



ESSAY

Emotion: The Connective Tissue of Atmospheres and Haunts

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HIGHLIGHTS

“Haunted” atmospheres might turn on the quality or intensity of feelings expressed by individuals, even if they are no longer in that location or no longer living.

ABSTRACT

Just as a small band of scholars has endeavored to explore the phenomenon of “atmosphere” – i.e., the characteristic feel of a particular situation, circumstance, artifact or era – another group of researchers has shed light on the defining characteristics of “haunts,” those places where the atmosphere may, to some people, seem strange, spooky or off-putting. The fields of atmosphere studies, hauntology, and spectrality attest to these investigations. However, scholars of atmosphere rarely refer to haunts, while scholars of hauntology and spectrality insufficiently emphasize the affective core of atmospheres. This paper argues that affect – which nearly all studies acknowledge as the key element of atmosphere – is equally central to the phenomenon of haunts. Since affect is a property of living creatures, the paper proposes that haunted atmospheres attest to the quality or intensity of feelings expressed by individuals, even if they are no longer in that location or no longer living. Just as atmospheres can be sensed but not grasped, just as they are ineffable yet discernable, and just as they are fleeting yet can also linger, they resemble feelings, moods and ghosts. The term “presence,” which recurs throughout atmosphere studies, hauntology, and spectrality, is closely considered for its connection with concepts of time, immediacy, and memory. Three experiences of the author are presented as touchstones for evaluating the possibilities discussed. The paper concludes by discussing our species’ “ocular-centrism,” i.e., its tendency to conclude that what can be seen and definitively measured is real whereas what is invisible and shifting is less real or not at all.

KEYWORDS

Atmospheres, emotion, haunts, presence, affect, spacetime.

INTRODUCTION

The Covid pandemic has, unfortunately, taught us many things. One of them is that some people miss being in the office with their colleagues...while others (the more introverted among us) enjoy being the sole worker in their home office. But one thing we can presumably all agree on is that the work atmosphere is much different on a screen versus being in person. The dynamics

are vastly altered: you can’t read body language; tone of voice seems an isolated cue; it’s hard to know if a silence is uncomfortably prolonged or merely routine; and jokes (especially dry ones) will mostly zip past people without benefit of a smile, a wink or a guffaw.

The difference between being in-person and virtual was pointed up recently by two comedic actors – Dwayne Johnson and Kevin Hart – discussing their animated movie, *Doggone Heroes*. Each plays a canine called upon to



help DC Comics superheroes who have been kidnapped. In an interview (Reinstein, 2022), the two actors said that they mostly recorded their parts separately but that “we made it a point to get together and record a handful of our biggest scenes together. Our chemistry is really dynamic and really jumps off the page. And when we’re together in person, it just becomes a different energy in the room and the air shifts.”

“The air shifts”...what an interesting statement. It reflects an intangible *something* between people – an energy that we somehow pick up on. The energy, the ‘atmosphere’ of a crowded bar where the patrons are cheering for their favorite team on TV is obviously different from that of a chapel memorial service, where people are gathered to eulogize or mourn someone they all knew (to choose two examples at polar ends of a spectrum). In the first case, the atmosphere will be raucous; in the second, somber or subdued. We could choose any number of other examples: the way hope seems to evaporate from a football stadium when the home team is intercepted in the final minute...the joyful feeling in a musical theater when the performers are belting out a number and reveling in each other’s company...the studious quiet of a public library...or the ‘devotional’ ambiance of a church, synagogue or mosque, where the worshipers are praying to some extent individually and to some extent communally.

What about when no other people are around? Can a deserted shoreline ‘feel’ desolate? Can a sun-dappled forest ‘feel’ serene? Can a cemetery visited at midnight ‘feel’ spooky? I shall posit that no such atmosphere is truly possible without more than one person – or, rather, more than one *creature*, present. The reason I amend to “creature” is the presumption, explored most recently in my book *Sensitive Soul* (Jawer, 2020), that many other animals besides humans feel and emote. Those feelings may well be evident in an atmosphere.

Consider the term *atmosphere*. It’s defined variously as “the gaseous mass or envelope surrounding a celestial body...and retained by [that] body’s gravitational field”...“a psychological environment: *He grew up in an atmosphere of austerity*”...and “the predominant tone or mood of a work of art.” The word stems from the Latin *atmosphera* (literally “vaporous sphere”) and, in turn, from the Greek roots *atmos* (breath or vapor) and *sphaera* (ball or globe) (Morris, 1981, 83). Words with related roots include weather, wind, vent, and ventilation (Morris, 1981, 1547). A close cousin is the Sanskrit word *atman*, meaning “breath,” “spirit” or “soul” (Morris, 1981, 83). The concept extends to meteorology and environmental science, as in “atmospheric pressure” or “the earth’s upper atmosphere.” A term often used synonymously, *ambiance*, is defined as the atmosphere surrounding someone. It re-

lates to the word *ambient*, which means “surrounding” or “encircling” (from the Latin *ambire*, “to go around”) (Morris, 1981, p. 41).

The literal atmosphere in which we all exist – the very air we breathe in and exhale, moment to moment – is, of course, transparent. Unless we’re unfortunate enough to live in the midst of smog, we never see it. Despite our being so thoroughly immersed in it, the air, as one writer puts it, represents “the most outrageous absence known to this body” (Abram, 1996, p. 225). nevertheless, the atmosphere is the very same medium through which we see, hear, smell, and feel. Whether it’s the warmth of sunlight or the coolness of shade...the smell of rain-drenched pavement...the pulsating bass of a rock anthem...or the shout of a familiar voice...all such sensations convey to us through the air.

Is it mere metaphor, then, when we describe a gathering – or even a place itself, absent of people – as exuding an “oppressive sadness,” an “electric vitality,” or a “casual charm”? Returning to Dwayne Johnson and Kevin Hart, can we legitimately say that “the air shifts” in a room when different people arrive, betokening “a different energy” or a different vibe that can be sensed by those on the scene? Can we really “air” our grievances or “clear the air” after an argument?

At the very least, such language takes weather – *atmospherics* – as its baseline. Since our individual moods tend to be transitory, and since the collective mood of a place (composed of people) appears to shift just as easily, we tie descriptions of feelings and emotions occurring within situations to the weather patterns everyone is familiar with. As a for-instance, we all feel relief after a storm has moved through without damage, just as we feel more comfortable in low humidity versus high humidity. Our bodies shiver to contain heat in the midst of cold, and sweat to stay cool in the midst of heat. It’s only natural to compare angry feelings to a storm, sad or depressed feelings to an overcast or foggy day, and buoyant, loving feelings to the emergence of sunshine and warmth. (“Here comes the sun,” sang George Harrison. “It’s been a long, cold, lonely winter” (Harrison, 1969)).

Three Illustrations

That’s not necessarily *all* that’s going on when we consider atmosphere or ambiance, however. I’m going to describe three situations in which only I was present, and in which I nonetheless registered distinct feelings that it was well-nigh impossible to attribute to anything in particular.

Situation 1: My wife and I were house hunting. This was the third or fourth house we had visited; it was in an

appealing neighborhood blocks from where we ultimately purchased. The upstairs seemed fine; I recall the kitchen was small or might have needed a bit of work. The downstairs also seemed fine until I walked toward one particular corner, which immediately felt somehow forbidding or unsettling. The feeling was strange and wholly unexpected but it also seemed distinct and tied to this particular part of the downstairs. I asked my wife, who was elsewhere on that floor, if she would stand where I was while I moved off. This we did; later she told me that she hadn't registered anything out of the ordinary. (I decided not to ask her for her impressions then and there.) Walking back to that spot, I tried to figure out what might be prompting the uncomfortable feeling. I noticed that the entire floor was halfway below ground; could I be feeling something akin to claustrophobia? If that were the case, why would I be feeling it in one corner of the room and not in another – nor, for that matter, standing in the middle of the room? I still have no ready explanation for the feeling, but the discomfort – the palpable feeling of disturbance – dissuaded me from liking the house.

