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## The spatial character of atmospheres: being-affected and corporeal interactions in the context of collective feeling

### Abstract

*The paper argues that we can gain access to atmospheres and their spatiality only insofar as we are affected by them in a felt-bodily way. We need a conception of felt embodiment, then, if we are to gain a philosophical understanding of the spatial character of atmospheres. This conception of atmospheres opens up new perspectives on the question of how collective feelings should be understood. The debate over mass emotions and shared feelings received essential impulses from Scheler's analyses of contagion and feeling-with-one-another (Miteinanderfühlen), which is phenomenologically criticized here. In examining felt-body or corporeal interactions in the context of collective atmospheres, the paper reveals how we can avoid misunderstandings in the debate over collective feelings. One result of our examination is that, with the help of felt-bodily interactions, we can explain why collective atmospheres are often artificially produced and much sought after.*

### Keywords

*Spatiality of atmospheres, Collective feelings, Corporeal interactions*

In everyday life, one often hears it said that someone spreads or exudes a certain atmosphere – for example, an atmosphere of unrest or irritation. Sometimes it is also said that a person has a certain radiance or gives off a certain “vibe”, that she radiates satisfaction or joy. These two ways of speaking refer to feelings and contain spatial metaphors such as “spreading” or “radiating”. I believe that there are good reasons for taking these descriptions literally, and not just in a metaphorical sense<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The following discussion of the spatial character of atmospheres is consistently inspired by the writings of Hermann Schmitz. My criticism of Max Scheler's concept

But if atmospheres are spatial, do they have to be regarded as things? By “things” I understand physical bodies, that is, bodies that possess mass, take up space and generally have fixed boundaries, so that their volume can be measured. To apply such a notion of a thing to atmospheres would be absurd, since they cannot be measured. But if they are not things, yet nevertheless are encountered in space, how should we understand them?

My paper is based on a broad concept of atmosphere. I use this expression to refer not only to the atmospheres of landscapes, times of day or seasons, such as the atmosphere of a spring morning, but also to all moods (in the sense of *Stimmungen*), and even to feelings in general. In my paper I will use the term “feeling” both as a noun to refer to emotions, moods and atmospheres and in its verbal sense to refer to the subjective experience of being affected by these phenomena. I will argue that we can gain access to the character of atmospheres and their spatiality only insofar as we are affected by them in a felt-bodily way. Without a conception of felt embodiment (*Leiblichkeit*), therefore, we cannot gain a philosophical understanding of the spatial character of atmospheres.

Furthermore, I would like to argue that this conception of atmospheres opens up interesting perspectives on the question of how *collective* feelings should be understood. In so doing, I will take my lead from the debate over mass emotions and shared feelings that received essential impulses from Scheler’s analyses of contagion and feeling-with-one-another (*Miteinanderfühlen*). If we examine felt-bodily or corporeal interactions in the context of collective atmospheres, we can avoid certain problems that arise in the debate over collective feelings due to misunderstandings about the spatial character of atmospheres and the corporeal mode of access to them. This is the case, for example, with questions concerning whether all those who become immersed in a collective atmosphere experience exactly the same or only a similar feeling – or, in a different terminology, whether all those who share a feeling share a single feeling in a numerical sense, or whether several feelings are involved (as discussed, for example, by Schmid 2008). A by-product of my reflections is that, in the case of shared feelings, it becomes easy to explain with the help of felt-bodily interactions

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of contagion differs, however, from Schmitz’s argument against Scheler. See Schmitz (2010a).

why collective atmospheres are often artificially produced and much sought after.

My paper contains four parts: *Quasi-things, being-affected and spatial experience* (1.), *Corporeal dynamics and corporeal interaction* (2.), *Collective atmospheres and feelings* (3.) and *Emotional contagion and mass emotions* (4.).

