
Daniel Purdy

Between Atmosphere and Character

Mixing Architectural Metaphors with the Eighteenth Century

Contemporary discussions about the “atmospheres” that buildings and landscapes produce seek to explain how the mixing of diverse aesthetic strategies can produce a humane, ecological, and cosmopolitan sense of place, grounded in the particular qualities of a given locale. These debates are by no means unique to our own era, for indeed many of the central terms that are now taken for granted were once radical and controversial in the eighteenth century. In the following essay, I wish to demonstrate that eighteenth century debates about the synthesis of aesthetic perceptions, particularly in relation to architecture and landscape gardening, reveal the long complex history behind the work of Gernot Böhme and Peter Zumthor in reasserting the importance of atmosphere in contemporary architecture and urban planning.¹

“Character” is the key term in the eighteenth century that comes closest to our contemporary use of architectural “atmosphere.” Both are understood as subjective responses to a building or landscape. Both discourses rely on the same German term, “Wirkung” (translated into English as “effect” or “impression”), in order to identify a building’s “character” or “atmosphere.”² By expounding the emotional effect of architecture and landscape, eighteenth-century Sentimental treatises tried to grasp the illusive yet compelling poetic character of buildings. A comprehensive survey of Sentimental architectural treatises lies beyond the scope of this article, instead I will touch briefly on the similarities between the discourse of atmospheres and the Christian Hirschfeld’s *Theory of Garden Art* published in five volumes (1779–1785)³ and the anonymous *Investigations into the Character of Buildings: On the Connection between Architecture and the Fine Arts and the Effects Which It should Bring Out through Them* (1785).⁴

The as yet still unknown author of the *Investigations* defines a building’s character in much the same terms as atmosphere: “The quality of a building with which it makes a noticeable impression on our heart, I call its character.”⁵ His definition was reiterated by Friedrich Meinert, a Prussian officer and professor, whose prose shows a striking similarity to the anonymous author:

1 Böhme 2013; Zumthor 2006.

2 Michael Hausknecht incorporates “character” into his definition of “atmosphere”: “Der Wahrnehmungscharakter einer Umgebung gewinnt Bedeutung als Gefühl.” Hausknecht 2014: 54.

3 Hirschfeld 1779–1785.

4 Anonymous 1986 [1785].

5 Ibid.: 11. “Die Eigenschaft eines Gebäudes, wodurch es eine merkliche Wirkung auf unser Herz thut, nenne ich seinen Charakter.” Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

A building must distinguish itself from another through something particular that belongs exclusively to itself and which catches the eye or makes an emotional impression. In other words, every building must make a noticeable impression on the heart of the observer.⁶

6 Meinert 1801. "Ein Gebäude muß sich von einem andern durch etwas Eigenthümliches, was ihm ausschließlicly zukommt und ins Auge fällt oder auf das Gefühl wirkt, unterscheiden, oder mit andern Worten: jedes Gebäude muß eine merkliche Wirkung auf das Herz des Zuschauers machen."

7 Heins 2001: 281.

8 Thomas Thränert provides a nuanced reading of how the pedestrian's excursions into a landscape garden shaped his perceptions: "Finden und Formen—Landschafts-Architekturen um 1800." Thränert 2015.

9 Anonymous 1986 [1785]: 13.

10 Anonymous 1986 [1785]: 14. "Guided by a reliable sense of taste, he will transform the idyll into a country house, the epic into a palace, and the hymn into a temple."

Hirschfeld likewise formulates "character" as a category whose quality "is natural, static, codifiable and locatable in organic objects, specifically, natural environments and their authentic human respondents."⁷ Hirschfeld analyzes the landscape garden's complex staging of scenes that allow the spectator to engage in a wide range of emotional encounters with buildings and botanical arrangements.⁸

The author of the Investigations insists that understanding how and why buildings leave impressions on their inhabitants should guide architectural design. The perceptual impact of a building is thus not secondary in the sense that exists as an after-thought or an unforeseen consequence of aging (patina).⁹ One of the primary points of the Investigations is that reading poetry aids the architect to understand how his design can elicit feelings. Buildings align with poetic genres, so that a well-read architect will know how to transform the text into a structure. "Guided by a reliable sense of taste, he will transform the idyll into a country house, the epic into a palace, and the hymn into a temple."¹⁰

The author makes clear that architecture helps maintain the poetic illusion that country life provides an idyllic escape from the pressures of urban competition. The parallel between the two arts operates in both directions, no one form can claim to more accurately represent the character of a place. Poetry constructs illusions much in manner of a building, for the artistic design of a single site is always challenged by the existing conditions of rural life. The poorest village might provide a faint hint of Arcadian simplicity, but under closer examination this impression does not hold up.

There are certain epochs that provide us with very pleasant memories. The Golden Age is one of these, about which the fantasy happily conjures up dreams. Architecture can foster this sweet dream through a simple style. For certain features of the Arcadian shepherds are still mixed in when we contemplate poor villages; on the other hand such pleasures could not stand up to a more exact examination.¹¹

The only thing that allows architects to design idyllic houses successfully and to convince clients that they are indeed quiet refugees from court and the city is the fact that everyone involved has read deeply within Greek and Roman poetic tradition. In order for the design of country houses to persuade, the observer must also have a thorough education in the tastes and judgments of idyllic poetry. The two artforms reinforce each other. "Given that we are already so well prepared, it is not difficult for architecture to transport us into this illusion."¹² The preparation meant here is a Classical education; both client and architect are well versed in the idyllic poetry that informs the design of country houses.

