

<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/RAA.2021.21.7>

INTO THE MESHWORK OF THE FOREST: A SENSORY EXPLORATION OF HUNTING LANDSCAPES IN GERMANY

EN EL ENTRAMADO DEL BOSQUE: UNA EXPLORACIÓN SENSORIAL DE LOS PAISAJES DE CAZA EN ALEMANIA

Thorsten Gieser
Czech Academy of Sciences

ABSTRACT

In this article I offer a sensory exploration of hunting landscapes in contemporary Germany. In a first step, I show how such landscapes are built on and materially structured as cultural landscapes through hunting practices. In the remainder of the article, I examine more specifically how hunters perceive this landscape while being engaged in hunting and looking for game animals. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, I describe not only what "objects" hunters single out in this landscape as relevant for their practice. More importantly, I extend perception from a mere "object recognition" to the skilled sensing of perceptual Gestalt relations in the landscape, guided by embodied sensations. Hunters' perception conceived this way thus becomes an atmospheric practice within the meshwork of a whole elemental weatherworld. I conclude by showing how a phenomenological understanding of hunters' perception might help ethnographers to open up new horizons of more-than-human worlds.

Keywords: Atmosphere; Hunting; Landscape; Multispecies; Senses; Germany.

RESUMEN

En este artículo ofrezco una exploración sensorial de los paisajes de la caza en la Alemania contemporánea. En un primer momento, muestro cómo estos paisajes se construyen y se estructuran materialmente como paisajes culturales a través de las prácticas de caza. En el resto del artículo, examino más específicamente cómo los cazadores perciben este paisaje mientras se dedican a cazar y buscar animales de caza. Basándome en la fenomenología de la percepción de Merleau-Ponty, describo no sólo los “objetos” que los cazadores señalan en este paisaje como relevantes para su práctica. Y lo que es más importante, amplió la percepción desde el mero “reconocimiento de objetos” hasta la percepción hábil de las relaciones gestálticas perceptivas en el paisaje, guiadas por las sensaciones incorporadas. La percepción de los cazadores, así concebida, se convierte en una práctica atmosférica dentro del entramado de todo un mundo meteorológico elemental. Concluyo mostrando cómo una comprensión fenomenológica de la percepción de los cazadores podría ayudar a los etnógrafos a abrir nuevos horizontes de mundos más que humanos.

Palabras clave: Atmósfera; Caza; Paisaje; Multiespecie; Sentidos; Alemania.

INTRODUCTION¹

Gusts of wind tug at my car. I drive off the main road onto a field path, past the mown meadows with their round hay bales and turn onto a forest path into the forest, past the first hide on the left, the small hunting lodge on the right, then another hide just before the crossroads, then the large windthrow area where the sows now often sit in the thicket between the young trees, the next hide directly behind it, and then come to the place where the Pirschweg (path for hunting) begins. I park my car and walk along the path to the clearing with the hide next to it. Already on the way I see the first tracks, quite fresh. The whole forest seems to be in motion. Trees sway creakily in the storm and the wind blows in my face. Arriving at the clearing, I see that the whole area is gebrochen, churned up by sows. The ground is wet from last night's rain, and I move in my rubber boots, smacking as it were on the damp meadow, towards some stones on the left edge of the area. There used to be a Kिरrung (baiting site) there - still recognisable by a few old corn kernels that don't seem to have been eaten. I continue to the end of the meadow, where a salt stone serving as a salt lick has been fixed to a dead thin tree trunk, within good shooting distance of the hide. Next to it an old track, almost washed out by the rain, by a roe deer. I peer

1. This article is a translation and slightly revised version of my article: Wald, Wild, Wetter und das Waidwerk: Sinnliche Erkundungen einer Jagdlandschaft. *Alltag - Kultur - Wissenschaft* 7 (2020): 169-196.

into the beech forest and spot fuzzy lines in the leafy ground where Wechsel (trails) lead to the salt lick. Head bowed for protection from the wind, I trudge on to the next corner of the meadow, where the grass looks depressed. Oh, a red deer track, unusual for this area. That's where it relieved itself, the Losung (faeces) is still clearly visible. A few metres further on in the brambles are the pigs' tunnels leading from the meadow to their pens. I walk around the outside, following the trail until I come to the slope with the plantation. Where the young trees peek out from the rampant brambles, they could be there. There's definitely something going on here, I think to myself as I walk back to the hide, the wind pushing through my fleece jacket making me shiver. This is where I'm coming to hunt tomorrow night...²

A sensory exploration of the forest as a hunting landscape is oriented towards the animals, towards the game (such as deer, wild boar) to be more precise - both in their physical presence and in their material traces, their atmospheric presence, as well as the forest they inhabit as a living landscape and weather world to which hunters must constantly relate anew in their hunting practice. It is a dynamic *multispecies landscape* where red deer graze, roe deer move along their trails, wild boar rummage the earth in search of edibles, trees grow, streams burrow fluidly into the rock, winds swirl animal and human scents. It is in this elemental *meshwork* (Ingold, 2011) of forest, wind, and weather that hunting takes place. It is here that it is carried out, and it is here that its routine actions sediment themselves into material transformations of the landscape, which in turn guide the practice of hunting.

What I shall outline here is the forest as a hunting landscape from the internal perspective of hunting, not the forest as a "contested landscape" of different user groups (Bender and Winer, 2001; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998). Of course, the hunting landscape is always shaped by different, sometimes conflicting interests and I will sketch these only briefly. First of all, there is forestry, which is the main use of the forest landscape in most hunting grounds (except perhaps for national parks and a few proprietary hunts). As I will show later, there are numerous areas of overlap between hunting and forestry, but also sometimes conflicting interests (summarized in the catch phrases "forest before game" or "game before forest"). In addition, there is a recreational function of the forest, especially in areas close to cities, e.g. by hikers, mushroom pickers, dog owners, horseback riders, and so on. In addition, the agricultural areas often adjacent to the forest place special demands on hunters, who are responsible for regulating game damage on these areas and are subsequently obliged to hunt there.

