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Resonance and Atmosphere in Architectural Aesthetics

Joona Markus Hulmi

Abstract

The present paper is concerned with the experience of architecture as analyzed through the concepts of atmosphere and resonance. I suggest that the experience of architecture occurs by means of atmospheres that consist of numerous factors, including architectural qualities, interpersonal aspects, and the subject's individual mind. Architecture may generate or foster atmospheres that are emotionally moving or meaningful, but also ones that are bland, indifferent, meaningless, or at least less meaningful than others. In particular, I examine how we understand atmospheres that are experienced as meaningful and emotionally moving in regard to the so-called resonance theory, as formulated by Hartmut Rosa. I relate the sociophilosophical concept of resonance to the concept of atmosphere in architecture and analyze this through a set of architectural examples. The idea is that meaningful and emotionally moving atmospheres can be understood as resonating. Also, the idea of alienating (that is, "mute") atmospheres in architecture is briefly discussed in contrast to resonating atmospheres.

Key Words

alienation; architectural aesthetics; atmosphere; Gernot Böhme; resonance; Hartmut Rosa

1. Introduction

The experience of architecture and the built environment is commonly described with the concept of atmosphere. Such atmospheres are described in various ways, for instance, as

being tranquil, intense, or dull. But how should we characterize what we believe is a good atmosphere, and what kinds of atmospheres should ultimately be pursued? What does it mean for a subject or a social group when architecture emanates or generates an atmosphere that speaks to them, that is, architecture that they consider meaningful and that affects them emotionally? These kinds of questions relate to normatively oriented questions concerning the quality of human life. They also import into the discussion a more hermeneutic orientation, where there is a requirement to interpret the meanings of atmospheres. The concept of atmosphere in architectural discourse, as notably theorized by philosopher Gernot Böhme, does not take a strong stance on such questions. This is presumably because for him the theory of atmosphere is more concerned with questions of perception.

The concept of atmosphere seems to be used in architectural discourse in two differing ways. Firstly, it is understood as a philosophical concept denoting an experience or perception that is value-neutral.[1] Here, the term refers to something interpersonal, in between a subject and object, that does not take a position on what kind of an atmosphere it is – whether it is particularly meaningful, welcoming, warm, or dull, less meaningful, repulsive, and so forth. On the other hand, the term is used in a descriptive way, in phrases such as *atmospheric quality*, *atmospheric character,* or *atmospheric architecture*.[2] The latter use of the term seems to be value-laden in a positive sense. This raises various critical questions. What does atmosphere as a descriptive term mean in relation to architecture? If atmosphere is understood in its philosophical sense as a concept of perception and experience – that is, denoting a feeling or emotion related to one's surroundings – then would it not be conceptually problematic to speak of *atmospheric quality, character,* or *architecture*? That is, does not a perceived atmosphere exist regardless of the quality of the architecture, be it vivid, peculiarly appealing, and emotionally moving or factitious, ingratiating, dull, meaningless, or even hostile? Furthermore, the descriptive way of using the term "atmosphere" suggests that it can be ascribed to a quality of architecture, which contradicts the understanding of atmosphere as a holistic and interpersonal concept.

In the following discussion, I suggest that atmosphere is a concept of perception and experience that should be understood as a value-neutral concept. In a value-neutral understanding of the concept of atmosphere, the experienced atmosphere can be emotionally moving, touching, and meaningful, but it can also be negatively assimilated, such as a hostile or repulsive atmosphere. This means that atmosphere

can be understood as a concept denoting experience and perception without taking a position whether an experienced atmosphere is always especially meaningful or promotes a "good life" or not.[3]

There are different ways for approaching meaningful atmospheres in architecture. For architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa, for instance, the meaningfulness of atmospheres seems to be based on the fundamental questions of existence and the corporality of an individual.[4] Since atmosphere consists also of interpersonal, cultural, social, and psychological aspects, I propose a new approach for studying meaningful and emotionally moving atmospheres, one which has not previously been used in architectural discourse, that makes use of sociologist Hartmut Rosa's concept of "resonance."[5] The basic premise of the present paper is that when an atmosphere is experienced as emotionally moving and meaningful, it is experienced as *resonating*, that is, the atmosphere *resonates* to a subject. On the other hand, as will be discussed briefly towards the end of the paper, when an atmosphere in architecture is experienced as bland, meaningless, or hostile, it might be understood metaphorically as "mute." Rosa's idea of resonating and mute relationships to the world have not previously been applied in studies of atmosphere in architecture.

With these reflections as a starting point, I will explore how the concept of resonance offers a response to some deficits in the recent discussion concerning atmosphere in architecture and the built environment and also provide new insights into it. The key question is: How are we to understand an atmosphere that is experienced as *meaningful* or *emotionally moving* by using the resonance theory? Before responding to this question, I shall first discuss the concept of atmosphere in architecture.

