

SARA BORRIELLO

Barbara Wolf-Christian Julmi
Die Macht der Atmosphären

The concept of 'atmosphere' has become increasingly important over the last twenty years and is currently a significant topic in contemporary aesthetics. The term was first used in a 'technical' sense by the late philosopher Hermann Schmitz in 1969, and a year earlier by the psychopathologist Hubertus Tellenbach, to define a sensorial and affective quality widespread in space characterising the perceptual experience of our surroundings. As qualities that arise during the so-called first impression, they belong to the passive side of sense perception, in which we feel 'gripped' by certain external feelings that Schmitz calls atmospheres. The concept has become one of the cornerstones of the New Phenomenology, which describes the effect of atmospheres on human beings in terms of 'corporeally being in the grip of an emotion' (*leibliche Ergriffenheit*), without the possibility of resisting – at least in the first instance. Experiences such as these happen to us all the time, and perhaps it is precisely because of their undeniability that the 'theory of atmospheres' has extended its boundaries not only to the human sciences, but also to the applied disciplines that everyday deal with 'situations' in which an expressive 'more' emerges. This 'more' cannot be traced back to the perceiver because it refers to an emotional tone that, precisely, 'is in the air'.

The analysis of the phenomena of atmospheres, the strength of their effects, and impact on the most diverse fields of knowledge is the leitmotif of the book *Die Macht der Atmosphären*, edited by Christian Julmi and Barbara Wolf and published by Karl Alber at the end of 2020. It is a collective anthology that brings together the essays of many eminent academics who participated in the 2018 New Phenomenology annual symposium at the University of Rostock.

The book is divided into four sections: the first and second constitute a theoretical analysis of atmospheres, while the final two examine their practical and operational aspects. The first section, focusing on the philosophical approach to the question of atmosphere, is more general and opens with Schmitz's contribution entitled *Atmosphären als Mächte über die Person*, in which the philosopher describes the effect that atmospheres produce on human

beings. The main point of the article – and of the book as a whole – is that atmospheres, poured out into space, assault us in the form of a corporeal and emotional involvement. The specific power of atmospheres, Schmitz says, is that they are themselves feelings or ‘generators’ of feelings inextricably linked to the perceiver through a bodily and personal «taking possession» (*Besitzergreifung*) (p. 32). One of the basic theses of the theory of atmospheres is in fact the notion of lived corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*), which also represents one of the core themes of the book. One example of this is Guido Rappe’s essay *Digitalisierung, Künstliche Intelligenz und die Macht der Atmosphären*, in which the author addresses the issue of artificial intelligence, asking himself what the difference is between the technical-physiological processes underlying the working of machines and the dynamics that characterise our authentic vital experience. The concept of *Leib* and intersubjectivity promoted by the New Phenomenology appear here as the main tools for recognising feelings as having their own status, and for not reducing human life to a mere «physical exchange of energy» (p. 59). The affective dimension is indeed our most personal feature, which reveals its absolute centrality in our lives when we feel affected by an atmosphere. Gernot Böhme describes its pervasive influence by analysing the experiences we have through the most direct and immediate sense we possess: the sense of smell, which, he laments, has been increasingly devalued due to the ‘deodorisation’ of the world that began in the 18th century. Despite this, in *Geruch und Atmosphäre*, Böhme considers smelling a practice that is still powerfully atmospheric by virtue of the paradox according to which the loss of olfactory skills – necessary to orient ourselves in the world through the senses – limits our ability to resist such atmospheres, making us increasingly subject to their effects and power. The first section ends with an essay by philosopher Uwe Voigt entitled *Eingestimmte Subjekte? Das Kombinationsproblem des Panpsychismus im Licht der Atmosphärenkonzeption der Neuen Phänomenologie*, where atmosphere (also in the sense evoked by the word *Stimmung*) appears as a possible answer to the long-standing ‘combination problem’ in contemporary panpsychism. More precisely, by conceiving of mental states not as private internal worlds, but as atmospheres, intersubjectivity is safeguarded since it would be precisely the ‘attuned’ (*eingestimmt*) interaction between micro-subjects that produces a macro-subject, i.e., a common atmosphere that connects the

‘elementary particles’ of reality in the same emotional tone (*Stimmung*).

