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Felt-bodily communication: a neophenomenological approach to embodied affects

Abstract

According to the pathic aesthetics the atmospheric perception should be understood as the first affective-synaesthetic impression of the expressive qualities (or affordances) ontologically rooted in things and quasi-things of the surrounding space. Through its specific dynamics, whose poles are narrowness and vastness, the felt (and not physical) body appears as the precise sounding board (also) of these atmospheric feelings widespread in the (lived) space. The paper a) retraces the neophenomenological theory (Hermann Schmitz) of the ubiquitous communication (incorporation/excorporation) that the felt body constantly generates with the outside world, and b) suggests the thesis that atmospheres are a great example of extended emotions, that is, of embodied affects exactly generated by one of the many forms of felt-bodily communication.

Keywords

Felt body, Atmospheres, Embodied feelings

1. What is felt-bodily communication?

In the last decades, even the mind has progressively become something bodily. Initially conceived of as a computational black box – inaccessible and “destined” to the disembodied and propositional cognition of “knowing-that” (*gnosis*) – it has turned into a bodily-affective instrument oriented to the “knowing-how” (*pathos*), whose realizations are at least partly due to bodily-environmental structures and processes. And yet, there is a branch of phenomenology for which this timid recognition that cognitive and affective cannot be entirely separate means stating the obvious. A strong example of distrust towards bodiliness can be found in the Frankfurt scholars, who perceived any

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betteristic themation of bodiliness as nothing but a fascist exaltation²: an implicitly blackmailing somatophobic warning which concerns the physical body and its possible performances – certainly not the felt body. Indeed, in my view, the “critical” reasoning about the fact that a feeling of the lived body cannot be reduced to a measurable biological-physiological dimension seems to show that, as desired by the Frankfurt scholars themselves, there is still hope.

Of course, here I will not address the wide discussion of the classical distinction between *Leib* and *Körper*, nor will I tackle the hypothesis that atmospheric feelings have a perfect sounding board in the felt-body and its isles³. Rather, I will only focus on two points: (1) the neo-phenomenological theory of “felt-bodily communication”; (2) the thesis that atmospheres are a great example of extended emotions, that is, of embodied affects.

The main topic of New Phenomenology is the archaic dimension of felt-bodiliness (see Schmitz 1965, Rappe 1995): that is, an affective state pathically perceived in anatomically elusive felt-bodily isles (chest, stomach, foot arch, oral cavity, anal area, etc.) without the mediation of sense organs and the “perceptual body schemas” (too much linked to experience and associationist explanations). Since the fifth century BC, felt-bodiliness has been circumscribed to the physical-material body, with spatial and physiological borders, which can be perceived from the outside, arbitrarily manipulated and described in the third person (*Körper*). This non-anatomical bodiliness, which can only be properly testified by the person who “inhabits” it, constantly generates intercorporeal superordinate units in the pericorporeal space – such units vary according to the shape of the intertwining between the

² Since “only culture treats the body as a thing that can be owned, only in culture has it been distinguished from mind [...] as the object, the dead thing, the corpus”, it “remains a cadaver, no matter how trained and fit it may [...]. Those who extolled the body in Germany, the gymnasts and outdoor sports enthusiasts, always had an intimate affinity to killing, as nature lovers have to hunting. They see the body as a mobile mechanism, with its hinged links, the flesh upholstering the skeleton. They manipulate the body, actuating the limbs as if they were already severed [...]. Unaware, they measure the other with the eye of the coffin maker” (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 193-5).

³ Cfr. Griffero 2016b.

two extreme poles of the whole vital dynamics⁴, namely “narrowness” and “vastness” (*Enge / Weite*)⁵.

