FLUID SPACES, ENCHANTED FORESTS YASMINE ABBAS

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YASMINE ABBAS is an assistant teaching professor at the Stuckeman School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the Pennsylvania State University. A French architect and strategic designer, her research explores mobility, digital culture, and augmented place-making, with current focus on fabricating atmospheres, generative mapping, cartography, and the computational design of ambiance. She received an SMArchS from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2001) and a Doctor of Design from Harvard University (2006) for her work investigating neo-nomads, researching strategies for the design of living environments across contemporary conditions of expanded physical, digital and mental mobilities. She is the author of *Le néo-nomadisme: Mobilités. Partage. Transformations identitaires et urbaines* (2011) and co-editor of *Digital Technologies of the Self* (Abbas, Y. & Dervin, F., 2009). She is co-founder of the Agboglobloshie Makerspace Platform, an open architecture project that has been exhibited at the 2017 Seoul Biennale for Architecture and Urbanism, 2018 Dak'Art Biennale and "Digital Imaginaries" exhibition at ZKM | Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany.

Observe a river. Water meanders downstream, moulds the form of stones and gravels ... Much like what happens to us in the spaces we inhabit, molecules in a liquid take the shape of their vessel. For a short moment, together they become one—i.e. *font corps*, to become one body. But the stream is capricious, depends on the inflow of (melt/storm) water as well as on intermittent obstacles and geographical accidents. As the fluid progresses, stones clatter, banks erode, sediments are carried away, the river bed morphs, water follows. Soon enough, an interstice in the embankment, caused by a root stretching to the water, gives way to a side stream that grows over time ... The shape of a fluid (and its properties) is uncertain. It adjusts across space and time to the milieu with which it comes into contact.

Liquids, or materials of flow, are signs of contemporary societies—they indicate our ‘liquid modernity’ and our ‘liquid life’ and the ‘space of flows’ where information technologies have contributed to fluidize relations, productions and economies.² Within volatile life circumstances, the figure of the global and ‘cultural hybrid’ emerges and is, according to Bauman, ideologically ‘extraterritorialized.’ While increasing numbers of displaced populations face a great number of threats and long for safe return to their homeland, “‘Cultural hybrids’ want to feel everywhere *chez soi*—in order to be vaccinated against the vicious bacteria of domesticity.”³ Our ‘liquid life’, as described by Bauman, implies a spatial crisis where inhabiting—taking the time to root—becomes irrelevant or ... vaporizes. Seeking to circumvent the consequences of uncertainty, neo-nomads—people who are simultaneously, and to varying degrees, physically, digitally and mentally mobile—take steps to create a ‘sense of place’ and anchor in fluid contexts.⁴ The mobile space of ‘Home’, much like water, changes states, from liquid to solid and gas.

Many architects have acclimatized to our ‘liquid modernity’ by designing for the various shades of mobility: temporary—often disposable—flexible, modular, portable, packable, and light, kinetic, adaptive and interactive, exploring the ‘oblique function’ (Architecture Principe, Claude Parent and Paul Virilio) to induce disequilibrium, engaging bodies with surfaces and smooth spaces, parametrically generated, inviting even more roaming. Technologies, pervasive and infra-visible, are imbuing environments with magical attributes, fluidizing and charging them with emotional stimulants. Fluid spaces or enchanted forests are sentient, have the property to perceive and communicate—and surveil. They are also mental transportation vehicles. Within this realm, architecture behaves as an

1 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge Malden, MA: Polity Press Blackwell, 2000).

2 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of The Network Society*, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Second (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000).

3 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 29.

4 Yasmine Abbas, *Le Néo-Nomadisme: Mobilités, Partage, Transformations Identitaires et Urbaines*, Présence. Essai (Limoges: Fyp, 2011).

‘epidermis’, writes Toyo Ito, becoming the interface between augmented environments, ‘media forests’ and our connected bodies.⁵ Yet, within Ito’s ‘media forest’, ‘Tarzans’, humans and non-humans, creatures of all sorts, glide ... pass by each other and sometimes, temporarily, coalesce, creating a memorable situation located both in space and time.⁶ Designing spaces that accommodate these magical moments, when place precipitates, when it permeates with significance and enables ‘wayfounding’, i.e. orienting, connecting and anchoring ourselves within, finding our place in the world becomes an ever greater challenge.⁷ While ‘wayfinding’ relates to the mechanics of locating oneself in an (urban) milieu, ‘wayfounding’ subsumes into serendipity, and the electrochemistry of chance encounters. It calls for atmospheric spaces—forests of enchantment.