The second section deals with how the concept of atmosphere has been utilised in the social sciences to analyse community or collective contexts in particular. In his contribution entitled *Was kann eine Gefühlsatmosphäre tun? Atmosphären zwischen Immersion und Emersion*, Tonino Griffero proposes a tripartition of atmospheres into *prototypical*, *derivative-relational*, and *spurious*. He then addresses the question of the producibility/production of atmospheres and their manipulative character by introducing the concept of ‘atmospheric competence’, which can be defined as an «atmospheric instinct» (p. 94) capable of distinguishing ‘toxic’ (not false) atmospheres from ‘benign’ ones and of fostering those atmospheres where an early pathic and immersive step follows an emersive phase. The combination of immersion and emersion can create a critical distance capable of immunising – as far as possible – the subject from the manipulative power of the atmospheres. In the following contributions, the concept is brought to bear on various domains, from those more ‘acquainted’ with the concept (such as urban geography and architecture), to more recent ones (such as sport). The geographer Jürgen Hasse deals with the theme of sacred space in connection with the concepts of numinous, aura, and *genius loci*. The essay, entitled *Heiliger Raum im Wandel. Zur atmosphärischen Macht von (profanierten) Kirchen* focuses on the atmospheric presence of church buildings in the public space of city. Whereas in the past churches represented the geographical and spiritual centre of cities and villages, in modern metropolises they have often lost their original function, but nevertheless remain important architectural, aesthetic, and cultural sites. It is in this regard that the author investigates the persistence (*Beharrende*) of the atmospheric *aura* within profaned churches, i.e., in those places of worship that have changed their intended use in the modern age. The question of the relationship between architectural construction and the generation of atmospheres is also central in the essay written by architects Christoph Michels and Dalal Elarji. In *Gemischte Gefühle. Affektive Atmosphären von Hochschularchitektur* they compare two different university architectural buildings to show how architecture conditions our perception in and of the places around us.

Robert Gugutzer’s essay *Kollektive Atmosphären des Sports* is devoted to a topic not much addressed by ‘atmospherology’,

namely the atmospheric experience in sport. He analyses on the one hand the characteristics of typical feelings-atmospheres in sports venues (stadiums, arenas, gyms), and on the other their influence on both the spectators and the athletes. Atmospheres are described here as collective phenomena with specific features that depend on factors such as their duration, their dependence on the location, and their 'form' (impressive or segmented). Based on these elements and their different combinations, Gugutzer draws up a 'situation typology', which precisely and systematically describes four types of situational sport atmospheres. Nina Trčka also talks about collective atmospheres. In *Kollektive Trauer. Formen der Vergemeinschaftung durch nahes und fernes Leid* she deals with the dramatic experience of losing a beloved person, to which one usually reacts with social isolation and a loss of interest in the world. The contribution aims to show how the loss of a 'shared situation' with the deceased can lead to the generation of an atmosphere of collective mourning, thus giving rise to a process of communitarianisation that involves both the bereaved and those very close to him/her. The section ends with a contribution by Reinhardt Knodt entitled *Von der Macht der Atmosphären. Eine korrespondenztheoretische Studie*, in which atmospheres are analysed in the light of 'correspondence theory' (in Dewey's sense) that overcomes dualisms and emphasises the interrelation (*Zusammenwirken*) between situation, *milieu*, and atmosphere on one side, and man (but also animals and things) on the other. The atmosphere as an event of correspondence is for Knodt a 'form of communality' that gradually develops into a power of increasing intensity to which we are subject.