There are many traditional currents of thought that have neglected felt-bodiliness throughout the Western intellectual history: Greek rationalism, scientific reductionism, Platonic and then Christian-Cartesian dualism. This list, however, should also include two views: the first is the one that, in a framework of extroversion-oriented common sense, one fatally tends to subordinate what is closer and more familiar to what is technologically manipulable. The second, and most significant, is the (less historicizable) view that things like the felt body, which are the conditions of possibility of experience, can hardly be thematized (Leder 1990: 111). New Phenomenology aims to tackle (perhaps not only in a descriptive sense) precisely this peculiar and operative invisibility of felt-bodiliness.

Cognitive sciences later became aware that every relationship with the world is mediated by our (lived) body. So what can be added to this by the theory of incorporation proposed fifty years ago by Hermann Schmitz⁶? One could answer, half in jest: the certainty of never being truly alone. In fact – just as one cannot dance a real valzer alone, or as one thinks better by holding a sharpened pencil (an example used by the young Wölfflin), so some cognitive and affective processes would not exist without interaction with some environmental “instruments”. However, the added value of the neophenomenological orientation lies in the more radical recognition of our incorporation into “things” that hypnotically take away our center, albeit only temporarily. Hence a lived and sentient complete intercorporeality that is superordinate to the two initial bodies and whose rich articulation offers innumerable nuances that are difficult to describe.

Irreducible to the physio-psychological explanation in terms of receiving and re-elaborating signals, perception neophenomenologically

⁴ It is worth noting from the start that this dynamics is non-objective and afinalistic, unlike the Freudian drive.

⁵ Hence other polarities, such as contraction/expansion, tension/distension, up to the extreme points of terror and therefore impotence (in contraction) and sleep and therefore unconsciousness (but also orgasm) in expansion.

⁶ It was precisely articulated a little later (Schmitz 1978: 75 ff.). Schmitz’s *Einleibung* (neither *Einverleibung* nor *Verkörperung*, *Inkarnation* nor *Verleiblichung*) should be understood more as a hetero-action in one’s *Leib* as “universal sounding board” (Schmitz 1990: 116), rather than as a bodily annexation of something (Soentgen 1998: 38).

understood thus appears in the form of a co-action of perceiver and perceived. This joint action is so immediate as not to allow for any reaction time and so fusional – though without becoming a cosmic substance like Merleau-Ponty’s somewhat over-metaphorical *chair*⁷ – that it cannot be divided into an only active or only passive pole. The idea – based on an articulated analysis of the “felt-bodily economy” and unfortunately misunderstood because of the predominant dualistic abstraction – is that the vital drive, initially afinalistic (Schmitz 2017: 69), makes us involved beings in the affective-reactive sense. Also, as such, it ontogenetically consists of the incessant dialogue between narrowness and vastness⁸. An authentic driving force, this dialogic self-affectation is then diversified according to three different parameters (intensity, differences of weighting, form of binding or intertwining between tension and swelling) generating precisely the already mentioned felt-bodily communication between what is external (in the sense that it is not always within the bodily boundaries) and the material body of the percipient. We may provisionally define this pole “objectual”, but clarifying that it cannot be reduced to the “formal object” singularly defined by genus and species, which is normally considered an intentional pole.

The extreme poles of this rhythmic competition of felt-bodily contraction and expansion, modeled on breathing and allowing for the consciousness of the subject, are fright with loss of consciousness in the case of incorporation (*Einleibung*), and a sense of emptiness followed by unconsciousness in that of the excorporation (*Ausleibung*). Between them, there is a wide range of possible states, some positive (prevailing expansion) and some negative (prevailing contraction). Each of them, moreover, can both annihilate and trigger its symmetrical opposite, up to turning into it.

⁷ Sometimes even Schmitz runs this risk, for example by defining the neophenomenological *Einleibung* as a “mythic participation” (Schmitz 1965: 343).

⁸ Indeed, its action is probable in the human embryonic phase and certain in the neonatal one (cfr. Schmitz 1996: 39; 2016: 185; Blume 2003: 171).

