

# **The Concept of Atmosphere in Management and Organization Studies**

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**Abstract:** Despite a growing interest in atmospheric phenomena within management and organization studies, a distinct line of research on atmospheres can hardly be identified. The present article reviews existing concepts of atmosphere in management and organization studies to promote a common understanding of how to conceptualize atmospheres. On the uppermost level, dualistic and non-dualistic concepts of atmosphere are distinguished. This article shows that non-dualistic conceptions are more appropriate for researching atmospheres than dualistic conceptions, but still need further development. In case of this paper, it is shown that considering the socialites of atmospheres is especially important to foster such a development. Furthermore, it is suggested that a full-range consideration of atmospheres needs to take both aesthetic and anaesthetic elements into account. In sum, the article pleads for a more systematic discussion of non-dualistic conceptions of atmosphere and seeks to mark a starting point for a distinct and coherent area of research on atmospheres within management and organization studies.

**Keywords:** Atmosphere; aesthetics; anaesthetics; atmospheric power; new phenomenology; spherology

## The Concept of Atmosphere in Management and Organization Studies

There is a growing body of research across disciplines and fields arguing that the atmosphere constitutes a vital aspect of social life and experience (e. g., Anderson, 2009; Böhme, 1993, 1995; Borch, 2010; Grant, 2013; Griffero, 2014; Hauskeller, 1995; Julmi, 2015; Langewitz, 2007; Rauh, 2012; Schouten, 2007; Sonntag, 2013; Sørensen, 2015; Zumthor, 2006). If this is true, the atmosphere is also highly relevant for management and organization studies dealing with people experiencing their environment. Indeed, in many contexts such as contemporary consumption habits, “the concept of ‘atmosphere’ is certainly back in vogue” (Degen, Melhuish, & Rose, 2015, p. 6). In organization studies, scholars are increasingly focusing on emotional phenomena that exceed the private inner sphere of a psychological state. It is recognized that emotions are not only individual, but also social or even organizational phenomena (Ashkanasy, 2003; Elfenbein, 2007). Accordingly, in their recent Call for Papers for *Organization*, Fotaki, Kenny, and Vachhani (2015) emphasize that affect “is what hits us when we walk into a room and inexplicably sense an atmosphere, an ineffable aura, tone, or spirit that elicits particular sensations”. Broadly defined, an atmosphere is “a total or partial, but in any case comprehensive, occupation of an area-less space in the sphere of that which is experienced as being present” (Schmitz, 2016, p. 4). This kind of atmosphere is sometimes referred to as “affective atmosphere” (Anderson, 2009; Ash, 2013; Michels, 2015).

Despite a growing interest in atmospheric phenomena within management and organization studies, a predominant conception of atmosphere across the field still needs to be established. Some scholars use the term in a more systematic manner, having started minor lines of research such as research on store atmospheres or group atmospheres. However, these minor lines of research more or less exist in isolation. In other words, atmospheres are not only mundane and vague as phenomena in the real world, but also as concepts in management and organization studies. If the growing interest in atmospheric phenomena is taken seriously, it is necessary to recognize where we actually stand, because only if we know where we are, we might decide where we should go from there.

Against this background, the present article reviews concepts of atmosphere in management and organization studies. Regarding the selection of studies, the sketched problems raise methodological challenges. To begin with, the use of the notion of atmosphere within a study does by no means indicate that it is treated as a distinct concept. Instead, the notion of atmosphere is frequently used as an empty formula without saying anything that goes beyond common sense. When, for example, Amabile (1994) reflects upon the “atmosphere of pure work” among scientists, the notion of atmosphere is, although eponymous, only a catchword, being regarded too trivial to require further explanation. Furthermore, the notion of atmosphere has different meanings. Besides the atmosphere as a perceived affective or social phenomenon, the notion of atmosphere also refers to physical, meteorological or ecological phenomena. These phenomena may be somehow relevant for management and organization studies as well, but refer to completely different phenomena. Thirdly, the notion of atmosphere is used in different contexts such as the atmosphere of a store and a group. And last but not least, studies on atmosphere are generally rare and heterogeneously distributed across the field of management and organization studies. Taken all together, the selection of studies can hardly be formalized and is therefore best described as detective work in all conscience.

The focus of the article is wide in the sense that it considers concepts of atmosphere from different, partly heterogeneous lines of research, assuming that the related phenomena behind the concepts somehow coincide. However, the focus of the article is also narrow in the sense that it only considers studies directly addressing “atmosphere” as a distinct concept,

being either systematically used across studies or offering clear theoretical foundations. It therefore neglects studies using the notion of atmosphere as in everyday language. It also neglects studies on concepts that may be similar or somehow related to the concept of atmosphere, but use a different term. Although, for example, the well-studied concept of climate may share some features with the concept of atmosphere, it cannot be conflated with the concept of atmosphere as there are also approaches making a clear distinction between both concepts or treat the concept of atmosphere in a way which is quite inconsistent with the existing climate research (for an overview of the climate research see Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011).

The organization of the article follows the distinction between dualism and duality made by Schultze and Stabell (2004). Whereas dualism implies either/or thinking and constructs the world in terms of mutually exclusive opposites, duality rests upon both/and thinking, denying dichotomies such as subjective-objective. Contrasting dualism and duality, Schultze and Stabell separate research that applies an epistemology of dualism from research that applies an epistemology of duality. Research following dualism assigns an investigated phenomenon either to something being outside an individual (e. g., a feature of the environment) or to something being inside the individual (e. g., a psychological variable). The aim of such an epistemology is to develop testable propositions or hypothesis in order to explain and predict the investigated phenomenon in a structural manner while clearly distinguishing between cause and effect (Dubin, 1969). In contrast, research following duality acknowledges that, in human experience, subject and object form a coherent whole in human experience which gets lost when both are conceptualized as being mutually exclusive. The aim of such an epistemology is to improve the hermeneutic or phenomenological understanding of the investigated phenomena (Wright, 2004). The distinction between dualism and duality seems to be especially useful for systemizing conceptions of such a mundane and vague phenomenon as atmosphere, which is often phenomenologically described as being somewhere in-between subject and object (Böhme, 1993).

The first part of the article takes a closer look on dualistic conceptions of atmosphere, following dualism. Respectively, the second part concentrates on non-dualistic conceptions of atmosphere, following duality. In the third part, conceptual implications from the review are discussed. The concluding part summarizes the main findings of the article.