11 Ibid.: 20. "Es gibt verschiedene Epoken, die uns in der Erinnerung sehr angenehm sind. Von dieser Art ist das goldene Weltalter, welches sich die Phantasie so gern erträumt. Die Baukunst kann diesen süßen Traum durch den einfaltigen Style befördern. Denn gewiß mischen sich noch immer einige Züge von arkadischer Schäferey in das Vergnügen, welches wir bey dem Anblick der armseligsten Dörfer empfinden; widrigensfalls könnte dies Vergnügen bey genauerer Untersuchung nicht einen so großen Stoß leiden."

12 Ibid. "Da wir also schon so gut vorbereitet sind, so kann es der Baukunst nicht schwer fallen, uns in diese Illusion zu versetzen."

That these eighteenth-century questions of artistic illusion reemerge in our present discussion of atmosphere is hardly surprising, given that Böhme states explicitly that he seeks to turn aesthetic theory back to the sensual and material formulation of Alexander Baumgarten. By doing so, Böhme hopes to expand atmospheric aesthetics beyond the narrow confines of autonomous art as it has been elaborated from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) to Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). Böhme's desire to revive an older aesthetics is reinforced by Michael Hausknecht's claim that the metaphorical meaning of "atmosphere", in the sense of an object's influence on its surroundings, originated in the late eighteenth century.¹³ "Atmosphere" shares a kinship with "Stimmung", another philosophically laden German term, whose etymology stretches back to ancient Greek notions of cosmological harmony.¹⁴ The distinctions between aesthetic categories, as well as the correspondence between observer's subjective moods and a house's structural appearance, were further blurred when "milieu" and "ambiance" were introduced into architectural aesthetics by German and American Romanticism, most graphically in Romantic stories such as E. T. A. Hoffmann's *Das öde Haus* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*.¹⁵ Psychoanalysis has, of course, provided its own rich analysis, commencing with Sigmund Freud's essay, *Das Unheimliche*, that concentrates far more on the condition of the observing subject than on the architectural space as the source for an uncanny atmosphere.¹⁶ Pinning down the origins of atmosphere has proven difficult in recent interpretations of these Romantic texts. The Germanist, Carsten Lange, reiterates the psychoanalytic tendency to interpret literary spaces as allegories of Romantic subjectivity, whereas the architectural theorist, Anthony Vidler, shifts the balance somewhat when he deploys the uncanny to explain the estrangement generated by Modernist architecture. Given how dependent the detection of an atmosphere is on subjective states of mind, we must again wonder how stable the term is a means of describing architecture, a discipline grounded in firmness.

The Sentimental and later Romantic mixtures of aesthetic illusion departed radically from the Enlightenment's classifications of artistic effect (*Wirkung*). For the Enlightenment, before there could be any mixing of art-forms, it was necessary to differentiate them through a critique that isolated their most important qualities. In order to discuss the process of blending, it was presumed that the units about to be mixed were clearly distinct from one another, otherwise there remained the possibility, as was suspected the case of architecture and landscape architecture, that the entities were already interdependent and that a mixture of the two really amounted to bringing together two fields that were in fact already combined. Given that it could no longer be presumed that the arts were integrated into a cosmological unity, Enlightenment theorists sought to differentiate each from the other in order to define them. The rational critique of the arts required categories, precisely to avoid the fuzzy arguments and vague enthusiasms that were later associated with Sentimental and Romantic enthusiasm. The mixing of senses that

13 Hausknecht 2014: 52.

14 Spitzer 1944/1945.

15 Leo Spitzer develops his genealogical analysis of these terms while providing a close reading of Poe's famous story in Spitzer 1942.

16 Freud 1989 [1919], Ibid. 1955 [1919]: 218–256. Carsten Lange 2007 confirms this a psychoanalytic tendency to interpret literary spaces as allegories of Romantic subjectivity in *Architekturen der Psyche: Raumdarstellungen in der Literatur der Romantik*. Anthony Vidler shifts the balance somewhat when he deploys the Romantic, psychoanalytic uncanny to explain the estrangement generated by Modernist architecture, Vidler 1992: 169–218.

Böhme and Hausknecht describe as fundamental to the perception of atmospheres finds little room in the Enlightenment aesthetics as represented by Gottfried Lessing, who tended to correlate artistic forms (sculpture, poetry, theater) with primary sensual perceptions, yet this compartmentalization was quickly questioned by Gottfried Herder and the *Sturm-und-Drang* poets. Likewise, Kant's three Critiques strive to establish clear boundaries between different types of judgment. In the *Critique of Judgment*, architecture stands as a primary example of how different types of judgments about the same object should be kept distinct. Thus Kant argues that making an informational statement about a building is not at all the same as describing the aesthetic impression it makes upon an observer. To know a building in terms of science and engineering is quite different from the emotional pleasure that it impresses upon us, in other words to perceive its atmosphere or character.

