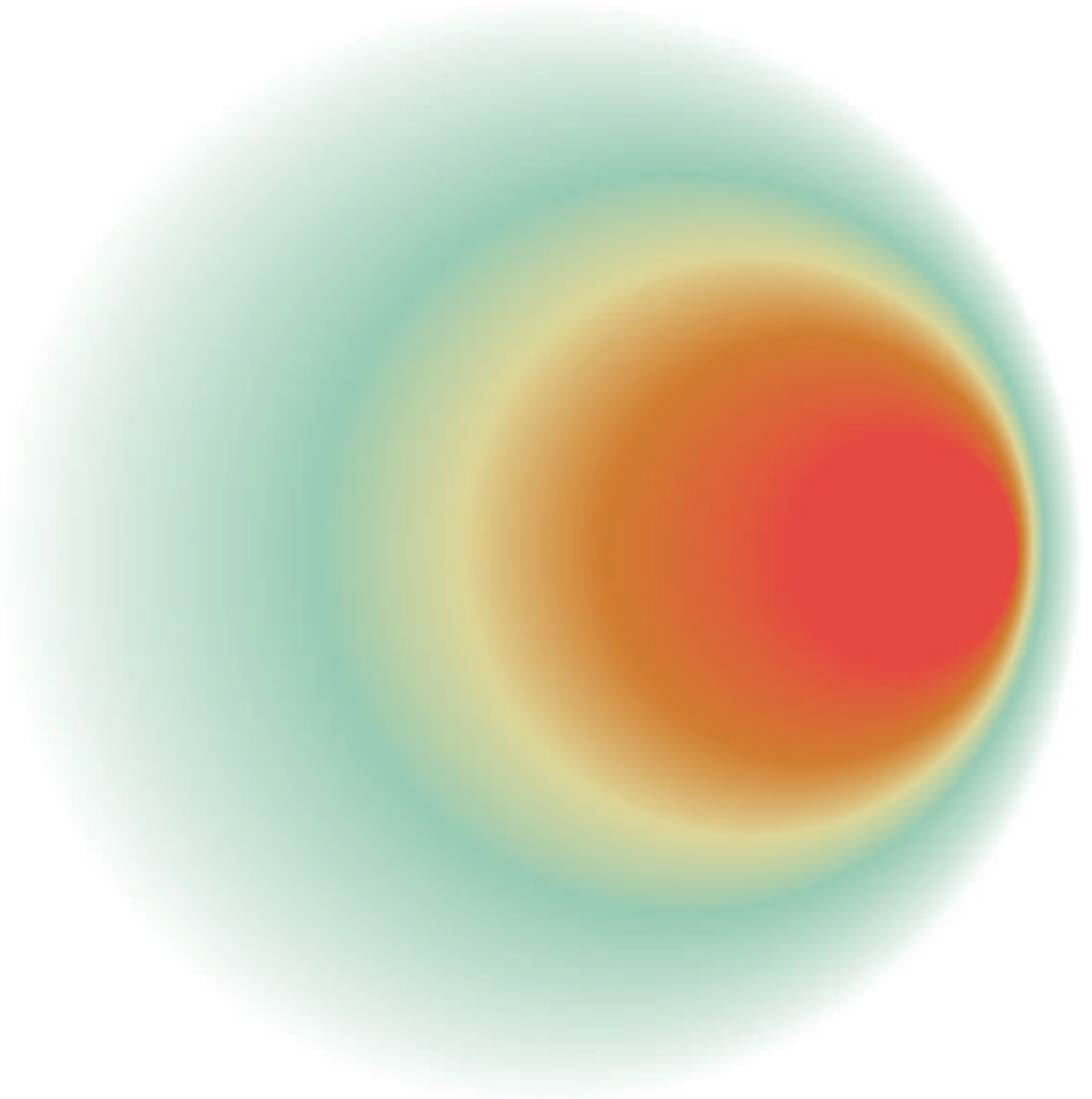
MNEMOSPHERE

Designing a Neologism between Memories, Emotions and Atmospheres

edited by Marta Elisa Cecchi, Clorinda Sissi Galasso



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3. Atmosphere of landscapes and haptic feeling: an aesthetic sense for communication

