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Technical frames of affect: Design-work and brand-work in a shopping mall

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ABSTRACT

This article is concerned with the dense network of politics and practices through which experts and institutions frame, instrumentalize and act on the problem-space of affect. Focusing on a new shopping mall cum residential tower in Singapore, I show how urban planners, architects, tourism regulators and retail managers were motivated by a self-reflexive awareness of the indeterminate nature of affect to continually experiment on defining and capturing its value. By highlighting the heterogeneous conditions of practice across multiple domains of expertise, I argue that each expert domain conceptualizes and intervenes into the problem-space differently, reflecting existing professional boundaries and technologies of control as well as divergent political interests. Because the perceived values of affect as well as the points of intervention are not consistent, the work of one group of experts can be negated, undermined or ignored by the work of another. This article argues that it is important to acknowledge the constructed and contested nature of affect, and analyze how its emergence in specific contexts, as discourse and practice, becomes imbricated in the structures of governance that in turn frame affect as the declared object-target.

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Introduction

In March 2009, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) announced the completion of a state-funded rejuvenation of Singapore's main shopping street, Orchard Road. This project was carried out in response to a government report, "Tourism 21: A Vision of a Tourism Capital", released after the Asian financial crisis of 1996. It proposed a new strategy which moved away from the previous model of producing enclosed pockets of exotic themed environments to a model that conceived of open attractions in different parts of the city (Chang, 2010; Savage et al., 2004). By overlaying onto the stream of everyday life a thematic map for touristic consumption, this model of embedded tourism conceived of exoticized local culture as lived and continuous, rather than suspended and segregated.

The overall objective of the rejuvenation was to produce a "multi-sensory seamless experience for shoppers" (STB, 10 March 2009). It divided Orchard Road into three "thematic zones", reinventing and representing select parts of its history through the introduction of flora, lighting effects and other decorative elements on the pedestrian boulevard. Around the same time, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) sold the remaining few large parcels of land along Orchard Road, setting the conditions and expectations for iconic development and market competition that would spur a new round of capital investment. The Orchard Road Business Association (ORBA) which represents many of the stakeholders was also given funding by the government to take on more responsibility as the place manager, an approach modeled after Business Improvement Districts (BID) in other shopping streets such as the Fifth Avenue of New York and New West End of London.[1] Thus, a mixture of market competition, neoliberal institutional reform and differentiated theming incited various actors to think about Orchard Road as a collective but segmented shopping environment.

The evocation of senses, movement and immersion captured in the slogan "multi-sensory seamless experience" points toward the very conditions of a mode of consumerism that is exciting, stimulating and fluid. This article is concerned with the dense network of politics and practices through which experts and institutions frame, instrumentalize and act on the problem-space of affect.

[1] In this arrangement, the STB adopts the role of a facilitator which provides networking opportunities, bureaucratic support, tourism data, training programmes and seed funding, while ORBA takes up the role of advocating for the stakeholders and coordinating the brand positioning, retail strategy and event organization of Orchard Road as a whole. Interview with Mr. Steven Goh, executive director of ORBA, 15 August 2013.

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Focusing on the planning, designing and management of the new shopping mall cum residential tower, ION Orchard, it shows how the building and its context has become an experimental site where different actors come to share certain perspectives and techniques on how to gain traction on this elusive object, even as their power-relations are being reconfigured in a neoliberal model. In this space, affect emerges within management and retail practices as a new frontier of value creation where the intersections between psychological, spatial, corporeal and informational forces are changing the modalities of consumption practices. Experimenting on these "atmospheric affects", business consultants Babin and Attaway (2000: 93) advise, can help to induce "hedonic shopping" – "the store atmosphere evokes emotions, these emotions help determine value, and this value motivates customers to patronize a given choice repeatedly".

The growing literature on affect in the disciplines of science and technology studies, human geography and architectural geography provides a broad canvas of theoretical debates and methodologies on which this essay rests. This turn toward affect does at least two things: first, it moves away from a semiotic analysis of the built environment in favor of a materialist ontology where non-human agents have the capacity to shape socio-technical relations; and second, it extends the complex politics of urban life into deeply human conditions of passions, moods and feelings, where the very contingency and unpredictability of life enters into relationships with modes of neoliberal governance (Anderson, 2012). Within this literature, affect is distinguished from emotions and subjectivity because it operates outside and independently of meaning and intention – the famous "founding" case being Massumi's (2002) analysis of Benjamin Libbet's experiment which he claims reveals a half-second delay between the brain registering a stimulus and the body reacting to the stimulus. My purpose, however, is not to build on this ontology, but to use it as a category with which to analyze how certain experts and institutions frame, instrumentalize and value this domain of human experience they themselves can only refer to in vague and indirect ways.

As a space of heightened consumption, it is not surprising that the shopping mall is one of the key laboratories of affective organization. As early as 1993, Goss analyzed the "magic of the mall" as the connection between mall design and management with the "consciousness industry". He mentions the quality of indoor lighting that acts as a "silent salesman" (Connor 1989, quoted in Goss, 1993: 32) as well as the use of music that immerses the shopper "in anesthetic or tonic aural fluid" (Boorstin 1961, quoted in Goss, 1993: 32). He notes that Victor Gruen, the pioneer of the modern shopping mall, paid considerable attention to the deeply human conditions of being in a mall – his formula was intended to "counteract the phenomenon of alienation, isolation and loneliness" (Gruen 1973, quoted in Goss, 1993: 23) by creating enriching and pleasant spaces to shop, socialize and relax. The turn toward affect has taken up these latent observations about music, lighting and sociality and generated new investigations into what may now be called the *unconsciousness industry*. The current thrust has been to open up questions about the complex and fluid agencies between materialities, ambience, users, designers and spatial practices, generally operating at the edge of cognition and outside the realm of the visual (Miller, 2014; Roberts, 2012; Jacobs and Merriman, 2011; Lees and Baxter, 2011; Knudsen and Waade, 2010; Rose et al., 2010; Lorimer, 2008).