2. The following remarks are based on material from a long-term ethnographic field research on current hunting practices in Germany, which I have been conducting since 2015. More about this on the project page <http://hunter-anthropologist.de>.

This diversity of claims, knowledge, appropriation practices, and discourses surrounding the German forest has been most extensively addressed in cultural anthropological terms by Albrecht Lehmann and Klaus Schriewer in their DFG-funded project on “forest consciousness” (*Waldbewusstsein*) and forest use in the present (Lehmann, 1999; Lehmann and Schriewer, 2000; Schriewer 2015). In addition to detailed monographs on the work culture of forest workers (Schriewer, 1995) or national park rangers (Genath, 2005), appropriation practices of foresters, nature conservationists and hikers, but also of hunters, have also been addressed, at least to some extent. With regard to landscape perception, it should be noted that it has been treated in this literature primarily as a question of “nature consciousness” (*Naturbewusstsein*). Klaus Schriewer, who is the only one so far to have dealt with contemporary hunting in Germany in an anthropological way, primarily used interviews and the analysis of special hunting literature (hunting journals and books). Participant observation hardly played a role (Schriewer, 2015: 32).

This essay is meant to be a supplement to the anthropological work on landscape perception, specifically of the forest, and to revisit contemporary hunting in Germany from the hunters’ perspective (see Gieser, 2020, for more on hunting in Germany). My phenomenological approach to landscape perception is about an active, bodily engagement out of a context of a situated practice, i.e. pragmatically oriented, an entanglement of action and perception in the movement through the landscape, which is structured both materially and perceptively towards action (Gieser, 2018a and 2018b). Thus, Klaus Schriewer also states for hunters, “They by no means fade the forest out of their consciousness; rather, their attention is focused on the aspects that are significant for their hunting practice” (2015: 144, my translation). At the heart of my fieldwork is a kind of participant observation with autoethnographic features, a “sensory apprenticeship” (Pink, 2007). Based on the assumption that each cultural practice produces its own specific mode of perception, this form of fieldwork is about training the anthropologist’s perception by learning knowledge and skills relevant to the practice. In this way, the anthropologist, with the help of his own body, taps into the implicit knowledge of hunting practice and explicates this knowledge through an audio-visually supported thick description. To explore the perception of hunting landscapes, I therefore primarily use photos taken by me during the last years of fieldwork in different hunting grounds for the visual documentation of hunting landscapes. Especially in the first years of research I was often dependent on the perceptual expertise of experienced hunters, without whom I would have overlooked many things. Only in the course of time my view became sharper (in the sense of a “skilled vision”, Grasseni, 2004) and I was able to find things on my own and to discover hunting relevant things in the hunting grounds. The photos are therefore an expression of the embodied knowledge of my research partners as well as of myself (see MacDougall, 2006).

Landscapes are not to be understood as mere backdrops or stages for hunting practices. Rather, landscapes are taskscapes created by the performance of practices; and not only by human, but also by non-human *agencies* (of animals, plants, atmospheric or geological processes) (see also Ogden, 2011). They are therefore constantly changing and call for active, resonant adaptation of actions and perceptions to changing circumstances. Such an approach combines, on the one hand, praxeological and posthuman approaches to the “ecology of the real” - that is, to what I previously called the elementary meshwork - with a “phenomenology of (bodily) experience” (Ingold, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1966). In the words of philosophers Gernot and Hartmut Böhme: “The explicit experience or even rediscovery of the elements takes place through one’s own corporeality. Nature emerges from the body as the nature that we ourselves are” (1996: 304, my translation). In terms of hunting practice, this means that I want to conceptualize hunting as it “makes sense” through a hunting-specific bodily and sensory engagement with animals and the landscape. The philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset put it this way:

“When one is hunting, the air has another, more exquisite feel as it glides over the skin or enters the lungs, the rocks acquire a more expressive physiognomy, and the vegetation becomes loaded with meaning. But all this is due to the fact that the hunter, while he advances or waits crouching, feels tied through the earth to the animal he pursues, whether the animal is in view, hidden, or absent” (Ortega y Gasset, 2007: 131).

Specifically, I address two core practices of hunting in Germany and their associated modes of perception. On the one hand, there is the so-called *Revieregang*, a walk through the hunting district. Hunters involves by far more practices than hunting and killing in the actual sense of the word. More often they are out and about in the hunting district, filling up baiting stations, repairing hides, sweeping paths for silent stalking, walking the dog, or simply having a look at what the animals are doing. This allows them, for example, to judge where the next hunt would be most successful. On the other hand, there is the hunt itself and especially the most common form of hunting in Germany, the *Ansitzjagd* (hunting with a rifle from a hide)³. The hunter waits stationary on a raised position, on a ladder or a raised hide and sits in wait for the game, often for several hours. These hides are of course not randomly distributed in the hunting district but are in themselves an expression of the hunter’s knowledge of the movements and lives of game animals in the area. They are located where potential encounters with game are likely to occur.

3. For information on the different types of hides and how they affect the perception of the landscape, see <http://hunter-anthropologist.de/2019/01/19/ansitze/>.

