Book Reviews

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Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics. Zizi Papacharissi. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 160 pp. $26.95 pbk. $14.55 ebk.

Reviewed by: Yiwei Wang, *The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas, USA*
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New media has become an integral part of civic life. We have witnessed its great and yet complex influence, whether good or bad, on both global events and everyday social activities. With technologies that enable people to fully immerse themselves in events by "feeling like those who directly experience them," new media energizes networked publics and affords the flows of affect that characterize digital political discourse and storytelling. In *Affective Publics: Sentiment, Technology, and Politics*, Zizi Papacharissi focuses on "public displays of affect as political statements" and on "what affective intensity does for digital politics and networked publics" by zooming in on how Twitter facilitates political formations of affect. For that purpose, she presents three case studies that examine digitally afforded affect in the Arab Spring movements, online iterations of the Occupy movement, and less purposive political expressions in daily life. Papacharissi is Professor of Communication at the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Papacharissi's conceptualization of affect successfully transforms the term from a psychological concept into a political discourse context. A significant contribution of her theoretical framework is that she challenges the conventional political thinking that emphasizes rationality in political mobilization and the dualism between emotion and reason. She argues that the groupings of affect and ideology, feeling and belief, and emotion and reason are not opposite ends of a continuum but tendencies that coexist. She also carefully distinguishes between affect and emotional reactions and discusses the connections among affect, experience, and action. Papacharissi acknowledges the difficulty of "empirically identifying, capturing, and connecting affect to related constructs via the conventional logic of causal empiricism," but argues that the concept provides a useful tool to understand nonlinear relationships between affect and its effects. Her position is clear: Affective processes are "enabled in the online environment" through the modality and texture of expression afforded by platforms, but the nature of affect is "non-rational and non-directional."

Papacharissi suggests that different media platforms have various impacts on discourses, depending on types of movements, and therefore cautions against

generalization. Furthermore, she argues that network platforms "serve as conduits that link together personalized interest" but do not necessarily force collective identity. This finding echoes Papacharissi's earlier argument that online activity "cannot be confused with impact." It also illustrates the term of "soft structures of feeling," borrowing the term Raymond Williams used to describe the patterned experiences generated by those living in the same generation, but arguing that the structures of feeling generated online are more spontaneous and fluid. Papacharissi suggests that although online expressions are interconnected, organized, and patterned, they are still fluid enough for people to generate their own interpretations and infuse these expressions with new meanings. Papacharissi also notes that as an event is unfolded offline, a parallel version of the story connects affective publics through collective news storytelling developing online. "The mediated texture of these events . . . provides listening publics with a different lens for relating to these events," she suggests. The affectively charged narratives further enhance prevalence of those underrepresented viewpoints to the extent that news report and conversation about the news are not separable. The impact of affective publics, as she explains, is substantial but symbolic, as it does not guarantee changes.

A few concerns are worth mentioning. First, as a reader, I occasionally found myself confused by a shifting conceptualization of affect. This does not mean that affect should be defined with one single sentence, or that the multiple concepts she employs are not important to establishing a more comprehensive understanding of affect. Papacharissi is very adept in capturing the nuance of affect by drawing literatures from different scholars and disciplines, but these concepts are somewhat tangled in the writing as she shuttles back and forth between them. Second, some key parts of this book are difficult to grasp without a knowledge background of network structure. To understand affective processes, it is essential to examine the architectures that support and visualize affect, which requires readers to be familiar with basic concepts of network analysis, such as transitivity, centrality, density, and ties. Last, the author refers to affect theory in the very beginning of the book, highlighting the theory as a theoretical source. Yet, it is not articulated with further explanations, and the theory is seldom referred to in the rest of the book. Although it does not affect the overall quality of her arguments, it does leave behind an untied end.

This book is very rich in its philosophical thinking, which readers interested in political mobilization, civic discourse, and networked publics may find inspiring. It also offers researchers and professionals a foundation for further research and practice via testing the propositions presented. For nonscholar readers, conceptualizations and methods utilized in the case studies are indeed intimidating. Nonetheless, they might appreciate the critical thinking about the relationship between social media and political movements in the book.