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WEATHER, CLIMATE, AND ATMOSPHERE. AN APPLICATION TO THE LANDSCAPE

Climate, then, is the agent by which human life is objectivised, and it is here that man comprehends himself; there is self-discovery in climate. (Watsuji 1935, 14)

1. Introduction

This article aims to determine how and to what extent meteorological and climatic phenomena influence and modify the affective tone (understood as the 'atmosphere') of a landscape. Before I proceed, two clarifications are necessary regarding the meaning I will attribute to the term 'landscape' and the perspective of my investigation.

First, I will use the concept of landscape in a 'canonical' sense (partially inspired by its use in landscape painting), considering it as a portion of nature with specific climatic and morpho-geographical features that foster a contemplative attitude rather than an instrumental one. Second, the perspective I will adopt is exclusively aesthetic-phenomenological, particularly inspired by the New Phenomenology of Hermann Schmitz, who has devoted some reflections to the climate (also in the meteorological sense).

The first text in which Schmitz concentrates on this subject is titled *Der Gefühlsraum* (1969). In this work, he incorporates the concept of 'climate' into the more meaningful and central concept of 'atmosphere', around which he formulates an elaborate philosophical theory that other authors later expanded and refined. Specifically, Schmitz understands climate as a 'supra-personal atmosphere'. He portrays it as a dimension of existence that wields a powerful and undeniable influence over humans. Its supra-individual nature makes climate not just one of many atmospheres but the *prime atmospheric model* because of its inherent externalism and the emotional impact it has on individuals. The extra-subjective character is, in fact, the primary feature of atmospheres, which Schmitz has defined (from 1969 onwards) as spatially diffused affective tones characterizing the

primary perceptual mode of our experience of the world. In this way, he advocates for and defends a radical affective externalism, which effectively frees the subject from the (typically Western) role of being the sole holder and creator of emotional states, responsible for giving shape and meaning to the inert contents of the world.

Interpreting feelings as atmospheres allows us to conceive of them as something that is, first and foremost, 'in the air'. Atmospheres are indeed the basis of sensory perception, capturing and affecting the subject from the outside. Although this aspect is often immediately evident in our perceptual experience, it is usually explained through projective, associationistic, analogical, or imitative criteria, in which everything we feel is seen as subjective content projected onto the world. Given this, the questions guiding my reasoning are the following: Is it possible to support an opposite thesis, namely, that feelings are primarily *out there* and not *in here*? And finally, if we choose to abandon projectivist theories, must we return to the romantic principle of an entirely animated nature, or is there a *third way*?

To address both questions, I will turn to the neophenomenological theory of atmospheres, which is distinct from the dominant contemporary theories on emotions (all of which are strongly oriented towards psychological and cognitive factors) as well as from a romantically based panpsychism characterized by transcendent features. The Schmitzian theory, in fact, fundamentally denies the existence of a psychic dimension. However, it does not seek to explain its viewpoint through an ontological-causal principle; rather, it focuses on describing what is immediately (i.e., without mediation[1]) felt (*gespürt*) in everyday experience, particularly concentrating on the 'first impression'. The New Phenomenology asserts that our surroundings play a major role in shaping our inner experience, as they emotionally

[1] In the sense that Lambert Wiesing gives to the so-called 'myth of the mediate', referring to the belief, common in contemporary philosophy, that access to the world is always mediated, that is, realized only through means such as actions and entities. According to the author, it seems that only phenomenology escapes this approach, as «there is hardly a dominant position in contemporary philosophy that could not be considered interpretationist». All other systems we use to explain the world «possess only mediate access to their reality, even if the systems themselves have no awareness of this irreducible mediation» (Wiesing 2009, 22, 21).

color our experiences, which are then felt within the fundamental 'resonating chamber' (*Resonanzboden*) of our felt-body (*Leib*). Consequently, the environment, in its broadest sense, becomes the primary realm for experiencing and living the atmospheric nature of emotions, undermining the traditional introspective paradigm that prevails in our worldview[2].

Within this theoretical framework, the concept of landscape also takes on a unique centrality, holding a distinctive place not only in Schmitz's theory but also in the most well-regarded and influential discussions on the subject. A preliminary, broad distinction between the two terms pertains to their semantic domains:

> The environment is a physical-biological notion that can be described in objective, scientific terms, while the landscape is a perceptual, experiential element that always includes the view of a territory by a subject and cannot be reduced to its physicalistic foundation but arises from it. (D'Angelo 2021, 44)

This clarification allows us to refine our field of study by considering the landscape as a distinct 'configuration' of the environment. Additionally, at least two other distinguishing factors contribute to the definition of landscape: its contemplative nature and its 'bounded visuality'. Both aspects are critical for the phenomenological perspective as well, as they focus on the emotional nuances 'encountered' in the experience of space.

Given this, we could describe the landscape as the result of an aesthetic[3] encounter with the environment, where each element gains new meaning in light of the perceived emotional tones. According to the atmospheric phenomenological perspective, in fact, a landscape is mainly defined not by its natural or geographical characteristics but, rather, by the affective relationship we establish with it. This is why, according to Schmitz, the basic classification of a landscape is based on the emotional qualities assigned to it, such as sorrow, joy, melancholy, nostalgia, fascination, charm, and so forth.

