

# RESPIRE

CONFERENCE

## *ESTHÉTIQUE DE LA RESPIRATION & CULTURE DE LA QUALITÉ DE L'AIR.*

## BREATHE

### *AN AESTHETICS OF BREATHING & AIR QUALITY CULTURE*

#### CALL FOR PAPERS

DM-Lab Ensad-Nancy (École nationale supérieure d'art et de design de Nancy), Artem Nancy,  
as part of Esch 2022, European Capital of Culture  
A PFUE 2022 (French Presidency of the European Union) project

*NANCY, ARTEM CAMPUS  
SEPTEMBER 22 AND 23, 2022*

## SUMMARY

In the vast atmosphere, I breathe the air inside my house, the air in my garden, on my street, in my city. What air does each of us breathe? The whole environment we inhabit: from our objects and our spaces to the products of human activity. Air quality relies on the material reality of our environments. It speaks to the senses, echoes in the development of our perception and requires the ability to acknowledge it.

The "Respire" (Breathe) conference aims at:

- exploring new ways of knowing the air we breathe and developing a sensitive culture of various qualities of air;
- presenting projects which explore ways to reconnect with a sensory perception of the air.

Structured around three axes, the conference will question the relation between measuring tools and sensory perception, somatic and artistic research on breathing, research on "breathing" materials, and design and atmospheric architecture projects.

# TOPIC

What do we breathe? We breathe wood from our tables, plastic from our windows, glue from our wallpaper, humidity from our walls, asphalt, trees, flowers in our gardens: a mix that we call air. It has various degrees of colour, odour, freshness, humidity, salt. It is a flow with ascending, descending, stagnant movements, cold or hot currents. It is result of rubbing, heating, injecting, emulsifying, pressuring, cooling, combusting, and melting.

Everything is mixed and set in motion. Our world is atmosphere, nothing but atmosphere (Coccia 2016). We are immersed in it. The image of immersion reveals the singularity of what surrounds us, the feeling of proximity, the continuity between what is near and what is far. In the vast atmosphere, I breathe the air inside my house, the air in my garden, on my street, in my city. What air does each of us breathe? The whole environment we inhabit: from our objects and our spaces to the products of human activity.

Air is not invisible. We have made air an abstraction, a chemical formula, we have developed measuring tools to quantify its components, to draw standards and to calibrate what is acceptable and what is not. Air is no longer the air of things, air is no longer a tangible reality, what is needed is an objective measure of air quality.

But air quality relies on the material reality of our environments. It speaks to the senses, echoes in the development of our perception and requires the ability to acknowledge it. A standard cannot replace sensory perception.

The conference is organised as part of the “Respire” (Breathe) exhibition, presented at Massenoire, Belval campus, as part of Esch 2022, European Capital of Culture.

It aims at:

- exploring new ways of knowing the air we breathe and developing a sensitive culture of various qualities of air;
- presenting projects which explore ways to reconnect with a sensory perception of the air.

The conference revolves around the three following axes.

## 1. MEASURING TOOL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION

As we breathe the contexts of our lives, the materials give us information on what we breathe, our senses determining its qualities: opacity, transparency, smell, granularity, humidity, acidity, etc. What we inhale does not have the character of the invisible, of the insensible, as technosciences would have us believe, focusing exclusively on measuring tools to determine air quality. Considering the materials of the environment we breathe makes a sensitive perception of the air possible.

If measures give an objective information, the value of said information relies not so much in its accuracy but on a level of factuality that allows awareness. While a technical approach seeks and values accuracy, it is not essential when we are not aiming at establishing a standard or obtaining a reference. It is essential in order to initiate an approach that progressively tends towards sensitivity, and subjectivation. To this end, measuring fluctuations and trends in the movement of life is enough: does the air quality improve or deteriorate when I am in such and such a place, doing this activity or that one? The goal is the search for improvement through a proactive approach, unlike standards, which encourage a delayed verification, inducing passivity. This is why standards, and the details on air quality variations that use them as reference, despite their objectivity, do not bring a real awareness, a development of sensitivity, changes in human behaviour (without coercive action such as fines, bans, etc.).