2. Einleibung/*Incorporation*

The *Einleibung* is an intracorporeal communication, as shown by the emblematic case of pain as a quasi-thingly antagonist (internal-external) ignited by the drive to escape as well as by the contractive-inhibiting drive (Griffero 2017: 69-77). It also becomes an external communication when it encounters quasi-things and is isolated-involved by them⁹ – for instance, when it dialogues with sound (which is invasive and cannot be distanced, contrary to a sight)¹⁰ or with the glance. The latter, despite its tendency to “reduce” the locational space made of surfaces to the more original and surfaceless space of vastness (Schmitz 2010: 281)¹¹, is a real tool of the antagonistic *Einleibung* and, according to Schmitz (Schmitz 2010: 278), explains awareness of the reality of the external world better than resistance. So felt-bodily communication, understood as ubiquitous incorporation (Schmitz 2016: 184), produces situations endowed with their own chaotic-multiple significance, whose explanation in terms of condensation around a core of narrowness clarifies certain collective feelings better than theories focused on non-verbal communication or on the mysteriously contagious character (magical or pathological) of energy that – going from a felt body to another – ends up transforming them both (Schmitz 1980: 35).

1) In any case, there are two main forms of this *leiblich* communication: in fact, incorporation can be unilaterally antagonistic, when – through the extended felt-bodily structure (a *Quasi-Leib* for Schmitz 1990: 137) made by the common vital drive – one of the partners steadily prevails, whether or not it addresses the other. “Sucking in”

⁹ For Schmitz those include pain, the wind, the electric shock, the gaze, the voice, noise, the melody, the night, time, invasive feelings, problems that trouble us, the worries and desires that obsess us. For me, with a much more “inflationary” approach, quasi-things are all those expressive qualities (in the broad sense) that, both as ecstasies of things and as absolute qualities, act invasively and *leiblich* on the percipient (cfr. Griffero 2017), generating an *Einleibung* in her/him that is mainly antagonistic.

¹⁰ However, I have some doubts about Schmitz’s distinction between the non-communicative character of the gaze as an atmospheric feeling (for example, in the case of shame) and the mainly communicative nature of the actual exchange of glances, since the imprecise circumscribability of the origin and the spatial diffusion of the gaze as a feeling does not diminish at all its role of counterpart of our feelings.

¹¹ Cfr. Griffero (2014a).

the felt-bodily narrowness of its partner (Schmitz 1978: 95; 2011: 39), the dominant partner controls the directions of incorporation, always oriented from narrowness to vastness. In fact, there is a sort of power of suggestion at the foundation of every perceptual relationship, between living beings, but also between living beings and things or forms. Consider a rolling stone: without any vital drive, it can capture our gaze up to sometimes making us fall with it; or it can appear threatening, automatically generating in us without any metrical evaluation the ability to avoid it (Schmitz 2016: 199). In general, like the stone, any “Gestalt process” can absorb the percipient thanks to its suggestions of motion. Even what is motionless, like a plant, in its standing and resisting the fury of the wind, not only arouses in us the idea of power, but affects our entire behaviour. Incorporation governs the specific relationship that lies between a *Leib* and any of its “encountered” beings – even if inanimate – experienced as its own, although factually (physically) it is not.

A dissociation of the normal tension between contraction and expansion, and the attribution (of course never absolute or perennial) of narrowness to the suggestive pole, prototypically determine non-dialogic perceptual perceptions such as fright and hypnosis. However – with varying intensity of course – this holds in every felt-bodily communication. The sadist is so hypnotically enthralled by his victim – who in fact holds the narrowness, unwittingly or not – that he passively parasitizes on the other’s pain¹², much like the football fan is hypnotized by the ball’s movement, the climber by a falling rock, the observed by the observing gaze, and so on. Thus deprived of her narrowness, the person being conditioned also gives life to a new formation with the conditioning pole, whose narrowness she submits to in some way by activating certain felt-bodily isles. This is a new *leiblich* non-dualistic formation, according to a mechanism introduced in the scientific debate on empathy thanks to the well-known example of the acrobat, “in” whom – and not just “next” to whom – the spectator would feel fully “carried away” (Lipps 1903: 122), to the point of being unable to

¹² On sadism as a specific kind of *leibliche Kommunikation* – half between its unilateral form and the reciprocal and alternating form (hence the need to continuously stimulate pain to give the victim the necessary dose of tension) – to be explained not so much as a form of aggressiveness but as hypnotic fascination, cfr. Schmitz (1989: 58-60, 208-10; 2011: 43-4).

initially distinguish his own spatial location from that of the acrobat in this empathic totality created by danger.

