

Exploring atmospheric affordances and felt body communication

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1. *Atmospherology*

We are all always *situated*, i.e. engaged in a series of atmospheric *encounters* or *games*, where by “atmosphere” – a concept become relevant in all the Humanities that subscribe to the affective- and embodiment-turn¹ – I mean the something more we sense “in the air”, a holistic qualitative feeling that pervades a certain (pre-dimensional) space and resonates in the experienter’s felt body, albeit it is inaccessible to an epistemic-analytical perspective. An atmosphere actually precedes any analysis and influences the perceiver’s emotional (and later also cognitive, practical) situation from the outset, resisting, especially in the cases I define “prototypical”, any perceivers’ conscious attempt at projective adaptation and epistemic correction. However, it may within certain limits be traced back to a more or less homogeneous set of affordances, which, using a notion of Gernot Böhme², act as atmospheric generators that can be (at least in part) specified and linguistically expressed.

An atmospherological project³ must be contextualized within the neo-phenomenological overturning of an introjectionist metaphysics

¹ Cf. T. Griffero, «Is There Such a Thing as an “Atmospheric Turn”? Instead of an Introduction» in *Atmosphere and Aesthetics. A Plural Perspective*, edited by T. Griffero and M. Tedeschini, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2019, pp. 11-16; Id., «Emotional Atmospheres» in *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion*, edited by T. Szanto and H. Landweer, Routledge, London-New York 2020, pp. 262-274.

² Cf. G. Böhme, *Aisthetik: Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, Fink, München 2001; Id., *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Routledge, London-New York 2017; Id., *Atmospheric Architectures. The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, Bloomsbury, London 2017.

³ Cf. T. Griffero, *Atmosferologia. Estetica degli spazi emozionali*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010; Engl. transl. by S. De Sanctis, *Atmospheres: Aesthetics of emotional spaces*, Routledge, London-New York 2014; Id. *Places, Affordances, Atmospheres. A Pathic Aesthetics*, Routledge, London-New York 2020; Id., «Urban atmospheres and felt-bodily resonances» in

(due to Plato's invention of the psyche) largely dominant in our culture. It takes seriously the provocative hypothesis suggested by Hermann Schmitz nearly 60 years ago now of a radical de-psychologisation of the emotional sphere⁴.

But let's start with an example of an encounter with an architectural space. Let's imagine that we are now entering the hall of a major banking institution, with its pretentious decorations, furnishings, paintings, and sculptures⁵. This certainly impressive lived space may be filtered (token-atmospheres) in various ways by our felt-bodily dispositions exemplarily, suggesting an atmosphere of inhibiting power on the customer and an atmosphere of power that makes proud the owner of the bank and even the employee who has developed a strong *esprit de corps*, despite the type-atmosphere (imposing and authoritative vastness) is the *same*. Proceeding, however, beyond this extreme polarity, different can be the *encounters*. Summing up: an atmosphere can 1) overwhelm us, 2) find us in tune with it, to the point of not being recognised and felt (hence some embarrassing inadequacy like moving in a disorderly manner in church or in a too conventional way during a party), c) be recognised without being really felt, 4) elicit a resistance that pushes us to change it, 5) concretize itself even in *materials* or components that normally express the opposite, thus giving life to an affective inversion (as when a building aims at intimidating us and instead enhances our tendency to rebel), 6) finally be perceived differently in the course of time (for various reasons)⁶. However, all these atmospheric *games* prove, against any projectivistic relativism, that different atmospheric moods are just relatively different felt-bodily filterings and *resonances*⁷ of the *same* quasi-objective and first-impression

The Affective City. Spaces, Atmospheres and Practices in Changing Urban Territories, edited by S. Catucci and F. De Matteis, LetteraVentidue, Siracusa 2021, pp. 24-49.

⁴ Cf. at least: H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, vol. III.2, *Der Gefühlsraum*, Bouvier, Bonn 1969; Id., *Leib und Gefühl. Materialien zu einer philosophischen Therapeutik*, Junfermann, Paderborn 1992; Id., *Atmosphären*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2014; Engl. transl. by L. Marinucci, edited by T. Griffero, *Atmospheres*, Mimesis International, Sesto San Giovanni 2023.

⁵ An example developed, even critically, in M. Arbib and T. Griffero, *Atmosphere(s) for Architects: Between Phenomenology and Cognition*, New Prairie Press, Manhattan (Kansas) 2023, pp. 44-49.

⁶ For a detailed presentation (also supported by literary examples) of this phenomenology of atmospheric *encounters* or *games* see: T. Griffero, *The Atmospheric "We". Moods and Collective Feelings*, Mimesis International, Sesto S. Giovanni 2021, pp. 37-66; Id., *Urban Atmospheres* cit., pp. 36-41.