Daniela Calabi
Design Department, Politecnico di Milano

Abstract

Perceptions of atmospheres and the identity of landscapes are experiences linked to haptic qualities, and thus to the interpretation of space and its symbolic representations (Panofsky, 1961). The relational organization of the senses shapes haptic perception; *hapticity*, therefore, is not merely tactile experiences but a measure of the *perceptual intelligence* (Petrelli, 2015), activated by the body *in motion*. Through *haptic sensibility* enabled by movement, both consciousness and emotional response are involved, the visible and the tangible, but also emotional encounter and memory, in a unique space-time interweaving. Haptic perception, deriving from the sense of touch as a function of the skin, in fact, constitutes the mutual contact between us and the environment, *both acting as receptors of a communicative interface* (Bruno, 2002, p. 6): an exchange of energy and information between the body and its environment. The relationship between the multisensory body and the environment is essential; focusing on the visual form may be responsible for the weak atmospheric quality evoked by many contemporary spaces and their representations (Pallasmaa, 2016). The quality of atmospheres is influenced by the overall bodily, haptic, and visual perception; haptic perceptual values, in turn, can be interpreted as multisensory factors that are not merely a sum of visions provided by the body moving in space, but are also shaped by the atmospheric conditions of a landscape (Mazzocut-Mis, 2002, p. 149). The atmosphere is thus a spatial quality, a reflection of the fusion of perceivable factors in the place in which one moves – or imagines moving (Dai, Zheng 2021). This study aims to investigate the relationship between haptic perception and the representation of 'atmospheric identities', particularly for the communication design of territorial identities, realized through

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aesthetic dimensions and *atmospheric tones* (Böhme, 2016), changing over time but permanently anchored in the symbolic elements that emerge from the landscape, recognized by cultural and social memory as 'images of the city'. It is important to recognize that landscapes represent a tangible and aesthetically perceived interconnection of relationships in the environment (Calzolari 1999). These relationships weave together the interactions of human societies and individuals with their surroundings, shaping the atmospheric and aesthetic character of the environment and its structures.

Introduction

The atmosphere produces emotions and feelings and gives formidable expressive qualities not only to the representation of space, but also to its communication and, in general, to design; it therefore affects all kinds of "aesthetic work" (Böhme, 2010, p. 64). As current theories on aesthetics as sensible knowledge, particularly the new aesthetics and phenomenology of Böhme and Schmitz (Griffero 2010, 2011) elaborate, the atmospheric phenomenon has emerged as a perception that is by no means taken for granted. It is capable of affectively, intimately, and in unison involve people who share the experience at the same time and place, remaining permanent in their memory. Like art forms, the landscape is also an 'aesthetic device' concerned by atmospheric studies; however, just like architectural work, the landscape presents such a great variety of socio-symbolic stratifications as to be irreducible to an (only) atmospheric analysis (Griffero, 2016, p. 30).

This exploration aims to focus on the haptic and own-body matter as a contribution to the communication design of the landscape and its identities, which focuses on the relationships between the subject, the features of the place, and the value of memories. The theories of sensory experience discussed here reference what is termed a revolutionary 'patica' aesthetics (Griffero, 2016), which contrasts with traditional theories by rejecting the notion that atmospheres are merely products of subjective projections of inner feelings and emotions. Instead, they emphasize the unique interplay between the observer and the external environment in creating specific atmospheric sensations.Bodily perception imparts the sensation of one's own presence; when it emerges from the elements of the landscape, it allows one to enter into harmony with atmospheric states, establishing an almost tactile perceptual contact that can be defined as 'haptic-aesthetic'. Haptic-aesthetic feeling attunes the mood to the environment, and the emotions that can arise from a place's states are not the result of subjective associations of thought. They are aesthetic learnings shared by those who travel the same journey, subject to differences in sensitivity and cultural backgrounds.

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The Latin word *motus* [mōtŭs, i.e., movement], at the origin of the meaning of emotion, refers to the inner drive aroused by a *stimulus*; hence, the atmosphere performs a motion from the outside world to oneself and back. Motion and movement activate haptics, but also feelings, and if there are many ways of traveling, the one that is most involved in the memories and characters of a place remains walking, due to the direct contact it establishes with the world and its stories (Careri, 2006). Through haptic perception and movement, consciousness and emotional experience, the visible and the tangible, experience and memory are involved in a singular space-time interweaving (Panofsky, 1961, p. 181).

