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[artitle]Tuning the Space: Investigating the Making of Atmospheres through Interior Design Practices

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[a]Abstract

This article explores the "making of atmospheres" for commercial spaces through interior design practices. Drawing upon Gernot Böhme's framework of atmospheres, it analyzes the knowledges and practices employed by interior designers when transforming an atmosphere into a "thing." It argues that interior design is primarily a social process which renders visible the strategies of materializing the inherent elusiveness of atmospheres into the form of a concept. This concept is configured in a design-network of humans and materials and defines the conditions under which a specific intermediary status between subject and object can arise. It is also based on mechanisms of reassurance which are played out in applying a design "philosophy" and generating shared economic, cultural and social understandings. Interior designers anticipate user experiences via images but also through specific material knowledges as a crucial form of cultural capital for "making an atmosphere". Central human actors in the design-network are clients and their culturally informed judgments which define the boundaries of the atmospheric concept. Drawing on case study research in an interior design practice specialized in hotel design , this article argues that turning an atmosphere into a "thing" is complex and multilayered and goes beyond what is commonly subsumed under "beautification". It suggests addressing this complexity by studying design from sociological, anthropological, and philosophical standpoints in conjunction with the practicalities of "making an atmosphere." This approach cannot only be considered as central to studying interior design, but it renews discussions around aesthetics and triggers new questions in areas like urban planning and architectural theory.

[key]KEYWORDS: interior design, material culture, atmosphere, aesthetics, cultural capital

[a]Introduction

[tx]Twenty-first-century metropolises are covered with highly aesthetic spaces such as "concept stores," "boutique hotels," and "design restaurants." These commercial spaces seem to enchant consumers and speak to their senses through highly individual spatial atmospheres that not only stem from their architectural form, but from a result of carefully compiled interior features such as furniture, wallpaper, and lighting. Much has been said about how spatial atmospheres are perceived by consumers, but how these atmospheres come into being still seems to be "terra incognita" for social scientists.

[txt]Discussions about body-space relations are not new. Debates in philosophy and social sciences increasingly attend to the ways that spatiality shapes social structures and vice versa (see e.g. Hillier and Hanson 1988[1984]; Lefebvre 1991; Löw 2001, 2008). New foci on sensual aspects of space and place-making (see Davidson and Milligan 2004; Duff 2010; Howes 2003; Rodaway 1994; Sennett 2002; Thrift 2004) have made this discourse increasingly interdisciplinary (Arias 2010: 29). Simultaneously, studies on consumerism and the aesthetics of everyday life have brought both objects and their components – materialities – into view. Drawing on these observations, design and marketing studies started to move away from an architectural focus to look at how atmospheres can be "made" through small-scale material arrangements (see Baker *et al.* 1988; Biehl-Missal and Saren 2012; Grayson and McNeill 2009; Kent 2007). Social and cultural research, however, has failed to follow up on this development in order to move away from primarily attributing the feel of a space to architecture (Anderson 2009; Fischer 2007; Gieryn 2002; Latour and Yaneva 2008; Pallasmaa 2012[1996]; Steinmetz 2011; Zumthor 2006), towards an investigation of the "making of atmospheres" through material arrangements on a much smaller scale (Löw 2008: 41).

This article draws on this observation and asks "How do interior designers *create* atmospheres?" It examines how specific atmospheres are "made" by interiors professionals through a field study in an interior design studio. Studying this kind of profession means empirically investigating what sorts of concepts, knowledge, strategies, and practices are employed to make an atmosphere a "thing." In other words: It means applying a "pragmatist approach" to design which allows to follow

“what designers ... do in their daily and routine actions” (Yaneva 2009a: 282) and observe the “numerous objects and networks” (2009b: 25) which are closely tied to the design practices.

