

SPATIAL FEELINGS. ATMOSPHEROLOGICAL
QUESTIONS (FROM A NEO-PHENOMENOLOGICAL
POINT OF VIEW)
TONINO GRIFFERO*

Abstract: This work analyzes the concept of atmospheres as key elements that influence human perception and emotional experience. The author proposes a classification of atmospheres into three categories: prototypical (objective feelings), derivative-relational (interaction between the subject and the environment), and spurious (subjective projections). It is argued that atmospheres possess a quasi-objective quality that modulates our emotional responses. The analysis also focuses on the ontological and political implications of atmospheres, contrasting natural and curated environments. The debate involves the views of Gernot Böhme and Hermann Schmitz regarding the manipulation of experiences through artistic atmospheres. Resonance is presented as a key mechanism in atmospheric perception, highlighting the body's role in experiencing atmospheres. COVID-19 is examined as an emergency revealing modern vulnerabilities, shaping atmospheres of insecurity and solidarity. The crisis has altered interactions and perceptions, fostering both isolation and a search for connection, underscoring the need to explore the bodily dimensions of experience and the interplay between atmosphere, affect, and response in extraordinary situations.

Keywords: Atmosphere, Felt-Bodily, Spatial Feelings, Neo-Phenomenology

After four monographs focusing on the theme of atmospheres¹, dozens of essays in journals and collective volumes², translations and editions it is

* Professore di Estetica l'Università di Roma "Tor Vergata".

¹ See Tonino Griffero, *Atmosferologia. Estetica degli spazi emozionali*, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2010 (Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2017²) (engl. transl. by S. De Sanctis, *Atmospheres. Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces*, Routledge, London-New York 2014); *Quasi-cose. La realtà dei sentimenti*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2013 (eng. transl. by S. De Sanctis, *Quasi-Things. The Paradigm of Atmospheres*, Suny, Albany (N.Y.) 2017); *Il pensiero dei sensi. Atmosfere ed estetica patica*, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2016 (enlarged engl. transl. *Places, Affordances, Atmospheres. A Pathic Aesthetics*, Routledge, London-New York 2019); *The Atmospheric "We". Moods and Collective Feelings*, Mimesis International, Milan 2021.

² For example: Tonino Griffero/Giampiero Moretti (eds.), *Atmosphere/Atmospheres. Testing a New Paradigm*, Mimesis International, Milan 2018; Tonino Griffero/Gianni Francesetti

perhaps superfluous to return to very general issues and to reintroduce for the umpteenth time the arguments that substantiate my externalist and neo-phenomenological thesis. According to which feelings are –first and foremost –atmospheres that pervade a certain (lived) space, and “colonize” it with sometimes greater and sometimes lesser intensity; as quasi-things they exert a certain power over the perceiver, resonate in the perceiver’s lived body and are therefore not at all the result of an external projection (empathic or otherwise) of her (supposedly) private and inner affections. More interesting and certainly less repetitive³, however, is to attempt to provide some answers to the questions posed to me by some students at Atlanta University a few months ago (for this I thank them here indirectly). By answering them, of course, I will have the opportunity to further clarify some of the key points of my atmospherology.

1) How did one end up studying atmospheres to this extent? What hooked one into this subject, and what is the most important thing to understand about atmosphere?

An atmospheric feeling is almost omnipresent, even though at times unnoticed and ephemeral. One speaks of atmospheres continuously, describes them and calls them into question every time that some effects seem to be out of proportion with respect to their causes. When one speaks, for example, of a wind blowing in the country or of the mood specifically suggested by a certain weather, says that “trouble is brewing”, etc., one is referring to a natural or social atmospherisation. If one has always known what “there is something in the air” means (tension or relaxation, for example, or an imminent threat, etc.), if Western culture feels for at least a century the increasing need for atmospheric concepts (such as *aura*, *ambiance*, *Stimmung*, etc.), if even marketing understands for at least half a century that “in some cases, the place, more specifically the atmosphere of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision”⁴, it is just for about twenty years that the notion of atmosphere has become a philosophical

(eds.), *Psychopathology and Atmospheres. Neither Inside nor Outside*, Cambridge Scholar, Newcastle upon Tyne 2019; Tonino Griffero/Marco Tedeschini (eds.), *Atmospheres and Aesthetics. A Plural Perspective*, Palgrave, Basingstoke 2019.

³ For an extensive bibliography (in progress) on atmospheres see <https://atmosphericspaces.wordpress.com/literature-2/>.

⁴ Philip Kotler, *Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool*, “Journal of Retailing”, 49, 4, p. 48.

theme, precisely since the New Phenomenology, founded by Hermann Schmitz in his *System of Philosophy*⁵, uses atmospheric feeling as a leverage to wipe away that dualism, both Christian-Platonist and Cartesian, that makes it impossible to explain how a interiorized subject is then able to get outside and acquire a reliable knowledge of the external world.

One could welcome this situation as a real atmospheric turn⁶, based on a stance that borders the deleuzian-metaphysical affect theory (affects as ubiquitous and anonymous intensities) as well as the more detailed and applicable affect studies (affects as bodily-relational relationship with the world) but is, however, ontologically much more ambitious than today's widespread cognitive rehabilitation of feeling in functional, narrative and adaptative terms. By stating that “feelings are the most important thing in life, because only they bring power and delicacy, brightness and opacity into the world; the only thing that, generally, makes something important to human beings”⁷, the new phenomenologist paves the way for a philosophical approach to reality based on a radical de-psychologization of emotional life.

But “atmosphere” has boomed only recently in areas of humanities that, bypassing positivist conventions and strictly functional parameters, pay attention to the vague and qualitative “something-more”, are interested more in expressive *qualia* and phenomenal *nuances* of appearing reality (the pathic “how”) than in detailed material reality (the cognitive “what” and, *a fortiori*, the etiological “why”). As a colloquial term, “atmosphere” is largely dependent on the context. Without the usual addition of qualifying adjectives, it works as a neutral title (the atmosphere of London, of a party, of a building, for example) or it refers to an only decorative background (“there is an atmosphere, but...”); sometimes it means *ipso facto* a favorable feeling (“what an atmosphere!”) and even a persuasive effect⁸.

⁵ Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, 10 voll., Bouvier, Bonn 1964-1980. For an introduction see Hermann Schmitz, *New Phenomenology. A Brief Introduction*, Mimesis International, Sesto S. Giovanni (Mi) 2019 and my introduction (ivi, pp. 9-41).

⁶ Tonino Griffero, *Is There Such a Thing as an “Atmospheric Turn”? Instead of an Introduction*, in Tonino Griffero/Marco Tedeschini (eds.), *Atmosphere and Aesthetics*, cit., pp. 11-62. For a synthetic view see Tonino Griffero, *Emotional Atmospheres*, in Thomas Szanto/Hilge Landweer (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Emotion*, Routledge, London-New York 2020, pp. 262-274.

