

Affective territories

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that 'affect' is not just incidental but central to understanding interior territories. The paper is set out in three principal parts. The first sets out the main approaches to understanding affect and territory. The second considers the ways in which affect has become central to understanding interiors. Explored in this section of the paper are two recent publications on interiors Thinking Inside the Box and Interior Atmosphere. The third section sets out a different kind of theorising that might be possible once affect is taken into account alongside the insights from post-structuralist theorisation.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade there has been an increasing interest in affect across the humanities, associated with a turn towards the material and the body. The focus on affect brings to the fore processes over substance and stability.¹ Many theorists have taken this turn due to dissatisfaction with post-structuralism and its focus on dis-embodied and primarily textual analyses and critique.² This paper investigates the emergence of affect as a critical tool for theorising interior territories. We begin by discussing territory and affect – teasing out their meanings, not to be definitive, but to look at edges that blur together offering opportunities for connections and associations between them. We then look at two recent publications that theorise interiors: *Thinking Inside the Box* and *Interior Atmosphere*, noting that while affect is not an explicit focus in them, it makes its mark on much of their discourse.³ Furthermore, territory is very much present in this shift towards affect, and is invoked as a symbol of containment and static ways of thinking, where affect is positioned to offer a new way of re-thinking space and time. Of particular interest is how affect emerges within this discourse about interiors at the expense of post-structuralist insights, in particular relating to embodied difference, such as gender in relation to interiors, but also race and ability. The contention in this paper is that affect has the potential to provide new ways of thinking about interiors, yet without a relationship to the social it remains an abstract and autonomous term.

INTRODUCTION OF TERMINOLOGY – TERRITORIES AND AFFECT

We will look first at territory before considering the multiple meanings of affect. Territory generally has a sense of consistency, because while territory has been explored through different disciplines and perspectives it continues to be framed as the ground for power, loyalty and the site of sovereignty and control in civil society.⁴ Not only is territory a spatial segmentation, it is accomplished in the very act of its enunciation.⁵ Before such performative speech acts, it is just space. Through the process of territorialisation, discursive power fixes territory '... demarcating its edges, orienting us into stabilised identities.'⁶ Territories thus are not composed from land but arise through despotic forms of sovereignty and theological forms of state that draw on and emerge out of assumptions of a material basis prior to textual inscription.⁷

Various theorists explore territory as space that is enacted and performed by unpacking how it operates as bounded and closed spaces of entrenched identity that are fought over and claimed. For Kathleen Kirby, it is fought over by those who can argue that it is for their own necessity.⁸ Heidi Nast and Audrey Kobayashi argue that territories are closed spaces of privilege such as corporate headquarters and private clubs that facilitate the management and distancing of less desirable and oppositional others.⁹ Thus, territorialisation is not just about defining space, it is also about defining bodies and performances appropriate to particular places.¹⁰ For Judith Butler, bodies named outside by this process are object bodies, territories are created for bodies/subjects who are 'intelligible and occupy liveable zones,' while 'unliveable' and 'uninhabitable' zones are made for un-intelligible body/subjects.¹¹ Thus for Butler, along with many others, territorialisation is an exclusionary process.¹²

Robert Sack argues that territory is a '...spatial strategy that is intimately linked to the ways in which people use the land, how they organize themselves in space, and how they give meaning to place...' ¹³ related directly to a desire to belong, to claim a home. However with essentialist forms of nationalism and other kinds of place-identification so entangled with the discourse of territory and home, it seems problematic to consider territory and belonging in a positive manner. Appadurai argues territorial tropes persist because of continuing – allegiances to essentialising understandings of territory manifest in '...the idea that cultures are coherent, bounded, contiguous, and persistent ... underwritten by a sense that human society is naturally localised and even locality-bounded.'¹⁴ On the other hand, antipathy to this view may undermine legitimate struggles for territory by those whose territory (as well as culture) has been appropriated or whose gender has historically seen them persistently de- or over-territorialised against their will.