17 Kant 2007 [1790]: 35f. "Ein regelmäßiges, zweckmäßiges Gebäude mit einem Erkenntnisvermögen [...] zu befassen, ist ganz etwas anders, als sich dieser Vorstellung mit der Empfindung des Wohlgefallens bewußt zu sein." Kant 1974 [1790].

To apprehend a regular and appropriate building with one's cognitive faculties [...] is quite a different thing from being conscious of this representation with an accompanying sensation of delight.¹⁷

While he certainly accepted the Vitruvian principle that a building ideally possessed *firmitas*, *utilitas*, and *venustas*—indeed, he may well have organized his own three Critiques in a similar sequence—Kant did insist that the intellectual evaluation of architecture according to knowledge, morality, and aesthetics not overlap. The object under consideration could well be the one building, but the judgments made about it were distinctly separate. Politics for Kant did not mix with aesthetics. Kant illustrates this separation with a Socratic question and answer—a style of argumentation he generally avoids. Yet by switching into a rhetorical mode, Kant calls attention to just how typical this exchange was within Enlightenment discussions.

Kant quite deliberately introduces the example of a building in *Critique of Judgment* to argue that aesthetic, moral, and scientific judgments need to be differentiated clearly from one another, precisely because architecture was such a contentious field in the Enlightenment with theorists sharply divided between the claims that as a discipline it had to be classified as either a mathematical science or an art. For Kant architecture could be organized under any number of differentiated forms of judgment. The key was to recognize that one did not overlap with the other. More than anything, for Kant, it was vital that judgments about buildings were not mixed with each other. Thus, he lists off several typical Enlightenment political critiques of aristocratic structures, from the "noble savage" to Rousseau to Laugier and Robinson Crusoe, but then adds that these moral condemnations of palaces have no relevance in judging their beauty.

If anyone asks me whether I consider that the palace I see before me is beautiful, I may, perhaps reply that I do not care for things of that sort that are merely made to be gaped at. Or I may reply in the same strain as

that Iroquois sachem who said that nothing in Paris pleased him better than the eating-houses. I may even go a step further and inveigh with the vigour of a Rousseau against the vanity of the great who spend the sweat of the people on such superfluous things. Or, in fine, I may quite easily persuade myself that if I found myself on an uninhabited island, without hope of ever again encountering human beings, and could conjure such a splendid edifice into existence by a mere wish, I should still not trouble to do so, so long as I had a hut there that was comfortable enough for me. All this may be admitted and approved; only it is not the point now at issue.¹⁸

At the source of a Kantian aesthetic judgment is the sensation of pleasure the subject feels in contemplating a building. As much as the contemporary discussion of atmospheres in building and landscape seeks to distinguish itself from Kant's aesthetics of autonomy, both approaches share a common lineage, yet Kant sought to correct what he would have considered errors in sentimental aesthetics by asking how it was possible for an observer to make more than merely subjective aesthetic judgments, in other words how one could speak about beauty in a universally valid manner.

The Enlightenment insistence on avoiding the mixing of different styles, genres, and forms of knowledge permeated down to the most detailed level of discursive analysis. Gottfried Lessing presented the most thorough-going argument against mixing artistic genres in his essay, "Laokoon, or the boundaries between painting and poetry" (*Laokoon oder die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*). As the title indicates, Lessing sought to argue against the chiasmic blurring of differences between the arts, specifically the ancient claim that painting was silent poetry and poetry was speaking painting.¹⁹ Taking the Classical Greek arts as his model, Lessing argued that that corporal beauty is best represented through painting because this art form is able to show bodies existing simultaneously in space, whereas poetry as a temporal form that can depict things only as a sequence—words following one after the other they can never be perceived all at once because the act of reading moves forward in time across the page, while a painting can be viewed in a singular, though often extended, perception. Poetry is thus best suited for recounting actions rather than offering exact descriptions. To underscore how unimportant description was to the action of epic poetry, Lessing points out that Homer merely summarizes the beauty of his characters with a single phrase, rather than lingering over their appearance with long passages. We do not find any exact descriptions of Helen's beauty in the Iliad, rather just brief accounts of the "effect" her appearance has on those around her. Lessing does not confine himself to questions of beauty, but as the title indicates opens his argument with an analysis of the differences between poetic and sculptural representations of the famous scene near the end of the Trojan War when the priest Laokoon, who has warned against allowing the Greek horse into the city walls, is suddenly attacked by giant snakes as punishment for his clear-sightedness.

¹⁸ Kant 2007 [1790]: 36. "Wenn mich jemand fragt, ob ich den Palast, den ich vor mir sehe, schön finde, so mag ich zwar sagen: ich liebe dergleichen Dinge nicht, die bloß für das Angaffen gemacht sind, oder, wie jener Irokesische Sachem, ihm gefalle in Paris nichts besser als die Garküchen; ich kann noch überdem auf die Eitelkeit der Großen auf gut Rousseauisch schmälern, welche den Schweiß des Volks auf so entbehrliche Dinge verwenden; ich kann mich endlich gar leicht überzeugen, daß, wenn ich mich auf einem unbewohnten Eilande ohne Hoffnung jemals wieder zu Menschen zu kommen befände, und ich durch meinen bloßen Wunsch ein solches Prachtgebäude hinzaubern könnte, ich mir auch nicht einmal diese Mühe darum geben würde, wenn ich schon eine Hütte hätte, die mir bequem genug wäre. Man kann mir alles dieses einräumen und gutheißen; nur davon ist jetzt nicht die Rede." Kant 1974 [1790].

