MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM

FEELING AND SUFFERING THE ATMOSPHERE

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INTRODUCTION

In philosophy, the phenomenological approach offers a unique perspective on human experience, emphasizing the subjective nature of consciousness and the significance of lived experiences within the world. Within this framework, the concept of 'atmosphere' has garnered consistent attention, providing a lens through which we can understand the subtle yet profound influence of our environment on our emotions, perceptions, and overall situatedness. Additionally, exploring atmospheres within psychopathology and psychotherapy unveils valuable insights into the relationship between our surroundings and mental health. Philosophers, such as Gernot Böhme and Hermann Schmitz, have delved deeply into the study of atmospheres. They view them as the affective and perceptual qualities of an environment that shape our experiences. As such, atmospheres are not just objective properties of space but are deeply intertwined with our subjectivity, affecting our bodily sensations, moods, and cognitive processes. For Böhme, atmospheres can transcend physical spaces and permeate our inner world, influencing our thoughts, emotions, and actions. In contrast, Schmitz emphasises the embodied and immersive nature of atmospheres, suggesting they can envelop us, profoundly affecting our sense of self and reality. When examining the relationship between atmospheres and psychopathology, it becomes evident that our environment can contribute to the onset, exacerbation, or alleviation of various psychopathologies. For example, individuals with anxiety disorders might be acutely sensitive to atmospheres characterised by tension, unpredictability, or threat, which can intensify their symptoms. Those with depression might be overwhelmed by feelings of gloom, stagnation, or emptiness. Trauma survivors may experience distress in atmospheres, evoking traumatic memories or sensations connected to past events. Recognising this connection between atmospheres and psychopathology unveils promising opportunities in psychotherapy, aiming to address and understand mental health issues through a supportive and transformative therapeutic relationship. Incorporating a phenomenological understanding of atmospheres into psychotherapeutic practices can enhance the therapeutic journey and cultivate conducive interpersonal environments for healing.

However, even though the concept of 'atmosphere' is gaining traction in philosophy and aesthetics, it is not without its challenges and complexities. A primary challenge in

understanding atmospheres is their subjective and elusive nature. As they are experiential phenomena closely tied to our subjective perceptions, emotions, and bodily sensations, they resist precise definition and objective quantification. An atmosphere seen as peaceful by one might be perceived as chaotic by another. This inherent subjectivity poses difficulties in establishing a universal framework for atmosphere analysis and poses challenges for mutual understanding and communication. Moreover, atmospheres are multifaceted, embracing many sensory and affective dimensions resulting from the interplay of elements, such as light, sound, spatial design, temperature, and social dynamics. Identifying specific qualities attributable solely to the atmosphere itself is demanding, as these traits often blend with other contextual factors. Indeed, the emotional response evoked by an atmosphere might be influenced not only by the rates of the atmosphere but also by personal history, cultural background, and individual preferences. Untangling these various influences and ascribing them solely to the atmosphere proves to be a daunting task. The very notion of "atmosphere" can be contentious due to its ambiguous ontological status. Are atmospheres tangible properties of an environment, or are they mere subjective perceptions projected onto the world? Such ontological ambiguity challenges our understanding of reality and the role of perception in shaping our experience of atmospheres. In aesthetics, the study of atmospheres poses further questions. Traditional aesthetics centres on the appreciation and evaluation of art and beauty, and the concept of atmospheres intersects with aesthetic judgement. Given that atmospheres are not restricted to art objects or purely aesthetic contexts – encompassing everyday environments, natural landscapes, and social spaces – should we regard atmospheres as artworks themselves, or are they mere settings for aesthetic experiences? These inquiries prompt a re-evaluation of established notions in aesthetics, urging a reconsideration of its scope and parameters.

Despite these challenges, the study of atmospheres in philosophy and aesthetics continues to provide valuable insights into the human experience. Precisely, it is their elusive and subjective nature that lends richness and diversity to our lived encounters with the world. In a psychopathological context, atmospheres are often simplified as vague perceptions of something else. Psychiatric experiences aren't solely confined to individual cognitive processes and behaviours. They also have a distinct atmospheric quality, affecting the way individuals perceive, interpret, and engage with the world around them. Two psychiatric conditions exemplifying the atmospheric nature of such experiences are pre-

psychosis and depression. Pre-psychosis, also referred to as the prodromal phase of psychosis, is the period preceding the onset of a psychotic disorder, such as schizophrenia. In this phase, individuals frequently experience subtle and gradual changes in their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. An increasing sense of disconnection, strangeness, and uncertainty typifies the atmospheres associated with pre-psychosis. Individuals might describe a subtle shift in their environment's overall tone, often sensing an unspoken tension, unease, or a fundamental sense of something being 'off'. These atmospheric changes can manifest in several ways, including heightened sensitivity to stimuli, increased perceptual distortions, and a pervasive sense of being observed or targeted. The atmospheric nature of pre-psychosis is deeply connected with the individual's subjective experience. Moving from a familiar and predictable atmosphere to one that is unsettling can lead to feelings of confusion, anxiety, and distress. Such atmospheric shifts help create a unique phenomenological world, differing from the experiences of individuals without psychiatric conditions. The atmospheric qualities of pre-psychosis play a crucial role in moulding individuals' interpretation of their surroundings, shaping their beliefs, and potentially intensifying their symptoms. In chapter three, I will delve deeper into the 'atmospheric' condition experienced by patients during the prodrome phase of schizophrenia. Regarding depression (not discussed in this thesis but a topic for future research), it presents as another psychiatric condition with a distinct atmospheric dimension characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities. Its essence can be likened to a pervasive heaviness or a dense fog that engulfs the individual's subjective experience. A profound sense of gloom, inertia, and isolation frequently characterises the atmosphere of depression. Individuals may view their surroundings as colourless or devoid of vitality as if a dense cloud 'hinders their complete engagement with the world. Thomas Fuchs, for instance, links these lived experiences to a 'rupture' in intercorporeality, referring to the inherently embodied and interactive nature of human existence. This highlights our engagement and alignment with others in our environment. Such interactions with other bodies and the mutual environment profoundly shape our lived experiences. Within this framework, atmospheres play an essential role in enabling and influencing the primary interpersonal attunement underpinning our understanding and connection with others. Atmospheres, as previously discussed, pertain to the environment's affective and perceptual qualities that induce specific moods or ambiences. They extend beyond individual bodies, enveloping the communal space where interpersonal interactions take place. Central to atmospheres

is the concept of “elemental interpersonal attunement”, which underscores our inherent capacity to sense and resonate with others’ presence, emotions, and intentions. It is through this attunement that we forge shared understandings and create meaningful connections. Atmospheres act as the medium for this attunement, influencing our interactions on emotional and perceptual levels. Entering a social setting, the atmosphere can immediately suggest feelings of welcome, warmth, or tension. Environmental attributes like lighting, sound, and the mere presence of others all contribute to the atmosphere, guiding our interpersonal attunement. For instance, a bustling café atmosphere might suggest vibrancy, leading to lively interactions. In contrast, a dim, quiet room might foster an atmosphere of calm, inviting deeper, reflective conversations. Such atmospheres mould our bodily states, emotions, and perceptions, determining our interpersonal attunement and defining the interaction’s overall mood. Atmospheres in inter-corporeal encounters not only ease elemental interpersonal attunement but also aid in co-constructing shared meaning. Through shared atmospheres, individuals craft a mutual experiential space guiding their interactions and communication. This shared atmosphere bridges individuals, allowing them to interpret and respond to ’each other’s gestures and cues. It encourages mutual comprehension, foundational to social unity and the construction of a collective reality. Additionally, atmospheres influence the creation of social affordances, which are the potential actions and interactions an environment or situation offers. Diverse atmospheres suggest different affordances, directing how individuals interpret and navigate their environment.

Genesis of all the affective qualities of the surrounding space is the atmosphere of trust. Tellenbach’s notion emphasises the crucial role of trust in establishing a supportive and secure environment that fosters authentic connections between individuals. An atmosphere of trust is characterised by a sense of safety, openness, and mutual understanding, enabling individuals to engage in meaningful and potentially vulnerable interactions. The first sensation with which we approach the world, Tellenbach tells us, is precisely atmospheric in nature: it is the smell of the mother, a vehicle of unconditional trust in a reality that has to be gradually built and experienced. Moreover, as will be seen later, atmosphere is also a crucial experience of life: that which preludes change, the expectation and imminence of something else that opens up new horizons of life.

SUMMARY

In the first chapter of the thesis, I carry out a detailed analysis of the theoretical foundations of the concept of atmosphere, New Phenomenology, and New Aesthetics. I highlight the crucial aspects of the concept of atmosphere from different perspectives. The essence of the phenomenon of atmosphere and its relationship with material culture, subjectivity and affect are investigated here. I assume that the atmosphere, in its phenomenal inter-affective quality, resides between the material and immaterial, practical and ideal, subject and object. With greatest evidence and frequency, it is mentioned as the ground of a shared reality, while difficulties arise in its epistemological identification and definition. The first chapter defines the relevance of this approach and the scope of its application. The atmosphere cannot be limited nor strictly defined spatially and physically: it has an ontological reality that shapes the world and each individual perception through a certain affective tonality. The theoretical positions presented in the framework of the study can be used for an in-depth acknowledgment of the phenomenon of atmosphere.

In the following, I examine Gernot Böhme's attempt to turn the concept of atmosphere into an aesthetic theory of the natural environment. Inspired by Hermann Schmitz's phenomenology of *Leib* and atmospheres, Böhme developed his aesthetics as a phenomenology of the environment. Böhme refers to the “economy of the body" rather than strictly abiding by the concept of Schmitz's body-isles. The primordial spaces of atmospheres are felt not in localizable bodily areas, but rather in their phenomenal impact on the overall structure of the body. Böhme's theory offers higher conceptual flexibility in defining the atmosphere. This approach partially rejects the moderate reification that Schmitz adhered to.

Reflections on the forms of bodily expressivity lay the foundation for new interpretations of emotions and a growing awareness of the modes of being in the world. I delve into well-known research in the field of affectivity with 1) Fuchs’ theory of embodiment, 2) Griffero’s concept of emotional plasticity, 3) Plessner’s analysis of the nature of laugh and crying, 4) Solomon’s concept of emotion as an uncontrolled force, 5) Damasio’s emotion as a purposeful adaptive activity, 6) Merleau-Ponty’s pre-reflective emotional openness of the body, and so forth.

Disciplines with different directions and approaches are combined to offer a multi-faceted vision of the same concept. However, I argue that such an integration is rather rare. There is the tendency to accord preference to one unique perspective. In fact, neurocognitive sciences continue to explain the status of the lived-body as a correlate of brain mechanisms focused on the survival of

the human species, neglecting the strong intersubjective as well as pre-reflective dimension of it. The dualistic approach of the human mind in science, where affectivity and cognition are tackled as two distinct domains, prevent a full acknowledgment of emotion in its multi-dimensionality. Relying not only on the New Phenomenology, but also on other theories, I explore the philosophical understanding of emotions and moods through the prism of atmosphere, intending to erase the gaps left by cognitive sciences and other studies on human affectivity, as well as beginning to build a new paradigm that values the ability of the body to *atmospherically resonate*.

1. THE ATMOSPHERE

If no one asks me, I know;
if I want to explain it to an interrogator, I do not know.
(Augustine)

Despite its evident presence as a phenomenon of everyday life, there is a real struggle to define the atmosphere without succumbing to 'being bullied' by cognitivist critics. The growing academic interest in the phenomenology of atmospheres might be due to the current absence of a satisfactory acknowledgement of all those 'background' phenomena that operate in our life in a pre-reflective and impressional mode. In other words, all those phenomena significantly impact our way of being, influencing how we act through gestures, postures, behaviours, and reactions. The atmosphere represents the most complex and challenging case study to attempt to unravel and dignify.
Its etymology dates back to ancient Greek: *atmos* means "vapour, exhalation", while *sphaire* recalls the circular dimension of the globe. There exist various types of atmospheres, all equated by the fleeting and immaterial substance of composition and a sort of inclusive nature: the terrestrial atmosphere, that subtle, invisible vapour that surrounds and saturates our planet; the atmosphere of a landscape, which communicates its aesthetic quality (melancholic, romantic, mysterious, flat); the atmosphere of a house, which might suggest features and habits of its inhabitants; the atmosphere of a city, that combination of lights and noises that lets us gauge its 'aliveness', and so forth (Böhme 1993). We are certain of the concreteness of this phenomenon, but the challenge lies at its roots: every time we formulate a theory of it, we somehow detract from its essence. The most reliable way to appraise atmospheres is to "rediscover the field of situationality" (Hauskeller 2001, 13). This means nothing more than rediscovering oneself as, fundamentally, a realm of pathos and affective resonances before being a set of neural systems and cognitive modules.

It is vital to consider this premise if we truly want to understand the essence of atmospheres and, simultaneously, its intrinsic problems. One of the most original and well-known accounts of atmosphere was provided by the German psychiatrist H. Tellenbach, who wrote a significant book on the ontological and therapeutic values of

taste and atmosphere, placing particular emphasis on the affective priority of some forms of expression over speech and thought (Tellenbach 1968). He specifically asserts that all human beings embrace, reject, trust or approach the interpersonal field primarily through smelling and tasting: "Even in the first hours of life, the baby smells and tastes what reaches it from the mother in the form of fragrance and flavour. The mother's emanations are the nucleus of our first experience of the world" (Tellenbach 1968, 23). Through the atmosphere, people recognise those who belong to their particular world. While in the animal kingdom, it is the dominant olfactory sense which draws invisible but sharp and effectual boundaries, in the human world, the sense of atmosphere serves this purpose. Thus, our atmospheric sense perception advises us whether to accept or reject a type of emanation. It reliably tells us what kind of atmosphere we feel we belong to or, put another way, how we perceive ourselves. Therefore, this is a fundamental element in establishing our relationship with ourselves (Tellenbach 1981, 30). According to Tellenbach, it is the "atmospheric" that dominates our everyday life, guiding our choices, behaviours, and even social bonds. My relationship with others, in particular, must be influenced by "atmospheric emanations" (particularly smell), so that in the scented encounter with another, a familiar atmosphere unfolds, which then becomes the unique tonality of that relationship. Tellenbach embarked on the investigation of the atmosphere as a "pre-personal and pre-verbal elemental contact" (Tellenbach 1981, 229) with the world, where the body is still innocently pure and wholly receptive to complex sensory impressions from the external environment. This intriguing intuition also touches on the association of atmosphere with the development of an existential structure: the feeling of trust and familiarity, "a trusting confidence in a direct protectedness and intactness, and therefore confidence in the environment" (ibid). These initial ideas on the nature and power of atmospheres were inspiring and were subsequently developed by other eminent psychiatrists, such as Alfred Tatossian and Ronald Laing. Both conducted brilliant phenomenological studies on psychosis, investigating the loss, or potential impairment, of an "in-between" dimension of attunement to the lifeworld, drawing from the metaphorical interpretation of the atmosphere itself. We will delve deeper into this point later on.

Resuming the previous discourse, the atmosphere can be "everything or nothing" (Griffero 2014a, 20): everything for those who detect in it an a-priori disclosure of the *Lebenswelt*. A nothing for those who, on the other hand, attempt to filter the phenomenon

of the atmosphere through a quantitative logic. It can even be interpreted as a "quasi-thing", a reified feeling with its own ontological status partially independent of the percipient subject, acting upon the subject with its own identity. This is the revolutionary, paradoxical account elaborated by the father of Neo-Phenomenology, Hermann Schmitz, with the primary objective of challenging the Western conviction of the absolutism of the psychic, private world. In a seminal volume on this issue, he writes:

> If, on the contrary, one admits that feelings are not internal but rather external, and more precisely, they are atmospheres that are effused in the pre-dimensional space, then one can distinguish among various kinds of atmospheres based on whether they irradiate from the space of vastness, the directional space or, finally, even the position-space. Our vital involuntary and felt-body experiences thus resume their most authentic physiognomy and are characterized mainly by an atmospheric voluminousness that is irreducible to the isotropic dimensions of quantitative sciences. (Schmitz 2004, 217)[1]

Being affectively involved, subjectivity is characterised, in Schmitz's perspective, by a primordial lived space of personal expression, with its own hermeneutic substrate and communication medium. Therefore, the discourse on atmospheres intertwines closely with a reformulation of the concept of space, which, in neo-phenomenological theory, represents a pre-dimensional and surfaceless ground of feelings and emotional tonalities. This pre-dimensional space is that from which every human being's presence unfolds: in affective involvement, in feeling in a specific manner, with the body as a resonant sounding board of the lifeworld, we find ourselves submerged in a "liquid of interpersonal relations and atmospheres inter-modally perceived" (Schmitz 2004, 219). Each affective involvement primarily exists in the felt body through dynamics of expansion and contraction. For instance, pain constricts and contracts those who experience it, whereas rage instigates a motion of bodily expansion, sometimes challenging to restrain. Therefore, space, atmosphere, and primitive presence are the foundational terms of New Phenomenology, a framework centred on the perception of an urgent, cultural need: to offer novel interpretations of the affective world, forming the bedrock for constructing our bodily and social identity.

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, texts in the original German or other foreign languages have been translated by the author of this thesis.

The atmosphere can be first intended as a spatial *prius*, a tonal bridge between the environment and oneself. An initial, rudimentary definition of atmosphere considers the sensible, spatial encounter between Leib (lived body) and the lifeworld – terms that must be properly elucidated, drawing from their progenitors and from their latest interpretations. The lived body, or *corps vivant*, is the body experienced in a non-objective manner (Gallagher 2010); it is the medium of every sensory input. Its motility initiates the primary spatialisation of the subject, engendering a centre of orientation through which the Ego subsequently intuits the intellectual space and the sensible world (Husserl 2004, 493). The body's duality, its fluid reversibility as an objectified entity (as during a medical examination) and an objectifying entity (as when one touches another body), signifies its intrinsic relationship with the external. The inherent interconnection with the lifeworld, conceived as the horizon of myriad possibilities, affordances, and interactions, is a fundamental component of the embodiment process, occurring at the very genesis of the development of subjectivity.

> We mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of an unavoidable absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox already lies in every visible (Husserl 1978, 136).

Through our body, we tacitly attune to a relational dimension of being-in-the-world, producing an overall stable feeling of being. Merleau-Ponty perceives the lived body as a latent, lived relationship between an intentional but pre-reflective body and the world it encounters and perceives through continuous immersion, awareness, and actions (Seamon 2017, 4). The human body and its spatial 'surroundings' are genetically interrelated, in the sense that we are always enmeshed with the world, and the world is enmeshed with us. This taken-for-granted interpenetration is facilitated by the silent work of our lived body, which, through perception, experiences and orientates ourselves within a field of pre-conscious existence already saturated with meaning. As Husserl wrote, "Thus the body has in itself the most original character of being mine" (Husserl 1973, 125-126). I perceive the body as a "remarkably imperfect thing", riddled with gaps and absences, opaque and cryptic zones, points of openness, and closure. In our view,

understanding the body is deeply entwined with the apprehension of the other in its various forms. Through attunement (Paarung, in Husserl's terms), I am incorporated within a shared intentional space, not necessarily explicit in the realm of linguistic meaning. My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the primary instrument of my comprehension (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 235). In essence, qualities of the world directly intertwine with the lived body, which, resonating with them, conveys immediate meanings and channels ambiances, typically at a tacit, pre-conscious level of awareness.

> The body finds a way to gear itself onto the world that allows it to find its way successfully within that world; once developed, we are significantly carried through our days by this now-habitual attunement. Thus, the body's habits and developed orientation reflect a specific style of having a world and create a zone of familiarity within which we carry out our daily dealings (Jacobson 2010, 223).

However, from a Neo-Phenomenological perspective, it is the world with its inherent atmospheres that determines our bodily-affective position, as. In other words, we should begin from the body's receptivity as the fundamental sounding board of inter-subjectivity, recognising the atmosphere phenomenon as a spatial, expansive core of "inter-tunement". "I am already in this world when I say 'I'" (Waldenfels 2000, 42). Before the Cartesian cogito, there exist opaque areas of the body that elude logical-rational comprehension, to which phenomenology dedicates its fervent investigation, albeit with shades of scepticism of a cognitivist nature. We refer to the lived body's implicit memory, also termed rhythm, habitus, and disposition, which embeds us in the fabric of daily life in a natural and pre-reflective manner (Fuchs 2000). Schmitz approaches the topic of the body by markedly deviating from Husserl's tradition, where there persists a subtle and unresolved dualism between the measurable body (Körper) and the lived body, as well as an egological approach. The only avenue to introduce something genuinely distinctive in the discourse on embodiment and affectivity is through the contemplation of the 'felt' in the corporeal and pericorporeal space (Schmitz 1965). "When you can feel it in its aisles[2], the body just takes on the appearance of an 'extensive and richly articulated landscape or even [of] a vast continent'" (Schmitz 1965, 157).

[2] The notion of a 'body isle' is quite controversial and open to different interpretations. Schmitz does not give specific definitions of it, but he refers to the spatiality and dynamism of the 'felt body': the body feels and makes its presence felt through bodily islands, areas of affect and affectivity independent of the five senses, but mostly refer to haptic vision.

From a neo-phenomenological standpoint, emotional involvement is foundational to the lived body. Through the dynamics of expansion and contraction, I have engaged with the lifeworld since the inception of my existence. This vital impulse is characterised as the "life of primitive presence", from which both the subjective self-recognition and the intricate identity of the intersubjective extension arise. The transition to the lifeworld is an evolution of this primitive presence. In its affective nuances, life becomes a "situational living" (Schmitz 2011), where corporeality is perceived through its spatial voluminousness. In one's own body, one cannot overlook a disposition to which only subjectivity reacts fluidly (Griffero 2014a). It is nothing outlandish or mystical: "To experience in the presence of the lived body and live in nature, in the street, in a meeting, it is now only possible thanks to the exercise and overcoming of alienating attitudes" (Böhme 2010, 127).

Therefore, the re-acquaintance with the body as the resonance centre for a philosophy of spatial sentiments (or atmospheres, mentioned earlier) also aims at recalibrating the modern thought system, either predicated on the narcissistic internalisation of the Self or on the contrived generation of interpersonal ties that subordinate feelings to appearances. As the philosopher Gernot Böhme asserted, the atmosphere concept can have a profound and cross-disciplinary significance if its liminal state between subject and object is diligently scrutinised. We have a rich vocabulary to describe an atmosphere – melancholic, oppressive, heavy, gloomy, goliardic, tense, erotic – but there is scarcely any ontological identification when we attempt to define it. The truth is that the atmosphere, transcending its spatial and pathic status, encapsulates the immediacy of an encounter, the fleeting nature of the interstice between a subject-object trajectory. In Böhme, the atmosphere concept draws inspiration from the idea of ''aura'', eloquently framed by Benjamin in his 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". I present below the complete extract on the notion of 'aura':

> What is an aura, actually? A strange tissue of space and time: the unique appearance of distance, however near it may be. Resting on a summer evening and following a mountain chain on the horizon or a branch, which throws its shadow on the person at rest – that is, to breathe the aura of these mountains or this branch. With this definition, it is easy to comprehend the particular social determination of the present decay of the aura. (Benjamin and Jennings 2010, 35)

The aura is something absorbed corporeally that flows spatially, meeting sensory perception, intertwining with it almost imperceptibly, yet it remains present and intense. Art exhibitions, for example, typically have an atmosphere of respectability and palpable dignity. Visitors feel enveloped by an emotional density, moving with caution and speaking in hushed tones, as if they do not wish to compromise the integrity of this aura. In Klages's early work, "Of Cosmogonic Eros" (1972), there is a first elaboration on the power and influence of images (archetypes). According to Klages, archetypical mages possess their own reality, penetrating human consciousness through our natural predisposition to receptivity (Klages and Kuhn 2018). As he states in the 1916 essay "On the Concept of Personality", the sensation of the world's image grips, lures, seduces, enraptures, and overpowers; in judgement, the comprehending spirit seizes it, reifies it, and locks it in the vault of experience (Bishop 2017). Klage's theory of images is rooted in concrete human experience. In his account, every presence of a human being has a transforming power to influence his fellow's character (Bishop 2017, 123).

Therefore, the concept of aura/atmosphere had already piqued the interest of various thinkers before the recent and notable speculations of Schmitz and Böhme. Schmitz, in fact, in his concept of atmosphere, draws inspiration from Klages' belief in the ontic reality of images, seemingly devoid of an origin, and their 'pressing' effect on invested things. Schmitz's formulation gives atmospheres both a spatial and affective connotation, portraying them as quasi-thing-like powers, mood bearers that transcend the traditional subject-object dichotomy and are deeply linked to bodily dynamics. Evoking Greek classicism, which attributed daemonic power to human emotions influencing situations and people, Schmitz challenges modern sciences' tendency to internalise the inner world, confining the soul to a supposed internal space delimited by the body. It is precisely his philosophical extremism that has positioned the discourse on atmospheres as a new phenomenology, a debate that, to some extent, sidesteps the phenomenology of its forebears. When present, atmospheres impose themselves upon us, often catching us off guard. When absent, they cease to exist, but they can resurface with all their prior potency. For Schmitz, encountering atmospheres epitomises that "primitive presence" upon which our being is founded, and it forms the most genuine part of any personal experience precisely because it is unchosen, yet confronts us with an undeniable, pre-reflective authenticity (Griffero 2014b).

This connection is pivotal between the New Phenomenology and pathic aesthetics. Their primary goal is to expand the concept of aesthetics to include atmospheric experience, since every experience is invariably aesthetic, and true aesthetics cannot be separated from its bodily resonance. Thus, we might ask ourselves if our private and collective emotional lives might not be better understood in the light of the hypothesis that –

> Feelings are not internal properties of the psychological subject, but stable, external, and aggressive entities, [*sic*] around which the subject has to rotate: in other words, conditions that are in the air and that are powerfully active on the lived body, with no need to anthropomorphize or 'metaphysicalize' them in the canonical form of "values" (Griffero 2014, 97)

Philosopher Tonino Griffero, translating Schmitz's New Phenomenology into what he terms "pathic aesthetics", also questions the reality-modelling power of atmospheres, thus creating a nexus with Böhme's writings. It is not about choosing sides but about first understanding the potential of a philosophy of atmospheres as a fresh and transformative way of conceptualising human subjectivity and intersubjectivity. This new paradigm allows us to embrace an original spatiality, a foundational environment that shapes the Self and is, in turn, shaped by it. One's corporeality encapsulates the essence of a human being. Our bodies reflect our life journey, vividly portraying our life experiences. Self-awareness means, first and foremost, recognising our existence within a particular environment and the sensations it elicits.

1.1. Hermann Schmitz: Atmospheres as "Spatial Feelings"

Having assessed the aesthetic reflection on the pathic dimension guiding the entirety of existence, a deeper examination of its technical-scientific consequences situates it within an orientation such as the so-called "New Phenomenology", developed over decades by Hermann Schmitz. This theoretical project, aligning with the current global scientific

resurgence of interest in emotions, envisions philosophy as a speculative exploration of what "it feels" like to inhabit a particular space (lived, pre-dimensional, and not geometric), making the involuntary vital experiences theoretically conspicuous. Above all, it refuses a priori the total psychic introjection of affective states, considered external to subjective consciousness and often refractory to any rational *captatio*. The actual corporeality, or 'voluminousness', is perceived differently from what we have traditionally known. Indeed, it unveils a process of domestication and "cultivation" within a pre-dimensional realm of atmospheres – those feelings, whether intrapersonal or interpersonal, that permeate our surroundings. These feelings are often beyond our direct transformative influence, leaving us mostly in a reactive stance. According to Schmitz, the prevalent conception of space is erroneous, often imagined as a flexible interlacing of locations akin to a coordinate system. In Schmitz's view, everything propagated by the common conception of space presupposes a rigid immobility that does not reflect the flow of life in which we are continually immersed. However, above all, they do not communicate with the lived body. Some spaces, elusive to geometric definitions, interact with the lived body in a fundamental and mutual manner. This includes the space of sound, populated by resonant noises, whistles, and distant motor suggestions (Schmitz 1965, 94). Equally intangible is the space of silence, which can be grand, expansive, oppressive, or as gentle as morning. Schmitz also identifies the space of wind, which impacts us without forming distinct areas, and the space of atmospheric 'rhythm', felt when transitioning from a stifling, crowded space into the open air, granting the body freedom to expand. Water, too, defies typical three-dimensional categorisation. Yet, it remains integral to life's essence as the primary element, the inception of life itself, and the primal volume our bodies engage with, inspiring within them the vital dynamics of tension and dilation (Schmitz 1965, 95). Our body's movements don't adhere to the concepts of surfaces, lines, or dimensions. Nor do emotions such as pain, hunger, pleasure, anger, or joy. Feelings, in reality, either invigorate or drain the lived body, as exemplified when returning home after a taxing day and feeling lethargic and depleted across different bodily regions. "The body we feel is a waving motion of body-isles", he writes (Schmitz 1965, 97), a *leibliche* communication between environmental affordances and movements of embodied reactivity (Griffero 2014b).

The "corporeal isle" concept, seen as a spatial non-space of interrelational resonances, likely poses Neo-phenomenology's genuine challenge to the entrenched dualistic Western

perspectives on body and environment, emotion and psyche. This introduces a philosophy that recognises the significance of "elements traditionally dismissed as ambiguous, metaphorical, and therefore of secondary ontic relevance. Consider the therapeutic value of this notion. The behaviour of the body isles is dictated by the body's contraction or expansion. If one were to lie in complete silence on a meadow, basking in the sun and ensconced in the moment's tranquillity, the body isles (chest, feet, ''mouth, and more) would harmoniously merge, culminating in a holistic sense of well-being. In contrast, in states of panic or confusion, the body contracts, causing the body isles to scatter, evoking an overwhelming void. Schmitz's introductory notion, elaborated in subsequent chapters, proposes a therapeutic approach to the lived body, aiming to restore unity among the body isles through psychotherapy or autogenic training. The body scheme and body image always presuppose "a felt-bodily feeling," a pre-reflective and atmospheric dimension that is prior to the apprehension of the embodied self and that works a bit like 'the darkness needed in the theatre to show up the performance' (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 115). The spatial and emotional sensations, facilitated by body isles, usher in the atmospheric concept within Schmitz's philosophical agenda. Therefore, feelings also possess spatial qualities, interpreted as atmospheres. An atmosphere is the "boundless occupation of a space without surfaces in which one lives the presence" (Schmitz 2009, 99). The spatial nature of feelings is the crux, almost unthinkable for Westerners accustomed to confining emotions to an inner, private realm. This reductive stance did not influence, for instance, Greek classicism. Thinkers like Empedocles still perceived love and hate as expansive atmospheres, as emotional forces confronting human beings. Comparable to weather elements, atmospheres impart a particular tonal quality to the individual's spatial experience within their body, resonating in an unspoken and implicit manner. The complex array of these pervasive emotions obstructs analytical focus. We must rely on the authority of our impressional and expressional dynamics, dismiss psychism and psychologism and start studying (from Latin *studeo*, "to get passionate about") the various atmospheres of which we are, at least partially, victims or actors. Schmitz suggests that the feeling that abducts in an atmospheric way must be differentiated from the very act of feeling, such as abduction. Consider the example of a man filled with anger and ill intentions who enters a church during the solemn celebration of Mass. His state of mind may or may not change (depending on the intensity of his anger), but he certainly cannot help but be 'assailed' by the atmosphere of profound solemnity, of dense silence that prevails in such a context. Conversely, a despondent man who enters a

raucous, frivolous party, only to find his mood worsening dramatically. Such contrasts exist: the antithetical encounters between environments and human beings are real events, and they only suggest the existence of a 'quasi-thingly' category of collective pathic feelings.

However, one must resist a total reification of feelings: "They are not invisible clouds, constantly floating in space, continuing to remain in the place where first the gaze turns, and then it turns away" (Schmitz 1965, 105). Atmospheres differ from things in that they can be interrupted, come and go, extinguish themselves and be recreated. When an audience leaves a lecture hall imbued with a serious, professional atmosphere of composed elegance, this atmosphere dissolves as the lecturers depart. According to Schmitz, it is not feelings that are private; it is the emotional involvement. Experiencing one's emotional rapture presupposes an act of self-observation, at least, which is entirely subjective. Feelings can be both individual and collective. Consider the waves of anxiety, bewilderment, fear, and confusion that the COVID-19 pandemic cast upon the hardest-hit nations: a collective emotional attunement that probably hasn't been felt since World War II. On the web, I distinctly recall reading the words, "I hear nothing but the grey of the street, the emptiness of the air, the deafening silence of the houses, the brightest, most melancholic skies" from an anonymous user. The lived body naturally predisposes itself, through its isles, to inter-affective resonance with the atmosphere. Sharing this spatial matrix, the lived body acts as a "sounding board" of emotional tones (Schmitz 1965, 110). The body isles respond through constriction to oppressive atmospheres and expansiveness to uplifting ones (Griffero 2014b). When we feel good, a pre-reflective atmospheric resonance allows our body to be wholly immersed in the world. The harmonious interplay between the atmospheric environment and the lived body is vital for existential well-being. In discussing atmospheres, Merleau-Ponty's concept of inter-corporeality is seen as an essential space of resonances, communication, habits, and rhythms; all these movements reflect encounters between people, things, and environments (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Understanding gestures is realised through the reciprocity between my intentions and the other person's gestures, and vice versa. It's as if the other person's intention inhabited my body or my intentions inhabited theirs (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 190-195). It is a matter of enhancing that inter-corporeal space – atmospheric, pre-dimensional, and pre-geometric – in which the atmospheres flutter as authentic quasi-things, ineffable in themselves, sometimes condensed or referred to some point of anchorage, and in any case

so “external” as to suddenly attack us, take possession of us and then suddenly disappear. The body, therefore, is not only something that identifies and enucleates us from an undifferentiated totality, but it is also that pathic-affective dimension that resonates with the outside environment, allowing processes of sharing, communication, osmosis; on the other hand, it maintains distinction and enucleation – essential substratum that we feel belonging to us until the smallest cells, which opens up to relationships, allows the self-individuation and the exchange with the external environment. “Life is, therefore, what has already happened to us before we clearly notice it” (Fuchs 2019, 70). If we adjust our perspective away from the constraints of reflexive consciousness and focus on the experiential backdrop against which qualities emerge, we might not only re-evaluate aesthesis as a source of knowledge but also reframe foundational concepts like “person”, “body”, and “environment”. The dimension in question is where one allows emotional engagement with meaning, where one feels physically moved by things, noting how the heartbeat, respiratory rhythm, and body temperature change in response to the world.

