Social geography III: Emotions and affective spatialities

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Abstract: The emotions and the affective qualities of space (i.e. affective spatialities) have featured prominently in social geography research. This report discusses how recent studies have taken seriously earlier critiques of affect theory, foregrounding intersubjective relations, collectives and socio-spatial hierarchies of power instead. The emotions can be mobilised to serve entrenched interests or challenge power hierarchies in social life, including through digitally mediated spaces. Whether in real or digital life, emotional labour and emotion work are constitutive of temporality, sociality and spatiality. The report concludes by reflecting on what 'caring-with' the emotions means for our institutions and the international academy.

Keywords: affect, affective spatialities, caring-with, emotions, emotional labour, emotion work

I Introduction

The third of my progress reports on social geography focuses on the emotions. Although previous progress reports on gender and geography had addressed the emotions (Sharp, 2009; Wright, 2010), this report discusses how recent developments in social geography have responded to some of the concerns raised in those reports and carved out new ways of analysing the emotions. Earlier iterations of affect theory had emphasised the precognitive, bodily intensities of affect (e.g. Thrift, 2004; McCormack, 2007), transcending the human subject in ways which feminist and anti-racist geographers found objectionable (e.g. Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). As this report shows, social geographers addressing the emotions and affect in recent years have situated their analyses in intersubjective relations, collectively felt intensities and the socio-spatial hierarchies of power in our social worlds instead. While continuing to foreground space, place and scale, some of them have also engaged new spatial vocabularies (see Ho, 2022) in their study of how the emotions and affect are constitutive of sociality.

This progress report also signals how social geographers have adopted conceptual ideas from cultural studies, sociology and psychology to study the emotions, deepening interdisciplinary analyses of how the emotions and affective intensities not only materialise in space but are also shaped spatially. Such inquiries flesh out the way that spatial contexts elicit particular emotions, as well as how the emotions and emotional negotiations constitute the affective qualities of bodies and space through which personal subjectivities and intersubjective relations (re)emerge. Particular attention is given to how the emotions are put to 'work' by nation-states, in organisational and private settings, and on digital platforms. The body of work discussed in this review also prompts us to critically analyse the temporal qualities of the emotions as ordinary people and powerful social actors both invoke temporal framings (e.g. past/present/future) and the experiential qualities of time (e.g. fast/slow, waiting/crises;

e.g. see Banta and Pratt, 2023) to rationalise ways of knowing and being in the world (Ho, 2021).

As Davidson and Milligan (2004) wrote nearly two decades ago in a now seminal article on emotional geographies, the "emotions can clearly alter the way the world *is* for us, affecting our sense of time as well as space" (page 524). In other words, the spatio-temporal registers of the emotions— together with affective intensities—make up who we are in the world in both intimate and collective ways. This progress report on the emotions and affective spatialities synthesises the deliberations in my two earlier progress reports on time and temporality, and space and sociality (Ho, 2021; 2022). The report concludes by reflecting on what it means to engage in processes of 'caring-with' (Askins and Blazek, 2017) as we inhabit academia.

II Affective intensities and emotional negotiations in and across spaces
Recent scholarship within social and cultural geography has converged through a shared interest in the emotions and affect. While some researchers had earlier treated the emotions and affect as separate domains due to particular emphases in their respective subfields (e.g. see Thien, 2005; Pile, 2010), writings in the sub-discipline of social geography today are likelier to see the emotions and affect as mutually complementary approaches for eliciting the verbal/non-verbal and visible/invisible dimensions of social life and social structures, while retaining a sensitivity to socio-spatial hierarchies. Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed's (2004) work on how the emotions 'stick' to surfaces and bodies to generate affective intensities have been influential in informing the way that social geographers approach studying the emotions and affect. Some researchers have focused on investigating how the affective qualities of space can illuminate the way that social identities are scripted in and by space. For example, Coen et al's (2019) study of gym users in Canada found that the affective qualities of space— made tangible through one's feelings of being in the gym and amplified by material surfaces like mirrors—create "hierarchies of masculinities and femininities" (page 325) that enforce gendered boundaries around how gym spaces should be used. In another study of physical activity in multiracial Singapore, Shee (2023) argues that the ethnic minorities she had interviewed opined that the affective intensities of Chinese prejudice (the ethnic majority) towards less-fit racialised bodies prompts individuals in those minority groups to prefer exercising in private gyms or at home rather than in public spaces.

