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**Mist opportunities: Haze and the Composition of Atmosphere**

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**Abstract**

In this article, I consider what atmospheres are and how we might approach their composition in performance. Atmospheres are an emerging subject of exploration. Yet when it comes to theatre and performance, though often used to describe various experiences, what atmospheres are remains rather hazy and the ways in which they might be generated are relatively unexplored.

To reflect on the hazy phenomenon of atmosphere, I turn, quite literally, to haze. I propose that haze share some similarities with atmosphere, help to materialise and arguably demonstrate our immersion in atmospheres. More specifically, I examine Jamie Lloyd's *Killer* (2017) and Ann Veronica Janssens' *Yellowbluepink* (2015) to consider the ways in which haze and visual obfuscation can be used to produce atmosphere(s). I expand on four specific strategies for the composition of atmosphere: the first impression of a space, the ecstasies of things, contrast/immediacy and duration. By bringing forward both a critical and practical approach to atmosphere, I aim to show not only how atmosphere can emerge and be understood in the theatre, or how they illuminate the felt, ephemeral and intangible capacities of scenography and performance, but also how the analysis of performance can contribute to the recent interest in atmosphere.

**Text**

Atmospheres play a crucial role in theatre performances. From a welcoming foyer to a festive auditorium, the cosiness of a pub theatre or the edgy allure of an underground venue, we are constantly immersed within, and are always a part of, an atmosphere. Atmospheres are creatures of the moment – we sense them immediately. When we enter a room we feel its cosiness, and when we walk past a dark alley at night we might feel threatened. There is also a rich vocabulary to describe atmospheres – serene, melancholic, tense, solemn, cold, warm, erotic, etc. – and in everyday speech, atmosphere is often conflated with mood, feeling, ambience, aura 'and other ways of naming collective affects' (Anderson 2009, 78). But what are atmospheres, exactly? And can they be composed?

Recently, there has been a growing attempt to understand the elusive phenomenon of atmospheres, particularly in the fields of philosophy, cultural geography, architecture and urban planning. Mikkel Bille and Tim Flohr Sørensen (2016) identify two strands in the recent proliferation of studies about atmospheres: the first tries to improve our understanding of atmospheric encounters and make sense of our experiences by unravelling the epistemological and ontological criteria of those encounters (see Böhme 1993, 2017; Thibaud 2011, 2014; Stewart 2011; Griffero 2014); the second regards atmosphere 'as something purely materialistic', and examines, practically, the different ways in which light, smell, sound or temperature may generate or shape a sense of space (Bille and Sørensen 2016, 159; see Edensor 2015; Bille 2015b; Zumthor 2006). However, when it comes to theatre and performance, while atmospheres are used to describe and unpack various experiences, what atmospheres *are* remains rather hazy and the different ways in which they might be generated in and through performance are often left unexplored. Therefore, in this article, I explore the use of obstructed vision – specifically using haze and darkness – in performance and installation as a means of investigating what atmospheres are *through* the process of their production.

To reflect on the hazy phenomenon of atmosphere, I turn, quite literally, to look at haze and thus pursue the recent thinking about atmosphere through haze, fog, mist, clouds and air (McCormack 2015; Wagenfeld; 2015; Rauh 2017; Salter 2014, 2017; Shearing 2017). If atmosphere is the immaterial 'something in the air' that influences the feeling of a space or a situation and the appearance of the material world (Bille 2015b, 267), I propose that haze and mist share some similarities with atmosphere and help to materialise and arguably demonstrate our immersion in atmospheres. Atmospheres might escape one's conscious attention, but mist can draw our attention to the air that surrounds us, the air that we are in and that touches us – the air that, similar to atmosphere, fills and creates our environments and experiences (Shearing 2017, n.p.).

I situate the examination of atmosphere *production* by means of haze and darkness within the growing engagements and designs by practitioners and artists – such as Elizabeth Diller and Dirk Hebel, David Shearing, Katrin Brack, Fujiko Nakaya and Olafur Eliasson – who explore the movement and transformation of climates, the production of artificial weather or the recreation of various hazy phenomena. Indeed, as Chris Salter notes, artificially produced haze and fog 'have long functioned as core materials in the quest for artificially produced atmospheres' (Salter 2014, 226–227, 233). This does not mean that atmospheres initiated by design are less real, sensed or

affective, but rather they might illuminate the felt, ephemeral or intangible manifestations and capacities of scenography and performance.

Thus, in the first section below, I begin by defining atmospheres more broadly in order to outline the process and challenges of the composition of atmosphere. I then observe Jamie Lloyd's *Killer* (2017) and Ann Veronica Janssens' *Yellowbluepink* (2015) to consider, first, the ways in which haze and visual obfuscation can be used to produce atmosphere(s), and, second, which atmospheres might emerge when we cannot see clearly. Through these case studies, I seek to expand on four specific strategies for the composition of atmosphere: the first impression of a space, the ecstasies of things, contrast/immediacy and duration. By bringing forward both a critical and practical approach to atmosphere, I aim to show not only how atmosphere can emerge and be understood in the theatre, but also how the analysis of performance and installation might contribute to the recent interest in atmosphere.

