There is fast-growing awareness of the role atmospheres play in architecture. Of equal interest to contemporary architectural practice as it is to aesthetic theory, this 'atmospheric turn' owes much to the work of the German philosopher Gernot Böhme.

Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces brings together Böhme's most seminal writings on the subject, through chapters selected from his classic books and articles, many of which have hitherto only been available in German. This is the only translated version authorised by Böhme himself, and is the first coherent collection deploying a consistent terminology. It is a work which will provide rich references and a theoretical framework for ongoing discussions about atmospheres and their relations to architectural and urban spaces. Combining philosophy with architecture, design, landscape design, scenography, music, art criticism, and visual arts, the essays together provide a key to the concepts that motivate the work of some of the best contemporary architects, artists, and theorists: from Peter Zumthor, Herzog & de Meuron and Juhani Pallasmaa to Olafur Eliasson and James Turrell.

With a foreword by Professor Mark Dorrian (Forbes Chair in Architecture, Edinburgh College of Art) and an afterword by Professor David Leatherbarrow, (Chair of the Graduate Group in Architecture, University of Pennsylvania), the volume also includes a general introduction to the topic, including coverage of its history, development, areas of application and conceptual apparatus.

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ARCHITECTURE www.bloomsbury.com

Cover design by xxxxxxxxx
Cover image © xxxxxxxxx

ISBN 978-1-4742-5808-1

9 781474 258081 90100

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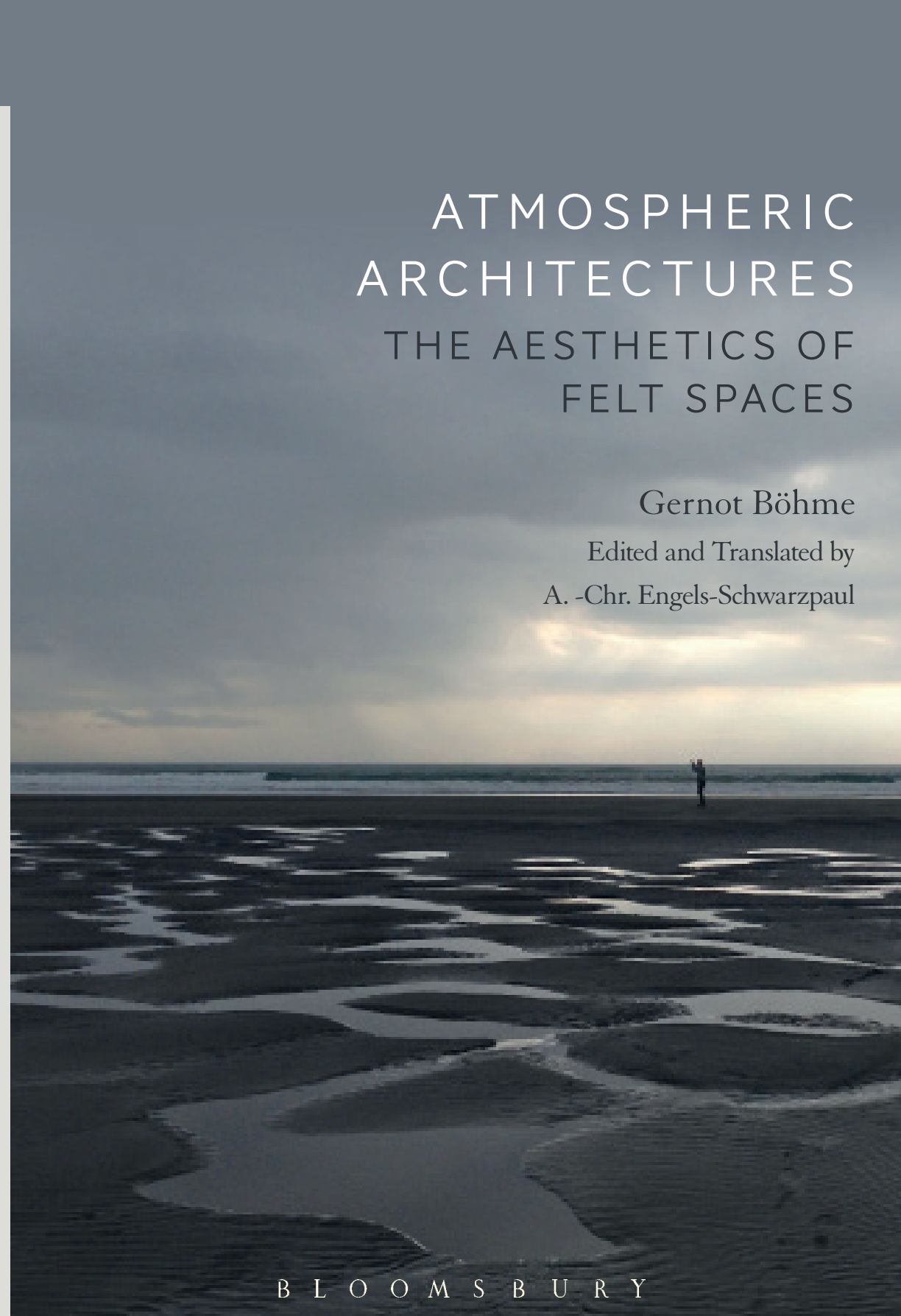
THE AESTHETICS OF FELT SPACES

