

Contemporary AESTHETICS

An international, interdisciplinary, peer- and blind-reviewed open-access
online journal
of contemporary theory, research, and application in aesthetics.

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Volume: Special Volume 12 (2024), Special Volumes

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Co-creating Atmospheres: the Use of Design for vā/wā, Community, and Common Sense

**Ethics
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Abstract

Design is usually understood as a professional activity by which objects and processes are given form through the deliberate and innovative deployment of aesthetic means. While design disciplines are branching out beyond their traditional concerns, and co-design increasingly involves nonprofessionals, designers' conceptual engagement with the perceptual processes set in train by design remains limited, even though they know them to be important from experience. Aristotle's *common sense*, for instance, is not commonly discussed in the design literature—yet its communal aspects could enrich not only co-design. Another expansion of perception beyond the individual occurs in *atmospheres*, which we register when we sense the moods in which we are immersed, or when they affect our bodies and dispositions as something Other. Atmospheres can, no doubt, be produced, but something about them seems to resist targeted and scheduled design processes.

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To address some questions raised by this journal issue, we reflect on a design project conducted by the Vā Moana Research Cluster at Auckland University of Technology – Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau between 2019 and 2022. The *Global Talanoa Platform* was created as part of a funded research project, “Vā Moana: space and relationality in Pacific thought and identity.” From a method to coproduce and disseminate knowledge, it morphed, from March 2020, into a resource to respond to COVID-19 conditioned restrictions. Amongst the guiding principles for the GTP design was atmosphere, along with kin concepts such as *vā/wā* (Samoan, Tongan/Māori), *qi* (Chinese) and *ma* (Japanese). In the process, we found that design, including its theoretical foundations, principles, and methods, had to undergo profound changes to generate atmospheres that would include all participants.

Key Words

atmospheres; conferences and research collaboration; co-creation; design; Moana communities; *vā/wā/ma*, *Zwischenraum*

1. Atmospheres and design: introduction

In *atmospheres*, or *tuned spaces*, perception expands beyond an individual. The term *tuned spaces* refers to seventeenth century philosopher Jacob Böhme’s idea of *attunement*: the characteristic resonance of individual instruments with each other, in an enfolded, expansive, trans-individual space.[1] Gernot Böhme deploys these terms to develop an approach to atmospheres with more-than-human aspects: our *Leib* (our body as it is directly given to our experience) is, for instance, “the nature we ourselves are,”[2] and part of the world enveloping and sustaining us. Bodily existence is “poured out in space, atmospherically affected and in bodily communication with other beings.”[3]

Atmospheric connections with the cosmos alleviate the subject/object dualities prevailing in Western thinking since Aristotle, and contravene the thing ontologies it is based on. Atmospheres suggest “a beyond of rational explanation, as though the proper, the aesthetically relevant began only there.”[4] Ontologically indeterminate, they are difficult to attribute to objects, environments, or experiencing subjects.[5] They exist for us only insofar as we can sense the moods they carry in changing, hard-to-pin-down but emotionally potent ways. We perceive them through immersion, or

through the affection of our bodies and dispositions by something beyond us. Thus, something about atmospheres seems to resist the deliberate, targeted, scheduled, budgeted—in one word: controlled—processes designers normally follow; though atmospheres can, no doubt, be produced.

Design disciplines, over the last decades, have branched out beyond their traditional concerns with objects and spaces and now include time-based and predominantly immaterial concerns, such as events, services, or games. Further, while most design has in practice always been produced by teams rather than individual genius, the role of individual professional designers became less central through recent co-design trends, promising a greater and earlier involvement of nonprofessional stakeholders. Thus, the *form* that follows *function* has been extended significantly beyond the dimensions, materials, and colors of finished commodities. And yet, designers' conceptual engagement with the actual perceptual processes prompted by their designs or with the effects of their products remains limited. Of the proverbial five senses, they mostly target eyes and ears, sometimes touch; the environmental effects of their designs usually enter their consciousness only as detrimental effects on the natural environment. Of course, designers experientially know that many other aspects are involved in their activities, but these are not well articulated.

Yet, these considerations were important to us (members of the Vā Moana Research Cluster at Auckland University of Technology) when we began, in 2019, to design an online platform to accommodate our research collaborations with colleagues in Aotearoa, across the Moana (Pacific) and all over the world.[6] In some ways, our situation was markedly different from what one could consider a normal situation—and a consideration of these differences and particularities provides the empirical grounding for our speculations in this paper.

In the first section, we present some principal reflections about the possibility of designing atmospheres and relate those to our design project, the Global Talanoa Platform.[7] In the second section, we explore non-European concepts of the in-between in order to discuss aspects of atmospheres that are not likely to be amenable to design methods as we know

them. In the third section, we consider the ethics and nuances of composing atmospheres along spectra of commonality and control.

