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WHO'S AFRAID OF ATMOSPHERES (AND OF THEIR AUTHORITY)?

The authority of atmospheres

We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift; while To Let, To Let, To Let, glared at me from empty rooms, as if no new wretches ever came there, and the vengeance of the soul of Barnard were being slowly appeased by the gradual suicide of the present occupants and their unholy interment under the gravel. A frowzy mourning of soot and smoke attired this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere dust-hole. Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar, – rot of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand besides – addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and moaned, 'Try Barnard's Mixture'.¹

It is hard not to be affected by the effect of this (gloomy) literary atmosphere. It is even harder to regard the 'emotionally impregnated' space² it outlines as the mere subjective projection of an ill-disposed perceiver. Or even worse to 'reduce' the spatial percept to a constellation of factors so de-axiologised and devoid of significance that they could be perceived in the most diverse ways³. The

¹ C. Dickens, *Great expectations: the first edition, 1861*, vol. 2, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 22-23.

² E. Blum, *Atmosphäre. Hypothesen zum Prozess der räumlichen Wahrnehmung*, Baden, Lars Müller Publishers, 2010, pp. 244-249.

³ Each affective-qualitative element perceived in an external world completely devoid of tertiary qualities and inhabited only by quantifiable and material dimensions (primary qualities), by neutral data waiting *to receive* some kind of meaning and to be integrated

authority of the atmospheric space does depend, like that of speech acts, on certain necessary contextual requirements – being in a church as tourists, waiting for the bus to take us elsewhere, is very different from being there as believers waiting for a true encounter with God⁴ – but in other cases it is violently imposed over the perceiver, completely reorienting her emotional situation and proving wholly refractory to any relatively conscious attempt at a projective adaptation. Be it serene or tense, relaxed or oppressive, smoky or airy, formal or informal, etc., an atmosphere still possesses and exercises authority or authoritativeness⁵. This is because an atmosphere that I feel externally – i.e. as poured out into the surrounding space⁶ and even in the entire biosphere (think of the unsettling atmosphere of terrorism or of the financial crisis) – is mine not because I possess it (possessive sense of the pronoun), but because it concerns me (subjectivising sense of the pronoun). Atmospheres concern us, despite having the fleeting and ephemeral existence typical of quasi-things, which come and go, so that we cannot sensibly ask ourselves, as Schmitz often says, where they are when we do not perceive them⁷.

The authority of atmospheric feelings – more stable and performative than a social norm or a thought⁸, but less so than the

with theoretical constructs of statistical-prognostic value, would necessarily be illusory, i.e. an unconscious projection of a psychic element (of the inner world).

⁴ J. Patzelt Werner, *Stimmung, Atmosphäre, Milieu. Eine ethnomethodologische Analyse ihrer Konstruktion und Reproduktion*, in S. Debus - R. Posner (hrsg.), *Atmosphären im Alltag. Über ihre Erzeugung und Wirkung*, Bonn, Psychiatrie-Verlag, 2007, pp. 196-232, here pp. 196-197.

⁵ As Hermann Schmitz repeats on many occasions (for a first approach in Italian to his New Phenomenology see T. Griffero, *Come ci si sente qui e ora? La 'Nuova Fenomenologia' di Hermann Schmitz*, in H. Schmitz, *Nuova Fenomenologia. Un'introduzione*, ed by T. Griffero, Milano, Christian Marinotti, 2011, pp. 5-23).

⁶ Schmitz takes this position to an extreme: asserting that a landscape could not be said to be delightful if all people were depressed is the same as stating that in the absence of humans and animals endowed with sight colours would no longer exist (H. Schmitz, *Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?*, Rostock, Koch, 2003, p. 201).

⁷ T. Griffero, *Quasi-cose che spariscono e ritornano, senza che però si possa domandare dove siano state nel frattempo. Appunti per un'estetica-ontologia delle atmosfere*, in T. Griffero - A. Somaini (a cura di), «Rivista di Estetica» 33 (2006), 3, pp. 45-68; Id., *Quasi-cose. La realtà dei sentimenti*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2013; Id., *Soffia dove vuole: il vento e altre quasi-cose*, in M. Rotili - M. Tedeschini (a cura di), *Cose* (Sensibilia 6-2012), Milano, Mimesis, 2013, pp. 189-212.

⁸ A. Blume - C. Demmerling, *Gefühle als Atmosphären. Zur Gefühlstheorie von Hermann Schmitz*, in H. Landweer (hrsg.), *Gefühle. Struktur und Funktion*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2007, pp. 113-133, here p. 127.

evidence of a state of affairs⁹ due to its less homogeneous diffusion – can be traced back to a sort of prestige or ‘force’ that constrains and enthralls, almost in the manner of an automatism¹⁰, even in the absence of physical coercion¹¹. It may take various forms and not just the three ones listed by Schmitz (legal, moral and religious). It is a normativity that, of course, is not so much discreet but rather loosely diffused into a situation; and yet it is able to inhibit any critical distance in those who come across it, especially if unexpectedly¹², as they become involved in the script (or ‘story’¹³) it predisposes. The angst-inducing atmosphere produced, for example, by the ubiquity of breaking news predisposes those who are enmeshed by it to see enemies everywhere¹⁴ or at least to overestimate the dangers of the outside world. By not reducing communication to an anodyne and to some extent controllable exchange of information, atmospherology¹⁵ should then properly evaluate the overall performative, illocutionary and perlocu-

⁹ H. Schmitz, *Die Legitimierbarkeit von Macht*, in H.J. Wendel - S. Kluck (hrsg.), *Zur Legitimierbarkeit von Macht*, Freiburg - München, Alber, 2008, pp. 5-19, here p. 8. Which is probably no more cognitive than affective, implying an immediate experience of the primitive presence and the coercion to accept the state of affairs as a ‘fact’.

¹⁰ A force that instead, in the case of the atmosphere of love, is based on constraints that are always relatively vague and, in any case, neither too tight nor too loose (H. Schmitz, *Die Legitimierbarkeit von Macht* cit., pp. 11-12).

¹¹ Hence the recurring mistake, a true *refugium ignorantiae*, of seeing a kind of sorcery in it (B. Carnevali, *Le apparenze sociali. Una filosofia del prestigio*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012, pp. 100-103).

¹² T. Griffero, *Alle strette. L’atmosferico tra inatteso e superatteso*, in P. Cavalieri - M. La Forgia - M.I. Marozza (eds.), *L’ordinarietà dell’inatteso*, «Atque» 10 (2012), Bergamo, Moretti & Vitali, pp. 101-127.

