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‘Pour votre tranquillité’: Ambiance, atmosphere, and surveillance

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abstract

This is a paper concerned with security, surveillance and notions of atmosphere and ambience. Whilst surveillance and security research has been excellent at examining socio-spatial relations drawn into the production and consumption of surveillance technologies, systems and practices, it has been far less well attuned to the material–affective relations, presences and absences it comes to constitute as the fabric of public space. Research within human geography and a broader ‘new materialism’ within the humanities and social sciences has become increasingly interested in exploring affective atmospheres, yet largely ignorant of a well established school of thought within French urban and social theory of ‘ambience’. This paper explores the providence of considering atmospheres and ambiances for the examination of surveillance through the case study of two major railway stations in Britain and France. The paper proffers some methods and techniques for the further exploration of atmospheres/ambiances of security.

“*The primary object of perception is atmospheres.*” (Böhme, 1993: 125)

1. Introduction: Camera

In Paris Gare du Nord we come across a poster stuck to a wall with strange drip-marks running down it. These turn out to be the smears of pigeon droppings which have run down the wall from where they perch and defecate. At odds with this scene, the poster contains an image of a smiling camera. The camera is a cartoon, expressive with curved edges. It points at an angle to the viewer. The smile makes its Cyclops eye less frightening. The camera is an almost friendly, welcoming face. Under the poster is printed: ‘Pour votre tranquillité’, or ‘For Your tranquillity’. The space has been equipped with a system of video surveillance that the poster suggests is there for the travelling public’s peace of mind, their tranquillity. The ‘tranquil’ mood implied is to be made possible by the presence and exertion of a common surveillance technology spread throughout the station, and it is for *the users* of the station. At a right angle to the cartoon camera is the real camera the poster describes. It is held within a plastic moulded housing connected to the wall by curving wire and a harder wall-mounting made of metal (see Fig. 1).

How to make sense of this scene of surveillance and security? How to comprehend the ways in which mobilities and circulations are regulated and controlled? How to understand the kinds of space being produced through this encounter? What kinds of questions can we ask of surveillance and security, what kinds of theories and methods can we employ to approach them and what might the sign really mean by tranquillity? These sorts of questions are commonly framed and posed in the wider literature within geographies of surveillance, surveillance studies and debates on security. In this paper we use this instance to ask slightly different ones and posit some challenges to security, surveillance, mobility and research methodology. How, we ask, to consider security and surveillance technologies and techniques like CCTV in relation to the ‘tranquillity’ they are purportedly for? What relation does security have to a mood or a feeling? How might this mood or feeling be constituted and experienced, in light of the poster’s surroundings of poo, pigeons and a national railway station? And why does this phrase sound so alien in relation to the commonly ‘jittery’ or ‘neurotic’ affects, emotions and dispositions so commonly associated with security and its practices and spaces? Furthermore, when such affective atmospheres and ambiances are in fact contingent outcomes of a multiplicity of relations between techniques, technologies, practices, materiality, sociality and much more, how can a specific outcome – here tranquillity – be engineered given its indeterminacy or apparent ‘autonomy’?



Fig. 1. 'Pour votre tranquillité'.

Responding to these questions, this paper emerges from the midst of a multi-site investigation into what we have called the 'sensory enigmas' of contemporary urban mobilities¹. Drawing on a collaboration between British and French scholars from geography, urban studies and architecture that explores the case-studies of Paris Gare du Nord and St. Pancras International, London, this research has coalesced around a burgeoning set of conceptual and methodological approaches towards the investigation of 'atmospheres' and 'ambiances'. These approaches, having evolved largely independent of each other in the UK and France respectively, each offer us particular spatial, material and affective understandings of space, perception and experience which we want to suggest are crucial to the performance of security and how it is lived and, more specifically in this paper, are vital to how we can go about making sense of and researching those performances. This paper then goes some way towards exploring the providence of investigating atmospheres and ambiances by opening out a first conversation between both camps.

In pursuing these aims, firstly, we examine the historical and disciplinary junctures of atmospheres and ambiances and what an emergent dialogue between them might offer analyses of surveillance and security. Secondly, we reflect on key methodological challenges that the enigmatic character of atmospheres and ambiances presents. We then move on to explore two key areas of interest for how surveillance might be apprehended through an ambiguous constellation of ambient and atmospheric material: first in terms of 'voluminosity' and the ways in which atmospheres and ambiances radiate from the various materialities and subject positions of researcher, and second in terms of the importance of 'angles of arrival' and affective dispositions. We conclude by highlighting the complexity of this kind of approach, the ambiguity of seeking to get at something that is inherently unpredictable, even unintended and, how further avenues of research might profit from this project.

2. Surveillance, atmosphere and ambience

Why bring practices of surveillance and security in relation to concepts of atmosphere and ambiances? What, moreover, can we even understand by an atmosphere or an ambience? In this section, we outline how research on surveillance can be productively brought in relation to the investigations of atmosphere and ambience, bringing the study of surveillance to speak to far thicker yet more diffuse understandings of experience, perception and spatiality.

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At the centre of questions around surveillance have always been questions of the public and private and, even more, their geographies. Mike Davis's *City of Quartz* (1991) arguably provided one of the origin-studies that actively described a "differentiated post-modern 'splintered urbanism'" that has given rise to public space CCTV, "the technological trope of the 1990s surveillance society" (Murakami-Wood, 2009: 55). To that end, research has excavated the role of surveillance in policing, disciplining and stratifying society into ever decreasing circles of visibility, intrusion and segregation into everyday life and people's life chances (Lyon, 2007). This work has been pushed in two slightly different directions. At one level attention has been directed towards the microphysics of power through surveillance and visibility (Ericson, 2006), the mundane and routine practices of watching, spectatorship and the direct touch of security and surveillance camera operators, security agents and personnel through closed circuit television systems in shopping malls and city centres (Koskela, 2000; Zurawski, 2000). The other end of the spectrum has seen increased and focused attention to the assemblages of systems through which surveillance, surveillant-assemblages and 'societies of control' might be constituted (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000). While clearly in tension, these have not meant diverging or contradictory moves. Rather, research has responded to explore how disparate systems of surveillance may result in increasingly violent and direct forms of surveillance and security presence in everyday life.