2. Designing atmospheres?

Answers to questions like, “How can atmospheres be designed (or curated)?” and “Are designed atmospheres likely beneficial or detrimental for transcultural resonances?” hinge significantly on the definition of terms. In the Global North, at least, *design* primarily denotes the professional activity of shaping objects and processes by deliberately and innovatively deploying aesthetic means for specific purposes. Modern design’s association with technical contexts, in production as much as application, typically requires an optimization of the relations between function and form. Industrial designers, particularly, insisted on a scientific rationale for design at least until the 1980s, but other designers also highlighted their activities’ empirical and economic basis. This instrumental aspect of design colludes with classical ontologies, which define a thing by its external end and its delimiting and enclosing form.[8] However, “a thing’s form is also *effective* to the outside. It radiates into the surroundings, as it were, takes away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and fills it with tensions and movement suggestions.”[9]

Gernot Böhme’s modified thing-ontology shares some aspects with Bruno Latour’s critical deployment of Martin Heidegger’s distinction between *Gegenstand* and *Ding*, in which *Gegenstand* is a technologically produced object and *Ding* (thing) an assembly (Proto-Germanic: *thing*) of connections with the world.[10] In Latour’s version, all things, technical products included, are gatherings of worldly concerns—an object would be a gathering that has failed.[11]

Once things are regarded as open to the world, it is possible to think of atmospheres differently:

Insofar as they are ‘tinged’ by the presences of things, of people or environmental constellations, that is, through their ecstasies, they are spaces. They are themselves spheres of presence of a something, its actuality in space. By contrast with [Hermann] Schmitz’ approach, atmospheres are then not thought of as free floating but, on the contrary, as something emanating from and produced by things, people or their constellations. Accordingly, they are not conceived as something objective (i.e., as properties of things), and yet they are something thing-like, belonging to the thing – insofar as things articulate their spheres of

presence through their qualities, conceived as ecstasies. But atmospheres are nothing subjective, like determinations of a state of mind, either. And yet, they are subject-like, they belong to subjects insofar as they are sensed by humans in bodily presence, and insofar as this sensing is simultaneously the subject's bodily being-located in space.[12]

Things and atmospheres, then, are relational assemblies-of-concern and between-spaces. It is their relational aspects that made them relevant in our quest for online conditions that could enhance and nurture research relationships in a Global Talanoa Network (GTN).[13]

In early 2019, as part of our commitment to accessible methods and outcomes of our project, "Vā Moana: space and relationality in Pacific thought and identity,"[14] we planned a blended conference/collaboration environment for the coproduction and dissemination of knowledge. The project's title signals the importance of relationships; it examined the Samoan and Tongan notion of *vā* as relational space and its origins and adaptations over time and in different locales. Relationality was also an integral part of our research methods, and the build of the Global Talanoa Platform (GTP) had to take this into account. At the project's outset, we aspired to combine digital conferencing with face-to-face encounters and asynchronous, ongoing online discussions.[15] Beyond such generally beneficial features, the platform was to safeguard core research values in the Moana. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, this includes the concerns of Māori as *tangata whenua* (people of the land) and the larger *tangata moana* (Pacific peoples) community.[16] Crucial Māori values include the regulation of relationships through aspects of *mana* (n: supernatural force, power) and *tapu* (stat: sacred, n: restriction), *whakapapa* (v: to place in layer, n: genealogy), *whakawhanaungatanga* (n: establishing relationships), and *manaakitanga* (n: hospitality, kindness, generosity).[17] We thus had to appraise the role of relationships within their diverse cultural and political fields to answer questions like, "What does a digital platform need to do in order to support and protect collaborative relationships in Indigenous research, exhibition, museum and community projects, specifically in Aotearoa and the Moana Nui (Pacific)?" and "How can we translate best practice in Moana and Māori research into a blended environment?"

Considering questions in different world contexts is also important regarding the specific questions this journal raises concerning the impact of a concept of atmosphere on contemporary design; or the contribution of technologically mediated cultural modes to the creation of meaningful and good atmospheres; or the extent to which designed atmospheres can evoke transcultural resonances. Such considerations must involve a revision and rethinking of familiar concepts, many of which, on closer inspection, are specific to Western modernity rather than universal. This becomes evident when addressing the increasing worldwide reliance of Indigenous research communities on online collaboration applications. Most existing mainstream applications were created in and for non-Indigenous contexts. Built into them are modern capitalist work principles, like a relentless 15-30-minute tact and the logic of constantly measured efficiency. When COVID-19 presented new socio-technical challenges, these principles were perpetuated in the development of new remote communication tools. The mostly white, male, young, and well-to-do tech developers understood little about the knowledges, creative practices and needs of local and Indigenous communities.[18] Their modes and tools of communication and collaboration tended to reinforce current organizational structures rather than supporting collaborative possibilities like those offered in *talanoa*. [19] *Talanoa*, a dialogic, inclusive conversation in a receptive space,[20] is central to Moana problem-solving and knowledge-production modes.[21] By contrast, most commercially distributed conferencing platforms arose out of sales conferences. They tend to reinforce competition and increase the alienation experienced by many conference attendants worldwide in the face of tightly planned and densely delivered programs. This alienation is even more pronounced in participants whose cultures reserve generous space for relationship building and the dialogical exchange of thought. Thus, it was imperative for us to attend to the relationships with and amongst the participants and to provide opportunities and support for exchanges all through the conference.

Some aspects of relationality in Māori and Moana cultures are greatly facilitated by the simultaneous bodily presence in a location—the sharing of speech, performance, food, drink, and air. We therefore began to develop an alternative, purpose-built platform for

talanoa, and genuinely collaborative projects more generally, that would include as many of those relational aspects as possible, be it even “in translation.” Our team continuously discussed how we could create space for ritual and ceremony—not necessarily to translate them directly into an online environment but to uphold their purpose. While onsite at AUT, we would have welcomed participants onto Ngā Wai o Horotiu *marae* (Māori ceremonial meeting place) in a *pōwhiri* (welcome ceremony); we now had to design an online place-based welcome.



Figure 1: Manu Tāwhiowhio (2021) Digital video still. Filmed by Emily Parr.