Gernot Böhme

Edited and Translated by

A. -Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul



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Atmospheric Architectures

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The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces

GERNOT BÖHME

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY A.-CHR. ENGELS-SCHWARZPAUL

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published in English, 2017

'Leibliche Anwesenheit im Raum'
'Atmosphären zwischenmenschlicher Kommunikation'
'Den Umgang mit Atmosphären lernen - eine neue ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen'
'Licht und Raum'
'Atmosphären kirchlicher Räume'

'Atmosphäre als Grundbegriff einer neuen Ästhetik'
'Der Glanz des Materials'
'Die Kunst des Bühnenbildes als Paradigma einer Ästhetik der Atmosphären'
'Architektur: eine visuelle Kunst?'
'Die Stimme im leiblichen Raum'
'Das Ding und seine Ekstasen'
'Das große Konzert der Welt'

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4742-5808-1
ePDF: 978-1-4742-5810-4
ePub: 978-1-4742-5809-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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Translator's Introduction

When pressed for a definition of atmospheres, Gernot Böhme calls them tuned spaces. The term conjures up Jacob Böhme's writing about instruments and their character in *The Signature of All Things* (1651). Their attunement makes them sound with others in characteristic ways, reflecting the relationships of many elements in an enfolded, expansive space. Atmospheres, which are experienced through immersion and by the ways in which they affect our disposition, are impossible to locate precisely. They are dynamic, diffused and, as pre- and inter-subjective, spatial carriers of mood, suffused with emotional power (see pp. xx-xx). Space, at least the space in which we are, is not something like an object. Rather, it provides a horizon, in which things and people appear and where their lives play out. Like much that is important about built spaces, atmosphere's enveloping nature as both void and totality is constitutively invisible but we can perceive it in other ways. Taking his lead here from Walter Benjamin and Hermann Schmitz, Böhme proposes that one of the best ways to access architecture as a spatial art is through bodily presence.

Architecture, so Benjamin, is experienced habitually and in a disposition of distraction – as much through haptic appropriation as through sight (1969: 239–240). His concept of aura (Greek αὔρα: breeze, Latin *aura*: breeze, breath) is a springboard for Böhme in conceptualizing atmosphere. Böhme emphasizes the relational role of aura, the 'indeterminate, spatially diffused quality of feeling' encompassing perceiver and perceived (2013: 27). Aura is a 'strange', connective 'tissue of space and time' (Benjamin, 2008: 23): as one breathes aura and absorbs it into one's body, body and environment invisibly and intangibly entwine (Takamura, 2011: 143). As self and world infuse and diffuse, sight and touch intersect; a perceptibility arises that corresponds to an other's attentiveness (Novalis, Kamnitzer, & Helmstatt, 1929).[1] Aura and atmospheres, then, suggest ways of relating to the world that are very different from those produced by the 'pervasive and dehabilitating split between subject and object'

[1] See also p. x, below.

scarring modernity (Latham, 1999: 466). Indeed, to experience aura one must be able to transpose a common response in human relationships to relationships with inanimate or natural objects: to 'perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return' (Benjamin, 1969: 188). Like the Romantics, Benjamin links sensorial aspects of perception: sight, touch and other senses – conjuring up a peripheral vision by which one feels one's way around a space (Latham, 1999: 463), rather than keeping it at a distance (as Alois Riegl thought typical of architecture since the Romans, 1985: 30). In the recognition of an Other, for which distance, however small, is necessary, objects transcend their boundaries; subject and object are part of the same world (Latham, 1999: 464).