Thus, the neo-phenomenological project aligns well with recent popular theories on embodiment and environmental relations. In his latest book, Thomas Fuchs, one of the best-known and most recognized psychiatrists and phenomenological philosophers of recent times, states that no matter what our conscious plans or intentions, we still live based on an unconscious, bodily background that we are not entirely able to reveal to ourselves (Fuchs 2019a, 71). The body, as a nexus of habits, abilities, and affections, knows the world well before we become cognisant of this fact. The lived body also has the ability to inhabit the space where atmospheres and bodily sensations converge. The organism-environment relationship thus expands to encompass opaque states, situations, and objects, accounting for profoundly significant circumstances with non-standard spatial and temporal properties. The lived body reveals its inherent nature, identifying us more than any other aspect; it’s what most fundamentally belongs to us, despite its vastness. We should, therefore, reconnect with our “primitive presence”, the wellspring of not only emotional engagement and self-awareness but also the pervasive identity found throughout life (Schmitz 2009, 62).

1.2. Atmosphere, Aesthetic Theory and the “In-Between”

The essence of nature must express itself
symbolically; the new world of symbols, and first of all

the whole symbolism of the body, not
only the symbolism of the mouth, of the
the face of the word, but also the total
dance mimicry.
(F. Nietzsche)

Schmitz's philosophy of the body demonstrates that profound changes of thought are required on the part of the subject. We must abandon the idea of the soul to undo the "introjections of feelings". The human being must be conceived primarily as a body, such that its self-awareness and sense of identity are intrinsically spatial: "to be bodily self-aware means at the same time the awareness of my state of being in an environment – how I feel here" (Böhme 2017, 85). Böhme fully engages with Schmitz's project, intertwining even its most complex ramifications to construct a fresh philosophy of nature, centred on the atmosphere, the lived body, and the Lebenswelt. The distinctiveness of his approach rests on the belief that traditional phenomenology has only approached the phenomenon of nature as a mere illustrative 'domain for analysing the *Lebenswelt*. Both Schmitz's New Phenomenology and Böhme's philosophy of nature aim to reject the primacy of consciousness and explore the phenomenon of human corporeality as "givenness in bodily feeling" (Trigg 2020). Much like Husserl's distinction between Körper and Leib, or the body-that-I-have and the body-that-I-am, Schmitz's phenomenology might have, as Böhme suggests, fallen into a dualistic trap, still clinging to a rather Hegelian notion of nature—as an "estrangement of the Spirit"" or the "not-Ego" "domain. To pioneer a renewed "naturalisation" of the body, we must therefore adopt a transformative perspective that re-envisions the lifeworld outside the Hegelian sphere of externalisation and objectification. Consequently, the issue of atmospheres extends beyond merely recognising these nebulous yet potent phenomena; it's vital to the phenomenological study of the embodied individual and the lifeworld. Böhme argues that the modern era's characteristic bodily feeling, in which nature has become more objectified and technologically manipulated, is far from being captured by the sentiment of Betroffenheit, which translates to 'being affected' or 'being affected by something' (Böhme 1997). Schmitz and Böhme aim to articulate those experiential "folds" that aren't delineated by binary contrasts or theories harkening to prevalent psychologism. With this foundation, atmospheres can be meaningfully conceptualised. They are spaces insofar as they are "tinctured" through the presence of things, persons, or environmental

constellations, that is, through their ecstasies (Böhme 2009, 68). For Böhme, the atmosphere places the perceiver and the perceived in a common ground of synthetic sharing. It can be described as a liminal state between the intra- and inter-personal domain, an affective situationality, a "spatial affordance" (Gibson 2014). Such conditions, although perceivable, defy linguistic description that might encapsulate their essence. They represent fluctuating states that significantly impact the organism, shaping its actions, influencing dispositions, and determining ways to make environmental sense or adopt particular stances. Within the atmosphere, the body undergoes a malleable lived experience, assimilating the emotive qualities of its environment; at the same time, it embodies its resonance with the atmosphere, adjusting its existential mode. This process of intertwining becomes an ecstasy, a near-thing or a "trait", drawing from Kimura's conceptual framework (2013).

In the rhythmic oscillation of contraction and expansion emblematic of every manifestation of life, the atmosphere presents its qualitative facets, harmonising with the lived body, inducing the emergence or fading of body isles. In this fundamental and pre-reflective realm, above all else, the significance of our existence unravels in relation to pervasive phenomena like the atmospheres. As Anderson elucidates:

> The very ambiguity of affective atmospheres – between presence and absence, between subject and object, and between the definite and indefinite – enables us to reflect on the affective experience as occurring beyond, around, and alongside the formation of subjectivity. (Anderson 2009)

It is precisely because of this trans-personal and transcendent trait that the atmosphere, as a spatial and affective phenomenon, declines quickly towards any praxis with theoretical foundations. The application field is vast, ranging from architecture to advertising, from commodity aesthetics, of which Böhme offers various examples within the consumerist trend, to art, and finally, to phenomenologically-oriented psychiatry. It is clear, therefore, that if seriously pursued, setting aside the stale Enlightenment prejudice of the valueless inferiority of all that is not "scientifically provable", the philosophy of atmospheres could constitute a new theory of modern socialisation. Think of the number of spontaneous

references we make daily to the atmosphere: a melancholic autumn afternoon, a cold and aseptic doctor's office, the gloomy and almost rarefied atmosphere of a cemetery, the warm and romantic atmosphere of a restaurant for couples. This is not metaphorical language but a way of giving voice to a lived experience, on the skin, of spatial feelings endowed with their transformative, subjective, and a-subjective, environmental, and affective power. The atmosphere is the prototypical "between" phenomenon (Böhme 2017). It's not only a spatial extension but also the principle of the encounter between persons, situations, and the lifeworld. However, as also specified by Böhme, the atmosphere is inseparable from the subject who perceives it: they are an interdependent reality. The statement is unsurprising. We have seen how much the body (in Merleau-Ponty's sense) resonates intensely with the emanations of the surrounding environment. Indeed, their existence can be reproduced, organised, and studied in detail to elicit specific emotions.

Moreover, for this reason, it is not ambiguous to think of them as objective entities. However, for atmospheres to be 'validated', they must be felt, here and now, enveloping the whole sensoriality and permeating the body isles with their specificity. Locality and physical presence, in a way, replace the two fundamental axes of metaphysical speculation: time and consciousness. "First, we propose that pure phenomenology is the science of pure consciousness" (Husserl 1977, 349). While remaining faithfully within the phenomenological frame, the new philosophical proposal restarts from the body, not as a mere empirical correlate of consciousness, but as a true founding nucleus of and for subjectivity, including the phenomenon of spatial affectivity in this research.

Remarkably, the term 'atmosphere', extrapolated from its original meteorological meaning, appeared for the first time in the work of the German psychiatrist Hubertus Tellenbach, "Taste and Atmosphere" (1968), in which the "entry" into the world of new-born babies is initially represented in terms of a 'sense of familiarity', felt primarily through smell and taste. The contextual relation of smelling to the atmosphere is more comprehensive, though. As I mentioned, tasting what he receives establishes the nucleus of the mother's 'experience. We spoke of the nucleus because what is offered in fragrance is condensed into taste and smell. Nevertheless, in this fragrance, something more than mere sense qualities passes from the mother to the child since the child also senses the personal nature of its mother, her atmosphere. In this instance, emanating from the mother, the atmosphere has a circular and transformative character: perceived by the child

as a cradle of love, or, on the contrary, as a poisonous nest of anxiety and hostility, it will determine, according to Tellenbach, how the child attunes to the lifeworld.

> In all of this, the atmosphere is a medium of preverbal and pre-reflective elemental contact. The atmosphere, as an emanation of personal qualities, can by its very nature not exist at the beginning of life […]. Prominently, confidence is developed in the protective atmosphere of the family, trusting faith in a direct protectedness and intactness, and therefore confidence in the environment. (Tellenbach 1981, 225)

Therefore, the construction of one's identity cannot ignore the atmospheric dimension; rather, it is strongly conditioned by the more or less favourable modulation of emotional atmospheres. Indeed, in the first years of life, the pathic dimension lacks barriers or filters; it wholly invests in the body isles of the child, which are then stored in the so-called body memory, a sort of affective storage that the subject will carry for life. The atmosphere of familiarity as a highly formative and fundamental moment for the existential predisposition of the individual has been debated at length, and still today, in modern psychopathology (from Karl Jaspers to Thomas Fuchs), a topic that will be discussed more extensively in the following chapters.

I resume the discourse on the nature of the atmosphere, having briefly touched on the psychopathological approach to it. In my discourse, the atmosphere is the actual realisation of a co-presence, the authoritative pre-personal ground of such an encounter involving persons, situations, and feelings in a unique aesthetic phenomenon. Only a posteriori are atmospheres differentiated in the subjective and objective poles of the relationship and established in the dual structure typical of modern gnoseology. Talking about the economy of the body, draws on a dimension that makes the *encounter* the true 'suture point' between the lived body and the environment. Certainly, Böhme's account offers a higher conceptual fluidity in the definition of atmosphere, partially rejecting the moderate reification endorsed by Schmitz. The phenomena, characterised as quasi-things, are experienced only through their bodily presence, i.e., through their intervention or their contribution to this economy (Böhme 1997). As a diffused totality, a tonally qualified space, the atmosphere sometimes blurs with the aura in Böhme, although these two realities are connected but distinct. The ecstasies of a thing should be understood as a

source of spatial radiation. It is at the heart of the atmosphere theory, which will be analysed in more detail in the following chapters. Thus, challenging the axioms of Western philosophy, which conceives the object as endowed with tangible and linguistically analysable form and qualities, the proponents of the New Phenomenology and New Aesthetics suggest the "de-metaphorization" of feeling, the externalisation of the pathic, and the valorisation, instead of consciousness, of the felt body. However, to be more precise, the enacted valorisation concerns the world of nature. Assuming that a structured constellation of natural things and anthropic products – a landscape, for example – produces, in its corporeal dimension, a certain atmosphere, it follows that atmospherology and the philosophy of the lifeworld represent two facets of the same novel project, where the size of expression is, therefore, a fundamental structure of all natural things (Böhme 1989, 53).

Expressivity before reflection. Dialogue, movement, feeling before thinking: these are the terms of a theoretical and practical revolution and a new ethical and epistemological realisation of the human being. However, why should man realise himself to the fullest when he 'surrenders' to pure bodily mechanisms? Or when he is incapable of controlling himself and the situation, namely forced to abdicate in favour of his felt corporeity? The loss of control could be configured as the ultimate opportunity to forge an unprecedented relationship with the lifeworld: through his body, the human being emancipates from the hyper-logical constructs of himself, determining a new way of existence in the world. However, we should also consider a contrary view, sceptical about the current appreciation of the pathic sphere as a medium for the re-conceptualisation of the lived body. According to the German philosopher Sloterdijk, the focus of modernity on atmospheres is a result of the 'morbid' celebration of the vegetative sphere of the human being (moods, skills, diseases, etc.) (Sloterdijk 2004). The enormous surplus of waking time to which today's society has accustomed us from the early years of life, might lead to the pursuit of luxury, daily aesthetic care, and the analysis of atmospheres as lived experiences and subjects of a new, exotic philosophical interest. The so-called "comfort greenhouse" is the cradle of the care of the surplus and the superfluous: therefore, according to Sloterdijk, therein lies the privileged access to 'where' and 'how' one feels. Regardless of the personal interpretation attributed to the current boom of studies on

affectivity and lived spaces (whether more or less sceptical or enthusiastic), the intriguing suggestion that:

> All this might have something to do with an everyday mode of being in the world that, for most of us, fuses consciousness and software—one that suspends the experience of presence. Perhaps this withdrawal state has provoked an enhanced need—and an increased desire—for encounters with presence. […] I am interested in the atmospheres and moods that literary works absorb as a form of "life"—an environment with physical substance, which "touches us as if from inside." The yearning for Stimmung has grown because many of us—perhaps older people, above all—suffer from existence in an everyday world that often fails to surround and envelop us physically. Yearning for atmosphere and mood is a yearning for presence—perhaps a variant that presupposes a pleasure in dealing with the cultural past. (Gumbrecht 2012, 20)

However, the differential issue of atmosphere and mood is crucial and will be discussed in the following pages. It should be remembered that their emergence is partly independent of the subject, emanating prototypically from external reality and not from the subject's interiority (Griffero 2014b). Their nature prevents us from understanding them completely. For now, it suffices to believe that the primordial phase of our existence is an "immersive bath" of atmospheres that transfer into our sentient bodies the first rudimentary traits of the life-world. "Infants perceive affects as the intermodal extract of rhythmic, melodic, vocal, facial, and gestural characteristics. These intermodal traits and contours are one of the main bridges of inter-corporeal resonance with primary understanding" (Fuchs 2017, 15). The atmosphere is not merely a mediator but provides the ground for mediation. Embracing the thematisation and problematisation of the atmosphere means accepting methodical uncertainty and a sense of conceptual indeterminacy. From a content perspective, however, new and various facets of the perceptual situation unfold. Ambiguity should rise as a new principle of real assumption. Nevertheless, our body, as opaque and *numinous* as atmospheres, is the only means we have to recognise and appreciate them in their invasiveness. In the dynamic act of bodily sensing, we experience our natural being.

> What contemporary humans acknowledge as nature in themselves are the things presented to them by science: their organisms, their frames. They disregard bodily sensing by actively aiming at targets; personal feelings and convictions are subordinated to performance and output, and in perception, the experience of self-presence is ignored while stating objects. (Böhme 2017, 180)

1.3. New Phenomenology and New Aesthetics

Böhme's atmospherological exploration aims to recognise the atmosphere of naturalness as a primary source of intra-personal and interpersonal attunement. Overcoming the traditional dichotomies of nature and art, nature and technique, the return to nature inaugurated by the "New Aesthetics" seeks to refocus attention on the corporeity of man as a genuine and authentic natural fact. Today, there's a growing consensus that the dignity of man lies not primarily in his rationality but directly in his lived body. So, nature itself, viewed as a vital flow of things, situations, and living beings, becomes a source of meaning and self-understanding for the human being, who is increasingly pushed into a prosthetic alienation of himself.

The artistic forms of nature, like snowflakes, symmetrical tree canopies, and the synchronic flight of birds, exhibit naturalness as an atmosphere, a fluid "that contradicts their thingly existence, i.e., their artisticity itself" (Böhme 2010, 235). Naturalness can be perceived as such because it is an intrinsic part of our most intimate being. The expression of a gesture or movement can be understood only with pre-reflective participation, a type of virtual symbiosis between the perceiver and the perceived. Moreover, according to Böhme, this is why the perception of naturalness is always also the perception of one's own naturalness. The rhythm and expression of natural forms resonate with the human observer, thus sharing their intimate essence. The body, experienced as the nature that we primarily are, unveils its givenness, something we have always been, which defines us more than any other aspect. It fundamentally belongs to us in its incompleteness, in its

elusion from an objectifying reflection, in manifesting our very presence through its partial concealment and its retreat when faced with a cognitive approach.

> We feel where we are in our inner awareness and emotional situation. So [,] the body is the primary sounding board enabling us to participate in the world. We are not in this world as spectres or souls but through physical presence. In an even more fundamental way than in our natural state, we are nature because, to participate in the world, we must be physically present in it. (Böhme 2017, 167)

The New Phenomenology, essentially, highlights an error – or perhaps an omission – which has paradoxically exacerbated the split between Körper (body-as-object) and Leib (body-as-subject) addressed by Husserl's phenomenology. The reality is that corporeity is neither reducible to the mere body scheme (or body image), i.e., how we articulate our body structure in relation to space, other bodies, and the internal relationship between the parts of the body itself, nor the instrument through which it is intentionally attuned to a world. It encompasses all that, but the core of the question differs.

Referring to Schmitz's treatment of the corporeal field and absolute spatiality or positionality, the lived corporeality is seen as the absolute emergence of the primitive presence, that is, that original dimension of being that precedes relativisation and singularisation and which, therefore, spreads like a vast indiscernible "here" that pervades everything. The original and undifferentiated substratum of the primitive presence continuously emerges, especially in the diffuse emotional involvement such as acute fright, pain, catastrophic shame or other shocking experiences, or in the collapse of the usual subjective or intersubjective balances, as seen in psychiatric disorders. To pre-empt a topic that will warrant separate discussion, since it is central to this research, the concept of primitive presence, in its emergence or breakdown, has been grasped by many authors, even contemporary ones, under various names. For instance, regarding schizophrenia, Ratcliffe speaks of the "erosion of a primitive form of trust" in the lifeworld, thus establishing a fundamental link between the pre-linguistic, bodily, and pre-reflective substratum and the integrity of a 'healthy' self-development (Ratcliffe 2017, 123). The Italian anthropologist De Martino formulated a somewhat similar concept: in his anthological work *The End of the World*, he collected a rich series of reports from

psychiatric patients with conditions like schizophrenia, manic-depressive disorder, and catatonic episodes about a recurring theme in their narratives: the loss, or diminishment, of the "vital impulse", represented by a horizon of meaning, values, self-transcendent and pre-reflexive experiences (De Martino 2002). Moreover, in my interpretation, Laing's concept of "ontological security" encapsulates the attributes of a primordial and atmospheric field in its conceptualisation.

> The individual, then, may experience his own being as real, alive, whole; as differentiated from the rest of the world in ordinary circumstances so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question; as a continuum in time; as having an inner consistency, substantiality, genuineness, and worth; as spatially coextensive with the body. (Laing 1960, 51)

This digression serves us to realize the presence of an experiential field so difficult to verbalize because of its intrinsic vagueness, depriving it of that metaphoricity with which it has consistently been expressed. Above all, it reminds us that it is not the artifact, the medium for humanity's homeostasis and equilibrium, but the discovery of what operates 'quietly', unseen, as an opaque and (erroneously considered) collateral event. Life itself in the world is "the artificial life of the developed presence", further absorbed by what is technically reproducible, alienable, and readily replaceable. Positioning oneself in a relationship, in movement and indiscernibility and committing to a reflection conscious of those unseen dimensions would remedy the fallacy of the usual way of thinking and living – an inevitable consequence of the segregation of the outside world into a reassuringly private and controllable dimension.

> The body as you feel it – plunged into the abyss between the physical body and the soul – and the bodily communication (in the exchange of glances and on countless other occasions of daily life), feelings like atmospheres, significant situations and, among them, the impressions, the spaces without surfaces (omitted from the model of Greek geometry) of the climatic weather, of sound, silence, gestures, body movements, feelings, etc.; and then, again, the semi-things, such as the voice, the wind, the dragging weight, the pain understood as invasive enemy and not as mere psychic state, feelings as semi-things capture the body (Schmitz 2011, 43).

Therefore, the most authentic nature of the lived body manifests itself in the pathic absorption, that is, in its receptivity to what occurs within it. Thus, the body is liberated from its reduction to a mere instrument for perceiving external objects or through which enacting its volitional impulses in actions primarily directed towards an external environment. Instead, the body-as-nature presents itself as an opening to a process of self-directed experience, of self-awareness as a prerequisite for a natural and more effective presence in the world. However, its innate nature might lead us to think that the body does not belong to us in the end; it remains partially alien to us. This could be traced back to the Kantian imprint on the conception of the body essentially as an extension of the *soul*.

Nevertheless, the subject perceives through his activity. Thus, the body would be nothing more than a phenomenal correlate of consciousness. However, 'self-feeling' isn't restricted to representing oneself in feeling. If that were the case, we could alter the emotions of our body with a mere shift in our conscious thought, perhaps more in line with the economy of self-preservation. According to Böhme, self-feeling must somehow surprise us, encompass us like something 'alien', to grant the essence of natural experience.

> To be sure, the body as nature is given to me, but as something strange, sometimes positively disconcerting. Moreover, it can never be denied that this strangeness is my strangeness. Of course, there are also massive self-estrangements in the concept of the body as the nature we ourselves are, in which people regard parts of themselves simply as things. In those cases, one would speak of illness. In the normal state, however, the relationship to the nature of my body, as a relationship to something that belongs to me, is secured by affective involvement. The feeling of the body remains a self–feeling. (Böhme 2010, 233)

The ego, consciousness, or any other instance of representative nature, holds no complete power over this foundational ground: the lived body. However, this should not be interpreted as a hymn to the acceptance, or even undifferentiated welcoming, of all that is bodily affection. It is rather a matter of redefining the terms of self-knowledge and holistically understanding all the dynamics contributing to a person's determination.

It becomes clear that perspectives such as the New Phenomenology and the New Aesthetics are of central value not because they present themselves as theories with an absolute truth about the world, but as different methodologies that, when intertwined, can collaborate to discover a suitable approach to the lifeworld, grasping its relationships with the environment and community.

Lived corporeity becomes independent, emancipates itself, and emerges in relation to the personal unit of the positional subject who responds with his body. As a body, it reveals the fundamental fact of being a corporeal existence, both internal and external to his corporeity, in tension with his physical existence to which he remains deeply connected. Thus, the pivotal question concerns the final object of investigation. Upon reaching the ground of things, what remains for us, the most elusive layer of our body? We discover nothing more than a familiar estrangement, a facticity that only manifests in affective involvement and pathic self-saturation: “The body is alien only vis-à-vis a relatively independent “I,” which can posit itself in a relationship of “having” concerning its body” (Böhme 2010, 234). Therefore, the body, as the nature that we embody, signifies active involvement with the external environment and immersing oneself in it due to our intrinsic affinity. Consider the experience of breathing, especially when it is hindered, as during apnoea underwater. Upon surfacing after a few moments of apnoea, we inhale deeply, expanding our chest to reclaim life. This is the most genuine experience of naturalness: our existence relies on breathing, and thus, we are fundamentally air creatures.

Our inherent nature is further attested to by two other phenomena: laughing and crying. Philosopher and anthropologist Helmuth Plessner provides a comprehensive analysis of these in a dedicated work. According to Plessner, laughing and crying document a profound emancipation of bodily processes from the person (Plessner 2000). In laughing and crying, one affirms oneself as pure pathicity, in the loss of control, in the freedom of impotence and in the disarticulated and unstructured expressiveness. Whoever laughs or cries loses control in a precise sense and, for the moment, has ceased to process the situation objectively (Plessner 2000, 51). Although the expressions of laughing and crying are characterized respectively by an exteriorizing nature and a more intimate one, both are meaningful reactions that attempt to re-establish balance within the positional subject

(namely, the subject in the lived space) and simultaneously have profound social significance.

The reflection on forms of bodily expression provides the foundation for new interpretations of affectivity and an increasing awareness of customary ways of being in the world. On one hand, this implies that the phenomenology of bodily existence will reconnect with the Aristotelian tradition. Thus, the body is animated nature (physis) in its experiential, pre-reflective dimension. Conversely, the body is also a physiological-organic entity with its observable nature (Fuchs 2019, 83). This may seem unoriginal. However, a general sense of dissatisfaction persists, especially regarding the mechanistic claim to explain humans' primary reactions as if they precede the embodied nature of the natural and social 'environments that truly constitute the experiential prius'. In essence, by neutralising primary instinctual expressivity, humans gradually blunt the affective, bodily plasticity that allegedly creates excessive vulnerability (Griffero 2015, 54).

1.4 Embodied Affectivity: The Prism of Emotions

> Embodied affectivity conceives emotions not as inner mental states residing within individuals (even less their brains) but as encompassing spatial phenomena that connect the embodied subject and the situation with its affective affordances in a circular interaction […]. In every face-to-face encounter, the partners' subject bodies are intertwined in the process of bodily resonance, coordinated interaction, and 'mutual incorporation', which provides the basis for an intuitive, empathic understanding. (Fuchs 2016, 195)

From the quoted text, it is deduced that the perception of a significant shift in understanding the pathic-emotional realm of humans is evident in many thinkers, not just in new phenomenologists. The increased awareness of the environment's impact on the lived body has led to the gradual dismissal of emotions as solely physiological reactions. Indeed, many narratives now consider the inter-corporeal and spatial dimensions of existence in understanding affective involvement. However, some theories still view emotions as entirely detached from bodily dynamics. For instance, Robert Solomon contends that "emotions are conceptually sophisticated intentional states that have objects outside of the body", implying that these are qualitative judgements about certain environmental stimuli (Solomon 1993, 17). Solomon's views on emotions arise from a need, or perhaps a fear, to completely debunk the 'portrayal of emotions as unchecked forces, reviving, however, an intellectualism of affectivity that might be more detrimental than the presumed romantic perspective. In this section, I juxtapose the notions of emotion, mood, and atmosphere, underscoring similarities and differences, and conclude by advocating for an atmospherisation of affects while maintaining conceptual boundaries.

Emotions are the meaning of life. It might be almost disturbing to question the foundations of this profound statement. We would not do so if there were not a sort of disembodiment behind it. Historically, reflections on emotions have intertwined with humanity's pursuit of happiness and the realisation of one's life. For Plato, spiritual and ideal contemplation, removed from the raw nature of passions, epitomised a meaningful existence. For Aristotle, the cultivation of moral virtues, the pursuit of ethical values, and political devotion were instruments for self-evolution (Plamper 2015). Both St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, following medieval thought, often associated passions or emotional

affections with deadly sins or, at the very least, with modes of the carnal world that distracted and dulled man's spirit, which ought to be directed towards the pursuit of good (the truth of God). Perhaps never before, as in that historical period within the Christian spirit, were emotions truly experienced in their intrinsic corporeity (Plamper 2015). Let us take a passage from Saint Augustine, where the awareness of the disruptive intensity of emotions as external and alienating forces emerges strikingly.

> I carried a torn and bleeding soul, impatient to be brought to me, and I could find nowhere to lay it. [...] Everything to her was horror, even daylight, and everything was not what he was, was sad and hateful, except moaning and weeping. She only had a little rest here, but as soon as I took her away from there, my soul overwhelmed me under a heavy burden of unhappiness. To heal it, I would have to lift it up towards you, Lord, I understood that, but I neither wanted nor was worth that much. (Agostino, IV, 7-12)

The battle on the nature and purpose of emotions has continued undaunted to this day, committing all the leading philosophers and thinkers of every age to pronounce themselves, dragging behind traces of the cultural forms in force.
However, from a phenomenological perspective, emotions often manifest as bodily 'turmoils'. Historically, the term passion has been synonymous with "emotion" and connotes an emotional disposition or feeling. Etymologically, both terms originate from verbs: the Greek *páthein*, meaning "to suffer" and the Latin combination: *ex*, meaning out, and + *movere*, meaning "to move". These highlight, on the one hand, our passivity towards things that affect us and, on the other, our lack of control over expressing our feelings. Yet, emotions are not just passive acceptance of bodily changes. They are communicative phenomena with significant interpersonal value. Nevertheless, modern cognitivist theories regard the bodily experience of emotions as merely a secondary aspect, or at most, as a confirmation that an emotion is occurring (Fuchs 2015, 6).

> Human emotion is not only about sexual pleasure or fear of snakes. It is also about the horror of witnessing suffering and the satisfaction of seeing justice served, the

> pleasure of Jeanne Moreau's smile, and the intense beauty of the words and ideas in Shakespeare's verses. (Damasio 2000, 52)

According to Damasio, emotion in itself is nothing without the feeling of it. Furthermore, one must 'possess' consciousness to experience this feeling. He posits that emotion predates consciousness in evolutionary history and arises from inducers we are often unaware of. However, the most conspicuous and lasting impacts of a feeling occur in the theatre of the conscious 'mind (Damasio 2000, 53). As a nuclear cell responding to environmental "calls", emotion forms the backbone structure of consciousness. They showcase a relationship deeply rooted in corporeity. For Damasio, emotion is a goal-oriented adaptive activity more logical than any cognitive-rational mechanism, thus demonstrating that the divide between rationality and emotion cannot endure. Properly channelled emotions provide a support system for reason. Damasio's definition, which positions emotion as a "palpable manifestation of the logic of survival", aligns with the thoughts of Darwin and Freud. While emotion is an overtly communicative phenomenon, the feeling is introspective in Damasio's theory, exclusive to the individual.

The sources of emotions are often elusive. Their root lies in the unconscious layer of the self, embodied in the so-called body memory, which Merleau-Ponty described as a "style of existence"". Lived experiences, anchored in body memory, encompass our environment, connecting us to things and people. It is "our permanent means of 'taking up attitudes' and thus constructing virtual presents"; in other words, to actualize our past and, with this, to make ourselves feel at home in situations (Fuchs 2011, 91). Consequently, the response to various stimuli, manifesting through physiological mechanisms and adapting to the "existential style", only partially addresses our understanding of emotion. Emotions elude willful control; one might feel euphoria or melancholy without pinpointing the trigger. Regardless of diverse theories on the nature and origin of emotion, one cannot deny a phenomenal aspect of primary importance: the extreme difficulty, sometimes even impossibility of holding back the eruption of emotion. A preliminary hypothesis might regard emotions as a complex interplay of neural and chemical reactions. According to Damasio, these are biologically predetermined processes innately set in brain structures, shaped over evolutionary history. Contextual shifts due to culture and individuality are mere secondary factors, not influencing their

foundational nature (Damasio 2000, 70). The unique paradox of neuroscientific approaches to what could be deemed 'philosophical' issues (as it has always been the case with the nature and thought of emotion) is that they frequently employ phenomenological terminology at the outset. They use terms like corporeity, experience, and inter-subjectivity extensively, yet they manage to achieve their initial explanatory objectives. However, when addressing the crux of the matter and offering their interpretation of the phenomenon, they swiftly attribute everything to the presumed deterministic causality of underlying neural processes in the brain – the "deus ex machina" that soothes the souls of the insatiable questioners (Griffero 2016).

The problem is that the same phenomenon must be observed through various methods and tools of understanding. It is not necessarily the case that disciplines with different focuses and approaches would conflict when debating the same subject. Instead, they could integrate to offer a prismatic and multi-dimensional vision of the same reality. However, this integration seldom occurs. There is a tendency to prioritise one perspective, often undermining the other. Thus, neurocognitive sciences continue to explain a phenomenon of the lived body as a correlate of brain functions oriented towards the survival of the human species, neglecting the phenomenon's robustly intercorporeal and spatially resonant dimension. This oversight is not due to arrogance but negligence, resulting from the persistence of cultural legacies favouring the assumed methodological superiority of scientific praxis. As Griffero states,

> [A]s long as the somatic correlates of the emotional are seen as an accessory phenomenon, in principle illegitimate concerning interiority (the mind system), one does nothing but persevere with the *discorporating* tendency of the affective sphere prevalent in Western culture. (Griffero 2015, 41-42)

However, there is general agreement among psychologists and philosophers that in emotion, there is intentionality, namely intrinsic directedness. Emotions relate to objects, situations and events (De Sousa 2010; Frijda 1994). Emotional processes reveal various levels of self-awareness and, concurrently, awareness of one's environment. In fear, we perceive something as a threat (which is a kind of world reference), and simultaneously we feel threatened; that is to say, we are aware of our potential vulnerability in a specific

way, which is rather a kind of self-referentiality (Stephan 2012, 158). According to enactivists, emotions should be considered as complex micro-nuclei of evaluations and personal and interpersonal concerns, with little emphasis on bodily resonance. As previously mentioned, some researchers view emotions as fleeting episodes, juxtaposing this with the notion of "mood", perceived as a less intense yet longer-lasting phenomenon. The debate also encompasses the nature of affectivity, not just in terms of ''localisation', but also primordiality.

