CHAPTER 18

"The Atmospheres of Tones": Notions of Atmosphere in Music Scholarship Between 1840 and 1930

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1 Musical Evidence for Atmosphere

Hermann Schmitz concludes his extensive deliberations on perception, deliberations that fill an entire volume of his monumental and somewhat utopian *System of Philosophy*, with the emphatic statement that music is "the most telling and evident proof" that feelings (*Gefühle*) are "non-subjective atmospheres" (Schmitz 1978; my translation).[1] This claim points to the centrality of music in Schmitz's phenomenology of atmospheres (Schmitz 1969) and simultaneously tenders a new notion, if not ontology, of music: the proposition that one thinks of music *as* atmosphere (see Riedel 2015). The musical points of reference that Schmitz turns to when defining "feelings as atmospheres" consists chiefly of Johann Sebastian Bach's organ works and the *Wohltemperierte Klavier*, to

[1] Unless otherwise indicated translations from German language source material are my own. The German term Atmosphäre is translated as "atmosphere", Stimmung as "Stimmung", and Gefühl as "feeling" or "mood".

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which he elsewhere adds dance- and march music, congregational singing or breakdance. But more importantly, it is music scholarship where the philosopher finds the kind of complex argumentative material against the backdrop of which he comprehensively particularises his anti-mentalist and anti-physicalist phenomenology of the "felt-body" and his notion of "feelings as atmospheres". He discusses at length nineteenth- and twentieth-century propositions about music and feeling made by Friedrich von Hausegger, August Halm, Heinrich Schenker, Hans Mersmann, Viktor Zuckerkandl, Heinrich Besseler or Robert Francès, to name just a few. But his intervention in musicological theories of feeling becomes particularly evident when he takes issue with nineteenth-century music theorist Eduard Hanslick.

Hanslick had notably claimed, in his seminal text *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen. Ein Beitrag zur Revision der Aesthetik der Tonkunst*, first published in 1854, that it is impossible to unequivocally determine particular feelings in music. Rather, music, for him, was unmitigatedly equivocal. According to Schmitz' reading of Hanslick, the musicologist and others after him had concluded from this that music did not express, communicate or represent particular feelings, as previous scholars had averred, but, instead, music only portrayed their "general dynamic properties" (Hanslick 1854, 16; my translation). The only element that music had "in common with our feeling-states [*Gefühlszustände*]" Hanslick insisted, was the hitherto "conspicuously disregarded notion of *movement*" (ibid.). Movement, he observed, was fundamental to both music and feeling. However, movement was "only *one* of the concomitants of feeling, not the feeling itself" (ibid.). Feelings in music could therefore be alluded to through the movement patterns in music but they would remain tentative and incidental. It would hence be misleading to seek to identify particular meanings and emotions in music. If anything, music only presented "silhouettes" of feelings that were interpreted and filled with meaning by the listener (Hanslick 1854, 22). The sense of ineffability that music invoked only confirmed, for Hanslick, that music was ambiguous and polyvalent. From this he drew the controversial conclusion that feelings were not key to the understanding of music. For him the only true content (or subject) of music were *tönend bewegte Formen*, "sounding moving forms" (Hanslick 1854, 32; translation of Rothfarb, Landerer in Hanslick 2018).

Schmitz doesn't challenge Hanslick's arguments by simply introducing a new understanding of music, nor does he elaborate a new theory of feeling. In fact, he concurs with Hanslick about the centrality of movement (*Bewegung*) in both music and feeling (Schmitz 1978, 255). And he also

maintains an emphasis on form since music and sound are for Schmitz suggestive of motion in their phenomenal appearance as *Gestalt*. Ultimately, what he brings to the discussion about feelings and music is a radically different philosophical *anthropology*—in other words, his understanding of the human. In phenomenological tradition, Schmitz' human[2] is anti-dualistic: it does not consist of a physical body with a metaphysical inside where soul, spirit or autonomous consciousness can reside. Instead, Schmitz's anthropology is monistic: his whole human is *Leib*, a dynamic felt-body or a feeling body. In consequence, he vigorously rejects Hanslick's definition of feeling as a "consciousness of a boosting or restraint of the state of our soul [*Seelenzustandes*], thus a state of contentment or discomfort" (Hanslick 1854, 4; my translation). For Schmitz, Hanslick's definition is symptomatic of an ideology of *introjection* according to which feelings are located in the metaphysical inside of a human being and thus assigned the status of private inner states. The philosopher, in contrast, posits that feelings are encountered by a person as external and spatially distributed *atmospheres*. Rather than being "movements of the soul" or "psychic processes", as Hanslick had supposed, feelings, for Schmitz, are out there in the world, that is, *in* the musical and sonic events.