⁷ Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, cit., III, 2, *Der Gefühlsraum* (1969), p. XII.

⁸ For a useful review of the linguistic uses of the term “atmosphere” see Andreas Rauh, *Die*

The atmosphere, thus, is philosophically interesting not despite but precisely because of its vagueness. One never has to exit from its vagueness, but she must learn to stay in it in the right way, first acquiring a specific atmospheric competence. General speaking, atmosphere means today a feeling distinguished from emotion, affect, mood, and that is not private and internal but objectively diffuse in the space and works as a qualitative-sentimental *prius* of every sensible (and later differentiated) encounter with the world. Regardless of whether it is tense, relaxed, gloomy, etc., an atmosphere “colours” the situation in which the perceiver finds herself and sometimes involves her to the point she is unable to escape with it.

2) *Is it possible to be such a thing as an objective atmosphere? Is the atmosphere always subjective? Can two people observe-sense two very different atmospheres caused by the same external stimulus, or must they be at least somewhat related?*

As a primary object of perception, the atmosphere is responsible of our feeling well or not in a certain environment and, as an “in between” (*Zwischen*) mediating subject (corporeal feeling) and object (environment) and their co-presence, or even holistically being prior to them, it is a quasi-objective being (a power) intersubjectively present in the space. Even if, strictly speaking, it is nothing without a subject feeling it, it is something you can enter into and be caught by a sensuous experience of things and “ecstatic” qualities they radiate⁹.

My atmospherological project is not content to talk about atmospheres in general but proposes a distinction between three different types of atmospheres, through which it is possible to account for the many ways in which atmospheric feelings are encountered (and expressed linguistically) in everyday experience.

besondere Atmosphäre. Ästhetische Feldforschungen, [transcript], Bielefeld 2012; Id., *Concerning Astonishing Atmospheres. Aisthesis, Aura, and Atmospheric Portfolio*, Mimesis International, Milano-Udine 2018.

⁹ See especially Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a.M. 1995; *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*, Routledge, London-New York 2017. But also, not to be forgotten is the groundbreaking book by Michael Hauskeller, *Atmosphären erleben. Philosophische Untersuchungen zur Sinneswahrnehmung*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1995.

1) For me a “prototypical atmosphere” is the most objective (neo-phenomenologically said). It is the atmospheric feeling that one encounters involuntarily and pre-reflectively, and whose causes appear unknown and due to a condition so immersive as to be prior to any relationship between the subjective and the objective poles, which are rather the result of this immersive first impression. Furthermore, it can be so independent of one’s state of mind that this first impression changes one’s mood completely (when the previous personal mood is different from this atmosphere), or causes one to react strongly (perhaps, for example, even moving away from the person, place or building one has entered). When the atmosphere encountered instead coincides with the previous state of mind, it is often not even perceived as an atmosphere.

2) A “derivative-relational atmosphere” is one in which the subject is as important in creating the atmosphere as the affective quality immanent to external world. The perceived atmosphere is felt outside oneself again, in the environment in which one moves for example, but the subject, realizing perfectly that it depends completely on the relationship between herself, her mood, and the specific characteristics of the environment (provided that she could sufficiently understand the atmospheric power), is not totally involved or subject to its authority (as in the case of prototypical atmospheres). Atmospheric immersivity is here only partial and the resulting emotional situation is, however, not the most significant example of the already mentioned neo-phenomenological externalization of feelings (which is why it is called not prototypical but derivative).

3) A “spurious atmosphere” is finally one that is not intrinsically occasioned by the current object, space, or quasi-thing, but is the result of an external projection of a wholly subjective state of mind already present in the percipient. In this way, a drab space entered by someone who is with someone she loves may offer a spuriously positive atmosphere, but only because of the person’s feeling for her companion. It is clearly nothing but a subjective projection of an inner affective quality on which no one agrees completely and that does not apply to any drab space, but only on that which precisely justifies this projection for that person. Such an atmosphere is less objective, less intense, and one whose subjective origin is easily understood: it is spurious, not a full-fledged atmosphere, because it does not at all exemplify the spatiality-externality of the atmospheric feelings that neo-phenomenological atmospherology aims to underline.

Importantly, true prototypical atmospheres are not even intentionally producible. I draw a distinction between the type-atmosphere as a quasi-thing –something relatively objective and independent from our feeling it, so that one can notice and describe it without being necessarily involved by it –and token-atmosphere, that is, the way that the type-atmosphere is concretely realised in the feeling one has, possibly even condensing on elements of the situation that are not responsible for it at all (the felt threatening atmosphere of a car one sees even if only because it reminds one of the car one had an accident with, etc.). In cases like this the thing or quasi-thing is simply the occasion of the token-atmosphere as a place of condensation of an independent type-atmospheric feeling.

Derivative-relational atmospheres certainly constitute most of the atmospheric experiences we have. Yet, prototypical atmospheres especially serve as an example of a) the affective externalism (re)discovered by the New Phenomenology approach of which (b) things and situations are only occasions of manifestation.

3) How does the subject interact with atmosphere? Does it only work one way (atmosphere affects the individual) or do people's moods and feelings impact the collective mood?

I have developed a large phenomenology of possible *atmospheric games*, according to a typology I gradually enriched and problematized¹⁰, which can be a breeding ground for more subtle phenomenological analysis that could be useful also in many (applied) fields.

Summing up: an atmosphere can 1. be so dystonic as to overwhelm us; 2. find us in tune with it, to the point of not being recognized and felt; 3. be recognized without being really felt; 4. elicit a mood of resistance that pushes us to change it or to oppose to this (felt as) manipulative atmosphere (think of experiences that are transgressive or at least freely randomized in opposition to what the disciplinary power wants); 5. concretize itself even in “materials” or components that normally express the opposite, thus giving life to a inversed atmospheric feeling (the sadness suggested on sufferers by intolerable beauty, or the restlessness produced by situations so orderly as to arouse the impression of a *mise-en-scène*); or 6. be perceived differently over

¹⁰ For the latest version see Tonino Griffero, *The Atmospheric “We”*, cit., pp. 29-66.

the course of time after the first impression. The first atmospheric impression of a photograph of one's schoolmates of decades ago, for example, may be pleasing, yet turn to melancholy once you, looking more closely at them, realize that some of them have died. Consider now also the interesting interaction between buildings that seem narrow from the outside and in whose interior the architect has instead managed to create an unexpected vastness, even more atmospherically suggestive the more unexpected in contrast with the first (outside) impression¹¹. Here, we can even imagine layered niches of atmospheric feelings. The way a building may support multiple atmospheres or better atmospheric moods can be enhanced by the contrast between the space that one has been in, and the space that one now enters. This applies, of course, also to the atmosphere of a person, a landscape, a city, etc.

4) To what extent is atmosphere determinant of personal feeling? How much room is there for preferences of atmosphere?