### 1. *Quasi-things, being-affected and spatial experience*

Feelings grip us at the corporeal level, that is, they intrude in the dynamics of our felt bodies and change them. This is what I call “being affected” (*Betroffenheit*) by a feeling. Being-affected refers to having a feeling, in the sense that one can speak of someone as being affected by a new tax law. The experience of being affected by it is not the same as the feeling, just as the tax law is not the same thing as the fact that you fall under it and that it may also have an emotional significance for you. There are good reasons, as I hope to show, to distinguish between the feeling and being affected by it, that is, between the feeling and actually experiencing the feeling. Thus, we are quite capable of perceiving a feeling merely in a distanced way without at the same time being affected by it – for example, when we register feelings of other people who are not close to us without feeling with them. The same applies to observing the feelings of film characters or noticing the atmospheres of landscapes, which we can also perceive without necessarily being gripped by them at a bodily-affective level.

That atmospheres can be perceived from a distance without being gripped by them points to the fact that feelings (or, more generally, atmospheres) possess a relative ontological independence. Therefore, the phenomenologist Hermann Schmitz (2010b) suggests that atmospheres should be called “quasi-things” (*Halbdinge*). In addition to feelings, the term “quasi-thing” also refers to phenomena such as winds, melodies, pains, voices and gazes. All of these phenomena are very much real and in that sense objective – we can all perceive them. But it holds for all of them that we do not encounter them as a material counterpart, but as an *influence* on our felt bodies, as when we say that a melody grips us and we cannot get it out of our heads or that another person’s gaze pierces us. These phenomena are not things. Therefore, unlike things, they cannot be separated from the resonance to which they give rise in our felt bodies.

Ontologically speaking, quasi-things are situated between things and the so-called “secondary” qualities. With these secondary qualities such as colors quasi-things have in common that they can only become something given for someone who is suitably equipped to perceive them. The fact that some people are color-blind does not entail that the colors that other people see are subjective; and the fact that blind beings exist does not place the existence of colored things in question. The same holds for atmospheres, but also for melodies or voices: some people also seem to lack the necessary sensory faculty to perceive them, but that does not mean that they do not exist or that what others perceive as a certain atmosphere, for example, is merely an external projection of an internal state. That is certainly not the case. The fact that atmospheres can only become something given for someone who is equipped to perceive them does not mean that they only exist *through* these people. After all, the same applies to all things in the world: they do not cease to exist once we turn around and stop looking at them. This is the same with atmospheres.

However, quasi-things have a different form of temporal existence from things. Things can change and make the transition to different states; they possess continuity. In the case of two temporally separated appearances of a thing, it always makes sense to ask what state it has been in in the meantime and where it has been. This does not make sense in the case of quasi-things like voices, winds or atmospheres: during the time in which they do not find expression, they are neither anywhere nor in any state; their duration has been interrupted in a sense. It does not make sense to ask where the atmosphere of a cheerful spring morning has gone when midday downpours lend the landscape a completely different aspect, or where the anger has disappeared to when it has “dissipated”.

Conceiving of an atmosphere as a quasi-thing has the advantage of enabling and requiring us to make a clear distinction between the feeling as atmosphere and the state of being affected in a bodily-affective way by this feeling. As a result, one can speak of the “objective” or “intersubjective” spatiality of the atmosphere in contrast to the subjective condition of being affected by it. However, the objectivity thesis must not be taken to imply that, when no one has a subjective access to feelings, these feelings exist as “things in themselves” (Schmitz 2005: 285). When an atmosphere ceases to be part of a situation, then like melodies, winds and voices, it does not have any ontic presence; it does not endure.

When I speak of the “spatiality” of atmospheres, I am using a different concept of space from the customary geometric one. Geometric space abstracts from our felt-bodily experience; it is structured in three dimensions, contains points and lines and can be divided up into surfaces. This is not true of the space occupied by atmospheres, which does not have surfaces. Grief, for example, has a certain weight; it exerts a discernible pressure. But it does not have any external surface and it cannot be described in terms of dimensions. This atmosphere does have a dynamic volume, however, and it also has a direction in space: it weighs and exerts pressure downward; it hits home in the absolute place of the perceptible felt body.