## On atmosphere production

I begin my exploration of atmosphere by broadly considering what atmospheres are, before examining how they might unfold – and be composed – in performance. Stuart Grant draws on Jürgen Hasse and defines atmospheres as 'spaces with vital qualities that can be felt sensitively' (2013, 13). They flow, include, envelop, resonate and give forth both the affordances of the environment and the qualities of the experience. For philosopher Gernot Böhme, while atmospheres bathe everything in a certain light or 'fill the space with a certain tone of feeling like a haze', we are unsure where they are, exactly, and 'whether we should attribute them to the objects or environments from which they proceed or to the subjects who experience them' (1993, 114).[1] Böhme describes atmospheres as floating in between: between subject and object (2013, 3), between being subjective and objective (or quasi-objective) (1993, 122). Following Böhme, atmospheres emerge between the perceiver and the perceived; they are at once 'spatial bearers of moods' and simultaneously 'affective powers of feelings' (ibid, 119). Atmospheres emanate from

[1] In trying to define atmosphere, some scholarship prioritises the properties of the space (the object) as opposed to that which focuses on the perceiver (the subject). For example, see Ingold's exploration of Bollnow's 'mood space' (2016, 167), in contrast with phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz's examination of atmospheres as means of understanding emotions (see Griffero 2014, 2017) or Heidegger's notion of Stimmung (mood) (see Welton 2011).

the ensemble of elements that make up the perceived 'object' and so they belong to the perceived object. On the other hand, they require someone to 'apprehend' them and as such they also belong to the perceiving subject (Anderson 2009, 79). Put differently, atmosphere is what relates factors of the environment with my experience in that environment *in a particular moment*; they form that relation and its qualities. As such, atmospheres, much like Susanne Gannon's definition of lived spaces, 'emerge in the contours and meetings of architectures, living and non-living things, all sorts of objects and bodies, memories, imagination, emotions' (2016, 79). We are therefore not just *in* atmospheres but are also a *part of* them (Bille 2015b, 270), as we have the capacity to impact – and be impacted by – how such 'meetings' might unfold. Therefore, as a working definition, I consider atmosphere as that which emerges from the interaction between the constellation or assemblage of natural and aesthetic elements in a particular space and time: in a particular 'meeting' or interaction. This relationship, in turn, can affect those who are part of that interaction and can impact the way in which they perceive, feel or make sense.

A useful way of thinking about atmosphere is through weather. The term 'atmosphere' has a meteorological meaning denoting the layer of gases that surrounds the earth. Since the eighteenth century the term has also been used to describe mood, or as a metaphor for 'something in the air': drawing from the etymology of *atmos* — the Greek word for steam or vapour — and *sphere*, and echoing something cloudy or indistinct. Bringing together meteorology and aesthetics, Andreas Rauh suggests that

> atmosphere *generates* both weather and sense phenomena; it *surrounds* the Earth as well as encompasses our sensual perceptions and *influences* both the unfolding of weather events and the flow of perception. (2017, 1–2, original emphases; see McCormack 2015, 83)

Much like the atmosphere around the earth, when one is immersed in a 'sensed' atmosphere, one is part of an encounter that colours one's own perceptions and steers them in certain directions (ibid).

However, atmospheres are not synonymous with weather. Granted, both atmosphere and weather can affect or modify my mood: I might feel happy on a sunny day, and gloomy in overcast conditions. However, understanding (sensed) atmosphere through Böhme's relational

approach implies that, unlike weather, atmospheres do not exist independently. Even if I imagine a particular place with a certain atmosphere (thinking of atmosphere by proxy), I still relate myself to it. The threatening atmosphere of the dark alley, for example, might emerge from its narrowness, the texture of the walls, the intense silence, the darkness, the lack of other people, the low temperature, and my interaction – or anticipated interaction – and response to all of these elements, as well as the particular mood with which I have entered the alley. It is through the encounter with that alley (either by walking through, or anticipating walking through, informed by memories, past or similar experiences), that the atmosphere emerges. Moreover, while weather has apparent forms that we can see or feel (such as rain, snow or wind; see Welton 2011, 128), atmosphere is not a 'thing', or material object, that is perceived. As Thibaud notes, 'we do not perceive *the* ambiance, we perceive *on the basis of* the ambiance' (2011, 210, my emphasis). Such a phenomenological approach suggests that atmosphere establishes the terms of perception; it is 'a *sensory background* that specifies the conditions under which phenomena emerge and appear' (ibid, 212, original emphasis). Indeed, weather – even if not 'visible', through temperature, humidity and air pressure – can affect how we make sense or feel in a particular space and time and therefore contribute to the emergence of atmospheres. Yet weather is only one of the elements that constitute an atmosphere. It is not only that the dark alley is cold and misty that generates its spooky atmosphere, but it is also the fact that the alley is, for example, dark or narrow. As such, all things, as Gannon notes, even those that do not have a clear form or shape, 'have equal potential to impact an atmosphere' (2016, 84).

The 'in-betweenness' or relational view of atmosphere that Böhme suggests leads him to two approaches to atmosphere: atmosphere reception and atmosphere production. For Böhme, atmospheres can be produced and are involved whenever something is being staged and where design is a factor (1993, 125; 2013, 3). By composing an atmosphere, one seeks to orchestrate and shape 'the experience of, and emotional response to, a place through the material environment' (Bille et al. 2015, 33) in order to facilitate particular feelings or sensations. This perspective allows us to identify various processes of aestheticisation and manipulation, for instance in architecture, commerce, advertising or even politics, as well as attempts to generate particular atmospheres in various places – such as restaurants, shops or theatres – by considering the composition and arrangement of both material and immaterial elements of that environment. The composition or of atmosphere therefore becomes central to the design of experiences, which is of particular

importance when it comes to theatre and performance. Böhme even looks at the theatrical stage set as a paradigm for atmosphere production, since scenography presents some of the necessary elements to produce an atmosphere on stage (2017, 2; 2013).