Yet, the turn to affect should not leave behind critical analysis of spectacles as social relations mediated by images. The Situationists, for example, were cognizant of the techniques of shock and disorientation, and thought of their counter-mapping psychogeographies as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, *consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals*" (Debord, 1955: 23, emphasis added). Affect construed as something absolutely prior to cognition and outside of representation is a problematic conceptualization that has been vigorously debated elsewhere (e.g. Pile, 2010; Leys, 2011). On the one hand, representation can be experienced as "things and events ... rather than simple go-betweens tasked with re-presenting some pre-existing order or force" (Anderson and Harris, 2010:14). And on the other, affect as corporeal and neurological responses also enters into relations with signifying, narrative elements and acculturated sensibilities, and does not operate in an isolated and automatic fashion that precludes and precedes all other forms of subjectivities (Rose et al., 2010; Butcher, 2011; Edensor, 2012). Thus, it is important that a critical analysis of urban politics in the context of consumerism takes into account how the social is mediated by images as well as bodies, information and the various infrastructures of feeling that affect theory has foregrounded.

By focusing on ION Orchard, one of the most prestigious development built during the Orchard Road rejuvenation exercise, I show how the "disruptive openness of affect" (Anderson, 2010: 168) emerged as a common referent object, and how the experts were motivated by a self-reflexive awareness of its indeterminate nature to continually experiment on defining and capturing its value. In these experiments, the planning, designing and management of shopping malls and urban environments flow across processes that operate on various sensorial and cognitive registers, very often in flexible and unpredictable combinations at the same time. Thus, signages, built form, material finishes and the uniforms of service staff appear on the radar of experts not merely as rigid systematizations or bodily automatisms, but also as problematic unknowns and culturally mediated perspectives that resist and elicit further rounds of experimentation.

Through this case, I also show the heterogeneous conditions of practice across multiple domains of expertise from urban planning to architectural design to retail and brand management. I argue that each expert domain conceptualizes and intervenes into the problem-space differently, reflecting existing professional boundaries and technical knowhow as well as divergent political interests. While the experts might agree on the importance of a "multi-sensory experience" understood broadly, and while one might collect these multiple projects within the larger arc of biopolitics, the perceived values of affect as well as the points of intervention are not consistent, such that the work of one group of experts can be negated, undermined or ignored by the work of another. Paying attention to the heterogeneous conditions of practice forestalls claims about the "claustrophobic" closing-in of affect for the "redeployment of discipline and biopolitics" (Anderson, 2012: 40) and tendencies toward an ontologization of affect, turning instead to a critical analysis of the internal inconsistencies of power within a given context of urban governance.

I begin by slicing the literature on affect, drawing out existing studies that explore the heterogeneous conditions of practice to make a case for my contribution. Then, I present my empirical analysis as two related clusters of work – design-work by planners and architects and brand-work by retail managers. This analysis is based partly on my own experience as an urban planner in the URA involved in the renewal of Orchard Road between 2004 and 2007. Subsequently in 2013, four years after the building opened, I interviewed the architects of ION Orchard, nine stakeholders of Orchard Road and a few of my ex-colleagues. A guided tour of the building and a public design symposium[2] gave me further opportunities to

[2] The public symposium, "100% Design Singapore", is an interior design exhibition for professionals centered in Southeast Asia held from 11th to 13th September 2013. The architects and managers of ION Orchard gave a presentation about the design and branding of the development at this symposium.

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analyze the ongoing strategies of brand-work that had transpired since the opening of the building.

Technical frames of affect

I borrow the concept of "technical frame" from Clough's discussion of the biomediated body, which examines how technologies and experimentations aim to expand "matter's informational capacity" (Clough, 2010: 214). Broadening this conceptualization, I understand technical framing as the constitution of the practicable means of knowing, instrumentalizing and shaping affect, staging the entry of capital into the body and defining the contours of biopolitics of contemporary life. My interest is in slicing a wide ranging literature touching on affect and architectural space to highlight the heterogeneity of technologies, each with specific lines of force and points of application, designed or assembled to achieve particular strategic objectives (Foucault, 1980).

In the disciplines of human and architectural geography, the conceptualization of buildings, materialities, bodies, atmospherics and practices as socio-material assemblages has dominated the discussion. In this literature, affect manipulation through architectural design and atmospherics takes on multiple strategies and forms. Adey's (2007, 2008) work shows how airports are designed to move passengers linearly and hold them in positions of spectatorship. Balancing the need to ensure efficiency and security in organizing passenger flow on the one hand, and generate feelings of comfort, homeliness and mobility on the other, airport designers deploy a range of technologies, combining customer profiling, "dataveillence" and auto-ethnography. Contingency and indeterminacy lies at the heart of the airport designers' "predictive system of calculation" (2008: 441) because the efficacies of these strategies depend on future encounters that cannot be planned in advance. Similarly, Allen's (2006) analysis of Potsdamer Platz argues that the ambience of the central public space is engineered to engender forms of social inclusiveness, where people are encouraged to mill around, relax and experience the commercial offerings laid out before their eyes. Yet, like Adey's case, this is done without "knowing in advance whether the plaza's style of ambience is effective as a commercial distraction."