Within these contexts and under these sorts of conditions key research questions around what sort of public life is now possible under surveillance has been pursued (Klauser, 2007; Helten and Fischer, 2004). What is lacking, however, are more nuanced conceptions of the micro-material, spatial and social practices which have come to constitute the new public and private spaces placed under the watchful eye of security and surveillance practices and technologies (see Gilliom, 2006). We see the predominance of 'panic', 'fear', 'terror' and 'neurosis' (Füredi, 2005; De Goede and Randalls, 2009; Isin, 2004) as key affective expressive conditions of securitised public space. Security is often cast a disintegrating role that undoes the insecurities it paradoxically produces. Moreover, these assumptions are rarely explored in the detail of their specific modalities. Despite Stephen Flusty's (2003) efforts to categorise "interdictory space" into "crusty, jittery, slippery, stealthy, and prickly", and feminist approaches sensitive to the internalisation and embodiment of security and surveillance technologies and practices in the performance of masculinity through desiring forms of visuality and close-sensing (Haraway, 1988), these are remarkably depopulated renderings of public space in terms of how attention is brought to a far less tangible social and material melee. Even materiality is drawn down into the symbolic identification of barriers, bollards and bodies, a recourse to tangible physical, hard engineering solutions that might characterise a place, or the rough touch of a security guard intruding on one's privacy and bodily integrity (Parks, 2007). In other words, these spaces generally lack a thickness, both in description and in the attention to the material-affective relations that constitute the quality, feeling and experience of being 'immersed' in a phenomenal setting that 'appears-with' surveillance technologies, systems and practices. Beyond annotations of a vague kind of feeling of what is "desirable and undesirable" (Helten and Fischer, 2004), or conclusions that surveillance seems more 'backgrounded' than totalizing presence (McCahill and Finn, 2010), there are conceptual limits to just how the field is being rendered as a site of affect and how it might be researched. This is undoubtedly, as Gilliom's (2006: 126) notes, a "necessarily messier, less institutionalized, and exploratory but absolutely crucial job" to be performed.

But there are more nuanced accounts of public space and affective politics. For example, Francisco Klauser's (2010) attention to Peter Sloterdijk's (2011) writings on spheres helps turn the focus inwards to an interiority, to a psycho-political understanding of increasingly splintered public and private space, held together by practices of security that exist and interfere with a host of distinctive affects. For Klauser, spheres are produced through security practices that render not only an abandoned population at the boundary of the bubble, excluded or disenfranchised, but also an inside. What appears to hold the inside together is not the individualism and isolationism of many classic accounts of solitary living, but group solidarity and collective feeling. Thus, Giulianotti and Klauser's (2010) work on the FIFA World Cup – protected by ID checks, a purpose built CCTV network, mobile police units with helicopter air support – and Sloterdijk's exemplar of the securitised apartment building (Duffield, 2010) illustrate insulated public and private spaces rich with atmospheres of well-being. Klauser explains how these feelings come coupled with the capitalisation of the collective sentiment embroiled within brand marketing and consumer spending opportunities.

Moreover, John Allen (2006) explores what he calls 'ambient power' in an effort to move beyond the 'guards and gates' approach he sees endemic within the examination of power and which fails to identify various modalities of control. Here, the public sphere is reproduced through an openness that is more ambiguous and 'felt' than scripted, symbolised or built by a reduced and inhuman notion of disciplinary materiality. Allen's ambient power supposes a particular "character of an urban setting—a particular atmosphere, a specific mood, a certain feeling—that affects how we experience it and which, in turn, seeks to induce certain stances which we might otherwise have chosen not to adopt" (2006: 445). Allen sees power performed through a far more subtle and modest form of invitation, coercion and seduction. Perhaps Gare du Nord's promise of 'tranquility' coerces us to accept the camera's gaze?

This noted, there remains a serious theoretical, and methodological, gap. How might we reconsider spaces under security and surveillance practices which appear to be about more than the construction and maintenance of physical protection and observation? How might we attune to senses of being 'secured' which construct highly valued group affectivity, intimacy and atmospheres conducive to solidarity, bonding and certain forms of behaviour, as well as alienation and exclusion? Furthermore, how can we employ more comprehensive and nuanced concepts that are far more sensitive to affective relations that coalesce between subjects and, moreover, the intangible and ephemeral materialities of space, atmosphere or 'ambiance' that Allen's approach goes some way towards identifying?

2.1. Atmospheres

One entrée into such questions can be found in the recent work in geography on affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009; Bissell, 2010; McCormack, 2008). In such work, we see an adjustment of thinking towards and around the relations between bodies and their environments. As Dyson (2009: 17) notes:

"the atmospheric suggests a relationship not only with the body and its immediate space but with a permeable body integrated within, and subject to, a global system: one that combines the air we breathe, the weather we feel, the pulses and waves of the electromagnetic spectrum that subtends and enables technologies, old and new, and circulates... in the excitable tissues of the heart".

Atmosphere, therefore, can be taken in a meteorological sense as "a turbulent zone of gaseous matter surrounding the earth and

through the lower reaches of which human and non-human life moves" but also in more specifically affective senses as "something distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies while also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal" (McCormack, 2008: 413; see Ingold, 2011).

Such atmospherics are tied to an expanded conception of materiality that draws attention to "the vibrant, constitutive, aleatory, and even immaterial indices" of materiality and materialisation (Coole and Frost, 2010: 14; also see Bennett, 2010). While interests in materiality in analytic approaches like structural Marxism and existential phenomenology were to some extent 'eclipsed' by post-structuralism's turn towards themes of language, discourse, and values, there has been a re-turn to matter in recent work and attempts to "give material factors their due in shaping society and circumscribing human prospects" (McCormack, 2008: 415). This affective materialisation seeks to emphasise materiality in the sense of it taking "place with the capacities and properties of any element (i.e. earth, wind, fire, air) and/or any state (i.e. solid, liquid, gaseous)" (Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 319; see Latham and McCormack, 2004). As such, a focus on atmospheres is 'thoroughly materialist', though "a turbulent materialism in which life is imagined through a combination of different elements and different states" (Coole and Frost, 2010: 3). An atmosphere should not become "reified as a 'thing'" (Bissell, 2010: 273), but rather a part of "a field of moving materiality that registers differentially in the perpetual affordances of sensing bodies" (McCormack, 2008: 415).