1. HUNTING LANDSCAPES IN GERMANY

The field diary excerpt at the beginning of this essay provided a first glimpse into the density and complexity of a hunting landscape. As an elemental *meshwork*, it entangles a multitude of human and more-than-human lifelines into a texture of action and experience with which hunters must become familiar. The hunting landscape, then, does not conform, as Schriewer claims, to the “pattern of the impenetrable forest” (2015: 145, my translation). In this regard, he writes: “In the interior of the forest, game moves in hiding, virtually behind a wall. As soon as it leaves this area and enters the cultivated corridor, it falls under the hunter’s grasp” (2015: 144, my translation). This description suggests a clear division of the landscape with allocated areas for humans on the one hand and animals on the other. When the human realm is thereby juxtaposed as “cultivated” with an animal realm in hiding, Schriewer unfortunately reproduces a nature-culture dichotomy that is difficult to find in hunting practice. Rather, the basic assumption must be that human and animal traces intertwine to form a humanimal landscape, as I shall demonstrate in the following.

Let us start our exploration with the most obvious components of the hunting landscape, the road infrastructure and the so-called hunting district facilities, the *Revierseinrichtungen*⁴. In most hunting districts, paved forest roads form the basic infrastructure of the hunting road network. They may also include unpaved hiking trails or the so-called *Rückegassen*, a forestry term for four- to five-metre-wide aisles at a perpendicular angle to a forest road (usually at a distance of 20-40 metres), along which the felled timber is moved to the road. Logging roads also provide paths for hunters and game, as well as clear and visible corridors for shooting at game. Finally, there are the *Pirschwege*, narrow paths made and used exclusively for hunting, often leading to hides. And all these paths, trails, lanes and roads are used by humans and animals alike, although mostly at different times of day yet remaining their character as contact zones for encounters.

4. More on *Revierseinrichtungen* at <http://hunter-anthropologist.de/2020/03/30/revierseinrichtungen/>.

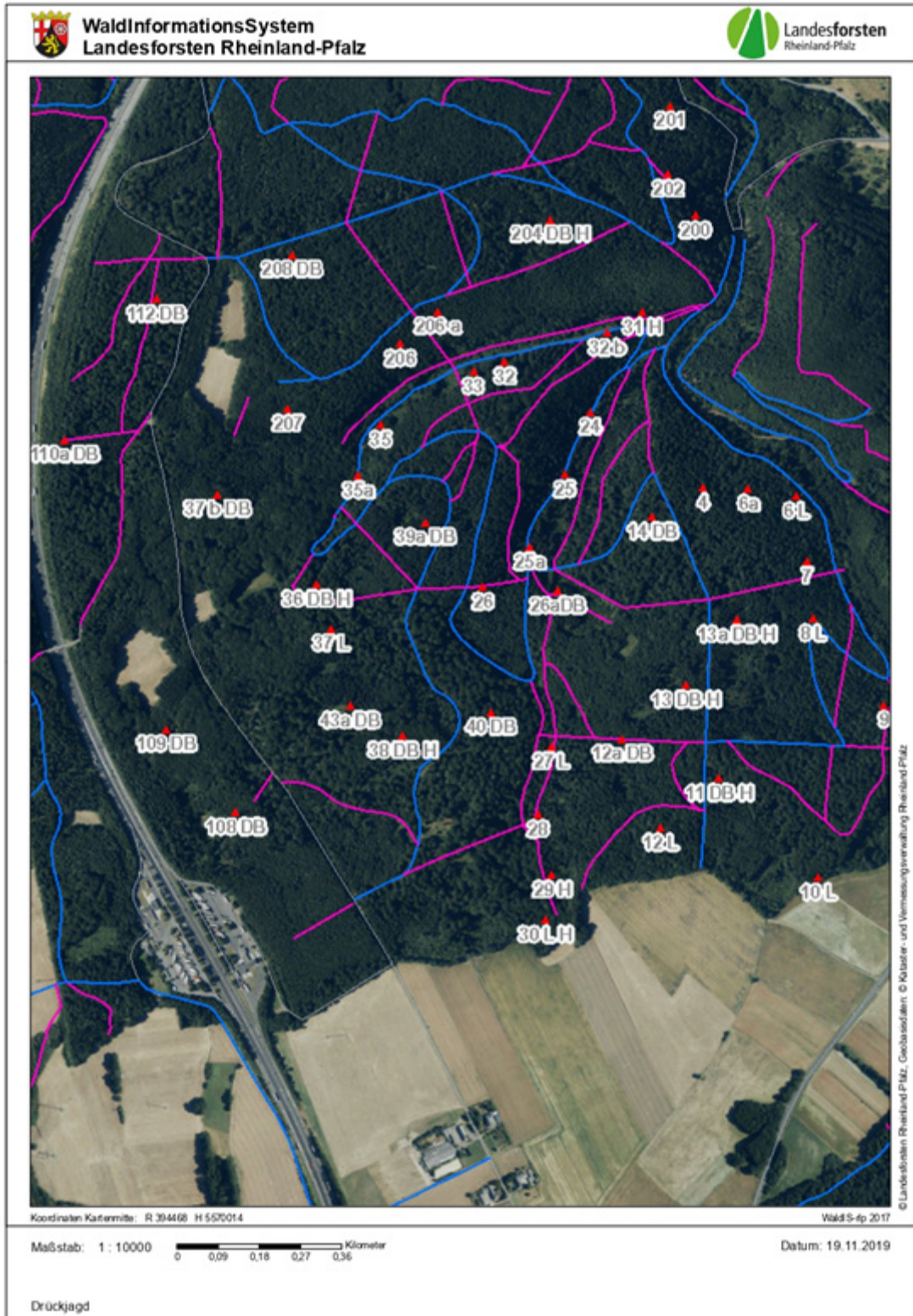


Figure 1. Map of a hunting district near Koblenz, Germany. The numbers show raised seats for hunting, forestry roads are in red. Source: Forstamt Koblenz, with permission.