In accordance with the phenomenological method, which always begins with experience, we can distinguish three levels of human spatial experience: the lowest level is “expansive space” (*Weiteraum*), the intermediate level is “directional space” (*Richtungsraum*) and the upper level is “three-dimensional space”. The first level consists of pure expansiveness – for example, when one feels the weather in an unstructured way in one’s felt body or senses a tranquil atmosphere. Expansiveness underlies all spatial phenomena; it is a necessary and sufficient condition for something to be spatial. Without expansiveness, there can be no space. Therefore, expansive space is the foundation of the other two levels of space. For our context, it is the second level of space, directional space, that is decisive. It is a result of the fact that felt-bodily directions proceed in a nonreversible way from the absolute place of the body into the expanse, as, for example, in the case of glances. The third level is the three-dimensional space that traditionally informs our reflection on space. It is formed by corporeal directions crossing each other, thereby giving rise to distances. Physical bodies, including living bodies, are located in it.

## *2. Corporeal dynamics and corporeal interaction*

I describe as “corporeal” or “relating to the felt body” (*leiblich*) what can be felt on or in the body from the first person perspective without relying on individual senses such as sight or touch. The “body” (*Körper*), on the other hand, is objectified and perceived from the perspective of a third person, even when it is viewed by the person herself.

“Contraction” and “expansion” are two fundamental categories for describing felt-bodily sensation. To illustrate this with an example:

when I am afraid, I experience a certain corporeal feeling of contraction, as when Germans say “*mir schnürt sich die Kehle zu*” (meaning something like “I am choking with fear”); when I am happy, I may feel buoyant and elated (think of the English expression “walking on air”) or feel a sense of expansion, as when we say “my heart is bursting with joy”.

The individual felt body is directed from contraction to expansion, and thus in a spatial way, but not in the sense of a distance that can be described in geometrical terms. For example, the length of a gaze cannot be measured, whereas its direction is clearly determined. It is equally impossible to measure the contraction felt in fear in centimeters. Nevertheless, the gaze as well as the fear can be encountered in felt-bodily space, for otherwise it would not be possible to speak of directions.

The structure of contraction and expansion is not only found in feelings, but is a fundamental feature of our felt-bodily experience. Our entire felt-bodily condition continually oscillates between tendencies toward contraction and toward expansion. One could say that it has a dialogical structure: contraction “responds” to expansion and vice versa<sup>3</sup>. When inhaling, for example, you first feel an expansion until a contraction sets in that is released by exhaling, until this second expansion in turn in a sense runs up against a limit and thus a contraction, thereby forcing you to reverse direction in renewed expansion by inhaling.

This dialogical principle, this alternation between contraction and expansion, is not confined to breathing. On the contrary, it determines the entire felt-bodily dynamic and opens the body up to the world. It is what first enables the felt body to be affected by external impulses. Only in this way can the felt body be addressed in a figurative sense, and only in this way can influences upon it be discerned. We are connected to the surrounding world through felt-bodily interaction. Felt-

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<sup>3</sup> See Schmitz (1982: 73-89) as well as Schmitz (2011: 2-4) – Fuchs, De Jaegher (2009: 476) speak of “centering” and “decentering”. Contraction and expansion remain closely intertwined in experience itself. Only in extreme cases do contraction and expansion decouple entirely: thus, in cases of extreme pain the pole of contraction can dominate over expansion to such an extent that expansion is no longer possible and the person loses consciousness. When falling asleep, however, it is the expansion in relaxation which suppresses the contraction and hence enables the body to fall asleep. In both cases the conscious experience ceases.

bodily contact is especially easy when the counterpart is also a sentient body<sup>4</sup>.

