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Foreword

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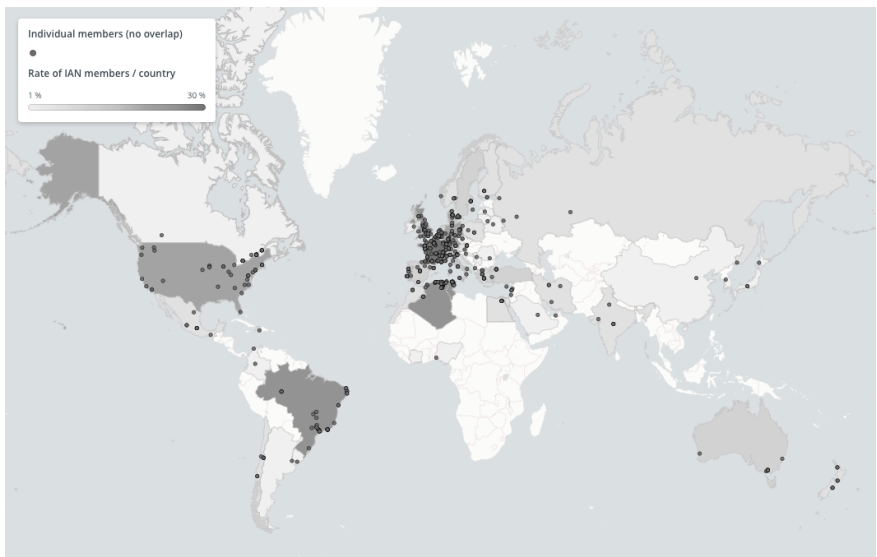
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Foreword

Ambiances, Alloæsthesia: Senses, Inventions, Worlds is the title of the 4th International Congress on Ambiances, organized by the International Ambiances Network. This is a thematic scientific network supported by the French Ministry of Culture, the *Ambiances, Architectures, Urbanités* research unit and the Grenoble School of Architecture. Its role is to federate and promote work relating to ambiances, to the sensory design of architectural and urban spaces and to the understanding of the ontologies, forms and powers of the affective intensities of atmospheres. It takes into account the sensory field in the ways of thinking and designing the spaces that are produced, experienced, practiced and represented. This approach to the built environment involves the sound, light, olfactory, thermal, tactile, kinesthetic and other dimensions of the world. It also involves the cultural, social and political dimensions of the situated bodily experience. The International Ambiances Network advocates multi-sensorial and multidisciplinary approaches. It is aimed at researchers, academics, professionals, artists and students from various horizons and covers the field of research as well as design activities, teaching practices and artistic actions. At the time we write these words, the network brings together nearly 1,080 individual members (whose distribution on the surface of the planet can be seen on the map below), spread over more than sixty countries. It also has some thirty teams (research, educational, professional groups) associated with it. Each year, this network contributes to the organization (scientific, financial and logistical) of at least one international thematic conference, several scientific seminars and educational workshops.



Members of the International Ambiances Network (October 2020). Basemap: Carto.

In line with previous editions (2008, Grenoble; 2012, Montreal; 2016, Volos), this 4th edition of the international congress aims to promote the widest possible range of research work, educational interventions, artistic experiments and design or conception operations, in and for which ambiances play a key role. They are present there

as much as an object of research, design intention and method of access to the sensitive world. As a place for meeting, exchange, transmission and innovation, the Congresses on ambiances are intended to welcome and bring people together. Different from themed seminars, they enable the expression of the great diversity of theoretical, methodological and practical approaches, as well as the meeting, within the same conference, of scientists from fields as diverse as anthropology, architecture, computer science, cultural studies, design, engineering, geography, history, musicology, psychology, sociology, urban studies, etc. They are also constructive moments, allowing the dissemination of the most innovative works, proposed by researchers at the forefront of their field, as well as the reception of embryonic research, still in the process of being set up, but whose novelty of questioning often goes hand in hand with thematic, methodological and theoretical renewal. Finally, these congresses are moments of sharing of the sensory, of testing the body, of experiencing situations and, historically, the emphasis is placed on sensory and aesthetic experiences, both individual and collective (through artistic installations, workshops, concerts, visits).

