

PROOF

1

Introduction: Affective Fabrics of Digital Cultures

Adi Kuntsman

Affective journeys, journeys of affect

The idea of exploring *affective fabrics of digital cultures* has been at the back of my mind for several years. My first encounter with the dense and complex conjunction of the social, the affective and the digital was when I was conducting the ethnography of an online community and researching passionate online nationalism, militarism and racism. I was looking at the effects of hatred, contempt and disgust in and out of cyberspace (Kuntsman, 2009). My ethnography followed virtual circulation of racist texts and images, cyberfantasies of rape and torture in the name of national security, or simply day-to-day online interactions in which the violence of racism and nationalism was normalized into the mundane, sprinkled with 'smileys' and often dismissed as 'just a game'. I was aiming to conceptualize the political and psychic effects of those powerful emotions, as they circulated on- and offline. I wanted to grasp the profound effect of online violence on many Internet users (and myself as an ethnographer) by looking at the ways in which feelings and affective states can *reverberate* in and out of cyberspace, intensified (or muffled) and transformed through digital circulation and repetition. I wanted to find a language that captures the ways in which affect and emotions take shape through movement between contexts, websites, forums, blogs, comments, and computer screens, flooding us with words, and at times, leaving us speechless.

Inspired by popular music studies and their analysis of 'acoustic space' or 'soundscape' (Tagg, 2006), I put forward the concept of reverberation in order to describe the affective and political work of violence. The notion of reverberation – as opposed to that of 'representation', 'narration' or 'impact' – invites us to think not only about the movement

2 Introduction

1 of emotions and feelings in and out of cyberspace, through bodies,
 2 psyches, texts and machines, but also about the multiplicity of effects
 3 such movement might entail. Reverberation is a concept that makes us
 4 attentive to the simultaneous presence of speed and stillness in online
 5 sites; to distortions and resonance, intensification and dissolution in
 6 the process of moving through various digital terrains. For example, it
 7 allows us to see how the movement of violent words in online domains
 8 can intensify hatred and hostility through what Sarah Ahmed describes
 9 as 'affective economies' (2004), where the power of emotions accumu-
 10 lates through circulation of texts. But reverberation also enables us to
 11 see how the injurious effects of online violent speech can be muffled.
 12 For example, it can momentarily dissolve into 'smileys', 'winks' and
 13 laughter (although not disappear entirely!). Or, met with some Internet
 14 users' *refusal* to engage in dialogue, it can fall out of circulation, become
 15 frozen in an online archive – ready to re-emerge again, but immobilized
 16 for the time being. The concept of reverberation, in other words, allows
 17 us not only to follow the circulation of texts and feelings, but also to
 18 trace and open up processes of change, resistance or reconciliation, in
 19 the face of affective economies of mediated violence.

20 I continue exploring digital terrains of affective politics, becoming
 21 more acutely aware of the need to think about feelings, technologies
 22 and politics *together*, through each other – as we are being bombarded
 23 by new mediated 'wars without end' (Mbembe, 2003), as well as by new
 24 and constantly changing digital communication technologies. As recent
 25 examples of the use of social media in the Middle East – and the global
 26 reverberations of such use – have demonstrated, it is now clear that
 27 digital technologies are fundamentally changing the terrains of warfare
 28 and conflict.¹ But what about the changing perceptions of victimhood
 29 and testimony, and regimes of compassion and indifference? What
 30 about the shifting sense of belonging or alienation at the time of instant
 31 messaging, facebook, twitters, and other, ever evolving, 'technologies
 32 of connection'? What about the constant availability of information
 33 through digital media – blogs, social networks, mobile phones – and
 34 the structures of feelings that such availability creates? And what about
 35 those wars and deaths that remain unmediated, forgotten, beyond our
 36 field of affective and political vision?

37 Working with a group of scholars on exploring the issues of war,
 38 conflict and commemoration in various realms of digital media in
 39 Russia, Central and Eastern Europe (Kuntsman, 2010b), and observing
 40 the passionate politics of militarism and warfare in the Middle East in
 41 my own ongoing research, I put forward another concept, that of the

1 'cybertouch of war' (Kuntsman, 2010a).² The cybertouch of war refers to
 2 the emotional and informational intersections between on- and offline
 3 military violence, the mediation of wars and conflicts, and the affective
 4 regimes that emerge in cyberspace at the time of imperial invasions,
 5 'wars on terror', and globalized mediascapes. The cybertouch of war,
 6 violence and death refers to ways in which past and current events can
 7 *touch* us through our computer and mobile phone screens, whether by
 8 using 'touch technologies' that can bring distanced experiences closer
 9 quite literally, *close to the skin*; or by creating an immediate emotional
 10 response (sadness, rage, pain, compassion, joy) – an 'affective charge of
 11 investment, of being "touched"' (Cvetkovich 2003, p. 49); or by caus-
 12 ing a blockage through disorientation (Virillio, 1995, 1997) or disaffec-
 13 tion (Manalansan, 2010); or by leading to long-lasting changes in the
 14 ways we experience and remember war and conflicts. The notion of
 15 cybertouch, in other words, points to the material-semiotic character of
 16 digital cultures and searches for a way to account for the intertwinedness
 17 of technology, feelings, war and politics in what Donna Haraway would
 18 describe as technoculture (1997) and what Caren Kaplan defines as a
 19 'global matrix of war' (Kaplan, 2009). Moreover, it is not simply the
 20 intertwinedness of the material and the virtual, or of the technologies
 21 of war and those of popular communication. Rather, it is what I can best
 22 describe as *affective fabrics* of digital cultures: the lived and deeply felt
 23 everyday sociality of connections, ruptures, emotions, words, politics
 24 and sensory energies, some of which can be pinned down to words or
 25 structures; others are intense yet ephemeral.