## **Dualistic conceptions of atmosphere**

### *Store atmosphere*

Marketing management is arguably the research field within management studies with the longest tradition of studying atmospheres, namely store atmospheres. Since Kotler's (1973) famous article on atmospherics as a marketing tool, the study of store atmospheres and their effects on the consumer's reaction have become a well-established line of research within marketing management. Kotler defines atmosphere as "the air surrounding a sphere" or "the quality of the surroundings" (p. 50) and dissects its perception into the main sensory channels sight, sound, scent, and touch. These sensory channels can still be further divided into sub categories such as color, brightness, size and shapes for the visual dimension. Other well recognized operationalizations of store atmosphere stem from Baker (1987) and Bitner (1992). Whereas Baker considers ambient factors, design factors and social factors, Bitner distinguishes between ambient conditions, space/function, and signs, symbols, and artefacts. Further approaches to operationalize store atmosphere are offered by Turley and Milliman (2000), Vilnai-Yavetz, Rafaeli, and Schneider-Yaacov (2005), Grayson and McNeill (2009) and Berman and Evans (1979/2013).

The research on store atmospheres generally follows the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm, which assumes that an external stimulus (S) triggers specific processes within an organism (O) leading to a specific reaction (R) (Spangenberg, Crowley, & Henderson, 1996; Woodworth & Marquis, 1908/1947). In the context of store atmospheres, the S-O-R paradigm “states that an organism (a shopper, in this case) is exposed to a variety of environmental stimuli (anything sensed by that shopper), will process those stimuli in a uniquely individual way and will then respond (behave) accordingly” (Sullivan & Adcock, 2002, p. 50). Within this paradigm, empirical investigations of store atmospheres are mostly theoretically grounded in environmental psychology, namely in the Pleasure-Arousal-Dominance (P-A-D) emotional state model from Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which was initially adapted to the context of store atmospheres by Donovan and Rossiter (1982). The P-A-D model operationalizes the stimuli of an environment into single variables of sense modalities (e. g., color, temperature, light, acoustic, smell, taste) and the information rate indicating the complexity of the stimuli’s temporal and spatial setting. Apart from the environmental stimuli, the emotional reaction of a person is also moderated by his initial emotional state when entering a site (e. g., being hungry or tired). The induced emotional state is operationalized into the three independent variables pleasure, arousal and dominance, which in turn mediates a person’s reaction, which can be characterized by approach or avoidance behavior. With respect to the S-O-R paradigm, the variables of pleasure, arousal and dominance reflect the “emotional experience as the intervening organismic state” (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001, p. 178). Sometimes, the variable of dominance is omitted in the application of the model as its independence could only be confirmed by some studies (Russell & Mehrabian, 1977; Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000; Yani-de-Soriano & Foxall, 2006), whereas other studies conclude that dominance is not an independent variable (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Russell, 1979).

Although studies on customers’ experiences using the P-A-D model use atmosphere as an umbrella term, the term itself is absent within the P-A-D model. For a conceptual understanding of atmospheres, it is important to clarify how the notion of atmospheres fits into or is consistent with its underlying paradigm. As there is no room between the external stimulus, the internal state and the behavioral response, the atmosphere has to be assigned to either one of them. Obviously, the behavioral response (approach/avoidance behavior) has the least relevance for atmospheres as atmospheres relate to perception rather than to behavior. The atmosphere therefore lies either within the stimulus perceived or within the perceiver of the stimulus. Beginning with Kotler (1973), he distinguishes between the atmosphere and its perception. As mentioned above, the atmosphere refers to “the air surrounding a sphere” or “the quality of the surroundings” (p. 50). Thus, the atmosphere is a quality of the environment and lies within the stimulus, which in turn influences individual internal states. On the other hand, however, Kotler also states that when “one hears a restaurant described as having atmosphere”, it is “meant that the physical surroundings evoke pleasant feelings” (p. 50). Here, the assignment of atmospheres to the external environment becomes less clear. Kotler seems to view atmospheres also as something that implies that someone is being affected by its quality.

A more detailed look into the various studies of store atmospheres makes the picture even less clear. Donovan and Rossiter (1982), for example, state that “store atmosphere effects are basically emotional states” (p. 35), indicating that the atmosphere is an external stimulus having an effect on the internal state. However, they also claim that “physical variables are antecedents of store atmosphere rather than alternatives to it” (p. 35), indicating that the atmosphere is an internal state. As the authors explicitly follow the S-O-R paradigm, there are no alternatives other than that, although their interpretation somehow rather suggests that the atmosphere is something in between external stimulus and internal state.

Comparing the work of different authors, there seems to be a general disagreement about how to assign the atmosphere within the S-O-R paradigm. On the one side, there are several authors locating the atmosphere within the stimulus (Grossbart, Hampton, Rammohan, & Lapidus, 1990; Rayburn & Voss, 2013; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Yani-de-Soriano & Foxall, 2006). Babin and Attaway (2000) even speak about the "physical atmosphere" (p. 91). Other authors, however, look at atmospheres as a psychological variable (Berman & Evans, 1979/2013; Buckley, 1987; Ghosh, 1990). Milliman (1986) distinguishes between the terms atmosphere and atmospherics: Whereas the term atmosphere is "used to describe the experience 'felt' but not always seen" (being a psychological state), the term atmospherics is "used to describe the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers" (p. 286). Foxall, Goldsmith, and Brown (1994/1998) even provide an alternative interpretation of Kotler's conception:

As Kotler points out, consumers purchase a total product, consisting not simply of the physical item bought but the packaging, aftersales deal, advertising, image, and — most importantly — the atmosphere of the place in which the transaction takes place. Atmospherics do not, therefore, refer to the objective physical and social factors that constitute store image [...] but to the subjective feelings these factors engender in consumers. (p. 201)

Accordingly, it becomes clear that there is an incommensurability between the atmosphere as the object of investigation and the underlying S-O-R paradigm (Julmi, 2015). As a result, the term atmosphere is avoided in the existing literature (see, for example, the review from Turley & Milliman, 2000). Although the term can frequently be found in article's headlines and introductions, it is often completely omitted in the research design of the undertaken study. Symptomatically, Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, and Hansen (2009) begin their section on "Service atmosphere" with the introducing remark that "Atmosphere is a major marketing element" (p. 679) without any further use of the term throughout the whole chapter.

To sum up, the well-established research field of store atmospheres has produced numerous important insights, but does not shed much light on the concept of atmosphere itself. Within this line of research, the notion of atmosphere is, although often eponymous, mostly a catchword.

