

ATMOSPHERE OF PLACE: A LOOK AT OLAFUR ELIASSON'S ART THROUGH PETER ZUMTHOR'S PRINCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

The atmosphere of a space has a multilayered structure and it is related to experience, interaction between body and space and senses. Experiencing the space is crucial for perceiving the atmosphere. Additionally, when the experience appeal to multiple senses—such as touch, hearing, and smell, rather than just sight— it became enriched. Given this, it can be said that a multisensory experience is necessary for a holistic perception of a space's atmosphere. The main aim of this study is to understand the concept of atmosphere in architecture and to explore how it can be created. The study first discusses the concepts of space, experience, relationship with senses and atmosphere. Then, nine principles defined by architect Peter Zumthor, who focuses extensively on the concept of atmosphere were examined. Since atmosphere is an abstract concept, Zumthor's nine principles contribute to a more concrete understanding of the elements that create atmosphere. Following this, the study analyzes the atmosphere in three works by artist Olafur Eliasson: "The Weather Project," "Din Blinde Passenger," and "Reality Projector," by using Zumthor's insights. This analysis identifies the elements contributing to the creation of atmosphere and highlights the importance of multisensory experience.

Keywords: Experience, Senses, Atmosphere, Peter Zumthor, Olafur Eliasson.

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MEKÂNIN ATMOSFERİ: PETER ZUMTHOR'UN İLKELERİ İLE OLAFUR ELIASSON'UN SANATINA BİR BAKIŞ

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ÖZET

Mekanın atmosferi çok katmanlı bir yapıya sahip olmakla birlikte deneyim, beden ve mekan arasında kurulan etkileşim ve duyularla da ilişki içerisindedir. Atmosferin algılanması için mekanın deneyimlenmesi büyük bir öneme sahiptir. Ayrıca yaşanan deneyimin sadece görme odaklı değil; dokunma, işitme ve koku alma gibi birçok duyuya da hitap eder halde olması deneyimi zenginleştirmektedir. Bu durum göz önüne alındığında mekan atmosferinin bütüncül bir şekilde algılanmasında çok duyulu bir deneyimin gerekli olduğu söylenebilir. Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, mimaride atmosfer kavramını anlamak ve atmosferin nasıl oluşturulabileceğini incelemektir. Çalışmada öncelikle mekan, deneyim, duyularla kurulan ilişki ve atmosfer kavramlarından bahsedildikten sonra atmosfer kavramı üzerinde çokça duran mimar Peter Zumthor tarafından belirlenmiş dokuz prensip incelenmiştir. Atmosferin soyut bir kavram olması nedeniyle Zumthor'un dokuz ilkesi atmosferi oluşturan unsurların daha somut bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkı sağlamaktadır. Çalışmanın devamında Zumthor'un anlayışından yararlanarak, sanatçı Olafur Eliasson'ın "The Weather Project", "Din Blinde Passenger" ve "Reality Projector" isimli üç eserindeki atmosfer analiz edilmiştir. Bu şekilde atmosferin oluşum sürecine katkıda bulunan unsurlar belirlenmiş ve çok duyulu deneyimin önemi ortaya konmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Deneyim, Duyular, Atmosfer, Peter Zumthor, Olafur Eliasson.

Tür: Araştırma Makalesi

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1. INTRODUCTION

Terms of experience and atmosphere have great significance in the field of architecture. Places are designed to respond some needs and they might have different functions, however, it is not possible think them without atmosphere. Atmosphere is the key element that gives a special feeling to the place so that place can have its unique character. This can be said about art too. Although not all artworks have a concern about creating an atmosphere, atmosphere can play an important role in order to complete the artwork and increase its impact. At that point, experience may be seen as a tool to perceive and understand the atmosphere. Therefore, this study focuses on the concept of atmosphere, the elements which are useful in the formation of atmosphere and how it can be created. Since atmosphere is a very inconcrete term by it's nature, it might be identified and understood in various ways according to the point of view. In order to understand this term in a more solid way, nine principles that are defined by architect Peter Zumthor were examined and analyzed on artist Olafur Eliasson's artworks that were named as "The Weather Project", "Din Blinde Passenger" and "Reality Projector". These three work were selected because of their strong atmospheric effects. Making an analysis on artworks with spatial concepts might open up the perspective about we look at art with its spatial context. In addition, these artworks can be guiding examples and influence the way of thinking and design architectural places.

