

# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

Many authors, from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, have struggled to implement a sensitive approach to urban modernity. How to be attentive to changes in the urban world and the minute variations of the ordinary? From the aesthetic thought of Simmel to Goffman's ecological approach, the philosophies of everydayness in anthropology, from Laplantine to Kracauer and White, to Wittgenstein, Bégout, and Rancière, work has described, translated and called into question the role of ambiance and atmosphere in the construction of urban life. Coalescing around notions of ambiance or atmosphere, notable research trajectories have interlaced disciplinary concerns within urban studies, cultural geography, sociology and architecture, especially in relation to interconnected concepts such as affect, place, aura, and ecology. Rarely, however, have these trajectories actually met or collided.

This seminar will develop a conversation between ambiance, atmosphere and translation. But how to translate? If translation is understood as a practice of «linguistic hospitality» (Ricoeur, 2004), as an experience of transition and mediation (Wisemann, 2012), what form might translation take? How might, in other words, the transition occur between the 'daily' word and the word of the 'expert', between that of the 'living' and that of the 'foreign'? How to make shareable experiences beyond the singularity expressed in different languages and cultures? What media or combination of media could help us achieve this?

This proposed move is particularly important for more than the usual reasons. Because how can accounts sensitive to the urban emerge from attempts to translate ordinary sensory experience? Or formulated differently, how can the act of making clear and intelligible the experiences, feelings, sensations, of distinct research areas, help forward debates on urban atmospheres/ambiances? Finally, how might a work of translation put our convictions in crisis, to put to test our existing ways of thinking, our relationship to the urban environment, and the plurality of modes of the city-dweller?

Amongst the many questions around translation, this seminar intends to address, notably practically, the issues of "installing", "communicating", "exhibiting", "expressing"... ambiances and sensitive/sensory experiences, thereby putting into question their controversial (i.e. capabilities of being put into public debate) "power".

After 'Ambience and Urban Practices', and 'Ambience and Criticism', this third meeting of Agence Nationale de la Recherche funded project «Sensory Enigmas of Contemporary Urban mobility», is organized within the framework of the International Ambiances Network.

## Observers

Kyran Joughin (University of the Arts, London), Derek McCormack (Oxford University), Jean-Paul Thibaud (Cresson, ENSAG, Grenoble).

## Organizers of the seminar

Peter Adey (Royal Holloway, University of London), Paul Simpson (Keele University), Damien Masson (Université de Cergy-Pontoise, MRTE, Cresson), Rachel Thomas (researcher at Cresson CNRS, Director of Cresson, ANR MUSE research coordinator)



# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

## Monday 25th

Venue - University of London, Senate House

- 13.00-13.30 Welcome coffee
- 13.30-14.00 Introduction of MUSE project  
*Rachel Thomas, Damien Masson*  
Introduction of Ambiances & Atmospheres in Translation Seminar  
*Peter Adey, Paul Simpson*
- 14.00-16.00 Ambiances in translation *into langage*  
. Ambiance versus Ambiente  
*Rozenn Canevet*  
. Feminine agent for change: reading Cornelia Sorabi through the paradoxes of Kali and the Zenana  
*Paidma Maitland*  
. A relevant City and the symbolic resources of art and poetry  
*Robert Galeta*
- 16.00-16.30 Break
- 16.30-18.00 Ambiances in translation *into techniques*  
. From the heritage of the stone to the sensitive heritage  
*Nadia Edhifi*  
. The dynamic translation of sensorial and physical ambiances in architecture and urban spaces  
*Claude MH Demers*
- 18.00 Free evening

## Tuesday 26th

Venue - University of London, Senate House

- 9.15-9.45 Tea/Coffee
- 9.45-11.15 Ambiances in translation *into performance*  
. Dancing with the sounds of birds: affect and atmosphere in transcultural performance  
*Martin Welton*  
. The affective atmospheres of nationalism: the case of London 2012 Olympics  
*Angharad Closs Stephens*
- 11.15-11.30 Break
- 11.30-13.00 Ambiances in translation *into notation*  
. The instillation projection as a translator  
*Toumadher Ammar*  
. A place-score: the temporal narratives of Fitzroy Square  
*Filipa Wunderlich*
- 13.00-14.00 Lunch
- 14.00-16.00 St. Pancras experiment. MUSE Research Axis 3 'Surveillance(s) in public' group  
*Peter Adey, Laure Brayer, Damien Masson, Paul Simpson, Nicolas Tixier*
- 16.30- 18.00 Visit of Gerard Byrne, 'A state of neutral pleasure' exhibit  
*Whitechapel Gallery, 77-82 Whitechapel High Street*
- 19.30 Dinner at Caravan King's Cross  
*1 Granary Square*

# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

Wednesday 27th

Venue - University of London, 11 Bedford Square

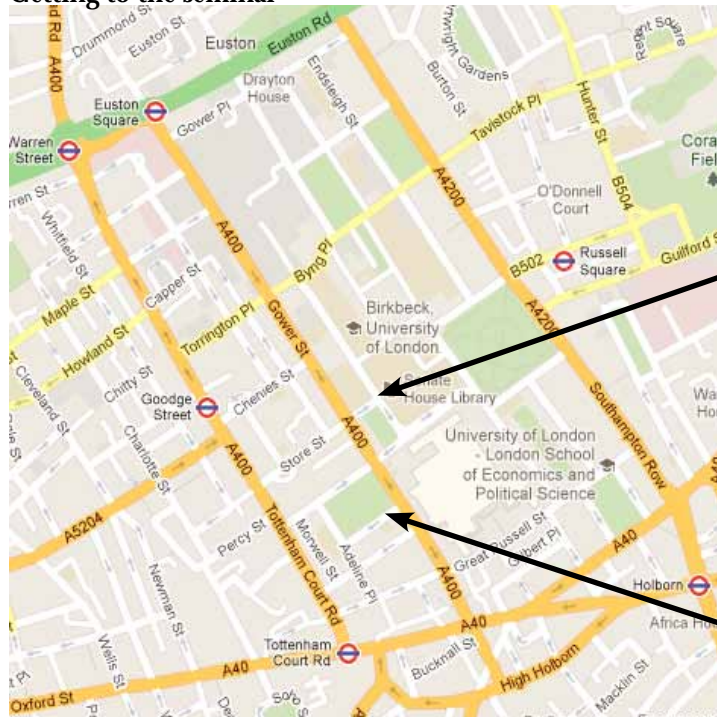
9.30 Tea/Coffee

9.45-11.15 Observer's restitution and debate  
*Kyran Joughin, Derek McCormack, Jean-Paul Thibaud*