Other researchers have focused on the ways in which one's emotional well-being can be enhanced through affective atmospheres (see Anderson, 2009) or the feelings of being in particular spaces. As examples, Tan (2021) and Cai et al (2023) have looked at street performances and singing respectively as activities through which people create social connections and occupy urban space with others to counter the alienation of urban life. COVID-19 also showed how being in green and blue spaces stimulated people's feelings of comfort and wellbeing during periods of lock-down and social distancing (Doughty et al, 2022). The pandemic brought to the fore collectively experienced anxieties as people sought to cope with the changes to how home, work and public spaces could be used. Turning to the phenomenon of people clapping and singing together at home during quarantine, Gemignani and Hernández-Albújar (2022) argue that these embodied responses symbolised self-care and "conveyed messages of hope, solidarity, and support" to others in the community (page 1). However, the authors also argue that such efforts which focus on the "micro-levels of the individual, the household, or the neighbourhoods" (ibid, 6) elide structural issues such as deficits in public healthcare funding and wider social inequalities. The above interests in affective spaces illustrate how people's connection to health and space are shaped by the

emotions experienced in and expressed through the body as certain types of spaces are used or avoided to manage complex emotions.

Another body of work on the emotions and affect in social geography intersect with mobilities research. Such work brings to view how the emotions reflect hierarchies of social identities as people move across spaces, prompting calls for transport or mobility justice. Shaker (2021) highlights the feelings of stigma and surveillance that the Muslim youths he had studied in Amsterdam articulated, contributing towards affective intensities of 'othering' in supposedly multicultural spaces. Focusing on gender relations, Rodriguez Castro et al (2022) write about the affective experiences of employed mothers as they commute between home, childcare and work. The authors question the "ideological and practical structures (e.g., work-places) that drive women's emotions of guilt, stress and shame when combining child care" (page 475). Turning to disability, Hall and Bates (2019) contend that paying attention to how bodies and emotions are assembled in micro and local urban spaces helps shift attention from the dominant discourse on hate crimes to the micro-aggressions that disabled people experience as they move across the city. Edwards and Maxell (2023) add that disabled people negotiate fear and hostility by developing "strategies to (re)author space and assemble safety" (page 171). Likewise, Harada et al's (2023) research on how older adults in Australia navigate mobility during peak hours demonstrate that feelings of familiarity and competence can augment one's sense of confidence and wellbeing.

The work reviewed above demonstrates the manner in which social geographers are taking seriously how the emotions and affective intensities are ways of knowing and being in the world, not only individually but also relationally and collectively. Such work also engages with how urban and social infrastructures engender particular affective qualities of belonging/non-belonging and equality/inequality as differently positioned social groups inhabit spaces or move across spaces, creating assemblages of human and more-than-human interactions. Approaching individually experienced emotions as constituents of differently empowered collectives amplifies issues of power, agency and social justice. The next section continues this discussion of how the emotions are constitutive of not only power, but also human agency through the way that people actively use the emotions to navigate their social environments or what psychologists Mesquita et al (2017) refer to as "doing emotions" (page 95). The work discussed below show how social geographers situate the 'work' done by the emotions in particular organisational spaces and across scales.

III Traversal emotions at work
Recent publications in social geography have continued a rich vein of socio-spatial research showing how "various forms of affect are facilitated and constrained by different actors, including the nation-state" (Mitchell and Kallio, 2017:8). A body of research has focused on how emotional representations of nationhood are used by states or representatives of the state to invoke political belonging and pride toward the nation (e.g. Finlay, 2021; Yarwood et al, 2021; Sysiö, 2022), thereby enacting territorial or extraterritorial reach (Ho, 2009). Lyons' (2018) research on British Muslim women further demonstrates the scalar connections tying the cultural symbolism of the headscarf with the home spaces in which the women can freely express their religious and diasporic identities, compared to their feelings of non-belonging in Britain. The above scholarship on emotions and the nation-state show how the emotions mark certain bodies as people in/out-of-place and demonstrate the permeability between privately embodied emotions and the public settings in which personal emotions become part of a wider collective.

Other research has considered the "emotional subjectivities" (Ho, 2009:789) and "affective governmentality" (Ashworth, 2017 cited in Strong, 2021:76) that shape people's everyday attitudes towards the nation-state and the national community. In a review paper on immigrant investor schemes[1], Peck and Hammet (2022) call for attention to how ordinary citizens feel towards unwelcomed changes to their local landscapes, housing and national identity when their governments attempt to diversify foreign investment and economic development by courting the super-rich from abroad (also see earlier work by Mitchell, 2004; Ley, 2010). Kallio et al (2020) further urge researchers to study the affective dimensions of citizenship, arguing that doing so helps "identify citizenship through agency rather than status or territorial belonging" (ibid, 724). For example, Strong's (2021) study of foodbanks in Britain shows how clients experience the emotion of shame for using these spaces but their shame can also be used to contest social norms depicting them as moral failures or mobilised by them to claim rights as citizens. Similarly, Webster's (2020) study of migrant women entrepreneurs in Sweden highlights the way they grapple with bureaucratic regulations (i.e. symbolising the state) but their hopes for future success motivates them to continue to navigate the bureaucracy and gain approvals for their small businesses. On the other hand, McIlwaine et al's (2023) investigation of gender-based violence in Rio de Janeiro during COVID-19 shows how emotions such as loss and desperation can lead to "emotional-political community building" (page 577) that brings about not only immediate responses to crises but also promote longer-term structural change.

