

# more than meteorological: urban atmospherics



'One Last Moment Under the Sky', Hottea, Asbury Park, 2019

ARCH 3308/6308; Sp. Topics in Architectural Theory; ARCH 4408 Sp. Topics in Architecture, Culture & Society Spring 2020  
| 3 credits | Instructor: Foster (jf252) | Thursday 2:30-4:25pm | 144 E. Sibley

Often reduced to a scenographic or aesthetic quality, 'urban atmosphere' is better described as an ambient condition, something sensed rather than seen and thought. Vivifying or stultifying, benign or malignant, it is a 'general comprehensive ambience' that both frames and limits outsiders' overall experience of a city and its potentials. Grounded in ambient meteorological conditions, 'urban atmosphere' is a living, compound phenomenon that, crucially, always involves an *in situ*, often social, encounter with the city that encompasses multi-sensorial experience, cultural memories and imaginaries, and fluxes of transpersonal affect that erode distinctions between 'experience' and 'meaning'. At the same time, because it is neither inherent in the physical environment or experiencing subject, the construct of 'atmosphere' mediates a way of relating to the city that is not only profoundly *emergent* but also *environment-al* – especially if we adopt David Gissen's definition of 'environment': the "biophysical totality of actants in a given locale (including human subjects), and the performances and interactions that link them". Thus, as we struggle to imagine alternative human/non-human convivialities, 'urban atmospheres' remind us of the political as well as *bio*-political potentials of embodied feelings and emotions awakened in and by urban environments.

The seminar offers a cross-disciplinary approach to 'atmospheric thinking' in architecture, landscape and urbanism. It proposes 'atmospherics' are everywhere imbricated in the socio-materiality of everyday urban life, and therefore, discourses about embodiment, the senses, place-attachment, urban nature, cultural climatology, media and technology, time-consciousness, citizenship, even the 'right-to-the-city'. After tracing the genealogy of the construct in the writing of philosophers, art historians, anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers and architectural theorists, we will explore some of multiple registers of sensibility through which urban atmospheres are manifested. We will also use the work of urban 'creatives' -- filmmakers, photographers, professional designers, environmental artists, and urban curators -- to explore whether such atmospheres can in fact be designed, and if so, the affective politics involved. In addition to readings, assignments will include an atmosphere diary, a short film and a final 'place paper'. The course is open to upper-level undergraduate and graduate Architecture students, as well as students in Art, Urban Studies, DEA, Planning, Landscape Architecture and any other discipline interested in the geo-humanities.