Thinking about affective atmospheres also draws attention to how affects can be 'collective' and be transmitted between people. Such atmospheres "form part of the ubiquitous backdrop of everyday life" but a backdrop that is at the same time "forceful and affect[s] the ways in which we inhabit... spaces" (Bissell, 2010: 272). As our opening vignette illustrated, a specific atmosphere was produced through the combination of the sign and what it signified, the pigeon excrement that adorned it, the suggestion towards the presence of surveillance activities and technologies and so on. However, the atmosphere aimed at or intended by the sign was not necessarily the one that was produced given the complex of objects, entities, discourses and so on that circulated in and through the environment in which the sign was placed. Atmospheres emerge from the relations of the multiplicity of (im)material bodies present in any given situation and so "do not float free from the bodies that come together and apart to compose [those] situations" (Anderson, 2009: 78). Rather, these atmospheres "emanate" from a group, a collective assembling of "human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situations" (Anderson, 2009: 80).

In this sense atmospheres occur both "before and alongside the formation of subjectivity" (McCormack, 2008: 419). They require a subject to apprehend their ephemeral and evolving presence but also emanate from the multiplicity of human and non-human entities present in that situation. They are "autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with" (Anderson, 2009: 78) but only find articulation via that subject. They are neither fully subjective nor fully objective but circulate in an interstitial place in and between the two.

2.2. Ambiances

This last point raises a key connection to, but also a distinction from, Francophone work on ambiances. This revolves around the relation of affect to perception and the perceiving subject. In Francophone architectural and urban studies the notion of *ambiance* has been used for more than half a century and it has been assigned three main properties (Tixier, 2001: 57). First, it surrounds

the body and qualifies the milieu of social life. Second, an *ambiance* forms a kind of climate or atmospheric mood. These points then are close to the understanding of atmosphere outlined above. However, and thirdly, *ambiance* is taken as a product, a composition that does not exist before the presence of individuals. Thus it is a composition of both physical and material characteristics and entities, and a collective sharing of sentiment. Although not presenting a clear and definite binary, there is in general a greater realist bent in work on atmospheres in their focus on pre-subjective affect and understandings of *ambiance* lay greater emphasis on perception. Thus, *ambiance* refers to the sorts of physical and moral surroundings of a person or as an “environmental quality”, placing *ambiance* at the interface of the material and sensory qualities of the environment and individual and inter-subjective perception. These kinds of ecological characteristics might be seen through spatial and temporal formations and architectures, interactions of people, things, space and representations, and the perception of the event (Augoyard, 2007).

To elaborate, we can turn to a key figure in the development of this body of work on *ambiance*: Jean-Paul Thibaud. Thibaud’s (2002a: 185) work articulates a sense of *ambiance* that emphasises this produced, even performed dimension of *ambiance* to account for a loop created between situated experience and *ambiance* making:

“The *ambiance* is both what can be perceived and what can be produced. More, it tends to question such a distinction given that perception itself is action. As well as the architect or the designer physically shaping sensory forms, the users configure by their actions the environment in which they are located”.

Thibaud proposes a synthetic way of understanding *ambiances*. More so, he aims to qualify *ambiance*, particularly in the way it is produced and how it is received and experienced. Thus, he gives *ambiance* four main qualities in the articulation of the body and lived space: its indivisibility, its pervasiveness, its immediacy and its “spreadness” (Thibaud, 2002a, our translation). The first and second characteristics refer to “material” dimensions of *ambiance*, characterizable as a whole, both spatially and temporally: it is *here and now*. The third and fourth qualities refer to a subject’s relationship to *ambiance* where Thibaud argues that the *ambiance* mobilises the body long before consciousness. Here *ambiance* is inseparable from perception. *Ambiances* are understood to surround and are difficult to comprehend as if from a distance, because their perception occurs inside an *ambiance* to the extent that we can only realise it from within and as a whole, or we are only able to perceive an *ambiance* through its unity. Thought this way, *ambiance* “puts us in immediate contact with a situation in its entirety” (Thibaud, 2002b: 3). Thus Thibaud emphasises the implication of *ambiance* within some kind of pre-reflective register, and furthermore, restores the ‘*feeling*’ instead of the *perceiving* subject, making the way for *ambiance* to be apprehended as an emotional corporeal relationship to space as a mood, as unity but also as a process. Thibaud identifies these qualities as the perceived immediacy, “a realm of immediate sentiment and bodily feeling” of an *ambiance* that is always changing and in phase or a state (Thibaud, 2002b: 4). Even if we might not realise the transition, an *ambiance* is understood to be more or less in one state or another. An *ambiance* may be more or less tense or consensual, but in a way that crucially “expresses and conditions the way we behave and act collectively” (Thibaud, 2002b: 5).

The entanglement of these levels underlines the complexity of the concept that inherently requires an interdisciplinary understanding. However, returning to security and surveillance, the *control* of *ambiances*, as taught in French Schools of Architecture, has been primarily understood functionally and through divisible

engineering solutions that emphasise the separate manipulation of physical lighting, acoustics, temperature and so on. It is suggested here that such parameters of *ambiance* can be recorded and monitored, and so manipulated, in the production of more hospitable and comfortable spaces (see Shove, 2003 and also Gissen, 2009 on the histories of thermal comfort in architecture and design). It has even been argued that it is far easier to study the *ambiances* considered as distinct sensory plans than the *ambiance* as a “place” or situation of multisensory synthesis that the designer and building engineers may unwittingly produce (Masson, 2009).

So where do these related yet previously independently pursued approaches take us in relation to theorising and researching security and surveillance? Together they offer us perspectives that challenge existing ontologies of space, subjectivity and emotion, and so can help us re-attune investigations of surveillance through a far greater sensitivity to the role of diffused, hard to pin down sensory experiences in the form of atmospheres/*ambiances* in the experience of surveillance and surveillant practices. They resonate a kind of sensitivity to an atmosphere/*ambiance* that research increasingly reveals is being drawn upon as a resource *for* the conduct of security practices; a becoming highly attuned to the particularities of place and behaviour – as opposed to simply individuals – and the ‘sense’ of something suspicious emerging (Murphy, 2012; see Helten and Fischer, 2004).