Landscape and Haptic Value

The explorers form a profound connection with the places they visit, a relationship that aligns their mental states with the perceivable, the imaginable, and the evocable aspects of the world – essentially, the landscape resonates with the sensitive body that orients itself through the stimuli. Griffero (2011) describes this as an 'affective' engagement between the body and the landscape, one that arises from aesthetic sensations, with emotions being deeply infused within the realm of atmospheric aesthetics.

'Aesthetics' viewed as a comprehensive theory of sensory knowledge, extends far beyond the simplistic interpretation associated with just the sense of beauty. 'Landscape' is a cultural process and a space of exploration (Venturi Ferriolo, 2009). These definitions frame some reflections and are worth a few insights. The characteristics of the landscape, its structural inhomogeneity, and its multidisciplinary vocation represent cultural and perceptual complexities that demand the choice of multiple points of view to be communicated. The synthesis carried out by the European Union, becoming aware of the changes that landscapes undergo due to social, economic, and environmental transformations, has provided a legal instrument of community guidelines for a shared approach to the subject[1]. The Council of Europe Landscape Convention has approved a definition of 'landscape'[2] that, as a cultural process, integrates the concepts of space and place: «Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and human factors». According to the Convention, every landscape must be preserved in its most relevant characteristics. It is a community heritage that derives from the combined action of natural configura-

1. See https://www.coe.int/en/web/landscape/definition-and-legal-recognition-of-landscapes
2. *Ibid.*

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tions and human actions in perpetual evolution, significantly impacting the quality of life. In this recognition of value, perception plays a critical role. Landscape results from multiple factors, but how it is experienced and perceived makes a difference in value.

Landscape is a *perceptual phenomenon* (D'Angelo, 2009), and it is the fundamental assumption of the following thought: the haptic mode of perception specifically refers to the personal, bodily experience that allows one to physically sense the atmosphere of places, through sensations *on the skin*. A sensation arises from environmental features, architecture, and infrastructure; types of natural forms; noises and sounds; light and air temperatures; degrees of darkness; presences and absences. Haptic feeling reflects the aesthetic sense infused by the atmosphere; when we step out into the same morning air, we find ourselves immersed in a shared mode of existence (Griffero, 2016, p. 34). It's as if to suggest that the emotion stirred by a sunset is a universal experience, even though it is imbued with deeply personal and intimate meanings. Haptic feeling is supposed to be the most fitting way to deeply connect with the aesthetics of an atmosphere; it is also an intense and deep form of shared emotional experiences. It is a sensation that evokes experiences of proximity and immersion in landscapes but can also be evoked at a distance or mediated by technological representations and interfaces. It should be made clear that one does not consider haptic-aesthetic feeling to be a sense of 'whole-body touch', which cannot grasp in 'overviews' of space as it proceeds by summations of details of surfaces or bodies. This notion of tactility needs to be revised when considering the empathic power of feeling contact with the landscape, just as the concept of space being flattened in the geometric representation of surfaces and bodies is reductive.

Hence, the haptic-aesthetic feeling of the body in motion is defined as a polysensorial expression, the only one capable of connecting with an atmospheric state that inherently has no surface. Indeed, why assume the definition of haptic-aesthetic perception and not the general one of *global body perception*? Because walking, observing, climbing, stopping, listening, feeling, grasping, grazing, falling, looking, jumping, and running are insufficient, emotions must be generated and attuned to atmospheric space. Therefore, one does not speak of a synaesthetically visual *super touch* instead of an aesthetic that shares emotion through haptic feeling. The haptic-aesthetic feeling does not create a hierarchical relationship between the senses; it does not differentiate itself from the contemplative component of visual observation or the capabilities of other sensory organs but relates them as it explores the perceptible world. The definition is intended to emphasize touch; the perceptual modality proceeds in a corporeal manner.

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The term 'haptic' actually derives from the ancient Greek *haptikós*, meaning *able to touch, touched, capable of active action*. The term became an alternative to the notion of 'touch' when some scholars among psychologists and physiologists, such as Géza Révész (1938), and James J. Gibson (1961), felt the need for a different term to define tactile sensations (generally referred to the hand) extended to the global body, inside and out. Although sight has historically been considered superior to haptic and tactile senses, the emphasis on touch and its connection to the body appears to reintroduce a reversed, yet still hierarchical, sensory logic: it undermines sight to elevate touch as the paramount sense. However, the primacy here is different and twofold. Firstly, haptic, and tactile senses are *ontic* (cf. Heidegger): touch is a prerequisite for understanding the world. Secondly, this relevance is *evolutionary* (encompassing both ontogenetic and phylogenetic aspects): it is through the skin that other sensory modalities specialize, and the nakedness of our bodies and their morphology lay the foundation for our cultural expressions, serving as the biological precondition for the power of language (Mazzeo, 2004, p. 66). Haptic values are identified in the relationship between body and environment, with the recognition of the natural, sensitive, affective origin of aesthetic experience of the landscape and its experience. Martin Grunwald, an expert in haptic perception and head of the Haptic Research Laboratory at the University of Leipzig, considers this sense superior because of its vital importance for many organisms (including human beings), but also because what can be touched has the character of reality, comforts, and relates. Hapticity is thus considered as a *vital extension* of touch.

