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Sense and Sensibility of Affective Atmospheres

Session 11 – Introduction

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The aim of this thematic session is to bring in different disciplinary and methodological perspectives on affective atmospheres to examine the underlying, intertwined processes of sensing as sensibility (i.e., feeling, experiencing) and sensing as sense-making (i.e., understanding, conceptualizing, meaning making). Recent affective and ‘more-than-representational’ turns in the scholarship and praxis, particularly visible in design of heritage architecture and places of memory, has emphasized the potential of affective and embodied experiences to act as a medium in production and communication of meaning. Such approach to creating interactive spaces assumes a negotiation between the processes of experiencing affective atmospheres and conceptualizing meaning, shaped by the broader socio-political context.

By considering the notion of affective atmospheres in spaces of heritage (and beyond), we ask what is the relationship between sense and sensibility? How can we investigate with different disciplinary and cross-disciplinary lenses - such as architecture, cultural geography, philosophy, cognitive science - the links between these two modes of sensing? What are the possibilities of a range of methodologies and tools - from ethnography to measuring physiological responses, from lived to simulated realities and other phenomenographic representations of atmospheric worlds - for understanding the ways in which we feel and think affective atmospheres? In what ways are sense-making and sensibility affected by the various socio-political factors and multiple stakeholders’ positions? And finally, what are the implications of understanding sense and sensibility of affective atmospheres at individual and collective level for creating a shared sense as a common ground for co-habitation in the future?

The seven papers gathered in this session demonstrate the plurality of approaches through which the question of sensing - sense-making, feeling - thinking affective atmospheres can be investigated. This plurality is particularly visible in the range of methodologies used to capture and describe the affective layer of spatial experiences, including variety of ethnographic research methods, creative participatory workshops, exploratory bodily performances, commented urban walks, questionnaires capturing affect and spatial qualities, among others. Such richness of employed methodologies allows us to examine affective atmospheres and their spatial situation at different scales and levels of detail - from individual’s experience and the role of affect in personal (body) identity, through individual’s relationship to space (built or virtual) to

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one's relationship to other individuals and the shared meaning as a product of communal practices and spatial choreographies. At the same time, based on the main focus of their explorations, the gathered contributions can be divided in two sub-sessions: first, centered around the role of different subjectivities in experience of affective atmospheres in architectural and urban settings, and second, centered around the role of the medium for representing and importantly, creating affective atmospheres.

Sub-Session 1

The subject and the affectivity of atmospheric spatial situation. The first set of papers by Christos Kakalis (1), Alice Salimbeni (2), Nathalie Audas, Fanny Vuailat, Sandrine Depeau (3), and Anders Palstrøm (4) tackle the question of sense and sensibility of affective atmospheres through exploration of different stakeholders - of different subjects' perspectives. In his paper "Atmospheres of Transformation: Language, Identity and the Liturgical Experience of a Transborder Orthodox Community," Christos Kakalis examines the rich tapestry of soundscapes and spatial experiences underlying the atmosphere of transborder liturgies. Here, the normativity of religious building typology and of the language of liturgical texts and practices is challenged through the more organic, transborder ritual choreography as the "living architectural brief of liturgical architecture." The diversity of liturgical texts and languages, manifested as soundscapes, becomes the atmospheric medium of shared practices and shared belonging. Second contribution "Atelier de la traversée: A workshop to reflect on a possible mediation between affective and political atmospheres" by Alice Salimbeni focuses on exploring the affective and the political aspect of women's urban experiences and how the two are intertwined in their everyday experiential encounters with the city. Through creative workshop activities and variety of mediums, the paper discusses the capacity of atmospheric spaces to accommodate the projection of individual's identity as an important factor in understanding the conditions of spatial inclusion and exclusion. Nathalie Audas, Fanny Vuailat, and Sandrine Depeau in their paper "Ambient outlines of children's urban experience: A look back at an interpretative methodology" bring forward the study of affective dimension of children's daily urban experiences by addressing the methodological challenges in working with children. Through a novel methodology that includes commented urban walks, inter-subjective listening (of the walks' recording) and interpretative writing (ambiance storytelling), they emphasize not only the possibility of capturing the sensitivities of children's experiences but also provide insight into how the atmosphere of these urban experiences is affected through child-researcher relationship. The final work in this sub-session by Anders Palstrøm "Atmosphere, resonance, and immanent transcendence: Rethinking the aesthetic experience as a threefold" rounds up the discussion on a more philosophical plane by examining the threefold structure of aesthetic experience as a way to account for a variety of our sensitive aesthetic experiences in atmospheric situations—some being mainly affective, others mainly resonant, and others deeply meaningful in a more cognitive sense. The contributions in this sub-session show the fundamental relationality between the subject and space; how this relationship questions the affective atmosphere and changes the feelings and sense-making of spatial settings depending on the subjectivity of the experiencing body - whether it is a woman, a child-researcher dyad, or a transborder religious community.

