



Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung: On a Hidden Potential of Literature

Hans Gumbrecht

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What are the various atmospheres or moods that the reading of literary works can trigger? Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has long argued that the function of literature is not so much to describe, or to re-present, as to make present. Here, he goes one step further, exploring the substance and reality of language as a material component of the world—impalpable hints, tones, and airs that, as much as they may be elusive, are no less matters of actual fact.

Reading, we discover, is an experiencing of specific moods and atmospheres, or *Stimmung*. These moods are on a continuum akin to a musical scale. They present themselves as nuances that challenge our powers of discernment and description, as well as language's potential to capture them. Perhaps the best we can do is to point in their direction. Conveying personal encounters with poetry, song, painting, and the novel, this book thus gestures toward the intangible and in the process, constitutes a bold defense of the subjective experience of the arts.

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