Situation 2: My wife and I were on vacation in Tennessee. We had just visited Lookout Mountain, a lovely spot near Chattanooga overlooking the Tennessee River – and the site of a Civil War battle in 1863. My wife entertained my request to visit the Chickamauga battlefield, a short distance away in Georgia, where a far bloodier battle had been fought a few months earlier in 1863. The locale of that battle – actually a series of engagements across a huge swath of land over two intense days – is today a peaceful, bucolic site. It is dotted by scores of statues, plaques and large granite memorials carved to honor military leaders, battalions, and skirmishes won and lost on both sides. Bonnie and I got a map from the battlefield park office, tuned our car radio to a frequency where one can hear relevant details on each site, and drove to see what we could see.

At one particular location – the second we stopped at, if memory serves – I got out of the car to look around. As I was walking, a feeling stood out for me in one particular spot, quite near a plaque I had stopped to read. I felt it in my solar plexus, a little like a buzzing. “Huh,” I thought, and wandered a bit further, noting that the strange feeling subsided as I walked toward a more wooded area. I decided to approach the matter scientifically, walking back along the path I had taken, then circling the area, then approaching the strange spot once more. Aside from the plaque, nothing else was stuck in the ground. I wondered if the details of the battle etched into the plaque had perhaps activated some unconscious sympathy toward the combatants on my part. If so, why would the feeling not have remained as I walked around? Back in the car, my

wife must have been wondering what was going on. Why was Mike this peripatetic? I returned to the car and explained to her this weird and unforeseen situation. We drove to several more Chickamauga sites where I got out and trooped around, wondering if anything similar would recur. It didn't.

Situation 3: Over many years, one particular room in my house – not the whole room, just one side of it – has consistently felt odd to me. Not every day and not at all times, but unpredictably. At such times that part of the room feels somehow ‘fuller’ than the surrounding area. I don't perceive a presence or even a full-fledged feeling; that section just feels unquiet. There doesn't seem to be any pattern to the sensation, which can occur any time of the day or night. This room serves as my wife's office and many gadgets are plugged in thereabouts – laptop, printer, desk lamp, phone. An adjacent outer wall is also where water seeped in years ago; when we bought the house, it turned out mold had grown there, which we remediated. A new floor was installed and I had the outside wall parged and waterproofed. Any or all of that could be at play. However, the sheer irregularity of it is baffling. One other interesting angle is that I never feel this when my wife is at her desk with the electronics running – only when the room is seemingly empty and quiet.

Such inchoate sensations and feelings are part and parcel of many allegedly haunted locations. An accomplished British journalist, Will Storr, wrote about one such place he had made it a point to check out for himself. Writing in the present tense, he records: “I take my sleeping bag up the stairs and into the haunted room. It's horrible in here. It's as if the air is made of invisible sponge” (Storr, 2006, p. 279). Another investigator elsewhere wrote, likewise, that the particular room felt distinctly fuller than normal (Rogo, 1978, p. 187). What could possibly be eliciting these ‘atmospheric’ perceptions?

Atmosphere and the Built Environment

To begin to answer this question, let us consider atmosphere less in the context of air, breath or weather and more in terms of the built environment: the indoors of houses, rooms, and enclosed spaces. Here, atmosphere can be defined as “a state of resonance and identification (sensorimotor, emotive, and cognitive) between an individual and the surrounding built space” (Canepa et al., 2018). Within this framework, architectural elements such as form, proportion, materials, color, finish, texture, and sound all contribute to a given atmosphere, because feelings (equivalent to “resonance” between the person and the surrounding space) will arise in occupants of or visitors to the space “when they interiorly establish an

embodied simulation” of those elements (Canepa et al., 2018). The elements of a space, in other words, “induce the brain to react, generating a specific emotional state” (de Paiva, 2018).

While the brain will ultimately establish such impressions, all manner of sensory input is required – including the proprioceptive and vestibular senses, which allow the brain to form a representation of the body’s configuration and posture, its position and movement in space, and the possibilities for action in that space (Jelić et al., 2016; Gallesse & Sinigaglia, 2010). The process typically plays out unconsciously. Only sometimes do we realize “Hey, the teak in this room has me feeling comfortably nostalgic” or “The way the sun streams through those curtains sure is brightening my mood.”

To understand how this works, we must realize that human beings are far more than our brains. As I have argued elsewhere (Jawer, with Micozzi, 2009, p. 5), our brain can be likened to an orchestral conductor. While the conductor elicits the music, he or she does not create it. The music, i.e., consciousness, is formed from sensory input with feeling itself the premier component, the lead player, in this conscious ‘symphony.’

In every instance, then, one’s sense of being in a set of surroundings – and what we feel about those surroundings – is built on automatic, pre-conscious processing. The thinking self is not directing the action, the action is ‘bubbling up’ from below. And to take the concept one step further, it can be argued that we have no self completely independent from the environment we’re in. We’re never *not* immersed in some atmosphere. Indeed, none of us would be here if it weren’t for our being immersed in our very first environment – our mother’s womb (Jawer with Micozzi, 2009, pp. 103-104). One’s sense of self, therefore, arises from and is reinforced by continuous interaction with the external environment (Legrand, 2006).

Another architectural concept will be helpful here, namely *affordance*. An affordance is a possibility for action provided by the environment or, alternatively, the relation possible between the environment and the person *in* that environment (Gibson, 1986). A chair, for example, affords sitting; neither the chair nor the person sitting is the affordance; they share the affordance, i.e., the possibility of sitting. Similarly, a door affords the possibility of passing through, while a staircase affords the possibility of ascending or descending (Pallasmaa, 2011). And beyond these literal possibilities, any environmental feature presents the possibility of unconscious association. The chair may remind one of a family member who used to lounge in something similar; for someone else, the door may represent a passage from one age, challenge

or circumstance to another. “From the perspective of unconscious psychic life,” writes a Jungian psychologist, “everything around us shimmers as potential symbol” (Chalquist, 35).

Ultimately, the atmosphere of a space can itself be considered an affordance for feelings arising in the perceiver, given the totality of whatever elements are present there (Ellard, 2019).

Atmospheres and Emotion

A small but dedicated band of psychologists, neuroscientists, and philosophers has, for the past 10 years or so, been shedding light on this curious phenomenon of atmosphere. Much in line with what I’ve presented so far are these statements: “Atmospheres are affective phenomena, which are grasped pre-reflexively, manifest spatially, [and] felt corporeally” (Trigg, 2020). And: “Atmospheres are pervasive: they are everywhere, we’re always in them, enveloped by them” (Slaby, 2020). An important point here is that atmospheres are plural – they can and do differ in different situations. The atmosphere of a party is considerably different from the atmosphere attending to a funeral; the atmosphere in an art museum is equally distinct from that of a political convention. The differences owe to any number of reasons: the material features of the space; the number of people present; and, most especially, what those people are feeling and expressing. Philosopher Dylan Trigg, who has written extensively on atmospheres, notes “the gradated nature of shared emotion, ranging from thin to thick, primitive to complex, and momentary to sustained” (Trigg, 2020). (It bears mention that Trigg (2013) is one of the rare scholars of atmosphere to explicitly address the uncanny.)

