Article

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Atmospheric Experiences of Place in the Anthropocene

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Abstract: This article offers the first extended English-language reading of Amalie Smith's *De næste 5000 dage* (2010) through the concept of atmosphere, arguing that mood functions not merely as an aesthetic effect but as a mode of ecological knowledge in the Anthropocene. Intervening in current debates within ecocriticism and new materialist theory, the article shows how literary atmosphere renders the entanglement of cultural imaginaries, infrastructures, technologies, and nonhuman forces perceptible at the level of embodied experience. Drawing on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's theorization of Stimmung and Bruno Latour's attention to heterogeneous mediation, the article traces a spiral movement across the book's six texts – from the Danish west coast, through Copenhagen's urban and digital spaces, to a collective account of an earthquake in Malmö. Close readings demonstrate how the summerhouse's apparent stillness is materially produced through coastal engineering, how urban environments generate anthropocentric and machinic moods of compression and self-reflection, and how seismic disturbance reasserts atmosphere as collective, more-than-human presence. The article contributes a refined vocabulary for understanding atmosphere as relational and historically situated, bridging aesthetics and ecocriticism by treating mood as a site where form, matter, and affect converge. By foregrounding atmosphere as an analytical category, it positions Smith's second book as an atmospheric map of the Anthropocene and suggests how literary texts can recalibrate attention toward the nonhuman conditions that structure contemporary experience.

Keywords: atmosphere; place; human and nonhuman in Amalie Smith's *De næste 5000 dage*

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1 Introduction

The Danish author Amalie Smith (b. 1985) belongs to a younger generation of Nordic writers whose work traverses genres and media, combining prose, poetry, visual art, and digital technologies. Educated at the Danish Academy of Creative Writing (Forfatterskolen), she has since the early 2010s developed a body of work characterized by formal hybridity and a sustained engagement with questions of materiality, technology, and embodiment. Across works such as *I CIVIL* (2012), *Marble* (2014), *Et hjerte i alt* (2017), and *THREAD RIPPER* (2020), Smith explores how human and nonhuman agencies co-produce experience through assemblages that draw on scientific description, personal memory, mythology, and visual documentation.

Several of Smith's works have been translated into English, introducing her writing to a growing international readership, particularly in the UK and the US.[1] Despite this, English-language scholarship on Smith remains scarce.[2] To my knowledge, only one peer-reviewed article focuses explicitly on her authorship: Lilian Munk Rösing's "Textile Textuality in Inger Christensen: 'Letter in April' and Amalie Smith: 'Thread Ripper'" (2024), which situates Smith in relation to Christensen through a materialist-textile framework. Notably absent from both Scandinavian and international scholarship is sustained engagement with Smith's second book, *De næste 5000 dage* (2010).

This omission is striking, as *De næste 5000 dage* anticipates many of the concerns that later come to define Smith's oeuvre: the entanglement of human and nonhuman actors, the mediation of perception through technology, and the epistemological status of observation and documentation. Moreover, the book foregrounds the affective dimension of place – how atmospheres are sensed, staged, and technologically engineered – an aspect of Smith's writing that has yet to be examined in depth.

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1 *Marble* was published in English in 2021 in a translation by Jennifer Russell and Sophia Hersi Smith, while *Thread Ripper* appeared in 2022, also translated by Jennifer Russell. *A Heart in Everything* (*Et hjerte i alt*) is currently in translation and forthcoming from Lolli Editions.

2 The following Danish- and Norwegian-language publications have addressed Amalie Smith's authorship (El Baz 2012; Mønster 2013; Zangenberg 2014; Thomsen 2015; Gregersen and Skiveren 2016; Stagis 2016; Krarup 2017; Rasmussen 2017; Skiveren 2020; Bjartan 2020; Buestad 2021; Mønster et al. 2021; Friis and Schyum 2023; Hoeck 2026). These include academic articles, student theses, doctoral research, broader studies of contemporary Danish literature, and non-academic contributions. The most recent Danish-language study is my dissertation, *Vi er naturen, der skriver digte: Materialitet, sted, krop og teknologi i Amalie Smiths forfatterskab* (Hoeck 2026), on which the present article draws. English-language research on Smith's authorship remains more limited. Lilian Munk Rösing's "Textile Textuality in Inger Christensen: 'Letter in April' and Amalie Smith: 'Thread Ripper'" offers a comparative analysis of Smith's Thread Ripper and Inger Christensen's Brev i april, focusing on their shared feminist and revolutionary potential (Rösing 2024).