¹³ W. Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt. Zum Sein von Mensch und Ding* (1953), Vorw. von H. Lübke, Frankfurt a. M., Klostermann, 2004.

¹⁴ «The software of new conflicts is given by information and media design and – as a result – by the generation of artificial atmospheres of fear» (Y. Mile *Design governance und breaking news: das Mediendesign der permanenten Katastrophe*, in C. Heibach (hrsg.), *Atmosphären. Dimensionen eines diffusen Phänomens*, München, Fink, 2012, pp. 285-303, here p. 301).

¹⁵ G. Böhme, *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1995; Id., *Anmutungen. Über das Atmosphärische*, Ostfildern v. Stuttgart, Tertium, 1998; Id., *Aisthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001; Id., *Architektur und Atmosphäre*, München, Fink, 2006; Id., *L’atmosfera come concetto fondamentale di una nuova estetica*, in T. Griffero - A. Somaini (a cura di), *op. cit.*, pp. 5-24; T. Griffero, *Atmosferologia. Estetica degli spazi emozionali*, Roma - Bari, Laterza, 2010; Id., *Atmospheres. Aesthetics of emotional spaces*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014).

tionary effect not only of language¹⁶, but in general of all forms of expression, even if merely mental¹⁷.

The model (or prejudice?) of the numinous

But to make an atmospheric feeling into a binding authority would perhaps imply the transformation of phenomenology into theology. In fact, is not precisely the 'numinous' – described by Rudolf Otto (and before that by Shaftesbury), i.e. an author explicitly preferred to Husserl – the model of Schmitz's conception of atmospheres? In fact, the atmospheric feeling – at least the prototypical one, which is marked as involuntary vital experience by ingression and discrepancy¹⁸ – does not only resemble the (Schleiermacherian) feeling of 'dependence'¹⁹, but also the *mysterium tremendum*. The numinous is both disturbing (*primus in orbe deos fecit timor!*) and fascinating in its corporeal resonance (shudder, goose bumps, ecstasy, etc.); we cannot exhaustively identify its foundation, since empirical phenomena are not its cause but only its occasional stimulus, nor we can have a notional intelligence of it²⁰. Similarly, the atmosphere manifests its own authority or majesty, it often attracts and repels as if it were the sublime and, while not being something absolutely other, it generates in those who are gripped by it a creatural feeling, a «depreciation of the subject»²¹ and of their own profanity that leads them to an affective submission²². But above all, as *mysterium tremendum majes-*

¹⁶ G. Böhme, *Atmosphären in zwischenmenschlicher Kommunikation*, in S. Debus - R. Posner (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, pp. 281-293, here pp. 282-283.

¹⁷ Think of the conditioning due to so-called 'mental images' (individual and/or collective), 'catchy' melodies and rhythms, or suggestive names of places and people.

¹⁸ T. Griffero, *Atmosferologia* cit., pp. 137-138; Id., *Quasi-cose* cit., p. 40.

¹⁹ Here we shall prescind from the anti psychologistic objections made against Schleiermacher by Otto.

²⁰ R. Otto, *The idea of the holy: an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* (1917), tr. by J.W. Harvey, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1936.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²² «In every highly-developed religion the appreciation of moral obligation and duty, ranking as a claim of the deity upon man, has been developed side by side with the religious feeling itself. None the less a profoundly humble and heartfelt recognition of the holy may occur in particular experiences without being always or definitely charged or infused with the Hense of moral demands. The holy will then be recognized as that which commands our respect, as that whose real value is to be acknowledged inwardly. It is not that the awe of holiness is itself simply fear in face of what is absolutely overpowering, before which there is no alternative to blind, awe-struck obedience. *Tu solus sanctus* is rather a paean of praise, which, so far from being merely a faltering confession

tas, augustum, energicum, fascinans, the numinous is demanding and sentimental without being either psychological in the subjectivist sense or a 'you' that can be encountered – as it happened in the subsequent realization of it in personal divinities (even differentiated by gender in historical religions). Similarly, atmosphere is contagious, in some respects bound to emotionally specific places²³ and binding without being a projection of the perceiver.

Indeed, the similarities are many. Summarizing: just like the numinous, every atmosphere is a) the more deeply felt, and *in a way* known, the less it is linguistically circumscribable²⁴; b) generable but not rationally communicable; c) engaging for the felt-body with consequences on the physical body (it is 'hair-raising', it makes your 'limbs tremble', it gives you 'goose bumps', etc.); d) contagious, because «like stored-up electricity, [it] discharg[es] itself upon any one who comes too near»²⁵; e) attractive not in spite of the fact that it terrifies but because of it; f) supervening with respect to sense data that are merely its *occasio*²⁶; g) finally, especially active on emotionally predisposed minds, since «impression [...] presupposes something capable of receiving impres-

of the divine supremacy, recognizes and extols a value, precious beyond all conceiving» (*ibid.*, pp. 53-54).

²³ Following Seneca (*Letters to Lucilius*, 43, 1), who acknowledged that the divine is naturally suggested by thick woods, lonely places and dense shadows, Otto (*op. cit.*, pp. 12-13; my emphasis) can state what follows: «Let us follow [this feeling] up with every effort of sympathy and imaginative intuition wherever it is to be found, in the lives of those around us, in sudden, strong ebullitions of personal piety and the frames of mind such ebullitions evince, in the fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that *clings* to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches [...]. The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its profane, non-religious mood of everyday experience».

²⁴ «Revelation does not mean a mere passing over into the intelligible and comprehensible. Something may be profoundly and intimately known in feeling for the bliss it brings or the agitation it produces, and yet the understanding may find no concept for it. To know and to understand conceptually are two different things, are often even mutually exclusive and contrasted. The mysterious obscurity of the numen is by no means tantamount to unknowableness» (*ibid.*, 139).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁶ «It does not arise out of them, but only by their means. They are the incitement, the stimulus, and the occasion for the numinous experience to become astir, and, in so doing, to begin at first with a naive immediacy of reaction to be interfused and interwoven with the present world of sensuous experience» (*ibid.*, p. 117).

sions, and that is just what the mind is not, if in itself it is only a *tabula rasa*»²⁷.