He proceeds to consider a most interesting question: What does it mean to say that emotion is diffused in space through an atmosphere? “When we enter a room,” he writes, “and sense a specific atmosphere there – let us say an eerie atmosphere – then it would be difficult to pinpoint [the source]. Specific phenomenal features may present themselves in a more focal way than others – modes of lighting, a disquieting silence, specific architectural aspects, etc. – but those features are expressive articulations of an atmosphere, which is irreducible to localized things” (Trigg, 2020). He quotes the late philosopher Gernot Böhme as remarking that, in a given atmosphere, “a certain tone of feeling” seems to “fill the space” (Böhme, 1993). The atmosphere is thus “indeterminate and unequivocal” at the same time. Much like a mood itself, I would add: while we can’t say for sure why we are feeling something sometimes, or where the given feeling came from, we may nonetheless feel it keenly. In a partic-

ular place or at a particular event, such an environmental impression, while amorphous, can yet be palpable.

A qualifier is necessary here. Unlike the weather, which exerts a fairly uniform influence, a given atmosphere may not be perceived equally by everyone present. One person may not register the feel of a particular place or event whereas others do. The former could be tired, or preoccupied, or have a different cultural standard, or hold a preconceived notion that prevents her/him from perceiving what others do. Likewise, a particular person might be so highly invested in the event or locale that her/his impressions differ to a large extent from others on the scene. (Trigg, 2020; Böhme & Thibaud, 2017). Another researcher, Jon Slaby, puts it this way: “We can behold atmospheres from a distance, sense their presence without being ourselves in their affective grip. We can see, grasp and neutrally describe the jubilation of the party, the tension of the meeting, the enthusiasm of the crowd and also the sadness or despair enveloping a friend in mourning, without being affectively involved ourselves” (Slaby, 2020). Bottom line: the level and type of *attunement* among individuals will inevitably vary.

While it may be impossible to pinpoint just how any atmosphere is constituted, “there is nevertheless a weight to an atmosphere [that] is gauged in and through the *lived body*” (Trigg, 2020, emphasis original). As living, sentient creatures, we express what we’re thinking and feeling at the same time as we’re gathering what *other* people are thinking and feeling – through their gestures, tone of voice, touch, gaze, and other body language. Furthermore, “the very expressivity of emotions renders them public affairs, which are, in varying degrees, extended spacially” (Krueger & Szanto, 2016). It is a short step, therefore, from what is termed *embodied interaffectivity* to an atmosphere. Indeed, emotions themselves can be seen to have atmospheric effects (Fuchs, 2016). In the pithy phrase of philosopher Tonino Griffero, “atmospheres are feelings poured out into space (Griffero, 2016). Think how much the atmosphere of an event can become charged given the forceful remarks of an impassioned speaker, or how the energy level of a gathering drops precipitously when the ‘life of the party’ leaves. We say, in the first instance, that the speaker “grabbed us” and that, in the latter case, “the air went out of it.” These expressions are not mere colloquialisms. Research asserts that any atmosphere is diffused spacially (in the air, as it were) and grasped affectively (viscerally, under the skin) (Trigg, 2020). Griffero compares the effect on people to that of the wind (Griffero, 2020) – a wind blowing, one might say, under the surface.

Under the surface, ineffable, unseen...atmospheres can, in any case, exert a palpable presence. How exten-

sive this effect is may depend on the degree to which individuals are invested in the given situation. An illustration comes, from all places, from virtual reality. In VR studies, the term *presence* occurs often. It refers to the degree of immersion in the virtual environment, i.e., the extent to which the person believes himself or herself to be physically present in that space (Draper, Kaber & Usher, 1998). Presence can be gauged by markers such as heart rate, skin conductance, and skin temperature, not to mention by the person’s ‘virtual’ behavior. It should come as no surprise that a higher level of presence is associated with greater activation of feelings (Riva et al., 2007).

Ineffable Presence

Could a degree of presence – virtual, invisible, yet somehow woven into the pre-conscious, subterranean fabric of our existence – account for the sensations I experienced in the three situations described earlier? The feelings apparently evoked in such instances may lead the surroundings (even outdoors, on a battlefield) to gain the reputation of “haunted.” Here, the literature concerning atmospheres is highly relevant, even though few investigators attempt to explicitly address haunts.

A significant jumping-off point exists in the work of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They suggest that “affects are becomings” – that an intense feeling can go beyond the body mind that produced it and merge with or effectively *become* the atmosphere (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 164; Deleuze & Guattari, 1997, p. 256). Recall that the Latin *atmosphæra* translates to “vaporous sphere,” then picture a feeling as an exhaled breath. Where does the exhalation end and the rest of the enveloping *atmos* begin? There is no bright line. Recall, too, the shifting and ephemeral nature of atmospheres, which, like emotions or moods, can be sensed but never grasped. Atmospheres are tantalizing, present but evanescent, never fully coherent.

The same, of course, can be said of ghosts. Are they real? Are they not? Whatever they may be, they are certainly not material. Yet a reputedly haunted place (or, for that matter, a person haunted by a memory) is unmistakably colored by...something. That ‘something’ doesn’t turn up on cue but, like an emotion, it manages to convey a certain force, a certain presence.

This insubstantial quality – of forming and dissolving, hinting at tangibility while being essentially indefinite – is beautifully captured by the singer-songwriter Al Stewart in his song Charlotte Corday (Stewart, 1993). Not just the words themselves but the very mood of the song conjure up ghostliness (atmospherics at the very least):

If you hear a step upon your stair tonight
 If you see a shadow in the candle light
 It's only your imagination leading you astray
 See her for a moment, then she'll slip away
 The ghost of Charlotte Corday

She wanders down the hallway in a long black dress
 And lingers by the fireplace like a faint caress
 Just what it is that brings her here no man alive can say
 See her for a moment, then she melts away
 The ghost of Charlotte Corday...

The clock ticks in the dark and now the night is still
 The air is like a murmur on the window sill
 All at once there's someone there that only you can see
 Seeking the forgiveness that will set her free
 The wind has taken away

The words she wanted to say
 The sky now turning to gray
 The dawn is turning away
 The ghost of Charlotte Corday

In a fascinating 2009 paper, geographer Ben Anderson considers how feelings can haunt – in the sense of ‘perturb’ – a given space. Consistent with other research surveyed here, he remarks that atmospheric “intensities may remain indefinite even as they effect...Something...exceeds rational explanation and clear figuration...Yet...the affective qualities [perceived] by those who feel it are remarkable for their singularity” (Anderson, 2009). He also remarks on the curious fact that something so diffuse and hard to pin down can nevertheless feel ‘full.’ (Recall the writer I quoted who said the air in an allegedly haunted room seemed as if it were “made of invisible sponge.”)

Anderson notes that both atmospheres and affects can emanate, radiate, surround, suffuse. He quotes Böhme: “On entering a room one can feel oneself enveloped by a friendly atmosphere or caught up in a tense atmosphere. We can say of a person that s/he radiates an atmosphere which implies respect, of a man or a woman that an erotic atmosphere surrounds them (Böhme, 1993). Slaby agrees that “Atmospheres are what we mean when we sense and say that ‘there is something in the air’ – or rather, they *are* the ambient air itself insofar as it is situationally charged with an energetic texture” (Slaby, 2020).

