Interpersonal atmospheres: an empathetic account

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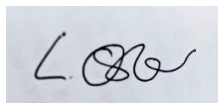
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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal atmospheres have received little specific attention in atmosphere literature and have been thrown, somewhat unceremoniously, from work done on the phenomenology of sociality. My thesis aims to fill this double lacuna. I present a phenomenological account of interpersonal atmosphere as a bodily form of empathetic perception. Rather than treat atmospheres as a mysterious object of experience, I argue that they are a relational *mode* of experience; not a *what* but a *how*. I claim that we experience individuals and groups as having an atmosphere when we bodily perceive the expressive experience of the participating subjects.

By reconceiving interpersonal atmospheres as a form of bodily felt empathy that discloses the expressive experience of individuals and collectives, we capture why experiencing interpersonal atmosphere gives us social understanding (and, conversely, why being insensitive to atmosphere inhibits our social understanding). Furthermore, by cashing out interpersonal atmosphere in terms of empathy, we enrich and expand traditional conceptions of empathy: highlighting how we not only empathetically perceive emotions but also mood, vitality and interrelatedness; developing a notion of collective empathy, whereby we empathetically perceive the expressivity not of a 'you' but of a 'they'; as well as doing justice to a more fully embodied way of apprehending others as temporally and spatially extended subjects.

Having established an empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere, I put this model to work by exploring the various ways in which we engage with interpersonal atmospheres and discussing instances where we are rendered insensitive to atmosphere. I, then, explore how the material world plays a role in shaping, supporting and sustaining expressive behaviour and how this impacts the emergence of interpersonal atmospheres. I also show how an account of interpersonal atmosphere can inform our understanding of non-peopled atmospheres and conclude by exploring the idea that we experience interpersonal atmospheres in the online sphere.

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A Vignette

It's Friday. It's been a long week of teaching, meetings and hurried writing. I'm not in the best mood but it's my friend Shay's birthday party this evening and I pull myself from the desk and make my way to her house. As I turn onto her street, I can see light spilling out of the windows, hear the faint buzz of chattering people and music. I sense the happy atmosphere of the party pouring out of the house and feel myself drawn to it. As I walk up the street, I feel like I am getting closer to the happy atmosphere of the party.

I pause at Shay's window and look in. Already, through the glass, I can see that the party is in full flow, that Shay's house is filled with people having fun. However, I still feel a certain distance between myself and the happy atmosphere. I can feel the happy atmosphere, to a certain degree, but I sense that I am 'outside' of it, that when I enter the house, I will enter the happy atmosphere. I push the door open and step into the open plan living room.

There is chatter filling the air, people animatedly smiling, chuckling, talking with one another. I'm not focused on any particular voice. Rather, I am met with a wash of excited voices. Over by the kitchen there are a few people already dancing to Billie Eilish; waving their arms, pointing at each other, also laughing. I feel a sense of uplift in my chest, an opening up to the room. I experience the happy atmosphere as all around me. The air feels as though it is suffused with happiness and cheer, almost thick with feeling. Although there is nothing, strictly speaking, touching me, I feel the presence of the atmosphere through my body.

There is a duality to this experience. I can attend primarily to the feeling of the happy atmosphere as felt by my body; focusing on the tingling feeling of openness, the vague sense that the atmosphere is pulling at me. However, if I attend too exclusively to this feeling, I lose the sense of the happiness of the party; replacing it with an experience of how *I* feel in the present moment. Conversely, I experience the atmosphere as something *out there in the world* that I am coming into contact with. Here one can draw the analogy with touching something. If I put my hand on the table in front of me, I *feel the table*, its hard top, the slightly rough texture. However, I can also switch my attention and *feel my hand*, its slightly fleshy palm, the weight of

it, a coolness of my skin. Ditto this atmospheric experience. I can attend more or less to the feeling of my body or to what the feeling of my body reveals, i.e. the happiness of the party. But what I am *touched* by in the case of atmosphere is not a physical object.

