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*Come rain or come shine...*

## The (neo)phenomenological will-to-presentness

### Abstract

*The paper aims at rehabilitating presence (present, presentification and presentness) from a spatial and temporal viewpoint and opposing against philosophies obsessed with the tendency to hermeneutically and semiotically defer the presence/present's sense of our experience. They fatally reduce present/presence into a mere elusive moment of transition, totally negligible if compared to the alleged active transformation of the world. The paper focuses specifically on: a) Gumbrecht's recent kulturkritisch approach to presence, b) the neophenomenological (Schmitz's) theory of the present as the principle of subjective identity, c) a possible link between these two rehabilitation strategies through the pathic-aesthetic notion of felt-bodily presence.*

### Keywords

*Presence, Atmosphere, Felt-body*

### 1. A cultural-critical starter: yearning for presence

Consumed either by the future, by all sorts of goals and deadlines, or by the past – apparently the only guarantee that something is (was) a fact – we usually end up disdaining the present and presence. So, the least that can be said is that presence and the present have never had good press in the last century. Merely dealing with something or somebody without planning ahead or simply lingering in a place more than necessary already seem to run counter to the predominant everyday teleology. By acting in this way, however, “we fail to notice what we actually are: life”, because “promoting presence-awareness is also a matter of the awareness of our own vitality” (Böhme 2014: 151). Driven by the intent of rehabilitating presentification from a spatial and temporal viewpoint, this paper is specifically aimed at: a) addressing

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Gumbrecht's recent *kulturkritisch* approach to presence, b) defending the neophenomenological (Schmitz's) theory of the present as the principle of subjective identity, c) lastly providing a link between these two rehabilitation strategies through the pathic-aesthetic notion of felt-bodily presence<sup>2</sup>. Although there are other possible approaches to presentness, I shall limit myself here to ask what kind of new understanding about felt-bodily presence/present can be gained through combining Gumbrecht's approach to presence with Schmitz's ideas about the present.

Today some see the revaluation of presence as a real paradigm shift. Although I am increasingly allergic to the serial production or even deluge of *soi-disant* new paradigms that appeared in the Humanities over the seventies and eighties, whose outcome has paradoxically been a pseudo-obligation of permanent criticism at best and a relativistic *horror vacui* at worst, I nevertheless must admit that the so-called "affective turn" undoubtedly seems to imply a new way of understanding presence. The present has long been underestimated in the modern era, first of all because of the time deferral implied on the one hand by the Being-prophecy underlying utopian-eschatological thought, to which present is nothing but a painful long wait for the Totally Other, and on the other hand by the contrapresent antiquarian nostalgia for what would seem to precede an irreversible time of decline. This underestimation, though, also depends on the more recent (from Kant onwards) social, cultural or interpretivist constructivism, according to which presence, understood as an appearance that seems to satisfy only a naive conscience, would be nothing but the very complicated and incomplete outcome of a necessarily mediated (and today digitized) access to the world.

If we broaden our view, it may also be argued that this underestimation of presence is the inevitable result of today's increasing pressure towards coolness as a modern form of detachment from everything. According to Peter Sloterdijk, for example, modern cynical knowledge expresses itself in a "crooked smile" reflecting a metaphysical dualism (essence/appearance, inner/outer, etc.), in a gaze that "transfixes things it does not penetrate and to which it does not really grant existence. [It] lets things know that they do not exist as real objects for it, but only as phenomena and information [...] as if they al-

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<sup>2</sup> For the project of a pathic aesthetics see Griffero (2016a, 2017a: VII-XXII, 2017b).

ready belonged to the past” (Sloterdijk 1987: 146). Still, even the cynical intellectual is nonetheless surprised and “offended that the things return this gaze” (Sloterdijk 1987: 146). Things cannot therefore be easily dismissed and this very “nuisance” proves he is still emotional at some level (a robot in fact does not give a damn about anything!) and in some way involved in something present. Hermann Schmitz’s new phenomenological interpretation of Modernity as the age of ironism, characterized by the capacity to freely withdraw (today technologically as well) from all points of view and therefore also to embrace them all<sup>3</sup>, seems at least partially disproven by too many ideological and emotionally contagious dreams of the last century, which was all but free of affective involvements.

