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THE MUTABILITY AND AMBIGUITY OF THE WIND. WHAT ART FOR A QUASI-THING?

1. The wind 'personified'

Of all atmospheric phenomena, the wind is perhaps the most ambiguous and mutable. The ancients were already aware of its extreme variability in relation to factors such as intensity, season, geographic area, direction, and origin, and had accordingly elaborated detailed distinctions for various winds, giving them different names. Thus, from the beginning, the wind has played an important role in the history of western culture.

The wind is, in fact, the protagonist of many of the main events in Greco-Roman mythology and is described as various divine figures with human features, each with their own genealogy and personality. However, the conventional traits that constituted its identity are not unchangeable, and they have undergone several modifications over the centuries, some of which are quite radical.

The mutability and variability of the wind is particularly evident in the story of Zephyrus, the West Wind, which in the collective imagination is often considered the gentle messenger of spring. However, in the Homeric poems it is described as a figure with violent and ruthless traits. Some passages in the *Iliad* testify to this, for instance: «Even one steady in heart / might have been terrified. As when on a resounding beach / the swelling of the sea rises, wave after wave, / driven by West Wind» (*Hom. Il.*, IV, vv. 416-419), or: «As when West Wind drives the clouds of the rapid South Wind, striking them with a violent storm» (*Hom. Il.*, XI, vv. 321-322). The same is true of the *Odyssey*, where Eurylochus addresses Odysseus with the following words: «How might anyone avoid total destruction if somehow, suddenly, the blast of the wind should come – either South Wind or blustering West Wind – which most often ruins ships in spite of the will of the ruling gods?» (*Hom. Od.*, XII, vv. 274-277).

It would take a few centuries, Nova observes¹, before Zephyr lost its malicious and ruinous traits and became linked to the mythical story of Aphrodite-Venus, signalling the arrival of spring (Nova 2007, 23). This transformation was slow and never definitive, and certainly led to a loss of importance for the mythical context in favour of a focus on the phenomenal characteristics of the wind, primarily its blowing². In highlighting the most common artistic customs for depicting the wind in the various ages, Nova emphasises the transition from mythicization (step one) to allegorical personification (step two), up to the representation of the wind as a 'pure' phenomenon (step three). Nova also analyses the intermediate stages, the most important of which is related to the idea of the wind as a symbol of human passions and feelings.

The shift from mythicization to allegorical personification was by no means trivial, neither from a visual nor an interpretative point of view. The rootedness of the wind in the mythical dimension had in fact partially dispensed art from posing the problem of *what the image of the wind was*, since it was conceived and represented as a figure with human features.

From the fifth century B.C. onwards, however, there was a need to adopt a new iconographic practice that could account for the phenomenal aspect of the wind without completely abandoning the link with myth. This resulted in the custom of attributing to the wind – which often retained human form – some symbolic elements aimed at specifying its action and function (Nova 2007, 40). Such signs, while giving rise to stereotypical characters, suggested a new interest in the wind, with a special focus on its phenomenal aspect. The representation of the wind as an

¹ My reconstruction is freely inspired by Nova's (2007) book on the main strategies and customs of depicting the wind. According to the author, three categories serve as a guiding thread for the iconographic history of wind, namely its representation as: a) a mythological element; b) an allegory or metaphor; c) an aesthetic phenomenon.

² Investigations that, with the passing of time, became increasingly in-depth and detailed. In ancient meteorology, for example, the wind underwent an important development. In less than a century, there was a progression from the fourfold division elaborated by Hippocrates in *Airs, Waters, and Places*, to Aristotle's wind rose (*Met. II, VI*) which consisted of twelve sectors.

aesthetic phenomenon³ is, in fact, the third and last step identified by Nova, appearing in art history at the beginning of the modern age and gradually replacing the two iconographic traditions related to myth and allegory. An excellent example of the coexistence of the three trends⁴ is given by Botticelli's *Primavera* (fig. 1), in which Zephyrus lends himself to different interpretations.

We can see him portrayed full-length on the far right of the painting as he embraces and fertilizes the nymph Chloris, who will become the goddess of flowers Flora (figure immediately to the left of Chloris), thus giving rise to the season of Spring. The West Wind here has definitively abandoned the violent traits described by Homer and has instead become a metaphor for spring. We can also note that it is characterized by various attributes, some of which are immediately recognizable, while others are the result of graphic conventions consolidated over time. In particular, the swollen cheeks and bluish hue of the skin would be signs of Zephyrus' fresh breath, and the white puffs coming out of his mouth, subtle and barely visible, would symbolize his fertile properties.