In making this move Schmitz is able to come up with a new solution to the problem of *ineffability*. While the speechlessness of the listener was, for Hanslick, proof that there are no explicit feelings in music, for Schmitz it attests to the fact that feelings are not internal, or subjective states. Turning Hanslick's argument around he insists that the very speechlessness in which listeners find themselves only indicates that the feelings they encounter while listening to music do not originate in themselves but must be external to them and therefore alien. It is the unfamiliarity with these feelings, their extraneousness, that makes listeners speechless rather than an inherent vagueness of feelings in music. Moreover, that persons find themselves powerfully moved yet speechless when trying to identify the feeling, Schmitz continues, is not particular to music. The feeling that is brought on by a landscape, for instance, appears equally unnameable yet substantive, vague yet powerful. It too must therefore be out there in the landscape rather than in the metaphysical eye of the beholder. Like a landscape, Schmitz contends, music does not simply communicate explicit feelings *to,* or arouse feelings *in,* a subject, but rather, feelings approach a listener in music as external powers that grip the body (*Leib*). What is

[2] Note that Schmitz considers all living beings to be *leibliche Wesen*. With regard to their "primitive present", there is no difference between animal and man.

encountered in music, according to Schmitz, is thus a "pre-subjective form of feeling". A somewhat raw feeling in its "not yet anthropocentrically organised archetypical form"—in other words: an *atmosphere* (Schmitz 1978, 260).

In this chapter, I investigate the notion of atmosphere that lies at the heart of Schmitz's argument about feelings and music. Rather than discussing "atmosphere" as a phenomenological concept in Schmitz's work, however, I first chart the semantic scope of the German term *Atmosphäre* and trace its use in music scholarship preceding Schmitz.

2 Refining a Vague Notion

Just as *Stimmung* barely developed into a stand-alone concept in nineteenth-century music writings (Klotz 2011; Welsh 2012), the notion of "atmosphere" played an even more marginal role. Thus, far from claiming that there is a coherent history to "atmosphere" as an aesthetic concept in music scholarship, the following is but an eclectic assemblage of footnotes, lectures, biographic passages and fragments of musicological treatises, in which the term atmosphere appears as a musical or acoustical concept. Faced with such inconsistent source materials, I proceed systematically by discussing the conceptual logic that is mobilised when the term atmosphere is used metaphorically or metonymically by music scholars of the long nineteenth century, namely Adolf Bernhard Marx, Adolph Kullak, Lina Ramann, Guido Adler, Oskar Bie, August Halm, Paul Bekker, Ernst Kurth and Richard Specht. In their texts, atmosphere is conceived in terms of a variety of different but overlapping ontologies: as mass, as emanation, as force, as texture, as mereological relation and as embeddedness.

With regard to recent scholarship on atmospheres, I propose two major revisions concerning the cultural history of the term. Firstly, I challenge the widely shared assumption that the aesthetic notion of atmosphere is a metaphorical appropriation of a meteorological term. A detailed reconstruction of the genealogy of the term in German tells a much more complex story of semantic shifts that, from its inception in the seventeenth century, render vague the very difference between the metaphorical and meteorological meanings of the term. As I briefly show, it is the field of medicine where the term atmosphere accrues its social semantics and its affective and aesthetic meaning. It is this medical, indeed anthropological, notion of atmosphere, that music scholars mobilise in conjunction with the meteorological concept when speaking of "musical atmospheres"

(Marx 1839) or "sound-atmospheres" (*Klangatmosphären*) (Adler 1929). Pursuing these historical-semantic shifts, I argue, affords a better understanding of the term "atmosphere" not only in the work of Schmitz but in subsequent debates about music, sound and atmosphere.

Secondly, I propose dating the emergence of atmosphere as aesthetic concept much earlier than previously assumed. While Hubertus Tellenbach (1968) and Hermann Schmitz (1969) are commonly accredited with having introduced the term into phenomenology and philosophical psychology,[3] the first systematic introduction of atmosphere as an aesthetic concept was already presented by Hugo von Hofmannsthal half a century earlier in a lecture on Shakespeare's plays in 1905. Hofmannsthal's lecture has been overlooked. This is perhaps understandable, given that it failed to strike a chord at the time, unlike a text on *Stimmung* by Georg Simmel just a few years later (1913) that actually pursues a very similar theoretical project but that became an important reference in scholarship on atmosphere and *Stimmung*. Much like Schmitz, Hofmannsthal developed his notion of atmosphere through music, suggesting once again a structural affinity between the two.

