

GHOST 13

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**SPACE, PLACE AND ATMOSPHERE**  
**- peripheral perception in existential experience**

I was very surprised, indeed, to learn the subject matter that I am expected to speak about today, namely “atmospheres”. Atmosphere, ambience and mood are rarely discussed among architects or in schools of architecture, as architectural theorizing, education, and criticism focus on space, form, structure, scale, detail, and light. Only during the past two decades has an experiential view begun to replace the formal understanding of this art form. Thus the explicit interest in the mood of settings in a business school is unexpected and even visionary. This conference also confirms my assumption that there are fields in today’s world of production and business that are ahead of architects in the understanding of human nature and behaviour.

I am personally grateful for the invitation to speak today, as the preparation of my lecture has obliged me to think about the role and significance of atmosphere in architecture.



**FUSION OF THE WORLD AND THE MIND**

The character of a space or place is not merely a visual quality as is usually assumed. The judgement of environmental character is a complex fusion of countless factors which are immediately and synthetically grasped as an overall atmosphere, feeling, mood, or ambience. “I enter a building, see a room, and - in the fraction of a second – have this feeling about it”, Peter Zumthor, one of the architects who have acknowledged the importance of architectural atmospheres, confesses.<sup>1</sup> This experience is multi-sensory in its very essence, but it also involves judgements beyond the five Aristotelian senses, such as the senses of orientation, gravity, balance, stability, motion, duration, continuity, scale and illumination. Indeed, the immediate judgement of the character of space calls for our entire

embodied and existential sense, and it is perceived in a diffuse and peripheral manner rather than through precise and conscious observation. Moreover, this complex assessment projects a temporal process as it fuses perception, memory and imagination. Each space and place is an invitation and suggestion of distinct acts.

In addition to environmental atmosphere, there are cultural, social, family, work place, etc. interpersonal atmospheres. We can, perhaps, even speak of specific atmospheres in the scale of cultural or national entities. *Genius loci*, the Spirit of Place, is a similarly ephemeral, unfocused and non-material experiential character that is closely related with atmosphere; we could well speak of the atmosphere of the place, which gives the place its unique perceptual and memorable character and identity. Even the imagery of a painting is integrated by an overall atmosphere or feeling; the most important unifying factor in paintings is usually its specific feel of illumination and colour. Music of the various art forms is particularly atmospheric, and has a forceful impact on our emotions and moods regardless of how little or much we intellectually understand musical structures. That seems to be the very reason why music is commonly used to create atmospheric moods in public spaces, shopping malls and even elevators. Music creates lived and existential atmospheric interior spaces, ephemeral and dynamic experiential fields, rather than distant shapes and objects. Atmosphere emphasizes a sustained being in a situation rather than a singular moment of perception. The fact that music can move us to tears is a convincing proof of the emotive power of art as well as of our innate capacity to internalise abstract emotive structures, or more precisely, to project our emotions on abstractly symbolic structures.

As we enter a space, the space enters us, and the experience is essentially an exchange and fusion of the object and the subject. Robert Pogue Harrison, an American literary scholar, states poetically: "In the fusion of place and soul, the soul is as much of a container of place as place is a container of soul, both are susceptible to the same forces of destruction"<sup>2</sup>. Atmosphere is similarly an exchange between material or existent properties of the place and our immaterial realm of imagination.

Permit me already at this early phase of my lecture to suggest a definition for experiential atmosphere: Atmosphere is the overarching perceptual, sensory and emotive impression of a setting or a social situation. It provides the unifying coherence and character for a room, space, place, and landscape, or a social encounter. It is "the common denominator", "the colouring" or "the feel" of the experiential situation. Atmosphere is a mental "thing", an experiential property or characteristic that is suspended between the object and the subject.

