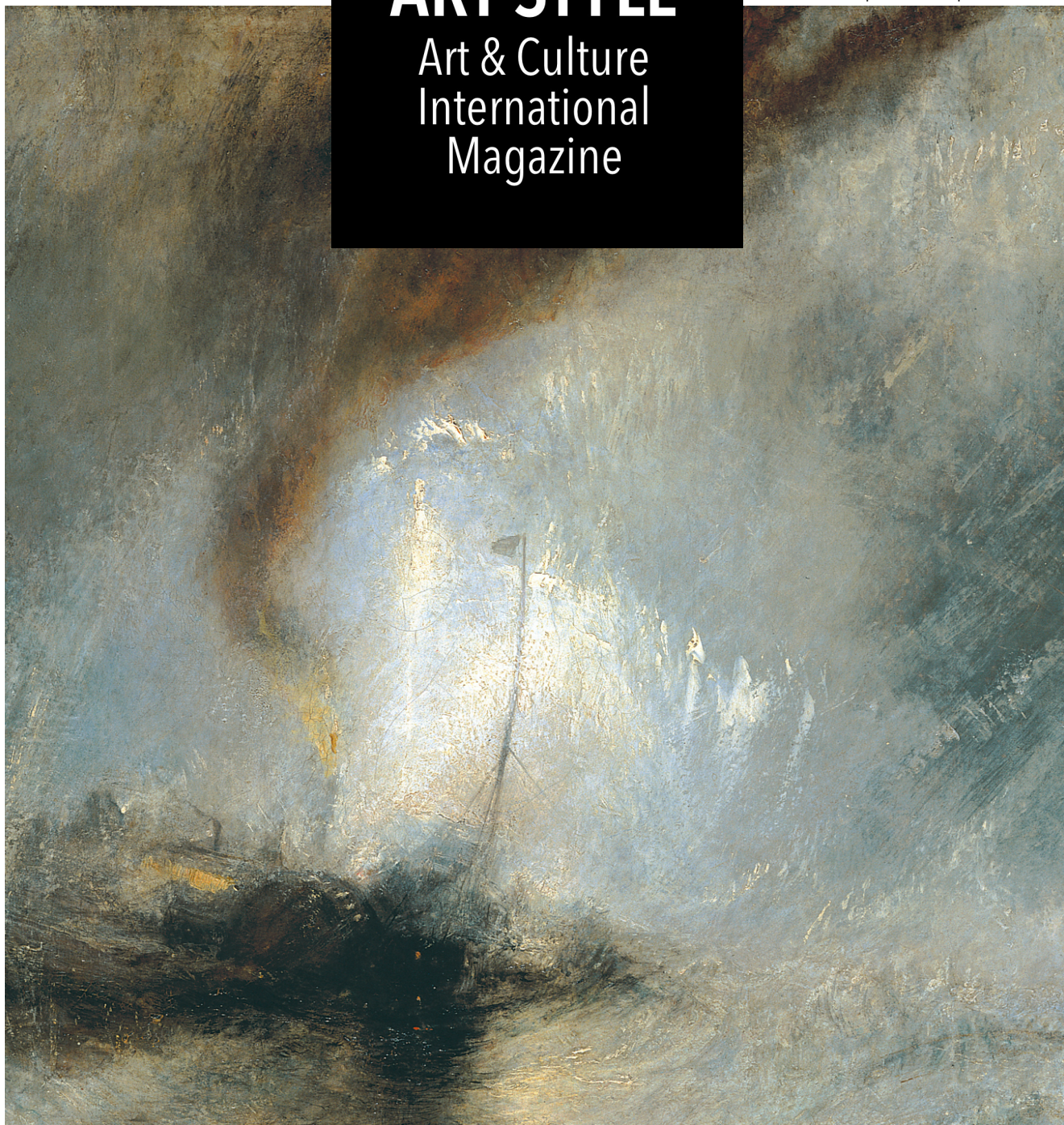


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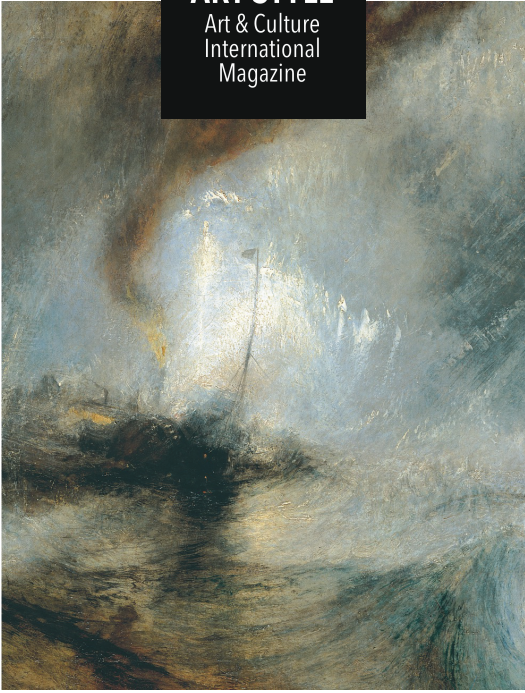


ATMOSPHERE AND MOOD

Two Sides of the Same
Phenomenon

ART STYLE

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International
Magazine



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Art Style | Art & Culture International Magazine is an open access, biannual, and peer-reviewed online magazine that aims to bundle cultural diversity. All values of cultures are shown in their varieties of art. Beyond the importance of the medium, form, and context in which art takes its characteristics, we also consider the significance of socio-cultural and market influence. Thus, there are different forms of visual expression and perception through the media and environment. The images relate to the cultural changes and their time-space significance—the spirit of the time. Hence, it is not only about the image itself and its description but rather its effects on culture, in which reciprocity is involved. For example, a variety of visual narratives—like movies, TV shows, videos, performances, media, digital arts, visual technologies and video game as part of the video's story, communications design, and also, drawing, painting, photography, dance, theater, literature, sculpture, architecture and design—are discussed in their visual significance as well as in synchronization with music in daily interactions. Moreover, this magazine handles images and sounds concerning the meaning in culture due to the influence of ideologies, trends, or functions for informational purposes as forms of communication beyond the significance of art and its issues related to the socio-cultural and political context. However, the significance of art and all kinds of aesthetic experiences represent a transformation for our nature as human beings. In general, questions concerning the meaning of art are frequently linked to the process of perception and imagination. This process can be understood as an aesthetic experience in art, media, and fields such as motion pictures, music, and many other creative works and events that contribute to one's knowledge, opinions, or skills. Accordingly, examining the digital technologies, motion picture, sound recording, broadcasting industries, and its social impact, Art Style Magazine focuses on the myriad meanings of art to become aware of their effects on culture as well as their communication dynamics.



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Editorial

Dear readers,

Art Style Magazine is entering its fifth year of publication and is well on its way. Many achievements have already been made along the editorial journey in an ongoing effort to meet the criteria for academic journals and improve the quality of our pieces. *Art Style* is currently indexed in Latindex and Diadorim and has been evaluated as meeting the editorial criteria necessary to be included in the Web of Science, Clarivate. Furthermore, in November 2022, *Art Style Magazine* was approved for inclusion in the Web of Science Core Collection, Emerging Sources Citation Index™ (ESCI). Therefore, the magazine will be continuously evaluated to reach the next stage. According to Clarivate's criteria, "Journals that meet the quality criteria enter Emerging Sources Citation Index™ (ESCI). Journals that meet the additional impact criteria enter Science Citation Index Expanded™ (SCIE), Social Sciences Citation Index™ (SSCI), or Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), depending on their subject area." Details of Clarivate's criteria, editorial evaluation process, and quality and impact criteria can be found on *Art Style Magazine's* website.

Moreover, *Art Style* aims to improve how the quality of research is evaluated through what it publishes, being a signatory to the main open-access agreements that pursue practices relating to research articles published in peer-reviewed journals (which can and should be extended to other products, such as datasets, because they are relevant research results). Hence, there are always opportunities for researchers and academics to publish, and contributors are welcome. So, stay tuned for our calls for papers, news, and a series of editions, which follow a scheduled plan based on our biannual periodicity. We expect support and contribution from everyone involved in and passionate about research and publications. For more information about the magazine, please visit *Art Style's* website.

For our 11th edition, we have prepared a special issue, "Atmosphere and Mood: Two Sides of the Same Phenomenon," edited by Martina Sauer and Zhuofei Wang. It is a wide-ranging contemporary theme that includes the aesthetic experience, external and internal factors that subtly influence perception, and theoretical and empirical approaches that relate to human-environment interactions. Finally, as always, I wish you good reading.

Christiane Wagner
Editor-in-Chief and Creative Director

Atmosphere and Mood: Two Sides of the Same Phenomenon

Introduction

In past decades, the subject *atmosphere and mood* has gone beyond the physio-meteorological and psychological scopes and become a new direction of aesthetics which concerns two sides of the same phenomenon. As the primary sensuous reality constructed by both the perceiving subject and the perceived object, atmosphere and mood are neither a purely subjective state nor an objective thing. Atmosphere is essentially a quasi-object pervaded by a specific affective quality and a ubiquitous phenomenon forming the foundation of our outer life experiences, while mood is a quasi-subject pervaded by specific objective quality and thus a ubiquitous phenomenon forming the foundation of our inner life experiences. A practical dimension is thereby, from the outset, embedded in consideration of both concepts. This is mainly characterized by actions and, correspondingly, ethical aspects, which concern the design and creation of atmosphere and, thus the triggering of mood through works of art. Here, on the one hand, the process of artistic formation, long neglected in the European tradition, is given prominence as an aesthetic practice, and on the other hand, an interactive dialogue is effectively established between the artist, the work and the viewer. Due to the fact that atmosphere and mood, both as in-between, emphasize the interaction of the perceiver and the perceived from two sides, here the decisive question is: in what kind of environment do we live or participate and in what way do we experience it? The focus of aesthetics is now not on the conventional issue whether the environment is beautiful or gives us a sense of beauty, but on how the environment influences our feeling of being there (*Befinden*) through our own sensuality. Such an approach would contribute to a critical transformation in aesthetic methodology, namely from the ontological and/or epistemological *what* to the phenomenological and anthropological *how*.

From this, it follows that within aesthetics, the interplay between atmosphere and mood occupies a key position. On the one hand, as a tuned space, atmosphere differs in its spatiality from inner mood it arouses and presents a certain independence. In this respect, mood can be seen as the inner pole of atmosphere. On the other hand, atmosphere and mood cannot be practically separated. Instead, they are intertwined in a complex relationship. Atmosphere radiates a prevailing, emotionally effective tone which affects and even formed inner mood while the perceiver, due to his or her own state of mind and feeling, may experience a certain atmosphere somewhat differently.

Against this backdrop, it is an interview by co-editor Zhuofei Wang with the practical philosopher Gernot Böhme, who died in 2022, that introduces this special issue and provides a first insight into the study of atmospheres and their relationship to aesthetics. Given Böhme's prominence in research, it is not surprising that most of the submitted essays tie in with his groundbreaking research on the topic. Thus, philosophically, cultural anthropologically, empirically and practically relevant research come into the focus of the articles submitted.

The affective affects and effects of the arts, and thus their dependence on corporeality, are recognizable in them as a basic motif. In doing so, the articles take an analytical look at various artistic media. Video games, for example, are discussed by Elisabeth Neumann in confrontation with Böhme's position. Brazilian popular music is the point of contact for Paul Gajanigo's socio-political approach, which deals with Jürgen Habermas and Louis Quéré. In addition, Zhuofei Wang focuses on the interdisciplinary exploration of European and East Asian art traditions against the background of Böhme and Stefan Majetschak. The basic assumption of the special issue on the interdependence of atmosphere and mood, finds substantial confirmation in empirical research. Thus, based on James Gibson's psychological concept of affordance, which is taken up together with research from pedagogy and again by Böhme, new approaches arise in the practical work with students in China and Germany by Albert Juan and Lyn Chen as well as by Andreas Rauch.

Finally, the last two contributions of the special issue are based on psychological findings presented by Franz Mechsner and neuroscientific research based on child psychological findings of Daniel N. Stern, by Giovanni di Cesare and Giada Lombardi. Both contributions are the result of an interdisciplinary exchange, either from an architectural viewpoint with Katharina Brichetti or from a cultural anthropological perspective against the background of Ernst Cassirer and Susanne K. Langer with Martina Sauer. The first contribution discusses the consequences for healing centers, the second sheds new light on paintings of Futurism.

The tension between atmosphere and mood, as revealed here, opens up a large space for exploring a new understanding of aesthetics. On this basis, the special issue pursued to diversify this discussion on an international level.

Martina Sauer
Senior Editor

Zhuofei Wang
Co-Editor



An Interview with Gernot Böhme¹

Zhuofei Wang

Gernot Böhme (1937- 2022) is a well-known contemporary German philosopher whose research interests cover classical philosophy, philosophy of science, theory of time, natural philosophy, philosophy of technical civilization, philosophical anthropology, ethics and aesthetics. From 1977 to 2002 he was Professor of Philosophy at Technical University of Darmstadt. Since 2005 he has been director of the Institute for Practical Philosophy (IPPH) in Darmstadt. Beginning in the late 1980s, Böhme developed the theory "ecological aesthetics of nature" (*Ökologische Naturästhetik*), which has already had a wide influence on current research in German-speaking countries. His major works in this area are (a) *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989); (b) *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995); (c) *Die Natur vor uns. Naturphilosophie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Kusterdingen: SFG Servicecenter, 2002); (d) *Leibsein als Aufgabe. Leibphilosophie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Kusterdingen: SFG Servicecenter, 2003). As a response to the current environmental debate, Böhme's ecological aesthetics of nature is based on a general theory of perception (*Allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*). He emphasizes the concrete human bodily experience in a special environment and gives priority to the original coexistent relationship between human and nature. With this theory, Böhme attempts to underline the idea that humans are a part of nature. He argues that we should abandon modern practices that tend to control and exploit the resources of nature and instead should actively promote the integration of human and ecological elements.

Wang: Good morning, Professor Böhme. I'm honored to be able to have this interview with you! Your aesthetic research starts with the critique of the traditional understanding of the term 'nature.' You have pointed out that nature in conventional European discourse has been described as something lying beyond human beings (*etwas hinter dem Menschen Liegendes*), as something to be conquered (*als etwas Überwundenes*) and as something to be dismissed as obsolete (*als etwas Obsoletes*).² In contrast, you attempt to establish "nature before us" as a basic principle. Could you please tell us how this principle is applied in your aesthetic practice?

Böhme: The thesis that nature lies beyond us can be traced back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's famous motto, "Back to nature" (*Revenons à la nature*). There he postulates that nature refers to a state that is given, and points out that we have already left it; that is to say, we are in the state of civilization. However, the current situation, in my view, is quite different. In the past fifty years, nature has become an intensively discussed topic precisely because we should give ourselves a new direction. Now nature confronts us with a new task to be fulfilled and we still need to investigate further our natural being. Fundamentally we regard ourselves as a "rational animal" (*zoon logon echon*), namely as a kind of being having rationality and language. In this case, animality means something to be overcome. We currently find ourselves in a phase which demands us to integrate our natural being into the self-understanding of human beings. In this sense, natural being and rational being must first be considered as equal. This primarily concerns external nature. We are already living in a cultural and civilized nature, and it is only now that we realize that what has been carried out as the domination of nature is, in fact, a totally impossible project. On the contrary, nature must be recognized as our partner and we should gradually adapt to such a partner relationship.

Wang: Since the late 1980s you have been developing the theory of an "ecological aesthetics of nature" (*Ökologische Naturästhetik*). Different from the modern conception, which leads to an alienation from nature, the ecological aesthetics of nature is based on the *general theory of perception* (*Allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*) and strives to integrate *nature in itself* and *nature for us* (*Natur an sich und für uns*). What does this actually mean? What older and contemporary theories have provided inspiration for this research?

Böhme: In my opinion, what really counts is that in our period we should rediscover our identity as natural beings and develop the consciousness that *body is the nature that we ourselves are* (*Der Leib ist die Natur, die wir selbst sind*). I view this as a crucial aspect. We have found ourselves involved in environmental degradation, that is, that our own nature is being affected. This concerns not only the problem of food but also of breathing. External pollution, for example the polluted atmosphere, is threatening our own existence. Moreover, we tend to suffer from cancer caused by the absorption of toxic substances. The important point is that the destruction of external nature has become a problem for us only when it has affected us and has been sensed with our own bodies. If this were not the case, one could say that it really does not matter what happens to external nature. What is a product of human behavior towards nature would not change nature as such because, for example, a desert or fallow land as well as the remains

of an industrial zone belong to nature, too. In this sense, nature as such is indestructible. But what has been destroyed is *nature for us* (*Natur für uns*). This actually concerns nature as a living space of human beings. In this respect, I hold the view that we should be aware of our own nature in order to tackle environment problems. In this way we may be able to recognize that what we have done to external nature could eventually conflict with our inner nature. The environment where we live is not an issue only related to nature itself. Instead, our human surroundings should be transformed into a human space, and nature as a living space made worthy of preservation.

Wang: In your work *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* (*Toward an Ecological Aesthetics of Nature*) published in 1989, the topic of *Being-located in environments* (*Sichbefinden in Umwelten*) is defined as a core theme of aesthetics.³ Could you please clarify this finding and its consequences?

Böhme: This deals with the issue that the science of ecology needs some adjustments. First, what interests us in nature is not important for nature as such but for ourselves. We realize that what we are interested in is not nature itself but nature defined by human limits, e.g. as do political borders or property boundaries. Secondly, what nature should be is not dependent on the norms of nature but on the standards established by human beings. For example, although a forest or a field is a part of nature, its situation is determined by various human uses and interests. In this sense, the values we desire to achieve are specified not in the field of nature but of society. That is why we have claimed in Darmstadt that ecology should be a social science (*soziale Naturwissenschaft*),⁴ namely that social norms and social value limits should be introduced into the basic categories of ecology. A specific point in this connection is the aesthetic aspect. Nature, which is interesting for us and desirable as a human environment, should also be observed from an aesthetic point of view. *Aesthetic viewpoints* (*ästhetische Gesichtspunkte*) do not pay attention only to the issue of whether nature is beautiful or offers us beautiful scenery but also to the fact that nature influences our own feeling of being there (*Befinden*) through our sensibility. With the help of our own bodily feeling (*Befinden*), we can feel the environment in which we are located. So there exists a relation between external conditions and our own body state (*Befindlichkeit*.) I call this relation an aesthetic aspect under which our own environment needs to be considered. And it is atmosphere that brings the human situation (*Befinden*) and the quality of environment together. In this view, we can affirm that external nature has a certain atmosphere in which we live. At the same time, this atmosphere makes us feel good or not.

Wang: In terms of the classical theories, 'environment' mainly concerns non-human nature consisting of organic and inorganic elements. On the contrary, Professor Arnold Berleant, who is an important contributor to environmental aesthetics, points out that environment refers to a dynamic natural process in which all things participate. In this sense human beings are in a continuous symbiotic relationship with their surroundings. Berleant emphasizes that humans cannot be separated from the natural environment and that there exists a single, complex situation, the human environment. Do you share this opinion?

Böhme: I view Ernst Bloch's concept of *alliance-technique* (*Allianztechnik*) as a guiding principle in this respect. Bloch coined this term in his book, *The Principle of Hope* (*Das Prinzip Hoffnung*). As regards his claim, he postulated that mankind was expected to develop such a technique, that is, such a relationship with nature that, in today's sense, it would be sustainable. However, it should be mentioned that a catastrophic divergence has destroyed what could be a symbiotic human-nature coexistence. The integration of human activity and natural development is being constantly threatened and is getting out of control. We call these environmental disasters, which are not only threatening us but are already at hand. We define these as environmental catastrophes because external nature has been altered through human activities, namely through production and consumption, so that it will eventually hardly any longer be a human living space. So we should demand here what was achieved in traditional agriculture. A peasant arranged his field in such a way that in the course of the year the field could return to the state from which it came, so that the next cycle could start again. This tells us that a wonderful symbiotic relationship in fact existed in traditional agricultural society. Today, on the contrary, in the industrial agriculture that we have, such a sustainable human-nature relationship must first be established. Now the problem is that we have to develop patterns of production and consumption that understand nature as a partner in an interdependent sense. In other words, this means that we always co-produce nature in our own production processes. Namely, we must transfer nature again to a status, generally its initial status, in which further production is possible, and we must see ourselves as a part of the reproductive processes of external nature.

Wang: The ecological aesthetics of nature reflects the human-nature interaction against the background of technological civilization. In your opinion, nature in our technological era means "not a counterpart to the culture of technology"⁵ but primarily in relation to the design of a human environment. How would you respond to the criticism that such a concept oriented towards subjective aesthetic needs represents a retrograde step toward the traditional subject-centered theory?

Böhme: The Norwegian ecologist *Arne Næss (1912-2009)* was of the opinion that we should overcome human-centered thinking. Thinkers like him are so radical because they try to reverse the relationship that has existed for hundreds of years and demand that we should take care of nature, as such. The welfare of nature itself is of importance and we, as humankind, have to put ourselves aside. This is completely absurd! The fact is that what in Europe is esteemed and protected as nature is not nature in itself. We have no wilderness. In traditional American stories we can find descriptions of wilderness because what immigrants met as nature was in fact wilderness. Therefore in the US, it can be argued that nature as wilderness should be protected. In Europe, by contrast, what people find good about nature is always cultivated nature. This is actually the old culturally affected nature that we know and find good here; in other words, this concerns what is considered as landscape, etc. However, this is not nature in itself. In this respect I would say there is a requirement, first from a historical and second from a practical standpoint, that we have a cultural environment, namely a human environment around us and not just wilderness. What is the point of not allowing anyone to enter a preserve? And for what reason? This actually cannot be the goal! Such considerations are not really related to environmental issues and politics. What counts is rather a balanced relationship, as mentioned above under the concept of "alliance-technique" (*Allianztechnik*). According to this, cultivated nature is the type of nature that should be taken seriously. Nature should be accepted and at the same time valued as an independent partner. The reason for this is that people have overloaded themselves with the project of dominating nature. However, total management of nature cannot be realized at all, for we should be fully conscious of the spontaneity and self-reproduction forces of nature.

Wang: Under the influence of cultural relativism, quite a number of aestheticians are now of the opinion that the aesthetic contemplation of nature actually does not follow a universal pattern but is influenced by the cultural tradition of interpretation that is permeated with particular historical, social, and psychological elements. What do you think of this viewpoint? Wouldn't it be easy to come to the conclusion that nature-related experience should only be evaluated in terms of the associated cultural understanding and could be considered as inadequate or inaccurate if it is judged from other cultural perspectives?

Böhme: I think your questions should be answered from two aspects. There seems to be a kind of relativism if one pleads for a cultural nature. Seen from a historical perspective, such cultivated nature is connected with a given culture from Europe, Asia, or America, etc., and could be considered acceptable. At the

same time, this also means that the nature in which we are interested is usually regional, that is to say, it doesn't concern the whole world but regions and landscapes. However, from an ecological point of view, the world should obviously be regarded as a whole, as well. In this sense, wholeness is indispensable. Thus there is an ecological dimension that is related to the entirety of the world. Take, for example, the ozone layer at the two poles: One is fighting against its disappearance, with the help of the enforcement of a worldwide ban or reduction of the FCKW gas emission, so that it could regenerate. Today we have other problems, such as climate change and slowly rising temperature, as well. All of these are deemed to be global issues, namely, they do not refer to a matter of the cultural imprints of landscapes but to the cosmos as a whole. An ecosystem that encompasses the whole earth should be guided into stability and preserved to make human life possible. As to the slow heating of atmosphere, we realize that this is not true. The melting of polar ice has been leading to higher water levels, so that the entire landscapes and countries around the Pacific region are being threatened. These environmental problems have affected large parts of mankind and must be overcome. What is preferable is a world climate that allows human life and well being, at least in large areas of the earth. Thus people would like to contribute to the maintenance of this climate. That means they will have to defend against those environmental problems that are attributed to their own activities. For our lives, we need an environment that is favorable for us. This actually is an international environmental problem.

Wang: Nowadays, the sphere of art has already gone beyond its traditional limits and occurs in new manifestations, such as urban design, advertisement, new media and microtechniques. As far as the development of an aesthetics of nature is concerned, it is increasingly difficult to differentiate between natural and artistic forms in cases like urban design, architecture, and bio-artifacts. How can we understand the contemporary relationship between artistic and natural aesthetic values? To what extent would an aesthetic analysis benefit from such an artistic extension?

Böhme: Generally speaking, it is clear that art is obviously something quite independent of other human activities and of human nature. This is called the autonomy of art. But today we are dealing with arts that are environmentally relevant and devote themselves to environmental problems. This mainly refers to art forms manifesting natural processes themselves. I call this "ephemeral art" (*ephemere Kunst*),⁶ for example, those works that deliberately expose themselves to nature and thereby let nature contribute to the creation of the art. Take

Fridhelm Klein as an example. He lets his paintings be flooded by waves. Here a natural process has been imposed on the form of the artwork itself and it shows the effect of nature being employed in a specific realm of art. To take another example, there is a type of art showing natural processes by introducing natural objects like plants, trees, etc. into the work. Of course there are also other kinds of art that draw attention to the destruction of nature. My last example is the great project, "Soundscape," which records acoustic landscapes. For one thing, such recordings preserve for us the natural environment in the form of acoustic records. For another, they remind us that we ourselves live in a natural acoustic environment that may even be the basis of our feeling at home. Yet another result of the "Soundscape" project is to create an awareness of this aspect of environment. Of course, this also concerns life in the city and actually relates to the issue of urban ecology. Environment here is not just mother nature but also urban environment. With the help of the "Soundscape" and acoustic installations, people are once again being made aware of the fact that they live in an audible environment and begin to develop an interest in it. And in the urban design the following question must be posed: *How should the environment be further developed?*

Wang: Professor Böhme, many thanks for this interview and all the best for the future!

Notes

1. On January 28th, 2014, Professor Böhme gave a presentation at the School of Arts and Design in Kassel (Kunsthochschule Kassel). On this occasion, Dr. Zhuofei Wang interviewed him about the central ideas in his ecological aesthetics of nature. This interview was originally published in *Contemporary Aesthetics* Vol. 12 (2014). Introduction and translation by the interviewer.

2. Gernot Böhme, *Die Natur vor uns: Naturphilosophie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (Kusterdingen: SFG Servicecenter, 2002), 9.

