Phenomenographies

Describing the plurality of atmospheric worlds

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Introduction: on atmospheres and the necessity of their description

"What a nice atmosphere here!"

1 A sentence such as this is often casually exchanged while entering a cozy sitting room or a dimly lit old-town square where at dusk a small ensemble plays vintage music to a smiling, improvised audience. It is the kind of statement that in recent years phenomenology has wrestled from the arbitrariness of everyday language and scrutinized for its role in expressing how we feel about the environment we inhabit. To speak of the atmosphere is no longer exclusively the small talk of a Monday morning: it can also indicate that we may come upon a space that is affectively charged; that we have felt a stirring *out there* making our body resonate with the world, and that perhaps we were not alone in our experience, but rather sharing it with someone else.

2 The phenomenology of atmospheres has come of age by underpinning a wide variety of explorations of reality. The world 'out there', in its inextricable unity, shows many aspects and can be described from a variety of perspectives; but no matter what our analytical intent may be, we agree on its fundamentally spatial nature, and on the corporeal and affective engagement it exhorts from all those present, either in an unreflective or more focused fashion. Both the occasional onlooker and the informed researcher—who reports the scene by implementing a set of methodologically fine-tuned skills—'resonate' with the affectively charged space. Thus, the description becomes tinged: by being embedded in a situation, we are not altogether free to take that backward analytical position that could grant us the objective stance of the external observer. We must espouse the subjective in its primary acceptation of

pertaining to the subject rather than as the whimsical atomization of individual, private experiences (Schmitz, 2019, p. 46).

3 The atmosphere is by definition, as Gernot Böhme has argued, a hazy and vague in-between phenomenon. The ontological characters preventing atmospheres from ever coming entirely into focus in fact broaden the potential grasp on lived space of methods striving to represent them: observing and describing reality through the lens of atmospheres grants us the ability of sensing that *something-more* is supervening on the material constitution of the environment (Griffero, 2018, p. 79). In this line of thinking, Sumartojo and Pink (2019) have argued that we may know *in*, *about*, and *through* atmospheres. By this tripartite analytical lens, they show how people live *in* a world of atmospheres that, while being actively shaped by them, in turn give form to their experiences. As researchers, we may thus seek to *know* about atmospheres, either retrospectively or when *in* them, while they are also a concept to *think through* when analyzing people's life.

4 The coming-of-age of the phenomenology of atmospheres thus entails a set of questions related to their study and analytical power. Primarily, atmospheres have been incorporated in the methodological toolkits of several fields of research and practices that focus on the description of human activities and their spatial settings, ranging from urban geography, planning and geopolitics (Anderson, 2009; Adey, 2014; Ebbensgaard, 2017; Fregonese, 2017; Gandy, 2017), homes (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2016; Bille, 2017, 2019), festivals and rituals (Edensor, 2012; Kiib *et al.* 2017; De Matteis, 2018; Eisenlohr, 2018), memory and heritage studies (Sumartojo, 2016; Micieli-Voutsinas, 2017), mobilities design (Jensen *et al.*, 2015; Kazig *et al.*, 2017) to music (Riedel, 2015; Scassillo, 2018; Bertinetto, 2019). Furthermore, atmospheres are also called into play when the understanding of lived space becomes prodromal to its transformation.

5 In architecture and other design practices, the discourse on atmospheres has been growing since the early years of this century (Meisenheimer, 2004; Zumthor, 2006; Hahn, 2013; Havik, 2013; Jäkel, 2013; Borch, 2014; Pallasmaa, 2014; Tidwell, 2014; Thibaud, 2015; Pérez-Gómez, 2016; Böhme, 2017; Albertsen, 2019; De Matteis, 2019; Griffero, 2019). This development may represent a welcome innovation vis-à-vis many overpowering distancing mechanisms that reduce the thickness of lived space to a shallow metric fact or consider it primarily a 'text' to be read and deciphered. Nevertheless, atmospheres have acquired a tool-value, meaning that they are no longer considered only for the light they can shed on experienced reality, but also for the practical purpose they can serve. In this sense, they are exposed to a number of risks: that of being 'hijacked', becoming part of an objectivizing technical-analytical paradigm, or of serving politically dangerous manipulations. The instrumentalizing tendencies may come despite the fact that the atmospheres' full, intentional producibility is controversial in the philosophical discourse, as seen in the debate between key figures such as Hermann Schmitz and Gernot Böhme. In marketing, for instance, the central work of Philip Kotler employs the term 'atmospherics' to describe the "effort to design buying environments to produce emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability" (1973, p. 50). While the philosophical background may not have been intentionally downplayed by Kotler, his work has furthered approaches to atmospheres where they are often understood solely in terms of emotional responses rather than affectively performed in everyday life.

6 Examples of this instrumental use of atmospheric effects can be found throughout the history of architectural design, from Baroque urbanism to the *Stimmungsarchitektur* of German Nationalism and its cinematographic portrayals (Bartetzko, 2012). Yet the manipulation of the public's affective response is not always considered a 'betrayal' of the designer's mission, or an ethically questionable political manipulation: in some cases, it is a mode of creating what may be termed *affective architecture*, e.g. in the context of memorial spaces and heritage sites (Micieli-Voutinas & Person, 2020), and *affective urbanism* (Ernwein & Matthey, 2018). Here, the often-paramount technical dimension of contemporary building practices all but misses its mark unless it becomes ancillary to the stimulation of an emotional response—although it is a matter of discussion if a planned atmosphere can be likened to a spontaneously emerging one, or if it is an atmosphere at all. The question lingers: how can what is experienced, or even intended to be experienced, be described?

