Atmospheres and Shared Emotions

This book explores the role atmospheres play in shared emotion. With insights from leading scholars in the field, *Atmospheres and Shared Emotions* investigates key issues such as the relation between atmospheres and moods, how atmospheres define psychopathological conditions such as anxiety and schizophrenia, what role atmospheres play in producing shared aesthetic experiences, and the significance of atmospheres in political events.

Calling upon disciplinary methodologies as broad as phenomenology, film studies, and law, each of the chapters is thematically connected by a rigorous attention on the multifaceted ways atmosphere play an important role in the development of shared emotion. While the concept of atmosphere has become a critical notion across several disciplines, the relationship between atmospheres and shared emotion remains neglected. The idea of sharing emotion over a particular event is rife within contemporary society. From Brexit to Trump to Covid-19, emotions are not only experienced individually, they are also grasped together. Proceeding from the view that atmospheres can play an explanatory role in accounting for shared emotion, the book promises to make an enduring contribution to both the understanding of atmospheres and to issues in the philosophy of emotion more broadly.

Offering both a nuanced analysis of key terms in contemporary debates as well as a series of original studies, the book will be a vital resource for scholars in contemporary philosophy, aesthetics, human geography, and political science.

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Research on ambiances and atmospheres has grown significantly in recent years in a range of disciplines, including Francophone architecture and urban studies, German research related to philosophy and aesthetics, and a growing range of Anglophone research on affective atmospheres within human geography and sociology.

This series offers a forum for research that engages with questions around ambiances and atmospheres in exploring their significances in understanding social life. Each book in the series advances some combination of theoretical understandings, practical knowledges and methodological approaches. More specifically, a range of key questions which contributions to the series seek to address includes:

• In what ways do ambiances and atmospheres play a part in the unfolding of social life in a variety of settings?
• What kinds of ethical, aesthetic, and political possibilities might be opened up and cultivated through a focus on atmospheres/ambiances?
• How do actors such as planners, architects, managers, commercial interests and public authorities actively engage with ambiances and atmospheres or seek to shape them? How might these ambiances and atmospheres be reshaped towards critical ends?
• What original forms of representations can be found today to (re)present the sensory, the atmospheric, the experiential? What sort of writing, modes of expression, or vocabulary is required? What research methodologies and practices might we employ in engaging with ambiances and atmospheres?

Atmospheres and Shared Emotions
Edited by Dylan Trigg

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Atmospheres and Shared Emotions

Edited by
Dylan Trigg
# Contents

*Figures*  
vii  
*Contributors*  
viii  
*Acknowledgements*  
xii  

**Introduction: Atmospheres of shared emotion**  
DYLAN TRIGG  
1  

## PART I  
**Moods and atmospheres**  
15  

1  *Are atmospheres shared feelings?*  
TONINO GRIFFERO  
17  

2  *Tuning the world: A conceptual history of the term Stimmung part two*  
GERHARD THONHAUSER  
40  

3  *Moods and atmospheres: Affective states, affective properties, and the similarity explanation*  
INGRID VENDRELL FERRAN  
57  

## PART II  
**Psychopathological atmospheres**  
75  

4  *Atmospheres of anxiety: The case of Covid-19*  
DYLAN TRIGG  
77  

5  *Feeling bodies: Atmospheric intercorporeality and its disruptions in the case of schizophrenia*  
VALERIA BIZZARI AND VERONICA IUBEI  
96
Contents

6 Agency and atmospheres of inclusion and exclusion 111
   JOEL KRUEGER

PART III
Aesthetic and political atmospheres 133

7 Shared or spread? On boredom and other unintended collective emotions in the cinema 135
   JULIAN HANICH

8 Nazi architecture as design for producing “Volksgemeinschaft” 152
   GERNOT BÖHME

9 Political emotions and political atmospheres 162
   LUCY OSLER AND THOMAS SZANTO

   Conclusion: Something we all share 189
   ANDREAS PHILIPPOPOULOS-MIHALOPOULOS

Index 209
Figures

7.1 Cinema audience 1 136
7.2 Cinema audience 2 145
8.1 May 1st. Celebration, Berlin 1936 153
8.2 Olympic Games 1936, light dome above the Olympic Stadium at Berlin 158
8.3 Thingstätte Segeberg 159
8.4 Die neue Reichskanzlei: Hitler’s office 160
3 Moods and atmospheres
Affective states, affective properties, and the similarity explanation

Íngrid Vendrell Ferran

Introduction
In ordinary language, “calmness,” “melancholy,” “cheerfulness,” and “sadness” are employed to describe affective states experienced by sentient beings. More precisely, these terms are used to report instances of moods. Yet, the very same terms are used to describe what seem to be properties of certain objects (e.g., things, situations) which, unlike sentient beings, are unable to feel. We usually describe atmospheres employing these terms. For example, we speak about the calmness of a forest, the melancholy of a painting, the cheerfulness of a field of flowers, and the sadness of a landscape. This double connotation raises the following set of questions: Are we, in fact, referring to the same phenomenon? If not, why then do we employ the same terms?

