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The Algorithmic Moral Weather: Atmospheres of the Imaginary in Digital Governance

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Abstract

The Algorithmic Moral Weather: Atmospheres of the Imaginary in Digital Governance.

Contemporary algorithmic systems influence moral life through affective atmospheres that orient perception before conscious judgment. This article introduces algorithmic moral weather to describe the diffuse climates generated within platformed environments, conditioning what appears acceptable, urgent, or legitimate. Drawing on atmospheric theory and the sociology of the social imaginary, it treats algorithmic environments as socio-technical operators of affective modulation through interfaces, visibility metrics, and temporal acceleration. The argument is developed through a theoretically informed discussion of documented dynamics on X, formerly Twitter, where outrage, quantified visibility, and accelerated responsiveness become especially legible. A climate-centered approach to digital governance reveals how collective sensibility is conditioned by the political and economic arrangements that produce such atmospheres.

Keywords

Algorithmic moral weather | Platform governance | Social imaginary | Affective atmospheres | Moral orientation

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1. Introduction

As algorithmic systems increasingly mediate social life, they have become central objects of inquiry across the social sciences. Scholarly attention has largely focused on bias, transparency, accountability, and the ethical implications of automated judgment. This research has clarified how algorithms classify, rank, predict, and evaluate individuals and behaviors, often with significant social consequences (Beer, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). Yet this emphasis can confine algorithmic power to identifiable outputs, explicit decisions, and rational evaluation.

Such a focus remains necessary, but it does not exhaust the forms through which algorithmic systems shape social experience. Algorithms also configure the conditions under which perception and moral evaluation take form. Their influence appears in affective environments that orient how situations are felt, interpreted, and morally framed. Work on affect and atmospheres shows that emotional climates operate pre-reflexively, structuring experience in largely implicit ways (Anderson, 2009; Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010; Schmitz, 2014). In digitally mediated cultures, these configurations intensify and circulate through symbolic and technological infrastructures, shaping collective sensibility (Cerulo, 2018; Susca, 2022).

Algorithmic moral weather designates this atmospheric dimension of digital power. The term refers to diffuse and persistent affective climates generated by algorithmic environments, including social media platforms, recommendation systems, and data-driven interfaces, that orient moral perception without relying on explicit norms, rules, or commands. Like meteorological weather, it does not dictate specific actions. It conditions the atmosphere within which actions, emotions, and evaluations come to seem natural, reasonable, or self-evident. The metaphor functions as a heuristic model for analyzing forms of affective governance that unfold through ambient conditioning rather than explicit prescription.

The concept draws on atmospheric theory and the sociology of the imaginary. Atmospheric theory conceptualizes affective tonalities as shared and spatially diffused conditions that shape experience pre-reflexively, rather than as purely subjective emotions or objective properties of environments (Anderson, 2009; Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010; Schmitz, 2014). Theories of the social imaginary emphasize the symbolic and affective horizons through which societies render the world meaningful and morally intelligible (Durand, 1960; Castoriadis, 1975; Legros et al., 2006). Their conjunction supports an account of algorithms as atmospheric operators participating in the affective-symbolic construction of moral reality. Through feeds, notifications, rankings, and metrics of visibility or approval, algorithmic systems modulate tones of urgency, reassurance, anxiety, and anticipation, contributing to a shared moral horizon without issuing explicit prescriptions.

Existing scholarship on algorithmic governance has provided essential insights into bias, surveillance, platform capitalism, and automated decision-making. Much of this literature approaches algorithmic power through discrimination, transparency, data extraction, and structural asymmetry, illuminating what algorithms do and whom they

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advantage or disadvantage. Less attention has been devoted to the affective conditioning of moral perception: the ambient organization through which certain evaluations acquire immediate plausibility, urgency, or social resonance. The article asks how algorithmic environments shape these conditions and introduces *algorithmic moral weather* to identify the platform-mediated distribution of moral salience as a distinct dimension of digital governance. The concept extends existing critiques of algorithmic power by showing how events, reactions, and positions become experientially legible as urgent, legitimate, blameworthy, or negligible.