2. EXPERIENCE OF PLACE AND ATMOSPHERE

"Our body is both an object among objects and the thing that sees and touches them." (Pallasmaa, 2011)

"But the air! If you stopped to notice, was the air always like this? " (Mansfield, 1922)

The term of space has a very broad definition and cannot be thought of independently from people and experience. When the answer to the question of what is space is investigated, definitions such as place, home, homeland and space are reached in (TDK, 2022). In the dictionary of architecture, the definition of space is made as "a space that separates people from the environment to a certain extent and is suitable for carrying out various actions in it" (Hasol, 1979). Therefore, it can be deduced that the main subject of space is human and it becomes meaningful when it interacts with people. According to Norberg-Schulz (1980), everyday life consists of people, animals, trees, flowers, stone, water, towns, streets and houses etc. Also, it contains more intangible things like feelings. With the help of the combination of tangible and intangible things, space turns into a place. Therefore, it can be said that "place" is something more just than a location. Certeau (1984) also discuss the concepts of space and place separately. He tackles with space and place in the context of everyday life too and according to him, place is produced by activities and space is an empty system where activities happens. On the contrary, Lefebvre (2014) explains the space that it is not a space detached from interaction with the body, instead, it is a place that is formed and lived with experiences and activities in it. People establish a connection with the place through their bodies and senses and an idea is formed with the inferences obtained from this connection. This situation should not be considered one-sided. In fact, there is a mutual dialogue in between people and space which people shape the space while at the same time the

space shapes the people. Therefore, it is significant to understand and examine the concept of experience more closely. Experience means that "All of the knowledge that a person has acquired in a certain period of time or throughout his life, experience, expertise" (TDK, 2022). Experience is a personal formation, it has a structure that is not the same for everyone and can change. Since perception and senses are involved here, the experience of everyone in a particular place will be different (Figure 1). Sometimes when you enter a place, the things seen may be the same, but the things that are felt, perceived and attracting attention may differ for everyone. The senses are also an important factor at this point because it is our senses that do the main job in perceiving a place. The senses are not separate and independent units. Each provides the perception of something else, but when combined, they complete each other. For example, the sense of taste occurs together with smell, or the sense of sight can be fully perceived when combined with touch. Sometimes people may want to touch the things seen in the exhibitions. Although this is not generally possible, the reason why this is desired is the desire to fully understand the work with the body.

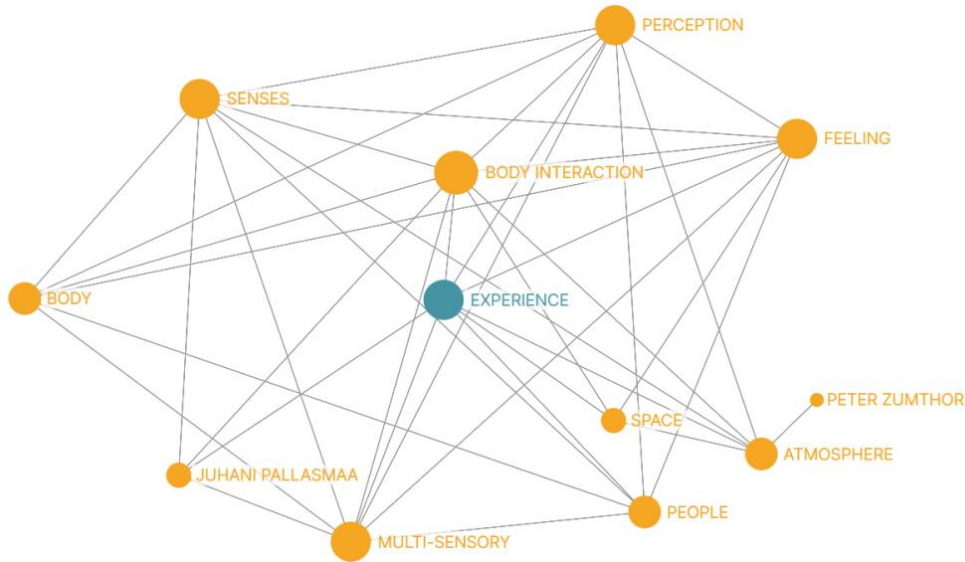


Figure 1. Keywords related with experience (prepared by author)

