



Open Library of Humanities

Affective atmosphere: embodiment and the film frame

Pavel Prokopic, University of Salford, pavel.prokopic@gmail.com

The affective atmosphere approach to filmmaking emerged from a practice-as-research project entitled Affective Cinema, which seeks to explore the unique expressive potential of film by offsetting its function as a vehicle for coherent communication of narrative and drama. Affective atmosphere as a production approach is about the focused and present becoming with reality that is not interrupted by separation between periods of filming and not filming. The approach instead complicates the separation between actuality and pro-filmic reality, and it equally complicates the separation between the habitual effect of the self and the representation of a fictional character. Affective atmosphere is about the sustained embodied presence of performers within the atmospheric conditions of the film set, which form the atmosphere of the resulting moving image. The approach is informed by the philosophical concepts of atmosphere, Merleau-Ponty's flesh and Deleuze's affect. The underlying practice-as-research seeks to understand what atmosphere is and what audio-visual expression it can lead to on film; this understanding then informs practical exploration of and experimentation with film drama and aesthetics.

Keywords: Affect; Atmosphere; Close-up; Flesh; Film Performance; Deleuze; Merleau-Ponty

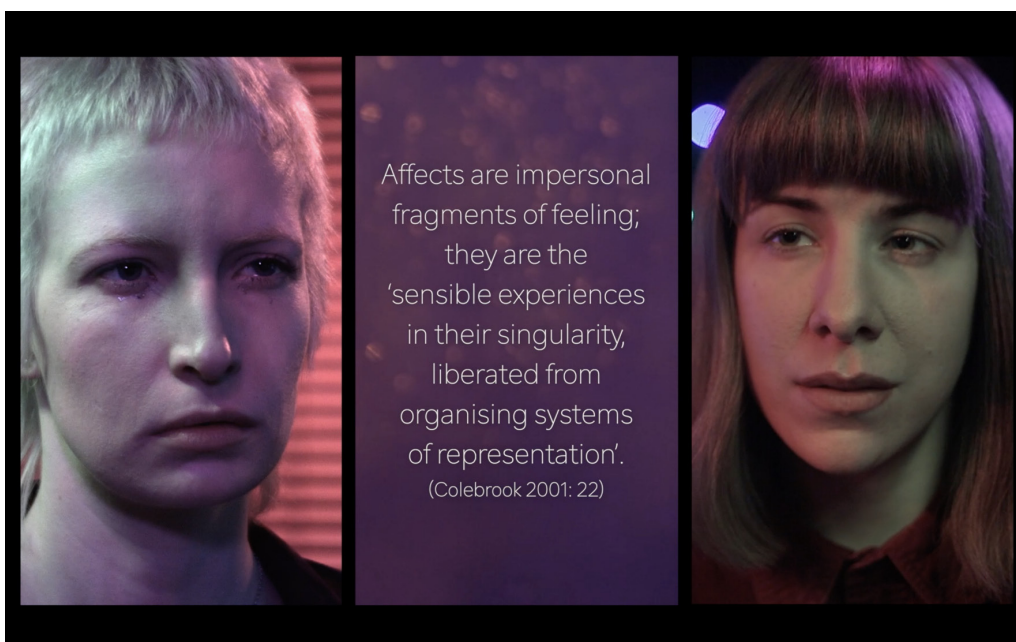
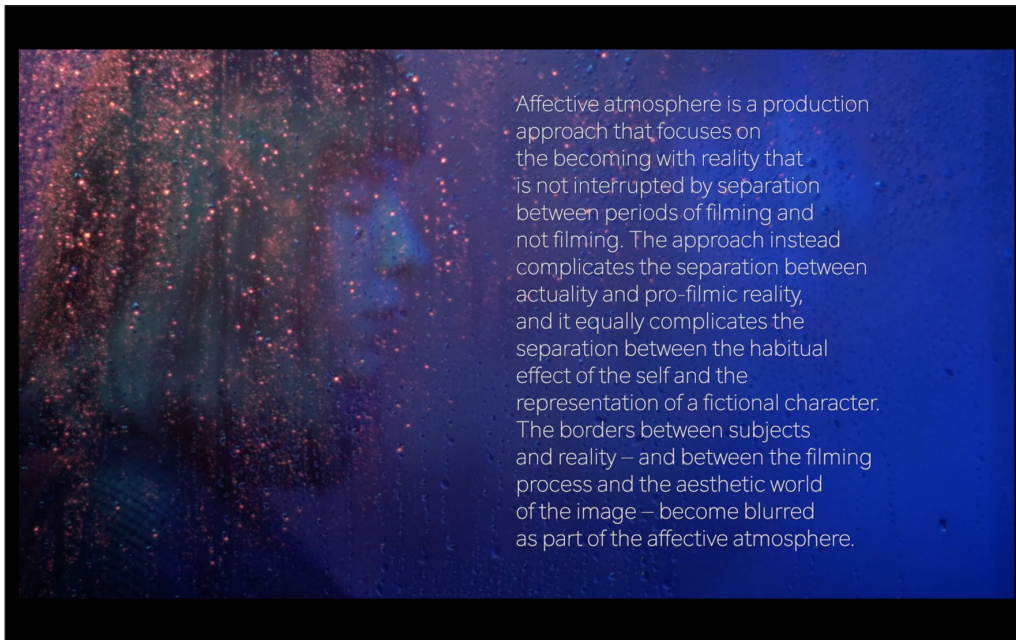