3. Gernot Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 9.

4. Gernot Böhme with E. Schramm as editor, *Soziale Naturwissenschaft. Wege zur Erweiterung der Ökologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1985).

5. Gernot Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1989), 12.

6. Gernot Böhme, *Die sanfte Kunst des Ephemereren* (Essen: Verlag der fadbk, 2008). Also in Mira Fliescher, Fabian Goppelsröder, Dieter Mersch, eds, *Sichtbarkeiten I. Erscheinen. Zur Praxis des Präsentiven* (Berlin: diaphanes 2013), 87-108.



Being Scared and Scaring Oneself in Video Games

The “Atmosfearic” Aesthetics of *Amnesia: Rebirth*

Elizabeth Neumann

Abstract

Atmosphere-centered philosophy and aesthetics are gaining more and more attention not only in widely established academic disciplines, but also in video game studies, a field that deals with one of the most popular forms of artistic and cultural expression in the 21st century. The fact that spaces and constellations of objects produced by game designers and instantiated by players create atmospheres on a *leiblichen* level of perception is evident in a medium as sensorially sophisticated as the video game. As an illustration of Gernot Böhme’s neo-phenomenological and neo-aesthetic concept of atmosphere, a look at Frictional Games’ *Amnesia: Rebirth* (2020) demonstrates how frightening video game atmospheres are created. The focus is divided into three parts: light, space, and sound. Although these domains cannot be entirely separated from each other, the analyses highlight how different ecstasies (i.e., ways in which an object and its constellations affect subjects) of video game environments and conditions influence the player’s state of mind and their being there (*Befindlichkeit*) and evoke a fear-inducing atmosphere, or rather *atmosfear*. The media-aesthetic analysis demonstrates the way in which game design is reflected as aesthetic labor in the player’s experience. Caused by the constant concurrence of potential safety and potential danger within the uncanny game world, players develop an ambivalent attitude towards it. Each of *Amnesia: Rebirth*’s elements—for example, the tension caused by sparse lighting; darkness and collapsed architecture that forbid freedom of movement; the avatar’s unreliable condition; unstable soundscapes; sound-sensitive monsters—negotiate the player’s curiosity, feeling-for, feeling-as, and reflection, as well as the game’s requirements for progression. The joint influence of seemingly contradictory affective impressions of fear, hope, despair, chaos, uncertainty, and curiosity prevents both the formation of unanimous intentions and attitudes and the execution of unambiguous actions.

Introduction

German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1937–2022) invokes atmosphere as the main subject of an aesthetics that is concerned with perception (not evaluation, taste, etc.), close to the discipline's origins. He conceives of atmosphere as a spatial, physically perceivable, bodily experienceable, and therefore always emotional (e.g., calming, threatening) in-between phenomenon that "fills," "charges," or "tunes" a space and, thus, affects the subjects present in it.¹ The in-between of the atmosphere refers to its status between object and subject: it connects the "properties" of an environment with the subject's state of mind, feeling, and being there—that is, with the experience of one's own bodily presence (through *Körper* and *Leib*) and, thus, one's own feelings—denoted by the German term *Befindlichkeit*.²

On the one hand, since the subject directly perceives an atmosphere, characterizing the atmosphere always means describing one's own affectedness. On the other hand, an atmosphere emerges from objects and their constellations in the space that it "tunes." Böhme calls the ways in which an object is present and goes beyond itself to both affect the space and co-constitute atmosphere *ecstasies*. These include, among others, color, smell, voice, sound, and concrete properties, such as shape or volume.

Atmospheres can be constructed by means of aesthetic labor, by deliberately using, changing, and combining things so that the totality of their *ecstasies* radiates a certain atmosphere, or—at least—favors an attitude of reception. Atmospheres are made with the aim of setting "a particular frame of mind" or evoking "a certain disposition of activity and passivity"³ in those they affect. Since atmospheres intensify, change, or trigger feelings or moods (i.e., longer-lasting feelings), which in turn influence thought and action, aesthetic work also implies the exercise of power.⁴ Not only people who are classically understood as artists but also game designers participate in exercising power in this manner.

The theory of atmosphere, which is especially flourishing in German-language video game studies,⁵ is a promising aesthetic approach to the essentially audiovisual-kinesthetic medium of video games. While atmosphere as an affective concept initially fell behind the dominant, titular terms *affect* and *emotion* within the discourse surrounding the *affective/emotional turn*, atmospheric aesthetics, (re-)introduced by Böhme in the 1990s, is now being considered and applied ever more frequently. In current video game research,⁶ atmosphere is examined as an affective

mechanism that triggers feelings, modifies perception, action, and *Befindlichkeit*. Philosophers Bernd Bösel and Sebastian Möring⁷ even see atmosphere as a central concept of “affective game studies,” and in 2020, the annual “Clash of Realities” conference of the Cologne Game Lab invited (video) game studies scholars to present their research on the interface of atmosphere, mood, and games.⁸ According to atmosphere-centered approaches, the affective potential of video games is primarily based on the interaction between a player who is in a certain state of mind or being there and the respective game and its atmosphere. What Bösel and Möring⁹ suggest is beneficial about considering the concept of atmosphere in analyses is that doing so assumes that the video game is a multifaceted medium, rather than focusing on its individual and non-representational elements. A materialist model of affect—that is, understanding atmosphere as *affect*, which circulates between bodies of whatever materiality, whether human, or non-human animal, non-organic, or abstract—is appropriate for analyzing the reception of a video game. The process of gameplay in the widest sense is essentially “transmaterial” since actuality and virtuality, the concrete and the abstract, and the analogue and the digital are intertwined. To illustrate the state of affective game studies within the field, this paper analyzes the atmosphere of the single-player game *Amnesia: Rebirth* (Frictional Games, 2020).

Overview

Amnesia: Rebirth

Amnesia: Rebirth (hereafter *Rebirth*) encompasses both paralyzing and motivating affects due to its ambivalent atmosphere. This affective dynamic stems from the fact that two genres clash in *Rebirth*. Adhering to traditional genre boundaries, the game is simultaneously a walking simulator labelled as peaceful, contemplative, and melancholic¹⁰ and a survival horror brimming with fear, anxiety, and violence. The mandatory acts of hiding and fleeing in survival horror games conflict with the likewise mandatory mode of exploration and discovery that is so characteristic of the walking simulator genre. Since its first title *Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (Frictional Games, 2010), the *Amnesia* series has oscillated between these genres. One might even claim that *Amnesia*’s creator Frictional Games is to walking simulators with a horror theme what The Chinese Room—the designers of, arguably, the first walking simulator, *Dear Esther* (2012)—is to the much more common walking simulators with a mysterious, melancholic theme.

What horrible events do players investigate and witness in *Rebirth*? Avatar Anastasie “Tasi” Trianon is a young woman who travels to the Algerian desert with an international group during the 1930s to document the process and proceeds of the ongoing mining operations. Tasi had been living in Paris with her husband, Salim, who is also part of the group. After a plane crash, Tasi seemingly finds herself alone in the desert. Since she cannot remember, among other details, why she is there, she sets out to find her husband and the rest of the crew. In doing so, players-as-Tasi roam through caves, oases, mountains, ruined fortresses, and an otherworld in Gigeresque art deco style (Fig. 1). In *Rebirth*, as in other Frictional Games titles, confrontation with immediate dangers must be avoided. An observant eye and a good memory for hiding places are required, as is the courage to risk one’s life at the right time to escape. However, not all dangers can be avoided by hiding, perseverance, and skillful—often, barely successful—maneuvers.



Figure 1. The alien otherworld is tinged in a turquoise twilight. Screenshot by author.

Equally typical for the franchise, the threat also lurks in Tasi herself. What slowly dawns on her is that she carries not only a child in her womb, but also a curse that has already either turned the other crew members into zombie-like ghouls or driven them insane—if they had not already died at the claws of their comrades or due to other cruel circumstances. The suffering associated with the curse causes Tasi to lose control under certain circumstances, as will be described later. The totality of all the game conditions creates an atmospheric charge that influences how exploring and retreating, looking and turning away, investigating and fleeing balance each other—if they do at all.

Rebirth's prevailing atmosphere is one of fear rather than nostalgia, sadness, or sentimentality, and it can be summed up as "atmosfear." The narrative of *Rebirth* does not have to be actively followed; in other words, players do not need to decipher the supposed story elements of the game environment to experience fear.¹¹ Fundamental phenomena, including abruptness; disorientation; and tensions between light and darkness, vastness and confinement, transparency and opacity, and unconsciousness and wakefulness, do not require a horror story to trigger fear-based feelings. The following sections deal with just such dynamics, which directly affect the players' disposition prior to any semiotic engagement.

In *Rebirth*, players find themselves in spaces that ooze insecurity, uncertainty, mistrust, and unease. Players, as co-saboteurs of their naïve curiosity or accomplices of their "morbid curiosity"¹² or *Angstlust*,¹³ can attune themselves to the atmosfear. Such atmospheric preparations before the game's start include, for example, balancing the gamma ratio and darkening one's real surroundings. Minimalizing visual distractions allows the senses to concentrate more intensively on the game itself. When the room one plays in is completely darkened, the game becomes the only source of light amidst the real-world darkness. Consequently, the virtual and the real bleed into one another, and from diegetic darkness follows actual darkness. A visual feature of *Rebirth* intensifies this effect, as black veins grow from the edge of the screen (i.e., from the edges of Tasi's eyes), spreading as Tasi experiences more fear, anger, or panic.

When all is set, players can experience themselves in the context of the fear-inducing game world. Although the perception of a space's atmosphere in the broadest sense precedes the concrete identification of the contained objects, there are "definitely objectively ascertainable properties of environments, which modify our 'being there'" (my translation).¹⁴ The following analytical paragraphs focus on the affectively active¹⁵ elements in *Rebirth*: light, space, and sound. It should be noted that the boundaries of perception are more fluid than the specialized domains of the senses would initially suggest—the effects of seeing, feeling, hearing, and so on cannot be considered hermetically separated. The analytical focal points, then, are meant to provide a clearer presentation of outstanding sensory impressions.

Fear in Light of Darkness

Light belongs to the instruments of atmosphere production; that is, it can be consciously used to “tune” spaces.¹⁶ Whether in theater, art installations, film, or baroque painting, the interplay of light and darkness is one of the fundamental—and possibly most effective—elements of (visual) horror. This is also true for video games; game designers and players alike highlight the avatar in its immediate space of movement, its actions, the actions performed upon it, and, thus, the starting point of affective impressions. Players accept the rules of the horror game, wherein light is rigorously regulated—they are literally groping in the dark. However, it is by no means the absence of light and the omnipresence of darkness that mark horror games. Rather, it is the tension and the volatile balance between brightness and darkness that arouse a primal unease and generate fear.

Light plays an essential role in giving *Rebirth's* atmosphere its terrifying effect. Yet, it is not light per se that is the object of experience, but the way it fills spaces and “lays itself on things and envelops them”¹⁷ (my translation), thereby further influencing the *Befindlichkeit*. Böhme therefore distinguishes between physical light and light as a phenomenon of perception. He calls the latter *Helle*, meaning the bodily experience of light as a “freely floating quality ... of space.”¹⁸ *Helle* is experienced in different gradients or levels of brightness, ranging from blinding, pure light to complete darkness.

Not only the brightness but also the color tone and the type of lighting are crucial for the atmospheric effect. Light as illumination—whether spotlights, the sun, lamps, or neon signs—bathes a room and the actions performed within it in a certain mood.¹⁹ In *Rebirth*, color tones also cause a kind of “affective intuition” to build up on the players’ part. Additionally, players often transition between the actual world and the strange otherworld without warning. The environments of the former world are characterized by diffused, warm, dusty-looking, earth- or rust-colored light that seems natural and comfortable, even cozy and familiar. In contrast, the places that are close to the ominous alien realm are an almost neon turquoise. The otherworld itself glows in the complementary colors of the world that Tasi and the players understand as “actual reality.” Blue bolts of lightning flash through the thundery, gloomy sky, which is illuminated by a poison-green almost burnt-out sun, and every light source emits a flickering turquoise. This also creates a complementary experience: everything feels cool and barren, except for the “rifts” into the familiar world, which glow with rich gold, attracting the players’ gaze and longing (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Golden light sparks hope in the red nightmarish levels as well as in the green otherworldly environments of *Amnesia: Rebirth*. Screenshot by author.

However, the tinge of the originally familiar world does not suffice to make the players feel comfortable overall. Except for short sequences—for instance, those occurring outdoors—the light, which they seek for its warmth and clarity, is sparse. Most rooms are only vaguely lit. A single candle, torch, or window at the end of a corridor punctuates the overall darkness only insofar as it allows for rough orientation. However, it grants neither security nor unrestricted freedom²⁰ of exploration and action. Hence, *Rebirth's* light policy modifies the mood of the players and influences their intuition of orientation and movement. They must react spontaneously to their surroundings since they cannot rely on a mini-map or visual target markers. Instead, they are forced to subordinate any tactical sense of orientation to a moth-like hunt for light.

If players want to see where they are going or what they are passing, they have to make their own light by, say, igniting a match. Tasi's own mobile light sources consist of an oil lantern that must be refilled regularly and matches that only cast the immediate surroundings in a flickering light. Furthermore, the matches burn down within seconds, and if players move Tasi too abruptly, the matches burn down even faster or die immediately. Thus, it is wise to use matches to light steady light sources, such as torches or candles. The lighting design thus provokes a certain dependency of players on stationary light sources and directs their movements in space,²¹ suggesting some directions and excluding others. In this respect, the light dictates where (placement, intensity, and permanence of the light source) and how quickly (depending on the match or the remaining lamp oil) a player explores, what overall impression the room leaves on them (e.g., narrowness), and how they act upon their curiosity.

It is true that players in *Rebirth* are never confronted with absolute darkness; instead, deep darkness pales after a few moments, as if Tasi's eyes have adjusted to the light conditions. Nevertheless, it is neither wise nor possible to leave Tasi stumbling through the dark for long, for she is intensely afraid of it. Apart from having to continually summon the courage to face the darkness and uncertainty, players cannot investigate every single corner or chest, or else they risk being left in the dark with no light source. If Tasi is exposed to darkness for too long, she—and the players with whom she shares her senses—is haunted by incomprehensible whispers, cries, wails, and hisses. Her heart throbs loudly, "fear flashes" (i.e., jumpscare-like flashing visions of strange places and faces) obscure her vision, and she breathes heavily, groans, and pants. She also has auditory hallucinations as if cockroaches were crawling through her ears and, by extension, the players' headphones. The black, necrotic, tentacle-like veins that encircle the screen reach further and further into the players' and Tasi's field of vision. These are all signs that Tasi—confused, alone, and traumatized—is about to go into a frenzy if she is not given the opportunity to soothe herself (e.g., by spending time in the light or finding a safe hiding place).

If Tasi loses control—and, thus, players lose control of her—she runs around panting and growling until she collapses. After a black-out, she wakes up again at another point in the level. As she regains consciousness, players regain control of her. This means that there is no classic "game over," but some sections are skipped so that players cannot fully explore the levels. Consequently, players negotiate not only their own affective impressions between curiosity and fear and between caution and courage, but also the represented affects of the avatar.

Players can muster as much openness, curiosity, and indifference towards the darkness, monsters, and disturbing sights as they may, but if they do not have the means to act according to their openness and satisfy their curiosity due to Tasi's inability to cooperate, their intentions come to nothing. The light does more than just motivate players to move forward, discover, and observe; players also know that every illumination could bring to light something frightening that they would rather not see. Even if players do not seek out the horror, it will seek them out, as moving towards the light or directly illuminating oneself is always associated with the risk²² of being seen. This is a crux of the nyctophobic design: light illuminates not only potential (exit) paths or useful objects, but also those who seek them. Whenever players light their lantern to follow a sound, they accept that whatever made it might become aware of them.

During *Rebirth*, players develop an increasingly ambivalent relationship regarding the light's role. Tasi's behavior reinforces this. On the one hand, it is advised to let her bask in plenty of light to spare her nerves, but on the other hand, an illuminated room can be both a refuge from mental danger and a source of physical danger. If players visibly move within a monster's field of vision, they will be chased. One of *Rebirth's* monster species, called Ifrit, scans environments with a bright white spotlight that fixes and drains Tasi when she steps into its beam. The light's unusual brightness may encourage players to find its source during their first naïve encounter. Böhme describes such a moment, in which "one is caught by the light or steps into the light," as a "shock ..., being thrown back on oneself and becoming aware of oneself as an exposed, vulnerable object. It is as if the light²³ looked at you with a thousand eyes" (my translation).²⁴ After the first confrontation with the Ifrit, it is precisely this light that players shy away from to seek the paradoxically safe darkness. Instead of feeling liberated from the oppressive darkness and finally gaining freedom of movement and action, players learn that light is linked to the exact opposite: being hunted, paranoid, and at the mercy of others. Regarding the previous point, scripted events also sabotage the once positive association with light. For instance, reading a note or arriving at a certain trigger point can cause a breeze to extinguish all present lights. The more densely this trigger web is woven, the more likely players are to ascribe potential game world effectiveness to any movements and actions. In this way, they may even experience a kind of conditioning that causes them to use light, even if necessary²³ to move forward, with hesitation. Thus, they force themselves and Tasi to expose themselves to the detested darkness. In doing so, due to Tasi's sensitive condition, players create their own personal dangerous situations.

The Spatial Organization of Hope and Fear

Spatial freedom is a bodily sensation that is also, but not exclusively, caused by lighting conditions. Böhme uses the terms “narrowness” and “wideness” of bodily space to describe the extent to which the senses allow to reach into space.²⁵ In addition to light and music, for example, the material-haptic-physical architecture also creates spaces and modifies them by opening; closing; concentrating; framing; and providing orientation, or direction.²⁶ This offers certain possibilities of perception and movement. Space-modifying—that is, atmospheric—elements shape the *Befindlichkeit*, thus influencing the affective-emotional experience, which in turn shapes thought and action. As an art concerned with space, game design is consciously used to create atmospheres that promote a certain mindset, behavior, or action tendency²⁷ in those they affect.²⁸

One of *Rebirth*'s atmospheric spatial features is how players may access certain rooms. While players-as-Tasi can barricade themselves in rooms when needed, at some points they must remove barricades, such as jammed furniture or millet sacks. However, there must have been a reason to separate the one room from the other before the players' arrival. When players uncover routes, they also open the way for potential dangers to enter. The openness or closedness of rooms in *Rebirth* plays a role as well. Windows, lookouts, holes in walls and fences, and long and wide paths grant an overview and act as escape routes, though potential dangers may descry players and gain new opportunities to attack.

Rebirth also uses the players' spatial exploration to create discomfort and suspense—for instance, via reduced speed as Tasi's pregnancy progresses, effects of disorientation from doors suddenly swinging open or slamming shut, and chase sequences. An effective way to frighten players and limit their actions is to have antagonists who have spatial control or an extraordinary freedom of movement. Holes in walls indicate the previous presence of ghouls and their ability to break through stone and metal. Spatial boundaries that were believed to be stable and to guarantee safety do not exist. In addition to ghouls, the Ifrit break spatial laws by flying around and teleporting in pursuit of Tasi, severely limiting the players' scope and urge to explore.

Players should hide until the monster has vanished to evade any confrontation with the incarnate horrors of *Rebirth*. To avoid being detected, Tasi should remain out of sight in a dark corner, though darkness places an enormous strain on her mental condition.

Pressing herself to the floor reduces the chance of being found even more. However, this “play dead mode” considerably restricts the field of vision and completely forbids movement. The search for suitable hiding places and places of respite is complicated by the almost exclusively chaotic, ruined, overgrown architecture, which constantly blocks paths and breaks views. This reflects the state of threat in which players find themselves. *Rebirth's* environments are ruins by any measure, as evidenced by the wrecked plane, the abandoned cave camp, the deserted fortress complex, the collapsed cistern infested with otherworldly rot, the grim otherworld itself, the desert, the excavation site where worlds collapse into each other like landslides, and the village whose inhabitants have been eradicated. This lends *Rebirth's* environments a tangible sense of futility and a perpetual feeling of being too late.



Figure 3. Shortly before Tasi is drawn into the otherworld, she catches a glimpse of the village (or rather its smoke in the distance) she yearns to reach. Screenshot by author.

Another example of the spatial design's obscurity are the points of no return, which feel like—and are often realized as—falling down a “rabbit hole,” either from the real world into the otherworld and precognitive nightmares or vice versa. Some of these “reality transitions” can be caused by the players-as-Tasi with the help of an acquired artifact, but typically, the transitions are unpredictable; sometimes, they are combined with glimpses of the destination the players originally aimed for just before the sudden transition. At one moment, for example, Tasi gets caught in quicksand as she approaches the village where she expects to find help, clarification, and friendly faces at last (Fig. 3). These falls and quasi-falls shake the players' confidence in the ground beneath their feet and the stability of reality itself; there is always the possibility that everything held to be true could fall apart. Players tread with extreme unease and are reminded that they are walking on dangerous paths on numerous scripted and non-scripted occasions.

In players, the sudden change of surroundings—and with it the change of *Befindlichkeit*, possibilities, and goals—evokes a profound insecurity and an instinctive distrust of the environment. This might even provoke despair or frustration. In many cases, it is only minimal hope that fuels the players' desire to explore despite the atmosphere. The unknowable—for instance, a shadow in the distance; an overgrown tunnel that allows only a glimpse inside but no passage; or scattered information about places, people, or objects—further stimulates imagination, speculation, and curiosity and thus motivates further investigation.

Fair Game at the Sound's Mercy

Similarly to how they experience the immersion in darkness, players also experience the atmosphere on an auditory level when they wear headphones. Böhme states that the exclusive mode of listening with headphones enables “presence and perception in a purely acoustic space”²⁹ so that players, for example, experience themselves “within the thing that ... [they] perceive acoustically.”³⁰ Players submit their sense of hearing³¹ to the video game—more so, in fact, than their visual sense, which must block out everything outside the screen, because the game sound, given the right volume, is all that is heard.

Unheimlichkeit (uncanniness) is the atmospheric leitmotif of the soundscape, as it is permeated by indefinable sounds, such as surreal whispering; grinding; clanking; echoes; and combinations of dusty, stony, fiery, crackling, rattling, hissing, gurgling, and suffocating noise chords. This variety of sound can be

troublesome, especially since each environment has its own sound spectrum. Hence, *Rebirth's* frequent change of environments due to the mentioned points of no return results in not only new lighting conditions but also new sound collages. This change heightens the players' feeling of insecurity insofar as the sounds they hear in a level—for instance, creaking, rattling, and howling—cannot be registered as familiar. This also means that progress requires a fresh effort each time. The new physical, material conditions—vaulted or dense architecture, high ceilings or cramped shafts, rotten wood or smooth stone, dampness or drought, and so on—always bring new sounds that stimulate anxiety and imagination alike.

Some sound effects are placed so precisely that they acoustically frame the experience with subtle effectiveness. For example, the panning shot of an improvised wooden cross adorning a recently dug grave triggers a ghostly, screaming echo. At such points, the level architecture (directing the players' attention to the trigger point), the light (the cross surrounded by a miraculous shimmer amidst darkness), and the music affect the players' senses holistically, meaning not only "at the same time and with almost even impact," but also with a shared atmospheric impact.

The immense influence that such audiovisuals, combined with spatial conditions, have on the players' *Befindlichkeit* can be experienced at the threshold of "safe zones," or "safe chambers" in *Rebirth's* case. Upon entering such chambers, players immediately realize that they have come to a place where they can relax, reflect, and gather strength. This is conveyed by the following characteristics of the space: the room is enclosed by intact walls, the entrance is lockable, the room is bathed in a peculiar glow of light rather than darkness, and the music becomes peaceful as intrusive sounds ebb away. In one safe chamber in the game's second level, the cave, players can discover a tiny, plastered shack. Candles burn inside, casting the shadow of an idol on painted walls. Players can even secure the room's door with a bolt. Tasi is reminded of her home and remarks, "I feel so much better in here." The droning, restless sound of the caves is replaced by gentle sacral chants that swell smoothly. Tasi's statement, which most likely reflects a spontaneous feeling of relative safety on the players' part, results in an affective-emotional consonance between player and avatar.

As comforting as the safe chambers may seem, players must leave them behind—after all, there is not much to discover in them.³² Nevertheless, it is difficult to trade the comforting atmosphere inside for the ghastly, tense atmosphere outside, where players continue their exploration. To put it bluntly, the *Heimelige* (the cozy

or homely) offers only limited epistemic content. Instead, what engages players, challenges them, and makes them ponder is the *Un-Heimelige* (the un-cozy or un-homely; uncanny). At the threshold between safety and threat, players realize how strongly light, sound, and architecture contribute to their state of being and feeling. While hearing in horror games has atmospheric purposes, there is also “instrumental” hearing,³³ which is listening to something or eavesdropping. In *Rebirth*'s pitch-dark environments, those who cannot see must hear. When players-as-Tasi encounter a ghoul, they ought to hide in the dark because it either wanders around looking for Tasi or pursues her as soon as it spots her. Since the monsters can hear Tasi, even if they do not see her,³⁴ they are more likely to find Tasi when she is panting and whimpering, with her heart racing. *Rebirth* punishes other acoustic ways in which players unintentionally indicate their presence. Many theoretically movable objects are indeed not statically anchored in the game's environment. This results in dynamic soundscapes, as sacks, bones, stones, books, tongs, scissors, and ceramics are often placed in such a way that players knock them down or break them. Just like light, sound radiates into the room and attracts the attention of monsters within earshot, which frequently occurs in the echoey rooms. While there is no coded causality that makes monsters spawn when noise occurs, fear and urgency are generated instinctively nonetheless.

