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Revija za fenomenologijo in hermenevtiko
Journal of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

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Andrzej Wierciński & Andrej Božič (*Eds.*)

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Original scientific paper
Izvirni znanstveni članek

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Mood as Interpretive Category
Experience as a Form of Understanding

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Abstract

The article discusses the functioning of the notion of mood in various fields (philosophy, psychology, architecture, literary studies). In this context, the mood becomes a way of experiencing oneself in the world (referring primarily to Martin Heidegger's concept). To be in a mood means—to be in the world, to experience the world, to try to understand it. To be in a mood is to feel your body and your mind in the world. The mood captured in this way allows a different reading of selected

poems by Halina Poświatowska—the sensuality of this poetry can be understood as a phenomenological record of experiencing oneself in the world.

Keywords: mood, understanding, world, Martin Heidegger, Halina Poświatowska.

Razpoloženje kot interpretativna kategorija. Izkustvo kot oblika razumevanja

Povzetek

Članek obravnava delovanje koncepta razpoloženja na različnih področjih (v filozofiji, psihologiji, arhitekturi, literarni vedi). V takšnem kontekstu razpoloženja postane način izkustva sebe znotraj sveta (zlasti v skladu z interpretacijo Martina Heideggra). Biti razpoložen pomeni—biti v svetu, izkušati svet, poskušati ga razumeti. Razpoloženje je občutenje lastnega telesa in lastnega uma znotraj sveta. Če razpoloženje razumemo na takšen način, se lahko drugače spoprimemo z izbranimi pesmimi Haline Poświatowske: čutnost njene poezije lahko razumemo kot fenomenološko zabeležbo izkustva sebstva v svetu.

Ključne besede: razpoloženje, razumevanje, svet, Martin Heidegger, Halina Poświatowska.

By enabling us to integrate philosophical, psychological, architectural, and aesthetic analyses, the category of mood constitutes itself as one of the "traveling concepts" of contemporary humanities. Drawing on Mieke Bal's theoretical framework, I adopt her interpretive lens as inspiration:[1] it permits me to bring together different references to mood, both discursive and experiential, enabling mutual illumination. While mood has been, particularly recently, a key concept in affective studies, the specific contexts of its exercise transcend the field. By attempting to "read mood" as an interpretive category, I also seek to draw attention to its specific literary entanglements that broaden available modes of reading. This, consequently, would render theoretical reflections a point of departure for analyses aiming to revise specific readings. Literary diagnoses, meanwhile, could prompt further reflection.

The problem with conceptualizing mood also stems from its particular imperceptibility. Here, I understand this imperceptibility as confirmation of the intuitive use of the word, which remains "unseen," until it has to be defined.[2] Dictionary definitions typically point to a mental state (persisting for a period of time) and "experiences and sensations" produced by being in a certain place and time, but also mention the process of tuning an instrument or adjusting voice pitch, and getting someone into the mood (or adopting a certain stance toward someone or something).[3] The term, therefore, usually connotes an emotional state or the ambience or aura of a given place or time, implies a certain atmosphere present within a setting ("summer morning mood"), or indicates a process of attunement or readjustment ("getting oneself into a festive mood"). The commonness of the term echoes in academic idioms,

1 Bal writes: "Concepts, often precisely those words outsiders consider jargon, can be tremendously productive. If explicit, clear, and defined, they can help to articulate an understanding, check an imagination-run-wild, or enable a discussion, on the basis of common in terms and in the awareness of absences and exclusions. […] Concepts play a crucial part in the traffic between disciplines because of two consequences of their power to propagate, found, and define an object domain: they capture, in a conflation of epistemology and scientific practice, the scientificity of the methodology they ground; and, moving in the opposite direction, they 'harden' the science in question by determining and restricting what counts as scientific." (Bal 2002, 23–34.)

2 "Intuitively, we know full well what it is we're speaking of, but when it comes time to define mood, the situation quickly turns hopeless." (Łukaszewski 2008, 208.)

3 Cf. *Słownik* ("nastrój").

which seek to formulate research practices based on empirical diagnoses they themselves are rooted in.

With this brief overview of the myriad ways of conceptualizing mood in modern humanities, I seek to define a common analytical space, which will allow me to identify a trajectory that would connect discourses while pointing out places warranting closer inquiry and ones that could potentially open new investigative avenues. Preparing this space is, to me, akin to sketching a map that requires both a broader scope and richer detail. Philosophically, the beginning resembles a cartographical grid.