In order to answer both questions, I proceed as follows. In the first section, I offer an accurate analysis of the structure of moods and of atmospheres, arguing that both phenomena are distinct in kind. Moods are affective states, atmospheres are affective properties. This “distinctiveness thesis,” as I call it, provides an answer to the first question posed above. Next, I focus on how atmospheres as affective properties are apprehended and experienced. In particular, I defend the “model of feeling” according to which atmospheres are apprehended by an intentional feeling. I proceed then to examine the wide array of experiences which the feeling of atmospheres might elicit. In the last part of the chapter, I provide an answer to the second question previously mentioned. In particular, I argue that terms for atmospheres are borrowed from the vocabulary of moods on the basis of a similarity between both phenomena. I call it “the similarity explanation.”

Distinguishing moods from atmospheres:
the distinctiveness thesis
Our experience of moods and atmospheres differs substantially. When we claim to feel sad, we refer to our own affective state. By contrast, when we speak of the sadness of the landscape, we describe a phenomenally objective
property of the landscape, i.e., a property which is experienced as being objectively there. In what follows, I will take this experiential difference at face value and examine essential traits inherent to the structure of each of these phenomena. The aim is to pinpoint those features that enable a comparison between both phenomena.

**Moods as affective states**

I begin by fleshing out the structure of moods as a kind of *affective state*. In particular, I am interested here in their distinctive intentional structure. Using the emotions as a foil for comparison, I will distinguish three different kinds of objects of moods (for comparisons involving other elements, see Krebs 2017 and Rossi 2019).

In emotion research, it is customary to distinguish between material and formal objects of the emotions (Kenny 1963, 193). Material objects are the targets of the emotions (broadly speaking: things, animals, persons, situations, etc.) which as such can be quite idiosyncratic, culturally and socially learned, and individually variable. By contrast, the formal object refers to the evaluative dimension in which these targets are presented to us. For instance, fear can be directed towards a thing, a person, an animal, a situation, etc., but its formal object is always the same: regardless of the targeted objects, they are all presented as dangerous.

Broadly speaking, a parallel case can be drawn for moods. Just as in fear (emotion) an object is dangerous, in sadness (mood) things seem less enjoyable and bathed in black. Like emotions, moods can also be regarded as being directed towards something and presented in a certain evaluative light. Yet, this parallel is obviously imperfect and includes some intriguing differences.

First, unlike emotions, the material objects of moods lack specificity. While my fear targets a certain object, my sadness affects everything. There have been different accounts of moods’ lack of specificity; for instance, it has been claimed that moods target all that I encounter while being in this mood (Sizer 2000), the world (Crane 1998) or everything and nothing in particular (Goldie 2000, 8 and 148; Solomon 1993, 71). All these different accounts point to the fact that unlike emotions, moods do not have specific objects.

Second, though both—emotions and moods—have an evaluative dimension, their evaluative character differs considerably. Emotions respond to objects that are presented as having certain evaluative properties, while moods do not respond to anything in particular; rather, moods illuminate with their light the different objects that they might target. Moreover, emotions are connected to specific evaluative properties (fear responds to the dangerous), while moods are related to different kinds of evaluative properties. When I am sad, I do not apprehend all the objects that I can target while being in this mood as having a unique evaluative property. What happens instead is that in sadness, we tend to be more sensitive to certain
clusters of evaluative properties such as the menacing, the depressing, etc.

The distinction between two kinds of objects is crucial to understand the structure of the emotions and, in my view, the structure of moods, too. However, the intentional structure of emotions and moods is not exhausted by this distinction. Emotions and moods do not leave their objects unaffected but make them appear as having a certain aspect according to the emotions or mood we are experiencing. They have the ability to impress their characteristic lights on their targets. As we put it in common parlance, affective states “colour,” “tincture,” and “dye” their targets. Geiger, who observed this feature, argued that affective states add a colouration (Färbung) to the targeted objects, giving them a brilliance (Glanz). He calls it a “feeling tone” (Gefühlston) which is to be understood as spreading over the objects targeted by the affective states (Geiger 1976, 26). My thought here is that this colouration or light can be considered as a third kind of object of emotions and moods. Each emotion and each mood has its specific characteristic colouration which spreads over the targeted objects. Thus, in fear (emotion), an object is presented not only as dangerous but also as having a certain colouration spreading over the targeted object and its surroundings. When I am sad (mood), this sadness tinctures all that we come across with a specific light. However, regarding this third object, emotions and moods differ in their scope. As a result of targeting everything we encounter while being in a mood, when it comes to spreading their colourations, moods have a wider reach than emotions whose objects are more circumscribed.

From these considerations, the following picture of the structure of moods emerges. Moods target everything we encounter while being in a mood (material object); they make us more prone to experience certain sets of evaluative properties (formal object); and they have the ability to impress their specific colouration onto the world (third object). To give an example: when I am sad, this sadness targets everything I encounter while being in this mood; it makes me more sensitive to grasping clusters of negative properties such as the dangerous, the menacing, etc.; and it casts its specific dark colouration over its objects.