The feeling in my body does not simply disclose my own bodily state or my own emotional state. My experience of the party's atmosphere tells me something. It gives me what we might call the 'character' or the 'mood' of the party. We can bring this into relief if we think about the difference of experiencing a party as having a happy or a melancholy atmosphere. Picking up on the atmosphere is an important part of socially grasping what is going on. Indeed, an atmosphere can reveal a lot about a social situation; whether people are having a good time, are feeling uncomfortable, whether one is welcome or not and so on. People who are oblivious to atmosphere seem to miss out on an important social understanding of a situation. This can lead to their acting in ways that are out of step with the atmosphere, of seeming out of place or disruptive. When I walk into Shay's house, I experience the happy atmosphere and this discloses something about what the situation is like. In experiencing the atmosphere as cheerful, I take it that the people present (or at least many of them) are also cheerful. I would be very surprised to learn afterwards that in fact everyone at the party was upset. The atmosphere seems to emerge or radiate from the party-goers, changing with their expressive gestures, movements, postures, interactions and so on. When we are talking about interpersonal atmospheres, it seems clear that the expressive behaviour of those contributing to the atmosphere is of central importance.

However, to say I hear cheerful voices, see smiles, watch dancing, while all true, does not seem to do the experience justice. All these factors seem to contribute to the happy atmosphere while not being reducible to them. What I am experiencing is the *happiness of the party* in a more general, holistic manner. Indeed, if I attend just to the behavioural movements, say, of the dancers in an intellectual fashion, the feeling of atmosphere itself seems to recede.

What is more, although I experience the happiness of the party, it does not seem that I am experiencing the happiness of any one person at this moment. The happiness seems to be diffused across the party-goers. I do not experience each of

the people in isolation, rather I experience them interacting with one another with their interlocking movements. The atmosphere does not seem to reside simply in the bodies of those present but rather as flowing from these bodies, in the space *between* and *around* those present.

I cannot point to an exact location of the happy atmosphere. There is no 'anchor' point, so to speak. Indeed, when trying to point out the atmosphere of the party, rather than point to a specific thing, I am inclined to draw a wide circle with my arms or try and grasp something in the air. Atmospheres, then, seem to be experienced as spatial but without having a specific location. But this is not to say they have *no* location. As mentioned, I did not experience the happy atmosphere as being out on the street but *in* the house, attached to the party and the party-goers.

Interestingly, although I *feel* the happy atmosphere, am moved by it, I do not currently experience the atmosphere as *belonging to me*. It is not *my* happiness that I am experiencing but a happiness that seems to belong to the party. I experience the happy atmosphere as something I have 'encountered', that I have walked into. I have a sense that I was 'outside' of something on the other side of the door and that I have now immersed myself into the atmosphere. Although I do not know where the boundary of this atmosphere is, I have a sense that if I went up the stairs, further away from the chatting, dancing, smiling people, that I would be walking 'away' from the atmosphere.

Indeed, although I experience myself as *in* the happy atmosphere, bodily gripped by it in some way, I am not currently feeling happy myself. I am still feeling tired and, honestly, a little grumpy. I feel the pull of the happy atmosphere but, for now at least, I am resistant to it. One might question how I can both feel the happy atmosphere and feel myself to be tired. However, having what we might call a polyphony of bodily experiences is something that happens regularly: I can have a throbbing pain in my finger while also feeling happy about the sunny day; I can feel both tired and nervous about something; I can be in love while also feeling bored. This is not to say that I experience the presence of the atmosphere and my tiredness as wholly separable. I might even experience my tiredness as dampening my experience of the happy atmosphere. What this highlights, though, is that I can experience the presence of a certain atmosphere that is at odds with my own emotional state or mood.

As I walk into the room, I turn to a person next to me and say 'oh what a good atmosphere there is in here', they smile and immediately nod in agreement. I experience the atmosphere as something that is available to others, not as some private feeling that I am having (in contrast, to my tiredness). Had this person turned round and said 'oh no, the atmosphere in here is dreadful', I would have been surprised. What is more, it is likely that I would have pointed to the happy party-goers, the dancing, the happy buzz of voices to try and get the other person to recognize that they are *wrong* about the atmosphere.