However, some studies seem to suggest that other experts admit less indeterminacy in their interventions. Healy (2014) shows how engineers and retail analysts make use of the science of thermal comfort to induce an affective state among shoppers that makes them vulnerable to further stimulus to consume. Casino designers are notoriously effusive about the scientificity of their work, arguing that one can design interiors that increase gambling revenue based on empirically tested cases and a set of universal principles.[3] In her study of casino design and gaming technology, anthropologist Natasha Schüll analyses the extensive material and digital apparatus that holds "players in a desubjectified state of uninterrupted motion so as to galvanize, channel, and profit from ... 'experiential affect'" (2012: 51). From mood lighting to soft music to ergonomic chair design and the design of screen interface, every detail activated at the level of biochemical changes, unconscious bodily movements and credit card activity is drawn into a databank that reveals patterns and potentialities in modulating players' preferences and behaviors. These discourses and experiments draw from a long tradition in environmental psychology and behavioral science, a key milestone being the work of Proshansky et al. (1970) in mental wards which was subsequently expanded and applied to social interactions in everyday spaces.

[3] See, for example, the debates between David Kranes and Bill Friedman which represent two "schools of thought" about casino design.

Science is however not the only forum of professionalization and experimentation. In his discussion on the materiality of glamor, Thrift (2010) points to Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas' design for Prada stores, suggesting that he "knowingly drew on various traditions of glamor to enliven these spaces ... through the qualities of focus and clarity, the development of more intelligent objects, the power of tactile surfaces, and the use of unproductive, even excessive space". Koolhaas did not practice the kinds of controlled experiments that reveal the half-a-second delay between cognition and action or rationalize his expertise in the form of design principles. Rather, he observed a kind of heuristic built from trained sensorial faculties as well as familiarity with market psychology and building products. This technical frame that straddles between intuition and practical knowledge is only superficially similar to the auto-ethnography of the airport designers – the star-architect does not qualify his expertise by his ability to feel as the users of his buildings might, but by his embodied authority in taste and design acumen. Similarly, architects and architectural theorists linked to the phenomenological tradition often appeal to an embodied form of unconscious knowledge by claiming a heightened awareness of the poetic of materials and tectonics (e.g. Pallasma, 2005; Zumthor, 2010).

These developments allude to what Thrift (2004: 68) argues to be a "gathering together of formal knowledges of affective responses, the vast number of practical knowledges of affective response that have become available in a semi-formal guise". Yet, what he terms as "semi-formal guise" should be taken as a paradox where supposedly subliminal and preconscious intensities are for these experts rather reflexive, more or less conscious and sensible qualities that can be actualized through the correct specifications of materials, colors, textures and geometry. Through training and self-projection, the sensitized body *apparently* can perform as a technical frame with which to specify and embed affective stimuli that are preconscious to the distracted majority. This paradox also swings in the direction of those whose interventions are "scientifically tested" and data-saturated. Though casino designers participate skilfully in an industry caught at the intersections of neuroscience and digitization, it is clear that they also make intuitive judgments about the qualities of materials and lighting, and most certainly make hyperbolic claims to secure their professional boundaries vis-à-vis their closest competitors – mainstream architects and gaming technologists (Lee, 2012). The domain of politics claimed by affect theory cannot be considered outside of the social, political and technical contexts in which these experiments and discourses emerge and engage with each other.

Thus, the objective of this paper is not so much to claim relevance for affect in contemporary politics based on a pre-established ontology, but to analyze the multiple practices and discourses through which experts come to act on something that has no precise definition or consensus about what is at stake. If the politics of affect is often located at the problematic encounters between a network of actors – from experts to technologies and material effects to the users of the space – this paper focuses on the side of power as internally heterogeneous and contested. For example, how might airport designers disagree with transport engineers and security consultants on the management of customer flow in an airport? How do the intuitive, auto-ethnographic and heuristic methods of designers square with the data-saturated depersonalized systems of technologists and engineers? Given such conceptual, social and technical discrepancies, what forms of politics arise when professionals and interest groups diverge on defining what is at stake?

By pointing to the gaps and mediations between these forms of expertise, I hope to open up avenues for further critical analysis into the internal inconsistencies of power. Such a critique seeks to foreground the politics of practice that drives the project toward

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a deeper and more human understanding of consumerism. My case focuses on the work of urban planners, tourism regulators, architects and retail managers who converged on a single site and what appeared ostensibly to be a single project. Though there seems to be a sequence of intervention where planners and regulators came before architects who came before retail managers, it should become clear that the technologies of control, as well as the political interests that flowed through them, did not obey such clear transitions; their effects – material, regulatory or symbolic – persisted, transformed and came into different relationships with the next set of expert interventions. Affect was always considered in relation to other modalities of experience and its qualities were also always mediated by technologies of representation and pre-existing professional and bureaucratic boundaries. What entailed, then, was a field of ambiguous and contested relations which fed back into further experimentations to define and capture the value of affect. If, as Pile (2010) and Leys (2011) argue, there is much that needs to be done to settle the normative blindspots and ontological assumptions of affect theory, then there is also a need to acknowledge the constructed and contested nature of affect, and critically analyze how its emergence in specific contexts, as discourse and practice, becomes imbricated in the structures of governance that in turn frame affect as the declared object-target.

Design-work: movement, presence and threshold

As with all sites sold through the Government Land Sales programme, planners in the URA prepared a set of control plans which stipulated various urban design and planning parameters for the ION Orchard site, which was then used by architects and developers in the designing and planning of the building (Fig. 1). These control plans function like the technologies of simplification and abstraction that James Scott (1999) associates with modernist planning. Elaborating on ichnographic projections, Söderström (1996:11) shows how such representations displace the subject to an abstract plane where "quality, hierarchy and difference are replaced by quantity, position, and measure". The reductive nature of the control plan is evident when placed beside the blueprint for the vision of Orchard Road released by the STB years earlier in 2003. In this report, the STB (2003: 58–66) painted a "hyperbuilding" with "incline elevators that move sideways and upwards", plunging dramatically below ground into a vast underground concourse while a glass-enclosed mall rises above it. All of these colorful visions exceeded the technical frame of the plan, and, to the consternation of some of the planners, suggested a larger space of possibilities not permissible given the existing planning controls.