Attending to atmosphere is significant for two reasons. First, it highlights a dimension of Smith's practice that complements prevailing materialist readings: her texts do not merely map networks of humans and things but render palpable how these networks impress themselves upon bodies through mood, sensation, and affect. Second, an atmospheric perspective situates Smith's work at the intersection of new materialism and ecocriticism, where *Stimmung* emerges as a site in which cultural imaginaries meet infrastructures and nonhuman forces. In this sense, atmosphere functions as a mode of knowledge that makes socio-ecological entanglements perceptible.

De næste 5000 dage consists of six heterogeneous texts that move from encounters with the west coast of Denmark, through urban spaces in Copenhagen, and conclude with a collective account of an earthquake in Malmö. What connects these disparate sections is their shared concern with how places feel – how atmospheres shape experience and reveal the interplay between cultural expectations and material processes.

This article offers the first extended English-language reading of *De næste 5000 dage* with atmosphere as its central analytical lens. Drawing on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's theorization of *Stimmung*, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, and related strands of new materialism, the article proceeds in three steps: first, an analysis of *Vestkysten genfortalt*; second, a reading of the Copenhagen texts; and finally, an examination of the concluding earthquake narratives. Through this progression, the article argues that *De næste 5000 dage* may be read as an atmospheric map of the Anthropocene, in which atmosphere appears not as a neutral background but as a dynamic field where the entanglement of human and nonhuman life becomes perceptible.[3]

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3 The concept of the Anthropocene is etymologically a compound of two Greek words (*ánthrōpos*/*"νθρωπος*, "human," and *kainós*/*καινός*, "new, recent, current, or modern") and can be translated as something like "the new epoch caused by humans," "a human-shaped new epoch," or simply "the epoch of humans." It was originally proposed by the Dutch atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and the biologist Eugene Stoermer in the early 2000s in their article "The Anthropocene" (2000) in *IGBP Global Change Newsletter* no. 41, as a designation for the geological epoch that follows the Holocene – the epoch that has lasted since the end of the last Ice Age, about 11,700 years ago. The Anthropocene is characterized by the fact that humanity's cumulative impact on Earth's ecosystems – including the composition of the atmosphere, the decline of biodiversity, changes in landscapes, and disruptions in geochemical cycles – has, over the course of modernity, become so extensive, pervasive, and in part irreversible that it no longer makes sense to maintain the idea that culture and nature, or human and nonhuman, exist in separate spheres. Instead, one must acknowledge that human activity – particularly since the Industrial Revolution – has itself developed into a geological force. In other words, we have entered a new geological epoch in which the human (through its development and consumption) appears not only as a cultural agent, but as a planetary force on par with ice ages, continental drift, and volcanic eruptions. The Anthropocene has thus

2 Atmosphere as a Path to the Recognition of the Nonhuman

New materialism is a strand of contemporary theory that, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, has reshaped debates across the humanities and social sciences by introducing new perspectives on agency, materiality, and relationality. Often referred to as the material turn (Bennett and Joyce 2010; Gregersen and Skiveren 2016), this shift is less concerned with proposing a single doctrine than with redirecting analytical attention: away from the autonomous human subject and toward the dynamic relations through which meaning, experience, and existence emerge. Central to this reorientation is a reconceptualization of the relationship between humans and the world, understood not as a relation of mastery or representation but as one of entanglement and mutual influence.

Whereas poststructuralist theories – such as Michel Foucault's analyses of power in *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Foucault 1975), Roland Barthes' theories of textuality in *S/Z* (1970), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), and Judith Butler's work on performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1990) – primarily examined how language, culture, and discourse shape human understanding of the world, new materialist approaches extend this concern by foregrounding how nonhuman actors participate in shaping both experience and the cultural constructions through which the world is interpreted. As Diana Coole and Samantha Frost emphasize in *New Materialisms* (2010), "for critical materialists, society is simultaneously materially real and socially constructed: our material lives are always culturally mediated, but they are not only cultural" (Coole and Frost 2010, 6). Meaning is thus never purely symbolic, but always emerges in relation to bodies, materials, technologies, and environments.