This rehabilitation of presence/present, however, does not wish to delete the past, as a large part of today’s naive technological optimism does, or to reduce it to its traces, as Derrida claims. His idea that events are nothing but their traces always reminds me (half-jokingly) of a bad tourist’s choice to visit a place not to experience its presence but to anxiously produce the traces (photos, selfies) that can prove that he has been there. Nor does one intend, on the other hand, to distrust the future as such, as Ludwig Klages claims on behalf of the eros of distance. However, it would be healthy for us to try to think like him, going against common sense understood as a phenomenon following the Promethean ideal, that only past and present truly exist and constitute real time. While the past, in fact, was something undoubtedly real, the future (the “time-to-come”) is nothing but a thought – it’s only what might not happen –, showing itself as a void, as a mere chimeras of deluded minds. For this reason “the ‘eschatologies’ and the ‘apocalypses’ [would be] the most terrible expression of the madness called ‘history’” (Klages 1991: 435).

Now, this approach is certainly metaphysically much less ambitious. One would just point out that the question of presence/present is something “that, only a few years ago, must have looked so utterly naive that nobody dared to ask it” (Gumbrecht 2014: 8). The modern and almost ubiquitous success of the hermeneutic *Weltanschauung*, obliging one to interpret every kind of experience and thus to unavoidably defer the presence/present’s sense, thus made a fatal deal with historicist radicalism aimed at the questioning of objectivity and the degradation of present/presence into a mere elusive moment of transition,

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<sup>3</sup> See Schmitz (2009: 26-7 and 2010: 111-26).

totally negligible if compared to the alleged active transformation of the world.

According to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, presence reminds us that “things inevitably stand at a distance from or in proximity to our bodies; whether they ‘touch’ us directly or not, they have substance” (Gumbrecht 2014: IX). It means that now we should reject all the necessary assumptions of the so-called meaning culture<sup>4</sup>. Let’s begin a) with the observer’s ex-centric role: concerned with finding the appropriate distance in relation to a world thus understood as a mere world of objects, this role in fact necessarily led to subject/object dualism. Moreover, b) the subject moved away from medieval thought, found Descartes’ dualism and especially the protestant only symbolic interpretation of many Christian theologians, so that Christ’s body and blood became only “meanings”, something that just “stands for”. This transformation of the mass into a mere commemoration of the past also helped the transformation of the subject into an un bodied and genderless subject, which as a counterpart to the physical world appeared as the only producer of all acceptable knowledge about the world. In this process c) the distinction between material surface and deeper meanings – in its many variants, including the Heideggerian distinction between Being and what is “present-at-hand” or “ready-to-hand” – increasingly appeared to be something natural, so that the truth necessarily was identified with something behind the surface (or the signifier), beneath a “body” whose hidden truths and thoughts would be “expressed” only in an imperfect way. Lastly e) the subject, thus become disembodied and spiritual, seemed to realize itself if, and only if, it was constantly motivated by a drive towards change and transformation of what is “only” present (which can be therefore underestimated).

However, it is too naive to believe that this list of charges can easily defeat the modern hermeneutic matter of faith (the unbridgeable gap between the surface of things and their conceptual depth) and replace it with “a cosmology of which humans consider themselves to be part” (Gumbrecht 2003: 83). Since the “desire for ‘full presence’”, after all, “is a desire without the possibility of fulfillment” (Gumbrecht 2014: 4-

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<sup>4</sup> See Gumbrecht (2011; 2012a: 190-209, 244-5).

5)<sup>5</sup>, it is better to think of the everyday situation rather as the “productive tension” and oscillation between “presence effects and meaning effects” (Gumbrecht 2003: 107). This very restriction urges us not to understand the felt-bodily communication between perceiver and world (better things and quasi-things) or Gumbrecht’s being “in sync with the things of the world” (Gumbrecht 2003: 117) too univocally, both in a Heideggerian (as unconcealment of Being) and in a ritualistic<sup>6</sup> or even eucharistic sense<sup>7</sup>. What’s clear, though, is that the specific mission of aesthetics is for me to go against this meaning culture, based on a subject/object dualism, a preconception of the invisible depth as the final truth, the removal of sensible perception and the body (especially the lived one), and the so-called psychological-reductionist-introjectionist paradigm. From its modern origin, aesthetics in fact has not only questioned the concepts (even more so if clear and distinct) but has especially highlighted the sensible particular on which we should linger for a while<sup>8</sup>, thus fulfilling “an enhanced need – and an increased desire – for encounters with presence” (Gumbrecht 2012b: 7).