A decisive feature of all contacts is that the corporeal directions, contraction and expansion, in virtue of their dialogical character, can be “distributed” among poles in space without changing their structure – that is, that contraction and expansion remain bound to each other and oscillate also in the case of a “distribution” between two poles in space. For example, imagine two people walking past each other in a narrow passageway. Sometimes the one and sometimes the other dominates the expansion tendency by coordinating gaze and movement, while the other takes over the contraction tendency until she takes control of the expansion once again<sup>5</sup>. In processes of this kind, the corporeal dialogue between the participants spontaneously gives rise to inclusive quasi-bodily units that are structured like the felt body itself. This can also be observed from the outside – think, for example, of the perfectly coordinated movements of a team competing in a sporting event or of ballet performances.

For the question concerning collective atmospheres and shared feelings it is important to distinguish between two distinct types of corporeal interaction between persons: a “bipolar” and a “unipolar” type<sup>6</sup>. In *bipolar* corporeal interactions, there are always two impulse generators or two sources that specify the corporeal directions, for example, two corporeally interrelated individuals. Examples of the bipolar form of corporeal contact are: handshakes; passers-by who avoid touching each other while perfectly coordinating their movements; an exchange of glances; a conversation; a boxing match; and the tender play between a father and an infant. In all of these *bipolar* cases, the dynamics are marked by opposition, since they start from two poles, *both* of which provide impulses. In contrast, the *unipolar* form can be described as being “aligned” (in the sense of being oriented in the

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<sup>4</sup> In substance, Fuchs, De Jaegher (2009: 475fn.) have a similar view on corporeal interaction, also with a view to things.

<sup>5</sup> When I speak of an intentional change in dominance here I am not inferring a competition between individuals, but rather that the corporeal directions have to be in agreement with each other. To a certain extent, it has to be bodily “agreed upon” who is to take the initiative – not simply who is to grant whom the initiative.

<sup>6</sup> These concepts replace what is termed “antagonistic incorporation” (*antagonistische Einleibung*; in my terminology: “bipolar corporeal interaction”) and “solidary incorporation” (*solidarische Einleibung*; here: “unipolar corporeal interaction”) in Schmitz.

same direction: *gleichgerichtet*)<sup>7</sup>, since in this case the interaction is initiated and directed by just one pole. This pole can be a person, a thing or even a theme; only it must determine the corporeal interaction and movements of those involved<sup>8</sup>. Examples of this kind of corporeal process are teams or pairs engaged in the aforementioned sporting competitions, shared music making, but also fleeing herds of animals or crowds of people reacting in a coordinated way to a source of danger or to something else that provides an impulse.

In what follows, I would like to show why unipolar felt-bodily interaction underlies all kinds of shared *feeling*.

### 3. *Collective atmospheres and feelings*

When at least two persons *share* a feeling, that is, when both of them are affected by the same feeling, this feeling intrudes in the dynamics of their felt bodies in the same way for both of them. In this case, the impulse comes from the feeling itself and not primarily from one of the persons involved. This can only be asserted with such confidence if we rigorously abandon the idea that feelings are private states that are inaccessible to others. At this point, our previous distinction between a feeling and being corporeally affected by it turns out to offer a successful simplification of the problem. Only against this background can we now say that in the case of shared feelings at least two people are

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<sup>7</sup> This correlates with an idea introduced by Undine Eberlein (2013) who suggests replacing Schmitz's awkward concept of "antagonistic incorporation" with "opposing dynamic" and "solidary incorporation" with "aligned dynamic".

<sup>8</sup> The distinction between bipolar and unipolar incorporation appears at first glance to be what Fuchs and De Jaegher term "coordination *to*" and "coordination *with*" in their analysis of "common intercorporeality". But with a more exact reading one can ascertain that this concerns two different forms of bipolar corporeal interaction. "Coordination *to*" refers to a form of one-sided coordination, where one of the two interlinked systems follows the lead of the other person, whereas "coordination *with*" requires "co-regulation". The first form concerns phenomena such as fascination and hypnosis, which Hermann Schmitz terms "one-sided antagonistic incorporation" (in my terminology: one-sided bipolar corporeal interaction), while the second form refers to "reciprocal antagonistic incorporation" – this correlates with reciprocal bipolar corporeal interaction. Because I am only concerned with unipolar corporeal interaction here this distinction can be ignored. Unipolar corporeal interaction is not dealt with in Fuchs, De Jaegher (2009: 470fn.), nor under a different title.