### *Group atmosphere*

Another line of research which can somehow be connected to the notion of atmosphere is the study of group dynamics. Within this line of research, the term atmosphere is used rather unsystematically, often remains undefined and is hardly traceable to distinct historical roots. Nevertheless, the notion of atmosphere reflects distinct concepts in some works. Here, atmosphere is mostly seen as a psychological variable reflecting the individual's perception of the overall group atmosphere, usually measured by a specific scale or score.

Early investigation of group atmospheres are reflected in a number of field studies from Lewin and his colleagues, regarding the social or group atmosphere as one of the key characteristics of an individual's psychological field, although an explicit definition of the term atmosphere is not provided (Lewin, 1939; Lippitt, 1939). The authors mainly distinguish between three types of group atmospheres (authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire atmospheres) and emphasize the role of the leader in changing a group's atmosphere. Whereas the differences between the three types of group atmosphere are described, the characteristics of a group atmosphere in general remain unclear (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939).

Another investigation of group atmospheres in a leadership context is provided by Fiedler (1967). For Fiedler, the atmosphere reflects "the degree to which the leader feels accepted by the group and relaxed and at ease in his role" (p. 32, see also Fiedler, 1962). As a psychological variable, the atmosphere is not an objective characteristic of the group and can therefore be perceived differently by different group members. As Fiedler points out, the leader's assessment of the group atmosphere may be (and often is) at odds with the assessment of the group members:

The leader may well become very tense and anxious because his group is too relaxed and playful, and the leader may be quite pleased and at ease when his group members are anxious and tense while trying to do a good job. (p. 32)

The group atmosphere is measured with the Group Atmosphere Scale (GA), consisting of ten items each reflecting a positive and a negative pole (i. e., friendly/unfriendly, accepting/rejecting, satisfying/frustrating, enthusiastic/unenthusiastic, productive/nonproductive, warm/cold, cooperative/uncooperative, supportive/hostile, interesting/boring, and successful/unsuccessful). In sum, the items indicate whether the atmosphere is positive or negative. The concept of atmosphere is therefore unidimensional, being either positive or negative.

Although, according to Jehn, Rispens, and Thatcher (2010), it was Konar-Goldband, Rice, and Monkarsh (1979) who introduced the concept of group atmosphere, Konar-Goldband and her colleagues simply adapted the GA from Fiedler without adding theoretical value to the concept of group atmosphere. The definition of Jehn et al. (2010) also fits within this context, defining group atmosphere as the "positive attitudes and cognitions of group members about their group" (p. 600). Their operationalization of group atmosphere, however, is based on the approach presented by Jehn and Mannix (2001) instead of the GA. Jehn and Mannix evaluate "the atmosphere that results among group members" (p. 241) through measures of trust, respect, cohesiveness, open conflict discussion norms, and liking for fellow group members. Again, atmosphere is understood as a unidimensional concept, being either positive or negative. A positive atmosphere is associated with high levels of trust, respect, open conflict norms, cohesiveness, and liking, and low levels of competition. Similarly and in the context of knowledge sharing, Zárraga and Bonache (2005) describe "a favourable atmosphere within the group" as "one in which individuals are encouraged to share and create knowledge" (p. 662). The authors distinguish between high and low care atmospheres, whereby a high level of care is equated with a high care atmosphere.

A different approach to group atmospheres is suggested by Bierhoff and Müller (1999, 2005) who equate the concept of group atmosphere with the concept of a group's affective tone introduced by George (1990) and George and Brief (1992). Whereas George (1990) defines the affective tone "as consistent or homogeneous affective reactions within a group" (p. 108), Bierhoff and Müller (2005) define the affective tone of the whole group as "the perceived group atmosphere or emotional climate between group members" (p. 484). To measure group atmosphere (as positive or negative), Bierhoff and Müller (2005) use the modular team climate inventory developed by Müller and Bierhoff (2000). Questions include whether the atmosphere is perceived as active, open or friendly. The difference of this approach compared to the approach suggested by Fiedler is that an atmosphere only exists when affective reactions are consistent or homogeneous within a group. If such a consistency does not exist, there is no group atmosphere (or affective tone). Atmosphere is operationalized as an affective state variable related to the whole group (being positive or negative), while mood is operationalized as an affective state variable related to the individuals of the group (being positive or negative). For a conceptual understanding of atmospheres, the relationship between the mood of the individuals within a group and the atmosphere of the overall mood

is of particular interest. Whereas George and Brief (1992) assume that a (positive) group atmosphere leads to (positive) individual mood, Bierhoff and Müller (1999) and Bierhoff and Müller (2005) find it more plausible to assume that (positive) individual mood leads to (positive) group atmosphere. Together with the concepts of atmosphere and affective tone, Menges and Kilduff (2015) list a number of terms (group affect, group mood, group emotion, group-based emotion, shared emotion, collective emotion, emotional energy, effervescence, affective climate, and emotional climate) which are, although similar and sometimes used interchangeably, highly blurred in their distinction.

In comparison to research on store atmospheres, group atmospheres are consistently regarded as psychological state variables. However, the outlined understanding of group atmosphere raises conceptual issues as well. Firstly, it is unclear how individual state variables can be aggregated to a group variable. The concept of affective tone seems to avoid this problem, because a group variable only exists when individual variables coincide (i. e., the group variable is the individual variable). The price is, however, that group atmospheres characterized by dissent — which are phenomenologically evident — fall through the cracks. Secondly, such a conception can hardly answer the question how someone who comes into a group for the first time can have an immediate impression of the group's atmosphere. The concept of emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994) may be applied here, but as emotional contagion is based on external stimuli (e. g., facial expressions or vocalizations), the group atmosphere cannot be conceptualized as an internal state variable in this case. Thirdly, atmospheres are seen as unidimensional concepts, being either positive or negative. For example, Fiedler describes positive atmospheres as pleasant and relaxed, negative atmospheres as unpleasant and tense. This stands in contrast to other works showing that the dimension of relaxation/tension (i. e., arousal/sleepiness or activation/deactivation) is independent from the pleasure/displeasure dimension (Russell, 1979, 1980, 2003; Russell & Pratt, 1980), allowing group atmospheres to be unpleasant and sleepy (e. g., a boring atmosphere) or pleasant and tense (e. g., a thrilling atmosphere) as well. The P-A-D model even suggests that there are three independent dimensions of affective states. Fourthly, the question of individual mood influencing group atmosphere or vice versa seems to reveal a kind of chicken-and-egg problem being inherent in the relation of group atmosphere and individual mood in general when both is understood as a psychological state variable. Is it the positive atmosphere of the group making everybody happy or do you need a bunch of happy people to form a positive group atmosphere? Or is there any difference between atmosphere and mood at all?

