

# INTENSIFYING THE ATMOSPHERIC: a post-phenomenological reappraisal of the ambiance of urban space

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## **Abstract**

*The phenomenological concept of atmospheres is more often applied as an aesthetic description of the urban space as such. This conceptualization is supported in this paper; however, I strive to give the concept a post-phenomenological axial turn. While phenomenology, due to its understanding of atmospheres as aesthetically 'radiating' from the surfaces of space, thinks physiognomically, the article argues for a spatial morphological perspective on atmospheres. Thus, post-phenomenologically, it is argued that the atmospheric given is given by the density of pedestrians, which are compressed by the spatial morphologies of urban space. Atmospheres are to be understood as an emergent property of the assemblages of pedestrian flows, whose spatial densification passes a certain threshold when the affective rhythm of urbanism becomes sufficiently intense. All things considered, this paper should be read as a social philosophical attempt to reconstruct the concept of urban atmospheres in the light of urban morphology.*

*This argument is developed in three steps: First, this paper accounts for the phenomenological perspective on the urban atmospheres and its ontological conditions. Crucially, the conditioning physiognomic ontology applied by phenomenology is, when assessed from a post-phenomenological and sociological perspective, unable to uphold the position of aesthetic universalism. Second, it is suggested that the vital condition for the emergence of urban atmospheres is the morphology, rather than the physiognomy, of urban space. From the phenomenological approach, it is thus maintained that the facticity of urban space is decisive for the emergence of the atmospheres, even though the analytical weight is displaced from the physiognomic facades of urban space to the morphologically empty volume of space that these facades generate. Theoretically, this morphological argument is based on the space syntax approach, which relates to the classical sociological discussions of social morphology, and to the Durkheimian concept of 'dynamic density' in particular. Third, the affective aspects of urban atmospheres are elaborated. It is argued that the Deleuzian key-concept of 'intensity' renders possible an affective reinterpretation of Durkheim's 'dynamic density'. Crucially, this reinterpretation makes it theoretically valid to argue for the aesthetic universalism that the phenomenological concept of urban atmospheres failed to substantiate.*

Everyone has presumably been grasped by the urban atmosphere at some point. Being in the metropolitan city is characterized by a certain urban feeling, a distinct aesthetic sensation, which phenomenologists have made a major effort to conceptualize (Böhme 1995; Albertsen 1993; Löw 2009). Indisputably, these phenomenological contributions are of great value for our understanding of urban life. Notwithstanding this fact, such a dedicated phenomenological perspective on urban atmospheres remains problematic. Thus, it is the initial argument of this paper that the phenomenological description of the atmospheric often ends up in an invalid analytics, especially concerning the vital question of aesthetic universalism. As we shall see, this analytical invalidity is due to an inadequate clarification of what *conditions* the atmospheric ontologically.

This critical point might appear to be a misconception of the phenomenological *oeuvre*, in that phenomenology could be defined as a rigorous rejection of interpreting the conditions of the phenomena. A going 'back to the things themselves', as the slogan of phenomenology prescribes, is tantamount to an apparently 'pure' description of the phenomenon as it 'shows itself', and thus a consistent 'seeing away' from what *gives* the given phenomena (Heidegger 1986, §7; Husserl 1982). However, the problem is not that phenomenology lacks, but *lacks to validate*, the operative ontological conditions that phenomenology, in fact, incorporates in the concept of atmospheres. Contrary to the self-understanding of phenomenology, its descriptions are by no means 'pure', but operate with an implicit ontological assumption about where (not) to go searching for the atmospheric *in* urban space. Consequently, it is seldom considered that we may have to look elsewhere in the city to capture the atmospheric phenomena phenomenologically. The implicit ontology of phenomenology is immunized against (self)critical securitization, and as a result, the existence of other potentially more valid ontological conditions of the atmospheric are not considered. This insufficient explication of the conditions of the atmospheric outlines the goal of this paper, which precisely intends to reconsider these conditions post-phenomenologically.

The argument is developed in three steps: *First*, the paper accounts for the phenomenological perspective on the urban atmospheres and its ontological conditions. Crucially, the conditioning physiognomic ontology applied by phenomenology is, when assessed from a post-phenomenological and sociological perspective, unable to uphold the position of aesthetic universalism. *Second*, it is suggested that the vital condition for the emergence of urban atmospheres is the morphology, rather than the physiognomy, of urban space. Theoretically, this morphological argument is based on the *space syntax* approach, which relates to the classical sociological discussions of social morphology, and to the Durkheimian concept of 'dynamic density' in particular. *Third*, the affective aspects of urban atmospheres are elaborated. It is argued, that the Deleuzian key-concept of 'intensity' renders possible an affective reinterpretation of Durkheim's 'dynamic density'. Crucially, this reinterpretation makes it theoretically valid to argue for the aesthetic universalism that the phenomenological concept of urban atmospheres failed to substantiate.