Nothing similar to this structure can be found in the phenomenon of atmospheres. When we claim that “the landscape is sad,” the sadness that we find “in” the landscape does not exhibit the typical structure of moods presented above. Though the sadness is experienced as belonging to the landscape, the sadness does not target the landscape (it does not have a material object), it does not make us sensitive to certain evaluative properties (it lacks formal objects), and it does not colour anything beyond itself. In fact, it seems that the atmosphere by itself has a colouration and that this colouration spreads over the landscape. However, this colouration is not part of an intentional structure, as was the case for moods as affective
states. In short, the sadness of the landscape does not exhibit the distinctive intentional structure of moods as affective states.

**Atmospheres as affective properties**

From the previous considerations, it is clear that when we speak about “the sadness of the landscape,” we are not describing an affective state. Rather, we are describing the way in which an object, in this case the landscape, appears to us. This appearance is what we often call aura, character, and also atmosphere (which is the terminology that I adopt in this chapter). How to determine the atmosphere’s structure?

To begin, some phenomenologists and phenomenological inspired authors attribute to atmospheres a certain degree of reality as “half-things” (Böhme 2001, 45 and 2006, 19; Griffiero 2014 and 2017, both taking the idea from Schmitz 2005, 343 and 2008, 269). Although I think that atmospheres have a degree of reality, I will not follow this line of thought here. Instead, I will start by considering atmospheres in terms of properties. To speak about “the sadness of the landscape” is to speak about a property of the landscape. This property is experienced as being “in” the object, or, more precisely, as “spreading over” the object or as “covering” it. We neither “interpret” the landscape as sad, nor does the landscape “express” sadness or “evoke” sadness in us. The “sadness” is literally to be found in the landscape as one property of it.

First, an important feature of atmospheres is that they are experienced as issuing from the object rather than as arising from the self. Atmospheres are experienced as having phenomenal objectivity, as being objectively there and as such as accessible to others. People usually converge about the existence of an atmosphere. This experience is what has been called “emotional realism” (Osborne 1968, 105; see also Hepburn 1968, 82; Morris-Jones 1968, 99).

Second, atmospheres are properties of a certain kind. They are what I call here “affective properties.” (Though I will use both concepts—atmosphere and affective property interchangeably, not all affective properties are atmospheres. For instance, if we claim that the “landscape is impressive,” we are speaking here also about an affective property of the landscape. However, “impressive” unlike “sad” is not a term borrowed from our vocabulary of moods. Rather, it is borrowed from the vocabulary for general feelings.) These properties are affective because they are experienced as related to our affective life. They are experienced as having the capacity to move and affect us, to change our position within the world and to orient us accordingly. Atmospheres make the world a place with reliefs, nuances, surfaces and profundities, colour and light.

Third, atmospheres as affective properties are dependent and founded on other properties of the object. For an object, e.g., a landscape to look sad, it must fulfil certain conditions such as having a particular form, colour, etc. If we change these other features of the landscape, then the look,
appearance, of the landscape will change too.\textsuperscript{8} By virtue of this feature, atmospheres can be designed and created. This happens by modifying and preparing the non-affective properties of the objects on which they are founded. Moreover, their temporal structure, existence and specific aspect or colour will depend on these other properties of the object.

Finally, affective properties have an evaluative character. Like axiological properties such as beautiful or unfair, affective properties call us to adopt a pro- or contra-attitude towards the object that possesses them.

What this analysis of the structure of atmospheres reveals is first of all that their structure differs substantially from that of moods. This supports “the distinctive thesis” according to which both phenomena are distinct in kind. More specifically, the analysis shows that moods are affective states with a distinctive intentional structure directed towards three kinds of objects, while atmospheres are affective properties founded on other non-affective properties of the objects in relation to which they are experienced. We can now answer the first question raised in the introduction: although we employ the same names for both phenomena, moods and atmospheres can be sharply distinguished. To answer the second question requires a further analysis of atmospheres. In particular, the question about the apprehension and experience of atmospheres has to be carefully analysed.

**How are atmospheres apprehended? The model of feeling**

The understanding of atmospheres as affective properties defended above raises an urgent epistemic question: How are atmospheres apprehended? After scrutinising the models of perception, recognition, emotion/mood, and empathy,\textsuperscript{9} I will argue that atmospheres are apprehended by a feeling.

**Perception**

We often employ the language of perception for the apprehension of atmospheres. We speak of seeing the sadness of the landscape or the melancholy of a painting. The perception model takes this manner of speaking at face value and argues that atmospheres are perceived. The perception involved here is not plain sensory perception (e.g., the perception of trees and chairs), but a \textit{sui generis} perception, one which is able to grasp the affective nuances of an object.

One prominent exemplar of this model is Wollheim’s account of “expressive perception” as perception of expressive properties (another name for what I call “affective properties”). In his view, an expressive perception is a genuine form of “seeing” just as “seeing-in” (e.g., seeing Napoleon in a painting) is also a sui generis form of seeing appropriate to representation. However, while “seeing-in” enables us to see something represented in a picture, expressive perception makes it possible to see the picture’s expressive qualities. As conceived by Wollheim, expressive perception presupposes
beliefs derived from certain experiences of the world (this feature is common to other forms of seeing) and it presupposes a mechanism for coping with feelings, moods, and emotions (1987, 80). For him, expressive properties are not entirely independent of our affectivity. In fact, they are the result of a complex projection of our feelings onto the world (see below).