2. Atmosphere as a phenomenological concept in architectural discourse

In everyday discourse, the term "atmosphere" is widely used for referring to the mood, ambiance, or feeling afforded by the environment. But the term has also undergone theorization as an architectural concept. The roots of the theoretical discussion on architecture and atmosphere or ambiance can perhaps be traced to the theory of art and architecture of the Italian Renaissance.[6] In recent times, the notion of atmosphere has been used notably by architect Peter Zumthor when describing the experience of being moved by a building. For him, an atmosphere is an impression of something, be it a building, music, or a person, that we perceive through our emotional sensibility.[7] Zumthor describes a certain moment on a plaza where many things

affect him simultaneously: the plaza and the people, the weather, the sounds, the colors, the materials, and his own personal mood. All these together constitute the atmosphere. He also introduces several points of personal concern as an architect when generating a certain atmosphere in a building he designs.

Theorists and architects alike have argued that atmosphere could indeed be the central objective of the architect, even if it is a concept that has escaped such a discourse.[8] But how are we to understand what an atmosphere is exactly? Even though "atmosphere" is a term that is commonly used, it is not something that is easy to explain. As such, the above question takes the discussion to a philosophical level.

In contemporary philosophy and phenomenology, the concept of atmosphere was first elaborated by Hermann Schmitz, who saw atmospheres as overwhelming emotional powers.[9] Schmitz's ideas were later taken up by Gernot Böhme, in reference to aesthetics and theories of architecture. According to Böhme, atmospheres are "the sphere of felt bodily presence," "the felt presence of something or someone in space," and "characteristic manifestations of the co-presence of subject and object."[10] Further, as he sees it, atmospheres are interpersonal and intermediate phenomena, something taking place between a subject and an object.[11] The concept of atmosphere has also been further developed in aesthetics, for instance by Tonino Griffero, who emphasizes the role of emotions and feelings and notes that atmosphere is, in a way, a spatialized feeling.[12] Thus, philosophers and architectural theorists have employed different ways of defining and approaching the concept of atmosphere.

For the purposes of this paper, it is essential that atmosphere can be understood as an interpersonal concept and as a holistic notion of experience. That is, they are formed between a subject and an environment when the subject perceives, feels, and experiences the surroundings and relates to them and to other subjects who may be present. Atmospheres are not solely defined by some objective quality, nor merely by a mood or feeling of an individual, and they are affected by various aspects. For example, one can speak of a tense, relaxed, cheerful, or unpleasant atmosphere in a meeting room. This atmosphere consists of factors such as the mood of the individuals in the room, the soundscape, the colors, the smell, and other spatial and sensual qualities of the room. As Böhme notes, atmosphere is a concept that takes into consideration both the aspect of how we feel in the surroundings of particular qualities and the aspect of how the social characters or social conventions might characterize the feeling.[13]

At this point it is necessary to point out that one may talk about different kinds of atmospheres, such as an architectural or a social atmosphere, each of which emphasizes different aspects. The former refers to a relational phenomenon between, for example, a building and its inhabitants, and the latter to a relational phenomenon between individuals of a group in space. Dylan Trigg argues that despite the seemingly fuzzy nature of atmospheres, they are not homogeneous: "Some atmospheres seem to derive more forcefully from material conditions whereas others stem from the social situations that take place within those environments."[14] In relation to the study of architecture, the concept of atmosphere proves conclusively ambiguous. In addition to aesthetic objectives, buildings are designed for the use of people for situations that are most often social in nature, and therefore the atmospheres experienced in built spaces form and develop in highly complex ways. The material qualities and conditions affect how the people interact in the space, but the social side affects how the material conditions appear and are experienced. Because the exclusion of social aspects in architectural atmospheres would be, in my view, problematically reductive, this paper does not completely exclude them from the discussion. However, the distinction between the concepts of architectural and social atmospheres is still crucial. Architectural spaces often, but not always, contribute or affect social atmospheres. Some social atmospheres can essentially be generated by people's social interactions, regardless of architectural surroundings, such as the atmosphere in a deep conversation between family members or close friends. Such an atmosphere is tied to the social relations and interaction of the participants, and the architectural space might have a negligible role in it.[15]