Paradoxically, we grasp the atmosphere of a place before we identify its details or understand it intellectually. In fact, we may be

completely unable to say anything meaningful about the characteristics of a situation, yet have a firm image, emotive attitude, and recall of it. In the same way, although we do not consciously analyze or understand the interaction of meteorological facts, we grasp the essence of weather at a glance, and it inevitably conditions our mood and intentionality. As we enter a new city, we grasp its overall character similarly, without having consciously analysed a single one of its myriad of properties. This is an intuitive and emotive capacity that seems to be biologically derived and largely unconsciously and instinctively determined through evolutionary programming. “We perceive atmospheres through our emotional sensibility – a form of perception that works incredibly quickly, and which we humans evidently need to help us survive”, Zumthor suggests.<sup>3</sup> The new sciences of bio-psychology and ecological psychology actually study such evolutionary causalities in human behaviour and cognition.<sup>4</sup> It is quite certain that we are genetically and culturally conditioned to seek or avoid certain types of atmospheres. Our shared pleasure in being in the shadow of large trees with the possibility of looking into a sun-lit open field, for instance, is explained on the basis of such evolutionary programming.<sup>5</sup>

Although atmosphere and mood are overarching qualities of our environments and spaces, these qualities have not been much observed, analysed or theorized in architecture. One of our lecturers today, Professor Gernot Böhme, is one of the pioneering thinkers in the philosophy of atmospheres, along with Herman Schmitz.<sup>6</sup> In the architectural profession Peter Zumthor, for one, points out the significance of architectural atmospheres in his book *Atmospheres*.

Atmosphere seems to be a more conscious objective in literary, cinematic, theatrical, and painterly thinking than in architecture. In fact, there is an entire painterly approach, as exemplified by J.M.W. Turner and Claude Monet, which can be called “atmospheric painting”, in the two meanings of the notion. “Atmosphere is my style”, Turner confessed to John Ruskin as Zumthor reminds us.<sup>7</sup> The formal and structural ingredients in the work of these artists are deliberately suppressed for the benefit of an embracing and shapeless atmosphere, suggestive of temperature, moisture and subtle movements of the air. “Colour field” painters similarly suppress form and boundaries for the benefit of intense interaction of colour. Great films, such as the films by Jean Vigo, Jean Renoir, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Andrei Tarkovsky, are also steeped in their characteristic atmospheric dramaturgy and continuum. Also theater relies heavily on atmosphere which supports the integrity and continuity of the story regardless of the often abstracted and vaguely hinted features of the place or space. The ambience can be so suggestive and dominating that very few cues of the setting are needed, as in Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* in which houses and rooms

are often indicated by mere chalk lines on the dark floor, but the drama takes a full grip of the spectator's imagination and emotions.

Somewhat paradoxically, we can also speak of "atmospheric sculpture", such as some of the sketch-like modelled works of Medardo Rosso, Auguste Rodin and Alberto Giacometti. Also interior decorators, set designers, and commercial designers of shop interiors and exhibits, not to speak of funeral parlors and wedding halls, seem to be more aware of the seminal role of the ambience than architects, who tend to think more in terms of the "pure" qualities of space, form and geometry. Among architects, atmosphere is judged as something romantic and shallowly entertaining. The serious western tradition is entirely based on seeing architecture as a material and geometric object through focused vision. Besides, architectural images seek clarity rather than ephemerality and obscurity.

## RECOGNITION OF PLACE AND SPACE

The instant recognition of the inherent nature of a place is akin to the automatic reading of the creature-like identities and essences in the biological world. Animals possess an instant recognition of other creatures crucial for their survival, either pray or threat, and we humans identify individual faces among thousands of nearly equal facial configurations, and recognize the emotive meaning of each face on the basis of minute muscular expressions. A space or a place is an image, a mental or neural "creature", a singular experience, that is fused with our very existential experience and cognition. Once we have assessed a space inviting and pleasant, or uninviting and depressing, we can hardly alter that first-hand judgement. We become attached to certain settings and remain alienated in other kinds of settings, and both intuitive choices are equally difficult to verbally analyse or alter as experiential realities.