2) In the examples analysed so far incorporation exhibits an asymmetrical relationship, although not necessarily and dramatically confrontational (Schmitz 1990: 136, Blume 2003: 174)¹³, as one of the poles has the role of narrowness and is therefore in power. However, the *Einleibung* can also be reciprocal, thanks to the alternation of the dominant role, sometimes even with no reaction time (combat sports, animal fights). In exchanging glances (cruel, erotic, etc.) and in glances in general – if asymmetric, glance is so powerful as to create unavoidable hierarchies, millennial superstitious (the evil eye) or less dramatic all-eyed atmospheres¹⁴ – the involved partners are not truly autonomous. In fact, in exchanging glances accompanying a dialogue and certifying the evidence of a having-consciousness “you” (whether human or animal)¹⁵, the dominant role rhythmically switches between the two partners.

3) A third possibility is solidary incorporation, generated by a symmetrical relationship between partners sharing a same reference center with evocative power. In singing or playing together, in a collective uprising, in a disordered escape dictated by panic, in enthusiastic cour-

¹³ However, the frequent (cfr. Schmitz 1980: 40) reference of dialogue to the *Kampfleib* model or to that of hypnosis inevitably suggests something about the *lebensweltlich* experience that inspires Schmitz’s neophenomenological proposal.

¹⁴ For instance, this happens in the idea that a sculpture – or maybe art as a whole – is made up of eyes (Hegel) or generates unforeseen affordances with its glance, as in the case of the acephalous stone contemplated by Rilke: “for here there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life” (1995: 67). In any case, the gaze limits the interlocutor’s autonomy, as “now he is not doing something, but undergoing something” (Böhme 1989: 152) – now he is the object.

¹⁵ “It is not a projection that persuades me of the existence of other having-consciousness beings, but a comparison: having to deal with them within the common vital drive of an antagonistic and alternate incorporation” (Schmitz 2011: 42). Indeed, the *leiblich* communication is supposed to explain the “search for partners” (in the broad sense) as involvement, outside of the erroneous theories of projection (psychic collection of transmitted data and their integration, usually by means of an analogic conclusion, in an image projected outside and conceived as another having-consciousness) and of empathy (the motion seen creates an imitative motion that arouses by association an already experienced psychic state which is conceived as a state of another psyche linked to perceived bodily motion). This approach was anticipated by Sartre’s theory of “comparison”, whose unilateral incorporation needs to be complemented by the alternate one (Schmitz 1990: 148).

age on the battlefield, etc., there is an integration of the elements involved mainly guaranteed by the rhythm and its suggestions of motion. The only indispensable requirement of this solidary incorporation, which may also occur in the presence of non-human beings (the rider and his horse), inanimate bodies (the driver and his vehicle), or even – to come to situations unforeseen by Schmitz – with purely virtual or even just imagined “objects” (Andermann 2007: 290, fn. 158), is that the “other” offers an adequate feedback. Nor should we underestimate the fact that the third member – the hypnotic-addictive one – while not obvious, must still be active latently (Schmitz 1980: 56), otherwise the incorporation would be incomplete and frustrating in the long run.

4) And of course, there are also mixed cases where, for example, in a classroom or at a concert, there may be an antagonistic incorporation (between teacher and students, or between musicians and orchestra conductor) and a solidary one (among students or among musicians). There can also be cases where antagonism turns into solidarity, like a party where the initial antagonistic-tumultuous phase (awkwardness and distance between the participants) can give way to a serene or at least more relaxed atmosphere (Schmitz 2011: 48-50, quoting Lacrosse 1978).