⁷ For a critical fine-tuning of this notion (also referring to Hermann Schmitz, Bernhard Waldenfels, Hartmut Rosa and Thomas Fuchs) see: T. Griffero, *Atmospheres and felt-bodily*

atmosphere, a form of response to affordances immanent to forms, things and living beings perceived in the pericorporeal space: a response that I want to investigate here following the neo-phenomenological theory of the ubiquitous felt-bodily communication⁸.

2. Atmosphere as sets of (non-Gibsonian) affordances

Atmospheres are affordances or sets of affordances that tonalize the affective (natural or built-up) space in which we (sometimes literally) enter and segment it through boundaries that, despite not being geometrical but emotional, affect our life-world experience. It's true that atmospheres mostly occur as an *in-between* (between the perceiver and their environment), but in the already mentioned prototypical cases, they may even be prior to the constitution of these two poles. Anyway, all atmospheres express more or less intensely what they *afford* a person not only to do (as James Gibson⁹ famously clarifies) but also to feel. And this because on the one hand, every relation to the world is primarily emotional and not the detached-impoorished perception reductionistically depicted by objective sciences, and on the other the perceived-sensed world is not the meaningless sphere of *dead* properties pursued by modern consciousness (both physicalist and culturalist), on which the experiencer simply projects their private-idiosyncratic feelings, needs, and motives. On the contrary, our affective and felt-bodily interaction with the surrounding (lived) space is always ruled by a physiognomic expressiveness to which, insofar as we are normal percipients and not experimental subjects, we mostly respond as recommended by phenomena themselves.

What leads to focus on similarities between the affordances studied by ecological psychology and the atmospheres¹⁰ is that both no-

resonances, in «Studi di estetica», no. 1, 2016, pp. 1-41; Id., *Felt-Bodily Resonances. Towards a Pathic Aesthetics*, in «Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy», no. 2, 2017, pp. 149-164; Id., *Better Be in Tune. Between Resonance and Responsibility*, in «Studi di estetica», no. 2, 2020, pp. 90-115; Id., *Being a Lived Body: From a Neo-phenomenological Point of View*, Routledge, London-New York 2024, pp. 145-159.

⁸ For the last version, see: H. Schmitz, *Der Leib*, de Gruyter, Berlin-Boston 2011, pp. 29-53.

⁹ J.J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Routledge, London 1986.

¹⁰ Cf. T. Griffero, «Architectural Affordances: The Atmospheric Authority of Spaces» in *Architecture and Atmosphere*, edited by G. Böhme, T. Griffero, J.P. Thibaud and J. Pallasmaa, Tapio Wirkkala-Rut Bryk Foundation, Espoo 2014, pp. 15-47; Id., «They are there

tions imply an embodied, non-representational, and situated approach to perception. Both also take the co-development of the perception and the lived space very seriously, thus rejecting a culture that dualistically splits the inner self and the outer world - a capital error on which the entire Western intellectual culture is based¹¹ - and, despite their differences, actually promote an approach to experience by focusing on a lifeworldly communication with the world. They actually pay due attention to the qualia of the lived (not geometric-isotropic) space¹² and their (even unconsciously perceived) invitations to act but also to feel in a certain way, which cannot be reduced to the simple dichotomy attractive/unattractive, thus following some Gestalt-psychological notions such as *demand character*, *invitation*, *valence*, etc., and suggesting to overcome the subjective/objective polarity. But this is not true either for those atmospheres which allow for the dissonance between perceiving a feeling and really being grasped by¹³ it and for those whose peculiar emotional authority imposes itself upon the perceiver even when they try to reject its grasping.

It goes without saying that both affordances theory and atmospherology oppose the constructivist-culturalist approach and its mentalistic/dualistic concepts, advocate for the thesis of direct perception, meaning that the environment is laden with affective qualities that perceivers *extract* (and which they resonate with) and do not *put into* it during their sensory experience. This direct perceptual realism means that perception does not need to postulate inner and always mediated processes (representations, inferences, computations, manipulation of representations) to access the world¹⁴ as our emotional life depends on affordances-based atmospheres that suggest us precisely what to feel.

to be perceived: Affordances and atmospheres» in *Affordances in Everyday Life*, edited by Z. Djebbara, Springer, Cham 2022, pp. 85-95.

¹¹ Cf. H. Schmitz, *Kurze Einführung in die Neue Phänomenologie*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2009; Engl. transl. by R.O. Müllan and M. Bastert, Introd. by T. Griffero, *New Phenomenology. A Brief Introduction* (2009), Mimesis International, Milano 2019, in part. pp. 53-59; Id., *Sich selbst verstehen. Ein Lesebuch*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2021, in part. pp. 257-270.