3 Sound Masses

It is only in a footnote in the *Allgemeine Musiklehre* (1839) where Adolph Bernhard Marx, influential early musicologist, composer and precursor of an "energetic" notion of music (Köhler 1996), describes the "atmospheres of tones". This footnote, a para-text to a passage on the instrument of the organ, is self-referential: as we shall learn, "atmospheres" for Marx were para-tonal yet substantial. Equally substantial were the assertions that he had relegated to the margins of his texts. In a vigorous manner he objects here to earlier theories of music that had reduced music (*Tonkunst*) to the mere arrangement of tones (*Töne*) into melody and harmony and that had regarded sound or resonance (*Schall*), timbre (*Klang*) and even rhythm as extraneous (Marx 1839, 174–175). The organ, however, did not seem to fit into this reductive ontology of music. The organ stops (mixtures), that added multiple additional partials to a fundamental pitch for any particular key, did not operate at the level of simple "tones" but at that of complex

[3] While the notion of "atmosphere as feeling" appears, of course, in earlier writings, as well as for instance in Willy Hellpach's Geopsyche from 1939, these two works by Tellenbach and Schmitz use the term atmosphere more systematically as a phenomenological concept.

spectra: they altered the "sound-mass" (*Schallmasse*) of a tone. They were not tonal themselves but embedded each "fundamental tone" in an "atmosphere of harmonics" (see also Marx 1847, 11). This "atmosphere" of tones could furthermore transform "the entire space of air" into "resonant matter" (*mitklingende Materie*) and had the capacity to powerfully "grip the listener". This observation was not reducible to the spatial expanse of the church, nor to the instrument of the organ itself. Marx remarked that the multifarious musical figures in a massive fortissimo performed by the middle-voices of a symphonic orchestra were equally not about melody or harmony but operated on an atmospheric level by "yielding" an "indivisible" "tone- and sound-mass" (*Ton- und Schallmasse*) that Marx describes as "presiding" (*walten*) over the musical occasion. Far from being peripheral to music, however, this material atmosphere was for Marx the very "fullness of being" (*Fülle des Wesens*) of tones that would otherwise remain "abstract" and "dry" (Marx 1839, 175).

But this is not all. Marx went on to argue that such "atmosphere" was not simply about the texture of overtones in which the (fundamental) tones were "enveloped". Atmosphere itself even generated tones by means of the very vibrations of air. These emergent *combination tones* were audible to the listener as musical atmosphere, even though they were not being performed by any one instrument of the orchestra. Marx's para-tonal atmosphere was thus also extra-textual. Indeed, it indicated the crucial difference between notated tones and the audible musical events. Moreover, since he envisioned the auditory atmosphere as materialising in the very moment and locus of performance, it rendered the listener critical and co-productive to the unfolding of the musical event. In short, Marx's insistence on the relevance of timbre, resonance and "sound-mass" as essential to the "art of tones", that is to (the experience of) music, flew in the face of Eduard Hanslick's subsequent proclamation of the autonomy of music.

Marx's quasi-metaphoric appropriation of the term, which he elaborated through references to air, thunder and light, considered "atmosphere" according to three different parameters. Firstly, atmosphere was a *para-tonal* dimension. It was distinct from the tones (conceived according to a logic of notes or organ keys) in that it added to a fundamental tone a spectrum of harmonics, literally "accompanying-tones" (*Beitöne*). Marx treated such sonic atmosphere as fundamental, not as subsidiary, to the ways in which tones (music) would "approach [*entgegentreten*] and engage the listener". Secondly, atmosphere was, by analogy to air, and in contrast

to "abstract tones", ultimately spatial, material and, furthermore, indivisible (*unzergliedert*). Thirdly, it was with regard to its material but aerial texture that the atmosphere of tones was described as all-powerful and as presiding over the musical occasion and even capable of exercising an "all-powerfully grip" upon the listener. Marx even uses the idiom "*schalten und walten*" (operate at will, preside over, prevail) that was used to describe the absolute agency of an almighty god or of a person of authority. This grip, however, should not be read here as a form of spiritual or disembodied arousal. Even though Marx was committed to a spirit-centred Hegelian idealism and would even be celebrated posthumously by Carl Dahlhaus as the founder of the theory of musical form (Köhler 1996, 10), he emphatically insisted that the body was crucial to musical appreciation. The "miraculous effects of music (*Tonkunst*)", he insisted, were due to its capacity "to affect the human in entirety", that is, the entire body (and not just the ear), soul, sentiments and ideas. Furthermore, the musical stimuli of the nervous system, that is of the body, were "sanctified" (*geheiligt*) by their capacity to mediate between the "sound-mass" and the soul, that is, by transmitting tones into the "secret depth" where they "touch the foundation or bottom of our being [*Dasein*]" (Marx 1839, 357; my translation).[4]

4 Atmosphere Between Meteorology and Medical Science

To understand Marx's extensive footnote on musical atmospheres, it is necessary to enquire further into the etymology and historical usage of the term *Atmosphäre* in German. The "*atmo-sphaera*", from Greek ἀτμός-σφαῖρα, first defined in 1638 by polymath John Wilkins as an "Orb of gross, Vaporous Air immediately encompassing the Body of the Moon" (Wilkins cited in Lewis 2012, 2) soon became a curious scientific object

