

Atmosphere, Anthropocene, Urbanity, Sensitivity. Session 1 – Introduction

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▶ **To cite this version:**

Niels Albertsen, Suzel Balez, Laurent Devisme, Jean-Paul Thibaud. Atmosphere, Anthropocene, Urbanity, Sensitivity. Session 1 – Introduction. Proceedings of the 4th International Congress on Ambiances, Alloaesthesia: Senses, Inventions, Worlds, Réseau International Ambiances, Dec 2020, e-conference, France. pp. 58-60, 10.48537/hal-03220242 . hal-03220242

HAL Id: hal-03220242
https://hal.science/hal-03220242

Submitted on 11 May 2021

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Atmosphere, Anthropocene, Urbanity, Sensitivity

Session 1 – Introduction

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The rise of the contemporary city with the many names: endless, limitless, porous, network, ubiquitous, città diffusa, metapolis, Zwischenstadt, ortlose Stadt, planetary coincides with the Great Acceleration that takes off from about 1950 and shows exponential increases in a range of socio-economic as well as Earth System indicators.

Many geologists consider this take off the beginning of the Anthropocene, i.e. the period in the geological history of the Earth, where human forces have become 'natural forces' influencing the planet Earth in unprecedented ways, disastrously as with climate change caused by greenhouse gasses. Seen this way contemporary urbanity and the Anthropocene have developed together, but not only this. Cities have also been a prime mover in the anthropogenic acceleration through increases in the carbon footprints of urban regions in the Northern Hemisphere. Heating and cooling in these regions are responsible for an estimated 35 to 45 per cent of current carbon emissions, while urban industries and transportation contribute another 35 to 40 per cent. Mobility, dispersion, suburbanization, sprawl and expanded infrastructures of contemporary urbanities generate anthropogenic effects. Cities cover only 2 per cent of the world's land surface, but consume over 75% of Earth's material resources.

- Contemporary anthropogenic cities are also the places of a variety of atmospheric experiences in both the meteorological sense and the æsthetic sense. How does this relate to the anthropogenic character of cities? Are there atmospheric experiences coming specifically from the anthropogenic aspects of contemporary urbanities? If so, do they problematize (render obsolete) the distinction between the meteorological and the æsthetic dimensions of atmosphere. Has the weather become one common denominator of both?
- Does the Gaia-hypothesis on the Anthropocene, which understands the Earth as a moving totality of living beings and materials, generate new ways of atmospherically moving people's feelings? Can atmospheric interventions enhance anthropogenic consciousness as indicated by Olafur Eliasson's melting icebergs in his Ice Watch installations in different cities?
- More generally, different spatial devices, in-situ experimentations, scientific, artistic or documentary projects, aim to concretely experience this "new era": observation platforms for landscape change, exploration of places

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affected by a disaster, exhibition-awareness of the Anthropocene… What can we say about the use of such devices, what is their scope?

- One of the characteristics of the Anthropocene era stems from the difficulty of projecting ourselves. There has never been so much questioning of planning failures, disappointments in planning… If this impacts public policies, it is not unrelated with sensitivities affected by forms of disenchantment and defeatism. We can more particularly observe them in places marked by the Golden Age of Development (the flip-side of which has turned out to be the take-off of the Great Acceleration) and whose future is problematic: seaside resorts, ski resorts and other spheres related to modern spatial design. What do these situated sensitivities tell us?
- The subtle, tenuous characteristics of certain ambient transformations undoubtedly also contribute to the apprehension of Anthropocene. How are these sometimes discrete evolutions perceived and / or represented, playing out at the limits of the phenomenal and often unusual temporal ranges? Can we consider these discreet changes capable of initiating important processes having long creative spans?
- How is the current socio-ecological crisis also and inseparably a crisis of sensitivity to our environments? If our way of being sensitive to the spaces we inhabit is changing, how is sensitivity a particularly relevant entry for thinking about current and future changes in our living environments?

This thematic session has welcomed contributions that venture into this broad problematic searching for arguable connections between atmosphere, Anthropocene, contemporary urbanity and sensitivity. Contributions could be theoretical, empirical, case-oriented, describing and/or advocating possible interventions or already executed ones. The following pages present the outcomes of the call.

The 5 collected papers cross the main stakes that have been summarized. The authors all pay attention to methodological questions for both researchers and artists. For example, **Bisson** reveals the importance of comparing intra-urban ambiances thanks to guided tours made in Nantes, allowing to decipher “interesting points” and “iconic places.” Related to his recent Ph.D., his reflection can be connected to anthropocene considerations that are more the concern of the other papers of the session.
The attempt of an artistic device to develop the common geological consciousness and help make tangible major changes at the scale of the earth is described by **Kellough**: an atmospheric sense of geological time could help to frame the consequences of human actions on a large time scale.

It is a similar “big question” that can be asked to O. Eliasson’s proposal of big pieces of ice being located in european city centres and which is mentioned by **Albertsen** in his reflection on the consequences of the arrival” of both the Metapolis - urban concept elaborated by Ascher in 1995 – and the great acceleration due to our new geological era on the transformation of our attentiveness. What could metapolitan climate policies integrate for enhancing such consciousness ? The question is open.
The transformation of the awareness to living environments is the main point adressed by **Thibaud**’s paper : what are the paths leading to the awareness of environmental issues? Listeners, appreciators, performers, resonators and weavers are put into perspective and their capacities explored for the intensification of sensibility. Clearly this intensification concerns both “powers to perceive” and “capacities to be affected,” traditionnally disjoined.

The horizon of reconciliation between man and the world thanks to architecture is not new indeed but may require new ways. That's what **Balez** explores with an attention to the role of senses, explicitly transferring Sloterdijks thoughts into architecture.

Finally, a methodological tool is explored by **Tzirtzilakis**, **Maragkou** and **Rimenidis**, relying on a dictionary of terms applied to the region of Thessaly, Greece. Such a tool could contribute to build a general observatory of Anthropocene.