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[2] Paradigm that Schmitz defines as 'psychologistic-reductionistic-introjectivistic'. Cf., for example, Schmitz (2009, 53-59).

[3] The term *aesthetic* in this context should be interpreted according to the meaning given to it by Gernot Böhme in recent decades, i.e. as related to sensory perception (Cf. Böhme 2001).

But what do these affective qualities depend on? The Schmitzian theory does not view them as the result of the projection of subjective feelings. Instead, it acknowledges that every environment is inherently *emotionally charged*, although it may be experienced in a harmoniously or discordantly affective manner depending on the emotional and bodily disposition of the perceiver (cf., for example, Griffero 2021, 95). From this viewpoint, it is not the subject that 'determines' the mood of a landscape; instead, it is the atmospheres inherent in the landscape that establish this. Additionally, these atmospheres are not arbitrary but are closely tied to natural elements or environmental configurations that can generate or suggest specific affective tones.

From this perspective, climate and weather[4] play a crucial role. I aim to explore how meteoclimatic phenomena shape the 'physiognomy of the landscape', significantly influencing the moods that the landscape radiates and thereby modifying the way we experience and interact with it. I will delve into the primarily emotional dimension of landscape experience and examine the affective dynamics between subject and object, perceiver and perceived, living and inanimate, while revisiting and reversing the conventional 'power relations' between these two poles. To begin, I will investigate the connection between the landscape and its emotional tones through a brief analysis of the 18th and 19th-century *topos* of the so-called '*Stimmung* of the landscape'.

2. The Stimmung of the landscape: Simmel's view

The term *Stimmung*, philosophically significant and etymologically intriguing due to its musical resonance, is often considered an untranslatable German word. Philologist Leo Spitzer (1963), who provides the most reliable and detailed reconstruction of the word's semantic universe, traces its original meaning back to the concept of 'universal harmony' from Pythagorean origins (later adopted by Platonism). This suggests that *Stimmung* represents a German-language reworking of this idea. In his detailed and complex analysis, Spitzer examines several key stages in the

[4] From a (neo)phenomenological perspective, there is no need to differentiate between climate and weather, which is instead essential in geography and atmospheric sciences. Therefore, I will consider the two terms as somewhat interchangeable or occasionally use the adjective 'meteoclimatic'.

history of the term. He shows, for example, how the term moves from Greek to Latin, acquiring the meanings of *temperamentum* and *consonantia* and finding applications in the cosmology and musicology of the time[5] before gaining a specific meaning within the philosophical tradition of the 18th century. During this period, due to the spread of Enlightenment ideas and the de-Christianization of Europe (as Novalis noted in 1799), the term lost its original musical and 'harmonic' meaning but nonetheless claimed a role in the aesthetic and philosophical realm[6].

According to Kant, *Stimmung* becomes the «proportionate accord which we require for all cognition and which we therefore deem valid for everyone who is so constituted as to judge by means of understanding and the senses in combination» (Kant 1790, 50). However, in the following century, a development crucial for our purposes takes place. Romanticism (as seen in the works of Schiller and Fichte) imparts a lyrical-sentimental quality to *Stimmung*, making it, in every respect, a characteristic of the *Gemüth*[7]. From the 19th century onwards, the term takes on both affective and harmonic-musical nuances, making it a bridge between microcosm and macrocosm, above and below, inside and outside. Its semantic richness is such that in the rest of the Western world, there is no

> term that would express the unity of feelings experienced by man face to face with his environment (landscape, Nature, one's fellow-man), and would comprehend and weld together the objective (factual) and the subjective (psychological) into one harmonious unity. (Spitzer 1963, 412)

Spitzer argues that no other language has a term that integrates both the transience of an emotional state and a stable attunement of the soul, both the inner subjective realm and the emotional tone that permeates a given space. Because of these attributes, it is the word *Stimmung* that best captures the relationship between

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[5] In German, *Stimme* means 'voice', and *stimmen* refers to the action of 'tuning' a musical instrument. This involves finding a concordance among relational elements to achieve a harmonious state.

[6] On this topic, see also Moretti (2014).

[7] I am following the entry written by Wellbery (2003), which traces the development of the term from the 19th century to the present day, reaching up to Schmitz and Böhme.

humans and the living nature, as conceived of and portrayed by Romanticism.

The dimension where this affective relationship and mutual influence between humans and the environment is particularly evident is precisely the landscape, which is not a passive perceptual object before us (*Gegen-stand*) but emerges as a genuine *experiential dimension* in which we are actively involved:

> For a German, *Stimmung* is fused with the landscape, which in turn is animated by the feeling of man – it is indissoluble unit into which man and nature are integrated. The Frenchman can neither say **l'humeur d'un paysage* nor **mon atmosphère* (at least not without expressed justification), whereas the German has at his disposal both 'the Stimmung of a landscape' and 'my Stimmung'. (Spitzer 1963, 412)

It is not by chance that the philosophy of landscape, which essentially starts with Georg Simmel, is linked to the concept of *Stimmung*. This word is associated with the idea of a sentimental unity felt within the environment, which we might also describe as 'atmosphere'.