[4] It would be wrong to read Marx's footnote in terms of a physicalist notion of sound—that is, as acoustic vibration and in terms of a physiological understanding of auditory perception. Marx had insisted that in contrast to the senses of taste and touch, the sense of hearing does not register sound as raw matter, which is then assembled into meaningful *Gestalt* in the soul, *Gemüt* (psychic state), or mind of the listener. Rather, the auditory world already appears as a holistic *Gestalt*, and it is this *Gestalt* that the ear grasps and transmits "into" the human listener, where it resonates with their inner movements that animate *Dasein* (Marx 1855, 49). In doing so, Marx avoids the challenge, that others such as Hanslick faced, of having to explain how a physical auditory stimulus translated into meaningful music.

scrutinised at length by natural philosopher Robert Boyle. The neologism was quickly adapted by German scholarship. But in crossing the linguistic boundary, it also traversed into another scholarly field, namely medicine. German physician Johann Jacob Woyt referred to Boyle when he attempted a definition of *Atmosphaera* in his *Gazophylacium Medico-Physicum* (Woyt 1709), a German-language medical encyclopaedia and standard reference of its time. Here in much more general terms—that is, without any reference to the moon or planets—"atmosphere" referred to effluvia and material aerial substances (*Theilgen*) that would inevitably "emanate from each and every body and ascend into the air" (Woyt 1709, 99; my translation). In later medical and pharmaceutical texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, atmosphere was then primarily used to refer to precisely those effluvia that emanated from the human body.

Depending on its use in medicine and meteorology, the term atmosphere acquired two distinct but overlapping meanings. Both meanings are given in the 1793 edition of the first major German dictionary, by Johann Christoph Adelung, but they can also be traced through numerous medical and meteorological books. In its meteorological meaning, atmosphere referred to the sphere surrounding celestial bodies that, in the case of Planet Earth, also marked the realm of existence for all living beings. Thus, for those populating the surface of the planet, the Earth's atmosphere was the ubiquitous *medium* of their dwelling, movement and existence. The pneumatic substance of life. By the early nineteenth century, the notion of atmosphere as climatic medium and sphere of collective existence became mobilised as metaphor to refer to the intellectual, spiritual but also moral environment and its influence upon the individual. In this vein, Lina Ramann (1833–1912), a biographer of Franz Liszt and a rare woman scholar in an age that grossly undervalued most female contributions, mentioned "intellectual (*geistige*) atmospheres". She described the atmospheres of the upper classes and atmospheres of particular times and places. She understood these as having a strong bearing on a musician's development: either hindering or stimulating the creative process. In much the same way, Marx had envisioned the ideal artist as being driven by an urge to lift himself up into a "free atmosphere of art" (Marx 1838, 507), and argued that the "spirit of the artist" would dissipate in the "stifling atmosphere of the salon" (Marx 1837, 186). Moreover, composers were tasked with capturing the "spiritual and emotional atmosphere of their era" in their musical works (Specht 1921, 18). This notion of atmosphere referred to a somewhat disembodied sentiment, a mentality in which the spirit of an individual was embedded. Such notions of atmosphere

as zeitgeist or moral environment were not particular to writings on music but common tropes across the humanities of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, this decidedly metaphorical notion of atmosphere fitted all too well into the metaphysics of the humanities of the day where music became a pivotal "metaphor of transcendence, something conceptual, disembodied and intangible" (Trippett 2013, 5).

The medical notion of atmosphere must however be distinguished from this meteorological atmosphere and its metaphysical associations with a spiritual sphere. In medicine, atmosphere referred to the aerial, elastic, magnetic and electric effluvia that emanated from and enveloped the human body, in fact, *any* sentient and non-sentient body—just as celestial bodies would cast vaporous stuff (Woyt 1709; Adelung 1793). These individual "atmospheres", in which people were seamlessly enshrouded as if by invisible aerial matter, were, in a parallel to galenic *humours,* indicative not only of the medical or physiological condition of a human being but also of their feeling-states, their social status and gender. Rather than being ambient media of dwelling and existence these atmospheres were media of *appearance* and *presence*. It was by way of their bodily effluvia that the character of someone or something became tangible. One's feelings could literally be smelt as room-filling atmospheres. In the poetic and aesthetic use of the term from the late eighteenth century onwards, as, for instance, in Christoph Martin Wieland's *Musarion*, atmospheric scent and atmospheric sensuality came to stand in metonymic proximity rather than in metaphorical distance. Moreover, in contrast to the meteorological meaning of atmosphere as ambient air which, by its very omnipresence, had no centre or location in space, atmosphere-as-effluvia implied the idea of a clear centre, which, at the same time, constituted the material source of its emanation.

