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Presentation of Hermann Schmitz' paper, "Atmospheric Spaces"

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Rainer Kazig

- Hermann Schmitz, the author of the text that is presented here in translation, can be regarded as a founding father of research on atmosphere for the German-speaking world. He is however not a founder in the sense of having intentionally laid a foundation stone for a field of research, by publishing a monograph or important essay on the subject of atmospheres, which was subsequently developed and became more differentiated. Rather, his first use of the concept of atmospheres was in a subordinate place in the 1969 monograph entitled *The sphere of the emotions* [Der Gefühlsraum] (Schmitz 1969). They are discussed there essentially in the sub-section on *Emotions as atmospheres* [Gefühle als Atmosphären]. For Schmitz, at this point in time at least, atmospheres evidently represented rather a secondary concept which serves primarily to support his conception of emotions, which he understands not as a purely subjective circumstance, but rather as an objective circumstance that is poured out over a wide area. In spite of the initially rather marginal significance of the concept of atmosphere in his work, this sub-section plays a central role in the development of research on atmosphere in the German-speaking and English-speaking worlds. Later on, it served the philosopher Gernot Böhme (1995) as an important reference for his first essays on the concept of atmospheres, which he developed further, accentuated differently, and elevated to a central object of aesthetics. In turn, Gernot Böhme's work forms an important foundation stone for the development of interdisciplinary and international research on atmosphere.
- But who is this author, whose work has rarely been translated¹, who stands at the beginning of this development? Hermann Schmitz, born in 1928, is a philosopher. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Bonn in 1955, with a thesis on Goethe's later philosophy. From 1971 until his retirement in 1993, he was Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kiel. Even after his retirement, Hermann Schmitz has continued to be remarkably productive. In terms of volume, his work currently

includes over 40 books and 150 essays in journals or collected volumes. Schmitz is a phenomenologist, and founder of what he calls the *New Phenomenology* [Neue Phänomenologie]. The core of his work is formed by his ten-volume *System of Philosophy* [System der Philosophie], spanning over 5000 pages, which he published between 1964 and 1980, and which includes the volume on emotions that was referred to above. By designating these works as a system of philosophy, he is expressing his claim to systematically illuminate the human experience of life. As Hermann Schmitz also sets out in the text translated here, this aim is based on his analysis of deficits of the system of thought², already established in Ancient Greek philosophy, that has characterised European intellectual culture right up to the present day. He would like to eliminate the deficits of this paradigm, which he refers to as an "*interior world dogma*" [Innenweltdogma] (Schmitz 2009, p. 14), and to supplement it with a system of thought that is anchored more deeply in the human experience of life than the existing one.

- 3 The *New Phenomenology* follows on from that separation of a person's interior and exterior worlds which characterises the interior world dogma. In the course of this separation, the interior world was conceived of as a private interior world, and initially designated as the soul, into which a person's entire experience is placed. Schmitz criticises the fact that with this psychologising of experience, important aspects of non-reflective life experience are concealed, and can be accessed for reflection only with difficulty. With the *New Phenomenology*, he proposes taking the *felt body* [Leib] as the basis for the conception of human experience. He understands a person's *felt body* as being what this person can feel or sense of himself in the sphere of his *material body* [Körper], without falling back on the five senses or on habituated ideas of the body. An important contribution by the *New Phenomenology* lies in the development of a systematic repertoire of concepts which permits a differentiated description of *corporeal* [leiblich] phenomena and enables adequate scientific communication about *corporeality* [Leiblichkeit] and the *felt body* (Andermann 2012, p. 130). However, this specific conceptual system also leads to the fact that one can open up the construct of ideas of the *New Phenomenology* to only a limited extent through short texts, and it rather requires more extensive exposition. Moreover, as a result of the specific terminology, it does not automatically follow on from existing concepts, even if Schmitz, in numerous works, elaborates the role of *corporeality* for societal sub-systems such as art, law, religion or politics, and has expressed emotions, consciousness or personality in a *corporeal* perspective. In this respect, it is not surprising if, in spite of Schmitz' extensive body of work, it did not receive a wider reception in the first instance, and intensive discussion of his ideas took place predominantly within the circle of members of the *Society for the New Phenomenology* [Gesellschaft für Neue Phänomenologie], which he established in 1992³. It is only recently that a wider reception has been noted, in both philosophy (for example Andermann 2012) and neighbouring disciplines (for example Goetz ; Graupner 2012).
- 4 The use of the concept of atmosphere in his repertoire of terms goes back to the prominence of the spatial dimension in his conception of *corporeality*. Schmitz develops a specific understanding of the spatiality of the *felt body*, which for him serves as the basis for distinguishing it from the *material body*. As Schmitz elucidates in the translated text presented here too, in his conception, in contrast to the *material body*, the *felt body* is characterised by a surfaceless and predimensional spatiality. In this sense, to speak of *corporeality* means to assume an absolute locality this is revealed for example in moments of great fear or severe pain. To enable us to understand his view

of atmospheres better, a brief look at two important aspects of his conception of *corporeality* is helpful : the dynamics of the *felt body* and its communicative dimension.