26 Notions of reverberation, cybertouch and affective fabrics all call
 27 our attention to the ways in which digital 'structures of feeling'
 28 (Williams, 1977) work together, or side by side, with broader political
 29 forces. For example, many testimonies of violence that circulate online
 30 operate within a regime of suspicion, where digitalized evidence is
 31 always already suspected of being photoshopped, made-up, fabricated –
 32 and as such, these testimonies fail to move, cause annoyance or mock-
 33 ery instead of compassion. The affective regime of disbelief is structured
 34 by technological possibilities as well as by digital realities of endless
 35 copies and circulation of texts, images and videos, and the extensive
 36 use of image and video modifications in propaganda wars. But it is also
 37 part of what Judith Butler describes as 'regimes of grievability' (Butler,
 38 2004, 2009), where only some lives emerge as valuable and mourned if
 39 lost, while others are seen as insignificant and already socially dead, so
 40 when killed, their loss does not really matter. Such differential distribu-
 41 tion of grievability also structures Internet users' perceptions of digital

4 Introduction

1 testimonies, often depending on who presents the testimony, and who
 2 appears to be suffering. The same digitalized account of events, the
 3 same image can become an object of shifting feelings: it appears once
 4 as truthful and heartbreaking evidence, and once as a skilful and evil
 5 deception; once as an outcry, and once as entertainment.³ It is this
 6 kind of theoretical encounter – between political and affective regimes;
 7 between technological transformations and shifts in structures of feel-
 8 ing and politics of perception – that inspired this collection. Bringing
 9 together contributions from the fields of sociology, media and cultural
 10 studies, arts, politics and science and technology studies, this book
 11 engages with the following questions: How does affect work in online
 12 networks and digital assemblages? What are the affective regimes of
 13 online sociality and of digital media use? What kind of objects and
 14 subjects circulate in and shape contemporary digital cultures? What
 15 are the structures of feeling that operate in our everyday digital life,
 16 and what kind of virtual public spheres do they create? How do digital
 17 media shape our everyday experiences and political horizons of love,
 18 boredom, fear, anxiety, compassion, hate, hope?

20 Disjunctions, intersections, inspirations

21
 22 In the last decade and a half, Euro-American cultural studies and cultural
 23 sociology have created a rich vocabulary for thinking about emotions,
 24 feelings and affect – whether it is the role of feelings and emotion in
 25 social struggle (Cvetkovich, 2003; Gould 2009) or identity politics and
 26 feminist and queer pedagogy (Sedgwick Kosofsky, 2003); *the cultural*
 27 *politics* of emotion (Ahmed 2004); the political life of *ugly feelings* (Ngai,
 28 2005); the public and political sphere as intimate (Berlant, 1997); the
 29 ordinary as affective (Stewart, 2007), affect as non-conscious intensity
 30 (Massumi, 2002; see also Clough in this volume); or the ‘affective turn’
 31 in theorizing war, terror and biopolitics (Clough, 2007; Puar, 2007), to
 32 mention the most notable ones. This vocabulary was picked up, applied
 33 empirically and enriched theoretically by many other scholars. In the
 34 same period, we have witnessed a spike in the growth of digital media
 35 and information and communication technologies and their social and
 36 political impact in – and well beyond – the ‘Western’ world. But while
 37 the theoretical language of emotions, feelings and affect is now broadly
 38 used in the field of social and cultural studies,⁴ the understanding of
 39 emotions and feelings as always social and political and the understand-
 40 ing of the social and the political as *passionate and affective* are still
 41 largely absent from the field of Internet studies and digital cultures.

One exception perhaps is the use of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and in particular the notion of affect and related ideas of rhizomes, networks, assemblages and the virtual (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; see also Massumi, 1987, 2002) – concepts that became widely popular in some areas of digital media and science and technology studies. Interestingly, however, the large body of feminist and queer scholarship on politics of emotions, feelings and affect, and their role in gendered, sexualized, racialized and classed political structures – such as the works by Sara Ahmed (2004), Lauren Berlant (1997), Ann Cvetkovich (2003), Eve Sedgwick Kosofsky (2003), Sianne Ngai (2005) and others – are yet to make their way into the mainstream field of digital media. And the work on emotions and feelings, in turn, has yet to address the challenges posed by digital cultures to affective politics.