Indeed, when it comes to theatre and performance, atmospheres can be a useful trope to describe or unpack various experiences. For actor and director Michael Chekhov for example, atmospheres name an affective zone, or a feeling which lives in the event-spaces, yet does not belong to anybody. Focusing primarily on the actor's body, Chekhov turns atmosphere into a metaphor for the feelings evoked by the performance or the 'spirit' or embodied qualities in the world of the play (Cornford 2017). While Chekhov considered the affective dimension of performance through dramaturgy ('the score of atmospheres'), Czech scenographer Josef Svoboda's holistic and dynamic view of scenography preceded Böhme and considered the significance of scenography, not merely through the practical functions of design but rather the evocation of atmospheric qualities (Hann forthcoming). More recently, Hans-Thies Lehmann highlights how in postdramatic theatre, 'the presentation of an atmosphere' as the *state of things* can become more dominant than the narrative of the show (2006, 63, 74). However, despite the growing interest in atmosphere as that which fills the space and 'exists between the theatre's walls' and passes or flows between and among actors and audience (Welton 2011, 130), atmospheres still receive relatively little attention, with research considering primarily atmosphere reception and experiences of spaces (Fischer-Lichte 2008; Welton 2011; Grant 2013). While Böhme's assertion regarding the significance of (stage-)design for atmosphere production has been frequently quoted and referred to in the emerging exploration regarding the capacities of scenography (Home-Cook 2015; Edensor 2015; McKinney 2017; Hann forthcoming), the different ways in which atmospheres are generated in performance and the difficulties of atmosphere production are hardly tackled. Therefore, following its nascent examination (Salter 2014, 2017; Shearing 2015; Collins 2017), I wish to advance the exploration of atmosphere production in theatre and performance, propose a few strategies for their composition, and consider some of the complexities such compositions might entail.

Böhme acknowledges that atmospheres 'are quasi-objective, namely they are out there' (2017, 2). Yet, his methodology is primarily phenomenological. On this basis, George Home-Cook, who conducts a phenomenology of atmosphere in the theatre, suggests that '[w]hilst sound, scenography, set design and lighting provide the initial stimulus for the manifestation of a particular

kind of atmosphere' (2015, 163), by paying attention to an atmosphere 'we motivate, enhance and intensify it; we allow it to show itself' (161). Thus, for Home-Cook, 'atmospheres only fully come into being as a consequence of their being *noticed*' (156, original emphasis). However, conceiving of atmospheres as a phenomenon that can *only* be apprehended by an experiencing subject foregrounds that one must be 'exposed' to an atmosphere in order to appreciate it (Sørensen 2015, 64). Such a perspective poses a fundamental challenge to the possibility of considering atmospheres beyond subjective experience, as it not only limits the scope of atmospheres that could be analysed or thought, but it also maintains a humanist bias that does not fully account for various possibilities of materials and 'the fluctuating contingencies of spacetimes composed of assemblages of relations' (McCormack 2015, 80). Moreover, it disregards how certain cultural, social and representational factors and contexts inform the understanding of atmospheres (more below). The focus on the orchestration of environments is a result of a methodological difference, since, as Böhme elucidates, '[o]nly from the perspective of the subject is atmosphere perceived as the emotional response to the presence of something or someone' (2017, 26). I, on the other hand, embrace a compositional approach and seek to examine atmosphere from the perspective of their production, or what Böhme terms 'the object', namely, the 'sphere of its perceptible presence' (ibid).

While Home-Cook's phenomenology reduces the capacities of different materials to shape a particular atmosphere, it points to some of the challenges and complexities surrounding atmosphere production. When examining the composition of atmospheres, the main challenge with which one is faced is how can we compose something which is intangible, diffuse and hard to grasp? Atmospheres, as Derek McCormack suggests, 'name the affective qualities of gathering intensities of feeling while always escaping the recognizable form of that gathering' (2015, 84; Salter 2017, 174). In other words, while the composition of atmospheres can be seen as the modulation of a constellation of different materials – natural or artificial, tangible or intangible – atmospheres do not have one specific point of origin: they always exceed and are not bound to the materials that form them. Furthermore, if the process of composition itself implies the arrangement of various disparate elements, atmosphere production also involves some ephemeral fleeting elements that are neither visual nor material. So how could these be crafted? Finally, the act of composition might imply some degree of separation between the composer and the 'object'

composed, which highlights an inherent paradox in the process (and analysis) of atmosphere production, since one is always part of and immersed in the atmosphere that is being produced.

In response, Tonino Griffero proposes that atmospheres are not composed but *generated*, namely, they succeed from their specific 'generators', whether material or immaterial (2017, n.p.). Such a view resonates with McCormack's conceptualisation of how different 'objects' become *devices for doing atmospheric things*. By atmospheric things he delineates, 'first, relatively shaped forms that foreground the relations in which they are immersed and, second, and simultaneously, the sense that something atmospheric is taking place without forming as an object' (2015, 85). In that sense, and building on Böhme's relationality, these arrangements, compositions or 'atmospheric things' do not form *the* atmosphere – or a representation of an atmosphere for that matter. Rather, they create 'tuned' spaces and *set up the conditions* for atmospheres to appear. These compositions can establish a dominant tone in a space or situation, that will only fully emerge *as* atmosphere when they are met with a perceiving subject. By this, I do not mean imply that there is a 'pre-atmosphere' or 'semi-atmosphere' in space, since we are constantly immersed in atmospheres. Rather, I argue that the composition of atmosphere is an invitation that seeks to enhance or shift the tone, the general character of a space, or intensify its experiential qualities as a result of particular material circumstances. Daniel Blanga-Gubbay notes that 'sometimes the artist is not the one that creates the form, but the one that fills the space with all the conditions […] for something to happen' (2016, 33). I propose that that *something* can be atmosphere. Indeed, following the relational perspective of atmosphere, these invitations could be changed or even declined (Griffero 2017, n.p.), but nevertheless, this material or practical view allows for a shift of focus from the personal perspective to a broader appreciation of the different (affective, sensuous, reflective) engagements between people and spaces or events. As such, it traverses the framework provided by a subjectivity-bounded phenomenology (Sørensen 2015, 67), which is tied to a particular experiencing subject.