In short, the present seems to be felt no longer as an intolerable Procrustean bed and thus presence, a real blind spot for our Cartesian and meaning culture, asserts its rights again. Paradoxically, the present claims to lifewordly become (more) present again, thus abandoning the (especially modern secularized) perfectibilism. Nor is it by chance that our present no longer seems able to “secrete” future expectations. Indeed, the current crisis of (spatial, economic, etc.) expansion expectancy and the resulting threatening scenarios necessarily challenge any trivial teleologism and justify, if not our squeezing into the present, at least a different chronotope. This is based on the “replacement of the *only telos* by *many short term ends*, perhaps on the substitution of the idea of ‘perfectibility’ by that of *mankind’s preservation*; maybe replacing *spiritual man* (called to improvement) by *physical man* (interested in his own preservation)” (Gumbrecht 2012b: 24).

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<sup>5</sup> But “it is better to suffer from an unfulfilled desire than to lose desire altogether” (Gumbrecht 2014: 9).

<sup>6</sup> Rituals are “attempts to correspond to cosmological frames” (Gumbrecht 2014: 3).

<sup>7</sup> See Gumbrecht (2012b: 218).

<sup>8</sup> “Aesthetic intuition is a radical form of staying in the here and now” (Seel 2003: 62).

Regardless of Gumbrecht's models<sup>9</sup> of the sportsman or opera singer, a neophenomenological rehabilitation of presence/present focuses, more generally, on appearances or signifiers not necessarily coupled with a meaning: physiognomies without interiority. It may be useful, in fact, to philosophically widen Gumbrecht's ontology of literature, based on "reading for Stimmung"<sup>10</sup> and immediacy – "for what affects us in the act of reading involves the present of the past in substance – not a sign of the past or its representation" (Gumbrecht 2012b: 14)<sup>11</sup>. This means placing re-presentation above representation (which has been predominant ever since Descartes), but also supplementing this approach with an aesthetics of atmospheres (as quasi-things) and a phenomenology of the felt body as their precise sounding board. I can only endorse Gumbrecht's view that "yearning for atmosphere and mood is a yearning for presence" (Gumbrecht 2012b: 20), thus replacing meanings with (even painful) present "moments of intensity", with atmospheres and moods no longer waiting to be "deciphered" (Gumbrecht (2012b: 18). They need to be felt-bodily lived as fascinating and almost gestural sources of energy whose authoritative relevance we can neither arbitrarily generate nor make last longer<sup>12</sup>, but without implying, as Gumbrecht instead does, a special "insularity", namely an aesthetic (literary) and for this reason too elitist "specific disposition". This seriously underestimates the epiphanic potential of everyday life experience, for example the usual coming and going of atmospheric feelings: they come out of nothing, have a spatial dimension, are unforeseeable events, are fascinating thanks to their aggressive (quasi-thingly) authority, and so on.

In short, the rehabilitation of presence/present means avoiding both the indefinite and therefore frustrating search for a transcendental foundation and the necessarily relativistic constructionist approach, thus reintegrating three underestimated dimensions: space against (overestimated) time, appearance as such against any alleged substrate and as self-reference against something other, but especially the

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<sup>9</sup> See Gumbrecht (2012b: 214-215).

<sup>10</sup> "Reading for Stimmung' always means paying attention to the textual dimension of the forms that envelop us and our bodies as a physical reality –something that can catalyze inner feelings without matters of representation necessarily being involved" (Gumbrecht 2012b: 5).

<sup>11</sup> According to this deictic attitude, "words are experienced as pointing to things rather than standing 'for them'" (Gumbrecht 2014: 6).

<sup>12</sup> See Gumbrecht (2003: 99, 103).

lived body, which we don't have but rather are. As even an ontologist of literature like Gumbrecht recognises that "we are fast losing the ability to 'be' a body, that is, the ability to let the body be an enhancing condition of our existence" (Gumbrecht 2014: 70). Exactly for this reason, it's only a small step, half jokingly, from Gumbrecht's historic-cultural will-to-presence – the "yearning for moments of presence in our broad present", the need "to grasp them and to be open to their fullness" (Gumbrecht 2014: 79) – to Hermann Schmitz's ontologic-neo-phenomenological will-to-present: for me, these are two of today's most relevant and solid declinations of the Heideggerian being-in-the-world.