It is precisely these absences and conceptual and political disjunctures which inspired this collection. The book brings into creative tension, and aims to create a dialogue, between the two fields which seem to develop simultaneously, but largely live parallel lives: cultural studies of affect, public feelings and the politics of emotion, on the one hand, and scholarship on digital culture, new media and information-communication technologies, on the other. Both fields are of course in themselves complex, diverse and multidisciplinary, and it would be naive to attempt to grasp them both in all their complexity in the scope of just one collection. What the book aims to do instead is to think creatively *through their possible intersections*. Some of these intersections are about bringing distinct bodies of theory into a conversation or even creating a new language; others are about finding conceptual tools to grasp the emerging empirical realities; yet others are about pushing the boundaries of one's discipline or thematic field. In what follows, I outline some of the concepts and theoretical insights from the field of emotions, feelings and affect, showing the inspiration they could bring to the field of the digital and pointing to the ways such conceptual encounters occur in the book's chapters.

Sites and anchors of emotions

Combining psychoanalysis with social and textual reading, Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) insightfully points out that texts have emotionality. Exploring emotions as the site of contact between the individual and the social, Ahmed suggests that affectively charged figures of speech (such as metaphors or metonymies) are what make texts 'moving' – generating affect. But emotionality of texts, according to Ahmed, also lies in their capacity to name and perform different

6 Introduction

emotions, such as disgust, fear, hate or shame. These capacities of texts to be moving and performative can be particularly useful in analysis of new media texts and online interactions: on webpages, in blogs, forums and 'talkbacks', in email exchanges and in comments and postings on social networking sites. Online performative acts of naming an emotion can create *communities* of feelings (Ferreday, 2003, 2009; Kuntsman, 2009), as well as *objects and subjects* of feeling: love, hate, mourning or nostalgia. As many of the contributors to this volume demonstrate, online texts are often affectively charged: see, for example, Athina Karatzogianni's description of the WikiLeaks affair or Julia Rone's analysis of the Bulgarian Internet. Internet sites can also be both objects and anchors of feelings, such as mourning or nostalgia, as Karenza Moore demonstrates in her discussion of British clubbing culture on social networking sites. What is more, 'digital culture' in itself can be a site of investment of feelings such as anxiety or hope, as suggested by Debra Ferreday in her discussion of fantasy and the digital.

Archives of feelings

Thinking about Internet sites as objects of feeling sheds light not just on the emotional intensity of online interactions, but also on digital media technologies more broadly, showing how they can be objects, mediators and repositories of affect. Mihirini Sirisena, for example, in her analysis of mobile phones among young lovers in Sri Lanka demonstrates how the phone itself becomes an object that is used to navigate intimacy, mediate relations and even stand for the beloved in their physical absence. Leder Mackley and Angelina Karpovich show how digital tagging and recording and sharing videos mediate people's intimate relations with objects. The final outcome of Leder Mackley and Karpovich's project is a 'digital archive of object stories' – a *digital archive of feelings*, as I would suggest, following Ann Cvetkovich's (2003, 2008) poignant formulation. Cvetkovich describes archives of feelings as 'repositories of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception' (Cvetkovich, 2003: 7). These archives do not simply contain information about particular events, but are 'memorial talismans that carry the affective weight of the past' (Cvetkovich, 2008: 120). The notion of archives of feelings resonates strongly with the ways emotional intensities operate in today's digital cultures, obsessed with preservation, saving, recording and storing (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009a). *Digital* archives of feelings are about recordings – such as personal narratives collected by Leder Mackley and Karpovich, or those of young

transgenders who record and post videos of themselves on YouTube, as discussed by Tobias Raun. But they are also about the capacity of digital sites to *become* archives (Einchorn, 2008; Kuntsman, 2011), where the emotionality of the everyday starts living its own life in cyberspace.

Movement and circulation

Thinking about feelings and emotions as they become digital archives, once vibrant but now 'saved as' (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009b), seemingly still but always open to (re)emergence, brings us to the question of circulation of affect in digital domains. Digital sites are never still: emails going viral, 'sharing', postings and re-postings on social networks, and many other examples of circulation all call our attention to the work of emotions *as they move*. Ahmed in her discussion of the cultural politics of emotion introduces the notion of affective economy. Combining insights from psychoanalysis and Marxism, she notes that 'emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation'. Emotions accumulate strength as they move between subjects and texts, and are 'not contained within the contours of a subject' (Ahmed, 2004: 45–46). Ahmed's notion of affective economies takes us away from the sole focus on the emotions of users in digital cultures. Instead, it invites us to think of the ways in which structures of feeling (Williams, 1977) and affective genres (Berlant, 2008; Staiger et al., 2010) are shaped and reshaped in digital environments. Attention to movement and circulation allows us to think about change or persistence of affective regimes such as paranoia, compassion or indifference, as Patricia Ticineto Clough demonstrates in her discussion of the exhibit *I Live Here*, and as Laura-Zoë Humphreys shows in her analysis of Cuban intellectuals' 'email war'.