Furthermore, by speaking about *the conditions* for atmospheres, we might begin to finally approach atmosphere as a collective or shared experience. While I acknowledge that we live in a diverse world with many and various relationships with atmospheres, I follow Thibaud in suggesting that we can

> [be] plunged together into a single ambiance […] whilst experiencing different ways of feeling submerged. To say "we are not in the ambiance" […] means that one's lived experience is not necessarily in perfect harmony with the dominant tonality of a situation (Thibaud 2014, 288; Bille 2015b, 269).

Therefore, the crux of atmosphere production is the engagement, orchestration and analysis of that 'dominant tonality': namely, the different ways in which architecture, lighting, sound, smell, texture, humidity and temperature (among others) are brought together and create particular conditions for experiences and atmospheres, situated in a particular space and time. This can be seen as a strategy for theatre making or be applied to the analysis of atmosphere production. For example, the view of atmosphere as a constellation of elements can illustrate how a particular element of design might function differently in various constellations or situations and lead to different atmospheres (as I demonstrate below). A red light for instance, can produce an erotic or scary tone through different angles and intensities, when interacting with other elements on stage or when appearing in different spaces. Thus, the composition of atmosphere in performance is not a *finite formation* using various theatrical means, nor is it a by-product or surplus of design. Instead, I conceive of atmosphere production as a deliberate, distinct and carefully constructed scenographic or dramaturgical arrangement geared toward the creation of a 'tuned space', where the various mise en scènes and their configuration of/on the stage can extend beyond the mere function of design or staging and create 'an atmospheric suggestion over the perceiver's felt-body' (Griffero 2014, 80–81).

### Stepping inside a cloud

Following the initial definition for atmospheres and atmosphere production, I seek to outline specific strategies for their generation, continuing the exploration of atmospheres through the process of their composition. To highlight the sensed or felt capacities of atmosphere, I unpack compositions that utilise visual obfuscation. Focusing on haze (or mist) and darkness, as specific dramaturgical/scenographic tools that establish dominant tonalities in spaces, in this section, I will propose two distinct approaches for understanding the composition of atmosphere: the first impression (of space) and the ecstasies of things.

While Böhme considers the stage set as a paradigm for atmosphere production, I suggest that the composition of atmosphere in theatre must extend beyond the stage. Atmospheres in the theatre emerge even before we enter the auditorium and whether anticipation, excitement or dread, the auditorium is suffused by an atmosphere that evokes a sense of place even before the show starts. Therefore, I propose that when considering the composition of atmosphere in performance one should also take into account the first impression of the audience member as she enters the space which includes factors as varied as the intensity, angle and colour of houselights; the presence of background music and its volume; the temperature of the space throughout the performance; or the smell of a room that is filled with haze. All of these different elements – and many more – influence the experience of performance by contributing to the emergence of different ambiances and tones, and, as such, also expand the frameworks of scenography and dramaturgy. Of course, we might not be able to account for all of them (in composition or analysis); yet, as some of them are often taken for granted, I argue that these possible contributors to atmosphere still play a vital role in establishing the 'dominant tonality' of the performance. While you cannot always modify elements such as seating arrangements, or the circulation of air, these factors are still present, and can still affect the production (and of course reception) of atmosphere.

Therefore, the first strategy I propose for the composition of atmosphere is the shaping of the first impression of space, environment or event. According to Griffero, the first impression is an affective and corporeal perception, succeeded by immediate evaluation (either conscious or felt). Imbued with atmospheric potentiality, the first impression 'influences and directs with its atmospheric charge every subsequent reflection and perception' (2014, 30–31). Atmospheres are seductive. In that sense, the cosiness of a room or the threat of the dark alley might be seen as a result of the initial encounter with the dominant tonality in these particular spaces. The same applies to performance that succeeds from the first impression of the performance space. Embracing the significance of first impression, Erika Fischer-Lichte suggests that the initial impression to affect the spectators upon entering the auditorium results in an atmosphere, which continues to influence their perception throughout the performance (2008, 115). The first impression, then, entails some degree of disruption or change, which breaks the habitual and pragmatic flux of experiences, thus providing the initial stimulus for the manifestation of an atmosphere (Griffero 2014, 29; 2017, n.p.). Thus, if the first impression is 'charged with an enormous yet fragile atmospheric potentiality' (Griffero 2014, 31), I suggest that accounting for or

modulating that first impression or interaction is a productive way to approach the composition of atmosphere. This can be seen, for example, in the first impression created by Jamie Lloyd's production of *Killer* (2017) by Phillip Ridley.