Thus, what comes first: The bodily affectedness or the conscious elaboration of such a state? For Colombetti and Fuchs, emotion cannot disregard either bodily resonance (of the whole organism), the action tendency that consists of projecting itself into significant movements within an *Umwelt* or proactive tension between possibility and realization. Emotions arise in the course of evolution when need and satisfaction are divided (Colombetti 2014; Fuchs 2016). To bridge the resulting gap, they fill the intentional arc of drive, desire, and action toward the desired object (Merleau-Ponty 1962). De Rivera (1977), while also referring to the dynamics of bodily expansion and contraction described by Schmitz in his New Phenomenology, identifies four basic types of emotional movement: "moving oneself towards the other" (in affection, sentiment), "moving the other towards oneself" (in desire), "moving oneself away from the other" (in disgust, for example) and "moving the other away from oneself" (in fear). We are getting closer to the progressive abandonment of stale and impoverishing notions for the flourishing world of emotional expressivity. We can say with certainty that the radical return to the valorisation of corporeity as a primordial space of affective attunement to the lifeworld began with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment.

> If we want to bring to light the birth of being for us, we must finally look at the area of our expertise [,] which clearly has significance only for us, which is our affective life. (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 178)

While Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception might not directly address emotions, it's believed that the current trend in affectivity research, grounded in the concept of pre-reflective and embodied communication, traces back to him. What I

believe to have significantly impacted subsequent philosophical thought is the attention on the original experiential field, affectively toned since the first period of life, the perceptual horizon from which the subject's whole existence looms. Affect is not gradually added on "layers" as additional qualia; rather, it is present from the beginning. Pioneers of enactivism, including Thompson, Varela, Rosch (1991), Gallagher (2018), Colombetti (2014), and Maiese (2017), have highlighted the role of affect in shaping consciousness. However, they might have underplayed their considerable debt to the French phenomenologist's theory of perception, a fact noted by the Copenhagen school (Koppe et al. 2018). For this investigation, it's pivotal to recognise that in our inherent quest for meaning and understanding, the primary form of affectivity unfolds. Colombetti refers to this foundational affectivity, not as some arcane, nebulous emotional state, but as the first displays of an organism's dynamism, which concurrently suggests a bodily sensitivity to the world (Colombetti 2014, 22).

With Merleau-Ponty, it is asserted that the body is neither merely a collection of passive reactions to external stimuli nor the embodied projection of actions determined by the cognitive and rational processes of the mind. The body is the origin of an initial opening onto things without which objective knowledge would not exist (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 111). It does not passively absorb the qualities of the outside world as though they were quantifiable objects but "incorporates" them spontaneously, in an unmediated way. The perception of the world always comes with a distinct perception of one's body. Moreover, the affected body is always poised for action. However, this does not mean that we react to a stimulus directing movement or project outward from a mental image to an objective spatial context. Movement originates from a fundamental impulse to move and be moved, where the body embeds itself in a phenomenal field. Movement and affect don't overlap, but movements are sensed (under normal conditions), and our affective life shapes our motile expressivity. If we accept that feeling and emotion are intertwined, then, in line with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the body is the sole medium to engage with the perceptual world and to create a world of meaning (Koppe et al. 2017). The affective, pre-reflective life underpins the reflective one. It forms the foundation for our habits, predispositions, relational attitudes, and existential styles. For Merleau-Ponty, emotion's essence lies in its embodied expression. He argued, "it is no more natural, and no less conventional, to shout in anger or to kiss in love than to call [a] table 'a table'. Feelings and passional conduct are invented – like words" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 220). Hence, the

formation of emotion resides in the tension between the sedimentation of emotional life and its reflective re-enactment. Emotions continually arise in the pathic interplay between me and the environment, which define each other. Boundaries might blur, as seen in love relationships, for instance. “The interior and the exterior are inseparable. The world is on the inside, and I am on the outside of myself” (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 430). The layering of emotional life and its transcending generate the tension vital for cultivating a new affective experience in a space yet to be explored. This space exists in the ephemeral “in-between”, captured in the dynamic interaction between the individual and the world.

Thus, the examination of the myriad theories on emotion offers a contrast and differentiation from other affective forms. We believe this differentiation should, at least partially, supersede older conceptions of affect, advocating a more expansive ‘worldliness’ of it. This outward orientation isn’t entirely new, nor is it in line with the contemporary processes of disenchantment and de-metaphorization consistently performed by modern thought. Instead, it opposes the prevailing trend of suppressing raw emotional expression, relegating it to the guarded domain of presumed privacy, or confining it within the bounds of scientifically endorsed spaces in psychotherapeutic discourse, or even distorting and commodifying it in the mass media. Neo-phenomenological studies place emphasis on emotional phenomena, often overlooked in psychological research, like atmospheres, extending these insights to the entire emotional realm. This atmospheric shift away from a purely psychological perspective is tied to recognising the body as a genuine primary source of meaning in the world. This perspective understands that sensations and emotions aren’t confined within the physiological boundaries of the body. Instead, they extend into the space around the body, enveloping it in an emotional “cloud” that colours the entire environment. The resulting dynamic is a symbiotic one: the environment, individual, and collective agents shape each other’s conditions, facilitating not just phenomenal appearances but also the foundational pathic moments of mutual affectivity. The environment consistently presents itself to the subject as a silent backdrop for their actions, beliefs, and meaning-making processes. Conversely, within this environment, the subject carves out various situations they deem favourable for their expression, forging significant and often unnoticed areas for their existence.

1.5. Mood (*Stimmung*) as Atmospheric Situatedness

Suppose modern theories of emotions aim to identify their intentional objects and corresponding foundations in cognitive modules. In that case, they often perceive emotions as a psychological element detached from any form of knowledge, linking them to a system of practice. On the other hand, regarding emotional tones, as I have mentioned on several occasions, there is a discernible critical-dismissive tendency in the academic landscape because science can only comment on them to a certain degree. Predominantly, there's a somewhat dualistic view of the human being in which affectivity and world knowledge are at polar opposites, and within this framework, certain phenomena, due to their complexity, do not quite align as desired.

A testament to this is the so-called moods and feelings of being. Mood, in German *Stimmung* (from the word *Stimme*, meaning "voice"" and the verb *stimmen*, meaning "tuning"), has been defined by various theories as a feeling of being, less intense but more pervasive than emotion, which imparts a specific tonality or hue to the space experienced by the subject. Classic examples include elation, euphoria, serenity, boredom, sadness, dysphoria, irritability, anxiety, and melancholy. Initially, moods might be described as global, primarily evaluative (pleasant or unpleasant) but non-intentional feeling states that make an individual inclined to experience himself and his environment in a particular manner, leading to corresponding behaviours (Fuchs 2015, 5). The consensus in most of the existing literature is that they are non-intentional, pre-reflective elements. However, exceptions include Solomon and Goldie, who argue that the distinction between emotions and moods isn't clear-cut: both possess an intentional object, albeit different ones, with the primary difference between these affective states being their intensity (Solomon 1967; Goldie 2000). Leaning towards cognitive functionalism, perhaps with a hint of Heideggerian existentialism, is Price's theory. He describes moods as "objectless emotions" with a peculiar characteristic: that of being fundamental 'states of vigilance', endowed with an intentional object distinct from that of emotions (Price 2006). Mood

will be primarily defined using Heidegger, Fuchs, and Ratcliffe's views, which largely converge on ascribing to mood a value of situationality of being, a pathic a-priori configuration that can persist over time and remain in the experiential backdrop without necessarily surfacing to consciousness. Through the *Stimmung*, a person finds harmony or discord with the world, and this situationality (*Befindlichkeit*) forms the basis for all knowledge and all experience of meaning. In German, the term *Stimmung* typically translates to "atmosphere", but it is essential to clarify that, in this context, it doesn't possess the same meaning bestowed by neo-phenomenological philosophy.

Instead, we'll see how this new atmospheric proposal fundamentally integrates into the debate about the nature and structure of mood, rather than counteracting theories on emotions, of which they constitute not just a mere extension, but the foundational structure on which they stand. As Heidegger posits, "a mood assails us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of Being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being" (Heidegger 1998, 176). Therefore, the act of being in the world, of being situated within a specific worldly context, is already definable as *Stimmung*, albeit with certain inherent challenges. This is because the points of reference, though elusive, persist as the inner and outer realms, maintaining a subtle dualism that isn't necessarily blind but is hesitant to embrace the potential of a pure intermediate dimension. It's also evident that the realm of emotions cannot be entirely condensed into this 'new' world of atmospheres; the fact that emotions, moods, and feelings of being exist with their unique phenomenology is undeniable. While emotions relate to and disclose the ontic status of objects, the *Stimmung* refers to their horizon, thereby connecting to objects more indirectly, serving as the affective backdrop of their appearance. Fuchs suggests that moods transcend the subject–object distinction, permeating the environment and imbuing the entire situation with affective qualities that resonate (Fuchs 2015). Thus, boredom or depression might impart a drab or sombre hue to objects, whereas, during euphoria, they radiate vibrancy and allure. As such, moods provide the backdrop through which we perceive things as significant or inconsequential. They belong to a foundational sphere of self and world alignment, thus underpinning all specifically directed, intentional states (Fuchs 2015, 5).

Therefore, the pathic situation presents itself as the primary revelation of being and the foremost mode of pre-theoretical understanding of the world. The mood in which one

finds oneself shapes one's relationship with others, the world, and oneself. In this context, Heidegger elaborates:

> It is about feeling oneself (*Befinden*), which we mean when we ask the other: How do you feel? That is: how are you? This question does not necessarily refer only to the body-inanimate state of health. This question can inform us about the other person's actual situation. It is the being in an affective tonality (*Gestimmtheit*), which totally determines the being and his relationship, from time to time, with the world and the being-with others. (Heidegger 1987, 182)

The feeling, situated as an instantaneous gash on authentic being, represents the fundamental occurrence of the human being: the world's unveiling through the pathic sphere is the pinnacle of 'manifestativeness', without which all discourse and logical structures would be untenable. The revelation of this gash, facilitated by the *Stimmung*, gives rise to space and simultaneously compels man to probe its origins. From a Heideggerian perspective, mood signifies both being-placed and a continuous transcendence of oneself. The paramount importance of affectivity, or Stimmungen in Heidegger's philosophy, becomes even more evident when discussing the notion of nostalgia as an innate, ever-evolving foundational existential mood in man. We move because original affective disruptions propel us, serving not as boundaries but as gateways to motion; the affective moment doesn't merely enclose, but actively expands.

Being grasped by the *Stimmungen* marks the very origin of philosophy, which thereby becomes a quest for lost unity, a recalibration of parts shaken by states that unsettle and provoke us. Heidegger even goes so far as to describe the *Stimmung* as the "voice of Being", the primary mode of interaction between Being and the multifaceted mundane with which it continually interacts. This emotive tension denotes the ontological hallmark of humanity and prefaces the hermeneutic processes underpinning its comprehensive relationship with the world. Thus, the event (*Ereignis*) embodies the rapport between Being and being-situated, deeply embedded in life's affective layer. Here, we ought to deviate from the notion of a tangible event; it's not a distinct historical instance or an identifiable locale, but a symbolic breach encountered when faced with Being's finiteness. Engaging with the raw essence of things is pathic in that, true to its ancient

Greek roots, it is endured, agonising, akin to a metaphysical affliction. To awaken is to resist being numbed by that anguish which Heidegger deems the predominant *Stimmung* faced by humans when unavoidably, emotionally cast into the world.

> In the clarification of its being in the world, the primary orientation of our being is not knowledge (*Wissen*) but a feeling of affection, which can be determined in different modalities, from time to time, depending on how an entity operates [...]. What is indicated with 'pathos' designates in a fundamental sense the being in the world and also how it [...] comes into question in the development of the *krisis*, of the stance, of making up our mind [...]. With the coming to light of this fundamental role of affections in the *krinein* (to judge), we also get, at the same time, the possibility to see more concretely the terrain of the logos. Moods characterize man's affectivity (Befindlichkeit). They are modes of being-taken in relation to being-in-the-world, which essentially determines the possibilities to orient oneself in the world. (Marcuse 1997, 206-209)

In the phenomenology of moods, absorption is pivotal, representing the state of immersion in the world's fabric, a shared condition. Within this state, humanity experiences its most profound and genuine being in a pre-reflective, inter-corporeal manner – a bareness revealed to the world through its engagement with the pathic realm. Heidegger introduces the inherently linked concept of shared attunements, portraying moods as the mechanism unveiling the "absorbed being-with" phenomenon. Moving away from Cartesianism, which portrays inner states as "psychic nests" to be decoded in others' minds, Heidegger deliberates on moods and posits that they are attunements – a direct, shared affective resonance (Dreyfus 2013).

What captivates about Heidegger's mood theory is its pinpointing of a component that becomes pivotal in the atmosphere theory, construed as foundational affectivity: it redirects analytical methods to the core of their structure, namely emotionality. At the heart of human emotional structure lies the principal modality of openness to worldly entities. Emotional comprehension is construed as the primary authentically cognitive disposition of being-there, its quintessential phenomenon. Concurrently, the theoretical behaviour of the entity is seen as a secondary way to engage with what primary attitudes (affectivity) have already unearthed, which may even obfuscate what was originally

exposed. I take issue with Colombetti's cognitivist outlook on moods, cloaked in a systemic-dynamic approach, which asserts that moods merely predispose to "setting up the conditions for different emotional forms; some emotional episodes typically take place in the context of certain moods rather than others (e.g., a bout of enthusiasm typically takes place in a cheerful rather than grumpy mood)" (Colombetti 2014, 179). Simplifying a phenomenon as intricate as moods based on its supposed contextual influence over varying emotional forms can risk creating an unwarranted hierarchy of affective expressions. It can also lead to over-emphasis on psychism, overlooking the global, relational essence of moods.

Moreover, differentiating emotions from moods can be glaringly discordant. Consider loving one's child: while it can be seen as a 'focused emotion', it might also signify a profound shift in one's worldview. Conversely, ponder the pain following the loss of a loved one. It may initially present as a sharp, distinct emotion, but who could contest that it often transforms into a seismic shift in one's life perspective? (Ratcliffe 2013, 164). "It is clear that attunements are not something merely at hand. They are precisely a fundamental way of being […] and this always directly includes being with one another" (Heidegger 1983, 100-101). As a fundamental mode of being-with, mood aids in rectifying our flawed ontology of viewing ourselves as self-reliant entities. Furthermore, by rooting itself in the essence of existence, pathicity unveils the pre-reflective dimension of the unseen, whose emotionally charged manifestations challenge the rigidity of rational perspective.

However, as Ratcliffe also pointed out, in the phenomenological journey undertaken by Heidegger that laid the groundwork for all scholars of affectivity, there seems to be a notable absence of reference to the bodily component of mood in his considerations on the subject. He asserts that the corporeal nature of mood will be addressed separately, thus meriting individual reflection. This 'parenthesis', which might have clarified whether he recognises the bodily roots of mood, is never broached in his writings. Hence, in Ratcliffe's view, it might be more appropriate to employ the term "feeling" with the same connotation as the Heideggerian mood, only reverting it to its primary corporeal dimension; moreover, given that feelings pertain to how one finds oneself in the world, many, if not all, descriptors related to feelings seem to encompass altered bodily awareness (Ratcliffe 2013, 191).

1.6 Feelings of Being

Emanating from the living organism as a whole, the feeling of being can be viewed as a primary display of the embodiment of subjectivity (Fuchs 2015). On the flip side, there's nothing barring us from perceiving feelings as states externally superimposed onto an indifferent consciousness to obfuscate and muddle it, but which are integral to the tonality of being psychic and even to any cognitive orientation (Bodei 2007). For ages, the near-obsessive quest for locating feelings has obstructed a holistic view of the body and environment, exaggerating the divide ~~between~~ mind/body and individual/environment. Consequently, the surge of theories on the varying facets of affectivity can be traced to a common origin: subjectivity, either rooted in the corporeal or the psychic. I contend that feelings are pivotal due to their intimate association with atmospheres. I advocate for the amalgamation of the feeling of being, 'as Ratcliffe conceives it, and the atmosphere, as perceived by Schmitz and Griffero, with some of my own nuances.

It is all about understanding and then rightly discerning the essence and implication of being in the world. The way of being in the world is something unitary (in non-pathological conditions), and the feeling of the body *ipsum* epitomises its emblematic facticity, which expresses as a mode of being conditioned by the social context where one is immersed, an arena of plausible projects, practical objectives, and values. A pre-articulated and pre-reflective essence, intrinsic to man, becomes accessible only when the existential sentiment undergoes a shift in intensity and sign. The realm of potential and its concurrent temporal aspect can either constrict overwhelmingly or expand immeasurably, altering one's connection with the world 'and perceptions of oneself and others. This reveals the present conceptual shortfall regarding the vast domain of feelings of being in comparison to the ample gamut of emotions at our behest. Ratcliffe posits that the nature and function of feelings have been overshadowed by the prevalent assumption that "all bodily feelings are experiences of bodily states and also by an over-emphasis on the issue of how they are integrated into an emotional experience." (Ratcliffe 2008, 19). Everyday language, as well as literary and psychiatric discourses, abound with variances

in states of being that scarcely fit into the conventional roster of emotions such as anger, envy, jealousy, pain, shame, and so forth. Consider the subsequent list:

> The feeling of being 'complete', 'flawed and diminished', 'unworthy', 'humble', 'separate and in limitation', 'at home', 'afraid', 'slightly lost, 'overwhelmed', 'abandoned', 'stared at', 'torn', 'disconnected from the world', 'invulnerable', 'unloved', 'watched', 'empty', 'in control', 'powerful', 'completely helpless', 'part of the real world again', 'trapped and weighed down', 'part of a larger machine', 'at one with life', 'at one with nature', 'there', 'real'. (Ratcliffe 2008, 19)

Moreover, there are feelings of 'being alienated', 'frustrated', 'enraptured', 'emptied', and so on. Ratcliffe suggests that these feelings surpass the conventional meaning of affection, encompassing both the realm of bodily affection and immersion in the world, underscoring their mutual dependence. These existential perspectives serve as a person's operational backdrop, infusing his Umwelt (surroundings) with a distinct hue that filters his lived space and time. In Ratcliffe's model, the body consistently acts as the resonating vessel of these feelings, which serve as a "hold on things" and materialise through modes of existing in the world. Notably, he establishes the utter dissimilarity of "existential feelings" from the widely acknowledged notions of emotion, which view their subject as a composite blend of several elements. Existential feelings aren't composites, akin to emotions, as Goldie describes, which comprise a "relatively complex state, involving past and present episodes of thoughts, feelings, and bodily changes, dynamically related to a narrative of part of a person's life" (Goldie 2000, 144). When swayed by an emotional condition, your mode of existing in the world is already determined. Existential feelings, upon altering, signify a shift from the previously experienced state of existence: the inherent, pre-reflective stance of the past gives way to another, distinct in intensity and nature. In all cases, this represents a transformation in the fabric of experience echoing unique existential stances, spanning from the real to the unreal, with a spectrum of shades that evolve and shape existence. It is specifically within psychopathology that the most genuine evidence of these foundational existential structures emerges.

1.7 The Body's Atmosphericity

Especially in the experience of alienation, the person complains about the loss of grip on things, which seem so unapproachable, frozen in their being no longer "within reach" of the person.

In any case, Ratcliffe's feelings of being are based on the Heideggerian notion of mood, focused on the analysis of anxiety as a form of "unveiling nothingness", but also as an existential feeling that emanates from the very structure of being-in-the-world through critical moments of one's life. Thus, alienation is a tormenting feeling of distance, underscoring the awareness of an unbridgeable gap. This feeling can amount to the awareness that one lives in a vacuum and is about to suffocate, or that one "lives in an unreal world in which things [are not] what they seem to be and in which attempts to connect fail as if there were a glassy wall between the person and the surrounding world" (Glas 2003, 238). Against this dizzying world, your body cramps and recoils. Your posture stoops, resembling a man who, having prematurely aged, has either lost his way in a forest at night or has been exposed to sudden trauma. To recover balance, you cling to any available surface. As you lose your grip on things, you simultaneously become lost on the bridge itself, lost in a world with no discernible dangers (Trigg 2016, 36). I have included two striking excerpts from two authors who describe the phenomenon of anxiety as a dramatic upheaval of the way of being, which implies the body primarily as a sounding board of the pathic exchange between the individual and the environment. The set of inter-sensorial possibilities forms the experience of the object, outlining the basic structure that Ratcliffe calls "space of possibility", immersed in a specific existential orientation, which is usually implicit in the activity of perception. The body, which serves as the fundamental medium that connects the subject to the world, is silent and is not felt in its presence by the person. The existential feeling arises when the body becomes distinct and prominent, transitioning from an active role to one that is passive, evolving from being an unseen platform for endeavours to a tangible, burdensome entity. Each part of this entity can be distinctly, and at times painfully, felt. What also aligns Ratcliffe's notion of existential

feeling with the notion of atmosphere is the extrapolation of this structure from the merely subjective context, being rather understood in its link to the background of the lifeworld. Like the atmosphere, the existential feeling has a spatial, intermodal, and effusive character. Starting from corporeal roots, it extends towards the surrounding environment, infusing a particular tone of meaning to the contextual situation. What is not clearly explained (but I believe is the differential point between the two phenomena) is that the former uses the lived body as a vehicle, while the latter, the existential feeling, originates from the profound modifications affecting the lived body. It is not a complete externalisation, but an intermediate dimension between the inside and the outside, the psychic and the mundane.

Both Ratcliffe and Heidegger aim at the abandonment of the sterile dichotomy of interiority/exteriority on which the sciences of the mind are still based. They instead unearth, within the pre-noetic, living, and primal realm of the lived body, the imprints of each individual's personal history. In true emotional tones, neither the ego, nor the object, nor any boundary between ego and object appear. On the contrary, one should say that the boundaries of the "I" become confused and disappear in a particular way. I and the world are incorporated into a total and undivided experience. The emotional tonality is both the ego and the world. Especially in reports of people suffering from anxiety or depression, the mode of existential feelings as background ways of finding oneself situated in a world comes to light evidently in their disruption. The experience of vulnerability, fragility, and lack of control becomes pervasive, and the change of existential orientation affects both bodily experiences and thoughts, as well as relationships with others.

In states of anxiety, the body that occupies this home is no longer rested in the world but instead exists in a state of tension. Stripped of its familiar attributes, our taken-for-granted relation to the world is momentarily ruptured by the advent of anxiety, leaving us with a sense of being ill at home in the world, desperately disconnected from the social community (Heidegger 1996). Bodily capacities emerge in encounters, mediated by forces that circulate in the background of pre-reflective life, with a profound subjective and inter-subjective impact. As Clough (2007, 3) asserts, beginning from affect as a feeling would allow us "to grasp the changes that constitute the social and to explore them as changes in ourselves, circulating through our bodies, our subjectivities, yet irreducible

to the individual, the personal, and the psychological". These observations indicate no separation between bodily feeling and existential orientation. I feel myself existing in the body, and this should not be interpreted as an organic transformation of psychic feelings. Therefore, the intimate relationship between world and body, affectivity and existence, me and other-than-me, becomes more and more binding. To demonstrate, Ratcliffe draws abundantly from narratives of depression, from which always emerges, in the foreground, the conspicuousness of the lived body with the silence of its pre-reflective threads directed to the lifeworld (Griffero 2022, 88) and the narrowing of experiential space as a direct consequence of the motor inhibition of the body. Through depression, it is observed how the feelings of being are intrinsically linked to a meaningful projectuality of the body, which has been implicit since birth.

> My surroundings took on a different tone at certain times: the shadows of nightfall seemed more sober, my mornings were less buoyant, walks in the woods became less zestful, and there was a moment during working hours in the late afternoon when a kind of panic and anxiety overtook me, just for a few minutes, accompanied by a visceral queasiness. (Styron 2001, 41)

In his autobiography, Styron retraces with powerful pathos the stages of his gradual descent into major depression. He recalls how, in the beginning, it was more about subtle atmospheric perceptions: a pervasive sense of heaviness and dullness that clung to his body and his surrounding space.

Different, however, is the discourse on existential feelings in psychotic experience. Here, the 'sense of unreality' predominates. Unlike in depression, the body in this condition appears almost evanescent, smoky, and faint. All the affective charge is directed towards the world, towards an external reality suddenly tinged with a sense of estrangement, unfamiliarity, and ominousness. Eventually, it becomes devoid of felt meaning. Especially in the early stages, in the so-called twilight phase of the psychopathology, when the person is still clinging to common sense (Blankenburg 1969) more trivially to his mental health, there is a proliferation of feelings of being, emerging as disrupted ways of perceiving the environment and other persons.

> Gradually, my mood shifted, and the world's brightness began to darken. As I remembered the past, the feelings began to blur the present. Then came the dreadful thoughts […] A dark haze settled around me. The beautiful camp turned foul, a thing of evil, not of beauty. All around me were shadows. (Schiller 1994, 31)

This altered subjective and world experience is amplified by the encounter-clash with other people, driven by the chasm created between the new, disconcerting, and terrifying world inhabited by the patient and that taken for granted by others. Trapped in the impossibility of communicating these new feelings in an inter-affective manner, the patient perceives the world as an unfamiliar, distant, and alien place. This inability to communicate intensifies his suffering, making him feel imprisoned in solitude. It becomes evident that within these feelings of being, or existential feelings, there is a presupposed foundational layer of coexistence with others. This is a pre-given adherence to a collective background from which individualities emerge and are moulded. As Fuchs articulates, "it is primarily in our coexistence with others that we feel close or distant, familiar or alienated, open or restricted, and even real or unreal" (Fuchs 2015, 3). However, changes in existential orientations can occur even without psychopathological deterioration. In such instances, these feelings may involve alterations in the perceptions of one's own body within a particular spatial context, such as when immersed in water. When confronted with an unfamiliar spatial form, another Umwelt, individuals express a wide array of ways of being situated, but all are centred on their body's modes of existence. One might feel "at one with the water", "at peace with oneself", "enveloped", or even "desperately alone", "abandoned to oneself", "hopeless", and "gripped by "the fear of suffocating" (Pisano 2017). Alternatively, upon relocating to a new city, one might feel destabilised, disoriented, alienated, and disconnected from others during the initial adaptation phase. Individuals sometimes express sentiments such as 'things just do not feel right', 'I am not in the mood today', 'I just feel a bit removed from everything at present', 'I feel out of it', or 'it feels awkward'. In the atmospheric encounter with a toned space, feelings of being often surge powerfully, imprinting a distinct operational directionality on the individual. To clarify, as we have observed, the concept of the feeling of being is intrinsic to both bodily affectivity and the spatial collective dimension of existence. The latter is already a significant topic when characterising mood in Heidegger's work. In my estimation, acknowledging the moment of origin and diffusion

of these feelings is partially absent from Ratcliffe's argument, which aims to establish a new phenomenological category of feelings, diverging substantially from Heidegger's theory of moods. I believe this moment could align with the encounter of an atmosphere.

1.8 Sense or *Atmosphere* of Reality?

Before delving further into my proposal, which seeks to combine existential feelings with atmospheres, as understood by the New Phenomenology, we must first conduct a final analysis to complete the study of affectivity: that of the 'sense of reality'. According to Ratcliffe, the sense of reality stands apart from existential feelings: it does not pertain to 'posited external realms' but rather to a background experience that alludes to an intrinsic relationality to where we find ourselves before we conceptualise ourselves as narrators or observers within a specific space-time context. In the phenomenological reduction, a cornerstone of Husserl's philosophy, the sense of reality is heralded as the highest phenomenological accomplishment. Through shedding the layers of scientific naturalism, the world reveals itself in its unstructured essence, not as an object of overt reflection but as the primary horizon of perceptual experience. Everywhere, apprehension includes in itself, by the mediation of a 'sense', empty horizons of 'possible perceptions'; thus, I can, at any given time, enter into a system of possible and, if I follow them up, actual, perceptual nexuses (Husserl 2004, 42). For Husserl, therefore, the sense of reality is phenomenologically anchored by the act of perception. When an object is perceived, only a facet of it is noted, whilst the other aspects, although not concurrently present during the act of perception, are intuitively assumed, without this casting doubt on their actual existence. Husserl also alludes to "the allure presented to consciousness, the unique gravitation an object presented to consciousness exerts on the ego", the manner in which it prompts us to actualize perceptual possibilities in a certain way (Ratcliffe 2013, 10). The myriad perceptual possibilities, amalgamated with striking practical affordances, supply each of us with this coherent sense of reality. Given its conceptual ambiguity yet its potency in its original presentation, the inextricable link with the lived body must be acknowledged. Husserl himself concedes that the body serves as the medium of

perception, the apparatus through which one finds a point of orientation in the world. Drawing from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty also characterises the sense of reality by virtue of the embodied practical possibilities: the kinaesthetically active body can engender, on a pre-cognitive and pre-conscious plane, a horizon of meaning that further defines itself following the progression of the inter-affective trajectory. Hence, the individual actualises the potentialities inscribed in his body, manifesting as capacities and predispositions moulded by life conditions. Within the sense of reality, which tacitly bestows meaning upon all our actions, the omnipresence of the lifeworld is evident, what Heidegger terms "worldhood". The "worldhood" embodies the manifestation of a common-sense experience, shared because it unveils potentials that surpass individual subjectivity, influencing the entire community. The 'opportunities the world presents are dynamic structures, appearing as potentials for impending activities shaped by bodily predispositions. These are phenomenologically discernible in terms of what the body senses. Paradoxically, they become more perceptible when they undergo alterations, mirroring existential transitions marked by the loss of structured direction. To comprehend worldliness (*Weltlichkeit*), it is imperative once again to cast a pure, unbiased gaze towards primary ontological inquiries, which incessantly pertain to co-existence, *Mit-sein*, existing in tandem with others.

> The others are not encountered during a restful knowledge of the preliminary distinction of oneself from the others; [...] Therefore, not in a preliminary intuition of oneself as the foundation of opposition to the others. [...] Against the straightforward theoretical explanations of the simple presence of others, it is necessary to hold firm the phenomenal fact that the encounter with the others takes place in the world's worldhood. (Heidegger 1969, 205)

The deeper we probe from various perspectives, the more it becomes evident that the sense of reality might be profoundly imbued with a foundational affectivity, which ecologically encompasses every individual, predisposing them differently for the subsequent construction of self-layers. The affective engagement, the emotional ramifications, and the subject's degree of vulnerability, coupled with the influential power of environmental conditions and interpersonal dynamics – which possess the capacity to mould or shatter the subjective balance – create the conditions for the fundamental

configuration of relationships which, in their manifestation and in their complete traversal, determine directions of action, cognition, and self-realisation. Reality is not merely an ontic phenomenon; its essence is fortified by the historical intertwining of meanings, biological and societal frameworks, and by the affective communal traits unique to each era and milieu. To highlight the affective facet of reality is to position ourselves in the stance of viewing it as an integral component of our existence, inseparable from the subjective lens with which we resonate. Over time, a sensation of familiarity, of trust in the unfolding events of the world, becomes entrenched, which, if shaken, results in existential disorientation. This begins with a subtle yet persistent perturbation in the overarching perception of entities: reality gradually acquires hues of alienness, unfamiliarity, oddity, and peculiarity. The entirety of experience is saturated by a disconcerting sentiment of vulnerability, fragility, and a lack of command. The world does not proffer a secure milieu to grapple with but rather a scenario one is subject to (Ratcliffe 2008, 112). In psychiatric ailments, patients almost invariably describe changes in bodily sensations and shifts in reality perception. This is evident, for instance, in the account provided by the psychiatrist Van der Berg regarding a typical psychiatric patient:

> His world is collapsing. Is he not saying the same thing when he states that his legs are failing him and he feels he is losing his sense of equilibrium? The world and body are interrelated. Then the customary distinction of world and body is probably much too definite. (Spielberg 1972, 56)

Narrations of psychiatric patients' experiences are paramount: they should be accorded voice, value, and empathic acceptance as they are the most conspicuous testimony of the unitary bond between world and body, affectivity, and alterity. Phenomenology applied to psychiatry is emerging increasingly not only as an observational-descriptive tool but also as clinical and potentially therapeutic. The expressive core of the human being is represented not by a supposed private, psychic or mental realm but by a vast pre-reflexive and reflexive space, a dimension that encompasses atmospheric feelings and meditations, impressions and reasoning, and interpersonal and environmental encounters. We will explore in subsequent chapters how feelings and affective atmospheres serve as conditions within which interpersonal encounters can transpire and potentially be therapeutic.

Without necessarily espousing the absolutism of the lived body as the sole true architect of existence or intending to supplant the mind in its erstwhile role of regulating passions, we wish to reflect in the absence of paradigms and examine things previously deemed collateral, metaphorical or even imaginative. By focusing on one's corporeity as an integrated dimension, the subject progressively gains the ability to liberate oneself from the tyranny that a dualistic paradigm imposes on him – drawing all his energies to itself and continuously inundating it with information, signals, and inputs – and thus recovers the capacity for attention and vigilance, evaluation and choice. Indeed, the conditions that enable existential feelings to surface, to illuminate dynamics that usually operate unnoticed, are those where a certain equilibrium is absent, where dissonance, discomfort, and inefficiency are prevalent; scenarios in which the dispositions of the agents fail to find the conditions for their fulfilment, being comparatively diminished or overlooked by the conditions objectively present in the world.