### *Socio-moral atmosphere*

The concept of socio-moral atmosphere is reflected in relatively few works within management and organization studies. Initially, the concept was introduced by Kohlberg and his colleagues to investigate moral decision making in school environments (Kohlberg, 1984; Kohlberg, Levine, & Hower, 1983). The concept of socio-moral atmosphere takes into account that moral action takes place in a specific social or group context influencing moral decision making. The socio-moral atmosphere refers to the collective norms of a group, understood as prescriptions arising from shared expectations within the group. The moral decision is conceptualized as a function of the group's socio-moral atmosphere, meaning that moral decision making depends on the socio-moral atmosphere of a group. Lovell (1995) defines the socio-moral atmosphere as the "influences which mark the territory through which moral reasoning must pass before it manifests itself in actual behaviour" (p. 60).

As the concept of socio-moral atmosphere seems to be relevant for organizations as well (Wyld & Jones, 1997), it has been adapted to study the ethical context in organizations. Within these studies, the terms socio-moral atmosphere and socio-moral climate are used

interchangeably, although Kohlberg and his colleagues themselves did not relate their concept to the work climate literature (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Following Kohlberg and his colleagues, Pircher Verdorfer, Weber, Unterrainer, and Seyr (2013) identify five components constituting a socio-moral atmosphere: (1) open confrontation of the employees with conflicts, (2) reliable and constant appreciation, care and support by supervisors and colleagues, (3) open communication and participative cooperation, (4) trust-based assignment and allocation of responsibility corresponding to the respective employees' capabilities, (5) organizational concern for the individual. The socio-moral atmosphere was measured through a questionnaire structured by these five items, indicating if there is a positive socio-moral atmosphere.

In an organizational context, the concept of socio-moral atmosphere (or climate) is seen as a component of the concept of organizational climate (Pircher Verdorfer, Weber, & Seyr, 2008; Weber, Unterrainer, & Höge, 2008). Pritchard and Karasick (1973) even equate the terms of "psychological atmosphere" and "organizational climate" (p. 126). The organizational climate refers to the shared and enduring perception of psychologically important aspects of the work environment (Ashforth, 1985). The socio-moral atmosphere therefore reflects a psychological variable of individual perceptions about the lived practice of moral behavior which are assumed to be similar between individuals (Weber et al., 2008). The more consistent these perceptions are, the stronger the socio-moral atmosphere is, regardless of whether the socio-moral atmosphere is consistently seen as positive or poor. This understanding corresponds to the concept of a group's affective tone according to which the existence of an affective tone depends on the similarity of its perception between group members.

Regarding the direction of causal relationships, the socio-moral atmosphere influences individual moral behavior, serving as a mediator between individual moral judgment and moral behavior (Hayes, 1991). As pointed out before, such a unidirectional causation seems problematic. Of course, it is plausible that the moral atmosphere influences individual behavior, but the question is how the moral atmosphere is influenced by the individuals (and their behavior), which certainly must be the case as well. The relationship between the shared atmosphere and the individuals sharing the atmosphere is probably more complex. Atmospheres seem to belong neither exclusively to a group (or organization) nor to its members, but rather characterize a dynamic relationship between the group and those who make up the group. The shared atmosphere and the individuals sharing the atmosphere reciprocally affect one another (Commons, Krause, Fayer, & Meaney, 1993).

#### *Problems of dualistic conceptions*

The presented conceptions demonstrate that atmospheres can emanate from physical surroundings as well as from social gatherings such as groups. It is acknowledged, though, that research on store atmospheres largely ignores social aspects of store environments (customers and service providers) (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003), although these aspects may be important in creating an overall atmosphere within a store. In this context, the social factors suggested by Baker (1987) consider the number, appearance and behavior of other customers and the service personnel. Subsequently, Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman (1994) distinguish between the social factor of a store with a prestige-image (more visible sales personnel, wearing aprons, greeting customers) and the social factor of a store with a discount-image social factor (one visible salesperson, wearing no apron, no greetings offered). The social context is consequently assigned to the stimulus here. In general, the friendliness or unfriendliness and the warmth or coldness (to borrow some items from the GA, where social factors are assigned to the organism) depends on the behavior of the service personnel and leads to specific customer's responses. Group effects may play here a role as



well as consumer behavior is also a socially interactive (and affective) experience (Howard & Gengler, 2001).

On the other hand, research on group atmospheres largely ignores the influence of physical surroundings as external stimuli. One could also argue that physical stimuli such as (cold or warm) light might influence a group's atmosphere. For example, Bartel and Saavedra (2000) note that environmental stimuli such as aspects of the work environment "provide the backdrop for group functioning" (p. 199). This becomes even more evident if one realizes that, following a dualistic view, facial expressions or vocalizations are environmental stimuli which serve as the basis for processes of emotional contagion.

One reason for this mutual ignorance may be that, although both research on store atmospheres and on group atmospheres are concerned with psychological states, the former deals with physical stimuli and the latter focuses on the psychological side, distinguishing between the psychological state of the individuals and of the group (which in turn is a function of the individual's psychological states). Thus, an integration of both types of influence may be difficult. Nevertheless, the investigated phenomena (i. e., the atmosphere) still seem congeneric. In all cases, the atmosphere is linked with an affective (psychological) state that somehow goes beyond the individual; it is only regarding the number of considered dimensions of affective states that the research lines differ.

Comparing group and socio-moral atmosphere, both are usually referred to group contexts. The concept of socio-moral atmosphere could just as well be understood as a special case of the group atmosphere concept. The concept is unidimensional as well, distinguishing between low and high socio-moral atmospheres, whereas a low socio-moral atmosphere seems to be evaluated as negative and a high socio-moral atmosphere as positive. In contrast to group atmosphere, however, the socio-moral atmosphere deals with social norms instead of affective qualities, bringing a cognitive element into the concept of atmosphere.