Today, the prevalence of an eye-centered perception actually means that other senses are put into the second place. However, seeing can't be enough in most time. The feeling that each sense creates in people is different, so as many senses as possible should be involved in order to provide a more holistic perception. One of the important names supporting this issue is Juhani Pallasmaa. He examines the concepts of experience, senses and multi-sensory experience, and the interaction of the body with space in his book named *Eyes of the Skin* (2011). He criticizes focusing more on the sense of sight and leaving other senses in the background. Even if an eye-centered approach is displayed, he thinks that it should be supported by another sense such as touch and that spatial perception will be stronger in this way. He argues that a multi-sensory experience should be brought to the fore (Figure 2).

Pallasmaa describes the concepts of experience and senses as follows:

“I face the city with my body: my legs measure the length of the passage and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously reflects my body on the facade of the cathedral, weight of my body meets the mass of the cathedral door and sinks into the dark space behind the door. As I enter, my hand grasps the knob of the door. My body and the city complete and define each other. I live in the city, and the city lives in me.”

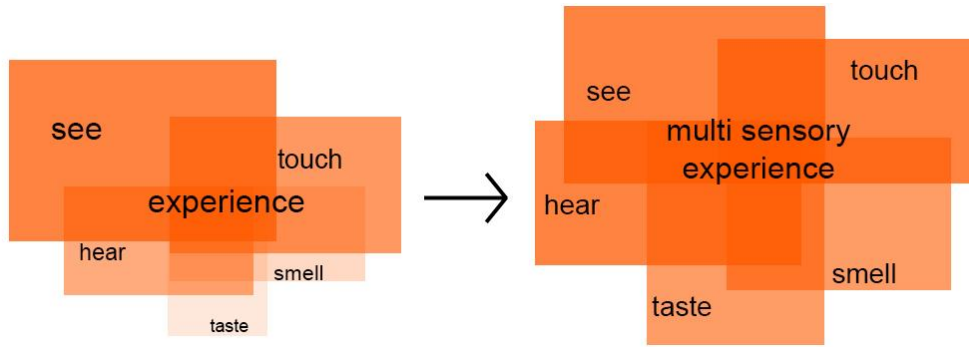


Figure 2. Transformation of dominance of sight to multi sensory experience (prepared by author)

When we talk about experience, it can be seen that this concept is highly related to the atmosphere of the place. Atmosphere is defined as "the environment in which one lives and is influenced by, the air" (TDK, 2022). Term of atmosphere is used in order to describe the subjective and unseen aspects of built environment in architecture. It can be said that it is the feeling or the character of a space. It is produced with a combination of physical elements such as light, sound, material and texture etc. and intangible things like the feeling that occurs while walking around a place. It can be said that it is the essence of place and it is not possible to completely comprehend spirit of place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). According to Böhme (2017), atmosphere is the first thing comes to our perception. Initial experience of a space is the atmosphere, not the building elements. In fact, creating an atmosphere is like designing an experience how the space will be perceived by people. It gives life to a space by adding multiple layers that can be understood sensuously. Therefore, atmosphere is very significant in order to understand and experience architecture (Wigley, 1998). In addition, every place has different atmosphere such as a festive ball-room, a house with the feeling of protection or a solemn church (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). These kind of atmospheric features stays with people when they experience a place. Goethe says: "We should feel the enthusiasm of a good place even though we were taken there with our eyes closed." (Usta, 2020).

At this point, Peter Zumthor who is an architect that gives great importance to the subject of atmosphere comes to mind. According to him, we perceive the atmosphere of the space with our senses and therefore elements that activate the senses such as light, sound and texture of materials are frequently seen in Zumthor's architecture. In his book *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects*, he talks about nine basic principles that affect the formation of the atmosphere.