Speculatively and through ephemeral experience, thought presses 'close to its object, as if through touching, smelling, tasting, it wanted to transform itself' (Adorno, 1982: 233). Perception is 'affective and merging participation', for Hermann Schmitz (whom Böhme considers to have first systematically introduced the term atmosphere into philosophy), and atmospheres are 'moving emotional powers, spatial carriers of moods' (see p. x below). In bodily felt spaces, atmospheres can activate a kind of architectural engagement quite different from that triggered by Euclidean geometries. This difference reflects two contrasting European concepts of space, topos (τόπος Aristotle) and spatium (Descartes). While *topos* is a place in which one finds oneself, a space of bodily presence whose dimensions and directions relate to the body (up/ below, right/left, front/back), the geometrical proportions of *spatium* constitute space as a medium of representation for some-thing. *Topos* is characterized by tightness or expansion, movements or restrictions, brightness or darkness, lucidity or opacity, and so on, and the same characters, as Böhme calls them following Christian Cajus Lorenz Hirschfeld (see p. x, below),[2][3] pertain to atmospheres as tuned spaces or spatially diffused quasi-objective feelings. A space can affect us as heavy or uplifting, serious and serene, festive, sublime, cool, or cosy, elegant, grand, medieval and ancient. At least five types of characters: moods, synaesthesia, movement suggestions and conventional and communicative characters participate in the perception and generation of atmospheres. In this area, Böhme significantly expands on Schmitz' elaboration of atmospheres. He identifies and analyses classical concerns, such as geometry, shape, proportions, dimensions, and also light, colour and sound, amongst the objective means by which atmospheres can be generated. Some material atmospheric aspects are conventional and depend on culture-specific values and judgements while, conversely, signs and symbols have not only conventional

[2] See also Rowe (1976).

but also affective, atmospheric dimensions. Their embeddedness and continuity in a culture gives them affective value. Atmospheres, then, arise between people and things; they are neither objective nor subjective but 'the shared reality of the perceiver and the perceived' (see p. x). How this reality is conceived will impact on perception and spatial practices, in turn.

While acknowledging the overlap between an aesthetics of proximity and one of distance, as it were, Böhme takes issue with the dominance of semiotics in aesthetic theory in the 1990s (see, for instance, p. x): semiotics wrongly privileges symbol-mediated communication over affective and corporeal modes of experience, reducing aesthetics to narrowly framed appreciation. Further, modern art left us with non-representational images, which are inaccessible to a semiotics-oriented aesthetic theory yet offer important experiences. An aesthetics of atmospheres, Böhme proposes, explicates experiences that, as in James Turell's works, no longer relate to tangible artefacts but to atmospherically tinctured spaces. Music, too, can be recognized as a spatio-emotional phenomenon and language for its ability to generate atmospheres. New media aesthetics and *aisthesis*, as a theory of perception, are two sides of the same cultural development in technical civilization.

Similarly, Böhme challenges the central importance of visual representation in architecture. The nature of most architectural work dictates that spaces that are, after all, designed for the bodily presence of people have to be presented in drawings, computer renderings and models. This visual presentation further reinforces Euclidean notions of space. Yet, architecture is not a visual but a spatial art, which is best experienced in bodily sensing through which the spatial design enters directly into one's disposition. This immersive experience of architecture also includes the music deployed as ubiquitous acoustic furnishing in public spaces, department stores and malls, subway stations and trains, elevators, doctors' waiting rooms and airports. An aesthetics of atmospheres develops a critical repertoire to analyse the emotional manipulation intended by these strategies. None of these aspects can be even approximated by a conception of architecture as a visual art – atmospheres are not visible; yet, so Böhme, they are vitally important.