> A healthy person can be one with her body insofar as she does not attend to it but attends to other things through it. The healthy body is not an instrument used but a pathic being and belonging that underlies all dealings with instruments. In illness, however, the body becomes strangely foreign, like a defective tool. (Ratcliffe 2008, 112)

The discourse on the myriad forms of affectivity, whether or not they are warped over time, invariably denotes a relationship with the lived body, a capacity for resonance that has been unduly overlooked in prior research. Contrary to Schmitz's thinking, to be present is to harmonise with one's body and, concurrently, with the surrounding milieu, with the lifeworld that persistently introduces the individual to fresh horizons of meaning that sculpt and engender new bodily capabilities. The unveiling of the world, innate and pertaining to one's situatedness, is co-created by the affective situation. Perceptual "access" is fundamentally a pre-reflective mode of feeling atmospheric, rather than a mere sensory and contemplative stimulus. We find ourselves in affects that others have already inhabited, that have already been shaped or put into circulation, and that are already there

around us (Flatley 2008, 5). All forms of communication, from explicit and narrative to implicit and corporeal, is full of references to an atmospheric relationality, underpinning every action and ability of the subject. Therefore, in the cessation of smooth functioning, the chasm between self and the external realm becomes manifest in the inadequacy and fragility of these connections. The subsequent lines offer a lucid and evocative depiction of the dissolution of vitality, a sorrowful withdrawal from the social milieu, and the fragmentation of the accord between the lived body and the lifeworld, manifested in the onset of depression.

> The night was blustery and raw, with a chill wet wind blowing down the avenues, and when Rose and I met Franchise and her son and a friend at La Lorraine, a glittering brasserie not far from L'Etoile, the rain was descending from the heavens in torrents. Someone in the group, sensing my state of mind, apologized for the evil night, but I recall thinking that even if this were one of those warmly scented and passionate evenings for which Paris is celebrated, I would respond like the zombie I had become. The weather of the depression is unmodulated, its light brownout. (Styron 2001, 22)

The notion that the individual and the environment, body and mind, inherently compose an integrated entity does not suggest that this unity is always harmonious. The pathic life, which influences and modulates the tempo of our existence, is built upon interpersonal and transpersonal, pre-reflective and pre-conscious perceptual modes, over which we have no complete dominion. Based on our interpretations of Ratcliffe's theory, the very fabric of feeling is underpinned by a pre-existing, worldly collectivity, an intrinsic sociality that suffuses our embodied sentient existence. Grasping the interplay between individuality, collectivity, and affectivity becomes feasible by progressively cultivating a harmonious relationship between the body and its surroundings, as being open to emotions and self-awareness can pave the way for reflective, and potentially therapeutic, journeys. Recognising that the organism is moulded by its environment and that the human setting is intrinsically social, one might argue that the body-mind unity is deeply influenced by collectively determined environmental conditions (Shusterman 2013).

Therefore, drawing not only from the New Phenomenology but also from authors such as Dewey and Shusterman, I explore the philosophical proposal of understanding affectivity through an atmospheric lens. This is not only to address the conceptual gaps left by cognitive sciences and other studies on human emotion but also to begin the construction of a new paradigm which values the capacity of *resonance* of the lived body. The body and the world pattern each other simultaneously, giving the situation its affective significance. Moreover, the primary form of understanding the ambiance is revealed in pathic involvement. Whether termed emotion, feeling, or mood, the mode of being of affection does not confine the subject to its presumed psychic realm but originates and emanates atmospherically, that is, "capturing" elements of the living space and enveloping the percipient subjects. Turning attention to atmospheres means turning towards a spontaneous life, expressed by the felt body in the dynamic structures of pre-reflective experience of the world. As Pfau also suggests in his recent book, affect (which he terms "mood") offers a new kind of understanding of the human event. In its rhetorical and formal-aesthetic sedimentation, mood speaks – albeit circumstantially – to the deep-structural situatedness of individuals within history, which remains ever elusive in a fully coherent, timely, and definitive form (Pfau 2005, 7). Some scholars, drawing from phenomenology, have ineffectively attempted to bridge the divide between the psychic and the bodily world with solutions that tread between monism and dualism. They entirely overlooked the sphere of bodily presence, as seen in the case of Scheler (Luther 1974). However, in my view, phenomenology is intrinsically linked to a full engagement with the felt bodily situatedness. It is a study of relatedness itself and not of something pre-formed that subsequently enters into a relationship with the body and world. Our sense of self is rooted in the pathic life, though it may extend beyond it. Griffero writes about the core tenet of Neo-Phenomenology:

> Therefore, the extracorporeal internalization of feelings is from the Neo-phenomenological point of view - as it was for James, for whom we would be sad because we cry and not vice versa! - a capital error, also because if "for every having consciousness the world splits into its external world and its internal world, with the clause that he becomes maximally aware of an object of his own external world to the extent that this object has at least one representative in the internal world of the having consciousness" [...], completely inexplicable is the way in which from a similar, illusory ineffable, internal world (the soul, then the psyche and now, in the age of neuromania, the brain), segregated and hierarchically stratified (sensitivity, ratio

> and maybe even spirit), the subject can then go out and acquire a reliable knowledge of the external world. (Griffero 2019, 4).

Given this initial insight into affectivity, its various manifestations and theories, in the next chapter, we shall delve deeper into the phenomenon of atmosphere, atmospheric perception, and the phenomenology of the uncanny, tracing its lineage from its origins to the most contemporary forms of recognition. What we consider real is the phenomenon or state of affairs expressed using descriptive tools sourced from ordinary language, anchored in non-transcendent felt experience. We then present results from a conceptual analysis aimed at identifying salient features of the experience without positing dual realities. Lastly, as Schmitz also noted, everything must be verifiable by the combinatorial reconstruction of these salient features. In the ultimate analysis, as we previously discussed, what matters is "to gropingly approach what happens to people", investigating that form of affect that captures them emotionally and that, therefore, "one cannot help admitting" (Schmitz 2005, 69).

2. ATMOSPHERIC PERCEPTION

SUMMARY

The second chapter is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the *atmospheric perception.* In the outcomes of the philosophical theories I investigated, each in its own way provided a peculiar definition of perception. In ancient philosophy, perception was set as the essence of existence: humanity recognizes the primordial elements of life through perception, and in interaction the physical world unfolds.

In the chapter, I consider three main categories that most accurately represent the philosophical heritage on the topic:

1. Perception in the prevailing philosophy of consciousness.

This phenomenon is associated with the relationship of mind and body, and thus the behavioristic trend. Mental states are explained through behavioral outputs. To circumvent the essence of reason, behaviorism formulated a theory consistent with modern scientific methods. Putnam challenged behaviorism, arguing that there is not necessarily a close relationship between a mental state and its external manifestation. The human mind is a software that creates a mental state with a specific function in relation to the cognitive activity of the subject. Within the framework of cognitivism, perception is rebuilt as a biological process associated with the mechanisms of neural transmission. The idea of likening the human mind to a computational system was elaborated by Kenneth Craik. He viewed the mind as an arena where we metaphorically create representations of worldly events, including potential actions in the environment. Jean Piaget, a representative of cognitive theory, theorized perception as a process of cognitive transformation. Perception, from his point of view, is a process of cognitive transformation resulting from innate imprints. Within this framework, there are sociological elements that contribute to a coherent representation of reality. Watson argued that open behavior is the only area that can be empirically studied by psychology, since the internal processes of the human mind, being invisible to external observers, are not suitable for scientific analysis.

2. Perception in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty

Husserl conceptualizes perception as the drama of *horizonality*, a constitutively opaque dimension of being that resists the scrutiny of reason because it represents its basis, rooted in the realm of living, vibrant, sentient matter. Perception is a " feeling of life", an orienting category of being, but one that itself eludes theorization. However, for Husserl, corporeality is not a foundational ground of perception: it remains the prerogative of consciousness, albeit in this 'horizonal' manner.

On his part, Merleau-Ponty conveyed the idea of the lived-body as an integral “I”, the subject of perception, thinking, speech, communication and freedom. He created an original philosophy that propels a new understanding of traditional philosophical themes and categories. Merleau-Ponty argued that Husserl’s phenomenology contains a number of contradictions, which include the fact that it tries to turn philosophy into a rigorous science, while at the same time offering a description of space, time and the world as sociality

perceives them. Merleau-Ponty claim that such contradictions could be solved by overcoming the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger.

In the following, I present James' proposed theory of human perception based on the belief that even the most elementary empirical data are characterized by the presence of a *halo*, which is not associated with the continuity of conscious life, but with the fact that something unexpected and out of scheme always disrupts the flow of existence. I suggest that James might be interpreted as an early proponent of the atmospheric nature of human perception.

3. The Uncanny

It is through the phenomenology of the uncanny, a phenomenon extensively thematized by Freud, Heidegger and contemporary authors such as Fuchs, Rosa and Griffero, that the relationship between perception, atmosphere and feeling of being will be concretely shown. I support the idea that the uncanny, somewhere between the sacred and the horrid, is the atmospheric experience of unfamiliarity, representing the thin line that links reality and imagination, the irruption of the foreign into the given reality through the affective-spatial quality of effusiveness.

2.1. The Meaning of *Perception*

In ancient thought, perception served as the primary gateway to external reality and objective knowledge. The fact that the foremost philosophical schools at the roots of Greek thought each privileged a specific dimension of perception in its unique way could support the hypothesis of a divide between two foundational attitudes that spanned antiquity. On one side, Ionic physics attributed the sensitive qualities of reality as the means to an objective perception; on the other, Eleatic and Platonic idealism, contrasting the former, prioritised the formal over the material, the intellectual relationship over the sensitive quality, subordinating the transient to the unchanging forms of a superior reality.

However, beyond the seeming doctrinal rivalry of these schools lies the articulation of two elemental facets of perception. The dichotomy between intelligible form and sensitive matter merely represents the clash of one form of perception with another. This is the opposition of "perception at a distance" versus "perception in proximity", of perception by hearing or sight compared to perception by touch and contact. Thus, it contrasts a perception grounded in theoretical contemplation, detached from corporeal life, with a perception rooted in tangible interaction with objects and the environment. Consequently, perception facilitates our understanding of reality because 'human manipulative action is intrinsically linked to the continuous creation of the world (Caston 2015).

> SOCRATES So the 'doesn't see' is a 'doesn't know', if for real the 'sees' is a 'knows'. THEAETETUS True.
> SOCRATES It follows then that one does not know what one has become acquainted with, even if one remembers it since one does not see it; however, we have affirmed that this would be monstrous if it happened.
> THEAETETUS You speak very true things.

> SOCRATES It seems, therefore, to achieve something impossible if one affirms that knowledge and perception are one and the same thing.
> THEAETETUS It seems.
> SOCRATES Then it must be affirmed that science is something, and perception is something else.
> THEAETETUS Yes, there is the risk (Plato, *Theaet*., 199a-199b)

In ancient philosophy, perception was positioned as the crux of existence: humanity discerns the primordial element through perception because, via a vibrant and cosmological engagement, it is a product of the generative physis. Therefore, it employs perception as a direct conduit to the lifeworld. In perception, the like is discerned by the like; this is why philosophy was perceived as the systematic evolution of a universal knowledge with perception as its foundational basis. Conversely, the Eleatic school, as represented by Parmenides and later championed by Pythagoras and Plato, countered the perceptual realism of natural philosophy with a metaphysical idealism. This perspective overlooked the deceptive nature of sensory knowledge and championed an understanding of reality rooted solely in cognitive revelation. This philosophical shift leaned more towards a moral realisation of humanity rather than a functional understanding of the natural world. This explains why, for Pythagoras and Plato, aspects of perception that epitomised true knowledge contrasted starkly with those favoured by the Ionic thinkers. Perception through proximity and contact, perceived as inconsistent and transient, appeared chaotic and disconcerting when juxtaposed with the metaphysical vision of the essences. It is thus reasonable to assert that, from Plato onward, the sensory approach to the reality of the natural world was relegated to a lesser, impure form of knowledge. This perspective then extended to the materiality of the body, also seen as deceptive and susceptible to the whims of change.

This degradation of the body is central to Schmitz's Neo-Phenomenology, which posits a significant error in human thought that revolves around the demotion of the body to a mere physical-material entity, spatially and physiologically defined, externally perceptible and arbitrarily manipulable. This corporeal dimension is 'drained' of the fluid pathicity that naturally linked it to the lifeworld, bypassing sensory organs and bodily schema. The subsequent detachment pertains to the internalisation of emotions, removing

them from their innate expansive spatiality. As mentioned earlier, the subsequent rediscovery of a pre-dimensional and pre-schematic lived space has led, in the project of New Phenomenology, to the intriguing "atmospherological" contemplations (Griffero 2010). These introductory remarks illuminate various prevailing theories of perception. I will address three primary categories, which, in my opinion, most aptly represent the philosophical legacy on this topic: perception as understood in mainstream philosophy of mind, perception as framed by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, and perception as outlined in the science of atmospheres.

2.2. Perception in Philosophy of Mind

The phenomenon of perception encompasses a form of epistemic and conceptual vision, a 'knowledge that', wherein the perceived object is recognised as such through an inferential process. It also comprises a non-epistemic form of knowledge, a 'knowledge how', defined by the ability to access the perceptual content in a non-propositional manner, yet distinguishing it from the surrounding environment in a pre-reflective manner. These two methods of understanding the phenomenon of perception complement each other, but they are rooted in two contrasting schools of thought. The intricacy of explaining this phenomenon evokes the challenges posed by the mind-body relationship. It can be argued that the dilemma of subjectivity originates directly from the matter of perception. Nonetheless, before the rise of more in-depth studies on subjectivity, the act of perception was associated with behaviour, specifically, the linkage between a mental phenomenon and the subject's predisposed attitudes towards the external world. Watson predominantly argued that overt behaviour is the only domain that can be empirically studied by psychology, as the internal processes of the human mind, being imperceptible to an external observer, are not fit subjects for scientific analysis (Watson 1913). Therefore, every element in the environment is an output of the internal and cerebral world, making it plausible to deduce brain functionality from observed behaviour. In its essence, behaviourism challenges both the introspective method and the fundamental notion of consciousness. A pivotal tenet of this school of thought is the idea of conditioning: a process wherein the repeated pairing of a neural stimulus with a non-

correlated response leads to the manifestation of the response post-stimulus. A state of mind is thus equated to behavioural tendencies. To sidestep the enigmatic essence of the mind, behaviourism formulates a theory aligned with contemporary scientific methods. Conceptual ambiguities have birthed vague and nonsensical terms such as “soul”, “sensation”, and “mind”; under this framework, these are merely misleading phrases masking behavioural patterns.

Nevertheless, behaviourism finds itself in conflict with a common intuition, namely, that our perceptions, regardless of their nature, are experienced subjectively and hence qualitatively distinct. Analysing behaviour proves wholly inadequate when applied to unobservable first-person experiences like thoughts, imaginations, and sensations. In the 1950s, behaviourism was pre-eminent in North American psychology. Its subsequent decline, however, was as swift as it was unforeseen due to the rise of cognitivism (Fortunato 2007). Some interpret this as a “rejection of consciousness”. Notwithstanding its credit for distinguishing the mind from the brain, behaviourism’s limitations become evident when asserting that humans can be conditioned as easily as mice, the latter being frequently used in experimental studies from which an eccentric theory has been drawn. Yet, with cognitivism, perception is recast as a computational event, a biological process tied to neural transmission mechanisms. From negating consciousness, the shift is towards a more simplified version. The notion of likening the human mind to a computational entity finds its roots in Kenneth Craik, who positioned this analogy as a comprehensive model for the mind in his essay, The Nature of Explanation (1943). He posits the mind as an arena where we metaphorically create representations of world events, inclusive of potential actions within the environment.

> My hypothesis then is that thought models or parallels reality - that its essential feature is not ‘the mind’, ‘the self, ‘sense data’, nor propositions but symbolism, and that this symbolism is largely of the same kind as that which is familiar to us in mechanical devices which aid thought and calculation. (Craik 1943, 57)

In discussions surrounding cognitivist theory, Piaget’s work (1936) often emerges, as he is regarded as one of the foremost scholars on learning across various human developmental stages, especially during childhood. For Piaget, infants are innately

equipped with rudimentary mental structures, which are subsequently reinforced and moulded through environmental interactions. Hence, perception, from the French psychologist's perspective, is a cognitive transformation process stemming from inherent and pre-formed imprints. Within these innate mental constructs present in the child even before full cognitive maturity, Piaget identified schemas and foundational elements that facilitate a coherent representation of reality. By Piaget's definition, a schema represents "a cohesive, repeatable action-sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning" (Piaget 1952, 7). When reflecting on the early cognitivist ideas, one is reminded of 'Plotinus' "Enneas", which posits that the soul, in its act of knowing, primarily performs a recognition since it inherently contains traces of the intelligible.

> In truth, the Soul knows the intelligibles because, in a certain sense, it is these same objects, and not because they are placed in it; in fact, it possesses them in a particular way, that is, it sees, and at the same time it is these objects, certainly in a somewhat obscure way, but as soon as it emerges from this obscurity thanks to a kind of awakening, it becomes more perceptive, passing from power to action. (Plotinus, *Enneas* VI, 2018: 34)

Piaget's schemas can be conceptualised as indices archived within the brain (Wadsworth 2004), each suggesting the fitting reaction to a particular stimulus. External reality, as such, is perceived and regulated via innate mental modules: assimilation and adaptation. The child is perpetually in pursuit of equilibrium, achieved by oscillating between these two systems, which in no manner reflect the kinetic reactivity of the human form. Ultimately, prior to acknowledging the body as the primary interactive medium with the external realm, the act of comprehending reality remains a paramount research area in the philosophy of mind, underscored by the belief that the lived world, despite its diversities, is still inextricably linked to consciousness.

However, there are currents of thought that deconstruct the concept of mind-brain identity. Consider Putnam's functionalism (1979), which challenges behaviourism by arguing that there is not necessarily a tight link between a mental state and its external manifestation. For Putnam, there is no necessary correlation between a person's felt pain and her expression of it through moaning or crying. The human mind is merely software

that produces a mental state with a specific function relative to the cognitive activity of the subject. In the so-called 'externalist' phase, Putnam posits that the external world, with all its constituent objects, is pre-constituted concerning the knowing subject; therefore, the only actual knowledge would be the "corresponding one", a neutral re-proposal of the world's structural configuration. The author does not endorse the idea of representation as an interface between the mind's "inside" and the world's "outside"". Largely in agreement with Husserl's thought, Putnam also seeks to re-establish a more direct, natural relationship between the mind and the lifeworld, discarding the extreme positions of materialism and the metaphysical notion of language.

Long before him, the American philosopher and psychologist William James proposed an original theory of human perception based on the conviction that even the most elementary experiential datum was characterized by a halo, a "suffusion" (or a "fringe"), which was unrelated to the continuity of conscious life, but with what always unexpectedly happens in the flow of life. The precise meaning of "halo" in his general conception of human consciousness remains elusive. Still, even without explicit articulation, James was an early advocate for the atmospheric nature of human experience in its rawest form. James posits that our immediately present life's pulsations, "drops of experience" directly perceived, represent the only genuine form of reality. The forward momentum of our thought through its fringes is a perpetual characteristic of its existence. We perceive this existence as continually off-balance, perpetually transitioning, rising from obscurity, moving through dawn towards a noon that feels like the dawn's complete realisation (James 1973, 165-166). Through this, James targets the strict Cartesian dualism that burdens the ego with the full representation of reality, or its absorption starting from alleged sensory data with their ontological autonomy. He does so in a move that was bold for its time, presenting the *hic et nunc* as the sole experiential field the subject occupies, a field that continuously beckons. For James, the only real principle is the pulsation of the life flow fully realised through pure kinaesthetic sensation rather than intellectual. "But our integral self is the whole field, with all those infinitely irradiated possibilities of growth, which we can only feel, without categorizing them, and we can hardly begin to analyze" (James 1973, 170). James was intrigued by the boundless creativity of personal life and the changing existential backgrounds of human subjectivity.

While he recognised the formative dimension of the emotive realm, he did not produce a comprehensive philosophical discourse on it. In this preliminary yet profound theory of human relationality, which derives from an atmospheric notion of experience, one can identify a potentially misinterpreted precursor of new phenomenology. However, James's theory does not encompass the bodily dimension of experience or the lived body as the resonant horizon of sense and meaning in a pre-dualistic manner. This gap is one that phenomenologists like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty can bridge.

To empirical psychology, Husserl counters that the only true evidence arises from experience that is constantly renewed, flowing with infinite possibilities. Husserl particularly interrogates the origin of the concept of temporality: the pre-noematic interaction between consciousness and otherness, between subjectivity and the world. We will see that every sensory experience, even basic perceptions, resonates with a deeper feeling of living that grows in meaning. In the subsequent section, we turn to an embodied understanding of perception, allowing the ideas of time and body to merge into a single conceptual framework through Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's theories of affectivity and perception, demonstrating that these two areas are inherently connected.

2.3. Husserl: Bridging Perception and Affectivity

> Life deserves to be lived […] with a superior right when in my acting, I see an open horizon of a social bond of love and a working community in which all of us advance on the average and can help ourselves in raising the level of existence. (Husserl 2014, 332)

The essence of phenomenological and neo-phenomenological analyses consists of the ultimate unveiling of a profound inter-human connection, lying in the most spontaneous and irreflexive acts, which animates and enables the growth of the self. To investigate the modes of perception, one must enact a suspension of habitual beliefs (epoché), which places the world and all things of the world, including our knowledge and prejudices, in brackets. This bracketing leads to the pure fabric of things, to the matrix of our ideas. As Husserl maintains, the essence, or *eidos*, is what I derive from things and then transform into an idea. Why is it necessary to "epochize" our natural attitude to understand what a perceptual act is? In perception, we discover ourselves in a pre-reflective manner, as

connected, both in mind and body, to a becoming flow that forms our present, replete with retentions and protentions. Sense-perception, in Husserl, is the foundation of successive and more complex levels of awareness: it provides the intentional what of the whole, seeing the object as it truly is. Perception leads to the so-called "hyletic data", directional orientations in space induced by kinaesthetic movements (Rabanaque, 2017). Before discussing 'hyletic data', Husserl delves into the undifferentiated perceptual experience, referring to it as a sort of "horizontal life-feeling" (Husserl 2006, 362). Husserl believes this universal and undifferentiated feeling implicitly conditions humanity's instinct of objectification. Despite the limited attention given to these pivotal points of Husserl's phenomenology, it is evident from some of his statements that he sensed the existence of an original background, difficult to express and define qualitatively, from which objectifications, layers of reality with varying levels of complexity, are driven. He posed both "the question about the original instinct that has its correlate in natural objectivation, and the question about how the primal hyletic affection of feeling, be it affections of pleasure or affections of displeasure, motivate objectivation" (Husserl 2006, 321). Thus, what is foremost in the primordial constitution of the world is the "sensory core, sensory feelings, and sensory kinesthesis". There is no doubt that even Husserl's philosophical rigour, a hallmark of his phenomenological project, falters when faced with what he terms 'the drama of horizonality', a constitutionally opaque dimension of being, which resists filtration by reason because it underpins reason, rooted in the realm of the living, vibrant, feeling *hyle*. The original moment, for Husserl, can be conceived as a dense blend of affectivity and kinesthesis (Walton 2003, 6): perhaps an *atmospheric* body, signifying the lived body merged with its environment, with indistinct boundaries, maximally receptive and responsive to environmental stimuli. Despite the enigmatic nature of Husserl's formulations, there is an acknowledgment of a fundamental premise, which perhaps post-Husserlian phenomenological thought has overlooked. He states:

> In the pre-active life, which, as a stratum, passes through all that which is active, precisely: (1) the hyle, (2) the hyle, which, however, is what it is qua affecting, qua 'affectivity,' determining feeling [the being-attracted that feels (positive desire) or being-repulsed that feels], and (3) the pre-egoical doing. The kinestheses in the drama of ontification. From here up to the objectification (enworlding), these moments permanently play their role, or rather, receive ever new roles, higher roles, they attain ever higher functional structures. (Husserl 1973, 604)

While evolving and becoming more complex, the layer of pre-active or pre-egoic life eternally weaves the threads of primary instances of human subjectivity. However, Husserl doesn't seem to explicitly acknowledge the corporeal roots of this movement of unconditional openness to life. The body does not hold the same significance in his reflections on human perception as it does for his disciple Merleau-Ponty. Still, it is evident from his words that everything can be traced back to it. Perceptions are, initially, apperceptions, that is, implicit acts of intuition and anticipation, which originate from a repository of sedimented spatial experiences. For Husserl, it concerns a space that is, in some manner, already organised: "The structure governed by the a priori shapes formal and material essences in such a way as to regulate the harmonious sequence of appearances of objects" (Husserl 1973, 12). The a priori Husserl mentions is a transcendental entity from which the experiential space emerges. Therefore, occurrences in the realm of feelings are derived from an 'eidetic' legitimacy that rationalises the experiential sphere. Consequently, even though Husserl aimed to distance himself from Kant's transcendentalism, he remained tethered to it, unable to see in the realm of feelings an authority as valid as the absolute a priori. Husserl's perception theory is undoubtedly contentious and has faced considerable scrutiny. While he acknowledges movement (and therefore the lived body, Leib) as a property that shapes content in consciousness, he rapidly concludes that perception is merely an act of interpreting intuitive or non-representational content (Hopp, 2008). Husserl speaks of a final 'fulfilment' process', wherein the ambiguity initially presented by the intentional act becomes clear. Our experience assumes distinct contours in fulfilment and presents itself as meaningful content. The challenge in accepting Husserl's perception theory, which is primarily hermeneutic, arises from the vast divide between the intuitive and the act of attributing meaning. The linkage between these two moments remains elusive and demands elucidation. In "Ideas I", in his attempt to combine the synthesis of the two moments, Husserl posits that experiences are not initially spatial: "Variation of perspective is an experience. But experience is only possible as such, and not as something spatial" (Husserl 1976, 119). At this phase of his philosophical endeavour, the concept of the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) remained largely uncharted by Husserl. One must await his final work to comprehend his definitive stance on perception.

The debate is vibrant and intricate; it would merit a separate chapter. However, I am interested in analysing and highlighting the part in which the affective and atmospheric dimension of perception subtly emerges in Husserl's thought - an element that will allow us to trace a common thread up to the New Phenomenology. "Perception has, for the consciousness, a horizon that always inherits to his object (the horizon that consciousness always implicitly awakens)" (Husserl 1954, 185). Husserl's horizon is a compelling concept. Little investigated and overlooked by the majority, we should imagine it as the implicit landscape where our eye rests, intent on observing an event, an object, or a phenomenon, which emerges from there. Importantly, for Husserl, perception is conceived more in temporal rather than in spatial terms. It necessarily refers to the present, so any connections with the question of corporeality and movement did not arise as naturally as they did for Merleau-Ponty. Husserl did not ignore the question of corporeality in his phenomenology; he concedes that 'the world is here understood as the temporal, spatiotemporal world in which everything has its corporeal extension and duration' (Husserl 1954, 188). Simply put (if one can say so), he directs an awakened consciousness to the modes of appearance of the lifeworld, always in respect to a consciousness that positions it before itself. Essentially, according to Husserl, the lived body is not the direct protagonist of perception, but it has its uniqueness, constituted by its spatio-temporal configurations. However, movement, or kinesthesis, is the guarantor of the immediate certainty of the present. The most phenomenological part of Husserl's later thought, the one that will orient future generations toward the affective and interpersonal dimension of human subjectivity, can perhaps be glimpsed in these striking words, with a clear ethical imprint:

> Now let us turn our attention to the fact that we, in our perception of the constantly flowing world, are not isolated but are linked to other men. The world is not only for the individual man but also for the human community (Husserl 1954, 190).

In bringing together what is simply perceptible, we see an idea of implicit collectivity, and of atmospheric intersubjectivity in the sense of a background involvement, which envelops humanity by creating a tacit and continuous circle of pathos and ethos. The missing piece was wisely added by Merleau-Ponty, who did no more than shift the

philosophical gaze from the open horizon of possibilities to the concrete *hic et nunc*: the flesh of the world.

2.4. Merleau-Ponty: Perception in the *Flesh*

> The presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that [*sic*] I "am of the world" and that I am not it; this is no sooner said than forgotten: metaphysics remains coincidence. That there is a thickness of flesh between us and the 'hard core' of Being, this does not figure in the definition: this thickness is ascribed to me; it is the sheath of non-being that the subjectivity always carries about itself. Infinite distance or absolute proximity, negation, or identification: our relationship with being is ignored in the same way in both cases. (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 127-128)

Merleau-Ponty disrupts the discourse on perception, arguing that truth resides in that invisible 'brute being' element of our existence. While Husserl breaks through the entirety of the preceding gnoseological tradition, which found no possibility of synthesis between percipient subjectivity and perceived objectivity, Merleau-Ponty courageously delves into it, thematising the pre-reflective and pre-linguistic dimension of the lived body. Perceptual experience, in Merleau-Ponty, appears enigmatic in every case, without necessitating recourse to scientific-rational explanations. Perception is the ''crystallisation' of the true in the here and now of the lived body; simultaneously, what it reveals in its essence is a potential dimension of the untrue, intrinsically supported by a cone of shadow where the untrue, the non-possible, resides (Merleau-Ponty 1968). Each object presents itself to our gaze in a partial and overshadowing manner, each time under varied and multiple configurations, signifying that reality is not a domain of being that can be fully mastered. Especially in his final work, "The Visible and the Invisible", Merleau-Ponty raised the question of the meaning of being in the world, in light of this structural chiasm between the visible and the invisible, between the world and embodied consciousness. A question that seemed at least partially resolved in "Phenomenology of Perception" returns to be complex.

As a manifesto of his philosophy, Merleau-Ponty argued for the need to "recognize the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 38). The quality of being manifests in this opaque, undefined, pre-reflective atmosphere, not in the determined quality. Empiricism sought to define perception with the latter, not realising that it is solely an object of consciousness and that subjectivity remains unrevealed by it. Perceiving represents the subject's elementary and primordial event, intrinsically equipped with its vital sense, akin to procreation, breathing, and growth. Feeling is not merely instrumental: it is revelatory. Feeling embodies the cognitive intentionality towards the lifeworld, establishing a vital communication with the world and rendering it a familiar and secure habitat of our life. In this profound connection, the lived body evades the ontological absolutisation of an object, which signifies the cessation of consciousness. In the 'constitution of the object, "the body withdraws, dragging with it the intentional threads that bind it to the surrounding world, finally revealing both the subject and the perceived world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 119). The motoric essence of this constitutive intentionality reveals the nucleus of perception: the living body. This incarnated subject perceives the structure of the perceived as a cohesive form of the internal and external. What mechanistic physiology has labelled as "reflex", a reaction instigated by external environmental stimuli, is not a mere blind process. Instead, it adapts to a sense of the situation and is an integral component of a 'pre-objective view' (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 128), representing the inaugural precise conceptualisation of the pre-reflective dimension of being and the manner in which the world manifests through our body. The pristine and uncomplicated phenomenon pertains to an elusive generality that can only be discerned in a specific and tangible manner. Sensation epitomises communion. In opening myself to the world, I paradoxically meld into it, effacing my existence. Thus, around our individual existence emerges an almost impersonal fringe of existence — surrounding the human world we each craft, there manifests a general world to which we must primarily belong to subsequently confine ourselves within the unique realm of a love or an ambition (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 132-133). We do not engage with things directly but through the body's interaction with the world: the body that we constitute, an amalgamated existence of the psychic and the physiological.

Recognising ourselves as a habitual body and adopting a specific behavioural style is pivotal for harmonious coexistence with oneself and others. The body represents our primary familiarity, a realm wherein the subject continually discerns the most profound

sense of his existence in the world. Merleau-Ponty attributes to phenomenology the distinction of having introduced the notion of the "transcendental field", which signifies the participation of reason in the tangible presence of the pre-reflective level. Nevertheless, the radicalisation of the epoché (central to the phenomenological method) transpires by uncovering an affective backdrop that initially propels consciousness beyond itself. The conventional concepts of reason, temporality, and logic are sidelined, replaced by the notions of body, space, and gesture. Merleau-Ponty's most emphatic assertion, however, pertains to the consideration of the lived body as the prerequisite for all expressive acts. Initially, the body possesses a history of unconscious (and pre-conscious) layers originating in infancy and accruing over life.

As elucidated by Fuchs, the lived body retains an implicit memory rooted in a habitual structure, which binds us to the world through its operational intentionality (Fuchs 2012). In Merleau-Ponty's example of a patient with psychic blindness, the functional connection between bodily movement and expressive space is evident. The patient struggles with abstract movements unrelated to any tangible situation: "However, even with his eyes closed, the sick person quickly makes the movements necessary for life, as long as they are habitual to him" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, 157). Psychic illness correlates with an organic element, as consciousness immerses in a cultural world, becoming embodied by it: consciousness inherently associates with the thing through the body. How does the lived body and its inherent predominance relate to the expression of experiences? We now transition to the philosopher's final unfinished work to discern its profound implications for Neo-Phenomenology.

> Through the body, I am not a language, but I inhabit language and I am therefore in intersubjectivity. Through language I have a world, I discover myself intimately connected to others. The body is an expression, it is the word; meaning inhabits the word [...]. The body is immersed in the world's spectacle: it is that spectacle's expression. (Di Fazio 2015, 10)

In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty does not dismiss the certainty of the situational concreteness of consciousness but investigates the nature of this relationship.