The process of marking out territory is literally and rhetorically embedded in the building process. For Deleuze and Guattari architecture is the art of abode and territory.¹⁵ For Elizabeth Grosz the 'cutting of the space of the earth through the fabrication of the frame is the very gesture that

composes both the house and territory, inside and outside ... interior and landscape at once.¹⁶ For McCarthy this image of architecture elicits a particular understanding of interiors through a reinforced geometric between inside and outside.¹⁷ Thus, for many, such images of architecture/interiors as a figure of inside and outside is to be avoided and moved away from in order to conceive the new and open.

How then to think of territory in new ways to make it live and move beyond space that is immobile, closed and organised?¹⁸ One approach exemplified by a number of thinkers such as: Bernard Cache, Grosz, John Macgregor-Wise and Massumi, is the use of Deleuze to think of territory in new ways.¹⁹ Thus, for Grosz and Macgregor-Wise, while architecture organises space through a territory-house system, as a process, territory iteratively proceeds by a dynamic process of territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation.²⁰ While both Grosz and Macgregor-Wise take us to the wall, still defined as a territory, other possibilities are sought. Grosz considers how the fabrication of territory enables the emergence of sensory qualities, via active interaction with the wall²¹ and for MacGregor-Wise the wall evokes lived relationships of encounter and touch: it radiates a milieu, a field of force, a shape of space.²² Both authors push us to understand territory as something that, from the outset, is about pure relationality and movement towards the inarticulate, which may be nothing other than affect.

MacGregor-Wise does touch on the question of gender, and how gender is located within the home via territorialisation '...in terms of connotations of gender, passivity, leisure, both household and sexual labour.'²³ However, he distinguishes this process of thinking of territory and its relationship with gender from affect – reiterating a conceptual divide between nature and culture. At one level it is the deadening repetition of the same, although the author does struggle with this conundrum – which is explored further in the next section of the present paper.

Notably, there is a reluctance in Deleuze's writing from the outset to engage with the gender-home-territory system. As Nicole

Shukin points out, his writing '...continuously invokes phenomena that evade domestication: "nomad thought", "primitive societies", "the East", war machines, music.'²⁴ This desire to depart from the domesticated home within Deleuze and Guattari's writing raises a question similar to that raised by Wigley in his analysis of deconstruction: '...is the departure from the ground, from home, from the architectonic a departure from the domestic?'²⁵ The philosophical economy, according to Wigley, is always a domestic economy, '...the economy of the domestic, the family house, the familiar enclosure.'²⁶ In this framework, to place the home, the ground and the architectural outside of philosophy enacts the boundary of inside and outside, thus entailing processes of domestication. For Shukin, while Deleuze and Guattari's movement to run '...from the cave, the home, the domestic, the ground,' betrays a certain haste, 'at the same time they need to evoke these terms, to displace them, they also summon up the foreboding mythology that now underpins their own work.'²⁷ The terms they wish to depart from still act as a constitutive reference point. Their disavowal comes back: it rebounds and is re-avowed, as it becomes a referent for the re-signification of 'becoming woman.' However one could also ask, what of re-considering the stereotype of home and of territory, this settled form, this reductive caricature that is cemented, supported and reiterated? What is the threat of this stereotype, which Deleuze evades? What is concealed in a stereotypical repetition – a deadening repetition of the performance of a stereotype? For Jerry Fieger there is '...no attempt to complicate the stereotype of the feminine or the masculine collapsed into space, to drain all markers of signification...' in Deleuze's and Guattari's writing, nor its iteration through the notion of territory.²⁸ Thus, as we come to the end of this exploration of territory, there has been a blurring into affect, which is the focus of the next section.

AFFECT

The perceptual affective and kinaesthetic forces of the body have been theorised in the main by Benedict de Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey, Luce Irigaray, Gilles Deleuze and more recently Nigel Thrift, Brian Massumi and Mark Hansen.²⁹ Affect

has been defined in a number of different ways, ranging from being defined as pure sensation right through to framing affect as thinking that has no impact on our bodies. Thrift argues that there are four main approaches to affect.³⁰ The first conceives of affect as a set of embodied practices, such as blushing, laughing and crying. The second approach is associated with psychoanalytical framework, for example Tomkins for whom affect is a set of drives.³¹ The third focuses on affect as a product of evolution and draws on the extensive work of Darwin in this area. The fourth approach sees affect as adding capacities through interaction with the world. In this latter approach the work of Deleuze is a significant influence in the Humanities, especially those theorising spatiality, where his version of affect as a movement between states is frequently reiterated.³² Additionally, Deleuze understands affect as being about bodily meaning that is able to confound and exceed conscious thought. Maxine Sheet-Johnstone defines the shift towards affect as indicative of the corporeal turn across the humanities.³³ To think of bodies as mobile shifts us from fixing bodies to specific territories and to instead think of the relationship between bodies and interiors in terms of connections, dynamic points of intersection and relations.