From a history-of-ideas perspective, this shift can be understood as a challenge to epistemological frameworks inherited from René Descartes and Immanuel Kant,

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become a powerful figure for the "material turn" in academia. As Jason W. Moore has written in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (2016): "The Anthropocene is not only a geological concept but also a call to rethink the human-nature relationship in ways that reflect the entanglement of socio-ecological processes" (Moore 2016, 5). Or, as Morton formulates it in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013): "The term Anthropocene marks a profound shift in human awareness – the realization that we are not outside nature but inside it, that we are part of a vast mesh of interdependent relations" (Morton 2013, 7). Or, as Stacy Alaimo has argued in *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (2016): "The Anthropocene is not merely a geological epoch, but a conceptual provocation that demands that we think across nature-culture divides, disciplinary boundaries, and species lines" (Alaimo 2016, 146).

in which knowledge is grounded in a rational, autonomous subject standing over against an external world. New materialism instead insists on relational ontologies, where knowledge and meaning arise within networks of heterogeneous actors. Bruno Latour's actor-network theory is exemplary in this regard. In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour argues that neither society nor culture can be understood as exclusively human achievements, but must be conceived as assemblages in which humans, animals, technologies, architectures, and materials participate on equal terms (Latour 2005, 63). His classroom example demonstrates how attention, concentration, and meaning-making depend on a complex framing of nonhuman mediators – walls, doors, acoustic insulation, spatial arrangements – without which teaching itself would be impossible:

> Just because some material element of the place does not determine an action doesn't mean you can conclude that they do nothing. We are now familiar with many more ontological stages than the two foolish extremes of being and nothingness. Fathom for one minute all that allows you to interact with your students without being interfered too much by the noise from the street or the crowds outside in the corridor waiting to be let in for another class. If you doubt the transporting power of all those humble mediators in making this a local place, open the doors and the windows and see if you can still teach anything. If you hesitate about this point, try to give your lecture in the middle of some art show with screaming kids and loud speakers spewing out techno music. The result is inescapable: if you are not thoroughly 'framed' by other agencies brought silently on the scene, neither you nor your students can even concentrate for a minute on what is being 'locally' achieved. (Latour 2005, 195)

What Latour's example makes visible is that atmosphere – the capacity of a space to enable attention, meaning, and affect – is never produced by human intention alone. Rather, it emerges from the interplay of material conditions, technological infrastructures, bodily presence, and culturally shaped expectations. This insight resonates with Donna Haraway's call to abandon the nature–culture divide in favor of the concept of natureculture, which emphasizes the inseparability of human and nonhuman processes (Haraway 2003, 15). Atmosphere thus becomes a key site where the entanglement of material and cultural forces can be sensed and experienced.

This emphasis on situated and mediated experience aligns closely with ecocritical approaches to place. As W. J. T. Mitchell argues, landscape is best understood not as a passive backdrop but as a "medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other" (Mitchell 2002, 5). Similarly, Simon C. Estok describes place not as a fixed location, but as a node within a dynamic web of relations that unfold across space and time (Estok et al. 2016, 218). From this perspective, place is always already relational, processual, and affectively charged.

Several theorists have pointed to literature as a privileged medium through which such relations can be experienced, precisely because literary texts operate not only at the level of representation but also through mood, atmosphere, and sensory

attunement. In *All Art Is Ecological* (2018), Timothy Morton argues that artworks generate a sense of "nowness" by acting directly on the body, not merely through meaning but through aesthetic and sensorial force (Morton 2018, 71). Likewise, in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), Anna L. Tsing describes how literary moods shape perception and behavior by contaminating the reader – altering how humans relate to other forms of life and to the world they inhabit (Tsing 2015, 27).

One of the most systematic explorations of atmosphere in literary theory is found in the work of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. In *Production of Presence* (2004), he introduces the concept of a "presence-based relationship to the world," arguing that aesthetic experience cannot be reduced to interpretation alone, but involves a bodily and affective dimension that precedes and exceeds meaning (Gumbrecht 2004, xv). This approach is further developed in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* (2012), where Gumbrecht shows how literary texts can bring moods to life by combining culturally coded descriptions with sensory resemblances to experiences readers have had themselves: "Texts affect the 'inner feelings' of readers in the way that weather and music do" (Gumbrecht 2012, 5).

Although Gumbrecht does not explicitly theorize relations between humans and nonhumans, his work nevertheless opens an important path toward such an understanding. In his conceptualization, atmosphere emerges as an in-between field in which human imaginaries and nonhuman phenomena are brought into relation through aesthetic experience. Literature, from this perspective, is not merely a mirror of culture, but a mediating practice that facilitates communication between human bodies and the material world. Where Latour elaborates an associated sociology, Gumbrecht may thus be said to propose an associated aesthetics – an understanding of art and atmosphere as emergent from networks of intertwined cultural and material elements (Gumbrecht 2012, 6).