Furthermore, though in subtly distinct ways, these conceptions bring with them an inherent challenge to the autonomous subject of experience that is taken as present at the outset of experience and so the legislator of it. In its place, the subject here is significantly decentred, emergent in the midst of a multiplicity of relations with this ‘vibrant’ milieu (Bennett, 2010; also see Simpson, 2013). For *ambiances* work the subject is a *feeling* subject rather than an abstract rational entity; a subject that is not necessarily entirely aware of what is going on but one which registers *ambiances* in its feeling body at a pre-reflexive register. For work examining atmospheres the subject of this corporeal–phenomenological perceptionism is further decentred and so even more emergent. There is a greater realist, as opposed to phenomenological, inclination in the possibility of the atmosphere existing prior to the subject’s registering of it. The subject is a product of the force-filled materialities of atmospheric conditions. While potentially shaped by its presence, the subject devolves from its corporeal relations to the atmosphere and the other materialities and socialities present.

These subtleties aside, together these approaches offer a distinctive manner through which we might critique the atmospheres and milieu that are co-constituted by strategies of urban security and surveillance. Indeed, perhaps surveillance atmospheres have remained so unacknowledged *because* they are produced through a multiplicity of relations, and it is *precisely* security’s ‘dividuating’ effects – and criticism of how surveillance identifies and discriminates – which have been given so much focus within the literature up until now.

3. Transecting tranquillity

Ambiance/atmospheres may help *us* become sensitive to material–affective relations of presence and absence, mobility and collective feeling that might not only be part of the surveillance gaze, but also the not-so-simple encounters with security’s materials, presences and practices. But how to actually research them? There is a distinct lack of writing on what research methods might be fruitfully employed in attending to *atmospheres*; it is not obvious how we should go about researching atmospheres, or qualities of surveillance and security, that appear irreducible, fragmented or

vague. How can we identify an implicitly ephemeral and transient phenomenon that is produced between and with entities, objects and things? Indeed, Allen's approach towards Potsdamer Platz is cognisant of the fact that ambient power "it is harder to apprehend and indeed, for some, to comprehend" (2006: 452).

In contrast, research on *ambiance* retains a far more developed, although not necessarily coherent, set of research methods and approaches more attuned to these phenomena. One key feature of this, at least from the perspective of those schooled in UK social sciences methodological norms and standards, is the open-minded and experimental nature through which research here often proceeds. Ambiances are addressed as material traces that cannot simply be measured, but are, to a certain extent, *sensed* by several different practices and representations. Research here proceeds along emergent lines of enquiry or by what Tixier et al. (2012) call 'exploratory protocols'. As part of this, an initial plan may be developed based on the use of some form of technological device (an audio recorder, light sensor, camera, or video camera) or a set of initial parameters that the research should proceed within. However, this presents only a *starting point* and the specific activities ultimately undertaken remain relatively open as matters emerge in and through the field of research.

One such initial starting point is the use of 'urban transects'. Traditionally, 'transects' involve a strict formal methodology whereby the transect unfolds along a straight line to bring attention to the "layers constituted by the life-forms and inanimate matter, and to the succession of spatial conditions and relations that these constitute in, spaces that the line cut through" (Tixier and Melemis, 2010: 130). However, *ambiance* research employs transects in not quite so formal a way. Rather than adopting a modernist geometric mind-set, the *ambiance* researcher adopts the disposition of the 'wayfarer', actively threading a way through and adapting to the environments being researched (Ingold, 2007). Such transects are thus interested in the relationships that constitute the ambient 'situation' between people, things, built objects, sounds and other senses and social practices, and so "allowing for the articulation of components of the urban milieu that are almost always considered separately from one another" (Tixier and Melemis, 2010: 129). This has been heavily influenced by the Situationists' walking encounter or *derive*, as well as walk-alongs and ethnographic walks (Lee and Ingold, 2006; Pink, 2008). Whilst several forms of representation are a primary outcome of the urban transect – some of which we reproduce here – at its most basic in *ambiance* research, the transect is far more than a mode of representation; it presents precisely the sort of 'exploratory protocol' suggested above.

For example, as has been well documented, the transect as a geographical method has been primarily used for organising empirical encounters by identifying a space to be observed and recorded, performing those measurements, capturing data and recording those representations. As an open-ended assembling of various materials to stage an engagement with a field, the ambient transect does something different. The approach presents a specific 'mode of experience' in that the purpose is not simply to record data (such as video footage, imagery or sound), but rather to produce a disposition which encourages sensitivity to events through equipment, movement and collaborative experiences emerging throughout the spaces of the site, both as and after they happened.

Our research initially entailed walk-throughs across the terrain whereby acute notice of the meeting of one's body with our field environment, as well as the other bodies that we attempted to characterise and identify in bodily sensation, was taken. Throughout this we collated various materials, producing a 'constellation' of disparate and seemingly unrelated materials that formed an unacknowledged sense or feeling. We employed and experimented

with a range of visual, audio and observational techniques, including audio transects, static and mobile video recording, time-lapse photograph and multi-angle filming. It was not so much that we employed these methods as part of a clear delimited methodology with which to research ambiances and atmospheres. Instead we were more open to the contradictory impression of the exhaustion of a place (Perec, 2010) and, paradoxically, the question of what do you see when you can almost begin to see everything? Thus, we were not always sure of what we were looking for while recording and we were not always sure what we *could* see, hear and feel through these mediated interactions. We used these methods as means to help us look at, listen to and feel the space differently, even away from the field site. This was more a manner of slipping into a place or an atmosphere that seemed to inevitably slide beyond our ability to record or recount it. Technologies and conventions of practice helped us in unusual ways. Video cameras brought our attention to things not through simply what they recorded but what they helped us notice and how we navigated space with them.