## **FOLLOWING THE 'PATH' OR 'METHOD' TO THE ATMOSPHERES**

Atmospherically, urban space makes itself felt. This essentially recapitulates the phenomenological insight concerning urban space, as Löw characteristically points out: "Spaces develop their own potentiality which can influence feelings. This potentiality of spaces I call 'atmosphere'." (Löw 2008, 44). Notwithstanding the correctness of this argument, the vague conceptualization of what these *conditioning* 'potentialities' consist of accentuates the problem of phenomenology. However, before tracking down this problem more systematically we must philosophically map out the conditioning ontology that the urban phenomenologist often (but mostly implicitly) applies.

Presumably, the most important sources of inspiration are, on the one hand, Heidegger's (1986: §29) understanding that being in space always-already implies a 'Stimmung', that is, a certain mood or emotional attunement, and, on the other hand, Böhme's (1995; 2006) closely associated existential phenomenology of 'aesthetic atmospheres'. Without making a sharp distinction between these affiliated phenomenologies, this paper focuses on Böhme's latter concept and illustrates its theoretical logic with the simplest possible example, namely a plain *blue cup* (Böhme 1993, 121; Albertsen 1999, 8). The blue cup presents, extends or self-unfolds, and thus atmospherically affects the spatial environment with its distinct 'blueness'. A thing, as Böhme (1995, 121) puts it, "(...) is tuned as ecstasies." Thus, we are dealing with a *physiognomic* ontology in which the blue cup – or for that matter, any object, spatiality, etc. – has an *inherent* characteristic or potential for expression, which is experienced atmospherically as aesthetic ecstasies. Accordingly, the surroundings in which the blue cup is situated becomes physiognomically 'filled' with a 'blueness', which essentially is the evident atmospheric phenomena. Phenomenologically, the atmosphere gains its qualitative 'color' by the *blueness of the blue*.

When tracking down the problematic validity of such a physiognomic conditioning of the atmospheres, one has to pay attention to the *tautological* character of this reasoning: arguing that the blue 'blues' is, in reality, a double enunciation of one and the same. Consequently, it follows logically that the phenomenological description of the atmospheric given is regarded as evident, without this evidence needing further empirical or ontological explanation: tautologies are by definition unconditionally true. To argue tautologically is indeed *logically true*, which in the absence of any empirical and ontological references and conditioning, however, says nothing about the *real truth* of the description (Wittgenstein 1996, §4.461, 4.462). Validity thus becomes a pure claim. When due to tautological reasoning, phenomenology is, as Kwan puts it, "(...) extremely poor in its ability to build up concrete references to worldly affairs and phenomena (Kwan 2005, 330).

This characteristic might sound as an irreconcilable critique à la Adorno (1973, 70); however, this is not the case. Rather, the job becomes drawing attention to the analytical limitation of phenomenology that Heidegger, perhaps surpassing and often unnoticed, but nonetheless clearly, acknowledges: "(...) tautological thinking is the primordial sense of phenomenology. (...) To understand this, we need to learn to distinguish between *path* and *method*." (Heidegger 2003, 80). Phenomenology must follow, or locate, the phenomena along a 'path' which should not be validated 'methodically' by analytical empirical procedures. Instead, the phenomenologist should insist tautologically on the phenomena in its immediate givenness – beyond any sort of dialectic mediation (Heidegger 2003, 81; 1986, 25). Thus anti-dialectically positioned, the tautological formula of the 'blueness of the blue' is identical with Heidegger's enigmatic attempt to let the phenomena speak for themselves: space spaces, thing things, language speaks, etc. (Heidegger 2001, 173). The path of phenomenology gives precedence to the tautological at the expense of a methodologically validated consideration of the conditions of the phenomena.

Relating these considerations to the urban and the atmospheric argument that, for example, London has a distinct 'Londonian' atmosphere, it is the present point that such a tautological argument – in the absence of any analytical reference to empirical and ontological conditioning – tells nothing about what *specifically* characterizes and conditions living in London. Arguing tautologically that London Londons is just as logically true as it is factually idle. Let us elaborate this philosophical point sociologically: from a sociological perspective it is, thus, highly problematic that the tautological approach of phenomenology neglects the dialectical elucidation of how the phenomenological experience gets its specificity as mediated or conditioned on social structures. With this point, we are facing the crucial question of universalism that is decisive for phenomenology to assert, but presumably impossible to defend tautologically. Thus, phenomenology asserts that the atmospheres have an (at least partially) universal or 'quasi-objective' nature, which 'seizes' the subject and

is perceived independently of such structural conditions (Böhme 1995; Löw 2008, 45; Bech 2005). However, this is denied dialectically by the sociological approach, insisting that such atmospheres are not phenomenological as immediate, but rather dialectically conditioned: is it as socially mediated that the atmospheric experience obtains its specificity or particularity.