On entering the ditch at Shoreditch Town Hall, the audience finds a large room lit by white fluorescent light. The brightness of the light reveals just how much the paint is peeling off the basement walls. Wooden chairs are arranged in a square shape and are facing outward so that, once sat, the audience cannot easily see the middle of the square or the majority of the group. On each chair lies a pair of headphones, and in the middle of the square an enthusiastic performer (John Macmillan) sits on the floor next to a large sound desk. The space is cold and damp and there is something disturbing about it. Above the wooden chairs and just below the light, thick amorphous smoke floats around. This menacing haze swirls across the space. It is very noticeable, and – perhaps due to its closeness to the light – it feels rather bright. As the show begins, the performer starts to speak behind the audience's back and, after a quick sound check for the headphones, a flick of a switch is heard. The space is now pitch black.

As this brief description of the ditch attests, the spectators' initial encounter with the performance space is already charged with atmospheric potentiality. This alarming first impression charged and coloured subsequent moments in the performance with a similar tone. For instance, when the audience was plunged into complete darkness, darkness maintained – and possibly enhanced – the threatening effect of space. The tense atmosphere cannot be traced to a solitary component but is a consequence of a dynamic constellation of elements and their ecstasies. In reflecting on what produced the first impression and particular atmosphere in *Killer*, we might point to exposed brick walls, the dampness or the disorienting sound, as well as haze and darkness that filled the space. The relationship between all these elements and the ways in which they effected one another (and the audience), through their ecstasies, resulted in the production of the disturbing tone in that space.

For Böhme, the ecstasies of things indicate the ways in which things radiate outwards into space, make a certain impression on us, and thus contribute to the formation of an atmosphere (2017, 5). Echoing the ancient Greek notion of standing out, or standing outside oneself, Böhme's notion of ecstasies refers to the effects objects could exert externally, beyond themselves, through the ways in which their qualities are *present*, perceived or sensed. Ecstasies of things do not simply

denote the parameters or characteristics of things – such as their sound, smell or colour – that determine the object, and distinguish it or separate it from other objects. Instead, ecstasies, in Böhme's interpretation, account for the expressive qualities and the effects things emit onto their surroundings. From this perspective, the blueness of a cup, for instance, is not restricted to the cup. It is not something the cup 'has' or 'is'. Rather, the blueness of the cup can be seen as a way in which 'the cup is present in space and makes its presence perceptible'. Its 'blueness' is something which occupies space. It radiates out or goes forth beyond the cup, to the setting around the cup, and colouring or 'tincturing' this environment in a certain way. As Böhme explains, '[t]he existence of the cup is already contained in this conception of the quality "blue", since the blueness is a way of the cup being there, an articulation of its presence' (1993, 121). The blueness of the cup is then part of its ecstasies, which when coming together in relation to other objects (including those perceiving those objects), create a certain tone in space, or make a certain impression, thus contributing to the formation of an atmosphere. Atmospheres then, could also be thought of through the ways in which spaces are 'tinctured': the different ways in which things or environmental constellations (including people) are present in space, that is, through their ecstasies.

Equally, the form, dimensions or volume of things can be thought of as part of their ecstasies, as the shapeshifting haze in *Killer* indicates. Haze was not simply thick or bright but it also 'radiated outwards'. By floating through the dimly lit space, thickening the air in the basement it was a significant contributor in the dynamic constellation of elements, that created the menacing effect and atmosphere of the performance. Equally, when the space was veiled by darkness, the latter emanated in space, arguably maintaining or intensifying the particular impressions and effects created thus far. The qualities of both haze and darkness transformed the space, and through their ecstasies, they demanded a different orientation in the room, filling it 'with tensions and suggestions of movement' (Böhme 1993: 121). Haze and darkness did not simply appear or were present in the ditch, but exerted effects through their qualities, provoking sensual and perceptual impressions through the ways in which they were present. Thus, they modified the perception of space and the tone that emerged in it. Consequently, we could broaden the understanding of ecstasies and consider or associate them with immaterial or intangible elements, such as darkness or haze. Accounting for the ecstasies of things, or gathering elements by their

ecstasies, can assist with the composition of atmospheres, and thus forms the second strategy I am proposing.

*Killer* took place mostly in darkness, with moments in low lighting where haze played a key role. When light (designed by Azusa Ono) appeared in the production, haze made the light beams more tangible and noticeable, as the light passed through the dust and haze particles. *Killer* was a promenade performance in which the audience members were directed, by small gestures of the performer and the use of light, to move around the rooms of the old building's basement. As the audience moved around, haze moved around with them. In *Killer,* haze and the tangible (hazy) light contributed to the composition of a stuffy and claustrophobic tonality in space. Haze not only enhanced the immersive experience of the performance, but it also added a layer of mystery and danger to the space, which enhanced the disorienting qualities of the performance. My experience of *Killer,* then, was not merely one of following a story; rather, my perception of the piece was suffused by a tense and dark atmosphere, which was created through my interaction with all the elements described above, as well as the challenge to visuality (created by darkness/dim lighting and haze). Haze floated by and, like a quiet accomplice, hinted that something might be lurking in the shadows. Darkness concealed what might be hiding in space, while the stuffiness of haze meant the audience could not see much in light either. Haze held the capacity to affect the audience, their perception and arguably their mood, and thus helped produce an alarming and tense atmosphere, supporting and co-creating the mysterious, dark tone of the play, which gave an insight to the inner world of three killers.