Furthermore, as a mediatory technology that moves from the regulators to the private developers, the content of the plan reveals a self-acknowledged limit on how much the state can intervene into the market. The range of controls the planner can exercise is generic across all urban development in the city center and is limited to overall form, height, density, and architectural details that impinge on the public realm (Lee, 2010). While it is not impossible to exercise control in a more interventionist way, through design committees and competitions for example, such undertakings are manpower intensive and generally reserved only for the most strategic sites in the city. Thus, the technologies of control operate within a context of bureaucratic division of expert labour, state-market relations and the perceived public value of the project at stake.

However, the control plan also works beyond representation and abstraction. There is a tradition of work pointing to the synaesthetic and kinaesthetic function of plans and sections. Reconceptualized as diagrams, they are not just reduced and abstract lineaments of the actual building, but serve as a vehicle for imagining, navigating and inhabiting spaces, where "relational haptic, kinaesthetic, and procioceptive qualities are mapped, enfolded into potential design but also serve as a graphical index of haptic sensibilities applicable to existing buildings" (Paterson, 2011: 277).

Reflecting on my involvement as one of the planners in the project between 2005 and 2007, one of my key tasks was to plan for the procession of commuters and shoppers, and propose urban design controls that would ensure a "seamless" connection between the interior world of shopping and the exterior world of the boulevard. To be seamless means more than being able to physically move from one point to another. It is about imagining and engineering a thickly layered atmospheric consistency such that the interior and the exterior blurs into a comfortable zone of perceptible and imperceptible transitions that can be remembered and felt as the "Orchard Road experience". What should the commuter see and experience at the moment of entering ION Orchard from the train platform at the basement level? A large atrium should bring his/her eyes upwards toward a skylight at the top of the podium that will give him/her a sense of the scale of the development. The vast verticality of space is further humanized through intervening horizontal layers – in addition to the 'public concourse' on the street level, there will be a secondary 'concourse' at the exit level of the train station. How should the shopper move from the basement of ION Orchard to other adjacent developments? A series of underground connections should be at least 7 m in width and lined with retail activities so that they are not experienced as underground connections, but as continuations of the shopping environment that gradually opens up to the exterior, or in the words of the tender documents, as 'seamless, direct, air-conditioned and all-weather protected pedestrian connections' (URA: 2005, 21). The detailed control of the public open space located at the prominent corner of the site speaks about this thickness and smoothness of space:

> A landscaped open space shall be provided ... Tree planting in the open space shall be carried out to give shade and a soft landscaping. The open space shall be surrounded by activity oriented uses and shall relate to the Orchard Mall [the pedestrian boulevard]. The level of the open space shall match the level of the Orchard Mall... and be seamlessly integrated such that activities ... can spill onto the mall
>
> [URA, 2005:13–4]

This process of using the self to populate, imagine and design spaces is common among architects (Imrie, 2003; Maranta et al., 2003).[4] It is self-referential in that the expert induces a general experience from his/her own embodied and imagined responses. The control plan can thus be seen as a makeshift technology of inhabitation, projecting a mobile sensing probe that renders the virtual space in multi-sensory analogue. Yet, this projection of the self is culturally and professionally mediated – the figure that moves through the imaginary spaces represents an undifferentiated public, a neutral category of masses that nevertheless is an extension of the planners' own sensibilities and the interest of the planning bureaucracy. The imagined paths reflect this bias, as they are focused on bringing the masses from the train station through the mall into the boulevard and vice versa. The imagined experience reflects the normative standards of good urban and architectural design, privileging intersecting volumes, humanized scales and visual legibility. There is very little sense of the diverse range of users or activities that might happen in a shopping mall with an attached residential component. There is also little acknowledgment of the commercialized nature of the experience – the projected figure moves through the shopping mall, but rarely enters into a shop.

[4] Many planners in the URA who regulate urban development within the city center are trained as architects rather than planners.

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In contrast, the architects and developers conceived of affect and its value quite differently. Led by David Buffonge and Meeta Patel of London based architectural firm, Benoy, the design team was faced with a complex site and programme – the underground train station cut through the site diagonally and the development had to include commercial, institutional and residential uses. In an interview and at a public design forum, they focused on issues related to the exclusivity of the luxury retailers on the ground level, the privacy of the residents who would live in the tower, as well as the media wall and architectural form that would make this an iconic building. While they generally subscribed to the planners' vision of a "multi-sensory seamless experience" and a