¹² Cf. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie* vol. III.2 cit.; Id., *System der Philosophie*, vol. III.4, *Das Göttliche und der Raum*, Bouvier, Bonn 1977; T. Griffero, *Atmospheres and Lived Space*, in «Studia phaenomenologica», vol. 14, 2014, pp. 29-51.

¹³ Cf. Schmitz, *Atmospheres* cit.

¹⁴ A metaphor, that of *access*, which, presupposing a hiatus to be overcome between the percipient and the perceived world, entails consequences contrary to our everyday phenomenological experience (see L. Wiesing, *The Philosophy of Perception. Phenomenology and Image Theory*, Bloomsbury, London-New York 2014).

On the one hand, (i) the concept of affordance helps me specify some generative aspects of the atmospheric *je ne sais quoi* (unfortunately often used as an alibi of ineffability), that is, to explain atmospheric expressiveness also as the outcome of affordances. On the other hand, (ii) it is useful to better explain if and when an atmosphere can be composed and thus even result from possible interference of its components (also as potential sub-atmospheres). Both assumptions give more substance to the true but too-vague thesis that atmospheres express a holistic unanalysable «something more»¹⁵. Developing Ger- not Böhme’s ontological notion of «ecstasies of things» in this way¹⁶, it could also be said that atmospheres are generated not by properties (as accidents) of things (as substances) but by their ecstasies, i.e. by qualities that radiate into the surroundings, thus taking away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and filling it with tensions and movement suggestions. Unlike properties, which exist even if they are only thinkable (the geometric ones for example), atmospheres are mostly nothing but phenomenal appearances tonalizing our lifeworld and segmenting it qualitatively (and architecturally).

An atmosphere might then result (emerge) from the convergence among different micro-affordances (resulting from sub-atmospheres), while a subsequent and more in-depth perceptual experience might reveal some discordance between the first holistic atmosphere and the one suggested by discrepant and initially unnoticed micro-affordances. Using the idea of affordances as cascades of increasingly specific and occasional constraints, one could also talk about *cascades* of atmospheres, that is, sequential or nested atmospheres, hierarchies of atmospheres or atmospheric niches also of different rank (classified into prototypical, derived, and spurious)¹⁷, due to the reversal of the starting figure/background structure, or simply to the exhaustion of the initial feeling. Crucially, even though the first-impression atmosphere can be modified and even denied (not necessarily in a reflective way), it still acts as an invariant, as a paradigm of any subsequent change.

According to the classical psychological theory *affordances* are visual opportunities for action and behaviour¹⁸. What I call “affor-

¹⁵ Cf. H. Tellenbach, *Geschmack und Atmosphäre*, Müller, Salzburg 1968.

¹⁶ Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures* cit., in part. pp. 37-54.

¹⁷ Griffero, *The Atmospheric “We”* cit., p. 38.

¹⁸ For a recent look at the various uses of the notion of affordance, cf. Djebbara (ed.), *Affordances in Everyday Life* cit.

dances-based atmospheres” are rather feeling possibilities triggered by synesthetic or at least supra-modal resonance. They invite us not so much to possible actions (the seatability of a surface for example), but to experience a feeling and even to indulge in it. This *pathic* and not gnostic¹⁹ involvement makes us not actors but situational *patheurs*²⁰. This extra-pragmatic extension of affordances means – unless the notion of “action” is extended to include every virtual affective motion – that an affordances-based atmosphere can be defined as a value-affective ecological object one responds first of all in an emotional way (wonder, disgust, awe and fear in the sublime, and even emotional palsy), but also by distancing or a contemplative (broadly aesthetic) detachment not to be confused with a Cartesian static-cognitive observation, which is nothing more than a «view from nowhere»²¹. Atmospheres as sets of affordances, thus, function as (ecological but also social) *scaffolding* of affective experiences that would not be possible without them, thus also helping solidify hitherto only inchoative emotional experiences and even establishing a socio-normative affective appropriateness.

A certain landscape, for example, affords/invites us to contemplate it in a melancholic way, a church affords/invites us to experience it in humility or at least in a controlled and meditative way, a successful party affords/invites us to relax, a wooden or velvet material affords/invites to touch it, a tree standing erect and resisting the powerful sway of the wind affords/invites us to feel strength and obstinacy, an airy and well-designed architectural space affords/invites us to occupy it and freely walk around, as is especially obvious when one conceives of architecture in terms of gestures²² – in all these cases we sense a meaningfulness made up of demands-invitations that are effective without being necessarily epistemologically true (compared to what?) or adaptively functional (as in the case of the phantom limb, which affords to do something even though it does not exist anymore).