5 Musical Emanations

Referring to weather phenomena such as thunder and lightning, Adolph Bernhard Marx invokes, in part, the meteorological semantics of atmosphere. But, ultimately, it is the meaning of atmosphere as bodily effluvia, with all its medical and social connotations, that Marx mobilised when he construed the timbral and harmonic dimensions of a musical event as forming an "atmosphere" around tones. According to this logic, the overtones and the sound-mass "emanated" from the fundamental pitch and endowed it with character (*Wesen*) just as the atmosphere surrounding a person was characteristic of that person. Marx's use of the term "atmosphere" here is

reminiscent of that of Johann W. von Goethe, who observed in his conclusion to *Elective Affinities* that "character, individuality, inclination, tendency, locality, circumstance, and habits, form together a whole, in which every man moves [*schwimmt*] as in an atmosphere" (Goethe 1809, 309). Even though the water-metaphor here seems to imply a logic of atmosphere as environment, Goethe's atmosphere remains anthropocentric and bound to the person. To him, "atmosphere" was a medium that conveyed something *about* that person, namely their character. It is in this sense that the acoustic emanations Marx described were not just unqualified auditory matter but conveyed the tones' character (*Fülle des Wesens*) or affective essence. Thus, atmospheres had an epistemic function that exceeded the notatable pitch. Moreover, as corporeal atmosphere was spatial and expansive, so did the atmosphere of tones fill a space. What distinguished Marx's musical atmosphere from the corporeal atmosphere surrounding human bodies, however, was their primary sensual register. Marx transposed the notion of atmosphere-as-effluvia from the olfactory to the auditory realm. What provided the semantic confluence between the two was air and its uncertain status between materiality and immateriality. The notion of atmosphere, however, recognised the (quasi-)material texture of sound and scent. Just as one was bodily involved in an olfactory atmosphere in the presence of another human body, so were auditory atmospheres of tones, the acoustic emanations, capable of gripping a listener.

Since the emanations of atmospheric matter endowed a body with character, it comes as no surprise that this notion of atmosphere was also transposed into the context of stage performance. Not only were aspects of sound and resonance considered atmospheric envelopments here, but the whole of a musical situation was described as being atmospheric. Conceiving of music as atmosphere, Marx described the musical accompaniment required for the scene of Euphorion in Goethe's *Faust II* as Euphorion's "unique and own atmosphere" (Marx 1845, 385). Just as the sound-mass endowed the individual tones and thus music with atmospheric character, so did music provide Euphorion, the character on stage, with his own unique atmosphere.

It is critical to note that Marx's "atmosphere" had not yet fully acquired the meaning of "feeling" or "mood" but, instead, referred to the character of something, that which made a tone distinctive and particular beyond its designated pitch (see also Spitzer 1942). His "atmospheres", in other words, were not just vague feelings in the air but made tangible the *individuality* of a character or of a tone.

6 Acousmatic Music and Virtual Emanations

By the beginning of the twentieth century, "atmosphere" had become a popular term in germanophone scholarship on opera. In his discussion of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, Oskar Bie, who taught aesthetic theory at the Berlin music academy, wrote that the timbre or sound (*Klang*) of the trumpet and a C-major motive endowed the character Florestan with an "atmosphere much greater than the entire stage" (Bie 1913, 221). In a similar vein, dramatist and musicologist Richard Specht described Pogner, in Wagner's Meistersinger, as being placed in a "music-atmosphere [*Musikatmosphäre*] that suits him" (Specht 1921, 230).

If we consider *atmosphere-as-bodily-emanation* as the source domain for its now more clearly metaphoric appropriation here, then the music-atmosphere that Bie and Specht observed on the opera stage came about through an act of *transference* or *substitution*. It was not the singing voice, which literally issued forth from the body of the operatic singer, that manifested an atmosphere about him. It was instead the musical sound of the trumpet or the orchestra at large that endowed the character on stage with atmospheric qualities. The corporeal source of the musical atmosphere was not identical with the acoustic source of the musical sound, namely the instruments. In fact, as the instruments were neatly hidden in the orchestra pit, they could only be heard but not seen. It was precisely in this acousmatic setting, with the orchestra hidden, that the source of the musical atmosphere could be transposed to the body of the singer. Brian Kane quotes an anonymous commentator who in 1826 emphatically remarked: "how much more atmospheric music becomes when it resounds unseen" (Kane 2014, 111).[5] Here, however, it is not simply a dematerialisation and thus transcendence of acousmatic music that renders music atmospheric, as Kane argues. Rather, in the substitution of the source of atmospheric and sonic emanation, the musical sound of the orchestra, separated from its visual moorings, could virtually emanate from the singer's body where it somehow re-materialised as *his* or *her* atmosphere. Just as individual atmospheres produced by corporeal effluvia were indicative of the medical and psychological state of a person, so was the musical atmosphere, in which a character on stage was enveloped, indicative of their state of