In sum, dualistic conceptions of atmosphere raise a number of questions regarding the nature of atmosphere as the object of investigation. Is the atmosphere a phenomenon of the environment (i. e., in the stimulus) or the mind (i. e., in the organism)? Is the atmosphere a feature of a group or an individual? Do atmospheres affect people or do people affect atmospheres? Non-dualistic conceptions try to answer these questions by conceptualizing atmospheres as something that lies in-between or goes beyond subject (mind, psychological variable, organism) and object (environment, physical variable, stimulus).

### **Non-dualistic conceptions of atmosphere**

#### *Aesthetic atmosphere*

As mentioned before, dualistic conceptions of store atmospheres are insofar problematic as it is not clear whether the atmosphere belongs to the external stimulus or the internal state. In contrast, non-dualistic conceptions of atmosphere try to avoid such allocation problems by accepting atmospheres as being both subjective and objective and/or in-between subjectivity and objectivity. One particularly relevant research stream in this context stems from aesthetics in the tradition of Baumgarten (Baumgarten, 1735). As Beyes (2016a) points out, the "revitalized interest in aesthetics is bound up with the scholarly desire to think and explore collective and subjective emotional involvements in affective atmospheres" (p. 115).

A theory often referred to in this context is Böhme's (1989, 1993, 1995, 2001, 2016) "new aesthetics" which is fundamentally a theory of atmospheres:

The primary "object" of perception is atmosphere. What is first and immediately perceived is neither sensations nor shapes or objects or their constellations, as Gestalt psychology thought, but atmospheres, against whose background the analytic regard distinguishes such things as objects, forms, colours etc. (Böhme 1993, p. 125).

In this sense, Böhme rejects dualistic conceptions of atmosphere. For him, the atmosphere neither belongs to the subject, nor to the object. Instead, the new aesthetics emphasizes that the atmosphere is the "in-between, by means of which environmental qualities and states are related" (1993, p. 114). Böhme defines atmospheres as the spheres of what is experienced as corporeally present in relation to the environment. He particularly emphasizes the social power of aesthetics which is connected with aesthetic needs and an aesthetic supply. Aesthetics are not only referred to as pleasure, but are also open to manipulation. The sum of activities to create and manipulate atmospheres is described as aesthetic labor.

In marketing research, Biehl-Missal and Saren (2012) draw on Böhme in order "to explain how the overall atmosphere of a carefully designed marketing setting may unfold a sensual impact upon people's bodies and minds" (p. 168). The aim of the study is not to improve the effectiveness of store atmospheres, but rather to take a critical perspective on marketing practices. Subsequently, Biehl-Missal (2013) examines how the visual atmosphere of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange exerts an aesthetic influence on people. Beyond, Böhme's new aesthetics is used to explore the aesthetic atmospheres in museums (Biehl-Missal & Vom Lehn, 2015; Bjerregard, 2015; Dorrian, 2014). Another work in this context stems from Degen et al. (2015) who investigate how digital images from architects and developers can evoke and manipulate specific place atmospheres for marketing purposes. Besides Böhme, the authors follow Anderson's (2009) understanding of atmospheres, who, like Böhme (who is considered by Anderson) emphasizes the elusiveness and ephemerality of atmospheres: "Atmospheres are perpetually forming and deforming, appearing and disappearing, as bodies enter into relation with one another. They are never finished, static or at rest" (Anderson, 2009, p. 79).

Another atmospheric approach in the context of marketing research stems from Julmi (2016) who theoretically distinguishes between aesthetic and anaesthetic (or kitschy) atmospheres. Whereas aesthetics "is the sensibilities activated to help the human observe", anaesthetics "is the means whereby the sensory faculties are blunted" (Strati, 1999, p. 81). Aesthetic atmospheres go beyond and break with the perceiver's expectations, turning his attention to the unique, unforeseen aspects of the environment. Aesthetic atmospheres stimulate the experience in a new and creative way. On the other hand, anaesthetic atmospheres confirm and align with the perceiver's expectations. In such environments, the atmosphere is rather ordinary than exceptionally, biting like a sedative anaesthetizing the experience.

Apart from marketing research, the well-established field of organizational aesthetics also deals with aesthetics in the given sense (Beyes, 2016a; Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Ewenstein & Whyte, 2007; Gagliardi, 2006; King, 2008; Küpers, 2002; Sørensen, 2014; Strati, 1992, 1996, 1999, 2009; Taylor & Hansen, 2005). Although Beyes (2016a) stresses the relevance of the atmosphere in this context, the notion of atmospheres still plays a negligible role within organizational aesthetics, however. As an exception, Strati (2009) points out that the atmosphere may be of relevance in organizations and lists some features of the atmosphere of the organization: It is mundane, felt through experience, has corporeality, is constantly changing and a hybrid object of investigation. As organizational aesthetics and Böhme's new aesthetics share the same Baumgartian tradition, Böhme's approach arguably has the potential to enrich atmospheric research in organizational aesthetics.

### *Emotional atmosphere, climate, and culture*

In organizations, emotions can be studied on different levels: as something happening within persons, between persons, in interpersonal interactions, in groups, and on an organization-wide level (Ashkanasy, 2003; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). According to Ashkanasy (2003), the exploration of emotions on an organization-wide level makes it “necessary to deal with the more nebulous concept of emotional climate” (p. 38) from De Rivera (1992), in which atmospheres play an important role.

Although De Rivera uses his concept of emotional climate in the context of societies, it has been repeatedly adapted to organizations (Ashkanasy, 2003; Ashkanasy & Härtel, 2014; Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Fink & Yolles, 2015; Kiefer, 2002; Müller-Seitz, 2008; Nolan & Küpers, 2009; Ozcelik, Langton, & Aldrich, 2008; Yurtsever & De Rivera, 2010). De Rivera (1992) defines emotional climate as an objective social phenomenon that affects the members of a group or society in a concrete way. The emotional climate refers to the collective feeling and behavior of people and is the expression of the way the people emotionally stand in relation to each other. De Rivera also introduces the concepts of emotional atmosphere and emotional culture. The term emotional atmosphere refers to the actual moment when a group focuses on a common event. Compared to the emotional climate, the emotional atmosphere is therefore not only of a shorter duration, but is also grounded in the actual moment. The emotional culture corresponds to the socialized emotional relations within a culture and therefore refers to the phenomenon with the longest duration. Although the concepts of De Rivera underlie several subsequent studies (Bar-Tal, Halperin, & De Rivera, 2007; Rimé, 2007), the interplay between emotional atmosphere, climate and culture still remains largely unexplained, especially in an organizational context, making the concept of atmosphere nebulous.

