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## INTRODUCTION

On September the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the colloquium *Atmospheres: between ethics and aesthetics* was held in Rome. The present Focus of «Lebenswelt. Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience» hosts its proceedings. A Focus is supposed to stress an extremely topical issue of the contemporary debate in aesthetics and nowadays the concept of 'atmosphere' has definitely reached such a status not only within the tight field of aesthetics (thought of as a theory of perception and sensibility) or even of philosophy<sup>1</sup>. It has spread out in several other disciplines such as architecture, design, religious studies, theory of art (as far as it is not identified with aesthetics), etc. Thus, talking about 'atmospheres' does not imply immediately referring to a physic phenomenon. Instead, making 'atmosphere' an aesthetic tool, or a tool to better understand other fields of human life, means firstly putting together the concepts of emotion, space and vagueness, and secondly confronting with the idea that there are in the world realities which, despite their ontological under-determinacy, determine the emotional quality of a given space. That implies one has to be always either attuned or not with a certain ambient. Thus, according to

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<sup>1</sup> Although, probably, it has had a lot of avatars and forerunner concepts, which can be considered as 'atmospheres' *ante litteram* (like *genius loci*, or the idea of something *numinous*), the concept of 'atmosphere' in a technical and philosophical sense has been introduced by H. Tellenbach, *Geschmack und Atmosphäre*, Salzburg, Müller, 1968. Almost in the same time H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, Bd. III, *Der Raum*, II Teil, *Der Gefühlsraum*, Bonn, Bouvier, 1969, started using this same concept. Both thinkers' idea was that the term 'atmosphere' could linguistically express an emotionally tuned space. However, only recently this concept has really come into question in current debate and turned into a highly interesting topic. In particular, the aesthetics of the last twenty years focused on the concept of 'atmosphere'. See at least G. Böhme (*Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1995; *Anmutungen. Über das Atmosphärische*, Tertium, Ostfildern v. Stuttgart, 1998; *Asthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, München, Fink, 2001; *Architektur und Atmosphäre*, München, Fink, 2006); T. Griffero, *Atmospheres. Aesthetics of emotional spaces* (2010), Farnham, Ashgate, 2014; M. Hauskeller, *Atmosphären erleben. Philosophische Untersuchungen zur Sinneswahrnehmung*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1995; A. Rauh, *Die besondere Atmosphäre. Ästhetische Feldforschungen*, Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2012.

the atmospherological hypothesis, the uncomfortable feeling of disorientation, which can seize somebody who has just arrived in a city never visited before, is not simply a psychological status; it is moreover something that comes from (supervenes on) the very *ordo rerum*, namely the fact one got into a unknown atmosphere which affects oneself in the flesh (what 'phenomenologists' and 'atmospherologists' normally call *Leib*, i.e. felt-, lived- or proper-body<sup>2</sup>). This kind of experiences are very common as well as the one of entering a space that seems to be emotionally tuned, or finding oneself conditioned and/or attracted by something external to us which however cannot simply be a particular object, but is due to the 'situation'. According to the theorists of the concept of 'atmosphere', the psychologistic explanations of these experiences don't suffice. The main argument consists in observing that our emotional and perceptual life doesn't simply depend on psychological or cognitive processes. Evidences come from many fields of our life, e.g., from architecture and design. Who has never experienced that a certain building, arrangement of apartments or museums, or a neighborhood in a city, made her feel strange, uncomfortable, afraid, bound or, on the opposite side, at home, comfortable, calm, free, etc.? Only a radical theory of atmosphere allows us to *explain* and *describe* what in fact happens here. But what is actually at stake with this new fashionable usage of such an old commonsensical concept is above all a realist foundation of the commonsense itself in the emotional layer *of the world* (i.e., not only of the human being). In other words, the theorists of the concept of 'atmosphere' aim at providing an instrument to understand the way everyone lives in the world and why and how it is possible that there are shared forms of life (that is, shared way to relate to the world) – 'forms' that are first of all 'pathic' or emotional, and only on this first ground pragmatic and social or even theoretical. This is of course a radically non-psychologistic and anti-subjectivist way to understand the human 'being-in-the-world'.