Since the Montreal congress (2012), the steering committee of the International Ambiances Network has chosen to co-organize its congresses. The challenge is to share the organization of this event with the network members and to enrich the network by learning and sharing the practices, cultures and territories that these encounters provoke. These partnerships also aim to identify and develop new research themes, by bringing together teams whose field of action and proximity to ambiances open up new perspectives for this field. In this sense, the meeting with Marcos Novak, professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara and the Media, Arts, Technology (MAT) team, to which he belongs, provided a particularly rich perspective for the network.

This team brings together academics and artists working on the intersections between media, media arts and technology. Based in particular on experimentation on scale 1, such as the production of immersive (visual, sound) devices, their work questions the modes of production of new environments and new aesthetic forms, as well as the renewal of forms of spatial narration, data representation, sound design and modes of sonification and so on. In doing so, they debate the philosophical, social and mediatic implications of the fabrication of worlds. They also question the production of new sensitive worlds and the evolution of sensitivities, particularly in situations of technological mediation of the latter. Without stating it explicitly nor thematizing it in these terms, these devices, like the reflections they underlie, participate in producing ambiances, questioning the forms of sensorial experience in situations of technological mediation of sensory environments and finally testing the limits of technological devices in the face of the complexity of the anthropic sensorium.

The partnership with the MAT and the fruitful exchanges with Marcos Novak have led to the development of hypotheses for the framework of this 4th Congress, whose title, *Ambiances, Alloaesthesia*, aims to express the questions arising from the crossroads of research concerns in our fields. These questions can be summed up in the following double questioning:

- What other forms of sensitivity are emerging at a time in history marked by major environmental, political and technological upheavals?
- In what way does this renewal of sensibilities question the problematization of the notion of ambiance, and how can the field of ambiances apprehend these upheavals?

The Covid-19 global pandemic provides, sadly, a perfect illustration of these upheavals. It has been widely noted that this health crisis is, at its core, a reflection of the environmental crisis we are going through, and it causes multiple shocks - economic, social and political. It is also provoking disturbances in sensibilities and affects. All over the world, humans are experiencing the consequences of the need to sanitize life in society. Through the almost global generalization, at different times, of confinements, we have collectively participated and assisted in the emptying of the streets of cities and the countryside, in the regulation of modes of occupation and possible uses within the public space, in the disinfection of bodies and common spaces, in the silencing of urban and extra-urban sound environments, in the proliferation of audio-visual mediations of verbal exchanges, in the fading of tactile contacts, in the relearning of breathing, in the disappearance of faces etc. This historical moment is also a moment to take time and step back. It allows a critical examination of our lifestyles and the choices made by our societies.

This crisis has not been without effect on the organization of the Congress, which had to be quickly rearranged into three phases: publication of the proceedings, an online conference, and then - once the health crisis is over - a time of exchange in co-presence. The situation, unprecedented in many respects, implied a resumption of the steering of the congress by the International Ambiances Network for the production of the proceedings and the organization of the e-conference. At the present time, we still do not know what form the third phase will take, but we sincerely hope that it will provide the opportunity for the expected meeting with our colleagues from the University of California in Santa Barbara, and that we can collectively benefit not only from rich intellectual exchanges, but also from bodily, sensitive and aesthetic experiences.

The present proceedings and the upcoming e-conference are evidence of a renewal of the forms of organization of the Congress. While the general framework of the call for papers follows the above-mentioned intentions, a set of thematic calls for sessions, proposed by specialists from different countries and disciplinary backgrounds, has been added to the thematic axes of the general call. Behind such an organization method lies the challenge of opening up themes and questions, but also of diversifying research approaches and practices. The initial call proposed 25 thematic sessions and 3 research axes, which were then reorganized once the abstracts were received, so as to ensure maximum coherence within each session. The present book, which reflects the organization of the e-conference, arranges 103 chapters spread into 16 sessions, representing a wide range of contemporary concerns relating to ambiances. Through this book and the forthcoming conference, we hope that the congress will fulfil its mission: to be a place of exchange, where each of the contributions can generate an echo, but also make a ripple effect by giving rise to extensions, be they ideas, experiences and collaborations.

Damien Masson & Nicolas Remy
Co-Directors of the International Ambiances Network
September 2020