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WEATHER AESTHETICS

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It. *Estetica del tempo atmosferico*; Fr. *Esthétique météorologique*; Germ. *Ästhetik des Wetters*; Span. *Estética meteorológica*. Weather aesthetics is a branch of contemporary aesthetics that analyzes meteorological phenomena as autonomous aesthetic experiences, rather than mere background or context. It examines how weather shapes emotions, moods, bodily and spatial perceptions, and how these experiences intertwine with everyday practices, dwelling, and engagement with the environment. Partly derived from environmental aesthetics, everyday aesthetics, and ecological aesthetics, weather aesthetics focuses more specifically on atmospheric manifestations and their implications for lived experience and daily life.

THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

Attention to weather as an aesthetic theme belongs to a broader development that has shaped aesthetic reflection in recent decades: namely, the expansion of aesthetics beyond the sphere of art. This expansion unfolds along two main lines. On the one hand, it takes the form of a “Baumgarten *Renaissance*”, that is, a return to aesthetics as a general theory of sensory experience (Baumgarten 2007). On the other hand, it manifests itself in a renewed focus on the objects and events of everyday life, which are granted philosophical significance even when they fall outside traditional “high culture”. From this perspective, the gradual inclusion of weather as an object of aesthetic inquiry appears as part of a wider interdisciplinary effort to critically reassess the notion of “environment”.

Environmental aesthetics was a pioneering field for the study of weather in aesthetics and, since the 1970s, it has explored how we experience and inhabit the environment aesthetically. With the emergence of ecological concerns and the debate on climate change, attention to weather has grown significantly, evolving from a primarily theoretical issue into more concrete reflections on environmental protection and preservation.

While climate has been the subject of philosophical reflection since antiquity – from Herodotus, Hippocrates, and Aristotle to Bodin, Montesquieu, Herder, and others – weather is a more recent object of inquiry.

One of the earliest sustained and systematic studies of the subject can be traced to the work of the German physician and psychologist Willy Hellpach, *Geopsyche* (1939). Hellpach explores the relationship between human beings and their environment through four variables linked to the concept of *Umwelt*: weather, climate, soil, and landscape. Drawing on Wilhelm Wundt and Friedrich Ratzel, he combines methods from human geography, anthropology, and physiological psychology to analyze environmental influences on both individuals and collective entities. He distinguishes between immediate sensations (*Eindrücke*), produced by atmospheric phenomena, and their lasting effects (*Einflüsse*), which shape “mood” (*Stimmung*) and broader “emotional disposition” (*Gemütstimmung*) (Hellpach 1939: 3-9). These effects vary according to temperament, climate, and individual sensitivity, influencing one’s physio-psychological state (*Befinden*) in terms of euphoria, tranquility, exhaustion, and so on. Hellpach thus identifies different “types of disposition”: 1) highly excitable individuals strongly affected by weather; 2) weather-insensitive individuals; 3) those moderately sensitive to weather, whose reactions range from “meteorological sensitivity” (*Wetterempfindlichkeit*) to the more refined “meteorological feel-sensitivity” (*Wetterfühligkeit*), up to “pre-sensing the weather” (*Wettervorfühlen*): namely, the anticipatory perception of meteorological change (Hellpach 1939: 89).

The idea that the psyche is shaped by geography and that this, in turn, affects both bodily and affective dimensions, makes Hellpach’s work one of the most significant contributions of the early twentieth century, partly integrated – at least in its general aspects – to American environmental psychology (Miller 2018: 347-348).

In the second half of the twentieth century, reflection on the sensory and affective experience of weather was further developed within the context of New Phenomenology, founded by Hermann Schmitz. Focusing on involuntary vital experiences and their impact on our “situationality”, Schmitz elaborates the so-called “theory of atmospheres”. By “atmosphere”, he understands a feeling poured out in space that does not belong to the subject’s inner world and is therefore not psychically generated, but experienced at the level of the felt-body (Griffero 2014). Since all feelings are conceived as atmospheres, weather and climate become paradigmatic examples of Schmitz’s externalist conception of affectivity precisely because they are quite literally “in the air”, that is, affective phenomena spatially diffused outside the subject and irreducible to an inner psychic state. Schmitz accordingly defines weather atmospheres as “supra-personal atmospheres” (*überpersönliche Atmosphären*) (Schmitz 1969: 98-106), insofar as they exceed individual experience and acquire a trans-individual character.

According to Schmitz (2014: 38), what transforms sensory perception into an atmosphere is a certain “feeling-ness” (*Gefühlshaftigkeit*), which enables emotional involvement perceptible in the felt-body and marks the pathic character of experience.

Although weather perception is intersubjective, it does not imply experiential uniformity. Faced with the same atmosphere – for example, a spring-like serenity – subjects may display different perceptual and affective configurations. This does not mean that the atmosphere changes ontologically according to the perceiver, but rather that the same phenomenon produces different effects depending on subjective and situational conditions. The same atmosphere can thus be “filtered” differently by each subject (Griffero 2021: 57 and *passim*), sometimes generating an “experience of discrepancy” with respect to the encountered atmosphere (Böhme 2001: 47ff.).

