

Session 3

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Reflections on Multisensoriality, Affectivity, and Atmospheres from a Philosophical-Phenomenological Perspective

My presentation will be a direct response to Luis Othon Villegas' one. We are both interested in multisensoriality, emotions, and atmospheres, though from different perspectives. He is an architect who needs to work in practice with these concepts and phenomena—for they are directly relevant for his projects and creations. I am a philosopher who wants to get clear on what those concepts refer to, and on whether and how they are connected. As a phenomenologist, I am particularly interested in lived or subjective experience—i.e., how it feels to have emotions, and to perceive atmospheres. As an “empirically minded” philosopher, I am also interested in evaluating current attempts to design atmospheres, based on scientific evidence.

The plan for my presentation is as follows. The first half will take the form of an introductory lecture, during which I will:

- 1) Introduce embodiment and multisensoriality from a phenomenological perspective.
- 2) Introduce the concepts of “emotion” and “affectivity,” and explain how they relate to each other, and to 1).
- 3) Introduce the further notion of “atmospheres” and its connection to those other concepts.

The second half will be more critical-evaluative. I will ask the question of whether architects can, and should, aim to control the emotions of people in buildings or other spaces; and, relatedly, whether atmospheres can be entirely designed. My view for the moment is that, while there is evidence that certain features of the built environment are preferred over others, people's perception of atmosphere is too dependent of many non-controllable factors to be entirely controlled or designed. Which is not necessarily a bad thing (says the non-architect...). And, in any case, why not ask people what they experience? I have not come across many qualitative studies of how spaces are experienced, in particular in relation to atmosphere. There is a great deal of interest in neuroscience and how the brain responds to certain features of the environment, but neuroscience alone cannot tell us what people feel, including what atmosphere they perceive, how, and why.