Public feelings and ordinary affects

One of the debates in the field of the relations between the political and the affective is the location of 'politics'. Can politics be found in grand events, moments of crisis, and scenes of conflicts? Or should we (also) look in the banal, the ordinary, the fleeting, the almost-invisible? Against the traditional understanding of emotions as located in the private and in opposition to the 'rational' public sphere where 'real politics' take place, Berlant has argued that the American public sphere is intimate, rhetorical and sentimental (Berlant, 1997; Steiger et al., 2010). Ahmed (2004) has similarly shown how racial, gendered and sexual politics rest on mobilizing and performing emotions. Janet Staiger,

8 Introduction

1 Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds have further conceptualized these
2 questions in their *Political Emotions*:

3
4 How do we 'find' capitalism and neo-liberalism, or progressive and
5 queer collectivity? Is it 'in' media, art, landscapes, cityscapes and
6 bodies? Or is it better to consider it as beneath, between, beyond, or
7 for only a moment, such as the lowering of the head or the vacant
8 stare [...] or the momentary recognition of possibility? Perhaps we
9 truly encounter the political only when we *feel*.

10 (Staiger et al., 2010: 4, emphasis in the original)

11
12 This attention to the 'beneath, between, beyond' can also be found in
13 Kathleen Stewart's description of 'ordinary affects', which are 'public
14 feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff
15 that seemingly intimate lives are made of. [...] They can be experienced
16 as a pleasure and a shock, as an empty pause or a dragging undertow, as
17 a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation' (Stewart,
18 2007: 2). So can public feelings and ordinary affects be found in digital
19 cultures? Several contributors in this collection demonstrate precisely
20 this shift in thought, by turning the attention to fleeting moments of
21 online intimacy; to sensibilities or disorientations, and to the seductive
22 or the boring that structures the engagement with digital media. Melissa
23 Gregg, for example, explores the politics of labour and exploitation by
24 looking at the everyday routines of white collar office workers, noting
25 intimacy and loneliness in repetitive moments of (dis)engagement with
26 digital technologies.

27
28 **Flows, assemblages, biopolitics**

29 Looking for digital politics in the affective ordinary is an epistemologi-
30 cal and conceptual shift that leads to the focus on the non-discursive,
31 the sensual, the fleeting and that which cannot be always put into
32 words. In a somewhat similar way, the 'affective turn' in theorizing
33 the social, described by Clough (2007, 2010), is about the attention to
34 affectivity – bodily responses often in excess of consciousness. In her
35 introduction to *The Affective Turn*, Clough points to 'new configurations
36 of bodies, technology and matter'; and to 'chaotic processes' where
37 the social is constituted through information/communication systems,
38 including both media and human memory; flows of labour and tech-
39 nology and 'biopolitical networks of disciplining, surveillance, and
40 control' (Clough, 2007: 2–3). Unlike some of the work on political feel-
41 ings and on feeling the political, however, Clough's reading of politics

and affect is specifically about the move away from the 'subjectively felt states of emotion – a return to subject as the subject of emotion', and turns instead to what she describes as 'the biomediated body' (Clough, 2010: 207). Drawing on the Deleuzian notion of assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987), as well as on Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova's (2000) analysis of 'organism' as not solely and not necessarily 'human', Clough locates the political and the digital in the relations between material and immaterial technologies, or rather, in the reconfiguration of the body-as-data-body and of the political as bio-political.⁵ In her chapter in the current volume, Clough mobilizes affect to further think through the meaning of the 'digital' and its relation to the body and politics, a topic also addressed by Luciana Parisi in her discussion of nanotechnologies and the 'synthetic building of new bodies and minds' and by Michaela Quadraro in her analysis of the affective politics of postcolonial art.

In this book

Each of the chapters in the book addresses some of the theoretical insights outlined above through their own conceptual and methodological prisms. Each of the chapters opens up and complicates theoretical and empirical understanding of affect, feelings or emotions *and* that of digital cultures. The book is organized around four themes: 'Affect in the Age of the Digital'; 'Subjects and Objects of Digital Cultures'; 'Virtual Intimacies' and 'Feelings, Technologies, Politics'. Although not united by a single theory or analytical framework, each part has its own agenda: the first part, for example, focuses on affect that is not limited to human bodies or subjectivities, and often transcends relations between bodies and machines; the second part explores the relations between various subjects and objects that come together in digital cultures; the third part looks at various formations of intimacy in computer-mediated environments; the last part addresses the role of feelings in politics, on- and offline. By doing so, each part makes its own empirical and theoretical contribution to the overall mission of the book.

Three contributors to the first part, 'Affect in the Age of the Digital', all open up theoretical understanding of 'affect' in conjunction with the 'digital' and/or the 'virtual'. Patricia Ticineto Clough's chapter, 'War By Other Means: What Difference Do(es) the Graphic(s) Make?' begins with *I Live Here*, a collection of books and a website, containing a collage of stories, graphics and images about war, death and genocide in four corners of the world: Chechnya, Burma, Mexico and Malawi.

10 Introduction

1 Reading the collection against the grain of its own expectations – to
 2 evoke emotional response of compassion, sympathy, shame, disgust or
 3 horror – Clough asks, what is – and what might be? – a humanitarian
 4 response to war. She further asks, what is the role of the visual in the
 5 affective regimes that shape such a response. Taking the reader through
 6 her own affective responses to *I Live Here*, as well as through concepts
 7 such as ‘branding of war’ and ‘affective branding’, Clough calls to shift
 8 the attention from the subject, body or language – concepts often used
 9 in analysing representations of war and suffering – to body parts and
 10 affective intensities, in order to understand the racialized sex appeal of
 11 the graphic images of violence, and the ways these images reproduce,
 12 rather than challenge, aesthetic capitalism and the logic of war.