affected by one and the same feeling. For the feeling is not something that each of those who experiences it has for herself privately. Thus, the notion that it is a matter of two numerically distinct feelings that they both “have” in common in some sense would miss the point. It is only their being-affected that each has “for herself”, it is only their *own* corporeal feeling that “exists” twice, but not the feeling (in a substantial sense). After initially being affected, one can adopt an attitude toward the feeling, for example, by giving in to it or resisting it, depending on personality, the form one happens to be in and the situation. These attitudes toward how one is affected are usually involuntary, and they shape the feeling somewhat differently from person to person. But as long as one continues to be affected by the same atmosphere, the directions of the participants in felt-bodily space remain aligned. The feeling is intensified in the process, because, in virtue of the dialogical structure of the felt body, it is not self-contained: on the one hand, the felt body can be affected by the feeling and, on the other hand, it can resonate with the felt-bodily dynamics of others, provided that they perceive each other. This is only possible because these processes unfold in a shared directional space.

If different people are jointly affected by the same feeling and they become aware of this, then in my terminology this is a case of unipolar corporeal interaction: the corporeal dynamic is aligned because the impulse comes from a single feeling. The feeling aligns the bodies that are jointly affected by it in the same direction. One could say that, in the process of feeling, it “synchronizes” them in a corporeal way. To reiterate the point, this is a process in felt-bodily space: all those who are jointly affected by this feeling are gripped by the same corporeal directions. For example, when several people jointly learn about an unexpected positive event, they are all filled with joy, with the accompanying typical corporeal feeling of expansion and elevation. These corporeal directions upward and into expansiveness must be understood in spatial terms, where spatial is understood in the sense of the directional space in which there are no measurable distances but in which directions can be felt and perceived. If those involved in the shared situation become aware of the *aligned* dynamics, then the reciprocity of this perception gives rise to an emotional resonance that leads to an increase and intensification of the feeling. In other words, if a feeling grips (at least) two participants at the same time and they reciprocally become aware of this, then this can give rise to a corporeal resonance, leading to a mutual reinforcement of the corporeal feeling. The

synchronization of feeling is brought about by an impulse distinct from the participants – that is, by the feeling as an atmosphere<sup>9</sup>. Here both the feeling and the fact that those involved are corporeally affected by it are processes that occur in directional space. It is only in virtue of this spatiality, which makes possible corporeal interactions between those present in the first place, that the feeling of the participants can be mutually intensified. Resonance is a spatial phenomenon. If the feelings in question were merely non-spatial conscious phenomena, then it would be difficult to explain the mutual amplification of the feeling.

I would like to illustrate the corporeal dynamics of shared feeling by means of an example, specifically with reference to the unipolar corporeal interaction within an orchestra that can, but need not, lead to shared feeling. What interests me about the orchestra here is *not* in the first place shared feeling, but *only* corporeal interaction. In an orchestral performance, the conductor takes up the corporeal dynamic of the piece of music, which provides the initial and dominant impulse. All of those involved let themselves be jointly directed in a unipolar corporeal way by this dynamic (Schmitz 2011: 48). The spatial arrangement reflects this: the conductor faces the orchestra so that her corporeal impulses can be taken up by the musicians; meanwhile the musicians are physically turned toward each other only slightly, but are nevertheless corporeally synchronized with each other. This occurs above all through the shared rhythm, but also occasionally through co-