And the fact that the holy is «an experience of determined atmospheres»²⁸, perhaps second in intensity only to the erotic²⁹, seems to be confirmed by the proto-Christian notion of holy spirit, considered – prior to its dogmatisation and crystallization in the form of the third person³⁰, and still today by minor communities (mystical, Quakers, pietism, etc.) – as the epiphany of an external feeling³¹ that, according to St. Paul, contends for the lived body of man against an opposite atmosphere (the flesh). It is a dynamistic and externalist model present in the archaic Greek world, for which feelings, and especially the religious ones, were notoriously not internal but external to the subject. Such model is applied here to the holy spirit-*pneuma* as neither individual person nor property interior to those who are gripped by it, but it also applies to the values (*mens, pietas, virtus, fides*) understood by the most ancient Roman culture not as inner virtues but as objective powers, as well as to any other conception of feeling as a daemonic possession (from the Dionysian onwards). This model, which was overcome by the subsequent concretisation of the divine – required by the dialogic character of human beings – and by the ‘invention’ of features such as omnipresence, perfection and soteriological certainty (which make the divine into a more controllable and manageable partner), survives in modern Europe, according to

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 164. «Like all other primal psychical elements, [the holy] emerges in due course in the developing life of human mind and spirit and is thenceforward simply present. Of course it can only emerge if and when certain conditions are fulfilled, conditions involving a proper development of the bodily organs and the other powers of mental and emotional life in general, a due growth in suggestibility and spontaneity and responsiveness to external impressions and internal experiences. But such conditions are no more than conditions; they are not its causes or constituent elements» (*ibid.*, p. 128, my emphasis).

²⁸ J. Soentgen, *Die verdeckte Wirklichkeit. Einführung in die Neue Phänomenologie von Hermann Schmitz*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1998, p. 90).

²⁹ See G. Rappe (*Archaische Leiberfahrung. Der Leib in der frühgriechischen Philosophie und in außereuropäischen Kulturen*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1995, for a summary see pp. 312-323).

³⁰ For the proto-Christian, already prepared to the not fully personal objectivity of feeling by the Old Testament idea of divine wrath that permeates everything, it must have seemed entirely plausible to conceive the divine as an impersonal power (1 Jn, 4, 18) – hence the subsequent resistance to accept the personalisation of the spirit in the Trinity (H. Schmitz, *Atmosphäre und Gefühl. Für eine Neue Phänomenologie*, in C. Heibach (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, pp. 39-56, here p. 55) – that is, as an atmosphere.

³¹ «No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us» (1 Jn, 4, 12).

Schmitz, only in the so-called voice of conscience, in the Kantian moral law as *numen* (true 'fact of reason').

The notion of atmosphere, at least the prototypical (Schmitzian) one, is therefore certainly indebted to that of the divine as numinous and *genius loci*, as precisely the local condensation of an atmosphere³², but it is so only in the sense that it shares not so much its absolute necessity but rather its absolute accidentality and its undeductibility from other phenomena. The divine – the derivation of Yahweh from the Egyptian god-wind Amun and the climatic origin of many religious beliefs are probably true³³ – blows where and when it wants, impregnating a certain human space and appearing more as a transient predicative concept or appellative ('here is god' would only mean 'divine event') than as the name of a stable entity which is subject to predicates. In the same way, the atmospheric feeling is such because, being the epiphany of an impersonal external force, it pervades a certain space (lived, anisotropic and yet pre-dimensional)³⁴ so intensely that it wins every critical resistance and ability of abstraction. The atmosphere is therefore 'divine' in this context only as it is resistant to a critical distance that, however, is always possible: in contrast to what is implied by the traditional theological notion of authority, in the case of atmospheres the corporeal and emotional involvement (effect) can indeed deny its cause (which is not a transmission of essence here), or at least, discussing it, mitigate its strength. The 'divinity' of atmospheres also involves a merely local authority, often only temporary, related to a certain community or even to a single person, and it is so hard to plan³⁵ that I in-

³² «Local divine atmospheres are part of the immense realm of supra-personal and objective feelings, which partly exist [...], like weather, without a place and simply, so to speak, 'in the air', or more precisely in the space of vastness; and which are partly also condensed in determined places and around certain objects, often only as fleeting evocations» (H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, Bd. III: *Der Raum*, 4, Teil: *Das Göttliche und der Raum*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1977, p. 133). See C. Norberg-Schulz, *Genius loci. Landschaft, Lebensraum* (1979), Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1991; R.J. Kozljanič, *Der Geist eines Ortes. Kulturgeschichte und Phänomenologie des genius loci*, 2 voll., München, Albunea Verlag, 2004; T. Griffero, *Atmosferologia* cit., pp. 79-81.

³³ See H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie* cit., p. 149; Id., *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand. Grundzüge der Philosophie*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1990 (2007³), p. 439.

³⁴ *Il ritorno dello spazio (vissuto)*, in M. Di Monte - M. Rotili (a cura di), *Spazio fisico-spazio vissuto* (Sensibilia 3-2009), Milano, Mimesis, 2010, pp. 207-239.

³⁵ Even Phillip Gröning's film, *Into great silence* (2005), set in the monastery of the Grand Chartreuse in the French Alps (Huppertz), rather than generating a religious atmosphere through various means (silent spaces extraneous to the historical time, light that is conducive to recollection, characters without a socio-biographical identity almost

vite those who have not experienced numinous moments – and, although with some differences, atmospheric ones either – «to read no further»³⁶.

Then, far from relegating the issue of ‘power’ and the authority legitimating it to sociology, or even worse to the physical sciences, we should ask ourselves, paraphrasing Kant, if the private and collective emotional life is not more easily explained by the (anti-introjectionistic) hypothesis that feelings are not internal properties (attributes-accidents) of the psychological subject, but stable entities – external and aggressive in a way that accidents surely cannot be!³⁷ – around which the subject has to revolve, conditions that are ‘in the air’ and that are powerfully active upon the lived body without it being necessary to anthropomorphise them or metaphysicalise them in the form of ‘values’³⁸.

Authority, intensity, depth

Now that we have spoken of the peculiar ‘divinity’ of atmospheres (in the strict sense of the numinous)³⁹, it is necessary to specify their authority. Being legitimate, even with socially relevant repercussions (marginalization in the first place), only prescinding from physical coercion⁴⁰, the authority of an atmosphere – whether it is a percept or the horizon within which we perceive something (in the intransitive sense in which ‘it is the tone that makes the music’)⁴¹ – is such because it implicitly claims an absolute va-

ahead of otherworldly depersonalisation, almost hypnotic practices aimed at the generation of transformational psychic conditions), simply sets up a condition of possibility that is necessary (but not sufficient).

