

ONE

Quasi-Things Come and Go and We Cannot Wonder Where They've Been (Starting from the Wind)¹

Things as a Prototype

Provided that we do not act like the Thracian servant-girl when she saw Thales fall into the well, dismissing the whole issue with a laugh, it is far from easy to say what a quasi-thing is. First of all, it is not easy to say what a *thing* is (strictly speaking) and how it is perceived.² One can be contented with resorting to a natural (but actually very historical) definition of it as a “substratum of properties.” Alternatively, one may try in vain to circumvent the issue by evoking the dizzying but frankly useless Heideggerian view of the thing in a non-representative but remembering sense (the thing as a question or as what is, as what is produced or represented)—that is, its thinging, understood as the “gathering-appropriating staying of the fourfold” (Heidegger, 1971, 172)—namely, earth, sky, mortals, and divinities. In any case, the issue of an exhaustive definition of “thing” is far from resolved. In fact, for an adequate phenomenology of things (even just material ones), it is not enough to quarrel about some object, as Heidegger sarcastically points out to Göttingen’s phenomenologists (“for a whole semester Husserl’s students argued about how a mailbox looks,” [Heidegger, 1999, 86]). However, it is not enough either to sit in a hut in the Black Forest and auratically invoke the unthought-of thinging made possible by the

worlding (*obscurum per obscurius!*). Nor is it enough to dramatize the aspectuality—that is, the infinity of adumbrations that, like a blank bill that cannot be collected, prevents the table perceived—which in philosophy is usually (and not surprisingly) a desk—from rising to absolute givenness.³ In the same way, one cannot just investigate the desk in the immanent meaningfulness deriving from the going about things it finds itself in,⁴ stigmatizing supposedly pure descriptivity as a failed description. Nor can one distinguish the desk “reduced” to a self-identical thing from its Heraclitean appearance, stubbornly changing according to the direction, the distance, the light, the perceiver’s felt-bodily⁵ state, and so forth.⁶

All of this is really not enough for a philosophy that aims to be neo-phenomenologically understood (Hermann Schmitz) as a reflection on how one feels in a certain environment and, at the same time, as an aesthetical-aesthesiological investigation (Gernot Böhme) on the atmospheric effectiveness of things and situations. First of all—overcoming the existential narrowness of the philosophers who seemingly regard only books and old desks as things, as shown by their examples—we must rather *leave* the desk. Once we’ve done that, we can devote ourselves—if not to housework, which is still phenomenologically more instructive than expected⁷—at least to beings (natural or not) that are vaguer than the solid, three-dimensional, cohesive, contoured, identified, and persistent ones prevailing in the usual ontologies. The latter are rooted in the guiding images of our common sense and language, which are far from neutral in identifying the type and number of regions it is *possible* to access in the logic of parsimony and reduction of complexity.⁸ In other words, we can examine holes and shadows, clouds and waves, atmospheres and (why not) the wind. Investigating the wind, intentionally exploiting what usually occurs only after the disturbance of conventional things, I will therefore try to focus on the legitimacy of the presence of quasi-things within a phenomenologically legitimate ontological inventory.

But before we turn to the wind and expose ourselves to its blowing, some clarifications are needed. There is no doubt that everyday life is very much affected by entities that are not exactly things,⁹ especially those subjective facts that—while obviously not counting as beings and therefore not increasing their number—are the ones that give life to a flattened world in which analytical rationality chooses stability over fluidity: in other words, a world reduced to a mere sum of material objects or, even worse, to a bundle of atomic particles. However, it is also out of question that things proper are pragmatically more important. In fact,

mostly following objectually guaranteed practical-instrumental intentions, we rarely pay attention to the nuances of the qualities we encounter: for instance, who would ever wonder about the exact tone of red of a streetlight? Differently put, we inadvertently “reduce” the wealth of appearances, including mere chromatic fluxes and evanescent impressions, to easily identifiable and usable entities. Of course, such things, which we segment reality into for pragmatic reasons, are not simply present-at-hand (material things) but mostly ready-to-hand (tools) referring to something other, as in early Heidegger’s tool-oriented ontology.¹⁰ However, this hardly affects the primacy of things, given that also when it comes to the innerworldly ready-to-hand, the “what thing” replaces the fleeting “what” of mere sensible presence, also thanks to a largely conventional crypto-semiosis that is little certified by appearance. In short, such presence is truly felt only when perceptual engagement, as in Hegel’s example of the sculpture’s thousand eyes, seems to be ascribable not to the perceiver but to the perceived.¹¹ Hence the legitimate doubts exemplarily expressed in 1910 by an early Husserlian:

Phenomena seem to be solid and resistant, but why should solid and resistant mean real? Phenomena do not show any stable delimitation, but why should the real be stably delimited? Phenomena come and go without leaving a trace, but why should the real leave traces? Phenomena cannot be grasped or weighed, but why should the real be able to be grasped and weighed? [. . .] I do not find any principle by which things should be the real. I do not find any principle by which daylight and a foot’s distance should present us the world as it is. Why shouldn’t twilight and a thousand feet’s distance present us the world more exactly? (Schapp, 1981, 95)

If one were to follow this suggestion to the end, so that the variable and the ephemeral, the fluid and the vague—even pareidolias in carpets, walls, and clouds¹²—are taken to be both no less “real” than the permanent and more expressive than normal things, the access to quasi-things would lose part of its problematic character. Indeed, one should not neglect the challenging character of perceptive chaos (risen to the legitimately ontological nature of the world and not reduced to our epistemic deficit with some reductionist strategy), calling for the good old things or—as Schapp himself disappointingly does—for the autonomous

power to bound inherent to the form and the idea,¹³ with an inevitably Platonic expedient.¹⁴ On the contrary, one should rely on the argument that, if not all that (epistemically) exists appears, all that appears surely (phenomenologically) exists, and, being perceived, it is also public and intersubjective by principle.

But ever since the Platonic exemplification of the *eidos* in beds and bridles, as well as the Aristotelian identification of *tode ti* and *ousia* with respectively a determined being and an autonomous and lasting substance that cannot be predicated on anything else, the prevailing Western *forma mentis* has been privileging things both in science and in common sense (linguistically favoring nouns).¹⁵ Things are roughly taken to be tangible and well-determined entities with a regular shape that, being three dimensional, cannot be exhausted by their representations. They are harmonious in their parts, which are not too distant or different both materially (cohesion) and qualitatively (homogeneity). They can be singled out and therefore, unlike substances,¹⁶ they can be measured based on their genus and species (individuation).¹⁷ They have a continued existence (persistence) and peculiar spatial-temporal properties. Such things, perhaps transcendently possible only if the analysis is temporally detached from the synthesis,¹⁸ probably gather the projection of the ideal in-itself that a constantly threatened being like a human feels to be lacking. Human beings, in their reistic deflationism, further “reduce” things to mythical substrates represented by “(inter-momentary and intersubjectively identifiable and manipulable) characters that are derived from the sensualistic reduction understood as the basis for abstraction and induction (for example the so-called sensitive primary qualities according to Locke)” (Schmitz, 1990, 216).

As we are beginning to note, all this happens at the expense of phenomenologically much more present entities such as situations (salient, albeit confused) and, at least in my sense, atmospheres. That is it happens at the expense of quasi-things, which as such are much more frequent than, say, abstract beings such as numbers or the mythical “data” whose growing immaterial spectrality allegedly entails an epochal and disturbing overcoming of the thing-like.¹⁹ In other words, this happens at the expense of the quasi-things we perceive unwillingly—and this unwillingness is another dimension that (non-coincidentally) was removed by natural sciences in their obsession with aetiology and prognosis.²⁰ And yet, these quasi-things are the only reason for the very welcome polychromy of our life world. So if we abandon the epistemological and pragmatic aversion to beings that do not respect borders (primarily

between the external and internal world), it is easy to discover instead that these quasi-things²¹—no less mesoscopic than ordinary things in their (phenomenological) independence from (epistemologically) micro- or macroscopic basic entities—brightly colonize a vast territory in between the (so-called) qualia and things in the proper sense. However, as I have said, we must resist the recurring temptation to remove them, whether by forcedly turning them into things²² (for example, by reifying distal vagueness at all costs) or by tracing them back to perceptions so chaotic and decontoured that they are as anomalous (if not pathological) as experimentally produced ones.²³

Of course I have no intention to disregard the representational advantages of a clear thing perception. Allowing for the subsumption of any of percept under genera,²⁴ it mitigates the anxiety provoked by the incessant change of our qualia. Perception, in fact, “is tranquil at once when things are given in a favorable way, but if that doesn’t happen, there is a moment of disquiet. Even at a distance, perception seems to refer to things. It searches in such a way as to find something that resists its gaze” (Schapp, 1981, 75–76). Yet it should be noted that this perception of things, as if they were independent sovereign states, is nothing but the identification (to an extent even false) of something with its most usual form of appearance.²⁵ And surely it is not the sole kind of perception, nor is it the primary one. In the aesthesiological field, for example, the things normally considered superfluous are certainly the most interesting—the effects of light and reflections rather than thing-like clarity—obviously not only because they are essential to the perception of the thing, which to some extent they are dependent on, but because of their vagueness and transience, fluidity and lack of borders—in short, for the non-subjective and non-projective atmospherichness they generate.²⁶