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<sup>9</sup> In his new publications Schmitz distinguishes between the two forms of corporeal interaction in what I have termed the “bipolar” form and what Schmitz terms “antagonistic” through stating that his is connected to “turning one’s attention to the other side”, while the unipolar form (what Schmitz calls “solidary incorporation”) “comes about without turning one’s attention to the partner or partners” (Schmitz 2011: 29). This conceptual definition could be misunderstood to the extent that it could be taken to mean that unipolar corporeal interaction does not concern whether the partners reciprocally perceive each other and are corporeally attuned to each other or – in the case of intentionally shared activities – coordinate with each other. I understand the expression “turning attention towards” in Schmitz’s conceptual determination in the sense of factual movement, such that the antagonistic incorporation can be described, as with Eberlein (2013: 97), through an “opposing” dynamic and the solidary dynamic through an “aligned” dynamic. The first would be connected with corporeal turning attention towards, while the aligned form usually does not necessarily involve corporeal turning attention towards.

ordinating glances or gestures. My proposal is that we should understand shared feelings in accordance with this pattern of the orchestra, whereby the feeling provides the decisive impulse, that is, the role of the work to be performed and the role of the conductor, while those who are feeling together take up the impulse and resonate in a unipolar way. Just like the individual voices in the orchestra, the ways in which the individual participants are affected can also differ to some degree. However, the corporeal directions of all participants are determined in the same way by the atmosphere or the guidelines of the score and to this extent are “synchronized”.

In the case of shared feelings – as with unipolar corporeal interaction in general – it is imperative that those who are interacting should “perceive” one another at a corporeal level, but for the most part without turning directly to each other. The condition that they should perceive one another mutually is indispensable, for it does not make much sense to speak of “shared” feelings unless they are noticed and are jointly experienced. Only through the corporeal attention directed *primarily* toward the impulse, the feeling itself, but also *secondarily* toward those who feel in the same way, is it possible to explain why shared feelings are experienced more intensively than individual ones. Without an emotional resonance that arises through the shared unipolar corporeal process, it would not make sense to me to speak of shared feelings at all: then the feeling would be no different from individual feeling. In this case it would be more a matter of parallel feeling, or at best of merely knowing that others are experiencing the same feelings as I am, but not yet of an immediately shared experience.

Most shared feelings are characterized by the fact that they are experienced more strongly and intensively than individual ones, and this intensification is rooted in the corporeal resonance among those present. Shared feelings do not call for explicit awareness, but they do require at least peripheral mutual attention, mutual perception or mutual registration. In other words, shared feelings presuppose a reciprocally reinforcing echo of the feeling through the “unipolar” mode of corporeal contact outlined. Without this corporeal interaction, no shared feeling is possible. The shared corporeal directionality gives rise to a resonance that increases the amplitude of the corporeal excitation of all participants and thereby heightens and intensifies the feeling.

How *positive* feelings can be intensified, I have explained in terms of the concept of corporeal resonance. The reason why we are equally inclined to share *negative* feelings is bound up with the fact that the

negative feelings, which always involve contraction, are distributed among several poles that are synchronized with each other. The fact that shame, for example, is *reduced* instead of increased when it is spread out over many people is bound up with the corporeal dynamics of shame, specifically that it is a constricting feeling. If many people feel shame for the same reason and become aware of this, the typical contraction of shame in corporeal space is strongly relativized and as a result is transformed into mere embarrassment, or is even dispelled completely.

In the following concluding section, I will address a distinction and a simplification that are particularly important for the expansive shared feelings.

#### *4. Emotional contagion and mass emotions*

A distinction is often made in the research literature between mass emotions, on the one hand, and shared feelings, on the other. At least these two concepts exist and they normally also refer to different phenomena: mass emotions exist in football stadiums, in the Arab Spring, at Pegida meetings, at revolts and at lynchings, whereas emotions are shared by two hikers watching a sunset (Heidegger 1996: 86, 88), by couples in love with each other, by two parents mourning over their dead child (Scheler 2008: 12, 70) and by audiences at successful musical premieres (Schmid 2008). In the following, I would like to ask whether in these cases we are really dealing with two different phenomena.