These principles are; architectural body, material compatibility, the sound of the space, the temperature of the space, surrounding objects, in-between composure and seduction, the tension between inside and outside, the levels of intimacy and the light on the objects (Table 1).

Tablo 1. Nine basic principles that affect the formation of the atmosphere (prepared by author)

Principles	Definitions
Architectural Body	The architectural body can be thought as literally our body. In this context, the material and the framework of the structure are treated like a skin covering the body and Zumthor (2006) defines it as an anatomy.
Material Compatibility	In the principle of material compatibility, it contains the diversity of materials and the special situation that occurs when each material comes together. Each material has its own characteristics and is directly related to the atmosphere of the space. The material that is used has a great importance because it can give an effect such as the warmth or coldness to the space or how the sound is heard and whether it transmits light. The combination of different materials creates a different situation each time (Zumthor, 2006).
Sound of the Space	It is the whole sounds in the space that is intended to be explained in the sound of the space part (Uysal, Cordan, 2020). Zumthor (2006) likens the space to an instrument and relates the propagation or gathering of sound to the material of this instrument. In this principle, physical issues such as the shape of the rooms, the choice of materials and the way these materials are applied are mentioned too. In addition to the sound of the space, silence can be seen as a significant element in this principle.
Temperature of the Space	Temperature of the space is the aesthetic properties of the materials and the warmth created in the space. While wood is a material that gives a warm feeling, metal adds coldness to the environment (Gümüş, 2019). In this regard, physical warmth can be considered together with the feeling of warmth too.
Surrounding Objects	The principle argues that not only a building or space itself, but also the objects surrounding it create the atmosphere of the space. If these objects also have some personal meanings, they make the atmosphere in that place personal and make it more meaningful (Uysal, Cordan, 2020).
In-Between Composure and Seduction	Architecture is a temporary art and in fact, architects have power to guide people in a place without directing them directly (Uysal, Cordan, 2020). These two seemingly opposite concepts can be seen together in Zumthor's Therma Vals project. Space attracts and draws people in, giving them a sense of freedom. It also creates an atmosphere of calmness and serenity (Uysal, Cordan, 2020).
Tension Between Inside and Outside	The difference of perception inside and outside of the buildings is mentioned. When viewed from the front, the interior space is not fully understood (Gümüş, 2019) and the perception changes with the movement of the body between inside and outside (Uysal, Cordan, 2020).

Tablo 1. Nine basic principles that affect the formation of the atmosphere (cont.)

Levels of Intimacy	Zumthor (2006) addresses issues such as distance, intimacy, and scale. It is about the proportions that the buildings have within themselves, as well as the ratio between the human body and the space. In some cases, the place or the objects in the place distance people and sometimes bring them closer so there are perceptual differences.
Light on the Objects	It is considered that the structure itself as shadow and places the light as a new element coming from outside into the mass. In the Therma Vals project, the infiltration of sunlight through the thin slits in the roof creates a spiritual atmosphere in the interior (Zumthor, 2006).

Since atmosphere is a very abstract concept, Zumthor analyses the elements of atmosphere and how it can be created by determining these principles. Each of them has a different effect on the creation of atmosphere and every one of them makes the experience richer. This article questions some issues such as can creating an atmosphere be the aim of design or does it only help us to read the architectural features of the place?, What is the goal of analyzing an artwork with spatial concepts? And can it make a contribution to the field of architecture? In order to test these questions, three artworks of Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson was examined. Eliasson's works were chosen because of his similar interest in atmosphere like Zumthor and the richness of the atmospheric features in his works.