[a]Atmospheres

[tx]The term “atmosphere” is widely used and yet poorly defined. Many things can have an atmosphere: not only spaces, but also events, epochs among others (Böhme 2008: 1). Atmospheres are commonly used as a synonym for mood, feeling, ambiance, or tone (Anderson 2009: 78; Böhme 1993: 113); they are a nebulous phenomenon and signify something that can neither be rationally explained nor clearly depicted as they blur borders between “peoples, things, and spaces” (Anderson 2009: 78). In a spatial context, however, atmospheres mediate between the built environment and human perception because they are “collective affects” (Anderson 2009: 78) or a “form of perception” (Zumthor 2006: 13) and thus alter how a space is experienced (Davidson and Milligan 2004: 524). Being “spatial bearers of moods” (Böhme 1993: 119) atmospheres are unmistakably intertwined with specific, in some way enclosed localities.

[tx]If atmospheres are nebulous and hard to grasp – and clearly depend on the user’s individual perception – then how can we talk about “making atmospheres” through design practices? Against the backdrop of this question, the German philosopher Gernot Böhme (1993, 1995, 2006, 2008) presents a very promising notion of atmospheric space as contesting the dichotomy between the agency of the perceiver and the perceived. He describes that atmospheres are a phenomenon that is based on some kind of movement through space, it is an “extended quality of feeling” (Böhme 1993: 117–18) that, again, can neither be clearly attributed to the space and its objects nor to the subject’s perception. Rather, atmospheres are the connection between the two, relating “environmental qualities and human states” (Böhme 1993: 114). A spatial atmosphere is the “common reality of the perceiver and the perceived” which always remains in a nebulous, or “peculiar intermediary,” state – and can only be fully understood *in* this agent-like state (Böhme 1993: 114, 1995: 22, 34).

Not only is an atmosphere – or a “tuned space” (Böhme 2006: 25) – defined by the borders of the spatial entity it emerges from (Böhme 2006: 26), it also depends on the configuration of materials and objects this entity contains (Böhme 2008: 3). This combination causes a *specific* affective quality which is unique or “singular”

(Anderson 2009: 78). Böhme (2006) describes this uniqueness as “quasi-objective” (26), allowing the interpretation of the atmospheric in a space as “thing-like.” This observation is important, because it answers the question posed above: If an atmosphere is some kind of a “thing” and has a quasi-object, then it is workable and manipulable by material means (Böhme 2008: 3) – it can be “made” despite its inherently obscure status.

Making up an atmosphere by material means ranges from specifying the material arrangements within a space and filling it with “cultural signs” which can intensify the spaces atmospheric identity (Böhme 2006: 18, 113). Speaking of *professionally* manipulating these material conditions under which an atmosphere – or a “tuned space” – can arise, consequently means speaking of interior design. Traditionally, interior design has been portrayed as a non-essential supplement to architecture, a slightly larger version of embellishment (Brooker and Stone 2010: 10) which is connoted with domesticity and femininity (Lees-Maffei 2008: 13). In this article, however, interior design is understood as a professional and “interdisciplinary practice that is concerned with the creation of a range of interior environments that articulate identity and atmosphere through the manipulation of spatial volume, placement of specific elements and furniture, and treatment of surfaces” (Brooker and Stone 2010: 12).

[a]Methodology

[tx]Even though I have argued that atmospheres transcend their ephemeral status and can be made through interior design practices, this study needs to be able to account for respective observations in the field. Investigating how interior designers convert an atmosphere into a “thing” leads to interpreting design as a mode of compilation (Latour 2009: 3–5) and a practice of charging artifacts with symbolic meaning (Du Gay 1997: 62).

[txt]Therefore, the theoretical perspective for analyzing respective observations in the field needs to be able to account for both the role of materialities as well as for how they are made up and handled through and in interactions. Materialities here designate both artifacts and objects (e.g. for decoration) as well as literal materials (e.g. for flooring or paneling or fabric for curtains). Consequently, this analysis applies the following strategy: theoretically, this article follows Yaneva’s (2009a) “pragmatist approach” to design in order to observe how an atmosphere is “made”

through material specifications and network assemblages in an interior design practice.