Thus, the core of the controversy concerns the physiognomic ontology, that is, the tautological-physiognomic hypothesis that physical objects and spatialities have certain inherent, and, in this sense, universal traits, which ecstatically fills urban space with atmospheres. It is precisely this universalism or authenticity that the dialectical sociology denies or particularizes, as it is manifested in Bourdieu's (1986; 2008, 73) fundamental and correct critique of such a physiognomic universalism. Furthermore, this dialectical critique is supported by several empirical studies rejecting the argument that spatial physiognomies result in universal experiences transcending the socially mediated judgment of taste (Loukaki 1997; Allen 2006). These critical studies are, additionally, supported by a number of studies, which, despite their intentions, have great difficulty proving the universal relationship between spatial physiognomy and atmospheric aesthetics (Franz 2005; Isaacs 2000). Rather than being universal, such atmospheric feelings are to be interpreted as a *particular* habitual judgment of taste, and in this sense, as conditioned on a socio-historical struggle about how this or that artifact should be perceived or felt atmospherically.

Presumably, some phenomenologists would pass off these remarks as purely 'external' (and thus incommensurable and irrelevant) criticism. To counter such an argument in advance, we should notice that phenomenology does not seem capable of withstanding an 'internal' criticism. For this purpose, we could draw attention to the common experience of *surprise*, which urban dwellers encounter once in a while: walking along a familiar street you, by chance, look up at the surrounding buildings, which until this very point had been utterly unnoticed. All of a sudden, you observe the distinct architectural forms, colors and texture of the buildings, which until this moment had gone quite unnoticed. Does this common experience not prove that the architectural physiognomy of urban space unlikely has crucial atmospheric effects? Simply speaking, you do *not see* the architectural traits of the blue house, whose blueness should have seized you atmospherically if the physiognomic interpretation was valid. In justice, these critical contemplations do not imply that you, in certain 'non-everyday' circumstances, could have genuinely physiognomic experiences. This is, for example, known from the city holiday in which the tourist guide leads your 'tourist gaze' (Urry 1990), and thus points out the architecturally interesting physiognomies by which we become atmospherically captivated. Moreover, an even more pronounced example could be the judgment of the connoisseur – the architect, the travelled cosmopolite, etc. – who laboriously has acquired a distinct (and distinguished!) 'mindedness' or feeling towards the atmospheres of the physiognomies (Lyneborg 2007). However, the fact that you need such particular and non-everyday circumstances in order to make one pay phenomenological heed to the spatial physiognomy merely substantiates the claim of the everyday life and atmospheric irrelevance of the physiognomy. Ordinarily, the blueness of the blue has no substantial effects, and therefore hardly constitutes the affectively constitutive core of the atmospheres: "Colors do not move (...) people (Deleuze and Guattari: 1987, 348).

The above critiques emphasize the problematic of the phenomenological understanding of atmospheres. This holds especially true when these atmospheres are described tautologically without any empirical awareness of the sociological-dialectic conditions, which correctly opposes such physiognomic affects. Thus, this speaks in favor of a post-phenomenological reinterpretation better theoretically equipped to meet the dialectical critic of sociology, and to substantiate the essential characterization of the atmospheric: that the urban atmospheres have an existence *sui generis* that seizes the subjects universally in a manner that is somewhat independent of socio-structural circumstances.

## BEYOND THE PHYSIOGNOMY: SPATIO-MORPHOLOGICAL DENSIFICATION

In this post-phenomenological search for the atmospheric, I take the same ontological point of departure as phenomenology, namely, the actual urban space. Thus, phenomenology is right in claiming that the atmospheres belong to and emanate from urban space, but misses due to its physiognomical emphasis on the atmospheric 'ecstasies' of space - the specific properties of urban space that condition the atmospheric. In other words, we need a post-phenomenological reinterpretation of urban space, which clears a new path to the atmospheric and its spatial condition (cf. Hillier 2005; Seamon 2007). Heidegger's distinction between 'path' and 'method' may initially help us clarify why phenomenology chose the physiognomic path, and thus how we are post-phenomenologically able to lay an otherwise methodological path to the atmospheric.