The initial impulse in that direction was a video that played during the opening moments of the conference: in an animation produced in Google Earth, and to the sound of the *mōteatea* (chant) *Taku Manu Tāwhiowhio* by Taituwha King and Valance Smith, the audience was “flown” from the *moana* (sea) to the *marae* and then watched moving images of significant sites in the neighborhood (Figure 1). A 360° virtual tour of the *marae* was also available for exploration on GTP.

An important aspect of a *pōwhiri* is the *hongi*, the bodily sharing of breath while pressing noses in greeting. While we could not breathe the same air during the conference, we were led in communal bodily actions relayed online; for instance, simultaneous inhalation and exhalation during the *actiVĀtions* punctuating each session.[22] Led by five artists and poets, these *actiVĀtions* provided breaks for movement, reflection, and imagination. Joining voices in *waiata* (song) or *karakia* (prayer) is another key part of Moana rituals, yet this is very difficult to enact given that

Zoom produces an incredibly disruptive delay. As a compromise, a small group of us onsite sang the *waiata* during the *whakatau* (opening speeches). The subsequent sonic handover between Tāmaki Makaurau and Honolulu, through the reverberating sound of *pūtātara* (conch shell trumpet), around the world through the online space, was a moving experience.

A pōwhiri concludes in *whakanoa* (removing *tapu*, or restrictions), when people share food or cups of tea, which is, beyond ceremonial purposes, a pleasurable part of any gathering in Moana communities. Further, since some of the best conference conversations happen during tea breaks, we mailed before the conference, as a gesture in that direction, *manaaki* (hospitality) packs containing a mug, cacao husk tea, and chocolate coated *kofe* (coffee) beans to the presenters and session chairs (there were too many attendees to send a pack to everyone). A breakout space for incidental conversations between participants was available in a Mozilla Hub designed by Nooroa Tapuni: an oceanic virtual world to explore and assemble in between sessions. In a similar vein, Emily Parr designed a custom Zoom

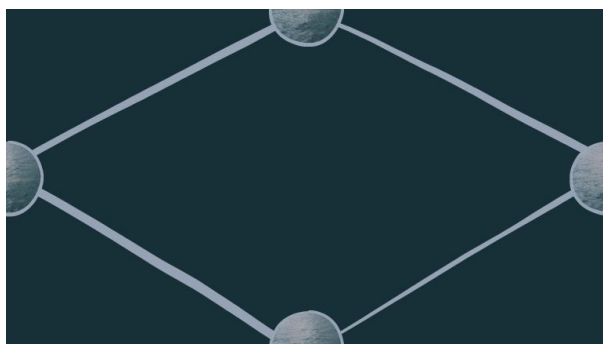


Figure 2: Zoom “net” background, designed by Emily Parr for Vā Moana conference, 2021

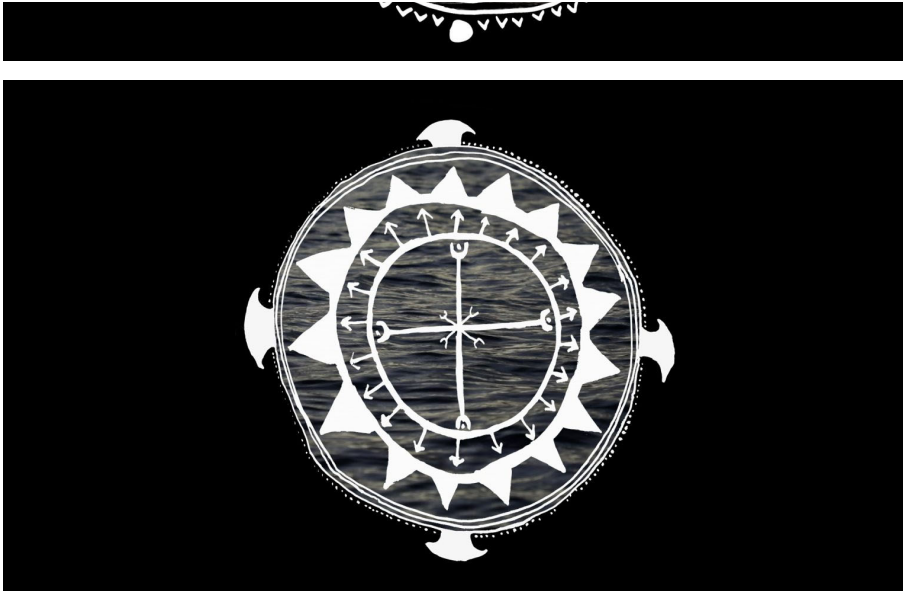
background that participants could install, if they wanted, to link our individual screens, holding us together in a visual “net” (Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 3: A screenshot of Zoom background in use during the conference.

To open, structure, and end each session, a *Moana Cosmogram*—John Pule’s drawings layered with video footage of the *Moana* by Emily Parr and *taonga pūoro* sound by Salvador Brown—was played (Figures 4-6). The pieces tracked the rising and setting of the sun (beginning in Aotearoa, travelling to Tonga, and ending in Sāmoa) and called some of our homelands, *atua* (ancestral spirits), and cosmologies into the gathering.





Figures 4-6: Moana Cosmograms 1-3 (2021). Digital video stills.
Emily Parr, John Pule, Salvador Brown.