Another prominent acoustic atmospheric strategy that plays a role in *Rebirth* is the use of voices. For Böhme, the voice is a way of being atmospherically present and tinges “the atmosphere in the environment in an essentially emotional way” (my translation).³⁵ The subject experiences the voice first and foremost in a “state of affective resonance,”³⁶ meaning that the listener first “co-realizes³⁷ the affect of the speaker in their hearing”³⁸ (my translation) instead of deciphering the uttered words. The voice indicates the utterer's momentary character or *Befindlichkeit*, such as threatening, which can frighten the listener.³⁹

The voice that constantly accompanies the players is Tasi's. Her voice and soliloquies have an enormous potential to influence the players' constitution and behavior. Tasi frequently talks and makes herself heard in other ways. For instance, she calls out into the darkness, curses, groans, moans, cries, sobs, comforts herself and her baby, and hums a lullaby to calm down. She also reacts audibly to events and sometimes comments on them instead of indifferently accepting them in silence. As a result of Tasi's manifold non-verbal and verbal sounds, players are repeatedly called upon to relate to Tasi's *Befindlichkeit*, thoughts, and will. They may reflect on whether and why they find themselves being similarly or contrarily “tuned.”⁴⁰

Occasionally, Tasi verbalizes what may be going through the players' minds. For example, when the seemingly endless gloomy otherworld unfolds before the players-as-Tasi's eyes for the first time, she exclaims, "Look at this place! It ... it can't be real?" When Tasi flees, she shouts, "Run!" When she crosses a rotten spot, she demands, "Watch your step, this floor doesn't look too sturdy." The imperatives seem addressed to what becomes part of Tasi's "self" during the game's execution: the player. In other words, players intuitively feel spoken to.

In addition, the mostly bodiless voices of the other crew members serve as incentives and influence the players' mood. The voices can be heard in audiovisual flashbacks triggered at certain level locations. Each calls up a dialogue Tasi witnessed prior to her amnesia. Furthermore, some notes, letters, and diary entries that players may find are read aloud in the voices of their respective authors. As a result, players get to know not only the names and approximate appearances of the crew members, but also the tone of the characters, so that they automatically develop sympathy or antipathy. For example, Yasmin, who is in charge of catering, has a suave voice and a caring nature; Hank, the expedition leader, speaks warmly, sonorously, and meekly; and Leon, the hot-tempered foreman, does not so much speak as snarl. When the players-as-Tasi actually meet Yasmin, Hank, and Leon, they have turned into ghouls, but they still utter words and sentences, recognize Tasi, and remember parts of the events.

One particularly intense voice experience takes place in the labyrinthine "hunting underground." As the players descend, a murmur repeatedly grazes their ears: "Honger ... altyd honger ..." (Afrikaans for "Hunger ... nothing but hunger ..."). While traversing the dark labyrinth, which is limited by grids and metal claws, both linked to a pressure plate mechanism, players often run unwittingly towards a dead end. Both visual and auditory orientation, as well as the possibility of pausing for a second, looking around, and estimating distances and directions, are inhibited.



Figure 4. The furious grimace of Leon, one of the ghouls in *Amnesia: Rebirth*. Screenshot by author.

Not only do the physical space and the oppressive darkness wear on the nerves, but the growling creeps also into the ear from all directions. Players constantly feel pressured on all involved sensory levels. Targeted searching, discovering, or assessing becomes unthinkable; instead, there is nothing left but to act from one moment to the next. The clattering, scratching, and shadows that scurry by finally reveal themselves to be Leon, or rather what the illness has left of him (Fig. 4). His rage is unmistakable, and his voice booms and breaks as he rattles the bars. Harshly spouted comments, such as “You’re so bright, so fucking bright, brighter

than the other filth!" and "Tasi ... You! Tasi Trianon ... How? How can you live?" drive Tasi into a corner. Apart from the voice's tone, the repeated address, the act of being called out, and the recognition cause the players-as-Tasi to feel a new form of vulnerability and peculiar sensation of being fixated by not by eyes, but by a voice. This last finding has to be the closing word for the analysis of *Rebirth's* ecstasies of atmosfear, although its ecstasies operate on several levels of gameplay. All ecstasies, since *Rebirth* is a survival horror walking simulator, negotiate the players' curiosity, empathy, and reflection, as well as the game's requirements for progression, its anxiety-inducing elements, and its challenging avatar dispositions.

Conclusion

This paper explored some ways in which Böhme's atmospheric aesthetics can be a lens through which to examine gameplay experience. This is, *nota bene*, a brief sketch that sheds light on some atmospherically active components. Beyond, or along with, the two genres of survival horror and walking simulator—which are considered atmospherically dense and intense—atmospheric constellations and ecstasies that may dominate one's own video game experience can be identified. The more subjective facts⁴¹ that are gathered by players, the more profoundly the respective design can be understood as atmospheric labor.

In the case of *Rebirth*, the so-called atmosfear received special attention. First, the paper demonstrated that players adapt an ambiguous relationship to diegetic light. While it allows players to orientate themselves and to look at and discover things, it also renders players-as-Tasi a visible object that is open to attack. Players are part of the gamble between safe but treacherous light and safe but unsettling darkness. They are forced into the position of negotiating their affectedness with those of the mentally fragile avatar. In this way, they clearly sense the permeability between the virtual and the real. Second, while addressing spatial organization, the paper suggested that players experience themselves as inferior in their spatial agency. As *Rebirth's* monsters penetrate the vastly distorted space stripped of its original order, players are forced to retreat, restrict their movements and actions, and prioritize temporary safety over the drive for progress. Moreover, the chaotically organized space constantly confronts players with obstacles, borders, and "rabbit holes." Thus, their current notion of the game's progression is shattered, but they are also provided with new opportunities to redirect their curiosity and urge to explore.

Third, principles of the lighting conditions are carried into the sound design; a warm, bright soundscape conveys safety, while a ruptured, sinister one conveys danger. Players, however, leave safe soundspaces to resume their exploration, though they must do so in spaces of acoustic intimidation. They also participate in the “game of hearing and being heard.” If they pursue (unknown) sounds, they risk exposing themselves-as-Tasi to harm, which can result in skipping level sections and, thus, opportunities to gain knowledge and experience oneself in the game world. Furthermore, Tasi’s non-verbal and verbal expressions serve as an emotional tuning fork. As listeners and co-participants, players are constantly called upon to respond to Tasi’s audible *Befindlichkeit* and modify their actions and, if necessary, their own interest in understanding Tasi’s needs and goals. Ambiguous phrasing in Tasi’s utterances also contributes to players feeling addressed or having the feeling that their affective experience is congruent with Tasi’s implicit affective experience.

Altogether, the atmospheric-affective forces in *Rebirth* are highly ambivalent, which is a typical quality of the horror genre. The arguably most prominent ambivalence of horror, the uncanny, allows the familiar and the unfamiliar to cooperate. The joint influence of seemingly contradictory affective impressions of fear, hope, despair, chaos, uncertainty, and curiosity prevents both the formation of unanimous intentions and attitudes and the execution of unambiguous actions.

As the analysis was exclusively devoted to *Rebirth*, there were no points of comparison to other walking simulators or works of survival horror. Further research could make up for this and explore what ambivalent affect profiles exist in other horror, drama, and mystery video games. In this respect, the analyses of phenomenological and atmospheric aspects can be considered an example of affective game studies. At best, the analysis encourages readers to expand their toolbox used to analyze video games⁴² and—qua the video games’ multimediality—other artistic environments, multimedia installations, performances, and all kinds of artworks. The renaissance of atmosphere as a subject of aesthetic studies has only begun, and it should include reflections on video games as often as reflections on what is traditionally understood as artistic and cultural expression.

Author Biography

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Notes

1. Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics," *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 114.
2. The merits of the German term *Befindlichkeit* lie in its ambiguous meaning: While the verb *sich befinden* means being physically present, the noun *das Befinden*, for example, means the general emotional state or condition of a subject, as in the old-fashioned question "Wie ist das werthe Befinden?" (i.e., "How are you?"). Because *Befindlichkeit* combines both actual presence and the subjective experience qua this presence, it will be used in the following.
3. Both quotes: Gernot Böhme, "Music and architecture," in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 181.
4. Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphäre als Begriff der Ästhetik," *Studia Phaenomenologica* 14 (2014): 28.
5. Bernd Bösel and Sebastian Möring, "Affekt," in *Philosophie des Computerspiels. Theorie – Praxis – Ästhetik*, ed. Daniel Martin Feige, Sebastian Ostritsch, and Markus Rautzenberg (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2018), 193–204.
6. See for example: Christian Huberts and Felix Zimmermann, "From Walking Simulator to Ambience Action Game: A Philosophical Approach to a Misunderstood Genre," *Press Start* 5, no.2 (2019): 29–50; Felix Raczkowski and Sabine Schollas, "'And we're stayin' alive' – Atmosphären in Horror- und Musikspielen zwischen Design und Interaktion," in *Zwischen / Welten. Atmosphären im Computerspiel*, ed. Christian Huberts and Sebastian Standke (Glückstadt: Verlag Werner Hülsbusch, 2014), 153–169.
7. Bösel and Möring, "Affekt," 198.
8. See the conference proceedings: *Mental Health / Atmospheres / Video Games*, ed. Jimena Aguilar Rodríguez et al. (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022).
9. Bösel and Möring, "Affekt," 198.
10. See for example: Hugo Montembeault and Maxime Deslongchamps-Gagnon, "The Walking Simulator's Generic Experiences," *Press Start* 5, no.2 (2019): 1–28.
11. Böhme, "Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept," 115.
12. Suzanne Oosterwijk, "Choosing the negative. A behavioral demonstration of morbid curiosity," *PLoS ONE* 12, no. 7 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0178399>.
13. See for example: Thomas Anz, "Ekel. Unlust- und Lustgefühle in interdisziplinären Perspektiven," in *Emotionen. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, ed. Hermann Kappelhoff et al. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2019), 165–173.
14. Gernot Böhme, "Anknüpfung. Ökologische Naturästhetik und die Ästhetisierung des Realen," in *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 16.

15. Böhme, "Introduction," 3.
16. Gernot Böhme, "Licht als Atmosphäre," in *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 139.
17. Gernot Böhme, 2013, 135.
18. Gernot Böhme, "Seeing light," in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 198.
19. Böhme, "Licht," 139.
20. Gernot Böhme, "The phenomenology of light," in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 207.
21. Böhme, "Introduction," 5.
22. Böhme, "Licht," 141.
23. *Helle* in this context.
24. Both quotes: Böhme, "Licht," 141.
25. Böhme, "Music," 180.
26. Böhme, "Introduction," 5.
27. See for example: Nico H. Frijda, "Emotion, cognitive structure, and action tendency," *Cognition and Emotion* 1, no. 2 (1987): 115–143.
28. Böhme, "Music," 181.
29. Böhme, "Music," 178.
30. Böhme, "Music," 180.
31. Gernot Böhme, "Acoustic atmospheres," in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 174.
32. A satirical corruption of video game dead-ends can be found, for instance, in *The Stanley Parable's* (Galactic Cafe, 2013) so-called "Broom Closet Ending."
33. Böhme, "Acoustic atmospheres," 172.
34. Likewise, ghouls have a sensory advantage: they can smell Tasi. Speaking with Böhme, players are dependent on visible, audible, and haptic ecstasies; temperature, smell, and materiality can at best be accessed synesthetically via the audiovisual-haptic interfaces. Occasionally, Tasi provides her own sensory impressions for the diegetically "anosmic" players by remarking, "Everything smells so old here. Like rust and wet copper" or "Something just changed ... the air is foul."
35. Gernot Böhme, "Die Stimme im leiblichen Raum," in *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 167.
36. Böhme, "Acoustic atmospheres," 168.
37. Ger. *mitvollziehen*.
38. Böhme, "Stimme," 163.
39. Böhme, "Stimme," 165, 168.
40. From a gender perspective, it is remarkable that a young female is given a lot of space for her own opinion, insights into her innermost self, her deepest motivations, and fears in a horror video game—instead of being conceived as a mute, suffering victim, damsel in distress, or vengeful Eris. It is also interesting that players cannot avoid Tasi's pregnancy, labor pains, and the birth of her daughter; they always play an active role. In horror video games, children, mothers, and pregnant women often solely serve as an embittered male protagonist's original motivation (see *Resident Evil Village*, Capcom, 2021) or as a monster type (see *P.T.*, 7780s Studio, 2014; *Cry of Fear*, Team Psykskallar, 2013).
41. Gernot Böhme, "Introduction. The aesthetic theory of atmospheres," in *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 2.
42. On a more methodological-linguistical note: The language used in this essay reflects the theme of the latter; atmospherical words that describe *Befindlichkeit* and overall experiences, impressions, and perception during gameplay may appear vague or florid to some readers. Yet, I would like to emphasize that sensitive, candid, and deliberately subjective language—as it is common in phenomenological research—might prove fruitful when exchanging thoughts on delicate phenomena such as atmospheres and about the individual instantiation of a video game.

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The Mood for Democracy in Brazil

Controlling the Public Atmosphere

During the Transitional Period

1974 – 1985

Paulo Gajanigo

Abstract

This paper analyses the setting of a new mood in the public sphere in the last eleven years of the dictatorship in Brazil, 1974 - 1985. To comprehend the general dynamics of this new mood, there is discussion of the profuse evocations of the expression "climate of openness" (*clima de abertura*) by government and opposition actors during the long, controlled process of transition to democracy. Firstly, a brief introduction of the opening process (*abertura*) is made. Then, research is presented on citations about the "climate of openness" from three of Brazil's most important newspapers – *O Globo*, *Estado de São Paulo* and *Folha de São Paulo* – delineating how these evocations were part of the disputes over the atmosphere of the public debate during the opening process. It is showed that, progressively, this new mood was spread to others social spheres, and it has, as relevant vehicle, art and, specially, music. Brazilian popular music became, during the 60' s, a significant political arena, not only for discursive elements, but also for sentimental references that influenced the mood of the public sphere. Then, discussing with public sphere theories, the disputes and control of the public sphere are articulated with a more affective, emotional approach to these theories, bringing to the debate on the decentralization of discourse in the public sphere – as a criticism of Habermas assumptions – recent contributions on mood and atmosphere in social theory. Lastly, in accordance with Dahlberg's argument that public sphere excludes aesthetic-affective modes of communication, it is discussed how the setting of a new mood in the public sphere is also a way to marginalize and exclude political actors, particularly those with persistent and undisguised rage after years of political repression.

Introduction

In this paper, I analyse the public sphere from the perspective of the decentralization of discourse, sharing the idea that: “affect and emotions play a role in constituting any kind of political public and any kind of discursive position within it” (Bens et al. 2019, 38). My interest in the affective character of the public sphere appeared when I was researching the Brazilian transitional period from dictatorship to democracy (1974-1985). I aimed to understand how this period was successfully labelled as “the opening period.” Rather than a posterior construction, this label was an active element of the process. I was intrigued by how extensive the idea of “openness” to other spheres of social life was. Researching in that period, I watched a TV show interview given by a popular Brazilian singer and composer at that time, Gonzaguinha, in 1984. The interviewer concisely asked him: “Openness?”. And Gonzaguinha gave a profoundly affective, personal answer: “As people record me, I am opening myself to those who can do so.”¹ The idea was of an “openness” born directly related to a political issue, but, as that interview suggested, over time, it became a common word and an affective organizer beyond political issues. To understand how a word circulates successfully through spheres, I had to consider the public sphere, not as an exclusive discursive arena, but as an affective, contagious field.

Jürgen Habermas’ concept of the public sphere has received several criticisms since his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, was published. As Dahlberg has shown, a large part of the critiques concerned the absent or insufficient analysis of the exclusory character of the Bourgeoise Public Sphere (Fraser 1990; Gilroy 1994). The seminal work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (1973) had explored how the abstractness of the Bourgeoise Public Sphere had hidden the exclusion of political subjects. These criticisms highlight the materiality and local nature of public spheres. Dahlberg (2005, 113) summed up the main aspects criticized:

... the exclusion of aesthetic-affective modes of communication and hence certain groups’ voices; the assumption that power can be separated from public discourse, which masks exclusion and domination; and the promotion of consensus as the purpose of deliberation, which marginalizes voices that do not readily agree.

As Dahlberg suggested, looking at the aesthetic-affective modes of communication helps us to see the conflicts in the public sphere better, beyond an idea of a discursive dispute – the public sphere is also, as Bude reminded us, a “field of threat, somewhere a person can lose face” (2018, 41). The affective perspective of the public sphere will be useful here to comprehend how the political transition was also a policy of moods. During my research, I realized that, in political debate during the transition, the term “openness” constantly appeared in a derivative expression: “climate of openness.” In this paper, I analyse the

profuse evocations of that expression, delineating how these evocations were part of the disputes during the opening process. To do so, understanding is articulated to this process with preliminary research on quotations about the “climate of openness” in three of Brazil’s most important newspapers. Then, public sphere theories are discussed through this material. My endeavour is to articulate the disputes and control of the public sphere with a more affective, emotional approach to the public sphere theory, bringing to this debate recent contributions on mood and atmosphere in social theory. First, however, I need to give an overview of the Brazilian political transition.

Political Opening

The debate about political opening began just after the 1964 civilian-military coup. The coup was alleged, by its organizers, to be a necessity in order to placate political agitation and return the nation to political normality. Despite this alleged justification, soon that idea of political normality appeared as a non-concrete, postponed target. In fact, only in 1973 was it possible to see a government initiative, when Samuel Huntington, a Harvard professor close to Henry Kissinger, was invited to collaborate with the Médici government (1969-1974). At the request of the Chief of Staff, Leito de Abreu, Huntington wrote a document in which he made suggestions about the Brazilian transition (Hoeveler 2012).

Although it is not known to what extent this document inspired the transition, there is a clear line between what was pointed out and how the transition actually took place. Huntington stated (1973, 2): “The effective and long-term decompression must be ...a gradual process over which the government maintains firm control.” For this purpose, Samuel Huntington presented a plan of action on three fronts: the institutionalization of public office succession; the growth of sectors that had governmental participation; the loosening of political and civil rights restrictions, and opening up of public debate. The institutionalization would ensure that a transition scenario would not mean reverting to a pre-1964 situation, the same concern vocalized by Artur da Costa e Silva. Representation growth was a way to anticipate the opposition, not allow it to accumulate forces for a rupture. The measure loosening restrictions seems to have responded to Huntington’s prognosis about the tendency of creating more conflict within the period of economic development Brazil was experiencing. The top priority among these three, as the author himself had made clear, was the institutionalization front. When Ernesto Beckmann Geisel became president in 1974, there was a new scenario in place. The discourse of the communist threat was losing strength because of the effects of political repression. Moreover, economic growth was slowing down. According to Eli Diniz (1985, 335), regime transition arose as the central theme and the main source of government legitimation. It is correct to

claim, therefore, that, during the Geisel administration, the transition went from backstage to the spotlight of the public arena. Geisel's first actions pointing towards transition were reducing press censorship and making the airtime of the 1974 election candidates longer. Focusing on the media resulted in support of major vehicles for the transition policy, and helped the political opening to gain the public spotlight immediately. Celina Duarte (1983, 189-190) claimed that the Geisel staff, even before he took office, had held meetings with prominent journalists to announce the suspension of censorship: "A climate of great hope was immediately established, and it became possible to talk about themes that had been untouchable before (such as the economic situation and the issue of democracy) and to use satire and more scathing ironies."² According to Duarte, censorship relief was aimed at strengthening the channels of negotiation and dialogue between the government and civil society, thus establishing a public debate that was slightly more open, allowing the emergence of references to and representations of civil society. It would also help Geisel to face more radical sectors in the Armed Forces. The strengthening of the public debate was to raise the embarrassment of these sectors so that Geisel could use media pressure against torture, censorship, and so on, reinforcing the image of his role as a mediator.

The first opening policies allowed the advance of divergent positions, not only in the media, but also in the political arena. The more extensive media exposure helped the MDB's³ (the opposition party) electoral success in the 1974 congressional elections. The MDB won in most states and expanded its representation in Congress, frustrating the government's expectations of having a controlled chamber to conduct the transition period safely. On the other hand, the more radical sectors of the Armed Forces were still at work, strengthening polarization. The murder of journalist Vladimir Herzog in prison in October 1975 was emblematic. This demonstrated that repression was still at large, but also that resistance to the dictatorship was growing, as seen in the silent protest at Herzog's funeral and in the public demand for an investigation into the murder, first reported by the authorities as a suicide. The government's reaction was to recant in some measures, mainly the electoral ones. In the 1976 municipal elections and 1978 congressional elections, legislation was amended to reduce campaigning airtime in the broadcast media.

In line with the Huntington proposal, the government-coordinated political opening was a complex exercise of timing, in rhythmic conduction that had to be clear enough to avoid the central role of the opposition in articulating disagreement on the part of several sectors of civil society (press, business class, workers, artists), but also not so fast as to provoke the Armed Forces' most radical sectors (Codato 2005, 94). Eli Diniz pointed out that the government strategy was a consequence of several pressures and much resistance, "its evolution is non-linear, marked by advances and setbacks, by contradictory moves and not always foreseeable oscillations"⁴ (1985, 334).

The opening process depended, thus, on multiple factors. Its centralization was combined with the development of a wide contact area that allowed the perception of and dialogue with the opposition movements, the radicals in the Armed Forces and several sectors of civil society. This new contact area allowed "the intervention of the national business, middle and working classes in the political game"⁵ (Codato 2005, 94). To summarize, this process meant the incorporation of new agents into the public debate, albeit under constant government control.

Climate of Openness

Luís Carlos Bresser-Pereira (1988) argued that the centrality of the "openness" theme labelled "The Transitional Period" was a discursive victory on the part of the government, thus defeating the term democratization (*democratização*). According to him, the advantage for the government of the use of "openness" term was that it brought forth the idea of a controlled transitional process, from top to bottom. The openness image, therefore, seemed to work, not only as a representation of the period, but as an effective way of indicating and encouraging a centralized transitional process.

Another term largely used and often composing an expression with the earlier term was climate (*clima*). President Geisel, at his first ministerial meeting, expressed the idea of creating a new climate.

The government will make sincere efforts for gradual but secure democratic improvement, by broadening honest, mutually respectful dialogue and by stimulating greater participation of the responsible elites and the people in general, to create a salutary climate of basic consensus in order to fulfil the institutionalization of the 1964 Revolution principles.⁶

This climate was claimed several times by government representatives, both to indicate a change in how to treat representatives of civil society, asking them to adopt a moderate attitude.⁷

The climate of openness became a significant expression in political discourses because it was the government's response to the challenge. After the political defeat in the 1974 elections, the need to change the regime became evident. Still, the fear of the opposition and the radicals in the Armed Forces turned the process into a slow construction. The idea of a climate of openness was, for the government, less an incentive to the democratization process and more the creation of a space for affect education with the aim of, at the end of the transition,

reducing the so-called radicalism of social movements and political parties. The long opening process, highly controlled, should come with climate change as a means of substantiation. Therefore, this climate of openness would be the field in which political struggles would take place. In establishing this condition, the government aimed at shattering the legitimacy of rupture proposals from the left, while also defeating those of the extreme-right that maintained the perspective of political rights restriction, justified by a communist threat. At the same time, the term presented a political grammar that opened the way for dialogue with social movements, trade unions, the business class, even if it was carried out under extreme control by the government. The climate of openness was evoked, in the first moment, by the government to appease the opposition by stimulating their expectations, and, later, the opposition party and several civil society sectors used it as a way of demanding political action.

By evoking the climate of openness, the government let some political conflicts arise in the public sphere. However, for the government representatives, this climate would also mean moderation from the opposition. The main opposition force, the MDB, was in a dilemma: taking part in the Geisel proposal and getting on with the program, or rejecting it, denouncing its lack of effectiveness. The MDB was a very heterogeneous party, and it took a long time to accept the proposal, which only came with an improvement in the climate. At the beginning of 1979, MDB Senator, Franco Montoro argued for the creation of a national political climate of openness "to materialize the much-wanted re-democratization."⁸ This move was not a complete agreement to the government proposal, but an act of criticism. After some measures that entailed greater institutionalization, press freedom, and the creation of dialogue channels with civil society, the government presented measures that were against political opening, such as the indirect election in 1978, involving only a third of the Senate. When Montoro demanded consolidation of the climate, he was accusing the government of having annihilated it, while also accepting the terms and thus the path proposed by the government. His criticism was not of the climate of openness, but the poor effectiveness of the activities surrounding it.

Most criticisms of the government were similar to Montoro's position, showing that the government was successful in establishing this climate. Few were questioning the opening process itself. It is possible to observe the echoes of the government's words in several spheres. For instance, the Telecommunications Department director of TV Cultura, Paulo Roberto Leandro, said that, although it was natural for "this climate of openness, present in all activities, has also reached journalism. Until now, the opening is more a state of spirit: the only concrete act that we see is the end of censorship."⁹ The same can be seen in the press report on the nomination of a conservative military man as the President of Funai (a government agency on indigenous matters): "His nomination gives the impression that the indigenous populations have not yet been reached by the climate of openness."¹⁰

Curiously, it was the opening process weaknesses that provoked a widespread demand for the climate of openness. *Folha de S. Paulo's* editorial in February 1977 sums up this change very well.

From the beginning of the Geisel administration, however, the spirit of diminishing tension has been radiated to the entire social fabric. The press, the university, the church (which, in a sense, helped initiate the process) were slowly permeated by the opening politics and began to reproduce its influence to the same extent. The best proof of it was seen one week ago when important business sectors began to use this climate of openness to present their demands. Stimulated by the pressures of hardships created by the economic crisis, the relief of tension – or, rather, its spirit – is moving into the scope of civil society.¹¹

If we look at the occurrence statistics of the “climate of openness” expression in the major newspapers (*Estadão*, *O Globo* and *Folha de S. Paulo*), it is possible to note how the use of this expression grew, precisely in 1977 and 1978,¹² years that saw government setbacks in its opening policies (besides the aforementioned indirect election in the Senate, the government extended the presidential mandate from five to six years, and reduced the parliamentary quorum to amend the Constitution). Since the first measures in 1974 and 1975, the government did not introduce any others capable of demonstrating new efforts in the opening process.

In 1979, the climate of openness evocations reached their peak due to a specific conjuncture. The opposition began to support the climate of openness due to Geisel revoking AI-5 (an institutional act established in 1968 that conferred exceptional power upon the government to punish whoever was seen as an enemy of the regime) in December 1978. Moreover, general João Figueiredo, the new President, proposed an amnesty law, which was passed in 1979. The climate of openness became a shared point of view, either to legitimize the government or civil society's demands.

Analysing the news in 1979, it is clear that there was a consensus about the perception of living in a climate of openness, even if there was no consensus at all about the opening process itself. With the government initially proposing few legitimizing measures, and then, facing strong criticism due to setbacks in the opening politics in the following years, the climate was finally established. Unlike the opening process, which can be analysed by concrete measures and actions, climate consolidation occurred at another level of social life. The successes and failures of the opening politics did not mean a setback in establishing this climate. Rather, we can say that the questioning and criticism expanded the evocation scope of the climate and, just like a prophecy, as it was evoked, it became real.