3. CREATION OF ATMOSPHERE IN OLAFUR ELIASSON'S WORKS

Olafur Eliasson is an artist who is the founder of Studio Olafur Eliasson in Berlin. He works with researchers, architects, craftspeople, archivists, cooks, programmers and specialised technicians in his studio. Eliasson made solo shows around the world with his installations, sculptures, paintings and photographs since 1997. He produced lots of projects in public space too like Green River (1998), Serpentine Gallery Pavilion (2007) together with architect Kjetil Thorsen and Your Rainbow Panorama (2011). Eliasson is well known especially with his installations that the use of colour, light, fog and mirrors are oftenly seen. While using different mediums, he is trying to rethink the relationship between art, space and viewer (Song-Ha and Jong-Ji, 2014). According to Freeland (2017), Eliasson's works with coloured light share a similar interest with American artist James Turrell. Both of them use the coloured light not to represent something, but to question the relation between colour and emotions. It can be thought that they try to explore some variety in using colour as in painting. By the use of light and colour, they aim to expand the awareness about sensory experience and perception. Another aspect of Eliasson's works is about how he create his works and its content. Like artist Michael Heizer, Eliasson include nature or built environment in his works as it can be seen in Waterfalls in New York (2008) or Ice Watch in Paris (2015) (Shapshay, and Tenen, 2018). He focuses on environmental issues like global warming, climate crisis and melting of icebergs. However, he sometimes gets criticized about the affect of his artworks related to these issues. For example, although putting some parts of glaciers in the middle of Paris where people can actually see the affects of global warming may seen positively in order to increase the awareness; collecting, shipping, and refrigerating the ice is a process that increases the carbon emission (Hornby, 2017). At the end, in his artworks it can be seen that experience and visitor participation come to fore and he emphasises that his works became complete

when people interact with them (Oggusto, 2023). In this study, Eliasson's three works were selected since atmosphere has a significant part of them. The selected works are The Weather Project (2003), Din Blinde Passenger (2010) and Reality Projector (2018). They are selected because of their strong atmospheric effects and various use of materials and techniques. In this part of the study, the atmospheric features of these works were analyzed with the help of Zumthor's nine principles (Table 2).

3.1 The Weather Project, 2003

The project was designed by Olafur Eliasson for Tribune Hall at the Tate Modern as a part of the Unilever Series commission. His main materials for this exhibition were a semi-circular screen (Figure 3), mirrors to cover the ceiling and artificial fog. The semi-circle illuminated from behind with yellow-orange light and it became the sun with the help of the mirrors on the ceiling. The mirrors expands the space and make it look like it is bigger than its actual dimensions (Figure 4). When it comes to the use of artificial fog, it can be said that fog increased the sun effect and created a feeling of sunset (Figure 5). Fog and light are important elements used in the formation of the feeling of warmth emanating from the sun too. Turbine Hall used completely as a free space and it became an environment where people can move as they want (Figure 6) (Olafur Eliasson, n.d.). Although the semi-circular screen was placed at the end of the hall where it is normally difficult to see while entering the hall, usage of inside space looks like total with the help of the light and mirrors. It is possible to say that Turbine Hall's huge dimensions allowed artist to create this big sunset effect inside. Also, when we look at the architectural features of the hall, it is seen that hall has only windows at its narrow sides and on the ceiling. Therefore, when ceiling was covered with mirrors; hall's main source of daylight was eliminated and a place like a closed box was created. This act strengthens the effect of sunset.

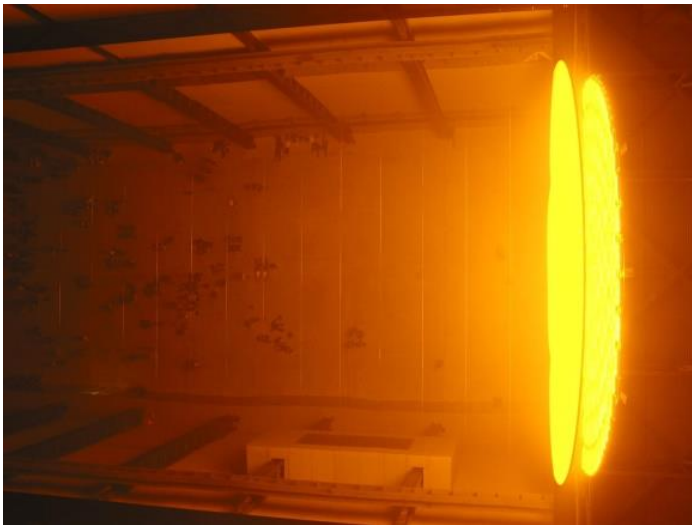


Figure 3. Semi-circular screen
(Photo: Credit Olafur Eliasson)