13 In her ‘Nanoarchitectures: The Synthetic Design of Extensions and
 14 Thoughts’, Luciana Parisi similarly claims that the analysis of affect
 15 should not be limited to human bodies and subjects. Her chapter
 16 explores affect and feelings as the relations between nanotechnologies
 17 and synthetic biology, and the ways they shift human bodies and sensa-
 18 tions away from the organic and the biological towards the mechanical
 19 and the digital. Parisi argues that nanotechnologies are ‘weapons of
 20 affect’: they can add ‘another measure to the quality of feeling since they
 21 intervene in matter to tease out unexploited potentialities’, but they also
 22 reveal that affect is not bound to organic bodies but instead ‘defines an
 23 architecture of feeling, a machinic registering of change that occurs at
 24 all levels of matter’. Tracing examples as rich and diverse as the atom-by-
 25 atom structuring of matter of nanoprogramming, to smart clothing and
 26 houses, Parisi theorizes synthetic extensions and thoughts as a form of
 27 affective futurity – a potentiality, where bodies and machines, sensations
 28 and programming merge in unpredictable ways.

29 The third and final chapter in this part, ‘WikiLeaks Affects: Ideology,
 30 Conflict and the Revolutionary Virtual’ by Athina Karatzogianni,
 31 addresses the relations between affect, social media and the Deleuzian
 32 virtual – virtual as potentiality – by looking at the recent WikiLeaks
 33 controversy and its political effects. The chapter follows public feelings
 34 and affective energies that came to the fore during the 2010 media and
 35 political scandal around WikiLeaks – an online resource that exposes
 36 and publishes classified materials created by governments, corporations
 37 and other organizations. In her discussion, Karatzogianni focuses on
 38 what she describes as ‘the global public sphere’ where emotions and
 39 affect, in conjunction with digital cultures and the social media, enable
 40 shifts in the political. Engaging with Brian Massumi’s (2002) notion
 41 of affect as the relations between the virtual – the potential – and the

1 actual, Karatzogianni argues that affective structures of social media and
2 digital cultures more broadly allow the transformation of the 'digital
3 virtual' into the 'revolutionary virtual' and then, in turn, to achieve,
4 what is yet an unqualified materialization of revolution, in the offline
5 world.

6 The links between emotions and affective intensities, forms of inter-
7 action, and the social and psychic structures engaged through digital
8 media are further explored in the second part, 'Subjects and Objects
9 of Digital Cultures'. In this part, the contributors address the ways in
10 which digital technologies such as virtual reality, videogames, social
11 networking sites and tagging technologies shape subjects and objects of
12 feelings and how these feelings, in turn, shape various domains of dig-
13 ital media. Debra Ferreday's 'Affect, Fantasy and Digital Cultures' begins
14 with a description of *The Endless Forest* – a virtual reality of a magical
15 forest where all players are deer, and where interactions between par-
16 ticipants are based on body language rather than on words. Looking
17 at the game's fantasy of becoming a (digital) non-human subject, this
18 chapter raises conceptual questions regarding the relations between
19 fantasy, affect and the digital. Ferreday shows that the digital is not
20 merely a place where non-humanness can be performed and where the
21 relations between human and non-human subjects can be rearticulated.
22 It is, moreover a site of struggle over what gets to be seen as reality or
23 'only' a fantasy. Engaging with feminist and psychoanalytic theories of
24 fantasy, Ferreday demonstrates how the digital becomes a site of fears,
25 anxieties and affective investments – in particular notions of 'reality', or
26 in particular forms of subjecthood – and as such, can eventually become
27 a site of hope.

28 Eugénie Shinkle in her 'Videogames and the Digital Sublime' contin-
29 ues the theme of the non-human; or rather, the posthuman – a 'subject
30 that is seamlessly articulated with an intelligent machine' – that is at
31 the centre of her discussion of videogames and the digital sublime.
32 Approaching the videogame as an aesthetic form, Shinkle shows how
33 it can challenge or, at least, unsettle, the distinction between body
34 and machine, hardware and software, visual material and conceptual
35 artifacts. Shinkle is particularly interested in the ways these distinc-
36 tions emerge from what she coins the digital sublime – a formation
37 that incorporates different forms of sublime affect: the Kantian (1987)
38 notion of an overwhelming sensation of awe which is about the rela-
39 tions between a human subject and nature; or David Nye's (1996) tech-
40 nological sublime which is about technology and civilization, rather
41 than nature. The digital sublime, argues Shinkle, incorporates these two

12 Introduction

1 forms of affect, but is also shaped through its proximity to the banal, or
2 to what Ngai (2005) describes as stuplimity: aesthetic awe intertwined
3 with boredom. It is this form of digitalized affect and the subjects that
4 it constitutes, which turns videogames into a characteristic postmodern
5 experience.