¹⁹ Cf. E. Straus, *Vom Sinn der Sinne. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Psychologie*, Springer, Berlin 1935; Engl. transl. by J. Needleman, *The Primary World of Senses: A Vindication of Sensory Experience* (1935), Free Press of Glencoe, New York 1963.

²⁰ For this notion in the context of the urban experience in particular, see J. Hasse, *Was Räume mit uns machen – und wir mit ihnen: Kritische Phänomenologie des Raumes*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2014, pp. 43-48.

²¹ T. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1986.

²² Cf. W. Meisenheimer, *Das Denken des Leibes und der architektonische Raum*, König, Köln 2006; A. Jäkel, *Gestik des Raumes. Zur leiblichen Kommunikation zwischen Benutzer und Raum in der Architektur*, Wasmuth, Tübingen-Berlin 2013.

To the key-question of whether both atmosphere and affordance are relational or non-relational dimensions, i.e. generated by a relationship between the subject and the world or prior to such a relationship, the only possible answer here, without fear of reification and/or ontological inflationism, is that this depends on the type of atmosphere we experience. In fact, prototypical atmospheres are real powerful entities and not only interactions and properties (let alone merely physical ones) or necessarily agent-related aspects. They are «quasi-things»²³ that, much like affordances according to some theories, are there even though they may not be actually perceived. Consider, for example, the atmosphere of narrowness that is idiosyncratically privileged by infants for its enveloping and protective character, while being felt as suffocating by adults, but in both cases because of the same felt-bodily resonance (of narrowness in this case).

One may also wonder if atmospheres and affordances are only dispositional environmental qualities. If from the first-person perspective they only are felt when they manifest themselves at a given time and in the *right circumstances*, from the ontological and third-person perspective they exist even though no one is feeling them at this moment or is not (yet) aware of them. In short: they are a feature of the environment even before manifesting themselves and being filtered by the perceiver. Lit candles, for example, may trigger an atmosphere of romance in an intimate restaurant but an atmosphere of unease and fear in a dark cellar. I suggest of talking about these different atmospheric resonances as tokens that depend on an invariant atmosphere, or type, in this case produced by the reduction of brightness, the enveloping presence of shadows, the desubstantialization of objects, etc. Their effect is certainly relative to the felt-bodily dispositions of the perceiver and not only to their physical body-scaling or their perceptual body schema. This resonance cannot be ever properly considered a mistake, given that the first-person perspective is never wrong in sensing something (where to find a criterion of *adaequatio* in fact?), which is quite different from saying that one can be wrong in explaining its cause and origin, whence the difficulty in speaking of *false* (at-

²³ H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, vol. III.5, *Die Wahrnehmung*, Bouvier, Bonn 1978, in part. pp. 116-139; T. Griffero, *Quasi cose: la realtà dei sentimenti*, Mondadori, Milano 2013; Engl. transl. by S. De Sanctis, *Quasi-Things: The Paradigm of Atmospheres*, Suny Press, Albany (N.Y.) 2017.

mospheric) feelings²⁴. To better understand it we should not seek help in neuroscience, provided that the brain as such neither has proper experiences or capacities nor is felt corporeally²⁵ – it is not a phenomenon, after all²⁶ – but in New Phenomenology’s theory of felt-bodily communication.

3. *Incorporation/excorporation: felt-bodily communication*

Neo-phenomenologically said, we immediately feel environmental bridge-qualities (motor suggestions and synaesthetic characters) and appropriately reproduce them in our lived (not physical) body²⁷ thanks to a felt body *alphabet* that is based on an endless modification of the contraction–expansion relationship. More exactly, according to Schmitz²⁸ the felt body alphabet (or «economy») contains thirteen components or «letters» that are variously combined in concrete experience and which cannot, of course, be explained in detail here: 1) narrowness (*Enge*) and 2) vastness (*Weite*), 3) contraction (*Engung*) and 4) expansion (*Weitung*), which are in turn mediated by 5) direction (*Richtung*), as such always only from narrowness towards vastness, and, because of the stimulating competition (whether simultaneous or successive), by 6) intensity (*Intensität*) and 7) rhythm (*Rhythmus*); between 3 and 4 then may be 8) tension (*Spannung*) as partial predominance of contraction or 9) swelling (*Schwellung*) in the sense of «swelled with pride», as partial predominance of expansion, while when one is partly given by separation from the other, respectively, 10) privative contraction (*privative Engung*) and 11) privative expansion (*privative Weitung*). This articulated alphabet is finally crossed

²⁴ Cf. Griffero, «Is There Such a Thing as an “Atmospheric Turn”?» cit., pp. 45-55.

²⁵ Cf. T. Fuchs, *Das Gehirn – ein Beziehungsorgan. Eine phänomenologisch-ökologische Konzeption*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 2008; Engl. ed., *ecology of the brain: The phenomenology and biology of the embodied mind* (2008, 2010), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018.

