ADV 09128 On Atmospheres and Design
GSD Spring 2013

Landscape Department
Instructor: Silvia Benedito
Office Hours: Thursdays 9.30 am-12.30pm (room 503)

Seminar: 4 credits – Limited enrollment to 15 students
Monday: 10am-1pm, Gropius Room
TA – Raquel Fernandez

“Imaginary Icicles,” over the Charles River, Boston
Friedrich St. Florian, 1971
Description

What is atmosphere? Is it air and weather? Or is it the in-between—effect, matter, immaterial, space, ephemera? How is atmosphere(s) designed when it seems to start where design stops? Within these questions lay implicit issues of time and material presence, scientific inquiry and description, space, phenomena and the body. The seminar will be examining definitions and investigations of atmosphere in the context of history, philosophy, art, film and photography, science, design, and the cultural imagination. Also, it will investigate built works that inform conditions of atmosphere. Our experiences are shaped in spaces that are not only of a visible and measurable reality, but also of the immaterial and ephemeral conditions that affect what we see, register, and experience. What is memorable that affects our imaginative experiences of the places we visit and live? What are the immersive qualities we collect when moving through the in-between? Many travelers have registered their impressions of landscapes and buildings based on the rhythm of natural phenomena and spatial experiences induced by the atmospheric conditions such as of light and humidity, reflection and sound, wind or temperature.

Atmospheres are because we perceive them. We are both part of the atmosphere and part of different atmospheres – climatic atmospheres, acoustic atmospheres, emotional atmospheres, kinetic atmospheres, material atmospheres, polluted, energetic, etc. Atmospheres are the bodily relationships that assert the presence of the world around us and are connected to us, while reminding us that atmosphere is also a lethal base for our existence and pleasure. Atmospheres are the immediate perception of the invisible (that get revealed) and the actual relation to our own natureness.

These are the atmospheres—their conditions, agents, and sources—that we will be examining in the seminar, treated as matter for inquiry in the built environment, while projecting further ways of constructing and imagining the discipline of design.

The seminar will be structured through discussions of selected writings and philosophical investigations as a means to position concepts of the atmosphere(s) as a design tool. Also, there will be an analysis of sensory media—installation, photography, and film—and design projects that explore concepts of atmosphere. Guest speakers will be invited to discuss their work and to engage in the conversation within the context of the seminar.

The Seminar will be dedicated to:
1) Expanding the concept of atmosphere beyond the mood or subjective impression (what is the most prevailing and also constraining to the term itself);
2) Projecting a position on how atmospheres can operate in the contexts of the poetic and imaginative constructs;
3) Raising the claim that atmospheres constitute a fundamental concept of material presence, invention and craft in design.

Therefore, the seminar will be structured by 9 categories of research on how to approach “atmosphere(s)” as it claims distinct constituencies and relevant bodies of knowledge:

1) On Atmospheres and the Body
2) On Atmospheres and Space
3) On Atmospheres and Matter (wind, sound, light, temperature, humidity, etc)*
4) On Atmospheres and Science
5) On Atmospheres and Art
6) On Atmospheres and Aesthetics
7) On Atmospheres and Environment
8) On Atmospheres and Politics
9) On Atmospheres and Design

* This session will be developed in 2 classes – Matter I and Matter II
References

The seminar explores 3 positions to guide the discussion and research on Atmospheres and Design. One is that of Gernot Böhme’s claim in his essay “Atmosphere as the fundamental concept of a new aesthetics.” Here, Böhme foregrounds atmosphere as a space of condition(s), independent from both object and subject. Atmospheres are re-positioned as an autonomous entity but have a co-presence within the space of subject and object. In this description, atmosphere is independent from the subjective interpretation and generative of a new field of ontological reasoning focused on the material qualities of atmospheres, its agents and entropic processes.

Second, the course will investigate the concept of “appearance” as developed in Martin Seel’s “The Aesthetics of Appearing”. Here, Seel foregrounds the moment of perception and awareness in the receiver while acknowledging artwork. As he claims “Attentiveness to what is appearing is therefore at the same time attentiveness to ourselves.” Appearance and disappearance are part of a dynamic process of phenomenological awareness as one implies the other within a certain time frame. Here, importantly, time is implied as an agent in the perceptual choreography.

The third, probably most familiar, position is that of James J. Gibson’s description of the world at the level of ecology i.e the environment. Gibson offers a structural analysis of the environment by describing it in terms of a medium, substances, and surfaces as operational interfaces between different material conditions. Gibson’s theory of affordances emphasizes dynamic structures (process) and properties, which reciprocally establish a dynamic relation between perceiver-environment. This position is particularly relevant in the context of the seminar as it focuses on structures that are dynamically recognized as perceptual information intrinsic to the environment, instead of being intrinsic to sensation in the perceiver’s mind.

Requirements

Discussion - The seminar will be structured through the discussions of the selected writings as means to position concepts of atmospherics. These concepts will be further explored through the analysis of photography, film and design projects that explore concepts of atmosphere. Lastly, select invited guest lecturers will come to discuss their work in relation to the content of the Seminar and to engage in the thematic conversations.

Research – Students may work individually or in pairs. The research work will be gathered as a booklet entitled “The Atmospheres Project.” The research will be developed in 2 research documents developed by the students:

1- The Chart – The measuring and describing each of the themes and its agents.
   a. The student(s) will be tracing the genealogy of the concept in its ontological (material), intellectual and operational implications and values, by the identification of parallel key authors and applications. The study will culminate in the work of cartographic representation across time and concepts.

2- The project/manifesto – The projective and speculative position informed by the findings in:
   a. In a foldable A2 panel each student will assembly a projective and speculative position on the future role of Atmosphere in the discipline of design. This may focus may be on particular constituencies, agents, properties, etc, specific to the theme.