Our core team consisted of five to nine staff and postgraduate students from architecture, spatial design, media design, user interface design, museum studies, and visual arts (digital art and videography), who all worked and researched in design or design-related fields and were familiar with the discipline's established theories and methods. Simultaneously, we were in varying degrees aware of the tensions between mainstream academic business and Indigenous aspirations.[23] Having to rethink time, space, energy, perception, relation, and affect, we considered *atmosphere* as a guiding principle for the GTP design—alongside kin concepts such as *vā/wā* (Samoan, Tongan/Māori), *qi* (Chinese), and *ma* (Japanese). The affinity of atmosphere with Moana concepts had already been observed some years earlier by Anna Boswell from the University of Auckland; published sources “offer at least five Māori expressions for atmosphere, and roughly forty for affect.”[24] This overlap provided us with an important bridge between Western and Moana thinking.

3. Beyond control: what atmospheres can also be

There is a conundrum when wanting to design atmospheres that can be perceived similarly by different people: to experience a stage set, for example, in the same or nearly the same way, an audience must be to a certain degree homogenous, that is, “accustomed to particular modes of perception.”[25] According to Böhme, atmospheres can be generated directly by impacting sensory-bodily presence through

movement impressions and synaesthetic elements,[26] but another factor in their production consists of socially mediated, conventional characteristics that are historically and culturally molded. The distinction between, as it were, biological and social perception makes sense wherever a clear division between science and humanities is established, as in modern Western epistemologies. It makes less sense where subject/object distinctions are less pronounced, or when a subject is not automatically assumed to be human. Böhme argues that human perception is “the experience of the presence of humans, objects, and environments,” and that atmospheres are the primary object of perception, from which “objects, forms, and colors, are then distinguished.”[27] In his book, *Atmospheric Architectures*, materials and lighting are important aspects of the examples—a stage design, a launch at a car-fair, a shop fit-out, and a men’s bathroom at a Cologne café that we will come back to (in Section 4). [28] Theatergoers, exhibition visitors, shoppers, and café clients presumably share some interests. As Tanehisa Otabe argues, Aristotle’s notion of common sense already contains a “productive germ” of the idea “of something inter-subjective that is common to different individuals.”[29] Strangely, common sense is not discussed in the design literature, though its communal aspects could enrich not only co-design.[30]

However, as Sarah Ahmed points out, no-body is affectively neutral, either; when we enter a situation, we carry our own mood with us so that “the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point.”[31] Thus, Boswell asks, “What if what is ‘there’ for you is not the same as what is ‘there’ for me?”[32] A history of conflict may produce different senses of ‘thereness’ and underpin spontaneous experiences of perceptual non-correspondence; an unequally shared history and a “brokenness of whatever might be said to be between us” may place limits on what can be in common.[33] When we ask how technological cultural mediation can help create atmospheres that are experienced as meaningful and good, we must therefore consider that, intra- and interculturally, atmospheres can be effective in different, even conflicting, ways.

To add another important phenomenon: Walter Benjamin’s *aura* transcends common subject/object dualities—a “strange tissue of space and time: the

unique apparition of a distance [of a mountain range or a branch, for example], however near it may be," which one follows with one's eyes on a summer afternoon while resting, breathing "the aura of those mountains, of that branch." [34] To experience aura, though, one must transpose a common response in human relationships to relationships with objects: to "perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return." [35] *Aura*, Böhme suggests, "designates atmosphere in general, as it were, the empty characterless envelope of its presence." [36] When we instigate a reciprocal "relationship between environmental qualities and human states," we create an *And*, an in-between, an atmosphere. [37] This *And* or *in-between* opens towards an immense sphere out of which atmospheres could emerge, and this makes it almost incompatible with a modern, instrumental design attitude. Carl Mika, in his 2023 discussion of *wā/wānanga*, points out that as soon as intangible or expansive phenomena are solely considered within contexts of human applications, they are torn out of their cosmic unity of space/time/matter/energy. [38] Non-European concepts of *in-between*, in which entities are produced through relationships, tend to preserve this unity better, often by separating and connecting simultaneously, like the Samoan and Tongan *vā*, the Māori and Hawaiian *wā*, and the Japanese *ma* (or, *aidagara*).

Vā, commonly translated as "space-between," continually enacts relationships by holding "separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All;" it reveals an "individual person/creature/thing" in terms of *vā* relationships, [39] whose enactment and cultivation dynamically define all things. Tongan artist-scholar, Epeli Hau'ofa extended this notion and shifted the perception of the Pacific from an island-dividing ocean to a connective tissue and superhighway of Moana cosmopolitanism, through his transformative image of "our sea of islands." [40] Today, 'Okusitino Māhina and Tēvita Ka'ili explore the *vā* in *tā/vā* (time/space) through *hoa/soa* (paired or polar) relationships. Former Samoan Head of State, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, defines *vā tapuia* as the sacred relations "between humans, animals, cosmos and the gods." [41]

Wā (Māori: interval, region, duration) similarly emphasizes the spatio-temporal connection and unity of all beings, be they "people, birds, fish, trees [or] the weather"—all are related through *whakapapa* and

connected to a shared place/time.[42] *Ma* (Japanese) translates as interval, distance, interstice, but also, with a peculiar ambivalence, as relatedness and polarity. The ideogram depicts a “moment of moonlight streaming through a chink in the entranceway,” expressing both subjective and objective aspects of a sense of place.
[43]

As between-realms, *vā*, *wā*, and *ma* are imbued with forces; in Māori, these include *hau*, *mauri*, and *wairua*:
[44]