Sports fans and concert-goers can attest that such experiences are not only commonplace but presumably

magnified amidst thousands of other, like-minded people. To choose a recent for-instance: toward the end of the 2022 Major League Baseball season, all-star pitcher Shohei Ohtani of the Los Angeles Angels was on his way toward a no-hitter against the Oakland Athletics, until he surrendered back-to-back singles in the eighth inning. The communal feeling in the stadium was captured by this sportswriter’s description: “The exhilaration of Ohtani’s mastery precipitated through the announced crowd of 31,293 as the innings wore on, each pitch more precious than the last. The “M-V-P” chants grew louder and, after the final out of the seventh inning...the crowd’s energy became more than emotion, but a physical electricity” (Mitchell, 2022).

Parents of college-age children will be familiar with another, calmer ‘emanation’ of feeling. When accompanying one’s kids on tours of college campuses, it becomes clear that each campus has a distinct tone or vibe, which prospective students quickly find appealing (“this seems like a really good place for me”) or unappealing (“I can’t see myself going here”). As Anderson observes, while such atmospheres are impersonal – relating to a collective locale or communal situation – they can still be felt as intensely, definitively personal (Anderson, 2009).

Connections With Culture and Time

Place isn’t the only source of atmosphere. A painting, song, novel, movie, season, a country, even a decade or an era can create – or be associated with – a particular kind of feeling. The tenor of the Star Wars series is vastly different than, say, a Martin Scorsese film. The feeling a reader gets from the E. L. Doctorow novel *Ragtime* is poles apart from Stephen King’s *The Shining*. American popular music of the 1950s would seem to come from a different planet from the “acid rock” of the 1960s, let alone the moods invoked by contemporary rap, hip-hop or R&B. Decades themselves – the events, personalities, fashions, crazes – can be said to leave distinctive imprints in their wake. The “tenor of the times,” especially in particular places, is nonpareil. Consider jazz-age Paris versus, say, the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco circa 1967: the feelings associated with the one would never be confused with the other. Similarly, the effect of a painting such as Picasso’s *Guernica* could not be farther removed from, say, the impression evinced by an Andy Warhol artwork. (Speaking of impressions, the Impressionist school of painting represented by Monet, Renoir, Cezanne, and other *fin de siècle* artists pioneered ‘atmospheric’ effects on the canvas. Swirls, dabs, dots, and blotches of paint – not to mention repeated layering – conjured shifting light, textures, images, moods – in

short, *impressions* rather than the clearly delineated figures and scenes that had been conventional in painting up until that time.)

Time itself plays a role in atmosphere. To begin with, consider that the elements of weather (of literal atmospherics), e.g., wind, rain, snow, fog, clouds, sun, are necessarily shifting and transient. Furthermore – and casting back to architecture – features of built spaces often induce perceptions related to time. Walking up or down stairs, as a simple example, takes time. Narrow spaces cause our perception of time to lengthen as we feel more constricted. A space with plenty of room to move or many options for moving, on the other hand, distracts us from ourselves and causes felt time to move faster. The age of built features likewise exerts an influence. “Weathered” surfaces suggest the passage of years, while a brick fireplace (as a for-instance) may prompt a sense of familial nostalgia. A skylight or glass roof, in contrast, suggests modernity and engages us directly in the present (Wittmann, 2019). Atmospheres, therefore, encompass time – both objective (clock time) and subjective (interior, psychological) time.

Most fundamentally, however, we must recognize that time and place are fused and ultimately indistinguishable. “Space is in its very nature temporal and time spatial,” observed the British philosopher Samuel Alexander (Benjamin, 1966). Any moment occupies a given place and any spot exists in time. This fact supports my contention that intense feelings – particular to a given time and place – may live on within the atmosphere they contributed to or helped generate.

How, exactly, might this occur? In *The Spiritual Anatomy of Emotion*, I suggested that it might be through a mechanism involving a torrent of unexpressed energy in the body (equating to unexpressed or dissociated feeling), a brain structure known as the orbitofrontal cortex, and the body mind’s stress handling system called the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis (Jawer with Micozzi, pp. 78-9, 91, 94-95, 115-117, 130-133, 159, 199-202). (The HPA axis is the conduit for the well-known “fight or flight response” – except that there is a third pathway, “freeze,” which is implicated in this particular scenario.) The equation would be, roughly:

***The energy of unexpressed feeling in the body
+ A preoccupation held in the brain
as processed through the orbitofrontal cortex and
HPA axis = A transmutation of feeling energy
into the atmosphere.***

Emotional Contagion

The above is obviously speculative. Beyond the difficulty in conceiving a way to test the hypothesis, the presumptions themselves (namely: that feelings comprise energy; that the physical, emotional, and mental parts of ourselves are not just contingent but unified; and that the energy of repressed or unacknowledged emotion could be displaced into the surroundings), are miles from being scientifically accepted. Yet many highly regarded psychologists *have* shed light on a closely related phenomenon, that of emotional contagion. And emotional contagion (simply put, the way people ‘catch’ emotions and transmit them to others) is universally acknowledged.

We know feelings flow from the inside out – but it’s also true they go the opposite direction. “If I can make you smile,” observes Malcolm Gladwell, “I can make you happy. If I can make you frown, I can make you sad. Emotion, in this sense, goes outside-in” (Gladwell, 2002, p. 85). Research has found that many emotions can be passed from person to person – often without either one realizing it – in a matter of milliseconds. This is because, during conversation, individuals unconsciously tend to mimic and synchronize the other person’s facial expressions, posture, and body language. This ‘attunement’ extends to speech rhythms, volume and pitch, and word choice. We do this automatically because of our natural interest to be in synch with the people we come into contact with, or, at the very least, to try to understand their frame of mind. The effect is more pronounced the closer someone is to us – so we are more likely to catch another’s mood if they are a family member, friend or roommate, or work colleague (Colino, 2006).

Through emotional contagion, our own mood can be considerably brightened or depressed, depending on who we bump into and how much they mean to us. Unsurprisingly, more charismatic people are apt to be powerful *transmitters* of emotion while the most empathetic among us tend to be powerful *catchers* of emotion (Isabella and Carvalho, 2016; Verbeke, 1997). Interestingly, the research shows that ‘live’ interactions are not necessary for emotion to be transmitted. Television and movies will do the trick (Isabella and Carvalho, 2016), as will music and, increasingly, social media (Tucker, 2021; Brooks, 2021).

Emotional contagion, as taken up in academia, is known as “affect studies.” Scholars speak of *embodied interaffectivity*, *affective attunement*, and *mutual incorporation*: the way people respond to one another, reflect and resonate with each other’s gestures, postures, gazes, voices, words, facial expressions (Fuchs, 2016). The prompts are not limited to what we see and what we hear. Smell – in the form of pheromones – may also be involved (Brennan, 2004, pp. 9, 68-69). The feelings being transmitted are not merely mental; they are expressed in

such a way that other people understand them and are affected by them (even virtually, when the person doing the transmitting is not physically present). In this sense, emotions resemble ideas. Just as ideas can ‘infect’ someone, get them angered, excited or dismayed, physiologies often change when emotions are conveyed. But this is more likely to happen with emotion because of the more animate ways that feelings are expressed. An idea, in contrast, is more static. It may ‘leap off the page’ but is relatively serene compared to a highly charged feeling.

Affective Spaces, Affective Subjects

Thomas Fuchs, a philosophy professor at Heidelberg University, writes of the “shared intercorporeal space” that is all around us. He notes that “we do not live in a merely physical world; the experienced space around us is always charged with affective qualities. We feel, for example, the hilarity of a party, the sadness of a funeral march, the icy climate of a conference, the awe-inspiring aura of an old cathedral or the uncanniness of a somber wood at night” (Fuchs, 2016). He draws upon the concept of affordances that I cited earlier, noting how environmental features present salient qualities based on their potential for action or their relation with the individual(s) in the given situation. For example, a door affords the opportunity for entrance or exit, a tree affords the possibility of shade, a breeze affords the opportunity for comfort or discomfort (depending on the air temperature), a wall necessarily encloses and a roof necessarily shelters. He further observes that objects themselves inevitably have a certain appearance or expressivity – evoked by shape, contour, color, façade or veneer. This is why spaces are atmospheric, especially when people inhabit them. (I would add animals, which often bring a presence and personality all their own.)