In the essay *Philosophy of the Landscape* (1913), Simmel employs the term *Stimmung* to characterize the 'spiritual tone' that arises from the array of elements comprising the landscape, thereby defining the perception of this specific aesthetic object as an emotional experience. It is important to clarify that, for Simmel, the landscape gains aesthetic value not merely as a pictorial representation (as some traditions suggested) but primarily and especially in ordinary perception, where «a range of natural phenomena spread over the surface of the earth is comprehended by a particular kind of unity […]. The most important carrier of this unity may well be the 'atmosphere' […] of a landscape» (Simmel 1913, 26)[8]. Accordingly, emotional intonation represents an identifying quality of the landscape that emerges «only at the precise moment of being seen as a unitary phenomenon, and not as […] the mere aggregate of disparate pieces» (Simmel 1913, 27). Simmel highlights the external and elusive nature of this emotional intonation (cf. Simmel 1913, 26-27), yet he does not consider it a trait exclusive to the objective world. Rather, he

[8] Instead of the term 'atmosphere', the English translation uses 'mood'. Considering the external and undeniably non-subjective aspect of this intonation, I chose to translate *Stimmung* as 'atmosphere'.

describes the atmosphere of the landscape as an expressive property that exists 'in potency' and that becomes active only through the perceiver's unifying act. In other words, *Stimmung* is «an exclusively human act of consciousness» that «can thus reside only in the emotional reflexes of the beholder and not in *unconscious* external objects» (Simmel 1913, 27; emphasis mine).

The atmosphere of a landscape is indeed objectively recognizable within the landscape itself. However, it remains a product of subjectivity, as it is tied to the observer's unifying and perceptual abilities. This hybrid approach enables Simmel to reject a purely projective perspective and instead embrace an 'intermediate' view, which considers the landscape as the outcome of an interaction (*Wechselwirkung*)[9] between subject and object. In this view, the external environment, through the *spiritual character* of the landscape, elicits a deeply subjective feeling in the observer. On this point, the author specifies:

> Landscape exists only through the unifying powers of the Soul, as the intertwining of something given with our creative capacities. It is something that cannot be expressed through mechanical analogies. Mood thus attains its whole objectivity as landscape from within the scope of our formative acts. Since mood is a distinct expression of, and specific dynamic within, these acts, it gains its full objectivity in and through landscape. (Simmel 1913, 28)

Moreover, the landscape is perceived as a unity through the 'delimiting gaze' of the subject, and it is precisely through the act of framing that the landscape «comes into being in a process whereby the Life that pulsates within our perceptions and emotions tears itself away from the homogeneity of nature» (Simmel 1913, 23), separating itself from the whole and standing out from its environmental 'backdrop'. In this sense, the landscape emerges as a modern concept[10], coming into being only when man develops a new sensibility that enables him to «tear away from that unitary feeling of the whole of nature» and enabling nature itself to be «transfigured into an individuated 'landscape' by the human gaze that divides things up and forms the separated parts into specific unities» (Simmel 1913, 22; slightly modified).

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[9] Cf. Simmel (1911, 183).

[10] This is also the famous theory of Ritter (1963).

According to the author, the apprehension of the landscape (conceived of as both perception and understanding) can thus genuinely occur only when it becomes an internal image within our consciousness[11] and is 'activated' by the subject in such a way as to reveal its emotional tones. The emerging sentimental qualities are the result of a specific relationship with the unified perception of the aesthetic object, which «attains its whole objectivity as landscape from within the scope of our formative acts». The atmospheric and emotional tone that is generated – which Simmel refers to as *Stimmung* – is therefore internal to the perceiver but «gains its full objectivity in and through landscape» (Simmel 1913, 28).

3. Emotional objectivism and empathic states: Geiger's 'median' perspective

Simmel's landscape philosophy, despite its partial subjective-projectivist stance, is significant for linking landscape perception with the emotional tones it 'suggests'. However, this intermediate standpoint is not an exception. Over the last century, phenomenology – with its emphasis on the first-person perspective – has frequently supported the view that *Stimmungen*-atmospheres are affective states directed at objects but rooted in subjectivity. In other words, they are considered related to the external world but produced by the perceiver.

Among the ranks of realist phenomenologists, for instance, there have been authors who, despite never fully abandoning a projective interpretation of emotions, have defended a principle of intrinsic expressiveness inherent in things[12]. Undoubtedly, the author who most exemplifies this approach is Moritz Geiger, whose ideas are aligned with emotional externalism. In his well-known essay *Zum Problem der Stimmungseinfühlung* (1911), he investigates the various ways a subject can relate to perceptual objects[13] with a particular focus on the empathetic aspect of

[11] «The mental image of our surroundings always takes its color from the form of our psychic existence» (Simmel 1911, 182).

[12] Research on emotions was a central theme in phenomenological realism, especially within the Munich Circle. Cf. Vendrell Ferran (2024, 148).