3. Ausleibung/*Excorporation*

Felt-bodily communication can also be generated by the opposite pole: that of excorporation. The latter consists of vastness-oriented trance-like states devoid of the concentration needed for incorporation, communicating with the incommensurable vastness through a privative expansion unlike the one normally present in the vital drive. That is, excorporation communicates “with the pre-dimensional depth [but] without confronting it” (Schmitz 1978: 99), as the felt-bodily and normally centrifugal directionality (from narrowness to vastness) does not find end points here. That’s what happens when we ecstatically stare at landscapes or monotonously straight roads, when we are dozing in the sunlight, when we fall asleep or stare at a blinding reflected light up to feeling at one with it (as happens in many descriptions of *unio mystica*, see Schmitz 2011: 50-1, Griffero 2017: 103-6). Because of the extroflexion of narrowness – which is a basic criterion of identity as

absolute subjectivity – a presubjective dimension and a pre-objectual one enter into communication thanks to excorporation.

However, excorporation is productive especially if it is partially restrained by incorporation, as in the case of the ingressive atmosphere of extendedness.

We experience the feeling of a general extension [...] when, entering a forest of tall trees or unexpectedly walking into a beautiful room, we breathe freely. Without wanting to, we expand the thorax and increase in size, as if we wanted to adapt to the immensity of the environment and prove to measure up to it. By dilating and expanding in this way, we make a vital experience of conquest of space and power extension. (Strehle 1954: 45)

Most of all, though, this is the case with the perception of essences, here understood as qualities that, contrary to abstract universals, act as concrete species “in whose occurrence what occurs appears as absolutely the same” (Schmitz 2016: 208) – for example, the timbre of a voice despite the changing volume. The diffuse inner significance of these species, pure and extra-thingly as they are released from their usual objectual supports – think of someone tasting wine or chocolate, not surprisingly with their eyes closed – envelops us by the virtue of an excorporation that inhibits any situational detail, while being intercepted by a suggestive stimulation¹⁶.

It is curious, however, that excorporation may suggest very different things: for example, in the young Ernst Mach (1856), it evokes the superfluity of the thing-in-itself (Mach 1896: 30, fn.) and phenomenal mechanics, whereas in Walter Benjamin it suggests the idea of aura as the unique appearance of a distance, no matter how close it may be (in this case a range of mountains on the horizon, see Benjamin 2008: 70) and, consequently, that of the historicity of the aesthetic experience. Funny tricks of (almost the same) excorporation!

¹⁶ Schmitz rightly sees an anticipation of this reflection in Sartre (1992, quality as a revelation of being), Metzger (1941, expressive qualities as ways-of-being or *We-senseigenschaften*), Conrad-Martius (1916, deep relaxation of the self), and, as expected, in poetic and mystical sources.

4. *Modes of incorporation*

Felt-bodily communication happens through many channels. First of all, there are a) exchanging glances, perceived in the whole animal kingdom as a battlefield in which all creatures measure one another, or as something generating an atmosphere of dominion or submission, but also threat and exaltation, of humiliation of the other (whom you pretend not to see) and awkwardness for what you are forced to see, etc. This is an elementary *Einleibung* (Schmitz 1980: 31)¹⁷ only later followed by a more conventional linguistic communication, which indeed can prescind from exchanging glances. (Almost) the same happens with touch: b) with a simple handshake, partners integrate for a few seconds, creating a felt-bodily whole (that is possibly also conflicting). However, with touch in a more general sense – which is an authentic focalization of the vital drive thanks to the penetration of the touched person’s felt-bodily economy (Schmitz 2016: 190) – one transmits the confidence that guarantees a positive feedback. To make some examples, this happens with the patient who trusts the doctor who palpates her – all the more so with adults exchanging cuddles and embraces. This also happens in the wide range of felt-bodily states produced by (even competitive) contact with the elements (water for the swimmer, the sun for those sunbathing, etc.), or in the expert’s ability to “touch” her (music, technical, etc.) instrument, with a symbiotic and measurement-free precision that makes the latter a simple bodily extension. In the case of hearing c), devoid of a precise instrument like the gaze, communication mainly goes through the suggestions of motion and the synaesthetic characters, and the fact that auditory contagion is more invasive (less avoidable) than the visual one is enough to explain the prevailing role of hearing in solidary incorporation.