The article is theoretical in design. It uses X, formerly Twitter, as an illustrative platform case through which recurrent dynamics identified in existing scholarship, including moralized amplification, quantified visibility, and temporal compression, can be examined in a concrete environment. X is therefore not treated as an independently sampled empirical field, but as a heuristic site for clarifying the analytical reach of algorithmic moral weather.

The article proceeds in five steps. First, it specifies the atmospheric and imaginary foundations of pre-reflexive social orientation. Second, it refines *moral weather* as a shift from norm-centered to climate-centered approaches to morality, drawing on emotional tonalities and collective climates (Bollnow, 1941; Schmitz, 2014). Third, it examines algorithmic environments as atmospheric operators shaping moral orientation before conscious judgment. Fourth, it uses X as an illustrative platform case to examine how amplification, visibility metrics, and temporal compression contribute to the formation of affective climates. Finally, it addresses the political and ethical implications of atmospheric governance, with particular attention to responsibility, agency, platform capitalism, and the limits of the meteorological metaphor.

2. Atmospheres and the Social Imaginary

Algorithmic environments can be approached as producers of moral orientation by moving beyond models that confine meaning and normativity to explicit representations, rules, or discourses. The notion of atmosphere captures forms of social experience that operate before conscious interpretation, while the social imaginary situates these affective dynamics within symbolic horizons that stabilize and circulate them (Anderson, 2009; Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010; Schmitz, 2014).

Together, these perspectives support an understanding of morality as a felt orientation toward the world, sustained by shared affective and symbolic conditions rather than by norms alone. Atmospheres clarify the experiential texture of social life; imaginaries explain how such experience acquires meaning, legitimacy, and self-evidence. Their conjunction enables analysis of forms of power that modulate collective sensibility rather than operating solely through direct coercion or explicit moral instruction.

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2.1 Atmospheres beyond Subject and Object

Atmosphere has become a central category in contemporary phenomenology and social theory, especially in the work of Böhme, Schmitz, and Griffero. This approach rejects a strict subject-object dichotomy in the analysis of affective experience. Atmospheres are neither internal emotional states nor objective properties of environments, but spatially diffused affective qualities that envelop subjects and situations alike (Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010; Schmitz, 2014).

Böhme (2010) defines atmospheres as quasi-objective phenomena situated between subjects and objects, emerging from material arrangements, spatial configurations, and bodily perception. Schmitz (2014) emphasizes their bodily and pre-reflexive character, describing feelings as atmospheres that seize subjects before cognitive articulation. Griffero (2010) develops this line by framing atmospheres as emotional spaces and as the object of an atmosferological aesthetics, stressing their experiential reality and social effectiveness.

Atmospheres precede interpretation and judgment. They shape how situations are immediately felt, tense or reassuring, inviting or threatening, normal or problematic, without prescribing what to think. They function as conditions of possibility for meaning, orienting perception and action without propositional content or explicit norms. This aligns with sociological accounts of affective atmospheres as shared and situationally emergent fields of feeling (Anderson, 2009).

This pre-reflexive dimension makes atmosphere particularly apt for analyzing digital environments, where power operates through the modulation of attention, mood, and expectation rather than through overt commands.

2.2 The Social Imaginary as an Affective-Symbolic Horizon

Atmospheric theory clarifies the experiential dimension of affective orientation, but it does not fully explain why certain atmospheres recur, stabilize, and acquire social legitimacy. The concept of the social imaginary addresses this problem. For Castoriadis, the imaginary designates the ensemble of symbolic forms, meanings, and affective investments through which a society institutes itself and renders the world intelligible (Castoriadis, 1975). The imaginary is therefore not an external layer added to social life. It is one of the conditions through which a world becomes perceptible, meaningful, and normatively inhabitable.