Such an approach therefore relies strongly on an open-minded disposition to the research process and in many ways moves away from thinking about the employment of research methodologies in terms of relative success or failure in 'capturing' the reality of the field. Instead, it looks more to where something may lead or how it may allow for ambiances and atmospheres to appear. For the UK-based academics on our research team this led to both a feeling of liberation, but also a not-always comfortable feeling during the research process about where things may (or more so may not) get to, especially as we came to leaving the field and thinking about what we had ultimately 'produced' as well as 'collected'.

Therefore, this paper also presents an account of how we took part in constructing an ambient or atmospheric "mode of experience", certainly by collecting, but also by representing and discussing; making the representation go far beyond being a way of describing phenomena. Thus, for instance, following a site-visit our 'fieldwork' continued through the discussions and conversations we had when we attempted to talk about, represent and present our encounters. One aspect of this was a process of using post-it notes, spaced out on a table in no particular hierarchy, to try to articulate the different experiences and issues that had become of significance to the collective. These were grouped under general colour coded themes – surveillance, auto-ethnography and reception – and were (re)positioned as the discussion unfolded. Combinations inspired further reflections and further post-it notes, in a sort of iterative process. While a record of the final array of notes was kept, this was not so much an intended 'output', but rather a product of a research process. Such creative and experimental practice helped us gain greater insight into our field experiences, and production of the field itself (Dewsbury, 2010), and so ultimately expanded our apprehension of the ambiances present/produced (see Fig. 2).

One thing that should be noted, and relevant to our not including all these notes and other media mentioned above, is that we will not be attempting to develop something like an 'atmospheric' mode of writing in this paper. While some significant developments have been made in this vein – Stewart's (2007, 2011) work on 'ordinary affects' and atmospheric attunements is exemplary here, as is McCormack's (2002, 2008) on the buoyant affects of ballooning as well as rhythm – this is beyond the scope of this paper's attempts to experiment with atmospheric modes of research. Instead, we will limit our efforts to focusing on the ways in which surveillance technologies, systems, practices and our attempt to grasp them, play a part in the constitution of the material-affective relations, presences and absences that circulate through, and emanate from, the fabric of mobile public spaces.



Fig. 2. (Re)constituting the field.

4. Voluminosity

“they are Something thing like, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities-conceived as ecstasies.” (Böhme, 1993: 122).

A member of our team takes extended video of pigeons trotting in a pair on the station concourse. He suddenly becomes aware of having backed into the path of a security patrol. When the patrols walk without the disturbance of a crowd they stay in formation. However, when they meet a crowd they tend to fan out, with the effect of creating a bigger volume between them. As they stroll they do so in a formation, two at the front one at the back. Their hand-guns radiate a presence that makes him nervous (see Fig. 3).

Later we see a larger team of 5 police patrolling outside the station. They make a similar formation that altered when they stop and search a young man who they force up against a wall, with his hands above his head. A policeman behind him has his hand on his back. Two others are looking at him and question him. Another stands looking outwards while the last talks on his phone with some register or clipboard in his hand. People walking by move out of their way.

Such events, patterned movements and force-filled materialities sit in tension with the previously mentioned ambition for tranquillity through security and surveillance. It is questionable how comfortably guns and tranquillity go hand-in-hand given the police presence, and their questioning of undocumented persons that emanates a feeling that everyone is potentially under threat from these practices.



Fig. 3. Pigeons on patrol.

Ambiances and atmospheres seem to radiate from things and collectives, an articulation of what Gernot Böhme describes as a kind of ‘voluminosity’. Böhme argues that atmospheres seem to seep and emanate from a point and a direction. Their source could be an object that ‘ecstatically’ occupies the space. A room, for instance, is changed when entered by a charismatic individual or object. The space of an atmosphere is ‘filled’ with someone or something; the object occupies the space more pervasively than its bounded materiality allows. In Böhme’s ontology, it is the thing that latches, that emanates such as in light illuminations that literally and affectively emit and immerse, as exemplified in the gas-heated bollards seen in Gare du Nord, which through their light and warmth beckoned collectives of passengers to form around them while waiting for their trains (Edensor, 2013).

We can easily see how particular objects and things radiate suspicion in terms of threatening the safety of public space, and publics have been routinely enrolled in order make use of their sensitivity to objects that might threaten their security. In public security campaigns such as the London Metropolitan Police’s ‘Trust Your Instinct’s’ series of posters (Aradau and van Munster, 2011) that surround the corridors of London’s underground like wallpaper, left-behind objects are represented to radiate alarm, portrayed as a comic-book explosion of waves of alert dissipating from a bag or forgotten luggage. And yet, in our heightened sense or sensitivity to our presence in the station we became increasingly aware of the ambient presence of security itself and us as its potential targets. Indeed, when attempting to research in these spaces – particularly through photography and the assemblage of our bodies, equipment and the station’s diverse regulations – we became productive of a particular kind of ambiance/atmosphere.

Reflecting on the position that we held as researchers in relation to security presences, intentions, rules, regulations and by-laws our position was relatively ambiguous. In St. Pancras our access was formalised and structured. In consultation with the station regarding their risk and safety concerns, we conducted a site-visit to plan out the locations within the station where we thought filming would be most suitable. As a condition of this, we had to register on our arrival and wear a badge to identify that we were carrying out our work. Furthermore, we had to ensure that our fixed locations were adequately partitioned off from passengers by using official station barriers. Ultimately, the station’s primary concern was that we research in a way that could not disrupt the smooth flow of passengers or would present a health and safety risk, nor would we resemble hostile reconnoisseurs. The outcome of this was that we almost felt important given the presence of our credentials; the camera proudly displayed, our faces doubled in a black and white copy that adorned our ID tags. The moveable bollards we carried with confidence almost parted the throngs of passengers that stood in our way. This made us visible to station staff, who occasionally approached us just to see that we were wearing a badge rather than to actually question our actions in a manner that negated any feeling of being under suspicion. The various materials and equipment we placed around us became, in a sense, voluminous, installing a small bubble of belonging to our group as officials.

Our experience with Gare du Nord in Paris was somewhat different. Firstly, the management of the station is much more complicated, given the range of companies that run various areas of the station. To research in Gare du Nord we asked permission from a variety of people prior to conducting the fieldwork, including approaching a contact (a researcher working at RATP and also the Director of communication for the station and connections). However, we received no response. Having checked on the station website to identify any restrictions on the sorts of activities we planned to undertake, we decided to conduct our fieldwork without formal authorisation or any identification of our presence or

why we were there. This had significant implications for our experiences of the ambiances and atmospheres circulating in and through the station space.