7 The transition of the phenomenology of atmospheres into a broader domain of practice cannot be ignored, regardless of the many methodological pitfalls it may conceal. Atmospheres are no longer under custody of the rigorous phenomenological project first systematized by authors such as Hubertus Tellenbach (1968) and Hermann Schmitz (1969, 2014, 2016, 2019; Schmitz *et al.*, 2011) on the shoulders of literature on *Stimmung* (Heidegger, 1962; Bollnow, 2011), and by now encompassing a vast and diversified body of philosophical literature (Böhme, 1995, 2001, 2017a; Bulka, 2015; Griffero, 2014, 2017, 2019; Hasse, 2015, 2017; Hauskeller, 1995; Rauh, 2018). We often need to introduce them on either academic or lay tables as something to be illustrated, shared and discussed: for the ethnographer reporting the feeling of a session of ritual chanting, the urban planner presenting a regeneration plan to a skeptic local community, or the architect trying to convince a client that the spaces he designed will feel just *so* comfortable. More broadly, representing atmospheres becomes necessary whenever we strive to convey to a third party a situation *in absentia* of the actual space and time where it unfolds—either because it is physically unavailable, or because it is envisioning something that does not yet exist. Many art forms—painting, poetry, music—are capable of producing atmospheric effects: but can the same be achieved through descriptions relying on the more technical avenues of formalized methods?

8 Representations of lived spaces are, in a way, a betrayal of that very ontological foundation claiming that "An *atmosphere* [...] is the unbounded occupation of a surfaceless space in the region of what is experienced as present" (Schmitz, 2019, p. 94). An image of an affectively charged spatial situation, even in its most faithful variation, even if by 'image' we intend a fully immersive condition experienced in a virtual environment, will *not* be the actual atmosphere that is being represented, since this is multi-sensuous, and sparks a comprehensive corporeal engagement. The experience of a represented atmosphere is sustained by the presence of a medium, an intermediate support such as a screen, a picture, a sound recording, a textual narrative—or a combination of these.

9 A space laden by an emotional agent, corporeally experienced by the present subjects, can be artificially produced, and the atmosphere in fact *installed*: yet, regardless of its ontogenesis, the situation the perceiver encounters will resonate affectively in a way that is not prone to interpretation. The quasi-objective character of atmospheres implies that different subjects encountering them may respond in varying ways: depending on their corporeal disposition and personal biography, the perception of the

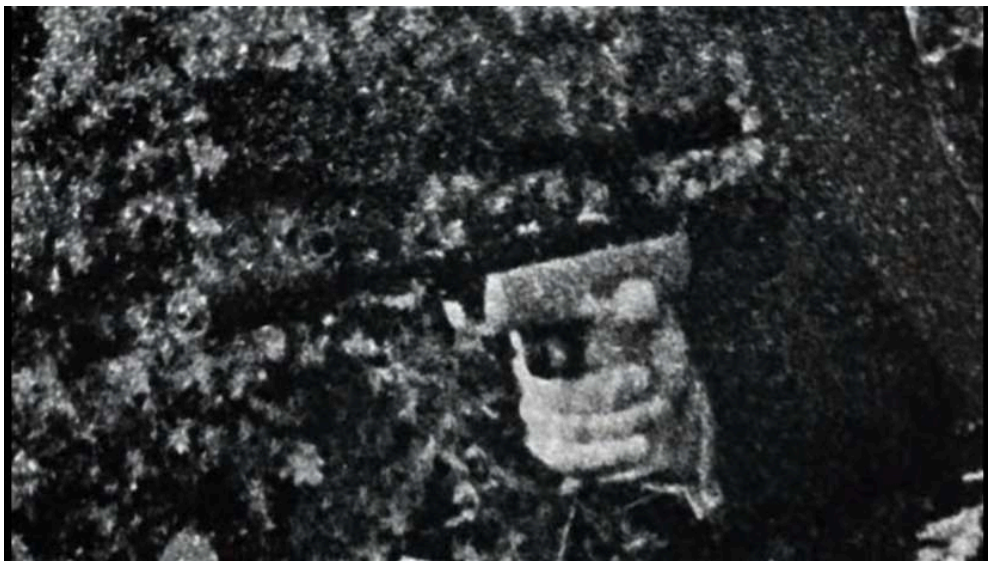
emotional affordances can strike rather different chords in the immediacy of the "first encounter" (Griffero, 2014, p. 29). Representations, on the other hand, call into play a range of individual skills that increases with the distance from the object that is being observed: even the most minute textual description of a spatial condition, for example, requires the reader to know the language in which it is written, and to have at least a basic previous experience of the illustrated situation or of an analogous one. The number of turning points becomes exponential, and the faithfulness of the representation to its object is all but guaranteed.

10 Nevertheless, despite the number of potential shortcomings and methodological risks, we believe that this is a tiger worth riding, and the intent of this special issue of *Ambiances* is to probe, compare and discuss ways of describing the experience of lived space. The notion of *phenomenography* at the center of our concern covers two distinct aspects: firstly, the range of descriptive methods and techniques that, across disciplines, address the representation of lived space; secondly, the outcomes of these practices, which, once established, become independent products, as either scholarly or artistic artefacts, engaging the subject and, potentially, acting on the dynamics of lived space.