As seen before, part of the criticism referred to the fact that the climate was restricted to specific fields. These demands took the climate itself to new areas – indicating one of its characteristics: not being limited by social borders, it spread. The evocations were spreading to other newspaper sections.

In cultural topics, the occurrences continued to grow even when there was a reduction in the newspapers' political section. In December 1980, in a press report on the theatre critic, Sábado Malgadi, it was said: "For him [Malgadi], the theater isn't touching the audience because dramaturgy is filled with metaphors and disagreements that don't make sense amidst the climate of openness in which Brazil lives."¹³ In a *Memórias de Amor* (a daily soap opera) summary, we found: "the climate of openness that surrounds the country reaches the six o' clock soap opera. So true that the episode was basically about sex."¹⁴

In his newspaper column, Artur da Távola (1980) praised two new journalistic TV shows (Canal Livre on Bandeirantes and Brasil-Debate on Globo): "Praise to the high level of both debates and the enviable climate of openness and candor in the questions and answers on both channels."¹⁵ In a newspaper interview, musician, Ruy Maurity was asked: "The LP gives the impression that you are more comfortable, speaking less through metaphors. Is the climate of openness contributing to it?". In his answer, Maurity said: "It had an unconscious influence. We had a few troubles with censorship previously, but the eventual, relative climate of freedom may have influenced and led to a state of relaxation to compose. I do not doubt this." (Chrysostomo 1980)¹⁶

The two examples above indicate a remarkable aspect of climate as a social phenomenon. Climate is a manner of collective tuning, a collective adjustment of mood. Climate can be understood as the frequency in which the subject engages him or herself, and as a basic affective disposition by which the subject feels and acts. The climate evocations in these two examples are related to this attunement, the existence of disposition among musicians, interviewers, and interviewees that, even if spontaneous in appearance, produces a sense of common environment. But this evocation of climate, as a discursive act, also indicates a specific work on collective mood.

Public Sphere and Feelings

Social theory has recently been devoting more attention to affective aspects of social life, the well-known affective turn (Clough 2008). The affective researchers have dedicated themselves to understanding the social process of extra-linguistic, non-conscious aspects – the “in-between-ness” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 1), or the “excluded middle” (Massumi 2002, 32). Regarding our concern, two concepts became popular in this new context: mood and atmosphere. Both defy a clear separation of object and subject, and this points to a hazy zone where body and ambiance attune each other. Mood is being used to translate *Stimmung* (Highmore and Taylor 2014), a German concept, well-developed by Martin Heidegger, that can signify being attuned, a disposition, or an ambiance. Despite being more related to internal life than external, mood highlights a tension of the separation of object and subject. For Susan Fraiman and Rita Felski (2012, vii):

Our mood often seems larger than we are, its location difficult to ascertain or pin down. The greyness of our mood dulls the whole world; a sense of elation bathes everything in a rosy light. Yet we think of ourselves as being in a mood (and not the other way around); we are enveloped or assailed by a mood. Mood is a feeling of I-and-world together.

“Atmosphere” also proposes a similar challenge to the division between the object and the subject. The philosopher, Hermann Schmitz, who attributed concept status to the ordinary use of atmosphere, stated feelings as external. For him, feelings were “unlocalized, poured forth atmospheres ...which visit (haunt) the body that receives them ...affectively, which takes the form of ...emotion” (as quoted in Böhme, 1993, 119).

More than an exclusive linguistic issue, these concepts form a useful constellation to deal with the experience of body in ambiance, considering it, not as separate entities, but as entities that resonate with one another. Here, I propose to take the Portuguese word *clima* (climate) as an element of this constellation. Its relevance in Brazilian transition, I argue, is due to how its evocation builds a frame for feelings. Setting a “new climate” is twofold: it demands new feelings, and it creates the idea of a new objective period. So, I would ask: What kind of politics is the focus on political climate, and what does this kind do? One aspect of the aim to set a new political climate is to define the basis for political action, a non-questionable basis, like Pierre Bourdieu’s interpretation of *doxa*. For him, “agents, even the most disadvantaged ones, tend to perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine, especially when you look at the situation of the dominated through the social eyes of a dominant” (Bourdieu 1989, 18). When a political climate is established, it is more favourable to some interests in a doxic way – an ambiance that is experienced by agents as if it were a given field for action.

Despite the relative absence of measures for democratization or liberalization of the regime until 1978, the idea of a new climate circulated for four years. When AI-5 was revoked, the fact was seen immediately as a concrete event of the new climate. The polemic about the idea of a new climate, therefore, did not prevent this immediate apprehension. A political climate can be seen as a general orientation for how to feel new political events. The 1979 boom of openness climate quotations in newspapers indicates the inauguration of a new climate prepared for years. In this sense, the revocation of AI-5 did not create a new atmosphere as something that emanates from an event. Still, it was the reference point for an already existing affective disposition. One could say that, to create a new political climate, the government had to talk about it, to name it in advance. Here, evoking is more important than doing.

Nevertheless, the focus on climate was related to the specific task of political transition. The liberalization period was a period of controlled enlargement of the public sphere. Huntington, in his 1973 document, postulated that one of the necessary strategies for transition was to create a political base where divergences could be negotiated. He suggested strengthening one political party so that it could serve as the basis for negotiations with sectors from civil society (he used the example of PRI in Mexico). This was not what happened in Brazil. Arena¹⁷ could not become PRI, and neither did they try to create another political party, as Huntington had suggested. The government followed another path. Soon, in his first speeches as President, Geisel postulated a new climate, one of open-dialogue. This climate was intended to become a new space for negotiation between Arena and MDB, and also for dialogue with leaders of civil society. In a sense, the climate approach was the necessary complement to the transition due to the weak partisan institutionalism in Brazil.

However, the focus on climate imposed a challenge to control political discussion. The measure to diminish press censorship did not soften public menace. Instead, the centralized control of an opening process was highlighted by the constant demonstrations, in which, if the opposition did not behave properly (non-aggressively), a setback was always a risk. One of the things that a focus on climate enhances is direct action that affects mood. Announcing the inauguration of a new climate calls upon people to feel differently. No doubt, the government used an idea of a new climate to react to the weakening of support (internally and externally). On the one hand, the announcement was an attempt to attune the government speech to changes in the public sphere, but, at the same time, was a way to intervene in the public sphere, trying to set a new mood (avoiding radicalizations, for instance).

The long opening process was, therefore, a durable process of a sentimental education through the setting of the mood of the public sphere. It was not a one-sided policy, but clearly, the government was successful in winning the main battle: the denomination of this process as "openness" and the focus on a new

climate that set a basis for political bodies to present themselves through the public sphere. The political opposition, and a wide range of political subjects that were gaining space, fought, in general, inside the opening spectre, exploring the proprieties of this climate to vindicate what should be spread. Gradually, opposition focus also became the climate, as pointed out in the Folha de S. Paulo editorial quoted above.

Highlighting the controlled characteristic of government climate policy is far from stating that policies on political climate are highly controllable. The focus on climate stimulates migration of political issues to other social spheres. When a government evokes a “climate of openness,” people do not only assess if they see concrete measures of liberalization and democratization. They are encouraged to feel in a new way outside the public sphere. Far from disagreeing with Jonas Bens et al. in their view of a two-way road between the public sphere and private life (2019, 33), we should add that this road is not always travelled in the same way and with the same facilities. Different political moods provoke different impacts on the dynamics of how the public sphere is related to private life.

An intimate openness was an element since 1975. The first broad media appearance of the idea of “openness” was the music festival: “Abertura: Festival da Nova Música.” This festival was produced and broadcasted by Rede Globo TV. The concept of the festival was to present non-established, not well-known musicians. The show related the word “openness” with the new unknown through a musical medium. Considering that the only significant measure of the dictatorship in the first three years of the “opening period” was the relaxation of media censorship, the creation of a new climate being mainly a media issue. Media was not simply a medium to reverberate what was happening in the political arena, but it was the main arena where “opening air” was being breathed.

Tim Ingold (2012) explored two sides of the idea of the atmosphere. “Atmosphere” is related to the medium – as ether – and with the thing – as an aura. Thus, the atmosphere can be seen both as the affective milieu where we get in and the hazy zone of an object that anticipates it and gives presence to it. Climate seems to work similarly, but with some nuances that are important to mention. In meteorology, atmosphere is a layer, climate is a specific condition located in time and space – a composition of atmospheric elements. So, atmosphere brings the idea of a stable medium more than climate. This nuance can be seen, in Portuguese, in how people use both terms. Despite the fact that climate and atmosphere are used frequently as synonyms, “clima” in Portuguese is a “warm” word, more used for subjective aspects, for instance, to say that we are not in the mood, we say that we are not in the “clima.”

According to our research, the “climate of openness” evokes the idea of a new medium where subjects act. The nuance, comparing to atmosphere, seems to be in how “solid” this medium is. As something more subjective than atmosphere,

climate brings with more emphasis the co-responsibility for this collective mood. The evocation of the “climate of openness” is not a case for an institutional openness to produce an atmosphere for dialogue. Rather, it is more about the creation of a subjective disposition for dialogue. It is closer to an intersubjective demand. Therefore, changing the focus from institutional measures to improve the atmosphere for dialogue to a demand for a new disposition for such, the evocation for this climate would share the responsibility between government and opposition unfairly. As an addition to Bresser-Pereira’s argument (1988) that the acceptance of the grammar of openness by the opposition is only understandable as an incorporation of political defeat, the focus on climate requires an intersubjective commitment.

On the other hand, climate also indicates an idea of aura. “Climate of openness” works as a reverberation of political measures and initiatives. In this sense, people try to anticipate the opening process itself, its presence. Therefore, a “climate of openness” is not “the openness”, it is a suggestion of its presence. This can explain the centrality of the media role in setting a new mood. Media communicate mood when they speak the language of atmosphere, anticipating the thing itself, as an aura of the events. It performs the reverberation of the events. However, media produce atmosphere through their own moods. So, when the government started its opening politics by decreasing media censorship, it was an attempt to change the mood of the reverberator of moods. Media offered hazy effects, putting into circulation an idea or insinuations of liberalization, suggesting a new way to feel events. Particularly, the fact that “the openness” appeared first as a label for a music festival suggested to people that it was bigger than a political issue, a label for a new period of social life.

Conclusion: The Affective Gate of the Public Sphere

It is assumed, here, that a public sphere is also a public atmosphere. It has an atmosphere, as Habermas’ coffee houses had. But it exists as an atmosphere because it must be attuned to be accessible. The criticisms that Habermas’ public sphere faced highlighted the materiality of the public sphere, as a place with specific class, race and gender characteristics. Making its materiality visible permits access to its exclusionary aspect, namely, who is allowed to enter or who can be heard in this place. But the public sphere is not built just for face-to-face interaction. The important milieu for the existence of the bourgeois public sphere for Habermas (1989) was the newspapers, albeit Habermas saw media as a contributor to its fall. Less negatively, John Thompson (1993, 187) pointed out the media effects on the public sphere:

With the development of communication media, the phenomenon of publicness has become detached from the sharing of a common locale. It has become *de-spatialized* and *non-dialogical*, and it is increasingly linked to the distinctive kind of visibility produced by, and achievable through, the media (especially television).

The public sphere exists as a material social space without being site-specific. With the intensification of media as a public sphere milieu, its actual appearance seems to be the atmosphere itself: an experience of attuning to specific ways of pronouncing, arguing in different means of communication. In a non-normative outlook, Louis Quéré focused on how the public sphere, far from being incarnated in any site or institution, is visible in “the forms of engagement, argumentation and public judgment.” (2003, 124) Therefore, a public sphere is not only formed (or should be formed, as Habermas stated normatively) by those affected by public actions, but the public sphere also has to be seen as something that affects the public, demands and provokes certain attunements. The attunement, therefore, became a very salient aspect. If a coffee house has control over the public sphere warranty by *habitus*, taste, financial situation, etc., control of the public sphere becomes, even more, a matter of what kind of mood you should have in order to gain access to this sphere. Of course, the mood is related in a certain way to *habitus*, as Bourdieu stated (1975, 124), but this does not dismiss the fact that, for controlling it, it should develop more complex tools.

What I wanted to propose with this paper is that politics of mood are also ways to exclude and marginalize. The efforts to create a “climate of openness” were a way to define which subjects and with what tone they should present themselves in the public sphere. As Riedel stated, “creating and mobilizing atmospheres can be considered a technology of power” (2019, 89). Considering the still-authoritarian regime of the opening period, politics of mood occupied the space that was being created by the relaxation of censorship, as a different technology of power. When government agents demanded respect for the climate of openness to the opposition, they were demanding obedience to a polite, low voice, docile argumentation. Thus, idealization of the public sphere as a rational, non-aggressive argumentation appeared as a violent silencing of political subjects. To be accepted in this highly controlled public sphere, they could not show any intent of revenge. This was clear in how amnesty was approved, still under military dictatorship in 1979, as an unequal political pact for forgetting acts on both sides (government and resistance movements), an “amnesty as oblivion and impunity” (Abrão and Torelly 2012, 152). Therefore, the climate of openness created its damned subjects, people with rage or who did not have enough fear to control themselves. For those who were still feeling the terror of prison, or of the loss of someone to police repression or exile, attuning themselves to the climate of openness was a highly emotional challenge.

It is possible to see that tension over the mood in Brazilian Popular Music. For José Wisnik (2005, 26), since the 60s, popular music became a significant political arena in Brazil, forming a “a message network.” Through these messages, people found, not only discursive elements, but also sentimental references that influenced the mood of the public sphere. Therefore, the debate over popular music in newspapers and magazines was related to the orientations and disputes for the mood in the public sphere. I end this paper returning to my mention of the singer-composer, Gonzaguinha. His first public appearance was in 1973 in a very popular TV show presented by Flavio Cavalcanti. In 1973, the strong nationalistic mood was losing support, but was still the general mood of the media under censorship. Gonzaguinha sang “Comportamento Geral,” considered a very bitter song. The TV show jury complained about its bad mood. Soon, he was labelled singer-rancour by journalists. In 1984, when Gonzaguinha gave the interview quoted at the beginning of this paper, it was considered he had overcome rancour a long time ago. In 1975, critics applauded his new album, *Plano de Voo*, as a turning point. One journalist commented on Gonzaguinha’s verses: “Fly, if it’s possible, in the serene awakening of morning” (*Voar se possível/ no despertar sereno da manhã*), saying that it was: “a project for a journey in a possible world.” (Bahiana, 1975)¹⁸ The acceptance of a calmer, non-aggressive mood was considered a well-done attunement to the period, with the media recurrently labelling him as one of the artists of the “opening times.” Still today, Gonzaguinha’s music is considered to be at the top of the list of the “opening period” soundtracks (Napolitano 2010).

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Notes

1. My translation.
2. My translation.
3. The MDB was the only legalized non-governmental party. All other parties were prohibited in 1965 by the Institutional Act 2, and this lasted until 1979.
4. My translation.
5. My translation.
6. "As Grandes metas do governo Geisel." (My translation).
7. From 1974 to 1985, we found 277 mentions of the expression, "*clima de abertura*" (climate of openness) in three major Brazilian newspapers: *O Globo* (97), *O Estado de São Paulo* (68) and *Folha de S. Paulo* (112).
8. "Montoro quer criar clima para abertura." (My translation).
9. "Telejornalismo, anos 80: terminou a censura, mas nem tudo está no vídeo." (My translation).
10. "Cimi faz crítica à nomeação na Funai." (My translation).
11. "Crepúsculo e alvorada." (My translation).
12. From 1974 to 1976, 8 mentions were found, from 1977 to 1978, 33, and only in 1979, 90.
13. "Metáforas e contestações, coisas de um teatro chato." (My translation).
14. "Memórias de amor." (My translation).
15. My translation.
16. My translation.
17. Arena was the political party created in 1965 to be the government party. All Presidents during the dictatorship were affiliated to it.
18. My translation.

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At Atmosphere and Moodmospheric Experience: Fusion of Corporeality, Spirituality and Culturality¹

Zhuofei Wang

Abstract

The aesthetic construction of the world can originally be traced back to the bodily-affective state of being in the surroundings. In this respect, the newly developed aesthetic concept *atmosphere* enables a new understanding of the interaction between sensation, emotion and the environment, and is therefore of great importance for the development of a contemporary environmental awareness. In reviewing the studies so far, it would be meaningful to further reflect on the following questions: what role does the spiritual dimension play in atmospheric experience? How is it possible for us to be critical of the atmosphere we encounter? How can a bodily-affective approach to the world be opened up by emphasizing atmospheric experience without excluding other legitimate aspects such as value judgments? These issues require re-examination of the current basic approach, according to which, on the one hand, atmospheric experience is largely confined to a pre-reflective level, and, on the other hand, sensation and awareness of atmosphere are viewed as occurring one after another. Practically, in the experience of atmosphere, corporeality and spirituality are not so clearly delineated, based on the fact that sensory recognition of external stimuli always merges with mental actions such as cognition, imagination, beliefs, values, memory and expectation. In this sense, the experience of atmosphere is not a purely biophysiological response at all. Instead, it is largely shaped by spiritual elements and cultural frameworks. The knowledge of traditions, customs, languages, religions, stories, folklore and/or mythology may modify the ordinary perception of things and thus open an unusual way to the atmosphere. The complexity of atmosphere and atmospheric perception reveals a diversity of life experience that can never be thoroughly represented and described, and thus largely opens up new horizons for an interculturally oriented aesthetics.

Introduction

Since the late 20th century, the term *atmosphere* has gone beyond meteorology and psychiatry to become an aesthetic concept.² As a primarily perceived object, atmosphere does not concern a single thing or a purely subjective feeling, but rather a sphere constructed *jointly* by the perceiver and the perceived, in which human sensitivities and environmental conditions are bodily-sensually brought together and imbued with a certain emotional quality (Wang 2020, 194). The aesthetic concept of atmosphere is developed on the basis of *aisthesis*, namely of the theory of sensory perception in a broader sense, and offers a new understanding of sensuality in the context of the contemporary environmental movement. Here sensuality is to be understood fundamentally in the sense of *feeling oneself in environment* (*Sich-Befinden in Umgebung*).

In the book *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) Heidegger introduces the concept *disposedness* (*Befindlichkeit*). From a phenomenological point of view, he points out, "Disposedness not only opens up *Being-there* [Dasein] in its thrownness and dependence on the world already opened up with its *Being* [Sein], it itself is the existential way of *Being* [Seinsart], in which *Being-there* constantly surrenders itself to the 'world', lets itself be approached by the world in such a way that it somehow evades itself." (Heidegger [1927] 1977, 185, my translation with the italicization of the key terms cited) Heidegger's analysis of *Being-there* underlines the intertwining of perception, existential experience, and world experience (Böhme 2001, 81). In this context, human being is viewed as a mere bodily thing with its properties. In contrast, non-human being is just a stuff with its suitabilities (Böhme 2013, 231). As a result, insufficient attention is paid to the power of things and environmental qualities as well as their impact on human sensation.

In contrast to this, the aesthetic concept of atmosphere to be presented here provides a new perspective on the understanding of *Being-there*. The perceiver experiences the atmosphere radiating from environmental qualities through his or her own situation and thus develops the awareness - *I am here now*. The decisive question is now: in what kind of environment are we situated and in what way do we experience and respond to the qualities emitted from this environment as well as the things in it to enhance human well-being? According to Georg Stenger, in a certain sense, the dichotomy between the feeling of the inner world and the perception of the objective outer world can be overcome through experience (Stenger 2020, 280).

This intertwining is particularly reflected in atmospheric experience. As an *In-between* jointly constructed by the perceiver and the perceived, atmosphere is a felt space that contains both subjectively and objectively identifiable attributes and brings together the sense of the outer world with inner moods. Here there is no confrontation between the inner world and the outer world. Instead, a field of its own is opened up, a field that is not already there before, but rather has to be realized in a primordial sense (Stenger 2020, 280). In this regard, the understanding of mood is to go beyond the boundaries of pure psychology or physiology and extend to the dimension of body phenomenology. It contrasts with those objectively recognizable and scientifically observable perceptions. Thus, mood concerns the emotional response of the perceiver when sensing his presence and environmental qualities (light, shape, color, warmth, smell, vibration, etc.) at a given time and place. It is not an object that can be observed by scientific measures, but rather, in Stenger's words, a kind of setting, a kind of fluidum (Stenger 2020, 294).

Problem:
Separation of Atmospheric Experience
and Atmospheric Awareness

The development of the aesthetic concept of atmosphere is connected with a critical reflection on widespread environmental problems (Böhme 2013, 13–18). Under current conditions, more attention is paid to establishing a new harmony between man and nature to facilitate the recultivation or renaturation of an environment that has been technologically and industrially damaged or destroyed. In order to reintegrate the naturalness of man into his self-understanding, Gernot Böhme, one of the pioneers that develop the aesthetic research on atmosphere, puts forward the thesis as follows: The body is the nature that we ourselves are (*Leib ist die Natur, die wir selbst sind*) (Böhme 2003, 63–72). This consideration of the physical being (*Leibsein*) is mainly based on a position influenced by biology and physiology. In this respect, Böhme states:

We first experience the situation that we are nature in our creatureliness: we have to eat and drink, we have to be born and die, we have to reproduce by procreation, we have to be exposed to disease and pain. [...] But eating and drinking, for example, is neither just a cultural act nor merely the satisfaction of a need. It is [rather] an action of our nature. (Böhme 2002, 226, my translation)

Although Böhme also argues that there is an implicit reflexivity (*implizite Reflexivität*) in physical perception (Böhme 2001, 85), he does not further explain how this reflexivity works in concrete sensuous events. In his studies, sensory, affective, reflective, and ethical components essentially do not occur simultaneously, but rather sequentially in time. For this reason, Böhme defines atmosphere as the first object of perception, which lies before the differentiation of subject and object (Böhme 2001, 45). Sensing the atmosphere is thus largely limited to a pre-reflective dimension. Böhme's argument demonstrates a currently influential position—atmospheric experience and atmospheric consciousness are two phases that appear in temporal sequence. As a consequence, the following questions may not be persuasively addressed: how is it possible for us to be simultaneously critical of the atmosphere we encounter? How can we, by emphasizing a bodily-affective approach to the world through atmospheric experience without excluding other legitimate aspects such as value judgments? These issues require re-examination of the current approaches to the aesthetic concept of atmosphere.

Corporeality and Spirituality in Atmospheric Experience

The first question we have to face is: to what extent does the spiritual dimension play a role in atmosphere perception? Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) divides human senses into the inner sense and the outer sense. The inner sense represents the state of my soul while the outer sense represents the state of my body (Baumgarten [1750/58, *Metaphysik*, § 535] 1983, 17). As corporeal perception, the outer sense, such as vision, hearing or flavor is thus conceived by Baumgarten as a capacity to represent bodily affections with varying degrees of complexity and intensity, depending on the actual position of the body in space (Majetschak 2010, 25). The effectiveness of mental representation is always based on external perception, which has a certain position, a certain place, a certain age and a certain location in this world (Baumgarten [1750/58, *Metaphysik*, § 509] 1983, 5). Baumgarten writes, "My soul is a force that

represents the world according to the position of its body," (my translation) (Baumgarten [1750/58, *Metaphysik*, § 513] 1983, 5). Stefan Majetschak further explains, "It thus means that the orders of the world states, the states of the body triggered by them as well as the ideas that represent such body states always run parallel. This naturally gives rise to—if this is correct—the insight, which is so important for Baumgarten, that in principle there is no need to distrust the reality of human sensory conceptions" (Majetschak 2010, 25, my translation).

Then, when the thinking unfolds, the body is always already *there*. The thinking body is always exposed to various environmental conditions such as nature, climate, fellow human beings, society and interpersonal relationships and expresses joy, anger and sadness about life situations (birth, illness, suffering, death, etc.). While reflection immerses itself in perception and experience itself, feeling, vision and movement exhibit their own reflective character (Stenger 2020, 420). "Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there is a powerful master; an unknown sage—his name is Self. In your body he dwells, he is your body," Nietzsche writes (Nietzsche [1883–1885] 1980, 40, my translation). Jena-Luc Nancy's argument further underscores the rootedness of thinking in the sensation, "Perhaps the 'ontological' body can only be thought where thinking *touches* the hard strangeness, the unthinking and unthinkable exteriority of that *body*. But only such *toucher* or *touche* is the condition for true thinking" (Nancy 2003, 19, my translation).

The philosophical discourses on the interplay of body, affectivity and mind have a stimulating effect on our examination of the structural components of atmospheric experience. Sensory perception represents the sensitivity that connects the ideas of my present state with those of the present world state (Baumgarten [1750/58, *Metaphysik*, § 534] 1983, 17). According to this, a spiritual dimension is actually inherent in the sensory-physical perception of atmosphere. Practically, in the experience of atmosphere, corporeality and spirituality are not so clearly delineated, based on the fact that sensory recognition of external stimuli always merges with mental actions such as cognition, imagination, beliefs, values, memory and expectation. In this sense, the experience of atmosphere is not a purely biophysiological response at all. Instead, it is largely shaped by spiritual elements. It is now crucial to take into account the higher mental functions, such as ideas, memories, purposes, which are essential for the creation and experience of atmosphere.

Atmospheric experience bridges the gap between lifeworld experience and scientific cognition to a great extent, for it contains not only sensory representation of the surrounding world, but also sensory reflection on perceived objects, which serves as a feeling in the broader sense in the realm of the sensuality (Baumgarten [1750/58, *Metaphysik*, § 608] 1983, 57). A well-known example of this is the causal relationship instantaneously inferred by the perceiver in the perceptual process. Viewed individually, colors do not seem to have any further meaning. When associated with specific objects, such as traffic lights, they go beyond simple visual stimuli and carry warning labels. In this case, the atmospheric experience contains also an assessment of the present traffic situation. Another example is the discrimination between fog and smog. As a natural phenomenon, fog consists of water droplets finely dispersed in the Earth's atmosphere and formed by the condensation of water in humid and supersaturated air (Wikipedia Germany). Usually, fog can emit an ethereal, dreamlike atmosphere. In contrast, smog, which is morphologically difficult to distinguish from fog, is primarily a complex political, legal and ethical phenomenon in today's environmental movement. Once one realizes that smog is air pollution caused by the emission of pollutants that negatively affects health, the perception of this seemingly foggy phenomenon can be changed. It has nothing to do with a positive feeling any more, but is intertwined with a critical reflection on the possible hazards and harmful consequences of smog.