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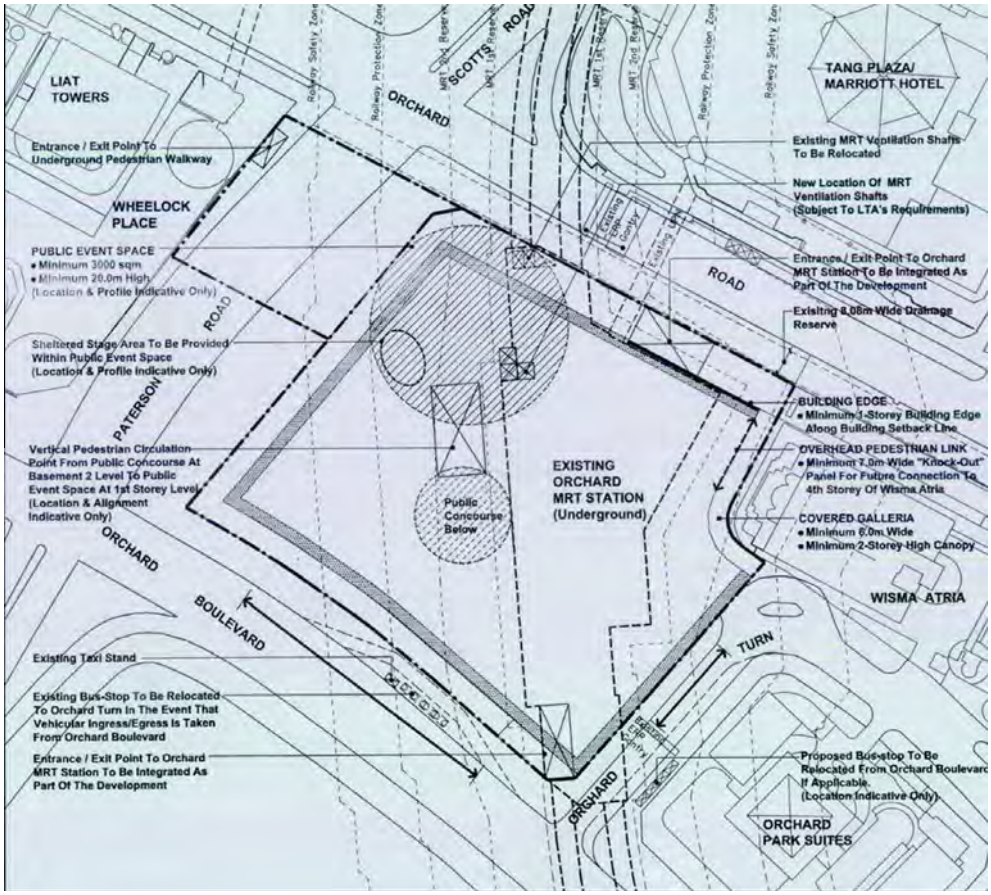

Fig. 1. One of the control plans in the tender documents for the sale of the ION Orchard site. *Source*: Urban Redevelopment Authority, 2005.

Fig. 2. Two of the six luxury brands on the ground level fronting the pedestrian boulevard. *Source*: Author, 2013.

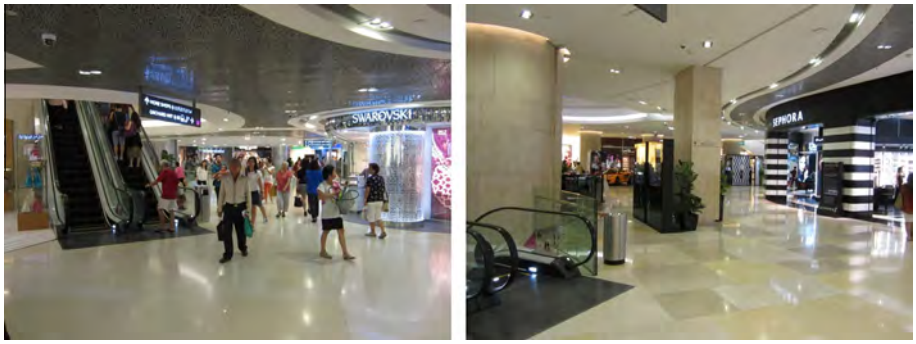

Fig. 3. Basement level (left) and ground level (right). Note the different floor finishes and ceiling heights. *Source*: Author, 2013.

prominent public space, they were equally, if not more, vested in creating a segmented space where the thresholds between the inside and outside, shopper and resident, luxury and mass market were quite palpable.

The palpability of these thresholds can be interpreted through the concept of "presence" – a word used by the architects and retail managers whom I interviewed. "Presence" is an affective *and* visual quality that incorporates the texture of materials, sense of spaciousness, prominence and scale. Take for example the luxury retail shops on the ground level:

> Brands want to have presence. A lot of the high-end brands in cities, they need to be in a particular location as part of their brand. Part of their brand is being there, being at the party, being in best site, the most luxurious type, the most expensive. They pay an unbelievable rent, hugely. But you may find out that a particular shop actually doesn't make a return in its own right. But they need to be there to have that presence and we find that most of the luxury malls follow the trend.
>
> [David Buffonge and Meeta Patel, 12 September 2013]

The six luxury brands such as Prada, Giorgo Armani and Cartier are not only there, but they have been carefully designed to be *seen and felt* in a way that preserves their distinctive ambiences within the overall ION Orchard experience. Thus, unlike all other retail shops, these luxury brands have direct frontage to the pedestrian boulevard, and, more importantly, are duplex units that command two stories of space (Fig. 2). A retail manager of ION Orchard educated me that, given the exorbitant cost of land and small market size in Singapore, it is almost impossible to have the kinds of stand-alone flagship stores found in other shopping streets like Omotesando of Tokyo and Fifth Avenue of New York. The task was to design the storefronts of these luxury brands *as if* they were flagship stores by accentuating their spaciousness, prominence and individuality. This was so important that before the building was constructed, the developers built life-sized mock duplex units in the showroom to show prospective tenants the presence they would get if they rented this address. Retail managers knew that presence could not be communicated through words or images alone – it had to be felt.

The double storey volume extends throughout the entire ground level, thus demarcating this horizontal layer of prime real estate from the more mass-market retailers in the basement levels where large volumes of commuters and shoppers pass through to get to the train station. Other devices subtly generate different atmospheric qualities that map onto the vertical socio-economic divisions of goods and consumers. Four atriums puncture the volume of the levels above the ground, but shrink in size at the basement levels. The tightness of the space – felt in the lower ceiling, the narrower corridors and the larger volume of people relative to the ground levels above – and the different finish of the floor tiles create a distinct atmospheric difference that marks the two shopping worlds according to the hierarchy of internal real estate (Fig. 3).