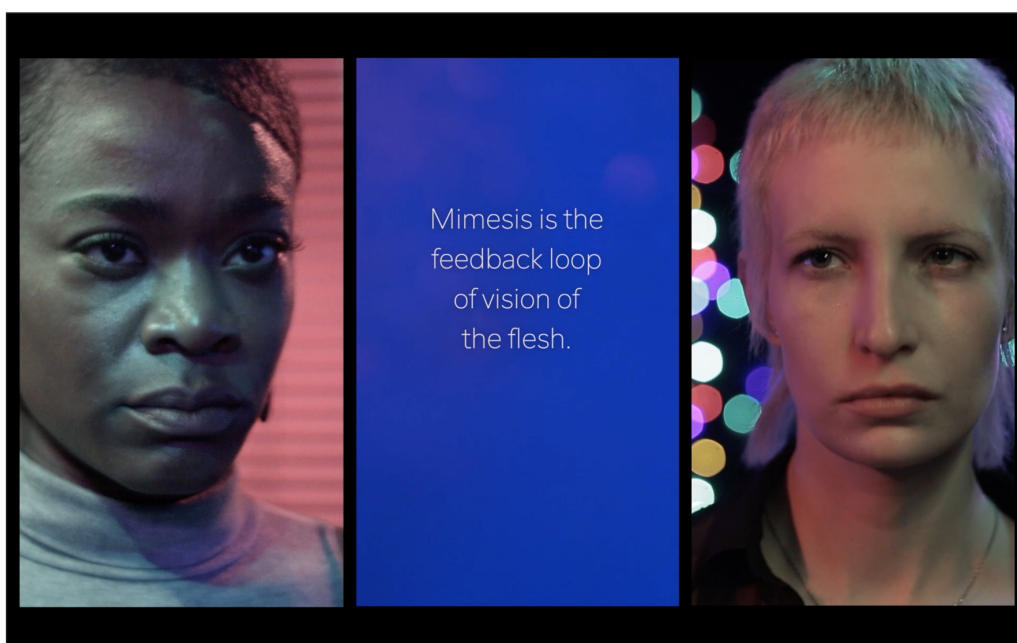
VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.8315>.

Available for download here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.8315.mp4>.

STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE





VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[Note: This is a transcript of a video article. Individual elements from the transcript, such as metadata and reference lists, may appear more than once in the document, in order to be properly read and accessed by automated systems. The transcript can be used as a placeholder or reference when it is not possible to embed the actual video, which can be found by following the DOI.]

**Affective atmosphere:
embodiment and the film frame.**

Pavel Prokopic

Affective atmosphere is a production approach that focuses on the becoming with reality that is not interrupted by separation between periods of filming and not filming. The approach instead complicates the separation between actuality and pro-filmic reality, and it equally complicates the separation between the habitual effect of the self and the representation of a fictional character. The borders between subjects and reality – and between the filming process and the aesthetic world of the image – become blurred as part of the affective atmosphere.

Affective atmosphere is about the sustained embodied presence of performers within the atmospheric conditions of the film set, which form the atmosphere of the resulting moving image. The approach is informed by the philosophical concepts of atmosphere, Merleau-Ponty's flesh and Deleuze's affect. The underlying practice-as-research seeks to understand what atmosphere is and what audio-visual expression it can lead to on film; this understanding then informs practical exploration of and experimentation with film drama and aesthetics.