As 'properties' of the performance's design, haze and darkness through their ecstasies can be understood as tools for the composition of an atmospheric effect (Böhme 1993, 125), deployed for the creation of atmospherically charged spaces in which the performance evolves. Haze and darkness do not simply *represent* atmosphere but are in fact *part of* what constitutes that atmosphere. While the movement of haze cannot be entirely steered, and its visual *appearance* cannot be tightly controlled, its presence, as a material object, has the ability to 'flow as a sequence of events and sensations, successively provoking immersion, engagement, distraction and attraction' (Edensor 2015, 333). Walking through *Killer* was like walking through the threatening dark and misty alley. In both, clarity is obstructed, challenging the properties of the seen and scene. Haze communicated something about the distinct qualities of the space (Hasse 2016, 178), while tuning the audience into a different rhythm. As mentioned, haze is by no means a new tool to

create an 'effect' in performance. Nevertheless, when it comes to *Killer,* I argue that haze does not serve as mere decoration, or an element that simply adds flair and drama to the stage-image. Haze altered the perception of light, surrounded (or floated around) the viewers and, through its ecstasies, affected the ways in which the audience sensed or made sense of the performance and therefore shaped the conditions for the show's atmosphere.

Another example of the potency of haze and mist can be seen in Ann Veronica Janssens' *Yellowbluepink* (2015). Shown at the Wellcome collection in London, the artist positioned her audience in rooms filled with colourful mist, where, upon entering, visitors stepped inside a 'cloud' (figure 1). In *Yellowbluepink* – which is part of a series of works titled 'Mist Rooms' – as visitors walked slowly around the gallery, they moved from seeing pink coloured mist to seeing yellow to finally seeing blue. Tim Ingold argues that atmospheres are not 'free-floating, like a mist into which we might place both things and ourselves' (Ingold 2016, 167). However, mist can also give rise 'to an unfocused way of looking, evoking a trance-like, meditative state' (Pallasmaa 2005, 46–47). Pointing to some of the ecstasies of Janssens' mist, this way of looking can be seen in *Yellowbluepink* where, while vision is hazy, the colourful mist can make visitors mindful of their body and their experience (Bal 2013). As I walked through the mist in *Yellowbluepink*, I reached out to find my way: almost trying to grab the mist I was engulfed in. Janssens' mist does not only move with the air as it circulates, but it also has the ability to move those who are in it, through the disruption of perception, haptic negotiation or other physical sensations related to temperature, humidity, etc. Like an animated Turner painting, Janssens' formal and structural ingredients of design can be seen, as architect Juhani Pallasmaa describes, as though they are 'deliberately suppressed for the benefit of an embracing and shapeless atmosphere, suggestive of temperature, moisture, and subtle movements of the air' (2014, 22). Crucially, there is a difference between observing clouds and being immersed in mist. When one views clouds from a distance they are objects of perception. However, when I find myself *in* mist (as a manifestation of clouds), 'in a space without clear corners or edges […] surrounded by a diffuse nebulousness' (Rauh 2017, 1), I adopt a different perceptual stance, as mist alter the way I sense (and make sense of) people and objects (ibid., 9). While the distinction between seeing and being in clouds, haze or mist is not always straightforward, the latter resonates strongly with the experience of atmospheres, which are all-encompassing yet still vague and fuzzy.

Importantly, while both *Killer* and *Yellowbluepink* incorporated haze, or artificial fog, in their design, the ecstasies of haze are not identical in both works. This is because, first, they interact with other scenographic elements – such as light, temperature or architecture. And second, there are differences between both hazes. Indeed, no two hazes are alike (Rauh 2017, 9) and there are numerous ways to produce haze in performance. Fog, smoke and haze machines use glycerine, glycol and water-based fluids that result in different kinds of mist, and dry ice is different to vapour. My intent is not to survey the various technologies to produce artificial mist/haze, but rather to stress that when unpacking the ecstasies of haze, one must take into account the different manifestations of haze, through for example, its density, movement, pace or odour. In Janssens' blurry mist rooms and in *Killer,* haze/mist rendered light more palpable, thicker and denser. However, the opaque colourful mist in *Yellowbluepink* can be considered blissful and cheerful, as opposed to spooky and alarming. Colours – with their cultural interpretations (more below) – clearly play a big part in the affects Janssens' work evokes. Her mist rooms may well induce disorientation, but the colourful mist helps to produce a bright vast space and a playful sense of discovery (Bal 2013). Apart from their difference in colour, in *Killer* the haze that engulfed the space was dense, whereas Janssen's was light. In *Killer* it was swirly, while in *Yellowbluepink* it appeared like cotton candy: still, suspended in space, helping to establish a cheerful and optimistic tone to/in the room through a contemplative and serene mood. Both forms of mist produced very different rhythms. In *Yellowbluepink*, children were running around, visitors wandered and played and many – in spite of the obvious challenge – tried to take smiling selfies. Conversely, the hazy obstruction of visual perception in *Killer* – which also relied on darkness and low levels of light – did not produce a sense of relaxation, but rather created a sense of being lost, trapped and secluded.

As both examples indicate, while first impressions of spaces are certainly significant, atmospheres are continuous; therefore, the composition of atmosphere has to be constantly re-established (or sustained) throughout the event. A particular light, for example, might colour the space differently and reintroduce it to the audience in a new way, or the sudden cut of sound might draw attention to the auditorium's acoustics, both of which might alter the atmosphere produced in the theatre and eventually impact the experience(s) of the event. Therefore, in the next section I consider some of the connections between atmospheres and temporality, and propose contrast/immediacy and duration, as two final strategies for the composition of atmosphere.