Recently, Julmi (2015, 2017) adapts the framework from De Rivera in an organizational context and links it to the phenomenological work of Schmitz (1964, 2009, 2016) and Schmitz, Müllan, and Slaby (2011), especially to Schmitz’s concepts of atmosphere and situation. For Schmitz, atmospheres are emotions spatially poured out in the domain of what is corporeally experienced as present. On the one side, atmospheres are objectively present in the space, but can on the other side also become subjective facts for anyone affectively involved in an atmosphere. In contrast to Böhme, Schmitz conceptualizes atmospheres as situationally bound phenomena. Atmospheres and situations are closely interlinked, being two sides of a coin, with the atmosphere building the emotional and the situation building the cognitive side of experience. Situations are permeated with atmospheres lending the situation its specific and emotional character.

According to Julmi, the culture of an organization can be understood as a shared situation aligning its members in a pre-reflective way. Through the course of living together, culture conveys social competence regarding appropriate forms and behaviors. As the visible expressions of culture, cultural artefacts are perceived as a holistic impression whereby this holistic impression is charged with significance from the organizational members’ point of view. As a holistic impression, cultural artefacts are perceived and felt atmospherically. The organizational culture directly and permanently affects atmospheres on an organizational level, giving the organizational culture its specific and emotional character. As there is a certain degree of consistency and coherence in perceiving and feeling these atmospheres among the members of an organization, the relatively stable element of these atmospheres is referred to as the organizational climate. The climate of an organization is the relatively stable and shared atmosphere of its culture (Flamholtz & Randle, 2014; Pritchard & Karasick, 1973).

*Organizational atmosphere*

Another concept dealing with atmospheres in organizations is the concept of organizational atmospheres introduced by Borch (2010, 2011) which is based upon Sloterdijk's (1998, 1999, 2004) theory of spheres. Sloterdijk assumes that people live in meaningful spheres providing them with a protective membrane. He distinguishes between three types of spheres: bubbles, globes and foam. Bubbles refer to micro-spheres of symbiotic relations; globes refer to macro-spheres of social reality constituting one's worldview enduring over time in history. Foam refers to the actual situation and is an aggregate of micro-spheres adjacent to one another, i. e., individual bubbles are bound to a mound of foam. Foam represents a multichamber organization of connected, yet isolated cells each making up its own microspherical world.

Although the cells themselves are separated from another, adjacent cells share the same boundaries and thus are characterized by co-fragility. As cells are protected and threatened by their boundaries at the same time, their maintenance and preservation becomes vital. The interaction between the cells is not based on direct exchange or communication, but rather through affect transmission (or mimetic infiltration). Although Sloterdijk locates the concept of foam on the same level as society and thinks of organizations as micro-spheres (being the bubbles within the foam), Borch conceptualizes organizations as a foam structure containing numerous individual bubbles. He argues that understanding organizations as bubbles would underestimate their complexity.

For Sloterdijk, social life is always embedded in and depends on atmospheres (or air conditions), which therefore also counts as foam sociality. In this sense, atmospheres play a crucial role in the transmission of affects between the cells. Hence, the concept of foam emphasizes the importance of the politics of organizational atmospheres, which rest upon the possibilities of atmospheric manipulation, understood as the capacity of atmospheric "production to generate specific affective states" (Borch, 2010, p. 234) on an organizational level. This atmospheric manipulation regulates social foam and the relations between the cells within the foam.

The politics of organizational atmospheres has two key objectives. The first objective is to shape the material side (architecture, aesthetic design, temperatures, smells etc.) and the psycho-social side (e. g., the spirit of teams) of the organization to encourage specific affects for transmission. The second objective considers the fragile nature of foam and seeks to maintain the organization as foam.

Regarding the conceptual understanding of atmosphere, Borch draws upon Böhme's (2006) work on (architectural) atmospheres. He adopts Böhme's understanding of atmospheres as "tuned spaces" or "spatially discharged quasi-objective feelings" (Böhme, 2006, p. 16, as cited in Borch, 2010, p. 234), indicating that affects are not only transmitted through personal interaction, but also through the architecture of the room itself and through the objects people interact with. By combining the theory of spheres with the concept of atmosphere, Borch offers a new and unique way of analyzing organizations (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011) and in this sense starts a distinct line of research attracting subsequent work (Halsall & Brown, 2013).

*Pedagogical atmosphere*

The field of management education is an area in which the consideration of the concept of atmosphere seems to be promising as well, especially with respect to power issues. Whereas education in general has been connected to Böhme's and Schmitz' concepts of atmosphere

(Düttmann, 2000; Schultheis, 2013; Wolf, 2015), Michels and Beyes (2016) are probably the first to explicitly stress the role of atmospheres in the context of management education. The authors are primarily concerned with the spatial design and architecture of the classroom environment and their atmospheric implications, addressing a spatial sensibility for the atmospheric effects and spatial multiplicity of the classroom environment. Michels and Beyes acknowledge the atmospheric concepts of Schmitz, Böhme and Sloterdijk, whereas for their own conception they focus on the works of Böhme and Sloterdijk who particularly stress the aspect of power in the context of atmospheres, “to shift emphasis to the production and modulation of atmospheres” (p. 315).

The pedagogical atmosphere is understood as a phenomenon located somewhere in-between the present subjects and objects, emanating from as well as affecting their complex interplay in spaces of teaching. Accordingly, the concept of (pedagogical) atmosphere approaches the possibilities to affect the students’ experience and actions by modulating the spatial teaching environments. In this regard, the authors distinguish between three atmospheric practices or spatial tactics: first, using new and unconventional material; second, decomposing and recomposing existing material; and third, leaving the classroom space in favor of urban spaces. The aim of these practices lies in how they might interrupt spatial routines, in order to stimulate the students’ intellectual development. With their approach, the authors “recommend and encourage the everyday spatial reconfiguration of what can be sensed, thought, and done in business school settings, of how learning processes unfold *atmospherically*” (p. 326). As educational atmospheres exercise power over those affected, a pedagogy of atmospheres is essentially concerned with a critical sensibility regarding the atmospheric politics of organizing management education.

### **Conceptual implications**

#### *The social side of atmospheres*

While dualistic conceptions of atmosphere seem to have declined at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the interest in non-dualistic conceptions of atmosphere has increased since then. As the paper demonstrates, there is a nascent, minor turn towards a non-dualistic notion of atmosphere in management and organization studies. However, as researching atmospheres in a non-dualistic manner is still far from being well-established, further strengthening of the understanding of atmospheres in a non-dualistic manner in the context of management and organization studies context is necessary.