## 2. A neophenomenological main course: present certainty

The importance of the present was strongly reduced in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy. Whereas Bergson gives priority to the past, as the present is something elusive compared to the *durée pure*, Heidegger instead gives priority to the future as the only source of authentic temporality. And Husserl makes the present too thin, taking the *Ur-Impression* as a horizon that always includes retention and protention. In contrast with this disregard of the present and, of course, the tendency to divide time as if it were an extended object, the present is for me the "now": an element of the time-quality that is immediately evident despite any objection of discursive thought (from ancient skepticism onward). In this sense the present must have "nothing to do either with the smallest part of measurable time that we are now in the process of representing to ourselves or perceiving or, even less, with the infinitesimal of physical theory [... It] remains indivisible, not because it cannot be divided but because the question of divisibility is no longer posed concerning it" (Minkowski 1970: 35). As "a now that is stretched out" (Minkowski 1970: 36), it is not point-like but, thanks to a duration<sup>13</sup> whose limits are very fluid, it coincides *de facto* with existence. Indeed, Schmitz elects the primitive present<sup>14</sup> as the principle of his new phenomenology (Schmitz 1964: 149), using it as a real "mythogenous idea"

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<sup>13</sup> We know (better, we feel) this duration without necessarily accepting the neuroscientific proposal to fixate it on a brain interval of three seconds.

<sup>14</sup> He thus assumes and expands some concepts proposed by Eugène Minkowski. The "I exist" – "a time of halting in our activity" that is neither purely dynamic nor

or, in a less critical expression, as “a mere metacategory we could as well name awareness” (Stepath 2006: 119, 123).

I simply want to underline here that for Schmitz “to be means to be-present” (Timm 1993: 262), because the person is a conscious subject with the capability of self-ascription if, and only if, she is always able to go back to her proto-identitary life. This original life, based on “subjective facts”, which are subjective even “in a more original way than the subjects” (Schmitz 1996: 26) and thus are identical (vertically) to us without reflective identification (horizontally), is exactly that of the primitive present, to be understood in both a temporal and an (older) spatial sense (Schmitz 1964: 196), a bit like the Japanese spatio-temporal *ma*. According to a felt-bodily economy based on the vital drive and on affective involvement, fright (exemplarily), pain, anguish, shame, orgasm and panic<sup>15</sup> generate a sort of contradiction – the self would like to escape itself! – that leads to catastrophic reactions (also in Plessner’s sense). This impossible escape, unlike the case of deep joy (in which one merges with the self’s other) or the simple prereflective going on existing<sup>16</sup>, shows precisely through a felt contraction that we are spatio-temporal attempting to escape from the spatio-temporal present/presence (the here and now) and thus we are precisely here: what happens is about us, touches and concerns us.

This primitive present is the fusion point of five elements (here, now, being, this and I), which however are recognized as five only *ex post*, namely by an unfolded subjectivity<sup>17</sup>. The certainty provided by the primitive present, guaranteed by a felt-bodily resonance, implies no certainty about our (self-attributed and a bit abstract) properties and the real nature of what appears to us, but only about our being emotionally concerned as subjects. It serves therefore as the deepest

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purely static but “an absolute point in space, precisely the one where I actually am and which is a true center of the world for the active ego” (Minkowski 1970: 124-5) – is translated by Minkowski into the absolute spatio-temporal point *me-here-now* (*moi ici maintenant*). But there are also analogies with Volkelt’s absoluteness of here-now-thisness (2013: 50-3). See Stepath (2006: 123, fn. 475).

<sup>15</sup> The examples provided by Soentgen (1998: 50) – dismissal, fascination, etc. – are more controversial, inasmuch as they refer to a less original felt-bodily state.

<sup>16</sup> See Andermann (2007: 273).

<sup>17</sup> See Blume (2003: 42, fn. 4).



*principium individuationis*, namely as a felt-bodily individuation without singularisation, which is always a subsumption under categories<sup>18</sup>. The immediate evidence of reality, given through a sort of narrowness of the felt body, obviously applies also to animals and newborns, to anyone who could “take fright” or, in other words, could experience the breakdown of the continuum due to something sudden and new<sup>19</sup> without still resorting to singularisation or self-ascription. On the contrary, the self-ascription through which my identity is normally explained is actually only possible (the risk being the *regressus ad infinitum*) through a self-consciousness without identification, that is, only if I am already acquainted with myself through this (primitive) present.