Commenting on Heidegger's assertion that mood is a "fundamental existential mode of being of the equiprimordial disclosedness of the world, being-there-with, and existence" (Heidegger 2010, 137), Stanisław Łojek argued:

> A human being-in-the-world (and, given their nature, humans are always in-the-world) remains necessarily open to all. And because this opening ensues through mood, the act of being(-in-the-world) always leaves us attuned this or that way. Only through attuned opening can things seem to us this or that and may apply to us, enabling us to encounter, experience, and comprehend them (encountering things is a precondition for all cognition, including its seemingly unattuned, "pure" form). This is because no thing can be this-or-that in and of itself, but can only be perceived in the context of a greater whole. (Łojek 2015, 39.)

Thus conceived, mood becomes something of an intermediary between the self and the world, negotiating the availability of the latter and revealing its incessant elusion. Focusing on the concept of angst defined as a fundamental mood allowing us to glimpse the "mystery of being," Łojek emphasizes:

> As a basic mood, angst opens us to a different experience of the being's existence—different from our everyday, academic, and metaphysical experience. Heidegger, however, aims for something more significant than just identifying new spheres and opportunities for "experience." […] The importance of basic moods lies in their ability to shift us to

> places where "existence appears as is." By its nature fleeting and rare, mood—like a flash—illuminates existence as it is, pulling down the everyday veil of the obvious. (Łojek 2015, 50–51.)

Angst, pushing us out of the everyday rut, is endowed with the aura of a primordial philosophical stance, and is thus bound with fundamental modes of existence:

> Genuine investigation requires proper attunement. (Basic) moods have the capacity to subvert and undermine fixed and established concepts, the stiff frameworks of which bind and truncate reality. Mood may transport us, if only for a brief moment, near those places where existence appears as is. Places which, according to Plato, are sought out and interrogated by philosophy, itself rooted in the deepest of human needs. The same philosophy, which Aristoteles believed began with and realized itself in the mood of wonder. (Łojek 2015, 51.)

It is attunement that enables perception, or—to put it differently—it *is* perception. Attunement is, at its core, a sort of openness to the world that is perceived and examined. Mood, therefore, connotes experience and definition, and traces space around the self, in which the self is always situated in relation to something (in-the-). And it is this particular positioning, interpreted as the pursuit of command over the (continuously elusive) world, that brings up the image of a sphere around each and every one of us.

Heideggerian attunement can be compared to Hermann Schmitz's concept of *Stimmungsatmosphäre* or mood atmosphere. Outlining his new phenomenology, Schmitz points out the existence of an invisible sphere, not only omnipresent, but one characterized by persistent disclosedness. After introducing the category of the living body,[4] Schmitz construes emotion as

4 "Here, I define living body as all that which he [man] feels in the immediate surroundings of his physical body, without basing himself on the testimony of his five senses […] and the perceptual body schema […]. The living body is populated with bodily stirrings, such as fear, pain, hunger, thirst, breathing, pleasure, affective involvement on the part of feelings." (Schmitz 2001, 12.)

"placelessly flowing atmospheres that engulf the living body" (Schmitz 2001, 61), and contends that they comprise another layer of the "emotional sphere" (ibid., 62), alongside moods and stirrings. Schmitz sees moods, the key subject of my investigations, as a sort of basis for all emotion:

> There are only two pure moods: pure fulfillment (pleasure) and pure emptiness (despair). Here, I do not mean either fulfilled or failed hopes or wishes, or a lack of perspective in the face of impending doom, but rather that the breadth of an atmospheric feeling presents itself as either a fulfilled or empty. (Schmitz 2001, 62.)

Conceived spatially, mood resembles a sphere that can be entered, an envelopment—broadening or narrowing that perspective, which enables us to perceive and sense all that exists within reach of our bodies. Writing about being affected by, among other things, a mood, Schmitz asserts:

> This communication is based around the living body, which registers what the ambiguous sensation seeks to express. The incorporation of others into the living body, consequently, allows us to understand perceptually—prior to any and all interpretation or empathy—whenever something appears within the sphere of the living body that does not belong there (as it belongs, in this case, to others) or whenever something emanates from that sphere by way of said communication; we sense it as we do the weather, the weight dragging us down when we fall or stumble, a gust of wind or an electrical shock, which we also experience within our living body (or even exclusively within it, rendering impossible any attempt to detach or isolate from it), but never as something that belongs there, but rather as something that comes over, permeates, or envelops it. (Schmitz 2001, 38.)