³ In defining the last category of his tripartition, Nova (2007) uses the adjective 'aesthetic' mostly in the classical sense, and thus in relation to art theory. As will be seen later, the purpose of this work is also to highlight the aesthetic properties of the wind in a broader sense, i.e., from a perspective of the theory of sensory perception.

⁴ Nova uses this example to show the combination of myth and allegory in the representation of the wind. Instead, I believe that the wind in the *Primavera* has characteristics that also allude to its phenomenality. Therefore, I use Botticelli's painting as an example of the co-presence of all three depiction strategies.



Fig. 1

It is significant that Botticelli wanted to depict the wind as a demigod (mythical aspect), by linking him to the element of spring (allegorical aspect), but also by including traits that refer to his physical characteristics (phenomenal aspect). In accounting for this manifold nature of the wind, the Florentine painter reveals a new interest in it, and anticipates the trend to represent it as phenomenon. Such a tendency will culminate in the dominance of the phenomenal aesthetic paradigm within the history of art.

From the 16th century onwards, in fact, a more 'realistic' approach to the world and its manifestations became widespread, and landscape painting emerged as an independent genre. This was due to both new geographical discoveries and the rise of the experimental scientific method. One of the consequences of this was an interest in the empirical observation of the world, a change which represented a departure from what had been valued previously. From an iconographic point of view, however, this 'realist thrust' did not replace conventions and symbolism, but launched a trend towards imitation and verisimilitude that would be difficult to disregard in the future.

2. The windy phenomenon

According to Nova's reconstruction, the first artist to embody the realist thrust was Leonardo da Vinci, who can therefore be considered the emblem of this paradigm shift. The coexistence of

theory and praxis in Da Vinci's production helps us to shed light on a representational strategy that was to become widespread in the following centuries. With the famous 'sfumato' technique in particular, he succeeded in investigating «with purely graphic means the phenomenon in its essence» (cf. figs. 2-3)⁵, determining a turning point in the history of wind perception (Nova 2007, 99) and establishing a practice that found much success in later naturalistic painting.



Fig. 2

⁵ An essence that, as such, is not contingent but eternal: Leonardo's technique, by producing imprecise and blurred contours, «has the merit of dilating perception in time, since the eye needs to concentrate in order to [...] reconstruct what the graphic sign leaves unexpressed» (Nova 2007, 80). In addition to the examples given, the codices K3 and Leicester are also of theoretical relevance since they testify to Leonardo's scientific interest in the wind and its characteristics, as well as his intention to develop a dictionary of graphic signs to describe their movements. See Nova (2007, esp. 81-87).



Fig. 3

Even Dutch painting of the seventeenth century, which was focused on the representation of atmospheric phenomena «without a biblical, mythological, or historical-allegorical pretext» (Nova 2007, 111), was to some extent indebted to him. Moreover, in 17th century painting, the wind as a natural phenomenon became a generalized iconographic practice along with the tendency to give it emotional connotations that made it a metaphor for human passions and emotions. The emergence of a new approach to reality characterized by the first experimental investigations into atmospheric phenomena – which, several centuries later, led to the birth of meteorology as a science – certainly contributed to this transformation. The representation and interpretation of the wind as a pure phenomenon was thus a ‘conquest’ of modernity, in which the link with the existential dimension of the individual and the sphere of affectivity remained nevertheless very strong, as can be seen in the famous seascapes or generic landscape painting, of which Jacob van Ruisdael was an outstanding exponent (see fig. 4).