According to my approach, quasi-objective feelings diffused in the external (lived) space “may” be filtered in a (relatively) different way by different percipients according to their different felt-bodily (*leiblich*) dispositions. In other terms: their felt body (*Leib*, not *Körper*) may resonate differently, without these resonances ever fully coinciding with the atmospheres arousing them¹².

5) Can one expand on the absence of boundaries inherent in atmospheres? Is this temporal? Spatial? Emotional, etc.?

Atmospheres, by using the power of their “affordances”¹³, attune the affective space in which people (sometimes even literally) enter and segment it through

¹¹ On the relationship between atmospherology and architecture see Gernot Böhme, *Atmospheric Architectures. The Aesthetics of Felt Spaces*, Bloomsbury, London et al. 2017, and Michael Arbib/Tonino Griffero, *Atmosphere(s) for Architects. Between Phenomenology and Cognition*, New Prairie Press, Manhattan (Kansas) 2023.

¹² On the necessary grounding of atmospherology in a phenomenology of the felt- or lived body, see now Tonino Griffero, *Being a Lived Body. From a Neo-Phenomenological Point of View*, Routledge, London-New York 2024.

¹³ Tonino Griffero, *They Are There to Be Perceived: Affordances and Atmospheres*, in Zakaria Djebbara (ed.), *Affordances in Everyday Life: A Multidisciplinary Collection of Essays*, Springer, Cham 2022, pp. 85-95.

boundaries that are not geometrical but emotional. It goes from the conscious choice of one restaurant rather than another, precisely for the atmosphere that hovers there, to the much more nonconscious tendency to prefer walking in one neighborhood rather than another or frequenting these and not those people. Our surroundings are thus segmented cognitively (things, properties, and events) but also affectively (hospitable or refractory spaces, environments that make us feel better or depress us, buildings or places that it is trendy to have visited at least once and others that do not interest us at all) with many behavioral, class, and taste consequences that only a proper atmosphere-based sociology could investigate more precisely.

However, I reject any “constructionist atmospherology,” underlining that the perception of an atmosphere is a direct perception: it is not mediated by patterns, inferential processes, or judgements that are all to some extent “projective.” On this account, direct perceptual realism means for me that perception does not need to postulate either inner processes (representations, inferences, computations, manipulation of representations) or a mediated access to the world.

The boundary question gives me the opportunity to show more broadly what differentiates an atmosphere as a quasi-thing from things in the proper sense. Developing to some extent a neo-phenomenological quasi-thingly ontology¹⁴ it could be said, in summary, that atmospheres, unlike things, a) are not edged, discrete, cohesive, solid, perduring in time, normally inactive, without concealed sides, and for this reason they coincide with their appearance. b) Not having inherent real tendencies, they have no history (they don’t get old), are radically evenemential and not merely a trace of something other. c) Without being the property of something or universally predictable *genera*, they coincide with their own phenomenal and “actual” “character” (not with their subjective-personal resonance, however). d) More immediate, intrusive, and demanding than things, they arouse encorporation and excorporation¹⁵ by virtue of an authority that is sometimes so absolute as to be irreducible to culturally emotional norms and to win any critical distance. e) They have an intermittent life, in the sense that they come and go, without

¹⁴ See Tonino Griffero, *Quasi-Things*, cit., pp. 1-18. The notion of quasi- or half-things (*Halbdinge*) was originally introduced by Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, cit., III. 5, *Die Wahrnehmung* (1978), pp. 116–139.

¹⁵ On this fundamental felt-bodily dynamic see Hermann Schmitz, *Der Leib*, de Gruyter, Berlin et al. 2011.

there being any point in asking what they did in the meantime. f) But along with transient atmospheric qualities there are also more persistent atmospheric qualities: the sublime atmosphere of an alpine landscape, for example, is relatively stable despite changing weather conditions. g) They do not act as the separate causes of the influence but are the influence itself, exactly like the wind, that doesn't exist prior to and beyond its blowing. h) Although they do not properly have a whence or a where, they "occupy" surfaceless lived spaces characterized by blurred boundaries. i) They are relatively (perceptually) amendable, if only on the level of common sense. l) They must have yet some kind of identity, as is well shown by the fact that one can be mistaken in producing them, for example trying to create an atmosphere of euphoria on a dreary day, or rightly imagine the (even counterfactual) conditions under which it could be produced. m) If they never properly exist as purely potential (thinkable) states, this does not mean that an atmosphere, especially the prototypical one, depends in all respects on its subjective perception. n) There are things and situations that stably arouse certain atmospheres, and others that occasionally take charge of them, as happens when a wild atmosphere, for example, ceases to be such, sensorially perceived components being equal, when its origin is ascertained to be artificial. o) They are mostly an "in between" made possible by the (felt-bodily but also social and symbolic) co-presence of subject and object and in rare but important cases transcendently prior to this co-presence.

6) Is there a difference between an atmosphere that naturally occurs, and one that is intentionally curated? In what aspect does this difference reside?

It is a truly central issue, with both ontological and political consequences. The idea that one is able to intentionally generate atmospheres raises the dispute between Gernot Böhme, convinced that many aesthetic workers really generate atmospheres, and Hermann Schmitz, whose anti-intentionalist warning may be summarised as follows. First, by "making" atmospheres our societies manipulate those "actual impressive situations" through which they try to escape from solipsism; by developing a technique of impression (*Eindruckstechnik*) they mime the golden season of the European art and finalistically stabilise atmospheres for propagandistic or advertising superficial purposes (*Plakatsituation*). Moreover, accepting Böhme's idea that atmospheres are the result of "ecstasies" of things would mean accepting

two false assumptions: that situations are radiated primarily by single objects (singularism) and not by a chaotic-multiple significance, and that an atmospheric perception can be explained through the still dualistic sender-receiver model¹⁶.

This ontological contrast also refers to a different assessment of aestheticization of everyday life, stigmatized by Schmitz as a misleading propaganda and welcomed instead by Böhme as the unavoidable reflection of a more general “theatricalization of our life”. Although Schmitz’s criticism should be taken seriously, it may be argued that this conflicts with his own assumption that it would be possible to cultivate atmospheric feelings in a closed space (dwelling and church, garden and Japanese tea house) in a not manipulative way; that his objection wrongly downgrades the rhetorical *coté* of aesthetics to something superficial and anti-educational; that, finally, to assume that the technique of impressions generates only fake atmospheres relies on an external axiology conflicting with his descriptive phenomenological approach¹⁷.