Ancestral power for both men and women came to rest *within* the body in the *mauri*, the immaterial abiding-place for the *mana* of the gods; and the *mauri* protected the *hau*, an individual’s characteristic vitality or breath of life, just as the *wairua* or immaterial self protected its physical basis the body (*tinana*). In fact all things in the phenomenal world had a *tinana*, a *wairua*, a *mauri* and a *hau*, for in Maori cosmological theory the same fundamental forces gave form and energy to all matter, and *tupu* or cosmic generative power already contained the potentiality for all forms of life.[45]

In Japanese, such generative power is *ki* or *qi*. [46] Translatable as origin of the universe, breath, or air, *ki* is an intensity of universally shared and affective betweenness.[47] Like atmosphere (literally, sphere of vapor), which is kin, as we have seen, to Walter Benjamin’s strange tissue of space and time, all these notions have an affinity with air. Perception contributes as “affective and merging participation” to atmosphere, the “typical phenomenon of the in-between.”[48] In this *Zwischenraum* (in-between space),[49] human and nonhuman beings coproduce a common world.[50]

Even though Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, and Gernot Böhme have conceptualized common spaces of emergence,[51] the “founding form of singularity exerts a pervasive hold on [Western] philosophy,” and the possibility of the primacy of plural relations is left unthought in Western traditions.[52] Ontologies conceiving objects and people as autonomous and closed are not attuned to complex relational webs and entangled ecologies between things, living beings, and their environment.[53] Yet, these capacities are urgently needed now. According to Australian philosopher Andrew Benjamin, ontological plurality is the original mode of existence: “being-in-common (the network of relations)” is inseparable from “being-in-place.” Relationality can be recovered in Western thinking due to its “almost archaic

presence.”[54] In Māori and Moana cultures, this relational thinking has never been obliterated; “the individual is understood as integrally woven into the collective fabric, based on *whakapapa* (kinship) and relationships,” which inevitably include environmental responsibility in thinking, planning, and action.[55]

4. What is in-common? The confluence of *aura*, *ki*, and *vā/wā*

Given that atmospheres are always angled, how can we assume an inclusive ground in common from which atmospheres can emerge? Schmitz, whose thinking has inspired Böhme, claims that the body is both receiver and agent of atmospheres.[56] Inasmuch as we share the same or similar sensorium, our perception can, up to a point, be our common reference point.[57]

However, the perceptual diversity amongst humans is greater than has been assumed in the past, and substantial conversations about common reference points between human and more-than-human participants have, as far as we are aware, only just begun. Still, concepts like *vā* and atmospheres start from a common, shared realm. If, as Mika argues, *wā* emerges out of the All (the totality of being), its shape or constellations congeal out of or intensify that All. The more socio-historically and culturally specific and articulated a situation, the less inclusive its atmosphere, perhaps: there will be much that local *iwi* (extended kinship group, tribe), settlers, and tourists cannot share about the atmosphere at Te Rerenga Wairua, the famous northernmost tip of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Thus, Boswell describes different subject formations and positions of *iwi*, tourists, and settlers, and how the latter have co-opted “Indigenous ideas about the site’s spirituality ... to produce a newly needed atmospherics of place.”[58]

Designing atmospheres therefore requires an understanding of the ambiguous nature of appropriation and dislocation: whether a commonality is built or destroyed depends in each case on the specific self-other relationship. Appropriation is normally a euphemism for misappropriation in Aotearoa, where Western settlers, visitors, merchants, and bureaucrats lacking a sense of mutuality have historically taken from Māori and Māori culture what they coveted, with or without consent. A similar form of appropriation occurs arguably at the men’s toilet at the Café Reichard at Cologne,[59] where the ephemerality of liquid crystal

glass cubicle walls and LCD screens was given a solid, material counterpoint: a massive stone sculpture inspired by “Primitive” Art’s African or Oceanic masks. If atmosphere is about place, and if place is about relationality, this design raises not only questions about the nature of its atmospheric efficacy but also about the ethics of composing atmospheres.

During the GTP design process, our team had interesting conversations attempting to tease out nuances of appropriation. Some elements of our design, like the *Mānu Tawhiowhio* video, could be place-specific because of longstanding relationships, knowledge shared with us, and explicit permissions. Conversely, the Mozilla Hub was intentionally not place-specific: it seemed inappropriate to digitally recreate a physical environment without time and budget for an adequate co-design process with *tangata whenua*. Instead, we relied on the atmosphere conjured by ocean, mountains, and sun—a shared, imaginative space in which past and future coexist.

Control appears to be a key issue here, too. Benjamin’s aura is in a sense inaccessible until one surrenders. Surrender, however, is incompatible with the driving cultural forces of modern life. German sociologist Hartmut Rosa considers “the interplay between what we can control and that which remains outside our control, yet ‘concerns us’ in some way,” is experientially important. “Life happens, as it were, on the borderline.”^[60] Atmospheres, likewise, seem to occur on the borderline. Attempts to control can destroy them, both literally as environment and metaphorically as a shared realm.