Proximity and brightness are undoubtedly the conditions of possibility, not surprisingly epistemologically privileged by modern technoscience, of our habitual world of things, beyond which everything actually blurs and liquefies. But the fact that things are normally thought of, for example, without shadows and at no distance, or rather only at the epistemically most advantageous distance, doesn’t mean that this should be a normative instance adequate to quasi-things (can we say that we perceive twilight better or worse at different times?). Also, quasi-things are not simply the outcome of the inaccuracy (due to extrafocality or poor attention) of the normal distal perception, nor are they the mere higher-order context of things acting as their “reference scheme”.²⁷ If that were the case, given the fact that every component of the environment

can occasionally be seen as thing-like, quasi-things would always only be relatively such, becoming a thing at a higher-order level space.

The decision to investigate quasi-things is almost a philosophical “luxury” that I here claim to be necessary. It is not at all the product of an extravagant mereological conjunctivism, for which (say) the keyboard and the hand touching it legitimately form a third autonomous entity. Nor is it related to exasperated linguistic conventionalism, for which every expression of ordinary language infallibly corresponds to a real thing. Since a great part of the world and especially of the lifeworld is made up of partially indefinite entities in terms of their boundaries and mereological structure, quasi-things are for us something ontologically and existentially much more significant than the imaginative products referred to by the ingenious thought experiments of analytic ontology. In other words: the world lends itself to being articulated into things but, whenever the perceptual and practical salience is taken over by the existential and emotional salience, it is worth being also regarded as the stage of quasi-things. And given the fact that the intersubjective and intermomentary thing, corresponding perfectly to an abstract cognitive ideal, is earned only with the partial deactivation of the perceiving self, as well as with the “reduction” (by means of distance, differentiation, and restriction) of the initial atmospheric perception and affective and bodily involvement it implies,²⁸ it is surely useful to look at actual phenomena in a new way—that is, starting from objectually inexhaustible quasi-things.

The unity of the thing beyond all its fixed properties is not a substratum, a vacant *x*, a subject in which properties inhere, but that unique accent which is to be found in each one of them, that unique manner of existing of which they are a second order expression. [. . .] If a sick man sees the devil, he sees at the same time his smell, his flames and smoke, because the significant unity ‘devil’ is precisely that acrid, fire-and-brimstone essence. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005, 372)

Is There Something in the Air?

We are sometimes told that nature no longer exists. Yet the dog snarling in our direction and the fresh air we breathe walking out of a sultry environment are still phenomena independent of culture and technology (i.e., forms of otherness that I attempt, respectively, to escape or to

welcome with pleasure). Undoubtedly less obvious than in the past, to the point of paradoxically needing an adequate aesthetic-phenomenological training,²⁹ rigorously phenomenic experience of nature still disproves the idealistic perspective, the grotesque consequence of which is that a subject always and only encounters herself everywhere. It does so without necessarily reviving physical-theology or invoking poetic-mnemonic thoughts, but more simply by not reducing *lebensweltlich* experience to reistic-quantitative naturalistic criteria, and also by escaping the impasse imposed by the “myth” of the “access” to the world, phenomenologically ill-fated when interpreting such access as mediation (interpretationism-constructivism) or immediacy (empiricism, but always of a cryptodualistic kind). Rephrasing Descartes’s *ego cogito* as *ego cogito cogitatum*, this paradigm still assumes a gap between the self and the world, basically just discussing the best way to get around it,³⁰ while people have no access to the world, but live there and are an indispensable component of it as long as they live.

For instance, if we mention the air in an aesthetic-phenomenological sense, we are not at all thinking of its chemical components, nor are we seeing it as a discrete component of something else. Rather—taking the cue, if you will, from the fact that the ancient doctrine of elements is irreducible to modern physicalistic elementarism—we think of air as a vital medium, normally non-thematized, thanks to which we live and breathe. And yet this naïve description already poses a few problems because, as we cannot see, touch, hear, or taste air, it is so inapparent that it reminds us of the void and, as Hobbes says in his *De corpore*, it makes us think of a fictional being: a pragmatically and cognitively useful hypothesis, nothing more.³¹ But this is not the case, because air is rather an “in-between” (me and the world): something absolutely indispensable and ubiquitous that is so little imaginary that it is sometimes even bottled.³² Also and mostly, it is something that affects us at the affective-bodily level,³³ even if it occurs mainly *ex negativo*—that is, when it is missing, making it difficult to breathe (not only for the claustrophobic), or when undergoing changes, such as becoming purer and more rarefied in the high mountains.³⁴ Apparently inapparent, being a quasi-thing and the condition of possibility of both things and other quasi-things, air is a very exciting chapter of perceptological reflection or, if you will, of a phenomenology of nature that is critical of an approach passing off experimental abstractions as “empirical,” thus losing sight of the Aristotelian, naïve, and pretheoretical sense of the notion.³⁵ Precisely because it is relatively excluded from the cognitive

area, air here returns to the spotlight as a phenomenological quasi-thing, but also as an atmosphere—that is, a sentiment poured out into (predimensional) space.