In her study on the representation of weather phenomena in early modern Dutch painting, Christina Storch (2015) points out how weather events – the real protagonists of landscape painting – were not merely a background element of the painting, but gave the landscape itself, or a part of it, a certain emotional quality. Wind, for instance, frequently played a crucial role in the paintings of shipwrecks, becoming an emblem of the misfortune and violence of nature. The theme of the ship at the mercy of the

storm (fig. 5) also found significant development in this period, so much so that it was consolidated as a metaphor for the individual overwhelmed by his own emotions (Storch 2015, 168). In other words, the landscape and the weather ceased to be a mere detail and became an expression of the individual's varied and multifaceted emotional universe. Artists began to consider sensations in and of the weather as the expression of a 'subjective bodily sensation' (*subjektive leibliche Empfindung*) based not so much on perfect resemblance to the outside world, but rather on the sensitive and emotional impression of the individual (Storch 2015, 204). Partly due to this close link between weather and *Stimmung*, Dutch landscape painting made a decisive contribution to making emotions visible, thereby inaugurating a trend that was to reach its zenith in the 19th century.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Indeed, the Romantic conception of landscape – based on nature as an expression of the divine and the absolute – plainly expresses this relationship, to the extent that weather phenomena became a mirror of human moods. We need only think of some of the most famous paintings of British and German Romanticism (figs. 6-7) which embodied, from a pictorial point of view, the concept of the ‘sublime’ theorized by Kant (1790).



Fig. 6

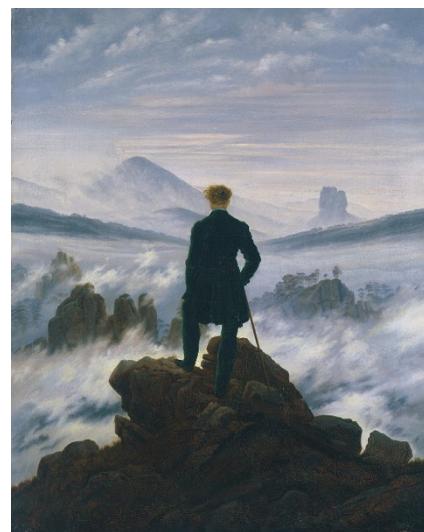


Fig. 7

In short, even if the ‘phenomenalization’ of the wind caused its partial de-symbolization, this did not mean a loss of its affective connotations. Emotional qualities that were previously characteristic of a semi-divinity, and later conveyed by metaphors or allegories, had to find a new space to express themselves within the phenomena. And even following the commencement of meteorological discoveries, as well as the growing trend towards more realistic representation, the link between nature and the emotions was never lost, but became explored beyond art, as part of the investigation into extra-artistic aesthetic experience.

3. The atmospheric experience of wind: quasi-things

The extension of aesthetic investigation beyond art theory has led to many studies in the field of the aesthetics of nature and contributed to the emergence of new areas of research, such as environmental aesthetics, in which atmospheric phenomena acquire an aesthetic dimension as a perceivable phenomenon⁶.

Within the great heterogeneity of aesthetic models and perspectives spread over the last seventy years, Hermann Schmitz's New Phenomenology occupies an original position, especially for his pre-Kantian conception of aesthetics as a theory of sensory perception. The New Phenomenology focuses on our 'spontaneous life experience', emphasizing the primarily affective nature of our sensitive relationship with reality, to which nature, landscape, climate, and weather obviously belong. One of the main and most radical theses of Schmitz's phenomenology consists in defining feelings as spatial and extra-subjective, which has important implications for our aesthetic experience of nature. To explain his theory of the spatiality of feelings and give a name to these 'externalised moods', in 1969 Schmitz introduced the concept of 'atmosphere' – later developed by Gernot Böhme and Tonino Griffero. Specifically, New Phenomenology believes that our daily perception is primarily emotional rather than cognitive and is based on the encounter and interaction with *atmospheres*, that is, feelings poured out into space that 'tone' the environments in which we encounter them. Not being psychic states⁷, but affective qualities of lived space, the phenomena of climate and weather represent the prototypical example of atmospheres because of their externality with respect to the subject.

Schmitz (1969, 98 ff.) defines such climatic phenomena as 'suprapersonal atmospheres' (*überpersönliche Atmosphären*) since they do not depend on the subject and are therefore «an excellent example of atmosphere as an unwilling feeling present in the space» (Griffero 2010, 56). Consider, for instance, the melancholic atmosphere of Sunday afternoon, a gloomy landscape, the energy

⁶ On the aesthetics of nature, see for example Böhme (1999, 2002). For an overview of environmental aesthetics and the various models of aesthetic experience of nature, see Feloj (2022).