Sir Colin St. John Wilson explains this irresistible force of architecture and physical settings:

It is as if I am being manipulated by some subliminal code, not to be translated into words, which acts directly on the nervous system and imagination, at the same time stirring intimations of meaning with vivid spatial experience as though they were one thing. It is my belief that the code acts so directly and vividly upon us because it is strangely familiar; it is in fact the first language we ever learned, long before words, and which is now recalled to us through art, which alone holds the key to revive it ....<sup>8</sup>

When describing his creative process in the essay "The Trout and the Mountain Stream", Alvar Aalto confesses: "Led by my instincts I draw, not architectural syntheses, but sometimes even childish

compositions, and via this route I eventually arrive at an abstract basis to the main concept, a kind of universal substance with whose help the numerous quarrelling sub-problems [of the design task] can be brought into harmony”<sup>9</sup> Aalto’s notion “universal substance” seems to refer to a unifying atmosphere or intuitive feeling rather than any conceptual, intellectual or formal idea.

The existential value of the diffuse but comprehensive grasping of the ambience of a spatial entity, or an entire landscape, is rather easy to understand from the point of view of the biological principle of survival. It has evidently given an evolutionary advantage to be instantly able to differentiate a scene of potential danger from a setting of safety and nourishment. Let me repeat, such judgements cannot be consciously deduced from details; they have to be instantaneously grasped as an intuitive reading based on a “polyphonic” grasp of the ambience. This polyphonic perception and cognition has been identified as one of the conditions for the creative mind. At this point, I wish to suggest that the elementarist idea of perception, imagery and thought is questionable, if not altogether wrong. An elementarist approach to architecture is equally misguided.

#### UNCONSCIOUS PERCEPTION AND CREATIVE THOUGHT

I have recently written a psychoanalytic study of creative imagery, or rather of perception and imagery in the creative process, with the title “In Praise of Vagueness: diffuse perception and uncertain thought”. Without going further into the subject matter of my essay in this context, I merely wish to say that against the common understanding, also creative search is based on vague, polyphonic and mostly unconscious ways of perception and thought instead of focused and unambiguous attention<sup>10</sup>. Also unconscious and unfocused creative scanning grasps complex entities and processes, without conscious understanding of any of the elements much in the way that we grasp the entities of atmospheres.

I am referring to these studies and theories of the creative mind only to underline the little known fact that we have unexpected synthesizing capacities that we are not usually aware of, and, besides, which we do not regard as areas of special intelligence and value. The biased focus on rational logic and its value in human mental life is a major reason behind this unfortunate rejection. It is surprising, indeed, that more than a century after Sigmund Freud’s revolutionary discoveries, the prevailing pedagogic philosophies and practices continue to grossly undervalue the entire universe of unconscious and embodied processes. Also architectural education continues to emphasise conscious intentionality.

We have traditionally underestimated the roles and cognitive capacities of emotions in comparison with our conceptual, intellectual

and verbal understanding. Yet, emotional reactions are often the most comprehensive and synthetic judgements that we can produce, although we are hardly able to identify the constituents of these assessments. When we fear or love something, there is not much scope or need for rationalization.

Also our accepted understanding of intelligence is grossly limited. Recent psychological studies have revealed seven or ten different categories of intelligence beyond the narrow realm of intelligence measured by the standard IQ test. The American psychologist Howard Gardner lists seven categories of intelligence: linguistic intelligence; logical-mathematical intelligence; musical intelligence; bodily-kinesthetic intelligence; spatial intelligence; interpersonal intelligence, and; intrapersonal intelligence.<sup>11</sup> Later in his book, he suggests three further categories: naturalistic intelligence; spiritual intelligence, and; existential intelligence.<sup>12</sup> I would definitely add the categories of emotional, aesthetic and ethical intelligence in this list of human cognitive capacities, and after the conversations in this conference, I would even suggest atmospheric intelligence as a specific realm of human intelligence.