11 In this introductory essay, we will attempt to provide a general definition of what we understand as *phenomenography*, as emerging from a variety of descriptive practices sharing a set of key theoretical intersections. In the third section, we will discuss previous literature on the topic, in the few instances where this term has been adopted. The fourth section provides an outline of the six articles included in the *Ambiances* 2019 special issue. The fifth and closing section will recapitulate several critical nodes emerging from the articles, discussing their problematic dimensions and suggesting further directions of research in the field of atmospheric descriptions.

Phenomenographies: investigations on lived space

Figure 1: Frame from *Blow-Up* (D: Michelangelo Antonioni, UK, Italy: 1966)



12 In a scene from Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blow-up*, a young man strolls through a London park. It is a weekday morning, and there are few people around. He

is a photographer, and with his camera—almost an extension of his eye—he is seeking a shot to conclude a book on the life of the city. He chases pigeons and observes a passerby; then, his attention is caught by a couple in the distance—a young, beautiful woman with an older, elegant man. He follows them up a stairway to an isolated lawn surrounded by hedges: hiding among the bushes, then behind a tree, he shoots several pictures as they embrace and kiss. Suddenly he is spotted, and the woman runs up to him in distress, demanding that he hand over the film. He refuses: first, she tries to grab the camera, then runs away. In the short lapse of their conversation, the man has disappeared.

13 Later that day, the photographer is back in his studio. In the darkroom, he develops the film and makes large-format prints: the grainy black-and-white shots are powerful, tinging the scene with a dramatic tone that one did not fully sense in the fine-pruned yard where they were taken. As he observes them, something claims his attention: a presence unseen, hiding somewhere in the frame. A blow-up of the photograph reveals that as the man embraces the woman, she casts her gaze sideways, as if to observe something with a worried expression. The photographer follows the woman's eyes: she is looking at the shrubs behind the fence. Another blow-up of that area shows a white spot; a further one a blurry, ominous face. The next enlargement reveals an extended hand aiming a gun towards the lawn; the final one, in a photo taken once the woman has left the scene, a body in the distance, lying on the grass. The mystery is unraveling: in the London park, unseen, was *something more*.

14 We can consider the two key scenes from *Blow-up* as a token of phenomenography, from which to induce some salient traits of the descriptive practices of lived space. Through his technical work on a medium—the images—the photographer produces a differed representation of a situation he has experienced in first person. By the successive framing of details, he brings into view an expressive agent he had not perceived in the real-space setting. This revelation retrospectively tinges the situation with a dramatic content he had somehow sensed, without bringing it into focus. It is a spatial representation—in the first scene, Antonioni's camera pans to explore the lawn from several different angles and points of view, while the photographs highlight the directionality of the subjects' gazes. The characters' affects, expressed through postures and gestures, permeate from one sphere to the other: the real-world spatiality of the park scene, the mediated manifestation as the photographer gradually discovers the hidden web in the images, to the film's viewer who is himself emotionally caught in the drama. It is not the details being brought into focus that engage us: rather, the atmosphere is evoked by the auratic sensation progressively emerging from the unfolding revelation. What we as final recipients ultimately sense as a menacing presence appears through the intersection between three intertwined objects of perception—the space of the lawn with its human actors, its photographic portrayal, and Antonioni's cinematic narrative. These three settings are separate, as *in abîme* representations of the same situation, each an image of the previous: yet it is evident that they all share *something* of the primary, real-space event.

15 These qualities roughly outline what we may understand as a phenomenography: the differed representation of a lived situation, actual or envisioned, relying on one or more intersecting expressive media—including written narratives—encompassing the spatial, corporeal and affective spheres. It can describe an atmosphere that is manifest, or frame and bring into focus a condition that could otherwise remain peripheral or

altogether cloaked. While atmospheres are by definition vague (Böhme, 2017b, p. 159; Griffero, 2017a, p. 106; Rauh, 2017, p. 2) and not directly discernible (Böhme, 2013a, p. 54), their mediated description could—almost paradoxically—be very precise about this vagueness (Bille *et al.*, 2015, p. 33), presenting it to the final recipient's sensation as a fundamental quality of lived experience, and expressing the overarching and pervasive spatial situation. Finally, if the encounter with atmospheres primarily occurs within spontaneous life experience—"anything that happens to humans in a felt manner without their having intentionally constructed it" (Schmitz, 2019, p. 43)—a phenomenography is the deliberate application of technical tools producing a description. In this sense, it can be both an interpretation of reality, as an account of a perceived atmosphere, and itself produce atmospheric effects.

16 Different techniques of description can grant multiple points of access to the atmospheric character of lived space. Antonioni's photographer explores events as a classical detective would do, inferring the hitherto concealed situation from details acting as 'symptoms'. The observation of a detail requires a focused attention, somehow countering the elusive and peripheral nature of atmospheric perception. Any phenomenographic description, however, is but a fragment of reality, shifting the focus on some aspects while discarding others: this becomes obvious when observations are conveyed by means of a preferential perceptive channel—most often vision—that remains ineffective for other sensory realms. Atmospheres produced by smells, for example, may require altogether different modes of description from those with visual anchoring points, or those based on synesthesia or multimodal linguistic references (Tellenbach, 1968; Moeran, 2005; Stenslund, 2015). What can thus sustain and collate individual parts, granting them the ability of producing a more unified impression on the recipient, is the narrative wherein they are embedded. Sherlock Holmes' investigations, in this sense, are based on the pure logic of deduction: yet, what makes Arthur Conan Doyle's stories atmospheric is the deictic sense of mystery sparked by a constellation of isolated clues initially showing no relation to each other. In the final pages, when the case is solved by the reconstruction of events, this constellation emerges into a recognizable figure, making the atmosphere disappear—and often leaving us wondering how we have been manipulated by it.