Together, the five points, with the resulting affective involvement in the form of a felt-bodily breakdown and contractedness, are “absolute” because they are not yet related to their five respective (but only relative, as we’ll see) elements. This “presingular subjectivity or self-awareness”, which is the undeniable guarantee of the coincidence between identity and subjectivity, can and must have then a development<sup>20</sup>, even if every later situation of the unfolded present is nothing but a particular sphere “guaranteed” by the primitive present and traced around the “vital phenomena affecting my whole being” (Minkowski 1970: 125). The unfolded present (in brief, the world), which in a way can never be fully achieved, explicates meanings by singularisation, frees them – also by means of sentential speech – from their original complete subjectivity and thus enables the self to distance itself from the original absoluteness. Indeed, it transcends the felt-bodily “here” (hence polarities like absolute location vs. vastness and space as a system of relative location) and “now” (hence absolute moment vs. duration as a modal temporality and the distinction between not-

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<sup>18</sup> Something can only be singular when it increases in number by 1 and it’s therefore an element of a set or an instance of a class.

<sup>19</sup> “Without receptivity to fright there would not be people who can take something like themselves” (Schmitz and Sohst 2005: 13). Being a lived body means that one can be cornered and scared (Schmitz 1989: 219).

<sup>20</sup> Also in an ontogenetic sense: for an application of this to child learning see Schultheis (1998: 93-5).

yet-being and no-longer-being)<sup>21</sup>. It goes beyond the “existence or reality” by projecting itself into the mere possibility and leaves behind the “this” by relating to identity and difference and even looking ahead to the future. Lastly, it can distinguish between one’s own world and another’s or alien world. In a word: through the fivefold unfolded present, the human being (unlike the animal) doubtlessly goes beyond the present situation. But the most important thing is that only through the collapse of personal emancipation<sup>22</sup>, caused by fright but also laughing and crying, and through the resulting regression to the primitive present (personal regression), does the subject feel and know with certainty that it exists. Only when meanings suddenly fall back into their internally diffuse meaningfulness and it is affectively involved, does the subject have full confidence in reality<sup>23</sup>.

Schmitz then differentiates time into three less original modalities, that is, pure modal temporality (being, not-yet-being and no-longer-being), pure relational temporality (relation of earlier to later or simultaneity) and finally the blended mode of modal relational temporality, which is the basis of the flow of time (the past constantly grows, the future constantly shrinks and the present is constantly shifting) but also of its well-known aporias. In the first case (pure modal temporality) the present is different from the past but so much exposed to the ingression of the new (future) as to be replaced by *Appräsens* (*ad presens*) as the fusion of present and future. The qualitative bipolar structure (past and appresens) of the primitive present (the now) is then quantitatively levelled in the unfolded present in the form both of modal relational temporality (past present, present present, future present) and of pure relational temporality (time of the day and clock time). However, it would be a mistake to absolutize one of these tem-

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<sup>21</sup> For an analysis of time based on the critique of the unilateral development of the primitive present/presence in a relational temporality (instead of a more appropriate modal relational temporality) see Schmitz (1990: 247-74, and more recently 2014).

<sup>22</sup> “People [...] do not simply present themselves as if they were new guests to a world already definitely divided into wholly individual things, but the very fact that they present themselves is an aspect of a fivefold structure of the primitive present/presence in a world endowed with its own form” (Schmitz 2003: 18).

<sup>23</sup> “Reality appears all of a sudden, breaking the duration of subsisting in primitive present/presence (for example, when a sudden and intense noise wakes one up from dozing)” (Schmitz and Sohst 2005: 29). On this “good” regression see Griffero (2016c).

poral structures, thereby sacrificing the paradoxical experience of everyday life that is neither wholly unconscious<sup>24</sup> nor a return to nature<sup>25</sup>. The present in fact usually manifests itself both as the shocking absolute now (modal temporality) and as the relative nows in the succession of events (relational temporality), but especially as that lifewordly fusion of the previous two modes (modal relational temporality) that characterises an *experientia vaga* whose best analysis is, since at least from Baumgarten, the aesthetic one.