Nonetheless, because of its intrinsic in-betweenness, atmosphere is intangible and does not have any secure ontological status, at least when assessed against the backdrop of Western ontology.[16] But in arguing that atmosphere is an interpersonal and relational phenomenon and something that develops only between the subject and the object, there is a notable anomaly in the discussion. In spoken language, it may be common to say that a building, an urban space, or a city has a certain atmosphere, which places atmosphere on the objective side. But how does this figure with the notion of interpersonal atmospheres? In my view, the conception of atmosphere as an interpersonal and in-between phenomenon can be understood as a non-dualistic conception of atmosphere, that is, denying the dichotomies of subjective versus objective. On the other hand, placing atmosphere on the objective side can be understood as a dualistic conception. The anomaly is that there are both

dualistic and non-dualistic formulations and conceptions in the theoretical discussion of architectural atmospheres. Christian Norberg-Schulz has placed atmosphere on the objective side, when stating that "it is the most comprehensive property of any place."[17] Even though Böhme has formulated atmosphere essentially as an in-between phenomenon, he also places atmosphere, to a degree, on the objective side, when he states that "atmospheres are essentially the objective pole of mindful physical presence in space" and when he somehow distinguishes external atmospheres from interpersonal atmospheres.[18]

Christian Julmi, who has comprehensively studied the dualistic and non-dualistic ways of understanding the concept of atmosphere in relation to management and organization studies, argues that the dualistic understanding of atmosphere has raised problematic questions, such as whether it is a phenomenon of the environment or the mind. [19] If atmosphere is understood as "the immediate experience of the whole" that fuses "natural, architectural, cultural, social and human ingredients into a singular experience," as Pallasmaa has stated, then there always needs to be objective features, but social, interpersonal, psychological, and subjective features and aspects also are involved.[20] Due to the inherent problems in the dualistic understanding of atmosphere, and because atmosphere consists of various aspects – the formal qualities of architecture, the individual mind of a subject, and social and interpersonal aspects, and so on – I consider atmosphere as a holistic and non-dualistic notion of the perception and experience of architecture that builds up, unfolds, and develops between the spatial object and the subjects who perceive it.

3. Resonating atmospheres in architecture

The concepts of resonance and atmosphere intuitively seem to have something in common. Both can be understood to have intersubjective features, both take place between the subject and the object, and both pay attention to social aspects in addition to corporeality. Despite their common features, they are nevertheless principally different. As discussed above, atmosphere fundamentally relates to perception and experience. The sociophilosophical concept of resonance as constructed by Rosa, in turn, is both descriptive and normative. Resonance denotes a kind of relationship to the world in which the subject and the world are mutually affected and transformed. A resonant relationship is a responsive relationship, where both sides "speak with their own voice." For Rosa, resonance is a basic human need and object of desire (that is, a description of human development),

and it aims to work as a measure of a "successful life."[21] Thus, when an atmosphere is experienced as resonating, the discussion concerning atmospheres in architecture becomes connected with the idea of human needs and normativity.

Rosa's idea of resonance as something always positive and as a normative criterion of a good life nevertheless has been criticized.[22] This paper does not argue that a resonating relationship with the world is the only aspiration or desire for a human being or that ultimately resonance can be a measure for a good life.[23] But despite these critical ideas, resonance is still considered as something meaningful and worth pursuing, and thus in this paper the normative dimension of the concept is at least to some degree retained.

3.1 Resonance and emotionally moving atmospheres in architecture

Rosa imports the concept of resonance into sociology and philosophy from physics and acoustics in a metaphorical way. [24] A vibrating object causes another object to vibrate with it, for example, a tuning fork and the body of a violin. Together they might affect each other to vibrate stronger than they would individually. Resonance requires a medium capable of resonance: a resonant space that allows but does not compel the resonant effect.

The physical phenomenon of resonance, in a way, is translated into a psychosocial phenomenon when it is used as a concept for a human interaction and relation to the world. However, beyond the fact that physical resonance is used only as a metaphor, there is another profound difference between the psychosocial and physical concepts. In physical resonance, two resonant objects eventually end up on the same frequency, but in resonance as a human relationship to the world, two or more objects in a resonant space "affect each other in such a way that they can be understood as responding to each other, at the same time each speaking with its own voice."[25] Thus resonance is not an echo in a chamber where there is only one voice.[26] Instead, it is a relational concept that describes "a mode of being-in-the-world, i.e., a specific way in which subject and world come into relation with each other."[27]

In resonance, the "vibrating wire" between the subject and the world resonates in both directions: the subject becomes affected, touched, and moved by some segment of the world, whereas the subject responds with outwardly directed emotional movements with intrinsic interest.[28] Thus, one way to explain an atmosphere in architecture that is experienced as meaningful and emotionally moving is that there is a particular relationship between the subject and the

architectural space or object, where the architectural object affects the subject, who then responds with an emotion. In other words, the relationship formed between the subject and the world in such an atmosphere can be described as resonating. Thus, if we think about the atmosphere that was described by Peter Zumthor at the beginning of this paper, we can explain that it was not just any kind of atmosphere but was a resonating atmosphere.