[01:14]

The moving image as atmosphere

Atmosphere is a pre-rational, undifferentiated in-between, in the here and now.

Atmosphere is the bodily presence for something and someone; it is one's bodily state in an environment. (Bohme 2017)

Atmospheres reflect an expressed world rather than a represented world; they 'radiate from an individual to another' in a 'dyadic space of resonance'. (Anderson 2009: 79–80)

Atmosphere is a resonance of the felt space – a vibration in which 'the perceived and the perceiver meet and even merge isomorphically and predualistically'. (Griffero 2016: 6)

Atmosphere reflects a life in the 'primitive present', fusing the 'here', 'now', 'being', and 'I' in space, which is a 'predimensional, surfaceless realm manifest to each of us in undistorted corporeal experience'. (Schmitz et al. 2011: 245)

Atmosphere as flesh

Merleau-Ponty asks: 'where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?' (1968: 138)

But where are we to put the limit between the body and the image, since film is flesh also?

Flesh is a homogenous, sensible material, from which both the world and the body are made – in which they exist as one.

'The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance'. (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 139)

Flesh is 'an "element" of Being'. (139)

Flesh is an impersonal, 'anonymous visibility', a 'vision in general ... being here and now' (142) that inhabits both the seer and the seen.

Through the vision of the camera, the image and the filmed reality meet and become one body of the image, mirroring the performer's body. The image is simultaneously vision and visibility, image and reality, a body and its mirage: flesh.

I have to tell you something.

You do?

I don't have to, but I want to.

Ok, I want to hear it.

I don't think you do.

That's for me to decide I think.

I don't care what you think anymore.

Ok.

That's what I wanted to say. I don't care what you think anymore.

What do you mean by that?

That you poison me with your thinking.

Sorry for telling you the truth.

No I'm sorry.

For what?

For telling you the truth.

The truth that I'm poison?

You are not poison. But you are full of hate and bitterness, and you want to infect other people.

I'm just being who I am. Everyone is responsible for what they let in.

This is it.

What?

How can you be so self-centred? You really think there is no responsibility for you?

What's the alternative?

You can care a little bit.

I care about the truth.

What does that mean?

I care about the truth.

No you are just arrogant thinking you know what the truth is.

I care about you.

You care about me like an owner cares for a dog.

Don't say that.

Because it isn't the truth?

Yes.

No.

[5:27]

Each filming session lasted for around two hours and was filmed in its entirety on three cameras. The two performers did not know the dialogue in advance but simply repeated mimetically what they heard in the moment from their 'shadow performers' off-screen, who read the lines from the script. The script did not seek to represent any specific situation, emotion or a dramatic context, aiming instead to remain in an 'affective register'.

Gender or character names were not specified either: the conversation was merely a one-line exchange between character A and character B, written in an intuitive, stream-of-consciousness manner. The performers were encouraged to deliver the lines simply and quietly, without any apparent intonation, which supported their affective participation in the atmosphere of filming process. However, the audio recording also contributes to the aesthetic impression of affective atmosphere in the film.

[6:30]

The flesh as affect

Affects are impersonal fragments of feeling; they are the 'sensible experiences in their singularity, liberated from organising systems of representation'. (Colebrook 2001: 22)

'The being of sensation, the bloc of percept and affect, will appear as the unity or reversibility of feeling and felt, their intimate intermingling like hands clasped together'. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 178)

'It is the flesh that, at the same time, is freed from the lived body, the perceived world, and the intentionality of one toward the other that is still too tied to experience'. (178)

Affects radiate from the flesh of the image, in the atmospheric unity of the moving body and the vision of the camera.

Affect as the body

In film, 'whatever happens to a body becomes instantly available to perception. Thus, the performing body presents itself as a shock wave of affect, the expression-event that makes affect a visible and palpable materiality'. (Del Río 2008: 10)

Film gives us the 'enhanced visibility, concurrent with a never-before-seen manifestation of the human body'. (Merish 2012: 448)

I woke up this morning and I felt weak. Like I caught something.

Are you ill?

I don't think so. The feeling went away.

That's good.

I wouldn't mind being ill for a while.

Ok.

It feels nice to be paralysed. Have no choice. Be forced to withdraw from everything.

I hate that feeling. The weakness and the pain.

I like it. It's kind of spiritual.

Spiritual suffering.

Something like that.

I don't want to suffer.

It's not about what you want.

It's about what you believe?

Yes.

I don't believe in much.

What do you believe in?