- 5 The intention is first of all to focus on the dynamics of *corporeal* experiences and bodily stirrings. Schmitz views narrowing and expansion as the two fundamental dimensions of *corporeal* modes of being, which stand in antagonistic relation to one another. They determine *corporeal* experience, and form the basis for a human being's vital drive. A certain state of balance between narrowing and expansion, such as for example when breathing in and out, represents the normal state of a human being. However, of particular interest to Schmitz are the interruptions to the normal situation which are associated with an experience of the self in the here and now, and which he terms the primitive present. He regards them as foundations for the development of subjectivity and the recognition of identity. However, Schmitz does not conceive of the dynamics of the *corporeal* as solely individualistic. Rather, he assumes the existence of *corporeal* dispositions, which are mutable but also depend on external factors, and to that extent are culturally rooted.
- 6 The prominence of circumstances of interaction and the interplay with other *material bodies* and things represents a further important characteristic of Hermann Schmitz' conception of corporeality. For this reason, his conception of corporeality is not limited to the analysis of corporeal involvement through one's own psychophysical state. Rather, a differentiated consideration of the analysis of the relationships to the environment assumes a central position in his deliberations. The concept of atmosphere is one of those terms with which these communicative relationships are expressed. As already indicated above, Schmitz uses it to sharpen his conception of emotions. In accordance with his wish to overcome the *interior world dogma*, he understands emotions not as a purely psychological category, but as atmospheres. He regards them virtually as an objective fact that is poured out into the wider area. To characterise this quasi-objective quality, Hermann Schmitz (2014a, 85 et suiv.) also assigns them to the category of *half-things* [Halbdinge]. A person who enters an atmosphere experiences it corporeally, as an affective involvement. He can follow this state of being affected, and accordingly can be seized by the atmosphere. It is however also possible that he merely perceives this atmosphere, without being seized by it in a corporeally tangible manner. Besides atmospheres, he develops further terms in order to express the interconnection of the *felt body* with the surroundings. However, because of the focus on the concept of atmosphere, we do not go into these further here.
- 7 The link between atmospheres and emotions, which has been moved into the foreground by Schmitz, is not without significance for the development of German-language atmosphere research, or of the international atmosphere research that has been triggered directly by Hermann Schmitz. On the one hand, this idea has been adopted directly and applied to specific areas of application in atmosphere research. Jürgen Hasse (2002, p. 22), for example, in a fundamental article on the significance of atmospheres for urban studies, equates urban atmospheres with emotional spaces, and thus maps out a specific orientation of a field of urban studies that is characterised by the concept of atmosphere. With the title of his book "Atmospheres : Aesthetics of Emotional Spaces", recently published in English, Tonino Griffero (2014) too takes up the Schmitzean understanding of atmospheres.
- 8 It is possible that the broad dissemination of the understanding of atmospheres as emotions also has an influence on the understanding of atmospheres, widespread in the

German-language discussion, as a conscious phenomenon. Even if the difficulty of describing atmospheres is often emphasised there, they are – like emotions – predominantly treated as a phenomenon that can be consciously experienced. The specific direction of this form of atmosphere research is apparent in contrast to the French tradition, where Jean-Paul Thibaud (2011) in particular has elucidated the motor-level, and thus often unconscious, manifestation of atmospheres. As is also clear in this translated article, the attuning of co-present subjects on a purely motor level is certainly taken into account by Hermann Schmitz. It is however described with the concept of *corporeal communication*, and is not primarily described as an atmospheric phenomenon.

- 9 The text by Hermann Schmitz which is presented here in translation first appeared in the original German in a collected volume on the concept of atmospheres edited by two art educationalists (Goetz ; Graupner 2012). It was reprinted in 2014 in a collection by Hermann Schmitz (2014b) of his own lectures and previously published articles, under the title *Atmosphären* [Atmospheres]. In the introduction to this book, Hermann Schmitz describes how, as a result of increased interest in the subject, in recent years he has received several invitations to lecture and publish on atmospheres, ultimately resulting in a body of texts worth publishing in book form. The text can, to a certain extent, be regarded as a result of the present-day dynamics of research on atmosphere which have affected even its involuntary founding father, and have prompted him to turn his attention increasingly to one of the numerous concepts from his construct of ideas, and to move it further into the foreground.

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NOTES

1. In 2011, the journal *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* published an article by Schmitz in translation, which is preceded by a longer introduction (Schmitz ; Müllan ; Slaby 2011).
2. Schmitz (2009, p. 11) speaks of an "abstraction basis".
3. The home page of the Society for the New Phenomenology, including English-language pages, can be found at : <http://www.gnp-online.de/The-GNP.7.0.html?&L=1n>.

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