Culturality and Atmosphere Experience

According to Stenger, man and culture are essentially the same (Stenger 2020, 441). He points out, "Culture shapes man as man shapes culture. You cannot separate the two" (Stenger 2020, 422, my translation). A cultural dimension is arguably intrinsically embedded in our senses. "At the same time, our body (every body!) is culturally inscribed in the broadest sense, which includes scientific and religious contexts as well" (Stenger 2016, 276, my translation). Even the merging of corporeality and spirituality in atmospheric experience is largely shaped by cultural frameworks. The knowledge of traditions, customs, languages, religions, stories, folklore and/or mythology may modify the ordinary perception of things and thus open an unusual way to the atmosphere.

The wholeness of body and mind runs through almost the entire philosophical and aesthetic tradition of East Asia. The Japanese Zen concept *body-heart* (Shen-Xin) represents the integration of life practices and ways of thinking. On

this basis, numerous atmospheric experiences in Japanese culture can be traced back to the consciousness of suffering emphasized by Zen Buddhism. A representative figure who made a fundamental contribution to this was the Zen master Dôgen (1200–53) (Stenger 2016, 279). In the Chinese tradition, too, body and mind are regarded as indivisible when it comes to discovering and shaping the world. This approach is reflected in particular in the poetic concept *intuitive cognition* (Miaowu, 妙悟). As the fusion of Chan Buddhism and Daoism, this concept was especially developed in the work *Canglang Poetry Talks* (滄浪詩話) by Yan Yu (严羽) around the 13th century. Here, intuitive cognition concerns an inward sensation with which one reaches the counterpart; an encounter with the scenery to which one opens the heart and can sense things in their existence, attain their spirit, and thus become partaker of the very essence of creation (Zhu 2020, 69). Here the essence of creation is connected to the *Dao* (道) (Zhu 2020, 70). To grasp the *Dao* (道), one must transcend those external forms that affect individual senses (such as sight and hearing), feel the rhythm and melody of things with the whole body-heart, and finally enter the sphere of oneness with the universe. Against this backdrop, in Chinese tradition, emotion, as a crucial part of spiritual communication with the outside world, is seen as a manifestation of the omnipresent Qi (Linck 2017, 154). In the Chinese chronicle *Zuo Zhuan* (左傳) (722–453 B.C.), a theory of emotion related to Qi was developed. According to this, as bodily impulses, senses are stimulated by the Qi of the universe. In this regard, six basic emotions are discussed: fondness, disgust, joy, anger, sadness and happiness. They correspond to each of the six forms of Qi: yin, yang, light, dark, wind and rain. In the fusion of emotions and landscape, the secret of creation is revealed (Zhu 2020, 58). In this sense, it can be said that the world experience in the Chinese tradition is essentially *atmospheric*.

In the current Western debate, atmospheric phenomena are primarily recognized as space-like, borderless radiating powers (Schmitz 2009, 79). Spatiality here means that atmosphere is perceived as a space into which one can enter (Böhme 2001, 47). The spatiality of atmosphere is not static, but characterized by a dynamic development (emergence, strengthening, weakening and disappearance). For instance, Jean-Paul Thibaud examines the temporal-dynamic characteristic of atmospheric space. In his view, atmospheric space is not stable and changeless at all, but rather a dynamic process undergoing different phases, each of which leads to the next (Thilbaud 2002, 287). In this sense, the temporal dimension is embedded in spatiality. On the contrary, in East Asian philosophical tradition, it is generally accepted that there is no absolutely stable order in the world and everything is in constant renewal—

whether it is visible or invisible (Wang 2019, 310). In this context, temporality in the atmospheric experience demonstrates priority over spatiality, while spatiality rather represents a fleeting moment from a continuously changing process of the world. On this basis, a movement-sensory dimension is brought to the fore in East Asian arts. According to Rolf Elberfeld, calligraphy and painting of East Asia are basically an art of movement (Elberfeld 2018, 98). He explains, “What is seen as an image [... in calligraphy] passes directly into a movement-sensory experience [...]. In the act of painting, too, these dimensions above all must flow together to achieve the corresponding aesthetic quality” (Elberfeld 2018, 98, my translation). With alternating brushstrokes, the sensation of movement is transferred to paper and illustrated, which creates highly dynamic atmospheric forces and effects.

Unfavorable Weather Events and Pictorial Atmosphere

The fusion of corporeality, spirituality, and culturality goes so far that the atmospheric experience of nature is also largely shaped by it. Using selected examples, my discussion in the following is devoted to unfavorable weather events in image representation. The focus is on the influence of three classic concepts respectively from Europe, Japan, and China—*sublimity*, *Wabi Sabi*, *Yi* (易)—on the production and experience of pictorial atmospheres.

Sublimity

Until the 17th century, the exploration of the concept *sublimity* took place within a rhetorical framework. In the 18th century, the rhetorical approach was replaced by an aesthetic one, which focused primarily on wild natural phenomena to reveal an aesthetic experience opposing the experience of the beautiful (Trebeß 2006, 97). A classic exploration of sublimity is found in Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*). Starting from a transcendental philosophy, Kant defines sublimity as an incomprehensible oversize or superpower, which ultimately evokes respect and awe for the idea of infinity in the subjective experience, and depicts various wild natural phenomena, including adverse weather conditions (Kant [1790] 1968, 261). In this context, the sublimity of nature, including adverse weather events, has nothing to do with being in environment, but exists entirely in the human mind (Trebeß 2006, 97).

As far as the sublime atmosphere of weather in image representation is concerned, William Turner (1775–1851) should be mentioned first. Inspired by Goethe's *Theory of Colours* (*Farbenlehre*) and the classification scheme of clouds developed in *Essay on the Modifications of Clouds* by the amateur meteorologist Luke Howard (1772–1864), Turner created a series of paintings depicting unfavorable weather events (storms, heavy rain, lightning, etc.), especially meteorological disasters caused by destructive forces of nature. One of the most famous works in this regard is *Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842, Fig.1). Here, an impressive, invincible natural world mainly represents the manifestation of divine power—a motif that was repeatedly expressed by romantic works of art. Turner's painting style is characterized by the creation of visual effects such as lightness, fluidity, and transience, produced through the broad use of atmospheric washes of color and transparent oil. In this way, the wildness and sublimity of nature contrasts sharply with the smallness and vulnerability of humans. Rather than simply depicting a fragment of nature, Turner attempts to express the feeling of being in pieces of nature and seeks to get the viewer to immerse themselves in that experience.



Figure 1. William Turner, *Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, ca. 1842, oil on canvas, 91 x 122 cm, National Gallery, London.

Copyright: U.S. public domain

Böhme points out:

Images that spring from this attitude are probably the first in which atmospheres or the atmospheric are depicted. These images, insofar as they already become non-representational, are as such suitable for the viewer to be exposed to the atmospheric effect of the image without having to leave the traditionally aesthetic discipline. (Böhme 2019, my translation)³

Wabi Sabi

Japanese culture largely reflects the intersection and integration with Chinese tradition. Nevertheless, it shows its uniqueness in many aspects. Special emphasis is placed on the concept *Wabi Sabi*, which is mainly influenced by Buddhism. Beth Kempton explains, “*Wabi Sabi* is closely related to the kind of beauty that reminds us of the impermanence of all life. This can be traced back to the three characteristics of existence in Buddhism: *Mujō* ([...] impermanence), *Ku* ([...] suffering), and *Kū* ([...] non-self, the oneness of all being).” (Kempton 2018, 32, my translation) Following Buddhism, *Wabi Sabi* reminds us of the imperfect nature of life (including man himself), and teaches us to experience impermanence, imperfection, and incompleteness in a positive light (Kempton 2018, 33). This concerns the feeling of a perfect moment in an imperfect world (Kempton 2018, 18). However, it is difficult to give a clear definition of *Wabi Sabi*, because it is more of a practical reference of the state of mind in environment—“only when you experience it firsthand do you really know what it’s about.” (Kempton 2018, 16, my translation).

Wabi Sabi largely forms a foundation of Japanese aesthetics. Based on this, the Japanese usually show a positive attitude towards adverse weather conditions. Connected with this is a view of existential philosophy: adverse weather events reflect the finiteness and transience of all moments of life, as Elberfeld emphasizes, “Here it is precisely not the eternal that is to be realized in the form of an ideal, but rather a profound experience of impermanence itself, which is at the same time the experience of one’s own mortality” (Elberfeld 2000, 17, my translation). The transience of the world and the frailty of man usually lead to pessimistic mood. On the contrary, under the influence of *Wabi Sabi*, one must seek courage and comfort in similar phenomena of the natural world.

A masterpiece in this regard is Utagawa Hiroshige's woodblock print *Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi bridge and Atake* (1857, Fig. 2). Through the heavy downpour of rain created with a large number of fine, dark and parallel lines, dark clouds with a gradient effect by bokashi technique (Bicknell 1994, 118), pedestrians in a hurry for shelter, and a raft being vigorously paddled, this work depicts a sudden downpour (yûdachi) on a summer afternoon, which was "a favorite subject of Edo haiku poets and ukiyo-e artists." Considering the local geographical and climatic conditions, we seem to feel here the temporary coolness from a sudden rain shower after the unbearable heat and humidity in summer, and thus well understand the mixed feelings of joy and tension of people in the rain.



Figure 2. Utagawa Hiroshige, *Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi bridge and Atake*, 1857, woodcut print, 33,7 x 22,2 cm, Brooklyn Museum, New York. Copyright: U.S. public domain.

Later, based on Hiroshige's work, Vincent van Gogh created 1887 the painting *Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige)* (Fig. 3).

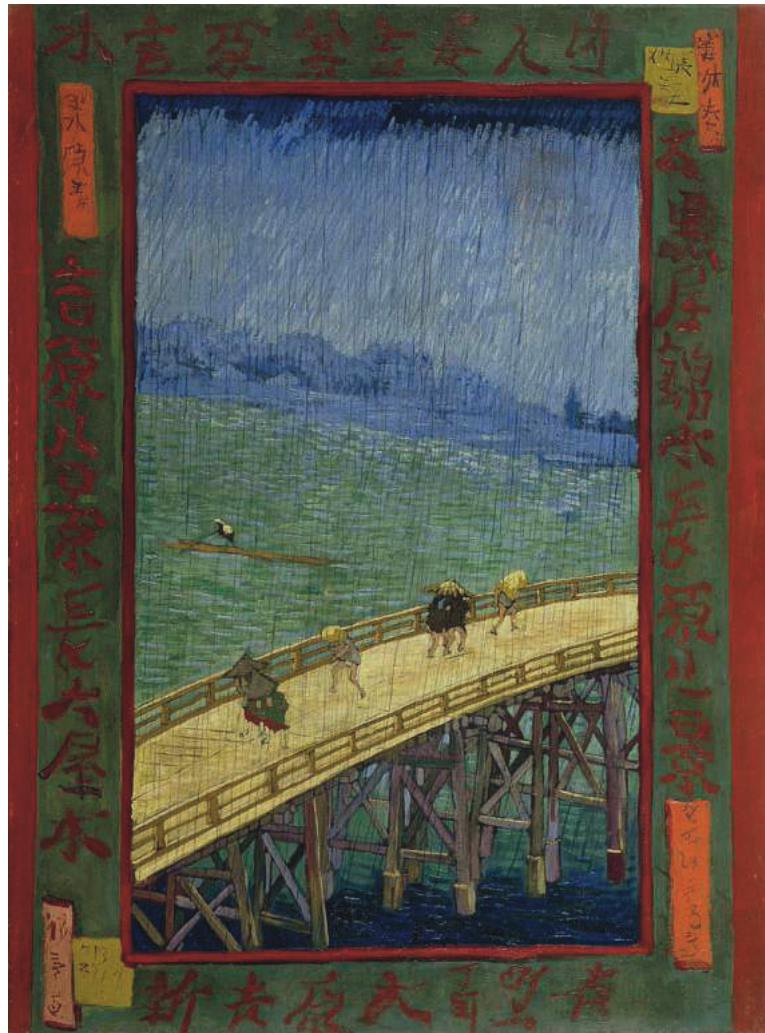


Figure 3. Vincent van Gogh, *Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige)*, 1887, oil on canvas, 73 cm x 54 cm, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. Copyright: U.S. public domain.

Here, on the one hand, the influence of the original such as “bright colours and distinctive compositions” can be found. On the other hand, unlike the original, using brighter colors, stronger color contrasts, and changing light conditions (Ohashi 2018, 238), Van Gogh’s painting aims to produce a bold and impressive spatial expression (ibid.). However, what is depicted there is no longer “the afternoon shower in Japan (yûdachi), but rather the rain ‘in general’,” (Ohashi 2018, 238, my translation) Ryosuke Ohashi criticizes. “What is not ‘copied’ in van Gogh’s painting is this natural and living environment of Japan in summer.” (Ohashi 2018, 238, my translation) What is *also* missing in it, I would like to add, is a transient atmosphere of nature and life originating from the *Wabi Sabi* consciousness.

Yi (易)

In Chinese thought, Yi (易, change) is not related “to creation in the demiurgic sense [...], but to a continuous transformation that ensures the continuation and constant renewal of life” (Wang 2019, 310, my translation). The concept of Yi (易) can be traced back to the classical book *I Ching* (circa late 9th century B.C.), according to which the world is one great continuum of life containing endless modifications (Wang 2019, 310). The worldview shaped by the idea of Yi (易) exerted a significant influence on Chinese art practices. For this reason, Chinese artists place less emphasis on depicting good weather conditions such as clear skies and bright sunshine. Instead, diffuse atmosphere of adverse weather processes such as rain, snow, fog, and haze are preferred to reveal something that fuses natural conditions and human bodily-spiritual existence into oneness. Here, the blurred outlines of objects in bad weather better characterize the processes of the world—everything is in the interaction between emptiness and fullness, formlessness and form, invisibility and visibility, absence and presence. In this sense, Chinese image representation offers an atmospheric approach to illustrate a general cosmological-metaphysical meaning (Obert 2007, 76). This approach is particularly evident in Guo Xi’s work *Early Spring* (早春圖, 1072, Fig. 4).

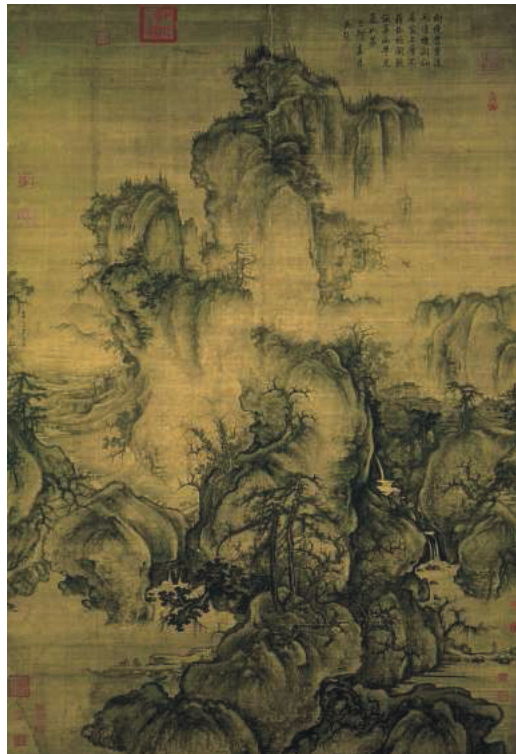


Figure 4. Guo Xi, *Early Spring*, 1072, hanging scroll, ink and light colors on silk, 158,3 x 108,1 cm, National Palace Museum, Beijing. Copyright: U.S. public domain

Through the interrupting function of the clouds in the painting, the mountain landscape appears as both emerging and submerging, and thus exudes an atmosphere that is fascinating, inexhaustible, and seemingly endless. Ultimately, life and movement are brought to the forefront of the aesthetic experience.

Due to the fact that images are fundamentally culturally rooted phenomena and in particular reflect the modes of expression of the respective views of the world and self-views (Seitz, Graneß, and Stenger 2018, 1), the pictorial representations mentioned above display various sensual-spiritual accesses to the world on the basis of their respective cultural traditions. An interweaving relationship between them lies in a conscious negation of visually recognizable form, characterized by the deconstruction of a structure seemingly coherent and tangible to the senses, in order to reveal the atmospheric foundation of the changing world of nature and life. Based on a movement-sensual perspective, the way of looking at these works is not so much geared towards the meaning and the represented, but towards the temporal shapes of movement sensually experienced (Elberfeld 2018, 98).

Conclusion

The complexity of atmospheric perception uncovers a diversity of life experience that can never be conclusively represented. Accordingly, the aesthetic concept of atmosphere does not claim to be the sole authority in interpreting aesthetic phenomena. Rather, it develops its own approach, which in turn should not be underestimated for other forms of aesthetic approaches. This approach not only triggers a reflection on the scope and limits of Western epistemological terms (judgment, reflection, analysis, insight, etc.), which are more related to substance or entity, and tend to presuppose a critical distance between subject and object, but also largely opens up new horizons for an interculturally oriented aesthetics. Here, the intercultural dimension refers to those aesthetic practices, which represent the complex unity of sensuality, affectivity, and spirituality under different conditions (historical, geographical, ethnic, ethical, political, religious, etc.), and reveals their respective cultural origins, identities as well as family resemblances. The resulting shift in perspective would unveil blind spots in our aesthetic perception formed by habitual aesthetic exclusion mechanisms, and thus contribute to discovering a different (and perhaps better!) version of ourselves.

Author Biography

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Notes

1. This paper is a revised version of my German presentation *Atmosphärisches Denken: Verschmelzung von Leiblichkeit und Geistigkeit* at the XI Congress of the German Society for Aesthetics *Ästhetik und Erkenntnis* (July 13–15, 2021).

2. A pioneering psychiatric study of atmosphere is the German-language monograph *Geschmack und Atmosphäre: Medien menschlichen Elementarkontaktes* by neuroscientist and psychoanalyst Hubert Tellenbach (1968).

3. This is a quote from an unpublished presentation of Gernot Böhme at the University of Hildesheim, July 4, 2019.

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Working with Atmospheres to Improve our Planet's Mood

Juan Albert and Lin Chen

Abstract

In studies on sustainability and environment, there are few references to perception and emotion. We believe that part of the environmental crisis which we find ourselves in nowadays is due to the fact that environmental issues have almost always been dealt with from an exclusively scientific-analytical point of view. The lack of a sensory approach in the study of our habitats has generated a crisis of perception of our environment that has led to a planetary climate crisis, an increase in pollution, a general depletion of earth resources, and a great loss of biodiversity. We have lost the ability to perceive the dynamics that permeate in our environments, so the disaster becomes invisible. Understanding the environment as atmosphere can be of great help to generate more emotional and human approaches to the design of our habitats since through atmospheres, we link spatial experiences with the states of mind. Perceiving atmospheres is mainly a bodily act to feel the state of the world, to transform it and to transform ourselves as inhabitants of a healthier planet. In this essay we aim to show the experience of the Space Exploration Course taught in the first year of Environmental Design at the Gengdan Institute of Beijing University of Technology (2020-21) in which students explored the generation of atmospheres linking spatial experiences of our environment with the states of mind. In this way, complementary to the analytical and rational thinking, the students developed a sensory thinking, which we consider fundamental to understand and feel the complexity of the environment. In the essay we will attempt to explain some fundamental ideas about atmosphere, perception and environment that served as the basis for the course and that point to the development of a necessary new ecological thinking.

Atmospheres and Environment

The term atmosphere appeared in 1709 as a compound word based on the Greek terms *atmós* 'vapor' and *sphâira* 'sphere' (Corominas, 1961, 71). This term was created at the beginning of the Enlightenment Era and since that date has been mostly referred to scientific aspects related to the climate of our planet. We deem it interesting to use the concept of atmospheres as a sensitive approach to environmental problems and as a way to introduce the emotional factor in the design of our habitats. Most of the environmental studies are carried out from an engineering point of view, but the scientific-analytical approach has not been sufficient to alleviate environmental damages. In many occasions this thinking has contributed to destroy nature supporting the idea of continuous growth and material progress. Environmental problems are too complex to be dealt with solely in a rational scientific manner and working with atmospheres can develop new tools to design our relationship with the planet.

At the end of the twentieth century the concept of atmosphere was introduced in space and environmental design as a means to achieve a more complete spatial experience than the merely visual one of rationalist and functional architecture. Studies by Norwegian architect Norbert Shultz emphasized the importance of place and experience in architecture (Norbert-Shultz 1971, 1979); Stephen Holl defined "phenomenal zones" of enmeshed experience in perception of space (Holl 2003); Juhani Pallasmaa illustrated the complexity of bodily experience in space perception (Pallasmaa 2005, 2012) and Peter Zumthor described atmosphere as environmental perception through the senses (Zumthor 2006). In words of Gernot Böhme, an atmosphere exists when there is a strong experience of place and space; when the space evokes sensory perceptions (heat, light, sound...), corporeality (body, mindfulness...), compassion with the user (empathy) and a specific cultural meaning. So atmospheres are connectors to the world. The essence of an atmosphere is the haptic sensation of being in the world at a specific place and time, the actuality of existence (Böhme 2013, 93).

The Cartesian idea of the world as a machine has led us to the domination and control of nature and to the thinking that we are separate from it. Nature is mainly perceived as a source of materials and energies and as a place for landfills. By understanding the environment as an atmosphere, we can connect the elements of nature (earth, water, air, fire) with our body through the senses opening an innovative approach to environment matters. The way we deal with temperature, energy, water cycles, air movement and circularity in material flows can be explored deeply through the design of atmospheres.

Fritjof Capra in his book *'The Hidden connections, integrating the biological, cognitive and social dimensions of life into a science of sustainability'* describes environment as a ceaseless flow of energy going through a multiplicity of patterns, dissolving into one another (Capra 2002, 11-12). He defines ecoliteracy as the ability to understand the principles of organization common to all living systems like networks, cycles, energy flows, partnership, diversity and dynamic balance (Capra 2002, 200-201). Part of the environmental disasters derives from our inability to perceive them. A more ecological perception would imply developing an awareness of complementarity, relativity, interconnectedness, dynamism and indeterminism of what is going on in our environment. Capra as a physicist relates this unifying vision of life with quantum theory but also with Tao spiritual awakening (Capra 1975).

The importance of this systematic approach that highlights the social and sensory aspects of environment is described by Christopher Alexander in *The Structure of the Environment* (1971). He describes an environment as a complex place consisting of people interacting and constantly changing in relation to objects and spaces around them. The emotional approach is essential to understand and care for our environment. He mentions that in designing a system, first we have to feel it and then we have to think. We must free ourselves from preconceived images and perceive the relationship of forces that exist in the environment (Alexander 1971). He believes that a phenomenological approach is fundamental as a first step towards understanding social ways of spatial occupancy.

In the *Timeless Way of Building* (1979), Christopher Alexander mentions the process to give life to a space. This process should free us from all methods, rules and preconceived concepts. First of all, we must look for the quality of the place; we must sense an order and a character of that place. Then we must feel the environmental and social patterns that take place emanating spatial qualities. When the environmental forces taking place are in perfect contact with our emotions, we begin to understand and perceive which patterns are able to generate life. The relationship between context, problem and solution are expressed obtaining a spatial configuration that allows the forces to resolve themselves. Space patterns are not only forms but also have a strong emotional component and are life generators (Alexander 1979, 222-223).

Working with atmospheres in environmental design, we have developed this systemic approach in which environment is not seen as a separate set of elements but as a web of relations. The aim was to get closer to what Victor Papanek affirmed in *The Green Imperative: Natural Design for the Real World* (1995) as a need to work for a 'new aesthetic' defined by environmental, ecological and social

considerations. He described this aesthetic as unpredictable in its forms, colors, variety and textures and at the same time enormously exciting since, unlike the new styles of the past years, it would not be reduced to a manipulated formal reaffirmation of what has been done before. Papanek believed that a deep concern for the environment and for people will generate new approaches to design and a new ethic that will serve as a starting point for developing new forms and expressions and more complex and exciting relationships with our environment (Papanek 1995, 235). This new aesthetic will be more interested in dynamic processes than in rigid forms, more concerned with adaptive changes of self-regeneration than with permanent elements. It will help us manage uncertainty and therefore develop a less fragile and more resilient lifestyle. Also, it is a great opportunity to develop a more exciting way of sensing and feeling of the dynamics of our planet. This aesthetic will help us deeply communicate with our planet and understand its moods.

Ecological Perception

The idea of environment based on dynamic relationships and complex interactions between subjects and objects is closely related to the concept of ecological vision that James J. Gibson discusses in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1986). Gibson distinguishes between the flat retinal image of the world and perception as a whole-body activity that he defines as ecological perception. The former, a product of the Renaissance culture in which conical perspective was invented, is rational, analytical and static. Everything revolves around a passive and fixed receiving eye as the center of everything. Subject and environment are understood as separate elements. Ecological perception does not take vision as a simple receptor but as an action that involves all the senses. With the body, thought, memory and imagination, they all constitute a whole dynamic and active system to face the environment. While retinal vision sees things, ecological vision sees events (that persist and change), changes of state, nested events (one inside the other), changes of scale, etc. Perception is not produced from a fixed point but within a path that looks for what the environment can offer (affordances) movement, shelter, water, fire, tools, etc. (Gibson 1986, 6-10).

These events are perceived on three levels. First the 'medium' which is everything perceived that cannot be touched but provides locomotion, gravity, breath, smell, light, etc. The second is the 'substance', elements that cannot be penetrated. They are more or less rigid compounds and materials structured in nested hierarchies that can be moved and manipulated. And finally there are the 'surfaces' that separates the medium from the substance. The surface is what can be touched,

which has layout, texture, color, and can react and change conditioned by reflects, light and shadows. Surface is where much of the action takes place (Gibson 1986, 12-27). This idea of a perceptive body closely linked to sensations (gravity, smell, touch...), memories and images (surfaces, lights, colors...) that the environment offers can be related to the concept of atmosphere as a sensual and emotional connector that we have been analyzing.