Progress. Procreation. Reason.

Reason.

What's wrong with that?

Nothing.

What do you believe in?

Love. Honesty. Destiny. Peace.

Like world peace?

Any kind of peace.

I don't know what love is.

That's sad.

I know need, and empathy. Maybe it's like those two together.

I don't know.

[09:39]

The lighting set-up created complex yet abstract foregrounds and backgrounds unique to each of the camera angles – generating a sense of atmosphere that aimed to enhance the performers' presence in this homogenous abstract space; this spatial atmosphere nevertheless also became directly transferred into the aesthetic atmosphere of the image.

The first camera (the right portion of the split screen) had an out-of-focus background created by coloured fairy lights on a black backdrop, while the performer was lit by a red light, back-lit by a purple light, and also lit by a transitioning LED light from above. The second camera (the left portion, and the reverse-shot angle of the first camera) had a background formed by a black blind with a red light behind it, and the performer was lit by a 'palpitating' disco light from above. The third camera (the middle portion and the present background shot) had the most complex visual setup – filming one of the performers from the side through a transparent glass sprayed with water, with its image feeding directly into a projector illuminating the background of the shot.

[10:40]

Affect as the close frame

Film is a frame, a fragment, a partition. It forms a new body, new abstract whole of the image as flesh.

Film amplifies the moving body, it brings an intimate view of the body by transforming it into a self-contained fragment – the close-up.

The close-up testifies to the encounter of vision between the performer's body and the camera.

The close-up releases 'the cinematic feeling'. (Epstein and Liebman 1977: 16)

The close-up gives us 'the screen as surface, with the annihilation of a sense of depth and its corresponding rules of perspectival realism'. (Doane 2003: 91)

The image becomes, once more, an image rather than a threshold onto a world. Or rather, the world is reduced to this face, this object'. (91)

The close-up shot of the face 'gathers and expresses the affect as a complex entity, and secures the virtual conjunctions between singular points of this entity'. (Deleuze 1986: 103)

I woke up this morning and I felt weak. Like I caught something.

Are you ill?

I don't think so. The feeling went away.

That's good.

I wouldn't mind being ill for a while.

Ok.

It feels nice to be paralysed. Have no choice. Be forced to withdraw from everything.

I hate that feeling. The weakness and the pain.

I like it. It's kind of spiritual.

Spiritual suffering.

Something like that.

I don't want to suffer.

It's not about what you want.

It's about what you believe?

Yes.

I don't believe in much.

What do you believe in?

Progress. Procreation. Reason.

Reason.

What's wrong with that?

Nothing.

What do you believe in?

Love. Honesty. Destiny. Peace.

Like world peace?

Any kind of peace.

I don't know what love is.

That's sad.

I know need, and empathy. Maybe it's like those two together.

I don't know.

[14:02]

The affective atmosphere differs from conventional methods of film production, in the sense that it generates fiction through a holistic, non-rational approach that does not

seek to represent a meaningful dramatic, emotional or spatial context. The work does not aim to be engaging on the level of dramatic or narrative value and relevance, but rather on the level of affects – on the level of impersonal, fleeting fragments of feeling emanating from the homogenised vibrations of the image frame. In this frame, the performers' bodies, their presence in the moment to the sound and light in the filmed space, and the aesthetic surface of the image, all coexist and amplify each other.

This approach to filmmaking is informed by the synthesis of the fundamentally related philosophical concepts of atmosphere, affect and flesh. In this way, the work is helping to advance – tacitly through practice – the understanding of film ontology, particularly the relationship between filmed reality, the human body, and the aesthetic and fictional qualities of the moving image.

[15:09]

Affective atmosphere as mimesis

Mimesis is the feedback loop of vision of the flesh.

Mimesis transcends the distinction between the subjective self and the representation of a fictional character.

Mimesis is an embodied encounter of two subjective objects – two prereflective bodies charged with vision. (Sobchack 2004)

An encounter with the other as a 'passionate devotion to the world, acting on and enfolding its and our own materiality through our senses and with feeling, [which] intimately engages us with our primordial, prereflective, and material sense-ability'. (Sobchack 2004: 290)

Mimesis is the bodily encounter between the camera and the participants in the affective atmosphere.

Mimesis is the fiction of the present moment devoid of narrative purpose.

Affective atmosphere as light

Light is the homogenising vision of the image.

The light of the image activates and amplifies a resonance of embodied presence.

Light is the flesh: vision and visibility intertwined.

