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Affect

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The concept of affect has opened up the study of media practices and technologies as carriers and mechanisms that articulate, direct, intensify, and orient feeling within context-specific social and political configurations. Affect theory provides a way into these configurations, by rethinking and privileging the *felt* aspects of everyday life, social change, and durable structures of power, in their (in some cases) nonrepresentational aspects. In studying affect, scholars aim to analyze what is not typically accounted for in media studies: how things feel, for whom, and with what potential. As Terri Senft (forthcoming) puts it, the concerns of affect theory exceed what can easily be located in the traditional study of meaning, representation, symbols, and signs.

In *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth define affect as "what arises in the midst of *in-betweenness*, in the capacities to act and be acted upon." It is the term given "to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing" that "drive us toward movement . . . thought and extension," but can also overwhelm, arrest, and frustrate. Simply put, affects are "forces of encounter" and "gradients of bodily capacity" (2010, 1–2; see also Ahmed 2004). They are not necessarily *strong* in their intensity, but different qualities of intensity register the different work affect does and is doing. For Zizi Papacharissi, affect "is the active ingredient that infuses structures of feeling with different measures of intensity" (2014, 117).

Much of the emphasis in media scholarship on affect is on what affect enables and does rather than what it might mean or represent. Affect theory offers new ways of conceptualizing and studying social collectivities and their structures of affective transmission. It approaches the experiential qualities of embodiment through the capacity to feel, move, and be moved and provides a different set of perspectives on what connects collective social bodies, their modes of relating, and their affiliative, felt structures of togetherness. Affect theory recenters the body *as media* in media studies analysis (see Gregg and Seigworth 2010) in its phenomenological and dispositional relations to technologies and communication infrastructures (see Lisa Parks, "Infrastructure," chapter 32).

To study affect requires an ability to interpret the signs and traces of affect's communicability, its transmissibility (Brennan 2004). Affect tends to be studied via the processes through which it registers and becomes communicable: as ritualized, as means of transmission, and as forces for making experiences audible, visible, and felt. This requires externalized signs and markings of affect's work and structuring presence, its structures of feeling. Typical research questions ask what affect enables, what it moves or makes movable, what it intensifies, and what it links or articulates. Media practices and communication technologies are central to these movements and articulations of affect, for as Anna Gibbs notes, "media and bodies appear as vectors, and affect itself as the primary communicational medium for the circulation of ideas, attitudes and prescriptions for action among them" (2002, 339).

In film studies and media studies alike, affect theory's approach to the body as medium interprets bodily gestures, faces, and modes of bodily comportment for nonverbal markings of affective states of being, a physiognomic practice of reading the body, and particularly the

face. Some studies interpret exterior surfaces of bodies and their proxies for capacities to feel together. As Beth Coleman (2011) argues in relation to her study of avatars, in "putting a face to things" through emoticons and avatars, networked communities create powerful feelings of copresence that, without facialized interfaces, are difficult to sustain. Some scholars also draw on the physiognomic ideal that one can interpret the exterior of bodies, buildings, and other surfaces in order to access other inaccessible qualities of affective and emotional states of being. Such physiognomic tools of reading are used as a means to interpret collective modes of feeling and bodily response in groups, such as in photographs that capture similar facial expressions made by on-the-scene witnesses to terrorist attacks (Sliwinski 2011). Physical movements and bodily gestures might suggest how affective states of being are occupied, carried, and lived, but there is also a risk that media makers, analysts, and viewers might essentialize the body as a machine of affective inscription, a surface of appearances that reveals the truth of shared embodied feeling states.

Affect is also studied through the lens of emotional labor and media work, in recognition that affect is both something that is worked on and something that constitutes a *kind* of work. One way scholars study how affect structures media making and communicative labor is through the structures of expression that accompany this labor and its surrounding public cultures and sites of meaning making—in training texts, public discourse, management documentation, interviews, and other research materials. These texts leave affective marks and traces, both in what they say through language, image, and sound, but also through how they move, are shared, and are used. Affective labor gives shape to activist communities and networks that take rhetorical and generic form in Twitter scripts, emoticons, tagging, avatar overlays, button clicks that message "I've got your back!" and other modes of expressing feeling, care, anger, rage, disappointment, and other shared, and potentially collectivizing, emotions via social media (Gregg 2011; Losh 2014; Papacharissi 2014; Rentschler 2014). Affective labor has increasingly featured in studies of media production cultures, industry studies, and the un- and underpaid labor of social media content creators, participants, and commentators—work often described as "labors of love" (which they can sometimes be, but ought not be a reason for undercompensation). Increasingly, work in this area attends to the seemingly banal and unremarkable functions of emerging platforms and apps, what Morris and Elkins (2015) call "mundane software." Apps and other software tools themselves do forms of affective labor, as commodity experiences of comforting sounds, touch-based pulsating color screen responses, verbalized affirmations, and mechanisms of routine, order, and quantifiable care.

The attention to affective labor in media studies, while long a topic of study for feminist researchers, provides one of the more compelling approaches to affect as something labored on and through, and produced by laboring bodies. Media studies scholars studying activist and cultural labor in affective terms, and the role of affect in social mobilization, concretely locate the stuff and work of affect in what it does, and what people do with it. Through these means, scholars study affect as it becomes communicable—audible, visible, and otherwise palpably felt.

Finally, affect theory provides essential tools and frameworks for robustly analyzing the work that feeling and emotions do in bringing people together, and shaping and moving social collectives, in the process of popular organizing and movement mobilization. Scholars such as Lawrence Grossberg (1992) and Linda Kintz (1995) examine the cultural resonances that media practices tap into, politically—from youth culture

and popular music to Christian right book series and intimacy videos—to analyze the links between politicization and the capacity to move people (see Ryan 1991). These links are made, and revealed, in concrete organizing strategies that leave documentary and other mediatic trails, in movement texts, training documents, and marketing plans for Christian publishing houses, among other kinds of materials. Jennifer Petersen refers to these materials as "the discursive side of feelings," those "under-examined parts of political communication and the role of media in politics" that are largely affective in nature (2011, 14). Networked affective publics also leave digital trails, through hashtags and other devices of aggregation and tonal expression (Mottahedeh 2015; Papacharissi 2014; Rambukkana 2015). To understand this requires that we get behind, analytically, the forms of activist and cultural labor that summon, gather, train, and direct affective experiences around collectivized political movements, often in conditions that are not expressly political. It also suggests that media connectivity is, of itself, an insufficient condition for collective action.

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Appropriation

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When everyday people talk about appropriation, they use words such as "theft" and "rape"—often speaking about how their favorite artist was pirated. These same terms are used to describe the dilemma of intellectual property—downloading and hook snatching reminiscent of a time not so long ago, when those who paid homage (the Beatles) and those who didn't (Elvis Presley and Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones) were endemic to how entertainment industries operated. Scandals such as payola in radio, voice-overs in film, black music video exclusion in cable, and reality television in general link to greed but also tie directly to the undergirding notion that if you do not have the means or foresight to copyright your work, or an audience valued by advertisers to protest, your work becomes an unintended category of fair use. Moreover, even when the work is protected, some lives, cultural producers, and cultures appear to matter less than others.

One of the central debates around appropriation is capital: Who gets recognized and remunerated for their cultural labor? Whose songs, style, and innovation become the raw materials for the next million-dollar advertisement for a major corporation like Nike or Pepsi? What dominant (read: white) rapper (Iggy Azalea), producer (Mark Ronson), or filmmaker (Quentin Tarantino) will next capitalize on the cultural work of black and brown creative output? Posing these questions should make it clear that appropriation has material consequences.