One of the strengths of the perception model is that it captures not only the way in which we usually speak about atmospheres and affective properties, but also the immediacy and directedness in which this apprehension takes place. However, my main concern with this model is that perception is not an intrinsically affective phenomenon, while the apprehension of affective properties is itself affective. In affective states, we are affected and moved in a way in which reality is presented under a certain evaluative light. This involves a twofold moment: the experience of reality in evaluative terms and the experience of a change in our position in the world. Both moments appear in all phenomena belonging to the affective family. My thought here is that the apprehension of the sadness of the landscape involves these two aspects: while experiencing the sadness of the landscape as an evaluative feature of it, I also experience a change in my relation to the world. It is precisely this affective character of the apprehension of affective properties that the perception model cannot capture. Although Wollheim acknowledges that this perception involves, evokes, and projects affective states, perception is not a phenomenon that belongs to the family of the affective (constituted by emotions, moods, feelings, etc.). In my view, we should find among the different phenomena belonging to the affective family a suitable candidate that explains the apprehension of affective properties.

**Recognition**

According to this model, the apprehension of atmospheres in particular and of affective properties, in general, can be explained as a form of “recognition.” In this model, to see the sadness of the landscape is in fact to recognise sadness in it. The recognition involved does not involve judgement, nor should it be taken in a literal sense as a re-cognition (i.e., as identification of something already familiar to us). Recognition is here an activity of the mind akin to understanding.

This model was prominently defended in aesthetics by Hepburn and Morris-Jones. For Hepburn, there is a reasonable extension of “seeing” affective properties (in his terminology: emotional qualities) which is recognising them. Though we can recognise an affective property without being ourselves in the same affective state, he does consider the occurrence of highly particularised feelings involved in this recognition (1968, 91). For Morris-Jones, the recognition requires neither that we experience feelings similar to the apprehended affective properties, nor that we are already acquainted with them. In his view, the conditions for apprehending such feelings are similar to those for the understanding of statements made in a
language one has learnt. For Morris-Jones, one learns to talk not only by learning the grammatical rules but also by developing a sensitivity as to when to make certain statements. In a similar vein, we can recognise affective properties we have never experienced (this presupposes that art is a kind of language of feeling whose norms and uses we have learnt): “Recognizing a feeling is like understanding the meaning of a statement, and the conditions of understanding are the same as those which govern the apprehension of feeling” (Morris-Jones 1968, 103).

Rightly, this model points to the ability of the subject to apprehend affective properties and explains this ability in terms of the active capacity similar to understanding. However, the model faces a series of difficulties. First, as was the case with the model of perception, the model of recognition explains the apprehension of atmospheres by resorting to a cognitive phenomenon. Second, a more pressing difficulty is that the model is conceived mainly for art works. The analogy between recognising affective properties in art and understanding language is central to this model. In fact, the model of recognition takes art to be a form of language with its conventions and systems of symbols that others might create and interpret correctly. Yet, affective properties permeate our experience outside and beyond artistic contexts. Finally, those not familiar with the same conventions and symbols as us can also be capable of apprehending affective properties.

**Affective states: emotion/mood**

This model explains the apprehension of atmospheres as affective properties in terms of affective states such as emotions and/or moods. For the proponents of this model, the apprehended affective properties are identical to the affective states elicited in the observers. More precisely, emotions and/or moods are responsible for disclosing such properties. In the past, this view was defended by Aldrick and Baensch (see Osborne 1968, 109). Although today this model has not been developed to explain the apprehension of affective properties, perceptual models of emotions (Tappolet 2000) and moods (Rossi 2019) embody a similar idea. By arguing that emotions and/or moods are able to present or represent evaluative properties, these models attribute to affective states the strong epistemic function of grasping sensible aspects of reality, and among the latter affective properties have a place.

Unlike the preceding models, this model regards the apprehension of affective properties as affective phenomena. However, this model also has to face a series of objections. First, to apprehend the sadness of a landscape is not the same as feeling sad ourselves. We are very well able to apprehend the sadness of a landscape without being in the same affective state. It is even possible to apprehend the sadness while being in the opposite affective state. We can apprehend the sadness of the landscape and be aesthetically pleased by it. While it is possible for us to end up sad after apprehending
the sadness of the landscape, this sadness is either a case of affective contagion or the causal effect of apprehending the sadness. But in itself it is not “the way” in which we grasp the sadness of the landscape. Thus, affective states cannot be responsible for the apprehension of atmospheres.

Moreover, this model falls prey to a crude oversimplification of reality. For this model, irritability presents offensiveness and anxiety presents threat. This might seem prima facie plausible. However, this does not capture what really happens in ordinary experience. When I am irritable, things are not just offensive. They are also threatening, menacing, obnoxious, etc. This seems to be a rule of thumb for all moods we can experience. For instance, euphoria is related to the wonderful, joyful, awesome, pleasant, outstanding, etc. Sadness is related to the threatening, menacing, inhibiting, unpleasant, etc. (This confirms what I have already set out in above; namely, each mood is associated not with one but with many evaluative properties.)