This point is crucial for understanding moral weather. If atmospheres shape how situations are felt, imaginaries provide the symbolic grammar through which such feelings become socially intelligible. In Castoriadis's terms, the imaginary operates through a dialectic between instituting and instituted meanings. Instituted meanings stabilize what appears normal, legitimate, desirable, or morally problematic. Instituting meanings, by contrast, open the possibility of new figurations, new thresholds of sensibility, and new ways of perceiving collective life. Moral weather emerges within this dialectic as an affective-symbolic field in which certain moral perceptions become self-evident, while others are marginalized, delayed, or rendered

less resonant. Durand's contribution further specifies the symbolic morphology of this process. By locating the imaginary in archetypal structures, symbolic regimes, and recurrent figurations, Durand (1960) makes it possible to analyze the forms through which affective climates acquire narrative and moral density. Digital indignation, for instance, does not circulate merely as an emotion. It is often organized through figurations of fall, contamination, purification, accusation, exposure, and moral separation. These figures belong to broader structures of the imaginary that distribute positions of guilt and innocence, impurity and rectification, enemy and community. In platformed environments, such figurations are intensified by algorithmic visibility and temporal acceleration, allowing moral climates to acquire symbolic coherence and affective force. The imaginary is therefore not reducible to ideology or representation. It functions as a background horizon of meaning that shapes what can be perceived as real, desirable, threatening, or morally significant. Legros et al. (2006) extend these insights sociologically, showing how the imaginary structures collective sensibility and shared worlds of meaning. From this perspective, imaginaries and atmospheres remain interdependent. Imaginaries provide symbolic coherence through which atmospheres appear meaningful and legitimate; atmospheres give the imaginary experiential force, transforming symbolic forms into lived tonalities.

Morality emerges from the convergence of affective climates and symbolic horizons that orient everyday conduct before explicit moral doctrines are invoked. Moral judgments are embedded in a broader field of pre-reflexive moral sensibility, sustained by shared imaginaries and enacted through atmospheric conditions. What feels excessive, urgent, intolerable, admirable, or shameful is never determined by affect alone. It depends on symbolic configurations that organize affect into recognizable moral forms. This convergence supports an account of algorithmic environments as sites where imaginaries and atmospheres are jointly produced. Algorithmic systems do not merely distribute content.

They participate in the institution of affective-symbolic environments in which moral perception is formatted, intensified, and stabilized. The next section develops this shift from norms to climates. Yet this alignment does not eliminate the tension between atmospheric phenomenology and critical sociology. Atmospheric theory foregrounds the pre-reflexive and quasi-objective character of affective climates, often bracketing questions of agency and structural power. Critical approaches, by contrast, locate governance within institutional arrangements, economic logics, and asymmetrical capacities of influence.

The present framework does not resolve this tension; it works within it. Algorithmic environments are treated as sites where experiential modulation and infrastructural power intersect, without reducing atmospheres to intentional strategies of control or detaching them from political economy.

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3. From Norms to Climates: Moral Orientation beyond Rules

Moral order is often framed as a system of norms, values, and prescriptions that guide conduct through rules, judgments, institutions, and sanctions. This view remains analytically useful, yet it can obscure how moral orientation is affectively organized before conscious deliberation. Such priority is phenomenological rather than historical: climates of feeling are already shaped by sedimented norms, institutions, and discourses (Bollnow, 1941; Cerulo, 2018).

A climate-centered understanding of morality follows from this premise. Moral orientation emerges within affective conditions that make certain actions, emotions, and evaluations immediately plausible, inappropriate, or unthinkable. This framing clarifies forms of moral governance that exert influence without direct command, remaining effective precisely because they operate at the level of sensibility, attunement, and everyday perception.

3.1 Why Morality Exceeds Normativity

Classical sociological theory indicates the limits of a purely normative conception of morality. Durkheim (1912) shows that moral obligations arise from collective forces that generate feelings of obligation, reverence, and attachment, exceeding the domain of codified rules. Moral life is sustained by forms of collective effervescence that bind individuals to shared meanings through affective intensity rather than rational agreement. Elias (1939) shows how moral dispositions are internalized through long-term processes of socialization that shape sensibility, thresholds of tolerance, and emotional self-regulation before explicit moral reasoning. Moral orientation follows from the modulation of affective thresholds rather than from simple rule internalization.

These insights converge with phenomenological and sociological analyses of emotional tonalities. Bollnow (1941) conceptualizes moods as pervasive conditions that color experience as a whole, shaping perception and action without becoming objects of reflection. Schmitz (2014) describes feelings as atmospheres that envelop subjects, structuring experience before cognitive interpretation.