[13] As is well known, Geiger defines aesthetic enjoyment as a 'receptive' attitude, within which he distinguishes four approaches that the subject adopts towards the object: objective (*gegenständlich*), positional (*stellungnehmend*), sentimentalistic (*sentimentalisch*), and empathic (*einfühlend*). Though the

aesthetic perception. In particular, he delves into the specific mechanism known as 'empathy of moods' (*Stimmungseinfühlung*), by which he assigns affective qualities to aesthetic objects while still maintaining a connection between the perception of objective qualities and creative subjectivity. From this viewpoint, objects and environments, though not animated (*belebt*) like human beings, are perceived as bearers of affective tones that the perceiver can grasp not just by experiencing them (*erleben*) but also by re-experiencing (*nach-erleben*) and co-experiencing them (*mit-erleben*) (cf. Geiger 1911, 36). More precisely, these properties emerge when the subject projects their own self onto the object (already emotionally characterized), entering into empathy (*hineinfühlen*) with it. In this process:

> I perceive a certain emotional character as the mood of the landscape. However, this emotional character does not remain purely objective; rather, the object evokes a mood in me that I experience as emanating from the object. At the same time, a tendency arises in me to relive this mood from within, spontaneously generating it from myself. (Geiger 1911, 36)

In Geiger's opinion, landscape's atmospheres and subjective moods are not separate experiences but, rather, a cohesive whole: The subjective feeling 'reflects' the objective emotional qualities but then interprets and internalizes them through the aforementioned processes of *erleben*, *nacherleben*, and *miterleben*. In other words, what occurs is a gradual adaptation (*Sichanschmiegen*) of the self to the object (cf. Geiger 1911, 37), which deconstructs the classical and projective notion of *Einfühlung*[14] by linking it to an idea of reciprocity between the perceiver and the perceived[15].

> The empathic attitude requires a completely new relationship to the mood. The mood is neither represented in the form of the

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philosopher recognizes that each perspective provides different ways of understanding the *Stimmung* of the landscape, he primarily emphasizes the empathetic attitude, clearly favoring this approach over the others.

[14] As shown by the reflections of Vischer (1872) and Lipps (1909). For a more comprehensive overview of the topic, refer to Pinotti (2011).

[15] This reciprocity is particularly supported by Geiger's distinction between two forms of empathy: the 'objectively conditioned' and the 'subjectively conditioned'. The former pertains more to the objective realm, while the latter is more aligned with subjective experience. Refer to Geiger (1911, 39).

> emotional character of the object, nor as an effect of the object on me; rather, it is perceived as my mood, and yet also as belonging to the object. The landscape does not actually appear animated, as a stranger appears animated to me, but nevertheless, my mood is perceived as a re-living, a co-living of the landscape's mood. (Geiger 1911, 42)

It remains an open question as to whether this 'reconciling' stance can effectively eliminate the shadow of projectivism given the inherent ambiguity in Geiger's thinking. This is mainly due to his effort to uphold the autonomy of objective expressiveness through a concept – empathy – that is canonically understood as the production of an *internal experience* rather than as the recognition of an *external reality*. In light of this, the theoretically most reasonable option would be to reach emotional objectivism by another means, completely discarding empathetic theories. However, Geiger never went that far.

More radical theses were proposed within realist phenomenology itself, though they never gained significant popularity among their contemporaries[16]. Apart from the insights from Berlin Gestaltism and some streams related to experimental phenomenology, it was Schmitz who reinterpreted this topic in a truly anti-projectivist sense.

4. Beyond empathy: Schmitz's anti-projectionism

Compared to previous theories, the neophenomenological approach to atmospheres stands out for its radically anti-projectionist basis, rejecting any form of empathic explanation. Since his 1969 work, Schmitz clearly endorsed an externalist interpretation of atmospheres, claiming they are coercive phenomena that

> phenomenologically refute the projection theory, according to which all feelings are primarily subject-bound [*subjektgebunden*], and only secondarily 'color' the world surrounding and encountered by the subject through reflection [*Abspiegelung*], empathy [*Einfühlung*], etc. The *supra-personal* and pre-objective holistic-atmospheric feelings cannot be projected from the subject onto external objects, because there is no object to which these feelings can be properly attached, and because the subject itself

[16] I am referring mainly to Maximilian Beck and his critique of empathic theories. Cf. Borriello (2024).

> phenomenally rises or dissolves within them. (Schmitz 1969, 102-103; emphasis mine)

Such feeling-atmospheres are first and foremost 'pre-objective'[17], residing in a condition of 'in-betweenness' (Griffero 2018; Rauh 2014). This makes them spatial affective forces (never projective) and only secondarily, and possibly, feelings with a potential objective anchoring point[18].

In his writings, Schmitz distinguishes three different types of feelings, which are, in order: 'pure moods' (*reine Stimmungen*), 'pure excitements' (*reine Erregungen*), and 'thematically grounded feelings' (*intentionale Gefühle*) (cf. Schmitz 2014, 37-38). As can be observed, *Stimmungen* form a distinct category underlying all other feelings. Due to their original and foundational nature, pure moods manifest in a space still devoid of surface, which Schmitz referred to as a 'space of vastness' (*Weiteraum*)[19]. This space provides the ideal backdrop for an atmospheric encounter, relating to so-called 'prototypical atmospheres', which are not centered in subjective creation but are fundamentally objective, external, and unintentional (cf. Griffero 2021, 38). Within this category, weather-climatic atmospheres serve as the theoretically and phenomenologically exemplary model.