5. Co-creating atmospheres: conclusion

The atmospheres we created wittingly and unwittingly—the rhythms, rituals, and relationships of the digital *vā*—were a mixture of what might be called aesthetic and social atmospheres. Yet, such a distinction still reverberates with a peculiar Western aesthetic.^[61] In Moana contexts, beauty is also functional and social.^[62] The core team’s concern was the visual-auditory creation of a shared space, through new connective modes based on ancestral Moana ways of being and knowing. Saltwater was ever present: in tears during emotional exchanges; in the sounds of the moana through digital artworks; in the material connection of our multiple shores. The almost sublime experience of the handover by *pūtātara* was both a feeling of being

small in the world and being connected to our colleagues and collaborators. In some activations, like Pelenakeke Brown and Rosanna Raymond's, our imagination of connection was helped by the materiality of a special, familiar object in our surroundings or the embodiment of a *wharehau* (meeting house). Rather than being moved by recalling or experiencing the same memories or emotions, we were moved (some to tears) by collectively activating the forces of our relationships in the shared atmosphere that had been created. Several times throughout the conference, participants expressed heightened emotion or indicated that they felt safe in the shared online space we had designed and convened. Crucially, according to feedback received later, establishing that Moana values and protocols would be at the fore gave rise to caring, inclusive, and genuine engagement and dialogue.

Design, including its theoretical foundations, principles, and methods, we found, had to undergo profound changes, far beyond the recent trends towards co-design, to generate atmospheres that would genuinely include all participants. A politics of working together, face-to-face, on things in common not only opens up a space of appearance in which we make each other visible,[63] but it also creates atmospheres.[64] By comparison, atmospheres produced solely by our professional design tools and methods, without the co-creation of a community of participants, would have remained as thin as the wallpaper in an outdoor store, where the attempted reference to sublimity (the forest, the mountains, the sea) fails as a fake—one senses the intent and becomes disgruntled.

The extent to which designed atmospheres may be able to evoke transcultural resonances, we suggest, depends on the ability of designers to be affected by the atmospheric constellations they are designing, and to revise the concepts they take for granted—realizing that many are specific to Western modernity rather than universal. Generally, though, perhaps the best design can do is to perceptively anticipate the angle of atmospheres, provide the best match of needs and affordances—and then step back and relinquish control to make space for commonly shared atmospheres to arise.[65]

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Published on December 10, 2024.

Cite this article: A.-Chr. (Tina) Engels-Schwarzpaul, Emily Parr & Albert L Refiti, "Co-creating Atmospheres: the Use of Design for *vā/wā*, Community, and Common Sense," *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Special Volume 12 (2024), accessed date.

Endnotes

[1] Gernot Böhme and A. Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures: The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, trans. A. Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2017), 1, 138.

[2] Gernot Böhme, "The concept of body as the nature

we ourselves are," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2010).

[3] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*.: 40-41.

[4] *Ibid.*, 13.

[5] *Ibid.*, 14.

[6] Vā Moana Research Cluster at the Technical University of Auckland – Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau (<https://www.vamoana.org/about>). Core team members: Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul, Albert L. Refiti, Rosanna Raymond, Layne Waerea, Emily Parr, Ali Taheri, Arielle Walker, Chantel Matthews-Perawiti, Valance Smith and Ty Tengan. Extended team members: Nooroa Tapuni, Sushmita Devi, Ricardo Sosa, Claudio Aguayo, Billie Lythberg, Sally Jane Norman, Alexander Mawyer.

[7] Albert L Refiti et al., "A Different Kind of Vā: Spiraling through Time and Space," *The Contemporary Pacific* 34, no. 2 (2022). Albert L. Refiti et al., "Vā at the time of COVID-19: when an aspect of research unexpectedly turns into lived experience and practice," *Journal of New Zealand & Pacific Studies* 9, no. 1, New Scholarship in New Zealand and Pacific Studies (2021).

[8] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 41, 23.

[9] *Ibid.*, 23. A thing's extension and volume can be sensed outwardly and lend it spatial presence.

[10] According to Latour, Heidegger mistakenly traced "a dichotomy between *Gegenstand* and *Thing* that was justified by nothing except the crassest of prejudices" "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1086/421123>.: 234.

[11] *Ibid.*, 246.

[12] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 23.

[13] GTN is a constellation of people, environments, processes, resources, and aesthetics that is served by the Global Talanoa Platform (GTP). Initially, we envisaged the GTN as a blended environment with three central conference hubs (in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Moana and Europe); several associated pods in each region would also offer live, onsite events. The GTP was to connect all these individual locations,

provide access to offsite participants, and serve as a permanent library and archive for online and offline collaborations. Additionally, one year into the project, the GTP suddenly became a resource to respond to COVID-19; it eventually morphed into the sole “location” of an exclusively online conference.

[14] This project was supported by the Royal Society of New Zealand Te Apārangi’s Te Pūtea Rangahau Marsden Fund.

[15] We also considered reach and geographical spread, archiving and future access, continued asynchronous discussions, and so on, but also the combination of the respective advantages of online exchanges and face-to-face meetings. Due to a lack of funding, our plan to share the successful prototype with the global research community in a wiki, for Indigenous researchers to adapt it to their own contexts, remains unrealized.

[16] Despite its desire to be responsive to diverse local cultures, Auckland University of Technology (AUT) remains a mainstream public institution. Funding mechanisms, for example, largely perpetuate prevailing Western values, epistemologies, protocols, and procedures, with which Moana thinking and research has to reckon as a matter of course. See endnote 8.

[17] All in “Te Aka Online Māori Dictionary,” Te Ipukarea, 2017, accessed 28 June, 2017, <http://maoridictionary.co.nz/>.

[18] Sara Ahmed, *What’s the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Evgeny Morozov, *To Save Everything, Click Here: The folly of Technological Solutionism* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013); Ramesh Srinivasan, *Whose Global Village?: Rethinking How Technology Shapes Our World* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

[19] Even onsite conferences are criticized for being over planned and time-boxed such that neither speakers nor participants can be responsive to the events of each day. This is exacerbated when they can no longer talk informally, during nonscheduled time over coffee, in the hallways, or over lunch and dinner.