Taken together, the work of Gumbrecht, Morton, and Tsing suggests that atmosphere arises through multiple, overlapping dimensions: through the formal composition of artworks; through the presence of human and nonhuman figures within texts; and through the depiction of material and environmental phenomena that shape spaces, places, and landscapes. Atmosphere, in this sense, becomes a key analytical pathway for recognizing the agency of the nonhuman – not as an abstract theoretical claim, but as a felt, embodied experience.

3 A Book About Places and Moods

It is clear that place functions as a central thematic concern in *De næste 5000 dage*. Across its six parts, the book repeatedly returns to sites and spaces that the narrator has inhabited and moved through in early adulthood. The book's opening text,

Vestkysten genfortalt, explicitly foregrounds place already in its opening line "Her er stedet" (Smith 2010, 10). This emphasis is reinforced in the opening pages, where the word *sted* appears five times within the first four pages, while *landskab* occurs as many as 10 times. The text describes a visit to Smith's parents' summerhouse on the west coast of Jutland, Denmark, and takes the form of a recollection originating from a video work entitled *HUS/HAV* (2009), recorded during a family stay at the summerhouse. Because of this genesis as a film recording, the written text bears the imprint of a narrow, investigative gaze shaped by the camera lens. Its minimal realism is marked by a high degree of descriptive precision and a restrained use of metaphor. Rather than centering interpersonal relations, the text is primarily concerned with the impressions and reflections that the narrating *jeg* receives in encounters with the elements and phenomena of the place – phenomena that are zoomed in, observed, and carefully recorded. In this way, *Vestkysten genfortalt* establishes from the outset a mode of attention in which place is approached not as a passive backdrop, but as an active field of perception. In "ATT. A.", the narrative turns back across time and space toward a remembered intimacy, while *Søgeresultater* explores the unfamiliar digital environments that Smith's generation helped pioneer. In *Stalkerprotokol* and *Alle døre åbne*, the reader follows wanderings through Copenhagen's urban spaces, and in the concluding text, *Beretninger om et jordskælv*, a polyphonic montage reconstructs different actors' experiences of waking in houses shaken by an earthquake.

Although the book does not unfold through a continuous plot, it nevertheless traces a recognizable movement: from recognition, overview, and clarity at the beginning, through forgetting and dispersal, and finally toward shock and awakening at the end. This spiral-shaped structure makes the work more than a mere collection of fragments. Instead, it emerges as a process of recurrent recognition, in which the reader is confronted again and again with the materiality of place, its atmosphere, and its cultural meanings.

In this context, atmosphere does not function merely as a mood-setting background (as in more romantic or impressionistic forms of fiction), but as the medium through which places become available for rediscovery. The descriptions show, first, how places are always embedded in cultural codes – in imaginaries, traditions, and historical patterns that condition how spaces are perceived and valued. At the same time, nonhuman actors – the wind and sea of the west coast, the built and machinic infrastructures of the city, or the tremors of seismic movement – step forward as co-creating forces. They participate actively in shaping experience and in the production of meaning and ethical orientation within the text. The book thereby demonstrates how atmosphere arises in the tension between cultural layers and nonhuman phenomena – and how, within this tension, a renewed recognition of place can take shape.

Through its form, *De næste 5000 dage* underscores that places cannot be understood only as static backdrops, but must also be approached as dynamic relations that require continual re-attunement. In a globalized reality, the transience of place means that it is easily forgotten or reduced to a superficial experience. Smith's book insists, by contrast, that places – through their moods and atmospheres – must be repeatedly recalled and sensed if their cultural and material complexity is not to be lost.

Repetition thus becomes a central motif in the work. Already in the title *Vestkysten genfortalt* the necessity of returning is built into the book's poetics, and in "ATT. A." the point is stated explicitly: "Har jeg fortalt dig det her før? Jeg siger de samme ting flere gange. Et liv fuldt af gentagelser. Det er gentagelserne, der folder tiden sammen" (Smith 2010, 16).

De næste 5000 dage can thus be read as a work that does not merely depict places, but demonstrates why they must be understood through moods and atmospheres. It is precisely through this affective dimension that places are rediscovered – as relations among human experience, cultural imaginaries, and material processes in the Anthropocene epoch.

4 Summerhouse Atmosphere and the Encounter with the Nonhuman

From the outset, the text *Vestkysten genfortalt* establishes a tension between human nostalgic imaginaries and expectations on the one hand, and the mutable, dynamic character of place on the other. This tension becomes evident in the opening paragraph, where the narrating "jeg" returns to the summerhouse after several years and notes that while "Stedet ligner sig selv", the experience is nevertheless "forskellig" (Smith 2010, 10). She recalls having come there every summer, yet now returns in October, with a camera, because there is "noget, [hun] gerne vil fastholde". The passage suggests a simultaneous recognition and estrangement: the place appears familiar, yet it resists full identification.