Among the *Reviereinrichtungen* are mainly the hides⁵, but also salt licks, baiting stations or artificial wallows (for wild boar or red deer). As can be seen in Figure 1, the network of roads and hides cover the entire territory, almost no area of the district is left out. What is not obvious from the map is that each hide has its own clear shooting area (Figure 2). If the hide is not located directly in a clearing or at the edge of a field, smaller trees are usually felled and low branches cut within a radius of about 50 metres, so that animals can be clearly seen, and no vegetation stands between hunter and animal and could potentially deflect a bullet. Given the large number of hides, this is a not inconsiderable intervention in the structure of the forest, although not necessarily a forestry-relevant one. The positioning of the hides follows one of two approaches. Either the game is lured to the hide by other *Reviereinrichtungen* such as feeding stations, salt licks or other sensory attractants (e.g. fragrant beech tar). Alternatively, hides are placed close to animal trails and habitats such as resting sites or wallows. Usually both approaches are combined, and this again requires a thorough knowledge of the hunting ground as an animal landscape.



5. For visual impressions of hides and how they affect hunters' perception see <http://hunter-anthropologist.de/2019/01/19/ansitze/>.



Figures 2, 3, 4. Raised hide (2), animal trail (3), artificial clearing with a raised hide nearby (4).
Source: author.

Again, starting with the most obvious components, here are the *Einstände*, animal resting sites. These are preferentially located in thickets or in plantations of young trees overgrown with bramble. There, the trails frequented by wild boar take the form of a tunnel network, which leads to their *Kessel*, dips in the ground used as beds. Roe deer, too, can often be found in these thickets. Hides are often placed near thickets in order to be able to shoot incoming or outgoing game. Alternatively, hunting dogs can be sent into the thicket to drive the game out or the hunters follow their dogs in.

Clearings (Figure 4) play a role for several animal species as a source of food, for play or mating and can arise spontaneously (as a windthrow area, for example) or being created by hunters as a so-called *Wildacker*, planted with specific plants (like buckwheat or field bean) to attract game to graze there. Connections between clearings and thickets are regularly used trails or *Wechsel* (Figure 3) or rather spontaneously and individually created unique tracks.

Further, traces of animal presence or activity can be seen in a multitude of mostly very small so-called *Pirschzeichen*⁶. Ingold writes: “People are known and recognized by the trails they leave behind. Animals, likewise, are distinguished by characteristic patterns of activity or movement signatures, and to perceive an animal is to witness this activity going on” (2011: 72). From the red deer alone, for example, the medieval professional

6. More on Pirschzeichen at <http://hunter-anthropologist.de/2019/01/19/pirschzeichen/>.

hunter in Germany knew up to 74 signs that enabled him to trace age, sex, individuals, and their activities (Lindner, 1956). In addition to footprints and tracks, common signs known by hunters in Germany nowadays include: droppings (cf. Figure 5); beds (Figure 6); peeling damage to trees (Figure 7); sweep marks, where roebucks have swept the bast of their antlers on flexible branches (Figure 8) or browsing damage, bitten-off buds on young trees. Thus, if all animal activities leave signs of their presence, it is easy to imagine that for the hunter the whole landscape is permeated with a *meshwork of animal presence*.



Figures 5, 6, 7, 8. Roe deer droppings (5), roe deer bed (6), peeling damage to tree by red deer (7), damage to tree by roe deer (8). Source: author.

Two observations emerge from this initial overview: First, it becomes apparent that the hunting landscape is more than a mental map given to consciousness. It is a humanimal place that is alive and becoming, shaped by the hunters and the diverse lifeforms of the animal world. This living environment is neither a finished map nor a stage, but a worlding world in constant flux⁷, shaped by the dynamics of weather and seasons. Secondly, the hunting landscape is not merely furnished with fixed, clearly definable material objects. It is true that there is a basic structure of man-made artefacts such as hides, feeding troughs or salt licks. But there are also non-human things, such as droppings or animal kills, and above all textures of materials (tracks, sweep marks, browsing damage) from earth, water and vegetation, which interweave to form an elementary *meshwork*⁸.

2. LANDSCAPE PERCEPTION: THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

This elementary meshwork acts as an “in-between” area that points to ambiguities of the process of perception and of landscape perception in particular. Specifically, this means that perception merely ends in objects, but is not exhausted in them. Put differently, one could say that perception as an intentional act of “object recognition” (in which a perceived something can be identified, classified and named) can be understood as an outcome of a complex pre-reflexive process of perception. It is therefore necessary to scrutinize the entire process of perception and to describe it as such, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty did in detail in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1966). The cultural sociologist Sophia Prinz summarizes his concern as follows:

“He (Merleau-Ponty) is concerned to reveal the original, perceptual process of articulation by which the world, initially present as a disordered, raw being, is transformed into a multiplicity of delimitable and manageable things” (2014: 176, my translation).

7. The use of the term worlds -as a verb form of the noun world- refers to the dynamic character of a world in constant becoming. Such an understanding is fundamental to Ingold’s reflections on the notion of environment, landscape, and the weather world (2000, 2011). He draws on Heidegger’s elaborations on the “weltende Welt” (e.g. 2012: 41), by which he described the active principle of a nature as physis. However, in recent years, Welten has also been increasingly used in New Materialism (also in distinction to Heidegger, see Haraway, 2016:11).

8. I take up the issue of animal materialities in hunting in a short essay on *Materialworldblog* (Gieser, 2016): <https://materialworldblog.com/2016/11/notes-from-the-forest-engaging-with-a-hunters-world-of-materials/>.