The last two arguments demonstrate that affective states cannot apprehend the affective properties of the objects they are directed towards. A third objection can be derived from the ontology of the mind. Affective states such as emotions and moods have a temporal duration: they extend over time and have a course of development which is compounded by different temporal moments. By contrast, the apprehension of an affective property exhibits the features typical of punctual occurrences. The apprehension of the sadness of the landscape takes place at a given moment and although it can take place repeatedly, it neither extends over time nor has temporal parts. In this regard, the apprehension of an atmosphere has the character of an activity of the mind, something that we achieve as a result of something we do (though not necessarily something we intend). As such it is akin to other activities such as perceiving or recognising (to mention here two of those mentioned above), rather than to conditions of the mind such as emotions and moods.

**Empathy**

In this model, atmospheres are apprehended through empathy. This idea was put forward by Lipps for whom the concept “Einfühlung” means literally “feeling into” something. Given that objects, unlike sentient beings, are unable to feel, it is by virtue of feeling into them, i.e., of projecting ourselves into them, that we come to experience in them affective properties.

The most detailed development of this model can be found in Geiger, who developed an account of the empathy of moods (Stimmungseinfühlung). In his view, we can “feel into” atmospheres (to which he mainly refers as “feeling characters” (Gefühlscharakteren) or simply “characters” (Charakteren)). When this happens, we can remain in a contemplative attitude by means of which we experience the atmosphere as being objective and external, or we can adopt an “immersive attitude” in which we immerse ourselves in the atmosphere. Geiger distinguishes four kinds of immersion: 1) in “objective
immersion,” we open ourselves up to the atmosphere and are able to experience it but we remain passive towards it; 2) in “position-taking immersion,” we apprehend the atmosphere and this apprehension, in turn, influences the way in which we perceive it (there is here an interplay between the atmosphere and my own affective state); 3) in “sentimental immersion,” we apprehend the atmosphere with the aim of resonating with it: we want to recreate in us the affective state that corresponds to the atmosphere (the atmosphere and affective state converge in a mood experienced by the subject); 4) in “empathic immersion,” we can feel into the affective property so that we are completely absorbed by the atmosphere and become one with it.

This model captures crucial features of the apprehension of affective properties. It understands the apprehension of affective properties as affective phenomenon. Moreover, in this model, the apprehension of affective properties has the character of an activity and an achievement. In this respect, the model is superior to those examined above. However, the model conceives of this affective activity as a “feeling into,” commonly translated as empathy. The problem here is that we are able to disclose affective properties even if we do not feel into them. Geiger’s contemplative attitude confirms this possibility. Following this idea, I will defend the view that affective properties are felt, although this does not necessarily presuppose that we feel into them.

**Feeling**

This model is closely related to the previous one. Here affective properties such as atmospheres are apprehended through a feeling. With this term, I refer to an *intentional* affective phenomenon by means of which we are able to apprehend the sensible aspects of reality.

The view is present in Geiger (1911) and in Scheler. Scheler distinguishes the feeling of affective properties (in his terms: mood-characters (Stimmungscharaktere)) from the feeling of axiological properties (e.g., dangerous, unfair). In his view, both feelings are intentional but only the feeling of axiological properties (or values) is intentional and cognitive (Scheler 1973, 257). Outside the phenomenological tradition, Osborne developed the idea of a “cognitive feeling” of affective properties (in his terms: emotional qualities). As he puts it: “We feel that a work of art is dainty, austere, florid, compact. But the feeling is not awareness of an emotional response in ourselves, deflecting attention inwardly, it is an outward directed, cognitive feeling” (1968, 116).

The model of feeling constitutes, in my view, a plausible alternative to the models discussed above. It captures the crucial features of the apprehension of affective properties stated above. First, the model of feeling captures the affective nature of the apprehension of affective properties. In apprehending an affective property, we are affected and moved. Reality appears not as neutral, but as a relief with certain features in the foreground and others
in the background, with fields coloured in one way or another. Things are not neutral, but tinctured with a certain colouration, for instance, as being “sad,” “melancholic,” or “cheerful.” This, in turn, makes us change our position within the world because we orient ourselves according to what we apprehend. Indeed, this intentional feeling exhibits the two features that I considered crucial to determine affective states: we are affected and moved in a way in which reality is presented under a specific “evaluative” light and we experience a change in our relation to the world.

Second, the model of feeling has the advantage that it underscores the active nature of the apprehension of affective properties. Unlike affective states which are conditions of the mind, this intentional feeling is an activity oriented towards an achievement: the grasping of a sensible feature of the world.

Third, this feeling is a punctual occurrence with a minimal temporal duration. It happens in time, but it does not stretch over time, though we might feel the property again and again. More specifically, the feeling of affective properties resembles other punctual occurrences such as “noticing” rather than mental states or processes that occupy stretches of time. Just as we can notice that there is a bird hidden in a tree, we can feel that the situation is sad.

Finally, the model indicates the existence of a form of receptivity towards sensible aspects of reality. This feeling indicates the existence of an ability to sense certain aspects of reality. We are equipped with a sensitivity for evaluative properties such as affective properties (e.g., cheerful, sad) and axiological properties (e.g., unfair, dangerous). The fact that we possess this sensitivity makes us able to orient ourselves in the world in action and thought.