²⁶ T. Griffero, *Being a Lived Body from a Neo-phenomenological Point of View*, Routledge, New York 2024, pp. 22-27.

²⁷ For a more than century-long reconstruction of the philosophical debate on the distinction between lived body (*Leib*) and physical body (*Körper*) and the hermeneutic opportunities offered by a phenomenology based on the former, cf. Griffero, *Being a Lived Body* cit.

²⁸ Cf. H. Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, II.1, *Der Leib*, Bouvier, Bonn 1965; Id., *Der Leib* (2011) cit.

by the opposition between 12) epicritical tendency (*epikritische Tendenz*) and 13) protopathic one (*protopathische Tendenz*).

The challenge relies in describing-explaining each felt body motion and resonance, whether aware or not, by means of a specific combination of these thirteen components. Fright, for example, is the prototype of the felt-bodily privative contraction and lust of the predominant felt-bodily swelling in intensive or also rhythmic competition with (subjugated) bodily tension, thirst as the supreme case of felt-bodily intensity, etc. More interesting for our topic, however, are the reflections on felt-bodily disposition, communication, and resonance: all point that can be summarised under the notion of “encorporation”, which I keep distinct also terminologically from the more cognitive and today trendy one of embodiment.

Through incorporation Schmitz settles the problem of the other’s psychicity from the outset, i.e. thanks to a non-monological concept of subjectivity according to which a (aware or not) felt-bodily communication to the other (living or not) allows us to always experience them. It is felt-bodily, in fact, not only the individual dynamic, but also the intercorporeal units arising in the pericorporeal space by extending the individual relationship narrowness/vastness outside and depending on the kind of *attractor landscape* or partner encountered. Importantly, the perception is not meant here as a form of receiving and re-elaborating signals but as a co-action and co-presence of perceiver and perceived, where the latter, whether it is a living entity, an inanimate object or simply a form, currently present or not (a building, the favourite armchair, a certain landscape, our house, the ball for the football player, etc.), radiates through its narrow-pole *motor suggestions* and *synesthetical characters* on the perceiver. Without ever embracing a cosmic substance like late Merleau-Ponty’s over-metaphorical «flesh» (*chair*) and thus theologising the communication²⁹, the perception could be thought as a joint action or dialogic interaction so ontogenetically immediate and fusional that it cannot be divided into an only active and only passive pole. Rather, it can be diversified according to three different parameters derived from the aforementioned felt body alphabet (intensity, differences of weighting, form of intertwinement between contraction and expansion). In particular, the felt-bodily com-

²⁹ Cf. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible. Suivi de notes de travail*, Gallimard, Paris 1964; Engl. transl. by A. Lingis, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968.

munication consists in a rhythmic competition between encorporation (*Einleibung*) and excorporation (*Ausleibung*) and results in some positive (prevailing expansive) and some negative (prevailing contractive) states, but also in states where one pole can trigger its symmetrical opposite and even turn into it.

A) Let's start with *encorporation* (*Einleibung*). It happens when the already intracorporeal, dialogical or agonistic, competition narrowness/vastness – perfectly shown by pain as a quasi-thingly antagonist ignited both by the drive to escape into vastness (symbolically in crying for example) and by the contractive-inhibiting drive (in gestures like clenching fists) – also becomes external by being grasped by affordances, atmospheres and quasi-things, for instance when it dialogues with buildings, the sound, the glance and even with challenging mental problems, so explaining the outside reality awareness better than mere physical resistance. This really ubiquitous felt-bodily encorporation is what Schmitz terms full-fledged «situations»³⁰, which are endowed with an inner chaotic-multiple significance and whose condensation around a core of narrowness also clarifies collective feelings better than theories simply focused on intentionality, non-verbal communication, or mysterious energy contagion. Now to the main forms of encorporation.

A1) The first, the one-sided «antagonistic», occurs when one of the partners steadily prevails, whether or not it addresses the other. Absorbing the other's felt-bodily narrowness, the dominant (living or not) partner controls the directions of encorporation, as such always moving from narrowness to vastness, through an almost hypnotic suggestion power. This means that any impressive-Gestaltic happening, even though it is motionless (a stone, a form, an object, a building, or some of its components such as a staircase, a window, etc.), can absorb the percipient thanks to its motor suggestion. By grabbing the other's narrowness, the suggestive pole gives life to a non-dialogic perception (fright, hypnosis, etc.) with varying intensity: a rolling stone captures our gaze up to making us fall with it or by its threatening generates in us the ability to avoid it without any metrical-local evaluation but thanks a primordial motor body schema; the football fan is *hypnotized* by the ball's movement; the climber by a falling rock