Furthermore, it measures the perceptual (Petrelli, 2015) and emotional intelligence activated by the body when it actively explores a landscape, and its tangible relationships. The shape of the landscape connotes the experience and is the one that comes into immediate contact with the observer's feelings, determining the involvement of perceptual and psychic states. Between organicism and rationalism, and referencing the poetics of architect Louis Kahn, Digerud J. G. (1980) identifies the emotional and aesthetic-atmospheric involvement in architectural space as a form of awareness, a state of knowledge, and an openness to understanding connections, origins, and ties with the natural evolution of the world, arising from haptic perception. When it comes to a landscape observed from a distance and when engaging with places, contact occurs with the dense network of witnesses of human events and physical transformations that stratify relationships. Thus, the landscape is a system capable of eliciting an engaging perceptive and aesthetic experience, derived from a structure of relationships (Calzolari, 2000, 56-58). It is interpretable as a unique entity among lithospheres and hydrospheres, between natural and anthropic environments, and across stratified levels of

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defined cultural forms. In the aesthetics of the landscape, which is fundamentally a landscape of relationships, the connective tissue is formed by the perceptive and aesthetic experiences (the atmospheres) that influence the states of mind of those who engage with the landscape's complexity.

Suppose the landscape represents historiographic writing, a physical access point to the sediment of memories and relationships; this implies a semantic interpretation, thus decoding forms as if they were *communicative acts*, beginning with the first impression that atmospheric aesthetics provide. However, can any atmospheric interpretation be sufficient to understand the depth of the historiographical scripts imprinted on the territory? There is no general answer. It can be assumed that the unique and special atmosphere of places explored through haptic feeling is more 'sincere', more evocative, and more engaging than that of the visual landscape observed from distance or mediated by interfaces. For the communication design of place identities, the challenge involves deep research and applications, important for predictive exploration from a distance and ethical, sustainable tourism. Indeed, it involves seamlessly combining the experiences of physical and extraphysical spaces. According to Calzolari (2000), the landscape is recognized for its ability to determine aesthetic impressions; it does not merely act as a backdrop to human actions but serves as a container and tangible content of events, forming part of a cultural process. It actively communicates with diverse points of view through the atmospheres it generates and shares, thus qualifying as both an aesthetic and emotional process.

The deeper and intertwined meanings that make up the landscape are formed by the memories and identities of the places; they contribute to determining the atmospheres, endowing places with aesthetic qualities. Immersion in the landscape results in a profound and moving empathy (Catalano, 2020) that brings into play culture, knowledge, and interpretative skills.

Landscape and Atmospheres

The haptic-aesthetic modality of perception leads to further reflections on the communication of the atmospheric landscape. The body's hapticity and aesthetic inclination derive from the sense of touch as a function of the skin; it naturally constitutes the mutual contact between us and the environment, both receptors of a communicative interface (Bruno, 2002, p. 6), establishing an energy exchange. The relationship between the haptic body and the environment is crucial, especially where the visual form returns partial knowledge and may be responsible for the weak atmospheric quality evoked by some territories in their representations (Pallasmaa, 2016).

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Haptic-aesthetic perceptual values can be considered factors that cannot be reduced to a summation of visions guaranteed by movement, depending on the overall conditions of the specific environment and atmospheres that hardly exhaust the complexity of meanings in the visual (Mazzocut-Mis, 2002, p. 149). Eugenio Turri (1998) refers to *iconemes* as identifiable and recognisable elements capable of metonymically representing a set of landscape features. These elements, known as 'territorial emergencies', stand out in the landscape due to their distinctive shape, size, material, and significance, all of which imbue atmospheric tones to the landscape's image, thus altering the perception and memory of the place. An example is the Statue of Liberty in New York Bay, a formidable city icon (Rykwert, 2008). Considering the eidetic nature of memory – that is, the natural capacity to recall perceptions associated with an image (Ricoeur, 2004) – one can understand how the representation of an environment can evoke both visual and bodily sensations associated with the memory of its atmospheres, as experienced in those same places or similar situations.