**Experiencing atmospheres: affective stances and affective responses**

While in the previous section I have described the apprehension of atmospheres in terms of feeling, this section focuses on the wide range of experiences that this feeling might evoke. In particular, I am interested in describing three affective stances that we might adopt towards our own feeling of atmospheres and in fleshing out some of the most common affective responses that this feeling might elicit.

As noted in classical phenomenology, we are able to adopt an affective stance towards a wide range of our own affective experiences (Geiger 1974 and 1976; Haas 1910). This stance must not be consciously and reflexively adopted. It is also not an evaluation or judgement about what we feel. Rather, it is an affective “yes” or “no” towards our affective experiences. We might be open or closed towards what we experience. For the case that occupies me in this chapter, this means that we can adopt a stance towards the feeling of atmospheres. This stance is what determines whether or not the feeling of atmospheres will unfold and evoke other affective experiences.

Prima facie, three main stances can be distinguished.
Neutral

It is possible to feel an atmosphere and remain neutral towards this feeling. This happens when we feel the sadness of the landscape, but this feeling does not elicit a response in us. The neutral stance is typical for cases in which we are unaware of the feeling despite registering the affective property. Neutrality might also happen when we are aware of ourselves feeling the atmosphere, but we remain indifferent about it.

Analytic

A second possibility consists in adopting an analytical attitude towards the feeling of an atmosphere. This attitude aims at examining different facets of the feeling. It can be directed towards some properties of the feeling such as its intensity, depth, quality, potential to elicit various emotional responses, etc. However, we can also focus on the affective property presented by the feeling itself. In this case, the analysis targets what we feel (the content) rather than on how we feel it (the mode). Our analytical stance might target the qualitative dimension of the property, its temporality, the elements upon which it is based and on which it depends, etc. We can attend to the sadness of the landscape and try to scrutinise its specific colouration, the object that it covers, which elements of the landscape it depends on, which elements are essential to it and which are contingent, and so on. A common result of adopting the analytical stance is that the feeling of the atmosphere usually does not unfold, or at least its development and its capacity to elicit emotional responses stagnate momentarily.

Responsive

Finally, it is also possible to adopt a responsive stance towards the feeling of the atmosphere. Here the feeling unfolds and elicits a wide array of affective responses. These responses might be second-order feelings as well as emotional reactions. In the first case, we have a feeling about the feeling of an atmosphere. For instance, in feeling the sadness of a landscape, we might like or dislike this feeling, we might feel comforted or discomforted by it, etc. In the second case, the feeling of the atmosphere evokes an emotional reaction. Feeling the sadness of the landscape might elicit sadness, melancholy, or even joy (as in the case when the sadness is apprehended within the context of an aesthetic experience).

In all these cases belonging to the responsive attitude, the subject resonates with the atmosphere while at the same time being aware of the difference between one’s own affective states elicited by the feeling of atmosphere, and the affective properties which are presented by this feeling. However, in limited cases, the awareness of this difference might disappear. In emotional infection, the subject comes to experience an affective state which is similar
to the apprehended affective property without being aware of the reasons why she is feeling this way. The subject might also feel one with the atmosphere and be totally absorbed by it (Schloßberger 2019).

The similarity explanation

Previously, I traced the distinction between moods and atmospheres in terms of a difference between affective states and affective properties. In the last two sections, I demonstrated that nonetheless affective phenomena play a crucial role in the apprehension and experience of atmospheres. In this final part, I want to tackle the second question posed in the introduction: why do we employ the same terms for moods and atmospheres if they are, in fact, distinct phenomena? It is puzzling that mood terms are employed to describe properties of objects which are unable to feel themselves. This is particularly intriguing because—as I have shown—these properties are not apprehended by homonymous affective states. I argued that they are apprehended by a feeling, but this feeling is not a mood. The landscape does not feel sad, nor do we apprehend this sadness by feeling sadness ourselves. Why then do we speak of the sadness of the landscape?

Possible answers to this question have been divided mainly into two camps (for an overview which includes other explanations, see Krebs 2017, 1423–1427). On the one hand, proponents of “the causal explanation” argue that affective properties are ascribed to an object in accordance with the affective states that the object might elicit or cause in us. The relation of causality can be conceived in either direct or dispositional terms. According to the “direct” causation explanation, that the landscape is sad means that it causes sadness in us. As noted above, this explanation fails because we can apprehend the sadness of the landscape without being sad. In its “dispositional” version, we attribute affective properties to an object when this object predisposes us to experience certain emotional responses. We call a landscape sad when it has the potential to elicit sadness in us. Though this version avoids the main problems of the direct causation explanation, it overlooks the fact that the apprehension of an affective property is not always linked to the experience of similar affective states. As noted above, we might perceive sadness in the landscape, but end up experiencing emotions which differ strongly from sadness (e.g., we might aesthetically enjoy it).

On the other hand, there is the “projectionist explanation” which comes also in two forms. The “simple” version explains affective properties as a projection of our affective states onto an object. Affective states colour and tincture our world. The landscape is sad because I project my sadness onto it. Though, as stated above, affective states have the capacity to colour their targets, the simple explanation is flawed since we can apprehend affective properties without being ourselves in a similar state.