³⁶ R. Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁷ It is unlikely «to be raptured by mere accidents»! (H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, Bd. III: *Der Gefühlsraum*, 2, Bonn, Bouvier, 1969, p. 406).

³⁸ Which in turn could be a positivistic surrogate not so much of the metaphysical (as Heidegger means) but rather of the atmospheric (H. Schmitz, *Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?*, Rostock, Koch, 2003, p. 310).

³⁹ See H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie* cit., p. 91: «an atmosphere, whether it is a feeling (or a constellation of feelings), is divine, as a gripping power, when its authority has an unconditional seriousness for those who are gripped by it».

⁴⁰ This does not exclude, however, that authority may also lie in physical force.

⁴¹ See J.-P. Thibaud, *Die sinnliche Umwelt von Städten. Zum Verständnis urbaner Atmosphären*, in M. Hauskeller (hrsg.), *Die Kunst der Wahrnehmung. Beiträge zu einer Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis*, Zug - Schweiz, Die Graue Edition, 2003, pp. 280-297, here p. 293; M. Bockemühl, *Atmosphären sehen. Ästhetische Wahrnehmung als Praxis*, in Z. Mahayni (hrsg.), *Neue Ästhetik. Das Atmosphärische und die Kunst*, München, Fink, 2002, pp. 203-222, here p. 221; E. Minkowski, *Vers une cosmologie: fragments philosophiques*, Paris, Aubier Montaigne, 1936, p. 234; see also the doubts expressed by V. Mühleis,

lidity and thus inhibits, at least in principle, any real possibility of choice and reaction in the perceiver.

Unlike socio-political authority, however, atmospheric authority does not always presuppose its own acknowledgement, much less a self-aware one, appearing mostly in the form of light and shade and with a variable intensity. This explains why no one can force me to feel it from the outside: atmospheres, in fact, exist in the proper sense, except for their more or less successful planning, only in act, as actual facts and not factual facts⁴² – that is, only when we sense their authority. They may exercise authority over the presence, in contrast to what the dead (cause) exerts on the living (its effect)⁴³, only if they are involuntarily (mnestically) reactivated in the present⁴⁴ (*à la* Proust), or, symbolically, in traces of the present (as in every millenarianism, even secular). If an atmosphere that here and now does not oppress anyone is certainly not oppressive, we could still sense the authority of atmospheres that do not capture us or that, as sub-atmospheres, lose in the interaction with other sub-atmospheres equally willing to occupy the entire space of the lived presence. Sometimes⁴⁵ the outsider, rather than disturbing the socio-cultural milieu or disregarding its expectations, acts as if he ‘felt’ the same atmosphere, thus contributing to its preservation and to the process of reflexivity needed in each construction of reality, yet without fully recognizing its authority.

Just as socio-political authority may not have spontaneously generated itself, but might have simply been transmitted (as in the case of officials) from a more autonomous authority, so atmospheric authority is often not the one (to use Schmitz’s terminology) exerted by the anchor point, which is what is authentically responsible for the atmosphere, but the progressively weakened one of its condensation points: this is why oftentimes the atmosphere of anguish, properly ‘caused’, for example, only by the pain of a dental visit, is overcome by an atmosphere that is condensed

Kunst und Atmosphäre, in S. Debus - R. Posner (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, pp. 124-140, here pp. 130, 136.

⁴² Thus G. Böhme, *Asthetik* cit., referring to J. Albers, *Interaction of color. Die Grundlegung einer Didaktik des Sehens*, Köln, Dumont, 1975. E. Blum, *op. cit.*, p. 130, also distinguishes between matters of concern and matters of fact.

⁴³ A. Kojève, *The notion of authority* (2004), London, Verso, 2013, p. 41.

⁴⁴ It does not seem possible to decide to undergo once again the authority of a dissolved atmosphere.

⁴⁵ J. Patzelt Werner, *op. cit.*, p. 211.

into what is associated with it (even the magazines in the waiting room) and whose authority, yet, is no less powerful.

Also, unlike political authority – which is more easily preserved «if the people who have to endure it know what must be done to keep it (and see that it is actually done, of course)»⁴⁶ – the authority of atmospheric feelings presupposes the non-total dissolution of the pre-reflective and shaded state it springs out of. Undermined by disenchantment⁴⁷ and irony, by even small gaffes and wrong tones and even more so by suspicion (‘the emperor has no clothes’), the atmospheric feeling does not always survive cognitive penetrability. And if an engaging feeling, for example the atmosphere of grief at the funeral of a loved one, is not scratched by the cognitive level (by the fact that we ‘know’ that we all shall die), the atmospheric detection is instead affected – it is a totally different cognitive element – by the full understanding of its generative conditions, just as a fully explained persuasive technique ceases to be such.

Things are different in the case of an atmosphere that is not in contrast with a kind of knowledge but that was generated by it (this perspective, however, is very different from the unfortunately yet uninvestigated persuasive atmosphere of thought): knowing that an object in itself anonymous was owned by a prestigious person makes us see it *ipso facto* as an ecstatic object, capable of removing the homogeneity of the surrounding space thanks to its emotional and symbolic ‘volume’, able to arouse special attention and reverence due not so much to fully aware knowledge but rather to suggestions unintentionally borrowed from ‘cognitive archives’ and ‘sentimental archives’ that are anything but systematic⁴⁸. In short: we know that what grips us is an atmosphere, but it cannot be ‘reduced’ to a concept. Nor is it necessary for such knowledge to be truthful, since the atmosphere, co-produced by its phenomonic appearance and by the thought of it (or by acting in it)⁴⁹ according to the model of Kantian ‘free play’, can receive an effectual contribution also by non-knowledge (the charm of the indecipherable) and false knowledge⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ A. Kojève, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁴⁷ G. Böhme, *Atmosphären in zwischenmenschlicher Kommunikation* cit., pp. 289-290.

⁴⁸ E. Blum, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁴⁹ For example, slow motion in cinema is atmospherically revealing (*ibid.*, pp. 214-216).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 35.

There is authority – it is right – only where there is a change in those who react⁵¹. But in the case of atmospheres it is not at all necessary to suppose a free and conscious agent, as often the (pre-linguistic, pre-reflexive) condition of our actions, its base tonality (Damasio's background emotions?) – unconsciously perceived and sometimes even misunderstood (it seemed as mere anxiety and instead it was love!) – turns out to be more powerfully atmospheric than the direct irradiation of this or that subject⁵². It is only essential that the atmospheric pre-condition is sufficiently intense, or rather, deep.

