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Quasi-Things

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Quasi-Things

The Paradigm of Atmospheres

Tonino Griffero

Translated by Sarah De Sanctis

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Contents

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	Preface <i>vii</i>
16	
17	ONE Quasi-Things Come and Go and We Cannot Wonder
18	Where They've Been (Starting from the Wind) 1
19	
20	TWO Quasi-Things Assault and Resist Us: Feelings as
21	Atmospheres 19
22	
23	THREE Quasi-Things Are Felt (though Not Localized):
24	The Isles of the Felt-Body 55
25	
26	FOUR Quasi-Things Are Proofs of Existence: Pain as the
27	Genesis of the Subject 69
28	
29	FIVE Quasi-Things Affect Us (Also Indirectly): Vicarious
30	Shame 79
31	
32	SIX Quasi-Things Communicate with Us: From the
33	Gaze to the Portrait (and Back) 93
34	
35	SEVEN Quasi-Things Are the More Effective the Vaguer
36	They Are: Twilightness 103
37	
38	Notes 113
39	
40	Bibliography 157
	Index 181

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
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Preface

Fortunately, there first exists (apart from the light waves and nerve currents) the coloring and shine of things themselves, the green of the leaf and the yellow of the grain field, the black of the crow and the gray of the sky (Heidegger, 1967, 210).

Where I Started From: A Pathic Aesthetics

My journey from an aesthetics of atmospheres¹ to an ontology of quasi-things has its frame of reference in the ambitious project of a “pathic aesthetics.” By “pathic” I do not mean pathetic or pathological, but rather the affective involvement that the perceiver feels unable to critically react to or mitigate the intrusiveness of. This very involvement is, for me, the core of the aesthetic sphere (in the etymological sense of *aisthesis*)—much more so than art and beauty. Philosophically rehabilitating pathicity means valorizing the ability to let oneself go—a skill so rare today that it appears surprisingly (and critically) very relevant nowadays; one could sum it up as the ability to be a means of what happens to us rather than subjects of what we do. This skill was obviously misunderstood by the rationalistic post-Enlightenment dogma of subjective sovereignty and finalistic action; and yet it is the main heuristic instrument of a pathic aesthetics. The practicability of the latter, though, entirely depends on our ability to welcome what “happens to us,” whether we like it or not, resisting the temptation both to transform the “given” into something “done” and to seek shelter from this contingency in (now compromised) late-Romantic nostalgias.

1 Only if we philosophically valorize what happens (to us) can pathic
 2 aesthetics—now emancipated from the nineteenth- and twentieth-
 3 century view of art as a continuation of religion and/or politics “with
 4 different means”—truly adopt Baumgarten’s idea (1750) that aesthetics
 5 is “also” a theory of sensible knowledge. Elsewhere I have defined it as a
 6 “thought of the senses”²—where the genitive is both subjective and
 7 objective—conceiving it as a non-gnostic but, indeed, pathic phenom-
 8 enology (Straus). For this very reason, it is finally free from what is only
 9 *one* of the many possible conceptions of aesthetics—that of philosophy
 10 or even metaphysics of art. In fact, classic aesthetics is (a) idealistic in
 11 focusing on the work and its supposed autonomy, (b) metaphysical in
 12 considering art and beauty *sub specie aeternitatis*, (c) bourgeois in its full
 13 adherence to the process of civilization (through abstraction) of the
 14 European elite, (d) intellectual in focusing on judgment or interpreta-
 15 tion rather than “experience” and in misunderstanding the role of felt-
 16 bodily sensitivity in the name of the (Kantian) alibi of “disinterested
 17 pleasure.” In short, classic aesthetics is governed by the same estrange-
 18 ment *from* and *of* nature that we find in the hard sciences and in the
 19 Enlightenment apology of the (alleged) autonomy of the subject.

20 However, as soon as one abandons this aesthetics “from above” and
 21 traces artworks back to (at most) exemplary cases of sensible perception,
 22 one sees that it is possible to avoid the frustrations caused both by tran-
 23 scendentalism—which is always bound to the analysis of the conditions
 24 of possibility—and by interpretationism (hermeneutics and semiotics),
 25 which is always bound to a necessarily deferred sense with respect to the
 26 “presence.” My pathic aesthetics, instead, intends to remain, against this
 27 twofold “bad infinity,” as faithful as possible to the presence—to the way
 28 in which “appearances” resound in our lived-body. My itinerary mainly
 29 consists in prescinding from special “things” such as artworks and from
 30 the traditional categories of aesthetics (beautiful, sublime, genius, etc.)
 31 so as to rather investigate atmospheric feelings³ in the context of today’s
 32 aestheticization of the lifeworld and the so-called diffuse design, typical
 33 of late capitalist societies. The analysis of situations and atmospheric
 34 perceptions, constituting the first step of this wished-for pathic aesthet-
 35 ics, introduces us to the entities that, without being full objects, are pres-
 36 ent and active on us.

37 Therefore, I am interested in our ordinary (naïve) sensible experi-
 38 ences, especially when they are involuntary.⁴ From the perspective of
 39 aesthetics of reception (so to speak), I am serious about the criterion
 40 of affectivity—of how “one feels” when experiencing the copresence of

1 oneself (me) and a thing (or quasi-thing). From the perspective of
 2 aesthetics of production (so to speak), I wish to underline the compe-
 3 tence of the “aesthetic work” that, objectifying or (*à la* Baumgarten)
 4 perfecting sensible knowledge, has specialized indeed in the generation
 5 (or at least, evocation) of atmospheres. However, what changes here is
 6 the very meaning of experience. A pathic aesthetics, in fact, does not
 7 presuppose an interpretative and constructivist approach—that is, the
 8 idea that the world is given only through some reflective “access”—but
 9 rather supposes that there is a sense (in both meanings of the word) that
 10 is always already sedimented outside of us and can be verified through
 11 our felt-bodily and prereflexive communication with the world. Much
 12 of this comes from the impressions radiated by spaces, possibly inhab-
 13 ited by things, and, as we see in this book, also by quasi-things—in any
 14 case, by entities that fully coincide with their felt-bodily appearance “in
 15 act” (active and effective—indeed, *wirklich*) and with their generating
 16 the affective situation (*Befindlichkeit*) in which we find ourselves.⁵

17 The expressive qualities that, radiating atmospheres, become quasi-
 18 things are both particular natural phenomena (twilight, luminosity,
 19 darkness, the seasons, the wind, the weather, the hours of the day, the
 20 fog, etc.) and relatively artificial phenomena (townscape, music, sound-
 21 scape, the numinous, dwelling, charisma, the gaze, shame, etc.). These
 22 qualities are salient not despite being apparent and ephemeral, but pre-
 23 cisely because of that. And yet, for that very reason, Western thought
 24 (and sometimes common sense) considers them devoid of reality as
 25 opposed to full things, which are endowed with borders, separated from
 26 others, perduring in time, and are normally inactive if not touched. The
 27 present pathic and atmospherological aesthetics, which is (broadly)
 28 realist in rejecting the lazy explanatory hypothesis of associationist and
 29 projectivist type, emphasizes instead the cooperative relationship
 30 between perception and the more nuanced dimension of quasi-things,
 31 which, just like the ecstasy of things, emotionally tune their surround-
 32 ings.⁶ I want to offer an initial aesthetological and philosophical analysis
 33 of this pathic area, intermediate (“in between” indeed) but predualistic.

34 The core of this “in between,” however, is always the felt- or lived-
 35 body (*Leib*) (ch. 2)—that is, the non-physiological or anatomic dimen-
 36 sion that always also presents itself as a task, as something we are daily
 37 responsible for—even more so when, like today, it is subject to (and
 38 threatened by) countless modifications and technological prostheses.
 39 Both the theories of atmospheres and that of quasi-things thus presup-
 40 pose an adequate investigation of human felt-bodily living. They also

1 seek to rehabilitate the specifically aesthetological paradigm of certainty,
 2 thought of as *experientia vaga* without rules, irreducible to an etiologic
 3 and genetic approach. However vague, because it underscores our affective
 4 hetero-determination, this experiential and sensible certainty attests
 5 our being-in-the-world better than other, traditionally privileged, states
 6 (including the *cogito*).

7 In short: we must learn to “experience pathically” (in the right way),
 8 no longer regarding teleological efficiency as a phenomenologically
 9 privileged path. We must pay attention not to our role as subjects—
 10 which has been pathologically overestimated by modernity with well-
 11 known negative consequences—but to the pathic “to me” (or the
 12 perceptological “me”) that precedes egological solidification, which as
 13 such is fatally destined to the dualism typical of cognitivism. Having
 14 this program in mind,⁷ I wish to try to conceive of human beings not as
 15 “subjects of” but rather as “subject to”—not independent and autono-
 16 mous as modernity would it, but sovereign and adult just because they
 17 were educated to expose themselves (in the right way).⁸ Moreover, it is
 18 known that what happens to us hetero-determines us much more vio-
 19 lently when we fight it than when we abandon ourselves to it (*cum grano*
 20 *salis*). So this is a chance to see affective involvement as potentially lead-
 21 ing to emancipation rather than—as our paranoid culture claims—
 22 occult and alienating mediation.

23 24 25 **How I Got Here: Atmospheres** 26

27 Nevertheless, if the journey I propose starts from the general project of
 28 a pathic aesthetics, the first destination is that of atmospheres. In fact, it
 29 is the atmospherological paradigm⁹ that guides the analysis of quasi-
 30 things. But what is an atmosphere? First of all, it is an example of the
 31 passive synthesis, largely intersubjective and holistic, that precedes anal-
 32 ysis and influences from the outset the emotional situation of the per-
 33 ceiver, resisting any conscious attempt at projective adaptation. As an
 34 influential “presence”—inextricably linked to felt-bodily processes and
 35 characterized by a qualitative microgranularity that is inaccessible to a
 36 naturalistic-epistemic perspective—an atmosphere is, in short, more a
 37 “spatial” state of the world than a very private psychic state.

38 This, however, presupposes the overturning of an introjectionist
 39 metaphysics, largely dominant in our culture. In fact, the present book
 40 follows the aggressive “campaign,” started several decades ago by

1 Hermann Schmitz, of depsychologization of the emotional sphere and
 2 of externalization of feelings, therefore understood as constraints that,
 3 like climate conditions, modulate the lived and predimensional space
 4 whose presence we feel—and, as a consequence, also our mood. As per-
 5 vasive impressions that precede the subject/object distinction, their
 6 “authority” resonates in our felt-body. However counterintuitive—we
 7 are after all attempting to think of the emotional sphere as it was con-
 8 ceived before psychization; that is, before the demonic extrapersonal
 9 (*thymos*) was relegated to a fictional private psychic sphere (*psychê*)—this
 10 aesthetic-phenomenological conception of the atmospheric feeling
 11 aims at correcting the dominant dualism and questioning a purely pro-
 12 jective explanation of external feelings. However, following Schmitz, I
 13 do not aspire to an impossible regression to a preintrojectionist way of
 14 life, but simply to a healthy rebalancing of the predominant psychic
 15 ontology.

16 Of course, similar to quasi-things (as I show), atmospheres, too,
 17 cannot but irritate traditional ontology because of their unavoidable
 18 vagueness. Then it might be convenient to begin by precisely defining
 19 what kind of perception the atmospheric and quasi-thingly one is. First
 20 of all, perception means having an experience and not the distancing-
 21 constative process that specialized psychology limits itself to—and, least
 22 of all, it means having the mere passive-reflective registration of a por-
 23 tion of the visual field by an immobile eye. This perception then does
 24 not concern cohesive, solid, continuous objects that are mobile only
 25 through contact, nor discrete forms and movements, but rather chaotic-
 26 multiple situations and quasi-things endowed with their own internal
 27 (and only partly cognitively penetrable) significance, whose petulant
 28 focalization would even represent a pathology. In other words: in this
 29 perception, the phenomenological “that” and “how” reveal themselves to
 30 be irreducible to the cognitive “what.” Perceiving atmospherically is not
 31 grasping (presumed) elementary sense-data and, only afterwards or *per*
 32 *accidens*, qualitative states of things; but it is instead being involved by
 33 things or, even better, quasi-things and situations.

34 Perceiving atmospheres mostly means being touched by them in
 35 the felt-body. It does not mean only that this kind of perception is direct
 36 and deambulatory, kinaesthetic and affectively involving, synaesthetic or
 37 at least polymodal, but most of all it means that one renders oneself
 38 present to something through the felt-body. Unlike the physical body, a
 39 legitimate object of natural sciences, the felt-body is indeed devoid of
 40 surfaces and occupies an “absolute” and nongeometrical space; it is

1 capable of self-auscultation without organic mediations; it is manifest
2 in the affective sphere and articulated, according to Schmitz, not into
3 discrete parts but into “felt-bodily isles” (cf. ch. 3) that “communicate”
4 with each other and with the world. It is indeed this felt-bodily com-
5 munication with all the perceived that, as we see, explains the percep-
6 tion of quasi-things through the extrareflective-situational intelligence
7 of external motor suggestions and synaesthetic characters.

8 Although atmospheres are opaque to the so-called expert knowl-
9 edge, they produce a real segmentation of reality. In fact, while uniting
10 and allowing for a productive tuning, they also divide at the same time.
11 As invariants thus obtained from a flux, still classifiable into a familiar
12 and sufficiently systematic repertoire of affective-emotional kind, they
13 must certainly be registered in the ontological repertoire originated by
14 our ordinary, intuitive, and pragmatically efficacious segmentation of
15 reality. Most of all, atmospheres take us out of our inner closed-off
16 sphere. Sartre rightly sets the philosophy of transcendence implicit in
17 Husserl’s intentionality against the “alimentary” philosophy of imman-
18 nence that claims to assimilate everything to consciousness. It would be
19 a matter of taking “everything out” (even ourselves!) and thus freeing
20 ourselves from “interior life,” bringing terror and magic back into things.
21 Yet my atmospherological approach is influenced neither by Sartre nor
22 only by classical phenomenology, but rather by the heterodox science of
23 the phenomenon sketched by Ludwig Klages—namely, a science of
24 “elementary souls” appearing phenomenally as originary real images—
25 and above all by the neophenomenological redefinition of philosophy in
26 the terms of a self-reflection of people regarding the way in which they
27 orientate within their environment. It therefore claims the right to
28 express, indeed, “how one feels”—namely, to examine experience so as
29 to discern its atmospheric charge in the light of anesthesiologic and
30 quasi-thingly sensibility.

31 This approach must also rehabilitate the so-called first impres-
32 sion—that is to say, the involuntary life experiences that function as a
33 global response and show our affective felt-bodily involvement. When,
34 for example, we feel something when visiting a certain apartment for
35 the first time, we have an affective and felt-bodily perception that has
36 immediate evaluational and expressive consequences, whose explana-
37 tion, though, sounds like a flat rationalization *ex post*. In this case, we
38 perceive atmospheres or quasi-things that are indeed feelings, but
39 mostly external ones, effused into a spatial dimension and constrained
40 by situations—that is, by multiple and chaotic states of things that can

1 be distinguished from others precisely thanks to their peculiar
2 atmospheric tone. From my point of view, the situational constraint is
3 always also an atmospheric constraint.

4 The desubjectification of atmospheres attempted here must not lead
5 us to forget that a quasi-thingly effect is still relative to a subject who
6 feels touched by something partially undecipherable. And it is thanks to
7 these felt-bodily suggestions—inviting her to this or that reaction, possi-
8 bly to a sort of cooperative embodiment—that she gains her own
9 identity. But, if the variable intensity of the atmospheric impression
10 therefore depends also on the subject, its phenomenic apparition must
11 be framed in the sphere of Husserl’s passive synthesis. In fact, I uphold
12 the antiseperatist thesis on the relationship between perception and
13 value and the idea that, in her feeling, the perceiver encounters atmo-
14 spheric affordances. These not only imply a preconscious reflective-
15 motor response but convey messages about their possible uses and
16 functions. What I mean to say with this ecological account of atmo-
17 spheric agency is that people are not surrounded by things that are
18 devoid of meaning but by things and quasi-things always already affec-
19 tively connoted. As James Gibson noted, the perceiving of an affordance
20 is a process of perceiving a value-rich ecological object. In the human
21 lifeworld there is indeed nothing rarer than the perception of an inex-
22 pressive object, and it is perhaps atmosphericness itself that makes it
23 possible for mere sensation to become a real perception.

24 However, going beyond Gibson, I must say that forms, whether they
25 are static or in motion, do not express merely apparent causal relations
26 and pragmatic affordances but also tertiary qualities or sentimental (and
27 therefore atmospheric) ones, which permeate the space in which they are
28 perceived. They are, in other words, shivers of meaning present in things
29 or quasi-things, within certain limits no less interobservable and repeat-
30 able than perspective properties. In this sense, for example, a diminished
31 seventh chord suggests a tense and chilling atmosphere just because it
32 sounds like a metallic friction—namely, because of its own immanent
33 sound material and not for associationist reasons. It is only in this (also
34 atmospheric) sense that, following Wertheimer, “black is lugubrious even
35 before being black.” The idea—very briefly—is that atmospheres func-
36 tion as (intermodal, amodal) affordances (i.e., as ecological invitations or
37 meanings that are ontologically rooted in things and quasi-things)—
38 namely, as demands not only of a pragmatic-behavioral and visual kind.

39 Precisely due to their supervenience on material situations, atmo-
40 spheres as quasi-things seem to “demand” special objectivity. For

1 instance, it is legitimate to expect that the unease and the feeling of
2 being spied on, aroused in us by a dark wood, is affectively and bodily
3 felt by anyone who shares such an experience. The disquietude can cer-
4 tainly be greater for a city person than, say, for a lumberjack; but cer-
5 tainly the wood has, for everyone, traits that impede a projection of joy
6 or lightheartedness. In opposition to the associationist temptation or,
7 even worse, the conventionalist one, one must then restate that the
8 atmospheric affordance of disquietude aroused by the wood does not
9 derive from the thought of fear, but is rather the immediate irradiation
10 of a quasi-tingly feeling that is spatially poured out. Association, if
11 anything, comes after; and it is certainly not arbitrary.

12 Even if an atmosphere—at least the prototypical one, in my view—
13 lies not so much in the eye of the perceiver, but is rather a relatively
14 objective feeling we encounter in the external space, I do not embrace *in*
15 *toto* Schmitz’s campaign of desubjectification of feelings. With the pur-
16 pose of a wider, practical applicability of this approach, I prefer to admit
17 that there are various types of atmospheres, also, as we see, depending
18 on the characters of the quasi-things that radiate them: in short, they
19 can be prototypic (objective, external, and unintentional, and sometimes
20 lacking a precise name), derivative (objective, external, and intentionally
21 produced), and even quite spurious in their relatedness (subjective and
22 projective). These different types of atmospheres can then generate vari-
23 ous types of emotional games.

24 In a nutshell:¹⁰ (a) an atmosphere can overwhelm us (ingressive
25 encounter) and be refractory to a more or less conscious attempt at a
26 projective reinterpretation; (b) it can find us in tune with it (syntonic
27 encounter), to the point that we don’t realize we entered it; (c) it can be
28 recognized (be it felt as antagonistic or not) without being really felt in
29 our body; (d) it can elicit a resistance that pushes us to change it;¹¹ (e) it
30 may not reach the necessary threshold for sensorial-affective observa-
31 tion, thus causing an embarrassing atmospheric inadequacy for oneself
32 and for others;¹² (f) it may (for various reasons, also absolutely idiosyn-
33 cratic)¹³ be perceived differently in the course of time; and (g) it may be
34 so dependent on the perceptual (subjective) form that it concretizes
35 itself even in materials that normally express other moods.¹⁴

36 Summing up, an atmosphere is the object of natural perception, but
37 it is filtered through the ideas and evaluations of the perceiver and is
38 indeed an invitation that can also be changed or partly declined. So in
39 most cases, in our everyday life, atmospheres exist “between” the object
40 (or rather, the environmental *qualia*) and the subject (or rather, the

1 felt-body). By stating this, I do not mean to fully embrace a projectivistic
 2 relativism. And the reason is always the same: if by observing an atmo-
 3 sphere we *ipso facto* alter it, no “first” atmosphere could ever overwhelm
 4 us and affect us. Instead, this is the very prototypical fact I have started
 5 from in my investigation of atmospheres and quasi-things.

6 I have spoken at length about atmospheres. But certainly not in
 7 vain, because atmospheres are both an example—or rather, *the* main
 8 example—of the wider ontological category of quasi-things and the
 9 fundamental way in which quasi-things touch and involve us. In short,
 10 atmospheres are not only quasi-things (*par excellence*) but also what
 11 quasi-things radiate on the perceiver.

14 Where I Got: Quasi-Things

16 It is emphatically claimed that today we are living in a (supposed) aug-
 17 mented reality. Well, I wish to set against this claim the more realistic
 18 warning to keep into account the many forms of “attenuated reality” (so
 19 to speak) whose existence luckily makes our everyday life richer and
 20 more colorful. That’s why, in a project that wishes to adequately valorize
 21 the intermediate entities unceremoniously done away with by the pre-
 22 vailing ontology, the passage from atmospheres to quasi-things seems
 23 entirely coherent.

24 Despite the fact that they do not “exist” fully—that is, in the only
 25 sense contemplated by (scientific and sometimes even commonsensical)
 26 reductionism, the half-entities I thematize (atmospherically) act very
 27 powerfully on us. And this happens not *despite*, but precisely *thanks to*
 28 their attenuated physical reality. In fact, why is it that, say, the future or
 29 an image—despite being less “present” than the couch we are sat on—
 30 are able to condition our thoughts and choices much more than the
 31 couch? Why is it that a melody, thanks to its very efficacious half-reality,
 32 can become an earworm that keeps coming back to our mind (even
 33 unpleasantly)? The reason is that images and melodies are indeed
 34 instances of quasi-things that generate a deep and intimate felt-bodily
 35 resonance through their expressive qualities (motor suggestions and
 36 synaesthetic characters).

37 However, to understand this new ontological category, one must let
 38 go of the rigid millenary dualism that admits the existence of only
 39 things (substance) and sensible qualities (accident); in order to do so,
 40 one must take the liberty to prescind from pragmatic purposes and the

1 indisputable representational advantage offered by the artificial objecti-
 2 fication of what is elusive. Only in this “liberated” condition can we
 3 finally experience something that is not a substance and yet is not an
 4 accident either, something that affects us in a way that is felt only in our
 5 felt-body while not being generated by it—indeed, it is rather felt like
 6 an extraneous agent, devoid of a substrate and with structurally impre-
 7 cise borders, and yet real (i.e., active) only when it affects us.

8 This half-entity was something so unthought of that it didn’t even
 9 have a name before Schmitz raised it to the status of authentic ontologi-
 10 cal category (*Halbdinge*) in the last volumes of his *System* (Schmitz,
 11 1978, 116–139). Right from the beginning of his masterpiece (in five
 12 volumes and ten books), Schmitz expresses his interest in quasi-beings,
 13 semirealities or quasi-realities (Schmitz, 1964, 446, 450); in this sense,
 14 he confesses that he was influenced by the brilliant pages of *Being and*
 15 *Nothingness* in which Sartre examines the *mal*. If pain “is not in the
 16 space” and “neither does it belong to objective time” (Sartre, 1978, 333),
 17 “pain-as-object” becomes illness as something psychic.

18
 19 Illness is transcendent and passive. It is a reality which has its
 20 own time, not the time of the external universe, nor that of
 21 consciousness, but psychic time. The psychic object can then
 22 support evaluations and various determinations. As such, it
 23 is distinct even from consciousness and appears through it; it
 24 remains permanent while consciousness develops. [. . .] The
 25 illness has an absolute cohesion without parts. In addition it has
 26 its own duration since it is outside consciousness and possesses
 27 a past and a future. [. . .] And these characteristics aim only at
 28 rendering the way in which this illness is outlined in duration;
 29 they are melodic qualities. [. . .] For organizing reflection, the
 30 brief respites are a part of the illness just as silences are a part
 31 of a melody. The ensemble constitutes the *rhythm* and the
 32 *behavior* of the illness. But at the same time that it is a passive
 33 object, illness as it is seen through an absolute spontaneity
 34 which is consciousness, is a projection of this spontaneity into
 35 the In-itself. As a passive spontaneity, it is magical; it is given
 36 as extending itself, as entirely the master of its temporal form.
 37 It appears and disappears differently than spatial-temporal
 38 objects. If I no longer see the table, this is because I have turned
 39 my head, but if I no longer feel my illness, it is because it “has
 40 left.” [. . .] The disappearance of the illness by frustrating the

1 projects of the reflective for-itself is given as a movement of
2 withdrawal, almost as will. There is an animism of illness; it
3 is given as a living thing which has its form, its own duration,
4 its habits. The sick maintain a sort of intimacy with it. When
5 it appears, it is not as a new phenomenon; it is, the sick man
6 will say, “my afternoon crisis.” [. . .] Nevertheless this synthesis
7 of recognition has a special character; it does not aim at
8 constituting an object which would remain existing even when
9 it would not be given to consciousness (in the manner of a hate
10 which remains “dormant” or stays “in the unconscious”). In fact,
11 when the illness goes away, it disappears for good. “Nothing
12 is left of it.” But the curious consequence follows that when
13 the illness reappears, it rises up in its very passivity by a sort of
14 spontaneous generation. For example, one can feel its “gentle
15 overtures.” It is “coming back again.” “This is it.” Thus the first
16 pains, just like the rest, are [. . .] the “announcements” of the
17 illness or rather the illness itself which is born slowly—like a
18 locomotive which gradually gets under way. On the other hand,
19 it is very necessary to understand that I constitute the illness
20 with the pain. This does not mean that I apprehend the illness
21 as the cause of the pain but rather that each concrete pain is
22 like a note in a melody: it is at once the whole melody and
23 a “moment” in the melody. [The] illness is transcendent but
24 without distance. It is outside my consciousness as a synthetic
25 totality and already close to being *elsewhere*. But on the other
26 hand, it is in my consciousness, it fastens on to consciousness
27 with all its teeth, penetrates consciousness with all its notes;
28 *and these teeth, these notes are my consciousness*. [. . .] For the
29 unreflective consciousness, pain was the body; for the reflective
30 consciousness, the illness is distinct from the body, it has its own
31 form, it comes and goes. [. . .] The illness is mine in this sense
32 that I give to it its matter. [. . .] We shall call it a *psychic body*. It is
33 not yet *known* in any way, for the reflection seeks to apprehend
34 the pain-consciousness is not yet cognitive. This consciousness
35 is affectivity in its original upsurge. It apprehends the illness
36 as an object but as an affective object. One directs oneself first
37 toward one’s pain so as to hate it, to endure it with patience,
38 to apprehend it as unbearable, sometimes to love it, to rejoice
39 in it (if it foretells a release, a cure), to evaluate it in some way.
40 Naturally it is the illness which is evaluated or rather which

1 rises up as the necessary correlate of the evaluation. The illness
2 is therefore not known; it is suffered, and similarly the body is
3 revealed by the illness and is likewise suffered by consciousness.
4 (Sartre, 1978, 335–337)
5

6 There are palpable differences between Sartre’s view and the one
7 expressed in my book. There are two main ones. First, opposing the
8 introjectionist paradigm, I cannot speak of a psychic object and assign a
9 constitutive role to consciousness as Sartre does. Second, from my per-
10 spective the quasi-thingness of illness (and, for me, also of pain as such;
11 cf. *infra* ch. 4) is perceived on a level that is not reflective but pathic and
12 prereflective. Still, these differences do not change the fact that this
13 (necessarily) long quotation harbors an anticipation of many details
14 about the “subjectivity” of quasi-things.

15 Of course, for Sartre, illness is only one example of the “thousands
16 of other ways, themselves contingent, to exist our contingency” (Sartre,
17 1978, 338). In fact, the “big and colorful family” (Schmitz, 1978, 134) of
18 quasi-things includes many other entities: the wind and the gaze, sound
19 (in music and in general), color (at least in some cases), the night, cer-
20 tain thermal qualities (cold and hot), smell and electric shock, weight
21 and the void, time (obviously only when we quasi-substantialize it, by
22 saying something such as “saving time”),¹⁵ and—what matters the most
23 to me—atmospheric feelings.

24 Therefore, the name “quasi-things” can be attributed to the sensible
25 qualities that, for their marked expressiveness and intrusiveness, have a
26 real physiognomic “character.” As we see in these pages, they affect us
27 like (sometimes friendly and sometimes threatening) partners—and
28 this also explains their millenary mythical-poetic hypostatization. They
29 are similar to surfaceless situations¹⁶ whose aggressive authority may in
30 fact be (relatively) overcome only with the advent of surfaces and the
31 neutral perspective that they make possible, freeing us from a challeng-
32 ing felt-bodily communication.

33 Something very significant for my atmospherological paradigm is
34 the fact that Schmitz himself came to believe that all atmospheric feel-
35 ings are quasi-things—even the less aggressive ones, and not only those
36 that act as an “almost demonic counterpart.” In this sense we can say
37 that a quasi-thing is any entity that—while not being a full thing—
38 deeply incorporates the felt-bodily narrowness and therefore exerts on
39 us a more direct and immediate power than that exerted by the full
40 thing, in terms of suggestion and sometimes depending on the context.

1 Even the faint dripping of a tap in another room, usually unnoticed, can
2 under certain conditions turn into a loud noise, which haunts us just as
3 a confused noise turns into a non-existent voice persecuting the psy-
4 chotic subject.

5 Following and radicalizing the hypothesis that quasi-things are
6 feelings themselves due to their atmospheric half-objectivity, irreducible
7 to private inner states of mind, in this book I therefore try to say more
8 of the ontological characters typical of quasi-things (cf. *infra* ch. 1), and
9 to apply the notions of quasi-thing and felt-bodily communication to a
10 number of concrete phenomena. In fact, it is clear that the philosophy I
11 embrace is not paralyzed by physicalism and reductionism: rather, it
12 explicitly favors ontological inflationism—that's the authentic leitmotif
13 of the present book and the core of its continuity with my previous
14 works—and a phenomenology engaged with what appears (the phe-
15 nomenon) *as it appears* and in the affective-bodily involvement it
16 implies, besides its genesis or causes. After analyzing the ontological
17 concept of quasi-thing based on the example of the wind (ch. 1), I
18 address (ch. 2) the affective-atmospheric presuppositions of the present
19 discourse and the main objections that have been made against the very
20 idea of atmosphere—especially against the fact that, insofar as they are
21 conceived as quasi-things, atmospheres are external feelings that both
22 ravish and resist the human being, proving to be endowed with a spe-
23 cific and relative objectivity as well as a non-ignorable reality (in a sense
24 that is not so much physical-material but rather active-effectual).

25 Then I proceed to illustrate the felt-bodily foundation of my theory,
26 not only of atmospheres but also of quasi-things (ch. 3). Here I outline
27 the (new) phenomenological theory of the lived or felt-body's constitu-
28 tive and holistic (prereflective) involvement in human experience.
29 Against a view of the (material) human body resulting from a long his-
30 torical and intellectualistic process of reductionist and introjectionist
31 objectification of the lived experience, I posit that from a phenomeno-
32 logic and aesthetic point of view our body is first of all a felt-body. By
33 means of its feelings, specific dynamics (between expansion and con-
34 traction, absolute location of subjective orientation in a predimensional,
35 surfaceless space) and felt-bodily "isles," the felt-body feels what belongs
36 to us also in the surrounding area without drawing on the five senses
37 and the perceptual body schema. This is how we have an acquaintanceship
38 with ourselves, a lived self-consciousness, and are able to regain a
39 sensibility for the nuanced realities of lived and spontaneous experience
40 as well as for an ethics of bodily existence. In this sense, felt-bodily isles

1 are both a tool for sensing the affective radiation provoked by quasi-
 2 things and “places” that, communicating with each other and with our
 3 consciousness, are themselves quasi-things.

4 Pain is also a quasi-thing (ch. 4). It appears in us but not as coming
 5 *from* us, and this special innerness/outerness is the character through
 6 which pain attests both our subjective presence and our being-in-the-
 7 world. As we have seen in Sartre, pain attacks us intermittently while
 8 having its own recognizable character; it dispossesses us of every initia-
 9 tive, and yet, as long as it is not destructive, at the same time it nails us
 10 to the absolute location—the non-relative “here” of our lived-body—
 11 from which we (unsuccessfully) try to escape. But this is precisely the
 12 way in which it confirms our identity more than any self-ascription. In
 13 the chapter devoted to pain, in fact, I restate that a pathic aesthetics
 14 needs an education to passivity, because learning how to be exposed in a
 15 “sovereign” way to what happens to us (even if it’s painful) has an eman-
 16 cipatory and even soothing power with regards to the illness we are
 17 being attacked by.

18 Another atmosphere and quasi-thing that is felt-bodily mediated is
 19 shame (ch. 5). This feeling, too hastily thought to be extinct in our soci-
 20 ety, seems instead to have only migrated to other contexts, where it con-
 21 tinues to play its traditional regulatory function (but now with respect
 22 to post-traditional values). Shame, too, is far from being closed off in
 23 our (supposed) inner sphere. Like other feelings, it is also atmospheri-
 24 cally poured out in the (lived) outer space—indeed, it attacks those who
 25 feel it from the outside. Rather than personal shame—which is already
 26 atmospheric as a form of affectivity that condemns those who are sub-
 27 ject to it in a centripetal form—I deal with vicarious shame, which we
 28 feel (non-empathetically) for those who “should” be ashamed. As we
 29 see, like any other atmospheric feeling, even in its vicarious version,
 30 shame acts as a quasi-thing.

31 Then (ch. 6) I move on to the specific atmosphere radiated by a very
 32 special picture, such as the portrait. As always, I start from the idea that
 33 there is a felt-bodily communication between the perceiver and every
 34 outside Gestalt. In the light of this, I interpret the relationship between
 35 the gaze (especially in the portrait) and observer on the ground of the
 36 complex dynamics that this relationship activates (exchanging glances,
 37 supportive or antagonistic embodiment, motor physiognomic sugges-
 38 tions, synaesthetic qualia, etc.). This proves once again that the atmo-
 39 sphere that an image radiates is also an ecstasy of the “thing” itself (in
 40 this case of a portrait’s eyes or glances) and not a projection of the

1 perceiver's subjective state of mind. Most of all, it proves that, precisely
 2 because it is intermittent and affectively involving to the point of an
 3 almost hypnotic rapture, the gaze is a real quasi-thing. Here it is also
 4 very clear that a quasi-thing is an expressive affordance that seduces and
 5 emotionally involves our lived-body, that even produces (to put it with
 6 Sartre) a hemorrhage of our identity, and not a mere occasion of an
 7 arbitrary hermeneutical exercise, in which someone believes, decep-
 8 tively, to give to the "outside" the color and the mood of his or her very
 9 private state of mind.

10 Finally, I deal with light and its atmospheres, which are particularly
 11 evocative when the light is somehow dimmed (ch. 7). Being very effec-
 12 tive on the affective and felt-bodily level despite being, materially speak-
 13 ing, almost "nothing," light is also a quasi-thing in an exemplary way.
 14 But perhaps it is because of the atmosphere of presence-absence, and
 15 due to the evocative vagueness aroused by dimmed light—my analysis
 16 mainly focuses on twilightness—that the viewer can have an extremely
 17 involving emotional experience, abandoning himself to moods that,
 18 once again, it would be absurd to consider the projections of his (sup-
 19 posed) ineffable inner life.

20 To conclude: the wind, feelings, felt-bodily isles, pain, shame, the
 21 gaze, and twilight, as outer atmospheric powers, are for me particularly
 22 clear examples of quasi-things. The list certainly does not end here, and
 23 could/should include other phenomena so materially elusive as they are
 24 emotionally engaging. But in this book it is enough for me to outline a
 25 possible path: one that, rejecting both constructionism or interpreta-
 26 tionism and banal causalistic realism, outlines the perimeter of a pathic
 27 aesthetics. The latter first of all focuses on the (re)discovery of the exter-
 28 nal character of feelings (atmospheres); then, drawing on the example of
 29 atmospheres, expands the ontological catalogue to include half-entities:
 30 being neither things nor mere *qualia*, they occupy (sometimes literally)
 31 wide portions of our everyday experience. In fact, every day we all
 32 describe these quasi-things, we set them in a (lived) space, we recognize
 33 their amodal and intersubjective identity, and above all we always feel
 34 their emotionally intrusiveness. A philosophy that is not an abstract
 35 exercise, but a reflection on how one feels here and now, should then
 36 recognize that any ontological repertoire (worthy of the name) cannot
 37 do without quasi-things and the affective qualities they generate.
 38 Therefore it is not by choice but by necessity that I believe that *entia sunt*
 39 *multiplicanda*. In fact, even an eliminativist à la Horatio ("there are more
 40 things in Heaven and Earth . . .") has only to leave his desk and walk

1 out of the laboratory, paying some attention to the quantity and variety
2 of his own sensible experiences, as well as the affective and felt-bodily
3 nuances of his encounter with the world, to realize that Ockham's razor
4 is as presumptuous a tool as it is insufficient.

5 The present book is the partially modified and bibliographically
6 updated translation of *Quasi-cose. La realtà dei sentimenti* (Milano:
7 Bruno Mondadori, 2013). The preface was written especially for the
8 English edition and the second chapter appears here in an extended
9 version.

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ONE

Quasi-Things Come and Go and We
Cannot Wonder Where They've Been
(Starting from the Wind)¹

Things as a Prototype

Provided that we do not act like the Thracian servant-girl when she saw Thales fall into the well, dismissing the whole issue with a laugh, it is far from easy to say what a quasi-thing is. First of all, it is not easy to say what a *thing* is (strictly speaking) and how it is perceived.² One can be contented with resorting to a natural (but actually very historical) definition of it as a “substratum of properties.” Alternatively, one may try in vain to circumvent the issue by evoking the dizzying but frankly useless Heideggerian view of the thing in a non-representative but remembering sense (the thing as a question or as what is, as what is produced or represented)—that is, its thinging, understood as the “gathering-appropriating staying of the fourfold” (Heidegger, 1971, 172)—namely, earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. In any case, the issue of an exhaustive definition of “thing” is far from resolved. In fact, for an adequate phenomenology of things (even just material ones), it is not enough to quarrel about some object, as Heidegger sarcastically points out to Göttingen’s phenomenologists (“for a whole semester Husserl’s students argued about how a mailbox looks,” [Heidegger, 1999, 86]). However, it is not enough either to sit in a hut in the Black Forest and auratically invoke the unthought-of thinging made possible by the

1 worlding (*obscurum per obscurius!*). Nor is it enough to dramatize the
 2 aspectuality—that is, the infinity of adumbrations that, like a blank bill
 3 that cannot be collected, prevents the table perceived—which in phi-
 4 losophy is usually (and not surprisingly) a desk—from rising to absolute
 5 givenness.³ In the same way, one cannot just investigate the desk in the
 6 immanent meaningfulness deriving from the going about things it finds
 7 itself in,⁴ stigmatizing supposedly pure descriptivity as a failed descrip-
 8 tion. Nor can one distinguish the desk “reduced” to a self-identical thing
 9 from its Heraclitean appearance, stubbornly changing according to the
 10 direction, the distance, the light, the perceiver’s felt-bodily⁵ state, and
 11 so forth.⁶

12 All of this is really not enough for a philosophy that aims to be neo-
 13 phenomenologically understood (Hermann Schmitz) as a reflection on
 14 how one feels in a certain environment and, at the same time, as an
 15 aesthetical-aesthesiological investigation (Gernot Böhme) on the atmo-
 16 spheric effectiveness of things and situations. First of all—overcoming
 17 the existential narrowness of the philosophers who seemingly regard only
 18 books and old desks as things, as shown by their examples—we must
 19 rather *leave* the desk. Once we’ve done that, we can devote ourselves—if
 20 not to housework, which is still phenomenologically more instructive
 21 than expected⁷—at least to beings (natural or not) that are vaguer than
 22 the solid, three-dimensional, cohesive, contoured, identified, and persis-
 23 tent ones prevailing in the usual ontologies. The latter are rooted in the
 24 guiding images of our common sense and language, which are far from
 25 neutral in identifying the type and number of regions it is *possible* to access
 26 in the logic of parsimony and reduction of complexity.⁸ In other words,
 27 we can examine holes and shadows, clouds and waves, atmospheres and
 28 (why not) the wind. Investigating the wind, intentionally exploiting what
 29 usually occurs only after the disturbance of conventional things, I will
 30 therefore try to focus on the legitimacy of the presence of quasi-things
 31 within a phenomenologically legitimate ontological inventory.

32 But before we turn to the wind and expose ourselves to its blowing,
 33 some clarifications are needed. There is no doubt that everyday life is
 34 very much affected by entities that are not exactly things,⁹ especially
 35 those subjective facts that—while obviously not counting as beings and
 36 therefore not increasing their number—are the ones that give life to a
 37 flattened world in which analytical rationality chooses stability over flu-
 38 idity: in other words, a world reduced to a mere sum of material objects
 39 or, even worse, to a bundle of atomic particles. However, it is also out of
 40 question that things proper are pragmatically more important. In fact,

1 mostly following objectually guaranteed practical-instrumental inten-
2 tions, we rarely pay attention to the nuances of the qualities we encoun-
3 ter: for instance, who would ever wonder about the exact tone of red of
4 a streetlight? Differently put, we inadvertently “reduce” the wealth of
5 appearances, including mere chromatic fluxes and evanescent impres-
6 sions, to easily identifiable and usable entities. Of course, such things,
7 which we segment reality into for pragmatic reasons, are not simply
8 present-at-hand (material things) but mostly ready-to-hand (tools)
9 referring to something other, as in early Heidegger’s tool-oriented
10 ontology.¹⁰ However, this hardly affects the primacy of things, given
11 that also when it comes to the innerworldly ready-to-hand, the “what
12 thing” replaces the fleeting “what” of mere sensible presence, also thanks
13 to a largely conventional crypto-semiosis that is little certified by
14 appearance. In short, such presence is truly felt only when perceptual
15 engagement, as in Hegel’s example of the sculpture’s thousand eyes,
16 seems to be ascribable not to the perceiver but to the perceived.¹¹ Hence
17 the legitimate doubts exemplarily expressed in 1910 by an early
18 Husserlian:

19
20 Phenomena seem to be solid and resistant, but why should solid
21 and resistant mean real? Phenomena do not show any stable
22 delimitation, but why should the real be stably delimited?
23 Phenomena come and go without leaving a trace, but why
24 should the real leave traces? Phenomena cannot be grasped or
25 weighed, but why should the real be able to be grasped and
26 weighed? [. . .] I do not find any principle by which things
27 should be the real. I do not find any principle by which daylight
28 and a foot’s distance should present us the world as it is. Why
29 shouldn’t twilight and a thousand feet’s distance present us the
30 world more exactly? (Schapp, 1981, 95)

31
32 If one were to follow this suggestion to the end, so that the variable and
33 the ephemeral, the fluid and the vague—even pareidolias in carpets,
34 walls, and clouds¹²—are taken to be both no less “real” than the perma-
35 nent and more expressive than normal things, the access to quasi-things
36 would lose part of its problematic character. Indeed, one should not
37 neglect the challenging character of perceptive chaos (risen to the legiti-
38 mately ontological nature of the world and not reduced to our epistemic
39 deficit with some reductionist strategy), calling for the good old things
40 or—as Schapp himself disappointingly does—for the autonomous

1 power to bound inherent to the form and the idea,¹³ with an inevitably
 2 Platonic expedient.¹⁴ On the contrary, one should rely on the argument
 3 that, if not all that (epistemically) exists appears, all that appears surely
 4 (phenomenologically) exists, and, being perceived, it is also public and
 5 intersubjective by principle.

6 But ever since the Platonic exemplification of the *eidos* in beds and
 7 bridles, as well as the Aristotelian identification of *tode ti* and *ousia* with
 8 respectively a determined being and an autonomous and lasting sub-
 9 stance that cannot be predicated on anything else, the prevailing
 10 Western *forma mentis* has been privileging things both in science and in
 11 common sense (linguistically favoring nouns).¹⁵ Things are roughly
 12 taken to be tangible and well-determined entities with a regular shape
 13 that, being three dimensional, cannot be exhausted by their representa-
 14 tions. They are harmonious in their parts, which are not too distant or
 15 different both materially (cohesion) and qualitatively (homogeneity).
 16 They can be singled out and therefore, unlike substances,¹⁶ they can be
 17 measured based on their genus and species (individuation).¹⁷ They have
 18 a continued existence (persistence) and peculiar spatial-temporal prop-
 19 erties. Such things, perhaps transcendently possible only if the analy-
 20 sis is temporally detached from the synthesis,¹⁸ probably gather the
 21 projection of the ideal in-itself that a constantly threatened being like a
 22 human feels to be lacking. Human beings, in their reistic deflationism,
 23 further “reduce” things to mythical substrates represented by “(inter-
 24 momentary and intersubjectively identifiable and manipulable) charac-
 25 ters that are derived from the sensualistic reduction understood as the
 26 basis for abstraction and induction (for example the so-called sensitive
 27 primary qualities according to Locke)” (Schmitz, 1990, 216).

28 As we are beginning to note, all this happens at the expense of phe-
 29 nomenologically much more present entities such as situations (salient,
 30 albeit confused) and, at least in my sense, atmospheres. That is it hap-
 31 pens at the expense of quasi-things, which as such are much more fre-
 32 quent than, say, abstract beings such as numbers or the mythical “data”
 33 whose growing immaterial spectrality allegedly entails an epochal and
 34 disturbing overcoming of the thing-like.¹⁹ In other words, this happens
 35 at the expense of the quasi-things we perceive unwillingly—and this
 36 unwillingness is another dimension that (non-coincidentally) was
 37 removed by natural sciences in their obsession with aetiology and prog-
 38 nosis.²⁰ And yet, these quasi-things are the only reason for the very wel-
 39 come polychromy of our life world. So if we abandon the epistemological
 40 and pragmatic aversion to beings that do not respect borders (primarily

1 between the external and internal world), it is easy to discover instead
2 that these quasi-things²¹—no less mesoscopic than ordinary things in
3 their (phenomenological) independence from (epistemologically)
4 micro- or macroscopic basic entities—brightly colonize a vast territory
5 in between the (so-called) qualia and things in the proper sense.
6 However, as I have said, we must resist the recurring temptation to
7 remove them, whether by forcedly turning them into things²² (for
8 example, by reifying distal vagueness at all costs) or by tracing them
9 back to perceptions so chaotic and decontoured that they are as anomalous
10 (if not pathological) as experimentally produced ones.²³

11 Of course I have no intention to disregard the representational
12 advantages of a clear thing perception. Allowing for the subsumption of
13 any of percept under genera,²⁴ it mitigates the anxiety provoked by the
14 incessant change of our qualia. Perception, in fact, “is tranquil at once
15 when things are given in a favorable way, but if that doesn’t happen, there
16 is a moment of disquiet. Even at a distance, perception seems to refer to
17 things. It searches in such a way as to find something that resists its gaze”
18 (Schapp, 1981, 75–76). Yet it should be noted that this perception of
19 things, as if they were independent sovereign states, is nothing but the
20 identification (to an extent even false) of something with its most usual
21 form of appearance.²⁵ And surely it is not the sole kind of perception,
22 nor is it the primary one. In the aesthesiological field, for example, the
23 things normally considered superfluous are certainly the most interesting—
24 the effects of light and reflections rather than thing-like clarity—
25 obviously not only because they are essential to the perception of the
26 thing, which to some extent they are dependent on, but because of their
27 vagueness and transience, fluidity and lack of borders—in short, for the
28 non-subjective and non-projective atmosphericness they generate.²⁶

29 Proximity and brightness are undoubtedly the conditions of possi-
30 bility, not surprisingly epistemologically privileged by modern techno-
31 science, of our habitual world of things, beyond which everything
32 actually blurs and liquefies. But the fact that things are normally thought
33 of, for example, without shadows and at no distance, or rather only at the
34 epistemically most advantageous distance, doesn’t mean that this should
35 be a normative instance adequate to quasi-things (can we say that we
36 perceive twilight better or worse at different times?). Also, quasi-things
37 are not simply the outcome of the inaccuracy (due to extrafocality or
38 poor attention) of the normal distal perception, nor are they the mere
39 higher-order context of things acting as their “reference scheme”.²⁷ If
40 that were the case, given the fact that every component of the environment

1 can occasionally be seen as thing-like, quasi-things would always only
 2 be relatively such, becoming a thing at a higher-order level space.

3 The decision to investigate quasi-things is almost a philosophical
 4 “luxury” that I here claim to be necessary. It is not at all the product of an
 5 extravagant mereological conjunctivism, for which (say) the keyboard and
 6 the hand touching it legitimately form a third autonomous entity. Nor is
 7 it related to exasperated linguistic conventionalism, for which every
 8 expression of ordinary language infallibly corresponds to a real thing.
 9 Since a great part of the world and especially of the lifeworld is made up
 10 of partially indefinite entities in terms of their boundaries and mereo-
 11 logical structure, quasi-things are for us something ontologically and
 12 existentially much more significant than the imaginative products
 13 referred to by the ingenious thought experiments of analytic ontology. In
 14 other words: the world lends itself to being articulated into things but,
 15 whenever the perceptual and practical salience is taken over by the exist-
 16 tential and emotional salience, it is worth being also regarded as the stage
 17 of quasi-things. And given the fact that the intersubjective and intermo-
 18 mentary thing, corresponding perfectly to an abstract cognitive ideal, is
 19 earned only with the partial deactivation of the perceiving self, as well as
 20 with the “reduction” (by means of distance, differentiation, and restric-
 21 tion) of the initial atmospheric perception and affective and bodily
 22 involvement it implies,²⁸ it is surely useful to look at actual phenomena in
 23 a new way—that is, starting from objectively inexhaustible quasi-things.

24
 25 The unity of the thing beyond all its fixed properties is not a
 26 substratum, a vacant x, a subject in which properties inhere, but
 27 that unique accent which is to be found in each one of them,
 28 that unique manner of existing of which they are a second order
 29 expression. [. . .] If a sick man sees the devil, he sees at the same
 30 time his smell, his flames and smoke, because the significant
 31 unity ‘devil’ is precisely that acrid, fire-and-brimstone essence.
 32 (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 372)

33 34 35 **Is There Something in the Air?** 36

37 We are sometimes told that nature no longer exists. Yet the dog snarling
 38 in our direction and the fresh air we breathe walking out of a sultry
 39 environment are still phenomena independent of culture and technology
 40 (i.e., forms of otherness that I attempt, respectively, to escape or to

1 welcome with pleasure). Undoubtedly less obvious than in the past, to the
2 point of paradoxically needing an adequate aesthetic-phenomenological
3 training,²⁹ rigorously phenomenic experience of nature still disproves
4 the idealistic perspective, the grotesque consequence of which is that a
5 subject always and only encounters herself everywhere. It does so with-
6 out necessarily reviving physical-theology or invoking poetic-mnemonic
7 thoughts, but more simply by not reducing *lebensweltlich* experience to
8 reistic-quantitative naturalistic criteria, and also by escaping the impasse
9 imposed by the ‘myth’ of the “access” to the world, phenomenologically
10 ill-fated when interpreting such access as mediation (interpretationism-
11 constructivism) or immediacy (empiricism, but always of a cryptodual-
12 istic kind). Rephrasing Descartes’s *ego cogito* as *ego cogito cogitatum*, this
13 paradigm still assumes a gap between the self and the world, basically
14 just discussing the best way to get around it,³⁰ while people have no
15 access to the world, but live there and are an indispensable component
16 of it as long as they live.

17 For instance, if we mention the air in an aesthetic-phenomenolog-
18 ical sense, we are not at all thinking of its chemical components, nor are
19 we seeing it as a discrete component of something else. Rather—taking
20 the cue, if you will, from the fact that the ancient doctrine of elements
21 is irreducible to modern physicalistic elementarism—we think of air as
22 a vital medium, normally non-thematized, thanks to which we live and
23 breathe. And yet this naïve description already poses a few problems
24 because, as we cannot see, touch, hear, or taste air, it is so inapparent
25 that it reminds us of the void and, as Hobbes says in his *De corpore*, it
26 makes us think of a fictional being: a pragmatically and cognitively
27 useful hypothesis, nothing more.³¹ But this is not the case, because air
28 is rather an “in-between” (me and the world): something absolutely
29 indispensable and ubiquitous that is so little imaginary that it is some-
30 times even bottled.³² Also and mostly, it is something that affects us at
31 the affective-bodily level,³³ even if it occurs mainly *ex negativo*—that is,
32 when it is missing, making it difficult to breathe (not only for the claus-
33 trophobic), or when undergoing changes, such as becoming purer and
34 more rarefied in the high mountains.³⁴ Apparently inapparent, being a
35 quasi-thing and the condition of possibility of both things and other
36 quasi-things, air is a very exciting chapter of perceptological reflection
37 or, if you will, of a phenomenology of nature that is critical of an
38 approach passing off experimental abstractions as “empirical,” thus
39 losing sight of the Aristotelian, naïve, and pretheoretical sense of the
40 notion.³⁵ Precisely because it is relatively excluded from the cognitive

1 area, air here returns to the spotlight as a phenomenological quasi-thing,
 2 but also as an atmosphere—that is, a sentiment poured out into (predi-
 3 mensional) space.