Sensors and measuring tools are effective tools because of the objectivity of their results, which can be used to establish a pact of factuality within social interactions. This is the foundation of the sensor-citizen movements. But the aim remains the quality of tools, of means of action, extending and expanding our perceptive capacities. The sensor can serve a political purpose (as for the Respire organisation fighting for the pedestrianisation of areas around schools) or an aesthetic one, as with the sensitive walks held by the AirCitizen organisation. These purposes are fulfilled through pro-active approaches and projects led by citizen groups, artists, and scientists.

Here, sensors and connected objects are seen as anything but consumer products. The software applications of connected objects try to respond to the programmatic need defining their uses, sometimes even offering coaching services. But following a program is not a creative use of tools, nor is conforming to standards. The combination of standards and programs always appears as a constraint, an obstacle to subjectivation. This is certainly the biggest challenge in designing connected objects related to health, self-transformation and the environment.

The conference will question the approaches aiming at training individuals to perceptive methods, in connection with instrumentalized measurements, such as the resurgence of pollution identification through visual perception in “smoke schools”, a distant legacy of Maximilien Ringelmann's contributions. It will question the role of measuring tools, pollution sensors in particular, in a process of sensitization to air quality. How can they serve sensory perception and accompany subjectivation processes?

## 2. SOMATIC AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH ON BREATHING

Breathing is an unconscious vital physiological process, regulated by the autonomic nervous system, and which can be modified through conscious control. For Hubert Godard (2021), the view on breathing is that of a process which is not acted upon. One simply offers oneself to gravity during exhalation and opens unconditionally to the world through inhalation. These two actions shape an ecological modality of breathing. We must admit that this is a “view”, as the poor quality of the air most of us breathe does not allow for such an “unconditional opening”. On the contrary, it entails a compromise with the world, a daily struggle against pollution. This compromise forces awareness of air quality and our way of breathing. An aesthetics of breathing with the objective of finding a sensory perception of air quality to develop environmental creativity necessarily questions the act of breathing.

This questioning leads us to somatic practices that offer a pathway to body awareness by taking the dual path of perceptual exploration and the creation of an environment specific to the session (Bottiglieri, 2014; Ginot, 2018), for example by offering support to bodies in order to suppress gravity. All somatic methods give a great importance to breathing, as its observation seems to be the prerequisite to the aesthetic work they propose during practical sessions. They stand out from our postural and gestural habits, from our usual relationship with the environment:

- suppressing gravity, experimenting with touch, sight, hearing, smell, and proprioception;
- seeking elasticity, the sliding of our fasciae, movement awareness, tonic variation, energy management, anchoring to the ground, body-spirit unity;
- feeling the other living organisms that inhabit us, the liquids and textures of our bodies, etc.

For somatics, all these elements constitute tools for exploring both the body and the environment. We propose to explore how these tools serve environmental creativity in the various fields of creation in which the body is the medium, such as dance, performance art, and in the disciplines that design our living environments, such as design, architecture, and landscape.

We are interested in the theories and practices of somatic design (Kristina Hook, 2016), one of its foundations being somaesthetics. This new field of philosophical research developed by Richard Shusterman (2008) explores three fundamental dimensions: first, a theoretical and descriptive dimension, explaining our perceptions and body practices; secondly, a pragmatic dimension through the comparative study of somatic enhancement methods; and third, a practical dimension, referring to bodywork itself. We find these fundamentals in somatic design, with the objective of enriching the methods of conception in design by taking into account the body experience of the designer and the final user. This implies starting from what we feel and requires a physical and practical personal commitment from the designer, through the development of their sensorial capacities and of their aesthetic appreciation of their experience, an analysis of perceptions, gestures, and movement. The designer finds in somatic methods many theoretical and practical tools they need. We want to ask the question raised by the practice of somatic design from the perspective of academic teaching: what body practices should be included in teaching design, what place should they hold?