An emergent body of work by social geographers on how the emotions are mobilised spatially engages with the influential ideas of sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) on feeling rules, emotional labour and emotion work. This work within social geography shows how individually experienced emotions are connected to different types of collective social and cultural settings, as well as the way that the emotions materialise in organisational spaces and in turn shape such spaces too. In a study of the filming industry in Australia, Watson et al (2021) combine the notion of emotional labour with affective atmospheres to analyse how both the film crew and cast perform feeling rules to 'stage' particular atmospheres that are conductive to acting in the film space. In another study of restaurant service staff in China, Shen and Hu (2022) show how rural-urban migrant workers are expected to perform emotional labour to portray an image of good hospitality. Although the workers privately resist the emotion work expected of them, they are induced by monetary incentives to align their internal feelings with the external image desired by their employers and customers. It is the anticipation of leaving their jobs eventually and returning to their rural hometowns or moving elsewhere that enables them to temporarily reconcile the emotional dissonance they experience. In these ways, the emotions connect the migrant workers' imaginaries of rural-urban spaces and temporal framings of the past/present/future.

The commodification of the emotions is also discussed by Yu (2018) but from the lens of eldercare work, which she argues inscribes care ethics into job requirements. Yet the working conditions and expectations of paid caregivers can entrench unequal power relations that run counter to an ethics of care. In a different study of graduate teaching assistants (TAs) in the United States, Bartos and Ives (2019) likewise draw attention to the emotional labour expected of and performed by female TAs and those of colour in particular. But the authors further show that their study participants subverted patriarchal norms by seeing themselves as making a difference towards changing patriarchal academic norms. Both studies remind us

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[1] These refer to migration policies that court high net-worth immigrants who are offered permanent residency or citizenship status in exchange for investing millions in the country of immigration. Examples of such countries are Canada, Grenada and Singapore.

that while being guided by an ethics of care, we must also be attentive to the politics of care and the actions necessary to redress structural inequalities.

Together, the body of work above illustrate how "doing emotions" (Mesquita et al, 2017:95) may serve to entrench privilege and power at times, but it can also challenge prevailing norms and structures of power even if doing so entails additional emotional labour and complex emotion work (ironic as it may be). The discussion also shows how the emotions are central to the production of space, connecting spaces and social units or imaginaries across scales in transversal ways. This section draws out in particular the topological dynamics of emotion work in geosocial spaces (Mitchell and Kallio, 2017) that defy binary categorisations such as local/global, micro/macro, intimacy/abstraction and near/far. The next section continues to engage with topological readings of the emotions through a focus on how social geographers have approached the study of digital technologies and space.

IV Emotions and digitally mediated spaces

The "rise of robots" (Bissell and Del Casino, 2017:435) have made possible, not only new labour practices, but also changing forms of sociality which are underpinned and shaped by the emotions. As Del Casino (2016) had anticipated, robotic technology as used in the care industry generates new relationships not only between robots and humans, but also between human subjects. Referring to human-robot interactions, Sumartojo and Lugli (2022) observed that "[the feeling of] trust has been identified as a crucial affective aspect of robots" (page 1225). Although robotic technology is meant to be autonomous and reliable, Woods and Kong's (2020) study of smart home technologies used by older adults in Singapore found that they prefer to call on trusted long-time neighbours for help rather than use the panic button installed in their homes. For the caregivers who are on standby to receive the panic alerts remotely, such smart technologies may encroach upon their personal lives—creating feelings of stress—as they are expected to respond and coordinate help at all hours of the day. Schwiter and Steiner (2020) further observe that "digital monitoring raises critical questions regarding autonomy and privacy". Digitally mediated spaces can be empowering on the one hand, but these can also create frustration and anxieties for users and care personnel.