[20] “The Talanoa Dialogue explained,” Climate Home News, updated 10/12/2018, 2018, accessed 31 March, 2023, <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2018/12/10/talanoa-dialogue-explained/>.

[21] Alex Golub and Matt Tomlinson, "Matt Tomlinson: God is Samoan. Dialogues Between Culture and Theology in the Pacific," (23 Jun 2020), Interview. <https://newbooksnetwork.com/matt-tomlinson-god-is-samoan-dialogues-between-culture-and-theology-in-the-pacific-u-hawaii-press-2020/>.

[22] Rosanna Raymond, "C o n s e r . V Ā . t i o n | A c t i . V Ā . t i o n . Museums, the body and Indigenous Moana art practice" (MPhil Thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2021), <http://hdl.handle.net/10292/14325>.

[23] Acting rationally and efficiently in mainstream New Zealand institutions means allocating and using time efficiently to achieve maximum results in minimal time. The criteria for measuring "maximum results" are, of course, contested: Māori and Pacific students and academics would mostly choose comprehensive, qualitative criteria over clearly delineated, quantitative ones. They would consider long-term effects (for example, on people and environment) as a matter of course. Since, in Moana cultures, time is conceived as multi-dimensional and non-linear, varied and variable in its flows, notions like *minimum* and *maximum* are more complex than project management systems can consider. In Māori and Moana teams, time frames and quality standards are often at odds with taken-for-granted best practices used by designers.

[24] Anna Boswell, "Fractured Atmospherics," *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* (2014), 40.

[25] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 160.

[26] Of interest here is the first and more popular Aristotelian version of *common sense*: "crossing over from one sense to the other, individual senses form a unity and enable a cross-modal perception," or the "idea of something intra-subjective that is common to the different senses in one individual." See Tanehisa Otabe, "The idea of 'common sense' revisited: A contribution to an 'aesthetic turn' of aesthetics," *SAJ-Serbian Architectural Journal* 7, no. 1 (2015). At various point of our design process, we explored the potential of intra-subjective common sense while also attending to the second, inter-subjective aspect. See endnote 30.

[27] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric*

Architectures, 17, 35.

Cultural experience and conditioning impact such distinctions via embodied conceptual structures. See Vyvyan Evans, Benjamin K Bergen, and Jörg Zinken, "The Cognitive linguistics enterprise: an overview," in *The Cognitive Linguistics Reader*, ed. Vyvyan Evans, Benjamin K Bergen, and Jörg Zinken, *Advances in Cognitive Linguistics* (London, UK: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2007). In perceptual experiments of the early 2000s, for example, "Westerners" tended to focus on important objects independently of context, whereas "Asians" tended to prioritize the relationships between objects and their context or field. See Richard E. Nisbett and Yuri Miyamoto, "The influence of culture: holistic versus analytic perception," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 9, no. 10 (2005), 467. Within this overall pattern, and in dynamic relationships between cultural contexts and perceptual processes, different social practices can lead to additional perceptual shifts.

[28] Atmospheres can be powerful on stage because lighting veils much that could destroy illusion, but also because of a willing suspense of disbelief amongst most theatergoers. The instrumental design of atmospheres has its limits when the willing suspense of disbelief is stretched too far. At the Tropical Islands Resort in Brand, Germany, for example, the creation of tropical villages in an ex-hangar is hardly convincing in the bright light of day. At Café Reichard in Cologne, the technically controlled, immaterial atmosphere of the men's toilet (Böhme's illustration of capitalist unfurling of material splendor) has provided stuff for online discussion for years—what is in common here, and between whom, is an interesting question.

[29] Aristotle, *De anima : Books II and III (with passages from book I)*, trans. David W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). Otabe, "The idea of 'common sense' revisited: A contribution to an 'aesthetic turn' of aesthetics," 37. *Common sense* in Kant's aesthetics succeeded the Aristotelean concept.

[30] Otabe notes that the *aesthetic* consciousness of our own being "is at issue in the *sensus communis* in the broad sense ..., the *aisthesis* that guarantees the 'feeling of realness' (Hannah Arendt) of ourselves and, therefore, also the world in which we live together with others." "The idea of 'common sense' revisited: A contribution to an 'aesthetic turn' of aesthetics," 37.

[31] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect*

Theory Reader, ed. M. Gregg and G. Seigworth (London, UK: Duke University Press, 2010), 37.

[32] "Fractured Atmospheric," 37.

[33] *Ibid.*, 37.

[34] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 23.

[35] Walter Benjamin, "About some motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 188.

[36] *Atmospheric Architectures*, 17.

[37] *Ibid.*, 14

[38] Carl Te Hira Mika, "Wā and its counter-colonial possibilities: Implications for the human self" (Otautahi/Christchurch, *The Physics Room*, 28 January 2023).

[39] Albert Wendt, "Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body," in *New Zealand electronic poetry centre* (12 December 2014 1996). <http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/wendt/tatauing.asp>.

[40] "Our Sea of Islands," *Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994).

[41] Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi Tui Atua, "Prelude: Climate Change and the Perspective of the Fish," ed. Tony Crook and Peter Rudiak-Gould, *Pacific Climate Cultures* (Warsaw, Poland: De Gruyter Open Poland, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2478/9783110591415-001>.

[42] "Te Ao Mārama – The natural world – An interconnected world," Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 2007, accessed 2 June 2023, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-ao-marama-the-natural-world>.