However, in our case, the path is not one of the forest paths, *die Holzwege*, that Heidegger (2005) preferred to walk along, but an urban path leading through urban space conceptualized phenomenologically as the experience of the street, sidewalk, or town square, which is passed, dwelled and felt from a first person perspective. In this horizontal perspective, the urban dweller moves through and along the paths of urban architectural space that encircle the urban path, and are thus oozing with atmospheric fullness: the 'despondent' modernistic, the 'monumental' sacred, the 'romantic' ornamented, etc. Seen from this phenomenological 'path-perspective' the physiognomical aspects of urban space obviously have precedence: the architectural facades of urban space literally tower up on all sides of the urban path, for which reason it seems self-evident that the atmospheric emanates from these aesthetic forms and surfaces (Böhme 2006; Norberg-Schulz 1991).

In this physiognomic light, the question is whether the post-phenomenological 'method' can draw attention to another origin of the atmospheric. This implies that we have to reject the first person perspective of phenomenology, which made the physiognomical interpretation obvious. Thus, we have to leave the 'horizontal' world of phenomenology, and methodologically adopt a 'vertical' perspective on the city. Judged from a phenomenological perspective such methodological approach is obviously highly suspect. Indeed, to such a degree that such a perspective always-already is diagnosed as a symptom of a perverted tendency of 'voyeurism' where you, high above the city, objectifies, enjoys and exploits phenomenologically-lived life. Recall de Certeaus' (1988, 92ff) famous critique of the voyeuristic gaze from the tower above New York. However, this should not shadow the valuable post-phenomenological insight that de Certeaus also draws attention to. When the city is viewed methodologically distanced from above, it appears as an 'urban text', which the pedestrians "(...) write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen." (de Certeau 1988, 92). Voyeurism or not, this description thus makes us aware of a crucial feature of space that extends beyond its physiognomic properties. The pedestrians are phenomenologically unaware of the textuality or grammatical character of space, which their urban practices, nonetheless, are structurally determined by. Thus, paradoxically, de Certeaus' defense for an urban phenomenology makes us aware of the analytical limits of the first person perspective of phenomenology: the city is *also* something structurally 'more' than the sum of the experiences of the urban pedestrians. Crucially, the urban text cannot be experienced, and is thus not described as purely phenomenological, but has to be methodologically mapped – from above.

These considerations make us aware of a different post-phenomenological perspective on urban space, beyond the physiognomy of the architectural space. The analytical focus shifts to the *morphology of urban space*, that is, the structural grid or configuration of space forming a grammatical condition for emergence of urban practices and experiences (Hillier 2005, 13f). With this post-phenomenological change of perspective, the decisive aspect of the city is not its architectural physiognomic forms – the aesthetic facades – but

rather the morphological forms of space: the empty volume of space between the built facades. In other words, we have to examine the life *between* the buildings (Gehl 1987; Jacobs 1993, 233ff), which is likely done most systematically within the space syntax paradigm.

Thus, the founding axiom of this urban morphological approach could be described as rejection of the physiognomic properties of space in favor of the spatial morphological configurations between the built forms (Hillier and Hanson 1984, 1). With de Certeaus' understanding of the 'textual' character of urban space in mind it is furthermore indicative that Hillier describes the approach as a theory of the *syntax* of space. Thus, the objective is to develop a methodology to map the underlying morphological 'grammar' or 'order' of space, analogous to linguistic mapping of the underlying grammatical structure of language (Hillier 2007, 28). Despite this grammatical analogy, the space syntax is a dedicated 'non-discursive' approach: its groundbreaking empirical insight consist of proving how the 'movement economy' of the city is primarily a probabilistic function of the spatial morphology, that is, the actual material configuration of the urban streets (Hillier 1987; Hillier *et al.* 1993;). Thus, movement in the city is beyond linguistic meaning and symbolic representation. Contrary to the sociological intuition that would explain the movement as a function of socio-symbolic 'attractions' (Bourdieu 1996), Hillier argues that the spatial morphology of space *by far* is most important in explaining the movement economy: configuration takes precedence over attraction; sociality is crucially conditioned on space (Hillier and Hanson 1987; Hillier *et al.* 1993). This might sound like an anti-sociological approach, but the space syntax approach, and the goal of the present paper, is rather genuinely sociological. Crucially, one must be reminded that the theoretical understanding of sociality as directly conditioned on the spatial morphology is in immediate continuation of Durkheim's concept of *social morphology*. Despite contemporary sociologists' unfortunate unawareness of this fact, Durkheim also founded the science of sociology as a morphological discipline. Considering this, Hillier and the space syntax theory could rightfully be characterized as a neo-Durkheimian approach (Durkheim 1978; Hillier and Hanson 1984, 18f).