However, what matters is to reject any metaphorical alibi.³⁶ Whenever we “cannot breathe” or we want to “get some air” and take “a deep breath,” we want to spare ourselves a feeling of felt-bodily narrowness that is anything but metaphorical, which is why we find that air, like a vast and airy space, invites the rib cage to expand and the gaze to get lost in the distance³⁷ until we feel “free like the air.” When we wonder what is in the air, we do not refer to its chemical-physical characters. Rather, starting from affective-bodily effects, the air tells us how we could and/or should behave in a situation tuned by a particular pervasive atmospheric quality. It might not be strictly a thing, but the air we breathe is still a very concrete experience, both climatic and affective.

The air suggests each time a specific felt-bodily communication with the world, so that it would be legitimate to say, imaginatively, that it is “the world (or the air) that breathes in me”—after all, this is the secret of many implicitly pantheistic meditation techniques. More soberly, one could say that “patterns of breathing are essentially the felt-bodily reality of our own emotions” (Böhme, 2003, 282), as indeed suggest other expressions (“clouds on the horizon,” “it’s nice again,” etc.).³⁸ It is the weather, duly subtracted to today’s prognostic obsession inscribed in the flood of “weather forecasts,”³⁹ that synthetically testifies the quality of our emotional involvement. In fact, it is a total affective-atmospheric impression (Alexander von Humboldt), be it generated by synaesthetic characters (“hot,” “chilly,” etc.), moods with their motor invitations (oppressive, glum, clear, etc.) or communicative characters such as typically seasonal colors or the weather’s “personal” qualities (“inclement,” “gloomy,” and so on). The air understood as climate or weather⁴⁰ is therefore an authentically atmospheric experience. In this sense, air is analogous to the dimensions (typical of Japanese culture but implicit in every philosophical climatology indifferent to the stigma of determinism) of *ki*—in the frame of a predualistic coexistence of self and world equivalent to air, wind, and *Stimmungen*.⁴¹ More generally, it is analogous to the dimension of *fūdo* (wind and earth)—that is, the climate, understood as that in which the human being primarily finds and discovers himself/herself,⁴² as a medium that makes our interactions possible and precisely for this determines their quality.⁴³

Quasi-Things: The Wind

The relative phenomenological inaccessibility of the air ceases to exist, *pace* Lucretius (*De rer. nat.* I, 277: *sunt venti corpora caeca*), especially when it comes to the wind, which has always been the object of human attempts to catch it and exploit its power. In fact, whipping and assaulting us like a threatening partner, the wind can be directly experienced even in the absence of optical data, thanks to the felt-bodily touch. This happens in particular, thanks to the specific sensitivity of the forehead as a true felt-bodily isle, but also indirectly through some of its peculiar epiphenomena, which neither lower it⁴⁴ nor degrade it to being a medium of something else (thereby reducing it to a false unity).⁴⁵ An inflated dress, shrivelled up hair, the bent branches of a tree, a waving flag, or hanging clothes, certain noises and sounds⁴⁶ made according to the shape of the environment, its effects on the clouds (speed, color, etc.) and on water:⁴⁷ all these are ways in which the wind manifests itself in its different qualities, be it as healthy and benevolent or as dangerously adverse.

Now, from an atmospherologic perspective not even things are simply closed up, discrete and inactive entities understood as substrata of properties: they are also the forms whose qualities, according to a certain natural patterns,⁴⁸ are ecstasies able to atmospherically affect the surroundings.⁴⁹ In the light of this, the wind is all the more a prototypical case of quasi-thingly ecstaticness. Coinciding with its own flow and thus being an event in the proper sense (a “pure act” in a way), it pervades space with its particular voluminousness, tuning it in this or that way (obviously a breeze is different from a hurricane) and arousing motor suggestions, thanks to synaesthetic affordances. Such impressions, in any case, cannot be reduced to the *Zubandenheit* in the name of which Heidegger is happy to say that, for instance, “the wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails’” (Heidegger, 2001, 100), or, even worse, a sign (although not subjective) of rain.⁵⁰

Now let’s try to start from the wind to exemplify the main “characteristics” of quasi-things.⁵¹ Of course—I repeat—I phenomenologically prescind from the surreptitious constructions that, ontologically thickening quasi-things seek to reduce their particular intrusiveness: just like an electric shock is irreducible to electricity, the weight that drags us down can’t be reduced to gravity (or, worse, to gravitons in quantum gravity); and the pain we feel doesn’t amount to neurobiological causes,

so the wind cannot be reduced to air moving when it blows or being still when it dies down.⁵² If by naïve experience, a face is happy before acquiring a certain color,⁵³ the wind is a pushy partner prior to any physical or climatic clarification.