³⁰ For an examination of the vast and highly articulated theory of situations, cf. H. Schmitz, *Situationen und Konstellationen. Wider die Ideologie totaler Vernetzung*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München 2005.

and the observed by the observing gaze, the suggestive power of a certain wall induces the passer-by to follow it captivated by its affordances, and so on. Even the sadist is so hypnotically enthralled by their victim's narrowness. Deprived of their narrowness, the person generates, also by feeling the activation of some own felt-bodily «islands»³¹ – felt body parts that do not coincide with organs or strictly physical parts and are activated and deactivated depending on the type and degree of percipients' affective involvement – a new non-dualistic formation with the conditioning-narrowing pole that closely resembles the pioneering Lipps' example of empathy for the acrobat, *in* whom – and not just *next* to whom – the spectator feels fully «carried away»³², to the point of being unable to initially distinguish their own spatial location from that of the acrobat.

A2) The incorporation, so far asymmetrical because one pole solely owns the narrow role, can however also be «mutual», thanks to the alternation of the dominant role and sometimes even with no reaction time (combat sports, animal fights, etc.). In exchanging (cruel, erotic, etc.) glances, for example – which, if asymmetric, are so powerful as to create unavoidable hierarchies, millennial superstitious (think of the evil eye) – the watched partner is not truly autonomous, is «not doing something, but undergoing something»³³ and becomes object for the other, and vice versa. Usually, exchanging glances accompanying a dialogue and thus ensuring the non-projective evidence of a *you* that has consciousness (whether human or animal) shows well how the dominant role rhythmically switches between the two partners. Which also happens in the perception of some architectural solution that now captivates us and now perplexes us, as in the case of a building that appears powerfully suggestive and, at the same time, severely manipulative to the user.

A3) A third possibility is «solidary incorporation», which is generated by a symmetrical relationship between partners sharing a same (suggesting-narrowing) reference centre, which is not necessarily human, also purely virtual or even just imagined. In singing or playing together, in a collective uprising, in a disordered escape dictated by

³¹ Schmitz, *System der Philosophie* II.1, *Der Leib* cit., pp. 151-169; Id., *Der Leib* (2011) cit., *passim*; T. Griffero, *Felt-bodily communication: a neophenomenological approach to embodied affects*, in «Studi di estetica», vol. XLV, no. 2, 2017, pp. 71-86, in part. 55-67.

³² T. Lipps, *Grundlegung der Ästhetik*, I, Voss, Hamburg-Leipzig 1903, p. 122.

³³ G. Böhme, *Für eine ökologische Naturästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, p. 152.

panic, in enthusiastic courage on the battlefield, in the collective affective experience of a certain building or urban space, etc., there is an integration of the elements involved that is mainly guaranteed by the rhythm's motor suggestions and whose only requirement is the partner's adequate feedback (in the cases mentioned the enemy, a building, etc.). Nor should we underestimate that the narrowing-hypnotic third member must still be active latently, so that the incorporation would not be incomplete and frustrating in the long run. The lift's anonymous and silent atmosphere, for example, is felt as oppressive exactly because it lacks a common, *third* theme, which is present instead in the case of the communication between the orchestra members and their conductor, as well as in the skilful emotional *orchestration* provided by a certain architectural work to those who experience it by visiting it occasionally or electing it as a place of affection.

A4) Of course, there are also mixed cases, when, for example, in a classroom or at a concert, there may be an antagonistic incorporation (between teacher and students, or between musicians and orchestra conductor) and a solidary one (among students or among musicians). In other situations, antagonism can turn into solidarity, as when the initial antagonistic-tumultuous phase of a party (awkwardness and distance among the participants) turns into a serene or more relaxed atmosphere, or when a certain living space initially atmospherically felt as inhospitable offers positive solutions and unexpectedly turns into a truly lived space.

B) Now to the opposite pole of felt-bodily communication: that of *excorporation*. It consists in trance-like states communicating with the incommensurable vastness through a privative expansion, that is, unlike what happens in the normal vital drive's centrifugalism, without finding perceptual end points. When we ecstatically contemplate landscapes, stare monotonously straight roads, lose ourselves in gazing out over the "sea" of houses and lights of a boundless metropolis, or when are dozing in the sunlight or fall asleep, the extroflexion of narrowness, i.e. of what is the basic criterion of identity as absolute subjectivity (primitive presence/present)³⁴, we enter a both pre-sub-

³⁴ According to Schmitz (from *System der Philosophie*, vol. I, *Die Gegenwart*, Bouvier, Bonn 1964) the person as a conscious subject with the capability of self-ascription can always go back to a proto-identitary life (given as identical to us without identification and reflection thanks to "primitive present/presence", in both a temporal and a spatial sense), by means of the vital drive and felt-bodily affective involvement. Self-ascription, by which identity is normally explained, is actually only possible (unless one wants to end up in a re-

jective and pre-objectual dimension normally experienced as a ingressive atmosphere of expandedness.