Despite the difference in theoretical origins or disciplinary territories, the similarities that serve to 'bind' these approaches towards affect is the body.³⁴ Research on affect generally focuses on relatively mundane activities of everyday life, such as: dancing, gestures, gardening, walking and touching and despite the diversity of examples, consciousness and discourse are always exceeded by the material body.³⁵ However, a critical aspect of affective discourse is that our affective relations precede conscious thought. Ben Anderson suggests that the development of affect begins with '...the assertion that the more-than or less-than rational cannot be reduced to a range of discreet, internally coherent, emotions which are self-identical with the mind of an individual.'³⁶ This distinction of affect from emotion, as defined by Deleuze, is a generally agreeable point, where affect is theorised as that which '...pierces social interpretation, confounding its logic, and scrambling its expectations.'³⁷

For Ash Amin and Thrift affect is a narrative of excess, a body which is always '...in excess of itself...' through movement, circulation, flow, transmission, or contagion, without specific determination 'a trajectory or line in continual variation with itself.'³⁸ Affect is in excess of the body, being applicable to bodies as various collectivities, following a line of thinking of animated space-time that emphasises the indeterminacy and complexity of life.⁴⁰ This offers us a way of thinking about space and time that is stretched out and distributed⁴¹ or as a way to disrupt space-time experience.⁴²

Thus affect is not defined as being tied strictly to the body. For Deleuze and Guattari '...affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived.'⁴³ The body here is not a '... container, closed from the world. It is a body which is not of the natural biological kind.'⁴⁴ McCormack, for example, argues that the '...affective dimensions of life are more-than-human-or trans-human, or post-human in provenance and occurrence.'⁴⁵ The boundaries around the body's own territory are thus challenged through the capacity of the body '...to be affected, through an affection, and to affect, as the result of modifications.'⁴⁶ Furthermore for Gregory Seigworth, '...affect takes place before and after the distinctions of subject – world or inside – outside'⁴⁷ – affect occurs before the making of territory.

Writing on affect, while coming from different positions theoretically, is also bound by a questioning of the current impasse within post-structuralist thinking.⁴⁸ Massumi is critical of the constructivist over-emphasis on power in constructing the subject which does not allow for an understanding of the excesses of life,⁴⁹ arguing that '...affect precedes and exceeds the signifying regime of ideological systems...' ⁵⁰ rather than freeze-framing subject-positions.⁵¹ Notably, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick dismissed her long-held beliefs about post-structuralism and shifted to explorations of the excesses of the body and the capacity of the body to transform relations through affect rather than text.⁵²

The great promise of affect is that, in contrast to post-structuralism, it offers us a politicisation that is free of the production and

regulation of bodies. For Lorimer, this is a '...suppler form of politics, born of experimental connections in the constant proliferation of events.'⁵³ The body is the basis for this politics of transformation, rather than merely dead matter or as the housing of an abstract subject. It is the basis of a politics that questions spatial and temporal logic, the logic of territories, and the logic of a boundary between inside and outside.⁵⁴

There is of course some imbalance in the description between territory and affect in this paper so far. Affect seems to represent what is good and new, while territory seems to represent what is bad and old. However there is a line of questioning and discontent that runs alongside writing on the delight of affect. Tim Cresswell, for example insists that we need to understand '...bodily mobility within larger social, historical, cultural and geographical words that continue to ascribe meaning to mobility and to prosper practice in particular ways.'⁵⁵ Thrift, amongst others, has aired his reservations about the darker aspects of affective engineering for political purposes.⁵⁶ Clare Hemmings, for example, directs our attention away from the image of affect as '...dancing in the open streets' and forces us to consider that some affective responses are '...the delights of consumerism, feelings of belonging attending fundamentalism or fascism, to suggest just several contexts [and] are affective responses that strengthen rather than challenge a dominant order.'⁵⁷ Hemmings also is critical of work that only '...explores the "good" type of affect, the type of affect that undoes the bad, the bad way of thinking, a reader is hardly going to say no to freedom – are they.'⁵⁸ In the next section of the paper we explore ways that the affective circulates within contemporary theorisation of interior as exemplified by two recent publications: *Thinking inside the Box* and *Interior Atmosphere*.

