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Atmospheres, what for? Jean-Paul Thibaud's version

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ATMOSPHERES

what for? ["Jean Paul Thibaud's version..."]

Ambiance is part of a general movement of openness to the senses. It contributes to the emergence of new frames of sensitivity. Whether one insists on the aestheticization of urban spaces or the increasing attention to ecological issues, the development of experiential marketing or the diffusion of ambient intelligence, our way of being sensitive to the spaces we inhabit is changing. No doubt we are engaged in a historical moment of transformation of our sensory conditions of existence. In other words, we are witnessing the birth of an atmospheric sensitivity of the world. Percepts and affects regain their own rights, involving the diversity of sensory modalities and recognizing the importance of bodily experience. With ambiance, it is not only a question of perceiving a landscape or measuring an environment, but of feeling situations in common and experiencing the sensory contexture of social life. From now on the sensorial is to be heard and ambiance is one of its most powerful resonators.

In this respect, the notion of medium is of prime importance, summoning the air in the first instance, that imperceptible but no less vital medium. Hence we should not be mistaken: an ambiance is not what one perceives, it is not an object of perception. It is from this which one perceives, which opens up the perceptibility of the world, which enables perception. No vision possible without light... no audition possible without sound... But also, the domain of ambiances is not an isolated domain, autonomous, independent from social practices. On the contrary, any ambiance is embedded in common gestures and forms of sociability. It involves social performances that actualize the resources of the built environment and accomplish our ways of being together. Thus we need to pay particular attention to the background of ordinary practices. What is taken for granted and usually goes unnoticed is the basic material of an ambiance. A way of walking, looking or speaking, quality of air or light, bright sunshine or sudden rain, the height of a stair or the material of a sidewalk are part of the composition of an ambiance. But an ambiance does not come from one or more of these components, it is not limited to their mere addition. An ambiance is rather the connection and coalescence between these various elements, to hold them together by giving a single tone and a unique pervasive quality to everything that appears.

We are dealing here with the power of homogenization and atmospherization of an ambiance. Ambiance leads to a shared, embodied, enacted and situated sensory experience.

As a nomadic concept, it goes from one science to another one. It migrates, circulates, translates. Far from being attached to a single scientific discipline or domain of action, it spreads and proliferates in regions as diverse as sensitive architecture or existential psychopathology, social anthropology, cultural geography or phenomenological philosophy, literary or urban studies, the area of organizations or consumption, the world of art... In doing so, ambiance pushes the boundaries of the disciplines and complexifies each time it comes into contact with them. In any case, ambiance highlights the pathic feature of experience, embodies the affective tonality of situations and involves the modes of attunement of everyday life. Theoretical tools then refine and diversify to its passage. New ideas are experimented such as sensory effects, tuned spaces, climatic envelopes, ordinary affects, ambient gestures and other diffuse qualities. Thus emerges an unprecedented field of research, which contributes to an extended sensory ecology of life forms and explores the potentialities of a socio-aesthetic of dwelling.

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