In most cases incorporation is latent (Schmitz 1989: 193), as in the case of general felt-bodily fatigue, whose core may lie in us or provisionally exist in a *Gesamtleib ad hoc*. However, it is patent when it finds its sounding board in some specific felt-bodily isles. Of course this is a fluid relationship: when, for example, our interlocutor makes an unexpected movement or says something that touches us more, the previously latent incorporation becomes obvious (Schmitz 2016a: 205), showing in an involuntary but explicit gesture (in the broad sense). To

¹⁷ On the belief of the ontological power *in distans* of the fixed gaze, cfr. Griffero 2003, while, on the gaze in general as a quasi-thing, cfr. Griffero 2017: 93-101.

sum up: we are constantly attuned (positively or not) with the situations we end up in, whose expressive-Gestalt qualities involve us – through veritable bridge-qualities such as suggestions of motion and synaesthetic characters¹⁸ – generating every time a specific state of the felt-bodily dynamics, thereby widening the intracorporeal dynamics (Schmitz 2016: 191). This state can be dialogic and develop in spiral-shaped and possibly transformative form if between the two partners there is continuous expressive feedback, but can be also unilateral, as when a charismatic person contagiously transmits to others otherwise unexplainable affective states.

The orientation of incorporation is mainly guaranteed by one's composure (*Fassung*), that is, the posture or attitude (social but also internal: see Zutt 1963) that, analysing the incorporation starting from the kind of compromise reached between felt-bodily dynamics and personal emancipation (frankness or cautiousness, joviality or pedantry, etc.), remains fluid and is brought into play in relation with the other pole's composure (Schmitz 2011: 46). A second orientation tool is the prefiguration of the gaze made possible by the extension of the felt-bodily motor schema, by which the *Leib* directs the material body with grace and precision, while not knowing in a strictly epistemic sense how this occurs. A third instrument, for Schmitz, is the distinction, dating back to Henry Head's neurology (1905), between epicritic and protopathic tendencies, in the sense that, for example in the case of music – without of course claiming thus to provide an exhaustive explanation of such a rich and complex phenomenon like music! – certain synaesthetic characters act in an epicritical direction (becoming sharpened and more punctiform, for example Mozart, toothache or a cold winter morning) or in a protopathic one (spreading in a dull and diffuse manner, for example Beethoven, stomachache or a sweet spring breeze, see Schmitz 2017: 73-4).

5. *Atmospheres as outside and embodied affects*

The neophenomenological theory of felt-bodily communication finds a particularly interesting specification in the theory of atmospheres as

¹⁸ Gait, gestures, sound, acoustic rhythm, optical rhythm (the aisles of a church) and semantic rhythm (poetry, slogans) and in general the cross-modal qualities in their different interweavings.

embodied affects. Cognitive sciences are increasingly recognizing that many mental processes are realized or, at least, implemented only by environmental structures and processes (starting from elementary cases like, for example, writing down a complex calculation). One should add to this the much more original hypothesis that impressive environmental situations, far from only stimulating cognitive and pragmatic processes, provide a solid structure – for example a face-to-face encounter with others, contemplation of the weather or a landscape, immersion in a work of art, the experience of blending in a group, etc. (Slaby 2014) – also to otherwise impossible affective states or states however destined to remain much more indeterminate. In this sense, atmospheres as pervasively poured out feelings, as “tools for feeling”, not only depend on the outside for their quality, intensity and dynamic (Slaby 2014: 36), but are also truly embodied and extended affects in all respects.