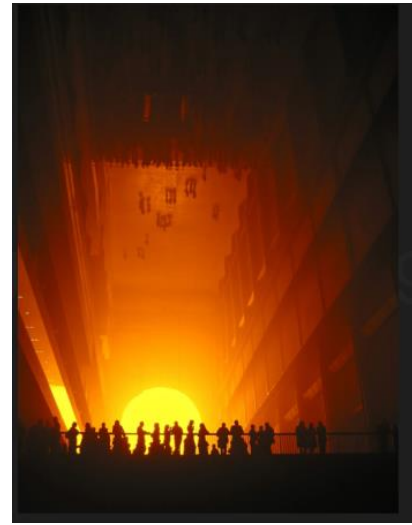


Figure 4. Mirrors on the ceiling
(Photo: Credit Olafur Eliasson)



Figure 5. Sunset effect (Photo: Credit Tate Photography (Andrew Dunkley, Marcus Leith))



Figure 6. Free space and free movement possibilities (Photo: Credit Olafur Eliasson)

3.2 Din Blinde Passenger, 2010

Danish title of the work means "Blind traveller" and it was realized in ARKEN Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen. It can be seen that fog and light are the main elements that were used in this work. People enter a 90 metre long narrow and long corridor like a structure placed inside the museum. Inside of the structure is completely covered with fog (Figure 7). Since the fog is illuminated with an extremely bright light, it becomes difficult to see when entering the structure. Visibility is only possible within 1.5 metres (Chin, 2010). The colour of light changes all along the structure. Therefore, it has become necessary to use other senses besides the eye to move forward (Figure 8, 9, 10 11). It is possible to move forward by touching the walls or perceiving the dimensions of it with sound. In this way, the use of other senses is increased and a multi-sensory experience environment is provided (Olafur Eliasson, n.d.). In this work, perception of place changes. Outside of the wooden structure, people see a long corridor for real so place is visible. However, when people are inside of the structure; place looks like infinite since the perception of dimensions and distance got lost. Therefore, it may be thought that the shell of the place is visible but inside is a colourful emptiness.

3.3 Reality Projector, 2018

This installation was realized in Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles in 2018. The foundation building was an old Masonic temple and it was converted into an exhibition space. Eliasson inserted some colourful pieces into the triangle beams of the building and while projecting light onto them (Figure 12,13); an atmosphere with the combination of light, shadow and colours was created. Wide exhibitions space became a place where people can see a colourful abstract film on the large walls (Figure, 14,15).

Since lights that were projected are moving, some colours may overlap with each other and create different hues. Also, exhibition contains a background sound that was arranged by a musician (Olafur Eliasson, n.d.). Inserting colourful pieces into the structure shows that characteristics of inside space shape the concept of the artwork. Without putting any other object in place, artist manages to fill the place with shapes and colours.



Figure 7. Corridor like structure with full of fog (Photo: Credit Thilo Frank / Studio Olafur Eliasson)



Figure 8. Difficulty of seeing (Photo: Credit Thilo Frank / Studio Olafur Eliasson)



Figure 9, 10, 11. Dense fog with different colours (Photo: Credit Anders Sune Berg)



Figure 12. Colourful pieces on the beams
 (Photo: Credit Joshua White)



Figure 13. Projecting light
 (Photo: Credit Joshua White)

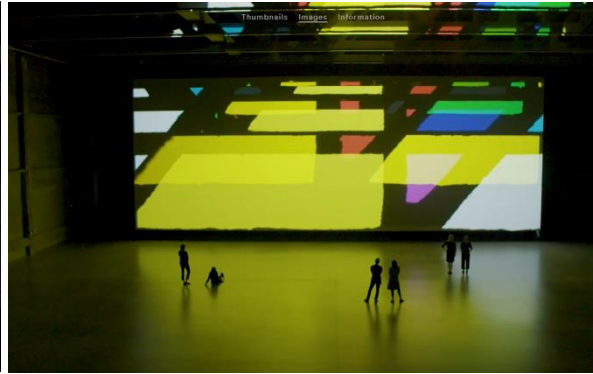


Figure 14, 15. Colourful abstract film on the wall (Photo: Credit Joshua White)

Table 2. Analysis of atmospheric elements of Eliasson's three work (prepared by author)