Practically, this study analyzes material which was gathered in a case study of one London-based interior design studio (seven days in total in June/July 2012). The case study approach was chosen in order to focus on a “specific, complex thing” (Stake 1995: 2) and because it was hoped that the focus on one studio would uncover project lifespans and allow for a deeper understanding of design processes and respective contexts. During field research, six semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the interior design team (interior designers, architects, and the head of the interior design studio). These interviews were organized around themes that had crystallized out of the literature research and ongoing informal conversations; all interviews were fully transcribed. I further attended internal meetings, conducted participant observation in the studio by “hanging around,” and took photos. I also conducted numerous informal interviews in order to follow up on themes emerging from observations and to clarify details the interior designers would consider self-explanatory. All observations and information from the informal interviews were documented in the form of field notes.

It has to be noted that this kind of material is bound to the short term and the limited geographical space (Burawoy 1991: 272), because it deals with only one interior design studio that has a particular focus (“leisure and hospitality,” see below) and does interior design for a particular kind of space (mostly hotels, see below). Hence, the analysis is limited in terms of generalizability. Consequently, this study needs to be conceived as preliminary and thus the beginning of theoretically literate research into design practices.

[a]Designing Atmospheres: A Case Study

[b]The Studio

[tx]The research site was a relatively big interior design department (hereafter StudioFour or studio) within a London-based architectural company. This department consists not only of interior designers, but also employs several trained architects. Its business focus is “leisure and hospitality,” which commonly means hotels, restaurants, clubs, etc. StudioFour works on domestic and international projects, serving both chains as well as individual clients. Some projects also include architectural design on top of delivering the interiors concept, but all projects are

managed by the head of the interiors department who runs up to twenty projects at a time.

[txt]Generally, design projects at StudioFour consist of five project stages which usually overlap: from the initial client presentation (or pitch) to the stage where all stakeholders agree on the final design and construction can begin. For the studio, a project is completed when the design plans are delivered to the client, in most cases StudioFour is not involved in the actual construction phase. Eventually, this means that the client can ignore specificities outlined in the design plan and substitute original materials and furniture with equivalents “made in China” (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). This observation is essential, because it means that in this analysis “aestheticizing” or “tuning” a space (Böhme 2006: 25) in this case study signifies not the construction of material configurations, but the very complex process of their planning which involves different kinds of practices and (material) knowledges.

[b]Materializing the Atmospheric

[tx]While it has been argued here that an atmosphere (at least when it comes to its theoretical interpretation) possesses a certain “thingness” per se, the goal of the field research was to specify what kind of a thing it was. Specifically it looked to interior designers as a means to identify the kind of processes, interactions, assemblages making this “thingness” possible. In other words, this case study sets out to describe how interior designers forge the inherent elusiveness of atmospheres into something more tangible.

[txt]First and foremost, the tangibility of the atmospheric concept, as it is handed over to the client at the end of the project, is based on relatively rigid concepts which are reconfirmed through systems of shared logics that inform and determine the material assemblages. For example, everybody at StudioFour shared an understanding of what interior design stood for: it dealt with detailing selections of furniture and finishes, as well as all other material aspects for the inside. It was all about “the materials, the feel,” the “overall mood of the space,” creating something “atmospheric” or a “palette mood” (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). More specifically, designers at StudioFour would take a “general idea” and make it a constant point of reference not only when selecting materials (and here “materials” may also include lighting and sound) and furniture, but also when arranging them in the space. Simultaneously, a distinct definition of what a hotel was circulated in the studio – and which aspects of a hotel were essential for delivering a good interior

design concept. In the studio, it was commonly understood that a hotel was not about "being at home away from home" (which, interestingly enough, would be a typical slogan of hotel chains), rather it was "about something else" (transcript, June 24, 2012):

> [ex]Hotels are about two things: service and environment. We cannot control service, but environment. There are two things people are looking for in a hotel environment: The first is "sanctuary" or "escape" – the same thing – and "playground" ... It is almost as you leave reality when you walk through the door. This is why hotel rooms have to be so robust, because people do the weirdest, weirdest things. (Interview transcript, June 28, 2012)

[tx]This shows that certain concepts and mechanisms of common sense not only form the base of a practice that is concerned with materializing the atmospheric, but that they – in turn – make this practice meaningful. At the same time, what is commonly agreed upon and framed into shared understanding limits what is materially possible. Ultimately, these shared understandings of the space and its future users determines how the space will be built and outfitted later on and consequently pre-defines the affective qualities it *can* have.