6 Karenza Moore in 'Digital Affect, Clubbing and Club Drug Cultures:
7 Reflection, Anticipation, Counter-Reaction' addresses another way in
8 which both subjects and objects of digital cultures can be affectively re/
9 configured. Moore analyses the role of digital media in UK clubbing cul-
10 ture, looking at memorial websites of no longer existing clubs as sites of
11 mourning and nostalgia; and at Facebook sites dedicated to clubbing as
12 sites of connectivity and anticipation as well as sites of reaction to (anti)
13 drug discourses – in particular, to moral panic about and hatred towards
14 drug users. Moore's reading of digital affect maps the variety of emo-
15 tional responses to clubbing and drug use and the ways these constitute
16 particular subjects at any given time; but her reading also opens up the
17 understanding of interactions between emotions, human embodiment,
18 and *technologies* – be that 'drugs', computers or 'the Internet' – thus
19 pointing to affective relations between 'human *and* non-human agents,
20 the organic and inorganic'.

21 The final chapter in this part, 'Touching Tales: Emotion in Digital
22 Object Memories' by Leder Mackley and Angelina Karpovich, takes the
23 most direct approach to objects *of* and *in* digital cultures, when they fol-
24 low material objects through electronic tagging and recorded narratives.
25 Leder Mackley and Karpovich's discussion is based on their ongoing
26 research project, 'TOTeM: Tales of Things and Electronic Memory', which
27 documents ordinary people's stories of personally 'meaningful' objects by
28 using various technologies of tagging objects and archiving and sharing
29 stories about them. One particularly interesting aspect of their study is
30 the engagement with groups or individuals who may not have easy access
31 to digital technologies or the Internet – such as older or disabled people
32 or those from very low-income households. In their discussion, Leder
33 Mackley and Karpovich take the reader through the intense emotionality
34 of narrating meaningful objects, showing how this emotionality exists
35 side by side with, or is intensified by the presence of digital recording.

36 The topic of the emotionality of the *digitalized* everyday is the main
37 focus of the next part. Authors in the third part, 'Virtual Intimacies',
38 explore the ways in which today's technologies of communication –
39 social networking sites, self-publishing video blogs and mobile phones –
40 shape and transform intimate relations and offer sites for exploitation,
41 connection, confession or intervention. Melissa Gregg in her 'White

Collar Intimacy' looks at the relations between white collar work, workplace-based online cultures, and reconfigurations of intimacy. Taking the reader through sites as diverse as advertisement, film, Facebook interactions, design of office spaces, practices of compulsive emailing and the blurring boundaries between 'work' and 'home', Gregg offers a complex reading of the everyday fabric of white collar work, labour politics and its relations to online technologies. 'Online technologies', Gregg mentions poignantly, 'are a factor in making their jobs [white collar workers] feel at times invasive, compelling, consuming, readily available, a solace, anxiety provoking and addictive. Many of these qualities can also be taken as the terrain of passion, love and intimacy'. Her reading of intimacy, however, is far from idealizing – on the contrary, it is used as a theoretical prism to 'explain how workplaces exploit the pact between emotional and temporal investment in labour in the interests of capital'.

Tobias Raun in his 'DIY Therapy: Exploring Affective Self-Representations in Trans Video Blogs on YouTube' explores another form of online technology and its relation to intimacy. His discussion follows virtual narratives of intimate matters – such as transitioning or coming out – in trans (transgender) video blogs (vlogs), posted and circulated on YouTube. Raun reads the vlogs of young white American transgenders against the mainstream Western culture, 'obsessed with affective personal stories'. Trans vlogs, he suggests, both echo and challenge this culture by bringing to the fore the personal that is political, and by doing so, they are transforming the very practice of confession. Examining the vlogs and their virtual audiences, Raun argues that the technology of recording, uploading and sharing YouTube vlogs creates a public of *intimate strangers*, as well as a form of intimate public sphere (Berlant, 1997) in cyberspace.

In the last chapter in this part, 'Virtually Yours: Reflecting on the Place of Mobile Phones in Romantic Relationships', Mihirini Sirisena looks at the role of mobile phones in intimate relations among young people in Sri Lanka. In her ethnographic exploration of everyday use of mobile phones among young university students, Sirisena traces the ways that mobile phones open up new spaces for young lovers to be virtually together, while physically apart. The mobile phones are not exclusively about talking or texting. Rather, Sirisena's ethnography reveals a myriad of everyday practices of being virtually together: from subscribing to 'couples' packages' of mobile service to ringing someone without actually talking, in order to signal that lovers think about each other as they go about their daily routines. Mobile technologies, therefore, figure here as both objects and mediators of feelings: they create expectation and

14 *Introduction*

1 shape practices of reciprocity; function as substitute for one's affective
2 presence and transform public space into zones of virtual intimacy.