#### SPACE AND IMAGINATION

Our innate capacity to grasp comprehensive atmospheres and moods is akin to our capacity of imaginatively projecting the emotively suggestive settings of an entire novel, as we read it. We live simultaneously in material and mental worlds and they are constantly fused. When reading a great novel, we keep constructing all the settings and situations of the story at the suggestion of the words of the author, and we move effortlessly and seamlessly from one setting to the next, as if they pre-existed as physical realities prior to our act of reading. Indeed, the settings seem to be there ready for us to enter, as we move from one scene of the text to the next one. Remarkably, we do not experience these imaginary spaces as pictures, but in their full spatiality and atmosphere. The same fullness applies to our dreams; dreams are not pictures as they are spaces and imaginatively lived experiences. Yet, they are all entirely products of our imagination.

The processes of literary imagination are discussed in Elaine Scarry's recent book *Dreaming by the Book*. She explains the vividness of a profound literary text as follows: "In order to achieve the "vivacity" of the material world, the verbal arts must somehow also imitate its "persistence" and, most crucially, its quality of "givenness". It seems almost certainly the case that it is the "instructional" character of the verbal arts that fulfils this mimetic requirement for "givenness".<sup>13</sup> Bohumil Hrabal, the Czech writer, points out the concreteness of our literary imagination: "When I read, I don't really read: I pop up a beautiful sentence in my mouth and suck it like liqueur until the thought dissolves in me like alcohol,

infusing my brain and heart and coursing on through the veins to the root of each blood vessel".<sup>14</sup>

Also architecture calls for a deepened sense of materiality, gravity and reality, not an air of entertainment or fantasy. As Constantin Brancusi requests: "Art must give suddenly, all at once, the shock of life, the sensation of breathing".<sup>15</sup> The power of architecture is in its ability to strengthen the experience of the real, and its imaginative dimension arises from this strengthened and re-sensitized sense of reality.

Experiencing, memorizing and imagining spatial settings, situations and events, all engage our imaginative skills; even the acts of experiencing and memorizing are embodied acts in which lived embodied imagery evokes an imaginative reality that feels similar to actual experience. Recent studies have revealed that the acts of perception and imagining take place in the same areas of the brain and, consequently, these acts are closely related.<sup>16</sup> Even perception calls for imagination, as percepts are not automatic products of our sensory mechanisms; perceptions are essentially creations and products of intentionality and imagination. We could not even see light without our mental "inner light", as Arthur Zajonc argues.<sup>17</sup>

The most amazing feature of our mental acts is the synthetic completeness of the imagery. As we read a great novel, we create the urban or landscape settings as well as the buildings, spaces and rooms and feel their ambience without, however, being able to focus on any of their details. Undoubtedly, the totality dominates the detail and this principle actually reflects the way our mind works.

Atmosphere or ambience is an epic experiential dimension or prediction, as we automatically read behavioural and social aspects – either existent, potential or imaginary– into the atmospheric image. We also read a temporal layering or narrative into the setting, and we appreciate emotionally the layering of temporal cues and traces as well as images of past life in our settings. We like to be connected with signs of life instead of being isolated in hermetic and artificial conditions. Don't we seek historically dense settings because they connect us experientially and imaginatively with past life, and we feel safe and enriched to be part of that temporal continuum? Traces of life support images of safety and generate images of continued life.

We do not judge environments merely by our senses, we also test and evaluate them through our sense of imagination. Comforting and inviting settings inspire our unconscious imagery, daydreams and fantasy. As Gaston Bachelard argues, "...[T]he chief benefit of the house [is that] the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace ... [T]he house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind".<sup>18</sup> Herbert Marcuse, the social

psychologist, also acknowledges the connection between the atmospheres of settings and our fantasies as he makes the thought-provoking suggestion that the alarming increase of sexual violence and distorted sexuality today is a consequence of the fact that our modern settings do not stimulate and support erotic fantasies.<sup>19</sup> The atmosphere of contemporary cityscapes and dwellings frequently lacks a sensuous and erotic air.