¹⁹ Lessing 1957 [1766]: 274. "daß die Malerei eine stumme Poesie, und die Poesie eine redende Malerei [sei]."

Hera sides with the Greeks against the Trojans and sends the snakes to silence Laokoon. Lessing contrasts the famous sculpture of the priest and his sons with the corresponding passage in Virgil's Aeneid, in order to consider how the two art forms represent Laokoon's terrible suffering. Throughout the essay, Lessing strives to show the limits of poetry, sculpture, and painting to represent an absent reality, whereby he also shows the limits of each. His criticism strikes against efforts to cross these boundaries. The urge to avoid aesthetic blending, or "Vermischung," lies at the core of Lessing's argument.

The process of mixing together different artistic effects to produce atmospheres often produces the kind of paradoxical language the Enlightenment sought to avoid. Gernot Böhme and Mark Wigley open their discussion of atmosphere by noting that the term is frequently used, with an imprecise meaning, at exhibitions, in catalogues and laudations. The fact that the term appears in architectural discourse justifies further reflection on its usage, particularly on its slippery meanings. Atmosphere may not be a thing easily defined but many people write about it nevertheless.

The inter-penetration of different aesthetic terms is not just a poetic mannerism, but rather it is legitimated, according to Gernot Böhme, in the synesthetic combination of human senses.²⁰ Michael Hausknecht suggests that the more complex the mixture of sensual perceptions, the more intense the atmosphere of a place will appear to observers, thereby giving considerable importance to the mixing together of sensual perceptions of space in the recognition of atmosphere.²¹ Theorists and poets write about the atmosphere of a place with a jumble of artistic terms precisely because all our senses are engaged in its perception. This sweeping appeal to all five senses shows that atmospheres can be produced and perceived in all sorts of different built environments and that their presence is not confined to autonomous works of art. Storefronts, restaurants, hotels, bars, stage sets, cosmetics, advertisements all strive to create an atmosphere that serves some end other than art alone. Gernot Böhme offers a broad understanding of the types of creativity that produce atmospheres, while also acknowledging that they rarely remain pure forms of perception but instead rely upon the mixing of diverse sensual experiences.²²

Böhme distinguishes between the vague usage of "atmosphere" in aesthetics and politics from what he claims is the more specific usage in ordinary speech related to people, spaces, and nature. I would argue this ordinary usage seems like common sense because it is derived from the canon of Sentimental and Romantic German aesthetics and poetry. Over two hundred years have allowed these perceptual techniques and standards of taste to become naturalized. As much as Modernism sought to overcome these modes of looking at nature and space, they persist as ordinary speech. Both the contemporary discussion of atmosphere and the eighteenth-century intuitions about the character of a place rely upon spontaneous feelings that ground their legitimacy in the immediacy of their reaction. In both discourses, then and now, if someone has an emotional response to a space the moment they

20 Böhme 2013: 34.

21 Hausknecht 2014: 55. "Je intensiver die dominanten Erscheinungscharaktere, je mehr Sinnesmodalitäten (Sehen, Hören, Riechen) an der Konstitution der Atmosphäre beteiligt sind und je größer die Übereinstimmung der Erscheinungscharaktere in diesen verschiedenen Modalitäten, desto dichter ist die entstehende Atmosphäre."

22 Böhme 2013: 41.

see it, these feelings are considered more ‘real’ than an analytical or reflective response. Yet I would agree with Thomas Pfau when he argues that what was originally considered “an originary and unimpeachable authentic effect—that core sensibility or feeling posited as the very center of eighteenth-century aesthetic experience and picturesque contemplation—has in fact been produced by historically specific and often curiously elaborate modes of formal aesthetic practices.”²³ The current invocation of “atmosphere” constitutes a return to these older notions of cultural value, with the key difference that in the eighteenth century Sentimental perceptions were the prerogative of a progressive educated elite, whereas now they are considered the ordinary opinion of a mass audience. There is of course an optimistic conclusion to be drawn from these parallels: namely, that twenty-first century Europeans have acquired the good taste that had previously been a privilege reserved only for the highly educated and the aristocracy.