According to philosopher Bernhard Waldenfels, this perceptive articulation process can be divided into three phases (2000: 96ff.). At the beginning, there is a bodily being-towards-the-world, which is at the same time an affective involvement and attunement. Here, perception initially begins as an indeterminate perceptible sensation of sensuously experienced environmental qualities. Guided by these sensations, the perceiving body then explores the surrounding qualities, which form themselves into sensible orders according to Gestalt principles (see below). From these, the object of perception finally emerges.

Central to this approach is that perception is less an act of consciousness than an active sentient process of exploration guided by a practical and embodied intentionality. Hunting, as a particular form of sociocultural practice, constitutes such an intentionality. As a trained habit or skill of perception, it orients hunters towards *what is* perceived, but also *how it is* perceived. If an overview of the “what” of hunting landscapes was given in the previous section, in the following I focus primarily on the “how”, that is, the articulation process of hunters’ perception. In reverse order, I first describe how perceptual objects make themselves known from a Gestalt context, using animal footprints and tracks as examples. Then, using a hard-to-recognize track on a leaf-covered forest floor, I show how the track shape is found through “sensations”. Finally, I situate the process of perception in an atmospheric context. As a counterpart to sensation on the side of the perceiver, atmosphere represents the affective structure in which the process of perception has its origin. Hunting from hides at dusk and at night illustrate this.

3. LANDSCAPE PERCEPTION AS GESTALT PERCEPTION

At the center of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception is the realization “that the field of vision, that the system of self-body-world is, as it were, traversed by lines of force of a field of tension that animate it in a magical and secretive way, here causing rotations, there contractions, there expansions within it” (1996: 72). Perception, then, does not begin with an isolated object, but with the entire visual field, which is structured and differentiated in a sensuous way from the very beginning - through practical intentionality. Individual qualities of the environment thereby recede into the background, others into the foreground, outlines are found, allow figures to emerge, which in turn, through their specific background, become a figure experienced as meaningful. This figure, however, is not a stable and finished object of perception, but is in a constant state of becoming. As the well-known example of picture puzzles shows, small changes in the focus of attention are sufficient for backgrounds and foregrounds to shift and new figures to appear in the same field of vision. This constant volatility in the process of perception also leads to the fact that always new aspects of my environment become visible while others close themselves to my perception and become invisible. Yet in the end, it is irrelevant whether

the entire Gestalt is visible, because one can already “sense” the whole through the specific composition of its parts.



Figures 9, 10. Fox footprint (9), fox track (10). Source: author.

For hunting, this process of perception can be well illustrated by the practice of tracking animals. Figure 9 shows the footprint of a fox, and Figure 10 to the right shows a fox track over a lying tree trunk. Tracking in snow like in the photo is relatively easy compared to other surfaces. The snow surface reduces the existing colours, compensates for diverse underground shapes, reproduces prints very well and are therefore easily recognizable. But how is it that a structure in the snow that at first seems arbitrary can be perceived *as a* footprint? It is noticeable that the dark ground under the snow is more or less visible in various places of the imprint and thus striking colour contrasts, which stand in a certain composition to each other, can be seen. This darker composition stands out as a foreground against the surrounding background of white snow. On closer inspection, individual shapes and outlines of the imprint then become discernible. The hunter's eye, trained on many tracks, recognizes in the individual forms five pads (one big central one behind, four smaller ones in front) and two claws (at the tip) and sees the shape of a fox print forming.

But hunters know, a track rarely comes alone, it is only an imprint of one of four feet, which are in motion and therefore leave a multitude of tracks, thus a trail. So if you

recognize the shape of a single imprint you will intuitively associate it with a larger Gestalt, the track (see Figure 10). Where is the next imprint? What belongs to the track and what does not? Is this track from the same animal or are there two walking here? Where does it lead in the context of the larger Gestalt of the animal habitat I am in?

The Gestalt context which leads from individual footprints to tracks connects animal presences with the landscape as a whole. Gestalts exist on a small as well as on a large scale, in multiple entanglements. In the picture collage (Figure 11), for example, one sees typical wild boar Gestalten: Individual footprints form into tracks; next to the tracks the earth is disturbed (*Gebräch*); tracks lead to wallows and then often show splashes of mud on the vegetation right next to them, on the way to the next *Malbaum* where the mud is scraped off boar bodies, the bark discoloured, and individual hairs left behind. A hide will be found nearby, with a *Pirschweg* connected to the nearest forest road. As hunters become aware of even a small fragment of this Gestalt, they intuitively anticipate its other components, the gaze begins to wander into the surrounding area and the body starts moving for further exploration.



Figure 11. Picture collage of wild boar tracks and signs. Source: author.

4. LANDSCAPE PERCEPTION AS SENSATION

The recognition of (man-made) artefacts in the landscape is usually a relatively simple matter. But as the last example has shown, the more one turns from artefacts to non-human things and finally to the elementary, to the material, the more difficult the process of perception becomes, and the clearer it becomes that perception actually begins in a bodily sensation, an as yet unarticulated affective stirring, of sensually experienced environmental qualities (colours, forms, movements) that make the body more receptive to further perceptual exploration. Or in Merleau-Ponty's words:

“The unity of the object is based on the foreshadowing of an imminent order which is about to spring upon us a reply to questions merely latent in the landscape. It solves a problem set only in the form of a vague feeling of uneasiness, it organizes elements which up to that moment did not belong to the same universe...” (Merleau-Ponty 2005: 20).



Figure 12. Animal track in leaves. Source: author.