### Temporality and affect

As haze and atmospheres are phenomena *in the air* rather than air itself, there are numerous connections that could be drawn between them. First, haze ties together both the affective/aesthetic and the meteorological meanings of atmosphere. Second, much like atmospheres, haze is both a spatial *and* temporal entity. When we describe an atmosphere we normally refer to the character sensed in a concrete 'here and now' (Rauh 2017, 7). It might be disputed whether haze and atmospheres are *in* or *of* the space (see Ingold 2016, 170), but as I proposed in the previous section, both the haze in *Killer* and Janssens' mist are still noticed or felt in space. Janssens' dense mist might stand out in contrast to the stable architecture of the room, but it is still very much *there*, contributing to the emergence of atmosphere. The concrete spatial presence of haze and mist also demonstrates how atmospheres are also bound with temporality (Salter 2014). I propose two complementing modes of temporality to consider atmospheres: immediacy and duration. Recalling the first impression(s), in both *Yellowbluepink* and *Killer* haze (and darkness) are instantaneously noticeable, much like when we enter a room and sense the atmosphere in it straightaway (Zumthor 2006, 13). Similarly, for Pallasmaa, this immediacy (rooted in the first impression) proves how, paradoxically, 'we grasp the atmosphere of a place before we identify its details or understand it intellectually' (2014, 21). However, as the movement of haze in *Killer* demonstrates, while haze might endure or linger slightly, it will eventually shift, change and dissipate. Haze is restless. Its shape and location ceaselessly transform as it dissolves and take form (Sørensen 2016, 749–50). This resonates with the experience of atmospheres, which, like haze, do not exist as entities that remain identical over time. We might notice atmospheres immediately – for example, a drastic change of temperature might draw attention to our experience – but as a *sensory background* they become more than a single moment of perception. Atmospheres highlight 'a sustained being in a situation' (Pallasmaa 2014, 20), since they continuously impact the way we feel, sense and perceive in a particular setting. Atmospheres are always a continuum. Thus, much like the whorls of mist, atmospheres are constantly emerging. The alley can have a completely different atmosphere in a different time of day. More subtly, the cosy feeling in my room might grow slightly when a particular loved one joins me there. As such, atmospheres are not only a matter of spatiality but can also be understood through their eventfulness, the current *state of things* (see Lehamnn 2006).

Returning to the snappy flick of a switch and initial plunge into darkness in *Killer,* it illustrates how atmospheres are wrought not only through the first impression but also through their contrast to previous situations, circumstances or spaces. The immediate plunge to darkness brings forward a different experience of atmosphere. For Böhme, atmospheres are 'experienced when their respective nature stands out, […] they are experienced through contrast, that is, when finding ourselves in atmospheres that clash with our own emotional state, or when entering into them by moving from one atmosphere to another' (2017, 168). Broadening the analysis of first impression, this observation can be applied to radical changes between spaces – such as the entrance from a cold and busy street to a festive theatre foyer or a cosy pub – and arguably, more subtle transitions or transformations in the same space. Hence, I suggest that contrast (or immediate change) can be seen as a strategy for the composition of atmosphere within the performance itself.

In another moment in *Killer,* after a long sequence of sitting in darkness, a torch is lit. It is then followed by two glowing light bulbs. The audience is directed to move to another room, and at that moment I am not sure how we are supposed to do it. Everything is dim and blurry to the point where vision becomes fuzzy (see figure 2). The audience walks carefully through a narrow corridor, guided by a string of glowing light bulbs surrounded by delicate haze. There is a sound of a short circuit and for a second everything goes dark again. Everything pauses. Finally, when the low light comes back on, the audience continue their journey to a new room and find themselves in another narrow corridor, where two rows of chairs are placed facing each other. The performer walks quickly in the passage between the chairs, still holding a torch and signalling the audience to sit down. The already dimmed light becomes dimmer, and with the veil of the haze, one can hardly see the person sitting in front of them.

The movement between the different performance spaces could have created numerous first impressions. But, more importantly, the plunges in and out of darkness exemplify how the experience in/of atmospheres can vary in intensity. The contrast or differentiation between states not only intensifies the experience of disorientation, but it also alters (even slightly) the conditions for the emergence of atmospheres.

On the other hand, we might be able to think of duration as another strategy for atmosphere production. For instance, as visitors move through Janssen's installation, the mist

encourages them to revel in it. The extended duration of the installation invites visitors to familiarise themselves with the misty room, explore and rediscover the space and their perception of it. A sustained tonality is being composed. Conversely, the extended blackouts in *Killer* – accompanied by graphic descriptions of violence – allowed the sense of discomfort to intensify as the performance unfolded.

The effects on the felt body are undoubtedly significant to our understanding of atmospheres, since as 'we enter a space, the space enters us' (Pallasmaa 2014, 20). However, while atmospheres, like affect, have a lived duration that shifts us between states (Anderson 2009, 78) affect and atmosphere are not synonymous (Edensor and Sumartojo 2015, 252). Like affect, atmospheres are interrelated and located *between* experiences and environments. However, as Bille et al. argue, conceptualising atmospheres *as* affect

> runs the risk of understanding atmospheres by proxy, translating them into another concept whereby they lose their material grounding. Atmospheres must have something to do with spaces and temporality, something to do with the intrinsic qualities of materials, and something to do with experience (2015, 35).