Is resonance in architectural atmospheres the same, then, as a certain emotion? Rosa argues that a resonating relationship is not the same thing as a particular emotional state, but rather is a mode of relation that remains open to emotional content and can be experienced in many ways, including sadness, sorrow, and happiness.[29] This formulation suggests that there are different kinds of atmospheres in architecture that can be experienced as resonating. An atmosphere generated by an architectural work may affect and resonate in many ways, evoking different kinds of emotions. To demonstrate this with examples of modern sacral architecture, one may think that the sacral spaces designed by architect Juha Leiviskä, which are full of light in such a way that they impart a sensation of gravitational lightness, might form atmospheres that are experienced as resonating. However, also the more spatially and structurally grounded Temppeliaukio Church, designed by architects Timo and Tuomo Suomalainen, which is built inside a solid rock outcrop so that one might see groundwater seeping out from the interior walls, or the wooden Saint Benedict Chapel, designed by Peter Zumthor, which has a serene small-scale interior in contrast to the surrounding spectacular mountain landscape, might create an experience of resonance for many visitors. The architectural means and materials and the use of both artificial and natural light in these sacral spaces are fundamentally different, but in all cases the spatial qualities might generate strong atmospheres that could be experienced as emotionally moving. All the same, to be experienced as resonating, an atmosphere in architecture needs to be meaningful and touch people instead of being indifferent or unresponsive. Furthermore, the perceiving subject needs to be in a mode of dispositional resonance.[30]

Atmospheres can be studied as something that is derived more from material and spatial conditions or social situations, and the same applies to resonance as experienced in architecture. As discussed above, architectural space may generate an atmosphere that the subject experiences as emotionally moving and possibly as resonating. Here, the atmosphere seems to derive strongly from the totality of the architectural surroundings, as determined by the form of the space itself, the materials, lighting, and so on. On the other

hand, spatial qualities can attune people to a certain mood that fosters sensitivity to other kinds of resonances that might be essentially social. For instance, many sacral spaces, such as those discussed above, are used not only for religious gatherings but also for concerts and other social events. The same can apply to other types of buildings too, since, as Rosa argues, architecture and design to a significant degree can foster or inhibit sensitivity to resonance in social groups, such as in educational, work, and residential spaces.[31] Thus, the spatial conditions and social aspects can be intertwined in many ways in resonating atmospheres in architecture.

Furthermore, if the ambiguous concept of architecture is understood as something that refers to the built environment in general, then the discussion of architectural atmospheres and different kinds of resonances related to them expands to consider almost all kinds of spheres of resonance, including nature.[32] For example, the presence of nature in built environments, such as parks, urban gardening, and so on, can be seen as a way in which nature forms a sphere of resonance in architectural environments. Tempelhof Field in Berlin is a good example of the encounter between nature and an urban environment, in being an important living space for many bird and plant species but also a place of meaningful atmospheres for the residents of the metropolis.[33]

3.2 Notes on "mute" atmospheres in architecture

In addition to the premise that there exists architecture that might generate resonating atmospheres, there also exist built environments that likely do not "speak" to people and where the relationship between the perceiving subject and their surroundings remains indifferent. For Rosa, the counter concept of resonance is alienation.[34] Resonance is a kind of relationship with the world in which the subject and the world are mutually affected and transformed, whereas alienation denotes a specific form of relationship with the world in which the subject and the world confront each other with indifference or repulsion and thus without any inner connection. Alienation indicates a state in which the world cannot be "adaptively transformed" and in which the world appears as hostile, indifferent, cold, or non-responsive.[35] An alienated relationship lacks resonance and therefore possesses a mute relationship to the world.[36] According to Rosa, it is also an alienated relationship when resonance is simulated, instrumentalized, manipulated, or controlled, since it then lacks the presence of the *inaccessible other* speaking with its own voice. Rosa argues that late modern culture tends to reify resonance and to possess a mute relationship to the world, particularly through the commercialization and commodification of resonating experiences.[37]

Atmosphere can be understood as a relational concept when defining it as a phenomenon existing between a perceiving subject and its surroundings. The subject perceives a space through a bodily presence and relates to it and to its objects in some way or other – perhaps in a resonating way, but possibly only indifferently, superficially, or even in an adversarial way. When an atmosphere is perceived in a built space and the relationship remains bland, meaningless, repulsive, or indifferent, then there is no inner connection between the subject and the subject's surroundings. Architecture does not metaphorically "speak" to the subject, and it is considered to lack those qualities that the subject would evaluate as meaningful.