As phenomena of the sky, they could potentially remain at a physical level without producing any effect on the human affective sphere. However, when they 'reach' and 'capture' the felt-body, they become true atmospheres, being perceived as genuine affective states. On this point, Schmitz himself specifies that there are

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[17] Alternatively, atmospheres can be described as 'quasi-things' (*Halbdinge*) due to their non-reifiable nature, though they remain concretely invasive. For a thorough ontology of quasi-things, refer to Griffero (2013).

[18] The concept of 'anchoring' draws on Metzger's (1941, 227-230) distinction between 'condensation zone' and 'anchoring point'. If one reinterprets this differentiation through Schmitz's lens, the sphere of condensation corresponds to the area where emotional tone is spatially diffused, while the anchoring point identifies the generative element of atmospheric feeling. See Schmitz (2014, 38).

[19] Schmitz describes our spatial experience as comprising three levels: the 'space of vastness' (*Weiteraum*), the 'directional space' (*Richtungsraum*), and the 'local space' (*Ortsraum*). The latter aligns with our common understanding of space, where objects are described in terms of their position and distance. Cf. Schmitz (1990, 279-291; 2014, 126).

> many borderline cases in which feelings and climates merge in such a way that it is justifiable to regard the feeling as a kind of weather or the weather as a kind of feeling. This applies, for example, of the solemnly quiet or even empty supra-personal mood of Sunday, or of the tense atmospheres vibrating with diffuse excitement […]. One then often speaks of 'thick air', thus subsuming, by means of a metaphor, the feeling poured over a situation into the genus 'climate'. (Schmitz 1969, 362)

Every sky manifestation becomes a feeling when, in their presence, we experience an atmospheric encounter that engages us in the lived body. In this sense, they acquire a distinctive 'feeling-ness' (*Gefühlshaftigkeit*):

> Weather and silence can be feelings, just as atmospheres that radiate joy, heaviness, oppression, or solemnity; however, they often miss this feeling-ness [*Gefühlshaftigkeit*]. The difference between the two lies in the way in which atmospheres can be sensed by the felt body. Being emotionally affected by a feeling is a being-grasped [*Ergriffenheit*]. Being-grasped means actually feeling that feeling [*Fühlen des Gefühls*] as the affected person is at first carried away by the impulse transmitting it; if the first chance to accept it or oppose it with some resistance only comes in a second moment. In contrast, someone who can face a feeling with a fully defined attitude from the onset of its felt-bodily involvement is either only grazed by it for a moment or is not really feeling it and just pretending to do so. (Schmitz 2014, 38)

This being-grasped primarily reflects the *pathicity* of sensory experience, as the person may give in to or resist the feeling – adding a personal touch to the atmospheric perception – but only after the first impression (cf. Schmitz 2009, 66). When affective involvement occurs, meteoclimatic atmospheres (in the physical sense) are perceived as *leiblich* sentimental nuances, which color our surroundings:

> The weather […] presents itself as a spatially diffuse feeling in which the subject involved is so immersed in the things of his environment [*Umgebung*] that everything appears coloured by this feeling, as is the case when looking through a yellow-coloured glass; this yellowish atmosphere is not primarily and simply an optical anomaly, but [the relationship] between weather and feeling. (Schmitz 1969, 363)[20]

[20] See also Schmitz (2014, 38-39).

Regarding landscape atmospheres, it is interesting to note that, from a phenomenological perspective, they form a specific category, though it is closely related to the climatic one. Both weather and landscape serve as prototypes of 'supra-personal feelings', but they are distinguished by the level of spatiality to which they pertain. While the climate belongs to the space of vastness, the landscape 'unfolds' in the directional space and requires a more complex aesthetic sensitivity than does the former. From this standpoint, climate introduces us to an experience of space that is atmospherically pervasive and free of positions and distances. Conversely, the landscape, due to its more intricate perceptual dynamics, always engages the *Leib*, underscoring the primarily bodily interaction with the surrounding environment.

Furthermore, Schmitz's view of the landscape dismisses the idea that it arises from a specific aesthetic-sentimental attitude towards nature (Schmitz 2014, 99)[21]. Instead, he considers it to be the result of a particular 'way of perception' in which the felt-body, with its dynamics and special mode of communication[22], is directly involved. Specifically, the way the landscape is perceived presupposes

[21] Schmitz has always been somewhat skeptical of the concept of 'nature', even in relation to the landscape. In his essay *Landscape as a way of perception*, he argued that «landscape arises not through its belonging to so-called nature or by a special aesthetic-sentimental attitude, but through a distinct way of perception» (Schmitz 2014, 99). This is why he never pursued his reflection towards a phenomenology of nature. In a private letter to Gernot Böhme dated June 17, 1994, he justifies his criticism as follows: «The concept of nature either fosters dualism, or, when speaking monistically about nature in man, or of man as a piece of nature, it supports the layered model, which induces one to place some higher layer, such as the mind or culture or technology or whatever, above nature in man» (cf. Meyer 2022, 5).

