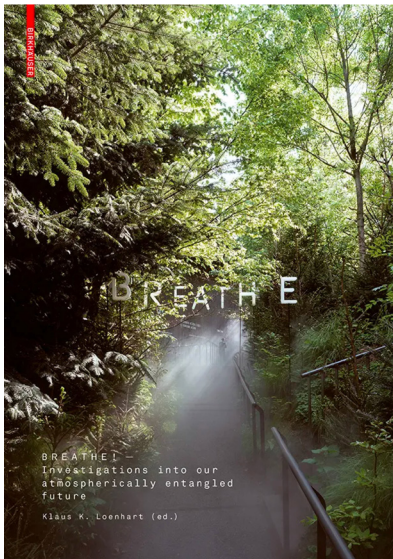


# Breathe - Investigations into our atmospherically entangled future

Editor: Klaus K. Loenhart

Publisher: Birkhäuser, Basel 2021



The act of breathing, and our right to it, is too often taken for granted. *Breathe* is deconstructing this process and presents breathing as a way to engage with a communal vision of the atmosphere. How design can then interfere with this relationship between humankind and the atmosphere?

Landscape architect and professor in Graz, Klaus K. Loenhart brought together eleven professionals from different backgrounds in this 283 pages publication. Designers, scientists, artists and the editor himself expose their thoughts about the entangled relationship between breathing, atmosphere and nature in an assemblage of short essays. It is divided into three chapters: One on breathing and the physical processes, another one on our common responsibility for the quality of the air and the last one on biometeorological design, focusing on design parameters for further interventions. The essay subjects are going from the human and individual scale to a more universal one, that includes the whole planet and living entities in a gradual progression. Between those chapters are inserted photos of the exposition pavilion *Breathe*, presented in Milan in 2015 and designed by Loenhart. The book is then a hybrid between an art book and a scientific publication. It is presented as a deeper reflection on this exhibition.

The uniqueness of the subject is striking. By looking at our planet through the lens of air, these essays raise awareness on the topic. The chapter division enhances the complexity of these issues while providing a clear overall framework to understand them. The theoretical backbone of the book helps to identify humankind's shortcomings when it comes to its relation with air and how it has been blindsided in many research and practical fields. In that regard, the American researcher in cultural studies Heather Davis's essay on the notion of air as a common space and its ethical issues righteously exposes the denial of our responsibilities towards air quality. On the other hand, the book is stuck into many theoretical postures that don't always serve the subject. The diversity of the writers is - on paper - a great way to attack this complex subject. However, so many points of view and semantic debates seem to scatter the arguments more than putting the publication together in a clear vision. The lack of consolidation at the end of the book tends to keep the subject in a very dispersed layer. It could be disappointing for someone who looks for the anticipated design tools that this book pretends to expose. They are briefly presented in the final essay by the editor, where he explains the design principle of the exposition pavilion he designed.

*Breathe* induces a new perspective on how we conceptualize our relationship with the atmosphere. This book could certainly please those who seek a cerebral and theoretic reading experience. But how do we implement this vision? What's the place of the design in this idealistic atmospheric future? Those questions remain.