17 Opposite Sherlock Holmes, the 'gnosic' detective *par excellence*, we could consider Inspector Maigret, whose investigations follow a more 'pathic' track (Großheim, 2010; Straus, 1966, p. 11): in Simenon's novels, the role of clues is toned down, while the detective often begins his work in a state of unfocused estrangement and confusion, 'sniffing' the atmosphere and almost instinctively recognizing culprits who immediately appear as such. Maigret does not infer who has committed the murder: he *senses* it as a first impression, an ambient atmosphere suggesting what could have happened, and later analytically reconstructs the sequence of events. Both detectives' goal is that of solving murder cases: but opposing phenomenographical approaches—even when describing fictional situations and events—can provide different ways of accessing reality, leveraging on various 'fragments' of lived space that ultimately report the presence of a certain atmosphere.

Plural phenomenographies

18 The term *phenomenography* originated in the 1970s in the seminal work of educational psychologist Ference Marton, who thereby intended "research aimed at description, analysis and understanding of experiences" (Marton, 1981, p. 180). He conceives it as a side-step from the phenomenological method:

> [...] a phenomenological investigation is directed towards the pre-reflective level of consciousness. The aim is to describe either what the world would look like without having learned how to see it or how the taken-for-granted world of our everyday existence is "lived". In "phenomenography," we suggest, we would deal with both the conceptual and the experiential, as well with what is thought of as that which is lived. We would also deal with what is culturally learned and with what are individually developed ways of relating ourselves to the world around us (p. 181).

19 In this sense, Marton opposes the central phenomenological feature of the *epoché*—bracketing off one's pre-understanding—and rather accepts that the way people sense and make sense of the world is deeply embedded in cultural and social domains. Marton's version of phenomenography, originating in a Scandinavian context, has inspired much further research, particularly in the educational field (Marton 1986; Entwistle, 1997; Bowden & Walsh, 2000; Larsson & Holmström 2007; Feldon & Tofel-Grehl, 2018). In this line of thinking, this approach essentially reveals the learners' perspective: how subjects understand and apprehend phenomena. It is in this tradition, aimed at the description of conceptions, that Marton's scarcely disguised skepticism of phenomenology—underscored by the creation of a neologism—addresses a difficult task: that of merging "the conceptual and the experiential". The spatial, the corporeal, and the affective spheres, however, play little role in this approach, and the interaction appears to unfold in an exquisitely mental domain. Thus, while the term promises a description of phenomena, and has raised central concerns in terms of describing conceptions, it comes somewhat short in understanding vague experiences of emotional and affective spaces.

20 A deeper conception of this subject matter lies at the foundation of Jürgen Hasse's *critical phenomenology of spaces*, largely based on Schmitz's work. First to recover the term phenomenography to a primary, unbiased meaning,[1] Hasse clarifies that

> Critical phenomenology finds its center in the illustration of self- and world-relations, mirrored in feeling-related meanings. The intelligible actor in his intentional agency is here not irrelevant, since he deliberately implements his knowledge of men's impressionability and of the atmospheric potential of situations. [...] I thus [...] set out from a double ontological structure of men, not placing a dividing line between the actors (the agent) and the patheurs[2] (he who is corporeally involved by the events), but rather defining the boundary with the individual's situation (2015, p. 12-13).

21 Hasse's phenomenological project unfolds through micrologic descriptions of urban and architectural spaces. The pathic subject can establish a distance from the atmospheric feelings he encounters, providing them with a name and thereby placing them in the analytical crosshair of critique. The possibility of exploration thus only becomes available once the individual masters his vital experience as a rational actor (2015, p. 187): while in the encounter with space we oscillate between two concurrent, mutually defining dimensions, in its retrospective description the gnostic must encapsulate the blurred margins of affective involvement within clear boundaries—without, however, deleting them.

22 The adoption of the term *micrology* in Hasse's work—meaning an observation that focuses on minute, microscopic details—harks back to classic writings on the city, such as Georg Simmel's descriptions of Berlin, where the sense of urban life appears to emerge from the minutiae of individual observed objects, or Walter Benjamin's city images reported in his *Denkbilder*. In a paragraph of his *Berlin childhood around 1900*, Benjamin writes:

> Sometimes, on winter evenings, my mother would take me shopping with her. It was a dark, unknown Berlin that spread out before me in the gaslight. [...] The alcoves and pillars could no longer be clearly discerned, and the faces of the houses shone with light. Whether because of the muslin curtains, the blinds, or the gas mantle under the hanging lamp—this light betrayed little of the rooms it lit. It had to do only with itself. It attracted me and made me pensive. It still does so today, in memory. Thus it leads me back to one of my picture postcards. This card displayed a square in Berlin. The surrounding houses were of pale blue; the night sky, dominated by the moon, was of darker blue. The spaces for the moon and all the windows had been left blank in the blue cardboard. You had to hold it up to a lamp, and then a yellow radiance broke from the clouds and the rows of windows. I was not familiar with the neighborhood pictured. "Halle Gate" was inscribed at the bottom. Gate and hall converged in this image, and formed that illuminated grotto where I meet with the memory of a wintry Berlin (2002, p. 372).