He approaches a more metaphysical level of the question. In his later work, the philosopher adopts a decidedly more cryptic and obscure style of thinking and writing, leaving some conceptual issues unresolved or, perhaps, deliberately unclear. Like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty was captivated by the opacity of being, by the nothingness that constantly threatens us, by the 'sunset of the perceptible' (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 50). To perceive is primarily an act of faith: I can perceive because I can simultaneously nullify, feel the void, and open myself to multiple, infinite possibilities: "what is mine in my perception are its lacunae, and they would not be lacunae if the thing itself, behind them, did not betoken them to be such" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 57). Everything can become visible: it is not visible at present, but it is somehow announced, concealed, placed behind my view. The visible and the invisible intertwine in the flesh, in a unity of concrete synthesis. I palpate things with my gaze, but simultaneously, I am captivated by the things themselves.

When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not intend to undertake anthropology and describe a world overlaid with human projections. Instead, we aspire to conduct genuine phenomenology, that is, to return to seeing things in their depth, beneath all their layers and facets, in their latency as well as their transparency and presence. Here we touch upon the most challenging point: the connection between flesh and the idea, between the visible and the interior structure which it manifests and simultaneously hides (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 57). In his final work, Merleau-Ponty further explores the interplay between opposing dichotomies such as idealism and materialism, which do not provide satisfactory answers to the question of human facticity. His philosophy does not impose ideal concepts onto reality but examines the reflection of Being in a 'super-reflexive' manner, articulating what is originally silent: the immediacy of perceptibility. No clear boundary exists between the body and the world since the world is also flesh: "As flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 138).

Why, among the many terms available, does Merleau-Ponty select 'flesh' to signify the intangible bond between body and world? According to Maldiney, Merleau-Ponty has delineated the horizon where the purity of being and the peril of Being converge (Maldiney 2000, 51). The flesh represents the enigmatic depth of this horizon, the potent expression of a binding paradox that unites appearance and expression in a temporal and spatial unity. The apparition or phenomenon exists in the expansive embrace of sky and earth, also carrying the possibility of non-being. In presence, one recognises oneself as

an inherently relational being, constantly and universally reflecting this foundational relationship. Thus, without dismissing a question that remains partly unanswered, the notion of flesh seems to be a pre-egoic gateway to the world. Erwin Straus describes this openness to the world as the "sense of sense", proposing that only this realm enables us to comprehend the intermodal communication through senses: a dimension that, although lacking in ontological clarity, remains foundational (Straus 1966). The very essence of the sensible, its indefinability, is nothing more than the convergence of the 'inside' with the 'outside'—the zenith of the sensible is this stabilised upheaval, that is, a recursive movement (Husserl 1976, 268). The crux of experience lies in its reversibility. The chiasm is the intertwined narrative between the perceptual moment and the 'appearance of the phenomenon: they symbolise both the unveiling of and the engagement with the world.

This revelation is materialised in the visible through the flesh, an elemental medium, akin to air, earth, and water, situated between the subject and the idea – an embodied principle that adheres to both place and time. For Husserl, it is the Transcendental Ego; for Merleau-Ponty, it is Flesh; and for Schmitz, it is Atmosphere. In each of these philosophical frameworks, a foundational bond is identified, undergoing an external evolution: the exploration of experience, of the ways of being thrust outwards, observed in their emotional progression. It is essential to accept the anonymity of being not merely as an integral but as a defining element of existence. Merleau-Ponty suggests that the flesh itself is tangible and extends into realms such as sound, silence, speech, and movement. Depth is the true dimension of the real, from which things derive their uniqueness. Divergence underpins the intricate structure of worldly relations, and absence forms part of presence itself, not standing in opposition to it. This inextricable duality of the world's flesh and the nothingness that accompanies it constitutes the ontological essence of being. In a September 1959 working note, Merleau-Ponty deliberates on this concept of nothingness. The perceiving subject, being an implicit, silent entity, emerges from the object itself without conscious identification. It is merely a deviation from it—the self of perception as "nobody," reminiscent of Ulysses, as the nameless entity embedded in the world, yet to carve its journey. Perception is understood as imperception, evidence without possession: one is so intimately familiar with what is at hand that there is no need to establish it as an object. This leads to the ideas of anonymity and generality, which means not a *nichtiges Nichts*, but a "lake of non-being," a certain nothingness sunken into a local

and temporal openness – vision and feeling in fact, and not thought of seeing and of feeling (Maldiney 2000, 63).

2.5. The Uncanny

> The world does not, that is to say, constitute a series of concurrent markers placed in the earth's landscape. Rather, being-in-the-world means being placed. At all times, we find ourselves located in a particular place, specific to the bodily subject experiencing that place. We are forever in the here, and it is from that here that our experiences take place. (Trigg 2012, 4)

What defines us is our experience in and through affectivity. In this section, I explore the connection between feeling of being and atmosphere, drawing from the research of classical authors such as Freud and Heidegger, as well as contemporary authors like Fuchs, Rosa, and Trigg. Specifically, the phenomenology of the uncanny – a notably recent theme – reveals how the lifeworld, tonalized in a particular way, determines how one feels in the here and now. The uncanny represents the resonance that exists between the atmosphere and the lived body. As this resonance unfolds, feelings of the unknown, the vague, the possibly threatening, and certainly the unfamiliar emerge within the subject's pathicity.

The concept of 'uncanny' (*Unheimlich*: the opposite of 'home, dwelling') was introduced by the German psychiatrist Jentsch in an essay in 1906. He posited that the 'uncanny' is that which induces a mental state of ambiguity and uncertainty when exposed to stimuli before which we cannot establish a clear stance. We are thus disconcerted by what cannot be immediately and perhaps involuntarily categorised. Wax statues, mannequins, and automata reside on the boundary between two categories. This ontological peculiarity engenders unsettling, ominous feelings. However, Freud went further, recognizing in the uncanny "that sort of frightening which goes back to what has been known to us for a long time, to what is familiar" (1919, 270). According to the founding psychoanalyst, Jentsch had merely highlighted the relationship between the

known and the unfamiliar, and the feelings this relationship provokes. Yet, behind this relationship, there lies a primary displacement and uncertainty in spatial orientation. “The more oriented a man is in the world around him, the less easily he will receive an impression of uncanny from things or events” (Freud 1919, 271). *Heimisch* pertains to feeling at home, comfortable, fulfilled, and harmonious with one’s surroundings. Simultaneously, it denotes concealment and remaining hidden. This term carries an intrinsic paradox, which extends to the very sensation of the uncanny. Both in Jentsch’s and more pronouncedly in Freud’s views, the uncanny represents a return to the past, to what is necessary, juxtaposed against what is now living and spontaneous (Fuchs 2019b). Pascarelli argues that the uncanny should be considered a structural factor of the subject’s integrity, unconscious process similar to the oneiric one, hypothesizing a so-called “line of the uncanny”, distinguishing conscious from unconscious and reality from delusion. We venture into pure post-Freudian psychoanalysis, which perceives the psyche as layers of consciousness, safeguarding a hidden core. Within this nucleus, the secret of reality lies hidden, ineffable. This core also houses – the Thing, *das Ding*, a paradoxical subject/object of desire that is never known and yet always sought after, placed beyond the confines of the psychic apparatus (Pascarelli 2002).

Ambiguity thrives as the ideal habitat for the uncanny, hovering between background and horizon; it is sensed but does not solidify into a percept. One of the pioneering authors who linked the sensation of the uncanny with atmosphere was Hermann Schmitz, the progenitor of New Phenomenology. Schmitz contends that the atmosphere produced in uncanny scenarios is a ‘centripetal excitement’, which neither qualifies as fear nor as anxiety, as both emotions to some extent presuppose an intentional triggering element. For Schmitz, the uncanny is best encapsulated by the term “Bangnis”, representing the “atmospherically encompassing, undivided whole of the uncanny” (Schmitz 1981, 283), an atmosphere that thickens around the percipient subject, causing unfamiliar meanings and objects to shimmer vaguely. In this unique experiential space, where the subject resonates ambiguously with the surrounding environment, the body itself becomes an uncanny factor. Besides, as Griffero also argues, it is the very co-presence of the alien and familiar in our bodily affectivity that determines the site of the uncanny in our lives (Griffero 2021, 133). The truth is that it is not so much the uncanny to be monstrous, but the actual possibility of an encounter with it, realized in the everyday.

The protagonist of Pirandello's novel, *One, No One and a Hundred Thousand*, perfectly embodies this uncomfortable mystery, which shows us how felt-bodily de-tuned we really are:

> When one has made a habit of living in a certain way, to go to some unusual place and in the silence to feel as a suspicion that there is something mysterious to us, from which, though present there, our spirit is condemned to stay away, is an indefinite anguish, because one thinks that, if we could enter it, perhaps our life would open up in who knows what new sensations, so much so that we seem to live in another world. (Pirandello 2011, 125)

The assuredness with which objects present themselves begins to unravel, engulfed in this pathic tonality teetering between allure and dread. This ambivalence often incites a combined response of fascination and trepidation. Rudolf Otto identified several elements that characterise the experience of the uncanny: mysterium, tremendum, fascinans, and augustum (1958). Nevertheless, Otto predominantly utilises "mysterium tremendum" to signify a profound sense of awe, something that engenders "blank wonder [and] astonishment that strikes us dumb" (Otto 1958, 65-68). Particularly intriguing is the correlation between the uncanny and the sacred. The latter signifies a realm only comprehensible through emotion, where feeling surpasses reason as an organisational and classificatory system of thought. It first begins to stir in the feeling of "something uncanny," "eerie," or "weird." It is this feeling which, emerging in the mind of primeval man, forms the starting point for the entire religious development in history (Otto 1958, 14-15).

Without necessarily venturing into religious discourse, we draw from Otto's formulation the insightful analysis of the concept of fascination associated with the experience of the strange, bizarre, and unfamiliar. Moreover, it is a culturally embedded element that transcends mental and temporal patterns: the feeling of the uncanny, perfected in the numinous emotion, always persists; its disappearance would be "an essential loss". Alongside Schmitz, we might suggest that the history of the numinous feeling aligns with the history of atmospheres as emotionally attuned spaces. Consider Plato's cave myth,

one of the most profound images in the history of human thought. It has, over the centuries, continued to fascinate and disquiet due to its everlasting atmosphere of the uncanny, cryptic, and mysterious, which underscores the significance and value of its contents. In a world cloaked in shadows, where captive men can scarcely differentiate themselves from the objects they glimpse in the cave, an enduring atmosphere of expectation or suspicion exists, suggesting that a significant change is imminent. Spanning from Plato to Edgar Allan Poe, we have been introduced to the anxiety-ridden feeling of anticipation, navigating through the fog of obfuscation that conceals and reveals, expands and contracts in tandem with our bodily reactions. The uncanny occupies the boundary between reality and fantasy, thought and imagination.

> It is not linked, as some have reckoned, to all sorts of irruptions of the unconscious. It is linked to a sort of imbalance produced in the fantasy, and insofar as the fantasy, crossing the limits that were initially assigned to it, comes apart and finds again the very thing that joins it to the image of the other. (Lacan 2003, 56)

Psychoanalysis often portrays the uncanny as the by-product of a psychic conflict which, when confronting reality, primarily elicits feelings of horror in the individual. In this context, Freud examined Hoffman's "The Sandman" (1919), a short story replete with surreal and bizarre characters, making it ripe for psychoanalytic interpretations. Beyond the intricate details of the story, it is imperative to accentuate the predominantly psychic and traumatic aspect of the uncanny. Freud proposed that the uncanny represents a domineering resurgence of the past; for Lacan, however, it stands as a seminal figure and symbol of modernity. Aligning with the French psychoanalyst, we partially delve into the psychopathology of the uncanny. Lacan contends it to be the eruption of the real amidst familiar reality, causing hesitation and uncertainty as the known disintegrates. Such hesitation is fleeting; it eventually resolves into a clearer state of mind, morphing into something more tangible and understandable. The uncanny experience showcases not fragility but the tenuous boundary between fact and intention, the perpetual threat of plummeting into an inaccessible, impractical, and unreal realm. The uncanny epitomises "ex-timacy" (Lacan 2003), a blend of the internal and external, a merging of inside and outside, which, as Schmitz articulates, disorients and unsettles the subject.

> It is as if I see everything through a veil and hear everything through a wall. The voices of men seem to come to me from afar. Things do not look as they did before, they are changed, weird, like in bas- relief [...]. Everything that happens surprises me, it seems new to me [...]. It is as if a membrane were placed over my skin. (Janet 1908, in De Martino, 2002: 143)

2.6. A Natural Relationship? The Uncanny and the *Epoché*

The uncanny has been characterised both as a boundary and a state of the aesthetic domain: it manifests as an absence, necessitating obfuscation. The transformation of the familiar into the uncanny and inscrutable gives rise to a sentiment which, in several aspects, might be likened to the emotional state caused by the enforced suspension of judgment of the known world, or the usual habitus. This can be equated with an externally imposed epoché. In the heart of the matter, COVID-19 epitomises the uncanny element that thrust us all into a comprehensive epoché. Suddenly, our surroundings became veiled in suspicion. The world, once a haven of certainties and a vast operational space, now conceals perils. All our actions, which reflect our interpersonal affectivity, carry risks and are consequently held in abeyance; the virus is either omnipresent or absent. However, we remain oblivious. Central to the phenomenological method is the act of bracketing, the epoché, a pause in judgment or a placing in parentheses (*Einklammerung*) of the affirmation of reality, that is, assuming that the natural attitude leads us to take our objective knowledge of the world and phenomena for granted.

> The operation of the epoché allows us to remove ourselves from the strongest and most universal and, therefore, occult constraints: namely, the constraints of the already-givenness of the world. The epoché, rightly understood [...] changes all conceptions of the tasks of psychology and reveals how everything that had been taken as evident beforehand constitutes a naivety. (Husserl 1936, 267)

To be precise, Husserl's method employs the epoché as the initial moment of a more detailed and intricate process of investigation. This phase evokes astonishment, a wonder

at how phenomena present themselves to us, while the phenomenological reduction concentrates on the analysis of the correlative interdependence between specific structures of subjectivity (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2008). The act of the epoché infuses practically all of Husserl's philosophy, but over time it has been subject to various interpretations because it lacks explicit procedural indications. In the eloquent words of Di Petta, "For nearly two thousand five hundred years, the human mind has been wandering around this crater of knowledge, based on a simple double-face operation: zeroing out the pre-constituted data, and restarting from ex novo, with all that this entails" (Di Petta 2010, 21). Through the epoché, one becomes more acutely aware of the usual pattern of things, recognising their influence on one's experiential flow. "The phenomenological attitude and the epoché that it implies are destined to produce a complete personal transformation" (Husserl 1954, 166). As we shall see, the experience of the uncanny shares with the epoché, particularly of a specific kind, this ambivalent dimension of familiarity and foreignness, and the simultaneous feeling of astonishment and confusion. The crux is that a deliberate act of epoché, when pondered upon and reflexively intended, becomes a genuine act of freedom. One can distance oneself from the beliefs, judgments, and thoughts of the original consciousness, culminating in the articulation, delineation, and explanation of these beliefs and judgments. In this regard, the epoché symbolises a singular opportunity to delve into the raw essence of a phenomenon. The act of suspending the world's habitual nature contains elements of joy, wonder, and astonishment. However, when this suspension precipitates *ex abrupto*, unintentionally, the subjective experience takes on a particular tone: discomfort, awkwardness, and anxiety. This is when the *Erlebnis* (lived experience) becomes intensely atmospheric – uncanny. An imposed epoché alters the individual's lifeworld, leading to a profound 'nebulisation' of all spatiotemporal structures. What becomes nebulised loses clarity in form and meaning: it can signify everything or nothing, and the world's perceptual experience becomes infused with a potent atmosphericity, which is both overpowering and inescapable.

> As in the epoché, something suddenly appears in a different light. However, the light of knowledge, as we know it, also has sinister gleams, which derive, in part, from the unknown that is being clarified, in part from the known that is being lost, in part from the new that is beginning to be experienced with that disturbing and exciting sense of strangeness. It is precisely from the dichotomy: loss of the known/disclosure

> of the unknown, resetting/restarting that intense and contrasting feelings arise, such as fear and joy, anguish, or the tranquillity of a new beginning. (Di Petta 2020, 22)

Thus, an endured, unwelcome epoché manifests differently. This is evident in certain psychiatric disorders and, to some extent, in recent collective experiences. The suspension of common sense and the obvious is mandated by the State for public health reasons, causing emotional distress, even if rationally understood. The lifeworld was halted, particularly in its essence: social interaction. The fear of contagion, the fixation on contamination, and the paranoia of distancing have taken the place of human connection, handshakes, and personal proximity. Amidst this externally imposed epoché, we increasingly lose touch with our own bodies, overshadowed by the frenetic pace of modernity, the obsession with appearance, and the technological nature of human relations. Gradually, the rich sensory experience of interpersonal contact freezes, becoming rigid due to future anxieties, contagion fears, and the loss of our aspirations. We might see one another, but we do not truly connect. Emotional responses become automatic, devoid of the subtle nuances that bring communication to life. In this stage of demystifying the familiar, the underlying threads of intercorporeality and intersubjectivity, vital for communication, come to the fore. The epoché uncovers this area, where our fundamental being-in-the-world is traumatically disturbed and presents itself to the individual as an intense pathic event. The world quickly shifts from familiar to unfamiliar, from transparent to uncanny. This transition underscores the predominant spatiality of the *Lebenswelt*, with a pronounced interplay of atmosphericity and affectivity. One of Janet's patients, at the onset of her psychosis, expressed: "It was as though I were looking at the world through a veil, a fog, or a cloud as if I were hearing myself through a wall that separates me from reality" (Janet 1908, in Di Martino, 2002: 145). Troubé claims that the aesthetic experience of the uncanny prominently emerges in the intermediate space where the essence of things, physical, psychic, and imaginary, are grasped without mediation (Scheler 1916, 48-49). It is evident how multifaceted the uncanny is, traversing various ontological categories and closely aligning with the dreamlike, fantastical, aesthetic-artistic, and psychiatric realms. Thus, if we could imagine the epoché as an atmospheric experience on the cusp between the pathic and pathological, infiltrating the ontological fractures of the subject, leading to slight

depersonalisation, our understanding of such phenomena that remain on the fringes would greatly expand.

Before entering into the psychopathological discourse and addressing the issue of 'field psychopathology', as well as analysing the prodromal phases of some of the most severe psychiatric disorders, allow me to conclude the discussion of the comparison between the concepts of uncanny and epoché. Although they differ, especially from an aesthetic standpoint, they appear to share a common phenomenological foundation:

- Aggressive/intrusive character: both the atmosphere and the affective epoché assail the individual from outside, often suddenly.
- Transformative character: the epoché, suspending the habitual nature of one's lifestyle, has the power to focus on previously unnoticed or neglected details, objects, and aspects of life. This can lead to disorientation, transforming familiar reality into something nebulous. Relatedly, the atmosphere is the emotional correlate of this 'shift, gradually guiding the individual towards a new inter-corporeal space.

Suspensive and allusive character: the epoché is rich in concealments and revelations. The individual is overwhelmed by an emotional charge that emerges from his bodily feelings and pre-conscious, pre-reflective level. Similarly, especially in its psychopathological form, the atmosphere surrounds the individual in uncertainty, anticipatory anxiety, and ambiguity. During this atmospheric phase of perception, clarity is elusive. This lack of clarity in thought emerges as the reflexive consciousness grapples with disordered, bodily being. If, amid a passionate state of mind of abandonment or expectation, what we were expecting suddenly betrays us, the world changes so much that we, as if uprooted, lose all support. Later, thinking of that instant, from the height of a regained stability, we say that in that moment, as if struck by thunder, we "[fall] from the clouds" (Binswanger, in Mishara, 1990). This phrase, "falling from the clouds", commonplace in everyday language, also captures a common feeling. Maintaining the necessary terminological distinctions, epoché, uncanny, and atmospheric all point to an essential experience that can either foster continued life or lead to a debilitating emptiness if unresolved.

Fuchs believes that

> The uncanny always refers to ambivalence and fragility in ourselves. The ambiguous and inscrutable things that confront us in the world mirror an inner conflict resulting from the latent continuance of animistic thinking under the surface of our rational understanding of the world. (Fuchs 2019b, 33)

Trauma, in the literal sense as a "wound" or "opening", leads to a revolution of Dasein that not everyone can accept and convert into new cultural and worldly tools. Similarly to the uncanny, in the initial phase of the traumatic event, the critical moment of epoché resembles the affectivity of a status nascendi: an auroral experience marked by a blend of anguish and fascination. In short, it is one of the most troubled and misunderstood human experiences. To be in a state of onset denotes an immense receptivity: the pathic capacity is saturated with anguish and simultaneously, exaltation. The philosophical core of this passage lies in a primordial unveiling. The "me" of the inter-corporeal bonds emerges suddenly, vulnerable and continuously at risk of falling. This pathic "me" forms the irremovable foundation of all experience. An abrupt and complete disruption of a familiar pattern inevitably causes disorientation, a state of emotional anguish where, in Heideggerian terms, the *Dasein* feels out of place. What does characterise the feeling of this condition? It is an 'amodal' sensation. We can transpose perceptual experiences from one modality to another, sometimes synaesthetically, experiencing them as a holistic intuition – an essence of intuition (Paduanello 2016, 291). We still associate atmospheric feelings with potent pathic states, which span from astonishment to anguish. The direct route to existential transformation involves multiple breakdowns; epoché does not seek our approval but requires a specific locus. The human soul cannot endure an ambiguous emotional state for an extended period, risking the dangerous fragmentation of the inherent mind-body connection into pathological deviations. Thus, the uncanny also represents a small amount of Heideggerian anxiety, which does not require obscurity or shades to manifest. In this state, Heidegger contends, individual existence confronts the potential of nothingness, void, and non-being. From an ontological-existential standpoint, Heidegger believes that the sensation of not belonging, or the sense of uncanny, is the most authentic phenomenon. This claim amalgamates, in a semantic unity, constellations of concepts that only seem distinct and intersecting.

Similarly, for Freud, the uncanny acts as a veil over known emotions, sentiments, and experiences that have inflicted primordial wounds during ego development. These sentiments recall specific evolutionary stages of self-awareness, a regression to a time when the ego had not yet sharply differentiated itself from the external world or other individuals (Freud 1919, 10). The world's stark reality intimidates the individual, preventing them from embracing such a view without a significant emotional burden. An individual, inherently receptive to the world, invariably finds himself ensnared in a pre-set emotional tonality (*Stimmung*). In our world-building, acknowledging it, and engaging with it, fear and confusion always play a part, which also unravels feelings of awe and wonder in various life scenarios.

Nevertheless, anguish delves even deeper; its subject remains utterly undefined. This ambiguity, Heidegger suggests, is unrelated to intra-mundane entities (Heidegger 2010, 227). As a collection of references and indicators that the understanding of being elucidates, the world in anguish loses its meaning, descending into a 'meaninglessness'. It is the entire world, devoid of significance, that distresses Dasein. In anguish, even for a fleeting moment, the unbreakable unity of the embodied subject and life-world, which forms the emotional tonality, either collapses or faces the threat of collapse. As Boll now highlights,

> [I]n true emotional tonalities, there is neither the 'I' nor the 'object', nor any boundary between 'I' and 'object'. […] Ego and world are incorporated into a total and undivided experience. Emotional tonality is both of the self and of the world. (Bollnow 2009, 34)

Faced with emotional insignificance, the world empties out, leaving us isolated in the grip of this disorienting nothingness.

However, drawing parallels between the uncanny and Heidegger's anguish has its limits, particularly when the boundary between sanity and psychopathology becomes increasingly blurred. Anguish reveals existence in its unbridled freedom of its cast nature, which simultaneously embodies pure potential and sheer might. The existential identity of openness and the open suggests that, within this identity, the world as the world unveils itself and the *Dasein* as solitary, unadulterated, and cast. This realization signifies that

with the phenomenon of anguish, a paramount emotional scenario ascends to interpretation (Heidegger 2010, 230). Conversely, this is not an entirely affective free state found in the early phases of certain severe psychiatric disorders. These are stages where ties to common sense remain intact; individuals suddenly find themselves immersed in an extensive epoché (not of their choosing), resulting in altered spatiality, temporality, and intersubjectivity. Consequently, the psychopathological epoché represents what an individual undergoes during psychotic transformation. In the succeeding, paramount chapter, we shall phenomenologically dissect the prodromal stages of schizophrenia, adopting a neo-phenomenological stance, and proposing new starting points for therapeutic efforts centred on early detection and clinician adaptation when faced with a patient's affective lifeworld.

3. PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF PRE-PSYCHOSIS

SUMMARY

In the third chapter, I consider in detail the atmospheric experiences of the prodromal phase of schizophrenia. To truly understand the twilight phase of psychiatric disorders, one must first realize that a psychotherapist and their patients co-create a peculiar atmospheric setting, within which communication and dialogue can take place more or less efficiently. Pre-psychosis is a transitional phase, hazy and saturated with an atmosphere of expectation, which can prelude to an existential precipice or, eventually, to a dramatic transformation. The approaches of different psychiatrists to the description of the patient's pre-psychotic state are here investigated and compared to clarify an often ignored and inappropriately qualified condition.

Jaspers reports the experiences of patients with schizophrenia at the beginning of the pathology, conceptualizing the *Wahnstimmung* – the delusional atmosphere, in which the existential background of life fluctuates, and the person feels to be as in a limbo. He draws a fundamental distinction between primary delusional experiences and delusional ideas, where psychosis fits the first category intruding itself when the subject perceives his surroundings as deeply unfamiliar or abnormally significant. In Conrad's theory, perceptual acts rather organize the world. His main assumption on the development of schizophrenia turns around the disproportionate increase of basal affectivity, which culminates with the freezing of perception at the 'pre-Gestalt' stage, where the capacity to shift from a surreptitious idea to a perceptually validated experience is lost. The basic idea is the deformation of the world experienced from a sensory and affective modality.

I further analyze the story of Blankenburg's patient Anne Rau, with the intention of bringing out here, too, a new interpretative key to pre-psychosis: the unfiltered advent of an intolerable pathicity that atmospherizes the patient's lifeworld, in a desperate search for semantic relief. For Blankenburg, the loss of natural evidence is inevitably associated with the weakening of the *sensus communis*, which refers to a sphere of collective sensoriality that should be cemented at a young age.

In front of the psychotic patient, one senses a truly primordial absence, something challenging to articulate in words, related to the feeling of "ontological insecurity" (Laing), or the failure of an essential encounter, the *aida* (Kimura), between the subjective human presence and the backdrop of life, which results in an excess of the otherness that fractures the ontological stability.

In the following, I conceptualize the atmospheric pre-psychotic condition as an "ante-festum" experiential modality, which is living in perpetual expectation of something crucial that will

happen. This represents an extremely vulnerable moment, potentially becoming an area of engagement or conflict with the lifeworld. In the moment of suspension and premonition, the individual's fate starts to crystallise. At the inception of psychosis, numerous patients undergo such a distinct atmosphere, often laden with an apocalyptic tone. I suggest a comparative analysis of De Martino's and Callieri's descriptions of the atmospheric world of pre-psychosis, arguing that the profound anxiety that characterizes the psychotic prodromes represents the outcome of an all-encompassing suspension, suddenly cast over the person's life, and, crucially, mirroring the characteristics of an *epoché*. I claim that while the temporary nebulosity produced by the phenomenological epoché prepares the ground for a lucid process of rationalisation and a new construction of meaning, while the one associated with the delusional atmosphere (*Wahnstimmung*) readies for the de-structuring and dissolution of the relationship between the subject and the world. It will therefore be the task of the phenomenologically-oriented therapist, with due practice and their own epoché, to try to reintegrate, through an atmosphere of therapeutic suspension of judgement, the poised world of the patient verging on schizophrenic psychosis.

Conrad (and Jaspers before him) describes the disconnection of the *Wahnstimmung* as a question that the patient asks himself and to which he cannot find an answer: "Something has happened, but I do not know what" (Paduanello 2016). The "'do-not-know-what" reported by the patient is perhaps the most misunderstood plea for help in clinical diagnostics. This is because understanding that vague and numbing affective state requires a pathic sensitivity that, indeed, not every therapist possesses. Let us consider the extraordinary phenomenological consequences of the psychopathological epoché. The prevailing notion is that the patient's world might have been overtaken and distorted by an autogenous epoché, that is, directed by the patient himself, and by which the patient has been dominated at a certain point in his existential journey. In his "Logical Investigations", Husserl discusses feelings by addressing emotional tones or affections that arise from environmental, external sensory stimulation, which the consciousness "suffers".

The so-called *Stimmung* is both an emotional atmosphere and a mode of feeling that sets the tone for the relationship with the world, providing the backdrop against which human experience unfolds. An essential ego feeling embodies the intrinsic unity of psyché and soma. Consequently, at the heart of all psychic life, lie vital feelings, the hues of the existential horizon. The human being is drawn towards or repelled by certain events that appear pleasant or unpleasant. He might feel oppressed or uplifted, hence perceiving things as uplifting or menacing. Concurrently, his emotional life represents a spectrum of inner states in which he finds himself in a particular 'mood' (Stein 2000, 127). If we accept that most of our emotional life oscillates in the vague and pre-reflective, primarily influenced by the body, which directs our decisions and our life course, we might not resolve but certainly better comprehend certain psychopathological phenomena. Atmospheres, drawing from Bollnow, convey an attunement with the world, allowing us to resonate with it.

> Everything around us is submerged in this dark atmosphere if we are sick. Nothing is saved. [...] Again, the *Stimmungen* are neither inside nor outside, neither in the subject nor in the object. In 'feeling', there is no subject or object in front of it. There is an experience, a relation, and an emotional tonality. (Caputo 2001, 12-13)

Emotional tonalities underpin the foundation of life: the entire cycle of experience, as Lersch highlights, is supported by something that is no longer a process but stationary emotional tones (Lersch 1948, 247). Through the psychotic exclusion of the world, as a transformation that removes worldly qualities from experience, the person's lived space readies itself for disintegration through a distinct atmospherization: twilight. Thus, the current theory posits that the purely philosophical discussion on epoché and the aesthetic one on atmospheres can converge in the field of psychopathology, offering modern studies in phenomenological psychiatry and psychotherapy a richer methodological and observational approach.

The onset of psychiatric illnesses is somewhat akin to Dante's Purgatory. It is a transitional phase, all clouded and opaque, imbued with an atmosphere of anticipation, which could allude to a severe precipice or, possibly, to a liberation. The practice of demystifying and doubting the obvious and the routine can lead to novel forms of thought and creativity on one hand, but also to a mental drift on the other. There could a loss of contact with our historical and cultural reality, a sense of being uprooted, an identity crisis, derealisation, and depersonalisation. To truly grasp the twilight phase of mental disorders, we must first recognize that a phenomenologically informed therapist and a pre-psychotic patient experience a kindred situation but with contrasting aims. Rümke, with his essential notion of the "praecox feeling", fully grasped this atmospheric-relational circularity between therapist and patient, arguing that "the phenomenon is most vividly interwoven with the affective disturbances, the anomalies of thought, and the psychomotor symptoms. This undefinable attribute that surrounds all the observed symptoms elicits the "praecox feeling"; the clinician, in other words, acutely feels that something is amiss in the patient and, "as interpersonal relations are not one-sided […] he notices something out of order within himself; he cannot find the patient" (Rümke 1990, 336). In the a-judicial contemplation of the presented contents, the typical individual recreates and refocuses himself and others positively. Conversely, the unwell individual loses the world by experiencing its negation. In this instance, it is an experience of a void or rather, approaching the brink of nothingness. In this intolerable and profound phase, the individual becomes purely a passive victim to a significantly amplified foundational affectivity. We will delve into this experience in detail, referencing cases and studies from some of the most renowned psychiatrists globally.

3.1 Jaspers and the *Wahnstimmung*

> A schizophrenic in the initial phase described his new restlessness, distinguishing it from ordinary restlessness, in which one cannot work [...]. In a certain way, the new restlessness is substantial: the whole being would be pervaded by it or dissolved in it. "There is nothing in the world that torments me like this. I cannot get out of this sphere. I want to extricate myself, but everything gets worse. (Jaspers 2012, 27)

This excerpt from Karl Jaspers's *General Psychopathology* recounts the experience of a schizophrenic patient at the outset of his illness. Whether by design or coincidence, the patient uses the term "sphere" to indicate a spatial-affective condition into which he has been thrust. The restlessness he speaks of is the missing atmos- of the word -sphere. According to Jaspers, this person experiences a feeling without an object, akin to existential anguish that overwhelms the subject, obscuring his consciousness. The suspension of natural attunement, leading to a gradual detachment from the everyday world, reveals a barren vulnerability that some find hard to accept. Encountering this emerging, insidious reality happens within a setting stripped of familiar, habitual, and thus reassuring meanings. A space emerges wherein the natural experience of the world vanishes. This is a boundary, perilous and inhospitable, which the comprehensive diagnostic manuals of psychiatry have often overlooked: it is the *Wahnstimmung*, that delirious atmosphere wherein the ground beneath one's feet seems to oscillate in a "suspended duration", as Di Petta described it, not yet been stemmed by a structured delusion (Di Petta 2020, 471).