Communication design focuses on developing systems to represent territories, tailored to cultural shifts and the complex histories of landscapes. The territory, with its intricate relationships, demands that the deep atmospheric sensations revealing identities and evoking memories are not confined to the aesthetics of visual representation, which can become stereotypical. Thus, communicating about the territory involves narrating the structure of relationships embedded in places, employing alternative and innovative models to meet the evolving communication needs of spaces perceived differently. Therefore, one must first reflect on the fact that the haptic experience assumes a relationship without physical mediation, between people and places. Attuning to atmospheric aesthetic elements requires primal, direct contact. This contact, even in virtual worlds, is sought with increasingly 'invisible' haptic interfaces. In contrast, visual representations (for communicative purposes) become *eidetic staging*, evoking personal memories with predictive, conservative, educational, and aesthetic value (Galasso, 2018).

Effective communication of experience occurs when the aesthetic factors adhere to a simple 'principle of coherence' (Böhme 2010, p. 106), aligning the atmosphere with the observer's mood. Therefore, in the representation of atmospheric aesthetics, an emotional resonance is sought that fosters a sense of presence and immersion in the landscape. Thus, own-body perception represents an evocative tool of knowledge to be rehabilitated and reconsidered in the historical hegemonic interplay with the role of sight. Secondly, it is reflected that haptic-aesthetic feeling and atmosphere share the same space. Landscape serves as the connective element and incubator of atmospheric emotions. Atmosphere is a spatial quality generated by the interaction of per-

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ceivable factors through which it is possible to move or imagine moving (Dai & Zheng, 2021). Landscape forms have been observed to evoke memories of and allow us to envision various events – natural, social, cultural, and political – thereby revealing to observer connections with a past that is perceived more than remembered (Galasso, 2018). *Walking through landscape spaces unlocks the mnestic dimension, fostering evocative, new, or renewed haptic-aesthetic impressions. The perception of such specific spaces and moments acts as a catalyst, solidifying the eidetic, perceptive, and visceral 'flywheel' that drives new forms of visual representation of atmospheres.*

In this contemporary digital era, spatial models are distorted by a conception of geographical space (Baule, 2018) that compresses every distance and temporal dimension. Consequently, the body necessarily returns us to the physical, natural, and sustainable dimensions of exploration. Another reflection concerns the fact that the atmospheres of landscapes are perceptual experiences linked to haptic qualities directly influenced by the conception of space, the symbolic and cultural forms of their representations (Panofsky, 1961), and the visible and tangible forms of memories. The haptic representation of form, according to Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968), expresses bodily, emotional, and conceptual sensations through an artistic visual composition that possesses the 'intention' (1955, p. 11), that is the implicit communicative desire in the cultural products of society.

The *intention of the landscape* can be described as expressing emotional, conceptual, and haptic-aesthetic sensations, while the substantial differences between the interpretations of those who explore the territories are of a cultural order. For example, the historian completes the experience with a comprehension of the nature of the transformations, which she or he situates temporally and spatially, while the designer intuitively perceives the transformative potential of communication made accessible through the representation of the atmosphere.

Since the time of Panofsky's sharp and, in some ways, predictive observations on the relationships between optics, haptics, surface, composition, space and time (1989, p. 181), the idea of space has changed, especially in perception, with a perspective shift from Euclidean space to topological space (spatial turn), which, it should be remembered, has profoundly marked the spatial-temporal experience of the territory (Marramao, 2013). The consequences have impacted literal, cultural, and scientific studies, social trends, and those of globalisation; now, nothing can happen without the entire planet being affected, and social structures no longer determine space but constitute them. Geolocalisation restores a different perception of space and time since it is possible to relate with anyone at any time. The impact on the haptic-aesthetic perception of the landscape that receives this topological turn is,

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above all, one of "opposition": to the compression of time due to the physiological procedural 'slowness' of haptic perception; to the pervasive visuality, which compresses the value of the haptic perception. A conceptual necessity emerges after the spatial turning point: from visuality to atmospheric as an aesthetic tool, towards the practice of spatial space as a 'slow' procedure for the intelligibility of connections, beyond the visual image and its representations. According to Berthoz (1997), the body in motion substantiates complete, global, immediate perceptions, which orient in space and among the meanings of things; *hapticity*, therefore, is not considered as an expression of tactile experience, but as a measure of the perceptive intelligence (Petrelli, 2015) of the senses activated by the body in motion.