Böhme's take on atmospheres is influenced by his personal and intellectual trajectory. Born in 1937 in Dessau, he studied mathematics, physics and philosophy in Göttingen and Hamburg. Having completed his PhD thesis in Hamburg on the modes of time in 1966, he moved into philosophy, working particularly on Plato and Kant. His work at the Max-Planck-Institute in the 1970s investigated life conditions in the scientific-technological world. During that period, he also qualified as a professor with a dissertation on Plato, Aristotle,

Leibnitz and Kant's theories of time. In 1977, Böhme accepted a chair for philosophy at Darmstadt Technical University, a position he held until his retirement in 2002. His research included classical and natural philosophy, philosophy of science, theories of time, aesthetics, ethics, technical civilization, philosophical anthropology and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Böhme held professorships and guest professorships at Kyoto, Vienna, Graz, Rotterdam and Linköping and conducted research at the University of Wisconsin, Australian National University, as well as Cambridge and Harvard Universities. An active interest in the practical and social relevance of philosophy has always accompanied Böhme's academic and theoretical engagements. He co-initiated the 1984 *Darmstädter Verweigerungsformel*, a declaration signed by more than 100 scientists to refrain from participation in the development of weaponry and to make transparent the contribution of their disciplines Darmstadt University of Technology. From 1997 to 2001, Böhme was *Sprecher* (speaker) at the Graduate School for *Technisierung und Gesellschaft* (Technification and Society), Darmstadt. With particular relevance for current global affairs, Böhme drafted the 1992 *Erklärung gegen Ausländerhaß, für Menschenrechte und Demokratie* (Declaration against the Hatred of Foreigners, for Human Rights and Democracy), at a time when violent attacks against migrants increased significantly in Germany. Whereas the majority of the population, as well as the state, seemed to tolerate if not condone such actions, 130 Darmstadt professors signed the declaration. A series of lectures during the summer of 1993 led to the publication of an edited collection, *Migration und Ausländerfeindlichkeit* (Migration and Xenophobia, co-edited with Rabindra Nath Chakraborty and Frank Weiler, G. Böhme, Chakraborty, & Weiler, 1994). Following his retirement from Darmstadt University of Technology, Böhme founded the Darmstadt *Institut für Praxis der Philosophie* (IPPh, a private institute for the practice of philosophy), which he has since directed.

Böhme's interest in the practice of philosophy has considerably influenced his approach to writing: typically, he works with a series of case studies, from which he develops and into which he embeds his theory. 'Scholastic' philosophizing, in the sense of an expert activity, or, in Schopenhauer's terms, a professorial philosophy for professors of philosophy (*Professorenphilosophie für Philosophieprofessoren*), is of little interest to Böhme. What matters to him is the realization of philosophy in personal and social life, a critical praxis complementing academic philosophy that engages with contemporary life. It is realized through participation and engagement, the ability to tolerate not-knowing and an involvement in life, as nature and with nature.

Until very recently, this aspect of Böhme's work was not apparent to Anglophone readers. The fact that an entire section (entitled *Das kritische Potential einer Ästhetik der Atmosphären*, The Critical Potential of an Aesthetics

of Atmospheres) is missing in an English translation of *Atmosphäre als Grundbegriff einer neuen Ästhetik* ('Atmosphere as a Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics', 1993a)[3] would have further contributed to misunderstandings about his positions. In any event, only a few brief texts were available in English translation until 2000 (1993a, 1995c, 1998b, 2000a), and only six more (2003, 2004, 2005a, 2008b, 2009, 2010b) were published by 2010. Translations, in a wide variety of venues and often difficult to find, were undertaken by many different, often anonymous translators, using different terminologies and diverse approaches to the task of translation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, an impression arose with some writers that Böhme insufficiently considers atmosphere in its original meaning, namely as weather or climate. Most recently, Mădălina Diaconu (2014: 328) notes that 'the weather plays a role only as a subject of artistic representation' in the aesthetics of atmosphere.[4] Other critics consider Böhme's conception of atmosphere to lack temporality – either as quality (Morton, 2007: 166) or as history (implicitly, Boswell, 2014; explicitly, Riedel, 2015: 94. See, however, p. 70ff in this book [this is the section "Architecture and felt space").