We experience the feeling of a general expansion [...] when, entering a forest of tall trees or unexpectedly walking into a beautiful room, we breathe freely. Without wanting to, we expand the thorax and increase in size, as if we wanted to adapt to the immensity of the environment and prove to measure up to it. By dilating and expanding in this way, we make a vital experience of conquest of space and power extension³⁵.

Excorporation is also triggered by the perception-vision of pure beings-essences as qualitative universals expressing polysignificant impressions that are (so to speak) released from their usual support: for example, the timbre of a voice despite its changing volume, wine or chocolate tasted not surprisingly with eyes closed, a certain quality of architectural lived space regardless of whether it is the building as such, a part of it or even its relationship to the context that suggests it, briefly, all what by a suggestive stimulation envelops us by the virtue of an excorporation inhibiting any extra-situational detail.

C) From the variable relationship between encorporation and excorporation and the different sensory channels used various modes of felt-bodily (pre-linguistic) communication arise. To the visual 1) belong exchanging glances, perceived by any animal as an atmospheric battlefield in which beings measure one another and express dominion or submission, irony, humiliation, or awkwardness, but also the experiential relationship between the designed and built spaces and their users, etc. Equally important is the haptic channel 2), moving from the simple handshake, through which partners integrate temporarily and create a felt-bodily whole (possibly also conflicting), to touching in general, which focuses the vital drive by entering the touched person's felt-bodily economy and thus usually transmitting a confidence that ensures a positive feedback (exchanging cuddles and embraces, etc.), up to the wide range of felt-bodily states produced by (also competitive) contact with the elements (water for the swimmer, the sun for those sunbathing, etc.) and architectural materials (just think how different is the atmosphere even haptically induced by the

gressus ad infinitum) if it is based on self-consciousness without identification: that is, if I am already acquainted with myself. This primitive present/presence is the guarantee of the coincidence between identity and subjectivity, and the fusion point of five elements that cannot yet be distinguished (here, now, being, this and I).

³⁵ H. Strehle, *Mienen, Gesten und Gebärden*, Reinhardt, München 1954, p. 45. Mine translation.

marble of our churches and the wood of Japanese temples), or due to the expert's ability to symbiotically deal with their (music, technical, etc.) instrument. By hearing, finally, 3) communication sometimes generates an auditory contagion that is more invasive (and less avoidable) than the visual one. And certainly, contributes to the atmosphere of a building, as Peter Zumthor³⁶ teaches, also the specific sound of the interior.

Furthermore, the incorporation can be latent (in us or provisionally in a whole ad-hoc felt body) (*Gesamtleib*), or patent, finding its sounding board in some specific felt-bodily islands. But the relationship of these two modes is usually fluid in the sense, for example, that one of the partners (also experiencers and architectural object in this case) involves the other and makes the previously latent incorporation flagrant. Generally speaking, however, by incorporation or ex-corporation we are constantly attuned (positively or not) with the situations we encounter and whose expressive-Gestalt qualities involve us, significantly, not through representations but «bridge qualities» – which are «close to the felt body and [...] can both be sensed in one's own body but also be perceived in objects»³⁷ – such as the already mentioned motor suggestions and synesthetic characters. The every time different so generated total felt body's dynamic can be dialogic and changing depending on two partners' continuous expressive feedback (in the sense that even a building *responds* to in time different hermeneutic *bait*s with which the user, *responding* to its occurrence, tries to specify his first impression of it), but also unilateral, as when a charismatic person (a building, a built-up area, etc.) contagiously transmits to others otherwise unexplainable affective states.

Schmitz also explores some instruments ensuring the incorporating orientation. The first is one's composure (*Fassung*), that is the usually involuntary but also voluntary, internal as well as social stylisable posture or attitude. Being «the most sensitive sensor of the incorporation in interpersonal contact»³⁸ as well as of atmospheres, situations and quasi-things, the composure is a fluid compromise between one's felt-bodily dispositions and one's personal emancipation (frankness or

³⁶ P. Zumthor, *Atmospheres: Architectural Environments – Surrounding Objects*, Birkhäuser, Basel 2006.

³⁷ H. Schmitz, *The Felt Body and Embodied Communication*, in «Yearbook for Eastern and Western Philosophy», no. 2, 2017, pp. 9-19, p. 17.