I walk further into the room. I pass my friend Alex laughing while telling stories to a few people, beaming and gesticulating. There seems to be a sort of concentration of happiness around her, as though the atmosphere might have some kind of epicentre. Over in the far end of the room, where no people are currently hanging out, the atmosphere does not seem so strong. While the atmosphere seems to suffuse the situation, it is not distributed among those present equally. There seem to be patches of concentration and dilution.

When I first walked into the room, I was struck quite explicitly by the party's atmosphere. However, this doesn't have to be the case. I walk over to Shay, at the other end of the room, to give her the bottle of wine I brought and a hug. She catches sight of me and throws up her arms, ready to be embraced. She is the focus of my attention. Everyone else drops into the background as I hug her, ask her about her day, listen to her excitedly talk about her new job and her weekend plans. My experience of the party's atmosphere hasn't disappeared entirely but it is no longer at the forefront of my attention. Rather, it seems to sit in the background; a kind of warm glow in the background. Instead, Shay's own excitement seems to pour out of her. Again, I am not just seeing this excitement, I can feel it radiating from her. I can, then, experience not only groups but also individuals as having an atmosphere. Where my attention falls, then, changes the quality of my experience. I am not simply a passive receiver of atmosphere: I can take Shay's excitement as my narrow focus or I can have the broader experience of the party as a whole.

Suddenly my phone starts frantically buzzing away. I excuse myself, go sit on the stairs and open WhatsApp. In my family WhatsApp group an argument is unfolding. A string of terse, angry and aggressive messages are materializing on my screen. A

feeling of anxiety floods my body. I start messaging back, my annoyance suffusing the texts that I am sending. I am entirely focused on my phone and the unfurling family argument. The party and its atmosphere have disappeared from my attention, I am completely immersed in argument. Unbeknownst to me, a friend waves at me but I am too fixated on my phone and my family to notice. Luckily, my sister's levelled responses and reasonable interjections begin to diffuse the tense argument. Family members apologise to one another for overreacting and being prickly. Feeling that the argument has been resolved, I message them telling them to have a lovely evening and put my phone back in my pocket.

However, the tenseness of the argument is still coursing through my body and while I turn my attention back to the party, I feel oddly cut off from what is happening. The atmosphere seems to have disappeared. I can see that nothing much has changed in the situation but I seem unable to feel the happy atmosphere, my body too full of the residual tension of the argument. What I see and hear no longer seems to move me. Slowly, as my anxiety and annoyance recede, I start to feel the happy atmosphere again. Indeed, the happy atmosphere of the party seems to beckon me, and I get up to help myself to a drink, allowing the happy atmosphere to take hold of me.

While the atmosphere still feels uplifting and cheerful, I become aware that a couple near the drinks table are having an argument. I can hear their tense voices cutting through the happy chattering - their movements out of harmony with those around them. As I turn my attention to them, I feel that they are emanating their own tense atmosphere. A kind of coolness that interrupts the otherwise warm feeling in the room. I can feel my body slightly drawing back, feel a constriction of my limbs. At first, although they have their own atmosphere which is in contrast to the happy atmosphere of the party, it is as though their bubble exists in the wider context of the party. I can focus on them but also drop back into feeling the happy atmosphere. It seems, then, that I can experience a situation as having more than one atmosphere depending upon where my attention is directed. We might describe the couple as having a kind of 'sub-atmosphere' within the wider atmosphere of the party.

But the couple's tense voices turn to angry ones, getting louder. Their gestures getting more emphatic, with accusatory points and aggressive stances. The angry

atmosphere surrounding them seems to get larger, to grow. Others become aware of the arguing couple, stop dancing, turn towards them or awkwardly pretend that they have not noticed the escalating row. The tense atmosphere ripples across the room, changing the tone of the whole party. Eventually the couple storm out, leaving the rest of the party depleted in their wake. The music seems out of step with the now uncomfortable people in the room. In the immediate aftermath of this disruption, we all stand around a bit awkwardly.

