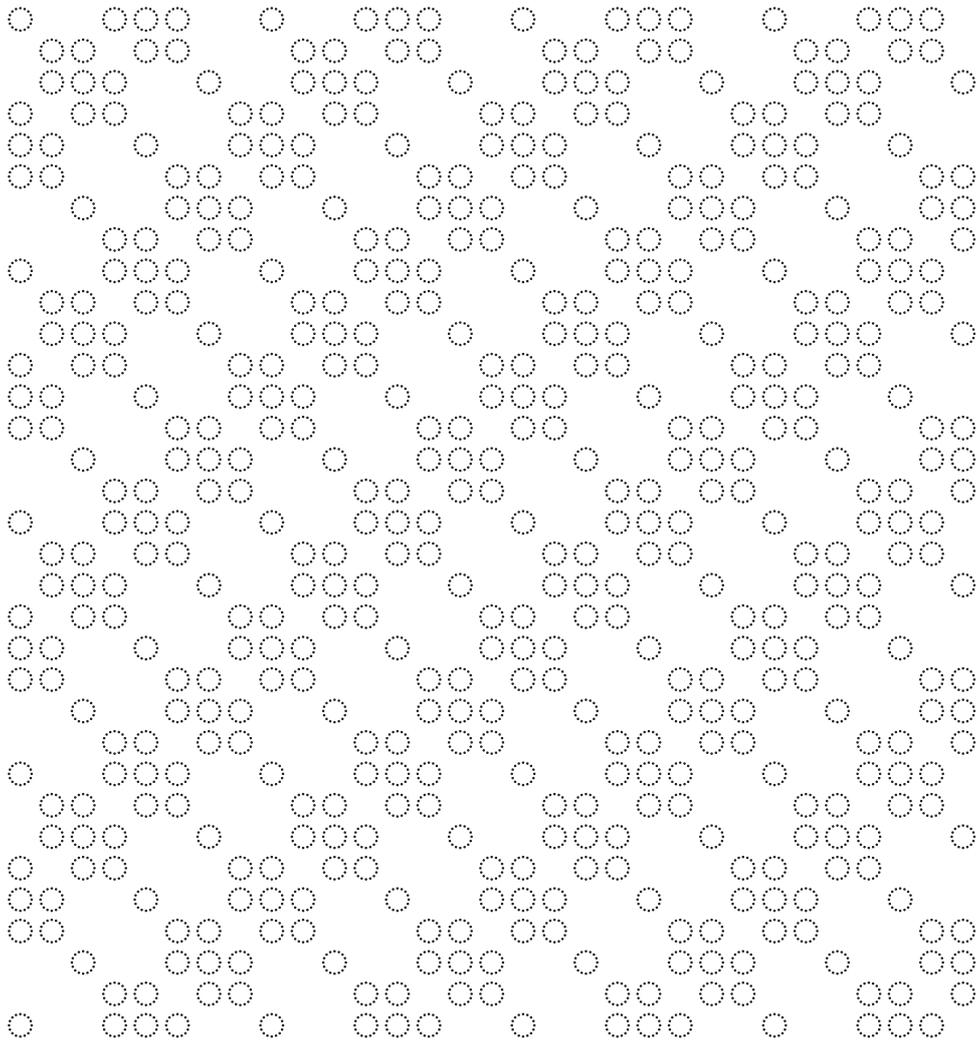


TEXTILE TERMS: A GLOSSARY

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EDITION IMORDE

TEXTILE STUDIES 0



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Textiles are agents of affect policies—this means they produce affects that are involved in different emotional fields of action. Neuropsychanalytically, they motivate both negative affects, such as the need to escape pain, and positive affects, such as, for example, personal desires.

Affects occur within a complex interplay of factors, out of which emotions develop. One decisive factor when discussing textiles and affects is the relation between emotions and knowledge gained through experience, which is backed by specific conditionings. These depend on, for example, whether an outfit is considered sexy or a woolen blanket is perceived as cozy. Therefore it makes sense to focus on the circular actions between the subject and the textile object when dealing with the concept of affect policies. Sara Ahmed (2004, 10) develops the argument that emotions are not found *in* the individual or *in* social contexts, but that they emerge *circularly* from both active and reactive processes. This is precisely how emotions produce the surfaces and hermetic forms that can be termed «objects.»