This doubleness resonates with what Gumbrecht has described as a modern yearning for *Stimmung*, understood as mood or atmosphere. According to Gumbrecht, such yearning emerges when everyday life no longer "surround[s] and envelop[s] us physically," prompting a desire for places that produce a sense of presence (Gumbrecht 2012, 20). In this sense, the narrator's return to the summerhouse can be read as a search for precisely such atmospheric presence – an attempt to recover a mode of being-in-the-world that feels both embodied and enveloping.

It is deeply embedded in the Scandinavian cultural imagination that the summerhouse is a place where one can disconnect from the hectic rhythms of urban life and reconnect with the slower temporalities of nature and the body. This understanding has been described, among others, by Jonas Larsen, who shows how the Danish summerhouse functions as a social and cultural space for "slow living" and proximity to nature (Larsen 2007), and by Orvar Löfgren, who emphasizes the summerhouse's role as a historically established refuge from the acceleration of modernity (Löfgren 1999). This cultural code initially seems to be confirmed by the narrator's experience upon arrival. She describes how the house has stood empty since summer, yet without dust settling in the air so close to the sea, and she reflects that time appears to move more slowly here, as she is otherwise "vant til at måle den i forandring" (Smith 2010, 10). The practical acts of opening the house, filling the stove with firewood and the pipes with water, noticing the absence of lime in the water, the salt-greased windows, the possible presence of dead mice and butterflies in the attic, and the sand on the utility-room floor all contribute to an atmosphere of stillness and suspension.

Together, these details – the slowness, the dead animals, the sand, the salt – create the impression of a place that has almost stood still, like a time capsule. Here, the expectation of the summerhouse as a site of calm and minimal movement appears to be fulfilled. Yet this impression is short-lived. As soon as the narrator moves outside the house and down toward the beach, she is reminded that the calmness of the place is neither natural nor self-evident. At the sight of the sea, she recalls the erosion of the coastline and a childhood game in which the family would guess how much closer the sea had come to the house since their last visit. Over time, however, the game lost its meaning. The narrator notes that she could hear, in the way her mother asked the question, that the dunes were moving inland more slowly each year, until eventually the question was no longer asked at all, because "Landskabet stod stille" (Smith 2010, 10).

At first glance, it may seem surprising that the "I" is so affected by these realizations, given that she has been returning to the summerhouse since childhood. The text itself, however, provides an explanation. The narrator repeatedly forgets the fundamental insight that places are changeable. She must return to the summerhouse and the beach each year in order to relearn and remember this fact. As she states explicitly, "Hvert år forstod jeg det på en ny måde. Så glemte jeg det igen" (Smith 2010, 11).

In his essay "Hic Jacet," Robert Pogue Harrison observes that "the world into which we are thrown is always a built world" (Harrison 2003, 349). While the narrating "jeg" understands this in principle, she only comes to grasp its full implications when she begins to investigate more closely what the coastline's apparent

stillness actually entails and how it has been produced. Walking along the coast, she looks for traces of both the landscape's former movements and the moment at which these movements were halted. This results in passages where the sensation of movement repeatedly encounters artificial stabilization. On the one hand, the narrator remembers the sea eating away at the coast, the shifting positions of church, bunker, and house over time; on the other hand, she observes that despite appearances, the landscape now "ligger stille" (Smith 2010, 11). The rhythmic movement of the waves creates the impression of ongoing motion, yet this motion is revealed to have been met by a forceful intervention that arrested the erosion that would otherwise have continued.

In order to understand what has concretely happened to the place, the family visits a coastal centre near the summerhouse. Here, the narrator recounts a series of scientific and historical facts about the coastline, providing an analytical account of its transformation over time. She explains how the Danish state first experimented with coastal nourishment in 1974, how the amount of sand was increased throughout the 1980s, and how today approximately 2.5 million cubic metres of sand are deposited annually along the west coast. She has herself observed the ships near the summerhouse, sucking sand from the seabed and pumping it onto the beach through long pipes (Smith 2010, 12).[4] Born in 1985, Smith belongs to the generation whose childhood coincided with the intensification of these coastal interventions. The narrator's rediscovered memories of a gradual shift from movement to stillness thus align historically with the increasing use of coastal nourishment to combat erosion. At the same time, these facts help explain why the "jeg" develops a fixed nostalgic expectation of the place. As the narrator reflects, coastal nourishment has "sat erosionen i stå" – "put erosion to a halt", holding the landscape in place through a counter-movement and producing "En stadig genfortælling af egnen, som den så ud i min barndom i 80'erne" (Smith 2010, 12).