Light is the resonance of the body within the felt space of the frame.

Light is the vibration, the oscillation, the movement of the affective atmosphere.

I wish we had more time.

We have the whole night.

Way more time. Years. Centuries.

Let's enjoy this.

I do enjoy it. I also feel sad.

Every creature is sad sometimes.

That sounds patronising.

Sorry.

Do you think we are equal?

What do you mean?

Do you think one of us is smarter?

You are more successful than me.

How do you measure that?

You have a real job.

That's nonsense.

I think I'm a bit smarter than you.

How do you know?

I don't know.

It doesn't make me feel good when you say that.

Sorry.

Not whether it's true or not. But that you would think this way.

Do you think we are equal?

I thought we were.

Let's just enjoy the time we have.

Sure.

[19:00]

Performers

Kayt Webster-Brown

Hannah Cecily

Michal Szpak

Marie Johnson

Fotina Papatheodorou

Theodor Spiridon

Megan Hatto

References

Anderson, B. (2009) 'Affective Atmospheres' *Emotion, Space, Society* 2:77–81.

Colebrook, C. (2001) *Gilles Deleuze*, London, New York: Routledge.

Bohme, G. (2017) *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, London, New York: Routledge.

Deleuze, G. (1986) *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, London: The Athlone Press.

Deleuze G., Guattari, F. (1994) *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.

Del Río, E. (2008) *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*, Edinburgh University Press.

Doane, M.A. (2003) 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol.14/no.3: 89–111.

Epstein J., Liebman S. (1977) 'Magnification and Other Writings' *October*, vol.3: 9–25.

Griffero, T. (2016) *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, Routledge.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press.

Mersch, D. (2012) 'Passion and Exposure: New Paradoxes of the Actor' in J. Sternagel et. al. (eds.) *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*, Transcript Verlag, 447–77.

Schmitz, et al. (2011) 'Emotions Outside the Box – The New Phenomenology of *Feeling and Corporeality*' *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Science*, June: 241–59.

Sobchack, V. (2004) *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.

Abstract

The affective atmosphere approach to filmmaking emerged from a practice-as-research project entitled Affective Cinema, which seeks to explore the unique expressive potential of film by offsetting its function as a vehicle for coherent communication of narrative and drama. Affective atmosphere as a production approach is about the focused and present becoming with reality that is not interrupted by separation between periods of filming and not filming. The approach instead complicates the separation between actuality and pro-filmic reality, and it equally complicates the separation between the habitual effect of the self and the representation of a fictional character. Affective atmosphere is about the sustained embodied presence of performers within the atmospheric conditions of the film set, which form the atmosphere of the resulting moving image. The approach is informed by the philosophical concepts of atmosphere, Merleau-Ponty's flesh and Deleuze's affect. The underlying practice-as-research seeks to understand what atmosphere is and what audio-visual expression it can lead to on film; this understanding then informs practical exploration of and experimentation with film drama and aesthetics.

Keywords

Affect; Atmosphere; Close-up, Flesh, Film Performance; Deleuze; Merleau-Ponty

pavelprokopic.com

References

- Anderson, B. (2009) 'Affective Atmospheres' *Emotion, Space, Society* 2:77–81. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2009.08.005>
- Bohme, G. (2017) *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, London, New York: Routledge.
- Colebrook, C. (2001) *Gilles Deleuze*, London, New York: Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203029923>
- Del Río, E. (2008) *Deleuze and the Cinemas of Performance: Powers of Affection*, Edinburgh University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748635269>
- Deleuze, G. (1986) *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, London: The Athlone Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350251977>
- Deleuze G., Guattari, F. (1994) *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Doane, M.A. (2003) 'The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol.14/no.3: 89–111. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-14-3-89>
- Epstein J., Liebman S. (1977) 'Magnification and Other Writings' *October*, vol.3: 9–25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/778434>
- Griffero, T. (2016) *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, Routledge. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315568287>
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968) *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press.
- Mersch, D. (2012) 'Passion and Exposure: New Paradoxes of the Actor' in J. Sternagel et. al. (eds.) *Acting and Performance in Moving Image Culture: Bodies, Screens, Renderings*, Transcript Verlag, 447–77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/transcript.9783839416488.447>
- Schmitz, et al. (2011) 'Emotions Outside the Box – The New Phenomenology of Feeling and Corporeality' *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Science*, June: 241–59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-011-9195-1>
- Sobchack, V. (2004) *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520937826>