A few minutes later a new group bounds through the door, bringing back enthusiasm that once again seems to change the atmosphere of the party, reinstating an atmosphere of festivity. I start chatting away to some friends and my tiredness and grumpiness ebbs away, replaced by a feeling of geniality and happiness. I feel myself getting swept up by the atmosphere around me. That my bodily perception of the atmosphere almost sinks into me, lifting me out of my previous bad mood. The happy atmosphere has influenced how I feel in a situation, affecting my own affective state. As I start laughing and animatedly interacting with those around me, I have a sense that not only am I participating in the happy atmosphere of the party with the others present but that I am contributing to it, even sharing it.

As the evening progresses, we get ready to take our party to a nearby bar. The party-goers puts on their shoes, grab bags, and pour out onto Shay's street. As we happily start walking into town, we take our happy atmosphere with us.

Introduction

1. Experiencing interpersonal atmospheres

We often talk of people having a certain atmosphere, both in reference to individuals and groups: of someone radiating an angry atmosphere, of joy pouring out of someone as atmosphere, the festive atmosphere of a party, the raucous atmosphere of a carnival, the sombre atmosphere of a funeral, the tense atmosphere of a family argument. These are examples of what I call *interpersonal atmospheres*. What is more, we have a very rich vocabulary for describing interpersonal atmospheres: we talk of atmospheres that are lonely, bleak, cold, depressing, melancholy, oppressive, aggressive, suffocating, stuffy, open, uplifting, happy, festive, cosy, warm, welcoming, and so on. So, if we walk into a party together and I turn to you and say 'Oh, what a happy atmosphere!', chances are, if we speak the same language, you understand what I am referring to.

In everyday experience and discourse we are very familiar with interpersonal atmospheres. As Teresa Brennan puts it: "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and "felt the atmosphere"?" (Brennan 2004, 1). While we talk about and experience interpersonal atmospheres frequently, they are rarely granted philosophical attention either by those specifically analysing atmospheres or in broader discussions of the phenomenology of sociality. Focusing upon interpersonal atmospheres, I argue, leads to an expansion of the traditional phenomenological notion of empathy; it shows how our empathetic perception enables us to *feel* the temporally and spatially extended emotions, moods, vitality and interrelatedness of individuals and collectives *as atmosphere*. Let's start with an outline of some of the key characteristics of the experience of interpersonal atmospheres, move on to identify two lacunas in the relevant literature (one concerning atmosphere and the other concerning empathy) and then sketch how my account brings these together.

In the opening vignette, I described the experience of encountering the happy atmosphere of a party. This vignette helps us pull out some of the characteristics of atmospheric experience. From the outset, interpersonal atmospheres seem to have a peculiar character. Atmospheres are *affective* phenomena - I do not deduce or

infer that the party has a happy atmosphere, that the family argument has a tense one, that my neighbour radiates an angry one - I feel these atmospheres through my body. Yet, while we experience atmosphere through our bodies, they are not experiences *of* our bodies. We do not experience atmospheres as something that comes from within us, that we carry around with us, as a bodily feeling that happens inside my private inner sphere. We feel the presence of atmospheres in the space around us, as 'in the air', as 'between' us and others, as something that radiates from people. Atmospheres are something that are both subjectively felt and yet are experienced as being out there in the world.

Yet, even though we describe atmospheres as something that we *encounter* in the world, they are not like chairs and tables. They do not have mass, colour, texture, we cannot point to their exact location. When using the word 'atmosphere' we need to be careful not to reify them. They are not objects in the world. That this is the case is highlighted when we reflect on the fact that we never simply encounter 'an atmosphere', they are always atmospheres *of* something. Or more specifically, in our focus on interpersonal atmospheres, atmospheres of someone or some group. While we cannot exactly pinpoint the location of an atmosphere the way I can point to a cup or a tree, they are tethered in some way to the people who produce them. I cannot experience the atmosphere of the party as in the next street, I do not experience Shay's joyful atmosphere as pouring out of David.

