



# Atmosphere and Aesthetics

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A Plural Perspective

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*Edited by*  
Tonino Griffero · Marco Tedeschini

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*Editors*

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# CONTENTS

<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Tonino Griffero and Marco Tedeschini	
<b>Part I Atmospheric Turn?</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2 Is There Such a Thing as an “Atmospheric Turn”? Instead of an Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
Tonino Griffero	
<b>3 Atmospheric Spaces</b>	<b>63</b>
Hermann Schmitz	
<b>4 Atmospheres and Moods: Two Modes of Being-with</b>	<b>77</b>
Jürgen Hasse	
<b>5 Japanese Atmospheres: Of Sky, Wind and Breathing</b>	<b>93</b>
Lorenzo Marinucci	

<b>Part II Senses and Spaces</b>	119
<b>6 The Atmospheric Sense: Peripheral Perception and the Experience of Space</b>	121
Juhani Pallasmaa	
<b>7 Atmosphere, Place, and Phenomenology: Depictions of London Place Settings in Three Writings by British-African Novelist Doris Lessing</b>	133
David Seamon	
<b>8 A Jungly Feeling: The Atmospheric Design of Zoos</b>	147
Michael Hauskeller and Tom Rice	
<b>9 Atmospheric Aestheses: Law as Affect</b>	159
Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos	
<b>10 The Lesser Existence of Ambiance</b>	175
Jean-Paul Thibaud	
<b>Part III Subjects and Communities</b>	189
<b>11 Atmospheres and Memory: A Phenomenological Approach</b>	191
Steffen Kluck	
<b>12 Atmospheres of Learning, Atmospheric Competence</b>	209
Barbara Wolf	
<b>13 Psychopathology, Atmospheres, and Clinical Transformations: Towards a Field-Based Clinical Practice</b>	223
Gianni Francesetti	
<b>14 The Lightness of Atmospheric Communities</b>	241
Mikkel Bille	

<b>Part IV Aesthetics and Art Theory</b>	<b>257</b>
<b>15 Smell and Atmosphere</b> Gernot Böhme	<b>259</b>
<b>16 Atmosphere and Taste, Individual and Environment</b> Marco Tedeschini	<b>265</b>
<b>17 Renga and Atmosphere</b> Tadashi Ogawa	<b>287</b>
<b>18 “The Atmospheres of Tones”: Notions of Atmosphere in Music Scholarship Between 1840 and 1930</b> Friedlind Riedel	<b>293</b>
<b>19 Architecture as Musical Atmosphere</b> Alberto Pérez-Gómez	<b>313</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>327</b>

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## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 5.1	The atmospheric manifold in Chinese-Japanese culture: “sky/emptiness”, “wind” and “ <i>ki</i> /breathing”	96
Fig. 5.2	The character 空 in seal style calligraphy	100
Fig. 5.3	Hasegawa Tōhaku (1539–1610), Pine Trees	110
Fig. 5.4	The historical progression of the early forms of the character <i>qi/ki</i>	112
Fig. 5.5	A mapping of the meanings of <i>ki</i> in modern Japanese	115



## Introduction

*Tonino Griffero and Marco Tedeschini*

Although the title of this volume includes the term “Aesthetics”, its chapters are not mainly devoted to the question of art. The reader should not be surprised nor suspect an error due to “clumsy” editors. Nowadays, aesthetics is no longer only a theory of art, it but has recovered its original vocation: to be a general theory of perception (from Baumgarten’s baptism in 1750) conceived of as an ordinary experience of pre-logical character. Indeed, even the most art-oriented aesthetics deals with art as an immersive object of our sensorial and felt-bodily perception. In this broader context, our purpose is to show whether atmospheres could take the prominent and paradigmatic position previously held by art in order to make sense of such pre-logical experience of the world.

In the last twenty years, the ordinary concept of “atmosphere” has been more and more subsumed by human and social sciences, thereby becoming a technical notion. This book has been conceived and compiled to give an account of this increasing popularity, which comes with a general reassessment of affective life as a proper tool to understand the human being. In many fields of the humanities affectivity is now considered crucial, and

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the concept of atmosphere has been adopted exactly because of its peculiar understanding of this side of our lives. In this sense, one may speak of an “atmospheric turn”. With this book we aim at providing the first wide-ranging state-of-the-art knowledge on this phenomenon in English.