In Gare du Nord, so as to appear less obtrusive, we worked in smaller groups – as pairs or on our own. Yet we became more visible. We were approached several times by a series of different station personnel, some obviously security, others less obviously so. Alongside the direct presence of security and station staff, the station space is also indirectly policed and surveilled by a combination of station security, civil police, Gendarme (military police) and a range of different surveillance cameras operated by the various companies who operate the station and the trains. An excerpt from our research diaries presents a particularly familiar security narrative discussed in academic research, by photographers and activists concerned with filming and photography in public space:

“I was approached while filming on the upper level by the entrance to the Eurostar trains. I was filming a time-lapse video of the movement of the people below to try to discern if there was some kind of order to the movements of the people through the station – clear routes such as those we had observed in various locations in St Pancras. After around 5 minutes a security guard came over and lingered a few feet from me, making his presence clear to me. I looked at him, making it clear that I knew he was there and to show I wasn’t hiding the fact I was filming. He then left. However, after another 10 or so minutes he came back. Clearly the length of time I had been there was cause for suspicion. He said something to me in French. I replied with my stock: ‘Je ne comprend pas. Je ne parlez pas francais.’ He became a little agitated, speaking more forcefully in French and gestured to my camera. I showed him what I had filmed to try to appease him. He watched the clip I had generated and still did not seem happy. He tilted his head side to side as though weighing up a decision but then said ‘ok’ in a slightly begrudging fashion. It was as though he had made a judgement call rather than applying a rule (a situation that appears the norm given the advice on filming given on the station website)”².

Stephanie Simon has recently posited that this kind of encounter between security and photographer is not “really about the photos themselves but rather about the desire to ‘fix, verify, and authenticate’ photographers” (Simon, 2012: 162). In other words, our taking photographs and film was targeted for intervention because our actions performed those of a ‘security subject’, or a subject that must be secured by practices which seek to fix which “futures might result from his or her actions in the present” (2012: 162). In the context of our station, however, the logic of preemptively fixing are not that easy to decipher. Indeed, Simon’s instantiation of “preemptive atmospheres”, or loose causes for photographic denial which are seemingly ‘plucked out of the air’, give some sense of the ambiguity over our legitimate presence in the station vis a vis those tasked with securing it.

Whilst our encounters could be read as preemptive policing, or a counter-terrorism and public safety logic, they combine and coalesce with other more prosaic station rules around photography and licenses. SNCF, one company that manages the station, advertises the slogan “la SNCF aime les amateurs” (“SNCF loves amateurs”). According to their website, “‘Merely’ being an amateur photographer or film-maker shouldn’t prevent you from being allowed to give free rein to your talent at stations!”. SNCF explicitly encourages amateur photography, although this right – legitimate within ‘free’ or public areas of their stations – may be rescinded at any point. Their regulations state: “This tolerance may be suspended for specific reasons (e.g. maintenance work, events) or

due to enhanced security measures (under the French government’s ‘vigipirate’ plan)”. In the UK, while photography at stations is not actively encouraged, there is explicit guidance that photos are allowed even if the guidelines are targeted at so-called “railway enthusiasts” who are rendered as insiders to the railway station by being asked to head away from busy passenger areas. Interestingly, these persons are explicitly asked not to wear any high-visible apparel that might confuse them with railway personnel.³ In contrast, when one of the French speakers in the group was confronted with station staff in Gare du Nord over his legitimacy to be there, we did not have a sure footing to stand our ground. We were not even questioned; it was simply asserted that we ‘could not’ take photos.

In this sense, the different assemblage of our bodies, equipment and our effectively ambiguous position to conduct the research we wanted, removed the air of authority and status we had garnered in St. Pancras which could have rebuffed the encounters and demands of different security personnel and, thus, the way we inhabited the space was far more unsure. Indeed, unlike the volume of insiderness we formed at St. Pancras, at Gare du Nord it was more a case of an ecstatic projection of apprehension outside of our more fragmented body-camera assemblages, to the extent that several of the group became paranoid that they were being closely scrutinised by plain-clothed security officials.

Affective atmospheres then can and will be experienced differently by different bodies (Bissell, 2010), and these bodies can in turn contribute something to the composition and affectivity of that atmosphere with their presence. Based on this, echoing Ahmed, it is important to attend to the exchanges that take place between bodies and their atmospheric environments (see Anderson, 2009). As such, it became clear that our bodies and our actions, and our technology, do not simply arrive so neutrally into a composition with other objects and bodies, but with a specific ‘affectio’ (a specific force or capacity to affect). This in turn amplifies outcome of affective relations given the ways that it multiplies the difference and ambiguity inherent in any encounter as our actions were made sense of through a probable set of subject categories: tourist, student, photographer, potential terrorist, and against which we were judged.

“We do not know in advance what will happen given this contingency, given the hap of what happens; we do not know ‘exactly’ what makes things happen in this way and that. Situations are affective given the gap between the impressions we have of others, and the impressions we make on others, all of which are lively” (Ahmed, 2010: 36).

5. ‘Angles of arrival’

“Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and ‘felt the atmosphere’? (Brennan, 2004: 1).

The securing of public spaces is not always spectacular. We can question this on more banal grounds. For instance, Peter Nyers has asked in the context of borders, can “dirt have a force or direction of its own?” (2012: 3). From our research, it would appear so. In St. Pancras any presence of any waste or out of place matter brought about a chain of reaction – the relay of a message between staff members, the appearance of a cleaner or other appropriate staff member and the subsequent removal of that matter. In contrast, in Gare du Nord things accumulate in random collections of materials: waste, bird crap, train tickets, things pushed into crevices in walls. Just the existence of pigeons is in stark contrast to

² Research Diary, March 2012.

³ http://www.sncf.com/en_EN/html/media/CH0007-Culture/BR0252-Amateur-photography/MD0005_20070522-Read-article.html. See also http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/passenger_services/guidelines_for_rail_enthusiasts.html.