Environmental Poetics

This dynamic, complex, total, and bodily experience of an atmosphere can be related with Gaston Bachelard's idea of a poetic image. Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1965) defines the poetic image as the product of non-knowledge and inverse to the causality of scientific thought. It has no consequences; it is essentially variable and captures us in a whole totality. He establishes that poetry puts language in a state of emergency, and that the task of the poet is to associate images to find a new way of being in the world (Bachelard 1958). He uses two very sensorial and environmental expressions to define the poetics of space: 'resonance' and 'repercussion'. Being poetically linked to the world is a two-way relationship. We perceive the poetic experience (impression) as a 'resonance' that affects and changes us, and in changing us, it 'reverberates' in us and our being (expression):

Resonances are dispersed over the different planes of our life in the world; repercussion calls us to a deepening of our own existence. In resonance we hear the poem, in repercussion we speak it, it is ours. Repercussion operates a change of being. (Bachelard, 1958, 14, my translation)

Referring to the poetic image he states:

We have received it, but we have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, it expresses us by becoming what it expresses, or in other words, it is both a becoming of expression and a becoming of our being. Here, expression creates being. (Bachelard, 1958, 15, my translation)

In this way, a poetic image involved in the perception of atmospheres, is a powerful means of transformation. Through this emotional affection the world resonates around us, generating changes in ourselves. This may be the key to beginning a new relation with our environment.

Working with Atmospheres



Figures 1-2. Emotional drawing.

In the creation of atmospheres sensitive to our environment mood, students began visiting, visualizing and analyzing the problems of a given context in Beijing (pollution, noise, loss of contact with nature, loss of cultural values, etc.) The idea was to feel the 'resonance' of a deteriorated environment. After this first contact with the environment they continued generating words reflecting the impact that the degraded contexts generated in them. Next step was to start drawing abstract, 'emotional' drawings, often with their eyes closed, guided by what the words and images evoked (Figures 1, 2 and 3). These drawing showed how the environment had an impact on their moods. Following Bachelard ideas, the images and concepts received had a strong 'repercussion' on the students causing a change in them.



Figure 3. Collective emotional drawing. Photographed by the authors.

After this first exercise of environmental sensing the next step was to design new atmospheres through abstract drawings based on positive environmental concepts and feelings. The drawings made at this stage are far from a simple optical passive perception. Instead, they apply Gibson's concepts of ecological active vision. They generate surfaces with textures, lights, shadows and reflections that advance and recede, and generate the germens of future spatial atmospheres. Peripheral vision, blurred vision and fusion of subject-object with the background are active and moving visual experiences that surround us in the world. They do not seek to represent anything in particular but to explore flows of the complexity of the moment. On these surfaces the outside world merges with the inner world of the observer. These atmospheric drawings show how the environment has touched and moved them emotionally (Figures 4-7).



Figures 4-5. Atmosphere exploration through emotional drawing.
Photographed by the authors.



Figures 4-7. Atmosphere exploration through emotional drawing.
Photographed by the authors.

In a second phase, following Gibson's principles, students applied the surface values previously explored to different substrates such as walls, pavements, objects, elements of nature, etc. Here, applying Gibson's concept of *medium*, they started generating structures and exploring emotional atmospheres with spatial values, patterns of movement, sense of gravity, etc. (Figures 8-10). Environmental qualities, like climate, mists, shadows, and their impact on materials stimulated their perception, imagination and spatial memory (Figures 11-13).

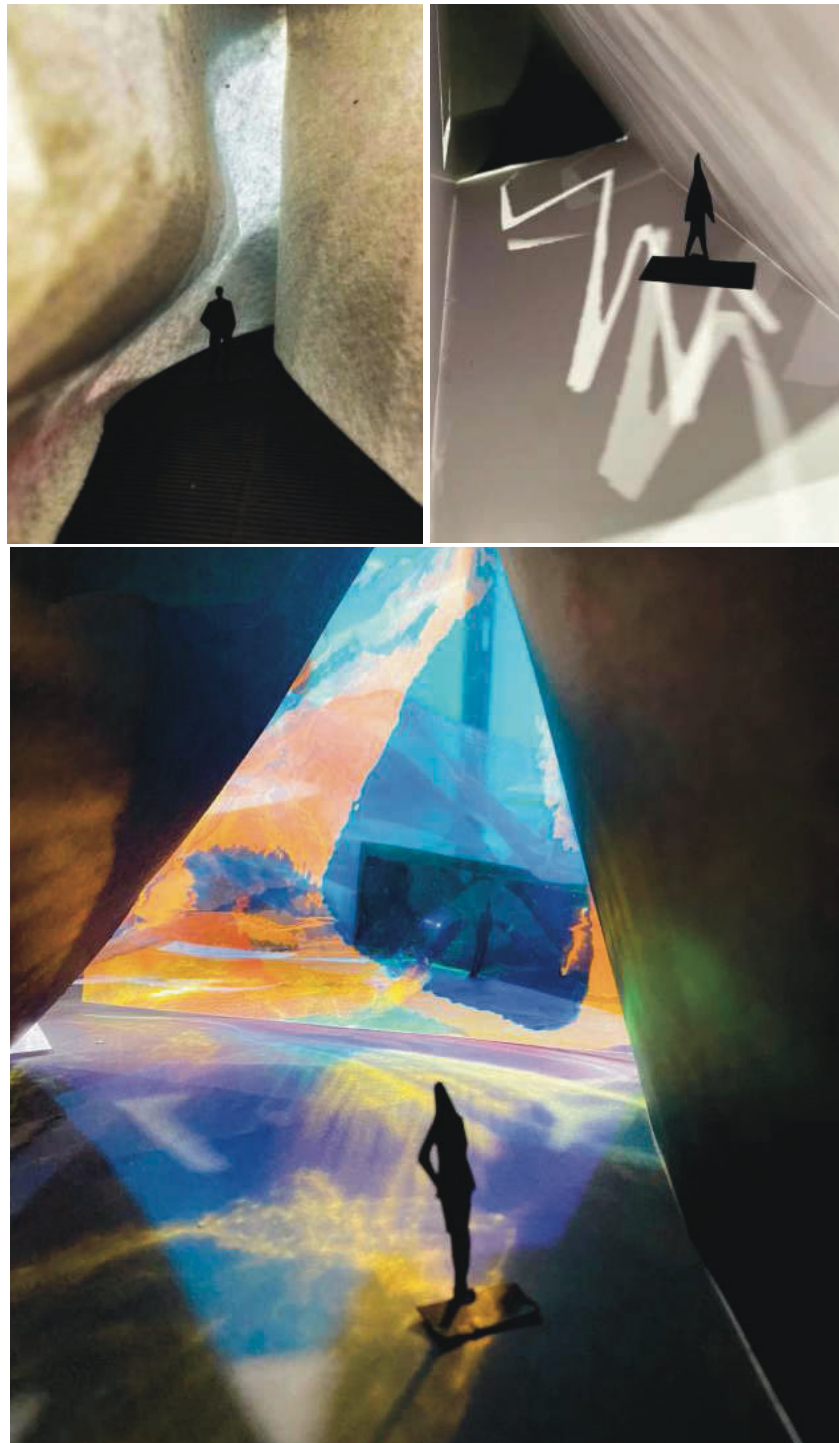


Figures 8-10. 3D models of structural patterns.
Photographed by the authors.

Drawings and models always include the presence of the human body. People are not outside as a passive viewer but merged as part of the environment. Surfaces, substrates and medium form an active perceptual environment. People, immersed in a flowing and changing sea of energy, constantly exchanging information with their context, develop an emphatic and compassionate relation between themselves and with the environment. People, affected by the environment, perceive the world and themselves in a new way (Figures 11-16).



Figures 11-13. 3D models based on environmental atmospheres.
Photographed by the authors.



Figures 14-16. Model exploration with flows and environmental perceptions.
Photographed by the authors.

Here, we need to highlight the intercultural value of this experience. Traditional Chinese culture gives great importance on how environmental elements affect our senses and shares great similarity with some of the atmospheric concepts that we were working. This contributed to the easy flow of the creative process along the course.

In the Confucian classic *'The book of history, Hongfan'*, (110 BC) concepts like *yi*, 驛 (desire for connection), *yu*, 雨 (rain), *meng*, 蒙 (cloudiness), *han*, 寒 (cold), or *feng*, 風 (wind) are part of the The Nine Divisions (*jiuchou* 九疇) to assume our relation with the earth. Environment is made up of five agents or elements (*wuxing* 五行) that interact in between them in a generative or destructive relationship: *shui* 水 water, is related to soak, to descend and to salty taste; *huo* 火 fire, is related to ascend and to bitter taste; *mu* 木 wood, is related to being bent and straight and to sour taste; *jin* 金 metal, is related to yield and change and to acrid taste and *tu* 土 earth, is related with seed-sowing and harvesting and to sweet flavor. In Chinese philosophy, medicine, and religion, the term *Qi* means natural energy, life force or energy flow which permeates everything under the sun. The convergence of *Qi* and earth gives life to all things (ChinaKnowledge.de).

In spite of being very different cultures, it is remarkable how bridges were established between them regarding ways of understanding our relationship with nature. Concepts of complementarity, interdependence and interrelation between people and their environment and between our senses and the elements of nature are common to both cultures. Understanding, from different approaches, that the environment is a continuous flow of materials and energies and that we are part inseparable of it, contributed to the strong atmospheric character of the final proposals of the course (Figures 17-22).



Figures 17-22. Final proposals of environmental design through atmospheres.
Photographed by the authors.

This creative process of generating affective atmospheres is the work of first-year students and we consider that it is fundamental as a basis for the generation of projects that students will develop in the following environmental design courses.

Conclusion

Climate change and environmental problems are not only issues of the future; they are issues that we are confronted with right now. Learning to live in uncertainty by continually rethinking everything will be fundamental for survival in the future. According to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, dealing with complexity requires two skills, differentiation and integration (Csikszentmihalyi, M. 356-357). We have devoted great efforts to differentiating everything around us; separating mind from body, people from nature, feeling from thinking... etc. Now it is time to learn how to join what has been separated, to develop new skills to integrate and cooperate in harmony with our environment. We need to develop our senses to get in touch again with the 'real world'. Through atmospheres we can connect again with nature, perceive the dynamics and flows of our environment and hear the mood of our planet. If this experience moves us, we will be able to explore new lifestyles more exciting than the old ones and develop new and more sustainable relationships with our environment.

Understanding environment as atmospheres our designs can breathe together with nature in the same way as Aldo van Eyck refers to architecture:

"Man still breathes both in and out. When is architecture going to do the same? There is a kind of spatial appreciation which makes us envy birds in flight; there is also a kind which makes us recall the shelters enclosure of our origin. Architecture will fail if it neglects either the one or the other"

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Aesthetic Interest and Affectability

Andreas Rauh

Abstract

Being in a celebratory atmosphere and enjoying the mood of a celebration are two descriptions of phenomena that are used synonymously in everyday life. This is not only due to the positive connotation, as can be seen in descriptions of tense atmospheres in which one can literally feel the tension in the room, in rooms that create a tense mood. Examples of impressive and overwhelming atmospheres can be taken from everyday experience, but can also be found in art as intentional stagings of spaces and situations. In the following essay, I would first like to explore the two leading terms of this special edition in everyday language. For even if both terms have semantic overlap areas, there are indeed differences in the pragmatic usage within the language. This is followed by a disciplinary side glance into psychology in order to practically contour the phenomenon of mood. Here, mood is revealed as a reason for and component of (aesthetic) judgements. It helps to consider the affective content of a situation as information on the one hand, and to remember specific affective situations on the other. This empirical turn is followed by an equally practical perspective — namely the perspective of art education — on aesthetic interest and the respective affectability, in order to appreciate atmosphere and mood as two different concepts but in the same field of phenomena. The artistic 'Projekt-Tagebuch' (project diary) 'aisthetics' is the inspiration for the affectability as the absorption of atmospheres through one's own mood and the stabilisation of one's own artistic modes of expression and content. By means of the PTB, an individual interest in aesthetic expression is constantly encouraged, which starts from everyday perception and develops further in a creative ping-pong game, ideally culminating in an enduring interest in an aesthetic object.

Throwing a Coin: Atmosphere and Mood in Everyday Language

In analysing the linguistic context of the terms 'atmosphere' and 'mood', I, as a German author, am confronted with the difficulty that the word *Stimmung* has a very wide semantic range in German. Wellbery has sufficiently pointed out the challenges in this respect, but above all the three pre-reflexive elements "the focus on the 'I', the potential for integration, the communicative ability" of mood (Wellbery 2018, 8; Wellbery 2003, 705). In the most recent research on the topic, Thonhauser therefore uses the German term and, on the basis of philosophical classics from Kant to Heidegger, unfolds a conceptual history that makes the extent clear to which *Stimmung* can encompass both 'atmosphere' and 'mood' (Thonhauser 2021, 1249f.).

In everyday life, one speaks of putting oneself in a mood or allowing oneself to be put in a mood, of ensuring a good vibe, of creating an inspiring ambiance. As a matter of course, this usage implies that a mood can be deliberately created. The suffix *-voll* in the German word *stimmungsvoll* refers to a scalable quantity: something (such as the room) can be filled with more or less mood.

The everyday language use of the term 'atmosphere' has a slightly different emphasis: one can get into an atmosphere, be seized by an atmosphere or be felt bodily affected by it. Something happens here that could not be felt without a sentient subject, but which also does not seem to be so easily influenced. One reason for this may be the meteorological origin of the word, which refers to the earth's atmosphere, which is also not easily influenced. The atmosphere can appear as a counterpart, and it illustrates the extent to which our felt bodies as perceivers are (or can be) affected by the perceptible. Böhme even takes this as a starting point to refer to the felt bodily constitution of the human being and perception by means of the felt body (Böhme 2001; 2007, 38f.). For him, bodily presence is the basic precondition for being able to sense atmospheres and moods in the first place. And this felt bodily presence and the memory of the felt bodily presence in other places at other times, which is, the felt bodily experience, as it were, is incorporated into the felt bodily memory.

Affective adjectives help to further differentiate the respective characteristics (Böhme 2001, 51f., 103). One speaks, for example, of the cheerful atmosphere of a spring morning, of the eerie atmosphere of a ruin or of the melancholy atmosphere of an evening. Even if it is not always clear whether the resulting descriptions refer to personally-subjective or materially-objective components of

perception, a differentiated vocabulary of affective adjectives is available, for example: cheerful, oppressive, uplifting, respectful, inviting, tense, festive. However, these affective adjectives do not always occur in connection with the term 'atmosphere'. Especially in everyday life, we often use the word 'mood' in the same or closely related sense: the cheerful mood of a spring morning.

There are linguistically established sentence structures and idioms from which the concept of atmosphere would be indispensable: I would rather not speak of the eerie mood of a ruin, but rather of the eerie atmosphere of a ruin. Conversely, there are also phrases in which I would use the term of atmosphere less, because I would rather speak of the melancholic mood of the evening than of the melancholic atmosphere of the evening. However, a search for conceptual ways of differentiating both phenomena reveals that the terms are often interchangeable in everyday life, they are then the two sides of the same coin. In other cases, however, they are sometimes avoided altogether, for example when I only report on the eeriness of a ruin and thus name the sensed character of the situation. These rephrasing possibilities suggest a "variability of the relationship between linguistic expression and the meant facts" and thus an uncertain labelling capacity of the atmosphere concept in comparison to the historically better established mood concept (Henckmann 2007, 54, translation mine). However, the variability is largely due to the intuitive use of everyday language and its terminological vagueness, which is why one must pay separate attention to the relationship between signifier and its signified.

A differentiation with regard to definition between 'atmosphere' and 'mood' is both possible and necessary if one considers the phenomenon of the experience of discrepancy. This refers to the phenomenal fact that atmosphere and sensed atmosphere are distinguishable, i.e. that one's own mood differs from the spatially sensed atmosphere — for example, when I am in a cheerful mood and enter the eerie atmosphere of a ruin. Practical, communicative considerations also lead to a pragmatic proposal for a differentiation that helps to keep the two sides of the coin apart in many research papers: "Atmosphere means... an objectively existing, quasi-spatially extended, emotionally perceptible given, mood, on the other hand, a subjective emotional state that, as it were, underpins our consciousness" (45, translation mine). In this way, the difference between mood and atmosphere refers at one point to the subject pole of atmospheric perception and at another point to the object pole — if this analytical separation into subject and object is at all fitting on the basis of atmospheric ontology.

Atmosphere as Perceived Mood: Psychological Benefit

On the one side of the coin, therefore, is 'mood' — understood as a hardly measurable, but at the same time rather subject-related phenomenon. Empirical-social psychological research approaches equate atmospheres with perceived moods and understand them as a purely subjective linking of one's own sensitivities and environmental stimuli. When sensing atmospheres, the perceiving subject is thus not only the recipient but also, within the framework of a bidirectional influence, a considerable constructor of atmosphere. The reference to atmosphere as the cause and object reference of one's own sensation is made possible by an understanding of emotional states as experiences of indeterminate, relatively undifferentiated affective sensation tones. However, these attribution-theoretical assumptions also offer the possibility of misattribution due to different subjective emphasis on sources of influence — such as different kinds of presuppositions, prior experiences and beliefs.

In contrast to the diffusivity of unconscious moods, atmospheres are placed in analogy to emotions due to their object-relatedness, from which, however, they differ in terms of intensity of sensation by a certain scope. This scope of intensity of the perceived atmospheres ranges from consciously and intensively perceivable specific conversational atmospheres — such as intense negotiations in a business meeting — on the one hand to more subtle and mostly unconsciously present department stores' atmospheres — e.g., by means of hushed music and scents to increase the length of stay and thus the desire to have a purchase — on the other hand (Strack and Höfling 2007, 105-107). Atmospheres as perceived moods with reference to objects can be the starting point for more complex perceptions and thus play a role within the framework of explanatory capacities. Especially for emotionally relevant aesthetic fields of perception, the mood-as-information approach makes it clear how consciously sensing the momentary mood leads to a reduction of complexity in the formation of judgements about the conditions of the momentary sensitivities. For psychological research, the reference to moods is interesting because between moods and emotions or feelings there are gradations of affective intensity, temporal duration and object reference (104). With mood-as-information, not only an explanation of the actual situation and the context of the present objects, persons and events would be provided, but also a basis for further explanations of the situation. In addition to the explanatory capacity, atmospheres also have an effect on memory capacities. The mood-congruent-recall approach describes how the retrieval of information from memory is easier when the affective content of the information is compatible with the mood during information retrieval.

From this psychological point of view, the perception of atmosphere is determined by diffuse moods that influence the current perception of space and one's own situation directly by reducing manifold perceptions and indirectly by selecting memory contents.

It may be due to this focus on the perceiving subject and on the empirical-quantitative research environment that viewing 'mood' as a predecessor or alternative term to 'atmospheres' is met with mixed feelings. If the atmospheric phenomenon is reduced to the mere linking performances of a sentient subject, only partial justice is done to the aesthetic orientation of the semantic court of 'atmosphere'. For it we take seriously how the term unfolds etymologically — it denotes something enveloping in a general way — then the theoretical approach must relate to everything that can be perceived. This is the framework for the demand for an 'aesthetics' as a general theory of perception that is aware of the fact that the aestheticisation of reality is increasing in the fields of politics, economics and everyday life (Böhme 2001, 20). This poses new questions for an aesthetic theory with a view to the actuality and extensiveness of perception, the human sensibility and corporeality, as well as a critique of media stagings. Those who want to phenomenally grasp the phenomena of atmosphere and mood would do well to orient themselves by the living world and everyday life. One tosses the coin to see the two sides of the coin flashing and to test their glimmer for authenticity. Even if this had to be done in a somewhat simplistic manner in the first section of the text, it becomes apparent that the uses of the term can change depending on the context of use and the practice of life. With all the concerns that can be raised against the active and purposeful shaping of atmospheres: Especially in an atmospheric context, which is not only focused on mere reception, but is always aware of the active role of felt bodily attendants and their affectability, practical methods and approaches can enrich and help to broaden the understanding of atmosphere and mood. One such practical approach is presented in the following.

Practical Approach: Inter-esse

On the other side of the coin we find 'atmosphere' — understood as a spatial quasi-objective influencing phenomenon that is even more difficult to measure. But nevertheless, or precisely because of this, the spatially existing atmosphere plays a part in the history of the foundation of aesthetic experience. For when we speak of a shift in aesthetics towards 'aisthetics,' it is admittedly perception that is understood without narrowing down to the art perception. Nevertheless, art perception has a paradigmatic role that can be enhanced and cultivated by exploring everyday perception. The possibility of development from a purely 'aisthetic' to an aesthetic perception in the classical sense is stimulated by atmospheres. This is achieved through the mood of the perceiver. In addition to the material arrangement, it is the people present who tune the room and are tuned by the room. An art pedagogical concept of interest-differentiated and project-oriented art teaching is based on this phenomenological basis. While art history and art science investigate the respective work of art, its manner of production and history and, in connection with this, perception in general, art education in particular or education in general is interested in the mediation of works of art, in the aura of the work arising from the work, manner of production and history, which is presented in a certain atmosphere (illumination, tempering, hanging, framing, accompaniment by other works...) and thus triggers specific moods in the viewer. Perceiving the aura of a work of art focuses even more on the work than perceiving the atmosphere that is perceptible through and around it (Rauh 2018, 57f.). Atmospheric theory makes attempts to mediate between bodily existence and its affective involvement, between resonance and material structures of appeal. Likewise, it is concerned with the interaction of receptivity and self-activity and thus, in an aesthetic context, with the relationship between atmospheres and an aesthetic interest related to them and created by them.

With regard to the special significance of atmospheres for the initiation and promotion of aesthetic interests, an explanatory concept of interest theory is particularly revealing. The concept of interest introduced here comes from educational-psychological research and differs from Kant's aesthetic interest by a specific intrinsically motivated reference to an object of interest (Goetz 2007; Schiefele and Krapp 2010). Similar to the atmosphere between subject and object as a medial intermediate phenomenon (Böhme 2007, 41), interest (lat. inter-esse, to be in between) acts as a relational and mediating instance. On the basis of the concept of interest, it can be asked why, on the one hand, a person gets involved in a new topic in the long term and on the other hand, under which conditions an interaction mesh based on the perception and shaping of atmosphere can be maintained and intensified (Schiefele and Krapp 2010, 75-86).

In this way, the fundamental and formable relationship between people and space is important for a school-related prescriptive approach to aesthetic education and motivation research. With the perception and mood-related shaping of atmospheres, exciting opportunities open up to make conscious and intensify the interaction mesh between the perceiver and the perceived, between the person and the object. This promotes the development and expansion of desirable motivational dispositions through atmospherically charged aesthetic situations of perception and creation. The spheres of the presence of simultaneously interacting subjects and objects point to a processuality of both the objects and the perception of these objects: namely, on the one hand, how the sensual constitution of the aesthetic object of perception is bound to a sensing presence of the realisation of this perception, and on the other hand, how the developing aesthetic interest inspires these processes of perception.



Figure 1. From Project Diary to Sculpture.
Exhibition in summer 2004, Art-Boat Arche Noah, Wuerzburg.
Photographs by Andreas Rauh.

The perceptible atmosphere of the room shapes the mood in the room in such a way that the perceivers can be tuned and retuned. An object becomes interesting when its atmospheric aura evokes a "sphere of its own meaning" (Goetz 2007, 242, translation mine, 262-268). The aim of art education is to maintain a mood in the creative person, independent of the initially perceptible atmosphere, which leads from an atmospherically supported initial interest to a sustained situational

aesthetic interest. Aesthetic interest thus marks a stage of development that has emerged from the engagement with one's own sensual perception and — especially in a creative context — in which one may and wishes to establish an artistic relationship to objects. In the interest-differentiated and project-oriented art lessons according to Goetz, the focus is on subject orientation with simultaneous differentiation, on the completion of ideas in creating and the interweaving of craftsmanship with experimental trial and error. For this purpose, a so-called 'project diary' is designed, which, in contrast to a sketchbook, is not primarily oriented towards collecting inspirations and image ideas in the form of small, isolated drawings. The 'project diary' serves to work out and constantly develop one's own aesthetic interests (Fig. 1). In this way, it cultivates and consolidates the reciprocal relationship between creating, reflecting and perceiving. The individual book does not stand alone. Oriented to a common, overall theme, the individual creations are discussed together, suggestions are exchanged, whereby artistic techniques and creative methods as well as aesthetic interests can be refined. Through projections, enlargements and further developments as three-dimensional designs (e.g., as spatial drawings, sculptures or installations), the individual mood images are then brought together in a performative staging (Fig. 2) so that "fields of interactions form and their connotations interlink" (240, translation mine). In this way, the circle that started from an atmosphere, which then led to differentiated moods, which in turn lead to a new atmosphere in the room is closed.

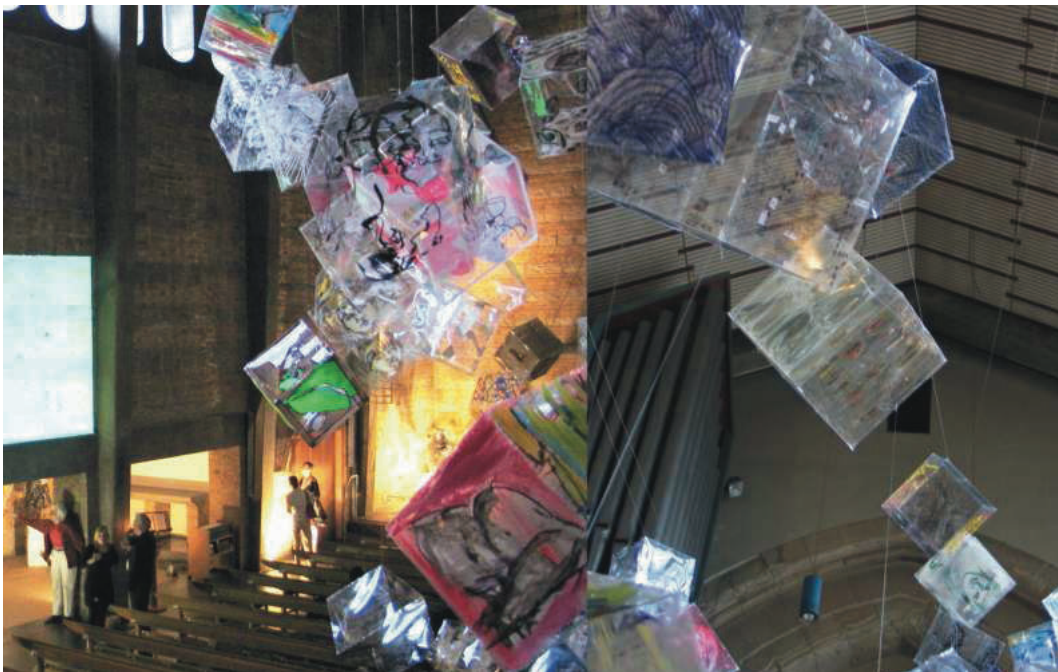


Figure 2. From Project Diary to Performance.
Exhibition in summer 2008, Johanniskirche, Wuerzburg.
Photographs by Andreas Rau.