Through this realization, the meaning of the text shifts. The atmosphere of calm and stillness that the narrator longed for and initially found confirmed is revealed to be the product of state planning and technical intervention. The west coast landscape no longer appears as untouched nature, but as a stabilized construction.

This recognition opens the text toward a broader interpretive perspective. As Latour's actor-network theory (ANT) demonstrates, places can never be reduced to human constructions alone, but are always formed through interactions with nonhuman actors. In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour emphasizes that mediators

4 Coastal nourishment is a method of coastal protection that adds sand to shorelines eroded by waves. In coastal nourishment, sand is sucked up from the seabed by a special vessel – a so-called sand dredger – and then pumped onto the seabed in front of the beach or conveyed through a pipe directly onto the beach itself (Miljø- og Ligestillingsministeriet 2025).

"transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour 2005, 39). From this perspective, atmospheres and sites are stabilized not by human intention alone, but by heterogeneous mediators whose actions actively reconfigure what a place is and how it is experienced.

Seen in this light, *Vestkysten genfortalt* becomes a narrative in which the narrator's experience of stillness is produced not only by childhood memory, but by a network of actors that includes coastal erosion, sand nourishment machinery, the geology of the coastline, wind and salt, and the presence of dead mice and butterflies. All of these elements participate in what Latour elsewhere describes as "the collective" (Latour 2005, 75), and they function as mediators rather than mere intermediaries, altering the very conditions of perception and presence at the shoreline.

Finally, the text also gestures beyond the local setting. When sand is moved from one place to another, it becomes clear that places do not exist in isolation, but are embedded in global systems. As the narrator notes, material is displaced as "Vores sand flyttes sydpå, ned til vadehavet" (Smith 2010, 11). In this respect, Smith's text resonates with Morton's claim in *The Ecological Thought* that "the ecological thought thinks place as anywhere" (Morton 2010, 55). Places appear as nodes within larger networks of circulation and connection.

Through this dual focus on cultural nostalgia and technical construction, Smith articulates a crucial insight: the atmosphere of the summerhouse is both real and constructed, both calm and controlled. The narrator's experience moves from the confirmation of nostalgic expectation toward an awareness that the place is also shaped by power, planning, and human intervention. As readers, we are reminded that the yearning for atmosphere described by Gumbrecht is always embedded within material, cultural, and technical contexts. Atmosphere is never simply given, but emerges from complex relations between human and nonhuman actors.

5 The City's Anthropocentric Spaces

The book's second text is titled "ATT. A", a reference to the abbreviation used in letters to indicate that they should come "to the attention of" a specific person. Whereas *Vestkysten genfortalt* directed its gaze outward toward a place and its nonhuman actors, here the narrator turns her attention inward toward the self and the interpersonal relation. The text does not open with a focus on place but with a focus on feelings and romantic attachment: "Jeg tænker tit på din ungdom i Odense" (Smith 2010, 16). At the same time, the space inhabited by the narrator and her beloved – a Copenhagen apartment with a kitchen, a rooftop terrace, and a view of Østerbro – is only fleetingly described. The descriptions are without detail and

without the inclusion of other actors beyond the two humans. The room functions as a backdrop for the individual's inner feelings rather than as an active participant in the experience.

This movement continues in the third text, *Søgeresultater*, where the narrative shifts even further away from the concrete place and into the digital and technological. The text begins as a telephone conversation between the narrator and the beloved, but the conversation gradually dissolves into reflections on the internet, social media, and scientific facts. Whereas the scientific information in *Vestkysten genfortalt* functioned as a supplement to the experience of the nonhuman world, in "Search Results" these elements become abstract fragments that point away from body and place and into the machines. The voice on the telephone is described as "usynlig" and "langstrakt", and the dialogue drifts into poetic fragments where memories of physical presence and nature's sensuousness collide with a fascination for galactic collisions and internet phenomena (Smith 2010, 33–36).