⁷ Schmitz radicalizes the thesis of the spatiality of feelings by denying even the existence of a psyche, understood as an intimate, private world in which feelings have been internalized. See Schmitz (2009, 53-59).

of a thunderstorm, or even the emotions evoked by different parts of the day: in none of these cases can we speak of an individual subjective feeling, nor can we reduce it to the mere experience of meteoropathy (see Griffero 2010, 57). Rather, atmospheres are spatially extended and as such belong neither to the subject nor to the object, i.e., neither to the percipient nor to the perceived. Accordingly, atmospheres are something halfway between things and qualities, and can therefore be referred to as *Halbdinge* (Schmitz 1978, 116-139).

Quasi-things (*Halbdinge*) cannot be compared to mere things, although they share some characteristics with them. They are different from objects in terms of their character of appearance, their absolute eventuality, the temporal and ontological overlap between the cause and action of their manifestation, their immediacy, and their felt-bodily resonance⁸. Due to these characteristics, quasi-things are largely «strictly akin to atmospheric feelings (also and precisely in a climatic sense)» since they have neither a *where* nor a *to where* and occupy «surfaceless and in any case non-relative spaces, [i.e.] lived spaces» (Griffero 2013, 13-14).

Almost all quasi-things are atmospheric⁹ precisely because of their ability to arouse, like feelings, «an affectively tuning impression binding the perceiver to a bodily resonance» (Griffero 2013, 15), provided, of course, that feelings are not understood as something merely subjective. According to this definition, and because of these characteristics, voice, colours, the night, or the cold, the fog, the autumn, etc. are also quasi-things. From the neophenomenological perspective, in fact, meteorological-climatic phenomena are both quasi-things and atmospheric¹⁰, in that they

⁸ Through the concept of *Halbding*, Schmitz attributes an ontological reality to feelings that emphasizes their autonomy from both qualities and things. See also Böhme (2001, 61 ff). For a more in-depth overview of quasi-things and their characteristics, see Griffero (2010, 110-114; 2013, 10-14; 2024).

⁹ Atmospheric phenomena always have a quasi-things nature, but not *vice versa*. There are quasi-things that cannot be considered as atmospheres because they are not poured out into the vastness. Cf. Schmitz (2009) and Böhme (2001, 63).

¹⁰ The distinction between the two categories, according to Schmitz, lies in whether or not one is felt-bodily grasped by a certain phenomenon. When this being-grasped (*leibliche Ergriffenheit*) occurs, the quasi-thing effectively becomes a feeling for us. See, for example, Schmitz (2014, 38-39).

affectively ‘tonalize’ the surrounding space and interact with the subject in the form of an affective and felt-bodily involvement. The emotional experience of such phenomena is independent – at least in its pure form¹¹ – from the inner psychic-individual feelings. The subject indeed confronts, undergoes, accepts, or rejects an affective state perceived as external to him.

Within the broad spectrum of these phenomena, the wind occupies a prominent place, as its characteristics (including its physical ones) are emblematic of ‘atmospheric quasi-thinghood’ (Griffero 2013, 15). This paradigmatic nature is linked above all to the immateriality of the wind and its elusiveness, whose breath – the atmospheric medium *par excellence* – can convey specific affective qualities.

In ordinary perception, we can use many expressions to distinguish these experiences; one can speak, for example, of a melancholic, sad, warm wind, or a joyful, aggressive, violent wind, which the subject experiences as something that does not belong to him. This would be a demonstration that some subjective experiences do not come from the subject but have their cause in a quasi-thing. The encounter with a quasi-thing like the wind, as Böhme (2001, 61-62) observes, determines an affective involvement with the surrounding environment that transcends the boundaries between the physical and affective spheres, while also revealing a pathic aspect of perceptual experience. Wind, in other words, being neither ‘moving air’¹² nor a projective feeling but rather an ‘ecstasy’ (Böhme 2001, 131-144) «able to atmospherically affect the surroundings» (Griffero 2013, 9), clearly shows the neophenomenological thesis of the spatiality of feelings¹³.

¹¹ According to Griffero (2010, 144; 2021, 38 and *passim*), in addition to ‘prototypical atmospheres’ (objective, external, unintentional), there are also ‘derivative atmospheres’ (objective, external, intentional), and lastly, ‘spurious atmospheres’, which are subjective and projective. According to Schmitz, the last two categories would not qualify as atmospheres at all.

¹² See Griffero (2020, 34; 2024) and Schmitz (1978, 118).

¹³ «Air we breathe is still a very concrete experience, both climatic and affective» (Griffero 2013, 8). On the ‘windy paradigm’, see Schmitz (1978, 117 ff.) and Griffero (2010, 55 ff.; 2017, 14 ff.; 2020; 2024).