The two concluding sections are dedicated to an in-depth examination of the pragmatic aspects of the power of atmospheres. Distinguishing between the description of a process and its actual realisation, the essays are divided according to their content: in the third part those that contribute to the operationalisation of the concept, and in the fourth those that get to the heart of the matter through examples that show the decisive contribution that the neo-phenomenological theory of atmospheres offers to the praxis of disciplines, especially therapeutic ones.

The third section opens with *Implizites Wissen über Atmosphären* by the sociologist Clemens Albrecht, who reflects on the constitution of atmospheres in a wide variety of contexts, from personal to professional. According to the author, atmospheres are a

bridge between us and the world, between our subjective experiences and external situations. Our skill to recognise and interact with atmospheres can be expressed in terms of a 'tacit knowledge' (after Polanyi), which must therefore necessarily be based on ethnographic methods of investigation. For his part, Rainer Kazig deals with our engagement with atmospheres, considering it not only as an affective and unconscious involvement, but rather as a conscious 'appropriation' of their power in view of a use in accordance with one's own interest. In his article entitled *Zum Umgang mit Atmosphären. Atmosphäre als Handlungsressource und sinnliche Vermittlerin von Lebensmöglichkeiten*, Kazig proposes furthermore a conception of atmosphere as an 'action resource' (*Handlungsressource*) (p. 223) capable of intervening on both the side of emotion and action.

Of a very different subject is the essay by the anthropologist Martin Radermacher, who is interested in defining the peculiarities of religious atmospheres. The suggestion offered in *Religion und Atmosphäre. Überlegungen zum Potenzial sozial-räumlicher Arrangements in religiösen Situationen* is that their effectiveness lies in the (semantic) potential of socio-spatial arrangement, which enables communication, practices, and religious experiences, without however determining them. Andreas Rauh's essay *Wirkmacht von Atmosphären. Ästhetische Verortungskordinaten* shifts the focus back to philosophical issues. The author establishes a connection between the theory of atmosphere and fundamental concepts of classical aesthetics (meant as the theory of beauty) and modern aesthetics (understood as the theory of sense perception). Starting from Kant's third critique, he uses in particular the notions of 'beautiful' and 'sublime' to describe aspects of atmospheric experience, highlighting how the affective and bodily involvement (and the presence of perceiver and perceived 'here and now') play a central role in perceptual dynamics. The section ends with a contribution by the editor Christian Julmi, who in *Wer macht die Atmosphären? Eine kurze Einführung in das System der atmosphärischen Führung* focuses on the interactions between leadership mechanisms, practices, and strategies on one side, and the atmospheres that arise in these contexts on the other. The aim of the article is to outline the characteristics of an 'atmospheric leadership' by referring to the system developed by Guido Rappe and Julmi himself in 2018, which is, in turn, based on Hermann Schmitz's New Phenomenology and Robert Gugutzer's Neophenomenological Sociology.