[22] It should be noted that the felt-bodily dynamic is essentially developed in the two dimensions of 'narrowness' (*Enge*) and 'vastness' (*Weite*), which are experienced through the two tendencies of 'contraction' (*Engung*) and 'expansion' (*Weitung*) of the felt-body. These tendencies overlap or alternate in the form of 'tension' (*Spannung*) and 'expansion' (*Schwellung*), giving rise to what Schmitz calls the 'vital drive' (*vitaler Antrieb*). This felt-body dynamic gives rise to felt-body communication, which develops as encorporation (*Einleibung*), in the channel of the vital drive, or as excorporation (*Ausleibung*), in the channel of privative expansion. Cf. Schmitz (2014, 102-103) or also Schmitz (2009, 64-69).

> moving away from the normal dominance of encorporation (*Einleibung*) and towards a prevalence of excorporation (*Ausleibung*), experiencing an increase in felt-bodily sensed expansion, one that is no longer connected to the engagement with contraction as swelling, but is rather unburdened of it. (Schmitz 2014, 113)[23]

According to Schmitz, the landscape becomes an «excorporation medium [...] experienced as a kind of fusion, a sinking into the depths of its defining features» (Schmitz 2014, 113). Therefore, it requires a 'frame', whether natural or artificial, to prevent the felt-body from becoming disoriented in its vastness. In this sense, the philosopher upholds the traditional belief that a landscape needs a frame to separate it from its surroundings and the observer. This creates the spatial distance essential for full enjoyment and aesthetic appreciation. Schmitz describes this process as a 'window frame' (*rahmendes Sehen*):

> The landscape needs a frame, offering to the eye an unburdening guidance into the vastness and ensuring that excorporation does not fall into the abyss of a measureless vastness. The indifferentiation (*Entdifferenzierung*) of detail characteristic of excorporation manifests itself as the single objects in the field of vision become weightless. Things remain, but they lose their mass against the floating, more wholly effused traits of the panorama, such as its light, the blurred background, and so on. Nature becomes an illustrated book: one looks at a beautiful vale immersed in warm sunlight, with solitary houses and grazing cows, or when the countryside is enveloped by a gloomy atmosphere, with smoke wafting towards the leaden grey of a misty morning, and so on. Regardless of the change of scenes, when one is merely passing through them, the gaze keeps being determined by its frame and is uniformly directed towards the depth of space, enthralled by the vastness that reveals itself through everything in the foreground. (Schmitz 2014, 109-110)

Within this framework, the properties of individual objects take a back seat to the holistic characteristics of the overall scene. This unity, however, is the outcome of the different sub-atmospheres[24]

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[23] A few pages earlier, Schmitz writes: «What is specific to the presentation of something as a landscape is the displacement [*Verschiebung*] of the felt-bodily communication which constitutes perception from encorporation to excorporation» (Schmitz 2014, 108).

[24] Definition adopted by Griffero since 2010.

that make it up, with meteorological and climatic phenomena playing a crucial role.

The thesis I put forward in this paper is as follows: among all the components that constitute the landscape, climatic phenomena are the most important in determining what we might call the *Grundstimmung* of the landscape[25]. I consider climate to have a foundational influence on our atmospheric perception of landscapes for three main reasons: a) it is an essential element of the landscape, which is always situated in a specific geoclimatic context; b) it consists of supra-personal and objective atmospheres, and therefore serves as concrete evidence of the anti-projectionism and externalism of atmospheres; and c) it embodies expressive Gestalt qualities, which are multi-componential and holistic, greater than the sum of their parts. Indeed, each meteorological phenomenon includes specific colors, sounds, light effects, and tactile and bodily sensations, which are sometimes captured synthetically[26].

Classifying a landscape in (neo)phenomenological terms entails not an investigation of its morphological aspects (mountains, hills, rivers, lakes, swamps, etc.)[27] but, rather, a focus on the perceptual and emotional aspects of perception. The atmospheric 'understanding' of the landscape replaces the scientific-quantitative approach with an aesthetic one but does not dismiss the contribution of the geographic-naturalistic component, always interpreted through its references to the experiential and

[25] Addressing the issue of the landscape's *Grundstimmung* is a challenging task. On the one hand, given the extreme variability in our atmospheric perception, it is not entirely justifiable to reduce the experienced emotional tones to a single underlying mood. On the other hand, this perspective – partly derived from Simmel – can provide a plausible approach to understanding our sensitive encounter with reality, at least regarding the first impression. I believe that in our atmospheric encounter with the landscape, we first perceive the most pronounced or evident emotional tone, which can be considered the landscape's 'fundamental affective tone' (*Grundstimmung*). Prolonged exposure to a specific atmosphere would then enable a more articulated perception, allowing for the identification of various emotional nuances or sub-atmospheres. While the process initially follows a principle of 'perceptual economy', it gradually expands, thus revealing the multifaceted atmospheric qualities of the environments.

[26] According to Böhme (2001, 87-100).

[27] This classification is significantly connected to climate, which plays an essential role in defining the different biomes.

emotional dimension, according to the *bedeutungswissenschaftlich* perspective of Humboldtian geography[28]. In my view, the emotional tone of a landscape, its affective physiognomy, is linked primarily to the climate, which emotionally qualifies all types of landscapes, imparting a specific emotional tone, a distinct climatic *Stimmung*. After all, how could we not agree that Caspar David Friedrich's *Morning Mist in the Mountains* (1808) (Fig. 1), Harald Sohlberg's *Winter Night in the Mountains* (1914) (Fig. 2), and Pierre-Louis De la Rive's *Mont-Blanc from Sallanches at Sunset* (1802) (Fig. 3) each radiate completely different atmospheres despite all three depicting mountainous landscapes?

