4th International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Emotional Geographies University of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands, July 1-3, 2013 Conference website: <u>www.rug.nl/frw/onderzoek/emospa/index</u>

Affective density: Interrogating the qualities produced by affective magnitude in networks

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Recent global events have demonstrated the exponential and dispersed power triggered by networked communication across distances, from the Occupy movements to recent riots over a Youtube video. These could be interpreted as new activations of imagined communities (Anderson 1991): not necessarily nationalist, nor linked to print journalism, but multifaceted networks interacting through multilayered and interlocking technologies of communication. Behavioral approaches from sociology, economics, political science and psychology frame these crowd formations through theories of network effects, critical mass, 'bandwagon' effects, or the cognitive implications 'herding' (eg. Markus 1987, Raafat et al. 2012), with an eye towards creating predictive geometries around the practices of populations. In this sense, dealing with complexity and the proliferation of alternatives has become the onus of several social sciences, including geography.

The upsurge of information and communication technologies foreground new and ingenious ways to create and exchange knowledge, fostering in the same time new affective realms as fertile grounds for 'increasingly nested levels of association and communication' (Fuchs 2001: 202). This stretches the spatiotemporal condition of encounter, by reflecting into what Callon and Law describe as '[p]laces that mobilise other places. Places that distribute themselves into other places. Relations that do not follow networks of fixed positions' (2004: 7). From e-learning practices (Maintz 2007) and flood risk management (Landström et al. 2011) to environmental activism (Hardt 2001) and massive social movements (Bauman 2011), technology has enhanced us with the capacity of immediate response and action. Yet, many effects of these technological interventions are engendered by affective potentials of human interactions, through which we can feel connected to the imagined community, both as an entity to succumb to and an entity to which we contribute, that becomes larger than the sum of its parts. For this session, we wonder about the affective qualities of these effects, in how they act as attractive forces pulling members in to the mass, and what role the densities of affect among many bodies (Saldanha 2008) and such proliferating spatialities may have as part of the predictive geometry pushing these imagined communities from stasis into action. Moreover, we wonder how we, as gualitative researchers, can approach the masses of data that can be aggregated with technology (see http://wefeelfine.org/ for one example) to explore the immeasurable value that affect injects into these networks.

For the Emotional Geographies conference, we seek empirically grounded papers addressing the affective qualities that come into play in the amassing of these networked communities,

looking towards how the sense of 'herding' plays a qualitatively substantive role in creating and maintaining these networks.

Some potential subjects or related concepts include, but are not limited to:

- science and technology studies
- innovation and the creative city
- cultures of solidarity and labor organization
- emotional labor and surplus value
- intersubjective leisure or ludic practices
- affective geographies of networks
- viscosity of many bodies
- normalization or individualization effects through increased network contact
- and potentially others

Please send abstracts to Lauren Wagner (<u>lauren.wagner@wur.nl</u>) by January 10, 2013.

Iulian, Michael and Lauren are members of the Cultural Geography Group at Wageningen University. Their individual research interests include, with some overlaps and some divergences: tourism economies, creative industries and innovation, interactional methods, labor geographies and social movements, diasporic aftereffects of migration, and material semiotics.

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