INTERIOR

While there is a developing interest in establishing a ground for interiors, establishing a canon is no easy task. As Ed Hollis et al argue, the discipline is still an evolving and slippery project.⁵⁹ *Thinking inside the Box*, 2007 aims '...to find a role for interiors in the 21st century...' ⁶⁰ this anthology looks at a range of topics, in particular: interior design education, what is interior design, how we do interior design and the problematic of historicising interiors. Affect is not a specific focus of the book however its presence in much of the writing adds support to assertions that the affective turn in other disciplines is also inflecting interiors.

The second publication surveyed here is *Interior Atmosphere*, edited by Julieanna Preston for the Architectural Design Journal series. *Interior Atmosphere* defines atmosphere as a special kind of mist, evoking a more ephemeral territory, providing a conceptual vehicle to challenge interiors as a contained and bounded spatiality. Similar to *Thinking Inside the Box*, affect is not privileged but it does surface as a critical response, in particular, when exploring the body as a source of sense-making.

THE BODY

As already alluded to the body is central to discussions on affect, it is also critical for a number of authors in *Thinking Inside the Box*, from defining the discipline through to expanding practices of design. Teresa Hoskyns argues for the centrality of the body in interiors supporting her position through Mark Taylor and Julieanna Preston who define interior design as concerned with the '... specifics of inhabitation and bodily presence.'⁶¹ The bodily presence evoked iteratively through the publication of *Thinking Inside the Box* is a gendered body. Clearly evident is the desire to untangle the historical territorialisation of women onto the domestic and interior space, where recovered histories, gendered discourses of power and the symbolic unpacking of the containment of identity into particular territories forms a significant field of inquiry.⁶² Moreover, as Taylor and Preston argue the strong thematic that runs through interiors characterises '...the impossibility of ignoring the role feminism and feminist theory has in any discussion of the interior.'⁶³ Indeed a critical focus on the body that draws on a post-structuralist analysis is still evident in *Thinking inside the Box*, for example, in the writing of Hoskyns, Lois Weinthal, Charles Rice and Saltzuk Ösemir. Exemplified by Weinthal's 'Towards a new interior,' which looks to Robert McAnulty's 1996 article 'Body troubles,' – in particular the passages where he explores Diller and Scofidio's work as a way to explain contemporary relations of the body, and as of course, Weinthal's work also starts to resonate around questions of social norms. However, Diller and Scofidio's own thinking has been seen as moving away from '...questioning the social conventions of architecture that constrains the body' towards a body explained through affect.⁶⁴ However, what is critical to note here is that this desire to shed light on social norms relating to a gendered body (and its entombment within specific territories) is positioned outside considerations of affect.⁶⁵

The body comes to the forefront in a number of chapters that question the notion of interiors as a bounded and enclosed territory through practices of spatial negotiation, interaction and activation through occupation.⁶⁶ Suzie Attiwill argues that interiors are composed of relations, phenomenal and emotive.⁶⁷ She suggests that ways of viewing and circulating could capture a subject's interior experience. Hoskyns questions the boundary between body and interior through the figure of the textile, a space of interaction.⁶⁸ Tara Roscoe argues for a more dynamic framing of space, a hybrid space that is of an evolving composition of immaterial and material relations that the body actively engages with. Mark Taylor and Mark Burry question the extent and the scope of the body by arguing for the possibility of destabilising the tradition of interiors defined through discrete boundaries/territories by extending our understanding of architecture through the influences of bodily occupation and activity.⁶⁹ So while there is an argument to disrupt spatial and temporal boundaries, what stands out about these projects is that actions of the body within these texts are construed as *consciously* driven – which is the realm of emotions rather than of affect.⁷⁰ According to Massumi, the moment that we '...make sense' of a state of being, or more properly becoming, we freeze it, evacuating it of the very intensity that offered the capacity for change.'⁷¹