[5] As I could not access the original source it remained unclear to me if the term Atmosphäre is used in the original text. I assume that this is not the case, which however does not affect the argument I put forth here.

feeling. For this reason, the acousmatic sound of opera music had a strong tendency to be atmospheric. In retrospect one might argue that the church organ, the model for Marx's musical atmosphere, was atmospheric for equally acousmatic reasons. The organ, embedded in a church's architecture and often not in direct sight of the congregation—the static pipes could be seen but mostly not the movement of organist, keys or pedals—organ music permitted an acousmatic situation of atmospherically spatialised intensity that pervaded the church. In referring to the acousmatic relation between operatic singer and orchestra, the notion of atmosphere accrued the semantics of feeling and mood much more clearly. It is significant, however, that these feelings were not those of the audience, nor of the musicians, nor of the composer. Instead, the musical atmosphere was a *mode* of affective musical and sonic appearance of the characters on stage in their dramaturgical situations.

7 Composing Atmospheric Textures

The "sound-atmosphere" (*Klangatmosphäre*) that an orchestra could "weave around the plot" or around "the mimic action", as Austrian musicologist Guido Adler phrased it (Adler 1929, 1066; my translation), didn't just operate at the nexus between the audible and the visual, between the body of the actor or singer and the musical sound of the orchestra. For Bie, the atmosphere as "surrounding sphere of emanation" could also be located within music itself. Thus, the vibrant semiquaver beats, for instance, performed by the orchestra that accompanied the singing voice of Belmont in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio,* disseminated an "indescribably suggestive atmosphere", not just around the performer who embodied the character Belmont on stage but "around the melody of his voice" (Bie 1913, 161; my translation). Influential music critic Paul Bekker, who in his music-phenomenology had propounded a decidedly materialist understanding of music as physical sound (*Klang*), defined "atmosphere" in line with its original medical meaning as the "fluidity [*fluidum*] of a human's character". Mobilising this notion, he then remarked on Debussy's dramatic works that the orchestra would become the "atmosphere of the singer's voice" by providing it with harmonies (Bekker 1934, 148; my translation). Here, it is not simply music that is ascribed with atmospheric potency, but Bekker and Bie used the term atmosphere, as had Marx, to refer to particular compositional techniques—techniques that had the capacity to endow a musical phenomenon, for instance, a melody or a

particular voice, with a characteristic musical atmosphere. Here too, the "vibrant atmosphere" (Bie 1913, 255) was not simply "in the air" as an ambient medium, but pertained to something distinct from itself, which it charged with meaningfulness and whose sphere of presence it marked: a stage persona, a singer's voice, a melody or, for Marx, even just a single tone.

8 Mereological Relations: Atmosphere as Aesthetic Concept in 1905

Although "atmosphere" was widely used in poetic and theoretical writings on music from around the turn of the twentieth century, it did not develop into a firmly established concept in music scholarship. As previously mentioned, the first to advance "atmosphere" as a strictly aesthetic concept in its own right was Austrian novelist Hugo von Hofmannsthal. His 1905 lecture about "atmosphere" in Shakespeare's plays, delivered at the annual meeting of the German Shakespeare Society in Weimar, consequently deserves more attention here. This is also because it highlights yet another important structural aspect of atmosphere, namely what I have come to term *mereology,* the study of whole-part-relationships (Riedel 2019).

While literary scholars had been fond of discussing the characters of Shakespeare's plays in their own right, dissecting the whole into parts "as if the characters stood in an airless space", Hofmannsthal urged his audience to "see and feel" "the whole", the shared "*Dasein*", that is, the ways in which the characters are each related not just to each other but "to all others". This "whole", according to Hofmannsthal's poetical elaboration, was "soaked by music"; or, as he puts it about Shakespeare's romantic plays, "all issues forth into this music, all abandons itself to music" (Hofmannsthal 1905, XIII). This musical whole, which, Hofmannsthal remarked, is termed "*l'ambiente* in Italian", was best approximated by the "vague" term *atmosphere* (Hofmannsthal 1905, XIX). The particular atmosphere that animated Shakespeare's plays in their entirety, Hofmannsthal claimed, was *nobility*, in fact, "a feeling of nobility". To Hofmannsthal, nobility was not the social status of an individual, but an atmosphere that was felt by all: a feeling in which all characters were dissolved (Hofmannsthal 1905, XXII). This feeling embedded all characters in class relations that exceeded themselves; nobility was the very "air they breathed", the "living space" in which they existed, the shared vital "element" from which they "emerged", "the space between them", "the

ensemble", "the whole": "the atmosphere". Hofmannsthal used the term atmosphere to refer to the affective sphere emanating from and enveloping individual bodies as if they were shrouded in festive music (Hofmannsthal 1905, XIII). But he also activated another aspect of the original meteorological concept, one that is actually more dominant today: namely its definition as *aerial medium* in which not just one but a multiplicity of bodies was embedded.