But we need to rethink this depth beyond the verticality typical of Western topics (from Plato to psychoanalysis)⁵³ and in the light of the neo-phenomenological externalisation of the affective. This 'depth' would then be a property not of the soul of the perceiver, but of what appears⁵⁴, and perhaps it would be explainable – referring to a tradition that goes from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century Gestalt psychology – through its ability to generate mixed feelings. Mendelssohn for example explains the pleasure for the negative by saying that, when you put the object at a distance (here is the link with the sublime), every performance is satisfactory for the subject because it is an affirmative predicate of it and because it is intuitive knowledge of affirmative characters of the object. It follows that mixed feelings are not as immediately rewarding as those that are only delectable, but they are also not as monotonous and, in the long run, nauseating: in fact they are capable of «penetrating deeper into the mind and appear to sustain themselves there longer [...]. The unpleasant mixed with the pleasant captures our attention, and prevents us from being prematurely sated»⁵⁵. Consequently greater authority is held by an atmospheric feeling whose overall quality is not only Gestaltically irreducible to its components, but also deep as it is 'mixed'.

⁵¹ A. Kojève, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵² G. Böhme, *Atmosphären in zwischenmenschlicher Kommunikation* cit., p. 288.

⁵³ B. Meyer-Sickendiek, *Gefühlstiefen: Aktuelle Perspektiven einer vergessenen Dimension der Emotionsforschung*, in G. Lehnert (hrsg.), *Raum und Gefühl. Der Spatial Turn und die neue Emotionsforschung*, Bielenfeld, Transcript, 2011, pp. 26-48.

⁵⁴ Schmitz perhaps juxtaposes too much depth and breadth (*System der Philosophie* cit., p. 337).

⁵⁵ M. Mendelssohn, *Moses Mendelssohn: philosophical writings* (1761), ed. by D.O. Dahlstrom, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 143.

Flat and shallow moods always have a somewhat monotonous direction [...] on the contrary all deep feelings have within themselves a polyvocal direction. And the deepest oppositions of the soul seem to agree without exception on immediately reunifying at the same time the starkest contrasts of feeling inside them.⁵⁶

Since the pleasure/pain distinction invests only the most peripheral states of existence⁵⁷, the most authoritative atmosphere might therefore not be the unilateral one but the 'mixed' one, both because it is discrepant compared to the state of mind of the perceiver and because it is able to induce the perceiver to complete its overall tonality even in the absence of further adumbrations.

Whether atmospheric effectiveness is 'naturally' inherent to a certain space, or it was absorbed by it over time maybe as a result of a functional planning, it still presupposes an empathically predisposed and in a sense 'sociologically' competent perceiver, that is, someone able to recognize in the atmospheric potential a generator of lifestyles and collective feelings: it is enough for us to exclude here that an atmosphere can be arbitrarily generated or declassified to a contingent and totally subjective emotion.

Emotional games

The most common temptation is certainly that of explaining the externality and authority of atmospheres by referring to «culturally determined emotional norms»⁵⁸ embodied in the situation to the point of causing us to be subordinated to the feeling we get or heterosense⁵⁹. The socially desirable trend to adjust our own feelings (*form* of perception) to the one we encounter (*content* of perception), especially if it is unexpected⁶⁰, explains much but not everything. It does not explain, for example, if not through fanciful anthropomorphic hypotheses, the authority of climatic and naturalistic atmospheres, nor the corporeal resonance of any atmos-

⁵⁶ F. Krueger, *Zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Ganzheit*, Berlin, Springer, 1953, p. 191.

⁵⁷ M. Scheler, *Schriften zur Soziologie und Weltanschauungslehre*, Bern - München, Francke, 1963, p. 46.

⁵⁸ C. Demmerling, *Gefühle, Sprache und Intersubjektivität. Überlegungen zum Atmosphärenbegriff der neuen Phänomenologie*, in K. Andermann - U. Eberlein (hrsg.), *Gefühle als Atmosphären. Neue Phänomenologie und philosophische Emotionstheorie*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2011, pp. 43-55, here p. 48.

⁵⁹ A. Blume - C. Demmerling, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

⁶⁰ M. Hauskeller, *Atmosphären erleben. Philosophische Untersuchungen zur Sinneswahrnehmung*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1995, p. 22.

phere. This clearly shows that conventionality perhaps does not totally rule out the suddenly binding character of atmospheres (for a traditionalist a convention has also an aura of authority!), but it does not do full justice to it, at least not in the prototypical ones (discrepancy).

Then the binding authority of an atmosphere, such as a meadow that we might call, not at all metaphorically⁶¹, 'happy', does not come from a subjectivist-fictional inference (it is *as if* the lawn was happy...), but rather from the effect of resonance of the percept (*that* meadow) in the perceiver, who feels this atmospheric authority in his *Leib* but (Schmitz reports this on many occasions) as not originating from it. This authority may take many forms, such as the pedagogical one, which, in hindsight, is necessarily based on all its choices (communicative forms, spaces, rituals, etc.) on pathic affordances addressed to the learner's felt-body⁶²; but also that of vicarious shame⁶³, whose atmosphere even conditions – and certainly not empathically, as there is no shame in the shameless⁶⁴ – the detached observer and his physiognomic-gestural (contractive, in the broadest sense) conduct.

An example very dear to Schmitz is that of the cheerful person who, encountering a sad person (who is so for 'serious' reasons), tends not to encourage her to recover her lost dignity, as if this person was merely tired, but – at least initially, and provided that he has adequate sensitivity – he tends to mitigate or completely conceal his own joy in order to respect the privacy of the other. This is because the atmospheric sadness radiated by people or things – very differently from a kind of exhaustion whose possible atmospheric character would still be spatially restricted⁶⁵ –

⁶¹ T. Griffero, *Atmosfera: non metafore ma quasi-cose*, in E. Gagliasso - G. Frezza (a cura di), *Metafore del vivente. Linguaggi e ricerca scientifica tra filosofia, bios e psiche*, Milano, Angeli, 2008, pp. 123-131.

⁶² K. Schultheis, *Macht und Erziehung. Überlegungen zur pathisch-leiblichen Dimension pädagogischen Handelns*, in H.J. Wendel - S. Kluck (hrsg.), *Zur Legitimierbarkeit von Macht*, cit., pp. 99-115.