In this sense, atmospheres present in the perceiver’s space appear as forms of incorporation or excorporation allowed by the felt-bodily economy. This doesn’t only happen with shared feelings, as when people in a group governed by feelings that are far from interior “feel” and act very differently from the way they would on their own. Indeed, it also happens with vague moods that get clearer and acquire certain authority only because they are embodied in a given perceptive space of the external world, by the virtue of their affordances that are sometimes syntonic (a grey day confirming my melancholy) and sometimes dystonic (the beautiful day that makes my pain worse). Evocative atmospheric situations are both the conditions and the outcome of embodiment, and their internality or externality can perhaps be simply explained in terms of relative and transitory predominance (Slaby 2014: 38)¹⁹. Without them, both our affective life and our axiologically oriented praxis would therefore be much poorer.

The affective enactivism proposed here therefore finds in atmosphericology an unforeseen integration. When, due to felt-bodily communication with the outside world, the felt body is affected by atmospheric feelings that due to their authority – sometimes absolute, sometimes relative (Griffero 2014b; 2016a: 91-104) – act as socially determined “commitments” (one doesn’t laugh gaily at a funeral) or as stimuli so aggressive that they hinder the recourse to higher critical-

¹⁹ In my own terminology, by means of the distinction between prototypical, derivative and spurious atmosphericness.

emancipated levels, it produces atmospheric games that take the shape of a veritable *body ballet*. This appears as a “compromise-formation” between the long term felt-bodily disposition (also biographically and historically attuned) and the felt-bodily resonance “triggered” by the single (albeit not always conscious) actual atmospheric experience²⁰.

However, let’s consider the absolutely subjective facts whose involvement originates agency, motivations, evaluations, etc. Do they extend in the world being embodied in it or do they derive from it? The atmospherological approach – contrary to the introjectionist paradigm, according to which feelings are private intentional states possibly projected by the subject onto an external world as such devoid of affective qualities – can only externalize the embodiment. The point is undoubtedly to correct (see Slaby-Wüschner 2014: 212) the famous James-Lange thesis – people don’t cry because they feel sad. Rather, people feel sad because they cry – claiming that there is a mutual influence between feeling (style and intensity of the involvement) and action as commitment in the world, consequently acknowledging that affective states are not so much mental states but rather temporally and spatially extended episodes actualized by a first pathic impression (see Griffero 2014c: 29-31) and by an agency conditioned by various factors (personal, historical, etc.). Now, it is certainly difficult to distinguish the active and passive components in an emotional state. However, in my opinion, the lapidary statement that emotion is something that is realised presupposing some sort of minimal agency, given that action is its “processual core” (Slaby-Wüschner 2014: 213), risks semantically extending too much the notion of “behaviour”.

“Feeling-towards” is always already an “active engagement-with”, so what’s the added value of calling “agency” (Slaby-Wüschner 2014: 217) something that happens normally, such as opening one’s eyes wide in front of unexpected danger? In short, in this perspective human life is never passive, but only shows varying degrees of activity, different modalities of “I-can” or “I-can’t” (but is felt-bodily shame the concretization of and dedication to a value?) that are also teleologically oriented (why?) to get a hold over affections and emotions. Lacking

²⁰ This distinction is analogous to the one made by de Rivera (1992) between *Stimmungen* or diachronic emotional scaffolding (*climates*) and atmospheres as synchronic states.

the ecstatic and depersonalizing passivity that characterises atmospherology, what would reactive agency integrate? The only option would be to conclude – with a real *coup de théâtre* – that if emotions are “passions” they are only such *qua* passive modifications of our active nature (Slaby-Wüschner 2014: 225), and that therefore feeling an atmosphere is a “paradoxical experience as the subject feels he is an active intervenient and yet also passively impressed” (Costa *et al.* 2014: 354). However, doesn’t this mean throwing out the baby – namely the pathicity presupposed by the felt-bodily perception of an outside atmospheric feeling – with the bathwater (dualisms like subject/object, inner/outer)?

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