While in its essence, interior design is about material assemblages of various kinds, its work practices are primarily based on visuality – most notably of three different kinds: the workshop collage, the mood board, and the "library."

[txt]In the very beginning of any project, the whole department is sent off to search for images which are perceived to be "typical" for the area where the next project is located. These images are then printed out and pinned on to the wall, clustered by themes such as "vegetation" or "fabrics." The team then discusses these collages in so-called workshops (Figures 1 and 2), makes decision on material and furniture approaches and concepts of spacing. In these workshops, the overall design idea – which serves as the leitmotif for the atmospheric concept – is, quite literally, put together.

[figs 1 and 2 near here]

[txt]A selection of these images, then, is arranged into collages called mood boards (Figure 3) which reflect a specific style or "mood" by outlining certain selections of colors, objects, and environments. Mood boards do not only serve as a rather

concrete discussion platform for the design team, they are also crucial for client presentations because they are the main channel through which "*the* atmosphere" is communicated to the client.

[fig 3 near here]

[txt]When the furniture, fabrics, lighting, etc. are defined, a "real" image of the space-to-be called the visual (a perspective drawing of the space) is produced (Figure 4). These images are similar to animations of architectural projects, and in order to make them look more realistic, people and shades are digitally mastered into them. Visuals may not be produced for the first meetings between client and practice but become more and more specific and detailed as the project moves into subsequent project phases.

[fig 4 near here]

[txt]These observations make it very clear that "manipulating material conditions" – that is to create an atmosphere – is first and foremost a visual process which mostly consists of compiling images into different collages, whether on the office's wall, into a mood board, or a visual. Images are mediators through which designers approach, work on and a project, they help them to anticipate user experience and engage and negotiate with the client – they are a medium for a wide variety of social interactions. Consequently, visuality is not only the basic vehicle via which an atmospheric concept "comes to be treated as a thing in the social world" (Slater 2002: 95–6), it is also the medium for sociability.

However, the "thingness" of an atmosphere is also reflected and acted upon on a sensual level. When designers think of "how they can talk to the senses," the materials have to "prove the idea" and aesthetically go in line with the overall concept, but at the same time "come naturally" (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). To achieve this, StudioFour worked with what everybody called "The Library" (Figure 5). This room hosted an impressive collection of material samples, from curtains to tiles to glass to leather to wood and marble.

[fig 5 near here]

[txt]This collection would have multiple functions: it served as a source of inspiration and the constant supply of the newest samples would ensure that everybody was up to date with the latest trends; but it was also used as a way of haptically anticipating future user experiences and emotions. Through working with these samples, designers are able to translate their visual assumptions into haptic realities. The

library and its material samples would also serve as a way for architects, being less competent in “material knowledge,” to educate themselves in the interiors realm:

> [ex][W]orking here, I have realized that there is so much more of a wealth of information in terms of materials and understanding what products are available that we don’t really get taught as architects or we are not aware of as architects. (Interview transcript, June 24, 2012)

[tx]The material samples sit in the library as stored material knowledge and are reclassified for every project in order to lay out the aesthetic identity of a space. Their circulation can be interpreted as flows of knowledge through which both interior designers and architects gain, maintain and share “cultural capital” in Bourdieu’s sense (1986: 243ff): a certain educational standard in “material knowledge,” a distinct understanding not only of implicit and changing meanings of materials but also of trends in fabrics, finishes, furniture, etc. which fosters relationships with suppliers. Essentially, it is the flows of this cultural capital which hold together a design-network from which the atmospheric concept can emerge.