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Grades:
- Reading and discussion (participation, leading discussion, content of discussion) 20%
- Research
  - The Chart 35%
  - The project/manifesto 25%
- Final deliverables 20%

The last 2 classes, April 22nd and April 29th will be dedicated to the further development of both research documents - Chart & project/manifesto. Each student / pair of students will work with the instructor and will adjust the chart accordingly to common observations, facts and events from the other themes. The goal of these 2 classes is to find consistency and common premises in the overall definition of the themes.

Discussions and planning on the research documents are highly encouraged to be discussed with the Instructor during the class and office hours (Thursdays 9.30-1pm). The presence in the class is mandatory.

Submissions

Interim submission: March 25th (Monday) – iSite submission & Pin-up in class
There will be an interim review of the structure of each research document (Chart & project/manifesto). Here, each student should submit to the iSite and pin-up both research documents (Chart & project/manifesto).

Final submission: May 10th (Friday) - iSite submission
Both research documents should be submitted to the iSite by 4pm.

All readings will be available on the Seminar iSite as PDFs organized by theme/class.
SCHEDULE

1- On Atmospheres and perceived conditions (Intro)
January 28th

2. On Atmospheres and the Body
February 4th

Guest: Iñaki Abalos

Readings:

Hellpach, Willy, “Geopsique” (1911), translated by José Ortega y Gasset (1940), Chapter I-B “Explicación de los efectos del tiempo,” p.45-81; Chapter III “Theoría del efecto del tiempo,” p. 93-117 (in SPANISH)


Recommended:


3. On Atmospheres and Space
February 11th

Guest: Alexander Häusler

Readings:


Recommended:


Pallasmaa, Juhani “Space, Place and Atmosphere- Peripheral perception in existential experience,” (2011) In Ghost 13, p. 1-16


4. On Atmospheres and Matter I (Wind, sound, light)
February 18th

Guest: Ernst Karel

Readings:


Böhme, Gernot, “Staged Materiality”, In Daidalos, n.56, June 1995, p. 36-43


Recommended:

Trifona, Temenuga, “Matter-Image or Image-Consciousness: Bergson contra Sartre,” (2003), In Janus Head 6(1), State University of New York at Buffalo, p.80-114

Otter, Chris, “Locating Matter- The place of materiality in urban history,” (2010), In Material Powers: Cultural studies, history and the material turn” ed. Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, p. 38-59

5. On Atmospheres and Science
February 25th

Guest: Ed Eigen

Readings:


Sloterdijk, Peter, “Terror From The Air,” (2007), Translated by Amy Patton and Steve Corcoran (2009)

Recommended:


6. On Atmospheres and Matter II (Temperature, humidity)
March 4th

Guest: Allen Sayegh
Readings (as per as Matter I):


Böhme, Gernot, “Staged Materiality”, In Daidalos, n.56, June 1995, p. 36-43


Recommended:


Trifona, Temenuga, “Matter-Image or Image-Consciousness: Bergson contra Sartre,” (2003), In Janus Head 6(1), State University of New York at Buffalo, p.80-114

Otter, Chris, “Locating Matter- The place of materiality in urban history,” (2010), In Material Powers: Cultural studies, history and the material turn” ed. Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce, p. 38-59

7. On Atmospheres and Art
March 11th

Guest: Sharon Harper

Readings:

Seel, Martin, “ Aesthetics of Appearing,” (2005), Chapter II.5 – Situations of Appearing, p. 87-104 Chapter III- Flickering and Resonating, p. 139-159


Mitchel, W.J.T., “The Landscape and Power,”(2002), Chapter: Imperial Landscape p. 5-34, Chapter: Territorial Photpgraphy, p. 175-202
Recommended:


8. On Atmospheres and Aesthetics
March 25th

Guest: Marikka Trotter


Böhme, Gernot, “Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics,” (1993), Thesis Eleven 36, p. 113-26


Recommended:


Rollins, William H. “Aesthetic Perception and Environmental Reform in Modern Europe,” (1997), In Greener Vision of Home – Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904-1918

9. On Atmospheres and the Environment
April 1st

Guest: tbd


Gissen, David. “Subnature- Architecture’s other environments,“(2009), Part one- Atmospheres, p. 30-87


Recommended:


Ingold, Tim, “Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description” (2011), Pt 3, chapter 9 - Earth, sky, wind, and weather, p. 115-125


Uexküll, Jacok von, “A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans,”(1940), chapter- Environmental spaces, p. 53-62

10. On Atmospheres and Politics
April 8th
Guest: tbd


Dessauce, Marc (ed.). “The Inflatable Moment- Pneumatics and protest in ‘68”(1999), Part one- On pneumatic apparitions, p. 7-26


Recommended:


Tuinen, Sjoerd van, “Air conditioning spaceship earth: peter Sloterdijk’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm.” (2009), Environment and Planning D: Society and space, Vol. 27, p. 105-118


11. On Atmospheres and Design
April 15th

Guest: Luis Callejas


Recommended:


Frascari, Marco and Emmons, Paul, “Making visible the invisible: signs of air in architectural treatises,”(2006), In Aeolian winds and the spirit in renaissance architecture, Kenda, Barbara (ed.), p. 87-102


Hight, Christopher, "Putting out the Fire with Gasoline: parables of entropy and homeostasis from the second machine age from the second information age to the information age."(2007). In Softscape by Sean Lally & Jessica Young (ed.), p. 11-24

12- “The Atmospheres Project” (WORKSHOP)
April 22th

13- “The Atmospheres Project” (WORKSHOP) – Final discussion and presentation
April 29th