My advice is to use an inflationary distinction among three kinds of atmospheres and consequently of spatiality. As already said, they can be prototypical (objective, external, unintentional, sometimes lacking a precise name and space and related to space of vastness), derivative (objective, external, intentionally produced, and related to directional space), and even quite spurious in their relatedness (subjective, projective, and related even to local space). This makes it possible to accept both Schmitz’s idea of free-floating atmospheric feelings (for me the prototypical ones) and Böhme’s effort to mitigate their overly random nature and to bind them as strongly as possible to objectual poles (for me the derivative atmospheres). If there were only prototypical atmospheres, perhaps partly overlapping with Heidegger’s *Grundstimmungen*, it would be hard to understand how aesthetic works could

¹⁶ Hermann Schmitz, *Situationen und Atmosphären. Zur Ästhetik und Ontologie bei Gernot Böhme*, in Michael Hauskeller et al. (Hg.), *Naturerkenntnis und Natursein. Für Gernot Böhme*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1998, pp. 176-190. See also Hermann Schmitz, *Atmospheres*, ed. by Tonino Griffero, Mimesis International, Sesto S. Giovanni (Mi) 2023, pp. 123-137.

¹⁷ See Tonino Griffero, *Was kann eine Gefühlsatmosphäre tun? Atmosphären zwischen Immersion und Emersion*, in Barbara Wolf/Christian Julmi (Hg.), *Die Macht der Atmosphären*, Alber, Freiburg-München 2020, pp. 77-96.

successfully produce an atmosphere and why humanities successfully apply this concept.

7) *Can one elaborate on the concept of tone and resonance and how it plays into the idea of atmosphere?*

This has to do with today's trendy phenomenon of resonance. I could say that atmospheres, as feelings poured out into the lived and peri-corporeal space, can only find their adequate sounding board in the lived or felt body – not in organic sensors, let alone in the mind. Hartmut Rosa, Thomas Fuchs and Bernhard Waldenfels have effectively introduced us to resonance as responsiveness¹⁸. However, my neo-phenomenological approach to the felt body as a sounding board for atmospheric feelings pervading a certain (lived) space means that this resonance involves felt-bodily “isles”¹⁹: some universal and others culturally and historically more variable, some relatively more stable and others endowed with an intermittent existence depending on the momentary affective state. A great example of this is the diaphragmatic zone, activated by emotional grasping: even if it has its own peculiar voluminosity, this specific “isle” turns out to be completely irreducible to organs. The experienced intermodal analogicity of affordances is based precisely on their felt-bodily resonance in the perceiver's felt-bodily isles, which become perfectly discernible within the strictly first-person phenomenal experience. Because of their intermittent and vaguely delimited existence, felt-bodily isles create a real landscape whose topographical components are, in a certain sense, resonance zones that are diversified by both quality and intensity. Generally speaking, resonance can be discrepant and syntonic. While, inhibiting fluid felt-bodily and physical behaviour, a) discrepancy induces an epicritic contraction giving birth to individual felt-bodily isles of which the subject was previously unaware (even leading to hypochondria), on the contrary, by facilitating felt-bodily and physical behaviour, b) syntony gives it a protopathic felt-bodily state of well-being that momentarily prevents some

¹⁸ See Tonino Griffero, *Better to Be in Tune. Between Resonance and Responsivity*, “Studi di estetica”, LI, 4 (2020), 27, pp. 90-115.

¹⁹ I developed this idea of Hermann Schmitz especially in Tonino Griffero, *Quasi-things*, cit., pp. 55-68.

particular isles from emerging and promotes an uncritical fusion with the external reality.

The different resonance effect proves that some atmospheric feelings are resonance-conditioned, i.e. existing fully as token-atmospheres (or moods) only when they are embodied and shared (for example, there can be no real atmosphere of courage without brave people making their collective feeling resound), whereas other atmospheres remain the same even when they are rejected and not shared, thus resonating very weakly (a landscape, for example, may be melancholic in itself and be regarded as such even if the spectator is and continues to be happy).

Atmospheres are quasi-objective and have different degrees of authority²⁰. Let's start with the simplest case of direct authority. It's the case of a cheerful person who, faced with people wrapped in an atmosphere of true and serious sadness, feels the authority of this sadness, respects it (not just for social etiquette) and, while not being infected by it, mitigates her own (evidently more limited) joyful atmosphere. As this case shows, some atmospheric feelings can legitimately claim to colonize the surrounding space more than others. This kind of binding authority usually happens in a discrepant-mimetic form, such as when people become dull and grey like the grey and sultry morning that overwhelms them. The resonance of this prototypical (authoritarian) atmosphere results from a relationship that is so entangling as not to allow the experiencers to take any position towards what grabs them, nor to mobilize the critical reserves provided by their level of personal emancipation. This felt-bodily resonance is rationally uncontrollable and triggers a unilaterally antagonistic incorporation, due to which one of the "partners" of the felt-bodily communication is in a sense "sucked into" the other's prevailing felt-bodily narrowness.²¹

There are also cases, as already mentioned, where this kind of binding authority paradoxically happens in a discrepant-inversed form. For example, a beautiful landscape and a lovely sunny day, precisely "because of" their beauty and relaxing-welcoming irradiation, may even sharpen someone's (previous) sadness. This happens not because one perceives a sad landscape

²⁰ Tonino Griffero, *Who's Afraid of Atmospheres (and of their Authority)?* in Marco Tedeschini (ed.), *Focus – Atmosfere*, "Lebenswelt. Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience", 4, 1, pp. 193-213.

²¹ I summarised Hermann Schmitz's theory of *Leib* and felt-body dynamics in Tonino Griffero, *Being a Lived Body*, cit., pp. 111-144.

or day, but precisely because one feels that pleasant view and delighting sunshine as something alien to oneself and therefore as deeply irritating. This inverted affective correspondence is a form of mixed resonance, where repulsive narrowness and expansive vastness paradoxically go together and undoubtedly generate discomfort.

The kind of experience to which the name “resonance” or tone applies occurs especially when persons do not expect it, that is, when something unpredictable and unplannable happens to them. This also requires that the experiencers are in a suitable disposition to resonate, to be in tune with the atmospheres they meet.

8) Where does the atmosphere take place (it's a location that we can literally describe) or is the locational language used for its separation more figurative? Does it exist externally in a separate sensory/emotional dimension? How do we sense these atmospheres? Are they through our emotional responses or do we experience them and then produce an emotional response?

That an atmospherization could be generated by language does not reductionistically mean that it is nothing but the result of an illegitimate (metaphoric) use of language if only because the very condition of metaphorization, i.e. the distinction between the proper (literal) and the improper (figurative), here is totally missing²².