4. Atmospheres in art

The thesis on the quasi-thingsly nature of atmospheric phenomena is, in my opinion, the great novelty of New Phenomenology, as it transcends the physicalistic character of things and recomposes the gap between the phenomenal and the affective in an original way.

The concept of atmosphere, in fact, restores to phenomena an emotional dimension that was previously guaranteed by the mythical-allegorical structure, as seen in the Homeric poems¹⁴. However, Schmitz does not reconstitute the archaic paradigm, but shifts the reflection to the realm of sensible experience, i.e., to the sphere of 'actual reality' (*Wirklichkeit*) which concerns 'how we feel' in our environments¹⁵.

The aesthetic experience promoted by New Phenomenology considers feelings-atmospheres as the qualitative-sentimental dimension of our ordinary perception, and for this reason does not attribute any primacy to art. Despite this, Schmitz (1995) acknowledges that works of art can irradiate atmospheres; they are considered capable of transmitting certain feelings to the subject through a mechanism of 'incorporation' (*Einleibung*), i.e., by establishing a felt-bodily-emotional dynamic with the percipient, even without possessing a *Leib* themselves. This means that feelings-atmospheres can, from the space of vastness (*Weiter Raum*), 'condense' into sensible things such as artworks, which Schmitz calls 'aesthetic configurations' (*ästhetische Gebilde*)¹⁶.

From this perspective, it is evident that art transcends its merely aesthetic value and assumes a far more important role: enabling the (affective before cognitive) understanding of our *Lebenswelt* as an emotionally attuned universe. In other words,

¹⁴ Precisely because of the radical externalization of feelings, also evidenced by the deification of atmospheric phenomena, Schmitz recognizes in Homer a conception of feelings as atmospheres, i.e., as affective qualities not (yet) internalized in the human psyche. See Schmitz (2009, 53-54). On the general relationship between weather and feelings-atmospheres, see Schmitz (1969, 98-106; 361-367) and Böhme (2011).

¹⁵ See Schmitz (2009, 45-51)

¹⁶ Schmitz explains this phenomenon in terms of a 'settling' (*niederlassen*) of emotional tones in aesthetic objects. Cf. Schmitz (1995, 20). Elsewhere he also speaks of 'condensation', borrowing the term from the *Gestalt* psychologist Wolfgang Metzger (see Schmitz 2009, 103).

thanks to art, it is possible not only to experience quasi-things within the narrow (though fundamental) aesthetic realm but also, more broadly, to shed light on our affective relationship with the world. By their nature, works of art have the ability to select *ideal* conditions of experience, where the subject's gaze (and felt-body) is not 'distracted' by other contingent factors, but is entirely within the phenomenon, wholly concentrated on it. In everyday experience, on the other hand, the affective involvement with atmospheric phenomena is often underestimated or even goes unnoticed, as we are typically overwhelmed by the practical-pragmatic demands that commonly accompany our 'dealings' (*Umgang*) in the world, to use Heidegger's term. From an atmospherological perspective, therefore, the advantage of art is that it «selectively intensifies ordinary perception and exposes the viewer to global tests in terms of the affective dimension triggered by the perception of closed and discrete (paintings, sculptures, texts, or installations), but above all ephemeral and often intermittent, i.e., quasi-thingsly entities» (Griffero 2023, 293).

Paintings or representations of climatic and meteorological phenomena are atmospheric due to this 'resonance power' of art, through which it reveals itself as both a *generator* of atmospheres (cf. Böhme 2001) and as a medium that brings out the dual (phenomenal and affective) aspect of quasi-things, expressing and enhancing their atmospheric character through images. This raises the question: Are all forms of art capable of both generating atmospheres and revealing the dual nature of quasi-things?

While the first question can be easily answered affirmatively – since inducing certain (including emotional) effects on an audience should be a prerogative of all forms of art –, the second question requires further exploration.

First and foremost, it is necessary to specify that the two queries arise from complementary yet opposite perspectives: the first is entirely focused on the *viewer*, while the second is centered on the *artist/creator*. Therefore, addressing the second question necessitates theoretical reflection not on the *effects* but on the *ways* by which a quasi-thing can be adequately represented. Essentially, it is crucial to identify which creative processes most effectively emphasize the intermediate nature of *Halbdinge*, perpetually situated between objects and *qualia*, and between subject and object.