#### “UNDERSTANDING” THE ARTISTIC IMAGE

We have been taught to conceive, observe and evaluate architectural spaces and settings primarily as aesthetic and visual entities. Yet, the diffuse overall ambience is often much more decisive and powerful in determining our attitude to the setting. Often buildings and details that hardly possess any aesthetic values, manage to create a sensorially rich and pleasant atmosphere. Vernacular settings and traditional towns are examples of pleasant atmospheres often arising from rather uninteresting units. Such urban atmospheres are most often created by specific materiality, scale, rhythm, colour, or formal theme with variations. In architectural education we are usually advised to develop our designs from elementary aspects towards larger entities, but our perceptions and experiential judgements seem to advance in the reverse manner, from the entity down to details. When experiencing a work of art, the whole gives meaning to the parts, not the other way round. We need to grasp complete images instead of elements, and, in fact, there are no “elements” in the world of artistic expression; there are only complete poetic images intertwined with distinct emotive orientations.

We are mentally and emotionally affected by works of art much before we understand them; or, indeed, we usually do not “understand” the works at all. I would venture to argue that the greater the artistic work is, the less we understand it intellectually. A distinct mental short-circuiting between the lived and emotive encounter and intellectual “understanding” is a constitutive character of the artistic image. This is also the view of Semir Zeki, one of today’s leading neurologists. He regards a high degree of ambiguity, such as the unfinished imagery of Michelangelo’s slaves or the ambivalent human narratives of Vermeer’s paintings, as essential contributors to the greatness of these works.<sup>20</sup> In reference to the great capacity of profound artists to evoke, manipulate and direct our emotions, Zeki makes the surprising argument: “Most painters are also neurologists”.<sup>21</sup>

#### MULTI-SENSORY EXPERIENCE: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TOUCH

Every significant experience of architecture is multi-sensory; qualities of matter, space, and scale are measured by the eye, ear, nose, skin, tongue, skeleton, and muscle. Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasizes this simultaneity of experience and sensory interaction: “My

perception is (therefore) not a sum of visual, tactile, and audible givens: I perceive in a total way with my whole being: I grasp a unique structure of the thing, a unique way of being, which speaks to all my senses at once."<sup>22</sup>

Even the eye collaborates with the other senses. All the senses, including vision, are extensions of the sense of touch: the senses are specializations of the skin, and all sensory experiences are related to tactility. We can also acknowledge that overpowering atmospheres have a haptic and almost material presence, as if we were surrounded and embraced by a specific substance. The anthropologist Ashley Montagu confirms the primacy of the tactile realm based on medical evidence: "[The skin] is the oldest and the most sensitive of our organs, our first medium of communication, and our most efficient protector . . . Even the transparent cornea of the eye is overlain by a layer of modified skin . . . Touch is the parent of our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. It is the sense that became differentiated into the others, a fact that seems to be recognized in the age-old evaluation of touch as 'the mother of the senses'."<sup>23</sup> Touch is the sensory mode that integrates our experiences of the world and of ourselves. Even visual perceptions are united and integrated into the haptic continuum of the sense of self; my body remembers who I am and where I am placed in the world. In the opening chapter of *Combray*, Marcel Proust describes how the protagonist wakes up in his bed and gradually reconstructs his world on the basis of his body memory "the composite memory of its (his body's) ribs, its knees, its shoulder-blades"<sup>24</sup>

The retinally-biased architecture of our time is clearly giving rise to a quest for a haptic architecture. Montagu sees a wider change taking place in Western consciousness: "We in the Western world are beginning to discover our neglected senses. This growing awareness represents something of an overdue insurgency against the painful deprivation of sensory experience we have suffered in our technologized world."<sup>25</sup> Our culture of control and speed has favored the architecture of the eye, with its instantaneous imagery and distanced impact, whereas haptic and atmospheric architecture promotes slowness and intimacy, appreciated and comprehended gradually as images of the body and the skin. The architecture of the eye detaches and controls, whereas haptic architecture engages and unites. Tactile sensibility replaces distancing visual imagery through enhanced materiality, nearness, and intimacy.