The second question brings us to consider the well-known experience of objectively recognizing and “registering” an atmosphere but without personally feeling it or being felt-bodily involved by it. In other words, one must consider the ontological-phenomenological distinction between a quasi-thingly (type) atmosphere and its (only potential) capturing power as a token-atmosphere (or mood). Is the former really a fully non-affective atmosphere,

²² On the controversial issue of the relationship between atmosphere and language (metaphorical and non-metaphorical) cf. Tonino Griffero, *Preservate o decise? Ridotte o eluse? Le situazioni atmosferiche alla prova del linguaggio*, “Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio”, VII, 2, pp. 53-65; Id., Forte verbum generat casum. *Espressione e atmosfera*, in Mauro La Forgia/Maria Ilena Marozza (eds.), *La parola che immagina*, “Atque”, 14, pp. 85-105. A new approach based on “linguistic phenomenology” is provided now by Yukiko Kuwayama, *Ki (気), Fühlen und Empfinden. Eine linguistische Phänomenologie vorprädikativer Erfahrungsformen*, Alber, Freiburg/München, 2023.

as Schmitz suggests, and Moritz Geiger explains by drawing a distinction between an observing attitude (*betrachtende Einstellung*) and an absorbing attitude (*aufnehmende Einstellung*)²³? Or is it, more simply according to me, a low-intensity atmosphere, which for the most diverse reasons is not engaging but also without being purely informative, given that no perception is ever a mere socio-semiotic “reading” of situation data but always a somewhat affective and felt-bodily communication? The low-intensity option has the merit of recognising that the body feeling is never “opaque” but always transparently referred to the world of which it highlights some aspects. Moreover, it obviously proves that even the most neutral-cognitive observation implies at least a minimal affective component, thus embracing Heidegger’s idea of a continuous albeit not always conscious affective situatedness²⁴, where background feelings alone, thanks to their motivational, hedonic and axiologic link to the world, enable any specific relationship with the world, with us and with others.

Let us take Rainer Maria Rilke’s example (*Malte Laurids Brigge*). Malte is in the middle of a festive crowd, whose “faces were full of the light that came from the carnival booths and laughter welled up and poured from their mouths like puss from an open sore [...] People stopped me and laughed, and I felt that I should laugh too but I couldn’t” (transl. W. Needham). I believe that only a low-intensity and incipient empathic share of the others’ joy can explain and justify Malte’s disappointment, thus making him feel a discrepant atmosphere.

For me Schmitz’s dissociation between neutral feeling and felt-bodily involving feeling, also proven by the uncertainty concerning the right gestural-postural conduct (which instead is perfectly instinctive in the case of a real and effective felt-bodily resonance), should at least be nuanced but certainly not eliminated. In fact, if too radical a dichotomy between living a feeling and the feeling as such risks reifying the affective too much, the identity between emotional involvement and atmosphere, claimed by many, risks instead of making inexplicable the distance from feelings (not only as attitude-position posterior to the initial emotional passivity but sometimes

²³ Moritz Geiger, *Zum Problem der Stimmungseinführung*. “Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft” 6 (1911), pp. 1-42.

²⁴ See especially Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929-30), Indiana University Press, Bloomington-Indianapolis, 1995.

even contemporary to it) which should also be admitted. Narrowing the too drastic gap between the cognitive and the affective, it can be assumed that the distinction between these two dimensions is always only gradual. It follows that every atmospheric perception is merely a possibility (based on the subject's felt- bodily disposition and resonance-capability) within an affective *continuum* that finds its extreme (and very rare) cases in emotional "fusion" and neutral distancing.

9) *How do we distinguish the "transient" or local atmosphere of well-being from the long-term, more ubiquitous one?*

First, it could be said that any distinction among moods, emotions and atmospheres seems unable to convincingly explain the circularity we experience²⁵. If a mood spatially objectifies itself into an atmosphere (and even an emotion, thanks to a more precise point of condensation), that mood, however, could in turn be generated by a previous (somewhat pre-formatted) atmosphere (triggered, perhaps, even by repeated emotions of the "same" type). Similarly, if an atmosphere subjectifies itself into a mood, for example by losing its thematic reference when entering personal involvement, it is likely that one could not perceive that atmosphere without a moody (pre-formatted) background. Well, this focusing-blurring alternation between emotions, moods and atmospheres is for me²⁶ nothing but a specification of the more general intertwining among different affects, underlying Musil's idea that "there was neither an entirely specific nor an entirely nonspecific emotion". In other words, an expression shapes and consolidates a mood into an emotion (without bringing it to an end) and an emotion "may blur out of focus into non-specific form, continuing to colour your way of thinking of (and feeling towards) the world"²⁷, thus continuing to resonate in some non-specific way. Well, in the same way, a mood could become (spatially) more focused and thus turn into an atmosphere, whereas an atmosphere could in

²⁵ For a very recent and reasonable perspective on the relationship between atmosphere and mood, see Jürgen Hasse, *Dichte. Zur Mächtigkeit von Atmosphären und Stimmungen*, Alber Verlag, Baden-Baden 2024, especially pp- 57-63.

²⁶ Cf. Tonino Griffero, *In a Neo-phenomenological Mood. Stimmungen or Atmospheres?*, "Studi di estetica" LI, 4, 27 (2019), pp. 121-151.

²⁷ Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, vol. III: *Into the Millennium* (1943), Knopf, New York 1995, pp. 1306-1307.

turn blur out of focus and turn into a mood. What is atmospherologically important (especially in the case of prototypical atmospheres) is not to conceive this fluid temporal process of backgrounding and foregrounding as something entirely depending on the subject's affective state.

It is certainly true that moods have increasingly acquired a spatial meaning throughout the twentieth century (from Ludwig Binswanger on). Although moods and atmospheres certainly share a felt-bodily protopathic nature (unlike the more epicritic emotions) –that is, they are felt in a diffuse and not acute way²⁸ –I would suggest to speak more precisely of atmosphere only when a feeling 1) belongs, unlike more floating moods, to a certain (pre-dimensional) space, even to a local space in the case of spurious atmospheres, and 2) has a status so objective-external for the perceiver's first-person perspective as to violently oppose the percipient's previous mood.

10) Can one expand on the idea of atmospheric competence? What does it mean for the atmosphere to be toxic or benign in the context of our unique atmospheric experiences?

Atmospherology demands that anyone has a good “atmospheric competence” (or intelligence): a not less multifaceted notion than the very notion of atmosphere. I consider it as the ability to a) feel atmospheres, b) understand them and possibly c) distance oneself from them, d) generate them. What we call atmospheric “instinct” or “flair” should thus be understood as a skill that can also be improved through exercise: that is, the ability to critically examine the atmospheres one feels. That would enable us to benefit from a “provisional atmospheric morality” (to paraphrase Descartes)²⁹.

In fact, a “good” atmospheric competence should be able, first, 1) to “correctly” feel the prevailing atmosphere to avoid probable social gaffes, which legitimize others to stigmatize those who have not felt adequately, but

²⁸ For a development of neo-phenomenological theory of lived space (Hermann Schmitz, *System der Philosophie*, cit., 3.2, *Der Gefühlsraum* (1965), see Jürgen Hasse, *Fundsachen der Sinne. Eine phänomenologische Revision alltäglichen Erlebens*, Freiburg-München, Alber, 2005, and Tonino Griffero, *Atmospheres and Lived Space*, “*Studia phaenomenologica*” 14 (2014), pp. 29-51.