[txt]Apart from the role these non-human actors play in the design-network, the materialization of the atmosphere would also depend on a network-based division of labor, which is exemplary for the “cultural industries” (Tonkiss 2002). First, the studio would hire “consultants” to support them in specifying certain material aspects of the concepts, in lighting, for example. Thus, a crucial part of the atmosphere as it is experienced later comes into being with the help of external experts and resources. Second, the studio would commission an external service provider to produce the “visuals” which then would be edited in close cooperation with the studio. Converting an atmosphere into a “thing” consequently is a practice that is concerned with and largely depends on a “design-network” of human and non-human actors who have the distinct resources and features needed at hand. The “aesthetic quality of a scene” (Böhme 2008: 2) as it comes into being later on, results out of the possibilities and the restrictions arising from the associations within this network.

[b]Negotiating Needs, Seducing the Client

[tx]Apart from the strategies that have been outlined above, human associations in the form of client interactions and negotiations play an essential role in the design process. Clients largely differ from project to project. That is to say there is a difference between professional clients, such as hotel chains, and clients who want

to build a hotel for investment. A current project of StudioFour illustrates the challenges the studio sometimes has to face in this regard. In a hotel project in Asia, two clients were involved: the owner and the operator (an international hotel chain). However, a huge issue arose in discussing where to place the bar. The owner belonged to a religious group refusing to drink alcohol and did not see the need to place a bar in the lobby which caused a “huge confusion” (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). Both the operator and StudioFour were convinced that there was a definite need for a bar close to the entrance. Personal renegotiations on-site between the StudioFour project manager and the owner resulted in new plans showing the bar not obviously in sight from the lobby, but a bit tucked aside. It was explained that this issue probably came up because this project was the first hotel for the owner and that he conceptualized it from the perspective of being a guest – not considering what would be beneficial for the hotel as a business (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). This case demonstrates that all sorts of different constraints can arise during a project, because design is a heterogeneous process as it dissolves both rival social interests (Gieryn 2002: 42–3) and opinions that are culturally informed. This does not only underline that “tuning a space” never follows a distinct pattern (Welsch 1996: 7), but that design practices are concerned with much more than what is commonly understood as “aesthetic”: balancing different ideas, understandings, and narratives of both aesthetic and non-aesthetic issues that are incorporated into the design process by different key stakeholders.

[txt]When some of the designers went to pitch a concept to a client, they were first and foremost concerned with attracting the client’s full attention because then “you sold the idea” (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). The StudioFour designers would achieve this by literally speaking to all of the client’s senses. Using the approach of “storytelling” – “a way to make and strengthen emotional connections” (Herskovitz and Crystal 2010: 21) – the designers would visually and sensually walk the client through the respective space. To support the client in imagining how the atmosphere of this space would feel, the presenter would say “Now you enter the room, you smell the leather of the sofa...” (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). What the designers found particularly challenging was that through their presentation they would have to get the client to temporarily abandon his perspective as business manager and “experience” the design concept as hotel guest and “become the customer” (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). Some members of the design team

would even have an occasional training session to improve their wording, mimic, and voice in presentations (interview transcript, June 24, 2012). To “enchant” the client (interview transcript, June 24, 2012), the design team would generally make use of two different haptic elements. First, a material box – or “palette” – would be passed around, consisting of beautifully composed material samples from “The Library,” offering a real feel and even smell of the materials proposed for the space (Figure 6).
[fig 6 near here]
[txt]Second, after the client had approved the concept, StudioFour would commission a so-called “mock-up hotel room”: An ordinary container is outfitted and styled as suggested in the concept. In this “fake-room” the client can literally “feel the space,” e.g. lie on the bed and test the mattress, touch the furniture, and feel the fabrics. This space serves as a realistic example of the atmosphere the studio intends to create for the whole hotel – and it is the final stage of materializing the atmospheric concept.
The form of the “tuned space” (Böhme 2006: 25) that is crucial at this point is not the atmosphere of the space when it is built and outfitted – it is the atmosphere that is created in the client pitch and the presentation of the mock-up room. Both are targeted to seduce the client by appealing to their senses as this establishes emotional bonds with the world (Rodaway 1994: 44). Here, StudioFour hopes to trigger desire in order to get the client like the planned aesthetic quality of the room. Thus, not only the anticipated desires of hotel guests, such as “sanctuary” and “playground,” are essential but also to create these desires on the client’s side.
[b]Being Subtle, Researching the Local
[tx]StudioFour completes all its projects against the backdrop of a general philosophy: making a “subtle reference” to the local and being “respectful and specific” to the place. This philosophy was not only a general approach for StudioFour’s aesthetic identity, it is a general understanding of how interior design has to be done *ideally* and is reflected in all levels of their work. The head of the interiors department was very specific about this philosophy and very much concerned that all members of the department had internalized the idea of the “subtle reference” and reflected it in their design suggestions and material choices. Meetings would be used to scrutinize the respective drafts for not only for the specificity of the local environment, but also for the subtleness of this reference – some references would be too subtle while others were perceived to be too obvious.