A. Unlike things, quasi-things (think of the wind) are not edged,⁵⁴ discrete, cohesive,⁵⁵ solid, and therefore hardly penetrable. Nor do they properly have the spatial sides in which things necessarily manifest themselves and from whose orthoaesthetic coexistence—even though only one of them is more representative (usually the frontal one)—one can gather the protensional regularities and the reversibility that are missing, not coincidentally, in magical-fantastic objects.⁵⁶ So when it comes to the wind, we do not perceive a side hiding while announcing the others. This means that if a thing—despite being a Husserlian “rule of possible appearances”—can still deceive us by having concealed sides, temporarily or eternally hidden inner strata⁵⁷ and only apparent qualities (cement can turn out to be plasterboard, the wood Masonite, etc.), a quasi-thing never deceives, because it totally coincides with its phenomonic appearance—unless one reductively experiences it as a thing.

B. Things do not merely undergo external changes, as Husserl posits, serving a naturalistic vision of the material world and thus attributing every activity to the transcendental subject.⁵⁸ In fact, beyond the frontal qualities perceived with greater clarity,⁵⁹ they also possess immanent and regular tendencies,⁶⁰ necessary to the point that they cannot be activated or nullified from the outside, under pain of the cancellation of the thing itself. An object weighs and tends to fall; the pages of a book turn yellow; if we don't lift something it stays on the ground: because of these immanent dispositions,⁶¹ also proving their compatibility or incompatibility with other bodies, things testify to humans their physical-bodily presence.⁶² These dispositions are irreducible both, *contra* Heidegger, to their *readiness-to-hand* (*Zuhandenheit*)—which if anything presupposes them—and, *contra* Schapp, to their historically anthropocentric finality (possibly even unknown) as things-towards-which (*Wozudinge*).⁶³ These are thus tendencies that are inherent in the material and shape of things, existing even without interaction (the glass remains frangible even if nobody breaks it), and able to confer to things a future as well as a past revealed by signs, marks, fractures, etc.

Vice versa, because of their relative immateriality, quasi-things do not seem to have real tendencies (nor do they have a history). Just like the night or anxiety understood as atmospheres and therefore as quasi-things, the wind doesn't get old and doesn't show any temporal patina: in

short, it doesn't bear the marks of past and future in its absolute "presentness." To sum up, quasi-things are not the continuation of something prior, but something always new and radically evenemental: something for the understanding of which genetic and aetiologic phenomenology is by no means essential.

C. As we have seen, things transcend their momentary character. They are not born nor do they die all of a sudden, but bear the signs of a specific history of their own. We can have them, portion them,⁶⁴ save them, or annihilate them. Similarly to matters such as dust, gold, water, etc., while being fully actual, quasi-things appear in a partial form—which doesn't necessarily mean by fragments and sides. So, if I can point at a single object made of silver to show someone what silver is, in the same way I can show *this* wind to explain what wind is in general, even if it obviously doesn't manifest all the variants and possibilities. And this is because a single wind is not the portion of a larger wind-thing.⁶⁵

However, this point is no less than controversial. If, following Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, the thing has an intuitive side (the portion perceived), a conceptual one (I know what it is), and an imaginative one (the sides that cannot be perceived now but are still present to consciousness), only the first of these aspects seems to be truly determinant for quasi-things. In fact, as I have noted, quasi-things seem to fully coincide with the "character" of their appearance as they are qualities floating in the air: they are actual facts (this wind as a pure phenomenon)⁶⁶ and not factual facts (the wind as physical-climatic element), to apply the distinction proposed by Josef Albers to the extra-artistic field. If it is true that a mere change of direction does not make a wind another wind,⁶⁷ or that a different tone does not make the voice (another quasi-thing) of a person different (warm, metallic, polished, hoarse, etc.), it is undeniable that quasi-things have their own distinct identity. Whether it is more or less intense, whether it is a headwind or a tailwind, a certain wind stays the same within certain (purely perceptual) limits. Therefore we must speak of quasi-things as both pure acts and "characters" that can be relatively traced back to types, while not being as universally predictable as genera.

