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Atmospheres And Felt Body Resonances



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Provided a quick survey of the "career" of the "atmosphere" concept, especially of the neo-phenomenological paradigm (externalisation of the affective) and its application in all scientific fields not based on functional-measurable parameters, the talk provides a concise overview of pathic and atmospherological aesthetics, both of its ontological inflationism (including even so-called quasi-things) and the range of atmospheric feelings one experiences in everyday life (prototypical, derived-relational, spurious ones).

Then, it explores atmospheres' quasi-objective power and authority against every reductionist (introjectionist and associationist) explanation, but also the experience of objectively recognizing them without personally being felt-bodily grasped (which proves their quasi-objectivity again). After a brief excursus on the possible "encounters" between percipients and atmospheres (they can surrender to them, embrace their radiating effect, oppose this effect or simply escape from it, feel the opposite of what they suggest, or lastly experience a mix of acceptance and resistance), the talk also advances a "provisional atmospheric ethics" based on a fourfold "atmospheric competence": the skill of generating atmospheres (within limits), of differentiating between toxic and benign ones (by a parameter of "weak" normativity), of experiencing as many and different atmospheres as possible and especially of fostering those atmospheres where an early pathic immersion may be followed by a re-emersion phase.

It is of great importance for pathic aesthetics to also examine the atmospheric perception and the way it effectively "tonalizes" our environmental situation, according to the neo-phenomenology idea of corporeal and pre-reflexive communication. Accordingly, the atmosphere is a widespread feeling whose sounding board is our felt (not physical) body (Leib). This makes the atmospheric perception the first affective-synesthetic impression of the environmental expressive qualities (or affordances) and the felt body their resonance place through its specific dynamic (pre-dimensional voluminousness, narrowness/vastness, contraction/expansion, incorporation/excorporation, felt-bodily islands, etc.) but without drawing on the five senses and the perceptual body schema.

If this felt-body-phenomenology makes a lived self-consciousness possible, it also offers a promising suggestion on how to build a new sensibility in architecture. On how to conceive architectural and urban design and its formal affordances as affordances-gestures, dwelling as a powerful way of cultivating atmospheres in a safe place, however, without giving carte blanche to constructionist theories, but reaffirming that of an architectural atmosphere (as of any other) one cannot intentionally plan the precise outcome but only the occasional condition of possibility.