Speaking of “atmosphere” does not simply mean focusing on human emotions. Indeed, “atmosphere” also implies a certain affective quality of (lived and non-geometrical) space. Put in general terms, an atmosphere is an emotional space that involves one’s body conceived of more as felt (*Leib*) than as physical (*Körper*): accordingly, the body that plays a key role in an atmospheric approach is not the body that we see in the mirror but the one we feel, and whose atmospheric resonances we can describe only from our first-person perspectives. The idea of atmosphere can undergo different degrees of radicality: it may imply a full independence of the emotional space from the subjective life (as suggested by Hermann Schmitz, see Chap. 3), or some dependence on the personal subject (as posited, e.g., by Gianni Francesetti, see Chap. 13). Whatever the case, the conceptual framework presupposed by the concept of “atmosphere” suggests that our affective life goes beyond the interior and subjective one. This approach proposes a solution to understand why our emotions and feelings can be (at least) intersubjectively shared.

Every chapter of our book addresses these questions from the peculiar standpoint of a specific discipline: from architecture to literature and music, from law to sociology, from pedagogy to philosophy and psychology. Of course, we were not able to gather scholars from all the disciplines in which the topic of atmospheres has been dealt with. For instance, we have collected contributions neither from anthropology nor from design, or economics, or the theories of organizations and management. This is not only due to the fact that not all invited scholars could take part in this project, but also, and mostly, due to the fact that our choice was to edit a book on “atmosphere” but also, as stated previously, a book on “aesthetics”.

We divided the book into four parts. The first one, “Atmospheric Turn?”, deals with the theoretical framework behind the concept of “atmosphere”. Tonino Griffero, in his essay “Is There Such a Thing as an ‘Atmospheric Turn?’”, asks whether the theme of atmosphere is only a short-term cultural trend, or whether it hides something deeper concerning our lives as human beings. Griffero notices that the humanities use the notion of atmosphere as a heuristic device to empirically research affects whenever it is necessary to pay attention to the vague and qualitative “something-

more” that one experiences. He then traces a history of the emergence of the concept of “atmosphere”. Lastly, he sums up his personal “atmosphero-logical” perspective on the topic.

Hermann Schmitz’s “Atmospheric Spaces” offers a short history of the concept of space, from which he derives a differentiation of spaces. He claims that it is necessary to consider the felt body as the object that lives “in” and “through” the spaces. The felt body is something that a human being can feel as belonging to them in the region of their body without resorting to the five senses. Furthermore, the chapter shows that human beings as felt bodies have developed techniques to design spaces according to their emotional and atmospheric needs. In this sense, habitation is the culture of emotions—which are atmospheres with a tendency to fully expand within the space of felt presence—in enclosed spaces.

Jürgen Hasse’s *Atmospheres and Moods* compares “mood” and “atmosphere”. He claims that these forms of emotional state are closely related. While basic moods are rooted in a personal situation, atmospheres often affect the individual from spatial and social environments. However, it is too easy to understand moods as feelings coming from the inside and atmospheres as feelings that affect us from the outside. Both have internal and external references and in both circumstances a person is confronted with their own (temporary and long-lasting) emotional states. The threshold from which an atmosphere becomes a mood corresponds to the power of a feeling that generates subjective involvement. This is what constitutes the difference between the two: there are distinct forms of subjective “being-with”, one with emotional distance and one without.

Finally, Lorenzo Marinucci’s *Japanese Atmospheres* aims at introducing three fundamental atmospheric notions deployed by Japanese culture, observing them both in their original context and through a neophenomenological lens. The three concepts are that of *kū* “sky”, *fū* “wind”, and *ki* “air” and “breath”. These apparently simple terms, however, show an impressive complexity and a wide array of meanings (which, after all, are highly coherent). Despite the risk of exoticizing non-European sources as “totally other”, this essay clarifies the potential of a cross-cultural phenomenology of atmospheres, also presenting the work of modern Japanese philosophers that have already retraced the heritage of these concepts in a philosophical perspective.

The second part of the book, *Senses and Spaces*, collects chapters concerning the manifold and multi-layered experience of space. Pallasmaa’s chapter on *The Atmospheric Sense* provides a historical, ecological, and evo-

lutionary perspective on the meaning of atmospheric experience. Atmosphere and mood are a central concern in various art forms, including painting, literature, theatre, cinema, and music. Our capacity for spatial, situational, and atmospheric imagination when reading a fine literary work is quite astonishing. Western culture has emphasized the separate functions of the five Aristotelian senses, but our most important sensory experience is the interaction of the senses, which creates the experience of “the flesh of the world”, to use Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion. We grasp entities before details, singularities before their components, multi-sensory syntheses before individual sensory features, and emotive existential meanings before intellectual understanding. Besides, precision needs to be suppressed for the purpose of grasping large entities.

David Seamon’s “Atmosphere, Place, and Phenomenology” focuses on a phenomenology of atmosphere as related to places. By “atmosphere”, the author refers to a diffuse ineffability that regularly attaches itself to particular things, situations, spaces, and environments. By “place”, he refers to any environmental locus gathering experiences, actions, events, and meanings both spatially and temporally. Seamon assumes that place and the experience of a place are an integral part of human life. In considering the lived relationship between atmosphere and place, he draws on three works by British-African novelist Doris Lessing, who in her writings regularly offers lucid accounts of place atmospheres in London, the city she emigrated to from Southern Rhodesia shortly after World War II.

