006: 28). As forms of affective labour, this value production involves the manipulation of affects, social networks, and forms of community alike (Hardt and Negri 2001: 293; also Coté and Pybus 2007). This is an issue of 'the corporeal and intellectual aspects of the new forms production' where 'labor engages at once with rational intelligence and with the passions or feeling' (Hardt 2007: xi). Not only do social media 'produce and circulate affect as a binding technique' (Dean 2015: 90) to attract returning and loyal users, but affective stickiness is equally intimately tied to the production of monetary value.

Network media involves both personal and collective affective economies (Ahmed 2004) linked to memories, feelings, attachments, monetary value, politics, professions and fleeting titillations. Explorations of networked affect as the fuel for action help in mapping out how online platforms, exchanges and devices matter, as well as that which they affect – the purposes they are harnessed to and the outcomes that they facilitate. Here, any clear binary divides between the rational and the affective, the human and the nonhuman or the user and the instrument used are guaranteed to break down.

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