St. Pancras which deters its aerial organisms by the regular use of a Hawk. These diverse and apparently unconnected encounters lead us to ask the question: As an apparently 'secure' space under different regimes of security and surveillance, who or what are the stations hospitable to?

The 'hospitality' of each station opens out some important questions for how these 'secure' spaces welcome their visitors and how surveillance and security practices might go hand in hand with the production, construction or even 'engineering' of specific kinds of feeling or atmosphere of arrival, or more specifically, welcome. Clearly both stations are points of arrival into major European cities as well as attracting significant proportions of local or domestic traffic. However, one of our field-sites (St. Pancras) presents a more intensified form of Welcome. First, the station recognises that 30% of its footfall will be visitors to the station itself rather than people travelling on trains from the station. And second, with the imminence of the Olympic Games at the time of our field-research, the station was gearing up to 'Welcome the World' and act as a gate-way hub to rail traffic into London. St. Pancras is very much intended as a 'destination' and has made significant material investment in order to create the right or correct environment to do this. Indeed, as Lisle and Bulley (2012) suggest, "there has been little sustained analysis of how the intricate power relations of hospitality play themselves out at a micropolitical level", particularly in the way an ethic of hospitality, perhaps even an atmosphere, might include and exclude in the segregation and hierarchical categorisation and treatment of guests to the city.

As the preceding has suggested, affective atmospheres are "evocative of affective states within social situations" (Anderson, 2009: 80) where 'social' includes various materialities beyond simple humans. However, care needs to be taken in terms of how the relationship between a perceiving body and the atmospheres it enters into is understood. There is a danger of assuming what Dyson (2009) calls an 'outside-in' logic. While illustrations of atmosphere are often presented in terms of a person walking into a room and 'feeling' an atmosphere (Brennan, 2004), we also need to attend to the role played by the body arriving (Ahmed, 2010), which is not necessarily pre-given. Rather, it emerges in the *co*-production of ambience/atmosphere and arriving body. Hospitality is not, then, one-way or pre-existent.

During our research the various angles of the respective team members' arrival was of great significance to the ways that the atmospheres and ambiances of the stations were registered in and by our researching bodies, and so how hospitable these spaces came to feel for us. All of the six researchers working on the project are white and, as with many academics, are broadly of middle-class background. Five are male and one female. All are employed in academic institutions at various career stages: as postgraduate researchers, research fellows, or early career/established lecturers. Considering these sorts of aspects of our identities and the relative continuity between us, the most obvious differences in our disposition arose from linguistic skill (or a lack thereof) and our more general status as 'foreign' bodies. This did have a bearing on the appearance of particular kinds of ambient thresholds. Working in our field sites in the UK and France meant, to varying degrees, members of our research team were working amid unfamiliar linguistic surroundings. This was perhaps most evident in the UK-based members of the team's very limited French which lent the fieldwork in Gare du Nord a relatively unsettling feel. As one researcher noted:

"The language barrier made me nervous and self-conscious with not being able to easily respond to or understand any questions asked and so not being able fully explain what it was we were doing there. This was made worse given the ambiguity of what explanation to give – play the stupid and naive

tourist or be open about being a researcher as each could have different repercussions?"⁴

It is also important to note here though that there is much more inflecting the ways such atmospheres and ambiances appeared to us and were perceived by us than these sorts of identity-based differentiations. While we can situate each member of us within a range of pre-defined subject positions (such as those suggested above), this risks effacing fundamental elements of our existential singular-plurality. In addition to such distinctions of this kind, there is also the difference in itself – not a difference of *x* from *y*, but a difference as utter specificity – that marks all of our subjectivities (Deleuze, 2004). Our subjectivity presents us with more than clearly defined molar categories within which we can be positioned; we are in fact a congealment of an on-going multiplicity of experiences, memories, affects and subjectivations stretching well beyond our current circumstances and that affect the way the world appears for us in ways we rarely are consciously aware of. We need to be careful not to just 'explain away' the role our relative subject positions played in the way in which such ambiances and atmospheres appear to us and were registered in our thinking-feeling bodies based on such macro-level forms of identity politics (Stewart, 2007).

For example, and remaining with the importance of language competency, spoken, individual, collective and recorded voices unevenly surfaced into presence and significance – coming out of a background – in different sorts of ways. One of those ways was how speech came to presence as talk or ambience by our ability to attune to it through recognition, despite the standardised SNCF tune that preceded station announcements – although these soon gained familiarity. Or at an even more mundane level, we can consider why the pigeons' movements filmed by one member of the research team as discussed above caught their attention as something interesting or affective as this by no means did the same of others in the research team (Anglophone or not).

That said, and returning to our national identity, this difference in angle of arrival came up in another way for the French academics when working in St. Pancras. Being in many ways a tourist opened a feeling of relative freedom and so the ability to experiment in the field with less concern for breaking rules given the ability to blame this on being a 'silly tourist'. Equally, our relative levels of permission to do our research (discussed earlier) were significant here. As one researcher noted:

"I think the biggest thing that coloured my perception of each station was the permission we had to be there. St Pancras seemed welcoming and with our formal permission it seemed their only concern was health and safety. We could do what we wanted assuming we kept out of the way and took adequate precautions. In Gare du Nord the very lack of response from the station to our requests made it all feel more ambiguous. This was made worse by them approaching me, and more so the response [the project PI] received – not just questions but out and out assertions that he wasn't allowed to take photos."⁵

Another related key feature of our angle of arrival, and so our registering of the variously (in)hospitable atmospheres and ambiances therein, came in terms of our relative familiarity with the sites and their organisation (both physically and administratively). From our greater contact and discussion with the management of St. Pancras, we had a relatively clear understanding of the administrative functioning of the station and its rail networks, and also the relatively simple layout of the terminal. However, it was rather different when it came to Gare du Nord:

⁴ Research Diary, January 2012.

⁵ Research Diary, March 2012.

“My first experience of Gare du Nord was arriving there from the airport a week or so before our field research was to start. This initial encounter can be best summed up as an experience of disorientation. Coming off the train I was struck by the sheer size of one of the lower levels where the RER trains arrive. At this time I wasn’t clear which exit to use and so took a few wrong turns and had to double back on myself. There were also people everywhere, all heading in different directions, creating a swarm of bodies and baggage.”