³⁸ Schmitz, *Der Leib* (2011) cit., p. 46.

cautiousness, joviality, or pedantry, etc.), each time intertwined with the partner's composure. A second incorporating orientation tool is the gaze prefiguration resulting from the extension of the felt-bodily motor schema: it also rules the material body with a non-epistemic precision and produces flowing performances and effectiveness. A third orientation instrument of the incorporation is the already mentioned distinction between epicritic and protopathic tendencies, in the sense that synaesthetic characters, for example, can act epicritically becoming sharpened and more punctiform (in Mozart's music, a toothache or a cold winter morning, a part of the building that focuses all our attention on itself, etc.) or protopathically by spreading in a dull and diffuse manner (in Beethoven's music, a stomach-ache or a sweet spring breeze, an architectural space whose overall atmospheric quality is like poured all over it, including the seemingly insignificant components, etc.).

4. Conclusion

Briefly said: a developed atmospherological phenomenology can rely extensively on the neo-phenomenological theory of atmospheres, felt body and felt-bodily communication (interaction), and consider the subjects to be already always incorporating the world (natural and built-up) in the way described so far (which should and could obviously be detailed much better). The experiencers, in fact, are pathically influenced through their felt-bodily dispositions by atmospheres acting as affordances to feel something, and also engage permanently in a felt-bodily communication with the world, with all its forms (animate or not), through a variously articulated dialectic between incorporation and excorporation of which the total ad hoc felt body is the result. It is, moreover, to provide a starting point for the elaboration of a sufficiently critical theory of atmospheric «competence»³⁹ whose indispensable components, as well as the *ability* to expose oneself to the spaces we find, are the commitment to multiply the atmospheric occasions (and therefore their different *powers*), to distinguish atmospheres (even if only necessarily ex post and in a third person-perspective) between benign atmospheres and toxic atmospheres, and

³⁹ Griffero, *The Atmospheric "We"* cit., pp. 98-103.

above all to know how to alternate immersion into and re-emerging from the atmospheric spaces so as not to deprive oneself of the benefits neither of pathicity nor of critical reflection⁴⁰. Only a theory of atmospheric competence and felt-bodily communication helps us demetaphorize what has always been obscurely said and sensed, namely that we are always in a communion with the world and that everything we look at, even a building, in turn also looks at us.

Abstract

A partire dalla teoria neo-fenomenologica del corpo vissuto (o sentito) (*Leib*), il contributo ne delinea il ruolo costitutivo nell'esperienza umana, ma soprattutto nella percezione estetica (in senso lato) dell'ambiente naturale ed edificato. Contro ogni oggettivazione riduzionista, introiettiva e quindi anche proiettiva dell'esperienza dei luoghi, una fenomenologia patica – che enfatizza il coinvolgimento affettivo a cui il percettore si sente incapace di reagire criticamente o di mitigarne l'invadenza – è un'indagine adeguata del corpo vissuto come cassa di risonanza delle atmosfere esterne pensate come *affordances* e spazi affettivi architettonici. Attraverso la sua specifica dinamica, basata sulla polarità tra angustia e vastità, e le sue “isole” visute, infatti, il corpo sentito comunica con ciò che accade nelle sue situazioni (esseri, linee, oggetti, edifici, ecc.), senza attingere ai cinque sensi e allo schema percettivo corporeo ma attraverso un'ampia gamma di relazioni dovute all'incorporazione e/o alla escorporazione.

Moving from neo-phenomenological theory of the lived (or felt) body (Leib), the paper outlines its constitutive role in human experience but especially in aesthetic (in a broad sense) perception of the natural and built-up environment. Against every reductionist, introjectionist and therefore also projectivist objectification of the experience of places, a pathic phenomenology – that emphasizes the affective involvement that the perceiver feels unable to critically react to or mitigate the intrusiveness of – is an adequate investigation of the felt body

⁴⁰ T. Griffero, «Immersion und (Re-)Emersion. Atmosphärologische Denkanstöße / Immersion and (Re)Emersion: Atmospherological Ideas» in *Eintauchen in die Kunst/Diving into Art*, edited by M. Bremer and M. Heinzlmann, Verlag für moderne Kunst, Wien 2023, pp. 61-72.

_____ Tonino Griffero, Exploring atmospheric affordances _____

as a sounding board of outside atmospheres thought as affordances and architectural affective spaces. By means of its specific dynamic, based on the polarity between narrowness and vastness, as well as its lived "islands", in fact, the felt body communicates with what happens in its situations (beings, lines, objects, buildings, etc.), without drawing on the five senses and the perceptual body schema, through a wide range of relationships due to incorporation and/or excorporation.

Parole chiave: *affordance*, atmosfera, corpo vissuto, nuova fenomenologia, incorporazione/escorporazione.

Keywords: *affordance*, atmosphere, lived body, new phenomenology, incorporation/excorporation.