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Affective affordances and psychopathology

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Self-disorders in depression and schizophrenia have been the focus of much recent work in phenomenological psychopathology. But little has been said about the role the material environment plays in shaping the affective character of these disorders. In this paper, we argue that enjoying reliable (i.e., trustworthy) access to the things and spaces around us – the constituents of our material environment – is crucial for our ability to stabilize and regulate our affective life on a day-to-day basis. These things and spaces often play an ineliminable role in shaping what we feel and how we feel it; when we interact with them, they contribute ongoing feedback that “scaffolds” the character and temporal development of our affective experiences. However, in some psychopathological conditions, the ability to access these things and spaces becomes disturbed. Individuals not only lose certain forms of access to the practical significance of the built environment but also to its *regulative* significance, too – and the stability and organization of their affective life is compromised. In developing this view, we discuss core concepts like “affordance spaces”, “scaffolding”, and “incorporation”. We apply these concepts to two case studies, severe depression and schizophrenia, and we show why these cases support our main claim. We conclude by briefly considering implications of this view for developing intervention and treatment strategies.