11.15-11.30 Break

11.30 -13.00 Reflections / Collective discussion

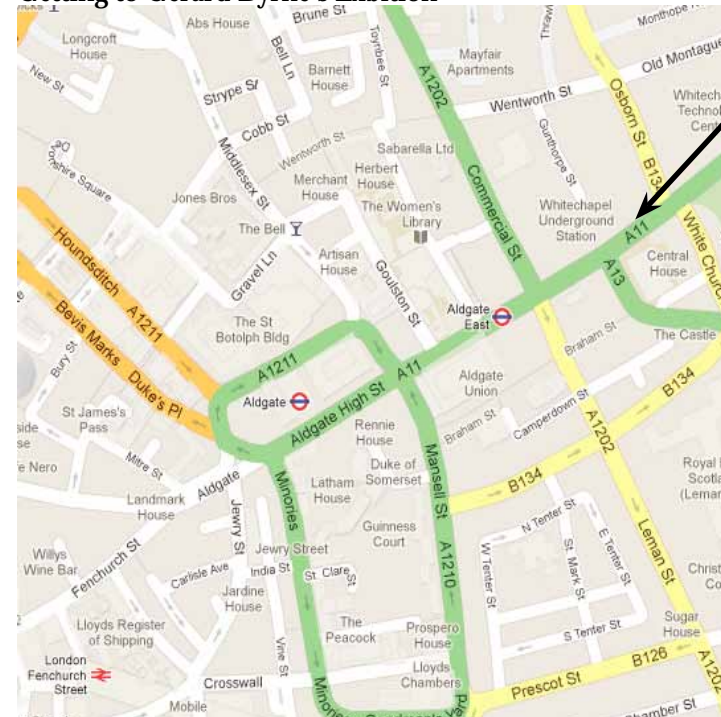
## Getting to the seminar



London University  
Senate House

London University  
11 Bedford Square

## Getting to Gerard Byrne's Exhibition



Whitechapel  
Gallery

# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

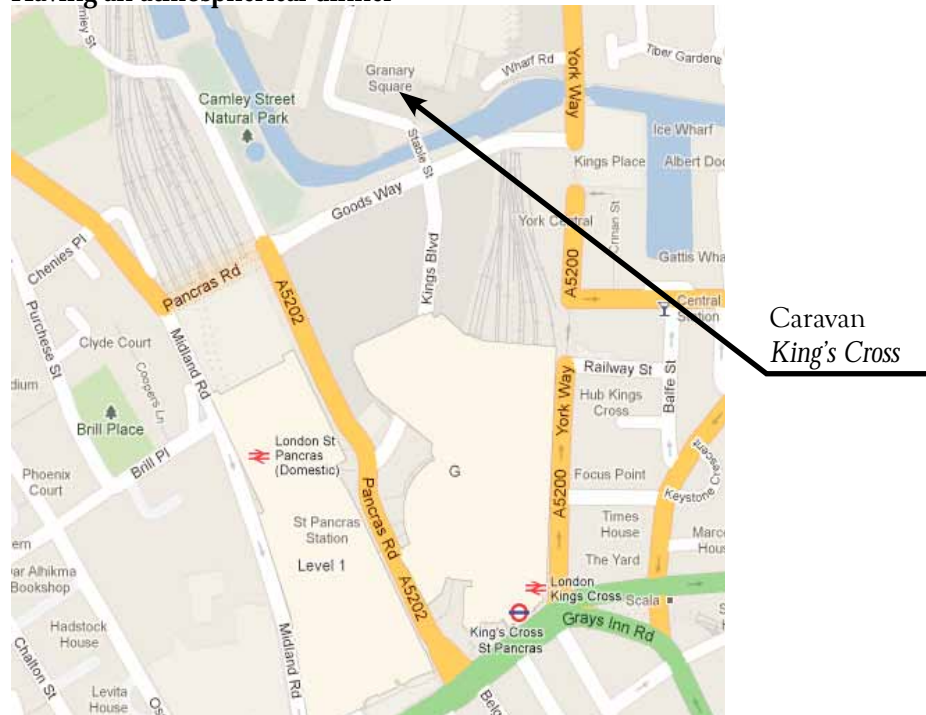
## Abstracts

### The installation projection as a translator

Toumadher Ammar

The atmosphere submits to dialogue the social, cultural, emotional, action and perception issues (Augoyard 2004). These elements must be equally detectable and decomposable to be identified to characterize an atmosphere. To stop at this level is not enough. We must now try to open the debate on acquired, to discuss and to challenge our ways of thinking about our relationship to the urban environment. The notion of translation can be a support to the development of these intentions. Translation is a time of reconstruction of plural unity of human discourse (Ricoeur 2004). It allows external supply of foreign securities which allows us to bounce on the fact that it can be considered as a Métis practical, both mixed and métissante (Nouss 2001). It serves as a communication medium. The subject of our research fits into the theme of “mixing”. It will concern two spaces, a tunisian and a sicilian neighborhoods. It will attempt to define the mixing in terms of atmosphere and urban forms. The Tunisian neighborhoods Capaci Grande and Capaci Piccolo were originally built by Sicilians coming from Capaci. Capaci will be considered as a reference in our study. These neighborhoods were the arena of multiple cultural coexistence. With the advent of independence Tunisian population began to conquest the ground, which has not excluded the proliferation and reinvestigation of some practices by Tunisian people. The experience that we propose to develop is to translate the atmosphere of today to understand the mechanisms of mixing concerning uses, practices, atmospheres and shapes. The experimental device is configured as an installation-projection which plays the role of atmosphere translator. It is staged synthetic environments identified before. We will try to recreate the atmosphere through the restoration of conditions of their appearance, or otherwise through their generators (Böhme 2008). They are understood as objects that they produce ambiantal reaction (Peneau 2012) that will act on visitors, sensors (Weber 2003). The installation-projection will take the form of a total art work depicting the various sensory characteristics of the study sites. This method will equally allow us to understand how the public understand the concept of miscegenation applied to environments and see the reports between there comprehension and the academic study of miscegenation.