Böhme’s aesthetics of atmosphere rejects Modernist experimentation, through its return to these earlier accounts of nature and perception, which he then couples with an added awareness of environmental threats. “The avant-gardistic and Futuristic contempt for nature lies far behind us. Already now for some time, nature has returned as the subject of art.”²⁴ Böhme’s atmospheres do not seek deliberately to produce alienation and discomfort in order to dismantle bourgeois conventions through critical functionality, nor do they attempt to restore a pre-industrial idyll, rather in the voice of eco-criticism, Böhme insists on a new critical method for constructing human relations with nature. In a double move, Böhme recalls a forgotten eighteenth-century aesthetics while situating it within the present environmental crisis. Even if we acknowledge the need for a critical environmental attitude, aesthetic education, in the Classical German sense of *Bildung*, permeates the discourse on atmospheres precisely because the recognition and appreciation of a space’s ambience requires that tradition’s sophisticated psychological techniques. When reading an account of a building’s emotional impact, we must ask: Who is the subject that perceives this atmosphere? We can get a sense of how important cultural background is to this recognition by following along with the meditations of the Swiss architect, Peter Zumthor, who opens his essay on the subject by stating that while atmosphere provides a means of discussing architecture quality, its perception is shaped by the particularities of the individual subject:

My title “Atmospheres” is derived from the following: I am interested—because of course I have to be interested—already for a long time: What is architectural quality really? For me it is relatively easy to say: architectural quality does not mean—for me—that it is found in architectural guidebooks, nor that it is mentioned or published in architectural histories, and so forth. Architectural quality for me can only come about because I am moved by a building. What the devil then moves me in a building? And how can I design this?²⁵

23 Pfau 1997: 20.

24 Böhme 2013: 248. “Die avantgardistische und futuristische Verachtung der Natur liegt weit hinter uns. Natur als Sujet ist schon längst in die Kunst zurückgekehrt.”

25 Zumthor 2006: 10. “Der Titel Atmosphären leitet sich daher: Mich interessiert—denn natürlicherweise muß das mich interessieren—schon lange: Was ist das eigentlich: Architektonische Qualität? Es ist für mich relativ einfach zu sagen: Architektonische Qualität ist nicht—für mich—in Architekturführern vorzukommen oder in der Architekturgeschichte vorzukommen oder publiziert zu werden usw. Architektonische Qualität, das kann sich bei mir nur darum handeln, daß ich von einem Bauwerk berührt bin. Was zum Teufel berührt mich denn an diesen Bauwerken? Und wie kann ich das entwerfen?”

Zumthor suggests a triangular relationship connecting individual emotional responses to the atmospheres generated by physical spaces. Ultimately, personal feelings become a critical means by which architecture's atmospheric effects can be judged. Just how important social historical factors are in determining these reactions remains unresolved. While Gernot Böhme maintains that all people are likely to have a visceral appreciation for spatial atmospheres, Peter Zumthor's account presents a sovereign subject, thoroughly educated in cultural history and confident in its continued reliance on the first person pronoun.

26 Ibid. "Ich komme in ein Gebäude, sehe einen Raum und bekomme die Atmosphäre mit, und in Sekundenbruchteilen habe ich ein Gefühl für das, was ist. Atmosphäre spricht die emotionale Wahrnehmung an, das ist die Wahrnehmung die unglaublich rasch funktioniert, die wir Menschen offenbar haben, um zu überleben."

I come into a building, see a room and notice the atmosphere and in a matter of seconds I have a feeling for what it is. Atmospheres appeal to emotional perception, that is a perception that functions unbelievably quickly, which we people have apparently to survive.²⁶

In order to answer the question of what constitutes architectural quality, Zumthor turns inward, eschewing any reliance on guidebooks and architectural histories—a safe gesture for an architect whose work appears in both. Having cast aside these books because he already knows what they contain, Zumthor relies on his own intuition. Although he considers atmospheric perception to be a basic human trait, his double-sided allusion to architectural books, which he obviously has read but which he then rejects in deciding artistic quality, suggests that the recognition of an atmosphere is a learned ability much like the old British definition of a gentleman as "someone who has forgotten his Latin." But specific to the German context, Zumthor's account shares an ambivalent mixture of natural instinct and education typical of Sentimental aesthetics. His rejection of books as he writes about atmospheres has all the qualities of Goethe's *Werther* or *Faust*, who leave their studies so as to formulate an intuitive feeling for nature. Indeed, Zumthor cites Goethe's life-long faith in his own visual intuition in explaining what types of buildings move him. "This we also have from our Mr. Goethe, who saw this all much, much earlier. And he looks closely, that is the fantastic thing about him, he looks closely at things."²⁷ As anyone who has read Goethe understands, his intuitions were never truly simple and unschooled.

27 Ibid.: 57. "Haben wir auch von unserem Herrn Goethe, der hat das alles schon viel, viel früher gesehen. Und der schaut ja hin, das ist das Fantastische bei ihm, der schaut hin."

Gernot Böhme likewise also relies on the language of intuition to describe how individuals perceive atmosphere. He claims, this time in the more modest third person, that "Upon entering a space one feels oneself immediately surrounded by a comfortable atmosphere, however one can also stumble into a tense atmosphere."²⁸ One commonality here is the immediate recognition of an atmosphere as a feeling—which corresponds to the sentimental discourse on architecture. Hirschfeld provides a similar description of the immediate effect a beautiful garden has on the pedestrian's imagination: "The impression of lively pleasure that awakens when [beauty] first pours into the imagination with the glance of an eye."²⁹ The phrase "with the glance of an eye" refers both to the instant in time and the act of viewing, a brief look suffices

28 Böhme 2013: 21. "Beim Betreten eines Raumes kann man sich gleich von einer gemütlichen Atmosphäre umfassen fühlen, aber man kann auch in eine gespannte Atmosphäre hineingeraten."