Herein lies every man who doubts his existence and, by extension, the challenge faced by the psychopathologist who confronts such an extreme experience. But how, and with whom? Furthermore, what resolution does delusion offer for an individual taken to the most authentic places, where one is confronted with one's very essence? (Pavese 2007, in Di Petta 2020, 475). Jaspers also draws a crucial distinction between primary delusional experiences and delusional ideas. The former, encompassing a significant alteration of consciousness, is described by the German psychopathologist as "incomprehensible".

The latter emerges understandably from other psychic processes, perhaps stemming from a fleeting state of mind. In this context, one is reminded of Husserl's reference to epoché. Epoché, in its utmost expression, denotes a profound inversion (a real *Umwertung*), ensuing from the interruption of a natural experience.

The primary delirious experience similarly imbues all perceived reality with a delusional feeling. Psychosis starts to manifest when the individual perceives reality as deeply, intrusively, and anomalously meaningful. It is not rare in this stage for one to anticipate the sensation of an impending apocalypse, as the ‘’intrusion of psychosis into ’one's life signifies a dramatic disruption in the relationship between self and world. The experience of the *Wahnstimmung* encapsulates the experience (*Erlebnis*) of the world's end, which can manifest in two contrasting forms: the end, the collapse of the world as a transition to a new one and the end of the world as a horrifying annihilation (Wetzel 1922).

In this vein, I cite the narrative of a psychiatrist who met a young patient at the beginning of a psychotic ‘end-of-the-world’ delusion:

> A sixteen-year-old boy was admitted to the psychiatric department where I worked for behavioral disorders. His parents reported a change in his habits and, in recent days, ‘strange attitudes, speech, and reasoning’. During the interview, the young man appeared highly anxious and worried; he often looked out the window as if there was something threatening and terrible outside. He pointed to an ordinary grey autumn sky, describing it as covered with black clouds from which a hurricane would soon break out, and then an earthquake would tear the earth apart. He was firmly convinced of his statements, imbued with a mystical and apocalyptic aura, in which he envisioned a punishing God. He looked at me and the objects in the doctor's office with suspicion, as if everything represented a danger to him and as if, at the same time, everything was a threat. He followed my gestures and the movements of my hands with prolonged attention, as if they were hiding something sinister and indecipherable, and he asked me if the titles of the medical books in the cabinet had not been rewritten to express the universal upheaval that was soon to occur: the end of the world. (Nocchiero 2021, 5)

During the onset of schizophrenia, where the environment becomes extremely atmospheric with oppressive tonalities, one discovers the void while simultaneously forging a formal existential framework to persevere. “But how much change can a person

tolerate before becoming schizophrenic?" (Blankenburg 1998, 45). It is vital to recognise the criticality and vulnerability inherent in our journey: no one can definitively determine the extent to which one can shield and maintain one's existence from the abysses of suffering, detachment, and rupture. What transpires in the initial stages of psychosis might strikingly resemble the result of a fully executed epoché, save for the pivotal difference that in psychosis, there is no voluntary choice to dissociate from others. As psychosis emerges, the individual embarks on a journey that defies logic and can only be grasped through the clinician's profound aesthetic sensitivity. In the end-of-the-world experience, ''the patient seems to recognise anguish as a foundational way of existing in the world. He no longer intellectualises the world but feels its negation and disassembly. His meaning intentions rest on new abnormal, inadequate bases, charged with an equivocal affective tonality (Callieri 1995). This grey area, where one's bodily connection with the world is at its most intense and thus most susceptible to emotional disturbances, remains difficult to articulate, as Jaspers himself acknowledged.

> If we try to approach these primary delusional experiences more closely, we soon realize that we cannot make them present to ourselves. There always remains a significant residue of the incomprehensible [...]. Primary sensations, vital feelings, and states of mind arise in the patient. <There is something, tell me what there is>. This was what Sandberg's patient said to her husband. Asked by him what was going on, the woman replied: 'I do not know, but there is something'. (Jaspers 1997, 106)

It is no coincidence that this presence-absence is primarily perceived in the air, in the space from which the body draws its lifeblood. Firstly, the environment has changed: the patient's *Umwelt* wavers, and a sinister hue envelops everything. As previously noted, in every life situation where we feel challenged or threatened by something greater than ourselves, the human reaction is never unproblematic or static. We anxiously seek a point of reference, a new understanding that will neutralise that overwhelming affective charge, relocating us to a somewhat idealised dimension. The "plunge into the flesh of the world", to quote Merleau-Ponty (1968, 143), when affected by this psychopathological epoché, can result in catastrophic consequences. Feeling the end of the world, during the twilight phase of psychosis, is somewhat metaphorical. Caught between reality and delusion, the

patient endures the torment of his own renunciation to worldliness, neither having chosen it nor managed to evade it. Lost in this twilight landscape, at the onset of depersonalisation, the individual merely seeks a lifeline, a final anchor to pull him from the maelstrom of looming insanity. Only by focusing on the light shed by the term *Stimmung* can we understand the pervasive atmosphere that unsettles the rise of delusion. Conversely, in German, bestimmt is used to convey agreement or harmony with what another person expresses. Thus, if I can resonate with the person before me, perhaps in a therapeutic setting, I might yet save him. The terrain of emerging psychosis has been studied by many German psychiatrists since Jaspers, shaped by Husserlian phenomenology, Heidegger's *Daseinalyse*, and even *Gestaltanalyse*, as with Klaus Conrad, who penned a volume on the prodromal stage of schizophrenia (1958).

3.2 The Beginning Schizophrenia

For Conrad, perceptual acts organise the world. Before any conscious recognition, on a pre-reflective level, it is the perceptual act that outlines configurations, distinguishing them from a backdrop. Essentially, perception (in a holistic sense) interprets the world. Indeed, even before understanding what lies before him, a person does not perceive an undefined, chaotic array of forms, but a clear configuration of them (the *pre-Gestalten* stage). Pre-forms encompass those environmental characteristics that convey an emotional tone. The act of perception, in its entirety, immediate and pre-reflective, discerns this emotional tonality in expressive qualities. Conrad's main proposition regarding the beginning schizophrenia centres on an abnormal amplification of basal affectivity, culminating in a stasis, a freezing of perceptions at the pre-Gestalt stage. As Conrad describes, the delusional patient's existence is thus situated "In a world between wakefulness and sleep [...] a world of fluctuating *pre-Gestalten*, about which, at present, the poet has much more pertinent things to say than the psychologist" (1960, 49-50). This overwhelming surge of affectivity, with its disruptive charge, coincides with the fragmentation of the pre-reflective experience of 'sensing one's existence'. Conrad suggests that during the psychotic onset, the individual grapples with the tormenting feeling of non-existence, primarily due to the disruption of that foundational sentiment.

In this stage, personal freedom becomes even more constrained: barriers envelop the psychic realm, generating a persistent state of strain, underscored by subtle initial alterations in reality perception. Hence, Conrad posits that during the schizophrenic onset, the perceptual domain halts its natural progression at the pre-Gestaltic phase, where the capacity to shift from an imagined significance to an authentically experienced one is halted. The so-called "Trema" phase can be traced back, etymologically, to the anxious tension that consumed the tragic actor before his stage debut, when he was profoundly influenced by doubt and helplessness about the play's progression. It is worth noting that, beyond emphasising the clear atmospherisation of experience, Conrad also underscores the emergence of inexplicable behaviours, thus mirroring a trait previously outlined by Jaspers.

According to Parnas,

> the prodrome is distinctively defined by the advent of a change from the habitual, which is significant of a new disorder and which may end in a psychotic decompensation. This transformation must involve a temporally datable, externally identifiable or subjectively experienced symptomatic event of distinctive severity and subjective relevance. (Di Iorio et al. 2013, 115)

It is a condition of extreme perceptive acuity that cannot be sustained long due to its intensity. It requires a situational restructuring into softer pathic frames as soon as possible. At this point, consciousness, afflicted by this twilight state, can take one of two escape routes: either one that rushes towards the future in euphoric anticipation or oppressive anguish, or another that petrifies itself in the last instant of contact with reality, "in the hour to come" (Minkowski, Bliss 1958). Conrad discusses limits, invisible barriers that are no less significant in our lives than the tangible objects of our present field. It is undeniable that there are situations in which these limits must be disregarded: we surpass them, no longer accepting them because they are unbearable. In any context, whether normal or pathological, processes of disintegration of the pre-given context arise, manifesting themselves through an increased basic affectivity. Responding to this intensity might eventually lead to senseless behaviours (Conrad 1960, 51).

In reality, this prodromal, crepuscular state marks the crossroads of various psychiatric pathologies, or more accurately, of various morbid tonalities. Abnormal degrees of the basic affective tonality might result in death anxiety, in the tonality of depressive melancholy due to a profound sense of guilt, or in euphoric obsessiveness through manic tonality. The spontaneous capacity for intersubjective attunement is particularly compromised at this stage. Alterity is detached from the pre-reflective framework and seems obscured by a veil of unfamiliarity in the patient's world.

> I find myself outside this world, I no longer feel welcome and safe in it. An abyss has opened up between me and the men I meet. I can no longer go towards them, I am on the other side, a side that I cannot reach and where no bridge can lead me. (Conrad 1960, 53)

Another key aspect of the Trema is the atmosphere of distrust that permeates the patient's lived world (Atmosphäre des Misstrauens). The patient feels, in a somewhat lucid and structured manner, a type of aversion emanating from the surrounding space, dotted with objects, people, and situations. It is precisely the power of the indefinite, of the vague, that destabilises the person's established certainties. With a poignant metaphor, Conrad suggests we visualise the experiential field of the distressed subject in the prodromal phase as

> Walking alone through a dark wood, where nothing is natural or evident. In the darkness, and among the trees, they lurk without knowing who is lurking [...]. The very background against which the obvious things stand out has lost its neutrality. What makes us tremble is not the tree or the bush we see, but everything that constitutes the background [...]: it is precisely the darkness and the background itself. (Conrad 1960, 59)

Some years later, Wyrsch would offer similar insights, painting a compelling picture of the 'paucisymptomatic' schizophrenia, asserting that the crux of this disorder lies in an inner inconsistency. Patients speak of a widening gap between themselves and the external world, hindering genuine pathic-fusional communication. Patients seem to be effectively outside this world to such an extent that it is difficult for an outside observer

not to feel their discomfort (Wyrsch 1971, in Parnas, 2003). In this painful re-evaluation of one's existence, in this profound loss of freedom, the initial significance of the psychotic experiential field subtly emerges: this is the phase of apophany. As a result, the intentional relationship between consciousness and the world dissolves in this eerie mist that preludes to something menacing and unfamiliar. This marks the onset of distress, of no longer feeling in control of one's situatedness. The most immediate comprehension of alterity becomes a "disorienting immanent" (Binswanger 1965). In apophany, the patient is akin to a train passenger convinced of his stillness, while the landscape outside moves, unable to alter perspective and shatter the rigidity of his point of reference. Strikingly, "the patient is like a Ptolemy in his own personal, small microcosm" (Conrad 1960, 70). The external space takes on an altered meaning, with a disproportionate amplification of environmental cues. Everything encountered feels novel. This phase is deeply intertwined with that of the *anastrophé*, the experience of being the world's centre, which provides the patient no solace. Instead, it confines him permanently in a structure so inflexible it becomes irreversible. It's about 'being constantly observed by the world', feeling central to a nauseating self-theatricalisation.

Anastrophé, inherently tied to apophany as its direct outcome, compels one to reflect – and the unusual significance of the surrounding space hinders spontaneous living. With a fine metaphor, Conrad exposes the core of this harrowing phase: "The sick person can no longer forget himself", and can no longer automatically suspend reflection on himself to be with others and live in harmony with the interpersonal world. Centrality, or egotism, as Grivois (1999) would later affirm, is the sole method of grounding meaning, signifying the individual's entry into the delusional world. The French psychiatrist believes that centrality is perceived as being at the heart of humanity, as the emotional experience of playing a distinct role and being both individual and collective. The formation of the other and the evolution of identity, in psychopathological phenomenology, are two sides of the same coin (Stanghellini et al. 2005): hence, in the dissolution of the other, one's identity inevitably erodes, trapped in a "spasm of reflection" (Conrad 1960, 108) that persists through delusion. The term Conrad chose for this stage, anastrophé, aptly denotes the structural inversion in the patient's life, where a functioning intentionality (Husserl and Cairns, 1977) undergoes such a dramatic shift that finds solace only in one's ego.

However, a fundamental situation accompanies the entire psychotic episode: each environmental stimulus heightens an already profoundly intense and altered basic affectivity. For a typical individual, a landscape might feel oppressive or comforting. A house in a wood may attract or deter. The atmosphere created in various contexts resonates differently within each of us. It has been observed that the psychotic patient is far more influenced by these factors than the average individual. Presented here is an exemplary case described by Conrad, highlighting alterations of affectivity in the transition phase of Trema:

> At the time, I thought someone was chasing me. It was a terrible feeling of anguish. To escape it, I wanted to throw myself out of the window. [...] Reason tells me it is not true, but it is all useless. I would give up money and anything else to get rid of this feeling. (Conrad 1960, 111)

To reach such profound levels of self and existence, the subject undergoes a significant withdrawal from his thoughts and emotions towards the world, consumed by a state of delirious perplexity that initially suspends the natural essence of being. “For sensoriality is also a kind of reason, as is every cognitive power”, Thomas Aquinas argued in his Summa Theologiae – a powerful *ante-litteram* study on the driving dynamics that affectivity exerts on a man’s life (Aquinas 2014, 147). Fundamentally, Conrad was responsible for the excellent intuition, which eluded many psychiatrists more or less contemporary with him, of a precise experience that occurs in the schizophrenic onset: the deformation of the world experienced from a sensory and affective modality.

However, the crux of the patient’s plight is not just the abnormal prominence of his perceptive experience, but his growing inability to detach from it, and the ensuing intricate web that ties him to this psychotic distortion. From the outset, the patient’s reaction to these unusual stimuli is predisposed, trapped in a predetermined scheme. The prodromal state of schizophrenia is primarily an affective domain, which is harsh, domineering, and admits no critical or rational mitigation. It might manifest abruptly, already laden with a prevailing emotional undertone. At this juncture, it is not we who observe things, but rather, it feels as if things observe us. Lacan encapsulated the tumult of this elementary stage metaphorically as “the world that becomes only an impression,

the sparkle of a surface that is not, in advance, situated for me in its distance" (Lacan 2003, 143). Owing to its inherent chaos and viscosity, it is often misinterpreted, a conundrum in psychopathology, concealed beneath diagnostic manuals. Naked identity begets suffering and anguish. And, if this state lacks a *super-structure* to mitigate its gravity, a pathology might emerge. Delusional formulations spring from attempts to comprehend and control this anxiety. In schizophrenic pathology, accentuating the crisis of a constant pathic overwhelming uncovers a pivotal reality: it inevitably results in a distressing self-questioning, an agonising hyper-reflection that destabilises the primary relationship of existence: that between the self and the world.

3.3. The Loss of Natural Evidence

On the precipice's brink, before the acute phase sets in, a potential lifeline for the patient may yet exist, albeit seemingly out of reach. According to Blankenburg, this lifeline is the very antithesis of psychosis: the psychiatrist must immerse in the pre-conceptual and pre-linguistic realm the patient now inhabits, having lost his anchorage in the familiar world but finding footing in a realm unfamiliar to most. As Blankenburg elucidates, "The loss of natural evidence means nothing more than an explosion of the dialectic between the evidence and non-evidence of *Dasein* to the benefit of the latter" (Blankenburg 1971, 48). This suggests that in daily life, there is an unspoken equilibrium between the unexpected and the normative. Without it, intersubjectivity would be impossible; the very reality of things would dissipate. Blankenburg's examination of the so-called 'paucisymptomatic' schizophrenia ties together three interlinked facets: atmospheric affectivity, ontological security, and the intersubjective framework.

In his 1971 book, Blankenburg identifies the root of the problem surrounding the classification of schizophrenia in the purely quantitative consideration of its symptoms. However, notable attempts, especially by anthropologically-oriented psychiatry, have aimed to delve beyond the manifestation of delusion, which is merely a by-product. Kulenkampff and Zutt, for instance, described the structural changes from which psychosis develops as a "fragility of being" or "breakdown of trust" (1963). The starting point for Blankenburg is the breakdown of familiarity, perceived as a rupture of the body's

mundanity and as an uncontrolled opening to the world: “When the tacit dimensions become explicit, they can no longer perform the grounding, orienting, namely constituting effect that only what remains in the background can play” (Sass 2014, 9-10). Crucially, to identify traces of a primal modification, we must examine individual cases, beginning with the particular to discern the fundamental paradigm.

Here, the detailed case history of the patient Anne Rau. This woman, sensitive and deeply insecure, recalls that she always had to “gather all her strengths to assert herself with others, not to let herself be unseated by others” (Blankenburg 1971, 49). A time occurred in her life when she felt overwhelmed by the constant need to think. Anne had lost all certainty: she could no longer grasp anything; everything appeared distant and blurred; she lacked confidence and relational impulses. Increasingly encroaching upon her life was an acute absence of atmospheric intercorporeal attunement, inducing a paradoxical stance: an autistic relationship with herself coupled with a vulnerable exposure to the world around her. For the psychiatrist, the desperation with which Anne sought to understand herself and convey her internal contents signalled a clear divide in the foundation of her being. This fracture unsettled the entirety of her ego, which remained restless. Anne grappled with something ineffable and unconfirmable in essence, which she identified as minuscule but vital for existence. She refers to an “unfinished humanity”, an urgent need for support, a grounding in daily objects, and a robust sensation of worldly matters. “A child cannot simply be put there: without relationship. [...] There are feelings that you need to become human” (Blankenburg 1971, 56). Anne termed her lack of a calm and unchallenged acceptance of daily life as a “deprivation of the feeling of things”, the lack of a serene and unquestioned acceptance of everyday life. Anne’s relentless ruminations were never followed by the ‘birth’ of a response allowing her to place herself in the world. Consequently, piecing together the puzzle without an underlying narrative proved impossible. Unable to articulate or offer tangible descriptions, the patient could only allude repeatedly to a “disjointed”, “unusual”, and “strange” manner of existence. For Blankenburg, uncovering the basis of this pathological change, primarily impacting feeling, meant revealing what truly fuels the essence of humanity.

However, this requires accepting a dimension terrifyingly elusive in linguistic representation, yet so pervasive that it risks overwhelming the individual, leaving them vulnerable to repetitive and draining attempts at comprehension. In pauci-symptomatic

schizophrenia, the patient recognises their disorder, resists it, and continuously seeks to rationalise it. “A silent sinking is generally regarded as the essential characteristic of simple schizophrenia” (Blankenburg 1971, 66). These experiences can be categorised as sub-apophanic, existing before delusional revelation, and imbued with distressing emotion because they undermine what Straus labelled “the axioms of everyday life” (1949, 45). At this juncture, the delusion as a fantastical creation and total renunciation of the socially shared world remains distant. Blankenburg firmly believes that experiences of depersonalisation and derealisation, traditionally ascribed indiscriminately to every form of schizophrenia, do not pertain specifically to the prodromal phase of the pathology. “When asked whether she herself, her own body, or what she encountered outside seemed unreal, she would always deny it: everything is real! I have never doubted reality!” (Blankenburg 1971, 71). The reality is overwhelming, not tempered by the instinctive ease of daily actions, thoughts, and connections. Disturbances in those structures that ensure the unity of spatiotemporal coherence transcend schizophrenia research; the primary core, connecting varied psychopathological manifestations, awaits exposure. A structural dialectic exists between the evident and the non-evident, a daily equilibrium between two modes of being-in-the-world. This balance cannot be static, for individuality forms in the perpetual flux of life-rhythms: in the clash, as Jaspers would argue, with “limit situations” (1950).

For Jaspers, the purest meaning configuration occurs through conflictual, tragic transformation. The psychiatrist affirms:

> As a subject-agent, I cannot really distinguish myself from the situations in which I have found myself, only for external reasons, in which I am like the physical body of what I can do, as the physical body of what I can be. Transcending all comprehensible thoughts, apart from feeling shaken in the borderline situation, I feel at one with the case, which I have understood as my own. (Jaspers 1978, 126)

The naturalness with which the understanding of this transformation occurs is the determining problem of psychosis. To elucidate: clarity will elude us as long as we adhere to mechanistic models of experiential processes that fail to address the essence of psychotic descent. According to Blankenburg, it is within the *dia-logos*, in the

atmospheric encounter between therapist and patient imbued with unique affectivity, that the manifold possibility of being emerges. Anne Rau laments the loss of something minuscule, elementary, yet vital for life. It is indefinable by nature and remains stubbornly outside of consciousness. Another of Blankenburg's schizophrenic patients, Karlheinz Z., speaks of an absence of 'something' that initially enables light-heartedness (Blankenburg 1971, 80). Within its evident universality, the *quid*, unreachable through verbal language but deeply embedded in pre-verbal bodily expression, is fundamental. It is quite telling that Blankenburg did not adopt specific terminology to denote the phenomenon of rupture foundational to schizophrenic evolution. Such an approach can be seen as the deliberate decision of a philosopher, over a psychiatrist, who observes, feels, and experiences within a spatial-affective context that is entirely anomalous, extraordinary, at the brink of human comprehension. The proto-schizophrenic alienation, the nascent feeling of fading and losing touch with reality, indeed mirrors phenomena diversely studied and described by philosophers and psychiatrists. They all share a common trait: an amplification of astonishment, bewilderment, and the ensuing desperate quest for a familiar framework.

As previously noted, Jaspers conceptualised the "shipwreck" as the paramount way of existing in the world. At a particular juncture, limit situations become unbearable for individuals, devoid of any anchor or stability. Escape from shipwreck is futile. This scenario unfolds in the relentless march of events, plunging the individual into a cathartic moment of collapse. A shipwreck is, therefore, a "shipwreck in time, the annihilation of all things and all certainties, of all stability and immutability" (Jaspers 1978). In a full Augustinian reminiscence, for Jaspers, life is perpetually outside of itself; it never really concedes itself to the present: "There is something in life that always surpasses the limits of before and after; it is itself and, at the same time, above itself. It is immanence and transcendence" (Jaspers 1978, 180). Limit situations, transcending our rational grasp, confront the individual with the profound dichotomy of psychological life or death. Individuals exist in a perpetual state of exception, where even the most mundane gesture can initiate a profound crisis, such as the onset of a psychotic event. Although Jaspers does not specify this, parallels can be drawn with Blankenburg's patient's experiences. The limit-situation is overwhelmingly triggered by a habitual, ordinary pattern, a form of thinking or a 'framework' that every human being needs to know on how to behave (Blankenburg 1971, 100).

Furthermore, this change is most discernible in interpersonal exchanges, the everyday tapestry of interactions, and the implicit demand of the other to reveal oneself. This shift appears to emanate from a distinct human shadow zone, prompting an individual towards self-alienation in pursuit of distinct individuation. However, emerging from this personal shadow and embracing one's path, decisions, and experiences will delineate the distinction between normality and potential psychopathological relapse. Alan Olson notably argued for the likelihood of psychopathological relapses when encountering limit-situations (1979). Fuchs also identified a direct correlation between limit situations and psychiatric disorders, linking them with the pre-conditions that later precipitate the illness (2013).

> The limit situation represents the abutment, so to speak, by which Existenz comes to itself. This is indeed also possible as a reaction to an intense psychic crisis; however, it certainly does not characterize psychopathological states in a strict sense […]. Nevertheless, I want to work out from the thesis that mental illnesses are connected with limit-situations. (Fuchs 2013, 301-308)

Interestingly, we can sense a certain affinity, but with divergent outcomes, with the concept of "primitive presence" already outlined in the previous chapters. According to Schmitz, primitive presence refers to the original dimension of the human being that precedes and grounds all other experience. It is a form of primal awareness that underlies all our experiences and forms the foundation of our being-in-the-world.

Schmitz argues that primitive presence is characterized by a kind of basic feeling or primal feeling that permeates all our conscious experiences. This primitive feeling is fundamental to our ability to experience the world and relate to it in a meaningful way. Indeed, Schmitz argues that "In absolute identity, which needs no identifiability, someone is able to recognize himself if what happens to him blatantly coincides, without room for choice and without comparison, with himself, that is, with the one to whom this thing happens." (2009, 53-54). In other words, I recognize myself in the *me-ness* of the event that assaults me, strikes me, disorients me. Nevertheless, differently from limit situations, it does not represent the 'gateway to the hell' of a pathology.

Thus, we could speak of a phenomenological-existential path, which begins with the encroachment of the limit situation, revealing the fragility of being as a primary condition, and then eventually could degenerate through the loss of natural evidence. Fuchs introduces the term "existential vulnerability" to identify predispositions that make the transition to psychiatric pathology easy. What disturbs the terrain of *Existenz* is the impairment of 'housing' (*Gehäuse*), that is, that fundamental structure of thought and attitude that protects against the irruptions of limit-situations (Fuchs 2013, 307). This is precisely the point: borderline cases come crashing down on us, bursting into our daily lives and illuminating the contradictions, conflicts, and antinomies of our being. These cases rend the fabric of the given and reveal existence in its raw potential and transformative capacity. Nevertheless, as emphasised earlier, a limit situation is not inherently tied to psychopathology; however, Fuchs underscores that a pronounced situational impact, resonating with its emotional intensity, might remain unresolved by the individual, leading to an irreversible crisis. A constant sense of vulnerability persists, an atmospheric perception of threat. The penetration of the foreign into one's own body, the experience of helplessness and being at the mercy of something can irreversibly shake one's essential trust in the world to its core (Fuchs 2013, 4). Whether consciously or subconsciously, the atmospheric quality of a potentially transformative or threatening proximity often arises within a pre-pathological context. The existential frailty of certain individuals, more attuned to life's critical junctures, may render them more vulnerable to psychiatric collapse. Fuchs references instances of trauma, hypochondria, neurosis, and depression but excludes psychosis due to its presumed incomprehensibility. Patients' experiences teetering between reality and pathology, in most instances, defy adequate verbal expression or understanding. While boundaries can be both personal and universal, all humans naturally shirk from pain, guilt, decision-making, and death. Not everyone navigates them successfully, thereby becoming trapped in the psyche's shadow, immobilised in a state of ontological rigidity or interpersonal detachment.

Let me examine the etymology of the word "psychosis": derived from Greek, it translates as "degeneration of the soul". The psyché, failing to discern a new order of meaning that would counterbalance a moment of heightened drama and crisis, deteriorates. It then begins to retreat from the horizon of common sense, forging a fresh one to mitigate the anguish stemming from the loss of the life world. "He who is not sick can face things and make progress" (Blankenburg 1971, 118). In the report on Blankenburg's patient, there is

mention of the erosion of the fundamental significance of things. Evidence, the foundational layer upon which we structure our everyday lives, characterised by implicit dictates and methods, is only partially contingent on our actions. Rather, it emerges as the by-product of an anonymous, communal transcendental process, a kind of "world-feeling", as Kimura (1969) articulated. Moreover, this feeling is vividly expressed in Anne Rau's observations. I highlight here the striking clarity of her statement:

> What I miss is always before that. Many people do not know how to dress or even know they have no taste, but they do not have a problem with it. What I lack comes before what they lack. Others simply have it. [...] Then there is no problem. One can create links with others and a dimension where everything goes without saying. Then one can find oneself. Only then is everything natural and evident; one is unapt for life if this is missing. You do not really make it. (Blankenburg 1971, 104)

To navigate life's perils, individuals ought to allow experiences, encounters, and the broader world to simply exist. Anne's desolation, arising from an absence of harmony with the life world, fuels her psychotic unrest and propels her suicidal tendencies. As a foundational approach, one should inherently possess the ability, from birth, to spontaneously delve into matters, identifying within them a pre-verbal, genuine reaction that silently underpins every action, whether it is pre-reflective or otherwise. Feeling defenceless against the tangible world leads to a ceaseless combat which, over time, drains and destabilises. An ontological lack often synchronises with a physical shortfall. Blankenburg believes that where the transcendent operation fails, the human presence is sacrificed to its brute corporeality and is at the mercy of everything it encounters (Blankenburg 1971, 107), leading one to be overwhelmed by this abyss of meaninglessness. However, this embodies a manifestation of "ego weakness", which Tatossian suggests might herald the onset of psychosis over many years. In the psychiatrist's assessment, Anne is in a state wherein she can certainly act, but devoid of a validation of their authenticity. This validation stems from innate evidence – originating from the transcendent process – which is frail (Tatossian 1997, 55). In Blankenburg's patient, interactions with the external world are characterised by harrowing exposure, where every element leaves a profound imprint. Impressions from objects and people, which one's innate capacity for reflective moderation should ordinarily sift, rather than

offering guidance for actions, encroach upon the patient's realm. This suggests that a disruption in one's rapport with the world consistently corresponds with a perturbation in everyday bodily experiences. From this, one can deduce that:

- The lived-body and the Other are indissolubly linked.
- The lived-body is immanent openness to the world; through it, we recognize ourselves in the encounter with the Other.
- What afflicts the common sense, or natural evidence (whatever term we use), afflicts the lived-body as well.

"The pathic dimension is by definition alien to the subject, as it is situated at the root of the emerging of the subject, when the subject has yet to be formed, moving it by calling it to respond incessantly" (Francesetti 2021, 41). Up to this point, the deficient ability to resonate with the pathic field, irrespective of its essence, would induce an unchecked influx of the external and unfamiliar, culminating in a pervasive sense of estrangement from the life world. In essence, it is well-understood how much each individual struggles to maintain a consistent sense of familiarity in life. In the aforementioned volume, it is claimed that the antithesis of pathicity is 'apathy', that is, its absence. More accurately, its converse aligns more with an excess of pathos; the patient, inundated by overwhelming feelings, is neither free to detach from this affliction nor capable of responding to the pathos.

Relying heavily on Heidegger's insights, Blankenburg contends that the disruption of the *sensus communis* is predominantly rooted in a misalignment of temporal perception, an initial cleavage between the a-priori and the a-posteriori. Yet, Blankenburg's viewpoint might challenge the very notion of the 'fundamental quality' of existence, given that temporality invariably assumes a historical formulation of self, logic, and reflection. Contrarily, narratives from patients at the threshold of psychosis depict a waning emotional synchrony with the life-world. To be precise, there is an erosion of accurate emotional modulation during their interactions with it. This element can be discerned in the testimonial of Renée's early psychotic episodes, the central figure in the Autobiography of a Schizophrenic Girl (Sechehaye 1994). Renée conveys that, without

warning, a vast emptiness manifests before her, with each entity assuming such an exaggerated prominence that it triggers her "waves of anxiety and bewilderment".

> Suddenly, a wave of anxiety would creep over me, the fear of unreality. My perception of the world sharpened the sense of the strangeness of things. In the silence and immensity, each object was cut off by a knife, detached in the emptiness and boundlessness, spaced off from other things. Without any relationship with the environment, it began to come to life. It was there, terrifying me. (Sechehaye 1994, 83)

As soon as her surroundings cease to serve as the background to her experience, they begin to distort, gaining such prominence as to instil in Renée a profound sense of anxiety. The invisible barrier that shields us from the aggressive intrusions of the world becomes powerfully prophetic, as in Binswanger's words (1957), who describes with poetic sensitivity the existence of the person with schizophrenia as "stranded on a step too high", entangled in a world project that alienates, in a *pathos* that becomes the stigma of an anthropological disproportion (Muscatello and Scudellari, 1998).

Although differing in focus and centred on various facets of the pathology, all these approaches share a unifying theme: they identify a foundational shift occurring at the level of the lived body, always situated within a relational context where it is ceaselessly moulded and reshaped. Anne Rau frequently speaks of an absence, a trajectory or growth, that might have shaped her into an ordinary person who would not constantly need to rebuild herself in order to persistently survive. From my perspective, the study of pre-psychotic experiences is inextricably linked with the study of atmospheres; one is an intrinsic part of the other, perhaps even a co-factor.

> The language with which patients tell their stories is vague and confusing because words cannot appropriately grasp what is pre-verbal and purely sensorial in nature. People with psychotic experiences live in the atmosphere, in the glowing hot crucible from which subject and world struggle to emerge without managing to. The drama here lies in the anguish for a separate world that fails to be constituted and in the lack of a language to convey the experience in communicable terms. (Francesetti 2021, 41)

In the fundamental state of perception, one encounters pathically the atmospheric. This would not be inherently problematic if the experiences of such moments could be easily thematized. The self and the world, as posited by Francesetti and Griffero, coalesce and define themselves precisely within the pathic realm and from this vantage point, they distinguish themselves as well, neither overshadowing the other. The capacity to immerse oneself, to embrace the other without feeling overwhelmed but merely 'touched', serves as a cornerstone of sanity, if not of life itself.