## 3. MATERIALS AND PROJECTS OF AN ATMOSPHERIC CONCEPTION

Atmospheric phenomena become objects of design (Philippe Rahm).

Flow models replace solid geometry in conception tools. Creation and innovation in materials are stimulated by the study of atmospheric exchanges and research on air quality (Maxime Louis-Courcier, “Matières spécifiques”, 2018). Imagining a respiratory process at work in materials gives us images of breathable materials and allows for new conceptions, such as constructive practices for a breathing habitat, equipped with “perspiring” walls, or a bioclimatic habitat with the goal of energy autonomy.

New fields of action appear for design, architecture, urban planning, and landscape: atmospheric and climatic design and architecture, energy landscape (Chezel, 2018), urban planning and environmental amenities.

Taking the atmosphere into account also induces a new systemic dimension that includes nature and questions the availability of resources. The use of natural resources is the subject of creative approaches that modify production and harvesting processes: they take the climate into account (permaculture), revive harvesting (seaweed, for example), consider waste, develop materials and transformation processes, enhance the value of artisanal know-how and local cultures, map the flow of materials within bioregions, and rethink the links between energy, materials and climate at different scales from the individual object to the whole landscape. These approaches focus on preserving the naturalness and cosmicity of materials and the processes of energetic, physical, chemical and biological exchange. After postmodernism, a new “Natural History” of disciplines is being written today (Rahm 2020).

The conference will question the projects, methods, and innovations regarding air quality, which in a global approach link the aesthetic, material, practical (sociotechnical process), political (citizen project, participative project), and biological dimensions, and accelerate the transition to an ecological economy that considers the interdependence and coevolution of human societies and ecosystems.



# TRANSVERSALITY

When we use the metaphor of parks and forests as urban or planetary lungs, through poetic imagination or through citizen action investing urban wastelands, or when we measure pollution with micro-sensors and build communities of citizen-sensors, question models of bodies and relations to environments based on new ecosomatic theories, consider ourselves as an environment populated by other living organisms, all these activities can be linked back to breathing.

We hypothesize that the thoughts and practices of breathing allow us to understand the continuity of living organisms with each other as well as with the environment, and discover new modalities of an ecological way of doing things in creative disciplines as well as in our ways of being and inhabiting the world. Breathing offers many possibilities for assembling metaphysical, poetic, socio-technical, aesthetic, political, and bodily experiences, for experimenting with the concepts of continuity and blending, the object of research in some areas of philosophy (Coccia, 2016) and contemporary anthropology (Tim Ingold, 2013; 2017).

In *Lines: A Brief History*, Tim Ingold asks what walking, weaving, watching, singing, storytelling, drawing, and writing have in common: “The answer is that they all proceed along lines of one kind or another!” Analysing lines allows Ingold to determine both what is continuous in their transformation process and what is common among activities. A work of basketry provides Ingold with the pedagogical example illustrating both the transformation of lines, with natural wicker stems becoming a surface that forms a basket, and his conception of “making” as a correspondence between the lines of the student-craftsman’s flows of consciousness and the material’s own forces. The craftsmen act in “a world of active materials<sup>2</sup>” and “give rise to the forms of the living world that we see all around us – in plants and animals, in waves of water, snow and sand, in rocks and clouds – adding his own impetus to the forces and energies in play<sup>3</sup>”.

Ingold proposes to think of the making, the morphogenesis of artifacts, as a process of growth that blurs the difference between organism and artifact. Throwing oneself into an ongoing process means following its lines, integrating the mesh of which one is but a constituent at the same time as one’s environment. The mesh of lifelines offers a model of relationship to the environment. What we have to gain in this description of the world by lines is an ecological awareness and a new ecology as the study of lines<sup>4</sup>.