Since 2010, with further English translations of Böhme's essays becoming available, there has been a fast-growing awareness of the role of atmospheres. The 'atmospheric turn', to which Böhme's work has contributed significantly, is of interest to contemporary philosophy, aesthetics and art criticism, music and visual arts, architectural practice and theory, performance, management and business studies, as well as education.This book now brings together Böhme's most seminal writings on the subject, providing a broad and systematic base for the further reception of his work and opening up opportunities for its extension in new directions.

In a recent publication, *Ästhetischer Kapitalismus* (Aesthetic Capitalism, 2016), Böhme takes up the topic of needs (*Bedürfnisse*) and desires (*Begehren*) again to explicate how aesthetic needs are neither needs nor desires, but *Begehrnisse* – a neologism condensing the German terms for needs and desires. *Begehrnisse* are not sated in their fulfilment like (basic) needs, but rather intensified, and therefore highly topical for practitioners of art, design, architecture and many related fields. In a field of tensions concerning what constitutes a good life in a precarious environmental present and future, it is crucial to come to terms with *Begehrnisse*. There is no point in differentiating between art and kitsch according to conventional aesthetic standards, and Böhme accordingly treats

[3] Later published in a German collection of essays (Böhme, 1995a).

[4] However, see Böhme's essay, "'Mir läuft ein Schauer übern ganzen Leib' – das Wetter, die Witterungslehre und die Sprache der Gefühle' ('A Shudder Runs Through My Whole Body' – Weather, Meteorology and the Language of Feelings, 2007).

them equally: artists, designers, architects, artisans, cosmeticians and florists are all aesthetic workers (see p. xx). They produce a *More* (Adorno, Adorno, Tiedemann, & Hullot-Kentor, 2002: 79) in artefacts, taking them beyond their thingness and traditional usefulness, which Böhme calls 'staging value' – a hybrid of use and exchange value. The qualities and meanings given to commodities for the purposes of exchange by branding and marketing experts may, if they serve to stage a personality or life style in the context of use, become their actual use value. Thus, the boundaries between architecture and the stage set blur when architecture acquires the staging value of a commodity. Under certain conditions, however, the intensification of everyday life can subvert all official intent in the production of environmental atmospheres). The aesthetization of the real, ubiquitous in developed capitalist economies, can be differently inflected. Böhme (2014) recounts the example of the Nordweststadt Centre, a shopping mall in a predominantly working-class quarter of Frankfurt (Germany), which has a higher than average proportion of migrants (Figure I.1). Like *flâneurs*, the residents of the Nordweststadt quarter have made the shopping centre their *urban village*: a place in which they spend their time at ease, meeting friends, participating in life and, occasionally, also shopping.

To me, these cultural aspects of atmospheres are particularly interesting and relevant – now that Europe yet again faces the challenges Böhme and his colleagues addressed in the early 1990s. Rising figures of migrants seeking refuge and/or work challenge us to develop ethical and practical positions in response. Then as now, the actual increase in the numbers of migrants was probably less influential than the atmosphere of fear created by metaphors such as *marauders* and *swarms* or *floods* of migrants (Shariatmadari, 2015). In our age of comparison (Nietzsche), in which a fusion of horizons (Gadamer) is no longer a choice since none are left (as Joseph Campbell argued already some fourty years ago, 1972: 221–222), collisions of people and ideologies are as unavoidable as they are commonplace. In his consideration of non- Western concepts that have affinity with his concept of atmospheres, Böhme has taken up this challenge.[5]

Atmospheres' non-Euclidian and generative characteristics may offer alternatives to the prevailing zero-sum approaches to space and resources. They may change patterns of thinking, so that people no longer automatically assume that a gain for one side necessarily means loss for the other. If an atmosphere, a *More* transcending mere facticity, is produced between people in exchange, there is a possibility that it can create a common world with shared ways of thinking (Julmi, 2015: 55–56).

[5] See briefly in this collection, p. xx, and Böhme (1998c).

Figure I.1 Nordwest–Zentrum (SK Architekten), Frankfurt/© 2010 Gernot Böhme.

It seemed important to me to preserve Böhme's style, which locates him as a writer at a specific historical and sociocultural intersection, and I have therefore erred on the side of faithfulness in translation. Only sometimes, I followed Novalis' (1997: 28) maxim to act in the author's spirit by changing his diction. Only rarely, when an English translation rendered the German insufficiently, have I provided the original term in brackets.