We experience interpersonal atmospheres as having a particular affective hue, tone or character. Just as I never experience just 'a smell', 'a touch' or 'an affordance' but a *bitter* smell, a *cold* touch, or an object or person as affording a particular array of possible interactions, so I never experience 'an atmosphere' but a *happy* atmosphere, a *tense* atmosphere, a *hostile* atmosphere, and so on. A happy atmosphere, for example, feels very different to a hostile or tense atmosphere. Yet this affective character is not fixed, it can change over time, changing from a happy atmosphere to a sad atmosphere, say.

Crucially, when we first encounter an interpersonal atmosphere of another individual or of a group, we do not experience the atmosphere, nor its affective tone, as belonging to us. When I first arrive at Shay's house, I feel the happy atmosphere of the party through my felt body but I do not experience it as *my happiness* in the

same way that I experience my being sad that my phone broke or my being hungry as *my sadness* or *my hunger*. Indeed, I can experience an atmosphere as something I am in conflict with; think, for example, of how the festive atmosphere of a party can serve to emphasise our own feeling of tiredness, grumpiness or loneliness. Rather, experiencing the party's happy atmosphere discloses something about the world to me: it conveys the emotions, mood or vitality of the participating subjects. Our experience of interpersonal atmosphere seems to give us some kind of social understanding, arising from the expressive behaviour, postures, gestures, movements, interactions of those who produce them.

Being sensitive to interpersonal atmosphere is an important part of our social understanding. Experiencing the happy atmosphere tells me about the social situation and can inform how I interact with those present. We all have experienced people who have got the atmosphere of a room wrong or who seem insensitive to an atmosphere. When this happens, the newcomer can strike the wrong chord, disrupt the mood. Failing to properly grasp an interpersonal atmosphere, then, has social consequences. I can also experience being swept up by an atmosphere, as joining in with the happy mood, contributing to and driving the atmosphere, or even changing it.

There is, then, something philosophically mysterious about atmospheres: they're at the same time 'out there' in the world, seemingly related to those who produce them, while also felt: they interweave the apparently objective with the apparently subjective. I argue that interpersonal atmospheres are not some kind of mysterious object that we encounter, nor some mere subjective bodily feeling. I suggest that we consider interpersonal atmosphere as a form of empathetic perception; a bodily way in which I apprehend the expressive experience of others. Interpersonal atmospheres, then, are relational phenomena; a felt apprehension of other embodied subjects.

2. The peculiar absence of interpersonal atmosphere

One might wonder why, given the ubiquity of the experience, interpersonal atmospheres need further philosophical research. Surely, one would reasonably suppose, they have been thoroughly discussed already. Atmospheres, broadly

speaking, have garnered attention from a number of disciplines, such as in architecture (e.g. Borch & Kornberger 2015; Pallasmaa 2014; Zumthor 2006), aesthetics (e.g. Benjamin 1936; Dufrenne 1973; Wollheim 1967), management studies (e.g. Julmi 2016), psychology (e.g. Costa et al. 2014, Tellenbach 1968), geography (e.g. Anderson 2009, 2014), anthropology (e.g. Bille 2015; Bille et al. 2015; Daniels 2015) and sociology (e.g. de Rivera and Paez 2007). Philosophically, however, the notion of atmosphere has received mixed and somewhat fragmented consideration and interpersonal atmospheres, more specifically, are rarely discussed at all.

Despite the ease with which we speak of experiencing atmosphere in normal circumstances, time and again philosophers label atmospheres "ambiguous", "fuzzy", "slippery" and warn of the difficulty of describing them (e.g. Böhme 1993, 2017a, b; Fuchs 2013a; Griffero 2014, 2017; Krebs 2017; Trigg 2020). Indeed, Böhme has gone so far to say that we often fall back on the word 'atmosphere' when we do not know what else to say (1993, 113). This ambiguity, that is so prominently associated with atmosphere, arises from their peculiar nature of being both subjectively felt while experienced as something objectively out there in the world.