In the context of this practical circle of stimulation and presentation of aesthetic interest, concrete pedagogical questions arise with regard to the initial phase of igniting interest in atmospheres and moods (246f.): How can we present aesthetic objects in projects atmospherically in such a way that a mood emanates from them that is transferred to pupils as a sphere of subjective experience? How can we create an interesting approach to the atmospheric framework theme through atmospheric fascination at the beginning of the project? How do we build the bridge from aesthetic experiences evoked by (initially theme-centred) atmospheres to new creative themes and methods? How do we stimulate the growing interest in knowledge so that reflections on moods and atmospheres are initiated and aesthetic fields of action are transferred to other fields of learning (Fig. 3)? What contribution can we make so that expressive elements become aware of latent analogies of form and significance in neighbouring materials and forms that would otherwise have remained unnoticed?

Practical work with atmospheric-artificial spatial moods to stimulate aesthetic interest not only satisfies the basic needs for experiencing (aesthetic) competence, (aesthetic) autonomy and social inclusion. The practical work can also sensitise for the interplay of atmosphere and mood and enrich the inductive work on the terms in a phenomenal way.



Figure 3. From Project Diary to Sustained Interest.
Creative work with a Project Diary and presentations in 2003 and 2018.
Photographs by Andreas Rauh.

Conclusion: Affectability

Spatial atmospheres on the one hand and the moods influenced by them on the other are the two sides of the coin that play an important role in practical aesthetic activity. They ensure a felt bodily involvement that is reflected in the respective personal experience and (i.e. via 'aesthetic' perception) becomes a reservoir of aesthetic experiences. Due to a developing interest in the aesthetic object, its perception, but above all its (re)design, this affectedness becomes affectability. This shifts the focus of investigation from a passive, perceiving subject to an active, creative subject. Affectability as a condition of the possibility of being affected becomes a common anthropological facet in the comprehensive sense of atmospheric perception-relatedness.

Atmosphere, mood, interest and affectability form a web of relationships of increasing perceptual competence. The critical moment in the context of education, which is given in this way, requires a dedicated and precise terminological work. But it also requires a practical approach by means of aesthetic design and project work. In this way, it becomes less questionable how a celebratory atmosphere is created and how one can enjoy the mood of a celebration.

Author Biography

Dr. Andreas Rauh studied philosophy, art education and pedagogy in Würzburg and did his doctorate at the Graduate School of the Humanities on the topic of atmospheres. From 2011, he was initially a research assistant at the Zentrum für Mediendidaktik (Centre for Media Didactics) and the Servicezentrum Innovatives Lehren und Studieren (Service Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning) at the University of Würzburg. Since 2014, he has been the managing director of the 'Human Dynamics Centre' of the Faculty of Human Sciences in Würzburg and coordinator of the qualification programme for doctoral students. He is currently working on his habilitation on the topic of 'Affectability and Materiality' at the Institute of Education at the University of Würzburg. His publications include: *Die besondere Atmosphäre. Ästhetische Feldforschungen*, Bielefeld 2012; "In the Clouds. On the Vagueness of Atmospheres"(2017); "Lernatmosphären" (together with Agnes Pfrang), in: Kraus, Budde, Hietzge and Wulf (eds.): *Handbuch Schweigendes Wissen. Erziehung, Bildung, Sozialisation und Lernen*, Weinheim 2017, 783-792; *Concerning Astonishing Atmospheres: Aisthesis, Aura, and Atmospheric Portfolio*, Milan, 2018. For further information, especially on publications, please visit: www.andreasrauh.eu, and ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1430-3868

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Healing Atmospheres

A Design Based Study

Katharina Brichetti and Franz Mechsner

Abstract

A conceptual turn is underway regarding the design of hospitals, medical practices and therapy centers. Medical facilities are usually associated with a cold, sterile atmosphere, loss of control for the patient, dependency, and an underlying fear. You go to the hospital with the expectation of entering a technical, purely functional, almost laboratory-like building. All too often, there is no interior beauty, no view of nature, let alone the chance to walk and recreate in a natural setting. Such an environment generates stress, demonstrably damages body and soul, and delays healing processes. As such, being ill and in a hospital implies stressful experiences. It is thus all the more important to create a pleasant interior and exterior conducive to recovery. Pleasant atmospheres are increasingly being used to positively influence the mood of patients and employees, and to reduce stress. We present examples from the fields of psychiatry, oncology, obstetrics and intensive care medicine that show how built space can have a direct impact on improving patients' recovery. Healing atmospheres in a hospital have a calming effect, promote positive thoughts, dissolve fears, convey hope, confidence, security and joy. As a result, patients need fewer painkillers and recover more quickly. In a hospice, the atmospheric design quality can support the experience of the spiritual dimensions of life. In a psychiatric ward, the quality of the atmosphere can have a direct impact on patient recovery. In an intensive care unit, a calming atmosphere can reduce the need for painkillers and sedatives and prevent delirium. As awareness grows of how significantly environment is involved in supporting wellbeing, health, and recovery, various design guidelines are being formulated in light of corresponding research, and planners of medical facilities are increasingly taking this research and these guidelines into account in concepts of "evidence-based healthcare architecture."

Healing Atmospheres

Human experience in a designed environment always implies the synesthetic perception of an atmosphere. The various atmospheres, the acoustic atmosphere, the atmosphere of light, of color and materials, affect our sensuality in an environment. Atmospheres are essential for experience, supporting comprehensive aesthetic responses and fundamentally influencing how people feel and behave. Architects are designers of atmospheres. They can specifically design positive and healing atmospheres that support and change people's moods. Healing atmospheres in a hospital have a calming effect, promote positive thoughts, dissolve fears, convey hope, confidence, security and joy. As a result, patients need fewer painkillers and recover more quickly. In a hospice, the atmospheric design quality can support the experience of the spiritual dimensions of life. In a psychiatric ward, the quality of the atmosphere can have a direct impact on patient recovery. In an intensive care unit, a calming atmosphere can reduce the need for painkillers and sedatives and prevent delirium-

Scientists have long recognized that "an individual's recovery" is "strongly related to their wellbeing."¹ A study by Roger Ulrich, which appeared in the renowned journal *Science* in 1984, was groundbreaking in this respect. It shows that patients who had a view of green space through the window after a gall bladder operation requested fewer painkillers, experienced fewer complications, and recovered more quickly than patients who looked at a wall (Ulrich 1984). Not only experience and intuition, but also scientific studies say that a pleasant atmosphere in a hospital can promote patient recovery. Evidence from psychology and neuroscience support the measurable impact of emotions on illness. In the following, we present four projects from the fields of psychiatry, oncology, obstetrics and intensive care medicine, which demonstrate healing effects of the built space.

Sensitive Hospital Design

Newer hospitals that embrace the idea that atmosphere can support the healing process often look like recreation centers and feel like hotels. While many hospitals play it safe with rather neutral, everyday designs, others embody bold, idiosyncratic ideas (Bernhard 2018). In particular, semi-public spaces such as lobbies and corridors are often designed as high-quality interiors featuring interesting objects, shapes and patterns, vibrant colors, art, ornamental painting, mosaics, or a (concrete or abstract) outdoorsy look and feel. Increasingly, designers are discovering the charm of regional elements and associations. In patient rooms, on the other hand, design is usually rather cautious.

Just as important as creating an atmosphere that promotes wellbeing are “the architectural elements that promote information flow, social interaction, meaning and communication. ‘Healing architecture’ also includes accessibility and usability of technologies that facilitate, improve, and expand such activities.”²

Design based on the principles of a “healing architecture” does the following:

- promotes positive feelings
- relieves stress
- improves sleep
- reduces negative thoughts, anger, anxiety, frustration, irritability, depression, and sadness
- reduces blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension
- changes the electrical activity of the brain to promote recovery
- reduces headaches, digestion problems (including nausea), and chronic pain
- reduces reliance on painkillers
- reduces postoperative complications
- minimizes the risk of falling
- prevents infections
- reduces symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- improves cognition, creativity, and critical thinking skills
- shortens hospital stays
- improves privacy
- averts disorientation
- promotes social support

As awareness grows of how significantly environment is involved in wellbeing, health, and recovery, various design guidelines are being formulated in light of corresponding research, and planners of medical facilities are increasingly taking this research and these guidelines into account in concepts of “evidence-based healthcare architecture.” (Ulrich 1984; Vincent et al. 2010, 42–55; Wilson 1972, 225–6).

Appreciative Atmospheres in a Psychiatric Ward

The relaxed, trust-promoting, familiar, calm and secure atmosphere in the psychiatric ward Soteria (ancient Greek soteria = healing, welfare) at the Berlin University Hospital Charité in St. Hedwig Hospital (Figs. 1 and 2) helps patients recover faster and take fewer psychotropic drugs. The homely atmosphere with wooden floors, wooden furniture, colorfully painted walls, comfortable seating and a winter garden, resembles more a patients' shared flat than a usual psychiatric ward. Patients and staff meet as equals in a therapeutic community and jointly organize the daily routine. They cook and eat together. In the spacious eat-in kitchen, informal conversations beyond the traditional doctor-patient interview take place (Voss and Danziger 2017, 899) The simple patient rooms, the bright winter garden and other areas provide sufficient space for retreat. The appreciative and non-stigmatizing atmosphere is not reminiscent of the usual sterile, distant and sometimes frightening psychiatric hospital environments (Mosher 2001). In effect, patients come to the clinic early and voluntarily at the first signs of psychosis and do not need to be admitted by force.³ All in all, it can be stated that atmospheres in healthcare buildings have therapeutic effects (Hoffmann and Voss 2017).

Maggie's Cancer Centers with an Emotionally Supportive and Strengthening Atmosphere

Prime examples of healing architecture in the healthcare sector in Great Britain are "so-called Maggie's Centers, named after cancer patient Maggie Keswick Jencks. Maggie's Centers are relaxation and meeting spaces, integrated into hospitals, that are designed to relieve cancer patients of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty in coping with their illness. Since the mid 1990s, more than 20 such centers have been established at hospitals in Great Britain."⁴



Figure 1. In the Soteria, a psychiatric ward at Psychiatric University Hospital Charité in St. Hedwig Hospital in Berlin, Architect J. Danzinger.
Copyright: K. Brichetti



Figure 2. In the Soteria, a psychiatric ward at Psychiatric University Hospital Charité in St. Hedwig Hospital in Berlin, Architect J. Danzinger.
Copyright: K. Bricchetti

Margaret “Maggie” Keswick Jencks, born to a wealthy family, was a writer, artist, and garden designer. She and her husband Charles Jencks, an architectural theorist, architect, and garden designer, were a famous “dream couple” on the architectural and garden design scene (Jencks 1977). After her breast cancer had returned, Maggie received her prognosis in May 1993 at a doctor’s appointment at Western General Hospital in Edinburgh, Scotland, saying she had only a few months left to live. However, it was not only the shock, fear, and illness that were difficult for the 51-year-old woman to bear, but also the environment in which she had to process receiving her diagnosis. Since many patients were still waiting to see the doctor, he led her to a chair in the windowless hospital corridor, illuminated only by fluorescent lights, where at least her husband and two children were there to comfort her. Again and again, Maggie had to return to the hospital for examinations, chemotherapy, and stem cell therapy; again and again she had to endure the bleak, demoralizing environment.



Figure 3. Maggie's Centre in the campus of St. James's University Hospital in Leeds, North England, Architects: Heatherwick Studio. Copyright: Hufton and Crow.

In response to these impersonal, desolate hospital spaces, which had the effect of a kind of “architectural aversion therapy,” (Jencks and Heathcote 2010, 12) and also moved by empathy for her fellow cancer sufferers, she and her husband began developing creative ideas for the exact opposite: an emotionally supportive and strengthening atmosphere; a lovingly designed, friendly place to spend time and recharge one’s batteries between diagnoses and therapies; a place with natural light and beautiful colors to take a break, relax, and meditate; a place for conversations with specialists under no time pressure; a place for relaxed encounters with fellow cancer patients, as well as with relatives and friends.

From a modest initial idea—a room with a view of natural surroundings—the couple developed their vision of an exemplary, architecturally therapeutic center: a healing place where cancer patients feel less alone with their manifold, massive, at times overwhelming life problems, where they find support of various kinds to boost their courage and vitality—or to develop some in the first place. Maggie and her husband convinced Edinburg’s Western General Hospital that this kind of cancer care center made sense, and they planned the building on its property—but as an independent annex to the clinic. They got architect Richard Murphy to do the design, and they mobilized the necessary financial support. Laura Lee, the nurse responsible for Maggie’s chemotherapy, was instrumental in driving the initiative forward (she is now the CEO of the charity that runs the centers).

Architect Richard Murphy’s main aim was to create a home-like atmosphere, an environment of tranquility and wellbeing that stood in contrast to the institutional ambience of the clinic. He wanted it to be architecturally inspiring, but without design extremes. He took an old stable and redesigned it as a modern, cozy meeting center. Intimate spaces for peace and quietness were just as important to him as open areas with lots of natural light, interesting materials and colors, a common kitchen, and a beautiful garden designed by Emma Keswick, a relative of Maggie’s. The garden comforts and reassures patients as they come over from the clinic, and in the summer it acts as a kind of outdoor expansion of the building’s interior.



Figure 4: Maggie's Centre in the campus of St. James's University Hospital in Leeds, North England, Architects: Heatherwick Studio. Copyright: Hufton and Crow

The treatment she received at Western General Hospital gave Maggie about two years of life instead of the few months initially predicted. On the day before her death in July 1995, she looked through the plans for the cancer care center for "her" hospital, whose opening as "Maggie's Center" the following year she would no longer be able to witness.

The success of the center and the enthusiastic response to it showed what an outstanding emotional, social—sometimes life-saving, in every sense of the word—help and support it was providing to oncology patients and their relatives. The attractiveness and appeal of the center, as well as the allure of this kind of "architecture of hope" (Jencks and Heathcote 2010), inspired the expanding and ever-changing team to now plan additional Maggie's Centers always as an independent annex in close proximity to hospitals which were named after the

pioneers of the idea Maggie's Centers. Each center has its own distinctive architecture, but they all share the same casual atmosphere that promotes relaxation, a feeling of security, and togetherness. Many were designed by famous architects—often acquainted with or friends of the Jencks—such as Richard Rogers, Rem Koolhaas, Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, and Norman Foster.

“Inviting, risk-taking, aesthetic, and spiritual” that is how Charles Jencks and Edwin Heathcote characterize the appearance and appeal of Maggie's Centers (Jencks and Heathcote 2010). Today there are more than 20 Maggie's Centers in Great Britain and around the world, each with its own idiosyncratic design to provide practical, emotional, and social support to cancer patients and their relatives and friends. The buildings are usually equipped with common areas, rooms for physical therapy and psychological counseling, offices for employees, a library, a terrace, a kitchen, and a garden that is visible from the inside. A tradition has developed of designing the buildings as architectural gems. The core idea, however, remains to make them invigorating, relaxing, healing places with a special atmosphere beyond the standard hospital ambience. The kitchen and kitchen table have turned out to play a central role. In their own special way, they encourage human interaction, relaxed and informal encounters among patients, visitors, and employees. As unusual as the thought may seem, could what Charles Jenck calls “kitchenism” also be an inspiration for hospitals and other healthcare buildings?

Maggie's Centers are hospitable places that invite in cancer sufferers more as individuals than as patients. They are open places with space to speak, to breathe, to regain vigor and vitality. They are inspiring places that offer psychological, medical, and life advice, or simply the chance to talk. They are home to artworks and artist studios, books, lectures, relaxing activities such as yoga or tai chi, gardens and garden art. In a way that is hardly possible for the hospitals themselves, they offer invaluable help in bearing the unbearable.

It is to be hoped that Maggie's Centers will serve as an example, that more and more healing buildings will be built on their model throughout the world and not only for cancer patients, but also for those suffering from other serious illnesses.

Selectable Smells and Lighting Atmospheres for Chemotherapy Treatment Rooms

Extra creativity is welcome when thinking of solutions for healing spaces. An example of ingenuity is the idea for designing chemotherapy treatment rooms that Canadian architect Jennifer Lynda Huynh proposed in her dissertation, which she wrote at Waterloo University under her maiden name, Jennifer L. Beggs.⁵ She began from an important observation: the impersonal, desolate environment in which cancer patients usually complete their chemotherapy treatment generates additional stress, which hampers the healing process in patients that are already vulnerable, often debilitated, and under severe psychological strain (Vollmer and Koppen 2010, 33). How could a healing environment reduce or prevent the side effects of chemotherapy by minimizing stress? What kinds of positive sensory experiences could benefit patients? One of Jennifer Huynh's ideas is to use plant smells, for example in a "scentcubator," a treatment chair where plants with specific pleasant smells can be inserted into a chamber on a tray under the seat. A tube system in the backrest aspirates the odors and gently scents the air around the patient. The air is then drawn in again on the side of the chair and led back over the herbs. The plants and fragrances are selected according to need: for example, jasmine for calming, or rosemary for revitalizing. If desired, patients can pull a screen down in front of them, as far as they wish, and play with light whose color can be adjusted at will. In an alternative room design based on these ideas, there are light dispensers in the room, and the scented plants are visibly housed in transparent columns. These "vertical gardens" are also pleasing to look at, especially when the room provides no view of natural surroundings (as would be truly desirable). The natural fragrances are distributed, sustained, and removed from a given area by a suction and filter system. Different room zones with specific scents are suitable for patients with different needs.



Figure 5. Alternative chemotherapy treatment room with vertical gardens, proposed by Jennifer Huynh (born Beggs) for Grand River Regional Cancer Center (Vollmer and Koppen 2010). Copyright: Jennifer Huynh (born Beggs).

A More Humane Intensive Care Unit with a Calming Atmosphere

Intensive care saves lives in a way that was once impossible. Nevertheless, the intensive care unit has become the epitome of a kind of “mechanical medicine” that is often experienced as soulless, even inhuman.

Can an intensive care unit be made more humane? Noteworthy examples in Germany are two prototype intensive care rooms at Charité in Berlin, developed according to the principle of healing design in partnership with the architecture firm GRAFT and media designers at ART+COM. The impulses and plans for this go back 15 years. Intensive care physician Alawi Lütz, along with Claudia Spies, then and now medical director of the Department of Anesthesiology, Division of Operative Intensive Care Medicine, have been significantly involved in development and testing from the very beginning. Where did the idea for this project come from? “We were looking for a way out of one of the most pressing problems of intensive care medicine: how to stop having to sedate patients?”⁶ The problem describes a dilemma. Traditionally, severely ill or injured intensive care patients have routinely been sedated or put into an artificial coma according to the motto, “The best thing for the patient is not to experience anything.” It is also much easier for staff to work on unconscious patients.

“However, we know that sedation is not conducive to recovery,” says Alawi Lütz.⁷ Studies show that sedated patients have an increased risk of death, experience delirium more frequently, and are generally more disoriented. Many patients have nightmares. Post-traumatic stress disorder is not uncommon. One-third of patients still suffer from cognitive impairment one year later, which is reminiscent of incipient dementia. The fundamentally good intention of sedation—to shield the patient from terrible experiences—does not really work, or it works only with extremely undesirable side effects. The best thing would thus be not to sedate at all, apart from a few exceptions. Unfortunately, without sedation patients often suffer anxiety and panic, become restless, are harder to treat, try to jump out of bed, and so on. The dilemma appears almost impossible to solve.

The problems of conscious patients are essentially caused by the environment,” says Lütz. “The ambience of the standard intensive care unit creates fear, has a disorienting effect on time and space, and disrupts the natural rhythm of sleeping and waking. All this has serious negative consequences. About 15 years ago we began to wonder, ‘Couldn't it be possible to remove the responsible stressors or at least to limit their effect?’ (Lütz 2018)⁸



Figure 6. Prototype intensive care room at Charité's Virchow-Klinikum campus in Berlin, designed by GRAFT. The focus of the prototype intensive care rooms at Charité is not on medical technology, but on the experience and feelings of patients and visitors. Copyright: Thomas Willemeit.

A lecture provided the inspiration. At a healthcare conference, architect Thomas Willemeit spoke about a dental practice (designed by his firm GRAFT) whose unusual and imaginative feel-good design was intended to take away patients' fears. Lütz says, "We were particularly impressed by how consistently and empathetically Thomas Willemeit took the patient's perspective and used it as a basis for explaining the design."⁹ Based on a meeting with Willemeit and other interested parties and possible partners, clinicians and architects started the project "Intensive Care Unit of the Future," which has become more and more comprehensive over time. Its motto is, "A calming atmosphere, not sedatives."¹⁰

The planners of Charité's intensive care room pilot project made every effort to make the rooms as comfortable as possible. The majority of the equipment is hidden behind wall panels, or at least out of the patient's view. As far as possible, disturbing noise from machines is avoided or dampened. There is also an observation room with a window into the patient room. Equipment for monitoring the patients' health is located in this separate room. Some medicines are measured out and dispensed electronically from here, and this is where doctors have their meetings. Patients are disturbed much less. Conversations can be annoying regardless of the volume, but the volume was also able to be reduced by up to half in some cases. Light whose intensity and warmth can be individually adjusted is also projected onto the ceiling. This is intended to help patients maintain a natural sleep-wake rhythm and to reduce delirium (Lütz 2018). In the new intensive care unit, the sun literally rises on the ceiling in the morning via the light control, while patients in the normal intensive care lie under fluorescent light. The times of the day are simulated, with "more than 20,000 lux" at noon, which corresponds to the amount of light under an open sky on a cloudy day (Schmidt (2014). This high light intensity is necessary in order to effectively influence the hormonal day-night rhythm and thus also a rhythm of wakefulness and sleep. A commercial device was tested first, but it did not provide the necessary light intensity and was therefore unsuitable.

In addition, a view through a canopy of leaves towards the sky can be projected on the ceiling—with moving green patches and shadows with a view through to a blue background. The more pain the patient feels, the longer the "canopy of leaves" can be seen. The inspiration came from scientific findings that have been mentioned several times in this book, according to which looking at trees can lower patients' stress levels and reduce the need for painkillers and sedatives (Ulrich 1984). All in all, the ceiling display is meant "to help patients orient themselves again"—both temporally and spatially—"after a serious operation or

after waking up from a coma.”¹¹ The new intensive care rooms also offer patients and their relatives maximum privacy. “The entire environment can be adapted to the individual needs of patients, thus helping to support the recovery process.”¹² Accompanying studies are investigating whether the healing process and wellbeing are improved in comparison to normal intensive care rooms. According to initial results, delirium occurs much less in the modified intensive care room (Luetz et al. 2018). In addition, researchers expect the benefits to include shorter stays in the intensive care unit, less need for painkillers and sedatives, and fewer anxiety and stress attacks.

Relaxing and Movement-Activating Atmospheres in Birthing Rooms

A change in thinking is taking place regarding birthing rooms. Replacing the traditional sterile wards, they are becoming more homely, comfortable and warm, thus creating a relaxing and calm atmosphere for those giving birth. It is known from research that the greater the medical equipment, the greater the fear of treatment (von Eiff 2008). Therefore, medical devices and typical elements of a hospital are hidden as much as possible.

For a relaxing and low-stress atmosphere, it is crucial that women can determine aspects such as lighting and sound level in their room as well as their privacy. It is also important to have enough space for a confidant person. Some partners are not comfortable close-by, and some women also prefer to be alone at times, or only in the presence of the midwife. An accompanying person must have opportunities to stay inside and outside the birthing room. An anteroom can be useful, as an alternative to the usual lonely hospital hallway. The furnishings of the birthing rooms are also changing. Examples are large balls, birthing stools, wall bars, a birthing mat on the floor, a birthing rope, a birthing bathtub or a flexible birthing bed. Women can take different positions during childbirth. Studies demonstrate that different upright postures and active movement during labor and delivery increase the likelihood of experiencing a natural birth without the need of a cesarean section. This is because the baby's weight and gravity help it to move more easily into the mother's pelvis. There is also evidence that mothers are more satisfied with their birth if they can determine for themselves which body position they feel comfortable in during labor.

Conclusion

The various examples have shown that a holistic, integrated perspective on healing atmosphere, including healing architecture and design is decisive. All essential aspects and principles of healthy architectural design must be considered. These include questions of perception and a holistic, user- and patient-centered view of architecture. Evidence shows the beneficial effects of a beautiful, biophilic patient-centered built environment. Pleasant atmospheres are increasingly being used to positively influence the mood of patients and employees, and to reduce stress. There is a growing openness in the medical profession and among hospital managers to learn about psychologically informed architecture and apply the insights for the benefit of patients, employees and visitors.