3 The relations between the intimate and the political, and between
4 social structures and mediated feelings, discussed in the third part,
5 are also at the centre of the final part of the book. The part, 'Feelings,
6 Technologies, Politics', maps the relation between political formations
7 (those of protest, dissidence and artistic interventions), the use of vari-
8 ous digital technologies (email communication, social networking and
9 digital installations), and the feelings and sensations that shape them.
10 In 'Symptomologies of the State: Cuba's "Email War" and the Paranoid
11 Public Sphere', Laura-Zoë Humphreys discusses the history and con-
12 temporary formations of what she describes as the 'paranoid public
13 sphere' in Cuba. Taking paranoid politics as her main frame of analysis,
14 Humphreys zooms in on the case of 'the email war': a digital exchange
15 between a group of Cuban intellectuals which grew into a counterpub-
16 lic, promising a dialogue between Cubans of different political opinions
17 on the island and in the diaspora. Yet, contrary to the democratising
18 promise of digital technologies in opposition to oppressive regimes,
19 Humphreys demonstrates how email exchanges – and the Internet more
20 broadly – 'feed into and even exacerbate the political paranoia that has
21 long governed the Cuban public sphere'.

22 A similar scepticism towards the political potential of new communi-
23 cating technologies, and social media in particular, is expressed in Julia
24 Rone's 'The Seducer's Net: Internet, Politics and Seduction'. Centring her
25 discussion around Bulgarians' use of YouTube and Vbox7 – a Bulgarian
26 equivalent of YouTube – for topics concerning the country's politics
27 and politicians, Rone describes Bulgarian Internet politics as seductive.
28 It is perhaps not surprising that the two chapters describe affect in
29 (intimate) public spheres of a communist and a post-communist coun-
30 try. Humphreys and Rone are united in their deep suspicion towards
31 the unproblematically hopeful view of digital media as liberating and
32 mobilizing. Focusing on the political powers of paranoia or seduction,
33 both authors remind us about the importance of reading digital politics
34 through the lens of feelings and emotions, whether these are located
35 in the medium itself (as Rone shows when she analyses the seductive
36 aesthetics of the Bulgarian Internet), or in the 'offline' political culture
37 that reverberates in digital technologies.

38 The final chapter, 'Digital Aesthetics and Affective Politics: Isaac
39 Julien's Audio-Visual Installations' by Michaela Quadraro, takes a dif-
40 ferent approach to the political power of the digital. In her analysis of
41 Isaac Julien's digital installations, Quadraro brings together postcolonial

theory and digital art in order to address the potentials that digital technologies offer to postcolonial politics. Inspired by Trinh T. Minh-ha's theorizing of the digital format as destabilizing subjectivity and allowing working at the limits of genres, Quadraro's analysis takes the reader through affective sensations produced by the aesthetics of the digital installations. Reading affect's potential to change forms of visibility and perceptive habits, in particular in relation to race and alterity, Quadraro demonstrates the political work of Julien's installations through what Parisi calls the micropolitical tactic of digital aesthetics.

The authors in this book take us on a journey through contested aesthetics of war, race and computer gaming; individual routines of labour, love and boredom and large-scale social events such as wars and revolutions; affective intensities and moments of disaffection and numbness; synthetic thoughts and virtual non-human subjects; digital mobilization and intimate public spheres. Taken together, the four parts of the book explore affective fabrics of digital cultures as a multifaceted, complex and politically loaded social field, opening new horizons of thinking about the intersections between the political, the affective and the digital.

Notes

1. For one reading of Middle Eastern revolutions and the digital virtual see Karatzogianni, in this volume.
2. The idea of the cyber *touch* of war was initially inspired by a series of research events, organized at Lancaster University in 2008 and entitled *Touching War*, to which I was invited to present my work on digital media and warfare in Israel-Palestine.
3. For an excellent example of such multiple readings, see Theresa Senft's analysis of the 'Neda video' – a video of a young Iranian woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, killed in Iran in 2009 during the election protests. The video was captured on a mobile phone by one of the bystanders and circulated widely on the Internet, causing waves of responses (Senft, 2011). On the regime of suspicion that shaped responses to photographs of Israel's warfare in Gaza, see Kuntsman (2011). See also Clough (in this volume) on whether, how and when images of suffering can counteract war.
4. As opposed to the field of psychology where emotions are analysed from a very different perspective. This is not to say that cultural studies of emotion focus exclusively on the social – as Sara Ahmed argues in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, emotions are simultaneously psychic and social, individual and collective: 'the emotions are not "in" either individual or social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects' (Ahmed, 2004:10).
5. The latter also means a shift from the Foucauldian (2007) notion of 'discipline' to the idea of bio-political control.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2004) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Berlant, L. (1997) *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L. (2008) *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Butler, J. (2004) *Precarious Life: Essays on Mourning and Violence*, London and New York: Verso.
- Butler, J. (2009) *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable*, London and New York: Verso.
- Clough, P. T. (2007) 'Introduction', in P. T. Clough and J. Halley (eds), *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Clough, P. (2010) 'The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine and Bodies', in M. Gregg and G. J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003) *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Duke University Press.
- Cvetkovich, A. (2008) 'Drawing the Archives in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36 (1 & 2), pp. 111–28.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Einhorn, K. (2008) 'Archival Genres: Gathering Texts and Reading Spaces', *Invisible Culture: An Electronic Journal of Visual Culture*, 12, available at http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_12/eichhorn/index.htm#_edn2 (accessed 1 October 2010).
- Ferreday, D. (2003) 'Unspeakable Bodies: Erasure, Embodiment and the Pro-Ana Community', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6 (3), 277–95.
- Ferreday, D. (2009) *Online Belongings: Fantasy, Virtuality, Community*, Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Foucault, M. (2007) *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, New York: Picador.
- Garde-Hansen, J., Hoskins, A. and Reading, A. (2009a) 'Introduction', in J. Garde-Hansen, A. Hoskins and A. Reading (eds) *Save As ... Digital Memories*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Garde-Hansen, J., Hoskins, A. and Reading, A. (eds) (2009b) *Save As ... Digital Memories*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gould, D. B. (2009) *Moving Politics: Emotion and Act up's Fight against AIDS*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Haraway, D. (1997) *Modest _Witness@Second_Millennium: FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*, New York: Routledge.
- Kant, I. (1987) *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Kaplan, C. (2009) 'Twitter Terrorists, Cell Phone Jihadists and Citizen Bloggers: The "Global Matrix of War" and the Biopolitics of Technoculture in Mumbai', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26 (7–8), pp. 1–14.
- Kuntsman, A. (2009) *Figurations of Violence and Belonging: Queerness, Migrant hood and Nationalism in Cyberspace and Beyond*, Oxford: Peter Lang.