Read in the light of Jean Baudrillard's analyses of the virtual as simulacrum (Baudrillard 2002) and Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" (Augé 1992), "Search Results" can be seen as a depiction of how technology creates spaces that no longer function as sites of presence but as functional transit and communication channels. Dreams of metro stations and underground transport systems, where the "jeg" is squeezed into automatic doors (Smith 2010, 22), underscore this atmosphere of anonymity and alienation. The logic of the machine becomes an overarching metaphor: the word "maskine" is repeated 14 times in the text, and a passage on "cloud computing" describes the vision of a worldwide "*sky*" a global internet of things where all objects are linked together in a single circuit (Smith 2010, 31).

This shift from the sensory calm of the summerhouse to the abstract spaces of the city and technology can be read as an atmospheric movement from openness to claustrophobia. Whereas the mood in the first text was calm and contemplative, the city's and technology's spaces create a different mood marked by restlessness, drama, and control. This becomes even clearer in the fourth text, *Stalkerprotokol*, where the narrator moves through Copenhagen. The atmosphere here is dynamic but also dark and enclosed: the city's spaces are described as artificial and controlled, where nature is reduced to synthetic fragments – a duck pond polluted by plastic bags and food waste, artificial grass (Smith 2010, 47, 55), or the Botanical Garden, described more as a zoological garden for plants and as "husmaskiner af glas" (Smith 2010, 49).

Tellingly, both implicit and explicit references to the myth of Narcissus appear here. The text opens with a readymade excerpt about the flower *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* (Smith 2010, 44), drawn from a botanical website:

> Narcissus pseudonarcissus tilhører narcisfamilien Amaryllidaceae. Middelhøj. Blade blågrønne, furede. Blomstrer med en mørkegul tragtformet indre bikrone og 6 lysegule blosterblade; nikkende, enlige. Kapselfrugt. (Smith 2010, 44)

In the rest of the text, an eerie atmosphere unfolds where the "jeg" is caught in a double role as both pursuer and pursued. On the left side of the spreads are photographs of Smith tasting daffodils, while the prose on the right follows an "jeg" stalking a "du" through the streets of Copenhagen. Cross-references between the pages make it clear that the "jeg" is in fact stalking herself:

> Jeg er mest af alt min egen stalker. Følger efter mig selv som et ekko. Sølvgade, Sølvgade. Botanisk Have. Jeg står på den store trappe. Iagttager mig selv lidt længere fremme. Måden jeg går på. Jeg ligner en, der leder efter nogen. (Smith 2010, 51)

This atmospheric staging of narcissism supports the reading of the city as an anthropocentric space. Whereas the presence of nature (or the nonhuman) in *Vestkysten genfortalt* could mirror and stabilize the "jeg", and lead here an attention to the nonhuman, the city is characterized by artificial, mechanical, and controlled frameworks that amplify the subject's self-absorption and alienation. The myth of Narcissus here functions not only as motif but as interpretive key: the city becomes a mirror that only returns the human its own image, while the connection to the nonhuman disappears.

6 The Nonhuman Returns

In the penultimate text of the work, *Alle døre åbne*, the atmosphere intensifies through a fragmentary montage of experiences, philosophical references, and sensuous images. The text functions as a transitional space between the city's dark narcissism and the bodily and geological tremor that concludes the book. The fragments range from banal observations in 7–11 or at Sankt Hans Torv to metaphorical images such as "digteren dier ved den store tomheds auberginagtige bryst" (Smith 2010, 82). In the text the I and the lover are driving in a car out of the city, and together the fragments give the impression of an accelerating atmosphere, where experiences, thoughts, and memories collide and create a chaotic mood. Toward the end, the mood shifts toward the prophetic: in a surreal sexual scene, accompanied by the words "HAPPY EARTHQUAKE DAY" written on the wall, an experience of dissolution and bodily intensity unfolds, foreshadowing the tremor to come. The atmosphere here vibrates between intimacy and cosmic foreboding, where the body's climax mirrors the movements of the earth.

This suggested tectonic force breaks through fully in the book's final section, *Beretninger om et jordskælv*. Here, the narrative voice withdraws, and a montage of witness accounts taking from interviews made by the Danish broadcasting cannel TV2 conveys the atmosphere of shock and fear that arose when an earthquake struck Malmö in 2008.[5] The voices – both human and animal – describe how the tremors invaded everyday life: dogs drooling, parrots falling to the bottom of their cages, furniture moving:

> Jeg vågnede, fordi min hund rystede og savlede cirka fem minutter forud for skælvet. Jeg vågnede ved, at min papegøje fløj rundt i sit bur og faldt ned i bunden af buret tre gange. Mit natbord rykkede sig cirka 10 cm, og flere parfumeflakoner fik en tur på gulvet. Samtidig ser jeg min hund med raketfart ryge ud af sin kurv. Aldrig har jeg set dens øjne være så fyldt med rædsel som i de sekunder, hvor skælvet stod på. (Smith 2010, 92)