In characterizing mass emotions, I will draw upon Scheler's account of emotional contagion, which he contrasts with (genuine) "empathy". Contagion corresponds to the phenomenon of mass emotions and Scheler's "genuine feeling-with-one-another" corresponds to shared feelings. We can leave aside Scheler's "genuine empathy", which also occurs in this context; it plays an important role for Scheler as an alternative to emotional contagion and he uses it as a counter-model to the latter.

In the case of contagion, according to Scheler, the feeling spreads exclusively as a result of those involved engaging in the corresponding expressive movements (or "imitation"); rephrased in my terminology, the corporeal resonance arises through mimesis and not through spatially aligned feeling. In Scheler's account, the imitated movements also give rise to the corresponding feelings only as a secondary effect.

The individual who has these feelings mistakenly believes that they are her own, but in reality they are merely imitations of the feelings of others<sup>10</sup>. According to Scheler, the emotions that have come about through emotional contagion, on the one hand, and “genuine” empathy, on the other hand, can be distinguished from each other primarily based on their *genesis*. Viewed from the outside, the group of people who have succumbed to emotional contagion seems to be artificially incited. It more easily becomes a mass acting together than in the case of Scheler’s “genuine empathy”, because *contagion* through imitation of the expressive movements gives rise to a reciprocal incitement and this intensification facilitates the transition from feeling to action<sup>11</sup>. Because Scheler argues above all against confusing phenomena of emotional contagion with “genuine empathy”, he loses sight of the similarity with “feeling-with-one-another”, or with what I have here called “shared feelings”.

From my point of view, the contrast that Scheler makes between merely imitated and real feelings is problematic, because in both cases those involved consider their feelings to be their own. As with all feelings, one can be mistaken also in the case of mass emotions, but one cannot always be mistaken. As Scheler defines contagion, however, mass emotions necessarily involve self-deception concerning one’s own feelings – in Scheler’s terminology, they are “not genuine”, since

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<sup>10</sup> Scheler characterizes “contagion through foreign emotion” such that the feeling of the other person is not reciprocally understood: “Here there is actually a common making of expressive gestures in the first instance, which has the secondary effect of producing similar emotions, efforts and purposes among the people or animals concerned; thus, for instance, a herd takes fright on seeing signs of alarm in its leader [...]. But it is characteristic of the situation that there is a complete lack of mutual ‘understanding’. Indeed, the purer the case, inasmuch as a rudimentary act of understanding plays little or no part in it, the more clearly do its peculiar features emerge, namely that the participant takes the experience arising in him owing to his participation to be his *own* original experience, so that he is quite unconscious of the contagion to which he succumbs” (Scheler 2008: 12, emphasis in original).

<sup>11</sup> “Especially characteristic [of contagion] is its tendency to return to its point of departure, so that the feelings concerned gather momentum like an avalanche. The emotion caused by infection reproduces itself again by means of expression and imitation, so that the infectious emotion increases, again reproduces itself, and so on. In all mass-excitement [...] it is above all this reciprocal effect of a self-generating infection which leads to the uprush of a common surge of emotion, and to the characteristic feature of a crowd in action, that it is so easily carried beyond the intentions of every one of its members, and does things for which no one acknowledges either the will or the responsibility” (Scheler 2008: 15fn.).

they are merely imitated feelings. One mistakenly believes that one really has the feelings that have arisen through contagion. Those who have been infected by the feeling are convinced that these feelings are their own.

Scheler's description of the contagion would not be so problematic if his analysis allowed mass emotions to arise in other ways besides contagion. But that does not seem to be the case. Also what we would describe here as atmospheres – for example, when Scheler speaks of the “cheerfulness of a spring landscape”, the “gloominess of wet weather” or the “drabness of a room” (Scheler 2008: 15) – can be infectious in his view, because the objective qualities of these phenomena can be imitated. What Scheler describes here as “imitation” is in reality, according to my thesis, the felt-bodily interaction between the atmosphere and those who are affected by it. Because he lacks both a concept of the spatiality of an atmosphere and of being affected in a bodily-affective way, he misunderstands the phenomena he describes as “not genuine”, merely imitated, and thereby turns the question of the *genesis* of contagion into one of authenticity. The problem of authenticity is not easy to resolve. Even the opposition between “imitated” and “genuine”, and thus the identification of “imitated” with “not genuine”, seems mistaken to me. In my view, even imitated feelings can also be felt as genuine.

