

Editorial: The Atmospheres of the Imaginary

Pier Luca Marzo

marzop@unime.it

COSPECS | University of Messina



Stefano Tomelleri

stefano.tomelleri@unibg.it

Dipartimento di Scienze Aziendali | University of Bergamo



In recent years, the so-called affective or atmospheric turn (Schmitz, Bollnow, Böhme, Griffero) has done much to bring emotional atmospheres to the foreground of the social sciences. Broadly speaking, atmospheres may be described as configurations of feeling elicited by the perception of a place, a group, a situation, or a historical moment. As Böhme argues, an atmosphere is neither a purely “inner feeling” nor an “external environment”; it is, rather, a space of emotional resonance that envelops the subjective and the objective, the corporeal and the symbolic, as well as individual and collective life. It is a sensory, affectively charged sphere that, even before conceptualization, conditions our relationship to the world and transforms topological space into experiential space. From a sociological perspective, atmospheres correspond to what Elias described as the “emotional climate” of the civilizing process, or to what Durkheim recognized in the movements of “collective effervescence” generated through ritual mechanisms. Atmospheres thus emerge as symbolic and emotional fields that permeate collective contexts. They express the affective tone of a social situation, what is felt or is “in the air” within a community, an event, or an urban setting, and arise from the interaction of material and immaterial elements: languages, relationships, architectures, shared memories. Like physical atmospheres, social atmospheres shape behavior and perception, producing a sensible environment that orients practices and meanings. In the contemporary digital world, atmospheres no longer form solely in physical spaces or communal rituals: they also take shape within the artificial landscapes of virtual and augmented reality, and within the information bubbles produced and amplified by social networks. For Castoriadis and Durand, the imaginary constitutes the symbolic dimension of atmosphere, the semiosphere in which emotional spaces become part of an environment of meaning that shapes modes of coexistence and the transformations of social life. Where atmospheres are collectively experienced, the imaginary institutionalizes and represents them through myths, narratives, images, aesthetic forms, and shared practices. Emotional atmospheres are therefore not merely states of feeling; they are nebulae in which social imaginaries materialize, become operative, and may also be subverted. As diffuse, transpersonal, and unstable affective qualities that emerge from the interaction of bodies, spaces, and objects, atmospheres act as invisible yet material forces shaping social life. Every society generates and inhabits its own imaginative atmospheres, expressed, for instance, in the widespread relief that follows a famine or a war, in the melancholy of a perceived historical decline, or in the enthusiasm for the future stirred by revolutionary change. Hyperconnected society, too, is characterized by specific symbolic forms of collective feeling that propagate and intensify algorithmically: social hatred and moralizing indignation circulating through social media, the generalized resignation bound up with capitalist realism, the hopes and anxieties triggered by technological innovation, nostalgia as a defining affect of

the postmodern, the horror associated with genocidal politics, the apocalyptic mood surrounding the climate crisis, and renewed desires for political participation.

Im@go No. 27 thus stems from a precise theoretical wager: that the social takes shape, before any explicit representation, within a pre-reflective dimension of feeling, the atmosphere, and that this dimension is inseparable from the symbolic-affective horizons through which a community renders the world intelligible and morally habitable, the imaginary. Our opening essay lays out the theoretical framework of these two poles, showing how the two seemingly “evanescent” notions of atmosphere and imaginary can become rigorous analytical tools. Its declared aim is to move beyond sociocentrism to explore what we propose to call the *dark matter of social facts*: the perceptual-symbolic sphere that qualifies and shapes the space-time of interaction without ever appearing in full light, and which the classical categories of structure, norm, and rational action presuppose without ever thematizing.

Around this nucleus, the contributions gathered in the monograph are organized along several complementary axes that map out the thematic terrain of the issue. The first axis interrogates the *digital and the algorithmic*: Angelo Falzarano, with his notion of *algorithmic moral weather*, shows how platform environments generate diffuse moral climates that orient judgment without prescribing it; Juliana Bez Kroeger, examining Italian fashion museums in the infosphere, reveals how platforms operate as *selective atmospheric infrastructures*, amplifying certain imaginaries while marginalizing others. The second axis recovers the *senses of proximity*, long marginalized by the oculocentric epistemology of sociological modernity: Samuele Briatore treats smell as an atmospheric medium in the genesis of collective imaginaries, while Paolo Do, through a multisensory ethnography of Chengdu’s coffee houses, captures atmosphere as an intermediate zone between environment and body, between external perception and incorporation. The third axis investigates the *emotional-relational dimension*: Massimo Cerulo and Michele Granzotto take confidence (*confidenza*) as a paradigmatic emotional atmosphere, a pathic and involuntary feeling that suspends the will and opens onto the discovery of one’s own Mineness in a given situation. The fourth axis turns to *urban space*: Fabio La Rocca conceives of the city as an atmospheric universe and “organi-city,” a surface of tonal places in which the human body and the urban body are bound in an affective reciprocity that generates an aesthetic imaginary. Finally, the fifth axis explores the *performative*: Minasi reads the stage as a sensible apparatus and shared landscape in which the actor, the spectator, and the environment co-constitute the atmosphere, reactivating Mikhail Chekhov’s psychophysical acting through neurophenomenology.

What holds together such heterogeneous registers, from algorithmic governance to perfume, from confidence to the theatrical stage, is the same intuition: that atmospheres produce orientation before any deliberation, and that this orientation is always both feeling and imagining. The contributions do not merely apply a ready-made grid; they put it to the test on different empirical and theoretical terrains, restoring to neophenomenological sociology its vocation as an analysis of the social in



its sensible becoming. It is this transversal productivity, rather than any homogeneity of objects, that makes this issue a first coherent testing ground for a sociology of the atmospheres of the imaginary.

Pier Luca Marzo and Stefano Tomelleri