Hofmannsthal's lecture attempts to systematically establish "atmosphere" as an aesthetic concept (Hofmannsthal 1905, XIX). Though curiously ignored by later atmospherological treatises, it is emblematic in its reliance on references to music and sound. In this endeavour, atmosphere and music turn out to be coextensive. While in the first half of his lecture, music epitomises the aesthetic effect of Shakespeare's drama, the musical metaphors become redundant with the introduction of the term "atmosphere". "I could speak of the music of the whole, or of a harmony, of a soulfulness [*Durchseelung*]" "this imponderable, this impalpable, this nothingness that yet is everything […] I would like to term: the atmosphere" (Hofmannsthal 1905, XX, XIX; my translation). What warrants for Hofmannsthal the interchangeable use of "music" and "atmosphere" is their structural similarity. For Hofmannsthal, both music and atmosphere operate on the level of the "whole" by way of embedding and rendering individual characters of a play or tones in a musical piece in an all-encompassing feeling or mood. Out of this structural resemblance, Hofmannsthal crafts a long list of analogies between music and the play. Just as each pitch was embedded in, and related to, "the melodic whole" (Hofmannsthal 1905, XIII), so was each character in Shakespeare's plays entrenched in, and emergent from, the atmospheric feeling of "nobility". And just as the atmosphere of "nobility" afforded the whole play with a character or mood, so was the "whole music"[6] permeated and characterised by a thematic material (Hofmannsthal 1905, XVII). Similarly, just as a chorus or rhythm could draw a musical event together and evoke its "wholeness" (Hofmannsthal 1905, XVII), so were the characters brought to life in an atmosphere that constituted their world as a whole. Thus, the "solemn and sublime tones" in Beethoven's Symphonies were not to be identified as individual "characters" or motifs in their own right. Rather, these "sublime tones" corresponded to the general sense or mode of roy-

[6] Note that Hofmannsthal simply uses the term "music" when referring to the whole instead of terms such as "composition" or "work" (*Werk*).

alty and nobility in Shakespeare's plays or to the use of light and colour in the work of Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens: they were the affective *matter* in which the music unfolded rather than individualised and simply juxtaposed tonal figures (Hofmannsthal 1905, XVIII).

What lies at the heart of Hofmannsthal's attempt to establish atmosphere as a concept is hence the discovery of whole-part-relationships both in Shakespeare's plays and in the act of reading them. Each play was held together not simply by the logic of the plot, but by an ambient feeling; a feeling that permeated and animated the whole play and that could not simply be localised in any one of the characters. Nor was the atmosphere simply the background against which the figures would stand out but atmosphere referred to an aesthetic texture where the very figure-ground relationship had collapsed. In Hofmannsthal's account, atmospheres are thus ultimately *mereological* phenomena. And the epistemic tool to introduce them is, for the poet, music. To Hofmannsthal, music and atmosphere were both structured mereologically, in that each part—be it a tone, sound or motive in a musical event or, in the case of the play, a character, scene or gesture—was related to the whole of the event. This occurred firstly by taking part in the atmosphere of the whole event and secondly by embodying or reflecting its overarching atmosphere. In effect, atmosphere or music wielded an authority over the individual characters (see also Griffero 2014). The sociologist Georg Simmel, who only a few years later discussed both "*Stimmung*" and "atmosphere" in the same mereological vocabulary as Hofmannsthal, would even insist that the *unity* of a landscape and the *atmosphere* of a landscape are, in fact, the same. For Simmel, it was the very feeling of *Stimmung* that produced the unity of music, plays, landscapes and persons (Simmel 1913).

9 Embedding in Music, Dissolving in Sound

This mereological aspect of atmosphere was widely invoked when the term was used in music scholarship, not least because music was equally analysed in a mereological terminology. Composer and music educator August Halm, for instance, compared the sonata to a bureaucracy: "The individual, that is the theme, the melody [in the Sonata], is not a being in its own right […] instead it is employed, consumed […]. It has its position and function within the whole […]; it is held together by the atmosphere of the whole event" (Halm 1913, 252; my translation). In this rather relational notion of atmosphere, atmospheric effects in music were precisely