The fourth and last section deals with proper ‘atmospheric practice’. The essays investigate the creation, generation, and use of atmospheres in various contexts, with a particular focus on the clinical field. Charlotte Uzarewicz’s contribution entitled *Hörbare Pflege? Der Beitrag der Akustik zur klinischen Atmosphäre* focuses on the role of hearing in care contexts from the perspective of nursing staff. Based on Julmi’s classification of atmospheric idealtypes, the author thematizes the typical characteristics of a clinical atmosphere, which is always synaesthetic and felt-bodily-oriented. *Atmosphären im medizinischen Umfeld* by Wolf Langewitz also moves in the clinical-medical field, investigating the positive influence of ‘healing architecture’ on patients and on everyone involved in care. The author also reflects on the potential of both doctors and patients to create, preserve, or modify an atmosphere. In *Die Wirkung von Atmosphären. Über den Umgang mit Attacken aus dem Prädimensionalen Raum* the psychotherapist Gabriele Marx attempts to describe the atmospheres that arise in the encounter with the other (in this case, between therapist and patient) and which are realised in the form of ‘mutual incorporation’ (*wechselseitige Einleibung*) (p. 365). The aim of the essay is also to offer some suggestions to the therapist to defend him/herself (as far as possible) from ‘atmospheric attacks’, i.e., from the feelings and ‘personal situations’ that the patient brings with him during the psychotherapeutic session. Of particular interest in this respect is *Arbeit mit und unter der Macht von Atmosphären. Fallbeispiele aus der Prosopiatry von Prenzlamm* by Cornelia Diebow that reports on her experience as a staff member of the Institute for Prosopiatry in Prenzlamm, which for several years has been offering support and assistance to psychiatric cases deemed untreatable. A prosopiatric approach rests on the concept of ‘person’ (in Schmitz’s sense) who is «always in his personal world, which is also a situation» (p. 376). The essay presents the result of the institute’s employees’ reflections on the most effective ways of working *with* and *under* the influence of atmospheres. The author puts forward the thesis of a threefold approach to atmospheres: 1) avoiding those that may hinder work, 2) tolerating those that may help treatment, and 3) building functional constellations for the establishment of new and more constructive atmospheres. Some clinical cases enrich the work, making it an operational model applicable in other contexts. The therapeutic context is also central in *Therapeutische Atmosphären. Am Beispiel der Musiktherapie bei Demenzen* by Jan Sonntag, who analyses the role

of music therapy in dementia patients. They are considered to be more sensitive to atmospheres because of their different 'sense of reality', which leads them to be more exposed to felt-bodily involvement. Barbara Wolf, pedagogue and co-editor, shifts the focus of attention in *Diversität schafft Atmosphären. Machtvolle Momente inklusiver Pädagogik* to the power of atmospheres in school contexts, making reference to the debate on inclusion from both a school-institutional point of view and in everyday classroom practice. The last contribution, written by Petra Seibert and entitled *Wie kommt die Atmosphäre in die Atmosphäre? Das neue dreiteilige Wahrnehmungsmodell – Logos-Auge-Leib – als Leitfaden*, is dedicated to the analysis of atmospheric perception based on the theoretical model developed by the author herself. Starting from the hypothesis that humans perceive and give shape to reality in three different ways, namely through the *Logos*, visual autonomy, and the *Leib*, or rather through the prevalence of one aspect over the other two, the aim of the essay is to profile the atmospheres that characterise these processes in order to trace a DNA of atmospheric perception that can free today's paradigm of knowledge from a predominance of the *Logos*. The anthology ends with an interview by Christian Julmi with Hermann Schmitz – the last before his death – on the question around which all the contributions revolve: the power of atmospheres. They discuss some of the fundamental topics of the New Phenomenology such as the reciprocal effects that characterise man's interaction with feelings-atmospheres, the relationship between 'atmosphere' and 'situation', and, finally, the aesthetic consequences and practical advantages that an atmospheric approach can bring to philosophical reflection and human and applied sciences.

In conclusion, the anthology underlines the fruitful contribution that the philosophical notion of atmosphere – representing a new filter through which questions and problems can be addressed from a new perspective – can offer to the conceptual framework of different disciplines. This is an ambitious attempt that requires a rethinking of several cornerstones of Western thought, including the hiatus between body and soul/psyche, the distinction between *Körper* and *Leib*, the introjection and psychologization of feelings, the status of subjectivity, and the characterisation of space. Many of these conceptual revolutions are due to Hermann Schmitz and his pioneering work, without which neither the theoretical elabo-

ration of the last few decades nor the pragmatic orientation of atmospheres would have been possible.

Die Macht der Atmosphären therefore represents an ambitious (and successful) attempt to take up Schmitz's heritage and broaden the boundaries of its investigation, with the aim of shedding light on the inextricable intertwining of perceiving, feeling, thinking, and acting.

Wolf B.- Julmi C. (eds.), 2020: *Die Macht der Atmosphären*, Freiburg-München, Karl Alber, 2020, pp. 480.