⁶³ T. Griffero, *Vergognarsi di, per, con... Le atmosfere della vergogna*, in E. Antonelli - M. Rotili (a cura di), *La vergogna. The shame* (Sensibilia 5-2011), Milano, Mimesis, 2012, pp. 161-190; Id., *Lo strano caso del pudore (vicario) e della sua atmosfera*, in E. Guglielminetti (ed.), *Pudore*, «Spazio Filosofico» 2 (2012), V, pp. 153-162; Id., *Quasi-cose. La realtà dei sentimenti* cit., pp. 89-108).

⁶⁴ And when mistakenly judging the sentiment of others as more intense than it is, we can even perceive the authority of «a feeling that is not felt by anyone» (M. Hauskeller, *op. cit.*, p. 23).

⁶⁵ H. Schmitz, *Die Legitimierbarkeit von Macht* cit., p. 9.

has more authority than atmospheric joy⁶⁶, it «claims entirely and exclusively for itself the space of lived presence and, with the dominance of this authority, it represses to various degrees the atmosphere of joy, which is just as prone to the endless invasion of the lived presence»⁶⁷. That is why the sad person normally feels more legitimated than the cheerful person to sink, sometimes even to the point of pathetic self-satisfaction, into the atmosphere that surrounds him and that he radiates; and he does not only feel an intense atmospheric contrast when he comes across a joyful atmosphere, whence the worsening of his sadness, but he also feels entitled to more or less explicitly protest against what he regards as the unjustified (unfair?) happiness of others⁶⁸.

Thus, in their confrontational game, the atmospheric feelings inherently endowed with greater authority prevail. It may be the vanity of things perceived in a cold winter morning or in an anonymous non-place, which is able to inhibit, respectively, someone who confidently opens the window and someone starting with the best hopes. But it can also be, symbolically, the solemn gravity that impresses one who enters a church for superficiality or animated by the worst intentions (the holy), or the accused convinced of being smarter than the court called upon to judge him (the law). It may be the wrath that persecutes, sometimes to the point of paranoia, those who feel a strong sense of guilt for their actions, or the mutual trust felt by those who 'breathe' it as being irreducible to the logic of giving and trying to get something back. It may be, finally, the binding authority of the atmosphere of love: it is no coincidence that it justifies at least part of the crazy things one does 'for love', and it also arouses in those who not reciprocate such feeling a certain respect for those who are caught by it.

⁶⁶ Id., *Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?* cit., pp. 47-48.

⁶⁷ Id., *Nuova Fenomenologia* cit., 2011, p. 102.

⁶⁸ A contrast of feelings that, unlike Hauskeller (*op. cit.*, p. 23) and Demmerling (*op. cit.*, p. 47), Schmitz does not attribute to the simple corporeal motions (otherwise a tired person would become perky for the sole reason of meeting energetic and volitional people), but that he explains by calling to witness the pleasure for the others' misfortunes (or vice versa). H. Schmitz - G. Marx - A. Moldzio, *Begriffene Erfahrung. Beiträge zur antireduktionistischen Phänomenologie*, Rostock, Koch, 2002, pp. 70-71). Schmitz and his critics underestimate, however, the case of syntony: a sad person among the sad is in fact often less sad, and a happy person among other happy people is a little less happy (and not only due to a superficial spirit of distinction).

More ethics...?

Whether the authority of an atmosphere is, to use Weber's categories, legal (I feel I must respect the atmosphere of the courtroom), traditional (I overpay an ancient book for the aura that surrounds it) or charismatic (I am unilaterally corporeally influenced by an environment or a person), it is often called 'irrational' just because we ignore the general mechanisms of corporeal communication⁶⁹, namely, the way in which an atmospheric feeling, suggesting a rule (broadly understood) to be respected, fascinates the perceiver, keeps him in check, raptures him (an intoxicating fragrance, a spark that catches the eye, soft skin that causes us to stroke it). In this case, the greatest charismatic suggestion would be featured by an atmosphere that blends unembodiment and unilateral embodiment, thus taking away from the passivated partner her personal distress and transferring to her the distress of the dominant partner instead, reaching an almost narcotic effect⁷⁰. Such dispossession causes the recipient to 'sink' into the percept and 'fixate herself' on the issue imposed on her, and perhaps juxtaposes atmospheric authority⁷¹ to the (Hegelian) authority of the lord over the bondsman.

While doubting that from a good definition of (atmospheric) authority one can «infer the way in which we must act upon man and men in order to be able to both generate an Authority, and keep it» (Kojève), we shall begin by distinguishing absolute authority, which cannot be resisted, and relative authority, whose centripetal direction one can resist by appealing to a higher level of personal emancipation. For example, one can feel wrapped up in shame on a level, but at the same time transcend this atmosphere on a higher level, for instance by regarding *that* shame as the result of mere convention; likewise one may feel gripped by a defeatist atmosphere but still manage to transcend it because of a recent personal success (Schmitz). But absolute and relative are in turn (historically and culturally) relative, depending on the given corporeal and biographical situation – in a word, on the level of

⁶⁹ According to H. Schmitz, *Charisma*, in H. Becker (hrsg.), *Zugang zu Menschen. Angewandte Philosophie in zehn Berufsfeldern*, Freiburg - München, Alber, 2013, pp. 100-109, here p. 101, they are provided mainly by the motor suggestions and the synaesthetic characters inherent especially to the eyes and the voice.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 106.

⁷¹ If we really were to adopt the four pure types of authority described by Kojève, they would be: father-son, master-servant, leader-band, judge.

personal emancipation of the subject involved⁷² – so that, even while being very close, two people might perceive totally different atmospheres (for example, they might or might not feel ashamed), but this does not necessarily entail the unreality of such atmospheres: they would be no less real than a toothache had by only one of the two, or than the same language spoken in a relatively different way by the two.

But the very admission that it is possible, if not to totally abstract oneself from involving situations (as evidenced by Hegel)⁷³, at least to achieve a certain distancing from an atmosphere which, for that very reason, perhaps does not even 'become' a real feeling⁷⁴, suggests that we should say something about the ethical consequences of this 'atmospherologic' approach. And not just because, since the (religious, ethical, aesthetic, ontological, legal) authority is a claim that, after careful checking, we feel we cannot light-heartedly avoid without feeling guilty, we must recognize that the legal norm is really a norm⁷⁵ only if it rests on the authority of legal feelings. We are referring to the specific pathos of wrath⁷⁶ and shame (depending on whether, outraged by the injustice, one feels in the right or in the wrong): two feelings whose legalization, which aims to prevent unregulated consequences (re-

⁷² Which aesthetic sensibility also pertains to: the melancholic atmosphere of a rainy landscape appears relatively less melancholic in the artistic mediation (H. Schmitz, *Situationen und Konstellationen. Wider die Ideologie totaler Vernetzung*, Freiburg - München, Alber, 2005, p. 289). But the relationship between the two levels of atmospheric power – hence the paradox that makes the museum into a device that both removes aura (transformation of an originally religious authority into a 'solely' artistic authority) and confers it (transfer of value and therefore aesthetic authority to banal everyday objects) – deserves much further investigation.