"My flesh vanishes when its unique condition of possibility, the flesh of the other, disappears" (Marion 2007, 119). The natural evidence to which Blankenburg's patient alludes is essentially a foundational sense of safety and simultaneously a sense of belonging to a consistent horizon of meaning. In its absence, the self is embroiled in a ceaseless and desperate quest to construct meaning on a shaky or non-existent foundation. "This is the relationship between basic trust and ego-identity" (Blankenburg 1971, 120). These foundational pillars remain inseparable throughout human existence, even if one remains oblivious to the other. The level of authentic reciprocity is never reached in patients like Anne, who nonetheless distinguishes herself as she has not arrived at any form of delusion, at any creation of a *mundus fabulosus*. In Jung's words, "Each of us is followed by a shadow. The less it is embedded in an individual's life, the thicker and blacker it is" (Jung 1995, 47). The shadow is not solely malevolent: it represents all that is primitive, raw, and unprocessed – both pure and infantile. It is the subterranean realm of the soul, held in check by a vital balance between pathos and gnosis. Armed with a modicum of ontological certainty, this shadowed area would merely serve as a counterweight to our personality, an authentic interlude of drives and desires that deviate from our regular self-representation under the guise of persona and societal role. In psychoanalytic terms, our psyche hides a convoluted and expansive realm that we seldom engage with. From a phenomenological perspective, we might assert that the embodied self is influenced by this multifaceted, atmospheric layer of impressions, experiences teetering on the edge of consciousness, oscillating between the visible and invisible, and straddling the realm of the other and our own. It becomes evident, therefore, that the discourse on pre-reflective affectivity is deeply intertwined with the concept of foundational trust. When this trust is eroded, the affective realm charges forth aggressively, often confronting those ill-equipped to harmonise it. Typically, the origin of this void has deep-seated roots, layered over time and resting upon inherently fragile

ground. As Francesetti observes, “We could say that what *the patient bears is what he does not have* (a pain seeking the light with the other, but which is manifested as the absence of pain)” (Francesetti 2015, 48, author’s emphasis).

Before Blankenburg, Minkowski had introduced the intriguing concept of “loss of vital contact” with reality as central to schizophrenia, recounting patient accounts strikingly similar to Anne Rau’s experiences (Minkowski 1998). One of his patients expressed it thus: “I have suppressed affectivity, just as I have suppressed all reality. I exist from the point of view of the body, but I have no internal feeling of life. I no longer feel things” (Minkowski 1998, 76). Within the prodromal phase, the episodic fragmentation and subsequent reconstruction of the ego bear significant weight. For both Minkowski and Blankenburg, comprehending psychosis is intimately tied to the autistic disposition: the individual, burdened by the external world, retreats from it, secluding themselves to the extent of severing ties with shared reality. However, this observation could detract from a pivotal facet of this study. It is not the autistic seclusion of the pre-psychotic phase that precipitates the ensuing delusional disorder, but rather the invasive encroachment of the world upon the self, rupturing an already fragile ‘in-between’ dimension. In this regard, Binswanger comes to my aid since he interprets the subject’s withdrawal into himself precisely as the deprivation of the self, induced by an unmoderated intrusion of the external world (1990).

Back to Minkowski, extensive scientific literature documents the French psychiatrist’s efforts to pinpoint a causal factor in schizophrenic disorders, particularly centring on the “loss of vital contact with reality”. There remains ambiguity surrounding the precise intent behind these words and their directive or explanatory role within the psychopathological framework, as Minkowski himself wished to accommodate diverse interpretations: “Grasping the generative disturbance means to grasp the intimate metamorphosis of subjectivity, which underlies the complex of symptoms and gives them their own structural unity” (Stanghellini et al. 2005, 265). Within the psychotic transformation of subjectivity, what truly alters is something so deep, so intimate, that it resists being relegated to diagnostic manuals. It demands to be sensed, observed, and heeded: through dialogue, gestures, and the inter-affective encounter.

3.4. *Aida* and The Fragility of Being

An identity that reaches its most complete fragmentation can no longer situate itself within a horizon of common sense. Hence, it does not feel the effect, the intersubjective resonance of its presence within that context. The person is so dispossessed of their place in the world that it tragically fluctuates, becoming its own paradox, lacking a genuine capacity for relatedness. If the world disappears, where do I fit in? How can I continue to justify my corporeal presence if the ground beneath my feet has collapsed?

> The man who is the subject of psychosis cannot be reduced to the status of an object of psychiatry. For Binswanger and Kimura, mental illness is not an aberration of nature but a form of excess or failed existence, whose conditions of possibility and, therefore, the principle of intelligibility are inscribed in the constitution of us all. (Maldiney 2000, 37)

It is, after all, a question of finding the ideal conjunction between the vital background of existence and its integration into the lifeworld. Its failure dictates the onset of psychopathological conditions, preceded, in the case of schizophrenic psychosis, by uncanny emotional tonalities. The focus of research, therefore, belongs to the order of the situated man, as Minkowski would phrase it, where what counts is the pathic structure between the self and the world. For Blankenburg, the loss of natural evidence is inevitably associated with the weakening of the *sensus communis*, which is a sphere of collective sensoriality that "should be cemented at a young age so as not to risk falling into deviance and madness" (Blankenburg 2001, 306). He adds that without it, all things remain as if suspended in the air, like an invisible sword of Damocles, threatening and unsettling. In the presage that it implies, it designates a zone of preliminaries, between being present and no longer being present, one step away from the abyss of nothingness, where there is no longer the immediate visceral contact with things naturally embedded in our flesh. When asked what he thought of the word 'collapse', a sick man replied: "When men are not in their right place. [...] The former world is gone, the beautiful, ordered world. I too am not in my right place, where one belongs to" (De Martino 2002, 207). Familiarity is also synonymous with common sense: its loss leads to hyper-reflexivity, an overly

introspective attitude, which questions the life-world but does not allow itself to be questioned by it because it no longer recognises or feels it. To mask this growing inner anxiety, patients often exhibit eccentric and mannered behaviours, as if they were attempting to display a spontaneity that is inevitably overdone (Binswanger 1956).

It is not possible, especially in the case of pauci-symptomatic schizophrenia, to outline a pathway that rigidly hierarchizes the generating disorder in cognition or affect; such a pathway would not yield a comprehensive answer. Affectivity and the capacity for judgment converge to an original unity that sees them combined in the notion of 'common sense' (Blankenburg 2001, 307). The state of astonishment and perplexity is, in any case, the starting point which, to be understood, surely requires the psychiatrist to be fully immersed in the patient's world, suspending any judgmental attitude. Therapists and patients emerge from a unique, once-in-a-lifetime force field that shapes them, enabling the actualisation of absences that hold the potential for transformation in the present moment. "*Suffering is pathos*; it emerges in an atmospheric way and absorbs the patient and therapist in the phenomenal field from which they emerge, and which gives form to their experience" (Francesetti 2015, 50). It is imperative, then, that those assuming the therapeutic role have a natural inclination to listen empathically to the patient and can actualise the patient's words within their own embodied *Erlebnis*. The genuineness of the intersubjective encounter rests precisely on the harmony between feeling and reality.

Without delving into the nuances of a metaphysical debate, we can infer that encountering otherness is impossible if the world recedes from a projective horizon of common sense, leaving the individual in solipsistic and anxious efforts to reconstruct it from a starting point of zero. Blankenburg refers to the concept of "basic trust", formulated by Erikson (1957) as the cornerstone of the subject's relationship with the world. According to the psychiatrist, this primordial atmospheric feeling connotes the predisposition to an unchallenged common sense (Blankenburg 2001, 310). Being, thus, means first and foremost to be present in a pathic relationship with otherness. Through the other, I comprehend and reclaim myself without losing my identity or fearing that I can no longer 'inhabit' my body. This relationship is underpinned by an implicit understanding where each perception belongs to a broader expressive domain (Resnik 1986, 122), encompassing all conceivable forms of communication, both linguistic and pre-linguistic. However, what if, during the essential encounter with the other, I fail to reconnect with

myself? In this tragic paradox, the defining characteristic of our existence is revealed: the closeness to and distance from the other, necessitating clear and structured boundaries. Ronald Laing, aligning with Blankenburg, suggests that in the face of the psychotic patient, one senses a truly primordial absence, something challenging to articulate in words, relating to the sentiment of "ontological insecurity" (Laing 1960).

> If a position of primary ontological security has been reached, the ordinary circumstances of life do not afford a perpetual threat to one's own existence. If such a basis for living has not been reached, the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and deadly threat. Only if this is realized is it possible to understand how certain psychoses can develop. (Laing 1960, 42)

So, according to the mentioned analyses, despite the different characterisations, various scholars agree in identifying a disturbance that touches the most vulnerable chords of the human being: the ones underpinning affectivity. Furthermore, how can we conceive of it separated from our bodies, which from birth record every emotional vibration, absorbing environmental stimuli into an immense pre-reflective memory storage? The point is that, at the appropriate moment, that process of 'safeguarding' should be triggered, filtering external outputs, because not everything must be recorded or tolerated without having destructive effects on oneself, in the near or distant future.

> In other words, we raise the following question: Is the brittle fragility of common sense merely a matter of pure deficiency, or does it involve an essential risk or vulnerability belonging to the very structure of being human? (Blankenburg 2001, 310)

Fragility is intrinsic to the human being because it is his very essence. However, it can remain unaltered as long as we maintain the continuity of a fundamental substratum of anchorage to life and otherness with which we risk coming into contact without seeing our individuality blur. Thus, mental health seems to result from a healthy dialectic with the otherness, constitutive of our being:

> The encounter with otherness is a necessary precondition for mental health. We know, however, that this encounter can become pathogenic. We call 'vulnerability'

> the otherness that I find in myself (in my involuntary disposition) when, as a person, I fail to dialogue with it. (Stanghellini et al. 2017, 43)

Moreover, with painful evidence, this vulnerability emerges primarily in schizophrenia, which is the collapse par excellence of oneself and the world, with no more barriers or defences of one's bodily boundaries. During a group session, a patient of Laing's complained of being forced to argue not to defend his thesis but to preserve his existence (Laing 1960, 44). Any activity, word, or gesture of the patient is not aimed at achieving forms of gratification or personal growth, but at the sole purpose of not getting lost in the other, seen as a threat and source of anxiety. The absence of solid ontological security pushes the individual to experience himself solely as saving himself from being 'engulfed' by the presence of others. Not possessing a guaranteed continuity, the individual continually strives to acquire it. In the precariousness of these foundations, the construction of one's personal identity occurs with little or no rooting of oneself in a shared field of life. In the imagery of these patients, especially in the pre-psychotic phase, there are often references to fire, burning, and petrification. Feeling one's body burning, metaphorically speaking, might represent an impulse to find lost affectivity or one that has never been lived serenely before falling into 'schizophrenic madness'; petrification, on the other hand, is the act immediately following the caustic experience. The individual, deprived of any secure and trusting contact with the interpersonal world, 'petrifies' himself to avoid risking being petrified by others. Behind this experience, there is an overwhelming emptiness.

Discussing schizoids, Kretschmer says they have a surface and a bottom. He compares some of them to "Roman villas that have closed their shutters to the scorching sun, but inside, in the twilight, there are celebrations and banquets" (Kretschmer 1937, 403). Nevertheless, he tells us that in others, behind this silent facade, there is nothing but ruins and ashes, "the monotonous emptiness, the glacial breath of affective dementia" (Laing 1960, 106). Confirming this, there is evidence that not all schizophrenics wander in their dreaming castles, in their 'crazy' fantasies, having severed every link with reality. Many of them continue to suffer the loss of connection, that natural evidence that is entirely affective and interpersonal. The dimension of in-between genuinely represents it, a concept finely elaborated by Böhme, as a perfect fusion of environmental qualities and

affective states, and perhaps even more so by Schmitz in his definition of 'atmosphere' as a feeling originating from the affective space of the body, in its primary dynamics of contraction and expansion.

In his revolutionary project, atmospheres appear more like fluctuating and independent entities, which settle on things and give them a specific emotional tone. However, this is another story; Böhme's moderate correction of Schmitz's position certainly comes more to our aid. In their being "spheres of the presence of something" (Böhme 2013, 13), they bring together, in an immediate certainty, the feeling of being and, simultaneously, of being-there. Therefore, they represent an essential requirement for living in a serene self- and hetero-determination context. A spontaneous "do ut des", which does not imply the loss of one's autonomy at the moment of yielding oneself to the other. On the other hand, if one does not possess that implicit feeling of ontological autonomy, it means that he or she can never experience a total separation or a total closeness to the other, ordinarily. Mutuality is, for the person, either dependence or destruction, as in the case of Laing's patient, Mrs R., who for all her life tried to keep herself alive through morbid attachments with other people, having experienced since childhood feelings of insubstantiality, irrelevance, which did not allow her to develop a solid affective salience concerning herself. For her, esse is *percipi*: to be seen, that is, not as an anonymous passer-by or casual acquaintance. It was just that form of seeing that petrified her. If she was seen as anonymous, as no one who especially mattered or as a thing, then she was no one in particular (Laing 1960, 57). A constant anxiety characterises the relationship that the ontologically insecure subject establishes with themselves, lived through an experience of alienation from the own body. It is like living in a prison, watching oneself act, think, remember, and plan without ever feeling at one with it. The spontaneous interplay of mind and body is dramatically interrupted in the subject predisposed to the development of psychosis.

We might conclude that, according to Laing, it is the absence of intra-personal affective resonance that may pave the way to a descent into psychosis. Resonance, as recently defined, is how we are in immediate, affective contact with a situation (Fuchs 2016). No situation exists in life where affective adherence to an intersubjective horizon is not implicitly required, resonating with the intra-subjective one. The failure of this connection, therefore, marks psychopathological conditions. After all, our presence truly acquires meaning in a shared context, in the ordinary sense of which Blankenburg speaks,

in the dimension of the “homme situé” which Minkowski describes, and in the *aida* upon which Kimura (1988, 1992) expounds.

The aida, rather than a noetic act (as the author himself defines it), is more appropriately an atmospheric field where human existence is diluted; where the ‘I’ and the ‘You’ meet within a medium (Zwischen), communicating pathically. Without the aida, the other would appear to us in a terrifying manner, destabilising subjective borders. According to Kimura, when proximity and distance are not established in a balanced manner, and the self is thus overwhelmed, the schizophrenic experience of being usurped by the other arises. Moreover, this is evident from numerous accounts of schizophrenic individuals, such as the previously mentioned Anne Rau, or Reneé, the central figure of Sechehaye’s autobiography, who expressed her profound despair, incomparable loneliness, yet still desiring to hold onto that waning glimmer of reality from her diminishing interpersonal horizon, succumbing to the isolation of madness.

> For me, madness was definitely not a condition of illness; I did not believe that I was ill. It was rather a country, opposed to Reality, where reigned an implacable light [...]; an immense space without boundary, limitless, flat. [...] I am lost in it, isolated, cold, stripped, purposeless under the light. In the midst of desolation, in indescribable distress, I am terrifyingly alone (Sechehaye 1994, 44).

We could reference myriad other narratives from individuals with varying degrees of psychosis, but we would identify the same core issue, a sense of desolate loneliness interspersed with an agonised quest for shards of familiarity with the world. This world becomes burdensome and oppressive for the individual confronted by it, devoid of any adequate protective barrier. Beyond the neuro-psychological foundations of the disorder, which are not my focus, we can indeed argue that the schizophrenic individual experiences a structural vulnerability, often emerging in pre-adolescence, precisely when a sense of personal identity starts to solidify, built upon childhood foundations. Kimura posits that the precariously constituted inner aida is ill-equipped to grapple with ’the physical and psychological tribulations of this critical phase. Further, he introduces the concept of “common sense”, focusing specifically on the relationship between human

presence and the backdrop of life (an idea closely related to that of the lifeworld). Recognising in the aida the noetic essence of such an encounter, the psychiatrist identifies the failure of this engagement as the hallmark of schizophrenic vulnerability. If an individual does not engage with another as a foundational moment of self-creation and consolidation, the intersubjective network can only appear contrived, brittle, jeopardising even the genuineness of the act by which one 'assumes' one's role within a societal context. Furthermore, by this, we are not referring to a collection of shared opinions within a broader collective horizon, but that tacit consensus (which Husserl also examines in his final work) of harmonisation between oneself and others, distinguishing between a life perpetually under scrutiny, and one that is indeed examined but through a solid and deliberate personal choice.

> The certainty of 'I am myself', although it has much evidence for most men, is not sufficiently constituted in the schizophrenic, to the extent that he strives relentlessly in excessive and painful self-reflection". (Kimura 1997, 91)

Ricœur's *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990) sees its most severe implications here: if the other-than-me does not define but 'consumes' me, obfuscating my boundaries, how could I not respond with anxiety, terror, and a perpetual sense of looming danger? Schizophrenia then becomes more comprehensible, both on a human and philosophical level. Regardless of any individual evolution, it is the pre-psychotic framework that should primarily capture the therapist's attention, or indeed anyone close to the patient. This is because, in the vast majority of cases, assistance is sought during psychosis when a new 'mythology' of the world has already taken hold. Medicinal treatments are of limited utility if the patient is not offered a bridge, a temporary aida, through which he can tentatively reclaim himself and liberate himself from the symptoms of psychosis. While Cartesian doubt may have underpinned the possibility of thought and thus identity itself in a fragile and precarious ground, ontological doubt anguishes and destabilizes. On the other hand, the symptoms appear as an attempt to reconstruct an internal articulation at risk of total annihilation:

> Suppose you try to eliminate those symptoms without psychotherapeutic support and using purely chemical remedies. In that case, you risk suppressing the last defenses

> of an already constitutionally weak ego and exposing it to the danger of such despair as to lead to sudden suicide (Kimura 1997, 9).

In Kimura, the bodily presence, which becomes an ambiance of resonance for the other, also embodies time. It merges with a healthy temporal perception, which does not dwell excessively on the painful moments of waiting or anguish. Beyond singular cases, what is most fascinating is that behind schizophrenic life, as a prelude to psychosis, there often lies a problem with the constitution of one's embodied self. The individual, throughout life, experiences the anguish of using artificial means to hold together the fragments of their subjectivity in relation to the world; in a typical context, the constitution of self and world is simultaneous. The anguish that anticipates the psychotic episode occurs when, precisely, the individual is overwhelmed by the inability to cope with the crisis of the unknown, of the future (Kimura 1997, 22). Such an individual knows a present that is a perpetual conflict to confirm their own existence.

The "ante-festum" is the typical modality of pre-schizophrenia, i.e., living in perpetual expectation of something that will happen, in pathic anticipation of a future whose development is unknown, but only its effects on the present are evident. If we recall again Schmitz's concept of primitive presence, we might infer that what the subject lacks is the ability to feel, at the roots of its existence, the unity of its corporeity that anchors him and naturally extends into the lifeworld. Living in the ante-festum can be approached "as the situation before the feast, where everything is joyfully foreshadowed by anticipating the event of the feast, or, conversely, dramatically when it is its desolating failure that is anticipated in anguish" (Kimura 1997, 40). The dimension of expectation carries an overwhelming affectivity, intrinsic to the suspension of the present, of the 'here and now'. This suspension impacts the person's world, like a sudden deflagration, which, after the impact, spreads a cloud around it, dulling and blurring the features of reality. An existence focused on defending itself, despite constant foreboding, resting on unstable ground, ready to crumble at any moment, is unsustainable. Of course, some will object, arguing that it is hard to find an existence marked by absolute certainties, linear goals, and plain paths. However, the issue is not about that: it is the lack of a sense of integrity with oneself, the rupture of the aida, that delineates the boundary between normality and pathology, between anchoring oneself to shared reality and descending into an unshared

world. To exist as being-for-the-other does not necessarily mean submitting oneself to the responsibility for the other, as Levinas suggested: it emerges naturally from the relationship with the background of life, which is the core of the aida. Losing subjectivity in relationships implies the loss of existence as an autonomous person, as suggested by Laing and Kimura. Kimura, drawing from musical theory, describes the encounter with the background of life as essentially the meeting with the collective atmosphere of the world, the familiar sensation of participation in a spatiotemporal horizon composed of continuity, change, and points of reference.

> Thus, common sense, while being a principle of life that is hardly objectified and verbalized, always accompanies our objectifications and verbalizations of events like a *shadow,* adding different nuances in the form of metaphors that enrich our everyday life. (Kimura 2013, 59)

3.5. Crepuscolarity and Psychopathology

Like Dante on his tortuous journey through hell, we navigate the intricacies of human subjectivity, pausing at significant junctures where we recognise brilliant insights, perhaps undervalued. The natural integration of Blankenburg's idea of common sense with Kimura's notion of aida as a pre-subjective and pre-verbal existential foundation now also influences our exploration of its affective dimension. We know through Tatossian that a deep affective modus dwells in the person, rooted in the body and thus in the vital sphere of the human being (1979). This vulnerability lies in its potential to become an area unconditionally receptive to engagement or conflict with the lifeworld. In that moment of suspension and premonition, the individual's fate starts to crystallise.

The nature of the personal response will determine the ensuing clinical portrait. Wyrsch, for example, posits that a person, usually influenced by a unique atmosphere, now confronts an unfamiliar and abnormal affective tone (1966). On the boundary between philosophy and psychiatry, Wyrsch theorises that the person's life story paves the way to schizophrenic pathology. There are notable similarities with Schmitz's and Bollnow's theories, the former in the emphasis on the concept of lived space and the latter

concerning affective tonality. Schmitz assigned to space – the space personally inhabited and experienced by humans – the role of imprinting upon the person insofar as this space is characterised by inherent affectivity. Space is not merely an objective metric related to some external dimension, whether geometric or linear; it is a feeling, an 'absolute bodily place', where we expand or withdraw based on the impressions we receive. We should refer to "dynamic volumes imbued with motor suggestions and non-reversible directions, associated with the sentient body" (Schmitz 2011, 96).

In a similar vein, Bollnow describes an enveloping unity of life and world, identified as "emotional tonality", broadly defined as a harmonious fusion between lived body and world (2009). Emotional tonality still lives entirely in and before the undivided unity of Ego and World; it, therefore, does not come from an isolated inner life of man, but it is man himself who is immersed in the totality of the surrounding space (Bollnow 2009, 33). Everything in us depends so much on the outside, or rather, everything external and everything internal is linked, they are one (Bollnow 2009, 37). The typical human condition, in a state of normality, is firmly rooted in the natural interplay between embodied subjectivity and affectivity as an element (muted in a specific manner) of openness to the world. No human state exists without an emotional tune. Bollnow argues that all distinct lived experiences are directed by an underlying emotional tone, a foundation that harks back to early life when everything external is absorbed without any filters.

In this context, the emphasis is on the assertion that throughout life, humans must consistently face situations that pose profound questions. Responding to these questions with urgency is crucial, lest they become overwhelmed by the emotional weight of their circumstances. This is precisely Wyrsch's emphasis in his work *The Person of the Schizophrenic* (2014), wherein he undertakes a conventional deconstruction of schizophrenia to shift focus to the person with schizophrenia, emblematic of an intense eruption of emotions, a being saturated with feelings. Relationship and affective tonality form the dual foundation of the psychiatrist's theory, which criticises (sometimes poetically) the psychological science solely fixated on the soma, the bios, and the hylé. To grapple with the skewed, opaque, and menacing spatiality found in schizophrenia means redirecting one's focus to more tangible reflections: not losing sight of the essentials, predominantly related to a body filled with meaning. When meaning is absent or starts to plummet into infinite abysses, individuals create supports, verbal or otherwise,

to reconstruct their unique significance and continue existing in a shared horizon. The progression of the pathology, from the pre-psychotic phase to the severe stage of delusions and hallucinations, as described by Wyrsch, can be understood within purely human dynamics: a waning subjectivity battling to prevent submersion into the abyss of insanity. Unlike Blankenburg, however, Wyrsch analyses cases of patients already advanced into schizophrenia, not during their pre-psychotic prodromes, of which, he believes, most have only muddled and unreliable memories. We find ourselves, therefore, at the terminus of schizophrenic progression, where "ideas are expressed in the form of hallucinations, which is why the world of the schizophrenic is only partially accessible to others" (Wyrsch 1966, 5).

Specifically, the psychiatrist presents the case of a woman, Ida, who was admitted to the Waldau clinic at the age of 42, following the appearance of severe paranoid manifestations, lack of restraint in relational behaviour, persecution mania, and disinhibition of various kinds. According to his report, Ida began to show significant changes as early as ten years earlier (Wyrsch 1966, 6-15), manifesting somatic pains, cenesthopathy, feelings of restlessness, and perceived threats. Depending on their individual personalities and experiences, people adopt different attitudes towards the onset of the illness; each displays a method of acknowledging a transcendence that seems to descend from above, disrupting an already fragile existence without suitable defence mechanisms.

What becomes glaringly evident in acute psychoses is the detrimental impact of the morbid process, which profoundly affects the individual, urging them to 'take a stance' and marking a pivotal moment in their personal narrative (Stanghellini et al. 2005, 113). In encounters with a schizophrenic individual, one is confronted with a pervasive feeling of emptiness, a lack of resonance that permeates the most nuanced aspects of interpersonal relatedness. This feeling is profound, leading almost immediately to a sense of confronting something entirely foreign and 'unmistakably schizophrenic' in the person with the psychic disorder. The atmospheric, then, is configured as both an existential and relational dimension in the world of the schizophrenic: at the dawn of pathology, he lives as if suspended, restless, in an air bubble, with a giant question mark hanging like a sword of Damocles over his daily *habitus*, yet still able to live with it so as not to lose his continuity with himself and others.

> The atmosphere these people experience is that of ‘Holy Friday’: one expects a collapse at any moment, experiences a sense of unreality, of disorientation, and everything could change at any moment. (De Martino 2002, 32)

The psychotic event, echoing Wyrsch’s appraisal, takes root ’deeply within an individual’s personal history, unlike other psychopathologies such as mania or phobia. Psychosis represents a departure from the established path, one defined by common sense, aida, and implicit understanding. This deviation, however, is driven by profound desperation: the relentless pursuit of answers, the urge to address a wound that has compromised the individual’s very essence. Given this context, it is evident that words cannot serve as the primary instrument for deciphering the pre-schizophrenic world. In this realm, words have lost their function as conduits of interpersonal communication. Conversely, throughout history, language has emerged as the dominant mode by which metaphysics has endeavoured to elucidate experiences, asserting itself as the primary means of verifying reality and sidelining phenomena that resist straightforward logical-formal interpretation.

If, as proposed earlier, both external and internal spaces are strictly demarcated by categorising and classifying language, where then do feelings, sensations, and passions belong to? I present this query as a challenge to modern thought, particularly within the psychiatric domain, which is deeply entrenched in technical jargon and predisposed to diagnostic judgements. This introduction aims to elucidate a peculiar, unsettling, and ominous phenomenon, the final aspect of my dissertation thesis: the atmosphere of an impending apocalypse and the psychopathological epoché. Intrinsically linked to the delusional mood (*Wahnstimmung*) is the psychotic anticipation of a cataclysmic event where the individual lives in anxious expectation of a disruption, perceived as the answer to their existential quandary. Why, at the inception of psychosis, do numerous patients undergo such a distinct atmosphere, heavily laden with an apocalyptic tone?

For this particular study, I am indebted to the collaborative efforts of Bruno Callieri and Ernesto De Martino, with the latter particularly investing significant time and resources to highlight the indelible connection between cultural and pathological forms of apocalypse. The foundational premise driving their investigative pursuit posits that there is a profound existential event, an extreme regression of the logos into some of humanity’s most primal expressions, coupled with the eschatological dread of a cosmic ’culmination.

In this context, patients attribute heightened significance to every facet of their environment, continuously alluding to latent, eschatological interpretations. Consider the case of Franca, 39, a patient under Callieri's care, who described experiencing unusual occurrences over several weeks: "There is a peace in the world that announces the coming of the Lord; everything has a different meaning from the ordinary, from the usual, the sun shines brighter, the flight of the birds is strange" (Callieri and Faranda 2001, 116, 117). As gleaned from Franca's statement, the world is presented in an unmistakably atypical light, not necessarily anchored in verifiable reality or its absence. The looming event is perceived with overwhelming intensity, rendering the familiar world eerie and filled with foreboding signs: the once-reassuring environment of the everyday now seems besieged by enigmatic emotions, as if cursed. The fundamental human state undergoes a relentless transformation, wherein coherence dissipates, and every facet gains potential significance. However, linguistic comprehension becomes increasingly challenging, drifting further from shared semantic understanding. Patients grow conscious of their anguish, a foundational aspect of our existence within the world. Yet, this awareness comes at a high price: the loss of a collective horizon of shared values produces an unsustainable withdrawal into abnormal intentions of meaning (Callieri and Faranda 2001, 125).

De Martino also posited that the delirious ambience is an insufferable experience for the patient, who is thus compelled to frantically seek a representation offering solace. The patient's *Umwelt* is then charged with abnormal, bizarre, unusual meanings. Furthermore, it is not so much the threat it brings that destabilizes the sick person as the feeling of alienation precedes it. Thus, the "here is something" becomes an extreme attempt to determine what there is (De Martino 2002).

> The experience of the end of the world, beyond whether or not it involves a morbid alteration of the ego, is, in terms of its content, an experience of a symbolic truth that spans the centuries and concerns man's existence. (De Martino 2002, 31)

According to the anthropologist, in the initial schizophrenias, the delusional atmosphere of the end of the world might have an 'apotropaic' value: to explain, in fictional archetypical imagery, it could ideally represent a symbol for the patient, a defence against the unravelling of nothingness, the disintegration of the ordinary world and the fading of

its familiar nuances. Extending the interpretation, the end of the world, therefore, seems to take the form of liberation from the intolerable anxiogenic burden that the patient feels in the waiting suspension phase, still oscillating between the world of the norm and the world of madness. The patient confronts the most significant of existential questions: not "who am I?", but "where am I?". The patient exists in the 'non-place' par excellence, an endless present without planning, and bewildering immobility. Within the nebulous heart of WS, the individual feels a disconnect from the life-world, which is nothing other than the implicit familiarity that fosters unconditional trust in the 'being-ness' of things. The most rudimentary feeling of being-ness is lost, and patients often report "feeling driven out of their bodies at the root" (Storch 1930, in Kuhn, 2014, 116). In the early stages of schizophrenia, the individual witnesses a progressive loss of existence, a slow separation from the shared world affecting both body and ego. The pre-psychotic individual is encompassed in a climatic, atmospheric situation, indicating an alien situation not yet materialised.

> Between the absence of the world and the possible absence of the self, in the vacuum of my-being-in-the-world, the question resounds within me: 'What is there? [...] I feel that there is something, but I do not know yet what it is. I don't know if it is me who is leaving or if it is the world vanishing under my fingers. (Callieri, Maldonato, and Di Petta 1999, 69)

Anticipating an explanation, the individual experiences a moment of detachment from oneself, one's body, and the interpersonal context. The tension between the expected and the unexpected finds solace only in the comforting embrace of delusion, which dispels the obscure and intolerable veil of *Unheimlichkeit*. The apocalypse then appears as "an experience of the loss of the intersubjectivity of values that make a world possible as a human world" (De Martino 2002, 50). It is not merely the temporal sequence of events that is lost, but the very ability to place oneself within them and to define one's existence in a projectual and communal manner. It is telling that the world of 'normality' is delineated in terms connected to domesticity and familiarity. The world's unfolding is enabled only by the taken-for-granted assurance of existence in contrast to the allure of nothingness. However, this does not suggest that the human horizon should remain static

or unchangeable when faced with various upheavals. It is possible to lose oneself in the abyss of doubt and turmoil, but one should find a way back to avoid delusion. In Callieri's view, the patient in the pre-psychotic phase becomes acutely aware of anguish as a fundamental mode of existence. In this anguish, the patient no longer recognises himself or others as entities within the world. The profound anxiety of the psychotic prodromes represents the outcome of an all-encompassing suspension, suddenly cast over the person's life, and, crucially, without prior deliberation. It closely mirrors the characteristics of an epoché.

3.6. The Pathic *Epoché:* Tracing the Path to Therapy

At the heart of the phenomenological method is the act of bracketing, the *epoché*:

> The operation of the *epoché* allows us to remove ourselves from the strongest and most universal and, therefore, most occult constraints: namely, the constraints of the already-givenness of the world. The *epoché*, rightly understood […] totally changes all conceptions of the tasks of psychology and reveals how everything that had been taken as evident beforehand constitutes a naivety. (Husserl 1970, 122)

Husserl's method foresees the *epoché*'s implementation as the primary step in initiating a process of research. Essentially, it marks the onset of awe and wonder regarding how phenomena present themselves. The phenomenological reduction subsequently homes in on the correlative interplay between particular structures of subjectivity (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008). The epoché pervades Husserl's entire philosophy. However, over time, it has accommodated various interpretations due to its lack of explicit procedural guidance (perhaps intentionally). A thorough examination of this topic exceeds the boundaries of this thesis. Instead, I shall present the generally accepted understanding of epoché.

We think of epoché as "a questioning of our usual discourse about something, putting in brackets the preventive structure that constitutes the omnipresent background of everyday

life" (Varela 1997, 330-331). Whether executed by a philosopher, a psychiatrist, or an amateur, this operation always stems from a conscious, deliberate, and thoughtful decision — a distinct act of "sinking into oneself, into one's bodily being and the flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 54). Husserl attributes a significant transformation to the act of epoché, thus endowing it with a substantial operational significance. Through it, one can observe the usual pattern of things and their effect on the flow of experience with heightened awareness. Nevertheless, refraining from judgment does not equate to identifying the content of the analysis or the intention behind consciousness. By engaging in the reflection enabled by the epoché, one gains distance from what consciousness initially believes, assesses, and conceives, rather than expressing, describing, and explaining its beliefs and judgements. In this context, the epoché epitomises a true act of liberty: a singular and unparalleled chance to delve into the unadulterated essence of the phenomenon.