Michael Hauskeller and Tim Rice examine the importance of atmosphere in understanding our experiences of zoos. Their chapter, *Jungly Feeling*, focuses in particular on the role played by sound in the production of atmospheres in the zoo context. Zoos often work hard to generate atmospheres which are appropriate to their purpose as sites for entertainment, education, and conservation, and the encouragement of environmentally responsible behaviour. Drawing on first-hand experiences of zoo visits, the chapter considers some of the different types of atmosphere created by zoos. The authors argue that zoos are atmospherically heterogeneous and complex, and face continual challenges as they try to design and maintain atmospheres in line with institutional aims and visitors’ expectations.

Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos’s chapter, *Atmospheric Aestheses*, deals with the affective value of law. Traditionally, the most easily recognizable forms of law (state law, private law, corporations law, etc.) have always been associated with an economic value, which, albeit with some unease, lies next to both the functional value of the law, as the order

provider in society, and its more idealized value as provider of justice. Law's commodity value, however, is increasingly superseded by its affective value, namely, law's ability to stage itself and communicate to the world that it and nothing else *is* the law. It has to stage itself in a consumer-oriented way, to market itself in a socially engaging way, and to package itself in a media-appetizing way.

Finally, Jean-Paul Thibaud's "The Lesser Existence of Ambiance" identifies "atmosphere" and "ambiance" and defines the mode of being of the latter. Ambiance is rooted in a fragile, spectral, and precarious mode of existence: this being the case, it exerts impregnating powers. Thibaud explores three complementary perspectives. First, ambiance can be seen as an in-between that phenomenalizes the world and makes any situation perceptible. Second, ambiance can be understood as an attunement that highlights our ability to be affected by our surroundings and affect them in turn. Third, ambiance can be conceived as a background that helps us understand how it infuses our various ways of being together. Finally, Thibaud's detailed description leads him to identify five key features for the ambiance's powers of impregnation.

The third part of the book, *Subjects and Communities*, shows atmospheric scenarios within both the subjective and the social life. In its first chapter, "Atmospheres and Memory", Steffen Kluck examines the atmospheric qualities of memory and remembrance. He inquires what kind of atmospheres are involved with states of remembrance. Empirically, the main focus of the examination is Marcel Proust's detailed description of remembrance. Overall, memory is recognized as accessible through a phenomenological analysis. The terms of new phenomenology are able to show what happens within the context of memory processes. Finally, it is also shown that atmospheres play a role both as content and as trait of these processes.

In the following chapter, *Atmospheres of Learning, Atmospheric Competence*, Barbara Wolf applies the paradigm of atmosphere and its framework to the educational situations, which are still mainly based on curricula, methods, and principles of teaching. The chapter hypothesizes that the individual way of interaction between pedagogue and child is at least as important as the above-mentioned aspects. The concept of "atmospheres" in this context demonstrates in what subtle ways children's socialization is influenced and how to use this knowledge for a positive impact. The notion illuminates elementary processes of learning not just as a cognitive function but as a guided experience in the concrete learning situation.

Gianni Francesetti's "Psychopathology, Atmospheres and Clinical Transformations" argues for a conception of psychopathology that goes beyond a symptomatic and individualistic understanding of human suffering. Starting from a critique of the dominant paradigm in clinical psychotherapy and psychiatry today, Francesetti attempts to describe how the concept of "atmosphere" can help open up a different understanding of psychopathology, diagnosis, and clinical practice. It is a paradigm shift that can lead psychopathologists onto a new epistemological ground, one that posits the relationship before the related, where subjects and the world emerge incessantly from an undifferentiated ground in which they are not yet defined.

"The Lightness of Atmospheric Communities", by Mikkel Bille, is the last chapter of this part. Bille focuses on what the atmospheric aspects of places do, in particular on how they shape a sense of community. With an ethnographic focus on everyday practices of domestic lighting in Denmark, and the atmospheres called *hygge*, Bille claims that atmospheres are not only individually experienced, but also entangled in everyday practices and cultural norms of sensing and appreciating atmospheres that connect people, places, and things in atmospheric communities. It is thereby argued that atmospheres may connect different scales of experiences from the individual to the collective, from neighbourhood to a national identity.