those that evoked a sense of unity, ubiquity and wholeness. Thus, music was not atmospheric per se. Rather, those improvisational and compositional techniques and styles that emphasised the unity of a musical event or the affective cohesion of an artistic performance were prone to evoke atmosphere. For this reason, the notion of atmosphere immediately promised to be fertile in the study of opera, which Richard Wagner had celebrated as *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Already in 1858, Alfred Kullak had insisted that *Stimmung*—a term that can be found in the writings of Friedrich Vischer (1857) or Theodor Lipps (1903) in collocation with "atmosphere" as *Stimmungs-atmosphäre* or *atmosphärische Stimmung*—was irreducible to the music but was rooted in the integrated whole of the arts. In a Hegelian manner Kullak asserted that "nothing individual is the highest, only the whole" (Kullak 1858, 272; my translation). But operatic action and voices were also framed as atmosphere and in mereological terms against such idealist metaphysics of the musical whole. In the historical analysis of *The Transformations of the Opera* (*Die Wandlungen der Oper*) by Bekker, who had defined music in materialist terms as sound-perception (*Klangempfindung*), atmosphere almost reaches the status of a key term. Giving primacy to music, and distancing himself from Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Bekker identified precisely those musical structures as atmospheric that operated on the level of the whole operatic event and permeated an entire performance. Choirs in Carl Maria von Weber's operas were, for instance, an "atmospheric element of the plot": the vastness of the sound of the numerous and indistinguishable voices absorbed the total picture (*Gesamtbild*) of the work and thus "mirrored" the work as a whole (Bekker 1934, 50). Bekker's observations regarding the French *opéra-comique* were even closer to Hofmannsthal's concerns. The characters in these French operas were not "singular and distinctive" but would "become themselves atmosphere". Ascribing these atmospheric characters with dramatic function, Bekker emphatically states that "milieu, scent and sound—in particular the voice—are part of the human action" (Bekker 1934, 129; my translation). Similarly, in the energetic theory of music of swiss musicologist Ernst Kurth, atmosphere became a critical notion. In his endeavour to re-think music in terms of dynamic motion, that is in a monistic ontology of kinetic energy, Kurth described impressionistic music in mereological terms and concluded that what was so characteristic about musical impressionism was that individual sounds were dissolved in "sound-atmospheres" (*Klangatmosphären*) (Kurth 1920, 360; see

also Kurth 1931, 141); just as Hofmannsthal had phrased that the individual figures in Shakespeare's play would dissolve in the atmosphere of nobility.

So, in contrast to a metaphysical understanding of musical wholeness and unity that referred to music as a reified composition, a through-composed piece (*Werk*), atmosphere here seems to account for a sonorous cohesion of the musical event in its phenomenal appearance. Accordingly, atmosphere could also encompass the situational setting in which music was performed. Writing much earlier, Lina Ramann, otherwise strongly influenced by nineteenth-century idealism, had ascribed the "background atmosphere" of a salon with the capacity to transform the music performed there. According to the respective atmospheres of different localities "the same tone or music sounded different in the salon of the parvenu than it did in the salons of educated society" (Ramann 1880, 401; my translation). Far from being autonomous, music here didn't just evoke a particular atmosphere but was itself modulated by the social and spatial setting. It was embedded in, and mediated by, the specificities of class and location as a whole. In turn, the Salon and its class distinctions were invoked in the very act of listening.

10 Conclusion

In the metonymic and metaphoric appropriation of the term atmosphere in scholarship on music and sound, atmosphere oscillated between, the immaterial and the material. From the medical concept of atmosphere as emanation, a notion of atmosphere was transposed into the auditory sphere according to which a musical element, be it a tone, a melody or a singer on stage emanated a musical atmosphere which in turn endowed them with character—either as a material emanation or, in situations of acousmatic listening, as virtual emanation. Where the meteorological notion of atmosphere as all-encompassing and all-pervasive seamless medium was invoked in music writings, it was the unity of a musical event that the notion of atmosphere referred to. It was however not only the ingenious composition of tones (*Töne*, in the sense of audible pitch) that in their artistic arrangement formed an aesthetic and ideal whole. Rather, when music scholars used the term "atmosphere" and appealed to its mereological meaning, they tackled the affective indivisibility of the musical sound event in performance—namely when music manifested as sound-mass, as seamless texture, as flow of tones (*Töne*) or as tangible

room-filling sonic matter, all of which were deemed essential to the "art of tones". A fundamental assumption operative in theories of music (*Tonkunst*) was that tones were singular in themselves and, as such, could form endless artistic permutations. The term atmosphere, in contrast, was called upon when addressing those musical parameters that were indivisible and could not easily be measured, parameters such as timbre (*Klang*) or sound-mass (*Schall*). Atmosphere made an appearance at the point where tones (*Töne*) lost their autonomy as individualised atoms of a musical whole. And maybe it is not a surprise that concerns about the materiality of musical sound met with mereological observations in the notion of atmosphere.

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