Another type of digitally mediated space is characterised by a range of social media apps that are widely used across age groups. In a study of how Tik Tok is used by older adults in China, Yu and Zhao (2022) note that this technology not only promotes ageing mindsets that are aligned with the 'healthy ageing' paradigm advocated by the Chinese government, but also the consumption of health products through advertisements broadcasted by digital celebrities and pop-up boxes online. In a different study of pregnancy apps used by mothers-to-be in the United Kingdom, Hamper and Nash (2021) noticed that digital technologies make possible new "spacing relations" (page 585) of physical and emotional closeness between the unborn foetus, prospective parents and older generations (through sharing pregnancy information and visuals). Drawing together these two studies, they both show how digitally mediated spaces generate emotional effects, albeit wherein one capitalises upon older viewers' fears of physical decline to promote viewership and consumption while the other makes tangible intergenerational relations of hope and family togetherness through new birth. By engineering one's emotional capacities to act, digitally mediated spaces also shape bodily behaviour and ideologies of health and wellbeing, thereby producing subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Turning the focus to how elderly parents use technology to connect with their children, Huang et al (2022) argue that practising emotional care technologically entails "actively investing in and managing familial relationships, both transnationally and locally" (page 1836). Thus while digital technologies can bridge subjects in seemingly disconnected

physically spaces, the emergent digitally mediated spaces are also characterised by a myriad of emotional labour and emotion work.

Digital technologies mediate the geographies of encounter too. Referring to the "stranger intimacy" that has been enabled through location-based apps and peer-to-peer service exchange, Koch and Miles (2021) observe that the emotions of attraction/rejection and conviviality have been profoundly reconfigured temporally and spatially through digital platforms. They caution that such platforms can "reinscribe biopolitical inequities" (ibid, 1392), privileging certain social identities over others. Digital platforms also create what Leszczynski (2019) terms as "affective space-times" and "affective capacity" (page 210). Extending these insights, Bissell's (2020) study of food delivery digital platforms foregrounds the "micropolitics of changing bodily capacities" (page 109), including the emotional negotiations that consumers feel as they confront "ugly feelings" (Ngai, 2005 cited in Bissell, 2020:108) towards their consumption habits. Bissell argues that alongside dominant critiques of platform capitalism, a micropolitical analyses of the diffuse power relations at work holds political potential.

As the above review shows, digital sociality requires and is sustained through emotional labour and emotion work. As the emotions circulate within and across digital infrastructures, it also connects assemblages of human and more-than-human actants. These hitherto less-studied spatial manifestations of the emotions implicate and produce topologies of socio-spatial hierarchies and vulnerabilities, such as digital literacy divides or the labour conditions needed to maintain 24/7 functioning of digital operations. In other words, what transpires within digital mediated spaces connects different temporal frames (e.g. across time zones or the past/present/future) and is enabled by people, actants and events that are located further afield than the immediate moment of encounter.

V Conclusion

The emotions and affective intensities can be mundane yet powerful, individually felt yet capable of mobilising collective identification and action. Their spatial and temporal manifestations engender social states and socio-spatial hierarchies, such the politics of belonging/non-belonging, compliance/defiance, inaction/change and other ways of being, feeling and doing. Therefore studies of the emotions and affect and their socio-spatial constitution must be mindful of the partial knowledges in circulation and the way these inform how we interpret our social worlds and those we study. Epistemological erasures can result in disorientations, tensions, conflicts and even felt violence (e.g. see Mitchell and Kallio, 2017; Faria, 2021; Shee, 2022).

This concluding section also provides an opportunity to reflect on what studying the emotions means for individual researchers and how we are situated within our institutions and wider academy. In a recent special issue on uncomfortable geographies, Owen et al (2022) argue that discomfort can prompt political change that is shaped by "empathy and understanding" (page 4). Another special issue engages with the topic of academic failure and the emotional toll that failure can have faculty members across different career stages (Davies et al, 2021). Elsewhere Askins and Blazek (2017) argue that the emotions "is central in and to [the] everyday and structural conditions of our [academic] work" (page 1088). They propose a project of "caring with emptions" (ibid, 1098) as an approach that reconciles an ethics of care with an ethics of justice.

While Askins and Blazek (ibid) had focused on the production of knowledge and its circulation and legitimisation, the emotional effects of carrying out teaching and service work within our institutions and for the international academy—extending into our domestic lives and personal relationships—should not be ignored too. This means taking seriously the emotional dissonance we may experience in the very work we do, such as on occasions when our actions could reinforce neoliberal practices in the academy or when what one offers as care to one person could be misconstrued by another person as uncaring dispositions. Caring-with the emotions recognises that only through continuously engaging with such discomforts reflexively—and seeking communities of support and counsel—can we identify ways of doing things differently and *care-fully*, one step at a time.

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