### Having an atmospherical dinner



# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

## **Ambiance versus Ambiente.**

*Rozenn Canevet*

It is now accepted knowledge that in the second half of the 20th Century the predominance of a retinal system has been replaced by psycho-sensory immersion. From this, a certain number of works in art, architecture and design – based more on psychological experiences than on traditional forms – have grown, advocating temporality over immediacy and the process of representation.

If the terms installation and environment have become common currency, that of ambiance still remains negligible. Following through this train of thought we become aware of the significance of the term, whether artistic, technological or ideological but it is above all in its role -- as counterpart – to the Italian term ambiente that proves to be particularly instructive here.

We will demonstrate that at a time when an artist could be construed as an architect, the designer an artist, it would appear essential to remember that the terms common to these aforementioned disciplines could have potentially encourage crossover and dialogue, their goals and their scope however differ significantly, depending on their implementation and material translations. Hence, ambiance is consistent with the concept of size, of representation, of conditioning, highlighting the potential of disassociation between technologies. It differs from the characteristics of ambiente that conform more to the experience of a physical or mental landscape where the relation between the individual and the world is re-examined as the utopian ideal of ones own consciousness. If the eminently modern characteristic of ambiance as ambiente is undeniable, it remains nevertheless a critique of the modernist aesthetic of autonomy that has from the 1950's to the present day woven through their variant forms

## **The Affective Atmospheres of Nationalism: the case of the London 2012 Olympic Games**

*Angharad Closs Stephens*

One of the recurring themes that emerged during the Olympic Games in London in 2012 was that there was something special, electric and moving about the 'atmosphere' of the Games. Indeed, the Games proved overwhelmingly popular in the UK, even with people who had been previously critical of them. This paper uses the case study of the Games to try and understand the enduring appeal of the idea of coming together as a nation. As such, the paper asks, what would it mean to understand nationalism as an atmosphere? The paper begins by illustrating how ideas about nationhood continue to be mobilized through the idea that we are sharing in a common journey. It also argues that nationalism travels hand in hand with cosmopolitanism, where the celebration of 'difference' often makes patriotic fervor more acceptable. These arguments are addressed through examples from the Opening Ceremony, the Torch Relay as well as 'ephemeral texts' such as tv clips and promotional materials that ran in conjunction with the Games. But the paper goes on to argue that in order to understand the persistence of nationalism, we need to draw on a broader set of critical tools, which involve asking how ideas about nationhood operate affectively and how nationalism might also be understood as an 'atmosphere'. In order to advance such a study, the paper draws on interviews with volunteers who worked at the Games ('Games Makers'), who represent a key site for examining the multiple, ambiguous and ordinary practices of 'nation-building'. It also addresses media campaigns that ran below, through and above the Games themselves, several of which worked explicitly to track, measure and thus represent 'the atmosphere'. In sum, the project advances upon current approaches to the geographies of nations and nationalism by going beyond the study of language, symbols, myths, memories and traditions to try and understand the ways in which nationalism is experienced as a feeling.

# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

## **The Dynamic Translation of Sensorial and Physical Ambiences in Architecture and Urban Spaces**

*Claude MH Demers*

The evaluation of in situ ambiances offers relevant sources of embodied knowledge for architects, engineers and inhabitants. The dynamic multisensory representation of environments provides a systemic quantitative and qualitative process to illustrate and graphically communicate ambiances. Rethinking spaces in terms of dynamic ambiances and communicating quantitative as well as qualitative assessments becomes the necessary challenge for understanding and designing spaces at architectural and urban scales. The dynamic of spatio-temporal experiences or promenade architecturale, widely discussed by phenomenology is hereby becoming an essential starting point. The systemic analysis of ambiances using in situ dynamic surveys aims to decompose the complexity of ambiances into visual, thermal, acoustical and olfactory dimensions which all act together in global environmental satisfaction. Longitudinal in situ surveys gather qualitative and quantitative evidences of the existent's multisensory environmental diversity as perceived by the static and moving inhabitants. Physical data are recorded through the use of a portable array equipped with sensors, as well as the acquisition of video information of the moving environment. Sensorial data are processed through the Physical Ambiance Rose to provide an immediate translation of abstract and complex data into a simplified illustration that can be universally understood. Qualitative and quantitative data are processed into a meaningful graphical format for engineers, architects and clients. A numerical method of data acquisition, based on Demers' research in daylighting visualization provides simplified analysis of luminous and thermal ambiances. Digital representations of space are either connected with plans and sections of spaces in a storyboard format, or pasted into a filmic representation, depending on the aim of the communication. The filmic format is particularly interesting for visualizing an atmosphere at the spatio-temporal level of an observer while the storyboard approach is more suitable to link quantitative as well as qualitative ambient data for spatial evaluation and design.

## **From the heritage of the stone to the sensitive heritage**

*Nadia Edhifi*

The sensitive approach of the architectural and urban space has a low importance in the domains of the restoration and the reconversion. This value is mainly due to a lack of specific operating tools and methodological and scientific approach.

To define, test and to validate a methodology of consideration of the atmospheres in the first phases of the restoration could participate to develop it.

The model of restoration of the Palace of the Baron d' Erlanger which was built at the beginning of the XXth century and restored in the 90s, is a good example of study. In this case, we try to define what the act of restoration preserved from original ambience: The technique? The principle? The materials?

For example, the light as an atmosphere is complex to define. Indeed, the abandonment of the original lighting and its replacement by LED and optical fibers had certainly an influence on the ambience. A return to the authentic lighting being very difficult even impossible, only the digital modeling would allow estimating the impact of the restoration.

The main goal of this study is the creation of sound, light and thermal prototypes leaning on the real atmospheres (measures in situ, investigation) and certain atmospheres relevant but lost in the palace (digital modeling). These effects will serve for the projects of extension or restoration of the other patrimonial buildings, especially in the Medina of Tunis. Ultimately, the results can be used to develop software which will ease the restoration of sensitive effects.

# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

## **A relevant city and the symbolic resources of art and poetry**

*Robert Galeta*

My starting-point is the splitting off of the sources and condition of art and poetry from the human science discourses, apart, perhaps, from anthropology. A key text here is Ignace Meyerson's 'Les fonctions psychologiques et les oeuvres', 1948, itself informed by Saussure and Mauss. I would begin by recalling the founding of greek colonies in southern Italy and Marseille in the 8th. century BC, where poets were sent with the ships to lay out the new cities and validate their topography with words and probably music. I would then talk about Sottsass's attitude to place and everyday objects and Krzysztof Wodiczko's projections onto significant buildings and monuments. I would conclude by thinking about cities as models and assemblages, the latter especially from the 19th century with capitalism's instrumental version of 'realism'. And so to think a different kind of assemblage-agencement which embraces symbolic affect and the enactive encounter we as humans actually need. One step might be to embed into architecture and urbanist education a review or dismantling of aesthetics-expertise as continuing connoisseurship, and to re-think tradition, indeed re-do tradition (a text here might be Lyotard's *Instructions paiennes*).

Images to be shown would include the town of Todi as a renaissance greco-roman model; the industrial model town of Gatehouse of Fleet; the grey furniture and nomadic cities of Sottsass; the civil war monument projection by Wodiczko; the rag-picker on the edge of town by Rafaelli and a japanese restaurant by Nigel Coates.