23 The passage highlights a key issue of descriptive practices: the potential discrepancy between a recollected atmosphere and its representation through an image. Benjamin's memory of his childhood winter strolls does not match the image until he manipulates it, holding it up against the light and associating the postcard's label to his own prior knowledge of the area around Hallesches Tor. It is a conceptual operation, grounded in the intersection between an intuition and an interpretation. Phenomenographic practices often rely on the collaboration between different expressive channels and sensory domains that become synesthetically intertwined, and are in turn related to the object of representation: the question on the floor thus regards the nature of the relationship between these various spheres, and how they affect us—both as isolated objects and in their intersection.

24 Most importantly, we are not to consider the potential misalignments emerging from such overlapping—or even contrasting—domains as a limit to the effectiveness of representation, rather as generators of fertile tensions. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht observes how literary texts always bear effects pointing to both 'meaning' and 'presence'.

> They "always appear together [...] and are always in tension. There is no way of making them compatible or of bringing them together in one "well-balanced" phenomenal structure" (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 105).

Affective perception and the reflective approach—if we at least momentarily admit such divarication—meet and clash in representations, becoming connected. In a way, phenomenographies investigate the nature of this connection, exploiting it to create a passage between lived experience and a new, distinct object of perception related to it: they articulate the tension, making it productive.

25 The nature of this connection is worth being queried, yet leaving the door open to multiple possibilities. In accounts of first-person experiences, the participation of the describer cannot be disregarded, since she or he is not simply a neutral conveyor of information, but rather embedded in the situation and affectively engaged. A phenomenographical account can at once report the atmospheric qualities of the

situation encountered *and* the biographical disposition of the reporter, potentially highlighting commonalities and differences between distinct subjects, rather than assume a position of epoché. The relevance of the describer's subjectivity entails that the connection will always only be *partial*: as anthropologist Marilyn Strathern writes,

> Ethnography works [...] by evoking in the reader responses that cannot be commensurate with the writer's—there is no 'object' that they both grasp, for the writer cannot 'represent' another society or culture: rather s/he provides the reader with a connection to it. Ethnography makes available what can be conceived but not presented. The connection is perceptible as the reader's realization of an experience (what the ethnographer has evoked for him or her) (2004, p. 7).

26 Strathern's opposition of 'evocation' to 'representation' further underscores the tension running through the describer, the recipient, the phenomenography, and the lived space they all somehow relate to.

27 Images—certainly prime phenomenographical tools—provide further evidence of the tension inherent in this connection, and of the influence of technical production on phenomenographical practices. As we have noted above, images—paintings, photographs, posters, projections etc.—have no actual space, nor are they endowed with the variability of situations, 'freezing' a single frame in time. The very act of framing, stemming from the selection of a crucial moment in a fluctuating, situational reality, can enhance the affective content: it is difficult to deny the existence of an atmospheric potential in images. Gernot Böhme recognizes in them a vast degree of autonomy and the ability of acting on the pathic subjects as primary objects of perception rather than as symbols of some represented reality: their mode of existence is not that of objects, rather that of *appearance* ("Erscheinung") (Böhme, 1999, p. 9). This is true regardless of their being depictions of reality—a postcard—or imaginative constructs such as an architectural rendering: all these forms can become phenomenographical tools.

28 As phenomenographies are partial representations of lived space, the production of images can leverage on technical means to highlight atmospheric qualities. A photograph can be adjusted in tone and color to solicit a felt-body resonance through multi-sensorial effects, pointing to a certain *Stimmung*. Even simple procedures such as framing and cropping—well highlighted in *Blow-up*—can lead to remarkable differences in the resulting effect (Griffero, 2019, p. 138), by including or excluding portions of the visual field, or changing the proportions of the image itself.

29 Images thus do not speak to us (only) through language, bearing *signs of* something, but also by means of the 'primary language' of emotions. The actual reality of images entails that sometimes the object of representation and its depiction can spark *the same effect* (Böhme, 1999, p. 90). It can also mean that some part of our experience of reality can *begin* through the images: the depiction becomes a different reality, capable of placing in focus spatial content that may otherwise remain latent. This notion could ultimately bear the sense of descriptive practices, highlighting and promoting a plurality of phenomenographies.

Descriptive methods: outline of the *Ambiances* 2019 special issue

30 The articles in this special issue are ordered in a way that takes us from the (auto)ethnographical, over the architectural, ending in the investigations informed by cognitive science. In selecting the articles for this volume, we intentionally chose to cover a wide field of approaches—even approaches that may be far from our comfort zone as individual editors. Yet, we see this variety as a strength of a multidisciplinary approach to atmospheres, not preemptively excluding any perspective. Beginning with the contributions resting on ethnographic methods, we open with an investigation by Shanti Sumartojo, Tim Edensor and Sarah Pink, advancing an autoethnographic methodology in which the authors engage in a dialogue *in* the atmosphere. That is, the authors walk through the inner city of Melbourne, Australia, to account for atmospheres as they arise *in situ*, rather than in analytical hindsight: as they put it, they research *in* atmospheres. While such an approach highlights the importance of experiencing atmospheres, the article also raises questions about positionality and documentation, which is central to an account seeking to describe atmospheres.