Moral orientation can therefore be treated as a pre-reflexive alignment with a socially shared sense of what feels acceptable, appropriate, or excessive. Moral situations are rarely encountered as neutral problems to be solved. They are entered within affective conditions that predispose evaluation. Discomfort, unease, reassurance, or enthusiasm often precede judgment and guide it silently.

This phenomenological priority is not external to normativity. It identifies the felt mode through which socially formed norms acquire immediate plausibility before becoming objects of explicit articulation or contestation.

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3.2 Moral Weather as a Conceptual Shift

Moral weather designates the diffuse affective conditions within which moral life unfolds, shaping how situations are immediately perceived and evaluated. It does not instruct individuals on what they ought to do. It conditions what feels normal, troubling, encouraging, or questionable in a given context.

The weather metaphor clarifies four properties. Moral weather is ambient rather than directive, shared rather than individually owned, dynamic yet often taken for granted, effective despite lacking clear authorship or intentionality. Meteorological weather influences conduct without issuing commands, for example by encouraging shelter, caution, or exposure. Moral weather operates analogously by modulating affective orientation. It can make some actions feel out of place and others self-evident without requiring explicit moral justification.

The concept supports an account of moral power as conditioning rather than coercion. Moral weather does not replace norms; it describes the atmospheric conditions through which socially formed norms acquire immediate plausibility and practical force. Analytical attention shifts from explicit moral discourse to the background conditions of moral experience, in line with sociological accounts of emotional climates and collective sensibility (Cerulo, 2018).

The proximity between moral weather and adjacent concepts requires a clear distinction. Research on emotional climate generally examines relatively persistent affective qualities attributed to groups or societies, while studies of moral climate and ethical climate focus on shared expectations concerning appropriate conduct within bounded organizations (de Rivera, 1992; Arnaud, 2010). Williams's structures of feeling describe historically emergent forms of lived experience that have not yet reached complete institutional or semantic articulation (Williams, 1977). Papacharissi's affective publics concern networked formations assembled through shared sentiment, narration, and mediated expression (Papacharissi, 2015). Bucher's algorithmic imaginary addresses how users perceive, imagine, and affectively negotiate the operation of algorithms, including the practices and expectations generated by those perceptions (Bucher, 2017).

Algorithmic moral weather identifies a different object. It does not primarily describe the affective identity of a group, the formation of a networked public, or users' representations of algorithmic systems. It designates the platform-mediated distribution of moral salience across an environment. The weather metaphor adds analytical precision by foregrounding ambient reach, temporal variation, recurrence, unequal exposure, and the capacity of localized events to modify a wider affective field. Its contribution lies in showing how infrastructural arrangements alter the felt thresholds through which actions, figures, and events become morally perceptible. The next section examines how platform infrastructures organize this ambient distribution of moral salience.

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4. Algorithmic Environments as Atmospheric Operators

The shift from norms to climates supports an analysis of algorithmic power beyond decision-making and rule enforcement. Attention moves from isolated outputs and automated judgments to systems that continuously shape affective orientation. Under this lens, algorithms appear as atmospheric operators that process information while conditioning how social reality is felt and morally framed (Schmitz, 2014; Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010). In digitally mediated cultures, this atmospheric dimension becomes more pronounced as symbolic forms of experience circulate and intensify through techno-cultural infrastructures (Susca, 2022).

4.1 Algorithms beyond Decision-Making

Much of the literature treats algorithms as systems that classify users, rank content, predict behavior, or trigger automated actions. These functions matter, but they capture only part of algorithmic power. A decision-centered focus can obscure the experiential field within which such systems operate (Beer, 2019; Katzenbach & Ulbricht, 2019; Zuboff, 2019). Scholarship on algorithmic power has emphasized how platforms shape conditions of participation and visibility rather than merely producing discrete outcomes (Gillespie, 2014; Bucher, 2018). This perspective supports an understanding of algorithms as infrastructures that pre-structure experience and orient action before explicit judgment occurs.

Social media platforms, recommendation systems, and data-driven interfaces are not encountered as isolated moments of decision. They are lived as continuous fields that organize visibility, relevance, tempo, and attention. Users receive outputs within structured spaces that persist and repeat, shaping experience over time rather than through isolated acts. Accounts of lived space as an enveloping condition, including Sloterdijk's sphere-like articulation of spatial experience, clarify this dimension (Sloterdijk, 1998-2004).