D. But how are quasi-things perceived? If "what we feel is thinglike by nature" (Koffka, 1955, 71; modified), this "of things" must also (perhaps mainly) include quasi-things. In fact they are (felt as) more immediate and intrusive than things, able to generate inhibiting and sometimes even unbearable motor suggestions—as in the case of sound phenomena, which we non-metaphorically call "sharp," "stabbing," or in

any case so penetrating that they are obsessive (think of an obsessive dripping in the night). The felt-bodily communication taking place in the presence of quasi-things can be summed up—similar to what happens in the presence of things—as the alternation of incorporation⁶⁸ and decorporation, with the difference that the motor suggestion of quasi-things (which as such are more “actively real,” *wirklich*, than simple things) is much more intense than that of things, which after all can almost only ever be moved by contact. Like each thing, they are “centers of incorporation” (Schmitz, 1978, 169), but they are also violent “attractors of our everyday attention,” (Soentgen, 1997, 13), thus more incisive and demanding⁶⁹ than things in the strict sense.

E. The wind dies down with the same inexplicable immediacy with which it rises. Although, as we have seen, it has a “character,” it doesn’t have the same continuity of existence as things, which as a rule cannot disappear from a point in space and reappear in another.⁷⁰ For this reason, the embarrassing question asked both by the child (“what does the wind do when it isn’t blowing?”) and by the adult who wonders if there is an *esse* separate from the *sentire*—a question that not coincidentally can be asked of all quasi-things (“what does a voice do when it is not heard?”; “where is pain when I do not feel it?”)⁷¹—turns out to be an excellent philosophical question. The normalizing and thinging answer given by the adult (“it has died down,” or even “it went to sleep”)⁷² disregards its importance. While things that are not perceived, lost, etc., provided that they are not totally destroyed, occupy a certain portion of space—even when the waves cease to crease it, we still see the water; but when the wind stops, there is no perceptible air left—quasi-things have a rather intermittent life, and it would make no sense to ask where they are when they are not present yet or when they are no longer there. Properly they are not present, but are “presented,” and probably in the form of *entia successiva*,⁷³ so requiring not a chronological but a kairological experience, which lies “not in the succession of events but in the attunement of attention and response to rhythmic relations” (Ingold, 2012, 76).⁷⁴

Besides, by denying this existential intermittency, one would end up claiming that atmospheric feelings are, say, all eternally present independently of people and situations.⁷⁵ And yet, unless one thinks that quasi-things are generated only when one feels them,⁷⁶ their appearance here and now does not mean—unlike what happens for things—that they can’t appear elsewhere at the same time (this holds only for their ideal-typical form, so for shame, pain, the wind, but surely not for *this*

shame, *this* pain, and *this* wind).⁷⁷ Mostly, it does not mean that they can't represent themselves as percepts endowed with their specific "character" ("here's my usual pain in the shoulder," "here's the melancholy of an autumn evening," etc.). Ultimately this intermittence is very different from the latency periods that normally belong to things that are temporarily not perceived. This intermittence is the source from which they derive a broken biography and gaps that cannot be filled by principle,⁷⁸ all the more so, epistemically speaking.

F. Following Schmitz, something peculiar to quasi-things (of which we are mainly pathically certain) is that they do not have a three-polar causality (cause-action-effect) but a bipolar one (cause/action-effect). A book is a book and then eventually it falls on the floor, after which, if it hits a glass, it eventually breaks it. On the contrary, the wind, which in a certain sense "is precisely this blowing and nothing else" (Grote, 1972, 251), does not exist prior to and beyond its blowing. So to speak, it is an aggression without an aggressor (a cause) that is separable from it and prior to it, one that can be given some potential. The obvious difference between cause and action, which induces Hume to look for a middle term, has no reason to exist in the causality of quasi-things: in fact, the wind that hinders our way and maybe makes us fall is an action coinciding with its cause. And only the need for prognosis and prevention, whose condition of possibility is precisely that the potential of the causes is discoverable before their action, justifies the transformation (both scientific and commonsensical) of bipolarity in three-polarity—that is, the tendency to assume a substratum whose experienced power would only be the (more or less accidental) expression. In the above-mentioned example, this would be the book as devoid of a supporting surface or even gravity. It is true that a thingly configuration is, formally, the phenomenic response—made up of units and links that are immanent to the world itself, which are therefore "found" and not constructed/projected by the perceiver—to an active and inquisitive reception of this world, in other words, a "unit that is constructed in accordance with the possibility that the self will turn to it, a possibility matched as much as possible by determined reactions" (Grote 1972, 96, but cf. also 1948). Then one should conclude that the always somewhat unexpected appearance of a quasi-thingly configuration is always necessarily followed by an involuntary experience, a pathic and felt-bodily involvement that is at least initially uncontrollable.