[43] Günter Nitschke, "MA – place, space, void," in *From Shinto to Ando: Studies in Architectural Anthropology in Japan* (London, UK: Academy Editions, 1993), 49-50.

[44] *Hau* was also a force binding a giver and receiver. Tamati Ranapiri in Geoffrey MacCormack, "Mauss and the 'Spirit' of the Gift," *Oceania* 52, no. 4 (1982), 289.

[45] Anne Salmond, "Māori epistemologies," in *Reason*

and Morality, ed. Joanna Overing (London, UK: Routledge, 2003), 238.

[46] James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, *Japanese Philosophy: a Sourcebook* (Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2011), 295.

[47] Gernot Böhme, "Brief an einen japanischen Freund über das Zwischen," [Letter to a Japanese Friend about the In-Between] in *Interkulturelle Philosophie und Phänomenologie in Japan*, ed. T. Ogawa (München, Germany: Iuridicum Verlag, 1998), 236-237; Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 103.

[48] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 125, 19.

[49] *Zwischenraum* is a term both for a non-tangible space for the meeting or collision of different cultural forms of life and for the concrete place of encounter—at the frontier or on neutral territory where several parties have agreed on a third, shared space. See Uwe Wirth, *Bewegen im Zwischenraum* [Moving in the In-Between] (Berlin: Kulturverl. Kadmos, 2012), 12.

[50] Christian Julmi, "Atmosphären in Organisationen: wie Gefühle das Zusammenleben in Organisationen beherrschen" [Atmospheres in Organizations: How Feelings Dominate Co-Existence in Organizations], vol. 10, *kultur&philosophie*, (Bochum/Freiburg: projekt verlag, 2015), 55-56.

Jewish-German philosopher Buber considered such *sphere of between* as a "fundamental fact of human existence," the "primal category of human reality." *Between man and man. With an introduction by Maurice Friedman*, trans. Ronald Gregor-Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 241. As one of few Western thinkers, he proposes in the post-WW2 revision of *Between Man and Man* the *sphere of between* as an alternative to the opposition between individualism and collectivism so widely associated with the East-West conflict at that time.

[51] *Between Man and Man. With an Introduction by Maurice Friedman*.

The Human Condition, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[52] Andrew E. Benjamin, *Towards a Relational Ontology: Philosophy's Other Possibility* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2015), 1.

[53] Due to a close affinity of thing ontologies with craft and production contexts (in which objects are manipulated and kept at arm's length), they also lean towards accuracy, efficacy, and calculation.

[54] Benjamin, *Towards a Relational Ontology: Philosophy's Other Possibility*, 1-3, 219.

[55] Louise Thornley et al., "Building community resilience: learning from the Canterbury earthquakes," *Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 10, no. 1 (2015), 30.

Böhme notes that current science moves in a direction that will make notions of reciprocity more plausible to Western societies: "If the natural sciences demonstrate something akin to cognition already at the level of molecules, notions of appearing and response will also be acceptable again at the phenomenological level."

Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 46.

In indigenous communities, kinship demonstrably contributes to well-being and builds resilience, enabling them to better cope with displacement and trauma.

Thornley et al., "Building community resilience: learning from the Canterbury earthquakes.":30. Yet, their experience of chronic displacement requires a revision and renewal of Indigenous emplacement in ancestral landscapes. Māori and Pacific people in Aotearoa New Zealand therefore also rearticulate concepts like *whakapapa* or *vā* to build resilient diasporic communities. Their success was evident when Te Puea marae in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland took the lead in housing the homeless during the winters of 2016-8.

[56] Hermann Schmitz, *Atmosphären* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 2014), 11.

[57] See Otabe on *common sense*, 6.

[58] "Fractured Atmospheric," 41.

[59] See endnote 28; www.express.de/koeln/irre-koelner-toiletten-das-magische-kristall-klo-vom-caf-reichard-40106.

[60] Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World* (Cambridge, Medford: Polity Press, 2020), 2.

[61] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 59, 114, 124. Tanehisa Otabe, "An Iroquois in Paris and a Crusoe on a Desert Island: Kant's Aesthetics and the Process of Civilization," *Culture and Dialogue* 6, no. 1 (2018), 37.

[62] Nicholas Thomas, "Kiss the Baby Goodbye: Kowhaiwhai and Aesthetics in Aotearoa New Zealand," *Critical Inquiry*, no. 22 Autumn (1995), 103. See also Senghor about African Art Léopold Sédar Senghor, "The spirit of civilisation or the laws of African negro culture," *Présence Africaine*, no. 8-9-10 June-November (1956), https://www.amherst.edu/system/files/media/1675/Leopold_Senghor__The_Spirit_of_Civilisation.pdf, 56.

[63] Beatrice Magni, "Liberalism and Loneliness. A Philosophical Point of View," ed. Milosz Hodun, *Lonely Europeans* (Warsaw: European Liberal Forum EUPF, 2022), https://liberalforum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/lonely_europeans.pdf, 37.

[64] Böhme and Engels-Schwarzpaul, *Atmospheric Architectures*, 24.

[65] A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul and Carl Te Hira Mika, "Silences Generating Space," in *The Place of Silence: Architecture / Media / Philosophy*, ed. Mark Dorrian and Christos P. Kakalis (Milton Park, Abingdon, UK: Bloomsbury, 2019).

Volume: Special Volume 12 (2024), Special Volumes
| Author: Emily Parr, A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul,
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ISSN 1932-8478