29 Hirschfeld 1779: 174. "Die Wirkung daß sie mit dem Augenblick, worin sie sich in die Einbildungskraft ergießt, lebhaftes Vergnügen erweckt."

to provide pleasure. Hirschfeld places much the same emphasis on the immediacy of feeling when he provides a more elaborate account of first walking into the Hannoverian Elector's gardens:

The idea of serenity is immediate aroused upon entering by a group of various flowers that decorate the middle of a lawn. At the same time, the pathways lure the eye between diverse tree clusters, awakening thereby a lively expectation of pleasure, which the friend of nature's beauty and pure garden taste may enjoy here.³⁰

The visitor experiences joy right upon passing into the garden. The eyes are drawn first to the flowers, and after this first impression, they are directed onwards with the expectation of more happy sensations. Hirschfeld's writing suggests movement as it calls attention to itself. However the garden and the text's promise of ever increasing pleasure requires an audience training in beauty and taste. The description moves quickly past the opening blast of delight into more complex and subtle joys. Jens Bisky points out that this passage combines two kinds of pleasure, neither theoretically defined, both assumed to be obvious to the educated viewer.³¹ First there is the direct delight of looking at simple beauty and then the more complicated alternation (Abwechselung) of vistas, far and near, that the wanderer sees as he moves along the paths. These alternations are supposed to prevent the monotonous display of endless rows of flowers. Mixing landscapes enhances the appeal of a garden.

To the extent that a landscape is a mixture of various different regions, it benefits from this multiplicity. Accordingly, a garden that is composed from various regions each with a distinct character, makes a stronger impression.³²

However Hirschfeld insists the variation not become an end in itself. Thus he states more than once that a consistent style must be maintained throughout the garden, without mixing in too many foreign distractions:

Finally for the sake of the overall effect, it is necessary to restrain oneself from falling into a strange mixture of different foreign architectural works, so that one should not allow an Egyptian obelisk, a Greek temple, a Roman monument, a gothic tower, a Chinese pavilion to all appear in the same prospect. An extravagance that dominates certain parks in England and which is so obvious that one wonders why anyone would admire them.³³

Decades later in his Berlin lectures of Aesthetics, Hegel reiterated Hirschfeld's admonition against the eclectic mixing of styles on the grounds that it provided only a superficial and fashionable impression as opposed to the infinite self-referentiality of a symbol.

30 Hirschfeld 1785: 197. "Der Begriff der Heiterkeit wird sogleich beym Eintritt durch eine Gruppe von mancherley Blumen erregt, welche die Mitte eines Rasens ziert. Die Gänge fangen zugleich an, das Auge zwischen den mannichfaltigen Baumgruppen hinzulocken, und eine lebhaftere Erwartung des Vergnügens zu erwecken, das der Freund der schönen Natur und des reinen Gartengeschmacks hier genießen soll."

31 Bisky 2000: 83.

32 Hirschfeld 1779: 228. "In so ferne die Landschaft eine Mischung verschiedener Gegenden ist, gewinnt sie an Mannigfaltigkeit. Demnach wird ein Garten, der aus mehreren Gegenden von einem bestimmten Charakter zusammengesetzt ist, auch mehr Wirkungen in sich vereinigen."

33 Hirschfeld 1780: 47. "Endlich ist es für die Wirkung des Ganzen nöthig, sich zu hüten, daß man nicht auf eine seltsame Vermischung verschiedener ausländischen Werke der Baukunst verfälle, nicht in einem Prospect einen ägyptischen Obelisk, einen griechischen Tempel, ein römisches Monument, einen gothischen Thurm, einen chinesischen Pavillon erscheinen lasse; eine Ausschweifung, die in einigen Parks in England herrscht, und die so auffallend ist, daß man sich verwundern muß, wie sie bisher Nachsicht finden konnte."

34 Hegel 1975 [1843]: 699f. and *ibid.* 1843: 352. “Ein großer Park dagegen, besonders wenn er mit chinesischen Tempelchen, türkischen Moscheen, Schweizerhäusern, Brücken, Einsiedeleien und wer weiß mit was für anderen Fremdartigkeiten ausgestattet ist, macht für sich selber schon einen Anspruch auf Betrachtung; er soll für sich selber etwas sein und bedeuten. Doch dieser Reiz, der sogleich befriedigt ist, verschwindet bald, und man kann dergleichen nicht zweimal ansehen; denn diese Zutat bietet dem Anblick nichts Unendliches, keine in sich seiende Seele dar und ist außerdem für die Unterhaltung, das Gespräch beim Umhergehen nur langweilig und lästig.”

35 Hirschfeld 1779: 186. “Nicht so allgemein, als die bloße Wahrnehmung dieser Mannigfaltigkeit ist bey den Menschen die Empfindung der Eindrücke, welche die verschiedenen Lagen in der Landschaft auf die Seele machen.”