4 However, what matters is to reject any metaphorical alibi.³⁶
 5 Whenever we “cannot breathe” or we want to “get some air” and take “a
 6 deep breath,” we want to spare ourselves a feeling of felt-bodily narrow-
 7 ness that is anything but metaphorical, which is why we find that air,
 8 like a vast and airy space, invites the rib cage to expand and the gaze to
 9 get lost in the distance³⁷ until we feel “free like the air.” When we
 10 wonder what is in the air, we do not refer to its chemical-physical
 11 characters. Rather, starting from affective-bodily effects, the air tells us
 12 how we could and/or should behave in a situation tuned by a particular
 13 pervasive atmospheric quality. It might not be strictly a thing, but the
 14 air we breathe is still a very concrete experience, both climatic and
 15 affective.

16 The air suggests each time a specific felt-bodily communication
 17 with the world, so that it would be legitimate to say, imaginatively, that
 18 it is “the world (or the air) that breathes in me”—after all, this is the
 19 secret of many implicitly pantheistic meditation techniques. More
 20 soberly, one could say that “patterns of breathing are essentially the felt-
 21 bodily reality of our own emotions” (Böhme, 2003, 282), as indeed sug-
 22 gest other expressions (“clouds on the horizon,” “it’s nice again,” etc.).³⁸
 23 It is the weather, duly subtracted to today’s prognostic obsession
 24 inscribed in the flood of “weather forecasts,”³⁹ that synthetically testi-
 25 fies the quality of our emotional involvement. In fact, it is a total affec-
 26 tive-atmospheric impression (Alexander von Humboldt), be it
 27 generated by synaesthetic characters (“hot,” “chilly,” etc.), moods with
 28 their motor invitations (oppressive, glum, clear, etc.) or communicative
 29 characters such as typically seasonal colors or the weather’s “personal”
 30 qualities (“inclement,” “gloomy,” and so on). The air understood as cli-
 31 mate or weather⁴⁰ is therefore an authentically atmospheric experience.
 32 In this sense, air is analogous to the dimensions (typical of Japanese
 33 culture but implicit in every philosophical climatology indifferent to
 34 the stigma of determinism) of *ki*—in the frame of a predualist coex-
 35 istence of self and world equivalent to air, wind, and *Stimmungen*.⁴¹
 36 More generally, it is analogous to the dimension of *fūdo* (wind and
 37 earth)—that is, the climate, understood as that in which the human
 38 being primarily finds and discovers himself/herself,⁴² as a medium that
 39 makes our interactions possible and precisely for this determines their
 40 quality.⁴³

Quasi-Things: The Wind

1
2
3 The relative phenomenological inaccessibility of the air ceases to exist,
4 *pace* Lucretius (*De rer. nat.* I, 277: *sunt venti corpora caeca*), especially
5 when it comes to the wind, which has always been the object of human
6 attempts to catch it and exploit its power. In fact, whipping and assault-
7 ing us like a threatening partner, the wind can be directly experienced
8 even in the absence of optical data, thanks to the felt-bodily touch. This
9 happens in particular, thanks to the specific sensitivity of the forehead
10 as a true felt-bodily isle, but also indirectly through some of its peculiar
11 epiphenomena, which neither lower it⁴⁴ nor degrade it to being a
12 medium of something else (thereby reducing it to a false unity).⁴⁵ An
13 inflated dress, shrivelled up hair, the bent branches of a tree, a waving
14 flag, or hanging clothes, certain noises and sounds⁴⁶ made according to
15 the shape of the environment, its effects on the clouds (speed, color, etc.)
16 and on water:⁴⁷ all these are ways in which the wind manifests itself in
17 its different qualities, be it as healthy and benevolent or as dangerously
18 adverse.

19 Now, from an atmospherologic perspective not even things are
20 simply closed up, discrete and inactive entities understood as substrata
21 of properties: they are also the forms whose qualities, according to a
22 certain natural patterns,⁴⁸ are ecstasies able to atmospherically affect the
23 surroundings.⁴⁹ In the light of this, the wind is all the more a prototypi-
24 cal case of quasi-thingly ecstaticness. Coinciding with its own flow and
25 thus being an event in the proper sense (a “pure act” in a way), it per-
26 vades space with its particular voluminousness, tuning it in this or that
27 way (obviously a breeze is different from a hurricane) and arousing
28 motor suggestions, thanks to synaesthetic affordances. Such impres-
29 sions, in any case, cannot be reduced to the *Zuhandenheit* in the name of
30 which Heidegger is happy to say that, for instance, “the wood is a forest
31 of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the
32 wind is wind ‘in the sails’” (Heidegger, 2001, 100), or, even worse, a sign
33 (although not subjective) of rain.⁵⁰

34 Now let’s try to start from the wind to exemplify the main “charac-
35 teristics” of quasi-things.⁵¹ Of course—I repeat—I phenomenologically
36 prescind from the surreptitious constructions that, ontologically thick-
37 ening quasi-things seek to reduce their particular intrusiveness: just like
38 an electric shock is irreducible to electricity, the weight that drags us
39 down can’t be reduced to gravity (or, worse, to gravitons in quantum
40 gravity); and the pain we feel doesn’t amount to neurobiological causes,

1 so the wind cannot be reduced to air moving when it blows or being still
 2 when it dies down.⁵² If by naïve experience, a face is happy before acquir-
 3 ing a certain color,⁵³ the wind is a pushy partner prior to any physical or
 4 climatic clarification.

5 A. Unlike things, quasi-things (think of the wind) are not edged,⁵⁴
 6 discrete, cohesive,⁵⁵ solid, and therefore hardly penetrable. Nor do they
 7 properly have the spatial sides in which things necessarily manifest
 8 themselves and from whose orthoesthetic coexistence—even though
 9 only one of them is more representative (usually the frontal one)—one
 10 can gather the protensional regularities and the reversibility that are
 11 missing, not coincidentally, in magical-fantastic objects.⁵⁶ So when it
 12 comes to the wind, we do not perceive a side hiding while announcing
 13 the others. This means that if a thing—despite being a Husserlian “rule
 14 of possible appearances”—can still deceive us by having concealed sides,
 15 temporarily or eternally hidden inner strata⁵⁷ and only apparent quali-
 16 ties (cement can turn out to be plasterboard, the wood Masonite, etc.),
 17 a quasi-thing never deceives, because it totally coincides with its pheno-
 18 menic appearance—unless one reductively experiences it as a thing.

19 B. Things do not merely undergo external changes, as Husserl posits,
 20 serving a naturalistic vision of the material world and thus attributing
 21 every activity to the transcendental subject.⁵⁸ In fact, beyond the frontal
 22 qualities perceived with greater clarity,⁵⁹ they also possess immanent
 23 and regular tendencies,⁶⁰ necessary to the point that they cannot be acti-
 24 vated or nullified from the outside, under pain of the cancellation of the
 25 thing itself. An object weighs and tends to fall; the pages of a book turn
 26 yellow; if we don't lift something it stays on the ground: because of these
 27 immanent dispositions,⁶¹ also proving their compatibility or incompat-
 28 ibility with other bodies, things testify to humans their physical-bodily
 29 presence.⁶² These dispositions are irreducible both, *contra* Heidegger, to
 30 their *readiness-to-hand* (*Zuhandenheit*)—which if anything presupposes
 31 them—and, *contra* Schapp, to their historically anthropocentric finality
 32 (possibly even unknown) as things-towards-which (*Wozudinge*).⁶³ These
 33 are thus tendencies that are inherent in the material and shape of things,
 34 existing even without interaction (the glass remains frangible even if
 35 nobody breaks it), and able to confer to things a future as well as a past
 36 revealed by signs, marks, fractures, etc.

37 Vice versa, because of their relative immateriality, quasi-things do
 38 not seem to have real tendencies (nor do they have a history). Just like
 39 the night or anxiety understood as atmospheres and therefore as quasi-
 40 things, the wind doesn't get old and doesn't show any temporal patina: in

1 short, it doesn't bear the marks of past and future in its absolute
 2 "presentness." To sum up, quasi-things are not the continuation of
 3 something prior, but something always new and radically evenemential:
 4 something for the understanding of which genetic and aetiologic
 5 phenomenology is by no means essential.

6 C. As we have seen, things transcend their momentary character.
 7 They are not born nor do they die all of a sudden, but bear the signs of
 8 a specific history of their own. We can have them, portion them,⁶⁴ save
 9 them, or annihilate them. Similarly to matters such as dust, gold, water,
 10 etc., while being fully actual, quasi-things appear in a partial form—
 11 which doesn't necessarily mean by fragments and sides. So, if I can point
 12 at a single object made of silver to show someone what silver is, in the
 13 same way I can show *this* wind to explain what wind is in general, even
 14 if it obviously doesn't manifest all the variants and possibilities. And this
 15 is because a single wind is not the portion of a larger wind-thing.⁶⁵

16 However, this point is no less than controversial. If, following
 17 Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, the thing has an intuitive side (the por-
 18 tion perceived), a conceptual one (I know what it is), and an imaginative
 19 one (the sides that cannot be perceived now but are still present to con-
 20 sciousness), only the first of these aspects seems to be truly determinant
 21 for quasi-things. In fact, as I have noted, quasi-things seem to fully
 22 coincide with the "character" of their appearance as they are qualities
 23 floating in the air: they are actual facts (this wind as a pure phenome-
 24 non)⁶⁶ and not factual facts (the wind as physical-climatic element), to
 25 apply the distinction proposed by Josef Albers to the extra-artistic field.
 26 If it is true that a mere change of direction does not make a wind another
 27 wind,⁶⁷ or that a different tone does not make the voice (another quasi-
 28 thing) of a person different (warm, metallic, polished, hoarse, etc.), it is
 29 undeniable that quasi-things have their own distinct identity. Whether
 30 it is more or less intense, whether it is a headwind or a tailwind, a certain
 31 wind stays the same within certain (purely perceptual) limits. Therefore
 32 we must speak of quasi-things as both pure acts and "characters" that
 33 can be relatively traced back to types, while not being as universally
 34 predictable as genera.

35 D. But how are quasi-things perceived? If "what we feel is thinglike
 36 by nature" (Koffka, 1955, 71; modified), this "of things" must also (per-
 37 haps mainly) include quasi-things. In fact they are (felt as) more imme-
 38 diate and intrusive than things, able to generate inhibiting and
 39 sometimes even unbearable motor suggestions—as in the case of sound
 40 phenomena, which we non-metaphorically call "sharp," "stabbing," or in

1 any case so penetrating that they are obsessive (think of an obsessive
 2 dripping in the night). The felt-bodily communication taking place in
 3 the presence of quasi-things can be summed up—similar to what hap-
 4 pens in the presence of things—as the alternation of incorporation⁶⁸
 5 and decorporation, with the difference that the motor suggestion of
 6 quasi-things (which as such are more “actively real,” *wirklich*, than
 7 simple things) is much more intense than that of things, which after all
 8 can almost only ever be moved by contact. Like each thing, they are
 9 “centers of incorporation” (Schmitz, 1978, 169), but they are also violent
 10 “attractors of our everyday attention,” (Soentgen, 1997, 13), thus more
 11 incisive and demanding⁶⁹ than things in the strict sense.

12 E. The wind dies down with the same inexplicable immediacy with
 13 which it rises. Although, as we have seen, it has a “character,” it doesn’t
 14 have the same continuity of existence as things, which as a rule cannot
 15 disappear from a point in space and reappear in another.⁷⁰ For this
 16 reason, the embarrassing question asked both by the child (“what does
 17 the wind do when it isn’t blowing?”) and by the adult who wonders if
 18 there is an *esse* separate from the *sentire*—a question that not coinciden-
 19 tally can be asked of all quasi-things (“what does a voice do when it is
 20 not heard?”; “where is pain when I do not feel it?”)⁷¹—turns out to be
 21 an excellent philosophical question. The normalizing and thinging
 22 answer given by the adult (“it has died down,” or even “it went to
 23 sleep”)⁷² disregards its importance. While things that are not perceived,
 24 lost, etc., provided that they are not totally destroyed, occupy a certain
 25 portion of space—even when the waves cease to crease it, we still see
 26 the water; but when the wind stops, there is no perceptible air left—
 27 quasi-things have a rather intermittent life, and it would make no sense
 28 to ask where they are when they are not present yet or when they are no
 29 longer there. Properly they are not present, but are “presented,” and
 30 probably in the form of *entia successiva*,⁷³ so requiring not a chronologi-
 31 cal but a kairological experience, which lies “not in the succession of
 32 events but in the attunement of attention and response to rhythmic
 33 relations” (Ingold, 2012, 76).⁷⁴

34 Besides, by denying this existential intermittency, one would end up
 35 claiming that atmospheric feelings are, say, all eternally present inde-
 36 pendently of people and situations.⁷⁵ And yet, unless one thinks that
 37 quasi-things are generated only when one feels them,⁷⁶ their appearance
 38 here and now does not mean—unlike what happens for things—that
 39 they can’t appear elsewhere at the same time (this holds only for their
 40 ideal-typical form, so for shame, pain, the wind, but surely not for *this*

1 shame, *this* pain, and *this* wind).⁷⁷ Mostly, it does not mean that they
 2 can't represent themselves as percepts endowed with their specific "char-
 3 acter" ("here's my usual pain in the shoulder," "here's the melancholy of
 4 an autumn evening," etc.). Ultimately this intermittence is very different
 5 from the latency periods that normally belong to things that are tempo-
 6 rarily not perceived. This intermittence is the source from which they
 7 derive a broken biography and gaps that cannot be filled by principle,⁷⁸
 8 all the more so, epistemically speaking.

9 F. Following Schmitz, something peculiar to quasi-things (of which
 10 we are mainly pathically certain) is that they do not have a three-polar
 11 causality (cause-action-effect) but a bipolar one (cause/action-effect). A
 12 book is a book and then eventually it falls on the floor, after which, if it
 13 hits a glass, it eventually breaks it. On the contrary, the wind, which in a
 14 certain sense "is precisely this blowing and nothing else" (Grote, 1972,
 15 251), does not exist prior to and beyond its blowing. So to speak, it is an
 16 aggression without an aggressor (a cause) that is separable from it and
 17 prior to it, one that can be given some potential. The obvious difference
 18 between cause and action, which induces Hume to look for a middle
 19 term, has no reason to exist in the causality of quasi-things: in fact, the
 20 wind that hinders our way and maybe makes us fall is an action coincid-
 21 ing with its cause. And only the need for prognosis and prevention,
 22 whose condition of possibility is precisely that the potential of the
 23 causes is discoverable before their action, justifies the transformation
 24 (both scientific and commonsensical) of bipolarity in three-polarity—
 25 that is, the tendency to assume a substratum whose experienced power
 26 would only be the (more or less accidental) expression. In the above-
 27 mentioned example, this would be the book as devoid of a supporting
 28 surface or even gravity. It is true that a thingly configuration is, formally,
 29 the phenomenic response—made up of units and links that are imma-
 30 nent to the world itself, which are therefore "found" and not constructed/
 31 projected by the perceiver—to an active and inquisitive reception of this
 32 world, in other words, a "unit that is constructed in accordance with the
 33 possibility that the self will turn to it, a possibility matched as much as
 34 possible by determined reactions" (Grote 1972, 96, but cf. also 1948).
 35 Then one should conclude that the always somewhat unexpected
 36 appearance of a quasi-thingly configuration is always necessarily fol-
 37 lowed by an involuntary experience, a pathic and felt-bodily involve-
 38 ment that is at least initially uncontrollable.

39 G. I have said that a quasi-thing does not properly have a whence
 40 or a where, thus being strictly akin to atmospheric feelings (also and

1 precisely in a climatic sense)—at least to those that, for their blatantly
 2 “air-like” nature are irreducible to what we believe to be their cause for
 3 mere autobiographic rationalism. Hence a further characteristic: unlike
 4 things, they “occupy” surfaceless and in any case non-relative spaces—
 5 that is, spaces not defined by reciprocal distances (this is the common
 6 local space), but rather lived spaces,⁷⁹ as such highly atmospheroge-
 7 nous. In such spaces, just as in the case of the wind, we feel motions but
 8 we don’t perceive them as actual movements from one point to
 9 another.⁸⁰

10 H. Finally, in some ways quasi-things are similar to fractal shapes,
 11 conceived here non-mathematically.⁸¹ In fact, they are ephemeral,
 12 apparently casual in their manifestations,⁸² only identifiable through an
 13 overall impression, devoid both of surfaces hiding depth and of a begin-
 14 ning and an end, non-manipulable and even more so inimitable (con-
 15 sisting basically of details without a solid correlative structure),
 16 unrepeatable,⁸³ and not exhaustively describable (as long as one doesn’t
 17 surreptitiously refer them to some thing in the real sense). These are the
 18 analogies. As per the differences, there is first of all the fact that, unlike
 19 fractal shapes, quasi-things intensely call for our attention. Also, in
 20 some cases they can be undoubtedly produced—suffice it to think of the
 21 aesthetic work, largely consisting in generating the desired atmospheric
 22 feelings, but also of certain meditative practices aimed at awakening
 23 latent felt-bodily isles and so on. Unlike fractals, also, they are not nec-
 24 essarily working residues of materials (such as marks), nor do they nec-
 25 essarily suggest that disgust that comes instead in the presence of the
 26 organic indistinction typical of many formlessness fractals. Ultimately, if
 27 they are fractals, it is in the sense only of the clouds of smoke that “hyp-
 28 notize” the smoker or the cognac lover, or of the ruins as a work of
 29 chaotic renaturalization of human artefacts. If fractal shapes are “a sort
 30 of *signatura* of a substance” (Soentgen, 1997, 133), then we could think
 31 of a quasi-thing as a sort of pathic *signatura* of a given quality.
 32
 33

34 It Blows Whenever and Wherever It Wants

35
 36 Like (almost) all quasi-things, though, the wind is also an atmosphere.
 37 And it is one even when it leaves the sphere of appearance: to make just
 38 one example, when speaking of “dead calm” we linguistically allude to a
 39 distressing situation of imminent danger (“the calm before the storm”).
 40 Of course it is an atmosphere in the proper sense when, like a feeling, it

1 arouses an affectively tuning impression binding the perceiver to a
 2 felt-bodily resonance⁸⁴—after all, this emerges from the traditional
 3 tendency to associate the wind with excitement, especially in relation to
 4 love. In fact, feelings—when understood atmospherologically—have
 5 always been taken to be windy and airy, be it the Jewish *ruah*,⁸⁵ Yahweh’s
 6 manifestations as wind, or the Greek *pneuma* (non-coincidentally able
 7 to blow wherever it wishes, without a whence or a where) (*Gv* 3, 8),⁸⁶ in
 8 analogy with “the mystery [of which] we experience the influence but
 9 do not see or know where it comes from and where it goes” (Volz, 1910,
 10 59). Foreign to human intentionality in its (not necessarily transcen-
 11 dent) numinousness, irrepressible and ambiguous at both an ethical
 12 (beneficial but devastating) and an aesthetic level (pleasure but also
 13 *horror vacui*),⁸⁷ the wind as an atmosphere cannot be confused with a
 14 merely subjective state of mind. In fact, substantially heretic compared
 15 to rationality and every “learned orientation” (Bachelard, 1988, 234),
 16 the wind spreads around like any other atmospheric feeling, impregnating
 17 a certain (lived) space and arousing affective “shivers” in the
 18 perceiver.

19 But in what precise forms does the wind exert its atmospheric
 20 quasi-thinghood? First when its blast (gust of wind) is intense but not
 21 really dangerous, when for example it dishevels our hair (moderate
 22 wind),⁸⁸ and of course when it makes objects fall (strong wind), hitting
 23 them as if it were material itself. In this case, untraceable and unstopp-
 24 able, the gust is “wild and pure,” so unexpected and “useless” that it
 25 suggests an atmosphere of “anxious melancholy” (Bachelard, 1988, 234,
 26 230), but also inducing whoever resists it to being aware of a physical-
 27 bodily dimension other than the felt-bodily one.⁸⁹

28 The wind is just as atmospheric when it is only a “light air” or a
 29 breeze (constant, light or tense) that caresses and seduces us, not
 30 arousing resistance but rather emancipating the felt-body from the
 31 physical body, promoting its relaxation if not the dreamlike abandon-
 32 ment to an indeterminate vastness (“privative expansion,” to use
 33 Schmitz’s term). In fact it is the breeze that arouses the *Sehnsucht*,
 34 “taking us away” to far-away and (by definition) “mysterious” lands,
 35 also significantly suggesting—say, in a sensitive Japanese traveler—a
 36 direct bond between an almost artificially ordered nature (given the
 37 regularity and symmetry of trees rarely moved by the wind) and a
 38 strongly rational art and *forma mentis* like the Western ones. Indeed,
 39 the seasonal wind, sudden and violent as in a typhoon, is apparently
 40 the origin of a *Stimmung*, like the Japanese, changeable but also

1 resigned, similar in this to the rapid flowering and equally rapid wilting
2 of cherry blossoms.⁹⁰

3 Other types of wind that are and cannot help being atmospheric are
4 the squall (moderate to strong) and the storm (up to the hurricane). The
5 latter's archetypal scream—"in a way, the wind howls before the animal,
6 packs of wind before the packs of dogs" (Bachelard, 1988, 229)⁹¹—urges
7 those involved to immediately decide which behavior to adopt: whether
8 to protect themselves or try to cope with it. Here the atmosphere is
9 dual: those who pull away are shocked by a power that weakens and
10 paralyzes them, whereas those who face it have (and symbolically sug-
11 gest to the observer) a decidedly heroic attitude. In this sense, Caspar
12 David Friedrich's (1818) *Wanderer above a sea of fog* (but also, upon
13 closer inspection, above a sea of wind) is nothing but the elegant and
14 brilliant version of each propaganda image of characters that stick their
15 chest out and go "into the wind." As in any other struggle against some-
16 thing destined to resist humankind, those who oppose the storm as
17 "pure anger, anger without purpose or pretext" (Bachelard, 1988, 225)
18 are fully pervaded by an atmosphere of conflict, sometimes even pleas-
19 antly so.

20 The all too easy campaign against positivist "sense-data" would be a
21 Pyrrhic victory if the thing, rightly put before sensations, were conceived
22 as a relatively constant beam of sensations—hence the inevitable
23 assumption of its exceeding noumenic character—and not as Gestalt.⁹²
24 But the quasi-thing is also a structured form or situation⁹³ persisting in
25 its "character," despite possible variations. Its physicalist details, extrane-
26 ous to the initial affective and felt-bodily involvement, appear only when
27 the perceived turns out to be different from what it seemed to be, as in
28 the emblematic case of disappointment: a ray of light (quasi-thing) that
29 upon closer inspection turned out to be a pile of snow (thing) would not
30 be an illusion, as in the dimension of quasi-things what matters is only
31 "the effect" of a certain perception and not its epistemic evaluation (and
32 correction). Quasi-things are always (perceptively) true, as they are
33 (almost) personal and atmospheric partners able to bind those involved
34 through a peculiar incorporation. Quasi-things are also more active than
35 things, and for this very reason they are indispensable: "a world without
36 quasi-things, devoid of the insistent power of immediate causality, would
37 be cold, faded and boring" (Schmitz, 2003, 105). Also, in a world devoid
38 of this *ab extra* rapture, one in which only the psychological-reduction-
39 ist-introjectionist paradigm held,⁹⁴ we would be scarcely certain of what
40 we feel, as we would be nothing but third-person observers.

1 Here I am merely sketching a phenomenological ontology of
2 quasi-things taking cue from their “catalogue,”⁹⁵ which can obviously
3 be integrated (as I do in what follows) starting from the wind. Most of
4 all, the choice to speak of quasi-things rather than simple relations or,
5 even more heretically, of relations devoid of (or prior to) *relata*, undoubt-
6 edly denotes an unpaid due to the ontological paradigm of things.
7 However, it does not amount to corroborating the universal tendency
8 (onto- and phylogenetic) to reification, whose advantages, as we have
9 seen, do not compensate for the loss of the semantic-pathic polyvocality
10 of reality.⁹⁶ My aim is dual and consists in taking relations and events
11 as (quasi) things while taking many things as less thing-like: for
12 instance, a mountain is such only within a specific segmentation
13 (anthropic and based on *fiat* [i.e., conventional boundaries]) of space,
14 thus only under certain (very unstable) conditions. The analysis of
15 quasi-things, like that of atmospheres, is extraneous to the popular
16 view for which every “analysis” amounts to an irreversible disillusion-
17 ment, and here has an unexpected outcome, consistent with the inevi-
18 table incompleteness of every ontological catalogue: in fact, many so
19 called things (a mountain, a road, etc.) are not much more defined than
20 the atmospheric feelings they irradiate—with the significant difference
21 that the atmospheric quasi-thingly repartition depends on a segmenta-
22 tion of what we “encounter” that is not so much artificial (functional)
23 or cognitive-semantic (which explains the Quinean privilege of homo-
24 geneous entities) but rather affective and felt-bodily. The atmospherol-
25 ogy and ontology of quasi-things thus proceed to an ambitious
26 “de-thinging” of reality, without replacing things with waves as physics
27 does, but rather keeping the philosophical horizon sufficiently open—
28 even just to save from the reductionist fury⁹⁷ all quasi-things—that is,
29 all entities acting as authentic generators of atmospheres as passive
30 syntheses, produced by reality without a “little help” from the transcen-
31 dental subject.⁹⁸

32 Now I could very well keep going and lapidarily say that quasi-
33 things have quality (intensity), extension (non-geometric dimensionality),
34 relation (to other quasi-things and the perceiver’s states of mind),
35 place (they are here and not there, even if only in the lived space) and
36 time (they occur right now, etc.), but it is early to assess the validity of
37 an ontology that, oriented to an eidetic of facticity, apparently earns
38 more from its potential applications than from abstract and preliminary
39 reviews on the subject as a matter of principle. Rather than hastily
40 building ontological architectures that close the horizon, perhaps



1 focusing on similarities between quasi-things and imaginary beings, it
2 might be better to consider some phenomena “in the flesh” (the atmo-
3 sphere *qua talis*, the felt-body, pain, shame, the gaze, the light), leaving
4 the reader the freedom to personally draw the conclusions from this real
5 phenomenological *flânerie*.⁹⁹ But there’s no rush. Out of the three pieces
6 of advice given by Dickens to aspiring writers (“make them laugh, make
7 them cry, make them wait!”), the third can (and should) apply here also
8 for us.

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TWO

**Quasi-Things Assault and Resist Us:
Feelings as Atmospheres¹**

And he was left alone once more. He filled the pipe and closed the window, as the air was turning chilly. It took no effort for him to picture the doctor's villa, the prosecutor's gloomy house. He who so enjoyed going out and sniffing atmospheres!

—Simenon, 2015, 65

(Neophenomenological) Depsychologization of Emotionality

One need not be alexithymic to be sometimes unable to describe, even just metaphorically, how one is “feeling” and therefore identify one’s emotional state, of which lived bodily sensations (*leiblich*) rather than strictly physical ones (*körperlich*) are the expressive resonance. One’s emotional state is the “expression of a *correspondence* between personal directionalities and the expressive characters of the environment” (Fuchs, 2000, 229). This is why we often resort to the vague and (falsely) all-explicative term “somatization”: we are unable to pinpoint some such emotions within our sensory organs or bodily parts, and yet we try to account for this undeniable resonance (be it fluid or pathological, attractive or repulsive).² And yet, this resonance is what brings to the surface—without any metaphorical (or, even worse, poetical)³ alibi—the analogy that unifies the subject’s and the world’s expressive forms in terms of existential a prioris of the lived-body, which exist prior to their becoming real within different regional ontologies.⁴ Due to our typically Western tendency to debodify the emotional

1 sphere, such an analogy gets seriously downplayed and the correlative
 2 somatic effect of the emotional sphere is considered an accessory
 3 phenomenon: in principle and compared to inner life,⁵ it is seen as
 4 something illegitimate, as well as identical to some non-affective physi-
 5 cal states, as if it were truly possible to confuse—each with its own spe-
 6 cific qualia—the palpitation caused by fear with the one caused by some
 7 sport activity.

8 A different and promising approach is, once again, the neophenom-
 9 enological one (put forward by Hermann Schmitz),⁶ thanks to which
 10 the role of life and involuntary bodily experience has been rehabilitated
 11 within the context of a systematic,⁷ original, and profitably unfashion-
 12 able philosophy of affection: being aware of the fact that it is not pos-
 13 sible to evaluate our condition without referring to existential feelings;⁸
 14 in this context philosophizing means wondering how we feel in this or
 15 that particular space. The task of the resulting atmospherologic propo-
 16 sals—which I also present from an aesthetological point of view⁹ in
 17 what follows—is thus to focus on the inquiry on the subjective feeling,
 18 not reducing the latter to a mere epiphenomenon (“what is it like to
 19 experience this or that feeling?”). This question is thus given priority
 20 over both the genetic one (“in what series of events does this feeling
 21 occur?”) and the causal one (“what is the cause of this feeling?”); in any
 22 case, this approach distances itself both from the (sometimes grotesque)
 23 functionalist-adaptive view¹⁰ of emotionality (e.g., one gets ashamed *in*
 24 *order to avoid* being assaulted!) and from the more sober, though slightly
 25 anodyne, multi-factorial theories.¹¹

26 Just like the other themes taken into account in this book, here, too,
 27 the phenomenological inquiry also involves the inquiry on the critique
 28 of culture. First of all, my task is indeed to dismiss the naturalistic (and
 29 by now commonsensical) thesis that feelings—both as biological pro-
 30 cesses and as products of our interactions with other individuals and the
 31 environment—are located within the inaccessible inner world of the
 32 subject. In short, the task is to take a distance from the association of
 33 feelings and neural processes, avoiding (broadly Cartesian) introjection-
 34 ism and depsychologizing the emotional life as much as possible; I then
 35 provokingly state that feelings (*qua* atmospheres, as we see) come from
 36 the “outside,” rather than the “inside,” of a human being. This depsy-
 37 chologization, among other things, goes hand in hand with the choice
 38 of prioritizing facts that are irreducibly subjective, rather than emptied
 39 and sanitized to the point of being identifiable as objective: in other
 40 words, subjective facts that are such not only in a positional sense, but

1 also because they depend on the subject and because only the subject is
2 able to refer to them (in the first person), bearing in mind the variability
3 of the “isles” (cf. *infra* 3) which constitute the *Leib*.

4 Even though it is not entirely new in the twentieth century, and
5 despite being antithetical to the Christian and especially Lutheran ten-
6 dency to reject whatever open talk about feelings,¹² this strategy of exte-
7 riorization does not get along with the apparently unavoidable processes
8 of demythification and disenchantment of Modernity. In fact, such
9 strategy atmospherologically depsychologizes the entire emotional
10 sphere; that is, it turns feelings into affections that go beyond the human
11 body (let alone the strictly physical body) and whose peculiar qualities
12 pervade and affect the lived space:¹³ they give birth to an irresistible
13 emotional engagement¹⁴ and thus affect the whole environment to the
14 point that something such as a neutral spectator is merely an excep-
15 tion.¹⁵ And this is one of the reasons why this strategy revitalizes, at
16 least in a compensatory way, the archaic-Greek externalist paradigm
17 and allows to take at face value the physiognomic-expressive character
18 of the external world, which appears demonic because its quasi-thingly
19 abyssality resists every subjective projection.

Atmospherological Premises

24 In this context, we cannot simply acknowledge the collective implica-
25 tions either of feelings or of the edgy¹⁶ and antireductionist side of a
26 theory of emotionality seeming somewhat materialistic (though not
27 “physical”). Nor should we feel paralyzed by the recent inclination that
28 strongly enhances the role of feelings¹⁷ only because they have assumed
29 some vague additional cognitive value. Despite its purpose of extending
30 the sphere of rationality beyond those of propositions and judgment—
31 either in a narrativist perspective (Nussbaum, Goldie),¹⁸ or by revaluat-
32 ing the role of the brain as functional toward the entire organism
33 (Damasio)—this inclination nevertheless overstates the connection
34 between emotionality and thought, thereby downplaying the role of the
35 felt-body. It both swings schizophrenically between the subpersonal
36 (physiological, neuronal) and the personal sides,¹⁹ and it underestimates
37 the value of emotions understood as dispositions (Wollheim), as a sharp
38 and unpredictable drive.

39 Atmospherology is something different. As an ingredient of the
40 rediscovery of the (*sui generis*) externality and spatiality of feelings,

1 wiped out by the millennial internalist and psychologist paradigm (ever
 2 since the fifth century), this theory identifies feelings (oriented or not)
 3 as physicalistically ineffable quasi-things, though possibly mixed with,
 4 or anchored to, something objective. Like any other quasi-thing, atmo-
 5 spheres assault us from the outside with a peculiar dynamism. They
 6 infect the sphere of the felt-body, either causing a specific unconscious
 7 miming resonance²⁰ or encountering our strongest resistance supported
 8 by a high degree of personal emancipation: in any case, however, they
 9 are immune to whatever projective impulse of ours (besides, the belief in
 10 the latter is nothing but the mirror of the preliminary belief in the
 11 semantic emptiness of the world). In the end they abandon us just as
 12 suddenly as they've affected us, and we're left unable to tell where they
 13 are, now that they're no longer perceived. They reveal their non-interi-
 14 ority so perfectly that their duplication becomes impossible.²¹ And the
 15 consequence of this, which wipes away every kind of dualism (both
 16 Christian-Platonist and Cartesian),²² is that we cannot explain how the
 17 subject—from its inner psychical world, hierarchically stratified (sensi-
 18 tivity, *ratio* and perhaps even spirit), so isolated and private—is then
 19 able to get outside and acquire a reliable knowledge of the external
 20 world.

21 I do not hold it necessary to proceed with drawing some deceitfully
 22 nitpicking distinctions between feelings and emotions, between emo-
 23 tions and protoemotions (Elster), between emotions and passions, and
 24 finally between passions and moods—and maybe even between the
 25 latter and atmospheres. Also, for the moment, I hold it unnecessary to
 26 draw a distinction between primary emotions (i.e., non-propositional
 27 and non-decomposable reactions with an adaptive function) and sec-
 28 ondary ones, which are grounded on the former ones and seem to be
 29 multicomposed and perhaps cognitively and culturally more developed.
 30 Granted that the emotional sphere is composed by different states
 31 whose length and intensity, connection to the world, dynamicity, and
 32 orientation may vary,²³ I would like to put a philosophical stress not just
 33 on the vagueness of “emotions,”²⁴ but on that of the entire pathic con-
 34 stellation, here uniformly conceived from an atmospherological point of
 35 view while allowing for easy passages from one state to another. Also, it
 36 is not my intention to overestimate, sociologically, the possibility to
 37 simulate emotions in general: they remain central within the “dramatic
 38 moments of one's individual social and political life” (Demmerling and
 39 Landweer, 2007, 1), as they display that ubiquitous character²⁵ which
 40 Heidegger (1995, 66–67) ascribes to the *Befindlichkeit*, that is, to the

1 affective situation: “the attunement is *not* at all ‘inside’ in some
2 interiority [. . .] but for this reason it is *not at all outside either*” since it is,
3 rather, “an atmosphere in which we first immerse ourselves in each case
4 and which attunes us through and through. It does not merely seem so,
5 it is so.”²⁶

6 However, the identification of feelings with atmospheres that we
7 perceive by means of a “felt-bodily synesthetic resonance” (Fuchs, 2000,
8 214) is not just an analogy. The quasi-thinghood of atmospheres shows
9 that they are not just intersubjective entities, but rather quasi-objective
10 ones. They are dynamically active onto the perceiving subject, though
11 not in trivially causal terms (keeping one’s chin up is not “caused” by
12 pride; rather *it is* pride): and in this case the neophenomenological “dis-
13 covery” may well turn out to be, to a large extent, a simple “re-discovery”
14 of the phenomenological realism of the early twentieth century, among
15 other things. Instead of resorting to (perfectable) phenomenological
16 and ontological arguments to support the atmospherologic solution,²⁷ I
17 hold it more convenient to face the main objections moved against this
18 approach, such as the compelling preliminary one that the “atmospheric”
19 is nothing but a metaphorical potentiality.

20 However, Wittgenstein himself does not seem to have a clear idea
21 of such metaphoricity.²⁸ In fact, at first he defines atmosphericness as “a
22 special application of language, for special purposes” (Wittgenstein,
23 2009, 167e), “precisely that which one cannot imagine as being absent”
24 (Wittgenstein, 1992, 4). But later, within a context in which he notori-
25 ously wants language to become independent from life experience, he
26 mocks the tendency that considers metaphoricity to be an “aroma,” an
27 “imponderable something” (Wittgenstein, 1980, §243) essential to
28 express semantically deep layers of language, indescribable characters,
29 and big personalities.²⁹ However, by acting so, Wittgenstein ends up
30 reducing it to a merely superfluous supplement,³⁰ even though it his-
31 torically became so much entrenched in previous linguistic uses that it
32 now appears as a discriminating factor: just as it is “embarrassing and
33 ridiculous” to imagine Goethe writing the *Ninth Symphony* (Wittgenstein,
34 2009, 192e), so the existence of an atmosphere for the word “if” and for
35 a long-familiar piece of furniture, or even for the great impression sug-
36 gested by the signature of a great man, may just as well appear undoubt-
37 able.³¹ So, in this perspective, the merely linguistic use is what may be
38 atmospheric—hence a clear and serious reduction of the richness of
39 experience, neophenomenologically understood. What’s more, such lin-
40 guistic use would also be misleading: in fact, it suggests, in a

1 contradictory way, the inseparable distinction between the thing and its
 2 own atmosphere³² while spreading a persistent semantic error³³ because
 3 of its metaphorical weight (as a picture of the use of the correlated
 4 word)³⁴—namely, an illegitimate transitive (descriptive) use of intransi-
 5 tive (emphasis) or even simply reflexive expressions.³⁵ The least I can say
 6 is that this prominent Austrian philosopher does not seem to measure
 7 up to the atmospherologic approach, which cannot be reduced to the
 8 figurative use of words and takes into account the phonosymbolic
 9 dimension;³⁶ nor does he measure up to this approach from a strictly
 10 linguistic point of view, if it's true that the persuasiveness of syllogisms
 11 presupposes an atmospheric effect³⁷ (though it's not well-studied and
 12 understood yet).

15 **Depsycho-logicization: A Metaphysical Reification?**

17 What irritates the most within the atmospherologic approach is not just
 18 the partial desubjectification of feelings, but rather their ontologization,
 19 even in spatial terms, for which they appear “in the common world—in
 20 principle—not differently from the way houses and trees do. Feelings
 21 are no more subjective than high streets are; they are simply less easily
 22 definable” (Schmitz, 1969, 87). Although it has been re-examined and
 23 corrected, also in the light of a less critical antipsychologicistic *vis* and of
 24 certain arguments which introduce the original dimension of quasi-
 25 things,³⁸ this thesis shockingly distances itself from introjection and
 26 aims at underlining the external, not just projective, nature of (atmo-
 27 spheric) feelings. Such externality is proven by the fact that, though we
 28 can experience feelings in a direct way, we can also simply observe them
 29 with a “distanced attitude” (Schmitz, 2005a, 285), we can talk about
 30 them with other people and understand each other almost completely,
 31 as well as speculate about their effectiveness (*contra* Schmitz in this
 32 case) through counterfactual reasoning and skilful situational
 33 manipulations.

34 In this approach, the emotional becomes quasi-thingly, causing an
 35 immediate ontological objectification. This has obviously been seen as a
 36 dangerous reification: pseudo-transcendence similar to that of Platonic
 37 ideas, though undergoing the same precise classification process as
 38 chemical substances and vegetal species.³⁹ Although such an ontological
 39 inflation⁴⁰—which some have strangely accused of obscurantism⁴¹—is
 40 mitigated by the acknowledgment of the existence of

1 non-well-definable feelings⁴² (for instance, in music), we cannot deny
2 that the neophenomenological approach sets forth a certain stress on
3 definitions, with “a will to be absolutely precise” (Schmitz, 1994, xiv),
4 which sounds a bit inconsistent⁴³ with a philosophy that is highly recep-
5 tive towards whatever is fluid and semantically “chaotic.” However, this
6 objection falls short, because it’s impossible to consider emotional
7 dimensions as reifying, since their spatiality is *toto coelo* different from
8 the local-thingly one (on which the misleading analogy with streets
9 depends). In short, atmospheric feelings cause an illicit reification only
10 for those who admit the sole existence of a physical, geometrical, dimen-
11 sional space on the one hand, as well as the existence of things as cohe-
12 sive and discrete entities on the other.

13 Thus, what is not acceptable for most theorists is the topological
14 conception of the emotional; that is, if sadness is some anonymous
15 atmospheric sadness which becomes my own only at a later time, most
16 theorists cannot accept the claim that what’s subjective is simply the
17 perception of an atmosphere—so quasi-thingly and objective that it can
18 permeate its own specific (predimensional, surface-free) space. It doesn’t
19 matter whether I am sad or whether a landscape is: sadness simply con-
20 sists of an atmospheric involvement coming from the outside. This sad-
21 ness is my own not because “I” own it, but rather because—making the
22 “I” an adverb rather than a pronoun—it assaults me or, at least, because
23 it’s related to me.⁴⁴ This original spatialization of the emotional, which
24 is undoubtedly suggested by the atmospheric experience also in a strictly
25 climatic sense,⁴⁵ is based on the hypothesis there must be a space that’s
26 more fundamental than (and irreducible to) the directional and local-
27 relative one⁴⁶—a space which is populated not just by things, but rather
28 by quasi-things.

29 An objection might be that such spaces can suggest only certain
30 intersubjective moods, without coinciding with them, and furthermore
31 that a certain feeling is not perceived as atmospheric when we ourselves
32 perceive it, but rather when we perceive it in others and in some envi-
33 ronmental resonance.⁴⁷ Also, we can object that a certain landscape, say,
34 *appears* to be exciting in itself as soon as the objectual elements and the
35 subjective reactions bump into each other, “on the basis of intersubjec-
36 tively shared, reactive rules” (Demmerling, 2011, 53). However, the
37 objection—that is, we don’t perceive our anger as atmospheric, and
38 when we perceive it as atmospheric it’s not our own anger—leads to the
39 paradox that the atmospheric exists only from a second- or a third-
40 person perspective, ruling out the viewpoint of the subject who’s

1 emotionally involved; on the contrary, according to the view I'm
 2 presenting here, there cannot be atmospheric perception without this
 3 emotional involvement.

4 Another claim might be that since the same environment may be
 5 both perceived as sad or happy by different subjects, the objectivity of
 6 feelings entails that "all the feelings should be constantly present in the
 7 given space" (Fuchs, 2000, 227). However, this can be true only if we
 8 both disregard the typically intermittent state of atmospheric feelings—
 9 which are quasi-thingly—and take the strong relativistic premise of the
 10 objection at face value, thus underestimating the countless and other-
 11 wise inexplicable examples of over-personal emotions (e.g., fans at the
 12 stadium, the national grief for Lady Diana's death, and so forth).⁴⁸ In
 13 order to explain the different and often antithetical emotional reactions
 14 of different individuals to the same situation, we would not necessarily
 15 want to infer that some of them are subject to self-delusion, but rather
 16 that there might be a somewhat different kind of "filtering" process for
 17 the potential atmospheres, which correspond to the different felt-bodily
 18 dispositions and degree of personal emancipation of the different
 19 subjects.

20 One further objection is that the desubjectification of feelings pre-
 21 vents them from being localized within the lived-body: but in this case
 22 we may reply that the felt-bodily dimension is not integrally singular-
 23 ized. Just as for the "I," for the felt-body "the proper vastness is not a
 24 vastness that I happen to own and control" but instead "the vastness in
 25 which the felt-body dissolves ('debodification')" (Schmitz, 2005a, 283).
 26 Thus it is not *within* the lived-body, but rather *through the debodification*
 27 within the lived space, that we can perceive, say, the atmosphere of holy-
 28 day relaxation as an objective quality that's not private at all. Still, atmo-
 29 spherology can and must find a more solid bond between the
 30 atmospheric, its expressive content immanent to the environment, and
 31 the personal situation of the subject who's affected by it.

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Are Atmospheres Supervening or Are They a Simple "in-between"?

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As they are radiated by environments, landscapes, quasi-things, and
 even things proper, atmospheric feelings are the "ecstasies"⁴⁹ or *affor-*
dances of such elements, here understood as the visual "offers" studied by
 ecological psychology⁵⁰ but in a broadened synesthetic sense that is not

1 necessarily pragmatically oriented. That is to say, they are a radiation
2 that's conceivable without falling back to the "Procrustean bed of the
3 emitting-receiving model, or of the subject-object contraposition"
4 (Schmitz, 2003, 244). There is a particularly crucial objection to this
5 view, which in turn ennobles the coarser one for which a situation cannot
6 be sad simply because a situation cannot feel: such objection states that
7 feelings are not immanent to the external world (say, melancholy to the
8 sunset), but rather that they are simply latent within the subject and
9 awaken because of this or that worldly experience.⁵¹ To feel the "joy" of
10 the sea would not amount to feeling an objective emotion, but rather to
11 experiencing a temporary emotional involvement on the part of the per-
12 ceiver, since "usually [...] the perceiving subject is not struck *by* a feeling,
13 rather his getting struck *is* the feeling itself" (Hauskeller, 1995, 26).
14 Even though these objections are in line with common sense (perhaps
15 even too much so), they nevertheless underestimate what I hold to be a
16 fundamental aspect—namely, that usually situations may not be pene-
17 trated in an emotional way, so that they result impermeable to the
18 projective feelings of the subject. In my perspective, the fact that a cer-
19 tain atmosphere may cease to exist as soon as a certain environment is
20 no longer perceived is a sufficient condition to hold *that* particular envi-
21 ronment responsible (not casually nor occasionally) for the awakening
22 of an atmospheric feeling, while the subject is only its *occasio*.

23 The claim that atmospheric feelings are supervenient entities⁵²
24 should be integrated with the inquiry on those entities to which this
25 atmospherogenic force inheres either in a constant or in an occasional
26 way, on the basis both of the constellation they inhere to, and of the
27 peculiar combination they generate within the mood of the percipient
28 subject. No matter if they are more stable and "natural," much like the
29 unsettledness of a wood at night or the attractive-repulsive sublimity of
30 a cliff in the mountains, or if they are idiosyncratic and cognitively pen-
31 etrable (Eliot considered April to be the cruellest month, Wertheimer
32 thought black to be grim even before being black, Cioran held that self-
33 disdain could be strengthened by the beauty of a landscape), atmo-
34 spheric feelings emerge from outside reality—at least prototypically
35 (probably in their climatic form)—and not from the subject's interiority.
36 Even if they were but the outcome of a subjective projection, it would
37 still be necessary to explain why a feeling is projected into *that* space and
38 not into another one; most certainly we may conclude that it's the space
39 itself, along with its specific *qualia*, that's invoking the feelings projected
40 into it.

1 The hypothesis that atmospheric feelings are supervening entities
 2 seems to be justifying their externalization in a less troublesome way
 3 than found in Schmitz's thesis, which describes them as "abyssal." Even
 4 though, in Schmitz's theory, this qualification denotes the lack of direc-
 5 tionality rather than of causes, if all feelings are unpredictable demonic
 6 forces, hardly controllable, transcending their genetic situation, intense
 7 yet with no "phenomenically circumscribed" direction (Schmitz, 1999,
 8 285), the atmospherologic discourse ends up lacking applicability (*in*
 9 *primis* from a aesthetological point of view). If the only true atmospheres
 10 were those that are completely independent from humans and things,⁵³
 11 it would be pointless to study the ties imposed on them by the objectual
 12 poles of which they are the ecstasies. While acknowledging how useful
 13 the radical and counterintuitive neophenomenological campaign of
 14 depsychologization may be, I hold it more advisable to commit, opting
 15 for inflation as usual, to the existence of different types of atmospheres:
 16 prototypical (objective, external, and non-intentional), derivative (objec-
 17 tive, external, and intentionally generated), and even spurious in their
 18 relationality (subjective and projective)—the last is the case of Proust,
 19 who's idiosyncratically fascinated (as noticed by Levinas, 1979, 192,
 20 with a certain awe) by the "reverse of the sleeves of a lady's gown, like
 21 those dark corners of cathedrals" (though we also ought to remember
 22 the auratic mat of the Guermantes).

23 In order to lessen the (controversial) objectivity and abyssality of
 24 atmospheric feelings, Böhme has introduced a distinction—no matter
 25 how lexically appropriate—between *the atmospheric*, a more objectively
 26 situational feeling that does not depend on the "I" (e.g., the night in
 27 general), and *the atmosphere*, which instead depends more on the subject
 28 (e.g., this-night-to-me).⁵⁴ This is all to avoid that an increase of subjec-
 29 tivization caused by the atmosphere may end up overestimating its indi-
 30 vidual relativity, for the sole purpose of finding a correspondence
 31 between that atmosphere and the variety of atmospheric perceptions at
 32 all costs. The value of the atmospherologic approach ultimately lies in
 33 the fact that it embraces the external and extraordinarily constant char-
 34 acter of feelings (at least compared to the long timescale of evolution),
 35 supporting the fact that they are an unavoidable phenomenal *prius*.⁵⁵ In
 36 this sense, Eliot could perceive a bright April morning within an atmo-
 37 sphere of cruelty only because the intersubjectively expected atmo-
 38 sphere, whose objective constituents are felt through the own-bodily
 39 resonance, was and still is completely different (peaceful, auspicious,
 40 etc.).

1 In the attempt to avoid both the complete objectivization and the
2 complete subjectivization of feelings, Böhme suggests that an atmo-
3 sphere may in fact be an “in-between,” something independent from
4 and prior to the subject and the object, being their transcendental pre-
5 condition (along the lines of the Japanese *ki*).⁵⁶ Even though Schmitz
6 sees the umpteenth *escamotage* of the psychosomatic dualism⁵⁷ in this
7 move, this intermediary and prerelational “collocation” of atmospheric
8 feelings looks undeniable: granted that such a collocation doesn’t get
9 reified and that we admit the existence of a relationship that is prior to
10 its *relata*, experience seems to confirm its validity, although the absence
11 of a term that pertains to this “in-between” may lead to an adjectivation
12 alternatively relying on the subjective or the objective.⁵⁸ The atmosphere
13 is, to all extent and purposes, an “in-between,” a quasi-thing that is so
14 presubjective and preobjective that it can be considered “transitional.”⁵⁹
15 Referring to the atmosphere, possibly in analogy to the *noema*,⁶⁰ we can
16 partly explain how it is possible that “on the one hand nothing can
17 appear unless it appears to a subject; on the other hand, what appears is
18 not structured by the subject” (Costa, 2007, 142–143). Otherwise said,
19 in the form of an “in-between,” the (prototypical) atmosphere necessar-
20 ily appears to a subject, even though it’s not the subject that generates it.

21 22 23 Authority and Dynamism: Numinosity and 24 Atmospheric Interactions 25

26 We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged
27 by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that
28 looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the
29 most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the
30 most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half
31 a dozen or so), that I had ever seen. I thought the windows
32 of the sets of chambers into which those houses were divided
33 were in every stage of dilapidated blind and curtain, crippled
34 flower-pot, cracked glass, dusty decay, and miserable makeshift;
35 while To Let, To Let, To Let, glared at me from empty rooms,
36 as if no new wretches ever came there, and the vengeance of
37 the soul of Barnard were being slowly appeased by the gradual
38 suicide of the present occupants and their unholy interment
39 under the gravel. A frowzy mourning of soot and smoke attired
40 this forlorn creation of Barnard, and it had strewn ashes on its

1 head, and was undergoing penance and humiliation as a mere
 2 dust-hole. Thus far my sense of sight; while dry rot and wet rot
 3 and all the silent rots that rot in neglected roof and cellar—rot
 4 of rat and mouse and bug and coaching-stables near at hand
 5 besides—addressed themselves faintly to my sense of smell, and
 6 moaned, “Try Barnard’s Mixture.” (Dickens, 2011, 22–23)

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 8 It is hard not to be affected by the effect of this (gloomy) literary atmo-
 9 sphere. It is even harder to regard the “emotionally impregnated” space⁶¹
 10 it outlines as the mere subjective projection of an ill-disposed perceiver.
 11 Or, even worse, to “reduce” the spatial percept to a constellation of
 12 factors so deaxiologized and devoid of significance that they could be
 13 perceived in the most diverse ways.⁶²

14 In principle, we cannot exclude that one individual, but not another,
 15 may perceive a certain atmosphere, or that an atmosphere may be per-
 16 ceived in an exaggerated way, erroneously.⁶³ Sometimes the authority of
 17 atmospheres does depend, like that of speech acts, also on certain neces-
 18 sary contextual requirements—being in a church as tourists, waiting for
 19 the bus to take us elsewhere, is very different from being there as believ-
 20 ers waiting for a true encounter with God⁶⁴—but in other cases (the
 21 prototypical ones), it is violently imposed over the perceiver, completely
 22 reorienting his or her emotional situation and proving wholly refractory
 23 to any relatively conscious attempt at a projective adaptation. Be it
 24 serene or tense, relaxed or oppressive, smoky or airy, formal or informal,
 25 etc., an atmosphere still possesses and exercises authority or authorita-
 26 tiveness. Because of this dissonance and this extraintentional
 27 externality—and since it displays itself as a felt-bodily involuntary
 28 involvement—an atmosphere may redirect the entire emotional situa-
 29 tion of the percipient, unexpectedly yet with an evident supercognitive
 30 authority,⁶⁵ so that his or her correlation with the world acquires a
 31 specific tone.