As expected, this 'middle position' cannot be grasped by any ordinary form of art but demands a unique kind of representation that can translate such an ambiguous and elusive theoretical concept into visual imagery, thereby making it perceptible to the viewer. In the following paragraph, I will propose a shift in perspective, focusing on the aesthetics of *production* rather than *reception*, and reflecting more broadly on which depiction techniques might be theoretically most effective for representing these phenomena in their quasi-thingness.

5. What art for a quasi-thing? Beyond subject and object

Within a neophenomenological framework, it seems that some artistic forms are more atmospheric than others. If, as I have tried to demonstrate, the primary characteristic of quasi-thingly phenomena consists primarily in a) an affective 'value'¹⁷ inseparable from the phenomenal aspect, and b) in transcending the subject-object dichotomy¹⁸, then many genres and artistic styles fail to adequately express the atmospheric. For this reason, I will suggest some examples where, instead, it seems to me that the phenomenon of wind reveals itself, through images, as an emotionally toned atmospheric manifestation.

Firstly, it is necessary to exclude artistic forms that employ mythological or allegorical figurative devices, as they are not suitable for representing the atmospheric. Therefore, attention must be exclusively directed towards the third iconographic category identified by Nova. The focus will thus be on wind as an aesthetic phenomenon within modern and contemporary painting.

Secondly, it is necessary for the depiction of the quasi-thing to emancipate itself from dependence on the subjective dimension, freeing itself from the introspective 'sin' that has over millennia contaminated how figurative art has understood itself¹⁹.

¹⁷ According to Scheler and Hartmann's interpretation of the term.

¹⁸ This concept can be expressed with the term 'in-betweenness', which refers to the 'intermediate' condition of the atmosphere – its position *between* inside and outside, thing and quality, subject and object. See for example Griffero (2010, 121).

¹⁹ Schmitz not only opposes the dogma of introduction but also critiques the entire prevailing paradigm of Western thought, which he labels as

In this regard, let us compare two paintings shown above: Turner's *Bell Rock Lighthouse* (fig. 6) and Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (fig. 7). What is the difference between the two in atmospheric terms? Far from offering an art-historical reading of the paintings, I will simply reflect on the different potential these two images possess and reveal the quasi-thingness of wind.

To begin, it should be pointed out that romantic art – because of its subject-oriented lyricism – does not seem to be an ideal candidate. In fact, although Romanticism exalted the sphere of feelings and assigned a strong emotional value to its relationship with nature, it ascribed the aesthetic experience to the pure expression of the lyric ego; to pure subjectivity that overwhelms nature, landscape, climate, and weather. Even the Kantian sublime, of which Friedrich's *Wanderer* seems to be the pictorial model, expresses nothing more than a self-regarding aesthetic emotion, and not an affective quality of the landscape itself²⁰. Atmospheric art would instead be that which is capable of expressing, not necessarily consciously, the indistinction between subject and object, describing «not so much the objects as their predualistic 'in between'» (Griffero 2010, 83).

Therefore, from a neophenomenological standpoint, atmospheric art is only that which represents the wind, as far as possible, in its 'phenomenal nakedness', that is, without mythologising, allegorising or metaphorizing it. As a quasi-thing, the affective power of the wind lies in its being a pure phenomenon, and it is precisely in this way that an atmospheric art should also conceive it.

Returning to previous examples, the Turnerian painting seems to be 'more atmospheric' because a wind-whipped sea dominates the scene, without incursion of the human figure 'invading' the landscape with its own subjective imprint, as seems to be the case in Friedrich's work. Generally, however, the Romantic

'psychologicist-reductionist-introjectionist objectification' (See for example Schmitz 2009, 55 ff.).

²⁰ As it is well known, the concept of the *sublime* set out in the *Critique of Judgment* (Kant 1790, § 25-27) does not refer to nature itself, but is the name for that particular aesthetic emotion that human beings experience when confronted with the overwhelming magnificence of certain natural or artistic phenomena. The sublime, in other words, does not correspond to a quality of nature, but is an emotion entirely internal to the subject.

interpretation of natural and climatic phenomena, which culminates in the concept of the sublime, has little to do with the affective (and pathic) aesthetics of nature proposed here.