For some, it is precisely this ambiguity that makes atmosphere an attractive research topic. Atmosphere is often invoked as a way to challenge, circumvent, or undermine traditional dualistic approaches to objectivity and subjectivity. On such dualistic conceptions, we can more-or-less clearly divide our subjective experience with what happens in 'the world'. This seemingly mysterious experience of a 'spatialized feeling', of affectivity 'out in the world', puts pressure on such dualism. Interest in atmosphere as a phenomenon, then, is often of secondary importance to a broader interest in unseating traditional dualistic ways of thinking about the world. Tonino Griffero (2014, 16), for instance, urges us not to try to untangle the ambiguous nature of atmosphere but to "stay in ambiguity in the right way".

Consequently, discussions of atmosphere often are used in the service of other projects. This rather instrumentalist invocation of atmosphere is perhaps most pronounced in the work of Hermann Schmitz (Schmitz 2019; Schmitz et al. 2011). While Schmitz's name has become almost synonymous with atmosphere, particularly in the last decade (e.g. Nörenberg 2020; Riedel & Torvinen 2019; Slaby

2019), his discussion of atmosphere is primarily motivated by an attempt to revolutionise the way we think about emotions and embodied subjectivity more generally. Schmitz is interested in placing emotions in public space, rather than locked in the inner sphere of an individual, and uses the notion of atmosphere to capture what he describes as a realm of pre-personal affectivity (Schmitz 2019, 97). Similarly, Griffero (2014, 2017), greatly influenced by Schmitz, uses atmospheres as an example of new ontological category he wants to establish called what "quasi-things". Jan Slaby (2019) has used the notion of atmosphere to bring together the neo-phenomenology of Schmitz with Massumi's work in affect theory, moving away from an understanding of affect that centres around human bodies and human experience.

While these are all interesting, and potentially radical, philosophical explorations, the use of atmosphere in the service of these wider projects has the somewhat ironic effect of leaving atmospheric experience frequently under-described, under-developed and under-analysed, and, more specifically, interpersonal atmospheres are rarely discussed at all. Indeed, these approaches often leave the reader none the wiser as to what atmosphere is, reinforcing the idea that atmospheres are esoteric, fuzzy phenomena that resist philosophical analysis. Moreover, given the radicality of Schmitz's proposal and the current resurgence of Schmitzian style theories of atmosphere (e.g. Nörenberg 2018, 2020; Riedel & Torvinen 2019), it has made it easy for those who are sceptical of his work more generally to dismiss atmosphere altogether.

So, while we experience and talk about interpersonal atmospheres often, feel them in the air around us, respond to them by entering or retreating from them, learn from them, contribute to, participate in and change them, they are not usually singled out for particular attention. Schmitz's work (2019) focuses on how atmospheres grip individuals as emotions, Griffero (2014, 2017) is interested in the ontological category of atmospheres rather than how they might give us social understanding, Slaby et al. (2019) focus on how atmospheres relate to the affective arrangement of environments, and Böhme (2017b, 2017b) is primarily interested in how the material world can create and produce atmospheres. Atmosphere literature is dominated by examples of non-peopled atmospheres (the atmosphere of a landscape, the atmosphere of a building, the atmosphere of a work of art) and interpersonal

atmospheres either do not feature at all or are mentioned as an addendum. The assumption seems to be that if we can get non-peopled atmospheres 'right' then we can also account for interpersonal atmospheres. Yet, as already highlighted above, interpersonal atmospheres have certain distinctive features: they emerge from the expressive bodies of the participating subjects, experiencing them gives us social understanding, we can experience ourselves as co-producers of interpersonal atmospheres, and we can get the atmosphere of a social situation wrong. Subsuming interpersonal atmospheres into the broader category of 'atmosphere' risks masking these features.