Let us elaborate this important theoretical, sociological point: Durkheim's insight – which he held throughout his authorship, and which furthermore was continued by his most important students (Mauss 1979; Halbwachs 1960) and parts of the Chicago School (e.g. Wirth 1923) – is that social life ultimately is conditioned on the 'dynamic density'. Crucially, this dynamic density is defined as the quantity of actual relationships in a particular societal population, mediated by the architectural, infrastructural, technological, etc. materialities of the society (Durkheim 1978; 1949, 257). In this social morphological perspective, the spatially mediated density of urban life therefore constitutes a dynamic potential for the development of new social form and functions. It is precisely such social morphological understanding of the varying social dynamics or morphogenesis as a function of the spatially concentrated densities that Hillier inherits and explicates. The neo-Durkheimian logic implies that the social life of the city obtains another torque when it, mediated by the spatial configuration, is lived in a more or less dense or co-present fashion.

Accordingly, 'space is the machine', as Hillier (2007) puts it, and that is a sort of 'morphological compressor'. This compression or dynamic density affects various parts of social life in the city (economic activity, criminal patterns, etc.), but may also affect urban aesthetics, and thus possibly the urban atmosphere. Here, I am following Hillier's morphological suggestion that the spatially conditioned density possibly provides a better explanation of the urban aesthetic phenomena and sensations than that provided by the commonly-invoked architectural theory, which places physiognomic emphasis on the aesthetic of the built facades. Thus, we have to exchange a 'physiognomic aesthetic' for a 'morphological aesthetic': "(...) many of the properties of urban space that we value aesthetically are a product of this functional shaping of space." (Hillier 2007, 119). Such a morphological aesthetic, and corresponding emphasis on the spatial 'compression', is possibly the

most promising theoretical alternative to the phenomenological emphasis on the physiognomic 'ecstasies' of urban architectural space. Thus, the post-phenomenological thesis is that the urban atmosphere essentially *is* the aesthetic experience of the urban density which, crucially, is conditioned on the spatial morphological compression of urban life and mobilities.

However, we have to admit that this hypothesis is rather inconclusive: it is theoretically unexplained *why* morphologically compressed dynamic densities in the urban street should be felt as atmospheric *affects*. Theoretically, the concept of dynamic density seems to concur with a functionalist logic – see Durkheim's (1949) statement that social morphological explanations follow the formula: 'everything is mechanic' – which seems unfruitful for explaining why atmospheres emerge and are experienced phenomenologically – affectively. It is precisely in order to clarify the relationship between morphological 'materiality' and phenomenological 'affect' that I in the following will suggest a Deleuzian reinterpretation of Durkheim and Hillier's morphological concept of dynamic density *as* affective intensity.

### THE CITY WITH QUALITIES: THERMODYNAMICS OF URBAN ATMOSPHERES

What justifies this (possibly) surprising interlinking between Durkheim and Deleuze is how they both regard *differences in density* as an ontological key concept and catalyst for societal dynamics. However, Deleuze importantly – and contrary to Durkheim's uncertainty on this point – regards the material and affective aspects as ontologically coinciding in these differences of density (Deleuze and Guatteri 1987, 261). This is clearly explained by Deleuze's rejection of the classic Aristotelian distinction between 'matters-forms', which seems to be the axiomatic distinction at the root of Durkheim's concept of social morphology. Deleuze's ontological emphasis is instead on the distinction 'material-forces', that is, "the essential thing is no longer forms and matters (...) but forces, densities, intensities." (Deleuze and Guatteri 1987, 342f). Thus, according to Deleuze, materiality is not primarily characterized by (morphological) matters that 'express' certain (social and functional) forms, but rather, that materiality 'captures' the vitalist intensities: *the affective flow of life*. Materiality is – rather than a material substratum which society is conditioned on – a morphological catalyst that captures, retains, and as I put it above: compresses, densifies and amplifies the intensive, affective flow of life. As we shall see, it is precisely such material morphological densification and intensification that constitute the theoretical key to the emergence of the urban atmospheres.

Even though the theoretical accentuation of Deleuze's concept of 'intensity' is displaced towards the affective ontology, we have to maintain the similitude to Durkheim's concept of 'density'. As mentioned above, and despite the concepts respectively Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian accents, 'density' and 'intensity' operate on the 'formal' level with a coinciding *emergence theory*. Let us take Durkheim's social morphology as our point of departure to elaborate this theoretical convergence. Fundamentally, the materialistic logic is that *quantitative* change in the density of a particular social population, at the point where the densification passes a critical threshold, can be a catalyst for the emergence of *qualitative* social forms and phenomena (Durkheim 1982, 139; 1972; Mauss 2005; Anderson 1972). In other words, it is argued that quantitative changes in the population, that is, the density or number of actual social relations, leaps into qualitative 'emergent properties': the quantity of the social *conditions* its qualitative existence, *sui generis*.