32 At this point, it is clear that we might even end up taking the socio-
 33 logical perspective into account, and explain the externality and author-
 34 ity of atmospheres by referring to “culturally determined emotional
 35 norms” (Demmerling, 2011, 48), embodied in the situation to the point
 36 of causing us to be subordinated to the feeling we get,⁶⁶ possibly invoking
 37 the socially desirable trend to adjust our own feelings (*form* of per-
 38 ception) to the one we encounter (*content* of perception), especially if it
 39 is unexpected.⁶⁷ But we need to resist these counterhypotheses, which
 40 also sound reductive with regards to persuasive (in a positive way) or

1 obsessive (in a negative way) ideas: rather, it is necessary to restate that
2 the social authority of a feeling displays a character that's simply deriva-
3 tive and vicarious with respect to the "natural" authority of a prototypical
4 atmosphere—namely, an atmosphere which is involuntarily perceived in
5 the external space.

6 The authority of atmospheric feelings—more stable and performa-
7 tive than a social norm or a thought⁶⁸ but less so than the evidence of a
8 state of affairs⁶⁹ due to its less homogeneous diffusion—can be traced
9 back to a sort of prestige or "force" that constrains and enthrals⁷⁰ almost
10 in the manner of an automatism,⁷¹ even in the absence of physical coer-
11 cion.⁷² It may take various forms and not just the three ones listed by
12 Schmitz (legal, moral, and religious). It is a normativity that, of course,
13 is not so much discreet but rather loosely diffused into a situation; and
14 yet it is able to inhibit any critical distance in those who come across it,
15 especially if unexpectedly,⁷³ as they become involved in the script (or
16 "story")⁷⁴ or sheet music it predisposes. The angst-inducing atmosphere
17 produced, for example, by the ubiquity of breaking news predisposes
18 those who are enmeshed by it to see enemies everywhere⁷⁵ or at least to
19 overestimate the dangers of the outside world. By not reducing com-
20 munication to an anodyne and to some extent controllable exchange of
21 information, atmospherology should then properly evaluate the overall
22 performative, illocutionary, and perlocutionary effect not only of lan-
23 guage,⁷⁶ but in general of all forms of expression, even if merely mental.⁷⁷

24 But to make an atmospheric feeling into a binding authority would
25 perhaps imply the transformation of phenomenology into theology. In
26 fact, is not precisely the "numinous"—described by Rudolf Otto (and
27 before that by Shaftesbury), that is, an author explicitly preferred to
28 Husserl—the model of Schmitz's conception of atmospheres? In fact,
29 the atmospheric feeling—at least the prototypical one, which is marked
30 as involuntary, vital experience by ingression and discrepancy⁷⁸—does
31 not resemble only the (Schleiermacherian) feeling of "dependence,"⁷⁹
32 but also the *mysterium tremendum*. The numinous is both disturbing
33 (*primus in orbe deos fecit timor!*) and fascinating in its corporeal resonance
34 (shudder, goose bumps, ecstasy, etc.); we cannot exhaustively identify its
35 foundation, since empirical phenomena are not its cause but only its
36 occasional *stimulus*, nor can we have a notional intelligence of it.⁸⁰
37 Similarly, the atmosphere manifests its own authority or majesty, it
38 often attracts and repels as if it were the sublime and, while not being
39 something absolutely other, it generates in those who are gripped by it a
40 creatural feeling, a "depreciation of the subject" (Otto, 1936, 11) and of

1 their own profanity that leads them to an affective submission.⁸¹ But
 2 above all, as *mysterium tremendum, majestas, augustum, energeticum, fasci-*
 3 *nans*, the numinous is demanding and sentimental without being either
 4 psychological in the subjectivist sense or a “you” that can be encoun-
 5 tered—as happened in the subsequent realization of it in personal
 6 divinities (even differentiated by gender in historical religions). Similarly,
 7 atmosphere is contagious, in some respects bound to emotionally spe-
 8 cific places⁸² and binding without being a projection of the perceiver.

9 Indeed, the similarities are many. Summarizing: just like the numi-
 10 nous, every atmosphere is (a) the more deeply felt, and *in a way* known,
 11 the less it is linguistically circumscribable;⁸³ (b) generable but not ratio-
 12 nally communicable; (c) engaging for the felt-body with consequences
 13 on the physical body (it is “hair-raising,” it makes your “limbs tremble,”
 14 it gives you “goose bumps,” etc.); (d) contagious, because “like stored-up
 15 electricity, [it] discharg[es] itself upon any one who comes too near”
 16 (ibid., 18); (e) attractive not in spite of the fact that it terrifies but
 17 because of it; (f) supervening with respect to sense data that are merely
 18 its *occasio*;⁸⁴ (g) finally, especially active on emotionally predisposed
 19 minds, since “impression [...] presupposes something capable of receiv-
 20 ing impressions, and that is just what the mind is not, if in itself it is only
 21 a *tabula rasa*” (ibid., 164).⁸⁵

22 And the fact that the holy is “an experience of determined atmo-
 23 spheres” (Soentgen, 1998, 90), perhaps second in intensity only to the
 24 erotic,⁸⁶ seems to be confirmed by the proto-Christian notion of “holy
 25 spirit,” considered—prior to its dogmatization and crystallization in the
 26 form of the third person,⁸⁷ and still today by minor communities (mys-
 27 tical, Quakers, Pietism, etc.)—as the epiphany of an external feeling⁸⁸
 28 that, according to St. Paul, contends for the lived human body against
 29 an opposite atmosphere (the flesh). It is a dynamistic and externalist
 30 model present in the archaic Greek world, for which feelings, and espe-
 31 cially the religious ones, were notoriously not internal but external to
 32 the subject. Such model is applied here to the holy spirit-pneuma as
 33 neither individual person nor property interior to those who are gripped
 34 by it; but it also applies to the values (*mens, pietas, virtus, fides*) under-
 35 stood by the most ancient Roman culture not as inner virtues but as
 36 objective powers, as well as to any other conception of feeling as a
 37 demonic possession (from the Dionysian onwards). This model, which
 38 was overcome by the subsequent concretization of the divine—required
 39 by the dialogic character of human being—and by the “invention” of
 40 features such as omnipresence, perfection, and soteriological certainty

1 (which make the divine into a more controllable and manageable
2 partner), survives in modern Europe, according to Schmitz, only in
3 the so-called voice of conscience, in the Kantian moral law as *numen*
4 (true “fact of reason”).

5 The notion of atmosphere, at least the prototypical (Schmitzian)
6 one, is therefore certainly indebted to that of the divine as numinous and
7 *genius loci*, as precisely the local condensation of an atmosphere,⁸⁹ but it
8 is so only in the sense that it shares not so much its absolute necessity but
9 rather its absolute accidentality and its undeductibility from other phe-
10 nomena. The divine—the derivation of Yahweh from the Egyptian god-
11 wind Amun and the climatic origin of many religious beliefs are probably
12 true⁹⁰—blows where and when it wants, impregnating a certain human
13 space and appearing more as a transient predicative concept or appella-
14 tive (“here is god” would only mean “divine event”) than as the name of
15 a stable entity which is subject to predicates. In the same way, the atmo-
16 spheric feeling is such because, being the epiphany of an impersonal
17 external force, it pervades a certain space (lived, anisotropic, and yet pre-
18 dimensional)⁹¹ so intensely that it wins every critical resistance and abil-
19 ity of abstraction. The atmosphere is therefore “divine” in this context
20 only as it is resistant to a critical distance that, however, is always possi-
21 ble: in contrast to what is implied by the traditional theological notion of
22 authority, in the case of atmospheres, the felt-bodily and emotional
23 involvement (effect) can indeed deny its cause (which is not a transmis-
24 sion of essence here), or at least, discussing it, mitigate its strength. The
25 “divinity” of atmospheres also involves a merely local authority, often
26 only temporary, related to a certain community or even to a single person,
27 and it is so hard to plan⁹² that we could invite those who have not experi-
28 enced numinous moments—and, although with some differences,
29 atmospheric ones either—“to read no further” (*ibid.*, 8).

30 Now that we have spoken of the peculiar “divinity” of atmospheres
31 (in the strict sense of the numinous),⁹³ it is necessary to specify better
32 their authority. Being legitimate, even with socially relevant repercus-
33 sions (marginalization in the first place), only prescinding from physical
34 coercion, the authority of an atmosphere—whether it is a percept or the
35 horizon within which we perceive something (in the intransitive sense
36 in which “it is the tone that makes the music”)⁹⁴—is such because it
37 implicitly claims an absolute validity and thus inhibits, at least in prin-
38 ciple, any real possibility of choice and reaction in the perceiver.

39 Unlike socio-political authority, however, atmospheric authority
40 does not always presuppose its own acknowledgment, much less a

1 self-aware one, appearing mostly in the form of light and shade and
 2 with a variable intensity. This explains why no one can force me to feel
 3 it from the outside: atmospheres, in fact, exist in the proper sense, except
 4 for their more or less successful planning, only in act, as actual facts and
 5 not factual facts⁹⁵—that is, only when we sense their authority. They
 6 may exercise authority over the presence, in contrast to what the dead
 7 (cause) exerts on the living (its effect),⁹⁶ only if they are involuntarily
 8 (mnestically) reactivated in the present⁹⁷ (à la Proust), or, symbolically,
 9 in traces of the present (as in every millenarianism, even secular). If an
 10 atmosphere that here and now does not oppress anyone is certainly not
 11 oppressive, we could still sense the authority of atmospheres that do not
 12 capture us or that, as subatmospheres, lose in the interaction with other
 13 subatmospheres equally willing to occupy the entire space of the lived
 14 presence. Sometimes⁹⁸ the outsider, rather than disturbing the socio-
 15 cultural milieu or disregarding its expectations, acts as if he or she “felt”
 16 the same atmosphere, thus contributing to its preservation and to the
 17 process of reflexivity needed in each construction of reality, yet without
 18 fully recognizing its authority.

19 Just as socio-political authority may not have spontaneously gener-
 20 ated itself but might have simply been transmitted (as in the case of
 21 officials) from a more autonomous authority, so atmospheric authority
 22 is often not the one (to use Schmitz’s terminology) exerted by the
 23 anchor point, which is what is authentically responsible for the atmo-
 24 sphere, but the progressively weakened one of its condensation points:
 25 this is why oftentimes the atmosphere of anguish, properly “caused,” for
 26 example, only by the pain of a dental visit, is overcome by an atmosphere
 27 that is condensed into what is associated with it (even the magazines in
 28 the waiting room!) and whose authority, yet, is no less powerful.

29 Also, unlike political authority—which is more easily preserved “if
 30 the people who are supposed to be subject to it know what needs to be
 31 done in order to preserve it (and see, of course, that it is done effec-
 32 tively)” (Kojève, 2013, 93)—the authority of atmospheric feelings pre-
 33 supposes the non-total dissolution of the prereflective and shaded state
 34 it springs out of. Undermined by disenchantment⁹⁹ and irony, by even
 35 small gaffes and wrong tones and even more so by suspicion (“the
 36 emperor has no clothes”), the atmospheric feeling does not always sur-
 37 vive cognitive penetrability. And if an engaging feeling, for example the
 38 atmosphere of grief at the funeral of a loved one, is not scratched, as I
 39 have already mentioned, by the cognitive level (by the fact that we
 40 “know” that we all shall die), the atmospheric detection is instead

1 affected—it is a totally different cognitive element—by the full under-
2 standing of its generative conditions, just as a fully explained persuasive
3 technique ceases to be such.

4 Things are different in the case of an atmosphere that is not in con-
5 trast with a kind of knowledge but that was generated by it (this per-
6 spective, however, is very different from the unfortunately yet
7 uninvestigated persuasive atmosphere of thought): knowing that an
8 object in itself anonymous was owned by a prestigious person makes us
9 see it *ipso facto* as an ecstatic object, capable of removing the homogene-
10 ity of the surrounding space thanks to its emotional and symbolic
11 “volume,” able to arouse special attention and reverence due not so
12 much to fully aware knowledge but rather to suggestions unintention-
13 ally borrowed from “cognitive archives” and “sentimental archives” that
14 are anything but systematic.¹⁰⁰ In short: we know that what grips us is
15 an atmosphere, but it cannot be “reduced” to a concept. Nor is it neces-
16 sary for such knowledge to be truthful, since the atmosphere, copro-
17 duced by its phenomenonic appearance and by the thought of it (or by
18 acting in it)¹⁰¹ according to the model of Kantian “free play,” can receive
19 an effectual contribution also by non-knowledge (the charm of the
20 indecipherable) and false knowledge.¹⁰² There is authority—it is right—
21 only where there is a change in those who react.¹⁰³ But in the case of
22 atmospheres, it is not at all necessary to suppose a free and conscious
23 agent, as often the (prelinguistic, prereflexive) condition of our actions,
24 its base tonality (Damasio’s background emotions?)—unconsciously
25 perceived and sometimes even misunderstood (it seemed as mere anxiety
26 and instead it was love!)—turn out to be more powerfully atmo-
27 spheric than the direct irradiation of this or that subject.¹⁰⁴ It is essential
28 only that the atmospheric precondition is sufficiently intense, or rather,
29 deep.

30 But we need to rethink this depth beyond the verticality typical of
31 Western topics (from Plato to psychoanalysis)¹⁰⁵ and in the light of the
32 neophenomenological externalization of the affective. This “depth”
33 would then be a property not of the soul of the perceiver, but of what
34 appears,¹⁰⁶ and perhaps it would be explainable—referring to a tradition
35 that goes from the eighteenth century to twentieth century Gestalt psy-
36 chology—through its ability to generate mixed feelings. Mendelssohn,
37 for example, explains the pleasure for the negative by saying that, when
38 you put the object at a distance (here is the link with the sublime), every
39 performance is satisfactory for the subject because it is an affirmative
40 predicate of it and because it is intuitive knowledge of affirmative

1 characters of the object. It follows that mixed feelings are not as
 2 immediately rewarding as those that are only delectable, but they are
 3 also not as monotonous and, in the long run, nauseating: in fact they are
 4 capable of “penetrating deeper into the mind and appear to sustain
 5 themselves there longer. [. . .] The unpleasant mixed with the pleasant
 6 captures our attention, and prevents us from being prematurely sated”
 7 (Mendelssohn, 1997, 143). Consequently greater authority is held by an
 8 atmospheric feeling whose overall quality is not only gestaltically irre-
 9 ducible to its components, but also deep as it is “mixed.”¹⁰⁷ Since the
 10 pleasure/pain distinction invests only the most peripheral states of exist-
 11 tence,¹⁰⁸ the most authoritative atmosphere might therefore not be the
 12 unilateral one but the “mixed” one, both because it is discrepant com-
 13 pared to the state of mind of the perceiver, and because it is able to
 14 induce the perceiver to complete its overall tonality even in the absence
 15 of further adumbrations. Whether atmospheric effectiveness is “natu-
 16 rally” inherent to a certain space or it was absorbed by it over time maybe
 17 as a result of a functional planning, it still presupposes an empathically
 18 predisposed and in a sense “sociologically” competent perceiver—that is,
 19 someone able to recognize in the atmospheric potential a generator of
 20 lifestyles and collective feelings: it is enough for us to exclude here that
 21 an atmosphere can be arbitrarily generated or declassified to a contin-
 22 gent and totally subjective emotion.

23 So much for the connection between atmosphere and authority (be
 24 it numinous or not). It often happens that the accusation of reification
 25 is associated with that of the excessive fixity of feelings. That is, atmo-
 26 spherology does not take into account the fact that feelings may develop
 27 as time passes by, deviating, acquiring different forms, and even com-
 28 pletely reverting during one’s life. But the fact that feelings may emerge
 29 either in a quick or in a gradual way—much like an “unexpected infil-
 30 tration” (Schmitz, 2002b, 73)—and that one may even be sure to be
 31 feeling something while ignoring its content (Musil), does not entail
 32 that feelings are ontologically undetermined. Only those who have
 33 already opted for the subjectivist view will get to this conclusion, thus
 34 underestimating the precision of the felt-bodily resonance that follows
 35 from atmospheric involvement. Sure enough, there are determined feel-
 36 ings as well as less definite ones, much like pure colors coexisting with
 37 soft ones. But the oscillation through which a person reacts to a certain
 38 feeling, particularly if this person is endowed with intelligence, cannot
 39 be immanent to the feeling itself, on pain of developing some “false
 40 phenomenology.”¹⁰⁹

1 One should not underestimate the fact that the motor suggestions
2 and synesthetic impressions through which atmospheres take hold of
3 the percipient do cause the emergence of definite and resolute expres-
4 sive forms within the percipient itself. This is precisely why nobody ever
5 wonders how an individual can learn to jump for joy or to withdraw into
6 oneself out of shame, while it is legitimate to be in doubt about the way
7 to adequately express a feeling that's perceived in others and not in first
8 person. Attempting an "urbanization" of Schmitzean neophenomenol-
9 ogy, I shall prefer a gradualist counterexplanation of this phenomenon
10 over the predictable naturalist one, expressed in terms of cabled behav-
11 ioral quasi-automatisms that are due to biologically encapsulated and
12 evolutionistically sedimented "programs." According to the former
13 explanation, instead, the ontologization of the emotional sphere needs
14 not downplay either the fluid *status nascendi* of the many emotional
15 situations, or the dynamic processuality, which sometimes characterizes
16 an atmospheric feeling.¹¹⁰

17 One thing is clear: the sociological explanation of the authority of
18 atmospheric feelings explains much but not everything. It does not
19 explain, for example, if not through fanciful anthropomorphic hypoth-
20 eses, the authority of climatic and naturalistic atmospheres or the cor-
21 poreal resonance of any atmosphere. This clearly shows that
22 conventionality perhaps does not totally rule out the suddenly binding
23 character of atmospheres (for a traditionalist, a convention also has an
24 aura of authority!), but it does not do full justice to it, at least not in the
25 prototypical ones (discrepancy).

26 Then the binding authority of an atmosphere, such as a meadow
27 that we might call, not at all metaphorically, "happy," does not come
28 from a subjectivist-fictional inference ("it is *as if* the lawn were happy"),
29 but rather from the effect of resonance of the percept (*that* meadow) in
30 the perceiver, who feels this atmospheric authority in his *Leib* but
31 (Schmitz reports this on many occasions) as not originating from it.
32 This authority may take many forms, such as the pedagogical one, which,
33 in hindsight, is necessarily based in all its choices (communicative forms,
34 spaces, rituals, etc.) on pathic affordances addressed to the learner's felt-
35 body,¹¹¹ but also that of vicarious shame (cf. *infra* ch. 5), whose
36 atmosphere even conditions the detached observer and his physiog-
37 nomic-gestural (contractive, in the broadest sense) conduct.

38 An example very dear to Schmitz of these atmospheric games is
39 that of the cheerful person who, encountering a sad person (who is so
40 for "serious" reasons), tends not to encourage her to recover her lost

1 dignity, as if this person was merely tired, but—at least initially, and
 2 provided that he has adequate sensitivity—he tends to mitigate or com-
 3 pletely conceal his own joy in order to respect the privacy of the other.
 4 This is because the atmospheric sadness radiated by people or things—
 5 very differently from a kind of exhaustion whose possible atmospheric
 6 character would still be spatially restricted¹¹²—has more authority than
 7 atmospheric joy,¹¹³ because, unless a malicious joy arises (*schadenfreude*),
 8 it “claims entirely and exclusively for itself the space of lived presence
 9 and, with the dominance of this authority, it represses to various degrees
 10 the atmosphere of joy, which is just as prone to the endless invasion of
 11 the lived presence” (Schmitz, 2009, 81). That is why the sad person nor-
 12 mally feels more legitimated than the cheerful person to sink, some-
 13 times even to the point of pathetic self-satisfaction, into the atmosphere
 14 that surrounds him and that he radiates; and he does not only feel an
 15 intense atmospheric contrast when he comes across a joyful atmosphere,
 16 whence the worsening of his sadness, but he also feels entitled to more
 17 or less explicitly protest against what he regards as the unjustified
 18 (unfair?) happiness of others.¹¹⁴

19 Thus, in their confrontational game, the atmospheric feelings inher-
 20 ently endowed with greater authority prevail. It may be the vanity of
 21 things perceived in a cold winter morning or in an anonymous non-
 22 place, which is able to inhibit, respectively, someone who confidently
 23 opens the window and someone starting with the best hopes. But it can
 24 also be, symbolically, the solemn gravity (the holy) that impresses one
 25 who enters a church for superficiality or animated by the worst inten-
 26 tions, or the accused convinced of being smarter than the court (the law)
 27 called upon to judge him. It may be the wrath that persecutes, some-
 28 times to the point of paranoia, the one who feels a strong sense of guilt
 29 for their actions, or the mutual trust felt by those who “breathe” it as
 30 being irreducible to the logic of giving and trying to get something
 31 back. It may be, finally, the binding authority of the atmosphere of love:
 32 it is no coincidence that it justifies at least part of the crazy things one
 33 does “for love,” and it also arouses in those who do not reciprocate such
 34 feelings a certain respect for those who are caught by it.

35
 36
 37

Can Atmospheres Be Produced as Percepts and Entities?

38
 39 It’s undeniable that, sometimes, perceptive non-transitivity (non-
 40 theticity) may be more suitable to explain the specificity of the

1 atmospheric experience. But in this case, rather than perceiving
2 something (even the atmosphere itself), we'd be perceiving "in accord-
3 dance" with something (in accordance with an atmosphere). Thus atmo-
4 spheres are not so much percepts, but rather non-transitive contextual
5 conditions of a perception,¹¹⁵ which become transitive only at a later
6 time.¹¹⁶ They are a sort of horizon which, while affecting anything they
7 lingers onto, stay unobserved, much like "glasses, which cannot be seen
8 when one looks through them" (Bockemühl, 2002, 221). They look very
9 similar to "the spiritual atmosphere in which both the man and the
10 world around him are immersed [. . .], without ever converging onto a
11 specific point. [. . .] This breath, in fact, creates a unique spiritual atmo-
12 sphere and incorporates inside of it, *beyond concrete objects and beyond*
13 *men*, the whole that it itself describes" (Minkowski, 1936, 257; my
14 emphasis). By reducing atmospheres to qualities that are purely contex-
15 tual and situational, there's the risk of underestimating the quasi-thingly
16 power and significance through which they assault us, as we have seen.
17 In other words, we may underestimate their authority and the felt-
18 bodily involvement deriving from them: we might downplay their being
19 aggressive and intrusive quasi-thingly partners. Schmitz vigorously—
20 and, from his point of view, coherently—objects to the application of
21 the atmospherologic discourse, say, in aesthetologic terms.¹¹⁷ Otherwise
22 said, he keeps from claiming that atmospheric feelings can be produced
23 artificially in the world of the so-called diffuse design and of the aes-
24 thetization of everyday life. This, in my opinion, is rather an unavail-
25 able and fruitful position for both a pathic aesthetics aimed at bypassing
26 "philo-artistic strabismus," and for designers, urbanists, musicians, etc.

27 Let us dig a little bit more into the emblematic case of architec-
28 ture.¹¹⁸ It is a well-known fact that presenting their projects, architects
29 often speak of "atmospheres." But do they actually feel this "obscure
30 object of desire" (Kretzer, 2013, 117) or do they just imagine it? And can
31 an atmospheric *Erlebnis*, with its vagueness, openness, and random pat-
32 tern, be planned and brought into being through technical constructs,
33 especially by means of a tool as distancing as the PC? Shouldn't we
34 instead uphold that an atmospheric effect is something unavailable,¹¹⁹
35 and even more so if atmospheres never exist, if not in a very inappropri-
36 ate way, as purely potential (virtual) states? There are no recipes, of course,
37 in planning atmospheres. Architectural drawings can do nothing else
38 but concentrate "on a specific site [and] try to plumb its depths, its form,
39 its history, and its sensuous qualities," and try thus "to express as accu-
40 rately as possible the aura of the building in its intended place"

1 (Zumthor, 1998, 36, 13). The architect must simulate, thanks to a
 2 prognostic body-schema and role-play competence, the future body feel-
 3 ing of the beholder/user and identify him/herself with his situation and
 4 so perhaps with the desired future atmosphere. He or she must, last but
 5 not least, explicitly rely always on a “pact of generosity” (Sartre), on some
 6 form of complicity, also as a tacit felt-bodily knowledge, of the beholder/
 7 user. Design is certainly always the exploration of an alien domain,¹²⁰ but
 8 the claim that atmosphere always “escapes analysis” seems to me greatly
 9 exaggerated. The same goes for the statement that “any specific proposal
 10 for constructing atmosphere [. . .] is no longer atmospheric,” because
 11 “atmosphere may be the core of architecture but it is a core that cannot
 12 simply be addressed or controlled” (Wigley, 1998, 27). When it is only
 13 planned, the atmosphere of course does not yet exist in the real sense of
 14 the word, but this does not mean that architecture works hard to create
 15 only “the illusion that atmosphere can be controlled” (ibid.). The design
 16 of an atmosphere often works perfectly, and if an illusion exists, it works
 17 in every human activity as a heterogenesis of ends and can never be com-
 18 pletely avoided. Many urban atmospheres are, for example, the uncon-
 19 scious result of planning, such as in the case of Manhattan, which offered
 20 its inhabitants “the spectacle, inscribed in stone, concrete and steel, of a
 21 way of life obeying a very different program, one answering a question
 22 quite different from that of ‘housing’” (Damish, 2001, 110).

23 It would be better not to exaggerate the strict actuality of atmo-
 24 spheres. First, they undoubtedly depend also on the copercception of
 25 past and expected atmospheres that are not in act, such as when, for
 26 example, the atmosphere of a hospital is tense precisely because we
 27 anticipate the situation to follow (the visit, the diagnosis, etc.), and we
 28 remember earlier ones (further waits, etc.). Second, the atmosphere in
 29 fact may certainly be also the successful outcome of a design on which
 30 we can counterfactually reason. In designing buildings architects should
 31 indeed contrive places that invite certain behaviors and so be aware of
 32 how to create affordances and how they are perceived.¹²¹ We can cer-
 33 tainly imagine, for example, the architectural conditions under which
 34 the atmosphere of that hospital could be less tense. An atmosphere thus
 35 sometimes exists, obviously in an incomplete and only hypothetical way,
 36 also as a potential to invite a certain mood and activity. I do think that
 37 architects do not produce atmospheres but only suggest and evoke them
 38 in the beholder and that for this reason architects should simply design
 39 more neutral places that stimulate the hermeneutic and emotional cre-
 40 ativity of the user.

1 It's true, as we have seen, that atmospheres are sometimes more a
2 transcendental unconscious, a background perceptive condition—what
3 only allows “emotions to emerge, to be” (Zumthor, 1998, 27)—than a
4 thetic object of transitive perception or the cause of a specific atmo-
5 spheric experience. But this does not exclude that at other times the
6 atmospheric encounter can to some extent be planned. Far from finding
7 in people and things only generic and vague occasions to manifest
8 themselves, atmospheres are sometimes exactly the expressive way in
9 which things (in this case buildings) call for us or even look at us.¹²²
10 Also the building itself looks at me and can make me, as Sartre likes to
11 say, “no longer master of the situation.”

12 But Schmitz—I repeat—would not agree. For him, the media (e.g.,
13 the Hollywood imaginary), are able to generate only fake atmospheres—
14 an axiology which is seriously troublesome within a rigorously descrip-
15 tive-phenomenologic context—as they make use of a “technique of
16 impression” (Schmitz, 2003, 256) that's typically found in totalitarian
17 regimes and in advertisement. There are many possible replies to this
18 point. For a start, this objection downgrades the rhetorical *coté*, within
19 the aesthetic tradition, to a generator of superficiality and precarious-
20 ness, depriving it of its educational and cultural value. Such values are
21 instead ascribed to the act of “inhabiting” as a culture (here taken to be
22 non-manipulative, who knows why) of feelings within a self-contained
23 space. Above all, however, there are no external parameters allowing us
24 to distinguish authentic feelings from fake ones. In my view, it is not
25 only possible to favor the emergence of atmospheres through situations
26 that are skilfully set up artificially: atmospheres can also be genuinely
27 generated.¹²³ Nor can we exclude that, even though they can be pro-
28 duced intentionally and by means of sophisticated counterfactual strat-
29 egies, atmospheres may assault the percipient subject with their
30 authority, so that he or she will be kept in awe at both the emotional and
31 the felt-bodily level just as it happens with non-intentional ones.

32 33 34 **Intentionality: Is It Just a Myth?** 35

36 There's a common misconception, deeply rooted in a certain tradition
37 that, just like the Cartesian one, finds it easier to explain the content of
38 mental acts rather than their antepositional felt-bodily dimension.
39 Such a misconception is that of distinguishing each one emotion on the
40 grounds of its different intentional content or “formal object”:¹²⁴ in

1 other words, the existence of emotions would be completely dependent
 2 on certain specific objects or states of affairs (i.e., on “values”¹²⁵ consid-
 3 ered as precognitive, perceptive, and pragmatic priorities).¹²⁶ The urgent
 4 necessity of defining boundaries through intentionality, particularly
 5 problematic even in a third-person perspective, is crucially opposed by
 6 Heidegger’s analysis of the *Stimmungen*: indeed in this case they are
 7 forms of the situational correlation to the world, not understood in
 8 terms of specific events. They are forms in which, since feeling-the-
 9 world and feeling-oneself identify with each other, an objectual *focus* is
 10 not really given,¹²⁷ to the point that even in Husserl’s view “a sad
 11 event [. . .] is not merely seen in its thinglike content and context, in the
 12 respects which make it an event: it seems clothed and coloured with
 13 sadness” (Husserl 2001a, vol. 2, 110–111). Next to the *auctoritates*, how-
 14 ever, there’s common experience: sometimes we feel threatened (or
 15 cheered up), despite the absence of an objectual reference to something
 16 that actively threatens us (or cheers us up). In this case, what counts is
 17 not so much the formal object of a certain feeling but rather the evalu-
 18 ational atmosphere on the background, in which some more sharply
 19 defined feelings may eventually emerge later.¹²⁸

20 But the most original (and thereby problematic) reply comes directly
 21 from Schmitz himself. Not just because he makes a distinction between
 22 non-directional atmospheric feelings (pure excitement like joy or sad-
 23 ness, nostalgia, or the spring mood) and directional ones (either all-
 24 directional or centripetal/centrifugal), but especially because, on the
 25 grounds of Gestalt psychology,¹²⁹ he reinterprets the apparent intention-
 26 ality of feelings, as he shows that what appears to be the object is rather
 27 only the point “in which this feeling, as an atmospherically effused field,
 28 is centred [. . .] thanks to a certain harmony of its proper stimulations”
 29 (Schmitz, 1969, 311). Therefore, within the atmosphere of, say, the “fear
 30 of the dentist,” it might be necessary to distinguish the sphere of the
 31 formal condensation (the dentist, his or her tools, the office, the person-
 32 nel, the whole practice are all perceived by the patient as a sensible
 33 presence of his or her concern) and an anchoring point—the real gener-
 34 ative location—which amounts to the pain itself that’s caused by the
 35 dentist’s practice. In the case of directional atmospheres, we might then
 36 have feelings which permeate a certain sphere of condensation without
 37 a true, identifiable, anchoring point, but whose intensity is proportional
 38 to the proximity to this unknown anchoring point. Is it not true that, as
 39 we get closer to an authority figure, we may perceive an atmosphere of
 40 subjection already caused by the very objects located in the waiting

1 room? However, to deny that the ditched lover's sadness is primarily
2 caused not by the abandonment (anchoring point) but rather by the sad
3 sensations provided by the environment (sphere of condensation) which
4 remind him or her of the abandonment,¹³⁰ amounts to shifting away
5 from a rigorously phenomenological perspective to a third-person
6 causal-genetic one.

7 Nevertheless, we cannot say that every problem is solved. If they are
8 considered non-intentional, feelings seem to get closer to the *Stimmungen*,
9 which are non-objectual and unmotivated. But does the occasional, or
10 even vicarious, Gestalt-fashioned transitivity really give a satisfactory
11 account of the emotional palette? Could it not be the case that an instinctive
12 drive (hunger, thirst), as it disappears once it's compensated, may
13 become a certain diffused meaningfulness (an atmosphere) permeating
14 the whole environment? Take the erotized worldview of young man who
15 solely awaits for the realization of his own indeterminate, though slightly
16 uncontrollable, impulse: is his not an atmosphere? Now, instead of rejecting
17 intentionality *tout court* and reverting its direction—such that it's the
18 object's intention that it's directed toward the subject!¹³¹—I hold it more
19 advisable to consider intentionality in a smoother, less objectual sense:
20 we should understand it as an extended condition,¹³² “operative” rather
21 than “acting” (Merleau-Ponty), in a revealing sense which pertains to the
22 passive syntheses,¹³³ or for which the direction is replaced by the “taking
23 part.”¹³⁴ Despite Schmitz's rough elimination of intentionality, his theory
24 has its own merits: as he awakes us from the dogmatic sleep of the phe-
25 nomenology of interiority and intentionality, he brings about the recur-
26 ring difference between the cause of a feeling and its content,¹³⁵
27 sometimes erroneous or vague; also, he generally highlights the massive
28 and spatialized nature of an (atmospheric) feeling whose “rationaliza-
29 tion” is but an *ex post* “centering” (be it adequate or not). Therefore, the
30 very location of the atmospheric is this emotional “no-man's-land”: that
31 is, when the *Stimmung* is *no longer* completely undetermined, as it has
32 found its own sphere of condensation within “ecstaticizing” events or
33 things, *though it's not yet* centered precisely on that anchoring point
34 (curtly conceived as an intentional pole)

35 I certainly share nothing with the objection that it is impossible to
36 access (or to speak about) the pre-reflexive, for two reasons.¹³⁶ First and
37 foremost, Against the gnoseological mimetic-descriptive¹³⁷ model I set
38 the explicative one: namely, what is to be known must not be conceived
39 as something stable which eventually needs to be given a certain mean-
40 ing, but rather as a fact that's singled out in different situations with a

1 diffused significance. Secondly, the scope of the neophenomenological
 2 approach is certainly not limited to the naïve life experience—in such a
 3 case “it might be better to dismiss phenomenology and simply exclaim
 4 “oh!” (Schmitz, 2003, 408)—but it researches what undoubtedly appears
 5 to be a fact that resists every phenomenological variation, adapting to it
 6 in a flexible way, without any extralinguistic illusion whatsoever.

7 But if, on the one hand, the very possibility of conceiving and giving
 8 a name to atmospheric feelings makes them quasi-thingly, as if they
 9 were “sentimental scores” (Frese, 1995), could it be the case that this
 10 possibility may distance them to the point of objectualizing them and
 11 dissolving their quasi-thinghood?¹³⁸ The hidden premise underlying
 12 this objection is the unjustifiable idea that the atmospheric vagueness be
 13 *de dicto*, and not *de re*.¹³⁹ Rather, it is certainly true that the peculiar
 14 atmosphericness of, say, the fog or of the sunset twilight cannot disap-
 15 pear because of conceptual, epistemic, or naturalistic clarification of
 16 such climatic events.

19 Noticing and Feeling: Subject-Dependence?

21 As outlined above, what seems to refute projectivist reductionism is the
 22 dissonance that’s experienced between the felt atmosphere and the per-
 23 cipient’s conscious mood. It appears useless to add (perhaps indulging
 24 in associationism) that the percipient need be at least predisposed to it,
 25 or that such atmosphere doesn’t come anew to him or her: for what
 26 remains unanswered is the question on the “first time”¹⁴⁰ that feeling
 27 was perceived (for example, “how is it that a blooming lawn suggests an
 28 atmosphere of joy?”). But the dissonance surely does not always trans-
 29 late into a real rapture: the distinction between the feeling as such and
 30 the correlated emotional and felt-bodily involvement of the perceiver
 31 provides an explanation of the common possibility that a certain atmo-
 32 sphere may be perceived even though it’s not directly felt¹⁴¹—that is, the
 33 possibility of noticing it within the “traces” that are immanent to a cer-
 34 tain space, whilst the subject is in a relatively different mood. But this of
 35 course is true of atmospheric feelings, not of elementary felt-bodily
 36 impulses.

38 Bravery would not exist without brave people, while melancholy
 39 may well exist despite the absence of a melancholic person; for
 40 instance, this is true when a certain autumnal landscape is soaked

1 in such a feeling, which is eventually noticed by some casually
2 happy wanderer; or again, when someone is visiting a museum
3 in a particular and non-melancholic mood of aesthetic delight,
4 and yet he or she is able to perceive the melancholic atmosphere
5 that spills out of a certain landscape canvas. (Schmitz, 1969, 148)
6

7 Even though this is not only true for “other people’s feelings, literary
8 descriptions, theoretical discussions, at the theatre or at the cinema”
9 (Demmerling, 2011, 50), aesthetic experience (in a generic sense) is
10 properly grounded in this kind of relatively unemotional perception.
11 The atmosphere that’s triggered by certain words written on the page of
12 a novel or by certain film sequences does not necessarily entail an actual
13 rapture: indeed, completely different feelings may well be triggered by
14 the following lines or sequences and/or the reader/the spectator may be
15 more receptive towards the latter.¹⁴²

16 What should we reply to those who think that, unlike trees, streets,
17 or mountains, no atmospheres would exist in a world devoid of perceiv-
18 ing subjects, so that feelings exist if and only if somebody “has” them, as
19 intrinsically relational phenomena? First of all, granted the (covertly
20 idealistic) premises of the objection, we shall reply that, in a world with-
21 out perceiving subjects, even trees would exist solely by the virtue of
22 some third-person, abstract, epistemic discourse, which is something
23 that neophenomenology does not really address. Besides, at the level of
24 philosophical anthropology, mountains too exist as alterations of the
25 ground that are relevant to the human “size” only in virtue of a species-
26 specific ontological segmentation (as we have seen). Moreover, in
27 Schmitzean terms, they may exist as single objects only if the percipient
28 is able to make use of the “explicitivity of the propositional discourse”
29 (Schmitz, 2005a, 285) within its readily developed (non-primitive)
30 presence. Finally, with a touch of irony, a further reply might be that the
31 question is phenomenologically undecidable, as a full subject-independ-
32 ence “does not even count for country roads. Who can tell whether
33 they still exist when everybody’s asleep?” (Ibid.).¹⁴³

34 On the contrary, surely there are many different ways to try to demon-
35 strate the full subject-dependence of atmospheres. One way to do it is
36 to reduce the undoubtable experience of our being passive towards them—
37 drawing from a quasi-Fichtean projectivist theory—to a sort of feedback
38 coming from a previous and unconscious projection (emotional, in this
39 case). Or, more humbly, we could limit ourselves to noticing the posthu-
40 mous effect of an atmosphere whose intersubjective origin got erased.

1 Specifically to avoid both reification and projectivist subjectivism,
 2 Böhme reasonably associates the atmosphere to the copresence of both
 3 the subject and the object, whose boundaries are anyway not so sharply
 4 defined at this level: the former takes it to be an existent entity only
 5 when it is felt, when it is actual.¹⁴⁴

6 What should we conclude on the basis of all this? I'll just reaffirm
 7 that, even though they are experienced by the subject, just as they super-
 8 vene to physical-material entities without being reduced to them, so
 9 atmospheric feelings are neither something that's only subjective, nor
 10 the mere justification of a subjective projection (in short, the threaten-
 11 ing character of the sky is as little subjective as its color). Rather, atmo-
 12 spheric feelings are an essential part of a "universal grammar of
 13 expressivity,"¹⁴⁵ whose value is even adaptive-evolutionistic. Indeed, the
 14 phenomenon of expressivity "is directly grounded in the constellation of
 15 observable events which identify its position in space, so that it depends
 16 on them and is located where they are located" (Bozzi, 1998, 115). This
 17 is also proven by the trivial and undervalued fact that, were *those* events
 18 absent from the perceptive arrangement, the atmosphere previously felt
 19 vanishes as well (sometimes even completely). Through their externality
 20 and (at least relative) subject-independence, atmospheres display a cer-
 21 tain analogy (disquieting to some, reassuring to others) with the logical-
 22 mathematical entities of Frege's "third realm,"¹⁴⁶ which is irreducible to
 23 subjective representations. Instead of looking up, however, our atmo-
 24 spherology prefers to look down and start from the common experience
 25 for which two people may sometimes share not only the same thought,
 26 but also the same (atmospheric) feeling—by the virtue of the same felt-
 27 bodily resonance, ongoing here and now, of a certain perceptive-envi-
 28 ronmental arrangement.¹⁴⁷

29 Overestimating its subject-dependence, one could raise the objec-
 30 tion that the atmospheric perception of a feeling may simply be a
 31 mistake. Those professions which require a certain degree of compe-
 32 tence as regards the atmosphere may well confirm how easy it can be to
 33 be mistaken in this context, clumsily generating an unwanted atmo-
 34 sphere: for instance, some advertisement may become hilarious rather
 35 than authoritative, or one could set up an open-space environment in
 36 order to ease social relationships and unexpectedly end up creating a
 37 stressful place with complete lack of privacy. However, the actual pos-
 38 sibility of perceiving an atmosphere in the wrong way is a completely
 39 different question. First of all, under what conditions are we mistaken:
 40 as soon as we get contaminated by it? And, what if this were the right

1 way to “feel” it? Can we say that we’re mistaken when we resist it? What
2 if such resistance actually proved that we did (ingressively) perceive it
3 correctly? Are we mistaken when we express it in a subjective way? Or
4 isn’t the subjective resonance the best proof of its involving effective-
5 ness? Are we mistaken when we notice it without feeling it? Or when
6 we don’t even perceive it? We moved into a real maze. And it is not
7 helpful to make a distinction between real and apparent atmospheres:
8 both because the only (properly) existing atmosphere is the actual one,
9 and because our ability to hold it deceptive relies on an external crite-
10 rion that is not available (e.g., the intention of the individual who
11 produced it, or a pathic view-from-nowhere of the surrounding envi-
12 ronment). Also, the normative introduction of a socially and culturally
13 ideal-typical atmosphere—which would thus be the only legitimate
14 one—would bring about far more difficulties than it can solve, as it
15 “reduces” nature to culture.

16 17 18 **More Ethics, Fewer Atmospheres?** 19

20 Whether the authority of an atmosphere is, to use Weber’s categories,
21 legal (I feel I must respect the atmosphere of the courtroom), traditional
22 (I overpay an ancient book for the aura that surrounds it), or charismatic
23 (I am unilaterally corporeally influenced by an environment or a person),
24 it is often called “irrational” just because we ignore the general mecha-
25 nisms of felt-bodily communication¹⁴⁸—namely, the way in which an
26 atmospheric feeling, suggesting a rule (broadly understood) to be
27 respected, fascinates the perceiver, keeps him in check, ravishes him (an
28 intoxicating fragrance, a spark that catches the eye, soft skin that causes
29 us to stroke it). In this case, the greatest charismatic suggestion would
30 be featured by an atmosphere that blends disembodiment and unilateral
31 embodiment, thus taking away from the passivated partner her personal
32 distress and transferring to her the distress of the dominant partner
33 instead, reaching an almost narcotic effect.¹⁴⁹ Such dispossession causes
34 the recipient to “sink” into the percept and “fixate herself” on the issue
35 imposed on her, and perhaps makes atmospheric authority¹⁵⁰ similar to
36 the (Hegelian) authority of the lord over the bondsman.

37 While doubting that “knowing what [atmospheric] authority is, the
38 way Man and men must be acted on can be *deduced* so as either to
39 engender or to maintain an Authority” (Kojève, 2013, 5), we begin by
40 distinguishing absolute authority, which cannot be resisted, and relative

1 authority, whose centripetal direction one can resist by appealing to a
 2 higher level of personal emancipation. For example, one can feel
 3 wrapped up in shame on a level, but at the same time transcend this
 4 atmosphere on a higher level, for instance by regarding *that* shame as
 5 the result of mere convention; likewise one may feel gripped by a defeat-
 6 ist atmosphere but still manage to transcend it because of a recent per-
 7 sonal success.¹⁵¹ But absolute and relative are in turn (historically and
 8 culturally) relative, depending on the given felt-bodily and biographical
 9 situation—in a word, on the level of personal emancipation of the sub-
 10 ject involved¹⁵²—so that, even while being very close, two people might
 11 perceive different atmospheres (for example, they might or might not
 12 feel ashamed), but this does not necessarily entail the unreality of such
 13 atmospheres: they would be no less real than a toothache had by only
 14 one of the two, or than the same language spoken in a relatively differ-
 15 ent way by the two.

16 But the very admission that it is possible, if not to totally abstract
 17 oneself from involving situations (as evidenced by Hegel),¹⁵³ at least to
 18 achieve a certain distancing from an atmosphere which, for that very
 19 reason, perhaps does not even “become” a real feeling,¹⁵⁴ suggests that
 20 we should say something about the ethical consequences of this atmo-
 21 spherologic approach. And not just because, since the (religious, ethical,
 22 aesthetic, ontological, legal) authority is a claim that, after careful
 23 checking, we feel we cannot lightheartedly avoid without feeling guilty,
 24 we must recognize that the legal norm is really a norm¹⁵⁵ only if it rests
 25 on the authority of legal feelings. We are referring to the specific pathos
 26 of wrath¹⁵⁶ and shame (depending on whether, outraged by the injus-
 27 tice, one feels in the right or in the wrong): two feelings whose legaliza-
 28 tion, which aims to prevent unregulated consequences (retaliation and
 29 suicide), forms the so-called legal sensitivity.¹⁵⁷ These feelings are as
 30 such the emotional and corporeal foundation of the whole social life
 31 (especially of the idea of duty)—a foundation underestimated only
 32 because it is previously controlled by an ethical constellation of
 33 prefeelings.¹⁵⁸

34 The ethical-political problem is also caused not only by the social
 35 but also climatic (environmental issue) and medial (manipulation) ubiq-
 36 uity of the atmospheric phenomenon,¹⁵⁹ and then by the interference
 37 between “natural” or background atmospheres and the intentionally gen-
 38 erated ones, between subatmospheres of different content and qualities,
 39 and so on. And, last but not least, by the fact that if “people never shape
 40 their conduct upon the teaching of pure reason” (Le Bon, 2009, 15)

1 but through impressions, vague reminiscences, easily translatable
2 ideas—in short, through seductive images that public personae and
3 active subjects try to control, wherever possible, in order to “cultivate the
4 sensorium which is the basis of all unity and all consensus” (Carnevali,
5 2012, 88)—much in politics depends precisely on the “climate”¹⁶⁰ that
6 one is able to arouse.

7 But then is the risk not that of irresponsibly indulging in the atmo-
8 sphere? Of becoming a mere appendage to it, as some fear about the
9 Internet and the navigable space that it “contains”?¹⁶¹ Obviously what
10 has been said so far on atmospheric authority takes a relatively different
11 shape depending on whether atmospheres, as we have already mentioned,
12 are understood as objective demonic powers—external to us, unintended,
13 with respect to which the subjective component is reduced to the more
14 or less critical reaction of the perceiver (prototypical atmospheres)—or as
15 an external and objective effect but *of a relationship*, implicit as may be,
16 between subject and object (derived atmospheres), or again as idiosyn-
17 cratic moods, subjective and projective (spurious atmospheres).

18 At the heart of the matter, we find the polite but firm dispute
19 between Hermann Schmitz and Gernot Böhme:¹⁶² does the increas-
20 ingly pervasive and seductive “aesthetic work” (cosmetics, furniture,
21 urban planning, lighting, fashion, set design, etc.) directly generate an
22 atmosphere—or at least the phenomenonic conditions of possibility¹⁶³ of a
23 physiognomic-expressive aestheticness that applies to atmospheres as
24 well as things—or does it merely exercise a “technique of impression”
25 (object of investigation of an unspecified “technology of impression”)
26 (Schmitz, 1998, 181–182), which is very different from the ordinary
27 climatic, seasonal, collective, housing feelings, etc., (i.e., situations or
28 quasi-things) that by their chaotic multiplicity cannot be generated by
29 single events and things?

30 Now, while suggesting that there may be non-atmospheric situa-
31 tions¹⁶⁴ and belying the deadly illusion of being able to generate any feel-
32 ing, Schmitz’s choice to circumscribe the atmospheric phenomenon also
33 generates some doubts as to whether something that, as required by the
34 model of the numinous, basically depends on the observer’s mere moving
35 can really claim absolute authority. What’s more, in the light of the anti-
36 dualistic and antiinformationist model of a felt-bodily communication
37 that acts as an unanalyzable impressing situation often even without
38 anchor points, it entails that it is impossible to explain manipulation (tra-
39 ditionally) in terms of moral responsibility (of what manipulates) and
40 guilty loss of self-determination (of the manipulated).¹⁶⁵

1 The clear demarcation between transcendent-abyssal atmospheres
 2 and tricky situations as “suggestive” condensations (*Plakatsituationen*)
 3 perhaps dangerously “centered” in some charismatic individual¹⁶⁶—
 4 Hitlerian state holidays, the extreme version of those during the French
 5 Revolution, advertising and contemporary aesthetic work (now devoid
 6 of any social normativity)¹⁶⁷—certainly has the merit of warning one
 7 against the instrumental and rhetoric administration of one’s affections.
 8 Yet, such demarcation is and will remain problematic as such. Both
 9 because in history, unfortunately, charismatic propaganda in totalitarian
 10 regimes can be exchanged for absolute (and, in this sense, divine)
 11 authority, and because no one is ever involved in an atmosphere that one
 12 *knows* to be manipulated (such acknowledgment is made only *ex post*
 13 and often only in the third person).¹⁶⁸ And also both because overcoming
 14 the dualism of subject/object involves the collaboration (not far-
 15 fetched, but radically excluded by Schmitz) of the manipulated person
 16 in the genesis of the atmosphere, and because the Schmitzian primacy
 17 of presence seems to underestimate the (sometimes not timely but
 18 delayed) nature of the atmospheric experience, perhaps even conceiv-
 19 able as a “compromise solution” with respect to the traumatic effect of
 20 the initial discrepancy.

21 Finally, it is needless to remember that the manipulative (in a non-
 22 judgmental sense: persuasive) appearance is obviously implicit in every
 23 practice that generates an atmosphere, much as the illusory appearance
 24 (which is such, besides, only in relation to a different and incommensu-
 25 rable level of “reality”) and the parasitic exploitation by the condensa-
 26 tion points (charismatic character or suggestive situation) of atmospheric
 27 feelings that are more authentic and widely disseminated.

28 And yet it is only by acquiring a better atmospheric “competence,”
 29 not reducible solely to the *affectus non nisi parendo vincitur*, that we can
 30 really learn how not to be grossly manipulated. How to reserve for us,
 31 where this is not given by the authority itself (in its best examples), a
 32 space for critical reflection of our own—even more so when, as in today’s
 33 globalized world, we must be disenchanting about more and more dan-
 34 gerously anonymous authorities (from the “stock market” to GDP to
 35 credit SPREAD, etc.).

36 But if this competence—the duly secularized “ability to distinguish
 37 between spirits” (1 Cor 12:10), as it were—mitigates the objection that
 38 in such determinism¹⁶⁹ a person would be “a blind passenger of atmo-
 39 spheres” (Soentgen, 1998, 117), still it does not entail easy illusions
 40 about full emotional transparency or about the availability of an

1 Archimedean point less fallible than personal critical sense.¹⁷⁰ As in
2 contemporary culture, there is no privileged place for awareness and
3 maybe we will have to settle for the interaction of the most diverse
4 experiences (spatial, medial, functional, etc.), without claiming a critical
5 position superior and/or external to them,¹⁷¹ but promoting on an emo-
6 tional level a kind of “separation of (atmospheric) powers” that is healthy
7 for mental life. For example, by relearning from the most artificial
8 atmospheres—for example, from the cold and procedural ones of
9 democracy¹⁷²—what the peculiarities of the most natural ones are, and
10 vice versa.