A typical situation during a *Reviertgang* through the hunting landscape might be as follows (see Figure 12):

When I walk through a wet autumn forest off the trails, I let my eyes wander. Rarely will I see any indication of game directly. Most of the time, as I roam, my eyes linger on something without knowing what it is. My eyes glance back, searching an

approximate area, perhaps getting stuck again on a colour, a shape, lines that don't seem to fit. I move toward it, looking more closely. Certain colours, shapes, lines begin to connect, others fade into the indeterminate background. Until I recognize the trail as a trail in the leaves on the forest floor: the leaves that are darker; that seem to be somehow erect instead of lying; and together make a line of movement. Now that I see the trail consciously, I see it stand out all the more clearly from the rest of the forest floor and follow it all the more easily.

This example can be used to show two things. First, it shows how the process of perception is tied to the body moving through the environment. It lets the gaze wander (with moving eyes), the head turns and looks back, the whole body moves towards something and follows. With each of these movements, the Gestalt of what is perceived also changes. Actively sensing, the body seeks the optimal distance, the optimal perspective, whereby an initially vague sensation can become an articulated Gestalt in which I identify an "object" (here, the track). Thus, secondly, it becomes clear that the formation of perception cannot be understood separately from the perceiving body as the ultimate background of any Gestalt. This, in turn, underlines the necessity of linking perceptions to a particular routine of a practice, in this case the hunting practice of the *Reviertgang* or the *Pirsch* (stalking). Only through the hunter's practical engagement does he experience his surroundings as something that concerns him, that affects him, and thereby guides his further actions and perceptions.

Ultimately, however, this receptivity must be trained through regular, ongoing routines of hunting practices. Which signs are there? In what variations do they occur? How are they connected? Sensitivity to the *Pirschzeichen*, no matter how small or hidden, is therefore based on perceptual habits in a dwelled-in hunting landscape that has become familiar to the hunter. This also means that different hunting grounds - with different landscape types, game species and hunting methods - shape hunters' perception in specific ways. A hunter of pheasants and hares in the field develops different perceptual skills than a hunter of wild boar in the forest.

5. LANDSCAPE PERCEPTION IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE WEATHER WORLD

September, at dusk. I have made myself comfortable on a raised platform, at a height of about five meters, and have a panoramic view: on my left, forest, then the clearing with the salt lick in the middle, on my right, the forest road, then more clearings. Above me, stormy rain clouds are drifting and the wind blows rustling through the treetops. The sun has long since disappeared behind the trees, and the sky is rapidly getting darker and darker. Colours and contrasts are becoming more

and more blurred and it is getting difficult to recognize anything anymore. On the clearing everything is still, nothing moves, nothing can be seen while in the east the full moon slowly begins to lights up the darkening night sky. The clearing has almost disappeared into darkness now, enveloping me. Rain pelts down, thunder comes from the distance. It is only as the rain and thunder move on that I become aware of an unusual sound through the dripping sounds. Silently and in slow motion I turn around and try to see something in the dark twilight. Below me, right next to the hide, a roe deer buck is carefully moving through the leaves and is grazing.

With the perception of landscape as a sensation, we finally approach more and more the affective “in-between”, which we have already encountered as the glue between aspects in the form of the Gestalt. The hunting landscape, after all, consists not only of a path infrastructure, architecture and hunting facilities, as well as numerous animal signs. It also possesses an atmospheric presence in which perceptual processes take place and act upon it. This is not to say that perception in hunting is, as Schriewer wrote, “overall pragmatic” yet “infused with moments of a romantic experience of nature” (2015: 147, my translation). Atmosphere, which I would like to illuminate briefly here, is not an incidental by-experience, but the all-encompassing, multisensory sensed background, which gives initial orientation to perception as sensation. It is also an *animal atmosphere* (Lorimer, Hodgetts and Barua, 2019), which emerges and condenses from a multitude of minute animal presences (*Pirschzeichen*) and other more-than-human *agencies* and becomes palpable to hunters (see also Schroer and Schmitt, 2018).

As already noted by Lehmann, hunters are quite unique in that they use the forest not only during the day, but also at dawn, dusk and at night (1999: 199ff.). Hardly any other user group knows the forest at these times of day. In my elaborations so far, I have primarily referred to the hunting practice of the *Reviertgang*. If we now turn to the hunting (and killing animals) proper, dimensions of landscape perception become visible that have so far remained unnoticed: Weather and light conditions provide information about the atmospheric nature of the hunting landscape⁹. Since game is usually active at dusk and at night (also due to hunting), most hunting take place at these times. A typical form of hunting, for example, would be on roe deer, from a raised hide by a clearing in the early morning or late in the evening. Wild boar, however, often do not become active until after dark, and so they require hunters to sit throughout the night. Due to the nocturnal darkness, hunting wild boar was reserved to clear full moon nights or soon thereafter or soon before (in recent years, this has changed considerably due to the now legal use of

9. I have previously explored a hunter’s perception in the weatherworld in a documentary short, *The Beauty of Hunting* (Gieser, 2016, 10 min) which is available on my research blog, together with a short elaboration: <http://hunter-anthropologist.de/2016/05/15/thebeautyofhunting/>.

night vision devices in parts of Germany). Hunters' perception during these hunts has to cope with and adapt to these challenging atmospheric conditions. But how concretely does this change the hunters' perception of the landscape when it takes place at dusk, dawn or at night?

