

The Ambiguous Project of the Atmosphere. A Conversation with Michael Tawa

edited by Luca Bandirali and Chiara Renna

At the core of the conversation with Michael Tawa lies a reflection on the possibility of designing atmospheres, understood as ephemeral and indefinable affective situations that arise from the encounter between a subject and the surrounding world. Outlining the methodological approach that characterizes his research, Tawa identifies the assemblage of elements that occupy a space as the fundamental practice for fostering the emergence of an affective tonality of that space. This practice

establishes the conditions for configuring an ambiance whose atmospheric irradiation may find resonance in a subject. In this sense, according to Tawa, any affective situation originates from a constellation of disparate elements, bound together by what he defines as “consilient discrepancy”, a relation marked by ambiguity and openness to reconfiguration. Within this framework, Tawa sheds light on the affective potential that resides in cinema, focusing on the compositional practices capable of activating an affective alignment in the subject.

Cloud Atlas: The Atmosphere of Contemporary Cinema

Denis Brotto

Since when did clouds begin to embody the image of the contemporary? Since when did clouds begin to determine the atmosphere of the present?

In his essay *Theorie du nuage (A Theory of Cloud, 1972)*, Hubert Damisch sought in clouds a form of revelation, of discovery. The images of contemporary cinema, on the other hand, create, from the reference to clouds, the testimony of an increasingly uncertain reality, made of restless flashes, sudden shadows, processes of erosion and fragmentation of the present.

Clouds that reveal tensions related to the environment, social relations, economic dynamics, ultimately urging us to look beyond, to identify possible solutions.

Paris, Metro, Cinema: The Cinematic Invention of Parisian Atmosphere

Giorgio Bottini

What defines that atmosphere universally perceived as “Parisian”? As with Deleuzian fabrication of ideas, the construction of aesthetic atmospheres also depends on the singularity of the techniques specific to each artistic medium. Alongside a literary, pictorial, photographic and musical Paris, there is a cinematographic Paris whose vector of atmospheric effusion is identified with the metro. This article aims to define what this cinematic atmosphere consists of, to establish how and to what extent this representation integrates and transcends those developed by other artistic languages, and to focus on how and why Paris has found its fatal object in the imagery of the métro.

Designing Affective Tones: The Aesthetic Work of Cinema

Chiara Renna

Filmmaking involves a set of practices designed to elicit specific affective responses in viewers. In the debate initiated within Gernot Böhme’s New Aesthetics, such responses are understood as the subject’s perception of an atmosphere, which, in the case of artworks, results from an aesthetic work. This article, approaching the question from the perspective of the organizational mechanisms of the objectual pole, examines the strategies through which cinema generates the potential for atmospheric perception.

Entheogenic Atmosphere. Ecstasy of Light and a Cinematic Experience

Francesco Iezzi and Lorenzo Ratto

The atmospheric potential of expanded states of consciousness (Younghblood), whether induced by psychedelic alterations or ecstatic visions, has been explored in various ways by cinema. In different phases of its history, cinema has been able to translate the pre-rational dimension into chromoluministic, immersive and engaging forms. This essay draws upon the concepts developed in the field of neo-phenomenological reflection (Schmitz, Böhme, Griffero) to analyse how the filmic device, from the experiments of the 1960s (Anger, Belson, but also Kubrick) to the present day (Noé, Patiño), has rendered the atmospheric “numinous” visible. The essay demonstrates

how this has transformed the filmic space into an entheogenic experience with participatory as well as narrative implications.

Atmospheric Bubbles: The Imagery of the Geodesic Dome

Margherita Fontana

The paper explores the cultural imagery of the geodesic dome as an “atmospheric bubble” situated on the border between utopia and dystopia, an architectural and ideological response to the atmospheric threats of the twentieth century. Through three examples from American cinema, *Silent Running* (Trumbull, 1971), *Bio-Dome* (Bloom, 1996), and *Biosphere* (Eslyn, 2022), the paper traces the evolution of the ecological debate from post-1968 to the present day, highlighting how this architecture, and above all the atmosphere within it, becomes a narrative device for reflecting on ecology, affectivity and identity in times of crisis.

Atmospheres of Technology

Mattia Gritti

Through an examination of Heidegger’s concepts of *Stimmung* and *disposedness* (*Mit-befindlichkeit*), the essay critically engages with the neo-phenomenological notion of atmosphere and with the distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, within which lies the risk of a ‘technicization’ of the corporeal. In this direction, starting from a triadic conception of atmosphere (emotional, ethical-practical, and linguistic) and drawing from Rancière’s notion of aesthetic regime, technical images offer an opportunity to rethink the experiential horizon.