11 Just as the experience of *trompe-l’oeil* and “immersive” spaces relies
12 on the fact that an immersive phase will be followed by a partly emo-
13 tional and partly reflective phase of emersion, so an atmosphere is poorly
14 manipulative when it stimulates this sequence, when the “I” that it calls
15 upon is neither a wholly non-reflective subject—and maybe tasteless
16 enough to appreciate only the atmospheric character of *clichés* (such as a
17 blue and clear sky)—nor a subject placed at an excessive contemplative
18 distance¹⁷³—provided, of course, that such coexistence of affective and
19 corporeal involvement and relatively self-reflective detachment can be
20 demonstrated.

21 As already mentioned, the authority of atmospheres exists in the
22 proper sense only when it overcomes all the critical scruples that the
23 perceiver may mobilize, when it prevails over his resistance and she
24 cannot access a further critical level. That is, when reflection does not
25 weaken the suggestion of the numinous, of the voice of moral con-
26 science (secularized residue of the divine) or of the appeal to do what we
27 feel is right: this is perhaps the atmospheric-binding sense, that can be
28 hardly overestimated in a hopefully shocking philosophical reevaluation
29 of suffering, paraphrasing Luther’s famous statement “Here I stand. I
30 cannot feel otherwise.”

31 Nevertheless, it is a short step from the problem of the (possible)
32 atmospheric manipulation to the ethical one. Surely, passiveness is nei-
33 ther really a problem nor a taboo for a neophenomenology whose core
34 is emotional rapture: indeed, this approach does not give way either to
35 an ascetic-rationalistic control of external feelings or to arbitrary projec-
36 tive transformations of them, but rather it allows for a relative distance
37 from them. As the abandonment to the unexpected and to the atmo-
38 spheric force field is considered in a positive way, I wonder whether this
39 might weaken too much the sovereignty (better said, the autonomy)¹⁷⁴
40 of the subject: the risk, in this case, would be that of putting forward a

1 perspective that would be just as deresponsibilizing as the perspective it
 2 was meant to overcome is moralistic. And wouldn't a subject—whose
 3 only options are to expose itself, resist, or give in to the burst of the
 4 “new”¹⁷⁵—be restricted to an exclusively contemplative attitude or,
 5 which is worse, be at the mercy of relentless demonic and destinal
 6 forces?¹⁷⁶ Wouldn't it dissolve in “a *purely* ‘systemic’ and ‘situational’
 7 ontology” (Fuchs, cited in Schmitz, 2005a, 271), where there's room
 8 only for challenge and response,¹⁷⁷ and for a pathic obedience, which
 9 swallows creativity as it shrinks to mere unexpected reaction to some
 10 given circumstances?

11 Sure enough, there is such a risk, which also includes that of indulg-
 12 ing in some kitsch aesthetics that's not grounded in “the activation of our
 13 judgment, but rather in the captivation of our heart” (Forssmann, 1975,
 14 9).¹⁷⁸ Such a risk should not be exaggerated, though. Particularly in the
 15 most radical Schmitzian form—granted it's not self-contradictory as it
 16 sometimes denies the role of abandonment though generally using it and
 17 wishing for it¹⁷⁹—atmospherology surely aims at proving the unavoid-
 18 able authority of external feelings¹⁸⁰ and the impossibility to produce
 19 them intentionally (therefore I am rather sceptical about the idea that
 20 atmospherology is a form of justificationism of totalitarian rhetoric). But
 21 it is also true that this approach defends the view that there are abso-
 22 lutely—not just positionally—subjective facts¹⁸¹ (“I am sad”), to be dis-
 23 tinguished from the ones referred to in the third-person (“Griffero is
 24 sad”), and even from objective ones (“Miami is located south of New
 25 York”). Although atmospherology may bring about some risks, I hold it
 26 to be less dangerous than the current leading illusion that the emotional
 27 sphere may be universally controlled and manipulated (even just in
 28 chemical-genetic terms). As a matter of fact, the typical outcome of the
 29 latter approach is astonishment for the fact that a person, despite his or
 30 her proud autonomy, has not been capable of simply saying “no.”

31 We could now proceed with the normalization of the atmospherolo-
 32 gic approach by means of distinctions and semantic-lexical clarifica-
 33 tions, as it refuses every generalization¹⁸² while being open to cultural
 34 and socio-interactional explanations of the emotional life, in terms of
 35 the necessary complementarity of the gnostic and pathic levels. But if we
 36 “urbanized” too much the counter-intuitive objectivity that's neophe-
 37 nomenologically attributed to the emotional—which is the basis of the
 38 repudiation of the common illusion that we can control and manipulate
 39 feelings (for example by finding out something more about the situa-
 40 tion)—we would end up throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

1 But in this case the “baby” appears to be heuristically productive,
2 particularly because it’s radically counterintuitive and (by now) unre-
3 lated to our (psychologistic) common sense. In fact, as the atmospheres
4 become the prototype of all quasi-things (although we shall hereby
5 limit ourselves only to some of them: lived-body, pain, shame, gaze,
6 light), the chosen approach justifies and fosters a desirable ontological
7 inflationism. With the exception of totally unconscious emotions (for
8 Elster, protoemotions)—which are devoid of a specific qualitative expe-
9 rience, so that they need not be taken into account—it is now time to
10 dismiss Ockham’s razor without regrets, as we face the qualitative-
11 expressive richness of the life-world. No matter if they are emotionally
12 relevant physiognomical lines or intermodal *affordances*, ecstatic irradiations
13 of the objects, or real intersubjective atmospheres (*Stimmungen*):¹⁸³
14 what is certain is that our world—irreducible to abstract categories like
15 those of space, time or causality—is *above all and first of all* pathically
16 attuned.¹⁸⁴ The qualitative eidetic which is immanent to this world is
17 able to produce a variegated (and atmospheric) felt-bodily resonance,
18 whose peculiarity is that the “feeling” in this case always amounts to the
19 “feeling oneself.” And it is so to the point that, much like a script,¹⁸⁵ fol-
20 lowing its “scripted space” and “immersive” urgency,¹⁸⁶ the atmosphere
21 somehow shows us how to behave, how to act, and also how to think.

22 This atmospherological approach—which is an example of a direct
23 realism devoid of exaggerations (the original sin of a large part of pret-
24 a-porter philosophy) and presumptions of all-comprehensiveness—
25 strongly reasserts a qualitative supervenience, foreign to any reductionist
26 *escamotage*, and supports the idea that an adult is not a person who
27 removes the passivizing-negative sphere, but rather an individual who
28 doesn’t neurotically prescind from it. Its focus is not thinghood as such,
29 but rather quasi-thinghood with a particular stress, in this chapter, on
30 the prototypical atmospheric feelings. Indeed, their influence appears as
31 more than analogical with that of Baudelaire’s loved one, which “perme-
32 ates my life / Like air impregnated with salt” (W. Aggerer, translator).

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THREE

**Quasi-Things Are Felt
(though Not Localized):
The Isles of the Felt-Body¹**

The (Felt) Body

In the Western world, the body has been freed from traditional forms of exploitation such as war and manual labor. However, the body now appears to be obsessively bound to some technical-aesthetic principle of efficiency for which those who do not—or, better said, do not manage to—live up to the given standards (in sport, but also sex life, self-care, and fitness) are stigmatized. In order to counterbalance this situational and excessively performative view, at last the body can and should be rediscovered in its felt and lived—rather than physical-anatomical—dimension.

This is not a consequence of the fact that cultural studies want to give up the anatomical-biological level in favor of the sociocultural one (the transition from sex to gender, for instance), rightly focusing on the “pre-objective qualities” of the body (Waldenfels, 2000, 332) that atmospherically pervade our entire existence (say, the male/female difference). Nor does it follow from the collapse of the disembodied conception of the mind (and even of the “brain-in-a-vat”)² typical of classical cognitive sciences, whose Platonic view disregards the role of the body in the development of cognition: in fact, now the growing

1 conception is that the brain is structured and modeled by the body (not
2 just in an anatomical sense).³

3 The thesis that “the biological body (what it enables and excludes by
4 its structure, basic posture, and motor capacity) is the body that shapes
5 the way that we perceive and think about the world” (Gallagher and
6 Zahavi, 2008, 133) thus has to be hindered: in fact, this enactive role—
7 which is transcendental for every subject/world correlation, rather than
8 a simple screen⁴—is rather to be ascribed to the felt or lived body. That
9 is, it should be attributed to what—roughly as body-subject⁵—“is not
10 just a construct composed of limbs and organs, an *ensemble* of sensations
11 and movements, [but rather] a felt-body which got shaped in an historical
12 sense, whose experiences got settled in its invisible dispositions”
13 (Fuchs, 2008, 57). Now, though it is true that the very contact with the
14 world coincides, following Sartre, with our being already in the world,
15 this being-in needs be understood above all in a felt-bodily sense. This
16 in turn implies the exclusion of whatever view from nowhere, with the
17 proviso that, once again, the world—with the feelings that are imman-
18 ent to it (atmospheres, as we have seen)—determines our bodily-
19 emotional situation much more than our own feeling can projectively
20 attune the external world.

21 However, my aim is not to describe, once again, the limits of the
22 naturalist view, bringing up the impossible physiological explanation of
23 Socrates’s choice not to evade (*Phaed.* 98c ff.), evoking some esoteric
24 technique of bodily auscultation, or even comfortingly giving value to
25 the subtle somatic sensitivity which comes up in adulthood by replacing
26 the early overflowing impulses. Nor is my intention to end up with the
27 cheap triumphal conclusion for which *we do not own, but rather we are*
28 our body. Such a conclusion, may in fact, sound true, as it refers, from a
29 phenomenological point of view, to an “I,” which does not precede its
30 own relations, but rather appears as a relational pole.⁶ At the level of the
31 history of ideas, it hints at the somatic inflationism often wished for by
32 the numerous and heterodox antidualistic *enclaves* of Western episte-
33 mology.⁷ Finally, from a theoretical point of view, it certainly refers to
34 the quasi-thingly and unwittingly transcendental (as regards whatever
35 experience) status of the felt-bodily. Nevertheless, it seems to indulge
36 too much in the supposed incommunicability of life experiences.

37 Provided that I am not particularly keen on ineffabilism, it is cer-
38 tainly difficult to represent and *a fortiori* define the felt body, primarily
39 because it’s not a proper thing, not even “of a particular type”
40 (Husserl, 1989, vol. 2, 165). Even more so, if we allow that the questions

1 about its operating nature (what does it do? how does it work? and,
 2 above all, what does it feel like to live it?) come before and shrink the
 3 role of the third-person theoretical-cognitive ones (what is it? what
 4 attributes does it have?).⁸ For these reasons, it is necessary to provide a
 5 more performative, or even exhortative, representation, rather than just
 6 a factual one. That is, we need a representation that maximally con-
 7 strains the action of the causalistic objectivation of its own theme, but is
 8 grounded in the very perception of the felt-body, which is completely
 9 ignored by natural sciences and fatally reified as soon as it refers to the
 10 exposure for-the-others.⁹ Besides, we need a representation that may
 11 overcome both the over-cognitivist one of the “operating body,” and the
 12 excessively primitive distinction between body-in-action and body-in-
 13 habit, natural body and cultural body.¹⁰ Furthermore, such a representa-
 14 tion shall neither lean too much towards the yet indispensable “discourse”
 15 about the body as a sociocultural construction (*à la* Foucault or Butler),
 16 nor towards those exaggerated virtual perspectives put forward by cul-
 17 turalist constructivism. Rather, it might be appropriate to raise some
 18 neophenomenological questions on the way the felt-body—as such, the
 19 “medium of the emotional life” (Böhme 2003, 130), which intimately
 20 touches and emotionally involves us¹¹—may deliver a self-experience
 21 that’s more authentic and certain than the one delivered by the Cartesian
 22 *cogito*, yet in the form of a late and definitely intellectual doubt (“I am
 23 already always in the world when I say ‘I’”) (Waldenfels, 2000, 306).

24 However, such a phenomenological approach needs accurately to be
 25 integrated at the ethical and aesthesiological levels in respect to the yet
 26 restricted Husserlian ontogenetic approach (passive synthesis). In turn,
 27 the phenomenological approach should also precisely describe human
 28 involuntary experiences. Surely, it shall include the memory—implicit
 29 within, and of, the felt-body—which gives rise to the *habitus*: otherwise
 30 said, that style or melody which grounds the continuity of an individual,
 31 as it allows him or her to perform an action with a certain grace, so to
 32 speak, in virtue of a tacit and largely analogical knowledge which does
 33 not lie within the explicit or autobiographical memory. It rather appears
 34 within intrabodily motor figures of a physiognomic kind (consider a
 35 musician’s fingering), raised by repeated motor-expressive sensations,
 36 which are suggested by things, quasi-things, and environments.¹²

37 We’re free to choose what path to follow. We may see the body as a
 38 physical and tangible thing among the others (*Körper*), thus metaphysi-
 39 cally and semantically presupposing a Cartesian dualism¹³ and a third-
 40 person perspective,¹⁴ be it scientific or commonsensical. Or—as I

1 hold—we may focus on the felt- or lived-body (*Leib*), thus rehabilitating
 2 a word that’s certainly older and partly imbued with a religious conno-
 3 tation: but it is nevertheless continuously invoked throughout the twen-
 4 tieth century (Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, to name a few), also for
 5 its critical value against the instrumental reason, as well as for the fact
 6 that it refers to something that’s been undoubtedly erased, with even
 7 pathological consequences (think of the hypochondria epidemic in the
 8 eighteenth century). Such elimination favored the view that the body is
 9 something merely physical-anatomical and always somebody else’s,
 10 even when it’s one’s own. The body has thus come to be seen as a sort of
 11 black box, whose signals need be immediately medicalized and manipu-
 12 lated,¹⁵ because they are (or rather, have become) unknown and no
 13 longer aligned with the dogma of efficiency.

14 To be clear: the terminological choice (felt- or lived-body) may
 15 sound rough, as the physical body nevertheless entails a form of life (for
 16 instance, the nowadays privileged one of narcissism), while the lived-
 17 body entails something that’s relatively objectual (were it not, how could
 18 we develop a phenomenology out of it?). Yet such understandable her-
 19 meneutical scepticism towards the shorter way should not become an
 20 alibi for ignoring such a difference. One thing is to speak about the
 21 (physical) body in third person, taking advantage of the ex-centric
 22 (Plessner) human position in order to privilege what got reified within
 23 the medical-naturalistic (physiological, chemical, neuroscientific, and
 24 even genetic) perspective and even pathologically derealized (for
 25 instance when we associate our own hand to another object). A com-
 26 pletely different thing is to speak about the (felt-) body in first person,
 27 acknowledging it not just as the objectivation of the will (Schopenhauer),
 28 but also as the keystone of a pathic form of the existence,¹⁶ which,
 29 because of its irreducible destinality and subjectivity, modern daily life
 30 tends to erase or technologically manipulate, as it inexorably transforms
 31 what is “given” to us into something that’s “fabricated.”¹⁷ As we see, this
 32 is the only way the felt-body can be considered in its phenomena both
 33 as an example of quasi-thing and as the location in which—and thanks
 34 to which—we can have an involving experience of every quasi-thing.

35 Surely, these are two complementary forms of life. A good dialectic
 36 between the two is in fact what may prevent psychopathological phe-
 37 nomena—for instance, those that may come along with one’s bodily
 38 transformation during puberty.¹⁸ Such dialectic also allows for a scienti-
 39 ficity that is not heavily alienated, since even mere measurement¹⁹ con-
 40 stantly presupposes the *lebensweltlich* bodiliness, as Husserl’s *Krisis*

1 notoriously shows. Despite this, of course, the (quasi-thingly) sphere of
 2 the felt-body is the only one that's fully prereflexive, as well as being
 3 extended in the lived space—unlike the psyche—and surfaceless,²⁰ but
 4 also indivisible—unlike the physical body. In the same way, what is
 5 within the body (and always in the pericorporeal space, too) can be felt
 6 only through it, yet without any mediation of either the sensory organs
 7 or the bodily schemes, as we see. As per the physical body, whose func-
 8 tion in history has often been rigidly normative toward the lived-body,²¹
 9 what's felt in it is mostly something negative—namely, a burden, fatigue,
 10 illness, practical incapability, etc., or because it gets reified by someone
 11 else's glance, be it occasional (the intrusive bystander) or professional
 12 (the physician). On the contrary, the physical body is not even noticed
 13 whenever a fluid and effective motor spontaneity is prevailing.

14 In short, the physical body speaks out as soon as it steps back (in a
 15 broad sense), whenever the spontaneously ecstatic orientation of the
 16 felt-body, as *Nullpunkt*, is paralyzed or at least made clumsy and comi-
 17 cal. The respective perspectives of the two types of body indeed are very
 18 different—from the outside or from the inside (Jonas)—as well as radi-
 19 cally independent of one another. Yet they are, though in different ways,
 20 both representable, granted that the retrospective inquiry about the
 21 antepredictive and the preintentional—that is, about a felt-bodily
 22 being-near that's more fundamental than the subject/object distinc-
 23 tion—does not entail a necessarily primitivist regression.

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Feeling Oneself as a Felt-Body

28 As a quasi-thingly coordinate of every other coordinate (be it itself
 29 quasi-thingly or not), the lived-body plays the role of an absolute loca-
 30 tion: it appears multifunctional, as it relates us to ourselves, to the world,
 31 and to the other from us. As we learn from the usual difficulties we face
 32 when we try to recognize what we felt-bodily sense in the mirror or in
 33 a photograph, the external representation of the lived-body appears
 34 misleading. It has to be either internal or mediated by some peculiar
 35 quasi-thingly experience such as pain (cf. infra 4) or that double sensi-
 36 tive reflexion we have when the (physical but partly also felt-) body is
 37 both percipient (touching) and perceived (touched) (Husserl, 1989, vol.
 38 2, 155–156). Or, again, it may be mediated by those involuntary experi-
 39 ences that are fulfilled when one gives in to them, which are so familiar
 40 that they look theoretically opaque—consider, for instance, the moment

1 when we fall asleep or are involved in a sexual act. Just as an engaging
 2 event makes us unaware that our eyes blink, or grabbing an object may
 3 presuppose the vanishing of our hand (citing Merleau-Ponty and
 4 Sartre), the prereflexive, proprioceptive sense of the lived-body is a
 5 dimension that's normally not thematized: it's conceptually vague, yet
 6 atmospherically—hence in a quasi-thingly way—pervasive and certain
 7 (we may well say that we are “nervous,” while ignoring what the anat-
 8 omy of nerves properly is!).

9 Finally, we need not exotically search in the East what can be also
 10 found in the West—namely, an anti-dualistic phenomenology (*in*
 11 *primis*, Schmitz's) that's so rigorously accurate as regards the phenome-
 12 nal-sensible—notoriously already theoretical *per se*, according to
 13 Goethe—that it excludes whatever manipulation and measurement,
 14 allowing us to legitimately and provokingly state that the brain *is not* a
 15 phenomenon.

16 From a neophenomenological point of view, we might therefore say
 17 that, unlike the body-thing (which extends within a dimensional and
 18 dissectible space, is composed of organs and is delimited within cutane-
 19 ous boundaries), the lived-body is, as a quasi-thing and as the resonance
 20 board of quasi-things, the set of what one feels independently of sensory
 21 organs (pain, hunger, thirst, pleasure, vigor, relaxation, etc.).
 22 Furthermore, we can perceive it in our own surroundings, to the extent
 23 that something salient can be embodied (and disposed of),²² as in the
 24 case of the weather, of the above-mentioned atmospheric feelings and,
 25 in general, of the qualia or *affordances*, whose intermodal analogueness is
 26 grounded in existential and felt-bodily resonances.

27 Let us start with the localization.

28
 29 When a burning sensation, an itch and so forth seem to indicate
 30 the undesired visit of a parasite, the prevailing hand gets swiftly,
 31 with no need to look for it in a relative place (defined by position
 32 and distance); we locate just as rapidly the place of the sting,
 33 although such place is usually not yet recorded into the bodily
 34 perceptive schema: that is, it is identified in a place that is no
 35 less absolute than that of the hand heading for it. (Schmitz,
 36 2007b, 266)

37
 38 The first localization, to which we get “guided only by the absolute place
 39 of the felt-bodily isle now manifest and by the habitual trajectories of
 40 the motor-bodily schema” (Schmitz, 1990, 291), is evidently the

1 absolute one. The second one, which is instead possible only by means
2 of subsequent focalizations of our finger, is relative. As a first rough
3 characterization, this is a communication between two felt-bodily isles
4 (I get back to this later) on the basis of absolute localizations, simply
5 driven by the motor scheme.

6 The first and most vivid property of the felt-body is that of being
7 a “system concentrically closed around an absolute center, within a
8 space and time whose directions are absolute” (Plessner, 1975, 294).
9 That is, it is based on an absolute spatiality,²³ which is surfaceless and
10 not three-dimensional. The reference to a “here” that’s both physical
11 and metaphorical in fact invariably hints to a “point-zero” of the phys-
12 ical *and* the lived-body, which entails a direction that’s neither per-
13 ceivable in third-person, nor linkable to the one which leads us to the
14 objects in the world, on pain of falling back to the pathological.²⁴ Such
15 a decentralization is surely necessary for the development of rational-
16 ity as much as the integration of the pathic with the gnostic is—with
17 a simile, it is like the integration of the landscape with geography.²⁵ If
18 the purpose of this decentralization is to truly identify the subject of
19 this or that bodily movement, as well as to know “what it feels like” to
20 be such a subject, it has to constantly refer to the centric perspective,
21 to an absolute spatiality that’s irreducible to both the allocentric and
22 the egocentric space. Rather, this spatiality is in fact similar to a
23 “spatiality of situation” that’s difficult to observe (Merleau-Ponty,
24 2005, 115).

25 In correspondence to the absolute spatiality of the whole felt-body,
26 we can find a similar absolute spatiality in the indivisibly extended felt-
27 bodily motions, as well as their correlated locations (which are first
28 felt-bodily, rather than physical) coexisting with no contradiction
29 whatsoever with the physical-bodily locations in which we can perceive
30 them. Feeling warm (for personal reasons) does not contradict the mea-
31 surable external cold: this is because warmth, with its absolute spatial-
32 ity, is perceived within the multiple felt-bodily isles.²⁶ These are
33 voluminous, yet surfaceless quasi-things that we perceive as the sources
34 of our impulses, and which we cannot identify with the many and artic-
35 ulate discrete parts examined within the naturalistic analysis—after all,
36 it is so fine-grained that it would be content only with subatomic
37 particles.

38 As they incarnate an existential and symbolic salience, which in part
39 is also culturally and historically variable, such isles are relatively stable
40 sometimes (oral cavity, anal zone, chest, back, belly, genitals, soles, etc.),

1 while at other times they can come forward or dissolve on the basis of
 2 excitement (itch, palpitation, burst of heat, ache, etc.), or even they can
 3 be subsumed in general movements (vigor, prostration, pleasure,
 4 uneasiness). On the one hand, at the practical level the felt-bodily isles
 5 are concealed by the permanent integration carried out by the
 6 perceptive-sensorial bodily scheme, and, at the theoretical one, by the
 7 dominant dualistic-psycho-physical paradigm. On the other hand, they
 8 are perfectly revealed within the *strictly* phenomenal experience, as Kant
 9 himself also acknowledged,²⁷ or within that experiment (be it mental or
 10 not) by which we verify what we feel of our own selves and of our sur-
 11 roundings, while leaving the five senses aside.²⁸ It is precisely in this
 12 context that, for instance, our chest, inasmuch as it is the felt-bodily isle
 13 dedicated to the perception of the emotional involvement, becomes
 14 other than the organs thereby located (*a fortiori* from the cells, the genes,
 15 the chromosomes, the atoms, etc.). Or, again, it is in such a context that
 16 our head, which we in fact perceive as busy (actualized) when we think
 17 in a particularly intense manner, becomes other than the brain anatomi-
 18 cally understood. And finally, when we say that we feel butterflies in it
 19 when we are in love, the stomach becomes other than the stomach as an
 20 organ. And so on, and so forth.

21 The difficult representability of the lived-body also pervades—even
 22 more so—the quasi-thingly felt-bodily isles. It is probably true that a
 23 relatively unitary perception of the entire felt-body is possible thanks to
 24 some unstable equilibrium between—in Henry Head’s neurophysio-
 25 logical terms, loosely used by Schmitz—epicritic sensibility (well-
 26 defined and fine-grained) and protopathic sensibility (diffuse and
 27 coarse-grained): otherwise said, between the maximal contraction
 28 *numbing* the felt-bodily isles, and the maximal expansion, which instead
 29 *melts* them by integral dilution. By contrast, as soon as it is felt within
 30 its own isles, the felt-body appears as a “vast, profusely articulate land-
 31 scape, or even [as] as a vast continent” (Schmitz, 1965, 157). It is a
 32 landscape which exceeds the physical-cutaneous boundaries so much—
 33 as in the case of the phantom limb or the stick of the visually impaired
 34 as sensible-experiential extremities—that it cannot be topographically
 35 defined, requiring a surrealist representation.²⁹ Or, more simply, it
 36 requires a fine-grained phenomenological perception—an autoscopia
 37 that’s naïve precisely because it lacks those anatomical and syntactic-
 38 ontological biases.³⁰ On such basis we are not even entitled to affirm: “I
 39 feel my hand,” because “what is felt, namely the hand, is but the feeling
 40 itself. And such a feeling is not even that of an ‘I’ owning the hand like

1 an object; rather it is nothing but the conscious being-the-hand. Such a
2 consciousness is not habitual, though: it has to be practiced” (Böhme,
3 2003, 120).

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Beyond the Body Schema

8 In psychology, everyone seems satisfied with the theoretical discourse
9 revolving around the body schema. But the felt-body, spatially absolute
10 and composed of extra-anatomical isles—as a quasi-thingly entity—
11 naturally transcends the body schema, that is, “the three-dimensional
12 image everybody has about himself [and that], although it has come
13 through the senses, it is not a mere perception. There are mental pictures
14 and representations involved in it, but it is not mere representation”
15 (Schilder, 1999, 11).³¹ It is perceived as natural, as it capitalizes experi-
16 ences, attitudes and beliefs whose object is the body; and, again, it
17 appears this way because it consolidates at the social level particularly
18 through the others’ objectivizing glance,³² but also because it alleviates
19 the modern epistemic anguish inasmuch as it allows us to locate the
20 feeling within some delimited anatomical substrate. However, in the
21 context that interests me, the body schema appears to be a piece of scrap
22 metal. Surely we are reluctant to leave it behind, as it allows us to “cope
23 with” (Schmitz, 1965, 32) the situations we face, but we have to acknowl-
24 edge that it provides us with only some “cultural” guarantee of the uni-
25 tary livability of the physical body. Of course its context-independent
26 abstractness cannot be reduced to the associationist approach, which
27 does not put forward any rule for the associations; nor can it be reduced
28 to the holistic-Gestalt one, which does not explain how to reach that
29 totality; nor, again, can it be reduced to the dynamic one, whose prag-
30 matic concretism wouldn’t even explain the possibility of the “as if.”³³
31 But this does not mean that the body schema has that fundamental
32 immediacy of the felt-bodily and emotional feeling, whose disintegra-
33 tion it is an outcome of. Though preferable to the single, reciprocally
34 unrelated mechanisms brought about by means of experimental arti-
35 fices, it’s still largely insufficient.

36 Despite the silent, Gestaltically background presence of the felt-
37 bodily feeling, the body schema is subject to huge geographical, historical,
38 and even individual variations. The body hasn’t always been
39 represented as a unity, *pace* Lacan’s mirror stage,³⁴ nor have all of its
40 parts been attributed with the same meaning (think of the heart and the

1 head, for instance): they have been symbolized in many different ways,
 2 based on the gender, on the way to use them (some of them were much
 3 more disciplined in more “military” times), and, last but not least, on the
 4 way we think they are looked at by others.³⁵ However, it is the histori-
 5 cal-cultural permeability of the body schema and its linking function
 6 between the “for-me” and the “for-others” (following Merleau-Ponty)
 7 that reveals its non-fundamental nature, besides the above-mentioned
 8 characteristics as the sensory-organic mediation and the (only relative)
 9 localization. One might insist on its not only visual, but also motoric
 10 representability, or on its representability as a commitment within the
 11 world (see Sartre and Merleau-Ponty); however, this schema presup-
 12 poses a quasi-thingly and felt-bodily feeling which is prior and more
 13 fundamental.

14 As it is composed of successive representations gained through
 15 sight and touch, the body schema represents, say, *the* foot as a unitary
 16 configuration (also semantic) that’s durably localizable. On the other
 17 hand, the felt-bodily feeling is able to perceive in it—be it in normal
 18 conditions (falling asleep, waking up, sunbathing), pathological condi-
 19 tions (intoxications, phantom limbs,³⁶ etc.) or artificial ones (autogenic
 20 training, massages, caresses, unction)³⁷—a peculiar voluminosity, inter-
 21 mittent and vaguely delimited isles, such as the ankle, the malleolus, the
 22 sole, etc. Were it a schema of the felt-body,³⁸ the body schema would
 23 nevertheless be too late and, besides, it wouldn’t result as explanatory as
 24 regards the perception (already present in newborns) of the unity and
 25 insular structure of the felt-body, also because it is tied to two non-
 26 fundamental forms of spatiality: the local (perceptive body schema) and
 27 the directional (motor body schema) ones.³⁹

28 The “non-observational proprioceptive and kinaesthetic awareness,”
 29 too generously attributed to the body schema, together with the
 30 intrabodily absoluteness for which “one cannot put one’s hands in front
 31 of one’s body since they are part of the body and cannot be put in front of
 32 themselves” (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, 143–144), should therefore be
 33 integrated with the pathic *qualia* provided by the felt-body. Such *qualia*,
 34 at the level of bodily capabilities—which aren’t silent only when they *no*
 35 *longer work*—are a bit like “the darkness needed in the theatre to show up
 36 the performance” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 115). For instance, could a
 37 woman who feels “her body desired and looked at by imperceptible signs,
 38 and without even herself looking at those who look at her” (Merleau-
 39 Ponty, 1968, 245) sense this indiscreet glance, as it points to those ana-
 40 tomical parts which correspond to her own body schema? Or, rather,

1 could she sense it as it points to those felt-bodily isles which, though felt
 2 within the movement, she cannot represent any more than a musician
 3 could represent the knowledge embodied in his or her own hands?
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6 All Out!

7
 8 Even though it's now hard to conceive or—even more—to represent,
 9 the felt-body was probably the norm in the past. In ancient Greece,
 10 before the “discovery” of the spirit or mind (citing Bruno Snell), for
 11 which the *Körper* was something “dead” and thus alien to the cosmos,
 12 the body was referred to only in the plural form, indicating different
 13 limbs or, using my terminology, the various felt-bodily isles.⁴⁰ The psy-
 14 cho-somatic and therefore dualistic turn (soul/spirit vs. body) can be
 15 located in the *Odyssey*, settled down in the fifth century BC, thanks to
 16 Plato and the Stoics, and still lives on. As I have previously mentioned,
 17 it has been pedagogically functional so as to assure the human rational
 18 domination of both the internal and the external world, while down-
 19 playing the role of the involuntary, vital experience and of the bodily-
 20 emotional involvement. As soon as feelings got secluded within a
 21 fictional internal container (the psyche) and conveniently set against a
 22 purely material corporeity, there was no more space for (not only emo-
 23 tional) *qualia* of the external world and for a dynamic felt-bodily dimen-
 24 sion of experience. This dimension, which can be easily revealed in
 25 everyone's life, was compensatively projected onto certain dimensions
 26 (nature, God, etc.) that are relatively alien to humankind in itself.⁴¹ The
 27 result was the correlated felt obligation to associate every experience no
 28 longer with a felt-bodily isle, but rather—with little success—with a
 29 quantifiable organic-anatomical object medium.

30 Let me be clear on this: today it makes no sense to speak of the
 31 body, pretending to be an ancient Greek, for whom the name “Descartes”
 32 means nothing at all.⁴² However, we can still start a campaign of depsy-
 33 chologization and somatic diversification, which nowadays is counter-
 34 intuitive and thus genuinely *kulturkritisch*, as we abandon the suggestive,
 35 yet exaggeratingly nihilist Frankfurtian view for which the transforma-
 36 tion of the physical body into felt-body (which is by the way impossi-
 37 ble⁴³) is but the fascist exaltation of the somatic functionality.⁴⁴ Against
 38 this, it seems worthwhile to mention another “critical” consideration, for
 39 which those who don't reduce a walk to mere movement or the meal to
 40 mere calories—hence reducing the body to the dimension of

1 measurement—are the ones who haven't lost their hope yet. In short, we
 2 simply need to rethink in terms of felt-body, following the example of
 3 what is accessible without any reflexive self-attributing mediation, most
 4 of what we exile into the physical-anatomical and the psychical dimen-
 5 sions.⁴⁵ This way we'll be able to bring back to light, also in scientific
 6 terms, the vast sphere of naïve experience that was segregated first
 7 within the soul (from a religious point of view) and then (from a psy-
 8 chological point of view) within the psyche. And today, it's once again
 9 secluded (from a neuroscientific point of view) within the brain, as it's
 10 subject to hyper-technological manipulations, which are legitimated by
 11 likewise hyper-technological perceptions (CAT, NMR, etc.).⁴⁶ Besides,
 12 such a rediscovery has an antisolipsistic value, since the emotional
 13 involvement fully includes the felt-bodily communication—namely,
 14 that process which embodies⁴⁷ not just our tools,⁴⁸ but also all those
 15 things whose continuity—which we experience in the pericorporeal
 16 space—with the peculiar voluminosity of our felt-body we sense: the car
 17 we drive, the bystander we miraculously avoid on the sidewalk, or, as in
 18 the two cases I thematize further on (cf. infra chap. 6 and 7), the others'
 19 glance and luminous phenomena.

20 21 22 **But the Felt-Body Is Also a Task** 23

24 What we feel by knowing, and what we know by feeling, of the felt-
 25 body, including the incorporation of those habitual structures which are
 26 irreducible to the mere sum of cognitive acts and discrete actions, is
 27 always also a form of expression. However, by saying this I am not dual-
 28 istically referring to bringing out (maybe even just by means of signs) an
 29 already-given interiority that we're trying to access from the outside, but
 30 rather to (literally) an embodied sense that translates into an event.⁴⁹
 31 But certainly such an expression—understood in the sense of a rigor-
 32 ously non-introspective, non-dualistic phenomenology—invokes an
 33 existential ethics that sees the felt-body as a “task,” rather than as a mere
 34 *datum*. That is, an ethics that, depending on how we live it and even in
 35 unpleasant moments, reveals the kind of people we are⁵⁰—an ethics that
 36 might suggest not just some conceptual criticism, but above all some
 37 new life habits, thus also encouraging change.⁵¹

38 As we can see, the neophenomenological approach goes hand in
 39 hand—as it has to, without any illusory purism—with a “pragmatic”
 40 philosophy. The purpose is that of integrating the pathic sphere in an

1 antireductionist way, atmospheric feelings included, without seeing it
 2 solely as a more plastic development of the fixed animal instinctual
 3 system, or as a mimetic resource supported by mirror neurons (which
 4 are the grotesque equivalent of handymen nowadays).

5 From this point of view, the solely theoretical problem of represen-
 6 tation definitely sounds reductive compared to the ethical-aesthetical
 7 one of how to live our bodily-emotional involvement with what hap-
 8 pens, starting from “what it feels like” as we live it. As “the me or the
 9 to-me, by means of which I articulate my involvement with the felt-
 10 bodily happening, it is even prior to and more fundamental than the
 11 notorious ‘I’ of the person” (Böhme, 2008, 156), we learn who we are⁵²
 12 much more from our passing pathic feeling (ethical-aesthetical), from
 13 the way we can “expose” ourselves and be correctly heterodetermined—
 14 after all, “felt-body” properly means being able to get scared!⁵³—rather
 15 than from our actions. The latter have been certainly pathologically
 16 overestimated in Modernity, along with the autonomy of the subject.

17 Our initial question on which body and, as we have seen, which
 18 quasi-thingly entity is the specific sounding board of external quasi-
 19 things thus appears to be rather intricate. Referring to the body as the
 20 “great reason” (Nietzsche), it now suggests a critique toward a civiliza-
 21 tion whose grounding is the removal of the felt-bodily presence in favor
 22 of the physical presence⁵⁴ together with the privilege of what can be
 23 translated into a propositional content. Also, it suggests the valorization
 24 of the indispensable naïve knowledge we often find summed up in
 25 instructions (“try doing more or less like this!”), which are semantically
 26 and functionally rich as much as they are informatively vague—in fact,
 27 they cannot be understood (for now?) even by the most perfect artificial
 28 intelligence. Furthermore, let us not forget about the ambitious project,
 29 though only sketched and a bit too performative and optimistic, of a
 30 (practical and theoretical) somaesthetics, understood as “the critical,
 31 meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of
 32 sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning”
 33 (Shusterman, 1999, 302).⁵⁵

34 Whatever the “alphabet” of the felt-bodiliness we might use⁵⁶ to
 35 explain its peculiar “economy,” the body seems to express a disposition-
 36 ality, thanks to which subjectivity can act fluently and learn of its own
 37 self without any third-person self-attribution. In conclusion, all of this
 38 is far from being extraordinary or mystic: it is something that, after all
 39 and even though it’s not objectively knowable, we’ve always known. To
 40 be fully felt-bodily aware of it, the right “exercise” is often sufficient.⁵⁷



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FOUR

Quasi-Things Are Proofs of Existence: Pain as the Genesis of the Subject¹

Atmospheric Pain

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When you get an itch, try to scratch yourself until the nail penetrates the skin: suddenly the initial pleasure will turn into pain; that is, it is something so omnipresent that it comes about whenever sensation reaches a certain threshold,² being perceived in our indeterminate felt-bodily isles (small pangs, intense itching, heat and chills, etc.) every time the dominant feelings are put aside. Whatever the specific characterization one chooses for it, pain is a kind of *basso continuo* of existence: a melody full of changes (Valery) relentlessly claiming its rights over life, provokingly indifferent to any value or merit.³ When it becomes chronic (hence possibly the millenary Greek-Christian hostility towards the body), it convinces whoever suffers from it—that is, statistically speaking, almost half of the population—that everyone else doesn't.⁴

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Even though it is likely that one should suffer from only one type of pain at a time, its definition implies rather “a syndrome synthesizing various signs and symptoms” (Wall, 1999, 58) partially unified by language; in any case, it's a cultural and symbolic experience and not only a sensorial one,⁵ so it cannot be reduced to the banal health/illness dualism. In my view, its indeterminate and very mixed dimension, hard to formalize and even to express in words, renders pain a particularly

1 interesting example of a quasi-thing. In fact, it is neither a thing in the
 2 proper sense nor the property of something; it cannot be objectified⁶ nor
 3 detached from the person suffering, as it is impossible to imagine “a pain
 4 that doesn’t hurt somebody” (Grüny, 2004, 65). Sometimes it even turns
 5 into an atmospheric force that, pervading our (lived) pericorporeal space
 6 and creating a gloomy and pathological climate in it, has a dual action:
 7 on the one hand it calls for a kind of “helpless activity” (precisely
 8 reflected by a sense of oppression or wheezing in the chest);⁷ on the
 9 other hand it promotes attention, even of a social kind, for the sufferer.
 10 Besides, the sufferer is powerfully led by pain to emotionally pay atten-
 11 tion to certain things and qualities of his or her environment.

12 It is surely true that physiological pain, problematizing our relation-
 13 ship with both the world and ourselves inevitably points to the symbolic
 14 if not even the sacred as *memento mori*, revealing the limits of human-
 15 kind.⁸ However, what interests me here is rather a phenomenology of
 16 pain, understood as an experience that can’t be reduced to specific neu-
 17robiological activities (which can’t be phenomenally experienced) or
 18 intentional ones (indeed, what would be the *noema* corresponding to the
 19 *noesis* of pain?). The experience of pain here analyzed is peculiar to the
 20 felt-bodily dimension that, temporarily circumscribing the way one
 21 feels—how does this or that pain *feel* for me (what does it mean⁹
 22 for me)?—appears unrelated to the doctor’s rational and strictly quanti-
 23 tative approach, without deserving to be taken as an obscurantist regres-
 24 sion (as posited by an irreversible pessimist such as Adorno).

25 26 27 What Is It For? 28

29 The first thing to note is that, testifying the dominance of feeling (the
 30 pathic) over knowledge (the gnostic), and involving not only the failure
 31 of normal functions but an overall restructuring of existence—following
 32 which contraction and solitude replace expansion and the relative self-
 33 oblivion implied by external perception¹⁰—pain is nothing short of the
 34 antithesis of seeing and hearing. I cannot say I have it, as I could say of
 35 a thing: in fact, more properly, it is not “in” the body, but that “in which”
 36 the body finds itself. We are exposed to it, it “happens” to us, it assault
 37 us, it is “inflicted” upon us, it “hits” us, it “comes” unexpectedly who
 38 knows when, just like any other quasi-thing; and we apparently can’t
 39 foster it nor can we avoid it, just like any other involuntary vital
 40 experience.

1 However, here the pathic is always also gnostic: in fact, while
2 colonizing our attention, pain makes us aware for the first time of our
3 felt-bodily isles and, paradoxically, also of the outside world, despite
4 implying a retraction from it. Take being slapped, as an example. On the
5 one hand it proves the existence of the outside world more than simple
6 pressure and *inertia* (see Dilthey and Maine De Biran), to the extent
7 that it interrupts the body's usual functioning and generates (painful)
8 places that were imperceptible before and in fact unexpected in the body
9 schema; on the other hand, it also sheds light on the whole felt-bodily
10 dimension and its problematic belonging to the subject.¹¹ The situation
11 appears instructively contradictory: any felt-bodily area, be it outside or
12 inside (this is the emblematic case of the transplanted heart, according
13 to the well-known example offered by Jean Luc Nancy) becomes really
14 mine only when it is painful, and yet that very pain shows its contingent
15 belonging to the sufferer.

16 These neophenomenological considerations obviously prescind from
17 the natural philo- and ontogenetic tendency to functionalize pain—that
18 is, to give a meaning at all costs to what *should not be*. In any case, we can
19 see the inconclusiveness of the arguments for which pain is a pathologi-
20 cal indicator and possibly a general warning sign of the body, or even the
21 punishment for inappropriate acts compensating for environmental risks
22 for humankind and thus acting as a warning for the future.¹² In fact,
23 there are too many exceptions to this semiotic teleologization of pain,
24 which is convincing only with regards to circumscribed lesions and
25 wrong motions, but certainly is not as a comprehensive explanation. This
26 is due to a number of reasons: the late appearance of the most serious
27 diseases (especially cancer), the often “differed” nature of pain (a pain in
28 your ear can actually result from an inflamed molar!), its coinciding with
29 the pathology itself (think of trigeminal neuralgia), as well as its occa-
30 sional hindering therapeutic objectivation. In short, stating that “every
31 animal mainly learns through unpleasant experiences” (Buytendijk, 1961,
32 88) or, in an evolutionary perspective, that pain is a warning sign aimed
33 at preserving the species works as a thesis only when it comes to moder-
34 ate pain; otherwise it has rather grotesque implications—and, in any
35 case, it doesn't explain the paralyzing and organically catastrophic effect
36 of intense pain, or of pain understood as a quasi-thing devoid of teleo-
37 logical cautions.¹³ Over the question of the meaning of pain—which is
38 typical of any metaphysics and relatively explicit theodicy, implying the
39 equivalence between pain and guilt—I shall here prefer the phenomeno-
40 logical question regarding the specificity of the experience of pain.

Incommunicability?

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3 Let's start from the supposed (and overestimated) incommunicability of
4 pain: while obviously being "not exactly replicable" (Wittgenstein) and
5 therefore only certifiable through introspection, pain has its own typi-
6 cality—otherwise it wouldn't be even recognized by the subject feeling
7 it. Also, pain is communicative in the sense that—evidently echoing
8 something universally human and acquiring stable social masks¹⁴—its
9 description is so easily understood that it generates an imaginary pain
10 even in the simple spectator.¹⁵ Due to its "porosité de soi à l'autre"
11 (Le Breton, 1995, 189), thanks to which we often empathically feel the
12 other's symptoms, the experience of pain seems to be no more incom-
13 municable than any other first-hand experience.

14 So we do talk about it. And sometimes the topological, qualitative,
15 and agentive description of pain, while proceeding by approximations
16 and exclusions up to reaching full evidence with the last adjective of the
17 list—"yes, that's exactly how I'm feeling!"¹⁶ is a legitimate verbalization
18 also endowed with great diagnostic and prognostic value. Of course,
19 whenever we are describing pain, we are powerfully affected by the
20 interlocutor's status (doctors, friends, or relatives) as well as by meta-
21 phors that are both efficacious and devoid of any reference to actual
22 experiences (who really knows what it feels like, say, to be stabbed or
23 bitten by a dog?).¹⁷ Most of all, we are forced to resort to an agentive
24 language that, while being partly erroneous, not only favors the exter-
25 nalization and therefore the communicability of pain,¹⁸ but also turns
26 out to be particularly enlightening about the nature of a quasi-thing. In
27 fact, the aggressive entity that we distinguish from the patient partly
28 hides the dynamic of the experience of pain,¹⁹ and yet partly brings to
29 the fore the pathic and unintentional character²⁰ of our felt-bodily com-
30 munication with quasi-things.

31 However, verbalizing pain does not mean only communicating it.
32 Temporarily bracketing Job's question regarding the lack of meaning of
33 the "ontological assault" (Garro, 1992, 103)—whose only outcome
34 seems to be to worsen pain by making any "metaphysical heedlessness"
35 illegitimate (Buytendijk, 1961, 22, 27)—verbalizing pain also means
36 subjecting it to a progressive hermeneutics. In fact, as soon as someone
37 takes our pain seriously, "believing" and pitying us, we feel comforted.
38 The same happens with the simple naming of pain, which partly miti-
39 gates the anxiety of non-meaning, partly responsible for the intolerabil-
40 ity of pain itself: the name that my pain "deserves," were it even a

1 neologism coined *ad hoc*, is something that, in fact, orders and controls
 2 an otherwise absurd experience, which leaves us no option other than
 3 screaming. It eliminates the guilt that inevitably weighs on undiagnosed
 4 pain, all too superficially classified by medical science as only “psycho-
 5 logical” pain (that is, imagined)—at best taken to be a self-complacent
 6 exaggeration aimed at demanding attention, and at worst regarded as a
 7 socially (and financially) harmful simulation. However, once named,
 8 pain may be subject to the expert interpretations of the shaman, the
 9 doctor, but also the psychologist, who is maybe interested in discovering
 10 that what is coded as pain is actually some other meaning of life.²¹
 11 Unless, as an event without a cause, it is an exception threatening the
 12 fabric of habit necessary to the lifeworld (*à la* Husserl), our pain turns
 13 into the “particular case of some pathology” (Gadamer, 1996, 120):
 14 hence the full social legitimacy of suffering. However, and this is what
 15 interests us here, it also turns into the qualified aggression of an external
 16 agent that is even more active than things proper.

19 For a (Good) Regression

21 Yet, at first glance, the quasi-thingly nature of pain seems to be contra-
 22 dicted by its more popular scientific interpretation. According to the
 23 latter, pain is not so much a state or the reaction to a stimulus but rather
 24 the very motion by which we try to escape or stop pain (a motion that
 25 is painful inasmuch as it is vain).²² In other words, pain would be the
 26 pathic, contractive consequence of an “escape” that, non-coincidentally,
 27 finds great relief in any practice of relaxation that manages to make the
 28 initial contraction fluid again. Be it more or less realized, in any case
 29 pain is a dual motion in which—contrary to what happens in pleasure,
 30 hence the well-known convertibility of the one into the other—the cen-
 31 tripetal prevails over the centrifugal. Differently put, pain is “a conflict
 32 between restriction and expansion internal to the felt-body, which takes
 33 the shape of a withheld push to move away. Extending itself, this push
 34 grows as opposed to an obstacle that, stopping it with the greatest
 35 strength, rejects it” (Schmitz, 1989, 157). What makes it clear that pain
 36 is an impulse to flee, inhibited and then pushed back into narrowness,²³
 37 is the fact that what is therapeutic is not to obey to it (to “bite the bullet”
 38 and “man up” possibly to the point of heroic algophilia²⁴ in the sign of
 39 contraction, with clenched fists, lips, and teeth), nor to escape it by
 40 means of distraction, given that pain completely takes over one’s mind.

1 What is therapeutic, rather, is the externalization of it,²⁵ whether it
 2 consists in following the impulse to flee, with (possibly culturally coded)
 3 cries and lamentations or in disabling the contraction through stillness,
 4 as in relaxation, hypnosis, autogenous training, etc.

5 Therefore pain, proper of and foreign to us at the same time, is
 6 somewhat a misunderstanding. In fact, both pain and the sufferer “tend
 7 to move in the same direction; that is, they both tend to flee, but they do
 8 so in mutual opposition so that the expansive impulse encounters a very
 9 powerful obstacle. It’s as if two escapees stumbled into each other”
 10 (Schmitz, 2003, 225). But the agentive interpretation, ontologizing a
 11 state (“it hurts”) into an opponent (“it hurts me”) that must be
 12 “defeated”²⁶ makes it so that we phenomenologically experience pain as
 13 a quasi-thing. This is also due to the already mentioned bipolarity of
 14 quasi-things: in the case of pain, the physical cause is surreptitiously and
 15 conceptually—that is, non-phenomenologically—added (say, by the
 16 doctor) to the action/effect relation, thus also underestimating all kinds
 17 of pain blatantly caused by non-physical causes.

18 Thus, the fact that pain is not a homogenous state but a dynamic
 19 conflict does not exclude at all that it is felt (and long before the seven-
 20 teenth-century establishment of the ontological and no longer humor-
 21 alist conception of diseases) as an external and aggressive
 22 quasi-thing—besides, a quasi-thing that is so indispensable that it
 23 unexpectedly rises to the role of legitimating self-awareness. Indeed,
 24 any felt-bodily affective involvement individualizes “my” presence,
 25 reaching its peak especially with felt-bodily narrowness in which anxi-
 26 ety, and even more so pain, restrict my previous exposition in the world,
 27 nailing me to a felt-bodily localization that is as oppressive as the phys-
 28 ical-bodily one. Pain forces me to regress to a “primal place” (Schmitz,
 29 1964, 196) and an absolute presence that is both spatial and temporal,²⁷
 30 obviously inaccessible to stoic heroism. Ultimately, the presentification
 31 induced by pain as authentic *principium individuationis* (from the simple
 32 pinch on up) and, therefore, as a guarantee of experience otherwise prey
 33 to confusion and subject to doubt—and, in the case of happiness, anni-
 34 hilating and largely incommunicable²⁸—is something extremely pene-
 35 trating, because it is the indirect result of a failed escape from presence.

36 Therefore the quasi-thingly presence (of pain) contributes to the
 37 genesis of the subject. This is all the more so if it is true that “the consti-
 38 tution of the self is not realized ontogenetically in the mirror stage or in
 39 the relations of recognition”—which are precarious moments—” but
 40 rather in the primary negative experiences of pain and disease, rejection

1 and prohibition. It is from the narrowness of a life folded onto itself that
 2 the self emerges” (Böhme, 2008, 142). As *experimentum crucis*, through
 3 which an adult “can always repeat the birth of his or her self” (ibid.) or
 4 consciousness,²⁹ pain—certainly not sharp pain, entirely seizing and
 5 destroying the person—finds here a felt-bodily positivization that is
 6 obviously neither doloristic nor masochistic. As an “experience of
 7 affected self-givenness, that is, as the certainty that it concerns me,” pain
 8 can definitely be considered, with Adorno, “memory of the nature of the
 9 subject” (Böhme, 2003, 108): a pathic-affective experience that is
 10 always-mine and that only later, ontologized and externalized in the
 11 dimension of the third person, turns into having pain.