To highlight the subject’s involvement in atmospheric perception, Gernot Böhme (1998; 2001) distinguishes between “atmosphere” (*Atmosphäre*) and the “atmospheric” (*Atmosphärisches*). The former involves strong subjective engagement, whereas the latter denotes phenomena in which this dimension is reduced or absent. Climatic and meteorological phenomena belong above all to the domain of the “atmospheric”, insofar as they cannot be produced or controlled by the subject. However, the boundary between the “atmospheric” and “atmosphere” is fluid, and these phenomena may shift from one to the other, even within a single experience.

In a later essay, Böhme distinguishes between “weather”, as a subjective condition felt at the level of the lived body, and “feeling” (*Gefühl*), as a quasi-objective phenomenon, which is neither a thing nor mere qualia (Böhme 2011: 155ff.). Drawing on a term coined by Alexander von Humboldt, Böhme argues that atmospheres generate a “total impression”. By this, he means the capacity to grasp a phenomenon as a comprehensive unity composed of different factors and “sub-atmospheres” (Griffero 2014), yet still given as a partially unified feeling.

According to Böhme, two groups of factors contribute to the formation of this perceptual unity: “characters” and “generators”. The “characters” determine the overall impression of weather as it is experienced by the felt-body. They do not refer to single physical elements, but rather express global qualities of the atmosphere, such as “clarity”, “oppression”, or “serenity”. Atmospheric characters play a central role in weather experience, including synaesthetic characters, moods or affective dispositions, and communicative characters (Böhme 2001: 87ff.). The “generators”, by contrast, are the factors that produce this overall impression: wind, rain, sun, clouds, humidity, temperature, and so on. They are neither merely external physical causes, nor independent objective realities, but conditions that shape bodily experience and structure our sensory and affective engagement with meteorological phenomena.

Böhme’s *aisthetica* shifts the focus toward the idea of a “nature for us”, understood as an experiential domain involving human beings as bodily-sensory entities. This broadens

environmental aesthetics beyond a purely descriptive or eco-scientific framework to include ethical, critical, and social dimensions, while retaining as its core the analysis of perceptual and atmospheric experience. In advocating renaturalization and ecological restoration, Böhme also introduces responsibility for the production of sensible conditions of the world, linking his approach to notions of engagement and care in contemporary aesthetics, especially in Arnold Berleant (1992; 2010; 2023) and Yuriko Saito.

In Saito's work (2007; 2022), *Everyday Aesthetics* is reinterpreted as an ethically relevant attentiveness to the sensory effects of ordinary practices, framing aesthetics as a form of care for the shared world. Weather, in particular, is a key domain of aesthetic experience and situated relation to the environment (Saito 2005). As "one of the last frontiers of human cultivation, manipulation, and control" (Saito 2005: 171), it fosters receptivity toward natural processes, encouraging humility and gratitude, and countering tendencies toward domination over nature.

A concrete attempt to integrate contemporary models of understanding weather can be found in the work of Mădălina Diaconu (2012; 2023, 2024; 2025). She combines the neo-phenomenological focus on affectivity with a practice-oriented approach from contemporary Anglo-American aesthetics, where the subject is seen as an acting body embedded in an ecological and social context. Diaconu stresses that, in the context of climate change, the aesthetics of emotional atmospheres must be complemented by social aesthetics, linking sensory impressions to their objective causes to avoid aestheticizing tendencies (Diaconu 2024: 25). This extends Böhme's aesthetics of nature by emphasizing situated practices and responsibility toward the environment. Such practices also appear in other contemporary approaches, including environmental ethics – which addresses the normative dimension – and eco-phenomenology – which rethinks the relation between phenomenology and the environmental sciences from the perspective of an embodied, situated subject in continuous interaction with its environment.

Unlike phenomenological approaches, Timothy Morton (2013) reframes weather within an ontology of "hyperobjects" that radically decentre human experience. In the age of "the end of the world" brought about by global warming, weather is no longer the *background* of perceptual experience, but comes to the *foreground* and imposes itself on attention. It thus appears as an ontic pseudo-reality, a "false immediacy" ontologically subordinated to a global hyperobject: namely, climate (Morton 2013: 103). In this sense, weather is a local expression through which climate change becomes indirectly perceptible. Morton further argues for moving beyond a restricted conception of the world as a human product designed exclusively for human beings, in order to adequately rethink ecological processes.

This perspective resonates, to some extent, with Tim Ingold's (2015) relational anthropology. In his account, weather is not a set of meteorological phenomena nor an external object of observation, but the medium in which we live, perceive, and act. It is not what stands "in front of" experience,

but that within which experience takes place. The overlap between weather vocabulary and affective states suggests a deeper convergence between the two. This unity of the affective and the cosmic is central to his understanding of atmosphere (Ingold 2015: 72). From this view, Ingold develops the concept of the “weather-world”, which suggests to understand weather not as an object of perception but as the condition of our perceptual and affective immersion in the environment.

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