Sound as Atmosphere. Toward an Acoustemology of Media Atmospheres

Annalisa Pellino

This essay examines the concept of atmosphere as a fundamental category of experience, with a particular focus on its aural manifestations. Specifically, it develops an alternative genealogy of atmosphere through an analysis that integrates media and sound studies, philosophy, and artistic practices—treating artworks as theoretical sites. It thereby seeks to establish an *acoustemology of media atmospheres*, emphasising the heuristic value of

sound as atmosphere, as well as of listening as a field and object of inquiry, critical methodology, and cognitive paradigm.

Arborescent Atmospheres: A Foray into the Cinematic Forest

Steffen Hven, Jamie Lee Moser, Alexander Wiese

“In the reign of our imagination, there is no young forest,” writes Bachelard recalling the ambivalent, enigmatic and paradoxical nature of the forest in cultural imagination as a quintessential ‘limitless’ or ‘avolumetric’ (Schmitz) atmospheric space preceding, enabling, and endangered by human civilization (Harrison). As a setting of countless films, the cinematic forest presents itself as a heterogeneous, yet forceful affective ecology — offering horror or tranquility; exposure or shelter; a place to be protected from and one itself needing protection; a site of ancient mythology and folktales and of brute ecological disaster—making it ripe for an atmospheric study. By offering such our contribution demonstrates how cinema presents the forest as a mediating environment in which the ecological, political, social and historical; the human and the nonhuman; matter and life; and nature and technology are inextricably bound together.

***Collateral* and The Atmosphere of Noir**

Alessandro Canadè

The essay proposes a reading of *Collateral* (2004) by Michael Mann considered as a paradigmatic example of the idea of noir as a place in which a pause in the narrative finds its perfect embodiment, an overcoming of the logic of action of American cinema and in which what becomes central are not solutions and dramaturgical but a set of situations (lighting, chromatic, scenographic, sound) not attributable to a genre structure but at the same time immediately recognizable because they are vehicles of emotional states. Ultimately, in noir a dimension that could define the atmosphere is primarily highlighted.

Meteorological Ecstasies: *Good Morning* by Ozu

Gianni Crippa

If Ozu can be considered the most Japanese of Japanese directors, it is certainly by virtue of his atmospheres and their specific cultural, historical,

and sociological connotations. Starting from an analysis of his depiction of domestic atmospheres, what emerges is how, due to a profound conflict between a conservative society and the individual's demands for change, the search for different atmospheric purchasers prevails. Through an analysis of the final scene of *Good Morning* (1959), we can understand the formal dynamics behind this and how, thanks to the particular role attributed to the wind in this regard, the spectator is profoundly involved.

The Soundscape of *Twin Peaks*. Badalamenti and The Aesthetic Sensation of Music

Michelangelo Cardinaletti

The article analyzes the role of Angelo Badalamenti's music in David Lynch's TV series *Twin Peaks* (1990–1991) as an atmospheric device capable of shaping perception. Far from being a mere narrative accompaniment, the themes composed by Badalamenti act on a pre-reflective level, transforming audiovisual space into an affective and sensorial environment that orients the spectator's disposition. Through a comparison with the theory of atmospheres and sound studies, the aim is therefore to demonstrate how sound produces embodied moods, defines a field of emotional forces, and contributes to constituting a distinctive trait of Lynch's poetics.

The Atmospheric Sense of Loss. Notes on Angelopoulos's Cinema

Maya Rebecca Fidelia Gargiulo

The affective density emanated from the atmosphere permeates the entirety of Theodoros Angelopoulos' body of work, functioning as an optic, haptic and perceptual device capable of shaping and simultaneously partaking in the reprocessing of Greek history and of the individual and collective past of the country. In particular, it is in *Landscape in the Mist* (1988) and *Eternity and a Day* (1998), two specular musings on the theme of impermanence, that the atmosphere conveys the resurfacing of a memory interwoven in the environment, conversing with the characters' own physical and emotional landscape.

Entering the “Emotionally Toned Space”: *The Blair Witch Project*
Marianna Di Lucia

The essay analyses *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) under the lens of Gernot Böhme’s atmospheric theory and the concept of postmodernism. By highlighting the complex classification of mockumentaries and found footage, as well as their hybridisation, it identifies the codification, in the textual and peritextual dimensions, of an “emotionally toned space”. The peritextual apparatus and the corporealisation of the camera encourage the viewer’s emotional participation, whose perception is incorporated into the filmic experience, blurring the lines between media and physical reality.