The exactness of the description stems from a meticulous breakdown of individual experiences (and their variations), which most see as familiar states expressed using metaphorical terms, such as "being touched by something" (whether it is situations, particular pronunciations, unexpected sights) or

"feeling the atmosphere" (of a home, a town, a personal encounter). These concepts allow us to mark the fact of experiencing states materializing between individuals in a given setting: often enough, they are emotional states we perceive somatically.

The attempt to capture the common experience, revealing all the possible meanings it may have with regard to our perception of reality, remains a key aspect of the above description. The "invisibility" of the atmosphere enveloping the living body stands in sharp contrast to the power it wields over individuals. Here, Schmitz puts particular emphasis on the clash of atmospheres carrying opposite emotional loads—when a person in a good mood enters a room with a solemn, downcast aura, the positive disposition is usually toned down to match the dignified atmosphere. To describe similar situations, the philosopher developed the concept of "authority" of a feeling.[5]

As they are rooted in communication based around the living body, mood atmospheres constitute a constant, enveloping presence that enables a range of human faculties, from moving efficiently through a crowd, through making conversation and tuning instruments, up to attuning oneself to/empathizing with the emotional experience of another person.[6] Schmitz asserts that, perceived through the living body, emotions need not be distilled down into discrete essences:

> Situations may unfold without feelings, which suffuse them in the form of atmospheres. One example […]: an ambiguous sensation, which, in order to avoid a collision, the driver facing an immediate threat must react to nearly instantaneously, without any relevant input, or following limited analysis, by either swerving, braking, or accelerating to avoid it. In crises like these, feelings remain muted: only terror may break the silence, manifested in the utter constriction of the living body. (Schmitz 2001, 91–92.)

5 "What subdues the cheerful person, is the dignity of the atmosphere, the authority of sorrow. […] In the aforementioned case, the cheer withdraws in the face of the more solemn and compelling desolation." (Schmitz 2001, 26.)
6 Cf. Schmitz 2001, 37–47.

The enveloping, suffusing, shrouding, covering, and touching of the living body by the mood atmosphere determines the specific domain of the relationship between a person and the space, in which they function. A relationship that is incredibly tender, caring, susceptible to minute changes in the environment, as indicated by the aforementioned words suggesting a certain gentleness of reaction (indeed, its particularly high sensitivity). The living body is especially vulnerable to changes in the stimuli, reflecting the effect of the broadly defined environment on the individual's ability to function. The Polish title of Schmitz's book, which roughly translates as *Bodysphere, space, and emotion*, centers the influence wielded by this portion of our immediate surroundings that always accompanies us: directly affecting our choices and our ways of conceptualizing reality.

The distinctly spatial character of the above interpretation invites a closer look at the ways, in which we conceive mood in architecture. The issue has been explored at length by Gabriela Świtek, who emphasized the importance of phenomenology for a description of the atmosphere of particular buildings. Following the findings of fellow scholars, Świtek points to the question of externalizing, relaying, and sharing of mood,[7] and further emphasizes that:

> Experienced within architecture, the moods emanating therefrom are not our exclusive, private preserve, neither are they "intersubjectively incommunicable." Rather, they make up constellations of expectations that we harbor toward professionals responsible for the architectural and urban landscape of the environment we live in. (Świtek 2020, 94.)

Analyzing the specific ambience of buildings, Świtek illustrates the transition from psychologizing attempts to empathize with space (as theorized by Wölfflin) to Heideggerian phenomenological descriptions, which see "attunement" "as 'primarily, and above all psychology of mood,' as the placement of Dasein" (Świtek 2020, 100; 101–102). Acknowledging

7 Cf. Świtek 2020, 65; 77–79. Drawing on the findings of Hubert L. Dreyfus, Świątek points to the difference between the mood of a room and the mood inside it. The former is constant, determined by architectural choices, whereas the latter is in constant flux (78). Both, however, may spread and may be shared.