The fourth and last part of the book, *Aesthetics and Art Theory*, aims at displaying the difference and, nonetheless, the convergence between the two areas. In his "Smell and Atmosphere", Gernot Böhme briefly retraces the origin of the term "atmosphere" in meteorological terminology and observes that since Goethe's Age it has been metaphorically used in all European languages. This metaphorical usage expresses the idea of a tuned space, that is, a space endowed with a mood. By examining the tight connections between atmospheres and smell, this chapter aims to show that smells are crucial factors in the generation of atmospheres. The lack of distance within the experience of smelling can lead to totally getting lost in it, so that the atmosphere of smelling may become one's entire world. Thus, such an experience can be, in a sense, profanely mystical, and the simple sense of smell can coincide with a moment of pure joy.

The relationship between the human being and their environment is also investigated in Marco Tedeschini's chapter, *Atmosphere and Taste*. Here he addresses the topic of atmosphere by wondering whether this concept is compatible with that of taste. After comparing the two origi-

nal theories of atmosphere, Tedeschini argues for their need for a concept of “taste”. Finally, he discusses the first systematic though non-philosophical usage of the concept of “atmosphere”, strictly related to that of “taste”, in order to show the relevance of the latter for understanding the relationship between individual and environment.

Tadashi Ogawa devotes a chapter, *Atmosphere and Renga*, to an atmospheric interpretation of this traditional form of Japanese poetry. Analysing *Renga* has relevant cultural implications. It shows that poetry is not only centred on the “singing” subject, but it is also a collective way of creating poetry in the same place. The attunement among the people gathered to create the poem engenders the collective atmosphere within which they are immersed and is further evidence of the common root between philosophy and poetry—that is, an interest in the world and human beings.

The penultimate chapter, Friedlind Riedel’s *The Atmosphere of Tones*, is an enquiry into the use of the term “atmosphere” in Germanophone music scholarship between 1840 and 1930. She claims that the semantic scope of the term can only be understood by taking into account the full panoply of conceptual source domains. Surveying a large body of writings on music, she argues that, by using the term “atmosphere”, music scholars have sought to bring the timbral, sonorous, and voluminous dimensions of music into focus, and have ascribed it to particular tonal structures and styles such as impressionism. The author defines atmosphere as a holistically embedding and penetrating feeling, suggesting to understand it as a “mereological” being.

The final chapter is devoted to *Architecture as a Musical Atmosphere*. According to Alberto Pérez-Gómez, recent architectural theory has increasingly identified the importance of atmosphere as a primary aesthetic concept in architecture. This essay aims at properly understanding the importance of musical analogies in architectural theories throughout Western history. There is no *aporia* in the understanding of architectural musical atmospheres as both emotional and intelligible, structured and ephemeral; they are in fact perfectly open to an architecture demanding both fixity and tectonic coherence, in dialogue with a topographic situation and a programmatic deployment, one that should at best offer psychosomatic attunement for a wholesome life.

PART I

---

# Atmospheric Turn?



# Is There Such a Thing as an “Atmospheric Turn”? Instead of an Introduction

*Tonino Griffèro*

## 1 IN THE MOOD FOR ATMOSPHERES

Atmospheres have only recently started to be in great demand both within and outside of the academic discourse. Is it only a cultural trend, a cash cow or small talk that is only convincing for a short time and for unknown reasons, or does it hide something deeper? Before answering this question, usually swept under the rug by the most influential literature, one ought to show the extent of such dissemination. Here, I won't be able to give a comprehensive account of the countless and increasing applications of the notion<sup>1</sup> in all the humanities interested in understanding how to produce (or awaken, at least) atmospheres. I will therefore simply offer a first insight into them (although any overview on the topic will probably soon become outdated).

<sup>1</sup>The term comes from the Greek (ἀτμός=vapour and σφαῖρα=sphere). In meteorology, it denotes the gaseous envelope surrounding our planet and only in the eighteenth century it began to metaphorically indicate “the conditions under which real or imaginary life might flourish” (Gandy 2017, 355).

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Leaving aside, for the moment, the philosophical contributions to the topic,<sup>2</sup> one ought to mention here some humanistic fields that are not necessarily directly linked to the German philosophy of atmosphere: first of all, architecture<sup>3</sup> and urban studies,<sup>4</sup> which aim at clarifying and “measuring” (in a sense to be specified)<sup>5</sup> how cities, buildings, streets, traffic and so on pathically modulate the felt-bodily (*leiblich*) space of perceivers through sensory (not always conscious) experiences and therefore affectively influence how well or bad people live. Cities and buildings are considered as inviting characters and tacit “gestures”,<sup>6</sup> as atmospheric affordances one could experience in situ, for example, through a “parcours commenté”<sup>7</sup> based on observing, accompanying, reminding and discussing the different *ambiances* experienced. Others see the specificity of an atmospheric architectural perception in a (usually) underestimated “peripheral unfocused vision”,<sup>8</sup> also using first-person lifeworldly micrologies able to account for a deep qualitative experience of (and attachment to) a certain place,<sup>9</sup> like, just to give three examples, sailor graveyards, marketplaces and sports stadiums.<sup>10</sup> In general, it appears that a good architecture fundamentally should offer a possibility of attunement, that