Body, Atmosphere and Metamorphosis in *Les Garçons Sauvages*
Letizia Granata

The article examines the role of atmosphere in *Les Garçons Sauvages* (2017) by Bertrand Mandico, shifting the focus from spectators to characters, upon whom atmosphere acts as a metamorphic agent. The island, a living and sensual organism, shapes bodies and identities within an erotic continuum with the environment. Through material and visionary aesthetic strategies, Mandico constructs a radical sensory experience in which atmosphere detaches itself from a merely narrative function to assert itself as an object of autonomous aesthetic appreciation.

Ghosts That Protect. The Rhetoric of Appearances in *Phantom Thread*

Raffaello Alberti

Combining the atmospheric analysis with the immunitary paradigm theorized by Roberto Esposito, this essay offers a reading that seeks to highlight the symbolic and allegorical elements of Paul Thomas Anderson’s film *Phantom Thread* (2017). The examination of the atmospheric qualities radiating from the house-atelier in which the protagonist lives conveys a sense of an aseptic, cold, and muffled climate, reflecting the character of a man who seeks to subject everything to the rule of form. From this perspective, the film’s hero embodies the figure of the decadent aesthete, one who shields himself from the shocks of life through form and the creation of forms. The female character, by contrast, plays the role of a conscious agent of a pedagogical-initiatory mission, forcing the man to confront the

limits of his own existence in both time and space. The argument is further refined in light of Gernot Böhme's distinction between physical reality and factual reality, which allows Anderson's film to be interpreted as a reflection on the relationship – relevant to both cinema and fashion – between essence and appearance, nature and artifice, between the dream of a separate sphere of appearances and the constant emergence of a material reality subject to the corruption of time.

Atmosphere and Wandering in *Trenque Lauquen* by Laura Citarella
Davide Persico

The paper investigates the ways in which the atmospheric element emerges in cinema within narrative structures characterized by the dimension of wandering.

How does atmospheric construction contribute to the representation and understanding of the experience of wandering, particularly in relation to the interplay between nature and culture, and to the concept of environment?

The theoretical framework draws on Michael Tawa's positions on atmosphere in cinema and Elena Casetta's reflections on the environment, integrating them with Foucault's notion of heterotopias, Derrida's concept of the trace, and Griffero's explorations of the relationships between sign and atmosphere.

The Sound Atmosphere in *The Zone of Interest*: The Soundscape as an Ethical Device

Lucrezia Lauteri

In *The Zone of Interest* (2023), Jonathan Glazer uses soundscape as a fundamental tool to represent the Holocaust. Off-screen sound becomes an invisible testimony of trauma, creating a disjunction between vision and listening that challenges traditional modes of representation. The film shows how sound can transcend the material boundaries of Auschwitz, transforming itself into an ethical device that reveals the horror hidden behind the apparent tranquility of everyday life, opening a space for reflection on the relationship between memory, vision, and listening.

Coming Into The World: *Vermiglio* by Delpero

Bernadette Piccolo

My essay aims to study the atmospheric *nuances* which spread throughout the world of *Vermiglio* (Maura Delpero, 2024), especially focusing on some specific directorial choices. Indeed, the text examines the soundscape, the climate and seasonal changes of a stunning and challenging pro-filmic and the carefully designed body language that is able to characterize both the single personalities and the lifestyle of the whole community.

Seeing Haptics, Feeling Thermals. *Pseudocolor* in *Aggro Drift*

Lorenzo Donghi

In contemporary visual culture, thermal imaging has emerged as both a unique artistic opportunity and a crucial tool for exploring the status of images. This essay examines the distinctive qualities of *Aggro Drift* (2023). By bringing the vision closer to a “thermal feeling”, Korine’s movie creates a surprising perceptual and cognitive experience. On one hand, it encourages viewers to break free from habitual ways of seeing, leading to a melancholic decentralisation of the gaze. On the other hand, it introduces a multisensory expressiveness that engages not only sight and sound but also challenges our sense of touch, fostering a synesthetic rediscovery of the cinematic experience.

Atmosphere and Spontaneity: An Aesthetic Perspective on Performative Spectatorship

Andrea D’Ammando

Starting from two particularly significant works (Alejandro Iñárritu’s *Carne y Arena* and Tino Sehgal’s *This Variation*), this article aims to explore the connection between the concept of “atmospheres”, the notion of spontaneity, and the nature of the performative spectacularity characteristic of much contemporary art. “Spontaneity” is a key term in modern aesthetic reflection, useful for designating the peculiar freedom that characterizes the judgment of taste (and aesthetic experience in general). In many participatory, interactive, and immersive artistic practices, the attempt to (ideally) eliminate the gap between representation and reality and actively engage the viewer is aimed at achieving an “effect of spontaneity” that comes precisely from the creation of atmospheres understood in an aesthetic sense.