Schmitz's perspective, meanwhile, Świtek focuses on his assertion about the indispensability of examining the "resonance between our mood or character and the atmosphere within a given architectural space" (ibid., 116). Being in spaces, co-generated by others, could potentially corroborate the significance of the moods experienced within the vicinity of our bodies, which are essential to architectural and urban planning due to how our immediate surroundings tend to affect our frame of mind. Drawing on how the German *Stimmung* denotes both architectural atmosphere and the act of tuning an instrument, and writing about the "attunement of architectural space," Świtek asserts that it ought to be understood as "the pursuit of harmony with the world within a formless space that our experiences suffuse" (ibid., 117).

Tying into attunement/tuning, this harmony with the would might suggest that internally conceived moods ought also to be taken into account. Interpreted through a psychological lens, it brings up exactly this aspect of its analysis and introduces a clear distinction between mood and feeling: while mood lasts longer and is less intense than feeling, it applies to situations that do not lend themselves to emotional definition.[8] Ewa Goryńska notes:

> Emotions are, generally speaking, highly intense states that require high energy expenditures and high levels of stimulation, whereas mood also applies to states that entail inactivity and low energy. Emotions are elicited by specific stimuli and are a reaction to important events or circumstances, while moods are shaped not only by external actions and experiences, but also by internally complex processes. (Goryńska 2011, 12.)

Poring over the highly diverse body of psychological research into mood (areas of which include its intensity, cognitive aspects, and relationship to psychological disorders), we ought to focus on interrogations of how music can be used to shape and affect mood, an area particularly important due to the special relationship between melodies and the listeners: the aural sphere envelops the listeners and, research indicates, affects both their physiological

8 Cf. Goryńska 2011, 12.

and emotional reactions[9] through a process that involves "finding synchrony with the acoustic structure [of music—author's note]. It is important to note that the reactions elicited by music are both physical and psychological: musical attunement modulates cardiac rhythms and thus regulates emotional experiences."[10] The research-backed correlation between disposition (mood) and music has contributed to the development of music therapy, which allows practitioners to regulate the condition of patients participating in the sessions:

> The effectiveness of music therapy seems to derive primarily from its impact on feelings and their attendant thought patterns. The stimulatory and affective response to music typically produces a cognitive reaction, which assesses the quality and meaning of the emotions. Consequently, music may elicit certain moods, intensify current emotional states or channel them in desired directions […]. (Kudlik and Czerniawska 2011, 263.)

This synchronization of emotional stimulation ostensibly corroborates the correlation between mood and broadly conceived background (in this case, its auditory portion). The therapy protocol, however, addresses the original, primary mood experienced by another person, and does so in a way that allows attempts at tuning/retuning it.[11] Cases like these, therefore, would necessarily include deliberate confrontation between different moods pursued

9 Cf. Kudlik and Czerniawska 2011, 250–260.

10 "The best-researched physiological impacts of stimulation include its effects on the respiratory and circulatory systems, both of which are strongly linked with our emotional response. On the one hand, emotional states are directly linked to breath and heart rates; on the other, changes in these two parameters may, in turn, elicit a specific emotional response. […] We should point out, however, that while breathing patterns are rather consistent regardless of experienced emotion, the heart rate profiles paint a different picture." (Kudlik and Czerniawska 2011, 250–251.)

11 "A similar aspect was pointed out by the authors of the so-called 'attunement music therapy,' in which mood is changed by first selecting a musical track that matches the patient's initial mental state, and then using a progression of different tracks designed to produce the desired emotional effect. For a depressive patient, for example, the progression would begin with a sad piece of music, while the following tracks would be chosen for their ability to lift the mood and activate the subject, all the way toward the end goal, in this case tension relief, relaxation, tranquility." (Kudlik and Czerniawska 2011, 264.)

for the purpose of finding a configuration that would produce one most useful (supportive) to the given person.

The psychological interpretation of the relationship between attunement of the self and the mood enveloping/touching the self lends further definition to Heideggerian being in a mood and Schmitz's ambient effect on the self, as well as offers a different perspective on the architectural projects of influencing and generating moods. The possible interpretations also include attempts at formulating literary-studies-inflected concepts, inspired primarily by the ideas first put forward by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.