31 Much in line with this autoethnographic approach efforts to challenge traditional methodologies, the paper by Olivier Gaudin and Maxime Le Calvé advances drawing and writing as ethnographic tools to describe atmospheres. In this sense, they argue that drawing is "both a field note and an image that can support the presentation of the ethnographic experience". This takes the premise of vagueness and 'moreness' of atmospheres seriously and engages with artistic ways of representation. Both cases thus display that when it comes to describing atmospheres, the first obstacle may not be how others experience them, but indeed to clarify what is gained from engaging with one's disposition and atmospheric competences.

32 Ulrike Mackrodt further critically discusses the pros and cons of traditional ethnographic methods, such as observation, *in-situ* and off-site interviews: describing atmospheres is no easy task and all selected methods come with a bias. In her study of the former Tempelhof airport in Berlin, she focuses on interviews on atmospheres conducted with city planners at a distance from the site being discussed. The planners' understanding of the atmosphere emerges as being shaped by a limited number of visits to the site and a wealth of cartographic representations: hence, the office becomes a central place for the description of the atmospheres experienced in a different geographic location.

33 Moving into the architectural territory, Klaske Havik's contribution explores the potential of literary language in the description of architectural atmospheres, to understand how people experience the urban territories they inhabit. She questions how such literary atmospheric accounts can be employed as a methodological tool of analysis and spatial design in architectural education. Literary descriptions can emphasize the experiential and embodied engagement with spatial settings, as mediums for both the portrayal of existing conditions and to forecast qualities of envisioned space, making these tools 'operable' for design purposes. The key advantage of using such devices in the design process lies in giving voice to tacit forms of experiential and embodied knowledge, highlighting the link between language and spatial, corporeal and affective experiences. A wealth of studies on the nature of language supports the understanding of our linguistic capacities as being grounded in

the immediate bodily, emotional, social, and cultural experiences of the world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Borghi *et al.*, 2016; Buccino *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, Havik's proposal aligns with the idea that the language of architecture might not be as detached from embodied and affective experiences as is usually thought.

34 Elisa Morselli employs the expressive medium of images, specifically architectural photography, to explore the synesthetically perceived dimension of sound in the representations of atmospheres. Through the analysis of visual components in selected photographs—bodily expressions, postures, gestures, gazes of portrayed persons—she highlights the possibilities of capturing and understanding a dynamic auditory and felt-body experience of spatial settings through a prime visual medium. Such phenomenography aims to provide a new way of reading the "representation of the atmosphere starting from these bodily traces". This is in part enabled, as the author suggests, on account of our capacity to connect with depicted bodies through bodily-empathic engagement, *i.e.* the "embodied simulation" of portrayed subjects' felt experiences through the activation of the mirror neuron system and thus, our own sensorimotor and emotional responses (Freedberg and Gallese, 2007).

35 The contribution by Elisabetta Canepa *et al.* shares a point of departure in Gallese's embodied simulation theory, investigating how this empathic engagement participates in the perception of architectural atmospheres. By intersecting contemporary philosophical literature on atmospheres with notions developed in the fields of embodied cognition and neuroscience, the authors conduct an exploratory study to examine the relationship between individuals' empathic sensibility and their emotional-evaluative responses towards a set of architectural settings. They address the question of the possibility of designing atmospheres through the systematic modulation of different spatial factors (materiality, light, form), represented in a virtual reality setup. This approach is motivated by the need to counteract some conceptions dominant in the respective fields—brain-centric cognitive science, primacy of vision, intellectualization—through the emphasis on our fundamentally embodied and affective engagement with spaces. Furthermore, there is a need to test some of the claims within the architectural discourse on atmospheres, related to whether certain design factors and sensorimotor/affective bodily responses differ in their role in perception and experience. Despite the seemingly reductionist approach—albeit adopted in the spirit of controllable scientific experimentation—the authors open the path for future studies incorporating additional measures of the subjects' corporeity (e.g., neuroimaging and physiological measures, while retaining the centrality of the phenomenological dimension of experience). The potential of such empirical investigations, as in the field of neuroaesthetics (Fingerhut, 2018), resides in providing an additional layer of understanding to current theories, clarifying the meaning of spatial experiences in the context of architectural design.

36 The articles included in this special issue cover a wide gamut of approaches, methodological premises and analytical techniques, which inevitably may appear as contrasting if not altogether contradictory. Far from espousing a single, privileged avenue for the description of lived space, we intend to accept the evidence that *no one shoe* fits the complexity of atmospheric investigations. In fact, from the intersection between a multiplicity of theories, methods and arguments, arise a conspicuous number of critical nodes, opening the discussion to further directions in research.

The critical nodes of atmospheric description

37 While most of the papers engage with methodological applications, they also bring to the front a number of theoretical issues. In exploring the possibilities of designing, describing and analyzing atmospheric situations, they naturally expose some theoretical cruxes on which the literature on atmospheres would hardly find an agreement. In particular, the focus on phenomenography purports an obligation to deal with empirical data. In our final remarks, it will be helpful to point out some of these theoretical issues, without however striving to provide comprehensive answers. We believe that the simple indication of some tensions can contribute to the growing interdisciplinary debate triggered by the so-called 'atmospheric turn'.

38 As some authors suggest, there are atmospheres that may not be consciously noted, or that remain entirely 'hidden' in the background. This entails a more general question: is atmospheric perception transitive or intransitive? In other words, is an atmosphere something we perceive thematically, or rather the grounding condition for the possibility of such thematic perception? In this latter understanding, it would exert an even more intense and lasting effect, as exemplified in Heidegger's notion of pre-reflectively apprehended *Stimmungen*.