Surprisingly, the fact that Deleuze operates with a convergent emergence theoretical logic, in which 'intensity' is conceptualized as the qualitative emergent property by the quantitative, is utterly overlooked in the literature (Deleuze 1994, 222ff; Delanda 2005: 56-88). Thus, on a formal level, the theoretical logic converges with Durkheim: when the intensity passes a critical threshold (that is, when the affective flow is in-

tensified necessarily) this difference in intensity constitutes a productive condition for the emergence of new phenomena – qualitatively ‘more’ than their quantitative parts. The ontological concept of intensity is thus, in the words of Deleuze, “(...) thereby revealing [the] properly qualitative content of quantity (Deleuze 1994, 222).

According to our post-phenomenological examination of the ontological conditions for the emergence of the atmospheric given, it is furthermore important that Deleuze understands the quantitative change or difference of intensity as the dialectical condition for the emergence of what is phenomenologically given. This ontological understanding of the dialectical relationship between the quantitative intensity and the emergence of any given qualitative diversity is formulated as follows:

Difference is not diversity. Diversity is given, but difference is that by which the given is given, that by which the given is given as diverse. Difference is not phenomenon but the noumenon closest to the phenomenon (...) Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, *difference of intensity*. (Deleuze 1994, 222).

Thus, Deleuze’s argument is that the qualitative diversity, which shows itself or is ‘given’ phenomenologically, has to be distinguished from the quantitative difference of intensity (*noumenon*), which constitutes the ontological condition that *gives* the phenomenologically given (*phenomenon*). The post-phenomenological objective is pronounced: reality is not – as in the case of the phenomenological ‘transcendental idealism’ – dependent on the ‘intentionality’ of consciousness or the ‘occurrence’ of being. Rather, reality is given ‘transcendental empiristic’ by the real (and virtual) intensities of reality – *independent* of such phenomenological idealism (Deleuze 2001; Delanda 2010).

We have formally considered and compared the emergence-theoretical ontologies, but how can these help us substantiate the atmospheric? Let us reply to this question by suggesting that it is more than a coincidence that Deleuze’s theorization of intensity occurs with explicit reference to thermodynamical theories of the emergent properties of *climatic atmospheres*. In other words, I am preparing the theoretical ground for what might be characterized as ‘socio-ontological thermodynamics of urban atmospheres’, which nobody to my knowledge has attempted in the academic literature. However, such an attempt is exactly found in Musil’s novel, *The Man Without Qualities*, whose famous opening passage makes such a suggestive linkage between thermodynamical and urban atmospheres. Thus, let us – in the attempt to prove Deleuze’s theoretical relevance for a concept of urban atmospheres – take Musil and the opening passage of the novel as our point of departure:

A barometric low hung over the Atlantic. It moved eastward toward a high-pressure area over Russia without as yet showing any inclination to bypass this high in a northerly direction. (...) The water vapor in the air was at its maximal state of tension, while the humidity was minimal. In a word that characterizes the facts fairly accurately, even if it is a bit old-fashioned: It was a fine day in August 1913.

Cars shot out of narrow, deep streets into the shallowness of bright squares. Pedestrian darkness formed cloudy strings. Where thick lines of speed transgressed their loose haste, they thickened, then trickled faster and after just a few vibrations assumed their former even pulse. (...) This noise, the peculiarity of which cannot be described, is all one needs, even after years of absence and with closed eyes, to recognize that one is in the royal capital city of Vienna. Cities, like people, can be recognized by their walk. Opening his eyes, he would know the place by the rhythm of movement in the streets long before he caught any characteristic detail (Musil 1996).



Let us proceed stepwise: as it appears from the first paragraph of the passage, Musil applies a thermodynamical frame of reference in which quantitative differences obtain qualitative properties. Hence, it is crucial to notice how it is precisely the quantitative differences of intensity – that is, the differences of ‘level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential’ as Deleuze described it above – which is the quantitative *noumenon* that forces the weather to change and, thus, *gives* the qualitative *phenomenon*. It is the difference of intensity of the atmosphere that constitutes the quantitative substratum, which gives us its qualitative gestalt: ‘It was a fine day in August 1913.’

