

Dear Antoine,

Going back to some earlier topics, I'd like to ask you about the difference between a piece and an atmosphere. As you made clear in May, the name *Wandelweiser* designates "an atmosphere; a growing set of "pieces", musical works (here too: no clearly defined membership function); etc. (this list probably is somehow open-ended)." However, earlier you made it clear that a name for a piece is the way you affirm its existence. So the name for a piece specifies it but the name for an atmosphere makes it something undefined.

But pieces and atmospheres are of course in a relationship. So I'd like to ask you, can you say more about the status of the "atmosphere"? Would you say it's different than a piece, or would you say there is no fundamental line dividing piece from atmosphere? Are the ways in which they are defined, or open-ended, more similar or more different? And in what ways does the use of a name differ in the two cases?

Best,
Samuel

Dear Samuel,

thanks for your inspiring and challenging question!

My use of the word "atmosphere", when talking about musical contexts (concerts, pieces, Wandelweiser, maybe even an instrument or a player) is inspired by its philosophical explication by Gernot Böhme:

Here are some references:

books:

Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik. Frankfurt am Main 1995

Ästhetik. Fink, München 2001

online:

»Die Musik modifiziert mein Gefühl, im Raum zu sein.«

Ein Gespräch mit Gernot Böhme

http://www.fh-frankfurt.de/de/.media/~weymann/boehme_interview.pdf

"Atmosphere" is, of course, first related to our experiencing a situation:

Entering a situation, we immediately grasp its "atmosphere", which is a conglomerate of an endless number of minute perceptions on all kinds of levels, most of them not conscious.

Contrary to pieces, atmospheres are not named, they are qualified: an atmosphere may be warm, cordial, threatening, dense, caring, impenetrable, light, etc.

We seem to find an endless number of words or expressions to circumscribe our experience of an atmosphere, usually combined with the feeling, that it does not exactly describe it.

While being experienced very subjectively, atmospheres, apparently, at the same time have some objectivity, they seem to exist outside us. In this sense they are an incredibly interesting kind of "entities", being inseparably objective (external) and subjective (internal).

Contrary to pieces, atmospheres have no beginning and end, they may evolve or alter, but their existence is not about having a definite beginning or end. This, however, is, I think, essential to (performances of) pieces of music (as the word “piece” already suggests).

On the other hand, we do say, that pieces *have* or *create* a certain atmosphere and to me this is the most important quality of a piece of music. When I am working on a piece and do not feel satisfied about it, this usually has, in one way or the other, to do with the atmosphere it creates, or manifests, or implies (in relation to playing or hearing it).

Pieces *have* an atmosphere the way a space or a situation may have an atmosphere. They are not (just) atmospheres, but it is their atmosphere, which distinguishes them (first of all). Also, the atmosphere within a piece of music may change (it generally doesn't in my music, though, and I suspect, this has something to do with my hope, that my music might be unconditionally affirmative of something).

Contrary to atmospheres pieces seem to be “something”, the existence of which is worth (and in need of) being affirmed by naming it, somehow similar to persons. Persons *have* a character, but there is more to them than their character, there is more to them than anything (or the sum), that could be said about them. Maybe this “more” is their sheer (and precarious) existence, which can only flourish, when it is lovingly affirmed and therewith elevated from its “sheerness”: when it is named.

One of my favorite Bible passages seems to mean exactly this:

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name: you are mine.” (Jes. 43,1)

Wandelweiser, as a word, may (amongst many other things) also designate a certain atmosphere, or a variety of atmospheres, the way “dense”, or “warm” or “intense” may designate or qualify an atmosphere:

a “*wandelweiser*” atmosphere. I think (or hope) it does.