One non-matching sphere of connotations between German and English warrants some discussion here in the beginning. The terms *Befindlichkeit* and *Befinden*, both derived from *sich befinden* (to be positioned, to find oneself, to feel), entail an ambiguity that matches them with the notion of bodily presence in space. When translated, the distinctions and affinities between the terms shift a little. First, efforts to make a clear distinction between *Befinden* (the actual condition one is in) and *Befindlichkeit* (the general term for such conditions, implying a reflexivity not inherent in *Befinden*) would sound awkward in English. Second, the double meaning referring both to location and to feeling is important to Böhme's use of the terms (this is discussed on p. xx). Finally, *Befinden* and *Befindlichkeit* are, at least in the context of atmospheres, in some instances better translated as *disposition* and sometimes as *attunement*. Disposition remains closer to the subjective pole, perhaps, that is, to the dispositions a person brings to and maintains throughout a new situation (similar to Bourdieu's *habitus*). *Attunement* implies resonance and leans towards the totality of a situation, towards other persons, things or spaces and their respective ecstasies.

Böhme uses the term *ecstasy* in a literally spatial sense: it refers to the way in which a thing steps out of itself and into the surrounding space, where it becomes palpably present (Böhme, 2001a: 129) and, through its appearance as presence, generates an atmosphere. Objects, which are closed in their opposition to a subject, are not ecstatic as such. Yet thingness inheres as potentiality in every object (Brown, 2015: 5): what exceeds the object's mere materialization or utility, its force as vital, sensuous presence, is what makes a thing. Likewise, Böhme's differentiation of *atmosphere* and *the atmospheric* reveals (in contrast to what classical thing ontologies and the subject/object divide would suggest) stages of objectiveness. Following Schmitz (2002:492, who calls them semi-things), Böhme draws attention to the quasi-objective qualities of the atmospheric: 'neither subject nor object – yet not nothing' (2013: 66). Paradigmatic examples are seasonal and diurnal phases (autumn, dusk, evening) and natural phenomena (wind, heat and mist), but also pain, voices, silence.The subject/object duality pertaining to Western thinking since Aristotle (see p. xx) affects the way we refer to our bodies in German: *Körper* designates in Böhme's terminology a body objectified in the gaze or (expert) discourse of others. *Leib*, by contrast, is the body directly given to our experience (see pp. xx and yy). The body as *Leib*, our *Leiblichkeit*, makes us realize the *nature that we ourselves are* (see p. xx). In translation, I have endeavoured to preserve some of the distinction between *Körper* and *Leib* (and their cognates) by calling experiential and sensorially close phenomena *body* or *bodily* and more abstract, objective ones *corporeal* or *corporeality*.

The chapters in this collection have been selected from Böhme's classic books and influential articles to provide a theoretical framework for the discussion of atmospheres in architectural and urban spaces. They explore philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of atmospheres, examining them in different media (acoustics, light and space) and spaces (corporeal and ephemeral, mundane and sacred). Combining philosophy with architecture, design, landscape design, scenography, music and visual arts, the essays together provide a key to the concepts that motivate the work of some of the best contemporary architects, artists, and theorists: from Peter Zumthor, Herzog & de Meuron and Juhani Pallasmaa to Olafur Eliasson and James Turrell. This systematic collection of important pieces – many of which were hitherto only available in German – offers various starting points and a range of reflective material to work with as we search for new approaches to sometimes urgent challenges. All chapters were newly translated to provide a coherent and consistent terminology and conceptual apparatus. They have gone through a process of discussion with and examination by Böhme himself, and footnotes were added where necessary to update references to social or aesthetic context.

As essays, the texts typically open up a field of engagement: Böhme welcomes the collaboration of writers with diverse ideas in trying to come to terms with pressing aesthetic and political problems – he considers systematic conclusions inappropriate at this stage (2013: 11). Initially, chapters recall and analyse life-world experiences, in which a familiarity with atmospheres is primarily receptive (they are experienced or suffered). They then identify connections of atmospheric experiences with everyday feelings. Gradually, the chapters move to explore atmospheres' origins, increasingly addressing generative aspects that make atmospheres such an important factor in the intensification of life. Addressing the role of atmospheres in both the work of professionals and the life of users, Böhme endeavours to cultivate an atmospheric competence that refrains from the kinds of judgement we are used to in aesthetic education. His intention is not to refine appreciation and distinction but to nurture, as a matter of course, an awareness of atmosphere. This would allow people to maintain a space for critical reflection vis-à-vis the persuasive as well as generative aspects of atmospheres.