Ultimately, Fuchs asserts, “the affected subject is engaged with an environment that itself has affect-like qualities.” Yet, because these influences are typically subliminal, their resonance with us only emerges into consciousness at a certain level of intensity (Fuchs, 2016). This goes some way toward explaining why I might have felt ill at ease in the situations mentioned earlier. Specific features – of the corner of the house my wife and I were visiting and, equally, of our downstairs office – might have snuck ‘under the radar’ and caused me to feel uncomfortable. The Chickamauga Battlefield location might likewise have been affecting, less because of affordances in the vicinity and more because of my latent knowledge of the battle’s bloodiness.

What remains a question, however, is whether spaces can exert such an effect in and of themselves, absent the

“embodied interaffectivity” generated by another person close by. This is the case for many allegedly haunted places. Of course, it can be argued that one’s imagination will be more hyperactive when it is *not* tempered by the presence of someone else. I can only say that, in two of the instances I’ve personally experienced, I confronted my odd feelings scientifically – in the one instance experimenting with the computer, clock radio and lights being turned off and on and, in the other case, by walking hither and yon to gather if the feeling in my solar plexus was replicated at any other spot. It could be that the collective, underlying expressive features of these places – their “unitary dynamic Gestalt” (Fuchs, 2015; Jawer et al., 2020) – had an effect beyond anything I could differentiate or identify. Yet the absence of people remains a puzzlement. Imagine a rally without protesters, a party without revelers, a church without worshippers. I suppose one could still sense ‘something in the air,’ be impressed or turned off. Through the features of the space and their associated affordances, impressions could presumably still form at a pre-conscious level.

Even so, I believe an essential, active ingredient is missing – the feelings generated by live, animate bodies. Affects, says Fuchs, “are at the very heart of our existence” (Fuchs, 2015) and I fully agree. Even the late Teresa Brennan, the staunchly materialist author of *The Transmission of Affect* – which outlines how feelings circulate to others in our midst through attuned, reciprocal physiologies – referenced the heart as the prime generator organ and receptor organ of feeling (Brennan, 2004, pp. 114-115). Implicit in such language is recognition that emotion is the prime mover of life. For this reason, I have difficulty accepting that an “exhilarating atmosphere,” a “tense environment,” an “oppressive climate,” an “icy atmosphere,” or a “frightful situation” could come about absent genuine emotion emanating from energetic creatures nearby. My contention finds support in the statement of anthropologist (and atmospheres theorist) Friedlind Riedel, who believes that where “a multiplicity of bodies cohere,” there is atmosphere (Reidel, 2019). Turning the equation around, another scholar puts it this way: “To sense presence is to sense relations” (Bell, 2017). I suggest this is true for any haunted locale: that living bodies – who radiated energy at one time into the surroundings – are responsible for the odd feelings evident to some people today. Furthermore, that the present gatherings of living bodies and the energy *they* radiate can serve as a ‘transducer’ for energetic impressions that were formerly spilled out into the environment.

Example of a Haunt

Consider this intriguing case. It concerns the Merchants House Museum in New York City, where the Tredwell family lived from 1835 to 1906. While the house operates as a museum documenting the life and times of this family, spectral presences are said to manifest within (Franz, 2021). Given that the furnishings and other objects the Tredwells lived with remain in the spaces they inhabited, their very presence could easily ‘afford’ ghostly impressions. Even in 1936, a writer commented that “The atmosphere of another century and another way of life pervades [the old house].” In 1990, the museum’s executive director remarked that “the atmosphere is so tangible: it’s 1850 and the Tredwells are coming up the stairs.” Today, the museum staff note that “its immersive nature allows visitors to brush up against a past that is almost present” (Franz, 2021).

From the paper that describes this allegedly haunted place, it is worth excerpting some perceptive observations about the characteristics of *houses* that lend themselves to haunts:

Houses [are] where the majority of people died, where people mourned, hosted wakes and sat shiva, and where the material of domestic life served as a mnemonic landscape invoking the deceased...houses contain lives, current and past, and become a place of intersection, a place “full of invisible borders and boundaries and locations.” [Hudson, 2017, p. 78]. [Merchant House’s] bedroom in particular...[is] a site of hauntings as this was “where people most often breathed their last, [and] it was also the room where deep emotions were most frequently manifested. It was a place for dreaming, having sex, exchanging intimate confidences and solitary anguish” [Davies, 2007, pp. 47-48]. In Merchant’s House, many ghostly appearances and hauntings have occurred in the in-between spaces of stairwells, hallways, and doorways or in the intimate sites of bedrooms. While other parts of the house have been sites of spectral encounters as well, these spaces are where ghosts and visitors encounter each other most frequently, layering new relationships across the boundaries of liminal space” (Franz, 2021, p. 385).

The reference to ghosts (real or imagined) crossing boundaries echoes the “indeterminate” nature of atmospheres themselves.

I find a pair of anecdotes concerning Merchant’s House to be especially revealing and shall quote them verbatim. Here is the first:

In March 1991, during renovation, the furniture and collections of the house had to be packed away; however, as the work progressed members of the museum staff became increasingly aware of strong, almost angry, energy – so powerful that at times it required great strength of will to climb the stairs...the sense of ill-boding and hostility was occasionally so oppressive, staff members would find excuses not to climb the stairs (Bellov, 2007, p. 13).

Here is the second:

...around the winter holidays, particularly around the museum’s Victorian Christmas events, there is the most spectral activity in the house...“the way they decorate the house for Christmas is beautiful...when you walk in there it’s a different mood...it’s a happy mood.” The ghosts follow patterns of coming and going that coincide with the environment of the house (Franz, 2021, quoting Bellov, 2007, p. 13).

Funnily, the Merchant House’s docent training manual had, in the 1960s and ‘70s, this prominent statement: “DO NOT TALK ABOUT GHOSTS!” Nevertheless, the presences persisted (Franz, 2021).

What I am proposing is that any atmosphere – or any haunting – reflects a comingling of bodily energy (past and present), body minds (to initially sense and then to turn those sensations into conscious perceptions), and – perhaps most crucially – emotion. It is important to realize that the vast majority of this dynamic takes place under the surface, in a field of joint time and space that is “pre-dimensional” (as one atmospheres researcher puts it) (Griffero, 2018) or “pre-personal” (in the words of a fellow philosopher) (Riedel, 2020). “Pre-dimensional” references a space without surfaces, lines or points; “pre-personal” references a sphere of influence preliminary to individual identity. Atmospheres, then, reflect a literally sub-liminal entanglement between emotion, the immediate environment, and the individuals who happen to be in it.

A Social Conception of Ghosts

Even if you reject this new angle on emotion, atmospheres, and haunts, scholars have presented other avenues for considering how we may gather a kind of ghostly presence in certain places. To begin, it will be helpful to distinguish “place” from “space.” The easiest way to do

so is to think of outer space – bereft of life and endlessly uniform – as the ultimate uninhabited space. In contrast, wrote the late architect Christian Norberg-Schulz, “the spaces where life occurs are places...A place is a space which has a distinct character” (Norberg-Schulz, 1980 p. 5). Architects should know, as their job is to envision – and then design – places where people can live, work or play.