This idea of metaphorically mute or alienating atmospheres in architecture brings to mind several different examples. One such example is a business park, with nothing but car parking spaces between the buildings, with no services or greenery, where one cannot enter the buildings or even the entire area without special permission, and where most people relate to it only in terms of business.[38] This kind of atmosphere could be considered as less resonating than a lively urban space with pedestrian-friendly features, intimate plazas, lush greenery, and vibrant urban culture. Similarly, the atmosphere in a classroom without any daylight or views out, and with poor acoustics and bad indoor air quality, would more likely be experienced as alienating than a classroom where these qualities are considered commendable. Finally, architecture can generate even literally hostile atmospheres for certain groups of people. This is especially true for the homeless and young people, whose "loitering" presence in a built space is even purposely guarded against through design. For example, certain types of structures, shapes, and spikes may be installed in public spaces so that staying, laying down, and resting in the place would be made uncomfortable. This side in the design of built spaces, which has become a specific field of research, using such terms as *hostile architecture, unpleasant design,* or *excluding design,* is often missing from the discussion of architectural atmospheres.[39]

Nevertheless, there are also many cases where the evaluation of architectural atmospheres is hardly straightforward, since a building may generate different kinds of atmospheres, including both mute and resonating features. For example, a building may relate to its surroundings in a hostile way when it has entailed the destruction of vulnerable properties in its surroundings or when its exterior form is indifferent to and lacks any relation to the existing buildings or nature, and yet it still may succeed in providing an interior that generates a resonating atmosphere. To some extent, the Oulu City Library can be analyzed in this way.[40] The concrete, brutalist-style

building, by architects Marjatta and Martti Jaatinen, is located on an artificial island close to the city center. The near surroundings are largely asphalted, and its extensive parking area does not allow for the creation of a lively urban space. And yet, at the same time, the library's warm interior succeeds in generating an inviting atmosphere.

4. The evaluation of atmospheres in terms of the resonance theory

Rosa's formulation of resonance offers conceptual ideas for analyzing and interpreting atmospheres in architecture beyond existing individual examples. His starting point for establishing resonance as a descriptive sociophilosophical concept is based largely on the social philosophy and hermeneutics of Charles Taylor, but also on phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and neuroscience. Rosa acknowledges, for instance, Taylor's analysis of the modern transformation of the boundaries between subject and world. One of the examples Rosa discusses is that between a mother and child: the relationship between a mother and her newborn is regarded as a resonant relationship, one that forms a base for later resonant experiences. This relationship is built through the human body, and beyond babyhood we are similarly in the world as bodily beings. The skin, other sensory organs, and bodily functions such as breathing, eating, drinking, sleeping, and so on form the bodily basis for how we relate to the world.[41] An understanding of bodily presence in an atmosphere could thus relate to the concept of resonance, so that in a resonating atmosphere there are bodily ways of relating to the world that are obviously different from an alienating relationship with the world. Nevertheless, instead of going deeper into the questions of the phenomenology of the body, Rosa goes on to discuss how subjects relate themselves to the world, picking up on another notion theorized by Taylor, that of strong versus weak evaluations.[42]

As already mentioned, resonance is a responsive relationship that requires both sides involved to metaphorically "speak with their own voice." For Rosa, this means that a resonant relationship includes both strong and weak evaluations. Strong evaluations mean that one finds something important or meaningful as such, regardless of whether one desires it or not. They "form the basis for evaluating our own desires and decisions and thus give our lives meaning and direction."[43] From the perspective of resonance theory, strong evaluations are not something that originates from the subject, but instead from a segment of the world that affects the subject in some way.

Compared to strong evaluations, weak evaluations only indicate that one desires a certain object or behavior: one has

"an appetite for something." Here, the world is sought only as an object of desire. If strong evaluations are absent, and merely weak evaluations are involved, then the world is encountered only as a particular object of desire and the relationship is one-sided, without responsivity. In turn, if only strong evaluations are embraced, then the world is confronted without the subject's desire, falling again into a one-sided relationship, where the subject's voice is silent. A resonant relationship therefore needs to have both strong and weak evaluations.[44]

In a resonating architectural atmosphere, there is something present that relates to the concept of strong evaluations: the architectural work and the atmosphere it generates are regarded as important as such, whether one desires it or not. However, from the subject's viewpoint, there also needs to be a desire to perceive the world and an intrinsic interest in participating in the atmosphere that might be generated, that is to say, the will and possibility to "speak with one's own voice." Otherwise, the atmosphere could not develop or would remain indifferent, despite the architecture's positive qualities. Therefore, when an atmosphere in architectural space "speaks" to the subject or the subject becomes emotionally moved by it, it means, in a way, that both ends of the vibrating wire start to resonate and both strong and weak evaluations are involved in the atmosphere.