The relevant unit of analysis is not the algorithm in isolation, but the socio-technical arrangement linking ranking procedures, interface design, visibility metrics, engagement incentives, business models, and user practices. These components operate at different levels and should not be treated as interchangeable causes. Ranking procedures order exposure, interfaces stage perceptual cues, metrics quantify recognition, economic incentives reward particular forms of engagement, and users reproduce, negotiate, or resist the resulting patterns (Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010).

4.2 Interfaces and Affective Modulation

The atmospheric effects of algorithmic systems are mediated primarily through interfaces. Feeds, notifications, rankings, and metrics of visibility or approval do more than convey information; they modulate affective states. Alerts, endless scrolling, and hierarchical ordering of content generate tonalities of urgency, anticipation,

reassurance, anxiety, or inadequacy, forms of emotional climate that are socially patterned rather than privately contained (Bollnow, 1941; Cerulo, 2018).

These modulations operate pre-reflexively. Before interpretation or reflection, users enter rhythms of attention shaped by design. Temporal acceleration, intermittent reward, and fluctuating visibility generate a climate in which immediacy and responsiveness become morally salient, while slowness or disengagement can feel inappropriate or negligent. This dynamic aligns with phenomenological accounts of feelings as atmospheres that seize subjects before reflection (Schmitz, 2014).

Such cues are rarely articulated as moral prescriptions. No explicit rule demands constant availability or emotional alignment. Interfaces nonetheless reward behaviors that conform to these expectations. Over time, these patterns support the internalization of affective norms experienced less as external constraints than as orientations toward what feels right to do. The interface becomes a site in which evaluation is mediated by sensorial and affective rationality, a form of ragione sensibile in social life (Maffesoli, 1996).

4.3 The Emergence of Algorithmic Moral Weather

At the infrastructural level, algorithmic moral weather is produced through the selective organization of visibility, tempo, and feedback across ranked feeds, interface cues, recommendation procedures, and engagement incentives. The adjective does not attribute autonomous agency to algorithms. It identifies a socio-technical mode of distribution through which affective intensity, temporal pressure, and public relevance are selectively arranged. Attraction, contagion, and enchantment contribute to the force of these arrangements, while their moral significance depends on the differential salience assigned to actions, figures, and events (Susca, 2022).

This atmospheric dynamic does not operate through commands or prohibitions. It distributes symbolic positions through which events become legible as contamination or purification, guilt or innocence, exposure or rectification. These figurations draw on instituted meanings, yet their circulation may also generate instituting departures by altering available thresholds of moral recognition. Users therefore encounter an affective-symbolic environment in which some responses become immediately intelligible while others remain marginal (Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010; Schmitz, 2014).

Nor is this process reducible to intentional manipulation. It emerges from interactions among technical infrastructures, design choices, economic incentives, and collective practices (Latzer & Festic, 2019). Its effects remain probabilistic rather than deterministic: platform arrangements can intensify some moral cues and attenuate others without fixing users' judgments or responses. Such modulation alters the possibilities of resonance through which the world is encountered as significant (Rosa, 2016).

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4.4 X as an Illustrative Platform Case

Algorithmic moral weather becomes analytically clearer when placed against recurrent dynamics within a specific platform environment. X, formerly Twitter, offers a particularly revealing illustrative case because moralized circulation, visibility metrics, and accelerated temporality are unusually prominent in its architecture and public use. The discussion synthesizes existing research on these dynamics together with documented platform affordances such as reposts, quote posts, trending topics, and ranked feeds. Its purpose is not to present an original dataset or to infer proprietary ranking operations from direct observation, but to clarify how the concept operates when applied to a concrete platform.

For reasons of scope, the illustrative discussion concerns X after its 2023 rebranding. Earlier studies of Twitter are used only where the affordances under examination, such as reposting, quantified visibility, trending content, and ranked feeds, remain analytically comparable.