²⁹ See Tonino Griffero, *Moralité atmosphérique provisoire. Urbaniser (un peu) la province de Schmitz*, in Didier Tallagrand, Jean-Paul Thibaud, Nicolas Tixier (Dir.), *L'usage des ambiances. Une épreuve sensible des situations*, Paris, Hermann, pp. 301-309, and Id., *Was kann eine Gefühlsatmosphäre tun?*, cit.

also to distinguish between “toxic” and “benign” atmospheres, while being aware of walking on thin ice whenever *aisthesis* and ethics mingle. It must be pointed out that toxic atmospheres, which cannot however be reduced to non-atmospheres, are not only those arousing stress and distress but also the dissuasive-sedative ones. They aim at defusing any social contradiction with the help both of artificial-conformist attunements and the inhibiting effects resulting from the alarmist demand, today become obsessive, to regulate every fragment of everyday experience, not least through the alibi of privacy and political correctness.

A good atmospheric competence also consists of 2) accepting the fact that, due to the lack in our post-traditional societies of a paradigmatic place of atmospheric awareness, that is of a situation that may act as a paradigm of every other atmospheric experience, one should rather learn to have as many and different atmospheres as possible and thus allow the resulting experiences to interact with each other. This could give rise to a wellbeing that, exactly as happens (or should happen) in democracy, depends on a division of powers (affective in this case) that relativizes their impact³⁰.

A good atmospheric competence also should 3) favour and foster those atmospheres where, as happens with a *trompe l'oeil*, an early pathic-immersive step may and should be followed by an emersion phase. An example of atmospheres allowing-affording both immersion and emersion, i.e. that are powerfully and influentially contagious without ever being oppressive and coercive, could be easily found in aesthetic experience, especially in contemporary art: unlike the populist, as such hypnotic-somnambulistic, atmosphere, in fact, the critical-artistic one generates through its provocative and irritating impact cognitive and affective discontinuities that always make a critical distance possible as well as empower whoever deeply experiences them.

Finally, certainly must have a good atmospheric competence 4) the one who has the task of generating emotional situations of this or that type, whether they are free or manipulative atmospheres (which are habitual in the most superficial dimension of the society of the spectacle, in demagogic and

³⁰ I have dealt with the non-obvious relationship between democracy and atmosphericity elsewhere: see Tonino Griffero, *Staged Emotions. Is a Democratic Atmosphericization a Contradictio in Adjecto?* in Elisabetta Di Stefano, Carsten Friberg, Max Ryyänen (eds.), *Aesthetic Perspectives on Culture, Politics, and Landscape*, Springer, Cham 2022, pp. 59-69.

authoritarian regimes, etc.), but also taking into account the implicitly ethical requirement not to indulge in coercive or kitsch affects as lacking any element of (self) criticism. Although it is very difficult to design a “self-ironic” real building, for example, architecture must do everything possible to avoid bombastic, self-celebrative and sedative atmospheres – hence the widespread risk of environments that today are so trendy because “immersive”: where it remains unexplained “if” and “where” you immerse yourself, “why” and “to the advantage of who and what”³¹.

11) Can the power of art be explained more in relation to atmosphere? Is the atmosphere created through art necessarily artificial or illusory, or is there a definite reality in it?

There is an indisputable difficulty of identifying the atmospheric in the world of art. Unless of course one is not contented with saying, metaphorically, that the true work of art emanates a “fresh morning air”, or that beauty is the specific atmosphere of works of art (they would all irradiate the same one, then!). Although contemporary art compensates for the fictionalisation and virtualisation of the historic-social world, inviting the spectator to a pathic and physical comprehension of the works of art (that, at times, must be touched, tapped, scratched on the surface), it’s right to regard the atmospheric approach to artwork as reductive. And for several reasons: for instance, because such an approach would fail to appreciate art’s ontological revealing power and often favour a superficial enjoyment (kitsch) instead of the effort from which only authentic feeling can spread out; or because, hermeneutically requiring a feeling homogeneous to that felt during the genetic *iter*, it would entail an undeserved psychologisation of art.

Then how can we justify an atmospheric theory of art? A first attempt could be that of considering atmospheric perception, capable of grasping a “sensuously and affectionally perceptible (and, in this respect, existentially significant) articulation of realized or nonrealized life possibilities³²” a

³¹ For a critical-atmospherologic look at the trendy notion of “immersion” see Tonino Griffero, *Immersion und (Re-) Emersion. Atmosphärologische Denkanstöße*, in Maria Bremer, Markus Heinzelmann (Hg.), *Eintauchen in die Kunst/Diving into Art*, Verlag Für moderne Kunst, Bochum 2023, pp. 61-72.

³² Martin Seel, *Aesthetics of Appearing: Cultural Memory in the Present Series* (2000), Stanford University Press, Palo Alto 2005, p. 92.

“corresponsive” modality that is intermediate with respect to the purely contemplative one and the properly artistic one. Yet the fact that it consists in “a sensual-emotional *awareness* of existential correspondence”³³, circumscribing it to a conscious existential affinity, makes it *de facto* impossible to have a phenomenology that would find in atmospheres unforeseeable chaotic and pre-semantic situations.

Then, a more promising attempt seems to be that of seeing in the atmospheric power of art a qualitative specificity of appearance, non-existent outside of the perception of the work of art and due both to the operative mode and to the chosen themes (extra-thing phenomena, intermittent apparitions that can be placed in museums only for documentary reasons). Thus, the canvases dedicated by Monet to Rouen’s Cathedral – painted in different hours and climatic conditions, from “the perspective of someone who is ravished [by it]”, made to represent not so much the objects as their pre-dualistic “in between”, namely “the shell that embraces all things”³⁴ – are doubtlessly atmospheric. Yet, the identification of atmosphere, in this case the indistinction of subject and object, as only one of the possible themes of art makes it impossible *a limine* to atmospherically explain the whole philosophy of art.

In the frame of this limitation, perhaps there is a more suggestive hypothesis: namely that artistic expressions are atmospheres when they are so self-referential that they induce us to ask what they show (or what their *mise-en-scène* is) rather than what they are, what their “actual fact” is (what the work irradiates) and not their “factual fact” (what the work is made of)³⁵.

A potentially universal idea could be the one – which lies at the basis of George Dickie’s and partly Arthur Danto’s “institutional theory” – that refers the whole “world of art” to a theoretical atmosphere; but here atmosphere would irremediably lose its indispensable phenomenological and aesthesiological traits, and it could insist, at most, for instance, on the role of the museum as an ontological transformer (readymade, aesthetic differentiation, re-auraticity, etc.), or as a generator of atmospheres through the works exposed but also (if not mostly) through a cunning communicative

³³ Ivi, p. 93.