Jumping forward about a century, we can observe how 20th-century art, particularly avant-garde movements, experimented with new forms and possibilities of artistic creation. In the case of representing natural phenomena, it became increasingly common, even outside the landscape painting, to find artworks where the subject becomes ever more marginal, sometimes disappearing entirely. Due to this characteristic, contemporary art seems to convey, much more adequately than Romantic art, the 'middle position' of quasi-things. This is especially true because contemporary art often dispenses with symbolic-metaphorical elements, staying very close to the phenomenon or approaching its subjects in a highly abstract manner.

For example, let us consider two contemporary paintings (figs. 8-9) by the German artist Gerhard Richter, whose work since the 1960s has focused on representations of nature in different climatic and landscape contexts.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

By using a variety of techniques, such as drawing, photo painting or overpainted photography, Richter has depicted generic landscapes, seascapes, snowscapes, cloudscapes, and alpine landscapes. With a few exceptions, his paintings do not contain humans, and so their power to transmit atmospheres is not linked to a symbolic background; his works have no subjective 'colouring', and express a «serene, unemotional, and thoughtful quality, which is supported by their intellectual, ultimately unromantic distance with which they confront us» (Lotz 2015, 203-204). Richter's paintings remain strictly «bound to the logic of the visual» and do not present any cultural or religious references, but are conceived and realized in a descriptive, almost phenomenological manner, referring to the phenomenon as 'actual fact', to quote the famous definition by Joseph Albers (1963). In other words, the painter lets the phenomena reveal themselves to us with their own affective qualities and emotional force²¹. Richter, therefore, seems to find a compromise between

²¹ The absolute prominence of the wind, or of other phenomena, would highlight the pathic aspect of the sensory experience in which the subject abandons himself to the atmospheres he encounters. Behind this dynamic there is a downsizing of the subjective dimension, which seems to me of great

the psychologism of the subjective and the coldness and neutrality of the objective. He produces works which are not symbolic, but phenomenal – fully atmospheric representations in which the wind appears as a quasi-thing.



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

interest and topicality. On the concept of *pathic*, see especially Griffero (2016; 2019).

Certainly, the works of the German artist are just one example of how painting can represent the phenomenon of wind in its quasi-thingness. In general, every work of art in which atmospheric phenomena are protagonists seems best suited to express the semi-objectivity and emotional connotations of a quasi-thing. Furthermore, given the intangibility of the phenomenon, the representation of the wind-atmosphere is often indirect, and is achieved by depicting its effects such as the rippling sea, as in Richter's paintings, the swaying of trees, as in Felix Vallotton's *The Wind* (fig. 10), or by conveying a more general idea of dynamism, as in the abstract painting by Friedhelm Meinass (fig. 11). In each of these cases, the effects of the wind are represented in physical terms, but they also evoke an emotional (and potentially felt-bodily) engagement of the perceiver, especially through the use of forms and colors.

6. Conclusions

Through parallelism with drawing and painting, I have tried to demonstrate that the mutability and ambiguity of the wind have been expressed in various ways, with different purposes of representation corresponding to the worldviews of each period. Occasionally, it was art itself that inaugurated certain trends, while at other times it was only the subsequent visual realization of cultural movements and transformations. Among these modes of representation, particular attention has been devoted to depicting the wind as an aesthetic phenomenon, where the image clearly reveals both its physical aspect and its manifestative nature.

Secondly, starting from the definition of 'quasi-thing' offered by Hermann Schmitz, I have sought to identify, in figurative art, those expressive modes that best enable the representation of the windy phenomenon in its quasi-thingness. I have also emphasized how the concept of *Halbding* is necessary to shed light on an atmospheric aesthetics, whose aim is not to elaborate a theory of beauty or art, but to experience the affectivity intrinsic to quasi-things within a circumscribed and privileged context such as the artistic one. From this point of view, graphic arts are not only able to offer an image of the atmosphere but prove to be a valuable tool for approaching and understanding the neophenomenological theory of atmospheres thanks to their visual immediacy and the ability to convey emotions.

Finally, through the brief description of some paintings, I aimed to illustrate the potential characteristics of atmospheric art, which not only makes the indistinction between subject and object its constitutive character, but also treats every affective impression, tone, color, or emotional disposition (in a word, every *Stimmung*) as a property belonging to the phenomenon. This seems to be, in short, an art of the quasi-thing.

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