39 Some of the articles describe the different atmospheres—possibly perceived in temporal succession—of a certain place or city (for example Gaudin and Le Calvé, and Surmatojo, Edensor and Pink). This introduces the scarcely debated question concerning the 'unity' of atmospheres: does a place have an overarching atmosphere, or does this coexist—harmoniously but in some occurrences also problematically—with various sub-atmospheres? The ensuing ontological and mereological problem articulates a twofold alternative: an atmosphere could be intended as the simple result of an aggregation of sub-atmospheres, which—if present—could be unwanted, remain unnoticed or even appear as being meaningless; or it could supervene on them and on their generative potential. This latter position, however, is still under-investigated.

40 Yet, the most pressing issue, variously addressed by all authors, is directly related to descriptive practices: do atmospheres only exist at the moment when we encounter and become engaged with their affective potential (see again Sumartojo, Edensor and Pink), or does even its description and methodic analysis preserve their existence and—at least partially—their effectiveness? This question entails two problems. Firstly, stating that an atmosphere can only be understood by living it—as in the article by Gaudin and Le Calvé—evidently refers to a *latu sensu* existentialistic meaning of 'understanding', that sidelines all epistemic meanings. In this sense, however, a phenomenography could not be truly conceived as a method to provide a fuller understanding of reality. Secondly, the identification between atmospheric feeling and direct involvement somehow disregards a very common phenomenon of our everyday experience: we can perceive the presence of an atmosphere, but in fact remain unaffected by it. On these occasions—think of the experience of mere contemplation—an observer would be capable of clearly recognizing an atmosphere outside of felt-body involvement. This condition could grant the observer a deep 'understanding' of the situation's 'objective' roots, and the ability to flawlessly convey its character to a third party, leveraging on shared situations and the constancy of affective responses to recurring conditions. Literature and poetry, for example, but also the notion of phenomenography as illustrated here, point in this direction.

41 The non-coincidence between perception and affective involvement proves, *inter alia*, the weakness of any projectivist thesis, also surfacing in some of the articles: the idea that an externally perceived atmospheric feeling can be accounted for as the mere projection on the surrounding world of a purely subjective feeling. Nonetheless, this occasional misalignment between perception and corporeal engagement could imply the need of admitting the presence of a minimal affective ingredient in every cognitive account—and vice versa.

42 In describing certain atmospheres, some of the articles do not exclude the possibility that these could generate distinct moods in different receptors. In other words, the pre-reflective recognition of their presence does not necessarily lead to an agreement between various subjects on their 'definition'—an aspect of informed appraisal. The question arises: are these varying effects the result of distinct atmospheres, or rather diverging filtrations of the same phenomenon? After all, opposing affective responses, such as attraction and repulsion, could share the same atmospheric origin. The authors address this issue from various perspectives: Sumartojo, Edensor and Pink discuss it in terms of the different thresholds of tolerability of atmospheres—a brief hint worthy of further exploration—while Canepa *et al.* discuss the evaluation of spaces as set forth by various individuals. Mackrodt adopts the analogy of blind men touching individual parts of an elephant, failing to agree on what they are perceiving, to demonstrate the subjectivity of atmospheric experience.

43 Setting out from a privileged medium—design, textual narratives, images, diagrams, etc.—the articles in this special issue attempt to overcome the variously recognized gap between atmospheres as they are experienced, and their possible representations, either as designs or as *a posteriori* analytical investigations. Several questions emerge from here: how can a drawing or an image, render, for example, the atmospheric effectiveness of the temperature of a certain place? Traditionally, visual mediums have been favored over linguistic descriptions, due to the presumption that the atmospheres cannot not be expressed linguistically (as reported by both Mackrodt and Canepa *et al.*). Nevertheless, we must consider that most of the content expressed when discussing atmospheres derives from language, and that some of the most effective examples of description are in fact literary pages. We thus cannot underestimate Havik's suggestion that literary narrative could claim a certain advantage through this capability of being more 'empathetic' to places: through the linguistic use of a multi-sensorial description of places, their social use and the foreshadowing of something that does not yet exist could actually come to life.

44 This point, however, shares some problematic aspects of the equally intricate question regarding the differing atmospheric 'powers' of various sensorial channels. If the most reasonable answer to this issue is that atmospheres are a primarily multi-sensorial phenomenon hinging on synesthetic perception—debunking the presumed privilege of one sense over the others—we could equally claim that no medium is generally to be considered more effective than others. This statement is further supported by the criticism of the preconceived idea of the five senses linked to sensory organs, set forth by the move towards the anthropology of the senses (Howes, 2013), and by the notion of a common sensorium that in fact exceeds the individuality of perceptive channels. In this light, the combination of different (and sometimes even contrasting) phenomenographic mediums could actually become the most effective way of conveying the experience of lived space.

45 Further tensions appearing in the articles concern the possibility of producing atmospheres. Can an atmosphere be intentionally produced and controlled, or is it rather groundlessly floating in lived space, entirely independent from human action? Or, as an intermediate stance, does it escape comprehensive design control, relying on unpredictable accessory factors, such as in the case of the ephemeral lighting effects reported by Sumartojo, Edensor and Pink? The most viable alternative, implied in the articles, appears to be one previously suggested by Gernot Böhme (2013b): atmospheres cannot be comprehensively generated, only the conditions for their possible appearance, thus depending on other, unpredictable events.