Contexts of affect and affect policies can be found in many different textile fields of representation (Helmhold 2012)—the following outline will focus on various textile living media and their affect policies. Textile living media manifest themselves spatially as architecture, but as ephemeral, «flexible» (German *biegeschlaff*; see Reiff-Stephan 2005/06, 282) textile architecture within the solid, built architecture. Gottfried Semper, within the discourse on material and form that arose in the nineteenth century, examined the relation between architecture and textiles through his «principle of dressing» (*Prinzip der Bekleidung*)—a thoroughly subversive criticism of the supreme discipline of solid architecture (Rykwert 1976, 78). Semper collected examples of textile festivity architectures that evidenced great potential for affect policies. Historically, textile architectures in exterior spaces were part of an overall urban architecture whose tasks included keeping the celebratory atmosphere literally «aflutter»: banners, flags, and awnings corresponded with the emotions of the festivalgoers (Helmhold 2012, 25). Semper (2004 [1860/63], 249) emphasized this specific purpose and use of textile media during urban festivities, arguing that textile media in the form of carpets, fluttering ribbons, and tents, together with branches and flowers, created a festive atmosphere that could not be achieved with monumental, permanent architecture only.

As interior living media, textile architectures such as carpets, hangings, pillows, or upholstery act as counter-architectures to the solid, built space (Helmhold 2012, 9–32). They are not just means of beautification or

embellishment but agents of subversion: they are unsettling, they can be used and worn, they inflate with presence, they fold up inconspicuously, they bear permanent traces, they can be destroyed quickly, and they cannot be burdened with any claim of permanence. Nonetheless, they are always *present*: textile architectures are inscribed into the spaces of solid architecture. They are connected to the emotional economy of their actors because they bear affinities to the bodies of their inhabitants. On the one hand, they form the hidden insides of architecture, but on the other, they provide their inhabitants with means of visual control as well as visual representation. Owing to these qualities, they are part of the unease of modernism, within which its «subject» does not allow mere «arts-and-craftsmen» to participate in the artistic discourse (Gropius 1967 [1935], 16, 50). With soft textile architectures we respond to emotional physical states and launch into discourses with ourselves—a context Sigmund Freud analyzed methodically, not coincidentally using the instrument of the couch (Guderian 2004, 121). Soft architectures can be used to crumple, pad out, smoothen, flatter, warm, cocoon, communicate, or form barriers.

Rather than to classic theories of emotion, the affect policies of textile architectures can be linked to the hypothesis of the «somatic marker» developed by the brain scientist António R. Damásio (1994, 173–77) in his research. «Feelings,» according to Damásio, «are just as cognitive as other percepts» (ibid., xv) through which physical states are imaged in the mind, or rather in which both are interrelated: «Nearly every part of the body, every muscle, joint, and internal organ, can send signals to the brain via the peripheral nerves. . . . In the opposite direction, the brain can act, through nerves, on all parts of the body» (ibid., 88).

Architecture requires incorporation by humans. August Schmarsow constructed a similar connection at the end of the nineteenth century, differentiating between the aesthetic and spatial reception of architecture—between architecture as form and architecture as the creator of space (Helmhold 2015a). Schmarsow (1994 [1894], 286) considered space as a form of perception that involves «experiences of our sense of sight, whether or not assisted by other physiological factors.» According to him, sensory experience, alongside the vestibular sensation, also includes «muscular sensations of our body, the sensitivity of our skin, and the structure of our body» (ibid.). Schmarsow, like the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, was bound by the physiological-psychological research approach of the art and architecture production of his time (Neumeyer 2002, 318). By directing the gaze to the *inner side* of architecture, he focused on the actors within the space and made them the actual *producers* of space (Wölfflin 1994 [1886]). By doing so, he constructed an interactive relationship between humans and architecture that appeals to our spatial *abilities*. In other words, architecture is unable to manifest itself spatially without the acting subject (Schmarsow 1994 [1894], 288). The spatial sociologist Martina Löw (2001, 108–15) supports this concept, for which she proposes the term *spacing*.