As to their “distinct character,” sociologist Michael Bell takes as his axiom that any place is uniquely *personed* by the lives of the people (I would suggest “creatures”) living there. And their ghosts – “that is, the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there – are a ubiquitous aspect of the phenomenology of place.” Bell explains that the term ghost or spirit springs from “one of the deepest social sensibilities...our sense that there is a kind of a quickening, an originating essence, within every person.” A ghost, therefore, is “a felt presence...that possesses and gives a sense of social aliveness to a place” (Bell, 1997). The inhabitants themselves may be long gone but the places they frequented contain vestiges of those departed.

Bell argues that the experience of ghosts is actually quite commonplace:

Although the cultural language of modernity usually prevents us from speaking about their presence, we constitute a place in large measure by the ghosts we sense inhabit and possess it... Who has not experienced that flood of images of people long gone, or people when they were younger, while revisiting an old “haunt,” as we say? Who has not had that slightly chilly, and yet very warm, feeling of almost being able to see your friends from when you were eight dashing down the sidewalk as you walk through the neighborhood where you grew up? Who has not had that sense, while creeping into some room where one really should not have been, that someone unseen was watching? Ghosts also help constitute the specificity of historical sites, of the places where we feel we belong and do not belong, of the boundaries...by which we assign ownership and [heritage]. Ghosts of the living and dead alike, of both individual and collective spirits, of both other selves and our own selves, haunt the places of our lives (Bell, 1997, p. 813).

This definition of ghosts, or of haunts, goes some distance toward explaining the odd feelings I experienced in the three examples I sketched at the outset of this paper. Perhaps, in the case of my wife’s office (which is, after all,

‘her’ office), I sense a carryover of her presence when she isn’t there – courtesy of everything in that room that reminds me of her. Yet this raises a problem, namely that I don’t feel anything remotely similar in the room next door, which is my daughter’s former bedroom. A recent college graduate, she’s moved out of the house. Since she no longer lives here (and my wife does), I should logically miss her more and be more receptive to whatever ‘spirit’ may convey in her room. Furthermore, what I feel in my wife’s office is infrequent – just now and again – limited to one section of the room, and disquieting rather than nostalgic. Based on Bell’s construct, I should be feeling something warmer, something homey.

Similar shortcomings apply to the situation I described in the below-ground living room of the house Bonnie and I were considering buying. For a start, no furniture or belongings of any kind were present to ‘afford’ a sense of who had been living there. There were only the four walls, the floor and ceiling, and the stairway from the floor above. Additionally, I experienced the strange feeling in one particular spot – just as I did on the Chickamauga battlefield. In the latter case, at least, I might have been primed to anticipate something strange because of latent associations between battlefields, traumatic violence, and specters. Again, however, the experience was precisely localized. It also occurred mid-day, with bright sunshine and no shadows to play tricks. Perhaps the perfect quiet of the place played a role, yet my experience was not duplicated a few feet away, not at any other spot we stopped at later on that afternoon.

Bell’s Uncanny Experience

Bell acknowledges that one’s apprehension of ‘ghosts’ in the social environment can span the gamut from rooted, friendly and affirming to unsettled, uncanny or scary. Regarding the latter, he relates an interesting anecdote that took place more than 25 years ago, when he was teaching at Iowa State University. It is worth quoting the full, ultimately ‘spooky’ story, since it leads with further context regarding Bell’s conception of the ghosts of place:

The building where I work [East Hall] is about a hundred years old, one of the oldest on my campus. And it is filled with ghosts. When I first arrived here, people delighted in telling me stories of who had had which office at various times. Not surprisingly, I heard the most about those who had previously been in my own office. Two of the previous occupants came by and made a special point of telling me about how

they had arranged the room when it was theirs and changes they had made that one could still see, such as the hanging of a blackboard or the building of the bookshelves that run quite a way up toward the thirteen-foot high ceiling....

These conversations were not merely about instrumental matters. I was being told about the ghosts in my office. I was being told by others that they still felt a sentimental attachment to that room, that they still possessed it and it possessed them to some degree. And when my mind is wandering from my work, I have sometimes imagined those two previous occupants reaching for a book off one of the highest shelves or engaged in earnest consultation with a student.

These ghosts are fading, at least for me. To some extent this is because – and I hope this does not constitute carrying the metaphor of “ghosts” for describing the social experience of place too far – I have engaged in a number of rituals of exorcism. I have given the office a thorough cleaning on several occasions...I took out the air conditioner...got rid of all but one file cabinet... installed a desktop light...and moved the desk to under the window...These changes were about more than personal preferences. They were also about infusing the preferences of my person, my ghost, in the material environment of that room, that interior place, and exorcising the ghosts of others...

Current students make somewhat edgy jokes about [a] “genuine” ghost of East Hall, and one student has reported to me her rather shivery feelings about that unseen presence... Such a ghost may have visited my office. A close friend of mine had suddenly died, leaving behind his wife, two young children, and a career that was just showing signs of taking off and making an important social contribution. The circle of those who knew him felt his death to be not only a great loss but a terrible injustice. On the day he died, but before I had learned of his death, I was at work and spent the whole afternoon in my office. Finally, near the end of the day, I stepped out for perhaps five minutes. When I returned, I discovered a small crowd outside my door. Those high bookshelves had collapsed in my absence, showering the floor with books and papers and an old iron rotating fan weighing some 25 pounds which I had foolishly stored on the top shelf – and which landed quite close to my desk. There had been no earthquake, no nearby con-

struction work, nothing understandable to cause the fall. (The carpenter who later came to fix them said he had seen track shelving pull away from a wall, but never collapse like these had done, leaving the tracks intact.) It was incredibly fortunate that the shelves had fallen during the only minutes when I was out of the office. Colleagues pitched in to help me clean up, and we made nervous jokes about imaginary headlines like “Scholar Killed by Avalanche of Books.” We all put it down as “just one of those things” (Bell, 1997, pp. 825-827).

It was, indeed, one of those uncanny things – so coincidental with Bell’s friend’s death that one cannot help but wonder at some camouflaged meaning. I have written fairly extensively about such stunning synchronicities in my Psychology Today blog (Jawer, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b). What the vast majority have in common is either a severing or a reminder of close emotional bonds.

Bell would presumably take issue with my opinion, as he writes “The ghosts of place are, of course, fabrications, products of imagination, social constructions...They do not exist on their own” (Bell, (1997). Yet his conception of presence is not confined to the intersection of person, place, and memory. He also suggests that a person’s presence can adhere to her/his possessions – that the bookshelves in Bell’s college office, for example, would necessarily continue to contain an ‘essence’ of whoever built them, even if that person were physically apart from them and even they were sold to someone else (Bell, 2017). The implication is that presence, in some manner, can convey. Perhaps feelings themselves can, too.

Hauntology and Spectrality

The subject of atmospheres has a parallel in *hauntology*, a field examining departures from certainty and reliability. The term “hauntology” was introduced by the late philosopher Jacques Derrida, who applied it toward Karl Marx’s proclamation, in the Communist Manifesto, that “a specter is haunting Europe – the specter of communism” (Derrida, 1994). Recognizing that “to haunt” implies not being objectively present – and drawing upon his recognition that what we call the “present” is ever-vanishing – Derrida coined hauntology to apply to any case of temporal or ontological disjunction, in which ‘being,’ for instance, is challenged by ‘non-being.’ Hauntology has since been invoked in many fields: philosophy, first and foremost, but also music, politics, literary criticism, and anthropology. The research I shall cite here addresses the term as it applies to prospective ‘middle ground’ between

dualities: between being and not-being, density and emptiness, certainty and hesitancy and, above all, presence and absence.