The 1950s–60s Lettrists and Situationists imagined the aesthetic practice of the *dérive* (drift) to spring “*déquotidianisation*,”⁸ that is, inhibit routines and the boredom they cause. Responding to the dull and frozen expression of our becoming liquid modernity, the “functionalization, moralization, militarization and commodification of urban spaces”⁹ and going with the flow—not the one imposed by the power in place—the Situationists then designed ‘influential cartographies,’¹⁰ mapped, collected and collaged what they called ‘*unités d’ambiances*,’ ‘islands’ or ‘atmospheric capsules’ as writes Bégout.¹¹ They envisioned reproducing these phenomenal situations to reprogramme cities, infusing them with the emotions they lacked.¹² Likewise, to enable ‘wayfounding’, architects are inviting movement not to serve the space of flows but, by making use of the property of fluids to change state, to create atmospheres—something that blurs the materiality of spaces, creating the condition for our emotional connection to our environment.

‘Atmospheric capsules’ or ‘*unités d’ambiance*’ have nonetheless, borrowing the expression of anthropologist Eduardo Kohn, a “fluid efficient form.”¹³ The patterns of formation of components—humans and non-humans—of fluid efficient forms have synergy. For example, as Kohn writes, the fractal pattern of the waterways that form in the Amazonian

- 5 Toyo Itô, ‘Tarzans in the Media Forest’, *Architecture Words*, 8 (London: Architectural Association, 2011).
- 6 Yasmine Abbas, ‘The Cartography of Ambiance’, in *Ambiances, Tomorrow. Proceedings of 3rd International Congress on Ambiances. Septembre 2016, Volos, Greece*, ed. by Nicolas Rémy (dir.); Nicolas Tixier (dir.) (Volos, Greece: International Network Ambiances, 2016), i, 253–258 <<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01409727>>.
- 7 Abbas, i.
- 8 Bruce Bégout, *Dériville: Les Situationnistes et La Question Urbaine* (Paris: Inculte-barnum, 2017), 25.
- 9 Ibid., 24, my translation.
- 10 In French: *Cartographie influentielle*.
- 11 Bégout, *Dériville*, 39–40.
- 12 Patrick Marcolini, *Le Mouvement Situationniste: Une Histoire Intellectuelle* (Montreuil: L’Échappée, 2012); Bégout, *Dériville*.
- 13 Eduardo Kohn, *Comment pensent les forêts: vers une anthropologie au-delà de l’humain*, trans. by Grégory Delaplace (Brussels: Zones Sensibles, 2017), chap. 5: ‘La fluide efficacité de la forme’, 205–248.

forest, meets and interrelates with the distribution of the rubber trees in the landscape (their distribution is, furthermore, a consequence of the presence of *Mycrocylus ulei*, a fungal parasite) and corresponds with the pattern of the spread of shamanism as well as that of the rubber colonial exploitation.¹⁴ Each element of the landscape or situation is born from constraints (a type of information) that influence its shape or state of mind, and each has its own agency. Together they create a form suffused with meaning.

When bodies and forest converge, humans 'grow into' their milieu, go through a 'mechanism of camouflage' whereby they modulate their identity with regards to what surrounds them.¹⁵ The 'sensuous correspondence' operates, not only visually, by the way of, for example, 'mimesis,' 'becoming,' 'sympathetic magic,' 'narcissism,' 'belonging,' or 'sacrifice,' as Leach explores, but also via all our other senses. Designing for 'wayfounding' therefore implies recognizing the parameters that generate both: the 'fluid efficient form' and the 'sensuous correspondence' that these forms enable. The Janes and Tarzans navigating media forests are in need of meaningful and anchoring encounters. They are longing for the conditions to be in this world, to belong, to be able to camouflage and to 'attune' to spaces in memorable and transformative ways.¹⁶ Spaces that afford such richness of experience, making themselves memorable, can be considered atmospheric.