<sup>2</sup> After Schmitz and Böhme (cf. *infra* §4), the main philosophers who have dealt with atmospheres include Hauskeller (1995, 2002), Hasse (2005), Griffero and Somaini (2006), Landweer (2007), Griffero (2010, 2013, 2016a, 2019b), Graupner et al. (2010), Blum (2010), Goetz and Graupner (2007, 2012), Debus and Posner (2007), Andermann and Eberlein (2011), Rauh (2012, 2018b), Rappe (2012), Heibach (2012), Tedeschini (2014), Diaconu and Copoeru (2014), Bulka (2015), Brünner (2015), Griffero and Moretti (2018).

<sup>3</sup> See at least Wigley (1998), Zumthor (2006), Böhme (2006, 2017b), Kamphuis and Onna (2007), Bressani and Sprecher (2019) and, *contra*, Leatherbarrow (2016).

<sup>4</sup> See Amphoux et al. (2005), Augoyard (1979; 2005), Thibaud and Siret (2012), Thibaud (2015), Rémy and Tixier (2016), Kazig et al. (2017), La Calvé and Gaudin (2018).

<sup>5</sup> At least since Milgram (1974).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Meisenheimer (2006), Hahn (2012), Jäkel (2013), Blok and Farias (2016).

<sup>7</sup> See especially Thibaud (2001, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Pallasmaa (2005, 2014), thus implicitly referring to environmental-psychological concepts such as “peripheral information” (Ittelson 1973) and “ambient vision” (Schönhammer 2018, 149).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Anderson (2009, 2014), Michels (2015), Seamon (2013, 2017, 2018) and, above all, Hasse (2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hasse (2016, 2018), Urich (2008). For a more detailed survey on sport as paradigmatic atmospherised socialisation through coaches and sportsmen, see Meyer and Wedelstaedt (2018).

is, a space of appearance consonant with people’s actions and habits (Pérez-Gómez 2016),<sup>11</sup> tacitly improving them.

Turning now to the arts, the atmospheric approach seems especially useful for contemporary art, which compensates for the increasing fictionalisation-virtualisation of the world, increasingly inviting the spectator to a pathic-immersive experience of its works (which at times can even be touched, tapped, scratched on the surface, etc.). It is often suggested that through art one apprehends what an everyday atmospheric experience is like in a privileged and intensified way. It is not clear, yet, when art itself is atmospheric in a more precise way: when does it arouse a “responsive” and not primarily semantic experience based on the subject/object indistinction? When does it express a specific qualitative appearance through peculiar themes and modalities?<sup>12</sup> When is it so self-referential to induce people to ask how it shows something rather than what it is? Or when (according to “institutional theory”) does it depend on the whole institutional, and in this narrow sense atmospheric, “world of art”, for example, on a critic’s legitimation or on a museum as ontological transformers of everyday objects? The list goes on.<sup>13</sup>

But it is theatre, at least since Chekhov’s reflections (1953) about the atmospheric link between stage and audience, that has long been the readiest and most multimodal model for an aesthetics of atmosphere.<sup>14</sup> Photography, in turn, seems to be atmospheric especially when its performative rhetoric builds on a transpictorial and multisensorial conception of images (Becker 2010). Something similar applies to lyrics,<sup>15</sup> film and media,<sup>16</sup> in short, to all the fields discussing if and when artistic atmospheres could be intentionally staged. Intercultural and classical studies are instead especially interested in ancient and/or Eastern models of “in-between” life dimensions (like the Japanese *ki* or *ma*), which atmospheres

<sup>11</sup> Cf. also Schmidt and Jammers (2004), Reichhardt (2009), Havik et al. (2013), Pfister (2011, 2013), Borsch (2014), Tidwell (2014), Weidinger (2014), Navarra (2014), Edensor and Sumartojo (2015), Sumartojo and Pink (2018).

<sup>12</sup> Starting from Turner’s saying “Atmosphere is my style” (extra-thing phenomena, intermittent apparitions, ephemeral effects like bright installations and land art, etc.).

<sup>13</sup> Mahayni (2002), Blume (2005), Grant (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rodatz (2010), Schouten (2012), Welton (2012), Home-Cook (2015), Griffero (2019b, 175–188).

<sup>15</sup> For a new phenomenology-based approach to lyrics, see Meyer-Sickendiek (2012).