[txt]In practical terms, this meant to incorporate specific colors, materials, furniture, and spacing (interview transcript, June 24, 2012) that were understood to be a materialized reference to the uniqueness of the respective location in which the project was based. To illustrate this: one of the current projects is based in a European city which was completely destroyed in the Second World War. Consequently, most of its architecture stemmed from the 1950s. To the designers, the 1950s architectural style dominated the feel of the city, it was the major point of reference for their design concept and led to proposing darker color schemes and materials that were associated with the 1950s (such as leather and chrome). Interestingly enough, these material references to the location needed to be unrecognizable at first sight, they had to be specific and yet subtle (workshop transcript, June 28, 2012). Another project shows this design principle very well: the studio was commissioned to design the interior of a London-based members' club that was run by a well-known brand. The client required the studio to incorporate the logo of the brand into the interior at least 10,000 times – a great challenge for a subtle design approach. StudioFour, however, managed to work around this by creating a mosaic consisting of the logo that would cover the whole ceiling. The reference to the brand was only identifiable at a close look. In essence, "being subtle" is an underlying ideology that determines and frames what material arrangements are possible – and ultimately what the perceived atmosphere is going to be like later on. Furthermore, it is a performance of the studio's "culture," which by the participating actors are categorized as a "philosophy." These ideologies and performances have to be taken into account when investigating the materialization of a spatial atmosphere through a design-network, primarily because they are linked and intertwined with the designer's culture and practices making possible the "existence of numerous objects and networks" (Yaneva 2009b: 25).

In order to make subtle references, the team had to develop a "sense of place" in order to be "respectful to the location, geographically, historically" (interview transcript, June 28, 2012). Developing this "*sense of place*" would mean to research everything related to the country, the area, the city, the neighborhood, the street – focusing on styles of housing, furniture, materials, cultural practices, etc. I conducted a participant observation in a workshop on a new project that was coming up in an African country, where the studio was asked to design both interior and exterior. The client also had the goal to have a socioeconomic impact on the region:

[ex]The client ... made his money in that region he is trying to affect and to give something back ... [T]he foundations of education and training are at minimum and kids have to go abroad to get trained or educated and hotels are always a good way of getting unskilled and uneducated labour to work and to learn skills, because of the whole range of tasks ... (Workshop transcript, June 28, 2012).

[tx]StudioFour was “really keen not to make it just an African experience but specific to the country,” to “give a sense of pride back to the place” which had suffered from years of civil war and at the same time to make it “playful, a little bit fun, but respectful to the location, not too serious” (workshop transcript, June 28, 2012). Primarily, the team was searching for materials with a certain “character” or “atmospheric charisma” and for those objects which culturally or historically stand for something (Böhme 2006: 158–9). Simultaneously, this workshop was not only a tool to identify and develop a “sense of place” in terms of aesthetics but it was a platform to gain and share cultural capital in the form of sociocultural knowledge of the respective country. This cultural knowledge would also influence design decisions. For example, during the workshop it was suggested to include an herbal garden into the hotel. This was rejected, arguing that gardening in this area is associated with survival and having it as a pleasurable place in a hotel would make a bad reference. The specific sociocultural and economic background of the country also influenced the decision to build the hotel using container-modules which would be made elsewhere and shipped over. This would mean having very limited resources on-site which could be stolen and consequently reducing security costs. Working with containers instead of ordinary rooms directly influenced what was possible both in terms of the way the “subtle reference” could be made as well as on “manipulating the material conditions” (Böhme 2008: 3) by limiting which materials could be used and how the furniture could be arranged in the containers.