Architects who seek to build atmospheres are, in many ways, spatial tricksters. They are the masters of artifice—from the Latin word *artificium*, rooted in the words *ars* (skill) and *facere* (to do or to make). They are experts at the art of making effects, ingenious in developing processes and techniques to design and fabricate 'virtual' or 'mental' spaces to "trick the senses."¹⁷ The materiality of 'meteorological architecture'¹⁸ can become that of the ensemble of atmospheric devices used to produce atmospheric effects: from László Moholy-Nagy's 1930 *Light Prop for an Electric Stage*¹⁹ and François Dallegret's illustration of a "baroque ensemble of domestic gadgetry"²⁰ to the 35,000 high-pressure nozzles²¹ of Diller and Scofidio's *Blur Building* or the different "artificial cooling devices [/] apparatus working on meteorological phenomena" of the *Jade Meteo Park*.²² Peter Zumthor, in comparison, relies less on technology than materiality and tectonics. He incorporates the sensory qualities of space, such as their 'sound' and

14 Ibid.

15 Neil Leach, *Camouflage*, Architecture/Design (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2006).

16 Alberto Pérez-Gómez, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science* (London: MIT Press, 2016).

17 Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, trans. by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 8.

18 Philippe Rahm, *Architecture météorologique* (Paris: Archibooks, 2009).

19 *Human – Space – Machine. Stage Experiments at the Bauhaus*, ed. by Torsten Blume, Christian Hiller, and Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau, Edition Bauhaus, 38 (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2014).

20 Reyner Banham, 'A Home Is Not a House', *Art in America*, 53 (1965), 70–79 (71).

21 <https://dsrny.com/project/blur-building> (Last accessed April 16, 2018)

22 Philippe Rahm, 'Form and Function Follow Climate', *AA Files*, 55 (2010), 2–11.

‘temperature’²³ in the initial stages of his design process through model-making.²⁴ He, literally, has a hand in the production of spatial effects, sometimes creating models using the projected building material.²⁵ Spatial tricks are not simulacra; they are not meant to deceive. Rather, they aim at provoking emotional fireworks,²⁶ melting the frozen faces of spaces, proposing alternatives to the dullness of contemporary living or to its hyperactivity.

Within the realm of computational design or data-driven architecture—also thought as liquid—architectural designers compose with data, choosing a variety of parameters to guide the fluid arrangement of forms. In order to design for atmospheres, such a process of computation begins with optimizing spaces for sensory effect: to create ‘an optimal sound map’ for the *Elbphilharmonie* (Herzog & de Meuron, 2016) in Hamburg²⁷ or an immersive space of visual delight under the canopy of the *Louvers Abu Dhabi* (Ateliers Jean Nouvel, 2017). Apart from their entanglement in the space of flows and their contribution to the society of the spectacle, the projects mentioned above successfully utilize the computing capabilities of machines to generate forms that stimulate the senses, that produce particular intended effects, a sonic or visual condition forever perfect, controlled. Where the sea meets the museum, the interplay of light and shade with air moisture, material reflection and the taste of salt in the air modulate the intended atmosphere and by that contribute to its lasting impression.

Enchanted forests are atmospheric. More flesh than skin, they form conditions with which humans and non-humans communicate, biologically and (electro)chemically, and, in the process, change the properties of the overall milieu in both expected and unexpected ways. Together, they form a climatic architecture that climaxes: an atmospheric architecture whose program and materiality co-depend on the trajectories of its constituents and their confluence—an architecture made for weathering.

The paradigm of fluidity calls for electro-chemical and spatial encounters, an atmospheric architecture—‘unités d’ambiances’, ‘atmospheric capsules’ or ‘islands’—for epidermal reactions—enchanted forests that neither dictate a way to feel nor cast us adrift, but that rather acclimatize, help keep our bearings by creating a space to moor, momentarily and experientially.

23 Peter Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments—Surrounding Objects* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2006).

24 Mathieu Berteloot and Véronique Patteeuw, ‘Form / Formless. Peter Zumthor’s Models’, *Building Atmosphere*, OASE.91, 83–92.

25 Sigrid Hauser, *Peter Zumthor—Therme Vals*, ed. by Peter Zumthor (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2007).

26 In French an “artificier” is a firework technician, a person who fabricates, sells or launches fireworks (via <http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/artificier>, last accessed April 11, 2018).

27 E. Stinson, ‘What happens When Algorithms Design a Concert Hall? The Stunning Elbphilharmonie’ in *Wired*, (2017) online: <https://www.wired.com/2017/01/happens-algorithms-design-concert-hall-stunning-elbphilharmonie/> Last accessed 2017/12/12.