<sup>16</sup> See Hauskeller (1998, 1999, 2002), Blum (2010), Brünner et al. (2011), Institut f. immersive Medien (2013), Vilotic (2013), Brünner (2015), Ulber (2017), Hsu (2017).

might also be based on,<sup>17</sup> while pedagogy seems increasingly prepared to acknowledge that atmospherically (and felt-bodily) (Wolf 2018) generated moods prove to be more educative than abstract methodological or content solutions.<sup>18</sup> Ethnomusicology and aesthetics of music see the ineffable but moving in musical meaning (and soundscape) as an in-betweenness resulting in felt-relations and a kind of “we-felt-body”.<sup>19</sup> These relations would be exemplarily based, in neo-phenomenological terms, on the sonic effect of presence and on the following solidary incorporation (dialogue between contraction and expansion) (Abels 2018b), whereas for others only sonic a-subjectivity and ineffability could really act as an ecological paradigm of every atmospheric experience (Vadén and Torvinen 2014).

It is well-known that psychopathology has become aware of atmospheres at least since Jaspers wrote that

the environment is somehow different, not to a gross degree, perception is unaltered in itself but there is some change which envelops everything with a subtle, pervasive and strangely uncertain light. A living room which formerly was felt as neutral or friendly now becomes dominated by some indefinable atmosphere. (Jaspers 1913, 98)

A certain psychopathology tries thus to better explain the clinical encounter through an atmosphere diagnosis, seeing it as an in-depth (and even aesthesiological) assessment of meanings transcending objective signs and symptoms.<sup>20</sup>

While geography explains (good or bad) affectively charged spaces and one’s different attachment to places,<sup>21</sup> politics and sociology interested in supra-individual emotions—at least since Durckheim’s “collective effervescence”—have focused especially on collective feelings permeating situations, community life and social structures as if they were real “emotional

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Rappe (1995), Kimura (1995), Ogawa (2001, 93–106, 2011), Hisayama (2014), Rouquet (2016).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Bollnow (1968), Lüdtkke (1998), Schultheis (1998), Düttmann (2000), Hövel and Schüßler (2005), Wolf (2012, 2015, 2019), Bredmar (2013).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Abels (2013, 2018a), Riedel (2014, 2015), McGraw (2016).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Fuchs (2000, 2013), Musikther (2005), Debus and Posner (2007), Sonntag (2013), Costa et al. (2014), Ratcliffe (2013), Francesetti (2015), Paduanello (2015–2016), Francesetti and Grifféro (2019), Grifféro (2019a).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Stewart (2007, 2011), Albertsen (2012), Gandy (2017).

regimes” (Reddy 2001).<sup>22</sup> The assessment of the interplay among emotional culture, emotional climate and the more transitory emotional atmosphere<sup>23</sup> shows that affective situations are often more compelling than intellectual ideologies and, if well dramaturgically used, could even re-democratise our public spaces (Carter 2014). Based on the same premises, management and organisation studies, advertising and marketing research<sup>24</sup> sometimes try to precisely measure the influence of atmosphere on people’s behaviour (consumers, hotel guests, etc.) (Heide and Grønhaug 2006).

Lastly, ecological and social anthropology have been recently studying atmosphere as “lawscape” or spatial justice, meaning the struggle of various bodies (animated or not) to occupy a certain space at a certain time (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2014), or an everyday background force which people dwell into.<sup>25</sup> Others, instead, see atmosphere as the multi-species experience of places and environments and, through a meteorological-affective inquiry and a special view to materiality, aim at restoring light and its artificial extension<sup>26</sup> or the world’s inhabitants to the fullness of their weather-world,<sup>27</sup> sometimes making experiments with special things (like a stratospheric balloon) of kinetic atmospheres only made possible by changing and intersecting materialities (McCormack 2013, 2018).

In summary, it is possible to state that the humanities use the notion of atmosphere as an heuristic device to empirically research affects whenever an invisible effect seems disproportionate as compared with its visible causes and it proves necessary to pay attention to the vague and qualitative “something-more” that one experiences—in short, when it is necessary to focus more on expressive *qualia* and phenomenal *nuances* of appearing reality than on the detailed material reality. I know that all this

<sup>22</sup> For a political (unfortunately mostly metaphorical) use of “atmosphere”, see Latour and Weibel (2005), Latour and Gagliardi (2006), Seyfert (2011). For a more phenomenological approach cf. Landweer (1999, 2007), Gugutzer (2012), Grossheim et al. (2014) and Runkel (2018).

<sup>23</sup> At least from De Rivera (1992) on.

<sup>24</sup> See Julmi (2015, 2017, 2018a, b). To give some example for marketing, cf. Donovan and Rossiter (1982), Bost (1987), Biehl-Missal and Saren (2012), Biehl-Missal (2013), Kazig (2013).