⁷³ Through self-consciousness, everyone might «find in himself the ability to *abstract himself from all* [...] and in this way prove himself able to set *every content* within himself» (G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of right* (1821), New York, Dover Publications, 2005, pp. xxxi, my emphasis).

⁷⁴ «When the gripping is authentic, he who is caught must first of all be in solidarity with the feeling and accept it in its own momentum; only later can he be personally confronted with the sentiment, surrendering to it or resisting it» (H. Schmitz, *Atmosphäre und Gefühl* cit., p. 45). Hence the possibility, usually excluded at the outset in the field of political science, of authority over the self: in this case, instead, it is exercised by a part of the self (involvement) over another, refractory part of the self (the previous state of mind but also more rational reflection).

⁷⁵ Beyond inadequate positivist theories (theory of values, natural law) or consensual theories (discourse ethics) of the sources of law (H. Schmitz, *Das Reich der Normen*, Freiburg - München, Alber, 2012, pp. 41-49).

⁷⁶ It is not by chance that in cultures that are not legally normed one tends to respect wrath (of the wronged person), which is obviously considered endowed with exceptional authority.

taliation and suicide), forms the so-called legal sensitivity⁷⁷. These feelings are as such the emotional and corporeal foundation of the whole social life (especially of the idea of duty)⁷⁸ – a foundation underestimated only because it is previously controlled by an ethical constellation of pre-feelings⁷⁹.

The ethical-political problem is also caused not only by the social but also climatic (environmental issue) and medial (manipulation) ubiquity of the atmospheric phenomenon⁸⁰, and then by the interference between ‘natural’ or background atmospheres and the intentionally generated ones, between sub-atmospheres of different content and qualities and so on. And, last but not least, by the fact that if «people never shape their conduct upon the teaching of pure reason»⁸¹ but through impressions, vague reminiscences, easily translatable ideas – in short through seductive images that public personae and active subjects try to control, wherever possible, in order to «cultivate the sensorium which is the basis of all unity and all consensus»⁸² – much in politics depends precisely on the ‘climate’⁸³ that one is able to arouse.

But wouldn’t we then be running the risk of irresponsibly indulging in the atmosphere? Of becoming a mere appendage to it, as some fear about the Internet and the navigable space that it ‘contains’⁸⁴? Obviously what has been said so far on atmospheric authority takes a relatively different shape depending on whether atmospheres are understood as objective daemonic powers – external to man, unintended, with respect to which the subjective component is reduced to the more or less critical reaction of the perceiver (prototypical atmospheres) – or as an external and ob-

⁷⁷ Jesus’ solution (Jh, 7, 53-8, 11: «He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her») is different, as it turns the wrath towards the guilty, demanding vengeance, into collective shame (H. Schmitz, *Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?* cit., p. 302).

⁷⁸ Id., *Situationen und Konstellationen* cit., p. 242.

⁷⁹ For example, it is by pre-feeling the atmosphere of outrage that would cause our outburst that we avoid to cross Michael Kohlhaas type of road without exit.

⁸⁰ Welcoming the (by no means exhaustive) distinction between physical, social and medial atmosphere (C. Heibach, *Einleitung*, in Id. (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, p. 11).

⁸¹ G. Le Bon, *Psychology of crowds* (1895), Cardiff, Sparkling Books, 2009, p. 15.

⁸² B. Carnevali, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁸³ We might speak, in general, of a ‘climatic pleroma’ or ‘third subtle’ (climate, *Stimmung*, *milieu*, *Umwelt*, even expression, etc.), that, because of its non-objectual and non-informative nature, is unrecognized by modern European rationalism (P. Sloterdijk, *Anthropisches Klima*, in C. Heibach (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, pp. 27-37, here pp. 28-29).

⁸⁴ S. Günzel, *Vor dem Affekt: di Aktion. Emotion und Raumbild*, in G. Lehnert (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, p. 67.

jective effect but *of a relationship*, implicit as may be, between subject and object (derived atmospheres), or again as idiosyncratic moods, subjective and projective (spurious atmospheres).

At the heart of the matter, we find the polite but firm dispute between Hermann Schmitz and Gernot Böhme⁸⁵: does the increasingly pervasive and seductive 'aesthetic work' (cosmetics, furniture, urban planning, lighting, fashion, set design, etc.) directly generate an atmosphere – or at least the phenomenonic conditions of possibility⁸⁶ of a physiognomic-expressive 'aesthaticness' that applies to atmospheres as well as things – or does it merely exercise a «technique of impression» (object of investigation of an unspecified «technology of impression»)⁸⁷, which is very different from the ordinary climatic, seasonal, collective, housing feelings, etc., i.e. situations (not things, at most quasi-things⁸⁸) that by their chaotic multiplicity are not things that can be generated by single events and things?

Now, while suggesting that there may be non-atmospheric situations⁸⁹ and belying the deadly illusion of being able to generate any feeling, Schmitz's choice to circumscribe the atmospheric phenomenon also generates some doubts as to whether something that, as required by the model of the numinous, basically depends on the observer's mere moving can really claim absolute authority. What's more, in the light of the anti-dualistic and anti-informationist model of a corporeal communication that acts as an unanalyzable impressing situation often even without anchor points, it entails that it is impossible to explain manipulation (traditionally) in terms of moral responsibility (of what manipulates) and guilty loss of self-determination (of the manipulated)⁹⁰.

The clear demarcation between transcendent-abyssal atmospheres and tricky situations as 'suggestive' condensations (*Pla-*

⁸⁵ H. Werhahn, *Die Neue Phänomenologie und ihre Themen*, Rostock, Koch, 2003, p. 79-81.

⁸⁶ G. Böhme, *Atmosphäre* cit., pp. 199-200.