Questions like these have long been left out of cultural studies landscape research. Tim Ingold was one of the first to note that visual landscape perception is also a sensory experience of and in light (2011). Since light not only illuminates the material landscape, but also floods the surrounding sky, light conditions must always be considered. To be able to see correctly or well - also when hunting - thus always necessitates bodily and sensory adjustment to current and changing light conditions. It is therefore no coincidence that landscape perception at night has hardly been addressed so far (see Edensor, 2016). As I will show in the following examples, our preoccupation with light conditions automatically leads us to weather as well, for both light and perception are "caught up in the substantial flows and aerial fluxes of what I call the *weather-world*" (Ingold, 2011: 96). This has consequences for hunting:

Early May, shortly before sunrise. I sit together with D. in a raised hide by a meadow at the edge of the forest. Fog shrouds the woods around us and wisps of mist drift across the meadow, revealing only small patches of pale green. Not really good hunting weather. We look strained through the windows, are extra attentive, so that nothing escapes us in this fog. D. keeps looking through his binoculars or his rifle scope to check whether it is possible to shoot at all in these conditions. But you can actually see better through the binoculars than without them. It's cold and it's starting to drizzle and the fog is drifting back and forth around our hide.

As can be seen, atmospheres are not only linked to the material morphology of the landscape. They are in constant flux in correspondence with the dynamics and rhythms of the weather, the time of day and the season. In the course of the night, when the moon rises and moves along the sky and clouds repeatedly cross its course, in the course of twilight, when the sun disappears more and more behind the trees and the sky becomes gradually darker, enveloping the forest in ever deeper shadows, the hunters' perception must be different in each case. This can be illustrated by hunting at dusk or at night. As an approximation, a look at Merleau-Ponty's description of perception at night or of the night helps:

"When, for example, the world of clear and articulate objects is abolished, our perceptual being, cut off from its world, evolves a spatiality without things. This is what happens in the night. Night is not an object before me; it enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses, stifling my recollections and almost destroying

my personal identity. I am no longer withdrawn into my perceptual look-out from which I watch the outlines of objects moving by at a distance. Night has no outlines; it is itself in contact with me and its unity is the mystical unity of the *mana*. Even shouts or a distant light people it only vaguely, and then it comes to life in its entirety; it is pure depth without foreground or background, without surfaces and without any distance separating it from me” (Merleau-Ponty, 2005: 330).

Visual perception at night, dusk or dawn thus changes in all the three phases previously described: object recognition becomes more difficult, Gestalten dissolve, sensations gain in importance. The hunters’ observation of the landscape, the recognition of animals and finally the shooting itself takes place in such circumstances. The determining orientation aid in this process, at the latest when an animal has been sighted, is the rifle scope on the weapon, which judges the world of twilight or night by *Büchsenlicht* (literally, rifle light). The perception through the rifle scope is actually always different from the perception with one’s own eyes and is “skillfully mediated” through this technology (Grasseni and Gieser, 2019). What can I see through the scope? How much or how well can I see anything at all to be able to make a good shot? During a late evening hunt, the roe deer are often difficult to recognize as a figure (contrasts have disappeared, colours have turned gray, often you only see them when they are moving, but without details). When shooting at night under a full moon, wild boar often appear only as dark shadows against an even darker background:

December, 10 p.m. I meet up with a few other hunters for a nightly hunt on wild boar. Temperatures are slowly dropping below freezing, and we’re all wrapped up thick as we scatter to individual hides along the fields at the edge of the woods. It’s cloudy and full moon is still a few days away. Still, the night is not entirely dark as the cloud cover reflects the light from the town not too far away. The forest beside me appears as an impenetrable blackness. The field in front of me is just visible, but how I’m supposed to spot the wild boar (which aren’t called Schwarzwild or black game for nothing) in this dark expanse is a mystery to me. So I listen into the night, knowing full well that although boar are difficult to spot at night, they are all the easier to hear.

Changing light conditions - whether due to the weather or the time of day - thus not only change vision per se, but also the relationship of the individual senses to one another. Even if seeing is the primary sensory access to the landscape for hunting, it becomes clear that perception here always functions intersensorily as well and brings a multitude of sensory experiences into connection with each other, in the background of a visual

Gestalt. Hearing in particular, often complements seeing, as in the previous example or the one on September evening, when the roe buck under my hide first betrayed me by its noises. It may also happen on a *Reviengang* that you smell animals but possibly don't get to see them at all. There is the strong, spicy "umami" smell of wild boar, for example, or the "horse-y" smell of red deer.

CONCLUSION

"But what does it mean to conceive of humans "from the elements"? It means to understand that "humans live 'in the draft of the elements'" (Böhme and Böhme, 1996: 21-22, my translation).

In this essay, I have tried to bring the hunters' landscape to life by describing hunting in the draft of forest, animals, elements, weather, light and darkness. The dynamics of this *meshwork* mean that the skill of landscape perception can never be finished and complete, but - on the contrary - must evolve in attuned correspondence with these dynamics and rhythms. For this fabric permeates hunting practice in all areas, influencing the hunting landscape, hunting practice and the hunters themselves. Even though hunters actively try to bring stability to this "worlding world" (by building paths, constructing hides, setting up salt licks, etc.), it (and the animals) always eludes them. Landscape perception, therefore, in order to function successfully in the context of hunting practice, must always remain responsive. And fundamental to this *response-ability* (Haraway, 2008; Ingold 2017) are the sensory skills, trained by routine, of a sentient and sensing body as it moves through the draft of multifaceted interrelations that make up the hunting landscape.