12 If health is a form of self-forgetfulness and organic silence that
 13 medicine cannot produce but only help nature restore,³⁰ being some-
 14 thing that cannot be extrinsically certified,³¹ pain unexpectedly turns
 15 out to be even the outcome of chance. This certainly holds not for the
 16 autonomous person, psychotically armored against any external threat
 17 to the point of ethical heroism, but for the “sovereign” person, who is
 18 superior because “able” to make a task of her felt-body, not always and
 19 obsessively resisting pain (up to the loss of dignity), but training to wel-
 20 come pain, thereby often making it more tolerable. This is not, of course,
 21 about accepting any pain or rejecting analgesic therapies, which are still
 22 possible within precise limits and have palliative value,³² but about
 23 learning how to let something happen to us. Not necessarily bound to
 24 diversionary techniques,³³ the sovereign person, knowing that the pain
 25 gets worse just when she opposes it, “flattens out, does not [. . .] want
 26 anything and [...] accepts everything that happens” (Böhme/Akashe-
 27 Böhme, 2005, 68). Thus it is by the virtue of this “good” everyday regres-
 28 sion from the “I” to the “to me” (sleep, sex, light pain, etc.) of primitive
 29 presence (which, in its subjective certification, cannot be reduced to a
 30 merely nostalgic-archaeological function or to a vegetative limit point),
 31 that, provided we do not consider any immediacy an occult mediation,
 32 we learn not to obsessively resist the experience of pain and, simultane-
 33 ously, to make an “ought” of the “nature-that-we-are.”³⁴

34 Some have said that, tragically showing our vulnerability, pain certifies
 35 our felt-bodily existence in the very moment in which it risks devastat-
 36 ating and almost annihilating it. This position is obviously opposed
 37 by the views for which pain is rather an alienation of the body from
 38 the I, or a scission of being and bodily zones between an I and an Es:³⁵
 39 in these cases, there is actually an *escamotage*, thanks to which the indi-
 40 viduation (or production: self-harm) of an epicritic pain attempts to

1 hide the evidently unmanageable, protopathic pain, and thereby
 2 re-establishing some relation to the world.³⁶ On the other hand, for
 3 those who think that the subject “becomes” the pain he feels³⁷—to the
 4 point of being unable to project himself other than in pain and feeling
 5 out of sync compared to the others’ and the world’s time frame³⁸—far
 6 from being an individuation of the subject, pain is rather the collapse of
 7 his identity. Taking the future away from the sufferer—forcing her to be
 8 pathologically sensorially hypervigilant towards the next “attack” and to
 9 idealize a deceptively suffering-free past—pain would be so senseless
 10 that it “prevents any appeal to thought, will, or feeling” (Buytendijk,
 11 1961, 131). In short, it would inhibit the expression of the suffering
 12 subject, often socially stigmatized, so as to almost induce alexithymia.

13 However, in the case of pain (normal pain, that is) as a quasi-thing,
 14 the situation is different. After all, even isolation, the relative loss of the
 15 power to expand in the world,³⁹ is but a variation of the ordinary rela-
 16 tionship with the world. As for the predictable objection that the gen-
 17 esis of the subject is proven not so much by pain but rather by happiness,
 18 the answer is easy: individuation could make no use of a state such as
 19 happiness, which annihilates every hetero-relation, erases differences,
 20 and gives everything the same tone. Differently put, individuation needs
 21 failure,⁴⁰ a problematicity arising exclusively in the presence of “the divi-
 22 sion into subject and object, the experience of an opposite *something*,”
 23 whereas “to *dwell* in happiness, to experience happiness *within* our-
 24 selves, is foreign to everything which has a problematic character”
 25 (Buytendijk, 1961, 22).⁴¹ In my terms, what certifies the subject—of
 26 course, a *subject-to* rather than a *subject-of*—is especially the encounter
 27 with quasi-things and, most of all, with pain.

28 It is well known that “the new state of health is not the same as the
 29 old one” (Goldstein, 1995, 310), as recovery is never a simple going back
 30 to the prior state: it entails experiential “scars” (both on the body and in
 31 memory). Yet the conservative paternalism that stigmatizes today’s
 32 algophobia, by treating it as a reductionist medicalization of life and a
 33 desymbolization that makes pain all the more intolerable and chronic
 34 the more it considers it (deceptively or not) curable,⁴² certainly doesn’t
 35 seem highly desirable. Its reasons, which can be summed up in the cri-
 36 tique of the dogmatically Enlightenment-like trend to degrade pain to
 37 intolerable atavism,⁴³ must never be exaggerated.⁴⁴ It is surely ethically
 38 suspicious to deceive the patient about the total success of algology, thus
 39 falling from algodicy into a no less metaphysical algophobia, for which
 40 all pain would be anachronistic—as long as the pain is not too intense

1 or long-lasting, and as long as the waiver to analgesics and anaesthesia
 2 is a free choice and not a discriminatory condition. However, it is just as
 3 suspicious, if not more so, to patronize the sufferer by talking about the
 4 (supposed) meaning of pain in the universe,⁴⁵ perhaps even considering
 5 him to be in a privileged position.

6 The will to soothe pain, thus adapting to progress (with a small *p*, of
 7 course), does not mean necessarily to join a mass hedonism that, being
 8 the true reverse of scientific utopianism, considers pain to be just a
 9 nuisance without any experiential value. On the contrary, what we are
 10 also stems from how seriously and with what “competence” we welcome
 11 the quasi-thinghood of pain,⁴⁶ thus claiming a right to chance (also of
 12 suffering). To be clear: I do not intend to generalize the need of trauma-
 13 tism inherent in rites of passage or the nihilistic-destinal view that pain,
 14 being a fixed tribute for humans, is directly proportional to the artifices
 15 with which one tries to limit it.⁴⁷ What I wish to do is simply restate
 16 that, despite being apparently threatening for the subject—as a limit-
 17 situation (Jaspers), presentifying *par excellence* and particularly revealing
 18 of emotional and felt-bodily involvement—pain actually guarantees the
 19 subject’s genesis and awareness. Accustoming us to (well) regressing up
 20 to absolute presence and showing us situations over which we have no
 21 control, pain—as such neither punishment nor redemption—makes us
 22 better and often, with its socially unifying force, generates the commu-
 23 nity of destiny that at least partly soothes our condition.⁴⁸

24 In this sense, being mature “patients” does not mean only participat-
 25 ing in each therapeutic choice and being apprized of the feasible alter-
 26 natives, or accepting the disease, claiming not to “be disenfranchised by
 27 the authority of the experts” (Gadamer, 1996, 19). It also means valoriz-
 28 ing as much as possible every declination of the pathic existence, without
 29 always and immediately resorting to the doctor,⁴⁹ thus turning even the
 30 unpleasant sensations we happen to feel in (felt-bodily) self-care into an
 31 estesiological possibility *for* and *of* the individual. That’s why, even when
 32 doctors, as they say, have “found” nothing about our pain, we have always
 33 found something: that is—“*doleo ergo sum*”⁵⁰—our irreducible, pathic
 34 subjectivity, by virtue of a form of initiation hopefully less tragic and less
 35 theologically oriented than that of Job. In accepting the contingency of
 36 pain and its intrusive quasi-thingly nature, *pathos*, *aisthesis*, and *ethos*
 37 unexpectedly converge. Ultimately, pain ceases to claim the arrears, so to
 38 speak, only when we do not obsessively try to eradicate and minimize its
 39 uncanny presence. That is, in a nutshell, when we turn it from mere non-
 40 entity to an uncanny quasi-thingly partner.



FIVE

**Quasi-Things Affect Us
(Also Indirectly): Vicarious Shame¹**

Shame Has Not Disappeared—It Has Emigrated

Shame does not integrally invest the philosopher, nor—unlike what notoriously happens to Josef K—does it outlive him (enigmatically). And yet shame does torment the philosopher who, on pain of professional marginalization, is forced to ask questions so big that they cannot be answered.² However, it is mostly as a wellspring of self-consciousness that shame as a quasi-thingly feeling should be “a primary concern of philosophy” (Lipps, 1977, 31)—in the full awareness that many threads of research about it appear to lead to a deadlock, as sometimes it is taken to be totally independent of society and at other times it is identified with physiological data that, upon closer inspection, are far from specific.³

One thing is certain: shame is not at all an emotional fossil with respect to the immodest and subtly authoritarian injunction to abuse of the I and therefore to “know everything, show everything, see everything” (Tagliapietra, 2006, 12).⁴ Even in mass-society, especially if one breaks some rule, it is not rare to witness “blushing, fumbling, stuttering, an unusually low- or high-pitched voice, quavering speech or breaking of the voice, sweating, blanching, blinking, tremor of the hand, hesitating or vacillating movement, absent-mindedness, and malapropisms” (Goffman, 1967, 97). In other words, it still happens⁵ that a situation cruelly witnesses to the impotence and fragility of the subject, her

1 desires and her “image”—that is, the total dependence, in her, of the
 2 *logos* and the reason on the pathic⁶ and its (in this case) devastating felt-
 3 bodily effects. At most one could say, by excluding an absolute differ-
 4 ence between the civilizations of shame (social dependence) and those
 5 of guilt (individual independence), that our civilization is more intro-
 6 verted, and therefore less inclined to the staging of shame.

7 Nevertheless, in modern individualistic societies the feeling of
 8 shame can be “all-encompassing and permanent” (Heller, 1983, 55). In
 9 fact, having moved all expectations and every sense of belonging from
 10 religious and other kinds of institutions to the global being of the indi-
 11 vidual, they rely both on shame and on its narcissistic downside—that
 12 is, the “ultimate attempt to avoid shame” (Lewis, 1995, 2). In this sense,
 13 the widespread shameless exhibitionism,⁷ which should obviously be
 14 distinguished from intentional aesthetic provocations,⁸ might be noth-
 15 ing but a pathological contraphobic attitude aimed at compensating for
 16 the contempt felt and its consequences (depression, social phobia, col-
 17 lective complicity, paranoid psychosis)—namely, the indefinite atmo-
 18 sphere of shame that seems to haunt today’s individual.

19 Far from being extinct, shame—which in the past was used for the
 20 protection⁹ of personal unrepeatability¹⁰ as a non-aggressive and there-
 21 fore permanent atmosphere—has, if anything, “emigrated.”¹¹ That is, it
 22 has moved from the sphere of honor, sexuality (nakedness), and dignity
 23 (culture and coherence) to that of success and bodily fitness, which today
 24 is the only sphere truly related to identity. In the capitalist (or even just
 25 liberal) society, the contemporary individual feels fully responsible for
 26 her life,¹² is afraid that she might be a nobody or that she might have to
 27 ask for help, proving to be dependent on others due to the insufficiency
 28 of her performance.¹³ Therefore, she feels just as much shame as indi-
 29 viduals of other historical ages.¹⁴ In fact, the self-reflexive evidence of
 30 shame—provided by an emotional involvement expressed by a felt-
 31 bodily contraction and a dissociation,¹⁵ following from a stigmatization
 32 of the whole identity through a partial but obviously decisive event with
 33 regards to self-esteem¹⁶—makes it, in all likelihood, an innate reaction¹⁷
 34 to the loss of value.¹⁸ In other words, it is a necessary stage on the onto-
 35 genetic path of self-consciousness, which can be placed around the
 36 second year of life; also, precisely inasmuch as it induces a self-reflexiveness
 37 that is absent in “ecstatic” states such as rage and sadness, it prefigures
 38 the inner contradiction (real vs. ideal) of every moral conscience.

39 Evidently, since Enlightenment apology of rational internal
 40 resources and the spread of moral scepticism,¹⁹ there has been a

1 progressive decline in the West of the ideal eye (first divine and then
2 social). However, there surely hasn't been the elimination of a feeling
3 that, along with pain, whatever its objects, is an ontological proof of the
4 subject that is as effective as pain. While being indispensable both as a
5 (not only archaic) moral-social regulator²⁰ and as constitutive of the
6 emotional basis of law,²¹ for me shame is mainly a quasi-thingly feeling
7 that "dogs our footsteps" (Nussbaum, 2004, 173), attesting to human
8 incompleteness.²² Shame first defeats infantile egocentric narcissism,
9 thanks to the emersion of the self, and later appears—in adult life—in a
10 form that is both destructive (in the fierce stigmatization of others'
11 shortcomings, behind which normotic personalities hide) and construc-
12 tive, as when it motivates "a pursuit of valuable ideals" (ibid., 208).²³

13 In short, since there is no such thing as a virtuous person with noth-
14 ing to be ashamed of (*Eth. Nic.*, 1128 b, 31–33), shame is "burning" even
15 today. And not just among teenagers, who are notoriously the most sub-
16 ject to external recognition.²⁴ Nor is it just in cases of excessive proxim-
17 ity (emblematically in the lift), but also in the most common experiences.
18 It monitors and inhibits the exuberance of passion and, at the same
19 time, it necessarily presupposes the validity of the rule infringed. Right
20 here lies the seductive thrill of wilful infringement, but also—and it is
21 more interesting—the loss of self-esteem for the violation we are (even
22 falsely) charged with.²⁵ Furthermore, by implying self-consciousness
23 without the latter being able to mitigate its effects, since it arises only *ex*
24 *post* as happens with other feelings,²⁶ not only does shame certify the
25 identity of the person who feels it but—as a felt-bodily experience of
26 the restrictive and objectifying atmosphere radiated by the other's
27 "gaze"—it also always acts as a powerful argument against solipsism.
28 The strictly theoretical and abstract certainty of the *cogito*, forever
29 threatened by the hyperbolic doubt, is here overcome by a suffering
30 whose effect we know very well²⁷—which proves the existence of a sub-
31 jectivity that is neither purely positional nor neurotically purified of any
32 felt-bodily residue. Shame expresses the radical pathic "mine-ness" of
33 my thinking and acting.

34 Shame annihilates (one can "die" of shame) and frustrates the oth-
35 erwise natural expansive felt-bodily motion. That's why we are con-
36 tracted²⁸ and, being aware of blushing, we feel completely passive and
37 isolated from the world, paralyzed by a shaming centripetal motion²⁹
38 symbolized by the gaze of others or by being pointed at. Due to the nar-
39 rowness imposed on us by this emotion of self-defence³⁰—that is, due to
40 this return to oneself (Scheler), which indicates both the failure of an

1 initiative and the coercive force of the rule infringed—when we feel
 2 ashamed we also always become absolutely self-aware, albeit as the
 3 object of the painful judgment both of ourselves and of the others.³¹

6 Personal Shame as an Atmospheric Quasi-Thing

8 To clarify in what sense shame is an atmosphere and therefore a quasi-
 9 thing, I start from personal shame and later turn to vicarious shame.³²
 10 Now, according to common sense, *someone* is always ashamed of *some-*
 11 *thing* and *in the presence of someone*. Indeed, shame exists only if it finds
 12 affective resonance in someone and if it can relate, if not for everyone to
 13 everything,³³ certainly to a lot of things—surely animate and responsi-
 14 ble ones. In fact, usually we are not ashamed of a landscape or clouds, of
 15 a child or an animal³⁴ (unless we regard the first as an adult and the
 16 second as a synecdoche of its owner).³⁵ What is surely more interesting
 17 under the atmospherological and therefore quasi-thingly profile is
 18 rather the third aspect: the relational one. The person in the presence of
 19 whom we feel ashamed might be the one person on whom the newborn
 20 symbiotically depends,³⁶ but also the crowd in front of us, to which we
 21 are exposed as being disadvantaged or showing a “loss of power”
 22 (Williams, 1993, 220). It could also be a symbolic other: the imaginary³⁷
 23 and hypothetical³⁸ hypostatization of the other’s abstract perspective; in
 24 fact, if shame only derived from the fear of being caught, “the motiva-
 25 tions of shame would not be internalised at all” and “no one would have
 26 a character, in effect” (ibid., 81). Therefore, like any other self-conscious
 27 emotion (embarrassment, guilt, pride), shame presupposes a witness
 28 (real or internalized) with whom to establish a complex psychological-
 29 social—and, in this sense, even atmospherological—game of censure
 30 and condemnation.³⁹

31 But the felt-bodily communication with shame as a quasi-thing
 32 finds its necessary mediation in the (lived) body: “one feels oneself
 33 looked at (burning neck) not because something passes from the look to
 34 our body to burn it at the point seen, but because to feel one’s body is
 35 also to feel its aspect for the other [. . .]: to feel my eyes is to feel that
 36 they are threatened with being seen” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 245). Thus
 37 it is realistically the gaze of the other—the principle triggering a felt-
 38 bodily communication (be it solidaristic or competitive) already imman-
 39 ent in the individual felt-body (contraction or dilation) and epitome of
 40 authority and social custom (internalized)—that here exercises, for its

1 shaming essence, a powerful atmospheric authority. In its aggressive
2 centripetal vectoriality,⁴⁰ the gaze of the other (cf. infra 6)—intensifying
3 the hetero-perception of our reflected image—generates an atmospheric
4 feeling in which potential witnesses also unwillingly participate.⁴¹ That
5 is to say, the gaze of others reduces the spontaneous and graceful felt-
6 body to a mechanical and vulnerable seen-body; it exalts the “boundaries
7 set by the physical body to our projects” (Fuchs, 2005, 247), depriving
8 the felt-body of its original ecstaticness⁴² up to decentering it and
9 paralyzing it (hence the ridicule). This leads to the point that, reduced to
10 a mere thing among other simple things, “the felt-body no longer dis-
11 closes the world, but stands as an annoying and tormenting obstacle”
12 (ibid., 265).

13 Thus the self-image aroused by shame is also the effect of an external
14 quasi-thingly atmosphere that today is radiated by the (more or less
15 real) gaze of the others and in the past was emanated by the gaze of God
16 or, subordinately, by his emissaries⁴³—(i.e., by a gaze that is the more
17 stigmatizing the more it is able to also probe one’s motives and remain
18 alien to the normal felt-bodily reciprocity of the gaze), such as in (rela-
19 tively) non-iconic religions.⁴⁴ “Splitting ourselves in a partial I that
20 observes and an I that is observed,” (Simmel, 1992a, 70) so that⁴⁵ an
21 *alter ego* monitors the *ego* and its social performances,⁴⁶ thus constantly
22 guarantees—by the virtue of a power so certain of its legitimacy that it
23 can do without physical coercion—both the level of self-esteem neces-
24 sary to the social group⁴⁷ and (as a mythically primal ethical-political
25 feeling) the inhibition of conflict,⁴⁸ but also, inevitably, the conformist
26 adhesion to the values of the majority, which are not necessarily more
27 rational than others.

28 What interests me here, though, is that shame—the real paradigm
29 of every feeling that is at least initially external and poured out into
30 space⁴⁹ (i.e., every atmospheric feeling)—is neither an option subject to
31 our will nor a purely mental process, but rather a quasi-thing. As soon
32 as an undue focus of oneself creates tension between the self and one’s
33 ideal (aesthetic, social, or moral) self-embodied in the others—regardless
34 of whether this happens for the unexpected exposure to others, for the
35 violation of the sphere of privacy of others, or simply for the implicit
36 comparison with others⁵⁰—the uncontrollable and only relatively vari-
37 able felt-bodily resonance of shame grandly exposes the illusory
38 Enlightenment pedagogy of the autonomy of the subject. Albeit inter-
39 mittently and despite the non-localizability of its origin, shame involves
40 and infects us *ab extra* with its authority and evidence. Like pain,

1 it attacks us, forcing us to surrender: that is, it makes us cry and
 2 liberatingly admit our infringement (like in confession, be it religious or
 3 psychological). However, it also makes us suffer the pathological “shame
 4 anxiety” (Wurmser, 1981, 52) that, possibly as fear of being laughed at
 5 (gelotophobia),⁵¹ saves us from actual shame, but only because (and it is
 6 no advantage) it expands its lethal inhibitory character in advance, albeit
 7 in a diluted form.⁵²

8 Therefore, being ashamed here means receiving—even anticipating
 9 it—the atmosphere of shame that the others radiate on us whenever we
 10 deviate from the norm, even unwillingly. Such deviation might not be
 11 negative, but just neutral—as happens in any attempt at innovation,
 12 especially when it’s done by the minority—or even positive, such as
 13 when we feel ashamed for being praised. The possible causes of the latter
 14 case include a compliment that is (a) too intimate, or (b) undeserved
 15 and prompted by the wrong reasons, or (c) expressed by people who
 16 aren’t entitled to it, and, finally, (d) that causes a loss of dignity revealing
 17 the praised person’s vanity, or else her impassibility by showing her
 18 guilty insensitivity.⁵³ In the case of (excessive) praise, what invests the
 19 person is an atmosphere of shame that can even be pleasant. However,
 20 as happens with any other quasi-thingly feeling, the person is never
 21 responsible for it.

22 Personal shame is therefore something we don’t “have,” *pace* the
 23 psychologizing and therefore reductive paradigm (as we know, the latter
 24 has replaced the dynamic paradigm of archaic Greece⁵⁴ so as to guaran-
 25 tee the control and manipulation of affective life). Nor is shame only the
 26 external expression of something internal: rather, just like simple embar-
 27 rassment,⁵⁵ it is an involving felt-bodily situation which we stumble
 28 upon, whose extraordinary authority can be detected both in the ten-
 29 dency to admit one’s guilt,⁵⁶ and in the impossibility to escape it with
 30 explanations or by abandoning the site where the gaffe took place.

31 32 33 **“Internal Hemorrhage” and Social Stigmatization** 34

35 It is hard to express the thing better than Sartre, starting from the
 36 impossibility to phenomenologically reduce our (mainly affective)
 37 being-for-others. If the others’ mere appearance determines an alien-
 38 ation of every subjectively felt datum, be it even just the grass’s green,
 39 the other’s gaze—more or less real but in any case different from the
 40 eyes in a physiological sense—disintegrates the self and brings it

1 definitively down to objecthood,⁵⁷ causing a sort of “internal
2 hemorrhage,” making the possibilities of the self actually impossible. In
3 this sense, shame does not concern some particular violation,⁵⁸ but is
4 “the original feeling of having my being outside, engaged in another
5 being and as such without any defence, illuminated by the absolute light
6 which emanates from a pure subject.” Thrown in the world and become
7 a thing among things, the ashamed person proves the inseparable existence
8 of three dimensions—“I am ashamed of *myself* before the *Other*”—
9 and does so precisely in the form of an “immediate shudder which runs
10 through me from head to foot without any discursive preparation”
11 (Sartre, 1978, 257, 288, 289, 222). In my terms, this is an atmosphere
12 produced by, say, “a rustling of branches, or the sound of a footstep followed
13 by silence, or the slight opening of a shutter, or a light movement
14 of a curtain. During an attack men who are crawling through the brush
15 apprehend as a look to be avoided, not two eyes, but a white farm-house
16 which is outlined against the sky at the top of a little hill” (ibid.,
17 257–258).

18 In short, the shame of being caught (for example) spying through
19 the keyhole, perhaps also with the unconscious desire to be caught,⁵⁹ is
20 an atmosphere that can also be radiated by an error of perception (a
21 trunk mistaken for a human being) and the occasional “convergence of
22 the Other’s eyes in my direction.” However, as such, this atmosphere is
23 omnipresent because “far from disappearing with my first alarm, the
24 Other is present everywhere, below me, above me, in the neighboring
25 rooms, and I continue to feel profoundly my being-for-others. It is even
26 possible that my shame may not disappear. [...] I do not cease to experience
27 my being-for-others.” Being an “original presence,” it haunts us as
28 an original sin because, poured out in the space where we simply expect
29 to find the other (hence a controversial repudiation of solipsism),⁶⁰ it
30 turns our being inside out, depriving it of all transcendence and freedom
31 and—especially when exposed to a chaotic multiplicity prior to the singularization
32 of subjects in the proper sense⁶¹—making it into “the object
33 of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this
34 qualification or even to know it” (ibid., 276–277, 267). For example, an
35 audience is

36
37 an intangible reality, fleeting and omnipresent, which realizes
38 the unrevealed Me confronting us and which collaborates
39 with us in the production of this Me which escapes us. If on
40 the other hand, I want to verify that my thought has been

1 well understood and if in turn I look at the audience, then I
 2 shall suddenly see heads and eyes appear. When objectivized
 3 the prenumerical reality of the Other is decomposed and
 4 pluralized. [. . .] Wherever I am, they are perpetually looking
 5 at me. The they can never be apprehended as an object, for it
 6 immediately disintegrates. (ibid., 282)

7
 8 The shame by which society—maybe seeking a surrogate of the maternal
 9 womb and a compensating projection of its own painful primitive
 10 shame⁶²—stigmatizes every minority and every (physical, racial, etc.)
 11 deviation in the name of a statistic “normality” passed off as normative
 12 is also heavily atmospheric, albeit on a less metaphysical level. Maybe it
 13 does so—as happens with some American law systems—in the belief of
 14 promoting a rebirth of moral (common) sense by means of a punish-
 15 ment consisting in exposing the transgressor to shame. While there is
 16 probably no such thing as a law system free from basic feelings such as
 17 anger and shame,⁶³ the outcomes of legal rehabilitation through shame
 18 seem largely counterproductive. The main reason is that, unlike guilt,
 19 shame involves not only the actions of the person but his whole person-
 20 ality, thus massaging the judges’ egos, so to speak,⁶⁴ and ultimately dis-
 21 regarding the criteria of dignity and equality of liberal democracy. As
 22 much as the guilty person seems to “deserve” such punishment, in fact,
 23 when he is condemned to an unmanageable emotional state, shame
 24 might lead him to further violations and to legitimize in the judging
 25 society a dangerously authoritarian use of the (fictitious) idea of
 26 perfection.

27 28 29 **Another Atmosphere: Vicarious Shame**

30
 31 However, shame turns out to be a powerfully atmospheric feeling, espe-
 32 cially in other manifestations. Not only in the (pathological) cases of
 33 dysmorphobia, due to which people are ashamed of a part of their body
 34 that they mistakenly overperceive, or in paranoia, in which people think
 35 they are being observed and persecuted to the point of never taking the
 36 necessary and healthy excentric position. Nor does it happen only with
 37 human beings today, historically humiliated by technological superior-
 38 ity (Günther Anders), or with people’s enduring collective shame for a
 39 “non-passing past,” thus deprived of a healthy cathartic outlet.⁶⁵ Shame
 40 reveals its full atmospheric and therefore quasi-thingly authority

1 especially in the case of vicarious shame, which is unfortunately little
2 studied. Vicarious shame is that by which we feel ashamed for someone
3 else that, perhaps “not even noticing what [. . .] is expected of them”
4 (Lipps, 1977, 41), is not ashamed at all.⁶⁶ In fact, the atmosphere aroused
5 by shameful behavior infects the innocent bystanders, sometimes even
6 when they merely foresee such behavior, or are forced to explicitly ask
7 someone to do what they should do spontaneously, without being told.⁶⁷

8 Vicarious shame, too, doesn't have either a volitional and motiva-
9 tional basis or a propositional content, but a specific quasi-thingly felt-
10 bodily course. In fact, being “in the air” in an overpersonal form, it
11 assaults us in a centripetal way in which cause and action coincide.
12 Moreover, it arises suddenly but is also fleeting⁶⁸—in fact, it inexplicably
13 disappears. Because of it, its witnesses—turned against their will into a
14 condensation zone⁶⁹ of this feeling—engage in an extremely violent
15 felt-bodily communication that is hard to contrast and (unlike what
16 happens with guilt, which oppresses us for a long time and always relates
17 to something that happened in the past) is centered on the present, even
18 though not necessarily on a single event. It can be linguistically expressed
19 only *ex post*—that is, when its centripetal vectoriality and the power
20 with which (unlike guilt, which is more focalizing) it spreads,⁷⁰ paralyz-
21 ing its witnesses in an “anxiety of the ‘this’” (Schmitz, 1964, 235), are less
22 intense. Besides, unlike what happens both in other collective feelings
23 and in personal shame, such anxiety is not at all mitigated by its
24 sharing—on the contrary, it is made even worse, turning (as happens
25 with moral panic) into the fear of being infected by the deviancy and
26 revealing some painfully removed and unwanted aspects of one's per-
27 sonality. Spreading in a form that is surely not strictly empathetic—as
28 this feeling is not felt by the person who is the source of it—vicarious
29 shame is delocalized “in ever widening circles of discomfiture” (Goffman,
30 1967, 106), causing the involuntary spectator to often feel more ashamed
31 of the *person* responsible for the shameful atmosphere (who is now per-
32 vaded by it) than of his or her specific and limited conduct.

33 But how is it that people radiating shame might not feel shame
34 themselves? Perhaps they are simply little sensitive to (or unaware of)
35 the current behavioral norms; maybe their blind defensive inclination to
36 removal induces them to continue undeterred in their conduct. Perhaps,
37 thanks to a high degree of abstraction and personal emancipation (that
38 is, to a strong scission between the affective and the reflective), they are
39 led to deny such emotion as heteronymous and therefore childish or
40 entirely mistaken just to prove to be independent of an atmospheric

1 feeling that, in any case, they feel at least in part.⁷¹ All these strategies of
 2 concealment may be emancipated from more conventional shame but
 3 probably not from moral shame, whose superiority to the mobilized
 4 critical reservations rather leads to seek a way out in religious transcen-
 5 dence.⁷² In any case, such strategies do nothing but strengthen the
 6 authority of vicarious shame, which is never as severe or even pathologi-
 7 cal and felt-bodily catastrophic as personal shame. While being a low-
 8 intensity kind of shame, there are still several (both involuntary and
 9 intentional) diversions used to contrast it: for instance, something intoler-
 10 erably shameful leads us to suddenly change the channel, to look the
 11 other way, or at least not to focus on the shameful event, but mainly to
 12 discharge the accumulated tension by stigmatizing those responsible.

13 In the (even partial) absence of such diversions, those who feel
 14 vicariously ashamed blush and—just as it happens with personal
 15 shame—they blush even more if they are aware of blushing (up to the
 16 extreme case of ereuthophobia), thus revealing both their involvement
 17 and (which is far from irrelevant) their inner, biologically and socially
 18 adaptive adhesion⁷³ to the violated norm, consequently begging for
 19 indulgence.⁷⁴ Just as in personal shame, those who experience vicarious
 20 shame perhaps feel a certain decrease in skin temperature and try to
 21 escape—albeit in vain, the goal being that same self from which they
 22 want to escape.⁷⁵ They want to die from shame, to disappear, and express
 23 this with a general loss of postural tone—contraction, bowed head,
 24 hunched shoulders, low gaze, all in the magical-childish illusion to
 25 reduce the space occupied and not be seen by the person they are not
 26 looking at⁷⁶—which, already in personal shame, signals the self-down-
 27 sizing of one's role.

28 Another aspect that vicarious shame shares with personal shame is
 29 the presence of the typical “covering” gestures, which might be less
 30 intense but are far from absent: those who feel vicarious shame also hide
 31 their face in their hands, tilt their head to one side, bite their lips and
 32 tongue, frown and dispense fake smiles, touch their nose, scratch their
 33 head, rub their hands, and so on. And even if they don't lower their gaze
 34 completely, at least they narrow their eyes so as to see less, and divert
 35 their gaze by suddenly moving their eyes (Darwin) or pulling a “blank
 36 stare,” in the illusion of silencing the most complex externalization
 37 mimicry of living by means of facial expressionlessness.⁷⁷ They might
 38 even adopt the low and monotonous tone full of pauses and sighs with
 39 which those who are personally ashamed claim to have purposely done
 40 the very thing of which they are ashamed.⁷⁸ They also try, in a way, to

1 make it up for another's shameful conduct by "saving his face" and
2 helping him go back to a less despicable behavior: for instance, they
3 might pretend not to have seen the shameful act or publicly underplay
4 it—anything to avoid the intolerable atmosphere produced by not
5 bearing to look at someone in the eyes.

6 This atmosphere, *nota bene*, can even be merely hypothetical—such
7 as when, looking away from the beggar or the crippled, we are ashamed
8 of the very shame they might feel by meeting our gaze.⁷⁹ Even if (unlike
9 personal shame) it doesn't hold as an *excusatio* to avoid exclusion (since
10 the group feeds on the very atmosphere of stigmatization of the other),
11 vicarious shame does not seem to be completely foreign to the dual
12 social injunction that leads the individual (i.e., the witness) to be
13 ashamed of herself first and then, recursively, to be ashamed of her very
14 shame.⁸⁰ While we never feel guilty for feeling guilty, if we feel ashamed,
15 even vicariously, we experience a sort of metashame—if nothing else,
16 because we realize that we are revealing to the others (but also, for the
17 first time, to ourselves) our conformity to values we might rationally
18 disagree with.

19 In all these cases, felt-bodily reactions are undoubtedly less intense
20 than those aroused by strong personal shame. However, as we have seen,
21 they are equally subject to the strategies deployed by social culture (*in*
22 *primis etiquette*) to protect oneself from atmospheric shamefulness. The
23 first of these strategies, which amounts to the arrogant and far-from-
24 morally innocent identification with the guiltless social gaze while com-
25 pletely externalizing the victim, features perhaps the most surprising
26 aspect of (atmospheric) vicarious shame. In fact, even though we feel
27 extraneous to the stigmatized conduct,⁸¹ it implies a relative sharing of
28 it as, after all, "it could be us." Also, it sheds a very unflattering light on
29 the fact that we respected those who now shame us,⁸² and it is obviously
30 the more intense the more one is emotionally close to the source of
31 shame (nationality, friendship, kinship, etc.). The identification of judge
32 and judged, which is fundamental to personal shame, is also present—
33 albeit in a mitigated form—in vicarious shame. In fact, when observing
34 based on a certain "emotional competence,"⁸³ we implement if not an
35 empathetic process, at least a perspective decentralization: one that
36 allows us to feel what "should" be felt by the shameful person, who from
37 this point of view is never totally other. In other words, we atmospheri-
38 cally feel her shame, even if the transgression is only hypothetical or
39 referred to ungrounded norms (that are nonetheless socially introjected)
40 or to norms that the transgressor doesn't deem valid.⁸⁴

1 I reject the objection that vicarious shame, always implying an
 2 audience⁸⁵ and conceding greater reactive possibilities than personal
 3 shame (starting from irony), should be declassified to simple embarrass-
 4 ment. Vicarious shame is undoubtedly less powerful than personal
 5 shame in its injunction to lying and projective resentment; to degrading
 6 the others and finding shelter in cover roles (professional, sentimental,
 7 etc.); to the device of declassifying shame as circumscribed and there-
 8 fore rewardable guilt; or to the trick of culturally reducing it to a matter
 9 of *etiquette*.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, just as it isn't a "shame of nobody" or a form
 10 of indignation in the second or third person, vicarious shame is not
 11 simply fleeting embarrassment or a "momentary, temporary, and incon-
 12 sequential" state (Nussbaum, 2004, 204).⁸⁷ Even the cultural condition-
 13 ing of affective states, which sometimes legitimates our shame for being
 14 inadequate compared to a personified ideal,⁸⁸ proves that the peripheral
 15 involvement of shame does not exclude a potential progression from
 16 initial embarrassment to proper shame, felt not only "on our skin"
 17 (Heller, 1985, 10) but also at a deeper level and, in the case of vicarious
 18 shame, felt inasmuch as it is shared.

19 Due to its quasi-thingly nature, which it shares with personal
 20 shame, vicarious shame entails at least a relative damage to one's image:
 21 that is, the pain felt by the transparent "I" seeing itself through the eyes
 22 of others,⁸⁹ in its intolerable "bareness." For this reason, it suppresses the
 23 obvious wish to see better and more so as to immediately leave a space
 24 that makes us feel guilty⁹⁰ or, at least, to prove to be unaffected by it,
 25 thanks to a different "emotional focalization."⁹¹ Otherwise, why would
 26 we be ashamed, say, of being one of the few people attending some
 27 public event, to the point of pretending we are there by chance? Perhaps
 28 because we risk appearing representative of those who guiltily didn't
 29 come?⁹² Because our participation to blatantly irrelevant events might
 30 be taken as a proof of the fact that we make a bad use of our time? Or
 31 because, more realistically, we sense the humiliation atmospherically
 32 radiated (be they aware of it or not) by those responsible for the event's
 33 failure?

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Atmospheric Games

38 It is precisely to avoid self-humiliation that—as I have said—vicarious
 39 shame often turns into stigmatization. Consider the tragically well-
 40 known link between shame and rage (as a consequence). In personal

1 shame, the latter is directed both against ourselves, to the point of
2 committing suicide,⁹³ and against those who allegedly judge us, up to
3 challenging them to a duel so as to wipe out the offence.⁹⁴ In vicarious
4 shame, instead, rage falls onto the person that condensates and radiates
5 such atmosphere. This link thus generates fury (in both types of shame)
6 due to the jamming of two mechanisms: that of underdistancing, thanks
7 to which pain turns into an inferiority complex, and that of overdistancing,
8 which usually mitigates pain through (pragmatic or linguistic)⁹⁵
9 hyperactivity, causing a distorted reaction to reality.⁹⁶ The quasi-thingly
10 atmosphere of vicarious shame therefore pushes the witness—who, as
11 we have seen, is always only partially “innocent”—to leave his shame,
12 potentially also caused by his blatant impotence with regards to the
13 other’s shameful conduct. It also pushes him to impose on the latter a
14 “game of inferiorization”—that is, the more intense the higher the social
15 standards adopted.

16 Of course it is a relational game that is largely context-dependent.⁹⁷
17 For instance, we are ashamed of the torn clothes of someone who has
18 suddenly fallen into disgrace but not of the clothes of the homeless; we
19 are ashamed of a genetic physical malformation but not of a casual one
20 (or is it the other way round?) that is not constitutive of the person; we
21 are ashamed of inadvertently violating the privacy of a reserved person⁹⁸
22 but not that of an attention-seeking public persona. And so on. The
23 game of inferiorization always also entails self-inferiorization: that is, it
24 entails “being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong
25 condition” (Williams, 1993, 78). This is true even if in this case the other’s
26 gaze is not that of the shamed person, who is often unaware, but
27 that of a sort of (even imaginary) third person whose judgment we
28 count on⁹⁹ and whom we know to be axiologically close to us, to the
29 point of recognizing our unease *as*, indeed, unease—perhaps it is the
30 gaze of an idealized society, in any case one that is well differentiated
31 from the one that doesn’t sufficiently stigmatize the shameful behavior
32 whose atmosphere is now affecting us.

33 Some have regarded shame (both personal and vicarious) as the
34 simple consequence of a failed initiative, even appealing to the indisputable
35 “inversion of directional space” (Schmitz, 1973, 42; see also 2010,
36 196) that turns from centrifugal to centripetal. However, this explanation
37 is not exhaustive. In fact, what initiative can be attributed to those
38 who are ashamed for being laughed at or for seeing their secrets exposed?
39 Think of those who are ashamed for mistakenly greeting a stranger, for
40 their physical flaws, for their social and economic condition,¹⁰⁰ for

1 having been raped,¹⁰¹ or even for outliving other innocent people (as in
 2 catastrophes or concentration camps, Primo Levi *docet*). The backlash
 3 thesis ultimately presupposes that we give the term “initiative” a mean-
 4 ing that is both too broad¹⁰² and too protensive. In fact, following this
 5 thesis, just as we are ashamed of what we unwillingly are—we are
 6 ashamed of, say, our physical flaws even when we are dressed, as we
 7 imagine that sooner or later we’ll be exposed to the other’s gaze—so we
 8 would feel vicariously ashamed because the perception of the other
 9 coimplies the anticipation of our potential analogously shameful behav-
 10 ior. But then why is it that, if we confess our violation, we often mitigate
 11 the (atmospheric) feeling of personal and vicarious shame? Unfortunately,
 12 it seems likely that the normally shareable antipsychologist neophen-
 13 omenological campaign here is throwing out the baby (the interiority
 14 of the broken rule) with the bathwater (the integral interiority of
 15 feelings).

16 In any case, I believe I have sufficiently proven that—precisely
 17 because it has the authority of an atmosphere and therefore of a quasi-
 18 thing—shame (be it personal or vicarious) prevents the oblivion of the
 19 negative self-transcendence¹⁰³ that is perhaps one of the essential guar-
 20 antees of the ontogenesis ad phylogensis of both the individual and the
 21 community. Today’s injunction to shamelessness, superficially mistaken
 22 for sincerity and authenticity, which is lethal for unconditional secrecy,¹⁰⁴
 23 is opposed by the neophenomenological and atmospherological thought
 24 through the appeal to our belonging to a spatialized sentimental sphere
 25 as the fundamental “cipher” of the individual.¹⁰⁵ Inasmuch as it is a
 26 quasi-thing, therefore, shame (both personal and vicarious) *nostra res*
 27 *agitur!*

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SIX

**Quasi-Things Communicate with Us:
From the Gaze to the Portrait
(and Back)¹**

Felt-Bodily Communication

As feelings poured out into space (both lived and predimensional) that grasp the perceiver on the affective and felt-bodily level before and more naturally than mere things²—understood here as a faded intellectual abstraction of previous passive syntheses—atmospheres engage felt-bodily communication with her and do so just like and more than things, thanks to their specific quasi-thingly intrusiveness. They watch her, concern her, and challenge her deeply,³ showing that the somatic is, after all, always “heterosomatic.”⁴ In fact, otherness (from a simple, animated or not animated Gestalt upwards) is absolutely constitutive for the felt-bodily nature of the perceiver, according to an innate disposition to translate everything that one sees in terms of motion. This is what typically happens in the atmospheric irradiation of the gaze of the other,⁵ with effects that—as in the case of the portrait—do not necessarily only put the subject to shame. By “gaze” I do not mean here, of course, the objectifying and distal act of seeing, perhaps reductively explained as the translation of physical stimuli into psychic states through enigmatic neural processes. Nor do I mean the observation of faces that aims “to extract information that is needed to anticipate others’ behavior and to guide one’s own” (Hochberg, 2007, 174). What I

1 mean is something more original: a lived perception⁶ that receives more
 2 than is trivially seen; for example, what one has already seen and has
 3 settled into one's corporeal memory.⁷

4 While sometimes being essential to disambiguate other sensory
 5 stimuli, the gaze as such is anything but unambiguous. The approxima-
 6 tive character of identikits derives from the inability to express in a visual
 7 medium the motor suggestions (bearing, movement, voice, and look) of
 8 others. What cannot be represented, in other words, is the "global
 9 impression" or the physiognomic "aria" (Gombrich, 1972, 8, borrowing a
 10 significant Petrarchian expression) of an interaction that, as I have men-
 11 tioned, is based on a prethetic and anything-but-static intercorporeality⁸
 12 ("symbiosis" or "communion") with the phenomenon perceived.⁹ Merely
 13 replicating and externalizing a dynamic (whether dialogic or antagonistic)
 14 that is already inherent in the individual intracorporeal feeling
 15 (narrowness vs. vastness), corporeal communication, and specifically the
 16 gaze, generates every time a peculiar symbiotic corporealization. There is
 17 nothing exceptional about this: it is what normally happens when people
 18 in a pedestrian area, while perceiving one another so elusively, thanks to
 19 passivity and unintentionality manage to be in motor harmony with the
 20 others, so that clashes are exceptional. This is merely the grossest exam-
 21 ple of a motor but also emotional competence that, according to the
 22 model of fascination as the radicalization of a normal affordance, directs
 23 our "reaction" to every situation encountered—which, for example, pre-
 24 figures future meanings and movements from the perception of some-
 25 one's gestures and face. For this reason (but prescinding here from a
 26 more precise artistic-historical contextualization¹⁰ and, *a fortiori*, from
 27 the infinite transcendentalization and ontologization of the face),¹¹ I now
 28 intend to investigate the portrait. Specifically, I look at the *ad hoc*
 29 communication sphere generated by the peculiar quasi-thing we call the
 30 face, and especially the gaze, of the other.

31 32 33 **The (Atmospheric) Character of the Face** 34

35 While being "factually" inanimate, the portrait, whose essence derives
 36 from presenting "already interpreted" people,¹² acquires an intense life
 37 "in act," thanks to our experience of it. Such experience should not be
 38 explained through empathy, whether projective (since then some experi-
 39 ences would be understood only by those who experienced them in
 40 person) or mimetic (how would it be possible, in fact, to imitate a deep

1 but contained joy that is therefore totally unexpressed?). Our experience
 2 of the portrait should rather be explained through that form of corpo-
 3 realization (subject to varying degrees) that we have, as I anticipated,
 4 “when our sensible body flows [...] into a larger whole, when a vast felt-
 5 body spontaneously comes to reform itself and the sensible body is dis-
 6 solved in it” (Schmitz, 1989, 190–191). Figure, exchange of glances,
 7 gestures (in the broad sense):¹³ these are the elements that I consider in
 8 my approach to the quasi-thing “gaze.” Such an approach might be
 9 defined “physiognomic,” without thereby assuming a hermeneutic and
 10 semiotic mindset (in a broad sense), committed to ward off the epochal
 11 and yet presupposed psychosomatic dualism through the most diverse
 12 and ingenious techniques of translating the bodily into the psychic and
 13 vice versa. Nor should one presuppose the hypothesis of anthropomor-
 14 phization, rejected by the immediate refractoriness of external appear-
 15 ances to every subjective projection. At the atmospherologic level,
 16 ultimately, the gaze of the other, as much as and even more than any
 17 other perceived form, is never a purely physical event from which mean-
 18 ing should then be inferred,¹⁴ but an aesthesiological-physiognomic
 19 expression that—even in a context of postures, style, clothing, etc. that
 20 is relatively changeable and communicative also *ex negativo* (shifty look,
 21 high self-control, rigidity, poor gesticulation)—should not be under-
 22 stood as the effect of causes or as a conventional sign, but as the expres-
 23 sion of an unintentional “polarized coexistential connection” (Lersch,
 24 1951, 14) that regards the face as the most expressively economic symbol
 25 of the whole personality (or of the soul, according to Simmel), at least
 26 in our culture,¹⁵ even if in continuity with the remaining manifestations
 27 (either bodily or felt-bodily) and even with natural atmospheres.¹⁶

28 The felt-bodily *ekphrasis* I have in mind here—obviously condi-
 29 tioned both by the viewers’ biographical preconditions (degree of recep-
 30 tivity, psycho-physical conditions, etc.) and by the relatively high
 31 expressive quality of the work—should therefore not neglect the general
 32 posture of the figure portrayed (even if it were fake or socially con-
 33 trolled, and therefore very little representative of the “true” psychic
 34 nature of the person). It puts to good use not so much the signals and
 35 discrete forms focused by the distanced and professional gaze of artists
 36 and critics, but rather a *Stimmung* that—triggering a somewhat
 37 theatrical¹⁷ transformative felt-bodily resonance, sometimes even only
 38 latent—is a (not necessarily physical) peculiar mediation point between
 39 the abandonment of personal regression (contraction) and the distancing
 40 of personal emancipation (expansion).¹⁸ Such resonance is profoundly

1 influenced by the perpetual variation of the light, of the viewing angle
 2 and the entire configuration of the face, inactive on mere “experience of
 3 physiognomic identity or [. . .] physiognomic constancy” (Gombrich,
 4 1972, 3). There is a self-portrait by Edward Munch,¹⁹ for example, in
 5 which Wilhelm Fraenger shows how the reciprocal inhibition between
 6 the human figure (too big) and the environment in which it is located,
 7 as well as the discomfort and psychic discontent suggested by various
 8 elements of the posture, expresses a disintegration of the self. Fraenger
 9 then exemplarily summarizes this interpretation obtaining from a
 10 quasi-thing like the face and the eyes (bird-like, with eyes opened dif-
 11 ferently, angry lips, etc.)²⁰ the impression of a tragically misanthropic
 12 personality. In the so-called *Capitoline Brutus*, on the contrary, the noble
 13 and commanding energy is in strange contrast with the joviality of the
 14 head, hair, and chin,²¹ so as to suggest a charming but not uniquely
 15 interpretable atmosphere.

16 I do not present many more examples. It seems more useful to recall
 17 that the reply to the portrayed face, which challenges the gaze of the
 18 viewer determining its centrifugal direction, is from the outset oriented
 19 and regulated by the affordances inherent in the portrait itself. The result
 20 is an intercorporeality that is by no means unidirectional: while stem-
 21 ming from the portrayed face, the dialogue of gazes calls for the reply (at
 22 times winning, at other times won) of the observer; and only the
 23 intensity of this exchange produces the intensity and fruitfulness of the
 24 overall corporealization.

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The Gaze as a Quasi-Thing (Gesture)

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The whole portrayed figure is organized around the area of the eyes and the gaze (which always “looks back” at us and—namely, concerns us), a place of excellence for the condensation of the facial expression. Yet, it remains unclear why the eye is a gesture and a quasi-thing. The first reason is that, provided that one doesn’t see in the eye a simple optical connection between the retina and the perceived but a powerful felt-bodily impetus, the gaze extends agentively, as it were a body itself (more culturally offensive than a punch!) in the pericorporeal space,²² with a function that is alternately aggressive (stigma, etc.) and protective.²³ The second reason is that—be it sharp, penetrating, probing, tired, apathetic, or inquisitive, and so on—the gaze, far from counting only as a symptom of the otherwise ineffable interiority of the other²⁴ but *being* as such

1 the feeling that it is mistakenly believed to conceal, generates its own
 2 specific atmospheric “evidence.” Such evidence could be summed up in
 3 a sort of “I am being looked at” waiting for a qualification, the origin of
 4 which nevertheless remains quite undetermined (Schmitz, 1969, 388).
 5 Regarded as an emission²⁵ rather than as a reception—in fact, the oph-
 6 thalmologist looks only at the eyes and not the gaze—the gaze is an
 7 appeal that for various reasons is “challenging”²⁶ for the other person,
 8 enmeshing her in her corporeal directions.

9 It is clear that the liveliness of the interpersonal exchange of glances,
 10 for example—its reversibility and the intensity deriving from unware-
 11 ness²⁷—is necessarily weaker (or in any case, different) in the exchange
 12 of glances between the observer and the portrayed person, and even
 13 weaker in that between the characters portrayed. Speaking of the
 14 looked-at gaze of the viewer observing a portrait might come across as
 15 a mere poetic-speculative *escamotage*. In order to avoid this, I will try to
 16 explain—seeing it as an intricate and multidimensional dance²⁸—not
 17 only how the gaze of the subject is liable, in time, to “so many and so
 18 fanciful interpretations” (Gombrich, 1972, 21), but also how the crystal-
 19 lized gaze of the portrayed subject can liquefy so as to replicate that of
 20 the observer. This is certainly not due to the mobility of the eyes, but to
 21 the semantic ambiguity (is it a pensive or a mocking smile?) for which
 22 the face—making good use of retention and protention of the per-
 23 ceiver—though still appears “as a nodal point of several possible expres-
 24 sive movements” (ibid., 17), tunes the lived space generated *ad hoc*,
 25 sometimes even attacking the observer, aesthetically legitimizing (with-
 26 out even resorting to the Cusanian *cuncta figura videntis*) that gaze that
 27 in social interaction looks as an indiscretion if not as a gesture of defi-
 28 ance, as revealed by the immediate concern of those who feel as if they’re
 29 being stared at.

30 It is therefore superfluous to recall that the interesting aspect of the
 31 gaze (be it portrayed²⁹ or not) is not its realistic and individualizing
 32 valence (the “truth of the face”) variously used by a naïvely psychobi-
 33 ographical semiotic³⁰ and overestimated by the literature of art history.
 34 What is interesting—but it would take a theory of “visual acts” to give
 35 an account of this very variable dramaturgy—is the atmospheric and
 36 therefore quasi-thingly nature of the gaze, which is indisputable even
 37 when it loses every individual demonic character and becomes a delib-
 38 erately abstract symbol of transcendence.³¹ Now, if the gaze radiates an
 39 atmosphere, first of all³² by (a) the opening of the eyelids, (b) the
 40 direction, (c) the movement—it does so only as codetermined by the

1 overall expression of the face—which is a salient felt-bodily isle and
 2 therefore a quasi-thing, irreducible to the corresponding anatomic
 3 section. To make just two examples, the gaze that is accompanied by a
 4 slight bending of the mouth as a symptom of a withheld emotion or an
 5 inquisitive attitude will have a different meaning from a gaze accompa-
 6 nied by a disarming smile devoid of surprises that alludes to a familiar
 7 tranquillity³³ but also to an attitude of superiority. In short, the gaze,
 8 even the fixed portrait, always radiates atmospheres, and not only in the
 9 exemplary case of the cyclothymic,³⁴ thanks to the expressive integra-
 10 tion of other felt-bodily isles, especially those relatively close to the eyes.
 11 In a nutshell, the gaze not only “come[s] out of the eyes, but at least of
 12 the mouth (often central), the nostrils and ears, and finally out of every
 13 pore, and out of all the strokes of the painting” (Nancy, 2000, 72). In the
 14 final analysis, one might say that the gaze comes out of all the other
 15 felt-bodily elements represented that are able to generate a “vital
 16 impulse embracing the two felt-bodies [the portrait’s and that of the
 17 observer] in the mutual intertwining of corporeal directions” (Schmitz,
 18 2010, 274).

19 I should start by identifying a few basic types of this felt-bodily
 20 communication mediated by the gaze. The first case is that of
 21 (a) *complementary resonance*, when the expressive direction of the gaze
 22 of the observer is expressly addressed by that of the portrayed figure
 23 (which is usually based on frontality)³⁵ and so induced to tune with it
 24 (understanding, common goals, complicity, etc.). The second case,
 25 communicatively more fundamental,³⁶ is that of (b) *confrontational or*
 26 *antagonistic resonance*. In fact, almost as much as the real ones, portrayed
 27 gazes “can attack, pierce, subjugate; here we have corporeal shaping,
 28 transforming, and burdening rather than an exchange of psychic-
 29 spiritual positions” (Schmitz, 1989, 191). This can occur through the
 30 *eyes wide open*, a sign of intense optical interest in the surrounding
 31 world but also of a belligerent and aggressive intention. It can occur
 32 through the so-called *sideways glance* (oblique) not accompanied by
 33 other mimic signs: an expression of coldness, distrust, perfidy, but also
 34 simply malice and ambiguity. The third case is that of (c) a *sadistic gaze*
 35 that—especially if centrally directed (as hypnotically as in the *fascinatio*)
 36 rather than aimed directly at the eyes of the interlocutor—starts a rei-
 37 fication that is psychological but also social (just think of the vain
 38 “right to portrait” of modern aristocracy). But symmetrically, this felt-
 39 bodily communication can happen also through (d) a *masochistic gaze*,
 40 which is exhausted in asking or begging, in humbly escaping—as in

1 the case of the lowered gaze or the reclined head of female figures—
 2 the virtual effrontery of the gaze of the other (regardless of whether
 3 such poignant resignation may prove to be a subtler instrument of
 4 domination).