What follows from this brief sketch is that the concept of 'atmosphere' finds its core-field in aesthetics. Then, every research field that has primarily to do with that has in principle to do with 'atmospheres' and can of course take advantages by applying the conceptual framework provided by atmospheric studies. Besides aesthetics, however, 'atmospheres' have outstanding

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<sup>2</sup> See T. Griffero, *op. cit.*, p. 2, n. 4.

implications in ethics and politics. Indeed, carefully observing our condition in lived spaces allows the researchers to recognize not only how we actually live here and now (evaluating the quality of our life), but also to critically evaluate how a certain space ‘acts’ on us, conditioning our psychic states, e.g., decisions, preferences, tastes, etc. (what is both political and ethical). The essays gathered here actually deal with all this, providing either a positive series of contributions, where the concept of ‘atmosphere’ is presented, thought and even used productively in order to show its fruitfulness and applicability; or criticizing this perspective and framework by shedding light on its limits or problems.

Matilde Amaturò’s *Le atmosfere di Lucia Romualdi* presents a perfect case study of what ‘making-atmospheres’ could mean: she shows how the artist Lucia Romualdi creates actual atmospheres in her works of art. Contrary to this, Michele Di Monte’s *Atmosfera e atmosferologia. Come mettere ordine tra le atmosfere?* stresses some crucial points and poses decisive objections to the atmospheric theory. Starting from the classical aesthetic issue of the ‘museum’, Maria Giuseppina Di Monte’s *Il paesaggio dentro il museo* shows if and to what extent a theory of atmospheres can be fruitfully applied to the contemporary idea of the museum. Filippo Fimiani’s essay, *Only noise if you can see. Spazi vuoti e luoghi dell’arte*, provides an actual atmospheric way of thinking, by showing how ‘atmospheres’ can work as material (concrete), focal and convergent principle, for a lot of different elements and devices that contribute to the success of the different attempts by Andy Warhol and Yves Klein to transform figurative art in immaterial and environmental one. Tonino Griffèro confronts the issue of the authority of an atmosphere. His *Who’s afraid of atmospheres (and of their authority)?* sketches a possible history of the relation between religion, politics and atmospheres in order to outline a proper atmospheric theory of authority and shows its ethical and political implications. Jürgen Hasse’s *Atmospheres as expressions of medial power* deals with the issue of emotional manipulation through atmospheres. The example of the HafenCity on Hamburg becomes thus a perfect case study to challenge this political shade of the theory of atmospheres. Juhani Pallasmaa, in *Space, place and atmosphere. Emotion and peripheral perception in architectural experience*, proposes a defense of the theory of atmospheres by starting from the idea of multi-sensory experience. By bringing scientific evidences for this kind of experience, he shows how at-

mospheric experience can be consistent with some recent issues of biology and cognitive sciences. *On the ethical-aesthetic potentials of special atmospheres* by Andreas Rauh is directly focused on the tight bound between ethics and aesthetics that concerns 'atmospheres' in the sense defended here. In Roberto Salizzoni's *Icone e atmosfera*, the author connects the current debate on atmospheres with the Russian Christian-orthodox debate on icons, and he shows how the concept of 'atmosphere' can be fruitfully applied to the latter. In his essay, Antonio Somaini sheds new light on the history of the concept of 'atmosphere' by comparing it with the history of the concept of 'medium', focusing especially on the way in which the two terms were used in the 1920s and 1930s by authors such as Béla Balázs and Walter Benjamin. What emerges from these readings is an understanding of the 'medium', not as a technical means, but rather as the *milieu*, the environment in which sensorial perception takes place, and an understanding of 'atmosphere' as one of the emotionally-laden 'densities' of such a 'medium'. Finally, Jean-Paul Thibaud's essay, *Urban ambiance as common ground?*, brings some evidences to the idea that 'atmospheres' (or, as he calls them 'ambiances') are the common ground of our everyday life.

Thus, as can be seen, what is at stake with the theory of atmospheres is our own life itself and the way it is carried on. We cannot afford to neglect that.