³⁴ Ziad Mahayni, *Atmosphäre als Gegenstand der Kunst. Monets Gemäldegalerie der Kathedrale von Rouen*, in Id. (Hg.), *Neue Ästhetik. Das Atmosphärische und die Kunst*, Fink, München 2002, pp. 63, 62.

³⁵ For this distinction see Gernot Böhme, *Ästhetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*, Fink, München 2001.

strategy (polysensorial involvement, dramaturgic structure of the exhibition, care for the thresholds of perceptive saturation, etc.).

Hard to define on a theoretical level, the atmospheric is nevertheless easy to identify in art. For instance, in the bright installations by James Turrell, which are so much an extra-thing that they coincide with their “optical presence, without being physically tangible”³⁶, or in the creative interventions of land art, for example by Richard Long. Or in poetry, especially when one valorises its sentimental-synesthetic halo, which transcends the consciousness of what is implied by meaning. Or in cinema, which – thanks to music, characters, certain archetypal shots or sequences, the physiognomic potentiality of the close-up, etc. – has been influencing for a century each experience of ours (in the most banal case, by making us familiar with places and situations never directly experienced), to the point of assuming an exquisitely psycho-geographical value. And so forth. Provided that art is a perception that has come to thematise itself, we could claim that in it we can apprehend, in a privileged way – obviously with a quality influenced by the rank of the artworks – what an atmospheric perception is and how atmospheres (which are evidently also experienced otherwise) should be treated.

In any case, this is certainly not the place to specify the atmospheric valence of every form of art. We shall therefore be contented with affirming that the artwork it is *moins un monde qu'une atmosphère de monde* (Mikel Dufrenne). It is so only because it selects and intensifies, also through its paratexts (environments, graphic layouts, etc.), atmospheric impressions that are already pre-existent in the extra-artistic environment. Which is to say, to use different terms, that “a seductive atmosphere in a museum seduces us precisely as a seductive atmosphere would do elsewhere, and if it does not seduce us, it is because it is no longer a seductive atmosphere”³⁷.

12) Can one discuss how COVID, as a permanent state of emergency, influenced these theories and writings? Is it enough already considering the interplay between atmospheres and elongated unpredictable circumstances,

³⁶ Eva Schürmann, *So ist es, wie es uns erscheint. Philosophische Betrachtungen ästhetischer Ereignisse*, in Michael Hauskeller (Hg.), *Die Kunst der Wahrnehmung. Beiträge zu einer Philosophie der sinnlichen Erkenntnis*, Die Graue Edition, Kusterdingen 2003, p. 350.

³⁷ Michael Hauskeller, *I Could Go for Something Koons. Neue Ästhetik und kommunikative Kunst*, in Ziad Mahayni (Hg.), *Neue Ästhetik*, cit., p. 180.

or does one have to reconsider and make exceptions to the atmospheric theory because of COVID?

The pandemic atmosphere is really a strange combination of a completely involuntary natural atmosphere (virus transmission), a partly involuntary social atmosphere (relationship between people but also between people and environmental things) and a fully intentional, even “toxic” media atmosphere (emotional manipulation in a positive or negative sense).

The pandemic atmosphere brings out a crucial aspect of the affective condition of the twentieth century, which was already brilliantly diagnosed by Peter Sloterdijk³⁸. For him, the discovery of air as a philosophical, political, and ecological matter as well as its use as a medium for the manipulation and control of the atmosphere (here also in the literal sense) is the most remarkable sign of the artificial modern environments. The awareness that terror might now come from the air would symbolize the typically modern tendency to make the implicit explicit – here the air as a threatened vital immunizing sphere.

In an atmosphere of protracted emergency³⁹ providing an emotional imprinting or an affective logic, the future is unpredictable or even completely lost. One lives the endless time of a present saturated with a sort of restlessness, whose most obvious symptom is phobic flight and social withdrawal. Given that it is hard to voluntarily create contrary atmospheres, the only hope comes from the periphery of this logic, i.e. from the blind spots that, relatively uncontrolled by the predominant affective core, might arouse new and counteracting sub-atmospheric resonances. A protracted emergency atmosphere can show inner sub-feelings of hope that give a different specific tone to the entire emotional state.

As regards the atmosphere of protracted emergency, this can occur in two ways. The first is when a) the predominant atmosphere of non-localizable insecurity coexists with more objective and less pervasive emotions (fear of the concrete effects of the virus, for example) and thus becomes protracted or occasionally something else (a more manageable emotion of fear). The second is when b) the predominant atmosphere of emergency finds remedies

³⁸ See for example Peter Sloterdijk, *Terror from the Air*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles-Cambridge 2009.

³⁹ That we analysed elsewhere: see Tonino Griffero, *The Atmospheric “We”*, cit., pp. 175-199, but also Dylan Trigg, *COVID-19 and the Anxious Body*, “Puncta” 5 (1), 2022, pp. 106-114.

in sub-atmospheres (or minor atmospheres) that are almost opposite in character. For example, a culture of fear spread by power apparatuses may arouse not only the need for protection and decision-making but also an atmosphere of deep solidarity among the opponents of the regime. In the same way, the predominant atmosphere of pandemic emergency may arouse in large sections of the population a previously unknown solidarity (in the best cases), or the search for a scapegoat (in the worst ones).

The pandemic atmosphere risks turning into a long-lasting and sedimented mood, of which the people's felt-bodily resonance is both the condition and the outcome. It is not sufficiently clear, however, why positive feelings are enhanced by becoming collective while negative ones, like the emergency we-feeling, instead weaken, relativize, and become more manageable, as certainly happens for collective shame, for example, which is notoriously less intense and burning than individual one. Nor is it clear if the increasing positivity to Covid-19 of public figures could come as a "consolation" and induce fatalism or generate further and even greater worries.

The necessary neo-phenomenological concept, as already mentioned, is that of "felt body". Precisely because the pandemic atmosphere is a mood that relates us to the world in a pervasive way, its sharing must be also investigated in the felt-bodily dimension. This obviously applies differently for those who merely "witness" what is happening and for those who instead are directly involved as patients or health professionals.

The felt-bodily communication/interaction aroused by the Covid-19 atmosphere forms solidary (or unipolar) units that neither exclude a hierarchical articulation (between virologists and simple commentators, for example) nor presuppose full awareness of said hierarchy. The impulse given to all those involved by this shared atmospheric focus does not need to be experienced by all at once and in the same way. This felt-bodily co-presence urges people to perceive the world's "affordances" with a tone that makes a range of possible actions possible or impossible. It is not true that because of the pandemic the affordances of other bodies are now missing, and the world is therefore disembodied. The temporary pandemic suspension of the body does not cancel all affordances but only accentuates the negative ones, because other bodies (and even all the objects in which the virus could survive) are perceived with greater intensity, inducing almost intolerable felt-bodily reconfigurations. Our atmospheric-emotional agenda is not so much

missing as severely impoverished and changed in character, except in the rare cases where the lockdown helps one rediscover *ex contrario* the fascination of one's prior extroverted life.