36 *Ibid.* “Diese Empfindung kann bey Rohigkeit oder Unachtsamkeit nicht empordringen. Sie setzt, wenn sie sich äußern soll, einen Grad von Schärfe und Aufmerksamkeit des äußern Sinnes, eine gewisse Leichtigkeit, die Bilder aufzufangen und sie zur Berührung oder Erschütterung der Phantasie, zur Erzeugung der inner Bewegung festzuhalten, eine gewisse Behaglichkeit der Seele an sanftern Gefühlen der Natur voraus.”

37 Anonymous 1986 [1788]: 7. “ihre Verschwisterung mit den schönen Künsten behaupten.”

Whereas a huge park, especially if rigged out with Chinese pagodas, Turkish mosques, Swiss chalets, bridges, hermitages, and goodness knows what other curiosities, claims our attention on its own account; it pretends to be and to mean something in itself. But our allurements vanishes as soon as it is satisfied, and we can hardly look at this sort of thing twice because these trimmings offer to the eye nothing infinite, no indwelling soul, and besides they are only wearisome and burdensome when we want conversation and a stroll in conversation with a friend.³⁴

Even when gardens did not pile on allegorical allusions, Hirschfeld maintained that the intellectual apprehension of spatial character was not a general human trait; it required refinement to gather up within oneself the emotional responses a landscape produced. These intuitions, Hirschfeld stressed, were quite distinct from simple empirical perceptions. In other words, the recognition of spatial relations was by no means the same as grasping the atmosphere of a place. He opens the section on “The Various Characters of Landscape and their Impressions” with the following general psychological statements:

The feeling for the impressions that the various sites in the landscape make upon the soul is not so common among people as the mere perception of this multiplicity.³⁵

Hirschfeld makes clear that an aesthetic education is required for one to grasp the poetry of a place. Unrefined or distracted visitors (just the kind of audience Modernists like Bertolt Brecht or Walter Benjamin preferred) were less likely to experience the subtle influences a garden has on the psyche.

This sensation cannot arise among crude or distracted people. If this sensation is going to express itself, it requires a degree of acuteness and attentiveness of external senses, a certain ease to catch up images and hold onto them so that they may move or unsettle the fantasy, thereby producing an inner movement, and a certain soulful contentedness in the soft feelings of nature.³⁶

A sophisticated appreciation of aesthetic nuances in architecture and gardening requires the designer to be proficient in many arts. Just as architecture was segregating into specialized fields—naval architecture, fortifications, hydraulic, etc—Sentimental theorists called on the architect to mix together precisely those arts that the Enlightenment had sought to distinguish from one another. Not only was the anonymous author of *Investigations* eager to erase the boundaries that isolated architecture from its sister arts,³⁷ he also sought to extend aesthetics beyond the ornamentation and ostentation of elite houses, so as to include ordinary farms with new notions of the picturesque and the idyllic.

And where is the boundary between handicraft and art? Is architecture only concerned with art in palaces, whereas only handicraft is found in bourgeois houses, in the farmer's cottage? I certainly do not want to make such a claim!³⁸

The mixture of architectural design and subjective impression that produce atmospheres are by no means symmetrical, nor does the atmosphere correspond directly to the built space. The many texts describing built atmospheres provide different balances of material and personal influences. For example, Romantic writing about buildings and landscape shares the subjective language of contemporary accounts of atmosphere, however current accounts insist more strongly that atmospheres are generated by the arrangement of material objects rather than the emotional states of their audience. Contemporary theorists will insist that they are much more concerned with reading emotional response out from buildings and landscapes rather than projecting feelings *onto* them. Yet E.T.A. Hoffmann's characters in *Der Sandmann* and *Das öde Haus* struggle with the question of just how much they are extending their own inner turmoil onto their surrounding spaces.

Gaston Bachelard, another phenomenologist who sought to read architecture in poetic terms, noted that the phenomenological interrelationship between different orders of space—in his case, the interior and exterior of a private house—is by no means symmetrical balanced. Even though the volume of interior spaces is much smaller than the vastness outside the house, the individual's perception of space as it unfolds in the state of domestic seclusion lends a far greater scale to the interior of a house than to what lies beyond. The consciousness of exterior realms does not correspond to its geographical measurement. "Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense."³⁹ Once subjective responses are included in any analysis of space the mixture of different elements is likely to vary dramatically and be far from even-handed. If Romanticism and psychoanalysis foreground these psychological "distortions" in spatial understanding, while contemporary discussions stress how the organization of material spaces that constitute atmosphere precede the impression on viewers.

In all the texts we have discussed, the central aesthetic question entails identifying the emotional impression that a work of art makes upon its audience. Can artistic effects be separated out from one another or do they work most wonderful in combination. When and how does the mixing of aesthetic impressions emerge as more than just confusion to become the playful circulation of imagination? As we have argued during the course of this essay, one important feature that Sentimental architectural theories share with Böhme's argument is their insistence that the effect ("Wirkung") art has on the viewer as the standard for judging its quality or character, for in the spectator's imagination, in the playful contemplation of aesthetic effects, the representations

38 Ibid.: 8. "Und wo ist den nun die Grenzlinie zwischen Handwerk und Kunst? Sollte die Architectur nur Kunst im Pallast, im Bürgerhaus aber, oder in der Bauerhütte nur Handwerk seyn? Das möchte ich nicht behaupten!"