An objective definition of such architectural qualities that could be classified as unambiguously evoking strong evaluations is probably neither possible nor relevant, since in this kind of hermeneutic approach the aspect of self-interpretation is central. However, some ideas and guiding thoughts and reflections could be taken into consideration. One might think, for instance, of history and the temporal layers of architecture as something that could be discussed in relation to the concepts of strong evaluations and resonating atmospheres. For example, a person interested in history might find historical places especially resonating. The built environment could house narratives of significant historical events, even tragic ones, and thus speak the "voice of history" to the subject, as Rosa has described.[45] On the other hand, I would like to think that temporal layers in architecture might be something that could foster a resonance in architectural atmospheres without special historical events bound to them. For instance, the patina of a building that is considered aesthetic might indicate that, firstly, the building is durable and is aging with dignity, rather than falling into decay, and secondly, the building is meaningful and important, so that it has been preserved and maintained throughout its existence. Likewise, an urban environment with temporal layers from different eras, each of which has added its own values to the

city, might enrich the perceiver's experience: the "voice" of past eras may affect the present and give direction for contemplating a meaningful future.[46]

5. Conclusion

The present paper has focused on the experience of architecture by using the phenomenological concept of atmosphere as formulated by Gernot Böhme, Juhani Pallasmaa, and others, and the sociophilosophical concept of resonance as formulated by Hartmut Rosa. The concept of atmosphere has been shown to be highly complex and one that has somewhat obscurely been used in architectural discourse. In stating my own position, I have considered atmosphere as a non-dualistic, relational, and interpersonal phenomenon and a holistic way of approaching the perception and experience of architecture.

The concept of resonance as formulated by Rosa, in turn, denotes a relationship whereby the subject and the world are related to one another in a certain way in which they metaphorically vibrate stronger together than they would individually. In a resonating relationship, the "vibrating wire" between the subject and the world is resonating in both directions: the subject becomes affected, touched, and moved by some segment of the world, whereas the subject responds with outwardly directed emotional movement with intrinsic interest. In the paper, I propose that in a meaningful and emotionally moving architectural atmosphere there exists a particular relationship between the subjects and architectural space or object that can be metaphorically understood as resonating.

The paper also referred to Charles Taylor's concepts of strong and weak evaluations, which have a prominent role in Rosa's theory of resonance. The paper proposes that when an atmosphere is experienced as resonating, it means that the perceived built environment is evaluated through strong evaluations: It is considered as meaningful as such. However, weak evaluations must also be involved, which means that the subject, in a way, desires the object and has an interest to participate in the atmosphere that the architecture may generate; otherwise, the atmosphere remains indifferent despite the positive qualities of the architecture.

There can also be architectural atmospheres, however, that likely tend to be more indifferent and meaningless. I have discussed such atmospheres by applying Rosa's idea of a "mute" relationship with the world, which is a counter concept to that of resonance. The idea of metaphorically mute atmospheres in architecture means that even though the subject may perceive an atmosphere, there is no inner

connection between the perceiving subject and their surroundings, nor a substantially meaningful and sensible responsivity between them.

Rosa's theory of resonance offers numerous ways for analyzing atmospheres. For example, a superficially appealing atmosphere or one susceptible to being exploited for economic or ideological ends could be said to relate to Rosa's idea of a simulation of resonance. Rosa's more recent development of the "uncontrollability of resonance" could also be worth discussing in the context of atmospheres since, as discussed in this paper, atmosphere is an intangible phenomenon.[47] Also, Rosa's argument that the acceleration of late modern societies leads to increasing alienation would provide an intriguing topic of discussion regarding atmospheres in architecture. Architectural atmospheres should nevertheless be analyzed beyond momentary experiences, and here Rosa's idea of establishing resonating relationships through the axes of resonance leaves room for further research.[48]

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

[1] According to Böhme, atmosphere is supposed to be nonjudgmental. See Gernot Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*: *Ambiances, Atmospheres and Sensory Experiences of Spaces* (London; Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 11-14.

[2] See Juhani Pallasmaa, cited in Klaske Havik and Gus Tielens, "Atmosphere, Compassion and Embodied Experience: A Conversation about Atmosphere with Juhani Pallasmaa," Building Atmosphere [Special issue], *OASE Journal of Architecture*, No. 91 (2013): 43, 45, 47, 53. See also Böhme, *Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, 11.

[3] The publisher's anonymous reviewer of my article raised the issue that the existence of atmosphere depends on our perception, and in this respect, atmosphere always contains normative elements. In response, I would argue that understanding atmosphere as a concept that is ascribed as only a "good" or "meaningful" experience is problematic and delimiting. Indeed, I think that a distressing, oppressive, hostile, or repulsive atmosphere is also a "spatialized feeling" and something where there is "the felt presence of something or someone in space" (to use Griffero's and Böhme's formulations mentioned later in this paper). Thus, in my view, the value-neutral understanding of the concept of atmosphere is reasonable and justified in the sense that atmosphere is perceived bodily, whether it is a positively or negatively evaluated feeling that is related to the perceiver's surroundings. I believe this perspective is supported by Böhme, when he emphasizes atmosphere as a nonjudgmental concept in aesthetics. (See *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres,* 11-14.)

[4] Pallasmaa, cited in *OASE*, No. 91, 45, 99.

[5] Rosa places his conception of resonance within the tradition of Critical Theory, which is better known for theorizing alienation in late modern societies. Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 335-356. It is beyond the scope of the present paper, however, to discuss Rosa's argument regarding increasing alienation and the tradition of Critical Theory.