G. I have said that a quasi-thing does not properly have a whence or a where, thus being strictly akin to atmospheric feelings (also and

precisely in a climatic sense)—at least to those that, for their blatantly “air-like” nature are irreducible to what we believe to be their cause for mere autobiographic rationalism. Hence a further characteristic: unlike things, they “occupy” surfaceless and in any case non-relative spaces—that is, spaces not defined by reciprocal distances (this is the common local space), but rather lived spaces,⁷⁹ as such highly atmospherogenous. In such spaces, just as in the case of the wind, we feel motions but we don’t perceive them as actual movements from one point to another.⁸⁰

H. Finally, in some ways quasi-things are similar to fractal shapes, conceived here non-mathematically.⁸¹ In fact, they are ephemeral, apparently casual in their manifestations,⁸² only identifiable through an overall impression, devoid both of surfaces hiding depth and of a beginning and an end, non-manipulable and even more so inimitable (consisting basically of details without a solid correlative structure), unrepeatable,⁸³ and not exhaustively describable (as long as one doesn’t surreptitiously refer them to some thing in the real sense). These are the analogies. As per the differences, there is first of all the fact that, unlike fractal shapes, quasi-things intensely call for our attention. Also, in some cases they can be undoubtedly produced—suffice it to think of the aesthetic work, largely consisting in generating the desired atmospheric feelings, but also of certain meditative practices aimed at awakening latent felt-bodily isles and so on. Unlike fractals, also, they are not necessarily working residues of materials (such as marks), nor do they necessarily suggest that disgust that comes instead in the presence of the organic indistinction typical of many formlessness fractals. Ultimately, if they are fractals, it is in the sense only of the clouds of smoke that “hypnotize” the smoker or the cognac lover, or of the ruins as a work of chaotic renaturalization of human artefacts. If fractal shapes are “a sort of *signatura* of a substance” (Soentgen, 1997, 133), then we could think of a quasi-thing as a sort of pathic *signatura* of a given quality.

It Blows Whenever and Wherever It Wants

Like (almost) all quasi-things, though, the wind is also an atmosphere. And it is one even when it leaves the sphere of appearance: to make just one example, when speaking of “dead calm” we linguistically allude to a distressing situation of imminent danger (“the calm before the storm”). Of course it is an atmosphere in the proper sense when, like a feeling, it

arouses an affectively tuning impression binding the perceiver to a felt-bodily resonance⁸⁴—after all, this emerges from the traditional tendency to associate the wind with excitement, especially in relation to love. In fact, feelings—when understood atmospherologically—have always been taken to be windy and airy, be it the Jewish *ruah*,⁸⁵ Yahweh’s manifestations as wind, or the Greek *pneuma* (non-coincidentally able to blow wherever it wishes, without a whence or a where) (*Gv* 3, 8),⁸⁶ in analogy with “the mystery [of which] we experience the influence but do not see or know where it comes from and where it goes” (Volz, 1910, 59). Foreign to human intentionality in its (not necessarily transcendent) numinousness, irrepressible and ambiguous at both an ethical (beneficial but devastating) and an aesthetic level (pleasure but also *horror vacui*),⁸⁷ the wind as an atmosphere cannot be confused with a merely subjective state of mind. In fact, substantially heretic compared to rationality and every “learned orientation” (Bachelard, 1988, 234), the wind spreads around like any other atmospheric feeling, impregnating a certain (lived) space and arousing affective “shivers” in the perceiver.

But in what precise forms does the wind exert its atmospheric quasi-thinghood? First when its blast (gust of wind) is intense but not really dangerous, when for example it dishevels our hair (moderate wind),⁸⁸ and of course when it makes objects fall (strong wind), hitting them as if it were material itself. In this case, untraceable and unstoppable, the gust is “wild and pure,” so unexpected and “useless” that it suggests an atmosphere of “anxious melancholy” (Bachelard, 1988, 234, 230), but also inducing whoever resists it to being aware of a physical-bodily dimension other than the felt-bodily one.⁸⁹

The wind is just as atmospheric when it is only a “light air” or a breeze (constant, light or tense) that caresses and seduces us, not arousing resistance but rather emancipating the felt-body from the physical body, promoting its relaxation if not the dreamlike abandonment to an indeterminate vastness (“privative expansion,” to use Schmitz’s term). In fact it is the breeze that arouses the *Sehnsucht*, “taking us away” to far-away and (by definition) “mysterious” lands, also significantly suggesting—say, in a sensitive Japanese traveler—a direct bond between an almost artificially ordered nature (given the regularity and symmetry of trees rarely moved by the wind) and a strongly rational art and *forma mentis* like the Western ones. Indeed, the seasonal wind, sudden and violent as in a typhoon, is apparently the origin of a *Stimmung*, like the Japanese, changeable but also

resigned, similar in this to the rapid flowering and equally rapid wilting of cherry blossoms.⁹⁰