5 Something more must be said, however, of the (e) *extended-privative*
 6 *gaze*, which externalizes and dissolves the anguish inherent in the lived-
 7 body into pericorporeal space. This is what happens when the portrayed
 8 figure does not look at anything (or, if you wish, looks at nothing) and
 9 when the gaze, diffuse and indeterminate (here's the first variant),
 10 haughtily *reaches beyond* the hypothetical gaze of the observer, with irri-
 11 tating or fascinating results. In this case, the portrayed gaze seems to
 12 look away, thanks to the representation of *parallel visual axes*, but also of
 13 the *profile*, an archaic symbol of the forces of evil³⁷ that, in the modern
 14 age, was rather the symbol of “a proud isolation” (Friedländer, 1960,
 15 124). Another possible representation is that of *half-closed eyes*, to
 16 indicate, with the lesser innervation of the eyelid muscle and with the
 17 consequent frown,³⁸ a snobbish indifference towards others and towards
 18 things. Such “reserve” sometimes expresses the erotic fascination of fate,
 19 but in other cases it may merely be a normal reflex after laughter or a
 20 protective reflex from the world and from the gaze of the other (through
 21 a reduction of the convergence of the visual axes). In fact, it is almost
 22 completely absent among children. But this reserve may simply be also
 23 a focus through a lesser exposure of the eye to light or a peep without
 24 the hindrance of the other senses. The extended-privative gaze some-
 25 times goes even through the *elimination of the eyes*, as if to signify, in the
 26 light of the tradition of the blind god or prophet, a transcendent view of
 27 the worldly condition, or that the portrayed entity is as impenetrable as
 28 a mask.³⁹ More often, however, it uses the *gaze upwards*, a sign of reli-
 29 gious devotion or thoughts otherwise unrelated to the outside world—
 30 or *downwards*, a sign of humility and servility, but also of the utmost
 31 concentration on something or someone, perhaps strengthened by the
 32 tendency to pass very slowly from one thing to another.

33 The second variant of the extended-privative gaze is that of *sinking*
 34 *into the object looked-at inside the canvas* (more or less visible), by virtue
 35 of a sort of involuntary atmospheric resonance, which is mimetic both
 36 with respect to the gaze of the person portrayed (especially in its pro-
 37 tentive valence) and with respect to the indeterminate, sometimes even
 38 structurally ineffable object in which the person's gaze seems to sink.
 39 This can be found, for instance, in Byzantine icons,⁴⁰ in the *claritas* of
 40 the transfigured face of Christ, but also in the famous gaze of eyes that

1 do not see: an overruling gaze that, spaceless and devoid of fixed points
 2 in its “immanent transcendence” (Simmel, 2005, 99), is typical of the
 3 late Rembrandt.

4 But does this sketchy phenomenology of the gaze, nourished by
 5 physiognomic-atmospheric reflections, really take into account the
 6 temporary or permanent nature of the gaze? While it is possible that
 7 “nobody will take Munch’s *The Shriek*, for example, as a face in repose”
 8 (Hochberg, 2007, 175), in the majority of (more realistic) cases it is
 9 anything but easy to distinguish, even in a portrait, the transient expres-
 10 sion from the permanent facial structure. In fact, the former may have
 11 deeply consolidated into the latter,⁴¹ or the picture could portray as
 12 stable a trait that is normally deviant. The fact that statistically the por-
 13 trayed state is typical of a person and not momentary basically has only
 14 the risk that the resonance is too typed so that, to specify itself, it must
 15 focus on the details that escaped the first impression: the only ones that
 16 allow us to understand, for example, if a laughing gaze is an effect of
 17 serenity or despair, if happiness is in this or that case better expressed by
 18 the agitation of the gaze and the face or by its spiritualized regularity.⁴²
 19 This allows us to relativize the classic physiognomic dispute between
 20 Lavater’s identism (people are what they seem) and Lichtenberg’s dif-
 21 ferentism (people are never what they seem), and to relieve the atmo-
 22 spheric character of the gaze from the morphological-diagnostic
 23 paradigm.

24 But to what extent does this relate to the gaze portrayed and to
 25 what extent does it relate to the gaze of the observer? The answer can
 26 follow only, as in all of my work, the direction of the immanence of
 27 meaning in the forms that “we suffer”⁴³ (whether this is called passive
 28 synthesis or real-symbolism), which is not explainable either as a signic-
 29 conventional reference or as a banal subjectivist projection. At most, one
 30 could say that the atmosphere radiated merges with the specific respon-
 31 siveness of the perceiver.⁴⁴ This generates an “in between” suspended—
 32 but predualistically so—between subject and object (in this case,
 33 portrayed figure and observer): the “in between” I always refer to when
 34 tackling the specific felt-bodily communication (even in the most dis-
 35 tracted perception) with quasi-things.

36 But does this interpretation of the portrait in terms of felt-bodily
 37 and intercorporeal communication completely remove the issue of the
 38 different aesthetic value (whatever it is) of individual works? Not at all,
 39 as long as we leave behind the classical ideal of art as a compensation for
 40 the contingency of life, and recognize that the essential aspect for the

1 rank of artwork is precisely the felt-bodily involvement of the user.⁴⁵
2 And here the atmospheric impression of the gaze can be radiated even
3 by works with no eyes or face. This is the case of the famous metamor-
4 phic invitation by Rilke to the headless stone of the Louvre—“for there
5 is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life” (“Archaic
6 Torso of Apollo”)—as well-known as that of the body made up entirely
7 of eyes (and therefore of soul) to which Hegel⁴⁶ refers sculpture and art
8 in general. Whatever the fanciful interpretations of this ocular atmo-
9 sphere (without eyes),⁴⁷ the gaze (be it portrayed or not) still restricts
10 the autonomy of the interlocutor, who is no longer master of the situa-
11 tion.⁴⁸ “Now he is not doing something but undergoing something”
12 (Böhme, 1989, 152), thereby turning—as is characteristic of the felt-
13 bodily relationship with quasi-things—from subject into object.⁴⁹

14 If the gaze is an atmosphere and therefore, by definition, a quasi-
15 thing, and the work of art is always a gaze (for Hegel, a thousand-eyed
16 Argus) focused on a user who is affectively and felt-bodily involved by
17 it, then the portrait is a continuation (by other means) not so much of
18 the Baroque divine one-eyedness, but rather of a far more archaic tradi-
19 tion—a tradition that distributes the magical power of the eyes (of the
20 gaze) onto different parts of the body. The important thing is that art
21 does not fall asleep and does not end up as Argus, forcing us to resort to
22 some kind of surrogate: to put it mythologically, making us resort to
23 residual eyes, stuck on the feathers of some insignificant peacock.

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8 **Quasi-Things Are the More Effective**
9 **the Vaguer They Are: Twilightness¹**
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17 ***Not the Light but in the Light***
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19 **I**t is certainly superfluous to insist on the atmospheric potentialities of
20 light, which is mainly “responsible for our impressions” (Böhme,
21 2006, 103). In fact, be it the object of thetic perception or (more often)
22 the holistic and intransitive condition of successive (correspondently
23 attuned) thetic discrete perceptions, light (just as other forms, some of
24 which I have already analyzed in the previous chapters) engages in a
25 felt-bodily communication with the perceiver. As already mentioned,
26 such communication develops in the pericorporeal space the (dialogical
27 or antagonistic) dynamic that is already present in individual intracor-
28 poreal feeling (narrowness vs. vastness).

29 Although contemporary art has long ago adopted it as a special and
30 not only decorative material, it is not so obvious that light should be
31 (and act as) a quasi-thing. Also, it is far from evident that it should be
32 one (i.e., a quasi-thing) while lacking haptic qualities but being fleeting,
33 tending to expansion, and not normally malleable—in short, the least
34 thingly being there is. Besides its privileged role in the Western scopic
35 regime as the guiding metaphor of life (of truth, being, but also God and
36 therefore sacredness and power),² I here examine two ideal types of light
37 (glare and twilightness), to assess their quasi-thingly atmosphericness.

38 Of course not much is known of the luminous experience of “rebirth”
39 that (in 1600) induced a young shoemaker named Jacob Böhme to feel
40

1 “introduced into the inner most Ground or Center of the recondite or
 2 hidden Nature,” to the point of being inspired for his own monumental
 3 theosophy. However, it seems that this “Light of God” was nothing
 4 more than “an instantaneous Glance of a bright Pewter-Dish, (being
 5 the lovely *Jovialis*³ Shine⁴ or Aspect)” (Franckenberg, 1780, 7–8)—that
 6 is, a reflection, the glint of a banal object,⁵ one that was normally alien
 7 to beauty due to its opacity and mere functionality.⁶ Therefore, gleam is
 8 here only the ephemeral flash of a hetero-lit object: an idea which, not
 9 surprisingly, was assumed in the same period both by mystical experi-
 10 ence and by painting.⁷ Could this mean that the “true” atmosphere of
 11 light lies in blinding splendor, brilliance, and sparkle (certainly key sym-
 12 bols, albeit today a bit “shadowy,” of luxury in advanced capitalism and
 13 therefore objects of reveries)? Not at all. In fact, blinding lights have
 14 surely played an important role in art and custom history as symbols of
 15 nobility (gemstones, glass, precious metals, ceramics, the decoration of
 16 the Bible), power (ceremonies as feasts for the eyes, *splendor imperii*)
 17 and, more generally, of transcendence, be it external (penetrating rays of
 18 light, luminous apparitions, solar visions, etc.) or internal⁸ (sudden
 19 “enlightenments,” the soul as inner light, prefall and/or eschatological
 20 man of light,⁹ etc.). However, they do not really seem to be particularly
 21 favorable to the generation of atmospheres.

22 In fact, irritating and disorienting the perceiver, made unable to
 23 locate the source of light, glare induces an (almost) painful contraction
 24 that ceases only when the glaring object and/or the perceiver move
 25 away. A blinding light may well irritate and fascinate at the same time,
 26 non-iconically alluding to the divine (escaping the gaze by principle);¹⁰
 27 but it hardly favors the mediacy and emotional vagueness that, in my
 28 view, characterizes atmospheres more than anything. This is rather
 29 experienced, therefore, in phenomena of mitigated light.

30 Indeed, if bearable, brightness does no longer push one away but
 31 rather attracts one’s attention, producing the purely atmospheric plea-
 32 sure typical of adornment.¹¹ The latter potentiates the normal “human
 33 radioactivity in the sense that every individual is surrounded by a larger
 34 or smaller sphere of significance radiating from him; and everybody else,
 35 who deals with him, is immersed in this sphere.” Such sphere “flows
 36 over, that is, it flows to points which are far removed from its origin
 37 [and] lays a vaster precinct which, in principle, is limitless” (Simmel,
 38 1997, 207), the more efficaciously so the more the combination of “dis-
 39 tance” and “favor” (ibid., 209) has strictly quasi-thingly bases—in the
 40 sense that the purest jewels are nothing more than their light radiation.

1 In any case, atmospherology should not deal with the epiphanic and
2 inaugural appearance of the light, be it otherworldly or inner. On the
3 contrary, it should focus on its contingency and its material contamina-
4 tion—in other words, the light should be regarded as belonging to the
5 intermediate realm of qualities that are subjectively felt without being
6 subjective and whose features are very much inhibited both by the light
7 and chromatic bulimia of our time¹² (i.e., by the ubiquity of artificial
8 light) and by the (much more hypothetical) inner or higher light. After
9 all, the light is a “letting-appear’ that does not itself appear” (Blumenberg,
10 1993, 31), not only when it stands for the transcendent—think for
11 instance of cathedral windows—but also when it functionally lights up
12 a simple store. From an atmospherological point of view, what matters
13 is that it is not the supposedly absolutely pure light (*lux*) of the first day
14 of creation, but rather the light become perceivable (*lumen*) as muddied
15 by the things on which it falls and which, at least relatively, it demateri-
16 alizes. The brightness and chromatic vividness that the twentieth cen-
17 tury has accustomed us to are also mere tonal gradations of light, and
18 not signs of a total exposure to it.¹³

19 But then we really should “urbanize” Heidegger (and his followers).
20 In fact, for him the fascinating character of the *Lichtung* (clearing) lies
21 in the absolute and unlightable darkness (the extraphenomenological
22 dark light) which is its condition of possibility; for me, on the contrary,
23 it lies in the perceived relative darkness or brightness (*lucus*) made pos-
24 sible by the *silva*, on pain of a glare that leads to muteness.¹⁴ The *silva*,
25 in fact, surely hides the clearing—which, in the case of the work of art,
26 hides the Earth, inexhaustible compared to the world—but it also gen-
27 erates the mild light of a clearing in the woods. To rightly counter the
28 excess of blinding light, demanded by the traditional metaphysics of
29 light, it is not necessary to look up and refer to the (transcendental)
30 overlight.¹⁵ It is more than enough, looking down at what actually
31 appears in the light, to turn to the light that is blurred, which only thus
32 can powerfully create atmospheres thanks to its interaction with
33 things.¹⁶ Be they due to Neoplatonic metaphysics and Abbot Suger’s
34 negative theology¹⁷—which, upon closer inspection, is “on the one hand
35 an objectified theology, on the other hand the cultural enacting of the
36 believers’ conversion (*conversio*) in view of their regeneration in the true
37 light of God” (G. Böhme and H. Böhme, 2004, 157)—or not, the atmo-
38 spheric architectures of light we find in gothic cathedrals are ultimately
39 numinous only because the light is expertly inhibited—that is, (to use
40 my own terms) because things are attacked by a quasi-thing.

1 To excessively spiritualize the light, in fact, means to (gnostically)
 2 transform nature into a huge cave platonically fraught with deceits and
 3 falsity, seeing “a projection, a play of shadows, in all that exists” (ibid.,
 4 153): in short, it means to guiltily disregard the rich semi-bright¹⁸ and
 5 even fully nightly¹⁹ atmospheric character of our *Lebenswelt*.

6 7 8 **The Vague, the Ephemeral, the Nebulous** 9

10 Thus we are specially immersed in atmosphericness when the light—
 11 perhaps without ceasing to be a biologically attractive factor—blurs the
 12 objects,²⁰ depriving them of any intolerable vividness²¹ and symmetry,²²
 13 thereby preventing the subject from linking things to their genus (which
 14 is a rationalizing activity favored precisely by vividness). As we see, this
 15 happens regardless of the fact that light vagueness is such *de dicto* (pro-
 16 duced iconically or as a consequence of the perceiver’s psychophysical
 17 state) or *de re* (ontological vagueness). The first atmospheric (and there-
 18 fore definitively quasi-thingly) effect of light vagueness is that it turns
 19 the almost tangible presence of things into unapproachable shapes,
 20 thereby endowed with an aura of their own, regardless of their actual
 21 distance from the perceiver. In painting this happens through the so-
 22 called film color, which confuses the object and its illumination, or by
 23 reducing the contrast.²³ In ordinary perception it happens by weakening
 24 the light: things are deobjectified by appearing at a distance²⁴ and there-
 25 fore require (Klages would say) the soul’s oneiric contemplation at a
 26 distance *par excellence*—the same that is demanded by “images” (in the
 27 strong sense).²⁵ But distancing in (experienced) space is such also in
 28 time. It is the wear and tear of things that atmospherically evoke their
 29 differed presence, contrary to an abstract concept, which is ontologically
 30 and pragmatically correlated exclusively to something new and not yet
 31 “experienced.”²⁶ In the same way, a perceived object made vague (because
 32 of the indistinction between figure and ground) by a blurred light invari-
 33 ably arouses a peculiar eros of the distance (both physical and
 34 temporal).

35 I have already recalled this: the ordinary encounter with things in a
 36 strict sense depends less on their shape and focus and more on their
 37 being immersed in a “casing” that is eminently atmospheric, precisely
 38 because it is formed by a constellation of non-focusable and often
 39 ephemeral qualities. In fact, today’s artistic use of light seems to refer
 40 exactly to its intermittent and transitory (quasi-thingly) existence: be it

1 to dematerialize specific substances such as (among others) aluminium
 2 and plexiglass, or to materialize light itself by expanding it in space,²⁷ art
 3 generates, more and more often, objects that have “an optical presence,
 4 even without being physically tangible” (Schürmann, 2003, 350)—thus
 5 recreating, maybe, “in the aesthetic context the now lost qualities of the
 6 lived experience typical of places of worship” (Wagner, 2001, 268).

7 But what is it that fascinates us, in these cases? Probably the deob-
 8 jectifying flicker of things and the sudden glint of an object, the shadow
 9 cast temporarily by things (shade) as well as that projected on them by
 10 other things around them (shadow). What is atmospherically fascinat-
 11 ing therefore is the ephemeral appearances that, as such, cannot be
 12 reduced to thingly properties. Contrary to the conception that light is
 13 the expression of Platonic ideas and in opposition to the Hegelian
 14 sense,²⁸ these luminous quasi-things spread around a deeply immersive
 15 affective tone, not despite but thanks to their transience, which was
 16 always guiltily underrated by traditional aesthetics and ontology in the
 17 name of duration and even eternity.²⁹ Testifying, at best, the incessant
 18 metamorphic movement of the world, the ephemeral and the momen-
 19 tary can be rendered (somewhat contradictorily) by multiplying fixed
 20 images,³⁰ but mostly by dimming the light. It is in this sense that I like
 21 to interpret the nineteenth-century admonition, later partly upheld by
 22 the light effects of Impressionism, to preserve “poeticness” by refraining
 23 from “sunlit scenes”; my interpretation could also hold for the predilec-
 24 tion (already stigmatized by Constable) for the “gallery tone” granted by
 25 the paintings’ old varnish (Gombrich, 1984, 39, 45).

26 The quasi-thingly atmosphere of light is also created by haziness.³¹
 27 It can be a “misty transparency”—that is, the brightness devoid of
 28 sharpness that, for Goethe, is typical of the Mediterranean landscape;³²
 29 it may be fog in the strictly climatic sense,³³ but is also artificially pro-
 30 duced haziness (thanks to the *sfumato*, for instance). In any case, hazi-
 31 ness wraps everything. Therefore it is not surprising that, wrapped in
 32 unspecified fumes and vapors and especially in the fog, an insignificant
 33 portion of space becomes powerfully atmospheric (as an undetermined
 34 quasi-thingly constellation), capable of generally suggesting³⁴ (also
 35 through impalpable humidity) a feeling of oppression that is both
 36 unlocalized and omnipresent, like a veil.³⁵ Without salience, things
 37 thus acquire a “newly menacing character,” analogous to the “total
 38 dematerialization of the surrounding world” produced by a candid
 39 snowfall. To have a “foggy mind” thus means “suffering” the atmo-
 40 sphere of a shrunken world in which every prevision becomes

1 impossible: a world in which we find ourselves in the sole company of
 2 sounds, which become in turn menacingly autonomous—hence “a
 3 feeling of loss of one’s own nature, of a floating in empty space”
 4 (Bollnow 2011, 206, 208). No wonder, then, that—wrapped in unspec-
 5 ified fumes and vapors and especially in the fog—an insignificant por-
 6 tion of the space becomes, as indeterminate quasi-thingly constellation,
 7 powerfully atmospheric, capable of suggesting a great degree—with
 8 sometimes distressing and sometimes reassuring effects)—the Kantian
 9 free play of the faculties. This paradoxically happens not through vari-
 10 ety but through the unitary tonality given to the optical field at the
 11 expense of the details. For example, immersed in nebulosity, a tree is
 12 nothing but a dark, looming mass that seems to have suddenly emerged
 13 from nowhere, thus evoking the *status nascendi* typical of the transience
 14 of every quasi-thing³⁶ that can atmospherically inspire a whole
 15 culture.³⁷

Twilightness

20 It is well known and easy to retrace in literature that some days, and
 21 mainly some parts of the day, are very atmospheric:³⁸ from the unbear-
 22 able inaugural vividness of the dawn to the paralyzing midday demoni-
 23 city (both Nietzschean), up to the thousand colors of the night. The
 24 primitive and poetic atmosphere of the night wraps and disorients us,
 25 reifying the sound and dissolving all distinctions between perceiver
 26 and perceived, leading to a certain lack of motor freedom and to a
 27 regression to a surfaceless, animistic, prelogic and extraobjectual
 28 spatiality³⁹—one in which everything is terribly possible but where, at
 29 the same time, the self finds its own irreducible identification.⁴⁰

30 But if blinding brightness does not generate atmospheres, neither
 31 does the darkest night.⁴¹ What does create atmospheres, all the more so
 32 in the age of universal illumination, is the light hardly emerging from
 33 the dark, or resisting it,⁴² giving life to a struggle that (also pictorially)
 34 carves matter out. Think of the (both artistic and commonsensical) *topos*
 35 of the seducing and protective candlelight, or of the so-called gum print
 36 used by early photographers to achieve a more haptic and kinaesthetic
 37 perception,⁴³ but mostly of the *diminutio* of light and the felt-bodily
 38 tension typical of twilight. The latter, thanks to the blurring of contours
 39 and the generation of a vague overall impression, is much more favor-
 40 able than daylight to arousing various moods.⁴⁴ That’s why even what is

1 an ugly “sea of houses” during the day becomes an architecturally
 2 fascinating play of light in the evening, especially if it’s foggy:⁴⁵ in fact,
 3 twilightness—an indistinctly emotional dimension, both felt-bodily
 4 and climatic, ultimately impossible to analyze⁴⁶ as it is intermodally and
 5 synaesthetically “suffered”⁴⁷—“falls” (not metaphorically!) on every-
 6 thing from the outside, by virtue of a naturalistically irreducible quasi-
 7 thinghood. Twilightness creeps in, making things less discrete,⁴⁸
 8 dissolving the distinction between identity and difference that, after all,
 9 is supposed by any rationalization,⁴⁹ and forcing the light into a striking
 10 residual fragmentation. In fact, the sole surviving luminous points,
 11 increasing the fascinating character of the whole, are the stars, the lights
 12 of the houses, but also those objects with their own light that in daylight
 13 are normally devoid of salience, but now, in the semidarkness, sparkle
 14 magically,⁵⁰ revealing their unexpected kinetic independence.

15 Inhibiting any spatial direction, twilight makes us strangers also to
 16 familiar things, reducing them to simple silhouettes, thus suggesting a
 17 necessary dematerializing experience both of the perceived and of the
 18 perceiver; even as semidarkness, it evokes an impression of numinous-
 19 ity⁵¹ and immemoriality.⁵² It also evokes a vague feeling of sadness⁵³
 20 generated by the threatening sense of the vainness of things⁵⁴ and,
 21 sometimes, (especially when the farewell to light alludes to other fare-
 22 wells, as in Gottfried Benn’s *blaue Stunde*) real despair. The fact that we
 23 are assaulted by it as a quasi-thing is also evident from the fact that, just
 24 as “the brightness of objects on earth is seen basically as a property of
 25 their own rather than as a result of reflection” (Arnheim, 1974, 304),
 26 their shadowness is also felt not so much as an absence (in contrast to
 27 the ancient tendency, ever since Eleaticism, to deontologize darkness)
 28 but as a positive and felt-bodily active quality—in short, more as an
 29 enigmatic emission of darkness than as a banal statistical relativization
 30 of the bright values of the field of view.

31 One should not exclude the possibility that, with the loss of thingly
 32 orientation, twilightness might awaken in different subjects relatively
 33 different moods. For instance one could feel deep concern or mature
 34 self-reflection. However, what is certain is that what generates these
 35 feelings is an intersubjective and quasi-thingly atmosphere whose felt-
 36 bodily resonance, before being declined in a more individual way, is for
 37 everyone the “horrified retreat into the narrowness of one’s felt-body in
 38 front of an extraneous vastness that surrounds us”(Schmitz, 1964, 157)
 39 and the intensification of hearing as (following Nietzsche) the organ of
 40 fear.⁵⁵ The twilight atmosphere is surely less intense in latitudes or

1 seasons in which the transition from day to night is almost immediate,
 2 but also in urban life, which today inhibits its charm by the simple ges-
 3 ture of turning on the light. However, if it were there, it would still
 4 reduce the subject to his or her “primal and ultimate element: an omi-
 5 nous feeling” (Böhme, 1998, 32). It is a slightly nostalgic feeling that,
 6 incidentally, is always much needed, as emerges from the large diffusion
 7 of dimmers in the very age of 24/7 work and the ubiquity of artificial
 8 light. Also, wanting to generate an intimate atmosphere in our living
 9 rooms, we tend to reject natural light, cold light (neon) and uniform
 10 light—in short, we don’t want the light whose effect, intolerable unless
 11 you’re performing sophisticated analytical operations (such as a sur-
 12 gery), makes all objects appear at the same and flat distance from the
 13 observer, as opposed to haziness and twilightness.

14 15 16 Eastward? 17

18 As we have seen, atmosphericness is therefore particularly intense
 19 (and, for this reason, quasi-thingly and felt-bodily very active) when *a*
 20 *parte objecti*, the perceived is (or is made) vague and dusky and/or
 21 when, *a parte subjecti*, the attention (normally pragmatically oriented
 22 to fitness) is (or is made) less efficient. In other words, this happens
 23 when the “releasement” makes perception into more of a suffering than
 24 an action. Here ultimately emerges an oriental *forma mentis* (broadly
 25 defined) that radically opposes the Western privilege granted to ful-
 26 gency and the technical pride of getting the shining out of dull rock,
 27 dark earth, and raw metal; in fact, such *forma mentis* choses blur, hazi-
 28 ness, and burnish over the shining, also because of the unintentional
 29 temporal patina it evokes.⁵⁶ But let’s simply take a candle and ask our-
 30 selves why its light fascinates us. It is evidently not only because of the
 31 elusive and hypnotic mobility of the fire but, above all, because of its
 32 ability to dynamize all the objects it casts its shadow on while high-
 33 lighting (in contrast to the flatness imposed on them by electric light)
 34 their beauty and presentiality.⁵⁷ Differently put, what fascinates us is its
 35 being an “indirect light,” “light, but giving no impression of brilliance”
 36 (Tanizaki, 1977, 18, 21). But thanks to what specific felt-bodily
 37 communication?

38 At first approximation one could talk not of a conflicting or
 39 antagonistic resonance but of a complementary and contemplative one,
 40 especially when, escaping the teleology of sharpness often embodied in

1 its very representational tool, art expresses vagueness thanks not only to
 2 the chosen theme but also to various artificial devices.⁵⁸ Perhaps one
 3 could talk, more precisely, of an extended-privative resonance that is
 4 intimately contrasted: that is, one in which the felt-body is first encour-
 5 aged by the quasi-thinghood of semidarkness to abandon the original
 6 narrowness for the peri-corporeal a-directional vastness it is presented
 7 with, only to be inexorably restrained in that (even just felt) motion,
 8 given the impossibility to specify the objects any further (objects are
 9 such only if they are “clear”).⁵⁹ Thus the felt-body is forced to anxiously
 10 look for certain (luminous) points, be they even just the headlights of
 11 cars cutting through the night.⁶⁰

12 It is a very common experience that twilight vagueness is the most
 13 intense (and slightly melancholic) luminous atmosphericness: the
 14 “aesthetic work” merely intensifies it. For an eighteenth-century theorist
 15 of garden art such as Hirschfeld,⁶¹ for example, the landscape character-
 16 ized by a “soft melancholy” is a perfectly feasible “scene.” The overall
 17 view has to be barred (depressions, tall trees, shrubberies), and the water
 18 must be stagnant and hidden by reeds and bushes; all must be quiet and
 19 seemingly lifeless, and there should be a few lights (but light cannot be
 20 completely absent, otherwise the atmosphere is no longer melancholic
 21 but authentically terrifying): this is enough for the hoped-for state of
 22 “reverence” and pensive suspension (Hirschfeld, 2011, 171ff., 180).

23 Of course choosing twilightness as a basic atmosphere and there-
 24 fore as an eminent example of a quasi-thing excludes *a limine* any
 25 attempt at prejudicially identifying the atmospheric scope (including
 26 the artistic one) with a cryptic message able to transform the perceiver’s
 27 existence. The already underlined pragmatic (if not utopic) urgency sug-
 28 gested perhaps by Rilke’s “you must change your life” is not, from the
 29 atmospherological point of view, more significant than the condition of
 30 silence, reflection, and privacy, or even nostalgic languor, promoted by
 31 semidarkness. But is all this a sign of an *anima naturaliter orientalis*? Of
 32 course it is, because the harmonious brightness of reason—suggested by
 33 Western oculo-centrism and by a (temperate) climate represented by
 34 eternal midday, but also promoted by a nature that is so “rational” and
 35 predictable that it significantly seems (to an oriental person) almost
 36 artistic⁶²—appears to be atmospherically inferior to a softened light. It
 37 is prototypically inferior to the crepuscular candlelight, whose conse-
 38 quences include (apart from the predictable and commercially all-too-
 39 exploited romantic effect), the disappearance of the self/world
 40 boundaries and a certain predisposition to reflection.



1 Even (and precisely) in totally electrified cities in which paradoxically
2 the night is sometimes even brighter than the day and thus loses its
3 dramatic character, twilight has not fully lost its atmospheric charm.
4 When a certain architectural illiteracy seems to frustrate the wish for
5 diversification by the “isotropic extension of the light onto isotropic
6 surfaces,” the rare shadows become all the more evocative.⁶³ After all,
7 without concessions to obscurantism,⁶⁴ we can atmospherologically say
8 that “the true project of light is to praise the shadow” (Pierantoni, 1998,
9 19, 11). It shall be enough not to seek, neurotically, the focus in every-
10 thing, especially not in every quasi-thing: to begin with, “we can turn off
11 the electric lights and see what it is like without them” (Tanizaki,
12 1961, 42).

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Notes

Preface

1. Griffero (2014a).
2. Cf. Griffero (2016).
3. Today much is being written (at an interdisciplinary level) on this topic, whose relevance seems more than justified by the increasing immersive and engaging experiences of our everyday life. For a bibliography *in fieri*, cf. <https://atmosphericspaces.wordpress.com/>.
4. Which it would be wrong to reduce to insignificant automatisms.
5. Or in which, as Heidegger claims, we are even “thrown.”
6. Atmospheric colors, for instance, before being perceived as properties of the objects, are not condensed into surface colors but are diffused as a horizon of significance, a “style” about objects and then become atmospheric colors: it is as if the thing were thrust outside itself, as Merleau-Ponty notes.
7. I believe this is fully consistent with the interdisciplinary affective (or even atmospheric) turn we see in many humanistic disciplines oriented to qualitative investigations.
8. See especially Böhme (2008, 188–201).
9. For a reply to the objections it raised, cf. *infra* ch.2.
10. For an analysis of atmospheric phenomenology, see Griffero (2014a, 129–141).

- 1 11. And the intensity of the protest of our mood in the case of an
 2 antagonistic encounter is indeed the best proof of the objective
 3 effectiveness of the atmosphere we react to.
- 4 12. Such as when one euphorically joins a community where a tragic
 5 atmosphere hovers or when, in general, one unexplainably feels
 6 out of place.
- 7 13. The atmosphere may change because of a slight change in the
 8 perceptual space or an additional cognition and a deeper appraisal,
 9 a new salience or a variation of perceptive distance, a change in
 10 the physiological conditions of the perceiver or in light conditions
 11 and the speed with which one approaches the place, potential
 12 conflict between non-homogeneous subatmospheres or scale-
 13 changes, etc.
- 14 14. But it is important not to overestimate the receptive (cultural, his-
 15 torical and individual) variability. The impressive entrance hall of a
 16 major banking institution, for example, will express an atmosphere
 17 of power for those who venture there in search of a loan (whence
 18 perhaps the impulse to leave the center of the room to take refuge
 19 in protective nooks and crannies), while expressing, on the contrary,
 20 an atmosphere of proud belonging for an employee who has devel-
 21 oped a strong *esprit de corps*. But it's clear that what generates both
 22 atmospheres (uneasiness or pride) is still the "same"
 23 spatial-sentimental quality of solemn vastness, only that for
 24 obvious reasons the former prefers a narrow and ordinary space
 25 while the latter chooses the vast and solemn one.
- 26 15. For a summary, see Schmitz (1990, 216–218).
- 27 16. That is, for Schmitz, chaotic manifoldnesses formed by states of
 28 affairs, programs and problems.

Chapter 1

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- 33 1. Cf. Griffero (2013c).
- 34 2. Here it is superfluous to pedantically distinguish every time
 35 (orthoesthetic) perception from the fusional feeling regarded as
 36 preworld (Waldenfels, 2000, 96ff.): the type of perception that is
 37 relevant here and that I think is the *prius* of experience as a
 38 whole is not the distal and constative one, but the affectively and
 39 felt-bodily involved one, which is ambulatory and far from
 40 neutral.

- 1 3. Husserl (1997, 44ff., 112–114; 2001, 60).
- 2 4. Heidegger (1999, 67–70, and especially 2001).
- 3 5. By felt-body I mean, *more solito* in phenomenology, the body
- 4 not as physical-anatomical (*Körper*) but as lived (*Leib*). Cf. infra
- 5 ch. 2.
- 6 6. Klages (1991², 504).
- 7 7. “Perhaps material substance would not have been so neglected if
- 8 the first phenomenologists had been more involved by their wives
- 9 in housework!” (Soentgen, 1997, 89).
- 10 8. Cf. Andermann (2011).
- 11 9. Böhme (1995, 161).
- 12 10. Großheim (1994, 245–250). Especially if, as it now increasingly
- 13 happens, we use an “apparatus equipment” without knowing
- 14 exactly its “nature” and sometimes not even the exact way it works
- 15 (Flusser, 1993, 7).
- 16 11. Böhme (1989, 185–186).
- 17 12. For a little girl, the bark of a tree is always also the face of a threat-
- 18 ening demon (as in the well-known example by Uexküll, 2010,
- 19 129). But even in a bistable figure, it makes no sense to ask which
- 20 of the two potential images is the real one, to be able to unmask
- 21 the deceitful one.
- 22 13. In fact, “it is not the ‘sensible’ that somehow ceases to be, but it is
- 23 rather the idea that breaks the sensible” (Schapp, 1981, 156).
- 24 14. Nevertheless, (*ibid.*, 96, 136ff.) thinks of the “idea,” inseparable
- 25 from the thing, as something extra-psychic no less than extra-
- 26 physical, which is “understood” rather than perceived.
- 27 15. There are exceptions, but they should be sought in types of knowl-
- 28 edge that have always been (or have become) marginal. For
- 29 example, in Jacob Böhme’s theosophic ontology, the thing is
- 30 nothing but the revealing of sound-olfactory *signaturae* (Böhme,
- 31 1995, 164–165).
- 32 16. In the sense that, for instance, a glass of water (individual thing) is
- 33 other than water (substance) despite having the same chemical
- 34 components.
- 35 17. But if being a thing means being a specimen of something, then
- 36 every mysterious and non-specified entity would also be a thing,
- 37 given its individuability as a specimen of the (evidently non-
- 38 natural) species “something.” After all, *contra* Heidegger
- 39 (1967, 190), it is still possible to feel an undetermined “something”
- 40 without the mediation of a specific sense organ.

- 1 18. "A body is one and unchangeable only so long as it is unnecessary
2 to consider its details" (Mach, 1959, 7).
- 3 19. Flusser (1993, 81–89).
- 4 20. On the emblematic value of a phenomenology of unwillingness,
5 cf. Griffero (2012b).
- 6 21. In enhancing various forms of "attenuated" existence, Schmitz
7 speaks right from the beginning of his *System* of quasi-beings,
8 semi-reality or quasi-reality (Schmitz, 1964, 446, 450), and of
9 *Halbdinge* (as opposed to *Voll Dinge*), also originally reworking
10 Sartre's reflections in *Being and Nothingness* on *le mal* (Schmitz,
11 2003, 15).
- 12 22. Schmitz (2005a, 159; 2005b, 61) mostly insists on this.
- 13 23. In short, the perception of quasi-things does not at all amount to
14 the daze (confusion, lack of borders, unreality, etc.) induced in the
15 experimental subject by spinning his or her chair (Kleint, 1940,
16 50–52).
- 17 24. "I require that all that exists [...] is precisely determined" (Schapp,
18 1981, 139).
- 19 25. See Soentgen (1997, 20).
- 20 26. In fact, the ancients regarded any inadequately illuminated space
21 to be inhabited by countless non-things (souls, spirits, etc.)
22 (Schapp, 1981, 59–60), hypostatizing and personifying more
23 autonomous and lasting qualities.
- 24 27. As claims Koffka (1955, 69ff.).
- 25 28. See Großheim (1994, 36) and Böhme (2001, 159–172).
- 26 29. Mahayni (2003, 24–25).
- 27 30. This is the main mistake of a (metaphorically or not) directional or
28 vectorial conception of intentionality (Wiesing 2014, 42).
- 29 31. "If there is something which cannot be regarded as a finite 'thing'
30 it is aerial space, which in consequence, to the primitive method of
31 vision, was empty, null and void, simply non-existent" (Friedländer,
32 1960, 122). See Schmitz (1978, 118).
- 33 32. Soentgen (1997, 99).
- 34 33. In fact, air is the least bodily of ancient elements, and we have of
35 it only an (indirect) testimony through the "experiences of our
36 felt-bodily feeling" (Schmitz, 2003, 103), notably breathing and
37 the wind.
- 38 34. Mahayni (2003, 215, 222); Soentgen (1997, 142).
- 39 35. Mittelstraß (1974, 67).
- 40

- 1 36. I have dealt elsewhere with the irreducibility of atmosphericness
 2 to something metaphorical (Griffero, 2010c).
- 3 37. Perhaps this is the secret of the “view from the tower”: that is, the
 4 authentic archetype of the modern legitimation of the (formerly
 5 taken to be heretic) aesthetic heterotopic *curiositas*.
- 6 38. Making use of the pioneering psychophysical reflections proposed
 7 by Willy Hellpach (1977), phenomenology should investigate the
 8 weather “neither as an objective fact, nor as the marginal condition
 9 of human action, but rather as a correlate of sensations, more pre-
 10 cisely of felt-bodily feeling” (Böhme, 2011, 163).
- 11 39. These data are functional to the weekend culture and for this
 12 reason are privileged compared to mere weather conditions.
 13 However, weather forecasts have been integrating for some time
 14 the “objective” temperature with the “perceived” one, unfortunately
 15 still understood as an instrumentally measurable degree, for exam-
 16 ple, of humidity (psychrometer). Cf. Böhme (2004a).
- 17 40. As Ingold (2012) prefers to say.
- 18 41. See Ogawa (1998, 324ff.) and especially Yamaguchi (1997).
- 19 42. Watsuji (1961, 12–13).
- 20 43. The weather, as “a phenomenon of the earth-sky world [. . .] is the
 21 very temperament of our being.” Short: “the world we inhabit, far
 22 from having crystallised into fixed and final forms, is a world of
 23 becoming, of fluxes and flows or, in short, a weather-world”
 24 (Ingold, 2012, 75, 77, 80).
- 25 44. Bachelard (1988, 225) doesn’t agree: “The wind threatens and
 26 howls but has no shape unless it encounters dust; once visible, it
 27 becomes a mere annoyance,” because all its representations “would
 28 give it rather a derisory appearance.”
- 29 45. As posited by Heider (2005, 46).
- 30 46. “Hearing is more dramatic than seeing. In reverie on the storm, it
 31 is not the eye that produces images, but rather the startled ear. We
 32 participate directly in the drama” (Bachelard, 1988, 226).
- 33 47. The direction of the waves; the pressure on the rudder; the intensity
 34 or color of the foam; certain smells, such as the flora of the still invis-
 35 ible mainland, and, if you like, even seasickness act here as reliable
 36 signs of the wind (see Minssen, 2004, 294–317). But for an attempt
 37 to visualize an intangible (dynamic, transient, aperiodic, turbulent)
 38 atmospheric medium such as air, cf. Wagenfeld (2015), who, in a
 39 sense, calls no-things what we define rather as quasi-things.
 40

- 1 48. "Isn't every flower the proof that natural things present themselves
2 to others?" (Böhme, 1995, 167).
- 3 49. Even weight, traditionally conceived as the intrinsic property of
4 something (and therefore as a primary quality), in hindsight is
5 no more than the simultaneous and reciprocal exposure of phys-
6 ical bodies in space (Böhme, 1995, 165). On this specific notion
7 of thing-ecstasy, see Böhme (2001, 131–144) and Griffero
8 (2005a).
- 9 50. Heidegger (1985, 206).
- 10 51. That is why the ontology of quasi-things should also include
11 atmospheres (Griffero, 2014a, 119–129).
- 12 52. For this qualitative-affective identity (the "power" of things), see
13 Koffka (1955, 72): "the terrifying character of the thunder is its
14 outstanding characteristic, its description as a noise of a certain
15 intensity and quality, quite secondary."
- 16 53. Ibid.
- 17 54. Even those who emphasize the role of protensions take things to
18 be "the self-enclosed set of something that satisfies a particular
19 context of expectation" (Grote, 1972, 41).
- 20 55. Of course it is impossible to sample quasi-things by grasping one
21 part of them (Bloom, 2004, 6).
- 22 56. Soentgen (1997, 49–50).
- 23 57. "They have an inner sphere which they deny to us. Each thing is a
24 *black box*" (ibid., 55).
- 25 58. "Husserl describes the thing as a portion, as an object produced
26 starting from the 'sensible *hyle*' thanks to the creating power of the
27 intellect" (ibid., 78).
- 28 59. Husserl (1997, 62).
- 29 60. Soentgen (1997, 56ff.).
- 30 61. "Latencies" and "norms of reaction" (Grote, 1972, 409ff.).
- 31 62. On this certification (of the human body, place and distance,
32 inside / outside) offered by the readiness-to-hand of things, see
33 Böhme (1995, 161).
- 34 63. "The of-what of things-towards-which only emerges with
35 things-towards-which, for which the material in itself cannot
36 show. The material is a derivative, something that descends from
37 the things-towards-which" (Schapp, 2004, 31). Hence the
38 absurd conclusion that "in order to appear, materials should
39 await the formation of a situation whose centre is man"
40 (Soentgen, 1997, 232).

- 1 64. For some ideas on the aesthetics of portions (and of crunching,
2 thus reconfiguring anything that has a crust) see Soentgen (1997,
3 153–155).
- 4 65. Excluded in discrete things, but possible in totally homogeneous
5 material substances (one portion of salt or water is not different
6 from the other), arbitrary portioning (*Ibid.*, 98–100) seems to
7 be missing entirely from quasi-things, unless they are reduced
8 to material things (for example, lived air to its chemical
9 reification).
- 10 66. Quasi-things “are pure phenomena, or appearances that exist only
11 as long as they appear, and not appearances of something” (Böhme,
12 2001, 62).
- 13 67. *Ibid.*
- 14 68. “Then, beyond every manifestation, the quasi-thing itself is
15 transferred felt-bodily narrowness that, through the felt-bodily
16 communication of the genus of incorporation, acts as a power and
17 thus keeps its manifestations together” (Schmitz, 1978, 136). This
18 thesis of an externalizing “transfer,” however, is no less than prob-
19 lematic in an antiprojectivist theory such as Schmitz’s!
- 20 69. Schmitz (*ibid.*, 133) excludes the immediate invasion of the eve-
21 ning and therefore its quasi-thingly nature, perhaps because of the
22 erroneous confusion between intrusiveness and harassing
23 oppression.
- 24 70. Bloom (2004, 6–7).
- 25 71. Wiesing (2014, 111–112), for whom the main quality of pain is
26 precisely to exist only in the moment in which it exists, denies the
27 meaningfulness of the question by differentiating pain and
28 perception.
- 29 72. See Ammann (1925–1928, 2: 47).
- 30 73. Cf. Varzi (2003) for a sophisticated analysis of the issue, albeit
31 focused on theses (all could amount to momentary entities that
32 take place over time) extraneous to common sense and therefore
33 to the first-person philosophy that constitutes atmospherology.
- 34 74. See Szerszynski (2010, 24).
- 35 75. There would therefore be an occult realm, from which from time
36 to time quasi-things emerge (Soentgen, 1997, 96, criticizing Grote
37 1972, 372).
- 38 76. As suggested by Thomas Fuchs (quoted in Schmitz 2003, 191, 193).
- 39 77. That is, a quasi-thing (antinaturalistically) understood as “a this
40 one” (Heidegger, 1967, 18) present in close proximity.

- 1 78. Such intermittence is not to be confused either with the sci-fi one
 2 (teleportation of objects) or with the artificial one of analytic
 3 ontology: unlike Theseus's ship, a quasi-thing certainly cannot be
 4 disassembled and reassembled (using the same units).
- 5 79. "Only the surface allows for a stable local space—a system of rela-
 6 tive places that are made mutually identifiable thanks to relations
 7 of position and distance measured on immobile objects—and
 8 orientation" (Schmitz, 2010, 279). For a framing of the issue of
 9 "lived space," cf. Griffero (2014 a, c).
- 10 80. Schmitz (2003, 394).
- 11 81. See Soentgen (1997, 126ff.).
- 12 82. But even the "artworks" of a land artist such as Richard Long show
 13 that the line of the wind, always reflecting also the nature of the
 14 area, follows a trend that is predictable to some extent.
- 15 83. Only to an extent (cf. supra C).
- 16 84. Schmitz (2005a, 287).
- 17 85. On this concept, with plausible anthropological bases (breathing
 18 but also the word as breath) but perhaps even more supra-personal
 19 and meteorological ones (wind), see Rappe (1995, 304–323).
- 20 86. "The wind comes from nowhere, shows its presence as it touches
 21 and grasps us felt-bodily, and soon after it goes back to the inde-
 22 terminate which it came from" (Mahayni, 2003, 219). See also
 23 Schmitz (1969, 271).
- 24 87. Mahayni (2003, 251–257).
- 25 88. Henceforth I will freely refer to the classic measurement of the
 26 wind proposed by Francis Beaufort (1831). Cf. Minssen (2004).
- 27 89. Mahayni (2003, 223–224).
- 28 90. Watsuji (1961, 73–74, 136).
- 29 91. Hence the working hypothesis of constructing "a phenomenology
 30 of the scream" starting from "a phenomenology of the storm"
 31 (Bachelard, 1988, 229).
- 32 92. Heidegger (1993, 151) is mistaken when positing that "whether
 33 this unity is conceived as sum or as totality or as a *Gestalt* alters
 34 nothing in the standard character of this thing-concept"—that is,
 35 of the thing as the unit of a multiplicity of sense data.
- 36 93. A situation, "the only event that is never ascribed to a genus"
 37 (Schmitz, 1998, 184), is always chaotic-multiple—that is (I come
 38 back to this several times) not composed of discrete elements but
 39 of states of affairs, programs, and problems, including protensions
 40 (Schmitz, 1978, 129).

- 1 94. According to Schmitz, this is the epochal human introjection (the
 2 Greek invention of the psyche) of all the qualities of the outside
 3 world, including the affective ones. Since then the world has been
 4 explained in terms of the insufficient triad (already present in
 5 Aristotle) substance-accident-relation and reduced to discrete
 6 quantifiable elements. It follows that possible moods are con-
 7 ceived (fatally and mistakenly) as mere metaphoric projections of
 8 the subject.
- 9 95. For Schmitz, quasi-things are: the voice and the gaze, gravity and
 10 the electric shock, the bitter cold and the scorching heat, the
 11 solemn silence or the oppressive and annoying noise, obsessive
 12 musical motifs and pain, nighttime darkness and experienced
 13 time, anger, and even the conscience when, as a semi-free reaction,
 14 “merging cause and action, it works on the situation, the emo-
 15 tional involvement and on itself” (Schmitz, 2003, 14–15, 76).
- 16 96. Waldenfels (2000, 105).
- 17 97. Paraphrasing a famous quote by Rilke: “live [quasi-]things, lived
 18 and conscious of us, are running out and can no longer be replaced.
 19 We are perhaps the last still to have known such things. On us
 20 rests the responsibility [. . .] of preserving their memory” (Rilke,
 21 1947–1948, 375).
- 22 98. Or, if you like, something more stable and objective such as the
 23 “atmospheric” (Böhme, 2001, 59ff.).
- 24 99. I like to think that the examples in which I set out to “lose
 25 myself” are, like quotations, almost “wayside robbers who leap
 26 out armed and relieve the stroller of his conviction” (Benjamin,
 27 1979, 95).

Chapter 2

- 31
- 32 1. Cf. also Griffero (2014e).
- 33 2. The term “resonance” refers to the “simultaneous transposition of
 34 a rhythmic process into a different medium” (Fuchs, 2000, 197).
- 35 3. Rather, poetry follows from the fact that “analogy is the funda-
 36 mental medium of our being-in-the-world” (Spaemann, 1996,
 37 290). At most we could think of the *atmospheric* as an “absolute”
 38 metaphor, following Blumemberg (cf. Griffero, 2010c).
- 39 4. See Fuchs (2000, 202, 204), Binswanger (1947, 75ff.).
- 40 5. See Fuchs (2000, 221–222).

- 1 6. Cf. Schmitz (1965; cf. also 2009 and above all 2011c for a
2 summary).
- 3 7. Grounded in the analysis of ninety different types of “feelings”
4 (Soentgen, 1998, 103).
- 5 8. Cf. Ratcliffe (2008).
- 6 9. Cf. Griffero (2006b, 2009c, 2010b, 2014a), following Tellenbach
7 (1968), Schmitz (1964ff., 1969, 1998, 2014), Hauskeller (1995),
8 Hasse (2005), and especially Böhme (1989, 1993, 1995, 1998,
9 2001, 2006).
- 10 10. Which is nevertheless unrelated to everyday experience, as its aim
11 is that of researching the “purpose” of emotions (Ulich, 1982).
- 12 11. Such theories dangerously atomize each single component (that
13 is, a feeling is a combination of perception, judgment, etc.), but are
14 basically unable to explain their unity.
- 15 12. They thus get segregated within the safe zone of one’s (supposed)
16 privacy or within scientifically legitimate enclaves (psychotherapy).
17 Or—which is worse—they are obscenely spectacularized by the
18 media (Hasse, 2008, 109–110).
- 19 13. A lived-space which is thematizable both from an atmospher-
20 ologic point of view (Griffero, 2014c) and as the evolution of the
21 oneiric condition, onto- and phylogenetically prior to the neutral-
22 objective space (Fuchs, 2000, 209).
- 23 14. Schmitz (1969, 343).
- 24 15. Despite its originality, the reinterpretation of the Husserlian unin-
25 terested subject as the one who “lives with an emotional tone that
26 refers to the being of the world, rather than to the being of the
27 things”(see Costa, 2007, 181) is still too much under the influence
28 of reason. Indeed, in this case the sense of wonder is not existential
29 or historical, but rather a rational fact.
- 30 16. According to Soentgen (1998, 106–107, 118), some neophenom-
31 enological ideas cannot be proven, and yet appear to be particularly
32 useful to eradicate certain deeply rooted biases.
- 33 17. Rather than focusing on the strategies by means of which they can
34 be inhibited (as has happened ever since Plato’s “winged chariot”),
35 or anyway controlled for pragmatic and/or ethical purposes.
- 36 18. Cf. Weber-Guskar (2007).
- 37 19. See Demmerling and Landweer (2007, 21).
- 38 20. Sometimes it is a “silent insinuation,” while some other times it’s a
39 “sudden and violent haunting,” without altering the mimetic cer-
40 tainty: “the perplexity as to what feeling is actually capturing us

- 1 does not at all amount to our hesitation about what gestures to
 2 choose.” (Schmitz 2002b, 73–74).
- 3 21. “For every individual endowed with conscience, the world is split
 4 between their own external and internal worlds, with the proviso
 5 that they will become maximally aware of an object of their own
 6 external world only insofar as such object has a proper representation
 7 within the internal world of the individual” (Schmitz, 2007a, 14).
- 8 22. “The sole aim of all the thinker’s efforts to establish a connection
 9 between the body and the soul as an interaction, a parallelism, or
 10 an intersection is that of eventually patching the distinct fractions
 11 of what is an immediate experience, in our daily life: the vital unity
 12 of the man whom we perceive, even through the autonomizations
 13 of the body and the soul” (Simmel, 1985, 54).
- 14 23. One might think—but this is just an example—that emotions,
 15 much like atmospheres, may last less time than feelings, which in
 16 turn (as they are more centripetal) may last less time than moods
 17 (as they are more centrifugal).
- 18 24. “The conflicting results of the research on the meaning of the
 19 word ‘emotion,’ as well as on the meaning and the structural
 20 dimension of the words which constitute the emotional lexicon of
 21 the languages we have studied thus far, lead researchers to think
 22 unanimously that it is currently not possible to identify a proper
 23 definition of ‘emotion,’ or to classify the emotional lexicon of a
 24 language” (Galati, 2002, 143).
- 25 25. See Bollnow (1956, 47). It is possible that seemingly extra-atmo-
 26 spheric situations are impersonal and anonymous atmospheres, or
 27 situations whose atmospheric charge does not reach the critical
 28 threshold; or, again, they may be dissolving moods that haven’t
 29 been compensated by a new *Stimmung* yet.
- 30 26. For a first, tentative atmospherologic revisitation of Heidegger’s
 31 *Befindlichkeit*, cf. Griffero (2008a).
- 32 27. To which I refer once and for all (Griffero, 2014a).
- 33 28. From which I exclude (Griffero, 2010c; 2014a, 108–112). While
 34 admitting that metaphors “enhance atmospheres, amplifying them
 35 and enchaining other metaphors” (Costa, et al., 2014, 355), I
 36 exclude that an atmosphere is not but an effect of metaphorical
 37 language and prefer rather to think (with Ingold, 2012, 80) that
 38 the literal and the metaphorical meaning of the term “atmosphere”
 39 suggests that something more fundamental is at stake.
- 40 29. Wittgenstein (2009, 164e; 1980, 84).