A first dimension concerns the emergence of outrage as an atmospheric baseline. Moral-emotional language can circulate more widely because it attracts interaction and further diffusion (Brady et al., 2017), although this finding does not demonstrate the operation of a specific ranking system. On X, reposts, quote posts, replies, trending topics, and ranked feeds can nevertheless increase the recurrent visibility of moral controversies. Repeated accusation and counter-accusation organize perception through figures of contamination, exposure, guilt, and purification, giving outrage a recognizable moral grammar. Rapid alignment may then appear protective, while hesitation risks being interpreted as indifference or complicity.

A second dimension concerns the moral function of visibility metrics. Likes, reposts, views, replies, and follower counts stage quantifiable signals of attention and approval, shaping conditions of recognition before explicit evaluation (Gillespie, 2014; Bucher, 2018). Visibility may consequently acquire a tacit association with legitimacy: highly circulated content appears socially validated, while low visibility can weaken perceived relevance regardless of argumentative quality. This does not imply that users consciously equate popularity with ethical validity. Rather, the continuous presence of metrics creates an affective environment in which numerical attention operates as a cue of moral salience, allowing the visible success of a post to intensify its perceived authority.

A third dimension concerns the normalization of indignation as a habitual moral disposition. Repeated exposure to morally charged content can sediment vigilance as an ordinary mode of platformed perception, reinforcing anticipatory orientations toward evaluation and response (Brady et al., 2020). Users may consequently approach ambiguous situations through suspicion, while silence, delay, or non-alignment acquire moral significance. The effect is not the elimination of nuance, but the increased availability of accusatory frames and the compression of the conditions under which moral complexity can be sustained. Within a heightened emotional tempo, slower or more ambivalent forms of judgment may appear affectively out of step with the platform.

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A fourth dimension concerns temporal compression. Notifications, trending flows, endless feeds, and rapidly changing visibility cycles organize attention around continuous updating and real-time responsiveness (Bucher, 2018). On X, controversies can emerge, intensify, fragment, and disappear before sustained interpretation takes place. This rhythm favors immediate and visible positioning over deliberation, organizing moral attention through successive intensities rather than enduring commitments. Issues that cease to circulate lose atmospheric salience even when their structural conditions persist, while urgency becomes habitual and sustained reflection appears increasingly misaligned with the pace of circulation.

Taken together, these dynamics show how platform affordances can distribute moral salience without determining moral outcomes. X therefore serves as a heuristic case for examining how visibility, vigilance, and tempo become politically consequential.

5. Political and Ethical Implications: Atmospheric Governance

Algorithmic moral weather foregrounds a mode of governance exercised through the organization of affective environments, visibility, and temporal pressure. By configuring the thresholds at which events attract attention and responses acquire plausibility, contemporary power assumes an atmospheric form (Schmitz, 2014; Böhme, 2010; Griffero, 2010).

This atmospheric form should not be understood as immaterial or politically indeterminate. The meteorological metaphor is analytically useful because it captures the diffuse, ambient, and pre-reflexive character of algorithmic influence. Yet it also carries a political risk: weather can appear natural, anonymous, and inevitable. Moral weather, by contrast, is produced through infrastructures, interface design, visibility regimes, recommendation systems, engagement metrics, and economic incentives. The metaphor must therefore remain under critical pressure. It clarifies how power is experienced atmospherically, while requiring analysis of the institutional and economic arrangements through which such atmospheres are generated.

Power is exercised here through the modulation of shared affective environments, emotional climates that structure collective sensibility and moral plausibility (Bollnow, 1941; Cerulo, 2018). Algorithmic governance thus belongs to broader transformations of political power in which indirect, ambient, and infrastructural influence becomes increasingly central.

5.1 Governing without Commands

Atmospheric governance becomes operative through patterned rewards, frictions, and cues. Interfaces make visibility, responsiveness, emotional alignment, and engagement more or less prominent and socially legible, allowing particular dispositions to acquire practical plausibility without formal prescription (Böhme, 2010).

This mode of governance complicates standard accounts of power and normativity. Disciplinary mechanisms rely on surveillance, sanction, and correction. Atmospheric forms of power rely on habituation, attunement, and affective alignment. Subjects regulate themselves according to what the environment makes feel normal, urgent, or desirable. Moral conformity appears less as obedience than as adjustment to a climate, grounded in the pre-reflexive force of feelings as atmospheres (Schmitz, 2014) and in the social diffusion of emotional climates (Cerulo, 2018).