It would surely be helpful at this juncture to examine the very word *presence*. Defined as “immediate proximity in space and time” (Morris, 1981, p. 1035), (i.e., being here now), its Latin root (signifying “to be”) is also found in the words *essence* and *essential* (Morris, 1981, p. 1515). But note the prefix “pre” in presence. The implication is that, whatever the essence that is here now, it had a before, a pre-being (Bell, 2017). Perhaps this is akin to what Derrida had in mind in his assessment of Marxism’s ongoing effects in the evanescent present.

A close cousin to hauntology is *spectrality*, which attempts to describe the quality of that which haunts. One spectrality researcher homes in, for example, on the nature of “ghost towns” – noting that they are characterized by abandonment, emptiness, decay, ruin, and neglect. While divorced from the present, they nevertheless suggest an opportunity to commune with the past (Sterling, 2014). This is the case with any museum, I might add, but with great care taken to preserve and ‘present’ whatever relics or artwork is on display – versus abandoning and neglecting them. We don’t have to set foot in a ghost town or a museum, moreover, to feel we are partaking of the past. Whenever we look at a photograph or peruse an audio or video recording, we are immersing ourselves to some degree in the past, whether it is a history we personally recollect or a history suggested to us by the nature and details of what we are seeing or hearing. The past, therefore, is never truly gone nor inaccessible. It beckons in our rear view or at the periphery, specter-like.

Spectrality’s focus on traces of the past – in the form of relics, mementos, abandoned or ruined places – inevitably relates to feelings. After all, “abandoned” easily translates to “feeling abandoned,” and empty, neglected or decayed places easily summon up melancholy, ruefulness, and regret. In my estimation, however, the literature on spectrality (and hauntology, for that matter) falls short of explicitly regarding affect as foundational. Nor do these fields establish emotion as the ‘connective tissue’ with atmospheres of any kind, whether the locales are considered ruined or something strikingly different.

Fortunately, song and poetry often bridge what academia does not. An especially lovely conjuring of absence and melancholy is the song *Empty Chairs* by Don McLean (McLean, 1971). His rendering of someone forlorn at a lover’s departure is replete with atmospheric touches:

I feel the trembling tingle of a sleepless night
Creep through my fingers and the moon is bright
Beams of blue come flickering through my window-

pane
Like gypsy moths that dance around a candle flame

And I wonder if you know
That I never understood
That although you said you’d go
Until you did, I never thought you would

Moonlight used to bath the contours of your face
While chestnut hair fell all around the pillowcase
And the fragrance of your flowers rests beneath my head
A sympathy bouquet left with the love that’s dead...

Never thought the words you said were true
Never thought you said just what you meant
Never knew how much I needed you
Never thought you’d leave, until you went

Morning comes and morning goes with no regret
And evening brings the memories I can’t forget
Empty rooms that echo as I climb the stairs
And empty clothes that drape and fall on empty chairs

And I wonder if you know
That I never understood
That although you said you’d go
Until you did, I never thought you would

Notice the songwriter’s use of affordances in the lyrics – the clothes that should afford wearing, the chairs that should afford sitting, the rooms that should afford being lived in. The song, however, was published 15 years before the concept of affordances was. The sense of indeterminacy, of feelings and circumstances in flux, is set early on, with references to “a trembling tingle,” flickering moonlight, and a candle flame. Furthermore, it is hard to say just when these lovers broke up – was it a year ago, a month ago, yesterday? All we know is the mood of the narrator and the atmosphere he is living in. Whatever happened, he cannot forget. While the physical connection with his lover has been severed, even the pillowcase reminds him of her fragrant hair. The past continues to resonate in this place that, for him, is haunted.

Neither hauntology nor spectrality proposes that ghosts exist. But they recognize that “the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be...that we would do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional circumstances betray us” (Jameson, 1999). The two fields thus approach a phenomenological view of reality. Philosophers Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger notably considered the present

something other than a fixed moment between the past and the future. Husserl held that the present is “thick” because it arises from and looks back on the past (via our memories and felt associations) while also anticipating the future (through our hopes, desires, and expectations). Heidegger likewise regarded the present as uniting the past and future, so that lived experience continuously spans these contexts (Stolorow, 2007, p 19).

Enchantment

Throughout this paper, I have asserted that feelings – in their fluidity and indeterminacy – both resemble and contribute to atmospheres. I have likewise argued that feelings are part and parcel of ghosts and haunts. That which haunts is nebulous, neither wholly past nor fully present, seeming to form but then slipping away. Yet haunted places are just that: places. Whether indoors or outdoors, they are *located* somewhere rather than extending infinitely. As one researcher points out, particular kinds of atmospheres “are arguably the prototypical spatial form of hauntology” (Buser, 2017).

When a person is in such an atmosphere – for that matter, in any atmosphere that comes unbidden, that challenges our preconceptions, that confronts us with a tingle of the unknown – we may find ourselves “enchanted.” *Enchantment* is the term currently used to describe the “mix, on the one hand, of excitement, awe, and wonder and, on the other, of unease, dislocation, and unpredictability.” The location may seem to be “momentarily transform[ed]...into something charged with the strange and anomalous” (Holloway, 2010). Ghost tours – which seem to have proliferated in most every city – are popular because they hold the implicit promise of enchantment, of encountering the unknown through spooky stories, legends, and atmospheres. By visiting places where tragic violence or injustice allegedly took place (especially at night), we learn a bit of history while finding ourselves enthralled or unsettled. The implication that a ghost might linger is attributed to the given atmosphere while offering those on the tour a potential taste of the uncanny. Spectrality is invoked, the present hearkening to echoes of the past (Holloway and Kneale, 2008).

Enchantment is undoubtedly a commercial goal – and not just of ghost tour operators but of heritage tour operators in general, museum exhibit curators, history documentarians, and movie producers (think of everything from “Fantasia” and “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” through to “Poltergeist” and “The Blair Witch Project”). However, it is entirely possible to be confronted with something atmospherically strange and yet be merely curious or puzzled. This was my reaction in each of the three

situations related earlier. The possibility of a ‘haunt’ did not occur to me until reflecting on those situations later.

The Influence of the Unapparent

I began this paper by referencing the Covid pandemic. When one thinks about it, the fact that harm spread so widely, and yet so inconspicuously, through the air is quite remarkable. It points up how much we’re bound to miss. There are so many wavelengths across the electromagnetic spectrum we’re not privy to: x-rays and microwaves we don’t see and a myriad of sounds we don’t hear. So many smells that beckon to our dogs yet slide right past us. Magnetic ‘lines of force’ that orient a thousand creatures – whether in the sea, on the land or in the air – and guide them through their vast migrations (Tyson, 2003), but of which we ourselves are unaware. This disparity raises a logical question: is it appropriate to legitimize what we can see and touch and measure but denigrate or dismiss what is unapparent? Is the imperceptible any less real?

The answer is obviously no. In his extraordinary recent book, *An Immense World*, science journalist Ed Yong reminds us that “every animal can only tap into a small fraction of reality’s fullness. Each is enclosed within its own unique sensory bubble, perceiving but a tiny sliver of an immense world....Not all is as it seems...everything we experience is but a filtered version of everything that we *could* experience. It reminds us that there is light in darkness, noise in silence, richness in nothingness” (Yong, 2022, pp. 6, 14).

In the emotional realm, feelings, intuitions, atmospheres, and ghosts point up what Griffero has dubbed “the phenomenology of the inapparent.” He comments:

Traditional Western ontology puts substances, things in themselves, before relations ...being before becoming...and the central field of vision before what is vague, ephemeral, and [peripheral]....Unfortunately, these parameters end up exiling everything that is vague, flowing, atmospheric...[But] the variable and the ephemeral, the fluid and the vague, are no less “real” phenomena than the permanent (Griffero, 2020, pp. 31-32).