- 1 30. Supporting conviction and understanding (Wittgenstein, 2009,
2 77e, 90e, 167e).
- 3 31. Wittgenstein (1980, 111–113).
- 4 32. “An atmosphere that is inseparable from its object—is no atmo-
5 sphere” (Wittgenstein 2009, 192e).
- 6 33. Among other things, it has been considered avoidable: “a particular
7 atmosphere, which dissipates when I look closely” (Wittgenstein,
8 2009, 77e).
- 9 34. Wittgenstein (1992, vol 1, §726; vol. 2, 38).
- 10 35. See Hobuß (2007, 192–194).
- 11 36. For an infant, the atmosphericness of motherly language (the so-
12 called motherese) is extrasemantic, as it’s constituted by physiog-
13 nomic variations of acoustic parameters.
- 14 37. Piattelli Palmarini (1995, 76–77); Griffero (2014a, 4 and note 12).
- 15 38. Lately Schmitz (2005a, 284; 2011a, 30).
- 16 39. See Hauskeller (1995, 30) and Soentgen (1998, 108–112), who
17 suggests that we might consider it as an “order of types,” similar to
18 that of clouds.
- 19 40. Such a risk of reification is avoidable through a certain diversifica-
20 tion (Griffero, 2014a, 129ff.), partly following Böhme (2001).
- 21 41. Demmerling (2011, 53).
- 22 42. See Schmitz (1978, 257ff.).
- 23 43. As stated by Soentgen (1998, 111).
- 24 44. Schmitz (2003, 180–181).
- 25 45. Besides, such an analogy appears to be incomplete: if we can surely
26 consider “a feeling as a kind of climate, or a climate as a kind of
27 feeling” (Schmitz, 1969, 362), then why doesn’t a climate become
28 “mine” when it affects me? (Fuchs, 2000, 84, 226).
- 29 46. Schmitz (1967, 1969); Griffero (2010a, 2014c, 2014f).
- 30 47. Hauskeller (1995, 25).
- 31 48. This is a sovraperonality that (partially or totally?) works within
32 culturally homogeneous circles.
- 33 49. “Something is never solely enclosed within its boundaries. It ema-
34 nates heat like an oven, as well as cold like ice (zur Lippe 1987,
35 515). Cf. Böhme (2001).
- 36 50. Cf. Gibson (1986).
- 37 51. Demmerling (2011, 50).
- 38 52. They should not be understood in a reductionist way, however:
39 although atmospheres are higher-order properties supervening to
40 physical properties, which in turn constitute them and bring them

- 1 to realization, the former never fully identify with or, which is
 2 worse, reduce themselves to the latter.
- 3 53. Schmitz (1965, 343; 1998, 188; 1999, 285ff.).
- 4 54. Böhme (2001, 59–60).
- 5 55. “We all have in our past a delightful garret.” (Hugo, 2006, vol. 2,
 6 231).
- 7 56. Kimura (2005) and Yamaguchi (1997).
- 8 57. “A third element which is inserted in between two borders as if
 9 it were a membrane and whose sole effect is that of stiffening
 10 the psychologicistic hiatus between the internal worlds and the
 11 external world, with its psychologicistic-reductionist-introjectivist
 12 paradigm”(Schmitz, 2002b, 71; see also 2005a, 273).
- 13 58. Huppertz (2007, 159n2).
- 14 59. Without being illusory, material and teleologically addressed
 15 toward objectivity as much as the one referred to by Winnicott
 16 (2005, ch. 1, for instance).
- 17 60. Though it’s identified neither with the mental image, nor with the
 18 real object (Costa, 2007, 154ff.). From this point of view,
 19 the atmosphere is an emotional state that’s constantly supposed on
 20 the reflexive level (yet allowing for variations of meaning along the
 21 course of the experience). Each time, though, it’s always as “real” as
 22 a life experience, without being parasitic of some regulative idea of
 23 a meaning (or a feeling) in itself.
- 24 61. Blum (2010, 244–249).
- 25 62. In this hypothesis, each affective-qualitative element perceived
 26 in an external world completely devoid of tertiary qualities and
 27 inhabited only by quantifiable and material dimensions (pri-
 28 mary qualities), by neutral data waiting *to receive* some kind of
 29 meaning and to be integrated with theoretical constructs of
 30 statistical-prognostic value, would necessarily be illusory (i.e., an
 31 unconscious projection of a psychic element [of the inner
 32 world]).
- 33 63. When we mistakenly judge the sentiment of others as more
 34 intense than it is, we can even perceive the authority of “a feeling
 35 that is not felt by anyone” (Hauskeller, 1995, 23).
- 36 64. (Patzelt, 2007, 196–197).
- 37 65. In the obvious sense that “to dive” into an atmosphere of grief, for
 38 instance, is not identifiable with the mere “knowledge” about the
 39 unavailability of death.
- 40 66. Blume and Demmerling (2007, 126).

- 1 67. As posited by Hauskeller (1995, 22); see Blume and Demmerling
 2 (2007, 127).
- 3 68. Blume and Demmerling (2007, 127).
- 4 69. Schmitz (2008, 8).
- 5 70. Probably in a no more cognitive than affective way, implying an
 6 immediate experience of the primitive presence and the coercion
 7 to accept the state of affairs as a “fact.”
- 8 71. A force that instead, in the case of the atmosphere of love, is based
 9 on constraints that are always relatively vague and, in any case,
 10 neither too tight nor too loose (Schmitz, 2008, 8, 11–12).
- 11 72. Hence the recurring mistake, a true *refugium ignorantiae*, of seeing
 12 a kind of sorcery in it (see Carnevali, 2012, 100–103).
- 13 73. Griffero (2012b).
- 14 74. Schapp (2004).
- 15 75. “The software of new conflicts is given by information and media
 16 design and—as a result—by the generation of artificial atmo-
 17 spheres of fear” (Milev, 2012, 301).
- 18 76. Böhme (2007, 282–283).
- 19 77. Think of the conditioning due to so-called mental images
 20 (individual and/or collective), “catchy” melodies and rhythms, or
 21 suggestive names of places and people.
- 22 78. Griffero (2014a, 130–131).
- 23 79. Here we shall prescind from the antipsychologistic objections
 24 made against Schleiermacher by Otto.
- 25 80. Otto (1936).
- 26 81. In every highly developed religion the appreciation of moral
 27 obligation and duty, ranking as a claim of the deity upon man,
 28 has been developed side by side with the religious feeling itself.
 29 None the less a profoundly humble and heartfelt recognition of
 30 the holy may occur in particular experiences without being
 31 always or definitely charged or infused with the Hense of moral
 32 demands. The holy will then be recognized as that which com-
 33 mands our respect, as that whose real value is to be acknowl-
 34 edged inwardly. It is not that the awe of holiness is itself simply
 35 fear in face of what is absolutely overpowering, before which
 36 there is no alternative to blind, awe-struck obedience. Tu solus
 37 sanctus is rather a paeon of praise, which, so far from being
 38 merely a faltering confession of the divine supremacy, recog-
 39 nizes and extols a value, precious beyond all conceiving. (ibid.,
 40 53–54)

1 82. Following Seneca (1917, 273), who acknowledged (*Letters to*
 2 *Lucilius*, 41,3) that the divine is naturally suggested by thick
 3 woods, lonely places and dense shadows, Otto (1936, 12–13; my
 4 emphasis) can state the following:
 5

6 Let us follow [this feeling] up with every effort of
 7 sympathy and imaginative intuition wherever it is to be
 8 found, in the lives of those around us, in sudden, strong
 9 ebullitions of personal piety and the frames of mind such
 10 ebullitions evince, in the fixed and ordered solemnities of
 11 rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that *clings*
 12 to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples
 13 and to churches [. . .] The feeling of it may at times come
 14 sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a
 15 tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into
 16 a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing,
 17 as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it
 18 dies away and the soul resumes its profane, non-religious
 19 mood of everyday experience.
 20

21 83. “Revelation does not mean a mere passing over into the intelligible
 22 and comprehensible. Something may be profoundly and inti-
 23 mately known in feeling for the bliss it brings or the agitation it
 24 produces, and yet the understanding may find no concept for it. To
 25 know and to understand conceptually are two different things, are
 26 often even mutually exclusive and contrasted. The mysterious
 27 obscurity of the numen is by no means tantamount to unknow-
 28 ableness” (ibid., 139).

29 84. “It does not arise out of them, but only by their means. They
 30 are the incitement, the stimulus, and the occasion for the
 31 numinous experience to become astir, and, in so doing, to begin
 32 at first with a naïve immediacy of reaction to be interfused and
 33 interwoven with the present world of sensuous experience” (ibid.,
 34 117).

35 85. “Like all other primal psychical elements, [the holy] emerges in
 36 due course in the developing life of human mind and spirit and is
 37 thenceforward simply present. Of course it can only emerge if
 38 and when certain conditions are fulfilled, conditions involving a
 39 proper development of the bodily organs and the other powers of
 40 mental and emotional life in general, a due growth in

- 1 suggestibility and spontaneity and responsiveness to external
 2 impressions and internal experiences. But such conditions are no
 3 more than conditions; they are not its causes or constituent ele-
 4 ments” (ibid., 128).
- 5 86. See Rappe (1995; for a summary see 312–323).
- 6 87. For the proto-Christian, already prepared to the not fully personal
 7 objectivity of feeling by the Old Testament idea of divine wrath
 8 that permeates everything, it must have seemed entirely plausible
 9 to conceive the divine as an impersonal power (1 Jn 4:18)—hence
 10 the subsequent resistance to accept the personalization of the spirit
 11 in the Trinity (Schmitz, 2012, 55)—that is, as an atmosphere.
- 12 88. “No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives
 13 in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 Jn 4:12).
- 14 89. “Local divine atmospheres are part of the immense realm of supra-
 15 personal and objective feelings, which partly exist [...], like weather,
 16 without a place and simply, so to speak, ‘in the air,’ or more precisely
 17 in the space of vastness; and which are partly also condensed in
 18 determined places and around certain objects, often only as fleeting
 19 evocations” (Schmitz, 1977, 133–134.) See Norberg-Schulz (1980),
 20 Kozljanič (2004), Griffero (2014a, 74–75; 2016, 206–228).
- 21 90. See Schmitz (1977, 149; 1990, 439).
- 22 91. Griffero (2010a, 2014c).
- 23 92. Even Phillip Gröning’s film, *Into Great Silence* (2005), set in the
 24 monastery of the Grand Chartreuse in the French Alps (Huppertz
 25 2007, 160–166), rather than generating a religious atmosphere
 26 through various means (silent spaces extraneous to the historical
 27 time, light that is conducive to recollection, characters without a
 28 socio-biographical identity almost ahead of otherworldly deper-
 29 sonalization, almost hypnotic practices aimed at the generation of
 30 transformational psychic conditions), simply sets up a condition of
 31 possibility that is necessary (but not sufficient).
- 32 93. See Schmitz (1977, 91): “an atmosphere, whether it is a feeling (or
 33 a constellation of feelings), is divine, as a gripping power, when its
 34 authority has an unconditional seriousness for those who are
 35 gripped by it.”
- 36 94. See Thibaud (2003, 293), Bockemühl (2002, 221), and Minkowski
 37 (1936, 234); see also the doubts expressed by Mühleis (2007, 130,
 38 136).
- 39 95. Thus Böhme (2001), referring to Albers (1975). Blum (2010, 130)
 40 also distinguishes between matters of concern and matters of fact.

- 1 96. Kojève (2013, 28).
 2 97. It does not seem possible to decide to undergo once again the
 3 authority of a dissolved atmosphere.
 4 98. Patzelt (2007, 211ff.).
 5 99. Böhme (2007, 289–290).
 6 100. Blum (2010, 66 and lxxviii).
 7 101. For example, slow motion in cinema is atmospherically revealing
 8 (ibid., 214–216).
 9 102. Ibid., (14, 35).
 10 103. Kojève (2013, 7).
 11 104. Böhme (2007, 288).
 12 105. Meyer-Sickendiek (2011).
 13 106. Schmitz perhaps juxtaposes too much depth and breadth (1969,
 14 337).
 15 107. “Flat and shallow moods always have a somewhat monotonous
 16 direction [...] On the contrary, all deep feelings have within them-
 17 selves a polyvocal direction. And the deepest oppositions of the
 18 soul seem to agree without exception on immediately reunifying
 19 at the same time the starkest contrasts of feeling inside them”
 20 (Krueger, 1953, 191).
 21 108. Scheler (1963, 46).
 22 109. Schmitz (2002b, 75; see also 1999, 288).
 23 110. Thibaud (2003, 287) and Griffero (2014a, 129–141).
 24 111. Schultheis (2008).
 25 112. Schmitz (2008b, 9).
 26 113. Schmitz (2003, 47–48).
 27 114. A contrast of feelings that, unlike Hauskeller (1995, 23) and
 28 Demmerling (2011, 47), Schmitz does not attribute to the simple
 29 corporeal motions (otherwise a tired person would become perky
 30 for the sole reason of meeting energetic and volitional people), but
 31 that he explains by calling to witness the pleasure for the others’
 32 misfortunes (or vice versa) (Schmitz, 2002b, 70–71). Schmitz and
 33 his critics underestimate, however, the case of syntony: a sad
 34 person among the sad is, in fact, often less sad, and a happy person
 35 among other happy people (who are happy in an excessive way, or
 36 simply for trivial reasons) is a little less happy (and not only due to
 37 a superficial spirit of distinction).
 38 115. “We do not perceive an atmosphere, but rather perceive in accor-
 39 dance with the atmosphere” (Thibaud, 2003, 293).
 40 116. Garelli (1992, 81), Kazig (2008, 149).

- 1 117. Cf. Böhme (2001) and Griffero (2010b).
 2 118. Cf. Griffero (2014b).
 3 119. Pinzer (2012, 107–108).
 4 120. Pallasmaa (2011, 89).
 5 121. Warren (1995).
 6 122. This is true not only, as for Sartre, with regard to atmospheric
 7 irradiation of the gaze of others, but also for the appearance of a
 8 thing (see Jäkel, 2013, 94ff.).
 9 123. Schmitz (1999, 258ff.).
 10 124. Ever since Kenny (1963).
 11 125. Which might be but “the positivistic surrogate of the atmospheric”
 12 (Schmitz, 2003, 7).
 13 126. Grounded either in axiologic judgments, though not necessarily
 14 propositional ones (Nussbaum, 2001), or in forms of knowledge
 15 that are corresponsive in their “secret intentionality” (Goldie,
 16 2000, 54).
 17 127. The reference to the world of moods is broader and vague. As it
 18 shows itself “as an answer to the question ‘how are you?’ then the
 19 next appropriate question appears to be not so much ‘what about?’
 20 as ‘why?’ Only in this way is it implied that the sadness was meant
 21 as a mood, as not as a directed state” (Tugendhat 1993a, 184).
 22 128. See Slaby (2007, 102, 109; 2008).
 23 129. See especially Metzger (1941, 175ff.).
 24 130. Schmitz (1969, 319). The origin of a feeling does not cease to be
 25 so only because it does not appear (Hauskeller, 1995, 28).
 26 131. Schmitz (1969, 321).
 27 132. Whose clarification can even be pathogenic, much like in the case
 28 of a psychotic worry which turns into a hallucinated perception of
 29 a “concrete” threat (Fuchs, 2000, 381 n25).
 30 133. In my view, the atmosphere is precisely “the acceptance of a mean-
 31 ing which has established itself at a passive level”: this is how
 32 Costa (2007, 148) explains prethetic (operating) and revealing
 33 intentionality, on the basis of which the meaning appears to the
 34 subject without being itself the subject’s product.
 35 134. When the priority of perception is given not to the subject or to
 36 the object, but rather to the perception itself (non-directionally,
 37 therefore non-dualistically understood), the percipient is in turn
 38 necessarily identified with the perceived (ontological equivalence),
 39 with a portion of the world (see Wiesing, 2014, 95ff.).
 40 135. Demmerling and Landweer (2007, 30).

- 1 136. Schmitz (2003, 406–409). Merleau-Ponty (2005, xi) legitimates
 2 from the very start a “reflection upon an unreflective experience.”
- 3 137. This is also presupposed by Waldenfels (2000, 278–280). However,
 4 he disapproves of a sort of *cripto*-Cartesianism (I am I > my felt-
 5 body is my felt-body) within the Schmitzean theory so aggres-
 6 sively that we may think of a (more-than-theoretical) tension
 7 between the two. This *cripto*-Cartesianism, according to
 8 Waldenfels, is allergic to the dimension of alterity and paradoxi-
 9 cally, for an author who cares for *depsychologization* (like
 10 Schmitz), leads to “a new sort of interiority, with a rather simplis-
 11 tic description (*Biedermeier*)” (*ibid.*, 280).
- 12 138. Which is feared by anyone who idealistically holds that nature,
 13 as it shifted from an autonomous power to being subject to laws
 14 of the humans, “can have no power over him, for in order to
 15 become objective it has to experience his own power” (Schiller,
 16 1902, vol. 1, 92).
- 17 139. The fact that, unlike “things” in a strict sense, quasi-thingly feel-
 18 ings can be articulated only through language (Demmerling,
 19 2011, 54–55) is readily denied, I think, by the precision of their
 20 felt-bodily resonance, as well as by the inevitably analytic-
 21 discriminatory character (hence “posthumous”) of the language,
 22 in contrast with the atmospheric-situational holism (Griffero,
 23 2013a).
- 24 140. See Fuchs (2000, 236).
- 25 141. Contra Demmerling (2011, 50). Also, let us not forget that the
 26 less an atmosphere is observed and noticed, the more strongly it
 27 determines us (Heidegger, 1995, 68).
- 28 142. Schmitz (2003, 251).
- 29 143. This sounds like Lichtenberg’s well-known joke: “Is it possible
 30 that girls may blush in the dark? Such a matter is undecidable, as
 31 we would need the light in order to verify this” (Schmitz, cited in
 32 Blume 2003, 81n22).
- 33 144. As Hauskeller also thinks (1995, 31–32 and n. 37).
- 34 145. Cf. Scheler (1973) and Griffero (2015).
- 35 146. Blume and Demmerling (2007, 129–131).
- 36 147. Kettner (2007, 68).
- 37 148. According to Schmitz (2013, 101), they are provided mainly by
 38 the motor suggestions and the synaesthetic characters inherent
 39 especially in the eyes and the voice.
- 40 149. *Ibid.*, 106ff.

- 1 150. If we really were to adopt the four pure types of authority described
 2 by Kojève, they would be: father-son, master-servant, leader-band,
 3 judge.
- 4 151. Schmitz (2012a, 169–170).
- 5 152. Which aesthetic sensibility also pertains to: the melancholic
 6 atmosphere of a rainy landscape appears relatively less melancholic
 7 in the artistic mediation (Schmitz, 2005, 289). But the relation-
 8 ship between the two levels of atmospheric power—hence the
 9 paradox that makes the museum into a device that both removes
 10 aura (transformation of an originally religious authority into a
 11 “solely” artistic authority) and confers it (transfer of value and
 12 therefore aesthetic authority to banal everyday objects)—deserves
 13 much further investigation.
- 14 153. Through self-consciousness, “anyone can discover in himself an
 15 ability to *abstract from anything whatsoever*, and likewise to deter-
 16 mine himself, to posit *any content* in himself” (Hegel, 1991, 37; my
 17 emphasis).
- 18 154. “When the gripping is authentic, he who is caught must first of all
 19 be in solidarity with the feeling and accept it in its own momen-
 20 tum; only later can he be personally confronted with the sentiment,
 21 surrendering to it or resisting it” (Schmitz, 2012a, 45). Hence the
 22 possibility, usually excluded at the outset in the field of political sci-
 23 ence, of authority over the self: in this case, instead, it is exercised by
 24 a part of the self (involvement) over another, refractory part of the
 25 self (the previous state of mind but also more rational reflection).
- 26 155. Beyond inadequate positivist theories (theory of values, natural
 27 law) or consensual theories (discourse ethics) of the sources of law
 28 (Schmitz, 2012b, 41–49).
- 29 156. It is not by chance that in cultures that are not legally normed one
 30 tends to respect wrath (of the wronged person), which is obviously
 31 considered endowed with exceptional authority.
- 32 157. Jesus’s solution (Jn 7:53–8:11: “He that is without sin among you,
 33 let him first cast a stone at her”) is different, as it turns the wrath
 34 towards the guilty, demanding vengeance, into collective shame
 35 (Schmitz, 2003, 302).
- 36 158. See Schmitz (2005a, 242). For example, it is by prefeeling the
 37 atmosphere of outrage that would cause our outburst that we
 38 avoid to cross a Michael Kohlhaas type of road without exit.
- 39 159. Welcoming the (by no means exhaustive) distinction among phys-
 40 ical, social, and medial atmosphere (Heibach, 2010b, 11).

- 1 160. We might speak, in general, of a “climatic pleroma” or “third
2 subtle” (climate, *Stimmung*, *milieu*, *Umwelt*, even expression, etc.),
3 that, because of its non-objectual and non-informative nature, is
4 unrecognized by modern European rationalism (Sloterdijk, 2012,
5 28–29).
- 6 161. Günzel (2011, 67).
- 7 162. Werhahn (2003, 79–81).
- 8 163. Böhme (1995, 199–200).
- 9 164. What if (Mt 12:44–45) the room was occupied by even worse and
10 more numerous spirits (see Werhahn, 2003, 80)?
- 11 165. Heibach (2012c, 263).
- 12 166. Schmitz (2002b, 169).
- 13 167. The only exception admitted by Schmitz in this trivial “smelling”
14 (aesthetic) atmospheres is dwelling as cultivation of feelings in an
15 enclosed space (home, church, garden, Japanese tea house, etc.).
- 16 168. For a few suggestions see Heibach (2012c, 263ff.).
- 17 169. Schmitz overestimates the immediacy of feelings (despite their
18 *status nascendi*) and the automatic gestural consequences of grip-
19 ping (often one is immediately certain of feeling something, but
20 one does not know what it is!). Besides, this is simplistically
21 explained as a relationship between servant (perceiver) and master
22 (feeling), thus underestimating not only the ambiguity of feelings
23 but also the—at least partial—active role of the subject in their
24 very creation (see Soentgen, 1998, 112ff.).
- 25 170. Schmitz (2003, 328; 2008, 14).
- 26 171. Bieger (2011, 88–89).
- 27 172. Griffero (2013b).
- 28 173. Diaconu (2012, 88).
- 29 174. Such sovereignty “presupposes [...] a certain willingness to expose
30 oneself, so that human beings may be trained in accepting the fact
31 that they are hetero-determined” (Böhme, 2008, 197).
- 32 175. Schmitz (1969, 348; 1990, 258–260).
- 33 176. See Soentgen (1998, 149), Fuchs (2000, 228–229); Wildt (2001,
34 469).
- 35 177. It is not accidental that Schmitz studied with Erich Rothacker,
36 whose core philosophical anthropology displays forms of life as
37 (possibly also creative) reactions to the “meaningfulness” of the
38 *Umwelt* (cf. Griffero, 2008b).
- 39 178. Yet to be explained is how an emotional rapture may be
40 kitsch, as it is—at least for the case of the prototypical

- 1 atmosphericity—dyscrasic, unexpected, and unrelated to the
 2 emotional commonsense (also of the percipient subject).
- 3 179. Why is it necessary to stigmatize (see Hauskeller, 1995, 30) the
 4 fact that someone is experiencing some trivial joy (Schmitz 1969,
 5 355), if we wish for a full passivity with respect to the atmospheric
 6 influence? “Schmitz fights against the “ideology of the ‘I,’” but
 7 there are very few philosophers who pronounced the word ‘I’ as
 8 willingly as he did while claiming to be original” (Soentgen, 1998,
 9 117).
- 10 180. Humankind cannot “put itself in the perspective of vastness and,
 11 as if it were some Archimedes’ point, leverage such vastness to
 12 manipulate feelings”(Schmitz, 2005a, 283).
- 13 181. The “being-what-it-is of every individual endowed with
 14 conscience”(Schmitz, 2002b, 148).
- 15 182. For some, atmospherology is an inappropriate generalization
 16 (Blume and Demmerling, 2007, 123) of certain circumscribed
 17 types of emotional experience—for instance climatic and/or col-
 18 lective (e.g., Saturday night’s “fever”). The fact that a good theory
 19 of feelings (also atmospherologic) is grounded in a philosophy of
 20 situations (for which Soentgen [1998, 108] accuses Schmitz) is so
 21 well established that the very concept of “situation” has been one
 22 of the most studied by Schmitz over the last two decades (Griffero,
 23 2009b).
- 24 183. Cf. Schmitz (2011b), concerning their atmospherichness.
- 25 184. On the *Stimmungsraum*, see Fuchs (2000, 193–251).
- 26 185. Before choosing the theme for a novel, Simenon suggests that one
 27 needs find the right atmosphere, to which one may eventually attune
 28 a certain season and the other details, much like a musical theme.
- 29 186. See Bieger (2011, 84).

Chapter 3

- 34 1. Cf. Griffero (2010e).
- 35 2. “The full and extraordinary support system that would be required
 36 to allow a brain-in-a-vat to experience things as we experience
 37 them, or in other words, to allow a brain-in-a-vat to be phenom-
 38 enologically in-the-world and not just physically in-a-vat, would
 39 have to replicate the bodily system that already supports our ordi-
 40 nary existence” (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008, 131).

- 1 3. Starting from the fruitful consequences of the erect position:
2 mobility and freedom of the hands, distance and independence
3 from anything, predominance of the sight and thus of fore-
4 sight, etc.
- 5 4. Also considering a *Gestaltkreis* between spontaneous motion and
6 perceived environmental feedback (Weizsäcker).
- 7 5. Looking for a name that's not tainted by dualism, the later
8 Merleau-Ponty (1968) referred to "chair," which in my opinion is
9 no less equivocal.
- 10 6. Properly, "a subject has no perceptions, but rather perceives!"
11 (Wiesing, 2014, 77).
- 12 7. Cf. Griffero (2003, 2006a, 2009a, 2011c, 2011d).
- 13 8. See Böhme (2003, 9) and Waldenfels (2000, 42).
- 14 9. Though linguistically approximable. Indeed, if we allowed that "to
15 feel our felt-body already entails the tendency to distance our-
16 selves from it within our consciousness" and, *a fortiori*, that "the
17 explicit linguistic articulation of the felt-body is [...] a product of
18 its elimination, even in the case of its counterposition to it"
19 (Böhme, 2010, 112, 119), the lived-body would be comprehensi-
20 ble only when practiced.
- 21 10. Also in Merleau-Ponty's view, the body is composed of organs,
22 even though, differently from the physical one, it is open to the
23 world.
- 24 11. Horror, anguish, hunger, thirst, pleasure, disgust, vigor, fatigue,
25 and, as we see in detail, pain and shame; cf. infra chap. 4 and 5.
- 26 12. Csepregi (2006, especially 51ff.).
- 27 13. With the notorious theoretical (materialism, occasionalism, psy-
28 chophysical parallelism, psychosomatics) and therapeutic (drugs
29 and psych drugs abuse) consequences.
- 30 14. But also in second person, given the possibility to access the physi-
31 cal body through the interaction with a "you" (Demmerling and
32 Landweer, 2007, 22n42).
- 33 15. If we conceived of the *Leib* as an autonomous "thing," instead of a
34 quasi-thing or as a function in which we are emotionally involved
35 in first person, we would fatally fall back to dualism, which we
36 want to avoid: such dualism would be no longer between body and
37 soul, but rather between felt-body and physical body (Soentgen,
38 1998, 60ff.; Waldenfels, 2000, 280; Blume and Demmerling, 2007,
39 119–120).
- 40 16. Straus (1963, 367–379).

- 1 17. Böhme (2003, 75).
- 2 18. Starting from the paranoid anguish of shame, as the reification
- 3 and decentralization of one's own person, up to dysesthesia and,
- 4 above all, dysmorphophobia as an exaggerated perception of a cer-
- 5 tain portion of the physical body, which is surgically incurable pre-
- 6 cisely because it's felt-bodily.
- 7 19. Waldenfels (2000, 255–257).
- 8 20. "Surfaces are unrelated to the felt-body; there are no surfaces
- 9 within our felt-bodily sensations" (Schmitz, 2010, 280).
- 10 21. Such as when we anatomically highlight, for instance, the sensa-
- 11 tion for which the uterus is a nomadic organ inside women's body.
- 12 This conception was common up until the eighteenth century.
- 13 22. Grote (1972, 92).
- 14 23. Cf. Griffero (2014c).
- 15 24. In fact, the question "where are you?" would be replied with a "I
- 16 know where I am, but I feel like I'm not there" by the schizoid
- 17 patient (Minkowski, 1970, 272ff.).
- 18 25. Following Straus (1963, 316–324).
- 19 26. A central notion in Schmitz (since 1965).
- 20 27. "In anxiety or joy the sensation seems to have its seat in the heart.
- 21 Many affections, yea most of them, manifest themselves most
- 22 strongly in the diaphragm. Pity moves the intestines, and other
- 23 instincts manifest their origin in other organs" (Kant, 1900, 50*).
- 24 Of course, the mistake is simply the organic collocation.
- 25 28. See Schmitz (2010, 225), for example.
- 26 29. Schmitz (1965, 27ff.); Soentgen (1998, 19).
- 27 30. Consider the difficulties transsexuals face when they strive to find
- 28 a match between their lived-body and the topography of their
- 29 (new) physical body.
- 30 31. Though the difference becomes thinner if we define the body
- 31 schema as an automatic system of sensory-motor processes and
- 32 prereflexive and proprioceptive consciousness (Gallagher and
- 33 Zahavi, 2008, 146), and if we see it as "an invisible network of the
- 34 spatial orientation [which is not] limited to our felt-body, but
- 35 rather also includes its correlation to the environment and to its
- 36 own dealing with things" (Fuchs, 2000, 41).
- 37 32. See Böhme (2003, 29).
- 38 33. Waving the hands, for instance, pretending to greet someone
- 39 (Waldenfels, 2000, 114–115).
- 40

- 1 34. The original and often oneirically attestable fragmentation of the
 2 body makes room for a single phantomatic unity, according to
 3 Lacan, only by means of a mirror image.
- 4 35. “The body schema, the way the body articulates, [is] at the same
 5 time an expression of the way the others see me” (Waldenfels,
 6 2000, 121).
- 7 36. Which is inexplicable in terms of illusion of the representational
 8 consciousness or as a malfunction of nerve funicula, and this is
 9 why it is meaningfully reinterpreted from both a psychological
 10 and a physiological (“existential”) perspective by Merleau-Ponty
 11 (1945, 88ff.). The phantom limb is actually a felt-bodily isle, a
 12 quasi-thing, which appears to be delusional only insofar as it is
 13 framed on the basis of the body schema (for instance, when one
 14 leans on the missing leg and falls): Schmitz (1965, 30) thinks so as
 15 well, albeit rejecting (2003, 387) Merleau-Ponty’s explanation,
 16 which he considers grotesque.
- 17 37. See Schmitz (2010, 231–232).
- 18 38. As a “systematic representation and culturally specific of the lived-
 19 body and of its motion” (Rappe, 1995, 34).
- 20 39. Cf. Griffero (2014c).
- 21 40. Cf. Rappe’s systematic work (1995), in line with Schmitz’s
 22 interpretation.
- 23 41. See Schmitz (1965, 365ff.).
- 24 42. If we admitted that human perception, which is all but a natural
 25 invariance, is nowadays governed by tasks of mere data acquisition
 26 and/or decodification of signals, how could we take it away from
 27 deep anthropological influences, especially if we’re driven simply
 28 by a resurrected theoretical paradigm? Where should we draw the
 29 resources to single out a sensible-bodily perception, which may be
 30 a perfect seismograph of one’s own emotional situation, rather
 31 than of the organism?
- 32 43. Since “only culture treats the body as a thing that can be owned,
 33 only in culture has it been distinguished from mind [. . .] as the
 34 object, the dead thing, the *corpus*,” it “remains a cadaver, no matter
 35 how trained and fit it may” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002,
 36 193–194).
- 37 44. “Those who extolled the body in Germany, the gymnasts and out-
 38 door sports enthusiasts, always had an intimate affinity to killing,
 39 as nature lovers have to hunting. They see the body as a mobile
 40

- 1 mechanism, with its hinged links, the flesh upholstering the
 2 skeleton. They manipulate the body, actuating the limbs as if they
 3 were already severed. [. . .] Unaware, they measure the other with
 4 the eye of the coffin maker” (ibid., 195).
- 5 45. It is not (following Aristotle) the soul, but the felt-body that is
 6 every other thing: “body am I through and through, and nothing
 7 besides; and soul is just a word for something on the body”
 8 (Nietzsche, 2006, 23).
- 9 46. Just as well, the relation between the mother and the foetus thus
 10 becomes surprisingly artificial. In a way, it is turned into an arte-
 11 fact, thanks to prenatal diagnostics (see Böhme, 2003, 37).
- 12 47. Which is something more than the “embodiment” made possible
 13 by new habits that have become familiar (Leder, 1990, 31).
- 14 48. “The tool is integrated within the felt-bodily sensations, so that it
 15 is—and it is moved—as if it were one of my parts” (Böhme, 2003,
 16 305).
- 17 49. In the Jamesian sense that anger, for instance, does not appear in
 18 clenching the fist, but rather *it is* that clenching (Waldenfels,
 19 2000, 226).
- 20 50. “From our felt-bodiliness come moral problems; that is, serious
 21 problems, and as we make our decisions on those, we thereby
 22 decide what we are and how we are as human beings” (Böhme,
 23 2008, 67).
- 24 51. For a first, historiographically useful approach to a phenomenol-
 25 ogy of the felt-body as philosophy of nature working as a “didacti-
 26 cal integration’ in the sense of an education to life and experience”;
 27 see Thomas (1996, 201 for the quotation).
- 28 52. “In general I am a self as it’s inevitable that I am given to myself”;
 29 “my body is not mine because I own it, but because I am given to
 30 myself as a felt-body” (Böhme, 2008, 157, 160).
- 31 53. Schmitz (2010, 248).
- 32 54. Hence the plethora of artificial remedies (sleeping pills, laxatives,
 33 aphrodisiacs, painkillers, stimulants), as they can force the body to
 34 do what it, in its non-intentionality, should be perfectly able to do
 35 by itself.
- 36 55. Cf. also Shustermann (2008).
- 37 56. The one suggested by New Phenomenology is particularly com-
 38 plex, and its obviously combinable “letters” include: “angst, vastity,
 39 contraction, expansion, direction, tension, dilatation, intensity,
 40

- 1 rhythm (felt-bodily economy as a combination of intensity and
 2 rhythm), privative expansion, privative contraction, protopathic
 3 tendency, epicritic tendency, felt-bodily isles formation, felt-bodily
 4 isles decrease" (Schmitz, 1965, 170).
- 5 57. "To experience oneself within the presence of the lived-body and
 6 to live felt-bodily living in nature, on the street, or at a meeting, is
 7 only possible through practice and by overcoming alienating atti-
 8 tudes" (Böhme, 2010, 127).

Chapter 4

- 13 1. Cf. Griffero (2011a).
 14 2. Klages (1991a, 316).
 15 3. "The seeds of destruction are indifferent to whether they destroy
 16 the mind of a numskull or a genius" (Jünger, 2008, 53).
 17 4. Le Breton (1995, 26).
 18 5. "A paradoxical instance of safeguard, repeated proof of existence,
 19 substitute of love to alleviate something's absence, means of put-
 20 ting pressure on the other, claim warranty, way of atonement, etc."
 21 In short, "between the stimulus and the perception there is the
 22 whole thickness of the individual as uniqueness, history, social and
 23 cultural belonging" (Le Breton, 1995, 55, 111).
 24 6. Is it true that humans can set themselves excentrically (Plessner)
 25 with regards to pain, while "the pain an animal endures does
 26 not cause to it to suffer," seeing as "it does not enjoy freedom
 27 with regard to its hurtful sensation, nor the consequent
 28 emancipation from the 'vital' pattern of behaviour" (Buytendijk,
 29 1961, 87, 86)?
 30 7. "A situation, a meeting, a silence, a word, a refusal to salute, etc.,
 31 are all painful in their objective and concrete form. Thus we speak
 32 of the hurtfulness of a word that causes us pain [...] In all forms of
 33 helplessness, whether fear, unfulfilled desires, ethical hurt, sense of
 34 guilt, man is thrown back on himself and experiences the expres-
 35 sion of helplessness in the change in the beat of his heart"
 36 (Buytendijk, 1961, 139, 141).
 37 8. Le Breton, 1995 (19, 23).
 38 9. See Costa (2007, 43): "Even if we know what happens in our brain
 39 when we perceive, it does not necessarily mean that know what it
 40

- 1 means to perceive [. . .] I can only know at first hand what
 2 perception is, insofar as I experience perceiving.”
- 3 10. Straus (1963, 356).
- 4 11. See Plügge (1967, 12).
- 5 12. After all, as wittily noted by Pierre Bayle, God could have very
 6 well given us impulses other than pain to protect the body.
- 7 13. “The conclusion that pain is to be found ‘wherever it has a share in
 8 the plan of the organism and is accordingly necessary and useful’
 9 is completely without foundation” (Buytendijk, 1961, 106)
- 10 14. “On the one hand, suffering itself produces its own masks; on the
 11 other hand it borrows them, it *wears* them, because every indi-
 12 vidual pain is preceded by the social figures of pain in the world—
 13 people *correspond* to them when the necessity of pain imposes it,
 14 they communicate pain through them” (Natoli, 1986, 12).
- 15 15. See van den Berg (2007, 187, 195).
- 16 16. Melzack (1975, 283).
- 17 17. Le Breton (1995, 40).
- 18 18. Scarry (1985, 27ff.).
- 19 19. Eastern cultures are apparently more careful to it (Grüny, 2004,
 20 144–145).
- 21 20. Unless one rightly regards the intentionality of consciousness as
 22 the act of “receiving the manifestation of the object” (Costa, 2007,
 23 47).
- 24 21. Szasz (1975, 89).
- 25 22. See Buytendijk (1961, 117); Weizsäcker (1990, 541); Wendell
 26 (1996, 171).
- 27 23. Hence the suggestive hypothesis that pain is a kind of frozen past,
 28 a bodily life not (no longer) in place, a “having-become settled [. . .]
 29 that on the one hand allows for the unfolding of felt-bodily vitality
 30 and on the other hand increasingly restricts it” (Fuchs, 2000, 124).
- 31 24. Required not only by Christian dolorism but also by the (often
 32 patriotic) sense of belonging to some communities as a virtue
 33 independent of individual talent (Buytendijk, 1961, 159–160).
- 34 25. Schmitz (1965, 308ff.).
- 35 26. Thus posited Gadamer (2003).
- 36 27. See Schmitz (1964, 183–207; 2003, 222–226).
- 37 28. “The sense of unhappiness is so much easier to convey than that of
 38 happiness. In misery we seem aware of our own existence, even
 39 though it may be in the form of a monstrous egotism: this pain of
 40 mine is individual, this nerve that winces belongs to me and to no

- 1 other. But happiness annihilates us: we lose our identity” (Greene,
2 1951, 47).
- 3 29. “The principle of subjectivity is the occurrence of affectively giving
4 oneself to oneself” (Böhme, 2008, 144).
- 5 30. In fact it is the disease, and not health, that comes forward and
6 meets us, invading us, because health is not exactly something that
7 manifests itself (Gadamer, 1996, 107).
- 8 31. Paraphrasing Gadamer (1996, 112), one could consider the ques-
9 tion “do you feel pain?” legitimate, while the question “do you feel
10 no pain?” is ridiculous.
- 11 32. “It’s almost as if the body of the patient were trying to hide under
12 a roof too small” (Böhme/Akashé-Böhme, 2005, 66).
- 13 33. They locate/confine pain in one part of the (physical) body—for
14 Freud, with libidinal investment (see Schilder, 1999, 104)—while
15 freeing the other ones, or impede the complete domination of
16 consciousness by means of opposite stimuli of various nature.
- 17 34. Thus posited Böhme (2003, 101).
- 18 35. Respectively Bakan (1968, 76) and Weizsäcker (1926/27, 320); see
19 Grüny (2004, 123).
- 20 36. Moldzio (2002, 258ff.).
- 21 37. Achelis (1925, 55); Jackson (1994, 206).
- 22 38. See Fuchs (2001, 65).
- 23 39. Scarry (1985, 55).
- 24 40. Schmitz (1964, 226–227).
- 25 41. Tagliapietra (2006, 142) is less exclusive: “One is never as fully
26 oneself as when one experiences pain or pleasure. The basic emo-
27 tions nail the abstract generality of our thoughts to the uniqueness
28 of a body and the particularity of a situation.”
- 29 42. See Illich (1976, ch. 2).
- 30 43. Le Breton (1995, 161–172).
- 31 44. “Someone who has been in an area which is all but cut off from
32 medical assistance knows that resignation, courage, and trust give
33 greater joy than the knowledge that the doctor can be called at any
34 time” (Buytendijk, 1961, 15).
- 35 45. “Any attempt at an apology for pain, which the search for meaning
36 is always in danger of falling into, is itself an act of violence towards
37 those who suffer” (Grüny, 2004, 264).
- 38 46. “Even through the willingness to endure something or, more gen-
39 erally, to let something happen us, we decide what kind of person
40 we are” (Böhme, 2008, 234).

- 1 47. This thesis is central to Jünger (2008).
 2 48. Le Breton (1995, 147ff., 211).
 3 49. Cf. Böhme (2009).
 4 50. Schmitz (1964, 222).

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8

Chapter 5

- 9 1. See Griffero (2012a, 2012c).
 10 2. Marquard (1989, 62).
 11 3. Cf. H. Böhme (1996).
 12 4. See Canetti (1978, 15ff.) and Sanders (2009). For an interdisci-
 13 plinary approach, cf. Antonelli and Rotili (eds.) (2012).
 14 5. Despite the undoubted tendency to self-concealment (Neckel,
 15 2009, 104; more generally 1991), enhanced today by the media
 16 iconomania (Belpoliti, 2010, 148–149).
 17 6. See Meyer-Drawe (2009, 38).
 18 7. Cf. Wurmser (1981).
 19 8. Blume (2003, 90–91).
 20 9. See Demmerling (2009, 89n13). In Scheler (1987), this is a pro-
 21 tection of the ideality of the spirit compared to what makes
 22 humans “completely similar to animals: corporeality” (Tagliapietra,
 23 2006, 66).
 24 10. Straus (1966) speaks of it in terms of “protecting shame.” Cf. also
 25 Binswanger (1958) and, more generally, Demmerling and
 26 Landweer (2007, 219–244).
 27 11. After all, this has always been acknowledged: “no one feels shame
 28 before children or animals—or of the same things before those
 29 who are known to them and those who are not; before the former,
 30 they are ashamed of things that appear really disgraceful, before
 31 strangers, of those which are only condemned by convention”
 32 (Aristotle, 1926, 219).
 33 12. “Not being able (physically or culturally, cognitively or aestheti-
 34 cally) of individualisation: this is the most modern form of con-
 35 nection between shame and person from the social point of view”
 36 (Neckel, 2009, 118).
 37 13. See Belpoliti (2010, 29) and Sennett (2003, 101ff.).
 38 14. Hilgers (2006, 15) suggests an instructive variety: “Embarrassment,
 39 shyness, shame for the cessation of competence, shame for addic-
 40 tion, shame for intimacy, shame for being the third wheel (oedipal

- 1 shame), shame for the discrepancy between the ideal (the self) and
 2 the state-of-the-is [,] feelings of shame connected to a sense of
 3 guilt, hence often the inevitable development of the shame-guilt
 4 spiral, [and] humiliation and mortification.”
- 5 15. “Those who feel ashamed duplicate themselves, as they perceive
 6 themselves ‘from the outside’ as those who are ashamed” (Fuchs,
 7 2005, 250) and that, therefore, are “rejected” (Seidler, 1995,
 8 178).
- 9 16. For instance, one is more ashamed of a sentimental failure than of
 10 a specific technical incompetence. Maybe this is because the
 11 sphere of love is an indispensable value that is both adaptive
 12 (maternal care aimed at survival and/or its centrality for reproduc-
 13 tive success) and cognitive (implying the person as a whole)
 14 (Lewis, 1995, 138ff.).
- 15 17. As posited by Heller, Nussbaum, and mainly Duerr (1988), noto-
 16 riously in opposition to the thesis brought forward by Elias (1994)
 17 on the growing separation between the public sphere and the pri-
 18 vate sphere (i.e., the “myth” of the process of civilization). Modesty
 19 and shame are, for Duerr, absolutely original ontological charac-
 20 ters, as shame and repulsion for the exposure of genitalia are con-
 21 substantial to homination itself, while being culturally refinable
 22 (Tagliapietra, 2006, 135).
- 23 18. Honneth (1995, 137).
- 24 19. See Demmerling (2009, 86).
- 25 20. See Heller (1985, 13) and Hilgers (2006, 15).
- 26 21. Sometimes, in fact, anger prevents shame (the duel wiping out an
 27 offence) and sometimes shame silences anger (the more or less
 28 stylized ritual of apologizing). See Schmitz (2010, 195).
- 29 22. Prototypical compared to the subsequent shame for sexual organs
 30 (Nussbaum, 2004, 186).
- 31 23. Holzhey-Kunz (2006). Demmerling (2009, 87–90).
- 32 24. For an opposite thesis, cf. Simmel (1992a).
- 33 25. Castelfranchi (2005, 176–177).
- 34 26. In shame we are immersed and subjugated: we do not judge some
 35 previous emotion (Schmitz, 2010, 197–198).
- 36 27. Schmitz (1994, 105).
- 37 28. “Shame is not properly protensional but prohibiting” (Lipps, 1977,
 38 32).
- 39 29. See Schmitz (2010, 196–197). “The feeling ‘I am the mid-point of
 40 the world!’ arises very strongly if one is suddenly overcome with

- 1 shame; one then stands there as though confused in the midst of a
 2 surging sea and [...] dazzled as though by a great eye which gazes
 3 upon us and through us from all sides" (Nietzsche, 1997, 166).
- 4 30. Taylor (1985, 81).
- 5 31. Schmitz (1964, 248).
- 6 32. Griffero (2014a: 140–141, and 2012a, 2012c).
- 7 33. See Castelfranchi (2005, 164, 170).
- 8 34. This was already posited by Aristotle (1926, 219).
- 9 35. "A landscape can have a sad, serene, or troubled effect and—when
 10 the clouds gather and the light turns dark—even an angry one, but
 11 surely not a bold, shameless or grateful one" (Schmitz, 1965, 147).
- 12 36. Nussbaum (2004, 185).
- 13 37. In the absence of a witness, rather than an emotion it would be "a
 14 passion to torture oneself with contempt continuously, but in vain"
 15 (Kant, 1996, 160).
- 16 38. "Feeling of loss of selfhood in the eyes of the (possible) other"
 17 (Tugendhat, 1993b, 57). See also Demmerling (2009, 93).
- 18 39. Anolli (2000, 7, 35, 61).
- 19 40. Due to shame, young Japanese people "bury themselves" in their
 20 room (Belpoliti, 2010, 127–139).
- 21 41. "Intermediaries of centripetal vectors of feeling as an atmosphere
 22 that also spreads without them" (Schmitz quoted in Blume, 2003,
 23 110).
- 24 42. "The great health ignores the objectivity of the body because it
 25 does not feel its weight" (Natoli, 2001, 106).
- 26 43. In fact, it is because of the gaze of angels that women should cover
 27 themselves (1Cor 11:10).
- 28 44. "Is it true that God is everywhere?' a little girl asked her mother;
 29 'I find that indecent!'" (Nietzsche, 2001, 8).
- 30 45. This is all the more so after the weakening of external moral
 31 authorities.
- 32 46. Since we live "in the minds of others without knowing it" (Cooley,
 33 1922, 208).
- 34 47. See Heller (1985, 48) and Scheff (1988, 399).
- 35 48. This is the sense of the gift of modesty to humans for their sur-
 36 vival, which is addressed in Plato's *Protagoras*. Hence, the birth of
 37 modern individualism, with its autonomy and its right to secrecy
 38 (Tagliapietra, 2006, 77, 136).
- 39 49. Schmitz (1973, 35–43, 44–47).
- 40

- 1 50. "I can be shamed by what another has the courage to do. Showing
2 me the possibility of that before which, discouraged, I fled, I am
3 exposed. I thus become aware of 'my limits'" (Lipps, 1977, 41).
- 4 51. This is tackled by Titzze (1997).
- 5 52. See Landweer (1999, 43).
- 6 53. Castelfranchi (2005, 167–169); Goffman (1967, 108n6).
- 7 54. But for a critique of the current of thought (started by Snell)
8 according to which the Homeric man, not perceiving himself as
9 personal unity and center of action, is alien to the idea of respon-
10 sibility, see Williams (1993, 21ff.). For him, the absence of the
11 name for it (say, for the psyche as separated from the body) does
12 not at all entail the absence of the notion of interiority: "an absence
13 of theory is not a theory of absence" (ibid., 27).
- 14 55. Lipps (1977, 10, 13). On Lipps, cf. Hennigfeld (1993) and
15 Kerckhoven (2001).
- 16 56. Schmitz (1997, 156; 1980, 173).
- 17 57. Hence the eternal alienation in the presence of the absolutely
18 non-objectifiable entity (God).
- 19 58. The very fear of nudity symbolizes, in fact, the fear of appearing
20 not as subjects (thanks to clothing) but as mere objects.
- 21 59. For Widmer (2009, 62–63), as well as for Lacan, this is the only
22 way to truly become a subject.
- 23 60. "It is necessary that the Other be present to consciousness com-
24 pletely in order that consciousness precisely by being nothing may
25 escape that Other who threatens to ensnare it" (Sartre, 1978, 284).
26 However, it is not certain that this leads to a real communication
27 between gazes: "I never know the other as both subject and object.
28 Nor can I ever relate to him as a subject to a subject" (Blume, 2003,
29 169). Cf. Schmitz (1981).
- 30 61. Schmitz (1980, 26–27).
- 31 62. Nussbaum (2004, 177ff.).
- 32 63. Schmitz (1990, 344).
- 33 64. Nussbaum (2004, 216, 243–244, 319).
- 34 65. It is with the paralysis induced by the collectivization of shame
35 that Schmitz (2010, 199–201) explains the corporate interests of
36 postwar Germany.
- 37 66. Goffman (1967, 100) and Schmitz (2003, 45–47).
- 38 67. See Lipps (1977, 30, 41). In any case, this is a less direct perception
39 than that of the external expression of shame (Schmitz 2005a, 286).
- 40

- 1 68. Such volatility makes it a sort of “law of all or nothing”: cf. Ballerini
 2 and Rossi Monti (1990, 1997) and Rossi Monti (1998).
- 3 69. Reinterpreting the supposed intentionality of feelings *à la* Schmitz
 4 (cf. *supra*, ch. 2) here we’d have a condensation zone (those who
 5 are captivated by shame or radiate it involuntarily) and an anchor
 6 point (the shameful act) (Schmitz 1990, 302, 343; 2010, 194–195).
 7 See Blume (2003, 79) and Demmerling (2009, 77).
- 8 70. Landweer (1999, 52); Tagliapietra (2006, 38).
- 9 71. Hence a moral disease, but in some cases also a positive refusal to
 10 internalize heteronymous moral parameters (Mason 2010, 408).
 11 See Schmitz/Marx/Moldzio, 2002, 170; 2003, 319, Schmitz/
 12 Sohst 2005, 92–93) and Blume (2003, 76).
- 13 72. Schmitz (1990, 330; 2003, 324; 2010, 198).
- 14 73. In fact, the involuntary character of blushing (Darwin *docet!*),
 15 which allegedly expresses one’s adhesion to the norm with child-
 16 ish innocence, is traditionally ascribed with an evolutionarily
 17 adaptive value. See Castelfranchi (2005, 173ff.).
- 18 74. Without being able to fake it, not even in front of those who
 19 weren’t aware of it until then.
- 20 75. Schmitz (1990, 339; 2010, 197).
- 21 76. In this sense, it is similar to the atmospheric fear infecting poor
 22 Cosette: “She was covered with it, so to speak; fear drew her
 23 elbows close to her hips, withdrew her heels under her petti-
 24 coat, made her occupy as little space as possible [. . .] and had
 25 become what might be called the habit of her body” (Hugo,
 26 2006, vol. 3, 166).
- 27 77. Hilgers (2006, 13).
- 28 78. Anolli (2000, 52–55) and Castelfranchi (2005, 186ff.).
- 29 79. Lewis (1995, 7).
- 30 80. Hence also the loss of self-esteem of those who see their reflection
 31 distorted by the anger of shame (Wurmser, 1981).
- 32 81. “The discreditor is just as guilty as the person he discredits—
 33 sometimes more so, for, if he has been posing as a tactful man, in
 34 destroying another’s image he destroys his own” (Goffman, 1967,
 35 106).
- 36 82. Those who are ashamed of someone else are neither completely
 37 foreign to them nor completely close to them (Simmel, 1992a).
- 38 83. Anolli (2000, 15).
- 39 84. Landweer (1999, 37); Castelfranchi (2005); Schüttauf, Specht,
 40 and Wachenhausen (2003, 24ff.). Instead, atmosphericness is

- 1 totally inactive in the case of totally idiosyncratic norms unknown
 2 to the witness (Demmerling, 2009, 79).
- 3 85. See Taylor (1985, 69), Schmitz (2010, 200) and, for an opposite
 4 opinion, Blume (2003, 88n7).
- 5 86. Food etiquette, for instance, allegedly hides the embarrassment for
 6 an animal-like activity such as eating (Schmitz, 1990, 385).
- 7 87. See also Landweer (1999, 122).
- 8 88. For instance, I might be ashamed of being a bad piano player, ide-
 9 ally considering music to be the victim of my shortcoming.
- 10 89. Anolli (2000, 30).
- 11 90. See Williams (1993, 89) and Tagliapietra (2006, 17–18).
- 12 91. Anolli (2000, 12).
- 13 92. This is posited by Simmel (1992a).
- 14 93. Wurmser (1990, 210); Schmitz (1973, 46).
- 15 94. Landweer (1999, 44).
- 16 95. The language of the shameful person is sometimes prolix and
 17 sometimes laconic (Anolli 2000, 31–32, 56–59), while sometimes
 18 it ritually falls into swearing (Heller, 1985, 29).
- 19 96. Scheff (1988, 402).
- 20 97. Anolli (2000, 73).
- 21 98. Simmel (1992a, 69; 1992b, 80–82).
- 22 99. Aristotle already posited that shame is particularly intense if those
 23 who are misbehaving are people we respect or who respect us
 24 (Aristotle, 1926, 215ff.).
- 25 100. See Wildt (1995, 31) and Blume (2003, 96–108).
- 26 101. Unless one admits that, in that case, they are ashamed for not
 27 being able or willing to react—or even, as posited by chauvinism,
 28 for having felt pleasure.
- 29 102. Schmitz (1997, 159).
- 30 103. Tagliapietra (2006, 174).
- 31 104. That is, the secrecy that is transcendently alien to exposure and
 32 not simply yet to be revealed.
- 33 105. Even though it cannot be reduced to a private inner world, due to
 34 its over- and presubjective nature.