So while affective bodily relations are foregrounded here, they are still infused with language that denotes our capacity for reflection and meaning, along with the agency to negotiate relations. Here, the subject plays a decisive role in the projects' performance: '...mobilized in space, negotiating space, occupying multiple positions, this is a subject who has the ability to make meaning from his or her context.'⁷² Thus within interiors, through a negotiation of space and time, there is a chance to theorise subjectivity that is not an emplaced masterful humanist subject, nor defined through discursive relations, nor as a body that is driven by deep seated bodily reactions devoid of meaning.

Hélène Frichot in her article 'Olafur Eliasson and the Circulation of Affects and Percepts: In Conversation,' focuses directly on the notion of affect in *Interior Atmosphere*. Her definition of affect is text-book Deleuzian; a shift between states. Frichot argues that through the spectator's interaction and engagement with Eliasson's work the spectator sees themselves in a new light.⁷³ So the argument through the affective is for transformation, supporting the position that affect '...refers to our qualitative experience of the social world, to embodied experience that has the capacity to transform as well as exceed social subjection.'⁷⁴ Frichot writes that '...the atmospheric pressure of Eliasson's work is such that it demands the visitor's engagement beyond that of a mere onlooker; it is an interaction that encourages the mutual transformation of both the visitor and the artwork.'⁷⁵ In keeping with the affective turn, Frichot argues that Eliasson's work is a '...way to return to the realm of affect and percept.'⁷⁶ One can only assume this return is away from understanding space and interactions with space through a textual framework.

Frichot's eliciting of the affective and perceptive states from Olafur Eliasson's work (for example) to some extent actually points to the fact that instances of non-signification which would break the nexus of architecture and subjectivity are impossible. The description of the project is peppered with a language where the visitor makes meaning about the project and negotiates these relations through the body; it offers a model where knowledge and passion are intertwined. As both history and signification are necessary outcomes of any process. Furthermore, whilst this project does not consider the issue of how gender and social issues pre-configure our body in specific relations to architecture, evident here instead is a predominant trend within discourse of affect where the body is rendered '...gender-neutral and broadly applicable.'⁷⁷

Although affect is not just the realm of atmospheric thinking in *Thinking Inside the Box*, the area that is clearly imbued with a rhetoric of affect is the section that focuses on the teaching of interiors, with articles written by Ro Spankie, Josie Bernardi, Beth Harmon-Vaughan, Julia Dwyer and Lorraine Farrelly. Ro Spankie, in 'Thinking Through Drawing' looks to use, movement, effect and the occupant as a way to embed architecture with the potential of a reactive body.⁷⁸ Julia Dwyer asks what space might be if the temporal, contingent occupation of space is attended to in interiors, and proceeds to expand on practices to explore these relations. In these examples, through practice,

space becomes a medium of sensation, '...a trigger for an affective bodily experience.'⁷⁹ This demonstrates a definite shift towards affective thinking which provides the grounds to re-think a self-contained subject through spatio-temporal displacement, interaction and the very technicity of moving bodies.⁸⁰ This shift towards questioning a self-contained subject is also inherent within Julieanna Preston's article 'Affecting Data' which takes a critical view of digital fabrication technology. She asks the question, 'where is the performative affect of such technological effects?'⁸¹ In this article affect is used as a critical tool to measure digital work, whose focus on the technical and the visual omits an understanding of visceral possibilities.

So on the one hand these articles that focus on practice and Preston's more critical article force us to consider the body and its interactions over architecture produced to support its visually orientated economy. It is practice that has the potential to widen the potential for interactions of '...receiving new affectively charged disclosive spaces.'⁸² However, on the other hand, what is also equally evident is that the negative aspects of affect are not considered submitting to certain affective styles can render people deferential, obedient or humble – or independent, aggressive and arrogant.⁸³ For example, Frichot argues that affect is not about consumerism. However, what if the space that is created is used to marshal aggression to control people – as various forms of military training aims to do?⁸⁴ Is affect hived from judgement still desirable when seen in this context?