[txt]These cases show that a good deal of making an atmosphere more “thing-like” designates a practice that is not only concerned with purely aesthetic considerations, but is a practice that requires respective actors to gain non-aesthetic knowledge in the form of socioeconomic knowledge and cultural awareness. This non-aesthetic knowledge is then “fixed” as common understandings of “cultural differences” (interview transcript, June 28, 2012) which simultaneously function as a mechanism

of reassurance for or against certain design decisions. Consequently, these understandings inform and determine the material assemblages that make up a spatial atmosphere and contribute to and specify its "thingness."

[a]Conclusion

[tx]Building on research in an interior design practice which primarily focuses on hotels, this case study has revealed that the answer to "How do interior designers create atmosphere" is not a simple one.

[txt]Atmospheres, as they are experienced by users later on, arise from a design-network which itself is made up of human and non-human actors. Then, "tuning a space" through "material configurations" (Böhme 2006: 25) is not something vague, but quite the opposite: it appears to be a clearly defined practice which deals with planning the conditions under which a specific intermediary status between subject- and object can arise. However, this can only be done because spatial atmospheres can be treated as things since they are "spatial bearers of moods" (Böhme 1993: 119), they are workable and commodifiable. It is because of this circumstance that a design-network can come into being that targets creating multisensual desires – on both the client's side to buy an atmospheric concept, as well as on the users' side, to stay in a beautiful hotel.

Investigating this particular kind of interior design practice allowed the observation of the different strategies through which designers materialize an atmosphere and shape it into the more explicit "thing" which can – quite literally – speak for itself by "talking to the senses." It also sheds light on how a commercial-space-to-be, in this case a hotel, can be conceptualized: through reassuring and stabilizing existing approaches and processes via repeating the application of a particular design "philosophy" and generating common-sense understandings of economies, cultures, and social circumstances; and through anticipating user experiences via images and visuals which, in turn, depends on specific material knowledge as essential cultural capital. The design-network also depends on material samples which act as non-human actors and on expertise that is located inside this network, but outside the studio, as well as certain human actors (most importantly clients) and their culturally informed judgments and narratives. These factors ultimately determine what this studio can put into an atmospheric concept, and, more importantly, what is omitted. This leads to the design process not only being an aesthetic endeavor, but also

being about understanding, balancing, and working around these differing understandings.

This analysis has shown that making an atmosphere more "thing-like" by material means is a complex process which is inextricably interwoven with the inherent "peculiar intermediary" state of an atmosphere as it always remains a "common reality of the perceiver and the perceived" (Böhme 1993: 122, 1995: 22, 34). In other words: creating an atmosphere is just as complex and manifold as an atmosphere can be itself and certainly, "aestheticizing" a space (Böhme 2006: 25) goes beyond what is commonly subsumed under beautification. Addressing this particular complexity through the approach mapped out here – that is by way of exploring sociological, anthropological, and philosophical concepts in conjunction with the (spatial) theories designers use and the practical realities of "making atmospheres" – can be considered as potentially fundamental to the study of interior design. Simultaneously, the observations outlined above may open up a whole new discussion about aesthetics and consequently trigger new questions in related areas such as urban planning and architectural theory. In this light, this study has to be considered as a preliminary exploration and the beginning of thorough investigations and theorizations of design practices.

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Figures 1 and 2

Workshop collage. Fieldwork, June 19, 2012.

Figure 3

Mood board. Fieldwork, June 19, 2012.

Figure 4

Visual. Courtesy of StudioFour.

Figure 5

The Library. Fieldwork, June 19, 2012.

Figure 6

Content of a palette. Fieldwork, June 19, 2012.