I cannot discuss the question of the authenticity of feelings in greater detail here. But I would like to conclude with some brief observations on a normative question. Quite apart from whether one wants to describe imitated feelings as “genuine” or as “not genuine”, imitation has an interesting practical consequence. For there are good reasons to think that one can more easily distance oneself from merely imitated feelings if one retrospectively realizes that they were not originally feelings of one's own<sup>12</sup>.

Normative problems can arise if we assume that mass emotions and other collective atmospheres, firstly, involve imitated feelings and, secondly, that it is easier to distance oneself from this kind of feeling than from feelings one regards as one's own from the beginning as well as in

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<sup>12</sup> It would make sense to examine whether what Scheler has in view, with his distinction between “contagion” and “genuine feeling” is not in fact a distinction between pre-personal and personal feelings. I do not deny that there are certain phenomena of contagion, which I would however call a transfer of feeling. This, however, would entail a longer discussion, which cannot be undertaken here.

retrospect. In this way one would not be fully responsible for the merely imitated feelings and hence not for the actions to which they could lead either. The expression “seduction of the masses” suggests this possibility. Given these assumptions, we must ask: were the mass emotions staged by the Nazis, for example, merely imitated by the audience? Is it possible that hardly anyone seriously felt them? And are the countless mass actions perpetrated by Nazi fellow travelers against Jews excusable if the racist hatred and contempt of some Nazis were merely imitated? Indeed, contagion in Scheler’s sense could in fact play a role today as well in some right-wing populist mass emotions. As I said, I specifically do not dispute that emotional deception is possible and that it can play a role in some mass emotions. But it is not a necessary condition for the emergence of mass emotions. They can just as easily develop as a result of being – “genuinely” – affected by political events, initially without any contagion. Moreover, it seems to me that the concerns of the affected masses are not disavowed simply because the emotion in question is caused by the contagion Scheler describes. Only political contents can be evaluated, not how the corresponding feelings arise.

If we take into account the spatiality of atmospheres and of corporeal interactions, then Scheler’s analyses of “contagion” can be transformed into descriptions of interactions in felt-bodily space. Mass emotions and feeling-with-one-another are not two phenomena, but one and the same (quasi-)thing. There is no critical level above which one would have to speak in terms of “mass” as opposed to “togetherness”. Whether many people or just a few feel with one another, in either case – here one must agree with Scheler – the collective atmosphere can be brought about by contagion. For, quite apart from whether the feelings are shared with a large mass of people or with just a few, one can be individually mistaken about these feelings, retrospectively regard them as not genuine, and so forth. However, it is also in principle possible to rid oneself of these feelings and of all collective atmospheres after initially being affected by them. One is not at the mercy of these feelings and certainly not at the mercy of the actions to which they may give rise. But as soon as a shared, corporeally expansive feeling arises and as long as it lasts, it is experienced by those who share it as an intensification of their own feelings, and is therefore also often specifically sought after: emotional resonance feels good.

This brings me back to the normative question, which I would like to pose again: is feeling together always good in the moral sense? Of course not. From the Nuremberg Party Congress to the Pegida movement, the

political staging of shared feelings undoubtedly involves dangers. In feeling with one another, the individual is confirmed and supported in her perception of the situation and thus often also in her whole person – not withstanding that the objects of this feeling may be ideological. This is why shared feelings are sought after and are often institutionally arranged. The moral-political evaluation of feelings depends on their content and on the contexts and histories of their emergence. But *any* politics would be well advised to take feelings seriously as atmospheres endowed with a very powerful spatial character.

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