Authors Biography

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Notes

1. Nickl-Weller and Nickl: "Das Gesunden eines Menschen"; "stark mit seinem Wohlbefinden" (My translation), *Healing Architecture*. Salenstein: Braun, 2013, 13.
2. Nickl-Weller and Nickl: "... sind die architektonischen Angebote für Informationsflüsse, soziale Interaktion, Bedeutung und Kommunikation. Zu einer 'Healing Architecture' gehören auch Zugänglichkeit und Benutzerfreundlichkeit von Technologien, die solche Aktivitäten ermöglichen, verbessern und erweitern," (my translation), *Healing Architecture*. Salenstein: Braun, 2013, 256.
3. Interview with Martin Voss, Physician Charité, Berlin, Soteria, St. Hedwig Krankenhaus, September 21, 2018.
4. Schmitt-Sausen: "... so genannte Maggie Centers, benannt nach der Krebspatientin Maggie Keswick Jencks. Maggie[s] Centers sind in Krankenhäuser integrierte Entspannungs- und Begegnungsräume, die Krebspatienten Stress, Ängste und Unsicherheiten bei der Bewältigung ihrer Krankheit nehmen sollen. Seit Mitte der [19]90er Jahre sind bereits mehr als 20 solcher Zentren an Krankenhäusern in Großbritannien entstanden," (my translation), *Ärztblatt online* 5 (2017): 224.
5. Beggs: Interview with Jennifer Lynda Huynh (born Beggs), PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 2015.
6. Interview with Alawi Lütz: "Wir suchten einen Ausweg aus einem der bedrängendsten Probleme der Intensivmedizin: Wie können wir dazu kommen, Patienten nicht mehr sedieren zu müssen," (my translation), *Intensive Care Medicine Experimental* 6 (Suppl 2), abstract 1305. (2018): 682–3.
7. Lütz: "Wir wissen jedoch, dass Sedierung der Genesung nicht förderlich ist" (my translation), *Intensive Care Medicine Experimental* 6 (Suppl 2), abstract 1305. (2018): 682–3.
8. Lütz: "Die Probleme wacher Patienten sind wesentlich durch die Umgebung verursacht. Das Ambiente der üblichen Intensivstation erzeugt Angst, wirkt zeitlich und räumlich desorientierend und bringt den natürlichen Rhythmus von Schlafen und Wachen durcheinander, alles mit gravierenden negativen Folgen. Vor ungefähr 15 Jahren begannen wir, uns zu fragen: Wäre es denn nicht möglich, die verantwortlichen Stressoren wegzunehmen oder zumindest in ihrer Wirkung einzudämmen?" (my translation), *Intensive Care Medicine Experimental* 6 (Suppl 2), abstract 1305. (2018): 682–3.
9. Lütz: "Besonders beeindruckt waren wir, wie konsequent und einfühlsam Thomas Willemeit die Patientenperspektive einnahm und von dort aus den Entwurf erläuterte" (my translation), *Intensive Care Medicine Experimental* 6 (Suppl 2), abstract 1305. (2018): 682–3.
10. Lütz: Project title: "Intensivstation der Zukunft." Motto: "Beruhigende Atmosphäre statt Beruhigungsmittel" (my translation), *Intensive Care Medicine Experimental* 6 (Suppl 2), abstract 1305. (2018): 682–3.
11. Schmidt: "den Patienten nach einer schweren Operation oder nach dem Aufwachen aus dem Koma helfen, sich wieder zu orientieren" (my translation), *SWR Wissen, Medizin* August 1 (2014).
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An Affective Perception: How “Vitality Forms” Influence Our Mood

Giada Lombardi, Martina Sauer and Giuseppe Di Cesare

Abstract

The form of an action has a strong influence on the interaction between humans. According to their mood, people may perform the same gesture in different ways, such as gently or rudely. These aspects of social communication, named *vitality forms* by Daniel Stern, represent a mean to establish a direct and immediate connection with others. Indeed, the expression of different vitality forms enables us to communicate our affective states and at the same time the perception of these vitality forms enables people around us to understand how we feel in that moment. In the last years of research, different fMRI studies have been carried out to investigate the neural correlates of vitality forms recognition and execution. Moreover, recent psychophysics studies conducted from our research group have demonstrated the presence of an affective contagion effect, during which vitality forms expressed by an agent affect the action perception and the motor response of the receiver. This means that vitality forms expressed by others can influence our mood positively or negatively, modulating as consequence our behavior. Note that vitality forms pervade our lives in a continuous manner and thus they are not expressed and perceived only during social interactions. For example, when we observe an artistic representation at the theatre, the dynamic postures of dancers, together with an alternation of acceleration and deceleration in their movements, communicate to us different affective states. Also when we are in a museum in front of a painting, lines, colors and shapes used by the artist can elicit in us different sensations and modify our attitude. In this view, with the aim to extend the concept of vitality forms from neuroscience and psychology to other disciplines of study, we dedicate part of this review to discuss how art, in all its forms, can be considered a pure expression of vitality forms.

Introduction

Have you ever understood the internal states of others by observing their actions? Depending on the positive or negative mood of the agent, during social interactions actions can be expressed in different ways, such as rudely, gently, vigorously or hesitantly. These aspects of social communication, defined *vitality forms* by the psychologist Daniel Stern (Stern 1985), enhance the quality of interactions by enabling to communicate our personal feelings and perceive those of others. For example, if an action is performed rudely or gently, one can understand if the agent is angry or calm. Vitality forms pervade our life and modulate continuously and unconsciously our behavior. Indeed, we have recently shown that a request (conveyed vocally or mediated by physical touch) expressing vitality forms (rude/gentle) have an impact on our action perception and action execution. In particular, when an individual asks us something, his/her positive and negative attitudes, communicated through vitality forms, modulate our perception of actions duration and our motor response (Lombardi et al. 2021). During everyday life we have experience of vitality forms not only when we interact with other people but also when we experience the affective power of art, in all its forms. Indeed, in his book *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*, Daniel Stern dedicated an entire chapter to describe the deep link existing between the arts and vitality forms. As he wrote, we have all experienced moments in which we have been captured or moved by the vitality forms evoked by an artistic representation (Stern 2010). In the first section of this review, we explain results of a previous kinematic study followed by a discussion of results of our recent studies regarding the influence produced by vitality forms on action perception and execution. Thus, the first section of the essay is dedicated to describing the existence of an affective contagion effect produced by vitality forms during social interactions. Starting from these findings, in the second section we discuss how, besides social interactions, a similar affective contagion effect could also occur during an aesthetic experience. In particular, we first summarize Stern's theory on the perception of vitality forms in art, specifically in the form of music and dance. Secondly, we discuss the possible effect of art, specifically in the form of paintings, on the mood of the perceiver by giving specific examples. Finally, we conclude with interesting perspectives for the future regarding the role of vitality forms in art therapy.

Vitality Forms Affect Our Action Perception and Execution

During everyday life the form of our actions and speech modulates our interactions with others. For example, when we are angry, we unconsciously reflect this negative mood on our action and speech style. Indeed, our gestures will be performed more vigorously and also our tone of voice will be ruder. From this simple idea, in 2017 Di Cesare and colleagues conducted a kinematic study with the aim to assess whether and how visual and auditory properties of vitality forms expressed by an agent influenced the motor response of the receivers. Specifically, participants were presented with stimuli showing two requests (“take it”, “give me”) expressed gently or rudely and presented in visual, auditory, or mixed modality (visual and auditory). According to the type of request, participants had to take or give a bottle placed in front of them. Results showed that the rude and gentle vitality forms modulated differently the individuals’ motor response. In particular, when the request was rude participants moved the object with a higher velocity and a larger trajectory. On contrary, when the request was gentle, they moved the object with a lower velocity and a smaller trajectory (Di Cesare et al. 2017). Starting from these findings, the subsequent idea was to understand whether, besides action execution, vitality forms expressed by an agent may also affect action perception and in particular the estimation of goal-directed actions duration. To this aim, we recently conducted a psychophysics study (Lombardi et al. 2021) at the Italian Institute of Technology (Genoa, Italy) in which participants were presented with video clips showing the initial part of a passing action performed with a rude or gentle vitality form and were asked to continue the action mentally and estimate the time of its completion by pressing a button (see Figure 1A). Particularly, for rude actions they observed 250ms, corresponding to 35% of the total duration of 700ms while for gentle actions they observed 420ms, corresponding to 35% of the total duration of 1200ms (see Figure 1B). Since the final goal of our study was to understand the effect of different vitality forms on the action estimation task, before the videos’ presentation participants received a request mediated by physical contact or vocally conveying rude or gentle vitality forms. More specifically, during the physical request a robotic manipulandum reproduced a rude (800ms) or gentle movement (3000ms) on the right arm of participants while, during the vocal request, they listened to a male or female voice (750ms) pronouncing “give me” (Italian verb: *dammì*) rudely or gently (see Figure 1C). Results indicated that a gentle request increased the duration of a rude action subsequently observed while the perception of a rude request decreased the duration of the same action performed gently. More specifically, when participants observed the initial part of a gentle action but were previously stimulated with a rude request (incongruent

condition: rude request, gentle action), they anticipated the end of this action compared to the same action presented after a gentle request (congruent condition: gentle request, gentle action). On the other hand, when they observed the initial part of a rude action but were previously stimulated with a gentle request (incongruent condition: gentle request, rude action), they perceived this action as lasting longer compared to the same action presented after a rude request (congruent condition: rude request, rude action). These findings are in line with data provided by other two psychophysical studies recently carried out by our group at the Department of Neuroscience in Parma (Di Cesare et al. 2021a). The experimental paradigm was very similar: participants listened to gentle/rude vocal requests and then observed the initial part of a passing action consisting in different durations (200ms, 250ms, 300ms, 350ms for rude actions; 340ms, 420ms, 500ms, 600ms for gentle actions). As in the study described before, once the action was obscured, participants were required to continue it mentally, indicating its end. Results showed that listening to rude/gentle vocal requests influenced the perception of actions subsequently observed. In addition, we quantified the duration of this effect by adding five time delays (0ms, 200ms, 400ms, 800ms, 1200ms, 1600ms) between the vocal request and the video's presentation, finding that the effect lasted 800ms and then started to decay.

Altogether, these findings suggest the role of vitality forms in influencing others from an affective state point of view. In particular, we provide first evidence that by observing a goal-directed action, besides the goal, the observer is able to internally simulate the vitality forms of that action. In the last few years, research has been carried out to identify the neural mechanisms underlying the ability to processing how actions are performed (i.e., the vitality form). Particularly, in a recent fMRI study, Di Cesare and colleagues identified the dorso-central insula (DCI) and the middle cingulate cortex (MCC) as the neural substrates underlying the observation and execution of vitality forms (Di Cesare et al. 2021b). These brain structures modulate the parieto-frontal circuit, specific for action goal understanding (Rizzolatti and Craighero, 2004; Iacoboni and Dapretto, 2006; Fabbri-Destro and Rizzolatti, 2008; Keysers and Fadiga, 2008; Caspers et al., 2010; Grosbras et al., 2011; Molenberghs et al., 2012; Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, 2016), determining how actions are executed. Thus, the dorso-central insula and the middle cingulate cortex formed a circuit with mirror properties specific for vitality forms encoding and processing. In this respect, it is plausible that this circuit may transform the vitality form information into a motor domain allowing people, during social interactions, from one side to understand vitality forms expressed by others and from the other side to prepare an adequate response.

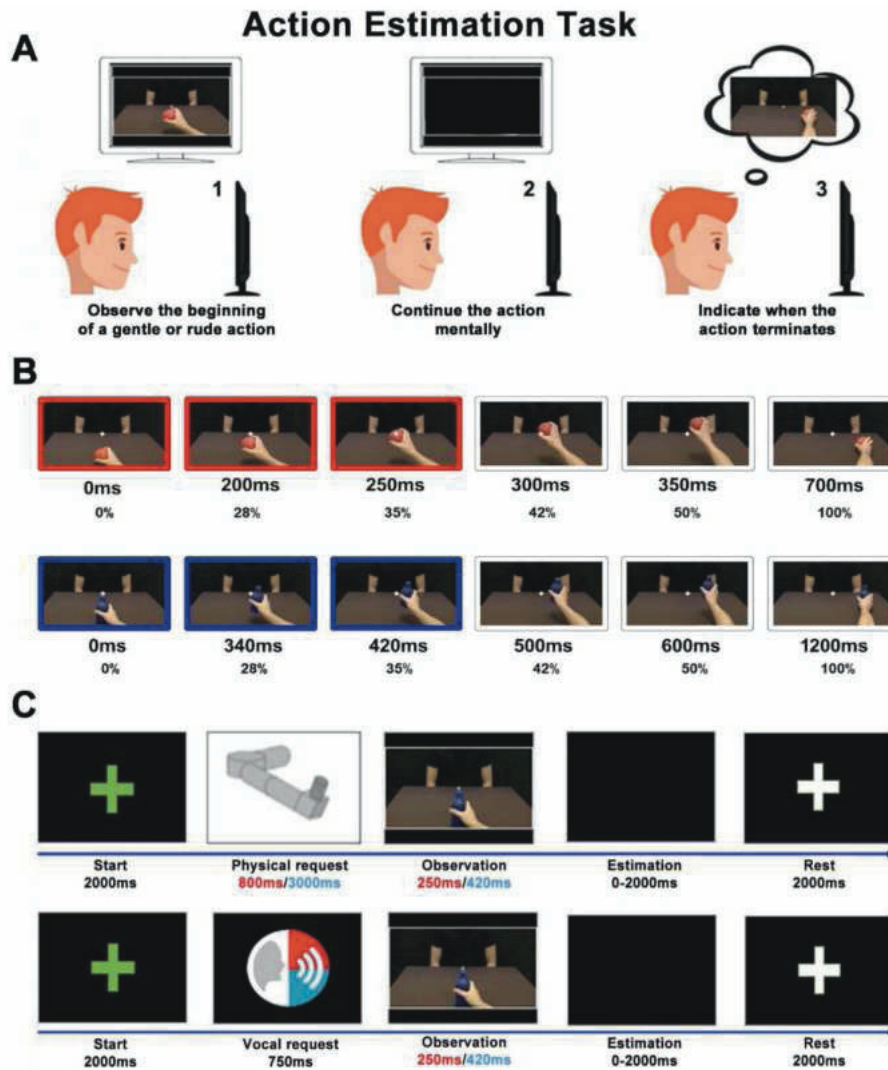


Figure 1. A) Action estimation task: 1. Participants observed the initial part of the passing action, 2. Continued the action mentally, 3. Estimated the time of its end. B) Experimental stimuli presented to participants. For rude actions (red) we presented 250ms, corresponding to 35% of the total duration (700ms). For gentle actions (blue) we presented 420ms corresponding to 35% of the total duration (1200ms). C) Experimental paradigm: before the action estimation task (Observation of the initial part + Estimation) participants received a physical request (rude:800ms, gentle:3000ms) or a vocal request (750ms for both rude and gentle vitality forms). Figure adapted from (Lombardi et al. 2021).

The Role of Vitality Forms in Human-Robot Interactions

As mentioned in the previous section, Di Cesare et al. (2017) showed that, during social interactions, participants' kinematic features were influenced by vitality forms expressed by an agent through visual and auditory stimuli. These findings rise a question: can also robotic attitudes influence human actions? To address this issue, our research group conducted a kinematic study at the Italian Institute of Technology of Genoa, Italy (Vannucci et al. 2018). The challenge we address was twofold: 1) to endow the humanoid robot iCub with vitality forms, allowing it to generate gentle and rude actions; 2) to investigate whether and how the observation of these actions influence the motor behaviour of the human partner. In the first step, by using a motor tracking system, we recorded the human kinematic of a passing action and remapped it into the joint space of the robot. Additionally, we produced a robotic voice pronouncing the Italian action command "prendi" (English verb: "take it") in a rude or gentle way. During the experiment, participants sat in front of the robot with headphones to hear the robotic voice indications. After the iCub action execution (passing the object) or verb pronunciation ("take it"), participants had to take a ball. Particularly, between the participant and iCub, we placed a small table with marks indicating the starting position of the right hand and two different targets on which the ball had to be placed by the participant. The robot action/voice could express two different vitality forms, rude or gentle. Results showed that the kinematic parameters of the robot action as well as properties of its voice are adequate to express different attitudes, consistently perceived rude or gentle by the human partner. Participants motor response has a tendency to show an increase in hand acceleration and speed of grasp aperture in response to a rude rather than a gentle robot behaviour. Starting from these results, we improved the experiment adding a video-phase, in which iCub was not physically present in front of participants, as in the live human-robot interaction, but was shown in a monitor in front of them. Vitality of the action modulates the speed of the participant, especially in the reaching phase of the movement where the speed difference between gentle and rude is extremely significant for both the video and live parts. Approximately, the same results were found for the voice condition.

EXPERIMENTAL SETUP DURING LIVE HUMAN-ROBOT INTERACTION



Figure 2. Experimental Setup during live human-robot interaction. The face of the robot was covered to avoid bias regarding eyes or facial information.

Figure adapted from (Vannucci et al. 2018).

In summary, it is possible to endow a humanoid robotic action/voice with vitality forms. More interestingly, also during human-robot interaction, vitality forms expressed by the humanoid influence the human partner from an affective state point of view, modulating his/her motor response. The opportunity of humanoid behaviour to express rude or gentle attitudes opens interesting future perspectives for robotics research: the kinematics and the voice can become a valuable tool to make the robot appear more "commanding" and "assertive" or "polite" and "kind", ensuring an effective and *affective* interaction with humans.

Art: A Pure Expression of Vitality Forms

In his book *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology, the Arts, Psychotherapy, and Development*, Daniel Stern describes vitality forms as a Gestalt, a whole of five elements (movement, time, force, space, and intention/directionality), the awareness of which gives rise “to the experience of vitality.” (Stern 2010). Stern applies this conception to the arts, specifically to music, dance, theatre and cinema. Each of these arts shows forms of vitality in a relatively purified way, in the sense that the dynamic features of an artistic representation grow and decrease continuously, allowing our arousal system to be constantly stimulated. The term “dynamic” in music, as Stern highlights, refers to sound volume, which is directly associated to force. Indeed, in order to obtain an intense sound, a musician needs to apply more force on the instrument, and this is immediately notified by the listener. Moreover, rhythmic variations characterizing a melody have an immediate effect on the arousal system, evoking a sense of vitality in the perceivers. A particular attention in Stern’s book is given to dance, a form of art which, with the affirmation of modern and contemporary styles, has started to give place to improvisation and thus to the spontaneous expression of personal internal states. Notably, Stern cites Rudolf Laban, known as the founding father of expressionist dance, in which the movements of dancers become a pure expression of their most internal vitality affects. In this way, by observing dancers while moving in the stage, we can be able to understand “their” feelings. We recognize particular accents, dynamic postures, acceleration and deceleration in their movements, and from them (i.e., expression of vitality forms) we can perceive what kind of feeling the dancers are expressing as if it were their own. Even if it is only performed and thus feigned (or simulated) (Sauer 2020). Although Stern takes into consideration only time-based arts, similar remarks can be done also for classical forms of art, such as paintings, sculptures, design. In this case, we can’t talk directly about sounds, movements, accents but we can reformulate the concept of “affective-vital perception” considering features that, since ancient times, artists have used to reveal their most intimate vitality affects, such as planes, lines and colors. In this regard, different colors, lines and shapes are a mean for the artist to freely express the internal states he/she looked for and thus can create a direct connection with others. By processing them as vital or living forms, the viewer finally gets the feeling of virtual vital images as Stern notes with reference to Susanne K. Langer (Stern 1985, 158-159). This feeling forms the basis of the viewer’s mood and colors the content of the artifacts (Langer 1967, 324, cf. also Cassirer 1944, 194, Sauer 2023 forthc.). An example will show this.

The “fundamental dynamic pentad” characterizing vitality forms experience can be perfectly associated to artists which have made energy, movement and vitality the basis of their work of arts. “Dynamism” was a magical word for the Futurist artists, who translated the kinetic rhythms and the intense sensations of modern life into potent visual forms, creating works of extraordinary emotional impact. In their Manifesto, Futurists said the goal of their paintings was “to put the spectator in the center of the picture” hoping that, through the perception of specific forms and colors, they were allowing the work of art to take effective possession of the observer’s mind and express intense sensations (“Futurism”, www.moma.org). Following the futuristic principle “*To paint a figure, you must not paint it; you must render its surrounding atmosphere.*” Umberto Boccioni’s *States of Mind* (1911) can certainly cited as one of the most important works in the movement. Each tripartite version of *States of Mind* contains the same titles for the individual images: *The Farewells*, *Those Who Go*, and *Those Who Stay* (Figure 3). The lines in each composition depict change or movement as an energy permeating our existence and suggest a particular mood, also underlined by colors. Choosing a train station as landscape, in *The Farewells* Boccioni captures the dynamism of movement and chaos through circulating and diverging directional pulses of lines and the power of complementary green and red forms. Oblique blue lines changing from dark to light in *Those Who Go* move diagonally leaving behind divergent shapes and thus evoking evanescent impression, resembling the effect of the view through the window of a fast-moving train. In contrast, *Those Who Stay* is characterized by vertical lines anchored in the frame conveying the mood of those who stay, fixed or even frozen in place. Moreover, the almost monochrome use of colors (blue and green) conveys the sense of cooling, creating a pervasive atmosphere of melancholy.

***States of Mind* - Umberto Boccioni**

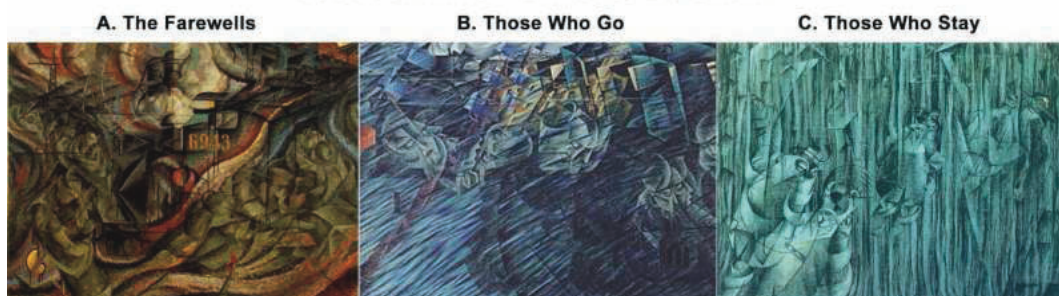


Figure 3. Umberto Boccioni, *States of Mind*, 1911, three-part, oil on canvas: A) *The Farewells*, 70,5 x 96,2 cm, B) *Those Who Go*, 96,5 x 70,8 cm and C) *Those Who Stay*, 70,8 x 95,9 cm. with friendly permission for noncommercial research use MoMA, New York.

The result is that, by observing the work of art, one can perceive what mood the artist conveyed with his/her creation, what particular sensations the artist wanted to communicate and in what kind of atmosphere the artist wanted to immerse the observers. As consequence, the observers can change their mood, creating a moment of full empathy with the respective topic the artist realized. The link between empathy (English translation of the German term *Einfühlung*) and aesthetic experience has been theorized by Robert Vischer (1873): observing a work of art the vital properties which we experience through our imaginary bodily perspective are thus bodily "projections". Indeed, the term "Einfühlung" literally means "feeling into" and refers to an act of projecting oneself into another body or environment. By "feeling into" a portrait or a sculpture, or a tale of a human being, it is supposedly possible to understand what it would be like to be that human being and thus to understand its mood (Ganczarec, Hünefeldt and Olivetti Belardinelli 2018). An interesting question is to understand how it is possible. Neuroscientific research, particularly from the Department of Neuroscience of Parma founded and led by Giacomo Rizzolatti, clearly showed that vision is a multimodal process that involves activations of brain circuits not only "visual" but also visceromotor and affective. From Parma's group, Vittorio Gallese interpreted mirror neurons as neural expression of the "Embodied Simulation" (Gallese 2009), and related art to neuroscience (Gallese 2019): the same structures involved in the subjective experience of sensations (with affective value) are also active when such sensations are recognized by observing a work of art.

To summarize, in this section we discuss the possibility to reformulate the same principle we apply to vitality forms expression and perception during social interactions for art, in all its forms. Indeed, on one hand the artist uses his/her creations to express internal states and on the other hand the recipients are able to capture immediately these affective states, sharing a moment of pure empathy with the topic of the creation and thus changing accordingly their mood. As Stern already said, art can begin an inner movement that promotes processes of inner change. With this idea in mind, we can additionally associate to art a potential therapeutic value, made of a free and powerful expression of our most intimate vitality affects. The idea is that people may use materials in various ways (i.e., vitality forms), working slowly or rapidly, making heavy or light quality of marks, and creating different color, shape and texture. These may be indicative of their state. In this regard, the expression of vitality forms in art therapy, which remain since now a relatively unexplored area, may become an interesting perspective for the future.

Conclusion

To conclude, this short review summarized the role of vitality forms in influencing our mood. Vitality forms concern the “How”, the manner in which actions are performed and by observing this fundamental component of social communication we can simultaneously capture other’s internal states and communicate ours. Vitality forms pervade social interactions and are responsible of our attitude change. For example, if we perceive a rude vitality form in someone’s gesture, we first understand that the agent is in a negative mood and we accordingly (and sometimes unconsciously) move more rapidly or perceive everything in a rude optics. Is it possible to reformulate this effect in other moment of social life such as the aesthetic experience? For example, by observing a painting, are we able to understand what mood the artist expresses or what kind of atmosphere want to create in us? As reported in the second part of the essay, art in all its form represents a pure expression of vitality forms. Thus, the work of art becomes a mean for the artist to communicate the most internal feelings corresponding to a topic to the observer. The result is that the observers can perceive these internal states and consequently change their mood. For this reason, art represents a powerful mean to give free expression of our personal internal states and communicate them to others. In this view, the last part of the essay gives space to the fascinating perspective to make art an effective therapy to reveal our most intime affective states.

Authors Biography

Giada Lombardi obtained her Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering at the University of Genova, Italy (DIBRIS) and specialized at the same University in Neuroengineering (110 cum laude). She carried out her Master thesis at the Italian Institute of Technology (IIT) of Genova, where she discovered Giuseppe Di Cesare's project on vitality forms. She continued her research applying for a PhD on the same research theme. From November 2020, she is a PhD student, supervised by Dr. Giuseppe Di Cesare and Dr.ssa Alessandra Sciutti, at the IIT of Genova (CONTACT lab). Thanks to a collaboration with the Department of Neuroscience at the University of Parma, Italy, she is improving her skills with neuroimaging techniques such as fMRI and DTI.

Giuseppe Di Cesare graduated in Biology at the University of Rome and obtained the PhD in Neuroscience from the University of Parma, Italy. During his PhD he learned neuroimaging, psychophysical, kinematic techniques and applied them to several studies on vitality forms. He is lead author of the Vitality Project, aiming to investigate the neural basis of these forms of communication expanding the study of vitality forms to autism and robotics. Since August 2019, he is working at the Italian Institute of Technology (IIT) in Genova, Italy (CONTACT lab) where he is designing and carrying out experiments on human-robot interactions involving fMRI and kinematics data collection which is part of the ERC starting grant awarded to Dr. Sciutti (G.A: 804388).

Martina Sauer studied art history, philosophy and classical archaeology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany (mid-term), Paris, France (Socrates fellowship) and Munich, Germany (graduation) and obtained the PhD in science of art from the University of Basel, Switzerland. After her PhD on affective affects and effects of abstract modern art and their consequences, she followed this idea in research and class at the universities and academies of Witten-Herdecke, Weimar, Bremen, Basel, Zürich and currently at Academy Mode & Design Hamburg and Düsseldorf. Martina is advisory board member and co-leader of the section image of German Society of Semiotics and the Society of Interdisciplinary Image Science and senior editor of *Art Style*, *Art & Culture International Magazine*. (bildphilosophie.de/en-gb)

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