Other types of wind that are and cannot help being atmospheric are the squall (moderate to strong) and the storm (up to the hurricane). The latter's archetypal scream—"in a way, the wind howls before the animal, packs of wind before the packs of dogs" (Bachelard, 1988, 229)⁹¹—urges those involved to immediately decide which behavior to adopt: whether to protect themselves or try to cope with it. Here the atmosphere is dual: those who pull away are shocked by a power that weakens and paralyzes them, whereas those who face it have (and symbolically suggest to the observer) a decidedly heroic attitude. In this sense, Caspar David Friedrich's (1818) *Wanderer above a sea of fog* (but also, upon closer inspection, above a sea of wind) is nothing but the elegant and brilliant version of each propaganda image of characters that stick their chest out and go "into the wind." As in any other struggle against something destined to resist humankind, those who oppose the storm as "pure anger, anger without purpose or pretext" (Bachelard, 1988, 225) are fully pervaded by an atmosphere of conflict, sometimes even pleasantly so.

The all too easy campaign against positivist "sense-data" would be a Pyrrhic victory if the thing, rightly put before sensations, were conceived as a relatively constant beam of sensations—hence the inevitable assumption of its exceeding noumenic character—and not as Gestalt.⁹² But the quasi-thing is also a structured form or situation⁹³ persisting in its "character," despite possible variations. Its physicalist details, extraneous to the initial affective and felt-bodily involvement, appear only when the perceived turns out to be different from what it seemed to be, as in the emblematic case of disappointment: a ray of light (quasi-thing) that upon closer inspection turned out to be a pile of snow (thing) would not be an illusion, as in the dimension of quasi-things what matters is only "the effect" of a certain perception and not its epistemic evaluation (and correction). Quasi-things are always (perceptively) true, as they are (almost) personal and atmospheric partners able to bind those involved through a peculiar incorporation. Quasi-things are also more active than things, and for this very reason they are indispensable: "a world without quasi-things, devoid of the insistent power of immediate causality, would be cold, faded and boring" (Schmitz, 2003, 105). Also, in a world devoid of this *ab extra* rapture, one in which only the psychological-reductionist-introjectionist paradigm held,⁹⁴ we would be scarcely certain of what we feel, as we would be nothing but third-person observers.

Here I am merely sketching a phenomenological ontology of quasi-things taking cue from their “catalogue,”⁹⁵ which can obviously be integrated (as I do in what follows) starting from the wind. Most of all, the choice to speak of quasi-things rather than simple relations or, even more heretically, of relations devoid of (or prior to) *relata*, undoubtedly denotes an unpaid due to the ontological paradigm of things. However, it does not amount to corroborating the universal tendency (onto- and phylogenetic) to reification, whose advantages, as we have seen, do not compensate for the loss of the semantic-pathic polyvocality of reality.⁹⁶ My aim is dual and consists in taking relations and events as (quasi) things while taking many things as less thing-like: for instance, a mountain is such only within a specific segmentation (anthropic and based on *fiat* [i.e., conventional boundaries]) of space, thus only under certain (very unstable) conditions. The analysis of quasi-things, like that of atmospheres, is extraneous to the popular view for which every “analysis” amounts to an irreversible disillusionment, and here has an unexpected outcome, consistent with the inevitable incompleteness of every ontological catalogue: in fact, many so called things (a mountain, a road, etc.) are not much more defined than the atmospheric feelings they irradiate—with the significant difference that the atmospheric quasi-thingly repartition depends on a segmentation of what we “encounter” that is not so much artificial (functional) or cognitive-semantic (which explains the Quinean privilege of homogeneous entities) but rather affective and felt-bodily. The atmospherology and ontology of quasi-things thus proceed to an ambitious “de-thinging” of reality, without replacing things with waves as physics does, but rather keeping the philosophical horizon sufficiently open—even just to save from the reductionist fury⁹⁷ all quasi-things—that is, all entities acting as authentic generators of atmospheres as passive syntheses, produced by reality without a “little help” from the transcendental subject.⁹⁸

Now I could very well keep going and lapidarily say that quasi-things have quality (intensity), extension (non-geometric dimensionality), relation (to other quasi-things and the perceiver’s states of mind), place (they are here and not there, even if only in the lived space) and time (they occur right now, etc.), but it is early to assess the validity of an ontology that, oriented to an eidetic of facticity, apparently earns more from its potential applications than from abstract and preliminary reviews on the subject as a matter of principle. Rather than hastily building ontological architectures that close the horizon, perhaps

focusing on similarities between quasi-things and imaginary beings, it might be better to consider some phenomena “in the flesh” (the atmosphere *qua talis*, the felt-body, pain, shame, the gaze, the light), leaving the reader the freedom to personally draw the conclusions from this real phenomenological *flânerie*.⁹⁹ But there’s no rush. Out of the three pieces of advice given by Dickens to aspiring writers (“make them laugh, make them cry, make them wait!”), the third can (and should) apply here also for us.