Chapter 6

- 35
 36
 37
 38
 39 1. Cf. Griffiero (2014d).
 40 2. Merleau-Ponty (1964, 162–163).

- 1 3. “The world watches me. Everything watches me: it watches out of
2 itself; it ‘looks out.’ To appear is a basic ontological mode of the
3 being of things; they are in all respects ‘appearance.’ [...] To appear
4 is really a form of seeing. The originary way of seeing, with which
5 things are in a sense born to the world. It founds my seeing related
6 to them. The seeing of man is a response, an adherence to the gaze
7 of the things themselves. Gaze-of-response” (Rombach, 1987,
8 185).
- 9 4. See Waldenfels (2000, 372): it’s a communication that is woven
10 throughout our being-in-the-world, but whose prototype (syn-
11 tonic, in this case) is perhaps the bodily, affective, and communi-
12 cative-mimetic understanding between mother and infant. But we
13 could also mention here the “reversibility” (Merleau-Ponty): since
14 body and things are of the same “flesh,” we could say that a thing,
15 which is sensible without being sentient, possess an agency of its
16 own, that “my bodily seeing the tree is the way the tree sees through
17 me” (Ingold, 2012, 83). Ingold defines these two interrelated
18 “being with” inhalation and exhalation and calls atmosphere only
19 the first one.
- 20 5. “A look can punish, encourage, or establish dominance. The size
21 of the pupils can indicate interest or distaste” (Hall, 1966, 81).
- 22 6. It “is not at all a reception of signals but a corporeal communica-
23 tion, basically of the type of that corporealization which occurs in a
24 particularly pure way in all forms of suggestion, as well as in acting
25 together with others with no reaction time” (Schmitz, 1989, 13).
- 26 7. Fuchs (2008, 51).
- 27 8. I use the adjective “corporeal” as referring to the felt-body.
- 28 9. (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 370, 373–374). “To see things in motion is
29 to see-between, to see-in, to peer into the cracks, joints and sutures
30 of things, to bury oneself in them and suck them; it means loving
31 things, sinking in them and then re-emerging from them” (Kassner,
32 1997, 78).
- 33 10. First and foremost prescinding from the long-standing issue of
34 the contribution given by portraiture to the genesis of the (modern)
35 subject, but also from the issue of the portrait as necessarily being
36 a self-portrait (of the artist) (Pommier, 1998) or a mere rhetorical
37 expression of the social function of representation (Gurisatti,
38 2006, 238–239).
- 39 11. Levinas (1979, 187ff.) would force atmospherology to an incoher-
40 ent apophantic ineffability.

- 1 12. Gurisatti (2006, 242).
- 2 13. Which can be summarized in “a directed, relatively complicated
- 3 figure that indicates the direction to the involuntary motor behav-
- 4 iour. A direction that proceeds from narrowness to vastness and in
- 5 which the gestures of its sensitive corporeal tendency always
- 6 extend far beyond their perceived realization in the world of the
- 7 physical body” (Schmitz, 1989, 213–214).
- 8 14. “In the face-to-face encounter, we are neither confronted with a
- 9 mere body, nor with a hidden psyche, but with a unified whole.
- 10 When I see another’s face, I see it as friendly or angry, etc.—that
- 11 is, the very face expresses these emotions” (Gallagher and Zahavi
- 12 2008, 148–149).
- 13 15. Covering the rest of the body, or underestimating the motor
- 14 expressiveness of the body as more transient.
- 15 16. The face also assumes its own meaning only if it recalls, first of all
- 16 through the “bust,” “the link with the set to which it belongs”
- 17 (Stoichita, 2003, 29). The atmosphere of a menacing look, more-
- 18 over, “as atmosphere, also appears in threatening clouds that
- 19 thicken and bring rain. What’s more, in the flicker of the face or
- 20 hands, or even in the rigid tension of the gaze, there emerges a
- 21 corporeal intensity that is spasmodically marked and included in
- 22 the pathos of the threat that emanates it, and also in the conflict of
- 23 person decided to attack, etc.” (Schmitz, 1989, 185–186).
- 24 17. Cf. Eberlein (2011).
- 25 18. Between corporealization, consisting in encompassing the other
- 26 or things in one’s felt-bodily contractive tendency, and decorpore-
- 27 alization, recognizable in the suspension of the contractive ten-
- 28 dency in favor of another contractive center (eminently, hypnotic
- 29 trance).
- 30 19. *Self-portrait with bottle of wine*, 1906.
- 31 20. Fraenger (1996, 73–75).
- 32 21. Schmitz (2002, 133, 136–137).
- 33 22. There is nothing “which, staying so absolutely in place, seems to
- 34 reach beyond it to such an extent: the eye penetrates, it withdraws,
- 35 it circles a room, it wanders, it reaches as though behind the
- 36 wanted object and pulls it toward itself” (Simmel, 1959, 281).
- 37 23. “As a radar, the look is bound, as if it were almost enchanted, to the
- 38 object approaching and transfers its motor suggestion—the intuit-
- 39 ive foreshadowing of its impending motion—to the motoric
- 40 schema of the body, whose directions (proceeding irreversibly

- 1 from narrowness to vastness) the gaze itself is a part of, in such a
 2 way as to succeed in the adequate movement with which it dodges
 3 the object" (Schmitz, 2010, 226–227).
- 4 24. Levinas (1979, 202, 212).
- 5 25. Wittgenstein (1980, § 1100). The gaze is traditionally considered
 6 endowed with a particular ontological power (*in distans*) (Griffero,
 7 2003, 2011c), based on the belief that "the light, the visual rays do
 8 not originate from the observed object but from the eye" (Frey,
 9 1953, 9).
- 10 26. "When one reads into the eyes of others, they respond in a way
 11 that always obliges one to engage (together with further reading)
 12 in a new initiative, possibly modified by their response; one
 13 becomes aware that the message of these eyes is the expression of
 14 an experience" (Schmitz, 1989, 197).
- 15 27. Waldenfels (2000, 379).
- 16 28. Condon (1975, 43).
- 17 29. That, in a nutshell, "is addressed elsewhere, observes a gaze cast
 18 upon him, observes a chance of attention or of an indefinite
 19 encounter, and also makes the whole face mobile, with some dis-
 20 crete trait" (Nancy, 2000, 42). I leave aside, on principle, any kind
 21 of interplay of gazes (philologically rather interesting), both
 22 between the artist and the person portrayed and between the vari-
 23 ous figures portrayed.
- 24 30. That "with its patterns of recognition and its identification codes
 25 exerts a morbid fascination on a public anxious to peer into (or
 26 expose) the soul of others" (Gurisatti, 2006, 183–184).
- 27 31. Frey (1953, 35).
- 28 32. Waldenfels (2000, 386–387n16).
- 29 33. Even as the unextended moment, to which infinite movements
 30 will aim and from which infinite movements will depart (Simmel,
 31 1959).
- 32 34. The "thrill of the most subtle expressive impulses up until the
 33 peripheral area of expression is what gives a cyclothymic man a
 34 certain atmosphere, an aura that radiates outside" (Lersch, 1951,
 35 143).
- 36 35. In fact, "the full face aspect," perhaps because it marginalizes the
 37 boundary lines (Friedländer, 1960, 124), is the immediate expres-
 38 sion of the "demonic individuality," sometimes even of the para-
 39 lyzing spell, but above all of "sympathy," of pity, of the bond
 40

- 1 between me and you in the relationship that the “world” has with
2 the “I” (Frey, 1953, 6, 20, 11).
- 3 36. Antagonism is in fact more communicatively effective (possibly in
4 equilibrium with the consonance) than harmony (Fuchs, 2000,
5 250), which in itself is too prone to emotional contagion and to a
6 unipathy that reduces the other to the self (Scheler, 2008, 8ff.).
- 7 37. Frey (1953, 12).
- 8 38. Often also symptomatic of a heightened attention (horizontal
9 frown) and of wait, or even of a conflicting disposition (vertical
10 frown). See Lersch (1951, 93).
- 11 39. See the wonderful analysis of Tintoretto’s self-portrait by Frey
12 (1953, 47): the face emerges out of a dark non-place, and the eyes
13 are empty, veiled by a mask that prevents any reading.
- 14 40. The gaze is directed to the void here, crossing and reaching beyond
15 an observer felt as absent or infinitely distant.
- 16 41. “The more frequent and intense the innervation of specific mus-
17 cles, the more it leaves traces on the surface of the epidermis:
18 engrams, solidified movements” (Lersch, 1951, 23). Hence
19 Schopenhauer’s idea that the portrait only of elderly people reveals
20 their true nature.
- 21 42. “When the power of the traits threatens to crack—as is the case
22 if the eyes are wide open, the mouth is open or the cheek muscles
23 are flabby and hang—we have the distinct impression of a decrease
24 in the spiritual life, or even of a ‘despiritualization” (Simmel,
25 1985, 57).
- 26 43. In particular in the case of the self-portrait, which, in its theatrical
27 aggressiveness, is “an emergence from the picture to a degree
28 which usually is not characteristic of portraits” (Friedländer, 1960,
29 124), and almost explicitly seeks to engage in a corporeal skirmish
30 with the observer.
- 31 44. Waldenfels (2000, 368ff.).
- 32 45. Schmitz (2002, 129).
- 33 46. Hegel (1998, I, 153–154).
- 34 47. In the case of Rilke, for example, an absolute verticality that, rather
35 than to religious devotion, might allude to the resomatization of
36 asceticism implied in contemporary athleticism (Sloterdijk, 2013,
37 19ff.).
- 38 48. Figal (2015, 213ff.).
- 39 49. Böhme (2010, 178).
- 40

Chapter 7

- 1
- 2
- 3 1. Cf. also Griffero (2013d).
- 4 2. Cf. at least Blumenberg (1993), Hauskeller (2004), Lechtermann
- 5 and Wandhoff (2008).
- 6 3. *Jovialish* alludes to Jove, and therefore to something heavenly and
- 7 divine.
- 8 4. The German word is *Schein*, which also means appearance.
- 9 5. But in Christian epiphany (e.g., Scotus Eriugena), every stone
- 10 or block of wood is a light capable of illuminating.
- 11 6. For a confirmation of the ancient link between brightness and beauty,
- 12 rejected by Socrates, see the sophist Hippias (*Hipp. Ma.* 289dff.)
- 13 7. The age when Jacob Böhme's vision took place is also that in which
- 14 the still-life painting genre bloomed (Böhme, 1989, 168).
- 15 8. Probably based on the ancient analogy between perceived (exter-
- 16 nal light) and perceiver (inner light) (G. Böhme and H. Böhme,
- 17 2004, 150).
- 18 9. For the "brightness" of the spiritual body, cf. Griffero (2006a;
- 19 2009a).
- 20 10. See Soentgen (1997, 238) and Bremer (1974).
- 21 11. Such pleasure is produced by means of "the being-for-the-other,
- 22 which returns to the subject as the enlargement of his own sphere
- 23 of significance" (Simmel, 1997, 209).
- 24 12. Cf. Sedlmayr (1979; 1964).
- 25 13. "We have been taught to look into light without putting on black
- 26 spectacles" (Gombrich, 1984, 45), and to observe the "play of dis-
- 27 embodied light" (Arnheim, 1974, 303).
- 28 14. In the sense that if one is blinded by the light, one cannot see
- 29 clearly what is in the light (Rothacker, 1954, 9).
- 30 15. Be it the being's destiny or, more modestly, the world project (par-
- 31 adigm) in force, it is still extrascientific.
- 32 16. Perhaps even with the skin, particularly sensitive to any light vari-
- 33 ation (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 118–119).
- 34 17. According to the famous, but now very controversial, thesis by
- 35 Panofsky (1955).
- 36 18. Clarity is far from "an absolute value. [. . .] It only represents a
- 37 form of life, one of the many. Not even for the world, in the name
- 38 of clarity, would we give up the dark, the night, the mystery and
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- 1 intense life that throbs in these phenomena, offering itself to us”
 2 (Minkowski, 1936, 159).
- 3 19. “As soon as night falls, our feeling about the nearest of things is
 4 changed. There is the wind, which travels as if upon forbidden
 5 paths, whispering as if seeking something, annoyed because it does
 6 not find it” (Nietzsche, 2013, 155).
- 7 20. The “atmosphere of discreet charm” of blurriness is sometimes
 8 reached even by perceptually (and, therefore, less sensibly) linger-
 9 ing on an object (Minkowski, 1936, 209).
- 10 21. “No one would like to live in an infinitely vivid place, where every-
 11 thing is patently connected to everything else. [. . .] We don’t wish
 12 to live in a goldfish bowl; we would be overwhelmed by a multi-
 13 plicity of evocative signs” (Lynch, 1981, 143).
- 14 22. “Nothing oppresses the heart like symmetry. It is because sym-
 15 metry is ennui, and ennui is at the very foundation of grief. Despair
 16 yawns” (Hugo, 2006, vol. 2, 223).
- 17 23. Gombrich (1984, 28).
- 18 24. Whereas the tendency to deprive things of their aura rather con-
 19 sists in the “need to possess the object, from the closest proximity”
 20 (Benjamin, 2008, 285).
- 21 25. The observer determined to mark differences treats even what is far
 22 away as if it were close, and sacrifices the intuitive picture for a
 23 sequence of places that he measures with his gaze one after another,
 24 i.e. separately, while the gaze of one who is immersed in observation,
 25 even of a nearby object, is captivated, devoid of purposes, by the
 26 image of the object—and this means at least that the image of a
 27 shape is not enclosed by borders, but by all of the images around. Not
 28 so much the object’s distance, but rather the mode of observation
 29 decides whether it has the characteristics of closeness or distance;
 30 and no one ignores that closeness has the character of the thing,
 31 while distance has that of the image. (Klages, 1991, 428–429)
- 32 26. Böhme (1989, 177).
- 33 27. Wagner (2001, 264) referring respectively to James Turrell and
 34 Dan Flavin.
- 35 28. Böhme (1989, 166–189).
- 36 29. An exception is given by Adorno’s (2013, 112) rather shy allusions
 37 to the subversive character of transience (that of fireworks) com-
 38 pared to the abstract duration of truth.
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- 1 30. This is the unresolved case of Monet's twenty paintings of Rouen's
 2 cathedral at different hours of the day (cf. Mahayni, 2002).
- 3 31. This should be properly distinguished both from the simple weak-
 4 ening of the light (adapting to which the eye preserves the previ-
 5 ous optical world) and from the so-called eye twilight, where light
 6 shines through closed eyelids.
- 7 32. This blurring, however, can even come from excessive light inten-
 8 sity (Lehmann, 1986, 155–156, 159, 190, and *passim*).
- 9 33. In Japanese landscape painting, the fog takes spatial depth away
 10 from the field of view, so that “what you see has a flat effect, the
 11 fog itself looks like a wall on which the objects do not stand out,”
 12 and mountains appear even more distant if interrupted by layers of
 13 mist (Böhme, 2006, 67, 72).
- 14 34. An exception to this is provided by the solitary man, who curi-
 15 ously sees fog as a consolation that “fills the abyss surrounding
 16 him” (Benjamin, 1999, 338).
- 17 35. In fact, the first impulse of a melancholy person—think of the
 18 traditional representation of *acedia* as a cloud (*caligo*)—could even
 19 be to go to the oculist.
- 20 36. Böhme (2006, 67, 70).
- 21 37. “This fog, these clouds and these lonely forest paths veiled in mist
 22 are what trains and educates us living in northern Germany”
 23 (Klages, 1944, 492).
- 24 38. Griffero (2014a, 57–60).
- 25 39. See Merleau-Ponty (2005, 330), Schmitz (1969, 389–390.),
 26 Bollnow (2011, 211ff.) and especially Minkowski (1936, 155), for
 27 whom the “teachings” of the night outweigh those of the day.
- 28 40. Hauskeller (1995, 127).
- 29 41. After all, this is vertiginously atmospheric (following the marvel-
 30 lous description found in Hugo 2006, vol. 2, 144) only “in the sooty
 31 opacity” generated evidently by some residual light in which “a chi-
 32 merical reality appears in the indistinct depths. The inconceivable is
 33 outlined a few paces distant from you with a spectral clearness. One
 34 beholds floating, either in space or in one's own brain, one knows
 35 not what vague and intangible thing [...] as though one's soul were
 36 becoming amalgamated with the darkness.”
- 37 42. As in the solar eclipse, which can suggest *ex contrario* the numi-
 38 nous character of what is missing, described by Stifter (see
 39 Sedlmayr 1964, 9–17), but also splendidly filmed by Michelangelo
 40 Antonioni (*Eclipse*, 1962).

- 1 43. Benjamin (2008, 283).
 2 44. Bollnow (1956, 144–145).
 3 45. This transient luminosity cannot be set against the city “in itself”
 4 since architecture designs and builds always also “with” light (even
 5 more so if artificial) (Böhme, 2006, 91).
 6 46. For Klages (1929–1932, 176–177), for example, twilight, irreduc-
 7 ible to discrete properties as a unified image, consists in the ver-
 8 tiginous mutual coimplication of a flag fluttering in the twilight,
 9 of the fluttering and the twilight itself, and so on (see Griffero,
 10 2014a, 120–121).
 11 47. That’s why it can be called “fresh,” “dim,” “secret,” “quiet,” etc. See
 12 Schmitz (1964, 154). We get lost in twilight (Tuppini, 2003, 150)
 13 just as we do in “muffled noise, a threatening shadow, in one of
 14 those indistinct rustles that only in the evening acquire their sur-
 15 prising and menacing character, or in someone’s being unnoticedly
 16 busy near the pier.”
 17 48. During the day space, on the contrary, “the intermediate space
 18 between things, that is, this apparent nothingness, is perceived in
 19 it” (Bollnow, 2011, 205).
 20 49. I therefore consider it reductive to state that “light when it travels
 21 through the night as in the beam from a lighthouse is thing-like,
 22 or when it spreads across the sky at dawn,” and not when the light
 23 is “here in this room.” Similarly, it is reductive to claim that the fog
 24 drifting up a valley is thing-like but the fog encountered by a ship
 25 isn’t (Koffka, 1955, 70–71).
 26 50. Nietzsche describes the night in Venice as only relatively dark
 27 (Olschanski, 2004, 73–74): “Let shadows start preparing / to grow
 28 into the brown and balmy night! / Too early in the day for chimes,
 29 the flaring / of gilded trim awaits a rosy light, / Much does the day
 30 compress, / much time for verses, prowling, secret sharing”
 31 (Nietzsche, 2001, 257).
 32 51. Otto (1936, 71).
 33 52. In the gloom of the forest, for instance, we go “deeper and deeper”
 34 as if “into a limitless world” which is *always* ancestral, seeing as “in
 35 the reign of the imagination, there are no young forests” (Bachelard,
 36 1994, 185, 188).
 37 53. Think of the distressing existential question to which Nietzsche
 38 (2006, 85) feels the need to answer when “the sun set long
 39 ago. [. . .] The meadow is moist, coolness emanates from the
 40 woods.”

- 1 54. One has “the compelling impression of things emerging from a
 2 state of non-being and likely to return to it,” of “life as a process of
 3 appearing and disappearing” (Arnheim, 1974, 327). However, the
 4 spectrality generated by the disappearance of boundaries and the
 5 following sensorial deceit (Bollnow, 2011, 209) can also be merely
 6 a feeling of emptiness suggested by a transient phase of the day
 7 without its own specific character (Ratzel, 1905, 174).
- 8 55. “The ear, the organ of fear, could have evolved as greatly as it has
 9 only in the night and twilight of obscure caves and woods. [...] In
 10 bright daylight the ear is less necessary” (Nietzsche, 1997, 143).
- 11 56. “The specific modulation of a material surface is defined patina. It
 12 derives from one’s material activity stimulated by an unintentional
 13 external influence” (Soentgen, 1997, 188).
- 14 57. Mahayni (2003, 99, 89–94).
- 15 58. For instance: uniforming or blurring filters, or colors so intense as
 16 to conceal the structure of matter and the form, or else the produc-
 17 tion of shadows in a medium that (like photography, especially in
 18 color) would in itself be unable to detect them (Böhme, 2004b,
 19 121).
- 20 59. “*It is clear* amounts to saying: now we can see, we can see things”
 21 (Böhme, 1998, 37).
- 22 60. Seitter (2004, 59).
- 23 61. Böhme (2001, 126–129).
- 24 62. In the West even trees show a “spontaneous and natural regular-
 25 ity”: an “effect of symmetric precision that [...] in Japan [...] is
 26 the product only of man’s hand” (Watsuji, 1961, 73).
- 27 63. Such as when “between the red walls a narrow and sordid alley
 28 appears, one that maybe the shadows of the metal fire escapes will
 29 make arbitrarily lyrical for a moment” (Pierantoni, 1998, 15).
- 30 64. Twilightness, while mitigating rational individuation, always also
 31 intensifies it (even though largely) pathically.
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29
30
31
32
33
34
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36
37
38
39
40



Index

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40

Numbers in *italics* refer to footnotes

Achelis, J. D., *141*

active (actual, wirklich), ix, xvi, xix,
12, 16, 23, 32, 34, 40, 42, 73, 94,
109–110, *148*

Adorno, T. W., 70, 75, *137*, *153*

aesthetics, vii–x, xx–xxi, 39, 52, 67,
107, *118*

classic, viii

pathic, vii–x, xx, xxi, 39

work, ix, 14, 49–50, 111

affordance, xiii–xiv, xxi, 9, 26, 37, 40,
53, 60, 94, 96

Aggerer, W., 53

Albers, J., 11, *128*

Ammann, H., *119*

anchoring point, 42–43

Andermann, K., *115*

Anders, G., 86, *142*

anger, 16, 25, 86, *121*, *138*, *143*, *146*

anguish, 34, 63, 99, *135–136*

Anolli, L., *144*, *146–147*

Antonelli, E., *142*

Antonioni, M., *154*

appearance (phenomenon), viii–ix,
xii, xvii, xix, 2–3, 5, 10–14, 20,
35, 37, 46, 48–50, 60, 84, 94–95,
105, 107, *117*, *119*, *130*, *148*, *152*

Aristotle, *120*, *138*, *142*, *144*, *147*

Arnheim, R., 109, *152*, *156*

associationism, ix, xiii, xiv, 44, 63

atmospheres

as constraints, xi, xiii, *126*

cognitive penetrable (only in part),
xi, 27, 34

distancing from, xi, 5–6, 24, 31, 33,
35, 44, 48, 51, 95, 104, 106, *114*,
135, *153*

and ethics, 47–53

and media, 41, 48, 51, *122*, *126*,
132, *142*

as numinousity, 31–33

producibility (design, generation
of), ix, xix–xvi, 5, 8, 14, 17,
27–29, 31, 34–36, 38–42, 46,
48–50, 83, 97, 104, 108–110,
114, *126*, *128*

prototypic (ingressive and discrep-
ant, as distinct from derivative
and spurious), XIV, 27–31, 33,
36–37, 49–50, *133–134*

subject-dependence of, 45–46

atmospheric/atmosphere, 28, *121*

atmospheric

affordance, xiii–xiv

- 1 authority, xi, xviii, 29–39, 41, 42,
 2 46–52, 77, 79, 82–84, 86, 88, 92,
 3 125, 128–129, 132
 4 competence, 46, 50, 77, 89, 94
 5 counterfactualty, 24, 40–41
 6 and emotional games, xiv, 37,
 7 90–92
 8 feelings, viii, xi, xviii, xx, 12–15, 17,
 9 24–29, 31, 33–34, 36–39, 42–44,
 10 46–47, 50, 53, 60, 67, 83, 86, 92
 11 involvement, 25, 36
 12 manipulation, 24, 41, 48–52,
 13 84, 134
 14 noticing vs. feeling, 44–45, 47, 131
 15 potential, 36, 103
 16 and ontologic segmentation, xii,
 17 17, 45
 18 theticity, 38, 41, 103, 130
 19 atmosphericness, xiii, 5, 23, 44,
 20 103, 106, 110–111, 116, 124,
 21 134, 146
 22 atmospherology 17, 21, 26, 31, 36,
 23 46, 52, 105, 119, 134, 148
 24 aura, 1, 28, 37, 39, 47, 106, 132,
 25 150, 153
 26 Bachelard, G., 15–16, 117, 120, 155
 27 Bakan, D., 141
 28 Ballerini, A., 146
 29 Baudelaire, C., 53
 30 Baumgarten, viii–ix
 31 Bayle, P., 140
 32 Beaufort, F., 120
 33 Befindlichkeit, ix, 22, 123
 34 Belpoliti, M., 142, 144
 35 Benjamin W. 121, 153–155
 36 Benn, G., 109
 37 Bieger, L., 133–134
 38 Binswanger, L., 121, 142
 39 Bloom, P., 118–119
 40 Blum, E., 125, 128–129
 Blume, A., 125, 131, 134–135,
 142, 144–146
 Blumenberg, H., 105, 152
 Bockemühl, M., 39, 128
 body (felt, lived, as distinct from the
 physical one), viii–xvi, xix–xxii, 2,
 8–9, 15, 17–19, 21–23, 26, 32,
 37, 40–41, 44, 48, 53, 55–67,
 69–71, 73–75, 77, 80, 82–84,
 87–89, 93, 95–96, 98–99, 101,
 108–111, 114–117, 119–120,
 125, 131, 135–140, 148–149
 disposition (felt-bodily), 26, 56, 67,
 93, 151
 exceeding cutaneous boundary, 60,
 62, 83, 124
 expanded in pericorporeal space,
 59, 66, 96, 99, 103
 localization (felt-bodily), 60–61, 74
 organs-independent, 56, 60, 62
 resonance (felt-bodily), xv, 15, 19,
 22, 25, 28, 31, 36–37, 46–47,
 53, 60, 67, 82–83, 95, 99–100,
 121, 131
 surfaceless, xi, xix, 59, 61, 136
 as a task, 66–67
 voluminous, 61, 64
 Böhme, G., 2, 8, 28–29, 46, 49, 57,
 63, 67, 75, 101, 103, 105, 110,
 113, 115–119, 121–122, 124,
 126, 128–130, 133,
 135–136, 138–139, 141–142,
 151–156
 Böhme, H., 105, 142, 152
 Böhme J., 103, 115, 152
 Bollnow, O. F., 107–108, 123,
 154–156
 Bozzi, P., 46
 brain, 21, 55–56, 60, 62, 66, 134,
 139, 154
 in-a-vat, 55, 134
 Bremer, D., 152
 Butler, J., 57
 Buytendijk, F. J. J., 71–72, 76,
 139–141

- 1 Canetti, E., 142
 2 Carnevali, B., 49, 126
 3 Castelfranchi, C., 143–146
 4 causality (bipolar), 13, 16
 5 Cioran, E., 27
 6 clarity (clear, clearness), 5, 8, 10, 51,
 7 105, 111, 152, 154, 156
 8 climate, xi, 8, 49, 70, 111, 124, 133
 9 cogito, x, 7, 57, 81
 10 colors, xviii, xxi, 8–10, 36, 46, 106,
 11 108, 113, 117, 156
 12 communication (felt-bodily), ix, xii,
 13 xviii–xx, 8, 12, 31, 47, 49, 61, 66,
 14 72, 82, 87, 93–94, 98–101, 103,
 15 110, 119, 145, 148
 16 condensation sphere, 33, 34, 42–43,
 17 50, 87, 96, 146
 18 Condon, W. S., 150
 19 Constable, J., 107
 20 contraction/expansion, xix, 15, 37, 62,
 21 70, 73–74, 80–82, 88, 95,
 22 103–104, 138–139, 149
 23 Cooley, C., 144
 24 corporealization/decorporealization,
 25 xiii, xx, 47, 94–96, 138, 148–149
 26 Costa, C., 123
 27 Costa, V., 29, 122, 125, 130, 139–140
 28 Damasio, A., 21, 35
 29 Damisch, H., 40
 30 Darwin, C., 88, 146
 31 De Biran, M., 71
 32 Demmerling, C., 22, 25, 30, 45, 122,
 33 124–125, 129–131, 134–135,
 34 142–144, 146–147
 35 depsychologization, xi, 19–21, 24, 28,
 36 65, 131
 37 Descartes, R., 7, 65
 38 Diaconu, M., 133
 39 Dickens, C., 18, 30
 40 Dilthey, W., 71
 distance (also eros of), xvii, 2–3, 5, 6,
 8, 14, 24, 31, 33, 35, 51, 60, 95,
 104, 106, 110, 114, 118–119,
 135, 153
 dualism, ix–xi, 7–8, 22, 49, 56, 60,
 100, 130, 135
 cartesian, 57
 felt body/physical body, 135
 health/illness, 69
 psychosomatic, 29, 62, 65–66, 95
 subject/object, 50
 substance/qualities, XV
 Duerr, H.-P., 143
 Eberlein, U., 149
 ecstasies (of things) vs. properties,
 ix, xiii, xx, 1, 4, 6, 9, 26, 28,
 31–32, 35, 70, 107, 109, 113,
 117–118, 124, 155
 effect, 16, 20, 31, 37, 49–50, 71, 81,
 100, 110, 111
 affective-bodily, 8
 atmospheric, 24, 30, 39, 45, 106,
 108, 123, 144
 felt-bodily, 33, 80
 quasi-thingly, xiii, 83, 106
 effectiveness 2, 24, 36, 47, 114
 eidetics, 17, 53
 Elias, N., 143
 Eliot, T. S., 27–28
 Elster, J., 22, 53
 emancipation (personal), x, 22, 26,
 48, 87, 95, 139
 embodiment/disembodiment, xiii, xx,
 30, 47, 55, 60, 65–66, 83, 110,
 138, 152
 empathy, xx, 36, 72, 87, 89, 94
 ephemeral (transience), ix, 3, 5, 14,
 33, 100, 104, 106–108, 117, 149,
 153, 155–156
 ex-centricity, 58, 86, 139
 expression, 6, 8, 13, 19, 24, 31, 46, 66,
 76, 84, 88, 95–96, 98, 100, 133,
 137, 139, 145, 148, 150
 expressiveness (expressivity), xviii, 149

- 1 eyes, xi, xiv, xx, 3, 47, 60, 81–82,
 2 84–86, 89–90, 96–99, 101, 104,
 3 117, 131, 138, 144, 149–151, 154
 4
 5 face, 10, 88–89, 93–101, 115,
 6 149–151
 7 atmospheric (physiognomic)
 8 character of, 94–96
 9 facts
 10 actual/factual, 11, 34, 57, 94
 11 subjective, 2, 20, 52, 126
 12 feelings
 13 abyssality of, 21, 28, 50
 14 externalization of, xi, 21, 24, 28, 30,
 15 32, 35, 46, 72, 74–75, 88–89, 94,
 16 99, 119
 17 mixed, 35–36
 18 Figal, G., 151
 19 first person- and third-person
 20 perspective, 16, 21, 25, 32, 37,
 21 42–43, 45, 50, 52, 57–58, 61, 67,
 22 75, 90–91, 119, 135
 23 Fischer-Lichte, E., 152
 24 Flavin, D., 153
 25 Flusser, V., 115
 26 Forssmann, E., 52
 27 Foucault, M., 57
 28 Fraenger, W., 96, 149
 29 Franckenberg, A., von, 104
 30 Frege, G., 46
 31 Frese, J., 44
 32 Freud, S., 141.
 33 Frey, D., 150–151
 34 Friedrich, C. D., 16
 35 Friedländer, M. J., 99, 116, 150–151
 36 Fuchs, T., 19, 23, 26, 52, 56, 83, 119,
 37 121–122, 124, 130–131, 133–134,
 38 136, 140–141, 143, 148, 151
 39
 40 Gadamer, H. G., 73, 77, 140–141
 Galati, D., 123
 Gallagher, S., 56, 64, 134, 136, 149
 Garelli, J., 129
 Garro, L., C. 72
 gaze, ix, xviii, xx–xxi, 5, 8, 18, 53,
 81–84, 88–89, 91–101, 121, 130,
 144–145, 148–151, 153
 antagonistic, xiv, xx, 94, 103, 98,
 110, 114
 complementary (dialogical), 94, 98,
 103 110
 extended-privative, 15, 99, 111, 139
 and look, 29, 41, 64, 82, 85–86,
 88–89, 94–97, 99, 148–149
 masochistic, 98–99
 as a quasi-thing, 96–101
 sadistic, 98
 Gibson, J., xiii, 124
 glance, xx, 59, 63–64, 66, 73, 95,
 97–98
 Goethe, J. W., 23, 60, 107
 Goffman, E., 79, 87, 145–146
 Goldie, P., 21, 130
 Goldstein, K., 76
 Gombrich, E., 94, 96–97, 107,
 152–153
 Greene, G., 141
 Gröning, P., 128
 Großheim, M., 115–116
 Grote, A., 13, 118–119, 136
 Grüny, C., 70, 140–141
 Günzel, S., 133
 Gurisatti, G., 148–150

 Hall, E. T., 148
 happens (what), vii–viii, x, xx, 12, 67,
 70, 75, 110, 141
 Hasse, J., 122
 Hauskeller, M., 27, 122, 124–125,
 129–131, 134, 152, 154
 Head, H., 62
 Hegel, G. W. F., 3, 48, 101, 132, 151
 Heidegger, M., vii, 1, 3, 9–10, 22,
 42, 105, 113–115, 118–120,
 123, 131
 Heider, F., 117

- 1 Heller, Á., 80, 90, *143–144, 147*
 2 Hellpach, W., *117*
 3 Hennigfeld, J., *145*
 4 Hilgers, M., *142–143, 146*
 5 Hippias, *152*
 6 Hirschfeld, C. C. L., 111
 7 Hobbes, T., 7
 8 Hobuß, S., *124*
 9 Hochberg, J., 93, 100
 10 Holzhey-Kunz, A., *143*
 11 Honneth, A., *143*
 12 Horkheimer, M., *137*
 13 Hugo, V., *125, 146, 153–154*
 14 Humboldt, A. von, 8
 15 Hume, D., 13
 16 Huppertz, M., *125, 128*
 17 Husserl, E., xii–xiii, 1, 10–11, 31, 42,
 18 56, 58–59, 73, *114, 118*
 19 Illich, I., *141*
 20 images, xii, xv, xx, 2, 16, 49, 63, 80,
 21 83, 90, 106–107, *115, 117,*
 22 *125–126, 137, 146, 153, 155*
 23 impression, ix, xi, 3, 9, 14, 15, 23, 32,
 24 37, 41, 49, 96, 103, 109, 110,
 25 *128, 151, 156*
 26 atmospheric, xiii, 8, 101
 27 first, xii, 100
 28 global, 94, 108
 29 in between, ix, 5, 7, 26, 29, 100, *125*
 30 individuation, 4, 74–76, *156*
 31 Ingold, T., 12, *117, 123, 148*
 32 intentionality/unintentionality, xii,
 33 xiv, 15, 35, 41–43, 72, 94–95,
 34 110, *116, 130, 138, 140, 146, 156*
 35 intercorporeality, 94, 96, 100
 36 introjectionism, x–xi, xix, 20
 37 (and psychological-reductionist)
 38 paradigm, xviii, 16, 22, 84, *125*
 39 involuntary (unwillingness), viii, xii,
 40 4, 13, 20, 30–31, 34, 57, 59, 65,
 70, 83–84, 87, 88, 92, 99, *116,*
146, 149
 involvement (affective-bodily-
 atmospheric), vii, x, xii, xix, 6, 8,
 13, 16, 25–27, 33, 36, 39, 44, 51,
 62, 65–67, 74, 77, 80, 88, 90,
 101, *121, 132*
 isles (felt-bodily), xii, xix, xxi, 14, 21,
 61–65, 69, 71, 98, *139*
 Jackson, J., *141*
 Jäkel, A., *130*
 Jaspers, K., *77*
 Jonas, H., 59
 Jünger, E., 69, *139, 142*
 Kant, I., 62, *136, 144*
 Kassner, R., *148*
 Kazig, R., *129*
 Kenny, A., *130*
 Kerckhoven, G., van, *145*
 Kettner, M., *131*
 ki, 8, 29
 Kimura, B., *125*
 kitsch, 52, *133*
 Klages, L., XII, 106, *115, 139,*
153–155
 Kleint, H., *116*
 Koffka, K., 11, *116, 118, 155*
 Kojève, A., 34, 47, *129, 132*
 Kozljanić, R. J., *128*
 Kretzer, A., 39
 Krüger, F., *129*
 Lacan, J., 63, *137, 145*
 landscape, 25–27, 44–45, 61–62, 82,
 107, 111, *132, 144, 154*
 Landweer, H., 22, *122, 130, 135, 142,*
145–147
 Lavater, J. C., 100
 Le Bon, G., 48
 Le Breton, D., 72, *139–142*
 Lechtermann, C., *152*
 Leder, D., *138*
 Lehmann, H., *154*

- 1 Lersch, P., 95, 150–151
 2 Levi, P., 92
 3 Lévinas, E., 28, 148, 150
 4 Lewis, M., 80, 143, 146
 5 lifeworld (Lebenswelt), viii, xiii,
 6 6–7, 58, 73, 106
 7 light, vii, xxi, 2, 5, 16, 18, 34, 49, 53,
 8 96, 99, 103–112, 114, 128, 131,
 9 144, 150, 152, 154–156
 10 candlelight, 108, 110–111
 11 dimmed, xxi, 107, 110
 12 glare, 103–105
 13 lux/lumen, 105
 14 Lichtenberg, G. C., 100, 131
 15 life experience, xii, 23, 44, 56, 125
 16 Lipps, H., 87, 143, 145
 17 Locke, J., 4
 18 Long, R., 120
 19 Lucretius, 9
 20 Lynch, K., 153
 21 Mach, E., 115
 22 Mahayni, Z., 116, 120, 154, 156
 23 Marquard, O., 142
 24 Mason, M., 146
 25 Melzack, R., 140
 26 Mendelssohn, M., 35–36
 27 Merleau-Ponty, M., 6, 43, 58, 60–61,
 28 64, 82, 113, 131, 135, 137,
 29 147–148, 154
 30 metaphor, 8, 11, 19, 23–24, 37, 61,
 31 72, 103, 109, 116, 121, 123
 32 Metzger, W., 130
 33 Meyer-Drawe, K., 142
 34 Meyer-Sickendiek, B., 129
 35 Milev, Y., 126
 36 Mine-ness (Me or to Me vs. I), x, 25,
 37 28, 67, 75, 81
 38 Minkowski, E., 39, 128, 136,
 39 152–154
 40 Minssen, M., 117, 120
 Mittelstraß, J., 116
 Moldzio, A., 141
 Monet, C., 154
 Mühleis, V., 128
 Munch, E., 96, 100
 Musil, R., 36
 Nancy, J. L., 71, 98, 150
 narrowness/vastness, xviii, 2, 8, 15,
 26, 73–75, 94, 103, 109, 111,
 114, 119, 128, 134, 149–150
 Natoli, S., 140, 144
 Neckel, S., 142
 new (neo)phenomenology, xii, xix, 2,
 19–20, 23, 25, 28, 35, 37, 44–45,
 51–52, 56, 57, 60, 66, 71, 92,
 122, 138
 neuroscientific (neurobiological)
 approach, 9, 21, 58, 62,
 66–67, 70
 Nietzsche, F., 67, 109, 138, 144, 153,
 155–156
 night, xviii, 10, 12, 27–28, 106, 108,
 110–112, 121, 134, 152–156
 Norberg Schulz, C., 128
 numinosity, ix, 15, 31–33, 36, 49, 51,
 105, 109, 127, 154
 Nussbaum, M., 21, 81, 90, 130,
 143–145
 Ockham, G. di, xxii, 53
 Ogawa, T., 117
 Olschanski, R., 155
 ontological
 character, xix, 143
 catalogue, xxi, 17
 category, xv–xvi
 inflationism, xix, 24, 53
 repertoire, xix, xxi
 ontology, vii, xi, xv, 3, 6, 17, 52, 107,
 115, 118–119
 Otto, R., 31, 126–127, 155
 pain, xvi–xviii, xx–xxi, 9–10, 12–13,
 18, 34, 36, 42, 53, 59–61, 69–77,

- 1 81, 83, 90–91, *119, 121, 135*,
2 *139–141*
3 as escape, 73–74
4 incommunicability of, 72–73
5 naming of, 72–73
6 as principium individuationis
7 (genesis of the subject), 74–76
8 psychic (Sartre), xvi–xviii
9 Pallasmaa, J., *130*
10 Panofsky, E., *152*
11 passiveness, xi, xvi–xvii, xx, 51, 53, 81,
12 94, *130, 134*
13 pathic (pathicity), vii–x, xviii, xx–xxi,
14 13–14, 17, 22, 36–37, 39, 47,
15 52–53, 58, 61, 64, 66–67, 70–73,
16 75, 77, 80–81, *139, 156*
17 pathic/gnostic, viii, 52, 61,
18 70–71, 106
19 Patzelt, W.J., *125, 129*
20 Paul, St., 32
21 perception, viii–ix, xi–xiv, 5–6, 16,
22 25–26, 28, 30, 39–41, 45–46, 57,
23 62–64, 66, 70, 83, 85, 92, 94,
24 100, 103, 106, 108, 110, *114*,
25 *116, 119, 122, 130, 135–137*,
26 *139–140, 145*
27 Piattelli Palmarini, M., *124*
28 Pierantoni, R., *112, 156*
29 Pinzer, D., *130*
30 Plato, 35, 65, *122, 144*
31 Plessner, H., 58, 61, *139*
32 Plügge, H., *140*
33 Pommier, É., *148*
34 portrait, xx, 93–98, 100–101,
35 *148–149, 151*
36 prereflexive, ix, 35, 59–60, *136*
37 presence (also lived, primitive,
38 original, felt-bodily, absolute),
39 viii, x–xi, xx, 2–3, 10, 12, 34,
40 38, 42, 45, 50, 63, 67, 74–75,
77, 82, 85, 106–107, *120, 126*,
139, 145
Proust, M., 28, 34
qualities (expressive, atmospheric,
qualia), ix–xi, xiii, xiv, xv, xviii,
xx–xxi, 3–5, 8–11, 14, 17, 20–21,
26–27, 36, 39, 48, 53, 55, 60,
64–65, 70, 95, 103, 105–107,
109, 114, 116–120, 125
quasi-things (vs. things)
as actual facts, 11
(causal) bipolar, 13
demanding and intrusive, 11–12
intermittent, 12–13
not edged, cohesive, discrete,
solid, 10
occupy surfaceless spaces, 13–14
similar to fractal shapes, 14
without tendencies, 10–11
Rappe, G., *120, 128, 137*
Ratcliffe, M., *121*
Ratzel, F., *156*
reductionism, xv, xix, 2–4, 6, 10,
16–17, 21, 23, 30, 44, 53, 67,
76, 84, 93, *124–125, 155*
regression (personal), xi, 59, 70, 73,
75, 95, 108
reification, 17, 24–25, 36, 46, 98, *119*,
124, 136
Rilke, R. M., 101, 111, *121, 151*
Rombach, H., *148*
Rossi Monti, M., *146*
Rothacker, E., *133, 152*
Rotili, M., *142*
Sanders, O., *142*
Sartre, J. P., xii, xvi, xviii, xx–xxi,
40–41, 56, 58, 60, 64, 84–85,
116, 130, 145
Scarry, E., *140–141*
Schapp, W., 3, 5, 10, *115–116*,
118, 126
Scheff, T. J., *144, 147*
Scheler, M., 81, *129, 131, 142, 151*

- 1 schema (body, perceptual, motoric),
 2 xix, 40, 60, 63–65, 71,
 3 136–137, 149
 4 Schilder, P., 63, 141
 5 Schiller, F., 131
 6 Schleiermacher, F. D. E., 126
 7 Schmitz, H., xi–xii, xiv, xvi, xviii, 2, 4,
 8 12–13, 15–16, 20, 24–29, 31,
 9 33–34, 36–39, 41–45, 48–50, 52,
 10 60, 62–63, 73–74, 87, 91, 95,
 11 97–98, 109, 114, 116, 119–126,
 12 128–134, 136–151, 154–155
 13 Schopenhauer, A., 58, 151
 14 Schürmann, E., 107
 15 Schüttauf, K., 146
 16 Schultheis, K., 129
 17 Scotus Eriugena, J., 152
 18 Sedlmayr, H., 110, 152, 154
 19 Seidler, G. H., 143
 20 Seitter, W., 156
 21 Seneca, 127
 22 Sennett, R., 142
 23 Shaftesbury, A. A., 31
 24 shame
 25 as atmosphere and quasi-thing, ix,
 26 xx–xxi, 12–13, 18, 20, 37, 48, 53,
 27 79–93, 132, 135–136, 142–147
 28 authority of, 83–84, 86, 88, 92
 29 for being praised, 84
 30 embarrassment, xiv, 12, 23, 82–83,
 31 90, 142, 147
 32 emigration of, 79–82
 33 as failed initiative, 91–92
 34 felt-boy communication with,
 35 82–83, 88–89
 36 and gaze, 81–84, 88–89, 91–92,
 37 143–145
 38 and individual, 80, 82, 89, 92,
 39 142, 144
 40 as internal hemorrhage, xxi, 84–85
 and law, 86
 personal, xx, 20, 48, 82–90
 shame/guilt, 80, 82, 84, 86–87,
 89–90, 132, 143, 146
 and stigmatization, 55, 76, 80–81,
 83–84, 86, 88–91, 96
 vicarious, xx, 37, 79, 82–86, 92
 Shusterman, R., 67, 138
 Simenon, G., 19, 134
 Simmel, G., 83, 95, 100, 104, 123,
 143, 146–147, 149–152
 situation, viii–xiii, xviii, 2, 4, 8, 12, 16,
 23, 26–28, 30–31, 37, 40–41, 43,
 48–50, 56, 61, 63, 71, 77, 79, 84,
 94, 101, 118
 affective (emotional), ix–x, 23, 30,
 37, 56, 137
 as chaotic multiplicity, xi–xii, 49,
 85, 114, 120
 Slaby, J., 130
 Sloterdijk, P., 133, 151
 Snell, B., 65, 145
 Socrates, 56, 152
 Soentgen, J., 12, 14, 32, 50, 115–116,
 118–122, 124, 133–136,
 152, 156
 sovereignty/autonomy, vii, x, xx, 4–5,
 51, 75, 77, 133
 space
 lived, xxi, 14–15, 17, 21, 26, 59, 97,
 120, 122
 predimensional, xi, xix, 8, 25,
 33, 93
 surfaceless, xviii–xix, 14, 59,
 61, 108
 Spaemann, R., 121
 Specht, E. K., 146
 Stifter, A., 154
 Stimmung, 8, 15, 42–43, 53, 95, 123,
 133–134
 Stoichita, V., 149
 Straus, E., viii
 subject to/subject of, x, 76
 Suger (Abbot), 105

- 1 suggestions (motor, felt-bodily), Valéry, P., 69
 2 xii–xiii, xv, xviii, xx, 9, 11–12, 37, Van den Berg, K., 140
 3 94, 131, 148–149 Varzi, A., 119
 4 supervenience, xiii, 26–28, 32, 46, Volz, P., 15
 5 53, 124
 6 synaesthetic (affordances, characters, Wachenhausen, G., 146
 7 impressions, qualia), xi–xii, xv, Wagenfeld, M., 117
 8 xx, 8–9, 109 Wagner, M., 107, 153
 9 synthesis (passive), x, xiii, 17, 43, 57, Waldenfels, B., 55, 57, 114, 121, 131,
 10 93, 100 135–138, 150–151
 11 Szasz, T. S., 140 Wall, P., 69
 12 Szerszynski, B., 119 Wandhoff, H., 152
 13 Tagliapietra, A., 79, 141–144, Warren, W., 130
 14 146–147 Watsuji, T., 120, 156
 15 Tanizaki, J., 110, 112 weather, ix, 8, 60, 117, 128
 16 Taylor, G., 144, 147 Weber, M., 47
 17 Tellenbach, H., 122 Weber-Guskar, E., 122
 18 Thibaud, J. P., 128–129 Weizsäcker, V. von, 135, 140–141
 19 thing (thinghood), vii–xiii, xv, Wendell, S., 140
 20 xvii–xviii, xx–xxi, 1–14, 16–17, Werhahn, H., 133
 21 24–26, 28, 38, 41, 43, 49, 53, Wertheimer, M., xiii
 22 56–57, 60, 66, 70, 73, 83, 85, 93, what it feels like, 61, 67, 72
 23 105–107, 109, 113, 115–122, Widmer, P., 145
 24 130–131, 134–138, 142, Wiesing, L., 7, 119, 130, 135
 25 148–149, 153–156 Wigley, M., 40
 26 Thomas, P., 138 Wildt, A., 133, 147
 27 Tintoretto, 151 Williams, B., 82, 91, 145, 147
 28 Titze, M., 145 wind, ix, xviii–xix, xxi, 1–2, 8–17, 33,
 29 Tugendhat, E., 130, 144 116–117, 120, 153
 30 Tuppini, T., 155 Winnicott, D. W., 125
 31 Turrell, J., 153 Wittgenstein, L., 23, 72,
 32 123–124, 150 123–124, 150
 33 twilight (attenuated light, nebulous), Wollheim, R., 21
 34 ix, xxi, 3, 5, 44, 103–112, world (access to), ix, 7
 35 154–155 Wurmser, L., 84, 142, 146–147
 36 Uexküll, J. von, 115 Yamaguchi, I., 117, 125
 37 Ulich, D., 122 Zahavi, D., 56, 64, 134, 136, 149
 38 vagueness, xi, xxi, 5, 22, 39, 104, 111 Zumthor, P., 40–41
 39 de dicto/de re, 44, 106 Zur Lippe, R., 124
 40