The “complex” version of projectionism was provided by Wollheim. The model of expressive perception mentioned above involves a process
of complex projection in which “the emotion flows from what we perceive to us” (Wollheim 1987, 82). Though this emotion is apprehended independently of our present affective state, complex projection involves simple projection. Drawing on Freud, Wollheim describes the mechanism of projection as an unconscious process in which phantasy is involved. There is an initial phantasy motivated by an emotion we want to retain or get rid of. Here the emotion is expelled from the body and spreads across the environment. Furthermore, the subject who expels the emotion has the disposition to fantasise that the world can be experienced in a certain way. In his view, here a “doubling-up of the predicate” takes place (Wollheim 1987, 84). This doubling-up is an example of how language can be idealised and how it might lead us to speak metaphorically about the world so that we end up misunderstanding our experience. This idealisation might lead us to understand our ability to apprehend affective properties as “the metaphysical application of psychological predicates to the world” (Wollheim 1987, 85). Though this account points to the fact that affective states are able to colour the targeted objects, it rests upon a problematic idea according to which we are able to expel affective states which we later experience as having phenomenal objectivity.

I turn now to what I think is the most plausible alternative: the “similarity explanation.” The roots of the similarity explanation can be found in Geiger. For this author, each mood projects a specific glow, light or brilliance onto the objects it targets, which he calls “feeling tone,” and this glow, light or brilliance is qualitatively similar to “feeling characters”—a term he employs to refer to atmospheres (Geiger 1976, 36). In what follows, I will elaborate on this explanation by examining the relation of similarity in more detail.

To begin, the similarity does not concern the mood and the atmosphere in their totality (as we have seen, we can apprehend an atmosphere despite being in a different affective state). Rather, the similarity concerns exclusively certain aspects of each of these phenomena. Put otherwise: certain aspects of moods are similar to certain aspects of atmospheres. In order to determine these aspects, we need to come back to the main features of the structure of moods and atmospheres developed above. Are any aspects of their respective structures similar?

At the level of the material object, no similarity can be stated between moods and atmospheres. Though both phenomena are not punctually localised and spread over several objects, the relation with these objects differs considerably. While affective states have an intentional structure, affective properties are based and depend on other properties of the objects in which we experience them. My sadness might be directed towards everything that I encounter while being in this mood, while the sadness of the landscape does not target any of the objects upon which it is based.

Next, the similarity does not concern the evaluative dimension of each of these phenomena. Moods make us more sensitive to the apprehension of a
certain cluster of evaluative properties, while atmospheres are only evaluative in the sense that they call us to adopt certain affective responses (pro- or contra-attitudes) towards them.

More promising is the analysis of moods’ third object that I called above the colouration characteristic of each affective state impressed upon the objects that state targets. In the view that I proposed, each mood has a typical colouration (the concept of colouration means not just one colour but a sum of features such as grey, black, wilted, lifeless, etc.). On the other hand, as described above, in our everyday experience, the world is neither experienced as a neutral surface nor is it always apprehended in the same manner. The way in which we experience reality changes. Reality has different aspects and looks. In this chapter, I argued that one good way to capture these different looks of reality is to speak about affective properties and atmospheres as having typical colourations. This typical colouration which is founded on other properties of the object and which is responsible for presenting the world as a relief according to which we can orient ourselves in action and thought. The only point of convergence between both phenomena is precisely this one: both involve a colouration. With this term, I refer to how things look when we are in a mood (moods’ third object) and how atmospheres afford a certain look to things.

Now the similarity explanation runs as follows. Sometimes we might realise that the world looks similar to how it looks when I am in a certain mood (e.g., sadness). As a result, and due to the lack of a rich vocabulary to describe all sensible aspects of reality, we resort to the vocabulary of moods and name this aspect of the world by employing the same term (e.g., sad). We literally borrow the vocabulary of moods to describe atmospheres. What is similar is this colouration that each mood typically projects onto the world and the aspect or look characteristic of each affective property. In other words, the colouration that I project onto the world when I undergo an affective state is similar to the colouration (aspect or look) of the world at certain times. To give an example: in sadness, I project onto objects a characteristic colouration which is similar to how these objects look on certain occasions. It is on the basis of this similarity that I then call these occasions “sad.”

Like Wollheim’s explanation, the similarity explanation acknowledges the ability of affective states to project their typical colouration onto the world. Both explanations share the view that we can apprehend affective properties independently of our present affective states. However, unlike Wollheim, the solution to the puzzle provided by the proposed similarity explanation does not explain atmospheres as properties which have their origins in a projection from our affective states onto the world. Rather, it solves the puzzle by indicating a similarity between phenomena which are, in fact, distinct in kind.

To sum up, the similarity explanation provides an answer to solve the puzzle along the following lines. Atmospheres (as a kind of affective
properties) receive the same names as moods (which are a kind of affective state) because atmospheres make things appear to us as having a similar aspect, look, and colouration as the one that we project onto the world while being in the corresponding mood.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that moods as affective states are sharply distinct from atmospheres as affective properties. This distinctiveness thesis provided a clear answer to the question whether moods and atmospheres are, in fact, the same phenomena. I have also argued that atmospheres are apprehended by an intentional feeling and that this feeling might elicit a wide range of affective responses. Finally, I have provided an answer to the question of why despite moods and atmospheres being distinct in kind, we employ the same terms for both. I have argued that this not because of a whim of language, but rather because there is a similarity between the two phenomena.