In order to strengthen such an understanding, it is helpful to pursue the question as to why non-dualistic approaches towards atmospheres are relatively rare in comparison to other disciplines such as architecture, urban planning, and design where one “of the most significant recent trends is a turn towards (or perhaps a return to) atmospheric qualities” (Borch, 2014, p. 7). The reason for this probably lies in the difficulty to separate atmospheres from the social influences on these atmospheres in a management and organization context. For example, architectural atmospheres can be treated and studied as a framework for social co-existence, as well as something material that is shaping the perceptions of those dwelling in such atmospheres. In contrast, it is difficult to find material expressions of a tense or relaxed, a trustful or distrustful atmosphere in organizations. Such atmospheres are essentially bound to the situations in which the members of the organization find themselves (Julmi, 2015). If, for example, an atmosphere is conflict-laden, the importance of understanding the situation behind the conflicts is necessary to fully understand the atmosphere, although the atmosphere as such may be perceived as conflict-laden by outsiders as well. Research into atmospheres in organizations is therefore always research into sociality.

Although Böhme's concept is arguably the most prominent non-dualistic conception in management and organization studies, it is exactly this point where its weaknesses lie. As Reckwitz (2012) points out, Böhme sometimes displays a one-dimensional understanding of atmospheres, neglecting the "specific cultural sensitivity and attentiveness" (p. 255) on the perceiving side of atmospheres. In this respect, Böhme's conception remains promising, but needs to be supplemented by a second dimension taking into account the social side of perception. Reckwitz suggests considering routine practices in a Bourdieu-inspired sense, because such routine practices "mostly rely on perfect matches between atmospheres and sensitivities" (p. 255). Michels (2015) also acknowledges the potentiality of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and habitualization to better understand people's resonance with specific atmospheres, and Kazig (2012, 2013) develops a shopping practice typology in which he explicitly stresses the link between specific shopping practices such as strolling or rummaging and the perception of shopping atmospheres. Thus, in order to complement Böhme's view on atmospheres in an organizational and management-related context, a praxeological approach seems promising.

Sloterdijk's spherology is, of course, another already proven and promising possibility to enrich Böhme's concept of atmosphere through social spheres, especially with the notion of foam. Spheres refer to situational dynamics, giving rise to a multiplicity and instability of social co-existence (Iedema & Carroll, 2015). In this context, the notion of atmospheres relates to the "affective constitution of spheres" and allows for an analysis "of how affective contagion takes place" (Beyes, 2014, p. 578) within such a social co-existence. As practices play an important role in Sloterdijk's spherology as well, the latter may serve as a broader conception encompassing the relation of practices and atmospheres (Michels & Beyes, 2016). Following a sphereological approach, "social practices essentially become a matter of co-existence" (Laurell, 2016, p. 526), "affecting, negotiating and redefining atmospheres of spheres" (p. 528). As Borch has shown, Böhme's concept of atmosphere has proven to go well with Sloterdijk's theory of spheres. In particular, both Sloterdijk and Böhme explicitly stress the significance of spatiality and architecture for atmospheric perception and transmission.

Last but not least, Schmitz' concept of atmosphere is also well suited for analyzing the social side of atmospheres. As already outlined, Schmitz treats atmospheres as situationally and thus socially bound phenomena. His definition of the term situation may serve as a broad conceptual basis for further digging into the sociality of atmospheres. Schmitz defines a situation through three attributes. Firstly, situations are uniform, that is, they are characterized by coherence in themselves and by external detachment. Secondly, situations cohere through a meaningfulness that consists of significances. Thirdly, the meaningfulness of a situation is internally diffuse, meaning that individual significances have to be neither individually countable nor separable from each other. In the context of organization and management studies, this definition of situations can be connected, for instance, with the concept of organizational culture (Julmi, 2015; Julmi & Scherm, 2012) or with shopping practices (Julmi, 2016; Kazig, 2013).

As Sloterdijk is a good reader of Schmitz (Michels & Beyes, 2016), it seems moreover worth analyzing the possibilities of combining elements from Schmitz' new phenomenology and Sloterdijk's spherology. Just like Schmitz, Sloterdijk attempts to elaborate "a grammar of the shared situation" (Sloterdijk, 2011, pp. 348–349, as cited in Beyes, 2014, p. 576) and can also be applied, for instance, to the concept of organizational culture (Halsall & Brown, 2013). However, regardless of whether a (new) phenomenological, sphereological or praxeological approach is preferred, researching atmospheres needs a deeper understanding of the social

side. Only in this way, the identified minor turn towards a non-dualistic notion of atmosphere may change into a significant trend.

### *Aesthetic and anaesthetic power*

One recurring theme in the discussion on atmospheres is atmospheric or aesthetic power. It is argued that power is not only an inherent feature of atmospheres, but also that power essentially unfolds atmospherically. For example, Böhme (2003) speaks about aesthetic labor as “the totality of those activities which aim to give an appearance to things and people, cities and landscapes, to endow them with an aura, to lend them an atmosphere, or to generate an atmosphere in ensembles” (p. 72). In a similar vein, practices of atmospheric modulation are seen as a form of power (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Borch, 2010, 2011; Michels & Beyes, 2016), carrying “their own politics of aesthetics” (Beyes, 2016b, p. 3). In a shopping context, “architectures of seduction provide an atmospheric scenery for consumption experiences” (Biehl-Missal & Saren, 2012, p. 170).

It is agreed here that aesthetics (in the sense of aisthesis) are key to understanding the power of atmospheres, but, following Julmi (2016), it is also suggested that the aesthetic is just one pole of a continuum, with the anaesthetic forming the other pole with an equal, although totally different relevance to power issues. Such a view acknowledges the circumstance that aesthetic phenomena are essentially atmospheric (Beyes, 2016a; Böhme, 1993, 2016), but an atmosphere does not necessarily have to be aesthetic in turn (Kazig, 2013; Schmitz, 1964). In the following, power aspects of aesthetic and anaesthetic atmospheres will be discussed, beginning with the former.