'Atmosphere, a basic concept of a new aesthetic' explains why the introduction of the term *atmosphere* to aesthetics led to a fundamental turn. Classical aesthetics, from Immanuel Kant to Theodor W. Adorno, was essentially an aesthetics of judgement which increasingly focused on a theory of the work of art. By contrast, reviving Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's perspective, the new

aesthetics is above all a theory of sensory experience. It is not simply an aesthetics of reception but equally concerned with the production of atmospheres. 'The ecstasies of things' takes the reader straight to the core of a theory of atmospheres. Whereas, traditionally, things were characterized by their qualities, that is, by what made them different from other things, ecstasies concern the ways in which things affect space, in other words, what they emanate. This will become central to a new understanding of architecture and design. 'Material splendour' empirically explores the role materiality currently plays in aesthetics and particularly in architecture. The chapter also shows that the theory of atmospheres has as much critical as phenomenologically descriptive potential. It is not simply a renewed appreciation of *what* things (and buildings) are made of but refers to the *how* of appearance, that is, their surfaces. 'Atmospheres in architecture' focuses on the turn brought about by the introduction of the term *atmosphere* in architecture. The use of various metaphors demonstrate how an understanding of architecture has, again and again, taken its bearings from music, sculpture, or painting. This chapter elaborates the proper of architecture: the art of space – not Euclidian space, though, but corporeal space, that is, the space in which we are.

Should, in previous chapters, readers have gained an impression that atmosphere primarily emanates from constellations of things, 'The presence of living bodies in space' revises this impression by looking at the historical and conceptual development of spaces of bodily presence. Even though the latter might sometimes seem superseded by forms of virtual presence, an appreciation of bodily existence obstinately persists and has given rise to a renewed interest in architecture where sensory experiences unfold as felt spaces of mood, action and perception. 'Atmospheres of human communication' extends the exploration of human presence in space from external atmospheres to the contribution of human participants. Atmospheres, the basis of communication, arise pre-linguistically wherever people meet. Atmosphere, as a *dispositif*, determines what is socially and communicatively possible.

'Learning to live with atmospheres: a new aesthetic humanist education' sketches the first practical consequences of these considerations: the ability to deal with atmospheres is a basic competence of human existence, and atmospheric proficiency an important element of 'education'. The engagement with Friedrich Schiller's classical work articulates a contemporary concept of an 'Aesthetic Education of Man'. Turning to an exposition of atmospheres in different media, 'The Grand Concert of the World' begins by discussing acoustic space: Murray Schafer's worldwide Soundscape project, on the one hand, and, on the other, John Cage's development of *musique concrète*. 'The voice in spaces of bodily presence' considers acoustic space in relation to the participating humans.

Everybody co-determines atmosphere by producing sound. This goes usually unnoticed, but it becomes evident when the human voice takes on a decisive importance as, for instance, in some areas of new music.

'Light and space' deals with another crucial factor in the generation of atmospheres. A building's appearance is not solely determined by geometry and material: light is an essential moment of architecture. 'The art of the stage set as a paradigm for an aesthetics of atmospheres' explicitly addresses the question whether one can produce atmospheres consciously and at will. The ancient art of scenography demonstrates a long tradition of producing atmospheres. Its successes show that atmospheres are quasi-objective, spatially extended feelings – scenography would be pointless if every person in the audience felt the 'climate' on stage in a different way.

Böhme has always endeavoured to render his theories vivid and accessible by using concrete examples and, accordingly, the book concludes with a case study, 'Church Atmospheres'. Since the construction of early European temples, particular atmospheres were produced in sacred spaces. In Christian buildings, Böhme teases out the consequences of, on the one hand, the renunciation of traditional elements in 'modern' church construction (and the resulting production of an austere atmosphere). On the other hand, the secularization of old churches (used as hotels, night clubs, book shops, etc.) raises the question whether their architecture might transfer a sacred atmosphere into the new situation.

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