- 1 Kuntsman, A. (2010a) 'Online Memories, Digital Conflicts and the Cybertouch of
2 War', *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*,
3 4, pp. 1–12, available at <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue04/adi-kuntsman/>
4 (accessed 1 November 2010).
- 5 Kuntsman, A. (ed.) (2010b) War, Conflict and Commemoration in the Age of
6 Digital Reproduction, special issue of *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian*
7 *and Central European New Media*, 4, available at <http://www.digitalicons.org/>
8 (accessed 1 November 2010).
- 9 Kuntsman, A. (2011) 'Digital Archives of Feelings and their Haunted Futures',
10 *Borderlands*, 10 (2), available at [http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol10no2_](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol10no2_2011/kuntsman_archives.htm)
11 [2011/kuntsman_archives.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol10no2_2011/kuntsman_archives.htm) (accessed December 2011).
- 12 Manalansan, M. F. IV. (2010) 'Servicing the World: Flexible Filipinos and
13 Unsecured Life', in Janet Staiger, Anne Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds (eds)
14 *Political Emotions*. New York and London: Routledge.
- 15 Massumi, B. (1987) 'Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements', in Gilles
16 Deleuze and Felix Guattari (eds), *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University
17 of Minnesota Press.
- 18 Massumi, B. (2002) *Pables for the Virtual*. Durham and London: Duke University
19 Press.
- 20 Mbembe, A. (2003) 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, 15 (1), 11–40.
- 21 Ngai, S. (2005) *Ugly Feelings*, Cambridge, MA, and London, England: Oxford
22 University Press.
- 23 Nye, D. (1996) *American Technological Sublime*, Boston: MIT Press.
- 24 Parisi, L. and Terranova, T. (2000) 'Heat-Death: Emergence And Control
25 In Genetic Engineering And Artificial Life', *CTheory*, 5, available at [ftp://](ftp://ftp2.at.proftpd.org/soc/ctheory/articles/Heat-Death_by_Luciana_Parisi_and_Tiziana_Terranova_.html)
26 [ftp2.at.proftpd.org/soc/ctheory/articles/Heat-Death_by_Luciana_Parisi_and_](ftp://ftp2.at.proftpd.org/soc/ctheory/articles/Heat-Death_by_Luciana_Parisi_and_Tiziana_Terranova_.html)
27 [Tiziana_Terranova_.html](ftp://ftp2.at.proftpd.org/soc/ctheory/articles/Heat-Death_by_Luciana_Parisi_and_Tiziana_Terranova_.html) (accessed 1 May 2011).
- 28 Puar, J. (2007) *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham
29 and London: Duke University Press.
- 30 Sedgwick Kosofsky E. (2003) *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*,
31 Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- 32 Senft, T. M. (2011) 'Sex, Spectatorship, and the "Neda" Video: A Biopsy',
33 *New Visualities, New Technologies: The New Ecstasy of Communication*, Ashgate
34 Farnham.
- 35 Staiger, J., Cvetkovich, A. and Reynolds, A. (2010), 'Introduction' in J. Staiger,
36 A. Cvetkovich and A. Reynolds (eds.) *Political Emotions*, London and New York:
37 Routledge.
- 38 Stewart, K. (2007) *Ordinary Affects*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- 39 Tagg, P. (2006) 'Subjectivity and Soundscape, Motorbikes and Music', in
40 A. Bennett, B. Shank and J. Toynbee (eds), *The Popular Music Studies Reader*,
41 London and New York: Routledge.
- Virilio, P. (1995) 'Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!', *CTheory*, 18,
no. 3, 1995, available at <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=72>, accessed
November 2010.
- Virillio, P. (1997) *Open Sky*, New York: Verso.
- Williams, R. (1997) *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

PROOF