**Notes**

1. We rarely speak of atmospheres (and of affective properties) with the same terms that we use to refer to our emotions. A landscape might be calm, melancholic, cheerful, sad, etc. but not jealous, envious, ashamed, or regretful.
2. Although most philosophers have interpreted intentionality in terms of about-ness, arguing that while emotions are intentional states, moods lack intentionality (Searle 1983, 1), here I adopt an intentionalist view of moods. For intentionalists, rather than asking what your anxiety, elation, or irritability is about, we should be asking how each of these moods makes things seem to you (Crane 1998, 241; more recently Kriegel 2019).
3. Although I develop my analysis of the structure of moods via comparison with the emotions, the differences regarding their objects are sufficiently distinct to consider moods as a different state (for a different view, see Goldie 2000 and Rossi 2019).
4. The relation between emotions and their formal objects has been the object of dispute in contemporary research. Here I adopt Scheler’s view according to which emotions are responses to evaluative properties (Scheler 1973, 259; Vendrell Ferran 2008, 2005).
5. Early phenomenologists are well known for defending realism and objectivism about values. What is less known is that they also embraced subjectivist positions. In this vein, though Geiger argued that evaluative properties are grasped through feeling, he also acknowledged the possibility that we project the light of our affective states onto the world. In a similar vein, Voigtländer argued that there are evaluative properties (such as impressive, imposing, etc.) which the subject impresses on the targeted objects (she names these properties: “Eindruckswerte”) (Voigtländer 1910, 80). On Voigtländer’s account, see Salice (forthc.) and Yaegashi (forthc).
6. For the view that emotions have three objects, see Mulligan (2015). Mulligan understands the third object in terms of a feeling character or atmosphere whose apprehension precedes the emotion. By contrast, here I endorse a different view more in line with Geiger’s proposal, according to which the third
object is a colouration or feeling tone impressed onto the world and as such its apprehension does not precede the emotional experience. Put otherwise: for me, the third object is what Geiger calls “feeling tone,” while Mulligan seems to suggest that the third object is comprised of what Geiger calls “feeling characters.”

While Böhme and Schmitz seek to challenge the subject-object divide, Griffero is closer to my idea of atmospheres as properties (2014).

This feature is common also to evaluative properties such as beauty, unfairness, etc. For instance, for a bouquet of flowers to be beautiful, it depends on the forms, colours, the composition of the flowers that constitute it. If we change one of the flowers for another which is different in colour and form, then the bouquet might lose its beauty (for aesthetic properties, see Reicher 2010, 60).

In my view, these are the main models presented in the research. However, I do not pretend to be exhaustive in my discussion of models and authors. There is a prolific literature on the apprehension of such properties in music too, which I will not enter into here.

The origins of this view can be found in the Brentanian and early phenomenological tradition.

These moments exhibit specificities for each phenomenon belonging to this family. For instance, emotions are responses to evaluative properties, while moods make us more sensitive to certain evaluative properties.

These arguments were put forward already by Reinach (2017, 211) and Scheler (1973, 257). In contemporary research, they have been developed by Mulligan (2009) and other critics of the perceptual model (e.g., Engelsen 2018, 240).

As a result, the thesis that moods exhibit a distinctive intentionality has to be understood beyond the frame of representationalism (Hatzimoysis 2017).

The core idea here is derived from a dichotomy between states and activities of the mind which can be found in classical phenomenology (Reinach 2017, 109; Scheler 1973, 257). Here, however, I adopt contemporary terms (Mourelatos 1978, 423).

In fact, Lipps distinguished four main types of empathy: a) empathy of activity; b) empathy of mood; c) empathy with nature; and d) empathy into the sensuous experience of other beings (1903, 96–223).

For a discussion and critique of Geiger’s account, see Griffero (2014, 109, 132, 134) and Vendrell Ferran (2019, 292 and 293).

Unlike Scheler, I consider here the feeling of affective properties and the feeling of axiological properties to refer to the same human ability but directed towards two different kinds of objects (more specifically, I consider that affective properties and axiological properties are both evaluative properties grasped through the same mechanism of feeling).

He refers to this feeling as “perceiving emotionally.”

Phenomenologists used to speak of feelings as an ability (Fähigkeit) which can be cultivated and enhanced, but it can also become impaired and we might even become blind to it (see, for instance, Pfänder 1973, 54).


I adopt here a tripartite distinction which can be found in von Hildebrand (2016, 368).

This is a constant puzzle in the discussion about affective properties (see, for instance, Krebs 2017, 1420 and 1423; Osborne 1968, 107).

In his paper on Stimmungen, Thonhauser argues that Geiger’s solution is “the closest we can get to the attribution of Stimmung to objects within a psychological framework” (Thonhauser 2020). In this paper, I took this frame as a point of departure by considering that moods and atmospheres are sharply distinct.
To be precise, Geiger also acknowledges that the causal explanation might play a role.

The idea of aspect or look should not be conflated with the idea of expression. When we call a landscape sad, the way in which this landscape looks need not have anything in common with the typical bodily and facial expressions of sadness in sentient beings.

References