Atmospheric Aesthetics and Communication

The literature discussing architecture as a language of space often refers to bodily experience (Bloomer & Moore, 1981); art historian Henrich Wolfflin argued in 1898 that if we were purely optical entities, the aesthetic judgment of the physical world would be precluded (as cited by Gallese, 2015, p. IX). Knowledge about haptic interactions is being researched, and technologies with haptic feedback promise integrated realities, to make new forms of design possible (Calabi, 2001). Research is also active in other areas, which are not technoscientific, such as the communication design of identities. While aesthetic and philosophical theories clarify the reasons why landscapes instil emotions profoundly from the characteristics of a place, haptic-aesthetic feeling (which activates the atmospheric dimension by evoking cultures and memories) contributes to instructing new attention in design, to bring forth a more conscious and accessible communication.

An interesting example of aesthetic work on memory and place, in which design faces the challenge of communicating the network of cultural and mnestic relationships, concerns an educational project focused on the Marchiondi Spagliardi Institute in Milan (2019, *Educazione e Memoria. Un racconto di periferia*[3]). The activity was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, when it was impossible to have free physically access to urban sites. The restrictions on accessible spaces necessitated a deeper engagement using archival materials; this unintentionally demonstrated the importance of on-site presence to understanding the atmospheres of the urban landscape. The preliminary analysis explored the many facets of the complex, now-aban-

3. See https://cinemaperlascuola.istruzione.it/progetto/educazione-e-memoria-iis-g-galilei-milano/

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doned architectural space. The approach to the actual symbolic meaning of this derelict, massive structure – a true urban memorial – revealed how places of memory initiate a crucial and engaging 'pedagogy of remembrance' (Augé, 2004) of events, realities, and oblivion.

After identifying the communication and knowledge deficiencies caused by abandonment, the data collection proceeded in stages (Calabi et al., 2021): the first stage focused on enhancing the archival documentation; the second (eidetic) involved guiding a process to recognize the identity of the place through digital images; the third stage aimed at reintegrating the haptic-aesthetic experience through the exploration of the sites. The third phase made evident the fundamental value of the walk *in situ* to fill the perceptive and experiential gap of the only visual documents discovered by archives. Starting with the visual experience, the atmospheric experience initiated a deeper contact with the topological space; this was made possible by the end of the pandemic confinement, impossible before.

To conclude, the study highlights the pivotal role of haptic aesthetic perception in deepening the understanding of atmospheric identities within urban landscapes. It emphasizes how bodily experiences, integrated with environmental interactions, enrich the communication of spatial narratives. By engaging with both the tangible and the visual aspects of space, haptic perceptions foster a profound connection with the landscape, enhancing the design and communication of territorial identities. This approach not only broadens the sensory engagement with space but also ensures that cultural and historical nuances are perceptibly integrated into the communication design for territories process. Haptic-aesthetic feeling connects with the atmospheric dimension and instructs a new awareness in the project, determining a more engaging and immersive experience.

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This book is a collection of essays written by authors from different disciplinary and professional backgrounds, offering various points of view on *Mnemosphere*, which still does not have an unambiguous definition, drawing inspiration for considerations and insights. The *portmanteau* is nourished by the interaction between the spheres of memories, emotions, and atmospheres, also the sections into which the volume is divided. Its nature is mutable, metamorphic, open to continuous interpretation. What started as a university research project proves to be an engine of reflection and a design driver for multiple theoretical and applicative fields and disciplines. A new composite word becomes an active tool for culture and design. The nuanced essence of *Mnemosphere*, an entity without defined boundaries, is not a weak aspect but is embraced as one of the fundamental elements for the open and interdisciplinary encounter of themes and people around a common subject. From colour to photography, from aesthetics to the history of exhibition spaces, from the urban context to the concept of "emptiness", and even to the memory of places.

Mnemosphere is a neologism that enhances our ability to communicate the complex realities we live and experience. It contributes to design research, manifesting itself in a visual exhibition accessible to all, which interprets its diverse conformations and meanings on an international level.

FrancoAngeli
La passione per le conoscenze