

n. 8

ATMOSPHERES

what for? ["Christian Julmi's version..."]

Where is the atmosphere when it is no longer there? More questions than answers

Research on atmospheres primarily investigates those atmospheres that we have right in front of us: Atmospheres of nature, of the city, of architecture, of art. In this context, it has become established to ascribe a quasi-objective ontological status to atmospheres. Hermann Schmitz refers to atmospheres as half-things. For him, atmospheres are objective powers in which a person gets like a storm. Similarly, Tonino Griffero speaks of atmospheres as quasi-things, emphasizing that quasi-things, like the atmosphere or the wind, rather have an intermittent life.

In this context, I agree with Griffero's notion that the question "What does the wind do when it isn't blowing?" is an "excellent—though upsetting and disturbing—philosophical question" (in *The Atmospheric We*, 2021, p. 77). However, I do not resonate with his statement that "it would make no sense to ask where they are when they are not present yet or when they are no longer there" (ibid.). To me, this question makes a lot of sense, and my proposal to answer this question is: They are still and already there, in the *atmospheric time-space of our Leib!* But in a potential, not in an "activated" or "evoked" form. (as the *Leib* is not any form of body, German *Körper*, I do not translate the term, and with "atmospheric time-space" I do not mean the physical concepts of time and space or space of time.)

Do atmospheres that grip a person have a history in which and through which they emerge? They certainly have. I would say that the most (emotional) atmospheres can only be understood and eventually altered by working through this history. Thus, the phenomenology of atmospheres must find a way into psychology, but also into sociology since atmospheres are often group phenomena. Supporters of a soccer team assemble prior to the match, becoming infused with excitement. Without the game, there is no atmosphere. However, where does this atmosphere originate before their assembly, and how is it intertwined with the game?

Even if atmospheres can rise like the wind, they usually do not in our everyday experience. Most of the time, atmospheres are not created spontaneously, but are rather evoked, often through interactions with others. In such cases, the collective history of all participants usually plays a pivotal role in this evocation.

A serene park alley, the romantic moonlight or the dreamy bay become a threatening backdrop when associated with the danger of an assault. For the lover the moonlight shines bright, for a burglar it is a nuisance. Who feels the "right" atmosphere? And where is the atmosphere of the other?

The role of the subject in the evocation of atmospheres becomes all the more apparent when we look at atmospheres that phenomenological research has paid little attention to so far: Atmospheres like jealousy, greed, avarice, vanity, resentment seize people from their backs, meaning that, while the atmosphere has a grip on us, we do not have the atmosphere in front of us. Those affected will usually neither realize nor admit they are under the spell of such atmospheres. This is where naive phenomenology, which only describes what it supposedly sees, reaches its limits. We must investigate the back of the phenomena to judge what we see in front.

Where, then, does the atmosphere of discomfort emerge, gradually ascending until it can no longer be disregarded? Or where does the atmosphere remain when it is not fully realized, when it taps gently but does not fully pass the "doors of perception"? Here I follow the *genesis phenomenology* of Guido Rappe, which answers: From the *subliminal of the Leib*. This subliminal is rooted in one's biography and socialization (which is not adequately captured by Schmitz's term *personal situation*). Together with Rappe, I therefore advocate an *epistemology* of atmospheres instead of an *ontology* of atmospheres that recognizes the history of concrete and "personal situations" as central to the genesis, evocation and understanding of atmospheres. This also means that we do not only need a phenomenology of atmospheres, but also a psychology and a corresponding sociology of atmospheres, which essentially is a phenomenological psychology and a sociology of the *Leib* and its time-space.

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