⁸⁷ H. Schmitz, *Situationen und Atmosphären. Zur Ästhetik und Ontologie bei Gernot Böhme*, in M. Hauskeller - C. Rehmann-Sutter - G. Schiemann (hrsg.), *Naturerkenntnis und Natursein. Für Gernot Böhme*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1998, pp. 176-190, here pp. 181-182.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸⁹ What if (Mt, 12, 44-45) the room was occupied by even worse and more numerous spirits (see H. Wehrhahn, *op. cit.*, p. 80)?

⁹⁰ C. Heibach, *Manipulative Atmosphären. Zwischen unmittelbarem Erleben und medialer Konstruktion*, in Id. (hrsg.), *Atmosphären. Dimensionen eines diffusen Phänomens*, München, Fink, 2012, pp. 261-282, here p. 263.

katsituationen) perhaps dangerously ‘centered’ in some charismatic individual⁹¹ – Hitlerian state holidays, the extreme version of those during the French Revolution, advertising and contemporary aesthetic work (now devoid of any social normativity)⁹² – certainly has the merit of warning one against the instrumental and rhetoric administration of one’s affections. Yet, such demarcation is and will remain problematic as such. Both because in history, unfortunately, charismatic propaganda in totalitarian regimes can be exchanged for absolute (and, in this sense, divine) authority, and because no one is ever involved in an atmosphere that one *knows* to be manipulated (such acknowledgement is only made *ex post* and often only in the third person)⁹³. And also both because overcoming the dualism of subject/object involves the collaboration (not far-fetched, but radically excluded by Schmitz) of the manipulated himself in the genesis of the atmosphere, and because the Schmitzian primacy of presence seems to underestimate the (sometimes not timely but delayed) nature of the atmospheric experience, perhaps even conceivable as a ‘compromise solution’ with respect to the traumatic effect of the initial discrepancy.

Finally, it is needless to remember that the manipulative (in a non-judgmental sense: persuasive) appearance is obviously implicit in every practice that generates an atmosphere, much as the illusory appearance (which is such, besides, only in relation to a different and incommensurable level of ‘reality’) and the parasitic exploitation by the condensation points (charismatic character or suggestive situation) of atmospheric feelings that are more authentic and widely disseminated.

a) And yet it is only by acquiring a better atmospheric ‘competence’, not reducible solely to the *affectus non nisi parendo vincitur*, that we can really learn how not to be grossly manipulated. How to reserve for us, where this is not given by the authority itself (in its best examples), a space for critical reflection of our own – even more so when, as in today’s globalised world, we must be disenchanted about more and more dangerously anonymous authorities⁹⁴ (from the ‘stock market’ to GDP to credit SPREAD, etc.).

⁹¹ H. Schmitz - G. Marx - A. Moldzio, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

⁹² The only exception admitted by Schmitz in this trivial ‘smelling’ (aesthetic) atmospheres is dwelling as cultivation of feelings in an enclosed space (home, church, garden, Japanese tea house, etc.).

⁹³ For a few suggestions see C. Heibach, *Manipulative Atmosphären* cit., p. 263.

⁹⁴ H. Schmitz, *Die Legitimierbarkeit von Macht* cit., pp. 15-16.

b) But if this competence – the duly secularized «ability to distinguish between spirits» (1 Cor. 12,10), as it were – mitigates the objection that in such determinism⁹⁵ man would be «a blind passenger of atmospheres»⁹⁶, still it does not entail easy illusions about full emotional transparency or about the availability of an Archimedean point less fallible than personal critical sense⁹⁷. As in contemporary culture there is no privileged place for awareness, maybe we will have to settle for the interaction of the most diverse experiences (spatial, medial, functional, etc.), without claiming a critical position superior and/or external to them⁹⁸, promoting on an emotional level a kind of ‘separation of (atmospheric) powers’ that is healthy for mental life. For example, by re-learning from the most artificial atmospheres – e.g., from the cold and procedural ones of democracy⁹⁹ – what the peculiarities of the most natural ones are, and vice versa.

c) Just as the experience of *trompe-l'oeil* and ‘immersive’ spaces relies on the fact that an immersive phase will be followed by a partly emotional and partly reflective phase of emersion, so an atmosphere is poorly manipulative when it stimulates this sequence, when the ‘I’ that it calls upon is neither a wholly non-reflective subject – and maybe tasteless enough to appreciate only the atmospheric character of *clichés* (such as a blue and clear sky) – nor a subject placed at an excessive contemplative distance¹⁰⁰. Provided, of course, that such coexistence of affective and corporeal involvement and relatively self-reflective detachment can be demonstrated.

⁹⁵ Schmitz overestimates the immediacy of feelings (despite their *status nascendi*) and the automatic gestural consequences of gripping (often one is immediately certain of feeling something, but one does not know what it is!). Besides, this is simplistically explained as a relationship between servant (perceiver) and master (feeling), thus underestimating not only the ambiguity of feelings but also the active role of the subject in their very creation (see J. Soentgen, *op. cit.*, p. 112).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁹⁷ H. Schmitz, *Was ist Neue Phänomenologie?* cit., p. 328; Id., *Die Legitimierbarkeit von Macht* cit., p. 14.

⁹⁸ L. Bieger, *Ästhetik der Immersion. Wenn Räume wollen. Immersive Erleben als Raumerleben*, in G. Lehnert (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, pp. 75-95, here pp. 88-89.

⁹⁹ T. Griffero, *Come foglie al vento? Osservazioni sull'atmosfera politica*, in P. D'Angelo - E. Franzini - G. Lombardo - S. Tedesco (a cura di), *Costellazioni estetiche. Dalla storia alla neoestetica. Studi offerti in onore di Luigi Russo*, Milano, Guerini, 2013, pp. 216-223.

¹⁰⁰ M. Diaconu, *Wetter, Welten, Wirkungen. Sinnverschiebungen der Atmosphäre*, in C. Heibach (hrsg.), *op. cit.*, pp. 85-99, here p. 88.

As already mentioned, the authority of atmospheres exists in the proper sense only when it overcomes all the critical scruples that the perceiver may mobilise, when it prevails over his resistance and he cannot access a further critical level. That is, when reflection does not weaken the suggestion of the numinous, of the voice of moral conscience (secularised residue of the divine) or of the appeal to do what we feel is right: this is perhaps the atmospheric-binding sense, that can be hardly overestimated in a hopefully shocking philosophical reevaluation of suffering¹⁰¹, including the Lutheran famous statement 'Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise'.

¹⁰¹ T. Griffero, *Quasi-cose* cit., pp. 75-87.