To conclude this section, there is clearly a desire to shift towards thinking through a body that is generative of space and time in interiors rather than one emplaced within space and hived from time. This is a body linked to affectively-rich environments; a productive rather than a policed body. In a similar manner to cultural theory, those papers dealing directly with it frame affect as the '...new cutting edge.'⁸⁵ Here, affect offers interiors a way to create '...new forms of sociability, community and interaction.' Affect is a way to '...transform fixed subjectivity, space, time and habitation...' ⁸⁶ to access another world or to reconnect with the world, with impermanence, a molecular world of becoming, without the spectacles of subjectivity.⁸⁷ This offers a theorisation of interiors, as well as a position from which to design, of becoming a pure relationality and movement, with the capacity of de-territorialisation into the realm of affect. However, in affective discourse, if one does not choose this form of affective freedom or transformation, one is left to choose social meaning and social determinism – at one's own peril.⁸⁸ However, this paper is critical of framing affect as being autonomous from the social, because as affect is made autonomous; questions of class, race and sexuality disappear. The question needs to be asked: what is lost in this detachment from the recent past where gender was a central issue in interiors?

For Brian Latour, the iteration of a boundary between affect and knowledge represents a modernist epistemology driven by a desperate attempt to dichotomise Nature and Society.⁸⁹ What is lost when meaning and myths that inflect our understanding of interiors are seen as distinct from

considering notions of affect? Affect is sheltered. Moreover what is occluded from the writing on affect is a '...sensitivity to "power geometries" and an acknowledgement that these are vital to any individuals' capacity to affect and be affective.'⁹⁰ Bodies bear and generate political meaning that have important consequences for environments where engagements with others occur.⁹¹ The position taken by the present authors then is quite simple; that affective registers need to be understood within the context of power geometries that shape our social world.

Where does this leave us in relation to affective territories? Firstly, evident in this survey of interiors writing is a mixing of knowledge and passion – affect is not something clean and autonomous. Thus we are critical of the divide between knowledge and passion in affective writing, which for Hemmings, is a misreading of Deleuze. Inherent within Deleuze's description of affect is the notion of an affective cycle, of movements from one affective cycle to the next. These cycles are subject to and reflective of political judgment. In this framework it is the reinvigoration of affective states and their effects, rather than affective freedom, which allows us to make our bodies mean something that we can value.⁹² Thus we do not reject the importance of affective thinking, but rather argue that affective territories provide a figure for thinking of affect as a term that is not outside of social meaning can be of greater value. From this we would argue, following Arun Saladana, that affective territories offer an image of relations in varying states of viscosity, '...where bodies gradually become sticky and cluster into aggregates.'⁹³ As the embodiment of gender-sex encompasses certain choices that we can make, '...it informs what one can do, what one should do in certain spaces and situations.'⁹⁴ It is necessarily a messy way of thinking. But through this way of thinking, interiors could be seen to multiply and differently as '...local and temporary thickenings of interacting bodies which then collectively become sticky, capable of capturing more bodies like them: an emergent slime mould. Under certain circumstances, the collectivity dissolves, the constituent bodes flowing freeing again.'⁹⁵ Affective territories are thus a way to theorise the complex materiality of social, textual, affective and spatial relations.

CONCLUSION

So to briefly conclude, we are avoiding setting knowledge and passions into neat categories for theorising interiors. Instead we have attempted to show connections and complications that exist between notions of knowledge and passion, affect and territory. The first part of this paper explored the varied ways that both terms are known but also how teasing out their meanings – not to be definitive but to look at edges that blur together – offers opportunities for connections and associations between them. As it can be noted that territory is inflected with the meaning of affect and vice versa, there are no clean-cut categories here. In the second part we looked at two recent publications *Thinking Inside the Box* and *Interior Atmosphere*. Both highlight the positive dimensions of affect for interiors but also reiterate questions of affect's autonomy from the social, textual and from knowledge. However within our survey, also evident is a blurring of edges with

complex connections that are made between knowledge and passion. This paper concludes that the notion of affective territories operates in this messy terrain between knowledge and affect to pursue both ways of thinking together.

NOTES

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