Subjectivity is no longer the land to which the *reductionist razor* exiles all that is too vague or complex but the sphere of extremely precise situations for someone. Indeed, the word “me” must be “understood not so much as a pronoun but rather as an adverb (a bit like ‘here’ and ‘now’), one that does not denominate a thing but characterizes a milieu, just as by the word ‘here’ one does not refer to a thing (‘the here’) but rather to what is here, in the immediate milieu” (Schmitz 1994: 15). Consequently, the person, no matter what her “style” is<sup>26</sup>, is a conscious subject that has an ascribable content and can singularise and explicate the internally and holistically diffuse meaningfulness of situations she encounters only if she has not completely emancipated herself from (and can still access again) the primitive present. That is, only if she is always “able” to appropriately fluctuate<sup>27</sup> between the poles of the primitive (implicating) present and the unfolded (explicating) present. Since “for human life is usually distinguished by a varied swinging as well as an ambivalent shimmering between the two forms of present” (Schmitz 1968: 4), and, as a consequence, the unfolded present is nothing but a labile and “fortunately” never definitely acquired stage<sup>28</sup>, our image of the person completely changes: she appears to be a chaotic phenomenon, infinitely (and therefore weakly) undecided about personality or prepersonality<sup>29</sup>, that is, about the five polarities and therefore also between primitive present and unfolded

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<sup>24</sup> As Stepath (2006: 132) seems to think.

<sup>25</sup> See Soentgen (1998: 52).

<sup>26</sup> For example: pride, irony, stoic imperturbability, sober realism, etc. (Schmitz 1990: 155).

<sup>27</sup> Hence a latent hysteria in humans as such (Schmitz 1997: 173; see Stepath 2006: 124).

<sup>28</sup> See Schmitz (2015: 119-37).

<sup>29</sup> It is the logic of endless undecidedness, to which Schmitz recurs several times to avoid contradiction (see Blume 2003: 48-51). For this logical criterion, see Schmitz (2008a: 115 ff.; 2013).

present, which also means between subjective facts endowed with binding validity<sup>30</sup> and now neutral objective facts.

### 3. *Chef's (atmospheric) recommendation: felt-bodily presence*

It should be recognised that Gumbrecht's presence and Schmitz's present converge towards a full phenomenological rehabilitation of all that appears as such and we directly felt-bodily perceive. Indeed, the undoubted differences between the two – whereas the former looks to a lasting situational and somewhat more abstract presence, the latter is more concerned with a momentary, unrepeatable and somewhat more shocking present – must not be overstated. They have a shared interest in tightly linking together perception and imposition of presence<sup>31</sup> (with the exception, of course, of what is temporally and not also spatially present to us). The latter is not always perceived in a strict sensorial way: sometimes (think of the speaker on the podium or the actor on stage, for example) we certainly felt-bodily perceive the atmospheric presence (and thus the feedback) of our outside, of the world, as if it were a gaze towards us and our presence were, as a consequence, our being looked at by them<sup>32</sup>. This brings us to felt-bodily presence, which seems today to be socially removed, to put it simply, because of the ubiquitous virtualisation and the increasing obsession with (also bodily) privacy. But this is only partially true. Indeed, it is true that a video conference cannot fully replace a face to face meeting, that only through bodily presence can one fully (synaesthetically) assess the “how” of another's talking, or that only a journey that does not rely entirely on the goal gives a chance to experience and appreciate a place. However, it's also true that technical development might unleash unexpected felt-bodily potentialities for the very reason that they are not bodily in a strictly physical sense.

This approach cannot be discussed in detail here but it is rooted in a neophenomenological theory of felt-bodily communication. In fact, we felt-bodily communicate with everything that is other (animated or

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<sup>30</sup> For a binding validity in law and religion see Schmitz (1973, 1977, 2012). For his hypothetical debate with Habermas see Lauterbach (2014).

<sup>31</sup> See Wiesing (2014: 79, 85).

<sup>32</sup> See Hauskeller (1995: 115-8).

not)<sup>33</sup> because we feel its presence-present (its “voluminosity”) through our felt-bodily presence, that is, through a resonance understood as one of many possibilities contained in the intracorporeal economy of contraction (incorporation) and expansion (excorpuration). By virtue of this simultaneous presence of the communication partners, and regardless of whether the subject thus embodies something or is disembodied into, it can be argued that feeling the presence-present does not indicate anything mystical or too performative. In other words, a real felt-bodily (in a way, extended) presence-present of ourselves and, at the same time, of the outside world is guaranteed not only by extreme and almost always solipsistic experiences or by some sophisticated training (meditation etc.)<sup>34</sup>, but also by our ordinary everyday experience (walking down a street, contemplating a landscape, waiting for the train, even feeling our heartbeat), provided that one is able, in the short term at least, to carelessly open oneself to the moment, get out of the usual goal-oriented life and feel oneself in the (even) ephemeral qualia of the world.