One has to take notice of the *asymmetrical* relationship or dialectics between quantity and quality: the quantitative difference that, on the one hand, conditions the atmospheric, on the other hand, ‘vanishes’ in the atmospheric quality. Deleuze explicates this asymmetrical relationship between quality and quantity with the thermodynamical distinction between ‘quantitative intensity’ and ‘qualitative extensity’ (Deleuze 1994, 223f; Delanda 2006a). Thus, the former quantity conditions the latter quality, which thus is experienced phenomenologically. In other words, it is the quantitative intensive change of pressure that causes the emergence of the atmospheric cloud formation with a particular *extension* (drawing in the sky, etc.) filled out with a certain *quality* (dark, rainy, etc.), which phenomenologically is experienced as a more or less ‘fine day in August’. Although the atmospheric cloud is given by the difference of pressure intensity, it can only be experienced phenomenologically in its qualitative extensive givenness. Thus, the catalyst of the atmosphere is, to express it with a concept borrowed from Jameson’s (1973) dialectics, a ‘vanishing mediator’: the quantitative-intensive producer is ‘cancelled’ or ‘hidden’, *in* its qualitative-extensive product (Deleuze 1994, 228).

It is such asymmetrical dialectics that a post-phenomenological approach following Deleuze has to be based upon. Contrary to phenomenology, we have to go ‘behind’ or ‘penetrate’ the conditioning intensity that gives the phenomenological given in its extensive quality. Accordingly, it is precisely this asymmetry that Musil was aware of as it is summarized by the title he gave to the quoted passage: “From which, remarkably enough, nothing develops.” That is: it is post-phenomenologically ‘remarkable’ that the quantitative intensiveness ‘from which’ the phenomenologically given ‘develops’ is canceled to ‘nothing’ in the qualitative extensity of the atmosphere. The theological event of creation *ex nihilo* is reinterpreted scientifically as *ex quanto*, but keeps its creative remarkableness.

Turning to the second paragraph of the quotation, it is furthermore essential that the city and the emergence of its particular urban atmosphere should be understood within the framework of this thermodynamical post-phenomenology. Metropolitan life consists of a pulsating flow of quantitative intensities “(...) like a boiling bubble inside a pot made up of the durable stuff of buildings (...)” (Musil 1996), which precisely constitutes the morphologically compressed or captured condition for the emergence of the unique atmospheric ‘personality’ of the city. And as Musil emphasizes, this is not a personality that reflects the ‘characteristic details’ of the urban physiognomy. Quite the contrary, and in accordance with our post-phenomenological thesis, this atmospheric personality is given morphologically as conditioned on the spatially situated and densified movements of the city: “Cities, like people, can be recognized by their walk.” This essentially sums up the intensive condition of the urban atmosphere: a city has an ‘individual’ intensive pulsation of movements and flows, which is experienced phenomenologically as the atmospheric ‘more’ whose distinct (Viennese, etc.) quality extends into and fills urban space.

### ATMOSPHERIC (SINGULAR) UNIVERSALISM: RHYTHM, AFFECT, EVENT

As I said at the outset of the paper, a concept of atmospheres should crucially be assessed on its ability to theoretically establish that atmospheres are felt in a universal way. Furthermore, it was precisely in the theoretical argumentation thereof that the insufficiency of phenomenology appeared: the physiognomic thesis that the urban atmosphere grasps you partially *independently* of the sociocultural context cannot be sustained sociologically – but only tautologically. Thus, the question is whether our post-phenomenological approach renders possible a more valid explanation for why the urban aesthetic atmospheres have an existence *sui generis*, which consequently is felt and experienced with universal affectivity.

Not surprisingly, the obvious theoretical candidate for such an aesthetic-affective universalism would be a socio-biological explanation – as is the case with Brennan's (2004) extremely influential suggestion that atmospheric universalism is due to hormonal pheromones. However fascinating, it seems reasonable to doubt this socio-biological reductionism. Thus, I instead concur with the other, more sociologically compatible, explanation of the affective universalism of atmospheres that Brennan only indicates, namely that the *body* as such is grasped affectively when crowds are moving rhythmically: "Rhythm also has a unifying, regulating role in affective exchange between two or more people." (Brennan 2004, 70). Moreover, this rhythmic thesis is a more obvious theoretical approach since rhythms precisely are Deleuze's way to conceptualize how intensification of social life takes affective root in the lived body (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 311ff; cf. also Lefebvre 2004). In other words, the rhythm is equal to the *affective* side of the intensification, which waves through the densified bodies as an emergent phenomenon: just like the wave of the ocean the rhythm is 'more' than the sum of the separate movement streams and flows. Spatio-morphologically intensified, the bodies have an autonomous rhythmic affect. With an existence *sui generis* the rhythm grasps the bodies, and thus redeems their "(...) capacity for affecting and being affected." (Deleuze 1988, 123). Being affected bodily by the rhythm *is* in this sense to be seized affectively by the urban atmosphere.