39 Bachelard 1994: 184.

specific to every art are combined, mixed, and blended to produce the subject's own private aesthetic experience. This interpenetration (*Vermischung*) then becomes one of the defining techniques for the modern emotionally sensitive subject to perceive space in more than functional terms.

Author

Daniel Purdy is Professor for German at the Pennsylvania State University. He earned his doctorate in German Studies at Cornell University in 1992. His publications include *On the Ruins of Babel: Architectural Metaphor in German Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011); *The Rise of Fashion* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004); *The Tyranny of Elegance: Consumer Cosmopolitanism in the Era of Goethe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) and most recently *China in the German Enlightenment*, co-edited with Bettina Brandt (University of Toronto Press, 2016).

Literature

Anonymous (1986): "Untersuchungen über den Charakter der Gebäude: Über die Verbindung der Baukunst mit den schönen Künsten und über die Wirkungen, welche durch dieselben hervorgebracht werden sollen [1785]," edited by Hanno-Walter Kruft. Nördlingen: Alfons Uhl.

Bachelard, Gaston (1960): "Poetik des Raumes." München: Hansa.

Bachelard, Gaston (1994): "The Poetics of Space." Boston: Beacon.

Bisky, Jens (2000): "Poesie der Baukunst: Architekturästhetik von Winckelmann bis Boisserée." Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger.

Böhme, Gernot (2013): "Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik." Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Freud, Sigmund (1955): "The Uncanny, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works." Vol. 17. London: Hogarth Press: 218–256.

Freud, Sigmund (1989): "Das Unheimliche Psychologische Schriften [1919]," edited by Alexander Mitscherlich; James Strachy; Angela Richards. Vol. 4. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.

Hausknecht, Michael (2014): "Begriff und Wahrnehmung von Atmosphären." In: Jürgen Weidinger (ed.): "Atmosphären Entwerfen." Berlin: TU Berlin: 7–61.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1843): "Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik." Vol. 2. Berlin: Dunker und Humboldt.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich (1975): "Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art." Vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon.

Heins, John P. (2001): "Characters of Environments, People, and Nations in C. C. L. Hirschfeld's Theorie der Gartenkunst (1779–1785)." *Lessing Yearbook* 33. Göttingen and Detroit: Wallstein and Wayne State University: 277–295.

Hirschfeld, Christian Cay Lorenz (1779): "Theorie der Gartenkunst." Vol. 1. Leipzig: Weidmann.

- Hirschfeld, Christian Cay Lorenz (1785):* "Theorie der Gartenkunst." Vol. 2. Leipzig: Weidmann.
- Kant, Immanuel (1974):* "Kritik der Urteilskraft [1790]," edited by Wilhelm Weischedel. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Kant, Immanuel (2007):* "Critique of Judgement [1790]." Oxford: Oxford University.
- Lange, Carsten (2007):* "Architekturen der Psyche: Raumdarstellungen in der Literatur der Romantik." Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.
- Lessing, Gottfried (1957):* "Kritische Schriften [1766]," edited by Paul Stapf. Berlin: Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft.
- Meinert, Friedrich (1801):* "Zeichenbuch für Baukünstler und Bauhandwerker vierter Heft." Leipzig: Friedrich August Leo.
- Pfau, Thomas (1997):* "Wordsworth's Profession: Form, Class, and the Logic of Early Romantic Cultural Production." Stanford: Stanford University.
- Spitzer, Leo (1942):* "Milieu and Ambiance: An Essay in Historical Semantics (Two Parts)." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 3, no. 1: 1–42 and 169–218.
- Spitzer, Leo (1944/1945):* "Classical and Christian Ideas of World Harmony: Prolegomena to an Interpretation of the Word 'Stimmung' (Two Parts)." *Traditio*, vol. 2, n. no.: 409–464 and vol. 3, n. no.: 307–364.
- Thräner, Thomas (2015):* "Finden und Formen—Landschafts-Architekturen um 1800." In: Sebastian Feldhusen, Ute Poerschke (eds.): "Between Architecture and Landscape Architecture." *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, International Journal of Architecture Theory*, vol. 20, no. 34, http://cloud-cuckoo.net/fileadmin/hefte_de/heft_34/artikel_thraener.pdf (15 September 2016): 217–230.
- Vidler, Anthony (1992):* "The Architectural Uncanny." Cambridge: MIT.
- Wigley, Mark (1998):* "The Architecture of Atmosphere/Die Architektur der Atmosphäre." *Daidalos*, vol. 17, no. 68: 18–27.
- Zumthor, Peter (2006):* "Atmosphären." Basel: Birkhäuser.

Recommended Citation

Purdy, Daniel (2016): "Between Atmosphere and Character. Mixing Architectural Metaphors with the Eighteenth Century." In: Feldhusen, Sebastian; Ute Poerschke; Jürgen Weidinger (eds.): "Mixings in Architecture and Landscape Architecture." *Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, International Journal of Architectural Theory*, vol. 21, no. 35, www.cloud-cuckoo.net/fileadmin/issues_en/issue_35/article_purdy.pdf (enquiry date): 131–145.