Drawing on Friedrich Schiller, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Riegl, Heidegger, Spitzer, Benn, and Toni Morrison,[12] and working off a framework that conceived mood as a sort of atmosphere, Gumbrecht formulated his concept as follows:

> I am most interested in the component of meaning that connects *Stimmung* with music and the hearing of sounds. As is well known, we do not hear with our inner and outer ear alone. Hearing is a complex form of behavior that involves the entire body. Skin and haptic modalities of perception play an important role. Every tone we perceive is, of course, a form of physical reality […] that "happens" to our body and, at the same time, "surrounds" it. (Gumbrecht 2012, 4.)

The physical aspect of mood, the experience of it (here, Gumbrecht cites Morrison describing this phenomenon as "being touched as if from the inside"; ibid.), becomes an essential element of investigating the effect that literature has on readers. To that end, Gumbrecht adopts the term *Stimmung*—here conceived as a literary device capable of eliciting a particular reaction in the readers:

> It might appear, at first glance, as if music and weather merely provided metaphors for what we call the "tone," "atmosphere," or,

12 Gumbrecht emphasizes the findings of Heidegger's concept of mood, Riegl's correct intuitions about how nostalgia would come to enjoy great fortunes in the future, as well as Spitzer and Benn's conclusion that mood cannot be reduced to just performing the role of harmony. Cf. Gumbrecht 2012, 8–10.

> indeed, the *Stimmung* of a text. My point, however, is the fact that such tones, atmospheres, and *Stimmungen* never exist wholly independent of the material components of works—above all, their prosody. Therefore, texts affect the "inner feelings" of readers in the way that weather and music do. (Gumbrecht 2012, 5.)

The literary text generates mood by organizing tone: the rhythm, intonation, as well as selection and clustering of specific speech sounds work to produce certain phonic effects, the "voice" of which affects the experience of the listeners. The immediate physicality of the tone of the work, however, does not impose any specific limits on the relationships between literature and mood—Gumbrecht also brings up the impact of certain forms ("forms of narration") on mood, as well as the meaning carried by the sensual elements of the work and its specific themes (and cites Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* as one spectacular example).[13] This, in turn, leads to associating mood with experience (which it evokes) and a certain form of presence: "Yearning for atmosphere and mood is a yearning for presence—perhaps a variant that presupposes a pleasure in dealing with the cultural past." (Gumbrecht 2012, 20.)[14]

13 Cf. Gumbrecht 2012, 6. Commenting on Gumbrecht's theories, Gerard Ronge notes that while generating mood is, on the one hand, a constituent element of the process of reception (while emphasizing its similarity to Ingardenian concretization), he, on the other, distinguishes this "moment of reception" from hermeneutical interpretations that "in the most obvious way can exist thanks to the chronological distance separating the moment of reading from the moment of the work's appearance. Elements of the reality surrounding the artist during her creation process which are completely neutral for her at that moment (i.e. they do not evoke any moods for her) are revealed with the passage of time to be important parts of that network mentioned by Goethe that connects everything to everything. Gumbrecht clarifies here that components of the work 'absorb' a mood already at the moment of its emergence, but reveal it only later on, during the process of reading." (Ronge 2016, 73.)

14 The concept of presence was also interrogated by Tomasz Mizerkiewicz in his interpretations of the writings of Zygmunt Haupt, which he situated within the scope of Gumbrecht's framework of "reading for *Stimmung*": "In Haupt's work, *Stimmung* is typically linked with the modern aesthetics of literary noise […]. Literary forms of presence constitute themselves and disintegrate to the rhythm of new 'atmospheres' or 'moods,' into which past reality transforms in the course of its description. […] Hence,

Anna Łebkowska sees Gumbrechtian inspirations primarily in the association between touch and affect, and, building on Gumbrecht's reference to Toni Morrison, asserts that the way researchers conceptualize psychological experience is far from any precise articulation and hews closer to Kristeva's concept of "semiotic […] primal contact with the world […], *Mitsein* in the face of this primal communion":

> […] for Gumbrecht, the road led from signs to presence, and the immediacy of presence links back to mood. At the same time—and once again suggesting some semantic community and offering a strong rationale for his decision to draw on Morrison—the effort centers the epistemological, identity, aesthetic, and affective aspects. […] Hence, this interpretation of touch consistently views it through the lens of action, activity, and intensity of experience. (Łebkowska 2019, 79.)