## **Feminine Agent for Change: Reading Cornelia Sorabji Through the Paradoxes of Kali and the Zenana**

*Padma Maitland*

This paper considers how metaphors can be used as important means for studying the emotional ambiance at the heart of late-colonial tensions over independence in India through a focused reading of the goddess Kali and the zenana according to Cornelia Sorabji's book *Between the Twilights* (1908). Born to a Christian Parsee family, Sorabji studied at Oxford before returning to India where she worked for the legal rights of woman in purdah.<sup>1</sup> Sorabji's writings mediate between the opposing viewpoints of colonial India by fusing multiple readings of key cultural metaphors, such as Kali and the zenana, into single narratives. The zenana represents a 'space' at the core of India, literally and figuratively marking the site for the production of tradition. Accounts of the goddess Kali vary according to whether the story is used to affirm or deny rights to independence. Rather than pick sides, Sorabji unites the dual images of Kali as both creator and destroyer within the space of the zenana. Acting as translator between the many perspectives on Kali and the zenana, a reading of Sorabji's texts reveals how she was able to situate herself within the complex political and social terrain of the time. By working within rather than against multiple liminal conditions, Sorabji capitalized on the paradoxes inherent to key cultural metaphors to craft an identity for herself as a modern, and female, agent for change.

<sup>1</sup> "Purdah: orig. and chiefly S. Asian. A curtain; esp. one used in some Muslim and Hindu communities to screen women from public observation and particularly from the sight of men or strangers. Now freq. in extended use." (OED)



# Ambiances & Atmospheres in *Translation*

## **Dancing With the Sound of Birds: Affect and Atmosphere in Transcultural Performance**

*Martin Welton*

Discussing the production of atmospheres, Gernot Böhme (2008) has suggested, directs one's understanding close to the sphere of theatrical performance, as it concerns 'aesthetic/affective effects' (Thrift 2009) which are more than the sum of their parts. As theatrical production increasingly takes place in transnational contexts, how its atmospheric and affective effects are explained by and amongst its participants, requires an attention to translation which is similarly excessive - i.e. is willing to move beyond its immediate context.

This paper concerns a complex moment of translation of embodiment, affect and aesthetics in the context of intercultural performance. The ArtsCross project (of which I am a co-director) at the Beijing Dance Academy in November 2012 saw the development of a series of new contemporary dance works by mixed companies of British, Taiwanese and Chinese choreographers and dancers - a process observed by a similarly international team of academics. The translation of the choreographers' and dancers' working language discussions was often glossed as requiring a response to one another's work in terms of the production or engagement of 'feeling'. One Mandarin term in particular - gong ming - stood out in this respect however, as a means of describing it in relation to interpersonal contexts. Whilst cognate in some degree with 'empathy' it has a more particular correspondence with the English 'resonance'. It signals a drawing together and reverberation of ideas and feelings which is contextual as well as personal. The written character ming also relates to the sound of birds, and when spoken achieves a particular sort of resonance in the nasal cavity. Words are not only ideas, but sounds too, which at certain frequencies are shared amongst bodies as atmospheric currents - a movement to which translation must be ready to respond, or 'dance' with, I will argue, in embodied as well as conceptual terms.

## **A place-score: the temporal narratives of Fitzroy square**

*Filipa Wunderlich*

Cities are patchworks of alive locations, temporal hubs of recurrent activity where society continuously negotiates with nature and the architectural artefact. Places are bundles of memories, movement, changes and repetitions; they are temporal rhythmic textures that side-by-side design the temporal city.

Overlays of urban place-rhythms - temporal patterns of social activity, natural cycles and spatial movements and other sensuous events harmonise into sensual linear and cyclical measures and offer temporal distinctiveness to places. Urban place-rhythms, as with musical rhythms, maybe consonant or dissonant, tonal or atonal offering places states of temporal harmony or dissonance / conflict. In urban places one encounters rhythmic orders and disorders, states of synchronicity and disturbance.

As in a musical score, place temporal narratives are in this study graphically explored, and carefully analysed in what regards its rhythmically complexity. Through this means, this paper will illustrate upon place differences, its socio-spatial and natural place-rhythms, and most importantly, the sensual and affective relationship patterns, which over time define a place's temporal character and identity.

Focusing on Fitzroy square in London during one whole year, seasonal, weekly and daily fieldwork studies have been performed; these make use of film, photography and place-specific writings, and new forms of translation (expression and representation) have been developed as to reflect this place unique temporality and rhythmicity.

This paper will deliver insights on Fitzroy Square distinguishable temporal aesthetics, constituted by unique place-rhythms (or temporal identit(ies) and discuss the value of temporal studies and place-rhythm analysis within the current interdisciplinary discourses on place, place-making and design.