## MATERIAL IMAGINATION

The atmosphere of a setting is often generated by a strong presence of materiality. The heightened experience of materiality strengthens the feeling of reality and temporality. But the dominant atmospheric feature of a place can well be an acoustical character, smell, or even especially pleasant or unpleasant weather.

In his phenomenological investigation of poetic imagery, Gaston Bachelard makes a distinction between “formal imagination” and “material imagination.”<sup>26</sup> He suggests that images arising from matter project deeper and more profound experiences than images arising from form. Matter evokes unconscious images and emotions, but modernity at large has been primarily concerned with form. However, an engagement with the material imagination seems to characterize the entire “other tradition of Modernism,” to use the title of Colin St. John Wilson’s book.<sup>27</sup> Expectedly, this architecture, such as the works of Sigurd Lewerentz, Hans Scharoun, Gunnar Asplund, and Alvar Aalto, is also highly atmospheric.

Ruin, destruction, weathering and wear strengthen the atmospheric impact of architecture.<sup>28</sup> In an essay on theater director Peter Brook’s destructive manipulation of the architectural space for theatrical purposes in his Bouffes theater in Paris, Andrew Todd writes: “The walls engage time in a complex way. There is an after-echo of the original bourgeois music hall form, and this is rendered profound, even tragic, by the opening up of the layers of time on the walls. The top skin, which seals the imagination at a specific style or period, has been scorched away, so the walls exist in an indeterminate time, partway between cultural definition and eschatological dissolution. But this is no dead ruin: Brook has not been afraid to bash the place around a little more, breaking holes, putting in doors . . . One can also speak of another virtual patina the walls have acquired through the accruing memory of Brook’s work in there.”<sup>29</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke’s stunning chapter in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, where the protagonist comprehends the life that has been lived in a demolished house through the traces it has left on the end wall of the neighbouring building; in fact these are signs by which the young man reconstructs essential aspects of his childhood and self.<sup>30</sup>

A similar atmospheric “weakening” of formal architectural logic takes place in the re-use and renovation of buildings. The insertion of new functional, aesthetic, and symbolic structures short-circuits the initial architectural logic of the building and opens up unexpected emotional and expressive ranges of experience. Architectural settings that layer contradictory ingredients project a special sensory richness and empathetic charm. Often the most enjoyable museum, office, or residential space is that which has been installed in an adapted existing building.

The ecological approach also favours an adaptive image, parallel to the inherent ‘weakness’ of ecologically adapted processes. This ecological fragility is reflected in contemporary art, for instance, in the poetic works of Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Wolfgang Leib, Andy Goldsworthy, and Nils-Udo, all set in a subtle dialogue with nature. Here again, artists set an example for architects.

The art of gardening is an art form inherently engaged with time, change, atmosphere, and fragile image. On the other hand, the geometric garden exemplifies the traditional western attempt to domesticate nature into patterns of man-made geometry. The tradition of landscape and garden architecture provides an inspiration for an architecture liberated from the constraints of geometric and strong image. Biological models have already entered various fields of science, medicine, and engineering; the use of biological models for human innovations is nowadays often called “Bio-mimicry”<sup>31</sup>. Why should biological models not be valid in architecture? Indeed, the more subtle line of high-tech architecture is already heading in that direction.

### PERSPECTIVAL SPACE AND PERIPHERAL VISION

The all-encompassing and instantaneous perception of atmospheres calls for a specific manner of perception – unconscious and unfocused peripheral perception. This fragmented percept of the world is actually our normal reality, although we believe that we perceive everything with precision. This fragmented percept of the world is actually our normal reality, although we believe that we perceive everything with precision. Our image of the world is held together by constant active scanning by the senses, movement and a creative fusion and interpretation of our inherently fragmented percepts.