<sup>25</sup> See Stewart (2007, 2011), Morton (2007, 160–169).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Bille et al. (2015), Bille (2015, 2017), Bille and Sørensen (2016). But see also the pioneering approach to environmentally atmospheres in terms of sense-tonic effects by Hellpach (1911, 1946).

<sup>27</sup> See Ingold (2011, 2015, 73–78), Schroer and Schmitt (2017).

is only a drop in the ocean and I have almost certainly forgotten to mention many things. But I think I have provided at least an idea of the incredibly large impact of the concept of atmosphere on the humanities: it ends up resembling a genie that flew out of the bottle and, once settled in the cultural sphere, cannot be put back inside. Now it is time to turn to the pioneering role played by philosophy.

## 2 WHY RIGHT NOW?

But how did we get here? How did we come to reasonably assume the existence of a more specific “atmospheric turn”?<sup>28</sup> This is obviously part of a broader and—like any alleged cultural “turn”—highly contentious “affective turn” (Clough and Halley 2007) which has recently arisen in the humanities from the ashes of the linguistic one and from the failure of both the cognitivist deceptive primacy of mental states and the alleged omnixplanative model of data processing. Although in a context still lacking a reference paradigm and a specific cultural-theoretical vocabulary for studying emotional life (Massumi 1995, 88), the concept of “atmosphere” has made a brilliant career and can hardly be only explained by a sort of “bandwagon effect”.

Now, if the viability of a theory and the career of a concept which set themselves up as “new” do not irrefutably prove their scientific and innovative character, they are, however, facts that should not be underestimated. The fact that certain phenomena previously expressed by a different (or no) word may not now suddenly be called otherwise is perhaps not only a semantic shift but a real change in the overall historical *Affektkomplex* (to use Spitzer’s term). What is new is surely the extent to which the atmospheric “discourse” has become generalised through wide sectors of humanistic culture and applied more easily than the Spinozist-Deleuzian interpretation of affect (which sees it as a force expressed only by ubiquitous bodily intensities), which through its two variants (process-metaphysics and lifestyle activism)<sup>29</sup> has notoriously resulted in all the so-called affect studies.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Soentgen (1998, 72–73), Seyfert (2011, 76–79), Schützeichel (2015).

<sup>29</sup> For some arguments in favour of the latter, see Slaby (2018, 78–79).

“Where” were atmospheres, in other words, before they were theoretically “discovered” in philosophy by Hermann Schmitz<sup>30</sup> and in psychiatry by Hubertus Tellenbach (1968)? This preliminary question obviously sounds a bit realistic since it excludes both the transcendental-constructivist claim that every alleged “discovered” thing is simply created and conditioned by the author’s background feelings<sup>31</sup> and the less ambitious claim that something never exists, properly speaking, before being consciously perceived. In my opinion, an unfolding becomes possible if and only if there is first a “fold” (what “atmosphere” means) that is not constructed but autonomously offered to one’s interest. Everyone knows the traditional conflict between phenomenological descriptivism and historical-philosophical narrative. My decision to trace back the recent rapid career of “atmosphere” to a certain *Zeitgeist* is thus rather theoretically problematic, especially for a phenomenological approach suspicious towards a philosophy of culture based on the model of great narratives and therefore implying a (positive or negative) teleology.

However, even a sober bird’s-eye reflection on “atmosphere” should try to explain the reasons for its great success, thus addressing the “lack of robust historiographies” (Gandy 2017, 33) within the debate on atmospheres in the English-speaking world. Today’s boom of atmospheres might also be just the attempt to express the same old thing in other terms, that is, the omnipresence of a basic attunement that, opening to the world, influences everyone’s situatedness and well-being while also pre-structuring experiences of things and cognitive states.<sup>32</sup> It might mean the same all-encompassing world-orientation previously expressed by equally “fuzzy” and ill-defined concepts like *aura*, *Stimmung*, *ambiance*, *genius loci*,<sup>33</sup> that is, by affective concepts. In my opinion, however, such concepts are productive precisely thanks to their semantic-linguistic

<sup>30</sup>First timidly (Schmitz 1965, 40–41) and then, from 1969 on, clearly and thematically more effectively.

<sup>31</sup>The soft yet buck-passing version of this claim is the catch-all theory of co-evolutionary dynamics of language-culture and body-affectivity.

<sup>32</sup>An idea developed under the term of mood (*Stimmung*) and affective situation (*Befindlichkeit*) by Heidegger from 1927 on (1927, 1929–30), Bollnow (1941) and recently by Ratcliffe (2008), but also, with more causal-physical details (background feelings), by Damasio (1999).