Let us exemplify this connection between the intensive rhythm of the bodies and the extensive atmospheric affects these may produce. Is it not exactly this close relationship between the spatially intensified rhythms of the body and the atmospheric affects, which Jacobs (1993, 65, 433) highlighted in her famous description of the 'sidewalk ballet'. It seems evident that this metaphor is Jacobs' way of describing the 'good' atmosphere of the metropolitan street. Space has compressed the bodies whose rhythmical dance with one another is affecting and being affected into an enjoyable atmospheric order, which is 'more' than the sum of the separate flows and dance steps by the pedestrians (Seamon 1979, 143ff). In Jacobs' description, the intensive rhythm is associated with 'positive' atmospheric affects given that the pedestrians are following the morphological 'direction of dance'. Thus, the urban dwellers are capable of enjoying the bodily rhythms oozing from the sidewalk.

This is not always the case. Obviously, space also has the morphological capacity to 'tune' the rhythm of the street *out of step*, and thus affect the body with an uncomfortable, atonal intensity. This is exactly what is at stake in Simmel's (1997) classical interpretation of how urbanism, in comparison with rural life, has 'rhythm of life' that intensifies urban life to the point of painful over-stimulation. As Simmel, in an almost Deleuzian way, formulates it, human being is a 'creature of difference' which in the city is affectively exposed towards the (...) *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli (Simmel 1997, 175). The rhythm is, in other words, also able to 'over-affect' the body and, thus, be the fertile soil for a metropolitan atmosphere – at the unpleasant edge of the affectively exaggerated.

In closing, I will conduct the crucial 'litmus test' for the present post-phenomenological attempt to reinterpret the conditions of the urban atmospheric given, namely the question of universalism. The theoretical key to such universalism is to be found in the above elaborated understanding of rhythms, and specifically, the *bodily nature* of this rhythmic intensity as the affective source of the urban atmospheres. Whereas the phenomenological argument for universalism could be disassembled sociologically, and thus be socio-structurally particularized, the universal potential of the rhythm consists in its affective effect existing beyond or on the edge of such social structuring. The rhythm puts its affective mark on the body unmediated by the socio-structural dialectics. Crucially, the affective nature of the rhythm has to be distinguished from emotions (Massumi 2002). Whereas the latter are closely interwoven with, and mediated by, the social structures (as it is well documented within sociology of emotions, see Hochschild 2003), the affects have a bodily 'autonomy' from the social structures, significations and codings. In comparison with emotion "(...) affects is unqualified" (Massumi 2002, 28), that is, by the fixed and fixing structures of the social.

Thus, the affective nature of the urban rhythm implies an 'asocial' dimension of the social interaction in the city that exempts the intensive rhythm from the sociological-dialectical critique, which rejected the alleged aesthetic universalism of phenomenology. The rhythmical affects are, and must be studied as, partially beyond the socio-structural mediations: the affective rhythm has no predetermined 'structure', but is rather to be understood as a singular 'event', which affects or seizes the body immediately (Massumi 2002, 27; Deleuze 2004, 118). In our case, this implies being affected by "(...) the metropolitan rhythm of events", as Simmel (1997, 176) anticipated it theoretically. Thus, this rhythmic affect, understood as an asocial event, is the theoretical key to the universalism of the atmospheres: "The correlation between universal and event is fundamental," as Badiou (2009, 31) puts it. Unmediated, the rhythm affects the body as an event, which compels us to feel the intensive rhythm of urban life – the bodily-affective pulsation, which constitutes an universal ontological condition for the emergence and experience of urban atmospheres. Notwithstanding socio-cultural and habituated dispositions, the body simply cannot avoid being whirled into the rhythmical affect. Formulated in a Deleuzian manner (Delanda 2006b: 29; Massumi 1997: 748), the affective rhythm is the expression of a 'singular universality' – *a felt absolute* – which atmospherically extends into urban space and thus seizes the pedestrian affectively. The very fact that the bodily rhythm cannot be utterly domesticated, mediated or territorialized socially, thus explains how it is the urban atmosphere that takes the urban dweller in its universal *possession* – and not vice versa. In other words, the paper hereby proposes that the post-phenomenological mapping out of the urban atmospheric universalism simply should advance the ancient Greek proclamation of Archilochus to urban space (West 1971, 128): "Know what sort of 'rhythm' *possesses* human beings."

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