This is why I am reluctant to use the term *affective atmospheres* (see Anderson 2008; Hann forthcoming). In her robust theorisation of what scenography does, Rachel Hann asserts that 'scenography occurs as an affective atmosphere, and sustains an innate potentiality for change and re-modulation' (forthcoming). Indeed, Hann adopts a new materialist reading of atmospheres that, similar to my exploration, traces the different qualities, various entanglements and affective capacities of both ephemeral and tangible materials. Yet, despite the recognition that atmospheres are crafted in relation to material assemblages and felt ideologies, referring to atmospheres as simply *affective* could risk disregarding conscious, intellectual and other felt experiences of atmospheres; how the understanding of atmospheres relies for example on past experiences and memories. Moreover, atmospheres – and the ecstasies of things – are also the result of social, cultural, political, historical and representational factors and contexts that inevitably influence the ways through which atmospheres are sensed (Edensor 2015, 334; Griffero 2017). Such a view also implies that the experience of atmosphere is not simply sensory or affective, but at times also involves reflective thought, playing 'on both sensing and knowing' (Thibaud 2014, 282). As Griffero explains, the perception of atmospheres relies on the co-perception of past and expected

atmospheres: 'you feel the tense atmosphere of a play precisely because you anticipate the following situation, heavily influenced by title, name of the author, genre, previous performances, etc.' (2017, n.p.). Thus, thinking of atmospheres as not synonymous with affect, and by acknowledging some of the psychological or intellectual understandings or cultural representations of materials (and their ecstasies), might provide another route for atmosphere production that identifies atmospheric potential and builds on previous experiences of atmospheres[2].

Darkness, for example, is full of associations, presumptions and even cultural values that portray some experiences in darkness as 'suffused with danger and uncertainty' (Edensor 2015, 344). By being immersed in darkness in *Killer* for a long period of time or walking through the hazy and corridors of Shoreditch Town Hall, my experience might already be affected and mediated by numerous horror films and cultural representations or past experiences. Atmospheres emerge in the interaction between matter, place and state of mind (Bille 2015b, 268) in a particular moment. Thus, while one should be wary of understating 'atmosphere *as* scenography' (Salter 2017, 173, my emphasis), the attunement to a situation is already saturated by shared meanings and histories. Notably, makers might rely on these shared meanings in order to impact how individuals would experience the atmosphere of the show (Grant 2013, 14).

By analysing the use of and engagement with visual obstruction in *Killer* and *Yellowbluepink,* I have sought to unpack the ways in which the conditions for atmosphere were set in both works. As such, I reflected not only on what the design and composition meant, but also on what they *did* and how the interaction between various elements produced different sensations, feelings, affects and reflections, and thus helped to orchestrate different atmospheres. Undoubtedly, my description was intertwined and intrinsically linked with my own experience, which as mentioned is the inherent paradox of such examination. To bypass this issue, I adopt Böhme's relational perspective, and suggest that it is a question of focus and emphasis. To clarify, my focus was not on my tense feeling throughout *Killer*, but rather, I attempted to trace the conditions that produced the atmosphere of the show and *how* they were set up in the first place.

[2] The composition of atmospheres can therefore illuminate different ways of being together in a situation thus adding a political layer to atmosphere (Thibaud 2014, 284; Bille et al, 2015, 31, 33; Grant 2013). As Griffero clarifies: 'At the heart of every social […] relation we thus find atmosphere. That is, the whole of words, gestures, corporal suggestions, gazes and cliches that, guaranteeing a shared emotional "agenda" of ideas and projects, implicitly restates social and axiological hierarchies, often by means of the reactivation of previous atmospheres, perhaps idealised ones' (2014, 72).

**Conclusion**

Take a look at the space around you: how the light falls, how far you are from others, what sounds you hear, how loud it is, how your feet touch the floor, whether it is cold or warm. All of these factors shape the atmosphere you are in. Atmospheres are shaped by the material and natural elements in our environment and through our interaction with those elements. They can alter our mood, and impact the ways in which we perceive, sense, or make sense. Even a slight change in intensity, volume, colour, direction or temperature can orchestrate an entirely different situation, producing a different atmosphere.

To conclude, in this article I examined the process of the composition of atmosphere. Atmospheres are not a 'thing', but are instead the result of a constellation, assemblage or encounters *between* things (whether human or non-human, material or immaterial), which can lead to various sensations, feelings and affects either when we notice them or as they unfold over time. Building on recent interest in atmospheres and sensory spaces, I have proposed specific strategies for atmosphere production – namely the arrangement of first impressions, accounting for the ecstasies of things, the crafting of contrast and immediate change and the facilitation of more extended duration – in order to illuminate this hazy phenomenon. We are constantly immersed in atmospheres, and I proposed that haze and mist share some similarities with atmospheres and can represent our immersion in them. I turned to haze and darkness to examine the various ways in which visual obstruction might shape different conditions for atmosphere production in performance. While my study of composition might expand or challenge the understanding of composition – as I focus on intangible or immaterial elements – my aim was not to show how more ephemeral elements of scenography replace traditional foundations of design (Salter 2017, 164) but instead to advance the exploration of how scenography exceeds a strictly visual dimension. Although I looked at specific conditions that overwhelm the felt body, we might also encounter atmospheres which are simply there, and 'like mist, […] do not disrupt the flow of the mundane, but float idly by it' (Welton 2011, 127). Performance, then, opens up space to think about that 'quality of relation': to further examine what atmospheres are, to consider how one might emerge and to reflect on how they bring us together. We can think about their production, constructing a deliberate, intentional composition to set the atmospheric tone for, and during, the event. Or we

can reflect on how different atmospheres create different experiences, and eventually contribute not only to the feeling of but also to the meaning of performance.

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