Sub-Session 2

The medium and tools in experience and creation of affective atmospheres. The second set of papers by Katarina Andjelković (5), Vahid Vahdat and Judy Theodorson (6), and Rikke Munck Petersen (7) explores the role of the medium - images/panoramas,

virtual reality, and drone footage - in representing as well as in creating affective atmospheric experiences. In her paper "Through the ambiguous objects of Benjaminian thought: Politics and affect in design of heritage architecture," Katarina Andjelković argues for the potential of panoramic image to recontextualize architectural atmospheres, and especially to challenge our linear perception of time - when joining past and present representations of the same object. The contribution by Vahid Vahdat and Judy Theodorson "Ambiance Production in Virtual Interiors: Engineering and Assessment of Affective Response in Design Studio Projects" demonstrated how virtual reality technology can be used in design studios to eliminate "outside sensations" - such as structure, program, climate, gravity, materiality - and place affect production at the center of the design process. The work of Rikke Munck Petersen "Ethics of the unseen: Extended sensibility and affection in drone film post-production editing" discusses how the interplay of vision, rhythm, and sound in drone filming and post-production editing produces the effect of "extended sensibility." The papers presented in this sub-session show how the mediatic tools we use can help us extend, enhance, and understand reality and the sense of self, and most importantly for the goals set before this session, how that knowledge can be further applied in actual design, understood here as the process of active creation of meaning.

One of the main goals of this thematic session is to explore the ways in which the meaning (sense-making) - individual and/or shared - can emerge from affective experiences and sensations, language (sounds and texts) included. However, as demonstrated in paper by Christos Kakalis, this is only possible when we all understand (and share among ourselves) the basic meaning behind the words we use, and this of course applies to describing places and atmospheres. As rightfully noted by one of the contributors, we are indeed operating in a complex and somewhat vague field of atmospheres, which more often than not escapes precise definitions. In words of Confucius, "If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence, there must be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything"³. Taken together, these papers demonstrate the essence of language as a medium in experience and research: even when trying to explore the 'non-verbal' layer of affective experiences, it is the language that becomes the medium of sense-making between affect and space.

This poses a question of how we can enter into a productive conversation between these different approaches - methodologically as well as disciplinarily - if we are to systematize and develop recommendations for architects and urban designers. How can we be even more rigorous in the language, terminology, and concepts that would allow us to clarify the implications of affective atmospheres for design? Without forgetting the multiplicity of stakeholders' agency, we ask how the agency of a designer, clearly expressed in sub-session 2, is to be negotiated with the intrinsic relationality between the subject-and-atmospheric space, as shown in the first set of papers? Consequently, what are the ethics of atmosphere/sensation manipulation, especially in (teaching) design studios or other design practices? These are some of the open questions we look forward to addressing during the conference discussion.

3. *The Analects of Confucius, Book 13, Verse 3, translated by James R. Ware, 1980.*