[6] Petri Vuojala, "Tunnelma Ja Retoriikka: Reunamerkintöjä Tunnelman Teorian Historiaan," in *Taidehistoriallisia Tutkimuksia* ["Atmosphere And Rhetoric: Marginal Notes on the History of Atmosphere Theory," in *Art Historical Studies*], ed. Jukka Ervamaa, Tellervo Helin, and Eeva-Maija Viljo, vol. 14, Juhlakirja Kalevi Pöykölle Hänen 60-Vuotispäivänään 9. Lokakuuta 1993 (Helsinki: Taidehistorian seura, 1993), 183–190; ref. 184-5.

[7] Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects*, trans. Iain Galbraith (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2005).

[8] Mark Wigley, "The Architecture of Atmosphere – Die Architektur Der Atmosphäre," *Daidalos* 68, (1998): 18–27.

[9] See Hermann Schmitz, Rudolf Owen Müllan and Jan Slaby, "Emotions outside the box – the new phenomenology of feelings and corporeality," *Phenom Cogn Sci* 10 (2011): 241-259: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-011-9195-1.

[10] Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, trans. A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 69; Gernot Böhme, "The Art of the Stage Set as a Paradigm for an Aesthetics of Atmospheres," *Ambiances* [Online], Rediscovering (2013), https://doi.org/10.4000/ambiances.315. Böhme cited in *OASE*, No. 91, 9.

[11] Gernot Böhme, "Urban Atmospheres: Charting New Directions for Architecture and Urban Planning," in *Architectural Atmospheres: On the Experience and Politics of Architecture*, ed. Christian Borch (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2014), 43; Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 14-5, 97-100.

[12] Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, trans. Sarah De Sanctis (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2014), 5-6.

[13] Böhme, "Urban Atmospheres," 50.

[14] Dylan Trigg, "The Role of Atmosphere in Shared Emotion," *Emotion, Space and Society* 35 (2020): 100658, 1: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2020.100658.

[15] The publisher's anonymous reviewer of my article referred to Hubert Tellenbach and pointed out that an individual who has been excluded from a social atmosphere for a long time is at risk of psychological and mental illness. In the reviewer's formulation: "...a question that should not be overlooked is: to what extent can the concept of resonance contribute to helping as many individuals as possible to integrate the corresponding atmosphere?" I think there belies a confusion between architectural and social atmospheres. Already in the comment it is noted that mental illness is due to isolation from social atmospheres, and not from architectural spaces. On the other hand, the reasons that have led a person to social isolation might have very little to do with the architectural environment (for example, a person who has isolated themselves from social interactions because of a psychological trauma after being abused or rejected in early childhood). Interestingly, according to Rosa, resonance can be considered as a psychoanalytic concept and a phenomenon

between a psychoanalyst and a person with mental suffering (*Resonance*, 118,137, 167). However, a full discussion on the concepts of mental illness, resonance, social atmospheres, and architectural atmospheres is beyond the scope of this article.

[16] Böhme, "Urban Atmospheres," 43; Böhme, Aesthetics of Atmospheres, 12. Throughout this paper, I use the hyphenated formulation of terms such as "in-between," "non-dualistic," and "non-responsive," following the usage in the original sources by Böhme, Julmi, and Rosa.

[17] Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 11.

[18] Gernot Böhme, "Atmosphere as Mindful Physical Presence in Space," *OASE*, No. 91, 27; Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 97-8.

[19] Christian Julmi, "The Concept of Atmosphere in Management and Organization Studies," *Organizational Aesthetics* 6, issue 1 (2017): 4-30; ref. 12.

[20] Pallasmaa cited in *OASE*, No. 91, 37, 49.

[21] Rosa, *Resonance*, 171-4.

[22] For Rosa, resonance is always something good. Based on that idea, he discusses questions concerning a "good" and "successful" life, which is absent in the discourse of atmospheres in architecture. However, according to Susen, the idea of "negative" resonance is dismissed by Rosa. Simon Susen, "The Resonance of Resonance: Critical Theory as a Sociology of World-Relations?," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33, no. 3 (2020): 326. For Susen, it also seems reductive and perhaps even monodeterministic that "all social struggles are driven by the species-constitutive struggle for resonance." Thus, the concept of alienation might become too reduced in Rosa's theory. (*Ibid*., 336) In addition, Blatterer notes in his critique of the resonance theory that from the perspective of self-determination, resonance only becomes sustaining of a *satisfied life*, instead of a *good* or *successful life*, contrary to Rosa's understanding. Harry Blatterer, "An Incomplete Dialectics? Rosa on the Good Life," *Thesis Eleven* 146, no. 1 (2018): 140–47, ref. 145: https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513618779530.