Principles	The Weather Project (2003)	Din Blinde Passenger (2010)	Reality Projector (2018)
Architectural Body	Semi-circular screen was illuminated from behind and it looked as sun with the help of artificial fog.	Narrow and long corridor filled with fog and light	Pieces with different colours inserted into the triangle beams and light spotted onto them.
Material Compatibility	Monofrequency lights, haze machines, projection foil and mirror foil	Plywood (main material of the structure), fog illuminated with different coloured lights	Colourful and semi-transparent gel material on the beams and colourful light
Sound of the Space	People are talking	People can try to understand the dimensions of the corridor with their voices.	A piano sound

Table 2. Analysis of atmospheric elements of Eliasson’s three work (cont.)

Temperature of the Space	Orange-yellow colour brings warmth in space	Colour of the light affects the sense of warmth inside. While orange evokes warmth, blue and grey evokes coldness..	Darkness of the place creates coldness and feeling of uncertainty but as colour of lights change, the atmosphere changes too.
Surrounding Objects	Free space for movement	-	-
In-Between Composure and Seduction	Sun (illuminated screen) was located at the end of the place so people can easily see it when they enter. Its dimensions and colour draws attention.	It is not possible to see what is inside of the corridor because of dense fog. The corridor and experiencing the unknown can create curiosity about going in there.	Colourful abstract film on the wall in a dark place catches people’s attention.
Tension Between Inside and Outside	-	A wooden corridor like structure can be seen from outside, however, people have a totally different experience inside.	-
Levels of Intimacy	Mirrors shows the space even wider than it was	Visitors try to understand the dimensions of the corridor with the help of their other senses than sight.	The scale of the abstract film is very big when it’s compared with human scale.
Light on the Objects	Illuminated semi-circle, light, sun, feeling of sunset	Illuminated fog	Projector’s light, shadows of beams, colourful lights overlap

After this analysis, it can be seen that there are some similar and different parts in these three work. Although their representation techniques are different, the use of light and fog is the same in “The Weather Project” and “Din Blinde Passenger”. Colourful lights were also used in “Reality Projector” while projecting light onto the triangular beams of the museum place. When it comes to material use; mirror foil, plywood and transparent gel like material are showing the diversity of materials that were selected. Sound was used intensionally in “Reality Projector” like a background music and it can guide and help people to find their ways in the work named “Din Blinde Passenger”. However, it might not possible to say that sound plays one of the primary roles in the other work. Temperature of space was directed by the colour of light not by means of degree of temperature but the feeling that was sensed such as warmth and coldness. It may not be wrong to say that each of these works created attraction with their atmospheres. Some similarities and differences can be seen in the creation of atmosphere and these features generate diverse atmospheres in each work that were examined.

4. CONCLUSION

Atmosphere is a concept that should be considered together with how we perceive and experience the space since they make atmosphere understandable and meaningful. Senses and the importance of multi sensory experience come to fore at this point. In order to fully perceive and understand atmosphere of a space, a multi sensory experience is needed. When other senses rather than sight are also involved, the experience becomes richer and it increases the potential to absorb every aspect of the atmosphere. As it can be seen in the examined examples of Olafur Eliasson, atmosphere can contain various features in itself. Some can focus on sight and touch while using light and different kinds of materials, some may alert the senses of hearing and smelling with soundscapes and odours. Also when we come back to main questions in this study, after analyzing Eliasson's works it is not wrong to say that atmosphere both can be the aim of design and be useful while reading the architectural features of place. "The Weather Project" is all about the atmosphere that catches visitors attention. The materials which creates the artwork can be seen as tools to create an atmosphere. At this point, goal of this design is atmosphere. However, atmosphere helps visitors to see some architectural features of the place like its structure in "Reality Projector". In addition, analyzing artworks with spatial concepts like Zumthor's principles may expand our way of looking at both architectural places and artworks. Places and artworks can't be thought separately especially when the artwork is made for a specific place. As it may be seen in the Eliasson's works, each of them are highly connected with their places and the effect of them wouldn't be the same if they were moved to another place because of their unique connections. Therefore, this understanding opens up a perspective about paying attention to details of both artwork and place and seeing how they are working together.

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