Mitsein, or being-with, implies a certain tangibility: while an affect might unfold within the body (be experienced somatically), it does not necessarily have to be associated with touch conceived physically. In this particular case, a more suitable framework would be provided by haptics, that is, somatosensory stimuli eliciting a sensation of touching/being touched. Marta Smolińska describes the attributes of haptic art as follows:

> Haptic artworks, therefore, "address" and interrogate the sense of touch without necessarily involving a physical "event." As a result, I consider touch to be a modality of vision or its fellow senses, a sensation of "being in contact with something." (Smolińska 2021, 21.)

The scholar indicates that haptics may extend to other senses as well, reframing the whole body as a source of haptic input. As it looks, listens, and tastes, the body registers (within itself) the experiences "as if touched," grazed by them.

Haupt's stories could indeed be viewed as accounts of the dynamics or production of presence." (Mizerkiewicz 2013, 190.)

A body capable of registering external inputs as a whole, sensual, receptive—a body that "attunes itself" within its surroundings, whether in closeness or in solitude: my interrogation of the many different ways that mood can be conceptualized in continues only, until I can lay bare the common embrace of the relationship between the body and all that touches, surrounds, and envelops it, but does not force, smother, or overwhelm it. The body's "attunement" illustrates its relationship to reality and the way it functions in space—it is also a framework that allows it to understand itself and the world/feel itself and the world (which does not always lend itself to precise definition). It might be a good idea to juxtapose this thinking with images looking for an idiom that could best explain this "attunement."

It might to be an interesting exercise to see how the thinking about the sensuality of a poet like Halina Poświatowska changes once we abandon the notion of reducing her metaphors to mere romantic staffage, when the potential of the *Stimmung* of this poetry is laid bare.

> Here I bask in the sunshine of your hands. Oh, what lovely
> weather you wrapped around my body. The water pressed
> the smoothed hair against the rough grain of sand in breath.
> Your fingers sing of me to the skies. Your fingers
> draw the skies into my hands. They rest against my eyes.
> In hasty touches, they circle my mouth and pull back my hair
> Like an unwelcome, stinging bee, they sink into my neck.
> I shudder.[15]

Poświatowska is widely considered a sensual poet—and I am interested primarily in the relationship between the body and the world, in the body "touched by the world," the experiencing body that is, simultaneously, gripped by its own experiences and seeking to define itself within the world, name itself, rewrite its experience of the world.

The passage above exemplifies the essence of (and being in) the mood—the weather enveloping the body is an attempt to examine a romantic

15 The poem "*** (Wygrzewam się w słońcu…)" from the collection *Hymn bałwochwalczy* is cited according to: Poświatowska 1989, 62.

relationship that reframes the body's sensory input (and makes the body itself feel embraced, chosen, appreciated) and much of the body's surroundings. As such, the amorous mood also affects cognition and broadens the field of sensory experience: breath finds itself in synchrony with the pulse of the water, and the fingers of the protagonist's lover stretch high enough to touch the sky—the exposed, receptive body resonates with the horizon, unexpectedly reachable, all the while the horizon closes over the protagonist, circumscribing the realm of the visible ("draw the skies into my hands"). Her lover's touch opens both her body and the space around it: the "lovely weather" is a lens, through which one can see a body whose (romantically) reframed perception allows it to sense a much broader range of stimulations. The closing line of "I shudder" implies not only a sexual thrill, but also the ability to perceive flurries of excitement around the body, signals its receptiveness to the rhythms of the atmosphere.

Mood is generated, experienced, and relayed—corroborating the ceaseless change sweeping the world, it illustrates the inevitability of exchange, of mutual impact. Poświatowska's world is forever "in motion," continuously remaking itself, pulsating, mutating:

doing my eyebrows is my primary occupation
I do them with the focus
of a woman damned
piercing the skin of the mirror with a careful eye

the corner of a townhouse I pass each morning
the curve of the street I cross
frail tendrils of mold close around grains of sand
cracks in the walls grow larger, cracks in the floor larger still

the streets crumble
and scatter to the four winds
the gale playing hide-and-seek with them

scooping my hair over my cheeks
I watch the grass grow over the stones[16]

