



The Matter of Air: Science ?and Art of the Ethereal

Steven Connor

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Without it, life on earth would cease to exist. Air is invisible and yet always present in one way or another, and people have long associated air with flight, spirit, transcendence and optimism. But as humans have progressively taken control of air through communications, warfare, travel and scientific exploration, the perception of air has changed. No longer is air a completely reliable part of our daily life but is instead another piece of the environment that must be watched closely for quality and purity. The Matter of Air investigates the meanings of air over the last three centuries, including our modern concern over emissions and climate change. Our concern is clearly not unfounded: from the impact of nitrous oxide to the development of gas heating and lighting, humans have undeniably had an effect on the atmosphere. Steven Connor looks at this effect by exploring radio atmospherics and poison gas as well as the fear of air pollution from cremating the dead and the worry over haze. The book also discusses the allure of effervescence and the development of explosives. The Matter of Air supplies a cultural approach to the history of air, drawing on religion, science, art, literature and philosophy to create a comprehensive history of its perception by humanity. Thoroughly researched and written with wit and joy, this book will appeal to any reader interested in a crucial combination of natural and human history.

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