A fundamental characteristic of aesthetic atmospheres is their power of turning the attention of the perceiver to unique and unforeseen qualities. An aesthetic awareness is created that connects the perceiver to the present, actual moment through affective involvement. Such an aesthetic awareness opens the space for new influences, giving room for “moments of insight, chance and serendipity, uncovering nuances, implications, hints and subtle nudges” (Linstead, 2000, p. 72). In museums, for example, the aesthetic atmosphere “creates a presence as such, an affective space which disturbs our everyday concepts of the world” (Bjerregard, 2015, p. 31). Grown expectations are suspended, while new expectations have the chance to arise. Aesthetic atmospheres thus have the power to modulate and reshape the conditions of social co-existence. Although aesthetic atmospheres (e. g., of an electrified group) stand in contrast to atmospheres of everydayness or ordinariness, they have a potential impact on the latter. As aesthetic atmospheres emerge in situ, the difficulty of seizing such manipulative power lies in its unpredictability and unavailability. Evoking aesthetic atmospheres is an artistic task, with the artist’s drive being “a corporeally felt impulse that guides the artist as a suggestion of motion” (Julmi & Scherm, 2015, p. 154).

In contrast to aesthetic atmospheres, anaesthetic atmospheres induce rather ordinary and foreseeable qualities. Atmospheres are anaesthetic if expectations are met on how the “right” atmosphere “has to be” in a concrete manner. Experiences of actual moments are not open but constrained by expectations of everydayness waiting to be confirmed. In an anaesthetic atmosphere such as a dull atmosphere, there is little space for new influences. However, anaesthetic atmospheres are not negative as such. They provide identity, context, orientation and relief to those dwelling in them. For example, when someone comes to rest in a cozy atmosphere, the surroundings operate like a sedative, pleasantly anaesthetizing the experience and creating predictable space to recover. Sometimes, everything literally just has to fall into place.

Initially, the power over anaesthetic atmospheres lies within the expectations, norms and conventions of everyday social life. With regard to the compulsory effect of everydayness, Heidegger (1927/1996) speaks of the domination of the *they*: "In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the *they* unfolds its true dictatorship. We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge. [...] The *they* [...] prescribes the kind of being of everydayness" (p. 119). Compliance with the expectations of the *they* is strictly monitored. The "averageness, which prescribes what can and may be ventured, watches over every exception which thrusts itself to the fore. Every priority is noiselessly squashed" (p. 119).

Thus, the acquirable ability to create anaesthetic atmospheres is to adapt to the expectations of those targeted (e. g., customers in a store environment). Such an ability is rather a craft than an art. From this perspective, the source of power stems from the target group and thus seems to be beyond reach. When, for instance, the customer is always right, the service provider is rather an adapting servant than a creating master. At second glance, however, there is much power on the management and organization side as well, calling for a critical perspective. If people are always provided with things they desire, a relationship of dependence may emerge where the dependent side is paradoxically the same side as the one the source of power was initially ascribed to. A maybe inappropriate, yet striking example for such a paradox of power is the case of a drug dealer giving his customers "just what they desire", while denying any responsibility for the results of his activities. Here, the aspect of power is less about manipulation, but more about habit-forming. Thus, the ability of evoking anaesthetic atmospheres yields its own power politics and should be critically discussed.

Combining the aspects of aesthetic and anaesthetic atmospheres, a third kind of atmospheric power emerges when there is an "aesthetic asymmetry" between those producing and those perceiving the atmosphere. This is the case when the ability of evoking anaesthetic atmospheres is used to produce aesthetic effects for a new audience, metaphorically passing glass beads off as pearls. In such cases, the production of atmospheres is an acquirable craft, but it is perceived as an inaccessible piece of art. Evidently, such a form of power needs critical discussion, too. Besides negative aspects of such an atmospheric manipulation, however, there are also positive aspects which nevertheless need to be handled with care and responsibility. The outlined pedagogy of atmospheres, for example, essentially relies on this third kind of atmospheric power.

## Conclusion

In sum, non-dualistic conceptions of atmosphere try to escape or resolve the identified problems raised by dualistic conceptions. They make it clear that the atmosphere as a phenomenon neither belongs to the stimulus nor to the mind, but is something that lies in-between or goes beyond subject and object, referring to the mutual relatedness of subject and object. Atmospheres emerge "as an intermediate position between subject and object, or rather as a unity of subject and object, which is fundamentally characterized by their co-presence" (Böhme, 2001, p. 56-57, as cited in Sørensen, 2015, p. 65).

Regarding the review of existing concepts, this article yields two main results. First, dualistic concepts of atmosphere are discouraged. Studies built on such concepts may reveal interesting and powerful results, but they do not shed much light on atmospheres as such. Second, non-dualistic concepts of atmosphere are encouraged, although further work is needed in order to illuminate the phenomenon of atmosphere in the context of organization and management studies. Looking at the conceptual implications, the article suggests that it is especially important to include the social side to fully understand the emergence, involvement and effects of atmospheres in this context. Although atmospheres are affective or



emotional phenomena by nature, they cannot be properly understood without considering their social (or cognitive) side. Furthermore, it is suggested that a full-range consideration of atmospheres needs to take both aesthetic and anaesthetic elements into account. The need for such a differentiation arises not only from a conceptual urge — it also reveals hidden facets of power and thus allows for a more nuanced study of atmospheric power politics.

In terms of *organizational aesthetics*, this article clearly pleads for a more systematic consideration of atmospheres. Boehme, who understands his new aesthetics as a theory of atmospheres, already shows the close connection between aesthetics and atmospheres. However, as the field of organizational aesthetics refers to an “aesthetic perspective on organizations and organizational phenomena” (Taylor, 2013, p. 30), a systematic consideration of the concept of atmosphere should also look at the social side of atmospheres. Apart from that, the contrasting of aesthetic and anesthetic atmospheres can also help to more precisely define the relationship between aesthetics and atmospheres in this context. Although it may seem contra-intuitive, this article suggests that the concept of atmosphere is broader than the concept of aesthetics.

Conclusively, a non-dualistic understanding of atmosphere may be vague, but this is due to the vague nature of atmospheres and not the consequence of the vagueness in the conception (Rauh, 2012). Only because atmospheres are vague, this does not mean that the meaning of the notion of atmosphere is vague itself (Böhme, 1995). In other words, the ambiguity of atmospheres is unambiguous. As soon as studies try to reduce this ambiguity, they lose grip on atmospheres. Beyond doubt, the main challenge of finding adequate ways of empirically approaching atmospheres lies within this “slippery territory of intersubjective experiences” (Ladkin, 2013, p. 325). Although the discussion of empirical analysis of atmospheres was not within the scope of this article, fostering conceptual clarity about the object of investigation may be and hopefully is of help here as well.

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