While admitting the fatigue, discipline, and constancy that such an attitude requires, Husserl never speaks of potential affectivity that might overwhelm or impact the subject. As a rule, the epoché does not fall upon us. It is not imposed from the outside, chaotically disrupting plans and values that direct our life without implicit consent. A pathic, undesired suspension has an entirely different configuration. As I explained, this seems to be the phenomenon characterising pre-psychosis and, to some extent, the happenings of recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The suspension of common sense and the obvious was imposed upon us by the State for public health reasons; hence, we suffered emotionally, but rationally understood its necessity. The lifeworld was abruptly halted at its core, namely in sociality. There was profound silence in the lifeworld as streets, squares, bars, and shutters closed. Social interaction appeared suspended in those lunar, metaphysical landscapes, with traits of 'psychotic desertification' (Di Petta 2020). The actions that formed part of our daily routine, those of implicit and serene obviousness – like having a coffee at the bar, shaking hands, meeting with a group of friends, and being able to get close to each other – were not only greatly hindered but also became dangerous potential conduits of death. In the void produced by this externally imposed suspension, we found ourselves losing further contact with our bodies, already overshadowed and dematerialised by the frantic rhythms of modernity, the cult of the image, and the technologisation of intersubjectivity. We found ourselves gradually diminishing direct contact with one another because of anxiety about the future, an

obsession with contagion, and the loss of our projects. Emotional reactions became automated, devoid of the infinite intermediate nuances that make communication vibrant. We saw each other but did not feel a genuine mutual connection. Therefore, the reflective act of suspending the world's habituality can reveal components of joy, surprise, and amazement. However, when the suspension precipitates *ex abrupto*, unintentionally, the subjective experience is tonalized in a certain way: unease, embarrassment, and anxiety. This is the stage where the *Erlebnis* (lived experience) is highly atmospheric. The perceptive experience of the world is imbued with vivid atmosphericity, a situational tonality that destabilises the individual:

> As in the *epoché*, something suddenly appears in a different light. But the light of knowledge, as we know it, also has sinister gleams, which derive, in part, from the unknown that is being clarified, in part from the known that is being lost, in part from the new that is beginning to be experienced with that disturbing and exciting sense of strangeness. It is precisely from the dichotomy: loss of the known/disclosure of the unknown, resetting/restarting, that intense and contrasting feelings arise, such as fear and joy, anguish or the tranquillity of a new beginning. (Di Petta 2020, 43)

In the prodromal phase of the psychotic disorder, patients often reported a blurring of reality, a deviation from the obvious and common sense (Blankenburg 1998). Upon closer phenomenological analysis, the patient seems violently thrust by this semi-catastrophic epoché into close contact with the bare threads of reality (their body, interpersonal contacts, a sense of trust) for which they are not affectively prepared. This realm, unveiled by the epoché, is where the immediate form of our being-in-the-world is traumatically disrupted, revealing to the subject a deep, pathic suffering. In addition to a foundational loss, the world suddenly shifts from familiar to alien, from transparent to uncanny, due to this loss event. In this phase, which highlights the predominant spatiality of the lifeworld, there is a profound interplay between atmosphericity and affectivity. One of Janet's patients, at the onset of her psychosis, pronounced: "It was as though I were looking at the world through a veil, a fog, or a cloud, as if I were hearing myself through a wall that separates me from reality" (Janet 1889). The atmospheric dimension of the pre-psychotic phase is intrinsically tied to a moment of suspension, leading to the intense pathicity affecting the momentary impressions and symbolic qualities of the world. Within the pre-

psychotic stage, individuals are consumed by the atmospheric dimension. In moments of fragility, when the subject suddenly becomes unfamiliar with the surrounding context, the most profound drama is their inherent inability to articulate their experiences adequately. In this state of heightened tension (referred to by Conrad as "trema"), the weight of an enormous existential question becomes so overwhelming that it gradually warps the overarching meaning. The world starkly closes off from the patient's view, who, within the pre-delusional atmosphere, perceives the world as opaque. Therefore, this is an experience that can be assimilated to that of philosophical epoché, causing a fundamental "interruption" (Callieri 1977). It represents a suspension, a fleeting limbo, a transitory phase heralding something new, perhaps a dramatic shift.

However, while the nebulosity produced by the epoché prepares the ground for a lucid process of rationalisation and a new construction of meaning, the nebulosity associated with the delusional atmosphere (*Wahnstimmung*) readies for the de-structuring and dissolution of the relationship between man and the world. A person who initiates a process of epoché is indeed subject to a perturbation of pre-constituted conditions, but he does not depart from the deepest roots of his existence. His bodily rootedness, within a horizon of common sense, is not necessarily questioned; paradoxically, this continues to guarantee the maintenance of a balance between the pathic and the noetic. The implicit ambiguity accompanying the epoché process suggests that if the pre-delusional atmosphere catches the patient ex abrupto and unprepared, he then experiences not lucid acceptance but anguished disorientation and perplexity. On the ridge between reality and its annulment, there are thus two types of suspension: one reflective and atmospheric, alluding to a prospect, and the other pathic and atmospheric, alluding to an omen (Callieri 1982). If it is true, in line with Husserl, that the phenomenologically-oriented attitude and its inherent epoché produce a complete personal transformation, then it is equally true that, if responsibly chosen and accepted by the subject, he will not lose that fundamental interpersonal resonance whilst transforming himself.

Conversely, in the pathic epoché, with that occurring to the person who enters the psychotic world, there is a process of demundanization, a loss of vital contact, as Minkowski (1953) would describe, where that vital contact is the embodied dialogue with the other. Given that this is a borderline experience and not yet confinement, it still permits those who approach it to glimpse, however ambiguously and perplexedly, two

worlds - that of the norm and that of psychosis. At this juncture, the patient's *via Crucis* begins: in the abyss of a single moment, finding oneself in a painful, affective situationality that eludes all collocation, that struggles to find adequate words for its expression. "The alchemy of ignorance is painful: in the fire of disintegration, every firm concept perishes, every known, piece by piece, and the familiar world turns to ashes" (D'Ippolito 1999, 233). Before the flight into darkness, it is not only the world that turns to ashes but also the walls of the ego. The expectation becomes increasingly distressing when confronted with that single, pivotal question that finds no resolution. Callieri states, "When you ask the world questions that the world cannot answer, you end up losing tune with the world itself" (Callieri, Di Petta 1999 45). That immediate attunement with the everyday world, received from birth as a spontaneous and pre-given relational quality, is replaced by a feeling of fragmentation, a 'crepuscularity', loss of naturalness, the underpinnings of every single daily act.

In conclusion, this atmospheric phase is conceivable in terms of an affective epoché that imposes itself on a structural vulnerability whilst opening itself up to an eye that is not prepared to look. The atmospheric stage that characterises the prodromes of psychosis, which can also be observed in the early stages of other psychopathologies, remains a phenomenologically underexplored dimension, especially concerning early therapeutic intervention. Moreover, the science of atmospheres still needs systematisation, grappling with the inherent vagueness of its foundational concept. Yet, it affects every aspect of reality, our body, our network of social interactions, and our environment: it is the living soul of the lifeworld. Hence, the study of atmospheres could extend to all sciences, primarily the psychiatric one. By combining the higher concepts of phenomenology and Neo-phenomenology, my stance moves precisely in this direction. In psychopathology, if therapists were to approach the so-called 'twilight phases' of illness with deeper aesthetic sensitivity, one could work towards a positive reintegration of atmospheres of trust, protection, and dialogue during the intervention. For instance, the first experimental study of the therapeutic atmosphere in psychotherapy sessions (FEST) was recently published by a team of Norwegian psychiatrists and psychotherapists: the patients involved in the experimental group suffered from anxiety, depression, and personality disorders (Siegel et al. 2020). This new method (the Transference Work) implemented five attitudinal categories into traditional dynamic psychotherapy techniques:

1. The therapist should address interactions within the patient-therapist relationship
2. The therapist should promote the exploration of the patient's thoughts and feelings about the therapy and therapist.
3. The therapist should encourage patients to share their perceptions of how the therapist might feel or think about them
4. In the interpretive linking of dynamic elements, direct manifestations of transference, and references to the transference, the therapist should explicitly involve themselves.
5. The therapist should interpret recurring interpersonal patterns and relate these patterns to interactions between the patient and the therapist.

The study's results showed that examining the interpersonal process between patients and therapists significantly aids in understanding and predicting positive therapy outcomes over time. Listening, it could be argued, is unquestionably the primary element of therapeutic intervention: the individual, before becoming a patient, stands before us with an immense burden of suffering, seeking to share it with someone prepared to journey with them into the depths of their pain. Now, I present the views of two eminent psychiatrists from the phenomenological school of our era:

> This is precisely what patients genuinely expect from their psychiatrists: they want to be understood and share their experiences with them. They want to be recognized, acknowledged, and accompanied, especially in their self-alienation and confusion. (Fuchs 2021, 123)

> On the aesthetic level, looking becomes seeing, squaring becomes opening, and facing becomes meeting. There is no *aesthetizing* drift because every relationship is played out from the first moment at a bodily, and therefore aesthetic, level. (Calvi 1995, 67)

True intersubjective contact can only occur if one bestows upon the experiences of others an *aura*, however fleeting, of authentic reality. The seemingly fanciful, paranoid, delusional realm of the schizophrenic can indeed be recognised (and subsequently treated) if the therapist endeavours with an 'epochizing' effort to immerse themselves in the patient's perspective. What genuinely allows people to feel at one with the world, thus non-alienated as in the case of schizophrenic experience, is found in three situational

cases: when they are loved, when they are respected and esteemed, and when they are considered for their accomplishments and virtues (Honneth 1995).

In the diverse experiences of the patients discussed here, none of the three situations can definitively be considered resolved, primarily because they necessitate a fundamental anchoring of oneself within one's personal world, serving as a foundational structure of the individual. People are not designed to perpetually exist in states of suspension, estrangement, uncertainty, and displacement. While such moods can certainly emerge in life, what if they precipitate severe outcomes, like psychiatric disorders? It becomes the duty of those fortunate enough to navigate such extreme situations, and those equipped to understand and address them, to carve a path in, to create a fissure in the wall of delusion, and to endeavour to rekindle a foundational trust in themselves and others. Consider Pietro, Callieri's patient, hospitalised at age 27 due to an acute psychotic episode. An academic young man, a prospective engineer, dutiful and directed: he had forever been the beacon of hope for his parents, embodying their unfulfilled ambitions. Unexpectedly, Pietro halts; he becomes immobilised. Callieri senses Pietro's existential pause, moulded by others' expectations, now marked by significant shifts in his life (relocating, ending a romantic relationship, changing his academic focus). Pietro finds himself enveloped in what has been frequently termed the 'Friday-Saint' atmosphere: he recognises familiar places but is confronted by an overlay of estrangement and alienation that deeply unsettles him. Yet, in Pietro's written confessions detailing his daily thoughts and feelings, the raw desperation of a man seeking the lost simplicity of daily existence and foresight is strikingly evident.

> The vision of people who have a job or are engaged or married. This also creates anguish for me because they are people who have a future, whereas I do not see one. [...] Friendships I see around me. When I heard last night that friends had organized a trip to Assisi, I felt bad because I immediately felt excluded. [...] When I am among them, I feel absent; however, I am participating, but passively. (Callieri 1982, 83)

Pietro exists in a precarious balance, teetering on the edge of everyday life that both wounds and overwhelms him with its relentless particulars. He yearns for connection, but an insurmountable distance already consumes him. He often articulates a profound wish

to relinquish control, to place his faith in his doctor to identify "the straight and narrow path", yet he feels hopelessly lost. This feeling, beyond his paranoia or psychotic episodes, is perhaps the most poignant testament to his plight: Pietro has been severed from the inter-affective resonance with the outside world, an intrinsic human facet deeply embedded in our core. This disconnection also extends to the temporality of his experience, as if it unfurls within a timeless void. His presence is entirely consumed by this ambiguous, eternal ambiance: his existence in the world is, in essence, fragmented, ephemeral, akin to fleeting wisps of smoke. Nebulosity, as dissected in the part regarding the concept of "uncanny", signals the onset of a liminal ontological domain. This frontier can either signify an anastrophé (etymologically meaning "upward twisting", thus constructive) or a catastrophé, indicating destruction or apocalypse. It is here, to some extent, that the 'magical' facet of the pathic epoché of psychosis resides: it remains elusive unless one refines their emotional acuity, allowing themselves to be completely consumed by the capacity to resonate with another's ambiance. Aldo Masullo would say, "to overturn objectivity, exposed to the observation of others, and transform it into subjectivity of manifestation to oneself" (Masullo 1990, 87).

In the realm of the mystical as an instrument for approaching the universe of the pathic-atmosphere, another esteemed Italian anthropologist, Ernesto De Martino, ventured. He authored a seminal work invaluable to phenomenological psychopathology. However, this work remains obscure and underappreciated. De Martino ingeniously bridged the study of cultural apocalypses with that of psychopathological ones, aiming to illuminate a quintessential human existential structure: the unconscious enactment of defensive rituals. These powerful protective mechanisms arise during moments of crisis and pivotal junctures, and if left unchecked, could spiral out of control.

> In the cultural-historical perspective of the theme of the end of the world and the eschaton as salvation, it is necessary to analyze, first of all, the apocalypse or collapse as a psychopathological risk. The psychopathological document of apocalypse and collapse has the methodological value of laying bare this risk in its most extreme and exasperated form so that, by contrast, those cultural reintegrations that have combated this risk and reopened a meaningful and operable world stand out. (De Martino 2002, 15)

In conditions of normality, being-ness naturally perceives the sense of its Sein but cannot comprehend it except through an 'absolute problematicity'. Therefore, through a reflective epoché as an act of growth and evolution; however, in psychopathological conditions, the absolute problem of the sense of being becomes an alienating fixation. From a position of background, it transitions to one of total prominence, thus giving the person that feeling of never truly being inside things and experiencing them as estranged and mechanical. In this sense, the pathic epoché can be associated with the apocalypse in De Martino's conception as a "permanent anthropological risk". The end is, in fact, understood as the risk of not being able to exist in any possible intersubjective world, losing the possibility of being present in the world in a projectual manner, and ending up in profound and unstoppable solitude.

> He felt a shadow of opaque bitterness, as when the grave hours of destiny pass us by without touching us, and their roar is lost far away while we remain alone, amidst chasms of dry leaves, regretting the terrible but great lost opportunity. (Buzzati 1989, 35)

We cannot make waiting and suspension a permanent modus vivendi. Otherwise, we will slowly lose our anchorage to an essential collective experience, which allows us to exist in the world and encounter the *alienus*, the other-than-me, without the fear of being constantly engulfed by it. In De Martino's historicist and anthropological reading, the numinous is a sacralised symbol of a compulsion to repetition inherent to human nature. What mitigates the anguish of the new and the becoming is nothing other than ritual, liturgy, and mythologisation: through them, man deflects the risk of the collapse of presence, perceived as psychosis, a disease of the *mundus*. Therefore, the connection, which existentialist psychiatry already identified, between the pathic epoché and the sphere of the sacred is demonstrated. Both arise, in one way or another, from the vulnerability of the human existential structure, which disastrously unravels when intersubjective validation is absent. This is articulated in compelling words by the ethno-psychiatrists Storch and Kulenkampff, who described a "bottomless nothingness" into which the schizophrenic might fall, lost in his endless Unheimlichkeit (unfamiliarity) where everything is shattered, discoloured, and collapsed. In particular, the case of a farmer from Berne, hospitalised at a young age for an end-of-the-world schizophrenic

delusion, is reported; when asked what he thought of the word ‘collapse’, the ill man replied:

> When men are no longer in their place. But not only men but also trees and houses. A change has taken place [...]. The beautiful world of before is no more. The mountains are no more. The world has flattened out, and men are no longer in their familiar environment. I, too, am not in the right place, where one is at home. (Storch, Kulenkampff 1950, 108)

When we lose familiarity with the lifeworld, we forfeit the radical nature of existence. As this experience often translates into a terrible and distressing sense of guilt for the individual, no longer able to live naturally in the preordained rhythm of things, anyone confronted with such a drama and called upon to provide therapeutic support should at least possess the ability to “epochize” his own world. By stripping it of all categorising prejudices, and accepting the patient’s language as it stands — naked and raw, devoid of metaphorical meanings. This is how I perceive the ideal therapist’s attitude when dealing with the psychotic patient: to resist the *dia*-gnostic temptation, in its etymological sense of ‘knowing - through’, by eliminating the ‘through’. Thus, not to know through the words he speaks, but to empathise with the pathic field they co-create. From a (neo)-phenomenological perspective, psychosis can be viewed as a ‘logjam’, a blockage in the fluidity of two essential life movements: personal felt-bodily access and the expression of trust in one’s surroundings. Additionally, considering De Martino’s anthropological perspective on psychosis, one might also take into account the idea of socio-cultural reintegration: a deep comprehension of the context from which the patient originates could suggest effective ways of re-establishing connection with the world they have lost. Nonetheless, as with everything, for every world one encounters, genuine intervention is impossible if one cannot first recognise, within oneself, the same possibility of a fall or a departure from the shared world. The “ruin of the ego”, as Masullo aptly penned (1996), is something profoundly pathic, manifesting itself as a visage beneath a mask through the anguish, emotional tempest, and shaking of life’s very foundations.

Terms like these hint at the authenticity, albeit cruel, of this liminal, pre-sickness suspension experience. One is never truly prepared for a confrontation with the raw

threads of reality, for they present the existential dilemma that the most vulnerable, the most ontologically insecure subjects, lack the capacity to bear. The authentic might be seen as discovering the colourlessness of one's own *Dasein*: as Sartre puts it, the concealed world asserts its existence, which is perpetually in suspension, in nothingness (1943). So, is there still a possibility of anchorage for those caught in this limbo between the real and the unreal, those who can only semi-live, undergoing an undesired epoché? We do not possess a definitive answer; no one holds the absolute truth on the matter. However, we can venture an attempt to access that world, not just through the logos of dialogue, but more through the *cum-prehendere* ("to grasp together") of an act in which the therapist first perceives the patient as a Daseinspartner, "a companion of that road which is his own life" (Callieri and Faranda 2001, 116). The psychotic experience emerges after traversing a borderland that is a 'between', an atmospheric aida that foreshadows and alludes. At this point, a lifeline can still be extended to clarify the nebulousness of this experience by trying to rebuild, in the patient, a relationship of trust with others and the outside world. Yet, preventing a descent into the shadows of 'madness' is challenging: the fact that most psychiatric patients arrive at the hospital deep in psychosis attests to this. Primarily, this occurs because both the at-risk individual (and his family) would need to discern and interpret the warning signs promptly. It is crucial, then, to possess a profound understanding of oneself and of feeling a certain way in the world. We might substitute the Socratic "Know thyself" with "Feel thyself", suggesting an empathetic immersion into the situation that dragged the patient from the precipice's edge (the *Wahnstimmung*) to the chasm of delusion. The truth is the emblematic question that unveils a shadowy dimension of anomaly, 'What is it?', 'Something has happened', is hard to define, both for those personally afflicted and for those subsequently tasked with its therapeutic treatment. Mere 'psychiatrising' it into an endless list of symptoms will not suffice. Here, in line with Callieri's and Masullo's method, the psychopathological assessment should consider suspending conventional nosographic categories and approach it as a human experience of *abysmal* freedom, perceived of course as uprooting and detaching from all else.

As described by Rümke, Tellenbach, and Wyrsch, encountering the schizophrenic patient is a disconcerting event, creating a solid sense of discomfort and bewilderment, evident in the aura of their meeting. It emanates from the coming together of two worlds in a predefined setting: two humanities that cannot stay distant if they are to merge. To truly

rehabilitate a world crystallised by delusion, one might need to transcend the norms of operationality and reasoned calculation. Without veering into the poetic or tragic, one should embrace the idea of thinking psychopathologically in terms of sheer authenticity; for Callieri, this means "absolute freedom". Nonetheless, the patient finds himself in a realm exhibiting traits of the alien, the bizarre, and occasionally, the terrifying. In his absence, he experiences the rawest fibres of human existence, enveloped in profound suffering. The similarity with the act of phenomenological epoché is evident. The suspension, the fall, the void, the transformation – this remains the individual's free choice, relinquishing ties with reality in preparation for new potentialities and shifts. In the pre-psychotic experience, the individual finds himself thrust into an unchosen state of suspension: it merely occurred, overwhelming his life, creating a perilous gap that opens to depersonalisation and then ruthlessly shuts. It is a one-directional epoché, imparting devastating, parasitic, nullifying meanings, unlike the phenomenological epoché, which enlightens and does not obscure. Hence, the vital need for genuine contact between patient and therapist becomes evident for the cure's efficacy, only achievable within a field-epoché: that of the patient's experience and that implemented by the therapist. But how can a therapist truly access the world of the psychotic patient? It would be challenging to offer a systematic and directive answer along the lines of the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Diseases.

However, one can attempt to open a breach by asking oneself this foundational question: "Are you really persuaded of what you are doing?" (Di Petta 2020, 151). The answer should then be imbued with common sense and personal intellectual honesty.

> What do they have? What are psychotics, if not those who, after a radical and literal *epochè* of the world, have remained protagonists, often passive, of a graceless drift between the world of common sense, which they have lost, and the delusional world, from which our pharmacotherapy has disengaged them? In which world do psychotic patients live for most of their lives? (Di Petta 2020, 152)

Umbratili, they live in a middle realm, where freedom and loss merge and contaminate each other; identity fragments itself before unveiling the void left uncovered by the pathic epoché. One can fall countless times and always return to the surface: this is the very principle of life itself, which involves moments of loss, separation, and then self-

reappropriation. Throughout this, the absolutely problematic nature of this experience cannot be ignored: being, as Masullo would suggest, only senses the meaning of its being-situated but cannot comprehend it (2003). It can relate to this through the mode of pathos and, from there, reshape itself to cope with the new demands of the world. Therefore, accepting the pathic dimension as real and existing means opening a breach into the origin of consciousness, where the essential figure of being in the world is shown – the reason for such anguish and joy: nothingness. The difference that lends it value and renders it acceptable is determined by the attitude: letting things happen and opening oneself up to their mystery provides the opportunity to remain in the world in an entirely different way, participating in its incessant flow as conscious actors, not as victims condemned to nonsense. Abandonment, as a therapeutic moment directed at oneself and the other, is not an act of wanting but rather a disposition of our being: it could almost be understood in the mode of waiting (Masullo 2003, 75), that is, learning how to wait in the encounter with the other, abandoning oneself to the atmospheric field even before uttering a word. In the encounter, one should not only observe the patient but, more importantly, oneself and the setting. The epoché performed by the therapist could then be seen as a saving anchorage for the patient. They can return to the outside world after having journeyed through the desolation and marginality produced by illness – though with the undeniable risk of being consumed by it. In this encounter with a world lacking familiar traits, a world that is foreign and sometimes terrifying, one can discern the presence of a broader dimension: the limit of my Dasein is profoundly affected by the weight of exposed vulnerability. Before that absolute freedom becomes rigid and ensnared by the onset of delusion, the individual still possesses an opportunity to rediscover his path home and to re-understand the world by dissipating the pathic epoché, followed by a subsequent effort to rebuild trust in the world itself.

Whoever takes the phenomenological attitude, which is *sensitivity to the fragment*, dissociates himself from the 'repressive' arrogance of medical techniques and, with patience, abandons himself to the game of fragmentariness, ready to catch, in direct contact, every occasional 'contact' between some nomadic experience of the sufferer and some his own bursting emotion (Masullo 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

Trust is the only viable adhesive of human relationships and the continuous undercurrent in our lives that bestows implicit significance upon even our most routine actions. It is crucial even in the construction of subjectivity. Nobody instructs us on how to trust the world, others, or ourselves. We encounter otherness with an inherent instinct to feel its proximity to us, despite the emergence of possible 'pathological pathways,' which, as discussed earlier, stem from a pathic fracture in a dimension that escapes logical-rational categorisation. Instead, this dimension lends itself to a more aesthetic understanding. The point at which trust in the world and others begins to deteriorate is critical. From here, the abyss of psychopathology starts to appear, a realm often depicted as alien and distant from our perceived normality. Almost every psychiatric disorder has a twilight, atmospheric phase. It poses a challenge to identify because the individual often struggles to articulate this deficiency. Losing one's sense of familiarity with the world is akin to suddenly finding oneself in an unfamiliar location, unable to recall how or why one arrived there. One would feel lost, bewildered, anxious, and vulnerable to unpredictable events. One would feel a lack of self-control and frantically attempt to piece together events to make sense of the disorientation. One would be submerged in an atmosphere that hints and foreshadows but provides no clarity or certainty. If perceived with "the requisite aesthetic" sensitivity, it is at this juncture that a therapist could potentially guide the individual back to a state of equanimity, averting a complete breakdown. It is not a matter of passing judgment, for all of us are more prone to psychopathological disruption than we might believe. Throughout our lives, we are exposed to profound disturbances that could lead to varying degrees of crisis. If we recognise vulnerability as an inherent aspect of humanity, discussions about mental illness would become more compassionate, focusing more on the *pathic* than on the pathological.

"For man, his incompleteness, his openness, his freedom and interminate possibility itself become the cause of illness" (Jaspers 1913, 45). Human frailty, both subjective and inter-subjective, serves as a ground for vulnerability. Before any label or stigma, a psychiatric patient is first an individual grappling with the complexities and uncertainties of life. If

we prioritised recognising our shared existential backdrop, we could relate more authentically and, through such interactions, truly comprehend and reintegrate them. Human existence is a delicate balance between strength and fragility, and mental disorders lay bare the vulnerabilities inherent in our conscious fabric. By adopting an epoché stance, we commit to setting aside biases and engaging with the core structures of individual experiences. In therapy, a phenomenological method can highlight the discord between one's sense of self and the intrusive forces of mental disruption. Conversely, introducing a new concept like the pathic epoché primarily seeks to bridge the gap between the worlds involved, dispelling the epistemic chasm that continues to feed psychopathology. Genuine understanding and healing can only emerge when one has grasped the essence of another's experience devoid of any categorising inclination. Nonetheless, declining an experience that by its very nature eludes any categorical fixity is quite an arduous challenge, a goal that should certainly involve a plurality of approaches aimed at enhancing, first and foremost, the affective magnitude of the change induced by the illness. In the ideational layout of this potential therapeutic tool, lies the need to be able to recognize, in a first instance, a potential de-structuring trigger that tones down the surroundings in a certain way, amplifying or dulling some basic reassuring sensations, such as the sense of daily living, one's own inner rhythm, and basic interpersonal space. As initial approach, we can imagine the pathic epoché, in fact, as the intrusion into the patient's world of a dream that has not been fully reabsorbed into lucid waking. The feelings it drags along are those of heavy disorientation, opacity and often unfamiliarity. The key concept for initial apprehension is here, in identifying a meeting point there, where the patient wants to emerge from the pathic epoché, while the therapist must want to enter into the patient's one.

In any case, a phenomenological clinical practice demands a sensitivity to the fragment, reflecting acceptance, resonance, understanding, and a profound readiness from the clinician, not just towards the person seeking aid, but also in relation to the entirety of the dialogical situation. It is in this context that one can truly appreciate an individual's complexity without diminishing them to a mere set of dehumanising symptoms. In an almost paradoxical manner, only an earnest act of epoché can assign value and meaning to the plethora of emotions and images that populate a patient's narrative. After all, a patient is fundamentally someone affected by intense emotional experiences, making self-reliance difficult or near impossible. The perspective introduced here diverges from

objectivism devoid of subjective standpoints; it concerns mutual understanding, where two parallel worlds engage in a dialogue without any hierarchical relationship or interdependency. Engaging with another's intricacies, enmeshed in a "hyper-semantic" web of ideas and emotions, represents an opportunity for mutual self-awareness, approached without judgment but retaining one's evaluative framework. Before any analysis, one must first experience the atmospheric incorporation, where an initial sensory connection between therapist and patient is established, setting the stage for a potential therapeutic bond. Furthermore, the clinical interaction is described as a suspensive event "between the pathic and the linguistic experiential domain" (Costa et al. 2014, 356). This phenomenological interchange foregrounds the patient's experiences, emotions, and physical sensations. The patient shares their narrative, unveiling their vulnerabilities, anguish, and hopes. The therapeutic process is a shared endeavour, with the therapist directing the exploration while honouring the patient's independence and agency.

By tuning into the patient's personal world, the therapist endeavours to deeply understand their distinct phenomenological landscape, surpassing mere symptoms and diagnoses. As the clinical interaction advances, the patient might gain insights or experience emotional release, but they might also face difficulties when confronting painful recollections, restrictive beliefs, or ingrained behavioural patterns. The therapist's attentiveness and empathic presence should offer a safe space to examine and navigate these experiences. The therapeutic relationship becomes an essential agent for transformation, cultivating trust, connection, and emotional solace. To genuinely listen to another is to feel their world, discerning the how before the what. Immersing oneself in the other's atmosphere is essential for establishing a therapeutic rapport.

By this, I do not mean to abdicate one's comfort zones within which to enclose catalogues of symptoms and diagnoses, but to replicate in one's own body the otherness in its entirety – literally, to be open to incorporating the patient's lived experience. Once again, it is a matter of enacting an epoché, with communication primarily taking shape through affectivity. Dialogue thrives only through an implicit reciprocal openness; indeed, there is a risk of projecting one's own personal and idiosyncratic pre-understandings onto the other, which could prevent authentic access to the other. However, it is in the very effort of the clinician that a meaningful narrative can be released – a narrative dense with symbols, metaphors, images, and free associations – which is understandable only, precisely, through an imaginative effort, a *conatus imaginans*.

It is tempting to assume that the best therapy should be an almost-hermeneutical "fusion of horizons", where the therapist becomes part of what is happening. It thus significantly contributes to the atmosphere that dynamically underpins the dialogue (Reuster 2005, in Fuchs; Koch 2014, 73). The therapeutic path should therefore consider the atmosphere as a space of intense pathicity and, concurrently, plasticity: Schmitz's 'quasi-thing' presents itself as a space-time gap where everything can change instantly, everything is so pendulous that it escapes a definitive stance. I reiterate that approaching the other's world with the mere assumption of understanding it through rational and objective observation is insufficient. The affective climate the patient carries cannot be deciphered in the cold precision of a pre-packaged and artfully conceived diagnosis. It first requires epoché as the therapist's rational act, allowing him to delve into the patient's pathic epoché, which is a boundary-experience between precipice and annihilation for all intents and purposes.

The truth is that nothing evades the embrace of atmospheres. Every living space, environment, place, or person is suffused with an atmosphere and can radiate it. My suffering is never a wholly private, intra-personal affair: it requires the bodily resonance of another to furnish its meaning and to shape it therapeutically. Inter-affective phenomena such as atmospheres illuminate the interconnectivity of human experiences and emotions within social contexts. They acknowledge that emotions are not exclusively individual but are co-constructed and influenced by the emotional states of others. In this regard, the atmosphere emerges from the collective interaction of emotions, intentions, and energies, surpassing individual boundaries. To understand the atmosphere, or at most thematize it, one must draw on synesthetic forms of expression, which succeed in semiotically linking proprioceptive bodily feeling to their related meanings (Hasse 2006). We should cease to assign the status of reality solely to what is three-dimensional, thus analysable and dissectible, without accounting for the feeling, the manner in which one's corporeality is affected. As Giacomo Leopardi wrote, "All of life is truly, by its own immutable nature, a fabric of necessary afflictions, and each moment that makes it up is an affliction" (Leopardi 2020, 283). In this quote, the original term used is *patimento*, with an etymology rooted in the realm of pathos as both a foundational and radical human experience. Furthermore, in a society that neither accepts weaknesses, imperfections, nor vulnerabilities but demonises and dehumanises them,

inevitably producing collective indifference and apathy, we must revisit the concept of *pathos*, making its expressive language universally intelligible.

Events always transpire because they are first felt: the risk for the modern man is that he might no longer sense himself, no longer being capable of deciphering the vast constellation of affectivity, as it concerns only the sentient corporeity, the flesh, the substance that we are without the shadow of another's gaze projected onto us. If we lost the capacity to feel, we would also forfeit the essence of existence itself: the ability to marvel at the world, which is inherent in human pathicity as openness, the potential of being affected. Facing the unknown through resonance, which is, as frequently stated, "a medium of inter-affective engagement in a given situation" (Fuchs and Koch 2014), or, as I propose, an atmosphere of sensus communis, establishing the conditions for interpersonal relationships. Thus, we must rejuvenate, strengthen, and nurture a discourse on atmospheres as a renewed theory of affectivity, especially in psychopathology: the atmosphere enlivens bodies in interaction, it is the dialogue's medium, the space for meeting the other. In the midst of this decline of embodied reciprocity, the gravest danger is, as Masullo describes, the emptiness of self-absence in the face of emotional atrophy (Masullo 2019).

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