Covid-19 results in a narrowness shown first by our felt-bodily withdrawal from the common-intercorporeal lived space. Dramatically emptied, this space leads to an oxymoronic "collective-shared isolation" whose felt-bodily resonance primarily expresses itself in dodging other people and falling silent, being still or even moving blindly, but also avoiding touch in a compulsive way and continuously sanitizing one's hands: in short giving life to a spatialized choreography of risk management which must now take account of the criminalization (or at least control) of previously normal everyday activities like dressing, shopping, travel, walking or sitting outside. This felt-bodily and even physical resonance, resulting from a tacit (background) perception permeating a certain space, is also continuously strengthened by perceiving other people's fear or anguish (different in quality and intensity) pre-reflectively, which do not need to be objectively-statistically proved or causalistic-indirectly communicated.

The lived or felt space is thus severely defamiliarized. It loses its usual and reassuring affordances and becomes a distressing environment consisting of present-at-hand objects that are no longer the guiding lights of our actions and rather become threatening entities as soon as they are touched by anyone other than us. This applies especially to public objects, to any densely populated urban environment, and even to the simple act of "being outside", as it is impossible to tell when and where you are further away from (or closer to) the virus. The "good old" urban outer reality is certainly still here, with its streets, shops, restaurants, cinemas, and theaters: it's just that they are all closed, we can't enjoy them any longer and, more generally, our usual social and physical flow, our fluid non-verbal and taken-for-granted interaction rituals and pre-reflective urban "directionality" seem more and more uncertain. Our homes, especially when we are told that family members may infect us, are no longer a zone of immunity demarcated against intruders and other calamities. Exactly like open spaces, they also become areas exposed to a plague and claustrophobic situations populated by nightmares, anguish and loneliness, places that stand no chance against an enemy that defies any hopes of control, corrodes internal integrity, and ignores the borders that usually define and defend identity. Even the injunction "stay at home!", which had a protective and de-distressing effect at the beginning of the pandemic, sounds

depressive as the emergency appears to continue indefinitely, and seems overtly paradoxical if home must be regularly sterilized. Not to mention those who for various reasons (domestic abuse, economic difficulties, unemployment, social isolation, etc.) run more risks at home than outdoors.

The normal intracorporeal oscillation between narrowness (centering) and vastness (decentering), which forms the basis of the neo-phenomenological theory of the felt body, is here almost entirely lost. But above all, while prior to the pandemic emergency my body was largely inconspicuous to me since it was absorbed in everyday tasks (and this absent-silent body is the sign of a felt-bodily health as “transcendence” and transitivity)⁴⁰, now it is normal to pay too much attention to the tiniest change in our bodies and worry at the first manifestations of any symptoms. Also, hearing others cough may increase coughing and therefore cause hypochondriac anxiety.

But even in the absence of these epicritic symptoms, somehow connected with strictly organic aspects, the emergency atmosphere, and the resulting social distancing (offensive especially in a community where all know each other), has two effects: on the one hand, it reduces human bodies to homogenized biological entities, and on the other it gives rise to a disturbed protopathic sensitivity. The lack of lifeworldly familiarity caused by this atmosphere implies the end of circadian rhythm synchrony, hypochondria, obsessive-compulsive traumatic stress disorders and addiction of various kinds. A certain (negative) role is also played by face masks, which limit intersubjective understanding and the possibilities of empathizing even with friends and family (not to mention the possibility of ironic facial expressions); masks determine a global renunciation of other people’s faces, smile and more generally their meaningful expressiveness (except maybe the exchange of glances, whose interpretation can however be misleading), thus always making meeting other people a bit spooky.

In short: our lived body has degenerated from a social subject into a mere physical, thinglike body that, as a site of continuous suspicion to be scrutinized and measured, hinders any lifeworldly attitude. The protracted emergency and suspicion atmosphere seems to lead to an objectification-depersonalization of any dimension that previously enjoyed our latent trust

⁴⁰ We have examined this widespread but controversial thesis elsewhere: see Tonino Griffero, *Being a Lived Body*, cit., pp. 80-86.

and that allowed a fluid and guaranteed being-in-the-world (which now instead is always precisely calculated). It is as if our world's tacit background foregrounded (became a figure, gestaltically speaking), thus becoming uncertain and threatening and giving a different tone to our affective life, now synthesized by a depressing sense of "I can't" and by people's isolation.

It's difficult to share the optimistic statement that this emergency has given us the possibility to reimagine our lives, to embrace a politics of compassion, new forms of collective spatiality and new rituals –in short that they have freed us from the old world and the regressive ideal of returning to how things were before.

Moreover, talking of our time as an age of protracted emergency means assuming that it is possible to discriminate historical periods also according to a predominant emotional regime. Group atmospheres and their causing-resulting felt-bodily styles are in fact fundamental components of what we call a historical climate or a basic mood: something that can certainly be better recognized in a third-personal (external) perspective as well as *a posteriori* (by comparison with other styles), but is already sufficiently understood by the interacting members of the group through the expression of others (second-person perspective). This comparatively collective and homogenous felt-bodily style is neither only the cause nor only the effect of an atmosphere but rather, circularly, both the condition of possibility of its perception and the resonance of this perceptual experience.

Anyway, I prefer not to indulge in unrealistic, typically philosophical fantasies, according to which the pandemic would be a favorable opportunity for a reconsidered communism (as a co-immunism) or the starting point of nefarious forms of authoritarian-securitarian control and raise some questions.

How could a protracted emergency atmosphere be managed? Only time tells, of course. It is difficult to understand how Covid-19-driven anxiety, a revenge of the air, as it were, has deeply affected young generations; if it could be downgraded from a basic-existential mood to limited fear and thus compensated for by other feelings; if one was able to avoid reacting to bodily disorientation through a purely mechanical and "masked" physicality, through a securitarian stiffening based on drawing net boundaries and keeping one's distance, or even through obedience to some authoritarian slogan; if one got around the damages caused by the loss of other people's smile and the handshake as the gestures that by definition exclude any threat, etc. In short,

it is very difficult to anticipate the long-term (affective, social, cognitive) effects of an invisible atmosphere like the one we were all “breathing”. Unfortunately, since it is “in the air” – literally - and we all shared it, Covid-19 instilled an affective-atmospheric flattening that we must simply learn to live with.

This lengthy response, relating to the specific atmosphere (as felt-bodily resonance) radiated by the pandemic, is only justified by the fact that it can serve as an example of how a more analytical exploration of a very specific atmosphere must necessarily examine in detail, in the light of the more general neo-phenomenological theory of felt-bodily communication, its equally specific felt-bodily resonance.

Here are some of my answers to the questions of the American students. They undoubtedly allowed me to clarify some essential points of my project (atmospherology as a pathic aesthetics). Which is and remains, however, a project in progress, awaiting new questions and (why not) further objections.