[23] In my view, Rosa's way of defining human desire simply as a desire for resonance is somewhat too simplistic, at least in the sense that the concept of sublimation is not studied comprehensively. See Rosa, *Resonance*, 114-5, 171. One may ask if it is possible that in some cases the alleged desire for some resonating segment of the world could be rather a neurotic way of getting satisfaction than a primary object of

desire. One might further ask whether some segments of the world could be more meaningful and thus primary oases of resonance compared to others.

[24] Rosa, *Resonance*, 124, 164-6.

[25] *Ibid.*, 166-7.

[26] *Ibid.*, 167, 174.

[27] *Ibid.*, 166.

[28] *Ibid.*, 163-4.

[29] *Ibid.*, 164, 174, 285-6.

[30] On dispositional resonance, see *ibid.*, 190, 247-8.

[31] On Rosa on design, architecture, and fostering sensitivity to social resonance (that is, the horizontal axis of resonance), see *ibid.*, 386.

[32] On resonance and nature, see *ibid.*, 268-280. According to Rosa (*ibid.*, 195-304), resonating relationships are formulated and established through axes of resonance, such as the social (horizontal) axis, the sphere of things and work (diagonal axis), and the spheres of religion, history, nature, and art (vertical axis). These, of course, are related in many ways to different kinds of architectural typologies and environments. A full discussion on axis of resonance and architectural atmospheres is, however, another broad discussion beyond this paper.

[33] As Diaconu notes, for Rosa, however, nature seems to be something quite romantic. Mădălina Diaconu, "Engagement and Resonance: Two Ways out from Disinterestedness and Alienation," *ESPES. The Slovak Journal of Aesthetics* 6, no. 2 (2017): ref. 46. I think it would be worth studying nature as a sphere of resonance in relation to atmospheres and architectural environments in general, not only something isolated from cultural and urban environments.

[34] The concept of alienation has been widely used in social theory and especially in the Critical Theory associated with the Frankfurt School. In his theory, Rosa defines the concept of alienation somewhat differently, as the counter concept to resonance, that is, alienation means alienation from resonance (*Resonance*, 175, 184). Here, however, alienation is not studied in relation to the Critical Theory tradition, but rather is used as a counter-concept of resonance for describing the mute relationship with the world. The various meanings that Rosa employs in discussing the concept of alienation have also been excluded from the present discussion.

[35] *Ibid.*, 174, 184.

[36] According to Rosa, a "good life" essentially entails that one establishes a resonating relationship with the world; in this pursuit, the mute relationship (for example, instrumental and technological processing of the world) is also important (*ibid.*, 184-191, 441). Thus, for Rosa there is a complex dialectic between resonance and alienation. The present discussion focuses on explaining meaningful atmospheres with regard to the concept of resonance and with only some brief remarks concerning "mute" atmospheres in architecture.

[37] *Ibid.*, 186, 369-371. However, this discussion of late-modernity must be excluded from this paper.

[38] Marc Augé's idea of "non-places" [*non lieu*], which refers to spaces that cannot be defined as relational or historical or concerned with identity, such as highways, hotel chains, airports, and large retail outlets, can be understood as a claim that the built environments of our time tend to form alienating atmospheres. Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe, Second English language edition (London: Verso, 2008).

[39] See, for example: James Petty, "The London Spikes Controversy: Homelessness, Urban Securitisation and the Question of 'Hostile Architecture.'" *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 5 (1) (2016): 67-81, https://doi.org/10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i1.286;

Karl Persson de Fine Licht, "Hostile Urban Architecture: A Critical Discussion of the Seemingly Offensive Art of Keeping People Away." *Etikk I Praksis – Nordic Journal of Applied Ethics* 11 (2) (2016): 27-44. https://doi.org/10.5324/eip.v11i2.2052.

[40] See Pia Krogius, "Oulun pääkirjaston rakennushistoriaselvitys' [Oulu City Library Building-historical Report], https://www.ouka.fi/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=590f8e06-a629-426b-8d73-825094034e99&groupId=78400, accessed October 12, 2022.

[41] Rosa, *Resonance,* 47-76.

[42] See Arto Laitinen, "Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur on Self-Interpretations and Narrative Identity," unpublished article (2002), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323522003_Charles_Taylor_and_Paul_Ricoeur_on_Self-Interpretations_and_Narrative_Identity, accessed October 12, 2022; Arto Laitinen, *Itseään tutkiva eläin* (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 2009).

[43] Rosa, *Resonance*, 134.

[44] *Ibid.*, 133-6, 170, 174.

[45] *Ibid.*, 296-303.

[46] For Rosa, in a resonating relationship with the world, the past and future have meaningful interactions in the present (*ibid.*, 299-302). This temporal aspect of atmospheres in architecture could, of course, be studied further.

[47] Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

[48] See Rosa, *Resonance*, 195-304.

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