<sup>33</sup>On these forerunners cf. Spitzer (1942, 1963). For a specific reinterpretation of *genius loci* as a place radiating a special atmosphere cf. Kozljanič (2004, II, 321–340) and Griffiero (2019b, 137–149).

vagueness: they are not only abstract ideal-typical categories unsuccessfully trying to systematise more chaotic and dynamic feelings (cf. Musil 1943, 1259–1279, for example) and distinguishing them as if they were “absolutely individual things” or “eternal and sacred psychic entities” (James 1890, II, 449).

Before answering to this objection I would stress that there are, for me, basically two options. The first is that atmospheres have always existed even before Schmitz and Tellenbach brought them to light, thereby clarifying a confused semantic sphere and especially building a new field of investigation.<sup>34</sup> The second is that the turn shows a phenomenon that has remained only implicit until now and that has been made fully possible precisely by today’s economic-political situation (late-capitalist, image- and information-based economy)<sup>35</sup> and/or by the overcoming of a previous linguistic-interpretative paradigm.

Let us briefly examine the second option using first Sloterdijk’s highly questionable but suggestive spherological (not phenomenological) approach. The philosopher stresses the present need of an (onto)atmospheric explication of current and multifocal forms of immunity from mimetic contagion, given that in the nineteenth century the metaphysical all-encompassing monospheres, with their only imagined immunological nature (bubbles and globes), have collapsed and been replaced by more chaotic foams (Sloterdijk 1998–2004). In so doing, he outlines an ontoclimatology that can consciously look at the milieu and the being-in-the-world only after the ecological crisis and the rediscovery of ephemeral and no longer monothematic *Erlebnis*- and scene-societies (in general pushed to a levitation atmosphere). When he anthropogenetically assumes that human beings always “create” both their place and atmospheres, which are first ecstatic and only later become residential situations, by ultimately projecting them outside of the protective maternal inside environment, he goes, however, in the direction opposite to (our) neo-phenomenological emotional externalism.

According to Sloterdijk, Modernity theoretically focuses on atmospheres, thus making explicit the implicit also in this case,<sup>36</sup> only when it becomes aware of the risk that the atmosphere may be manipulated or

<sup>34</sup> Obviously starting not *ex nihilo* but from twentieth century’s philosophy of affect in its hermeneutical (Dilthey), fundamental-ontological (Heidegger), psychological (Geiger) and anthropological (Bollnow) variants.

<sup>35</sup> In belittling and not completely acceptable terms Henckmann (2007, 76) says that the theory of atmosphere is nothing but one of superfluous needs of our affluent society.

<sup>36</sup> Schützzeichel (2015, 61) calls it an “implicit turn”.

become unlivable (“atmoterrorism”, alarmist weather reports and breaking news, etc.). Modernity replaces the lifeworld with a climatic technique or with air-conditioning, without anachronistic regrets for a naïve perceptual dimension and for an alleged natural unification, but bravely joining the “experimental age” based on “climate control” and on mixing humans and non-humans together (see Latour 2003).

One less known and yet more intriguing statement of Sloterdijk’s is that today’s attention to atmospheres is part of the greater attention to the vegetative sphere (one’s moods, skills and even diseases) made possible by a surplus of waking time. This surplus would really enable not only luxury and everyday aesthetics but also atmospheres both as lived experiences and as possible subjects of analysis. It is interesting to note that whereas Heidegger, with his phenomenology of boredom as a basic *Stimmung*, “conservatively” aimed at overcoming the levitated existence, characterised by the inability to be really moved by something, through a new mission, Sloterdijk suggests looking at today’s central role of moods and atmospheres exactly as the result of the “comfort greenhouse” of the affluent society, of its contagious demand for superfluous<sup>37</sup> and of privileged access to “where” and “how” one feels oneself.

After this partly only metaphorical understanding of the notion one should point out that its boom fits well with the most recent rediscovery of the central role of moods (*Stimmungen*)<sup>38</sup> and presentness. According to Gumbrecht (2003, 2012a, b, 2014), today’s relevance of “effects of presence (and, among them, atmospheres and moods)” marks the crisis of “constructivism” and of the “linguistic turn”—to use his words—of “ontologies of literature based on the paradigm of representation” (Gumbrecht 2012b, 20). All this

might have something to do with an everyday mode of being-in-the-world that, for most of us, fuses consciousness and software—one that suspends the experience of presence, so to speak. Perhaps this state of withdrawal has provoked an enhanced need—and an increased desire—for encounters with presence. [...] I am interested in the atmospheres and moods that literary works absorb as a form of “life”—an environment with physical substance, which “touches us as if from inside.” The yearning for *Stimmung* has grown,

<sup>37</sup> Henckmann (2007, 76, 80) claims that today’s obscurantist interest in atmospheres, defined as a “swarm of unreal ghosts” (!) produced through a dangerous game, exactly proves that their cultural removal was and is the healthy means to the self-preservation of humankind.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Pfaller and Wiese (2018) for a recent report on this “revival”.