Having thus raised doubts about every too-performative and voluntary approach to the felt-bodily presence-present<sup>35</sup>, in conclusion I must underline again that being-present-and-in-a-presence always means being-in-a-mood, since “a mood contributes to sensing where we are. By feeling our own presence, we feel the space in which we are present” (Böhme 2017: 137). In other words, we cannot pay attention to the presence-present without also paying attention to the presence-present of our existence<sup>36</sup>. Thank to this, we feel a relatively stable atmosphere poured out in the (lived) present space and time<sup>37</sup>. It gives a quasi-thingly and quasi-objective tone to all other partial and ephemeral moods and makes them something undoubtedly real and actual (effective *qua* affective in Böhme’s sense). Against the highly predictable argument that this (relatively extended) presence-present

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<sup>33</sup> See Schmitz (from last 2017: 64-79) and Griffero (2016b).

<sup>34</sup> See Böhme (2010: 127 and 2014: 152, 154).

<sup>35</sup> It has already been the subject of some critical remarks on Shusterman’s somaesthetics (Griffero 2016a: 30-3).

<sup>36</sup> The intuitive conscience of the presence implies “a conscience of *my* here and now at the same time” (Seel 2003: 62 and also 160-1).

<sup>37</sup> I do not wish, of course, to speak at length about atmospheres as the paradigm of a new (pathic) aesthetics. For more on that, see Griffero (2014, 2016a and 2017a).

could end up in solipsism<sup>38</sup>, one needs to underline with Schmitz that, being the “person so open that one can no longer speak of an enclosed private internal world” (Schmitz 2008b: 31)<sup>39</sup>, this expanding present-awareness (in every sense of the term)<sup>40</sup> is something aesthetic *and therefore* ecstatic exactly because it always “learns” from what is other but present in the present world.

But is this felt-bodily presentism only the “pie in the sky” of not-so-young people who wish to remain forever young and slightly alien to the hypertechnological present? I undoubtedly agree with Gumbrecht’s claim:

Don’t those of us who are older have the right to remain on our islands for as long as possible? Why should we clumsily adapt to the demands of the electronic that dominate the new present? We are already living in a vast moment of simultaneities. There is no need to reject us – we who embody one of many pasts – from our havens in the broad present. (Gumbrecht 2014, XIV)

A serious thought about presence-present cannot help critically putting an end to today’s availability, today too often misunderstood as infinite (pseudo-democratic and finally enslaving)<sup>41</sup>, and thus keep alive the principle according to which presence emerges and grows only thanks to its existential contrast with absence.

But, at this point, neurophysiologists inevitably step forward and, sweeping away every phenomenological and cultural-critical issue, remind us with a condescending look and thin considerations – but let’s remember that the young Husserl sharpened his penknife until it broke! – that what we call outside presence is nothing but a construction (image) of the brain. Yet the brain itself, which is no doubt part of

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<sup>38</sup> See for example Irrgang (2016: 100) and Kersting (1992: 83), for whom “the presentist is the brother of the solipsist in the context of a philosophy of time”. I believe it is also a bit misleading to define the presence-awareness an endogenous outcome (as Böhme claims, 2014: 157).

<sup>39</sup> See also Schmitz (2017: 148-61).

<sup>40</sup> “Present is the sum of representations and (physical as well as spiritual) sensations we consciously and unconsciously alternatively perceive, and at the same time always the horizon our perception. Our access to the world has its roots in this process of discontinuous oscillation. If this access is optimistic, one links the present to the representation of a ‘kaiocracy of life’; if it’s pessimistic, one understands the present as ‘pull to death’” (Schmitz 2002: 27).

<sup>41</sup> “How impossibly old-fashioned is it if” – so Gumbrecht – “I regularly feel that in this type and under these conditions of interaction it should be exclusively my privilege to be ‘available’ or not?” (Gumbrecht 2014: 63).

the outside world, would therefore only be a construction (image) of the brain, and this would be nothing but an image of an image, and so on. It is always the same old story... but now even without the good old transcendent (Platonic) consolations.

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