Call for Articles

Special issue: Atmospheres in Film

The term “atmosphere” may derive from the scientific lexicon, but for more than 20 years now it is commonly used in the humanities and social sciences (eg. philosophy, human geography, urban studies, theatre and performance studies, cinema studies, information and communication sciences, such as psychology, phenomenology or aesthetics). As such, the word (which has affinities with other similar terms such as ambiance or mood), expresses a key relationship between the sensible and the ephemeral. As Gernot Böhme says: “the space of moods is atmospheric space, that is, a certain mental or emotive tone permeating a particular environment, and it is also the atmosphere spreading spatially around me, in which I participate through my mood” (Böhme, 2002). Indeed, the sensation of an atmosphere is essentially subjective and ephemeral, as it depends on the subject and can evolve over time. For instance, in their book Atmospheres and the Experiential World (2019), Shanti Sumartojo and Sarah Pink propose an original approach to atmosphere by suggesting new ways of thinking about the relationships between people, space, time and events that may fall within the purview of an affective approach. The authors draw on phenomenology to develop those ideas of Gernot Böhme, which led him to create his notion of “aesthetic of atmospheres” as a general theory of perception. Böhme states that “the first ‘object’ of perception are the atmospheres”, adding further that the atmospheres are “the background against which the analytical eye distinguishes things such as objects, shapes, colours...” (Böhme, 2018). As the “perception includes the affective impact of the observed, the ‘reality of images’, the living body and its feeling” (ibid.), Böhme highlights how the bodily state is linked to an environment and how that works in the perception of an atmosphere.

In the same way as the sixth issue of the Ambiances Journal “Staging Atmospheres: Theatre and the Atmospheric Turn” focused on the issues raised by the emerging paradigm in international theatrical researches on atmospheres and ambiances, we propose in this issue to address these notions through the prism of cinema. Specifically, we aim to investigate how atmosphere and cinema question, relate and redefine each other. As Robert Spadoni points out, in his analysis of atmosphere in film there is often “a tendency to view the phenomenon [of atmosphere] as primarily or exclusively associated with an artwork’s environmental character and, in the case of a film, its settings, sounds, and depictions of weather” (Spadoni, 2020). Following Spadoni, our aim is to go further than this tendency and to discuss, how the atmospheres may be used in matters of content, technology, process and sensation in film.

To do so, we invite the authors to consider the following questions:

1- How do we identify atmospheres in film?
2- How does the audience experience the atmospheres?
3- How are the atmospheres of a film constructed?

1. How do we identify atmospheres in film?

The first question considers the various perspectives involved in the investigation of what commonly constitutes the specificities of a filmic atmosphere. These perspectives have a history. In 1952, Etienne Souriau talked about the “atmospheric marvel of the filmic universe” (Souriau, 1952), highlighting, in particular, the chemical characteristics of the film reel and how its “grain” plays an essential role in the representation and perception of the cinematic atmospheres. More recently, the arrival of digital technology in cinema and the recurrent use of visual special effects can also be addressed through the notion of artificiality that underlies the creation of cinematographic atmospheres. Going further still, considering the links between atmosphere and place (in real locations or created sets), can lead us to think about the concepts of naturalism and realism in cinema. The notion of the style, as a feature of authorship, is another perspective at stake here, as the term “atmosphere” is frequently used to describe the work of a director reflected through his entire filmography. It leads us to consider how the audience can recognize similar characteristics between one film and another. To tackle these ideas, we would welcome, for instance, filmic analysis of the atmosphere in a particular film, or to think about the relations that might exist between atmospheres and a film genre.

2. How does the audience experience the atmospheres?

The second question invites contributions that focus on the spectator’s reception of the filmic atmospheres. In Bordwell’s characterization of film theaters, the audience is surrounded by multiple atmospheres created by “the tangible texture of film” (Bordwell, 2005), meaning the perceptual surface we encounter when watching and listening to diegetic worlds. In this conception, the “tangible texture” is both aesthetically conceived and polysensorial: “it is the many-sided feel of the places represented in films and art, along with what that collusion of sense, affect, and aesthetics conveys” (Deggan, 2013). On top of this, by taking into account the ecological turn in film studies and the questioning around the Anthropocene, contributors are encouraged to explore how cinema can
help to reach a non-anthropocentric perception of the atmospheres, following a phenomenological approach for example.

3- Finally, in the third question, we welcome analysis of the ways cinematic atmospheres are artistically and technically created. Consider for example, the importance of the construction of sound ambiances in cinema, since “in the context of cinematographic perception, the sound ambience contributes in a preponderant way to the atmosphere, it is an enveloping background that encompasses the spectator” (Adjiman, 2018). Music scores and their roles in atmosphere construction are other possible subjects for discussion, as well as the color grading of some audiovisual works, since this technique can allow, in some cases, to “recreate past time atmospheres, emulating old processes” (Cortés-Selva, 2009). It is also possible to question whether and how the cinematic experience of the atmospheres is modified by technological innovations in immersion, such as 3D, 4DX or virtual reality headsets.

By addressing these three central, but non-exhaustive questions, our goal is not to define the atmosphere in film in a definitive way, but rather to open up new dialogues. To do so, we welcome contributions from various fields drawn from film studies, aesthetics, technical, historical, communicational, philosophical, phenomenological and psychologic perspectives. By diversifying the approaches to atmospheres in film and the range of studied works (fiction, documentary, experimental, animated movies etc), we expect each paper to act as a point of reflection allowing us to reveal the richness of this term.

We invite, not only researchers in the human sciences to submit proposals, but also film professionals who have addressed this topic on their works.

If you have audio-visual material, such as short clips of film or audio, film stills or images from film productions, that will illustrate and enhance your essay, please include them in your submission.

Indicative bibliography

- HARD Michale, LOSCH Andreas, VERDICCHIO Dirk (dir.), Transforming Spaces: The Topological Turn in Technology Studies. URL : http://www.ifs.tu-darmstadt.de/gradkoll/Publikationen/transforms.html
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Special Issue Editors

Rosine Bénard O’Kelly, Lecturer, Deputy Director of the Sciences, Arts, and Techniques of Image and Sound department, Laboratory PRISM, Aix-Marseille University – CNRS.
Patria Castello Branco, Research fellow, Coordinator of the Laboratory of Cinema and Philosophy, Nova University of Lisbon
Rupert Cox, Lecturer, Director of Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, University of Manchester
Natacha Cyrulnik, Full university professor, Laboratory PRISM, Aix-Marseille University - CNRS.

Informations

• Articles in English or French, containing 30,000 to 50,000 characters (including spaces)
• Reception date: 17 February 2023
• Initial feedback to authors: 17 March 2023
• Publication: December 2023
• Please respect the guidelines for authors: https://journals.openedition.org/ambiances/221
• And send the paper to: journal@ambiances.net