Picture our existence, Griffero says, as “the affective brushstrokes of a painting, rather than the accuracy and schematic simplification of a map.” The denial of what we cannot see or cannot pin down is, he remarks, “ocular-centrism, completely tantalized by boundaries of stable and knowable objects” (Griffero, 2020). What is

intangible, amorphous or mercurial, however, is no less real. The wind can blow strongly: it can gust, topple trees and houses. Further, as feelings demonstrate every day – and quite profoundly – the evanescent can be thoroughly meaningful. Feelings weigh on us, even if that weight isn't subject to objective measurement.

This is not to imply that “truthiness” should prevail over truth, the gut instincts should take precedent over bona fide evidence, nor that guesswork should supplant careful investigation. It is simply to affirm that what is in the air can be highly relevant even if it is intangible. Like the ghost of Charlotte Corday, faint impressions can nonetheless register consciously. Traces of emotion – especially if potent in the original brew – may, I believe, still be discernible.

Griffero puts it this way. To say “the mood is shifting” means not only that one senses the shifting mood; it means that the shifting mood is what one senses. While elusive, it can be absolutely present. The wind analogy is apt: like feelings (and atmospheres), it can seemingly come out of nowhere, ebb and flow, die down with the same inexplicable immediacy with which it rose. Yet the wind often enough has a describable quality, a character. We say, for example, that a breeze is gentle or sweet, that a gust is harsh or biting (Griffero, 2020). Atmospheres – and perhaps the emotional perturbations I equate with ghosts – provide hints of *their* character as well.

Movement and Feelings

In the final analysis, what is most important in life are not things we can hold in our hand or ‘bound’ precisely. What most everyone would agree is of enduring importance are values, memories, friendships, loves, passions, challenges, accomplishments, knowledge, wisdom, wholeness, acceptance, satisfaction. None of these is static; if they were, they would lose their allure. Life itself is always moving, always changing – with time itself impossible to halt or catch. We are born wriggling and crying; our movement never ceases until death. Movement is essential to all of our senses. The world around us moves, too – from the daily weather to natural and human events with the potential to change our lives. Fundamental human concepts have their origin in movement, e.g., far and near, this side and that, fast and slow, weak and strong, abrupt and sustained, etc. Every one of our actions and decisions reflects a certain degree of movement, on a spectrum from hesitant to forceful. Indeed, as Aristotle observed nearly 2400 years ago, movement is the foundational principle of nature and of life (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017).

Emotion is consonant with movement. Our feelings

flow. So do our thoughts, of course, but typically with less consequence. Feelings *animate* us. And, of course, they are energetic. On the best of days, we feel exuberant, joyful, motivated, and full of vigor. On the worst, we feel sapped, depressed, ‘at a loss,’ and slowed to a crawl. Both emotion and movement are foundational to everything else. They span time and space – yet are ultimately insubstantial.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke opined: “We must assume our existence as broadly as we in any way can; everything, even the unheard of, must be possible in it.” Courage is required, he added, “in the face of the strangest, the most astounding and the most inexplicable” (Rilke, 1904). It is time to summon up such courage to consider ghosts in the same vein as feelings and atmospheres. Existence is a vast riddle and its depths remain to be plumbed. Ironically, our most prosaic, everyday experiences – of feelings and atmospheres – have much to reveal. They are, I posit, the keys to much more.

Implications and Applications

The approach presented here points toward the value of research that considers two ‘sides of the coin’ equally: first, the particulars of a space that contribute toward any discernable atmosphere that visitors or occupants may report and, second, the emotional styles that are characteristic of those visitors or occupants.

As regards the ‘heads’ side of the coin (particulars of a space), a paper I had the pleasure of contributing to posits six factors likely to figure in any reputed haunt – each factor reflecting a different way in which the given space affects the people occupying or visiting it. Those factors are: 1) Affordance (the degree to which the space suggests different uses or makes one curious to explore); 2) Ambiguity and Threat (how much the space prompts feelings of discomfort based on cues that more or less indicate a threat); 3) Immersion and Presence (the extent to which one feels fully present and invested in the space); 4) Legibility (the ease with which one can recognize the layout of the space and navigate easily in it); 5) Memory and Associations (the degree to which one feels that the space is comfortably similar to any other space); and 6) Atmosphere (the dominant tone or mood of the space) (Jawer et al., 2020). Clearly, atmosphere can be broken down into many components, such as room dimensions (including ceiling height), building materials (color, texture, warmth), lighting (quality and amount, ambient or artificial), sound (noisy, quiet, resonance of the space), temperature, humidity, air flow, electromagnetic fields (emanating from electronic equipment in the space or from external sources), age (of the space, built features,

and furnishings), and personalization (the extent to which the space reflects the history or personal taste of the current or prior occupants). In any case, researchers would do well to apply the six major factors noted above – and perhaps others yet to be developed – in their assessments of purportedly haunted places. I am gratified to know that a forthcoming paper will hone in on these environmental aspects (Houran et al., in press), just as a landmark 2020 paper examined the literature pertaining to ambient variables (Dagnall et al., 2020).

As regards the ‘tails’ side of the coin (emotional style), recall Bell’s principle that every place is uniquely personed by the people occupying it – whether current or past (Bell, 1997). To the extent that the personality of those individuals can be gauged in a standardized way, their contribution toward any particular atmosphere that might be evident can be reasonably taken into account. The most important trait to be ascertained, I suggest, is not emotionality *per se* but the individual’s degree of expressiveness.

One means of comparing/contrasting different people’s emotional style is the Boundary Questionnaire (BQ) developed by the late psychiatrist Ernest Hartmann (Hartmann, 2011)¹. While the full BQ encompasses 145 items and typically takes an hour or more to complete, Hartmann and colleagues developed a short-form BQ of just 18 items (Kunzendorf et al., 1997)². Additionally, Rawlings developed a 46-item BQ that is of equivalent reliability to the original (Rawlings, 2001). I commend these questionnaires based on my proposition that highly “thick boundary” people are likely to engender hauntings whereas highly “thin boundary” people are likely to apprehend the emotional perturbations that attend to a haunt (Jawer with Micozzi, 2009, p 441.) (A survey intended to appraise a person’s sensitivity – developed by psychologist Michael Pluess and colleagues – is a good complement, in my estimation, to the Boundary assessment (Pluess et al., 2020).

In sum, I expect that the approach taken in this paper will advance a fuller appreciation of the role of feelings in the phenomenon of atmospheres, and especially in atmospheres of the supposedly haunted kind. It need not matter whether feelings are experienced or expressed in situations present or past; they are equally valid representations of embodied interaffectivity. This paper is further intended to spur researchers toward embracing a holistic view of hauntings (indeed, of any atmosphere). Such a view will acknowledge that all creatures inevitably affect one another by virtue of their presence – and that, just as they are affected by their environment, all creatures exert environment effects. Emotion, which is arguably the most significant force that can affect another,

has priority in this holistic view of person acting on place and place acting on person. The most enlightening and effective research will not only consider atmospheres as a unified “gestalt” but seek to understand the strange feelings that may spontaneously arise in given situations (and especially in reputedly haunted situations) as indicative of that gestalt.

NOTES

¹ An encompassing view of Hartmann’s work is available at <http://ernesthartmann.com/>.

² The short-form BQ can be taken online at <http://youremotionaltypes.com/boundaries/quiz.html>.

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