Palpable thresholds of luxury were also designed for the residents in the tower. This was tricky because the architects had to create a prestigious residential address on top of public transport infrastructure and within a shopping mall. Departing from the typical typology of a residential tower that sits on top of a shopping podium, the architects explained how they brought the tower down to the ground such that the residents can directly access their apartments through the secured elevators in the main lobby. Thus, the back of the shopping mall becomes the front of the luxury apartments, maintaining a presence that should come with a prestigious address (Fig. 4). Other secondary lobbies in the mall itself are discreetly hidden or set deep into one corner through generously proportioned corridors. It is important that residents feel that they enter *their* residential tower, rather than just entering a lobby through a shopping mall:

> The problem though is that the residential [component] is luxury, so it needs to be private. The people who buy luxury residential want privacy and total exclusivity. And it's obviously a tight site. Luckily we have two roads: Orchard Boulevard is from the back which is the luxurious residential road and Orchard

Fig. 4. Residential tower lobby at the back of ION Orchard. *Source*: Author, 2013.

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Road which is the [shopping] street. And imagine we fuse them together so that it works but they are separate . . . one of the key things we did was to let the residential tower touch the ground. Lots of them (shopping malls) are usually podium developments – it has a podium and a tower on that. So what we did is, when you go along Orchard Boulevard, the residential [address] has its own presence.

[David Buffonge and Meeta Patel, 12 September 2013]

Generating threshold and presence also requires an understanding of movement within the mall that exceeds simple economic logic or instrumental efficiency. A retail manager told me how mall design no longer observes the labyrinthine configurations designed to maximize contact between shopper and product. There are multiple entry points into ION Orchard, another one stressed, and "we no longer believe in making people move in certain ways". While maximizing "footfall" is still important, it is more important to ensure "convenience" and "seamlessness" in the movement and separation of residents and shoppers. Express escalators, the tour guide who brought me around the mall pointed out, allow for people to cut across multiple stories so that they can get where they want quickly without clashing into other classes of users. For the public who wants to visit the observatory deck and celebrity restaurant on the 55th and 56th floor, there is a dedicated high speed elevator that continues the ION Orchard experience uninterrupted.

In this sense, design-work conceptualizes the building as different "presences" stacked on top of and interwoven with each other, sometimes blending disparate parts of the building together and sometimes disconnecting contiguous spaces. This is reminiscent of the planner's ability to weave through the control plan but much more nuanced in creating thresholds of luxury. Moving away from mechanical and rigid concepts of the relationship between shopping and space, these experts attempt to blend smooth movement with palpable thresholds through a combination of materialities, formal and spatial organization, and infrastructures of mobility. Echoing what several scholars suggest, planners and architects presume that the organized materiality of the building may explain the "stubbornness or persistence of affect" and how affect circulate and spread in enclosed environments (Kraftl and Adey, 2008; Anderson, 2009: 77–81; Gieryn, 2002; Duff, 2010). Such claims appeal to these experts who stake their professional distinction on being able to produce certain experiences through the built environment. Yet, for the next set of experts involved in brand-work, this claim is never taken for granted, and we now turn to them.

Brand-work: working with and overcoming the building

Experts often distinguish between the "hardware" and "software" of place management. It is a loose professional line that expresses the divisions of labour between architects and planners on one side, and retail managers, interior designers, merchandisers and branding specialists on the other. This line also differentiates between the obdurate physicality of buildings and the kinds of continuous work required to keep the brand fresh and alive[5]:

"It was a bright and sunny morning as tenants arrived at ION SKY to hear their speaker talked about the challenges facing brick-and-mortar retailers and how to overcome these. The Key take-away: Be Sticky! It is vital to forge an emotional bond with customers through social interactions as this forms part of their retail experience."

[ION Star, June 2013]

For those involved in brand-work, the physical givenness of buildings is an opportunity but also a challenge that must be overcome, as the quote above suggests. It is in this sense that they connect with and depart quite significantly from how architects and planners conceive of affect and the environment. For them, the built environment is an opportunity in the sense that it is both the blank canvas and permanent sign that can be used to project certain meanings and values strategic to the business. It is a challenge in that its inertia and the costs associated with changing it resist the accelerated temporality of consumer trends and the need to continually refresh and innovate in order for the business to stay relevant. There is, in other words, a temporal differential between the building as congealed capital and the forms of fluid social relations generated through the complex interfacing of signs and objects in the course of consumption. If, as Lury (2004) argues, the brand is "a set of relations between products in time", then brand-work seeks to maintain a dynamic unity between all its various components, working with buildings and overcoming their inertia through the dimension of time.

The retail managers[6] of ION Orchard enliven the building with stories, dramatizing architectural concepts and spaces with historical, personal and "cool" narratives that build social capital through the experience of ION Orchard itself. While the architects evoke the metaphors of seed, stem and skin to articulate the formal qualities of the building, the managers weave these metaphors into coherent narratives that merge with the tropical theming of Orchard Road and other elements of the interior experience, such as artworks, the observation deck and the design of storefronts by various tenants – "everything curves", a manager emphasizes. This narrative unity extends into the social world of the consumers. Thus, while "ION Orchard" signifies a charged particle and connotes energy and magnetism, what is more important is its playfulness. My tour guide explained this playfulness: ION Orchard can be read as "I on Orchard", thus linking the name to the fashionable social trend of personalization, and it can also, if read backwards, become "No. 1". In her elaboration, the name ceases to be just an accumulation of meanings, but a game that is social and engaging, something consumers use to generate their own experiences and social capital. As Arvidsson (2006: 66–94) argues, the brand has become a means of production for consumers, functioning "as a pre-established context of consumption that anticipates a certain style, mood, or experience".