The political problem is that such attunement often appears spontaneous. Because it is mediated through ordinary interface cues and engagement routines, the resulting orientation can be experienced as personal reaction, collective mood, or ordinary platform culture. This is where atmospheric power becomes effective: it arranges the background conditions of perception, attention, and affective resonance, making some moral responses immediately available while rendering others slower, weaker, or less visible.

5.2 Responsibility without Decision

Algorithmic moral weather complicates responsibility because moral orientation is shaped through diffuse affective climates rather than discrete decisions. Accountability becomes difficult to locate when there is no single decision point to contest, no clear rule to critique, and no identifiable agent issuing moral commands.

This diffusion does not remove responsibility; it makes responsibility harder to perceive. Moral climates are distributed across infrastructures, design choices, economic logics, and collective practices, but they are not therefore authorless. Platform companies design architectures of visibility, define the metrics through which relevance is staged, and profit from forms of engagement that often intensify emotional and moral reactivity. In this respect, algorithmic moral weather must be situated within the political economy of platforms, where attention, data extraction, and affective intensity become central resources of value production (Srnicek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019; Couldry & Mejias, 2019).

Ethical critique must therefore address unjust outputs together with the atmospheric conditions that render particular moral orientations natural or collectively sanctioned. Because these conditions emerge through interdependent socio-technical relations rather than linear causal chains, responsibility cannot be assessed at the level of classification alone (Morin, 1991). It must also consider which sensibilities are privileged, which forms of experience are muted, and which possibilities of resonance are enabled or foreclosed (Rosa, 2016).

5.3 The Limits of Atmospheric Critique

The limit of the weather metaphor lies in its tendency to obscure production behind apparent environmental inevitability. Its analytical value therefore depends on treating weather as a mode of experiencing power, not as an account of causation. Platform climates remain produced through business models, ranking systems,

visibility metrics, and interfaces that make some affective patterns recurrent and profitable.

Responsibility must therefore be located neither in individual users alone nor in abstract technological systems. It must be traced across the socio-technical assemblage through which platforms arrange attention, intensify affect, and stabilize moral salience. Yet these arrangements are neither uniform nor uncontested. Different publics may interpret, resist, or redirect the same visibility regimes through competing imaginaries, generating counter-atmospheres that interrupt dominant alignments. Algorithmic moral weather therefore names a diffuse form of governance whose instituted force remains exposed to instituting practices and requires critical analysis of power, economy, and responsibility.

6. Conclusion

The significance of algorithmic moral weather lies in shifting the analysis of digital governance from isolated decisions to the conditions of collective moral perception. Platform power is exercised not only when a system classifies, excludes, recommends, or ranks, but also when it alters the background against which events become noticeable, reactions appear proportionate, and positions acquire public intelligibility. This atmospheric dimension does not precede society or escape normativity. It is formed through historically sedimented meanings, technical arrangements, commercial priorities, and everyday practices that together shape the felt contours of the morally relevant.

The dialogue between atmospheric theory and the sociology of the social imaginary makes visible a dimension that neither approach fully captures on its own. Atmospheres explain the immediate force with which situations are encountered, whereas imaginaries account for the symbolic forms that make this force recognizable and communicable. Their conjunction permits algorithmic environments to be understood neither as neutral channels nor as autonomous agents, but as contested settings in which infrastructures and collective meanings participate in the production of moral experience.

The discussion of X has clarified the heuristic potential of this framework rather than demonstrated a uniform platform effect. The concept must therefore remain open to empirical differentiation. Different architectures, publics, and cultural contexts may produce distinct climates, expose users unevenly, and sustain divergent forms of interpretation and resistance. Comparative research will be necessary to determine when atmospheric conditioning becomes durable, when it fragments, and how alternative sensibilities interrupt dominant patterns of attention.

The critical value of the concept ultimately depends on denaturalizing what platforms make ordinary. What appears as spontaneous urgency, collective indignation, or self-evident relevance is always mediated by arrangements that could have been designed, governed, and inhabited differently. To render those arrangements perceptible is already to make them available for political judgment.

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The question is therefore not whether digital life can exist without atmospheres, but who participates in producing them, whose sensibilities they privilege, and under what conditions they may be transformed.

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