46 Among the articles, Morselli and Sumartojo, Edensor and Pink privilege a perception that is not detached, rather deambulatory and articulated over time. This is in line with a beneficial pragmatic-ecological turn in the humanities: nevertheless, as Mackrodt discusses, the need still remains to integrate a more traditional, contemplation-oriented paradigm, which may focus on the detached observation of individual objects —panoramas, photos, works of art, etc.

47 Atmospheric phenomenographies may aim at combining qualitative and quantitative elements. Despite the difficulties intrinsic to this goal, it is the path taken by various articles, all seriously engaged in trying not to reduce—despite the ineluctably enigmatic character of atmospheres—the qualitative to pure and incontrollable ineffable intuitions, or the quantitative to exquisitely extra-emotional formulas. Canepa *et al.*'s contribution, in this sense, provides a possible starting point for further investigations.

48 One relevant aspect of the theory of atmospheres that is only marginally addressed in the articles is the notion of the felt body as an authentic 'sounding board' of spatial feelings (Fuchs, 2000; Gugutzer, 2012; Griffero, 2016, 2017b, 2017c). Hints can be found in Mackrodt's account of the Tempelhof experience, Morselli's description of the spatial sequence of Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, or in Canepa *et al.*'s consideration of empathy from a neuroscientific point of view. Yet the need to produce in-depth analyses of felt-body salience relates to both atmospheres that are directly experienced, and to those that are objects of design: for example, which felt-body resonance can architects imagine is released from their work? Crucially, this aspect may also impact on the effectiveness of phenomenographic accounts: what felt-body resonance can be expected in the audience of a researcher attempting to provide a methodological account of lived space?

49 Clearly enough, despite covering a wide thematical ground, the articles do not consider some varieties of possible atmospheric encounters. Two frequent everyday-life cases remain unexplored: the 'dyscrasia' emerging when one feels an atmosphere radically differing from his personal affective disposition, or the 'atmospheric inversion' that generates in the percipient a response that is the opposite of what one would normally expect—such as when a beautiful day exacerbates my feeling of pain. Even for atmospheres, we could argue, one can claim with Shakespeare that "there are more things (atmospheres) [...] than are dreamt of in your philosophy".

50 The list of open questions could extend almost indefinitely: is the atmosphere, understood as an 'in-between', as the outcome of the subject-object relation, or is it rather the pre-dualistic background of that relation, as an original, holistic 'in-betweenness'? Is our atmospheric experience influenced by knowledge and cultural socialization? Does atmospheric perception change over time—and in case it does, to

what extent—or does it remain anchored to the first pre-reflexive impression? Are there different types of atmospheres, depending on issues such as the degree of independence from the perceiver, the possible presence of a prevailing generator, the dominance of a particular sensory channel, the synesthetic character, or even the syntactic character of its expression? Most theoretical nodes might precisely derive from the confusion between these different types of experience.

51 Nevertheless, we do not feel the urge to venture further into these still-open questions here: we can limit our observations to the problems suggested by the articles presented in this special issue, as we have described and discussed above. Far from being criticisms, our final remarks are meant as the recognition of a series of tensions emerging from *within* the articles and *between* them: tensions that would be unproductive to attempt to resolve at this point. The articles collected here certainly set the readers on the trail of both atmospheres in a general understanding, and, above all, of how various human sciences can effectively account for them, striving to reduce —at least slightly—their seemingly insurmountable enigmatic nature.

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NOTES

1. Hasse's 2015 book is titled *Der Leib der Stadt: Phänomenographische Annäherungen,* ("The City's felt-body: Phenomenographical approximations")
2. The term *patheur* that Hasse derives from Erwin Straus could roughly be translated as the "pathic individual".

ABSTRACTS

In recent years, the theory of atmospheres has extended beyond phenomenology and aesthetics, informing a wide variety of descriptive practices in the humanities. Diverse scholarly fields such as anthropology and architecture, musicology and art criticism now include the notion of atmospheric space in their methodological toolkits. The descriptive practices of lived space, however, entail several theoretical questions, concerning the potential and limits of giving voice to first-person experience. In the introductory essay of the 2019 special issue of Ambiances, we address the methodological perspectives emerging from the articles and discuss several question concerning the theory of atmospheres and the practices aimed at describing them.

Ces dernières années, la théorie des atmosphères s'est développée au-delà de la phénoménologie et de l'esthétique, partageant ainsi un large éventail de pratiques descriptives avec les sciences humaines. De nombreux champs académiques, tels que l'anthropologie, l'architecture, la musicologie et la critique d'art, incluent désormais le concept d'espace atmosphérique dans leur boîte à outils méthodologique. Toutefois, les pratiques descriptives de l'espace vécu impliquent plusieurs questions théoriques, concernant le potentiel et les limites de l'action de donner voix à l'expérience à la première personne. Dans l'introduction du numéro spécial 2019 de la revue Ambiances, nous abordons les perspectives méthodologiques issues des articles et soulevons plusieurs questions relatives à la théorie des atmosphères et aux pratiques visant à les décrire.

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Keywords: phenomenography, atmosphere, phenomenology, micrology, methodology, ethnography, architecture
Mots-clés: phénoménographie, atmosphère, phénoménologie, micrologie, méthodologie, ethnographie, architecture

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