Brand-work also generates feelings of luxury by focusing on specific spaces which are non-commercial, even mundane, in nature. Very often, the spectacular and the affective are inseparable from each other. As my tour guide emphasized, the posters in the elevators and the brand-art that flashes on the large media façade of the building are not advertisements because there is no overt selling of products. It is not even necessary that customers actually read them. Indeed, the poster provides no information about what is being sold, or the prices, or where to find this store – such messages are secondary to the overall effect of the poster (Fig. 5). Rather, its display is intended to create an ambience of high fashion – the mall management had specifically engaged Harper's Bazaar, an haute couture magazine, to shoot these photographs so as to maintain a "classy" atmosphere even in mundane spaces such as an elevator. Similarly, the brand-art that flashes across the media screen on the building façade is not about pushing products. Rejecting numerous monetary offers to place advertisements on this prominent facade, she explained that brand-art is something like Louis Vuitton flashing its monogram in a series of blinking lights. Like the poster, the specific content is not as

[5] ION Star is the in-house brochure of ION Orchard produced by the management of the mall for its tenants and employees.

[6] For the purpose of this article, and to ensure the anonymity of my informants, I will use the generic label of "retail manager" to cover the range of people involved in the strategic branding and everyday maintenance of ION Orchard.

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Fig. 5. Poster in the elevator. *Source*: Author, 2013.

important as a certain stylism that is more than a product, a name or an event. It is a form of presence combining the disinterestedness of art with a quasi-commercial aesthetic that distinguishes advertising from brand-art.

When pushing products is seen as vulgar for a luxury mall like ION Orchard, retail managers understand that the sublimation of consumption into an artistic practice requires the disappearance of signs of exchange value so as to re-enchant it with an aura of distinction. This aloofness is quite similar to "coolness" as a form of achieved resistance, and brand-work as "capturing cool" becomes a way of "incorporating and profiting from the resistance that consumers spontaneously produce" (Arvidsson, 2006: 73). Though the poster and the media wall are highly visual displays, their placement and lack of overt messaging suggests that luxury's appeal should also be understood "in terms of irreducible surplus, an excess that the visual, with its emphasis on display or other-directnesses, cannot apprehend" (Mathiowetz, 2010: 2). From this perspective, the most mundane and profane of spaces can often become the privileged sites where luxury is most powerfully felt. Thus, besides the elevators, my tour guide enthused about the opulence of the toilets, pointing out its cleanliness (one staff is designated to each toilet), its facilities (the fresh flowers, the swivelling mirrors and the individualized dryers) and the quality of the marbled finishes. It is perhaps in these profane spaces that the most excessive flouting of sumptuary conventions achieves its maximum impact.

In the quest to become "sticky", brand-work overcomes the inertia of the building by fostering social and affective bonds between consumers, goods and workers. At the level of the workers, there are no longer "security guards" or "service staff", my tour guide corrected me, but ambassadors. Ambassadors should be conceptualized as living, breathing, mobile brands. ION Orchard staff are given new sets of uniform every year, educated on the appropriate kinds of cosmetics, jewellery and hair-do for work – no garish make-up or hoop earrings – and trained to greet customers in very precise but manifestly friendly ways – "it is important to smile, but not to smile when the customer is angry", my guide pointed out. Tenants of ION Orchard undergo training programmes and sharing sessions which emphasize the importance of service through personal interactions. Outside the malls, ambassadors in red uniform are deployed by the ORBA to roam the length of Orchard Road distributing brochures, greeting customers and handling queries. Brand-work operates through the capacity of living bodies to build fleeting but visceral bonds with other bodies in the art of being "sticky".

At the level of the professionals, to be "sticky" translates into a heightened sensitivity to the desires, habits and quirks of the fastidious and high-spending customer, to become cognoscenti of shopping. As Bourdieu (1984, 31) notes, "the naïve exhibition of 'conspicuous consumption', which seeks distinction in the crude display of ill-mastered luxury, is nothing compared to the unique capacity of the pure gaze, a quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the common herd by a radical difference which seems to be inscribed in 'persons'." More than just a pure gaze, the cognoscenti claim to possess Rem Koolhaas' attunement to the affective capacity of materials and are alert to things that escape the attention of the less acculturated and sensitized. Take, for example, the scent, an often noted feature in literature on shopping malls and hotels. The retail manager informed me that they have created a patented scent for ION Orchard, and that it is very important that this scent is unique. She assured me that she is able to identify and remember the hotels she has stayed in by the scent alone, something I certainly will not be able to do. Or the "Uniqlo" store, where they have managed to persuade the merchandiser to use the special display of white text on red background rather than the usual black on white (Fig. 6). This is, she stressed, the only Uniqlo outside of Japan that has this special color combination, and will likely to be noticed only by fans of the brand.[7]

The fact that both professionals and select customers are inducted through invisible clues into what might be called a "club of the senses" suggests that part of the affective power of luxury extends beyond this secret knowledge into the *feeling* of knowing something that is largely inconsequential to and restricted from the "common herd", to use Bourdieu's words again. Social stratification re-emerges not in the form of physical segregation, but in invisible bonds of belonging, concentrated in specific spaces but also extending beyond them. As Mathiowetz (2010: 7) suggests, felt luxury is more than the sum of visual and sematic cues. Rather it permeates invisibly in a thick concoction of sensual stimulation that is no less effective in rendering social divisions palpable and even pleasurable: "the cognoscenti will attest to what every person who has sought to distinguish cashmere from acrylic already senses: while the eye may be fooled by the knockoff, you know by touch ... the invisibility of luxury renders its invidiousness no less pleasurable". This touch that can do what the eye cannot is similar to the nose that can differentiate between brands and the discriminating eye that sees what other eyes miss out. Invisible social bonds are generated through an amalgam of cognitive, affective and sensorial elements, and brand-work intervenes into these bonds to locate and produce the "quality consumer", a desirable category defined as "tourists who spend good money" (interview with STB officer, 7 December 2014).