Schmarsow's concept of the «muscular sensations of our body,» which he introduced in a lecture held in Leipzig in 1893, can be correlated with current knowledge on emotional physical states, as popularized

by Damásio in the early 1990s. There are somatosensitive regions of the brain in which sensations from the whole body are received as signals and transmitted back to the body. The systematic introduction of jails, or punitive spaces, during the nineteenth century is based on this concept of bodily muscular sensations and related emotional deprivations (Helmholtz 2012; 2015b).

Beds respond to the postures and constitutions of their residents; they soothe and console, they are discreet, and they lastingly record the traces of those who have slept in them, even after they have left. Eugène Delacroix's watercolor *Un lit défait* (ca. 1827, Paris, Musée national Eugène Delacroix) visualizes this idea: only the sensuously, elaborately mingled sheets bear witness of the activities and movements of the bed's former users—a dramatic landscape of textile bedding. Beds are affect-intensive spaces used for withdrawal, relaxation, sexuality, sleep, pleasure, desire, etc. The upholstery of a mattress, pillow, or cushion triggers positive muscular sensations, or positive somatic markers, by reacting to the smallest changes of the body's position with an adaptive movement.

We go to bed relatively unprotected, with little clothing or naked. Fundamentally, we associate with this space a feeling of trust, which is imparted in early childhood (Helmholtz 2012, 161–64). Knowledge through experience, which we gain by interacting with soft and pliable spatial media early in our lives (Nussbaum 2003; Seiffge-Krenke 2003), is mostly positively affected by social-care media applied to our own bodies. This leads to the formation of positive «somatic markers,» which for their part are involved in decision-making, namely—and this is the remarkable thing about Damásio's hypothesis—in feedback processes between the body (Greek *sōma*) and the nervous system (brain). Damásio does not use pillows, rugs, and beds in his examples, but he shows how decisively the production of sensations is linked to body knowledge—in a way, our brain is also present in our muscles and joints. This conception could explain why the need for soft body media in the human «history of pampering» (Sloterdijk 1999, 232–33) continued even in the technologized modern age.

The installation *My Bed* (fig. 3) by the British artist Tracey Emin elicited strong reactions from critics when it was shortlisted for the 1999 Turner Prize. It was linked to a biographical crisis: the bed served as both a refuge and a representation of the artist's past suffering. The bedding, sheets, and towels carried traces of sperm, urine, vomit, tears, and blood. Their apparent disorder referenced Delacroix's *Lit défait*, and a pile of various objects in front of the bed indicated excess and loneliness (Clark 2015). In Emin's work, epitomizing the ambivalence of textile architecture, textiles and upholstery acted as agents of affect policies, expanding, warming, and embedding the biological body, alleviating suffering and pain, and/or stimulating desire and passion. The textiles had absorbed and contained traces, smells, and body fluids; in a society of hygiene, olfactory hypersensitivity, and body control, this was a potent provocation—*dirty linen*. Simultaneously, the bed appeared as a fragile space that offered little protection from the outside world; Deborah Cherry (2002) has fittingly related Emin's work to homelessness in the context of immigration, asylum-seeking,

and the search for existential protection in the European integration process of the 1990s.

Textile media are part of visual culture but also—and this is crucial—of material everyday culture. As such, they are systematically *in touch* with ideas of body, materiality, and the senses (Tilley et al. 2006, 5; Pinney 2006). Emin's installation draws attention to this ambivalence, as it materializes both positive and negative affects: negative affects appear as the need to escape pain, positive affects as the search for security and protection. In psychiatric clinics this has been used historically to control and regulate patients' affects: in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the bed became a place of internment for the mentally ill and emotionally unstable (Ankele 2008, 17; Helmhold 2012, 98–99).

A user-related theory of textile affect policies still remains to be written. It possibly requires an advanced perception theory that does not examine the receiving «I» but the performative-experiencing «me» (Wiesing 2009). However, the materiality of textile architecture is being questioned and analyzed with regard to affects and the body in energetic housing concepts, for example in Carole Collet's *Toile de Hackney* (2005); and Mette Ramsgard Thomsen's *Vivisection* (Heinich/Eidner 2009).