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

It is evident that climatic conditions, as recognized by English Romantic painters[29], can significantly transform our perception of the landscape and the resulting *Grundstimmung*. Each landscape

[28] It is well established that A. von Humboldt proposed a connection between landscape and emotion. He closely associated the 'physiognomy of the landscape' with climate, asserting that each climatic zone shapes the character of its landscape and atmosphere. Cf. D'Angelo (2021, 125-128). For some insights into geography as a *Bedeutungswissenschaft*, cf. Falter-Hasse (2002).

[29] Notably, John Constable, during the 1820s, dedicated himself to observing and depicting the sky at different times of day, recording the location, date, and meteorological conditions of each sketch to capture the climatic changes. He believed that the sky, with its various atmospheric phenomena, was essential both to the composition of his work and to the emotions it evoked. In a famous letter to John Fisher dated October 23, 1821, the painter stated: «It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which the sky is not the key-note, the standard of scale, and the chief organ of sentiment». Cf. Beckett (1968, 77).

possesses, first and foremost, a distinct climatic quality, which is then enhanced by other factors (geographical, anthropological, architectural, cultural, etc.), enriching the perception with new shades, nuances, and affective tones. To better illustrate the emotional influence of climate, I will now analyze a literary text to show how a landscape can radically change its atmospheric character with the occurrence of a particular meteorological event.

I have chosen to examine the phenomenon of snow through Adalbert Stifter's story *Rock Crystal* (*Bergkristall*), initially published in 1845 and then, definitively, in 1853. I chose this text for its 'phenomenological style', in which the narrative remains on a descriptive level, avoiding as much as possible any influence from the subjective shades of the lyrical self. Here, snow is the central figure and focal point, described in both its appearance and its disappearance. The narrative emphasizes how this phenomenon dramatically changes the atmosphere of the surrounding area, transforming it from something familiar, comforting, and accessible into a landscape that becomes alien, threatening, and impenetrable.

Set in a fictional region of the Bavarian Alps, the story follows the adventure of two children, Conrad and Susanna, who find themselves trapped in a snowstorm on Christmas Eve while returning from a visit to their grandparents in a nearby village. The storm prevents them from finding their way home and forces them to spend the night in a cold, mysterious forest. Only the following morning are the children rescued and brought back to the valley, where they reunite with their parents and recount their experience.

Right from the beginning, Stifter depicts a village encircled by mountains, deeply intertwined with its geography and defined by its traditions and customs. The natural cycles, such as daily hours, seasonal transitions, climate changes, and weather patterns, seem to control every aspect of life there. The mountain, with its snow-covered peak, dominates the scene, standing out prominently against the clear blue sky. Confident in their ability to interpret the complex and subtle signs of nature, the children's parents allow them to cross the Gars to visit their grandparents, provided they return before nightfall. Let us now consider how Stifter's description, from the outset, exhibits a detailed attention to atmospheric elements:

> One winter, on the morning before Christmas, when the first dawn had passed into day, *a thin dry veil was spread over the whole sky* so that one could see the low and distant sun only as an indistinct red spot; moreover, *the air that day was mild, almost genial, and absolute calm reigned in the entire valley* as well as in the heavens, as was indicated by the *unchanging and immobile forms of the clouds*. So the shoemaker's wife said to her children: «As today is pleasant and it has not rained for a long time and the roads are hard, and as father gave you permission yesterday, if the weather continued fine, you may go to visit grandmother in Millsdorf; but ask father once more». (Stifter 1845, 371; emphasis mine)

Conrad and Susanna set off along the path under a sky in which the sun appears as a large, vague red stain. From this moment on, the weather conditions begin to worsen, and the drop in temperature forces the two children to start their journey home earlier than planned. As time passes, the familiar natural landscape changes perceptibly, giving way to an increasingly unfamiliar environment where even the usual orientation markers lose their effectiveness. The children find that the ice they observed in the morning is now partially covered by patches of snow that have settled on the ground.

> The first observation the children made when entering the woods was that the frozen ground appeared gray as though powdered with flour, and that the beards of the dry grass-stalks standing here and there between the trees by the road-side were weighted down with snow-flakes; while on the many green twigs of the pines and firs opening up like hands there sat little white flames. […] The snow-flakes descended ever more copiously so that *the ground was altogether white already* and the woods began to appear dappled with gray, while snow lay on the garments of the children. (Stifter 1845, 377; emphasis mine)

The children's joy in walking through the snow is soon replaced by a sense of uncertainty and fear that even their childlike innocence, still unaware of the danger, can no longer contain. The snow falls with increasing speed and intensity until everything becomes an unrecognizable expanse of white:

> But there was nothing about them but the *blinding white, white everywhere* which drew an ever narrowing circle about them, passing, beyond it, *into a luminous mist descending in bands which consumed and concealed all objects beyond*, until there was nothing but the unceasingly descending snow. (Stifter 1845, 381; emphasis mine)