As I joined the hunters in this landscape, I learned that training my own senses was not only methodologically necessary to access their experiences of the forest and the animals within. I also began to realize that this new mode of perception opened up new ways of understanding the world as more-than-human. It might well be that it has become theoretically established in recent years to take a variety of agencies into account when discussing human-environment relationships. Yet it is a different matter when it comes to recognizing more-than-human agencies and relations practically in the field. Sometimes one may struggle to see the wood for the trees. Therefore, research into the more-than-human needs new forms of awareness, as Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut argued when they propose a methodological intraspecies *mindfulness* as a "new mode of embodied attention and awareness" (Moore and Kosut, 2014). Such a form of awareness - like the hunters' awareness - decenters the human subject, thus enabling a *becoming-animal* in the sense of an interweaving of human and animal modes of perception.

This article can therefore be read as a contribution to the understanding and awareness of more-than-human meshworks by extending the concept of perception in two ways. First, it was temporally extended by conceptualizing perception as an articulation process from sensation to Gestalt perception to object recognition. Second, it was spatially expanded by linking the object of perception as a Gestalt with its horizon of perception in an elementary, atmospheric weatherworld. Both participant observation and the ethnographic descriptions it guides can benefit from paying attention to this ambiguous process and in-between world beyond subjects and objects. For, as Hartmut Böhme notes in his diagnosis of the present, “Our attention is no longer focused on sensing the atmospheric presence of things, but on the information-reading identification of factual content” (2000: 20, my translation). Against this background, it does not seem too far-fetched to me to suggest that the (re)presentation of animals as passive objects of human meaning attribution - which has long predominated in the humanities until recently - was not only a theoretical problem but also a methodological one. How we understand landscapes and animals in the field is linked to how we have learned to attend to them. The revival of the more-than-human world thus needs to go hand in hand with the revitalization of our senses as researchers.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Anderson, David (2002) *Identity and Ecology in Arctic Siberia: The Number one Reindeer Brigade*. Oxford: Berg.
- Bender, Barbara, and Winer, Margot (ed.) (2001) *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*. Oxford: Berg.
- Böhme, Gernot, and Böhme, Hartmut (1996) *Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft. Eine Kulturgeschichte der Elemente*. München: Beck.
- Böhme, Hartmut (2000) "Anthropologie der Vier Elemente". In: Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik (ed.) *Wasser*. Köln, pp. 17-38.
- Edensor, Tim (2017) "Aurora Landscapes: Affective Atmospheres of Light and Dark". In Benediktsson, Karl and Lund, Katrin Anna (ed.) *Conversations With Landscape*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp. 227-240.
- Genath, Peter (2005) *'Es geht fast täglich auf den Brocken ...!' Der Arbeitsalltag der Ranger im Nationalpark Hochharz aus volkskundlicher Perspektive*. Münster: Waxmann.
- Gieser, Thorsten (2016) "Notes from the forest: Engaging with a hunter's world of materials". Available at <http://www.materialworldblog.com/2016/11/notes-from-the-forest-engaging-with-a-hunters-world-of-materials/>.
- (2018) "The experience of 'being a hunter': Towards a phenomenological anthropology of hunting practices". *Hunter-Gatherer Research*, 3: 227-251.
- (2018) "Killing a wounded sow: a phenomenological approach to a problematic hunting situation". In Thiemo Breyer & Thomas Widlok (eds) *The Situationality of Human-Animal Relations: Perspectives from Anthropology and Philosophy*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- (2020) "Hunting wild animals in Germany: conflicts between wildlife management and 'traditional' practices of Hege". In Michaela Fenske & Bernhard Tschofen (eds.) *Managing the Return of the Wild: Human Encounters with Wolves in Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 164-179.
- Grasseni, Cristina (2004) "Skilled Vision. An Apprenticeship in Breeding Aesthetics". *Social Anthropology*, 12: 41-55.
- Grasseni, Cristina, and Gieser, Thorsten (2019) "Skilled Mediations: Introduction". *Social Anthropology* (Special Section on Skilled Mediations) 27(1): 6-16.
- Haraway, Donna (2008) *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Heidegger, Martin (2012) *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks*. Frankfurt: Klostermann.
- Ingold, Tim (2000) *The Perception of the Environment: Essays, in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- (2011) *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge.
- (2017) *Anthropology and/as Education*. London: Routledge.
- Lehmann, Albrecht (1999) *Von Menschen und Bäumen. Die Deutschen und ihr Wald*. Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Lehmann, Albrecht/Schriewer, Klaus (Hg.): *Der Wald. Ein deutscher Mythos?* Berlin: Reimer.
- Lindner, Kurt (1956) *Die Lehre von den Zeichen des Hirsches*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Lorimer, Jamie; Hodgetts, Timothy, and Barua, Maan (2019) “Animals’ Atmospheres”. *Progress in Human Geography*, 43: 26-45.
- MacDougall, David (2006) *The Corporeal Image. Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Macnaghten, Phil/Urry, John (1998) *Contested Natures*. London: Sage.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (2005) *Phenomenology of Perception*. London: Routledge.
- Moore, Lisa Jean, and Kosut, Mary (2014) *Buzz. Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee*. New York: New York University Press.
- Ogden, Laura (2011) *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.
- Ortega y Gasset, José (2007) *Meditations on Hunting*. Belgrade: Wilderness Adventures Press.
- Pink, Sarah (2007) *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Prinz, Sophia (2014) *Die Praxis des Sehens. Über das Zusammenspiel von Körpern, Artefakten und visueller Ordnung*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Schriewer, Klaus (1995) *Waldarbeiter in Hessen. Kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse eines Berufsstandes*. Marburg: AVK.
- Schriewer, Klaus (2015) *Natur und Bewusstsein. Ein Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte des Waldes in Deutschland*. Münster: Waxmann.

Schroer, Sara, and Schmitt, Susanne (eds.) (2018) *Exploring Atmospheres Ethnographically*. London: Routledge.

Waldenfels, Bernhard (2000) *Das leibliche Selbst. Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des Leibes*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp.