

2013 UNDER CONSTRUCTION SYMPOSIUM

INTERSTICES

MOVED: ON ATMOSPHERES AND AFFECTS

Auckland, New Zealand, Friday 22 to Sunday 24 November



“Moved: Of Atmospheres and Affects” will address questions such as, what are the roles of emotion and imagination and the immersion in affective states? What is the role, politically, culturally, creatively, of felt or non-conscious states and excesses of affect in our cities? What does *being moved* mean, historically and today, for the thinking of design practices spanning cities, architecture, scenography, interiors, objects?

Considerations of feeling, intensity, affect and immanent experience have gained importance across a range of disciplines over past decades. In architecture and related arts, Peter Zumthor works with atmosphere as the means by which emotional sensibility is registered, and which offers orientation faster than any critical faculty. Olafur Eliasson, James Turrell, Jean-Gilles Decosterd & Philippe Rahm, Herzog & de Meuron, Diller & Scofidio Designers and theorists as diverse as Juhani Pallasmaa and Tim Ingold find common reference in the thinking of German philosopher Gernot Böhme. For Böhme, atmospheres – moods and affects in their spatial situations – are the primary reality aesthetics (understood as aesthesis, a general theory of perception) has to deal with. Atmosphere demands a co-presence of perceiver and perceived that engulfs the terms of any subject/object division as well as the longstanding bifurcation of physis and techné, nature and technology.

Gernot Böhme is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Darmstadt Technical University, Germany. Böhme has been Guest Professor at Universities in Austria, Sweden, USA, Japan, the Netherlands, the UK, and Australia. In 2003, Böhme received the *Denkbar-Preis für obliques Denken* (Denkbar prize for oblique thinking). He has risen to prominence through his work in aesthetics, the philosophy of embodiment and technology, and practical philosophy. His book *Architektur und Atmosphäre* (2006, Architecture and atmosphere) is most influential in art and design practice throughout the world. Professor Böhme will deliver “The Aesthetics of Atmospheres - Theory and Applications” at 6pm on Friday 22 November, at the School of Architecture and Planning’s Design Theatre (Building 348, 22 Symonds St). The lecture is free and open to the public.

The 2013 Interstices – Under Construction Symposium will run 22 to 24 November at the School of Architecture and Planning’s Design Theatre (Building 348, 22 Symonds St) and in AUT’s Sir Paul Reeves building (Governor Fitzroy Place). Full registration costs are \$210 (concession tickets for full time students and the unwaged are \$95) and occasional registration for individual sessions is available for \$55 (\$25 concession) during the event. To register visit <http://interstices.ac.nz/news-events/>. Participation will accrue NZIA CPD points. A final brochure with programme abstracts will soon be uploaded here.

“Moved: Of Atmospheres and Affects” is hosted jointly by and at
AUT University and The University of Auckland, November 22 to 24, 2013.

Art into Nature: Elementalism in Contemporary Public Art and Architecture

Eu Jin Chua

In the study of ancient or pagan thought, the term “elementalism” is sometimes used to refer to the personification of nature’s elements — for example, the belief in the existence of a god of wind or god of fire. Conversely there is a new elementalism at work in contemporary art. Recent artists have pursued - often in public works - atmospheric manipulations of elemental effects: clouds, sky, air, water, light, or smoke. Common in contemporary artists such as Olafur Eliasson, Roni Horn, and Rachel Whiteread, is a reductivist approach that strips aesthetic objects down to phenomenal essences. A similar tendency can be seen in contemporary architecture, with Diller+Scofidio’s Blur building

(2002) being a notable example. If the Crystal Palace of 1851 is said to be the first building in the world in which “atmosphere is perceptible” (Merrifield), the Blur project subverts the built almost entirely in favour of elemental effects.

Gernot Böhme (1993) has suggested that the idea of atmosphere can serve to supersede foundational Western conceptions of the aesthetic that are founded in subject/object distinctions (experiencing atmosphere doesn’t require one to be a subject counterpointed against an object). Recent elementalist works could be said to stage precisely such a superseding of classical aesthetics through their dissolution of art or architecture into nothing but atmosphere. Replacing aesthetic objects and subjects apprehending them are fields of affect.

My primary interest in such works, however, is that this dematerialization of the aesthetic object is more than a dissolution into affect — it is also a dissolution into nature. The Art-Nature distinction is – alongside the subject-object distinction – one of the key premises of Western thought. Kant long ago held that, whereas nature is the realm of mere ungoverned effects (*effectus*), art is the deliberate human transformation of such arbitrary effects into determined objects ensouled by reason and meaning. The Art-Nature distinction therefore endorses the Subject-Object distinction and shores up the supposed superiority of the former over the latter. Recent elementalist works ignore this classical policing of the line between art and nature. Many contemporary artists apparently *want* their works to approach the ostensible indeterminateness of nonhuman nature. The dissolution of the object into atmosphere and affect thus seems to imply a ‘naturalization’ of art — perhaps a dehumanization, or perhaps a post-humanism?

This paper explores the idea that, in their annulment of the art-nature distinction by means of elemental atmospherics, the new elementalists might also be intuitively conducting an advanced kind of posthumanist *naturphilosophie*.

Reference:

Böhme, G. (1993). Atmosphere as the fundamental concept of a new aesthetics. *Thesis Eleven* 36, 113-126.

Merrifield, M. (1970). Essay on the Harmony and Contrast of Colours as Exemplified in the Exhibition. *The Arts Journal Illustrated Catalogue: The Industry of All Nations, 1851* (i-viii). London: David & Charles.

Eu Jin Chua is a Lecturer in the history and theory of design and visual arts and post-graduate Programme Leader at UNITEC School of Design and Visual Arts. He has published widely in the areas of moving image and film, cultural studies and visual arts. He has also curated a range of exhibitions on film and video in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand. He is currently completing a PhD at The London Consortium, Birkbeck College, University of London.