Therefore, white ceases to be the color of clarity; it transforms into an 'ecstasy'[30] in which the atmospheric and material elements overlap and occasionally fuse, producing an alien landscape:

> After a while the children lost sight of them. They got away from the rocks as unexpectedly as they had got among them. Again, nothing surrounded them but white, no more dark forms interposed. They moved in what seemed a great brightness and yet could not see three feet ahead, everything being, as it were, enveloped in a white darkness, and as there were no shadows no opinion about the size of objects was possible. The children did not know whether they were to descend or ascend until some steep slope compelled their feet to climb. […] Whenever they made a halt *everything was still, unspeakably still*. When they resumed their march they heard the shuffling of their feet and nothing else; for *the veils of heaven descended without a sound*, and so abundantly that one might have seen the snow grow. (Stifter 1845, 382-383; emphasis mine)

The pervasive whiteness no longer provides comfort. Instead, it has become menacing, leading to a sense of bodily constriction (Schmitz's *Enge*) that induces paralysis. Surprisingly, Stifter's snow, with its strong invasive and dissonant quality, takes on a twilight character, rendering what was once familiar completely alien. This alienation perfectly captures the essence of the *uncanny*, with its atmospheric force felt across various levels: tactile (the biting, treacherous cold), visual (the oppressive, somber white), and auditory (the disturbing silence and muffled footsteps). This sensory interplay is genuinely synesthetic, with each sensory dimension being polysemous and inseparable from its affective aspect. In this way, snow becomes a generator of a deeply unsettling atmosphere, which transforms the landscape's physiognomy and ensnares the two protagonists, leading to an atmospheric encounter in which surrender overcomes resistance.

The climax of the story is reached when the feeling of the *Unheimliches* densifies and crystallizes to the point that it acquires a true concreteness, becoming a more 'material' and defined emotional state: fear.

> As far as the eyes of the children reached there was only ice. *Hummocks, slabs, and spires of ice rose like terrible* (*furchtbar*)*, snow-covered ice*. Instead of being a wall which would be followed

[30] In the sense of Böhme (2001, 131-144).

> by an expanse of snow, as they had thought, new walls of ice lifted out of the glacier, shattered and fissured and variegated with innumerable blue sinuous lines; and behind them were others again, *until the falling snow veiled the distance with its gray*. (Stifter 1845, 386, slightly modified translation; emphasis mine)

After this fearful experience, the snowfall stops and the clouds start to clear, revealing the beauty of the starry sky. Soon, the dawn's light arrives. It is followed by the warm and reassuring sunlight that restores the contours of nature and things.

> At last, after the stars had shone alone for a long time, and nothing had been seen of the moon, something else happened. The sky began to grow brighter, slowly but recognizably brighter; *its color became visible*, the faintest stars disappeared and the others were not clustered so densely any longer. Finally, also the bigger stars faded away, and the snow on the heights became more distinct. Now, one region of the heavens grew yellow and a strip of cloud floating in it was inflamed to a glowing line. *All things became clearly visible and the remote snow-hills assumed sharp outlines*. (Stifter 1845, 394; emphasis mine)

This 'emotional relaxation' is immediately reflected in a sense of felt-bodily expansiveness along with a regained vitality that encompasses the entire living body: «The children arose and tried their limbs which only now felt their tiredness. Although they had not slept, the morning had reinvigorated them» (Stifter 1845, 394). The restored energy brought about by the environment's gradual return to familiarity, the high-rising sun, the luminous clarity of the peaks, and the clear sky makes it possible for the children to be rescued and brought to safety at last.

Regardless of the (happy) ending of the story, it is interesting for our purposes to observe how the unsettling atmosphere felt by the two children mirrors the way the snow manifests itself: intensifying until it envelops the environment, then disappearing and allowing for a return to the initial state. The atmosphere generated by the weather, therefore, is reflected in that of the landscape, altering its physiognomy. In *Rock Crystal*, the *immersive* dimension[31] of the landscape experience leads to an intense

[31] One of the main characteristics for distinguishing between 'genuine' atmospheres and those that are consuming and manipulative lies in the alternation between *immersive* moments, during which the atmosphere fully ensnares the perceiver, and *emersive* moments, during which one can distance

emotional engagement that affects the characters on a felt-bodily level, shifting from a state of paralyzing anxiety to a progressively expansive and calming sensation[32]. The discrepant atmosphere described in the story exemplifies the pathic attitude underlying an aesthetic view of emotional spaces. Stifter's characters, in fact, 'let themselves go' to what happens, revealing a receptivity to external influences that impact their personal moods.

For all these reasons, the story is a masterful example of prototypical atmospheric perception, as it evokes and describes *Stimmungen* that are «refractory to any more or less conscious attempt at a projective re-interpretation or reflective reductionism» (Griffero 2010, 130), thereby highlighting the fundamentally external, non-volitional, and semi-objective nature of meteorological and climatic atmospheres.

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themselves from it. Such alternation is essential for experiencing certain atmospheres without becoming completely overwhelmed by them (cf. Griffero 2020). Stifter's story seems to be characterized by a dynamic shift between immersion and emersion.

[32] According to Schmitz's felt-bodily alphabet. For a summary, see, for example, Schmitz (2011, 15-27) and Griffero (2024, 127-129).

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