The physical and administrative structuring of Gare du Nord is complicated. There are a great variety of levels in the station, many of which are operated by different companies and authorities responsible for train and station operation, security, retail and hospitality, which constitute different materialities of station design, but also a more complicated array of types of trains that leave the station. This means that the station is full of thresholds, changes in materials and their properties, differences in oversight and management (see Figs. 4 and 5).

Whilst it has been relatively well documented that borders produce a succession of thresholds from which to scrutinise and decide upon the mobility of passengers through security checkpoints and border controls (Salter, 2008), these thresholds seem also to be performed atmospherically and are not necessarily registered immediately. For instance, through our research we identified what could be thought of as sonic thresholds. In each station audio recordings we took identified the frequency of audible security announcements relating to, for example, unattended

baggage and suspicious behaviour, marking a sort of sonic territory. Further, our audio transects identified key shifts throughout the stations’ various spaces and levels, giving a clear sense of their shifting aural ambiances.

Indeed, in discussion with a staff member of St. Pancras, we were told how the station has worked very hard to produce a particularly luxuriant ‘atmospheric gateway’ to London, what might be described as elegance redolent of Victorian splendour. The station’s own literature as well as its restaurants, bars and eateries emphasise this point. The focus is on welcome, what they call a ‘positive sense of arrival’ wrought by openness, light, clarity and a ‘high quality public realm’ (TFL) that gives a sense of the exclusivity of this kind of ambiance. Is this how to construct “a sense of physical and psychopolitical security and togetherness” (Klauser, 2010) or an atmosphere or ‘climate’ of joy? One of our field diaries led with the notion that this was a ‘polished’ space, smooth and clean, totally different to Gare du Nord:

“I started to observe absent elements: not much noise, not a lot of security announcements, no smell, no surveillance personnel patrolling, no homeless people, neither beggars, nobody running, no upset crowds of passengers, no lines of people at the checking of Eurostar, no dirt.”⁶

In this manner of immersion, it is evident that ambiances and atmospheres build and surge their way to awareness, gaining momentum as they register more distinct and insistent than a vague feeling, but to a specific focusing on material, people and practices that may be more or less hospitable for some.

It is difficult to separate this kind of intent from a broader and deeper emphasis on the security of public space within UK planning and public space proposals following the Gehl report on the state of London in 2004, which specifically focused on the ‘quality’ of Britain’s public spaces. Now we see aspirations of a ‘high quality public realm’ in countless town centre and regeneration scheme planning documents. But how also not to see a particular atmospheric aesthetic reproduced in the attainment of these ‘premium’ atmospheres or public spaces secured from anything that does not fit this model? Thus whilst we see a high-level attention to risky or dangerous objects proliferating the concerns of metropolitan security and surveillance according to counter-terrorism practices (Ara-dau and van Munster, 2011), discussions with station management and observation of daily routines of station personnel illustrate the convergence of the security of objects. Attention of low-level scrutiny or a vigilance to dirt and rather well-used notions of matter out of place is evident. This is indeed the focus of much of the surveillance of the station and the concerns of St. Pancras marketing and branding, that nothing should detract from the feel of the station, from litter to yellow signs and poorly designed posters placed at ad hoc locations.

6. Conclusion

This paper leads towards a sense that surveillance practices appear receptive to atmospheres/ambiances and atmosphere/ambiances to those practices and technologies. Surveillance seems to respond to atmospheres of diffuse and ambiguous behaviours, to situations that seem not quite right, or wrong. But ultimately our approach has sought to get at something that is seemingly enigmatic. A feeling of a space under surveillance and security practices, altered through our efforts to interact, engage and ‘research’ our stations through a range of research methods. Indeed attempting to pin it down, to bring precision from ambiguity reflects the uncertain moves of security and surveillance seeking to



Fig. 4. Station levels.



Fig. 5. Material manifestations of station management. Note the switch from a wooden floor to a tiled one, denoting a shift in the managerial jurisdiction for those areas of the station.

⁶ Research Diary, June 2012.

label, categorise and ultimately decide over the mobile and transitory environments it oversees.

Our approach was distinctive to doing certain kinds of research and our experiences of atmospheres/ambiances reflect those modes of experience. We would then exercise caution in ascribing our experiences of ambiance research to everyday passenger experiences of transit in spaces under surveillance. We have shown that atmospheres/ambiances of security seem unpredictable, maybe even unintended. They are by-products of (sometimes random) activities, collections of things and events, and passengers may well exercise the kinds of unfamiliarity and photography with which we arrived and sought to consume and catalogue the station spaces. In other words, atmospheres/ambiances seem an important way in which secured spaces are experienced, lived and addressed.

Beyond the realm of studies of security/surveillance alone though, in this paper we have also articulated the sort of methodological disposition we feel is required in accommodating and apprehending the fleeting and multi-sensory nature of ambiances and affective atmospheres as they appear and come to be registered. This has revolved around the loosening of the constraints often placed on social science research in terms of its limited methodological repertoire, but also, more so, the disposition with which such methodological work is approached. In other words, our approach is perhaps an example of how to think and develop methods that are not necessarily generative of a given recording, an iota of data, a diary entry, a video capture or distinctive and identifiable relations, but rather an unstable and open experience of a place or context, and the contingent shifting, intensifying and lessening of presences and absences.

One question that this raises though, and which we have not had space to attend to here, is how to write and/or represent such ambiances and atmospheres. If we approach the research process differently based on our theoretical questioning, it is appropriate that this too should inflect our presentational practices. As such, further work is required in thinking about how we might be able to write in some kind of 'ambient' or 'atmospheric' way. How to develop a style, grammar or syntax that is alive to the potency of ambient/atmospheric forces and so does not reify them into stilled categorical taxonomies? Furthermore, how could we sufficiently present ambient and atmospheric encounters inside and outside of the limits of text? Given what we have been talking about is multisensory in its very nature, might this mean we seek to actually reproduce such sensory experiences, for example through site-specific installations and experiments such as sound walks and tours. Or even more performatively, by arming academics and others with a camera and notepad and asking them to participate in the research process themselves?

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