The historic development of the representational techniques depicting space and form is closely tied to the development of architecture itself. The perspectival understanding of space gave rise to an architecture of vision, whereas the quest to liberate the eye from its perspectival fixation has enabled the conception of multi-perspectival, simultaneous, and atmospheric space. Perspectival space leaves us as outside observers, whereas multi-perspectival and atmospheric space and peripheral vision or peripheral vision encloses and enfolds us in its embrace. This is the perceptual and psychological essence of Impressionist Cubist and Abstract Expressionist space; we are pulled into the space and made to experience it as a fully embodied sensation and a thick atmosphere. The special reality of a Cézanne landscape, Jackson Pollock painting as well as of engaging architecture and cityscapes, derives from the way these experiential situations engage our perceptual and psychological mechanisms.

While the hectic eye of the camera captures a momentary situation, a passing condition of light, or an isolated, framed and focused fragment, the real experience of architectural reality depends fundamentally on peripheral and anticipated vision; the mere experience of interiority implies peripheral perception. The perceptual realm that we sense beyond the sphere of focused vision is as

important as the focused image that can be frozen by the camera. In fact, there is evidence that peripheral and unconscious perception is more important for our perceptual and mental system than focused perception.<sup>32</sup>

This assumption suggests that one reason why contemporary spaces often alienate us—compared with historical and natural settings, that elicit powerful emotional engagement—has to do with the poverty of our peripheral vision. Focused vision makes us mere outside observers; peripheral perception transforms retinal images into a spatial and bodily involvement and gives rise to the sense of atmosphere and participation. Peripheral perception is the perceptual mode through which we grasp atmospheres. The importance of the senses of hearing, smell, and touch (temperature, moisture, air movement) for atmospheric perception arises from their essence as non-directional and embracing character. The role of peripheral and unconscious perception explains why a photographic image is usually an unreliable witness of true architectural quality; indeed, architects would do better if they were less concerned with the photogenic qualities of their works.

Even creative activity calls for an unfocused and undifferentiated subconscious mode of vision, one fused with integrative tactile experience.<sup>33</sup> The object of a creative act is not only enfolded by the eye and the touch, it has to be introjected, identified with one's own body and existential experience.<sup>34</sup> In deep thought, focused vision is blocked and thoughts travel with an absent-minded gaze. In creative work, both the scientist and the artist are directly engaged with their corporeal, existential and atmospheric experience rather than with an external logical problem.

Today's urgent call for an ecologically sustainable architecture also suggests a non-autonomous and collaborative architecture adapted to the precise condition of topography, soil, climate, vegetation, as well as other conditions of the region and site. The potentials of atmosphere, weak gestalt and adaptive fragility will undoubtedly be explored in the near future in the search of an architecture that will acknowledge the conditions and principles of the ecological reality as well as of our own bio-historical nature. I suggest that in the near future we will be more interested in atmospheres than individually expressive forms. Understanding atmospheres will most likely teach us about the secret power of architecture and how it can guide large masses, but at the same time, enable us to create our own individual existential foothold.



“The richest experiences happen long before the soul takes notice. And when we begin to open our eyes to the visible, we have already been supporters of the invisible for a long time”.<sup>35</sup>