The sensitive eye seems wary of recognizing manifest symptoms of change, looser skin, less pronounced features—the process of observing inevitability touches everything in sight. This "attunement" enables the perception of similarly "sounding"/"visualizing" spheres of fragility, alongside spilling, fracturing, and parting elements. Weakness, drift, dissolving bonds: the breakdown of matter is experienced, while the somatically perceived "sense of terror" sharpens not just the gaze, but perception itself. The "tendrils of flesh" are more than just a graphic manifestation of decay, they also expose the horrified shudder of a body that feels touched by decomposition. The gesture of "scooping the hair" preserves that fear: sensitizing to the reflex to conceal—it senses, within itself and with its entire self, the creeping overgrowth; it senses the viscosity of corroded matter. What surrounds it and what is inside it—the mood of decomposition, is no mere facile gesture of projection, but rather resembles a certain predisposition, a sort of high-sensitivity filter that captures moments of fragility that we tend to ignore. By registering traces of decay, the filter amplifies the sensation, becoming a lens, through which one can experience reality, and confirming the power of immersing, sharing existence—of resonating.

In Halina Poświatowska's poetry, the sensuality of experience is linked with "attunement": the panoply of sensations reveals the prospects of bodily immersion in the world and traces the limits of its perception. It deepens its understanding and illustrates how what once was conceived as material obstacle could actually allow us to feel (experience) everything around us. This perception is always localized, remarkably intense, and lends significance to being-in-the-world. The poet captured that particular experience in a simple, yet very vivid way, by bringing up the image of struggling against life for life itself: significantly, this time

16 The poem "*** (moim głównym zajęciem…)" is from the collection *Oda do rąk* (cf. Poświatowska 1989, 139).

the sensations suffuse each other and fear of losing life coalesces with the ecstasy of living it—:

whenever I yearn for life I scream
when life leaves me
I cling to it
I say—life, dear
leave not yet

its warm hand in mine
my lips by its ear
I whisper

life
—as if it's a lover
about to leave

I hang myself around its neck
and cry

I'll die if you go[17]

More than just a game of paradoxes (rooted in Baroque concepts), this is a keen attempt to flesh out the tangled knot of profound desire and enormous fear. Taking in life with the whole body, as if carried by a wave of ardor, but undercut with the sense of its sudden end—a bodily experience, in which openness is wounded, evoking simultaneous longing for being-in-life and fear of its inevitable elusion. This entanglement—this struggle with the lover and for the lover—renders the perception of life as a bodily experience of being immersed in the world: the fear of its loss is the fear of the somatically experienced removal, severance from life.

The sensitivity to even the slightest tremor in the body and the world, manifest in Poświatowska's writing, and her sensual entanglement with the

17 The poem "*** (zawsze kiedy chcę żyć…)" is from the collection *Oda do rąk* (cf. Poświatowska 1989, 166).

world suggest viewing "attunement" as existential openness: perceiving (experiencing) oneself is perceiving the world, as the two are always intertwined, always linked, always "in-between."

*

Conceived in this manner, mood appears to be a category combining affect with phenomenological inquiry into perceiving oneself, which enables us to probe and express the depth our entanglement with that which touches us (regardless of whether it touches us directly or not).

Interpreting mood, we seek to give ourselves a closer look at our own selves—as we sense something that slips our grasp belonging to us, elusive although right beside us. Like air.

But also—interpreting mood, we seek to give ourselves a closer look at what is around us—and how we affect that which we encounter and which, in turn, encounters us.

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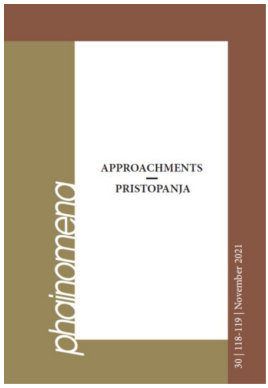

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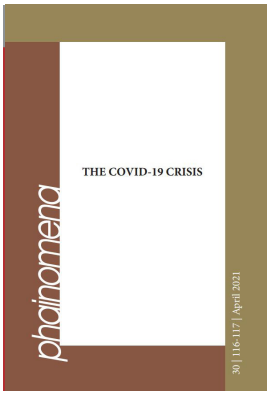

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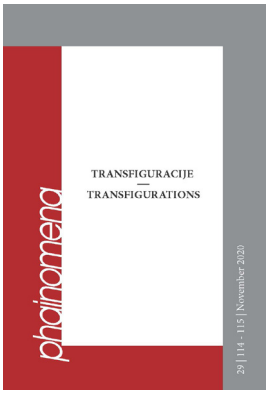

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