With this quotation it becomes clear how the earthquake is experienced both bodily and affectively – as an event that strikes humans and animals simultaneously and destabilizes even the most everyday surroundings. The fearful and chaotic atmosphere is suddenly no longer a human construction but a field created by the earth's own movement. While the earlier texts already suggest that atmosphere emerges from an interplay between cultural imaginaries, human structures, and material forces – exemplified by the beach in the opening text as a dynamic, more-than-human environment – the ending renders this interplay more palpable, allowing the world itself to appear as an active participant in the production of mood.

As Morton argues in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013), climate change and other hyperobjects generate precisely such a "being-quake," a shaking of existence that forces humans to recognize the instability of their own ground: "The ground of being is shaken […] The Titanic of modernity hits the iceberg of hyperobjects" (Morton 2013, 19). Smith's earthquake scene can be read as a literary staging of this "being-quake," where the tremors not only destabilize furniture and houses but also unsettle the anthropocentric assumption that humans control their environments. In this sense, the earthquake is both a local event in Malmö and an allegory of the Anthropocene's planetary shocks.

Thus, *De næste 5000 dage* completes its spiral: from the summerhouse's slow and nostalgic atmosphere, through the city's claustrophobic and narcissistic moods, to the earth's unpredictable shock. Each text evokes a particular atmosphere, but together they show that mood is never pure or stable: it is both culturally shaped and materially produced, and it can shift at any moment. The book's final tremor underscores that atmosphere is not merely an aesthetic phenomenon, but a medium

5 Montage of reading reports from nyhederne.tv2.dk, December 16, 2008.

through which humans can experience their connectedness with the nonhuman in the Anthropocene epoch.

7 Conclusions

This article has argued that *De næste 5000 dage* can be read as an atmospheric map of the Anthropocene, not because it "depicts" the ecological crisis as a theme, but because it makes perceptible the aesthetic and material processes through which mood is relationally produced. Through Gumbrecht's concept of Stimmung and Latour's attention to heterogeneous mediation, the analyses have shown that atmosphere in Smiths book is neither a subjective add-on nor a neutral background. It emerges as a relational field in which cultural imaginaries, infrastructures, technologies, bodies, and nonhuman forces co-compose what a place is and how it can be felt.

Reading Smith's west coast text through this lens reveals that the summerhouse atmosphere of slowness and stillness is inseparable from engineered stabilization. The work does not simply demystify nostalgia; it shows how a culturally coded desire for presence is materially secured through technical intervention, sedimented habits of perception, and coastal processes that continue to press against the dream of stasis. In the Copenhagen sections, the atmospheric register changes: urban and digital spaces do not eliminate material agency, but reorganize it into machinic and self-referential circuits. Here, atmosphere becomes an aesthetic form of compression – of attention, proximity, and temporality – staging anthropocentrism not as an abstract ideology but as a lived mood structured by infrastructures, interfaces, and controlled environments. The concluding earthquake montage then interrupts this enclosure. By distributing perception across humans and animals and by foregrounding the Earth's movement as a force that exceeds human framing, the text restores atmosphere as collective, more-than-human presence – a felt reminder that the ground of everyday life is contingent and that the nonhuman is not simply "around" us but actively co-constitutive of experience.

The contribution of this article is thus twofold. For ecocritical literary studies, it proposes atmosphere as a category that bridges aesthetics and ecology by treating mood as a mode of knowledge: an embodied, culturally inflected way in which socio-ecological entanglements become sensible. For new materialist approaches, it demonstrates how nonhuman agency in literature should not be located only in represented objects or networks, but also in the text's capacity to attune readers – to make infrastructures, elements, and forces felt as atmospheric pressures shaping perception. Smith's book exemplifies how a poetics of retelling and return can function as an Anthropocene pedagogy of attention: repetition is not mere nostalgia

but a method for re-sensing the conditions that habit and cultural coding continually make disappear, until shocks – geological, climatic, or infrastructural – break through.

If *De næste 5000 dage* still matters beyond its immediate Danish context, it is because it offers a way to think place under Anthropocene conditions as neither stable ground nor pure flux, but as an ongoing atmospheric negotiation between memory and matter, expectation and mediation, human self-construction and more-than-human force. Atmosphere, in Smith's book, becomes the medium through which the Anthropocene is not only conceptualized but experienced – at the scale of the body, the city, and the moving Earth.

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