Gabriele d'Annunzio

## NOTES

- 1 Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres – Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects*. Birkhäuser, Basel • Boston • Berlin, 2006, p. 13.
- 2 Robert Pogue Harrison, *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2008, p. 130.
- 3 Zumthor, op. cit., p. 13.
- 4 See, for instance, Grant Hildebrand, *The Origins of Architectural Pleasure*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1999, and; Grant Hildebrand, *The Wright Space: Pattern & Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright's Houses*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1992.
- 5 Edward O. Wilson, "The Right Place", *Biophilia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1984, pp. 103-118.
- 6 Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 1995, and; Gernot Böhme, *Architektur und Atmosphäre*. Wilhelm Fink GmbH & Co. Verlags-KG, 2006.
- 6 Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie, Bd. III: Der Raum, 2, Teil: Der Gefühlsraum*, Bonn, 1969.
- 7 Zumthor, op. cit., title page.
- 8 Sir Colin St. John Wilson, "Architecture – Public Good and Private Necessity", *RIBA Journal*, March, 1979.
- 9 Alvar Aalto, "The Trout and the Mountain Stream", *Alvar Aalto Sketches*, edited by Göran Schildt, the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1985, p. 97.
- 10 Juhani Pallasmaa, "In Praise of Vagueness: diffuse perception and uncertain thought", manuscript for a book on psychoanalysis and architecture to be published by the University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 2011.
- 11 Howard Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Basic Books, New York, 1999, pp. 41-43.
- 12 Ibid., p. 47.
- 13 Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2001, p. 30.
- 14 Bohumil Hrabal, *Too Loud a Solitude*. Harcourt, Inc., San Diego • New York, London, 1990, p. 1.
- 15 Constantin Brancusi, as quoted in Eric Shanes, *Constantin Brancusi*. Abbeville Press, New York, 1989, p. 67.
- 16 Ilpo Kojo, "Mielikuvat ovat aivoille todellisia" [Images are real for the brain]. *Helsingin Sanomat*, Helsinki 16.3.1996.
- 17 See, Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind*. Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1995. ,
- 18 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, p. 6.
- 19 Herbert Marcuse, *The One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1991, p. 73.

“... a whole dimension of human activity and passivity has been de-eroticized. The environment from which the individual could obtain pleasure – which he could cathect as gratifying almost as an extended zone of the body – has been rigidly reduced. Consequently the ‘universe’ of libidinous cathexis is likewise reduced. The effect is a localization and contraction of libido, the reduction of erotic to sexual experience and satisfaction.”

- 20 Semir Zeki, *Inner Vision: An Exploration of Art and the Brain*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 22-36.
- 21 Ibid., p. 2.
- 22 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Film and the New Psychology, *Sense and Non-Sense*. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, IL, 1964, p. 48.
- 23 Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin*. Harper & Row, New York, 1971, p. 3.
- 24 Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Volume 1, Swann’s Way*, Vintage Books, London, 1996, p. 4.
- 25 Montagu, op. cit., p. XIII.
- 26 Gaston Bachelard, “Introduction”, *Water and Dreams: An Essay On the Imagination of Matter*. Dallas Institute, Dallas, Texas, 1983, p. 1.
- 27 Sir Colin St John Wilson, *The Other Tradition of Modern Architecture*. Academy Editions, London, 1995.
- 28 See, David Leatherbarrow, Mohsen Mostafavi, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*. The MIT Press, 1993.
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- 30 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, W.W. Norton & Co., New York and London, 1992, pp. 47-48.
- 31 See, Janine M. Benuys, *Biomimicry*. Quill William Morrow, New York, 1997.
- 32 Anton Ehrenzweig offers the medical case of *hemianopia* as a proof for the priority of peripheral vision in the psychic condition of our mechanism of sight. In a case of this rare illness, one half of the visual field turns blind while the other retains vision. In some cases of the illness, the field of vision later reorganizes itself into a new complete circular field of vision with a new focus of sharp vision in the centre and an unfocused field around. As the new focus is formed, the reorganization implies that parts of the former peripheral field of inaccurate vision acquire visual acuity, and more significantly, the area of former focused vision gives up its capacity for sharp vision as it transforms into a part of the new unfocused peripheral field. “These case histories prove, if proof is needed, that an overwhelming psychological need exists that requires us to have the larger part of the visual field in a vague medley of images”, Ehrenzweig notes.
- Anton Ehrenzweig, *The Hidden Order of Art*. Paladin, Frogmore, St. Albans, 1973, p. 284.
- 33 See, Ehrenzweig, op. Cit..
- 34 The word “introjection“ in psychoanalytic language refers to the manner children in their early life experience and internalise aspects of the world through their mouth.

- 35 Gabriele d'Annunzio, *Contemplazioni della morte*, Milan, 1912, pp. 17-18. As quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. The Pegasus Foundation, Dallas, Texas, 1983, p. 16.