Expanding on his first research, Ingold studies the relationship between lines and atmosphere, starting from the observation that if one lives according to lines, he believes the atmospheric medium is the site where these lifelines intertwine. This time, it is a matter, for example, of seeking “the common denominator of breath, time, mood, sound, memory, colour and the sky”. Ingold opposes the observation of the sky from the Earth to the overhanging vision given by the images of the satellites of what we name today the “planet” and the “space”. Of course, another type of line appears when inverting the point of view, as he reintroduces perception and action. Professor Ingold makes his students discover these lines on the beach near Aberdeen, by asking them to observe and deconstruct the horizon line between the ocean and the sky. Considering of the immersion of the living in the atmosphere allows Ingold to introduce our relationship to climate and express continuity between our breathing and the weaving of the world through the meshwork of lifelines. “In the real world, where time runs forwards, the living, respiring being is the site where atmospheric immersion is transformed into the haptic extension of the meshwork along its proliferating lines. It is where the weather is turned into the furrows of the ploughman, the wind into the wake of the sailboat, and the sunlight into the stems and roots of the plant. It is a transformation, indeed, that is fundamental to all animate life<sup>5</sup>.”

Indeed, the movement described and theorized by Ingold is that of “animate life”. “Making” means accompanying a process of growth in which artifacts remain open to multiple exchanges throughout their existence. They are never isolated. This conception leads Ingold to reject the theory of object agency, a theory that would enclose within the object itself a power to act of which the object would be the incarnation. To this closed object, endowed with agency, Ingold opposes an open object, endowed with an animate life. The opposition between incarnation and animation brings new questions. “For material things to be enrolled in cognitive processes, must they already have been rendered in cultural forms? Why should people think with artefacts alone? Why not also with the air, the ground, mountains and streams, and other living beings? Why not with materials<sup>6</sup>?”

To answer these questions, Ingold builds kites with his students. In the eyes of the anthropologist, the kite does not exercise a form of agency, any more than air does. “And in this dance, flyer and air do not so much interact as correspond. The kite, in effect, sets up a correspondence between the animate movements of the flyer and the currents of the aerial medium in which he or she is immersed. It is not that you need air to interact

1. Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2007, p. 1.

2. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2013, p. 21.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

4. See Yves Citton and Saskia Walentowitz, “Pour une écologie des lignes et des tissages”, *Revue des livres*, n° 4, March 2012, p. 28-39.

5. Tim Ingold, *The Life of Lines*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2015, p. 88.

6. Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

with a kite; rather, you need a kite to correspond with the air.<sup>7</sup> Air is a transducer that converts the quality of a gesture into a material flow. In this reflection, Ingold sheds light on the transformation evoked in the examples of the blacksmith, the ploughman, the sailboat, and the sunlight.

The conference offers to expand on Ingold's questioning. Can we think with air? Which practices and gestures are involved? What are the continuities, or the lines that allow us to discover new modalities of an ecological making?

7. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

# CONDITIONS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Communications will last 30 minutes and must be submitted in French or in English.

Please follow the instructions below to write your abstract:

- title: max. 255 characters (including spaces);
- abstract: max. 3,000 characters (including spaces);
- keywords: max. 5;
- references: max. 5.

Please email your abstract and a short bio-bibliographic profile (up to 200 words)

to [patrick.beauce@ensa-nancy.fr](mailto:patrick.beauce@ensa-nancy.fr)

By June 13, 2022.

The selection results and the final workshop program will be disclosed at the end of June 2022.

## ORGANISATION

DM-Lab - Ensad-Nancy, Artem Nancy, as part of Esch2022, European Capital of Culture  
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## CATEGORIES

Design (main category)

Art

Architecture

Somatic studies and practices

Dance and performing arts

Soma-aesthetics

Ecology

Anthropology

Sociology

Environmental humanities

## LOCATION

Artem Campus in Nancy

## FORMAT

On-site only event

A series of workshops will be held in the week of the conference with students from cross-border art and design schools. The results of the workshops will be presented during the conference.

## DATES

September 22 and 23, 2022

## ATTACHED FILES

Colloque Respire.pdf

## KEYWORDS

art and somatic practices, sensor, citizen-sensor, environmental creativity, medium design, atmospheric design and architecture, somatic design, design, ecosomatics, materials, air quality,

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