But none of these produces guaranteed results. Despite the performance of certainty put up by most of my informants involved in brand-work, their narratives are shot through with a persistent sense of unknowability. Every articulation and technical apparatus brought to bear on defining the value and object of affect is frustrated by a degree of futility: excitements "fade", people "do not get it" or "feel it", "you will never really know" are common admissions. Relying on a mixture of intuition, heuristics and data

[7] This is of course impossible to verify. But to ascertain the accuracy of the claim is not the point. The point is that such a claim is desirable and significant enough to make to an interested layperson like myself.

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Fig. 6. Uniqlo brand, white on red. (For interpretation of the references to color in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the web version of this article.) *Source*: Author, 2013.

analytics, they remind me and each other about the need to always be vigilant, which suggests not just the fast changing milieu in which they are operating, but also the self-awareness of the unknowability of affective life. "Nothing must be left to chance!" my tour guide stressed, alluding precisely to the elusiveness of the object-target of control. Her insistence on controlling everything points to how these kinds of "uncomfortable knowledge" (Rayner, 2012: 107–125) carry a force that propels various experts to think about their projects in reflexive and self-motivated ways.

These specters of unknowability are also a result of the neoliberalization of urban governance. Though the setting up of ORBA was designed to promote a culture of collaboration and self-government among stakeholders while the state withdraws its regulatory influence, ORBA is a voluntary organization and has limited funding and clout. Unlike the overseas BID examples on which the ORBA was modeled after, the role of ORBA is primarily limited to event management, marketing and advocacy, and has yet to prove its value to merit increased contributions from the stakeholders (interview with Mr. Steven Goh, executive director of ORBA, 15 August, 2013). The fact that the key functions of place maintenance, landscaping and security are still vested in various governmental agencies further diminishes the role of ORBA and undermines attempts to produce a consistent and total affective environment. This fragmentation extends to the variegated landscape of private interests and business models on Orchard Road. For example, the retail manager of ION Orchard laments that it is often not possible to know if what the management is doing is reaping results because there is as yet very little sharing of data among the various stakeholders and the data collected by the STB is not precise enough. If the footfall drops in her shopping mall, she will have to call the manager of the other shopping mall to figure out the causes. At Shaw House, the shopping mall cum cinema next to ION Orchard, the manager told me that data analytic of the sort carried out in shopping malls is not entirely relevant to his management, given that he positions and runs the business as an entertainment complex. While ORBA is increasingly empowered to make certain decisions once undertaken by the government – for example, to regulate advertisement signs and busking activities – such empowerment can create political conflict: how can ORBA advocate for the collective interest of Orchard Road and yet made regulatory decisions that might favor one stakeholder over another?

Conclusion

This article fleshes out the multiplicity of ways in which one can follow the translation of affective conditions into practice, usually loosely assembled into some kind of actionable programme and articulable concept. Insofar as they are trajectories of biopolitics, we can understand these as so many experiments in tracing affect along visible, actionable and conscious registers. As I have shown, affect is seldom isolated as a discrete domain of action, but often imagined and abstracted as part of a larger environment involving multiple sensorial experiences and modes of encounter. I suggest that the technical frames of affect can be further explored through the intersections between these evoked affective conditions, the technologies of control at the practical disposal of experts, and the institutional structures that govern the political and social agencies of different interest groups. Such empirical work can furnish us with more grounded criticisms of what affect can become and do within the larger context of urban politics and consumerism.

The value of affect and its relationship to consumption might be apparent in both academic and trade literature, but it has no a priori definition outside of the existing contexts of urban politics. In parsing out the myriad practices that are at work in the professional circuits of urban planning, architectural design and retail and place management, my analysis highlights the different regimes of values, interests and techniques that converge but do not map neatly on each other. On the one hand, planners struggle to shape urban space and subjectivity by placing the figure of an undifferentiated public at the forefront. Their ability to do so is limited by established state-market relations and mediated by bureaucratic processes and representational techniques. On the other hand, retail managers and branding specialists of ION Orchard attempt to establish social and spatial stratification by working on the body and its affective capacity through multiple channels, from brand-art to customer service to multi-sensorial stimuli. One group of expertise presumes the relative stability of affective regimes enclosed in carefully designed environments, while another is constantly caught up in generating new experiences and interactions to overcome the inertia of the built environment. From a generalized sense of public to nuanced thresholds that divide the development into different classes of goods and users to engaging with the fleeting desires and practices of the "quality consumer", these heterogeneous forms of expert intervention illustrate the complex power-relations and the reflexivity of expertise that undergird the transformation of Orchard Road as an affective space of consumerism.

As Singapore embarks on neoliberal experiments in the governance of urban space, such power-relations are continually being stretched and tested, further highlighting the fragmented project of shaping consumer culture at the affective level. The multiple gaps, mediations and conflicts between different players attest to the internal inconsistencies of power, giving rise to a landscape of differentiated networks of influence and uneven material changes in the built environment. A few weeks before ION Orchard was scheduled to open, the Land Transport Authority of Singapore removed the pedestrian crossing that connected ION Orchard to its neighboring mall across the road. While it created a smoother vehicular traffic flow along Orchard Road, it also drove pedestrians underground as that became the only way to cross the junction, thus breaking the experience of walking along the pedestrian boulevard. The planners at the URA and the STB as well as the architects of ION Orchard had not expected this. Today, the public space in front of ION Orchard is not a node, but a dead-end, far from the crowded and vibrant space once imagined in the initial stages of the rejuvenation exercise. Yet, its quietness gives the

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facade and the six luxury stores a prominence and exclusivity that plays into the aura of distinction carefully cultivated by the retail managers of the development. The project of creating a "seamless multi-sensory experience for Orchard Road" remains an elusive task full of unanticipated moments, not just because of the unpredictable and contingent *nature* of affect, but also because of how affect is constructed, contested and valued by multiple interest groups within a given structure of governance.

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