Böhme (2017b, 97), one of the most preeminent contemporary atmosphere scholars, explicitly acknowledges that atmospheres of people remain largely undiscussed and that the addition of people to the picture throws up any number of problems for accounts that take non-peopled atmospheres as their starting point. For Böhme, when we are dealing with atmospheres that arise from *subjects*, the concern seems to be that we lose the ability to account for why we experience atmosphere as not purely subjective, but out there in the world (2017b, 97-98).[1] Rather than viewing the presence of people as a peculiar complication for atmosphere research, I suggest that this prompts us to move away from models that only focus upon the co-presence of a subject with objects, to looking at how we experience being *co-present with other subjects* as atmosphere. In short, I think Böhme's assessment alone highlights the need to provide an account of specifically interpersonal atmosphere.

While this gap in atmosphere literature is striking, we also find discussions of interpersonal atmosphere missing from other seemingly relevant areas of research. Perhaps most notably we find no developed account of interpersonal atmospheres in the phenomenology of sociality. Here they are noticeable primarily for their absence; both in classical phenomenological discussions of sociality (e.g. Husserl 1976; Schutz 1967; Stein 1989, 2000; Schutz 1967) and in contemporary compendiums (e.g. Dolezal & Petherbridge 2017; Salice & Schmid 2016; Szanto & Moran 2015). This absence should strike us as strange. The phenomenology of sociality focuses upon our embodied, affective, intersubjective experiences (Szanto & Moran 2015, 5).

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[1] Böhme also suggests that subjects will find it nigh on impossible to describe interpersonal atmospheric experience because "their embeddedness in atmosphere makes the situation overly complex" (*ibid.*). Luckily, this is precisely the kind of task that phenomenology is well-equipped to tackle.

As interpersonal atmospheres are bodily felt experiences involving other people which seem to provide us with some form of social understanding, one would think that they fall firmly within the phenomenology of sociality's remit.

This omission of atmospheres from the phenomenology of sociality can be attributed to two factors. The first being a traditional, yet poorly argued, conflation of atmospheric experience with emotional contagion. I will address this in detail in chapter 2. For now, it suffices to note that this conflation characterizes atmospheric experience as essentially self-centred, as not providing us with awareness or understanding of others and their expressive experience. Indeed, it is common practice to mention atmospheres only in passing as an example of an experience that does not amount to an other-directed experience and they are then summarily ousted from such discussions (e.g. Scheler 2014, 10; Stein 2000, 203; Zahavi 2018, 738).

The second factor is Schmitz's role as a controversial figurehead of atmosphere. With the lack of modesty that certain philosophers display, Schmitz claims that he has birthed a neo-phenomenology that breaks with the traditional phenomenological oeuvre of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and so on. Schmitz's own hostile attitude to classical phenomenology has, unsurprisingly, been met with similar hostility from those working within that arena. As such, traditional phenomenological discussions often give Schmitz's work wide berth, as well as the topic of atmosphere more broadly.

3. An empathetic approach

In light of the above, I think it fair to say that, when it comes to interpersonal atmospheres, there is a double lacuna, with interpersonal atmospheres missing in both atmosphere literature and more broadly from the phenomenological literature on sociality. This thesis aims to fill this gap by singling out interpersonal atmospheres as its focus and carrying out a phenomenological investigation of them. I reintegrate interpersonal atmospheres with the phenomenology of sociality by presenting the claim that interpersonal atmospheric experience is an affective form of empathetic perception that discloses others and their experiences to us in a bodily felt manner.

In order to make this claim, it is necessary to significantly expand and enrich the classical phenomenological conception of empathy. According to classical phenomenology, empathy is the fundamental way in which we experience others as expressive, embodied subjects and gives us access to, at least some of, another's experience (e.g. Husserl 1960; Jardine 2013; Stein 1989; Zahavi 2014). Underpinning the classic phenomenological notion of empathy is the idea that we are essentially embodied subjects and that our bodily expressions and behaviours are constitutive parts of our experiences. As such, when I see my friend's smile, I see part of her happiness. I do not need to infer, simulate, or imagine her experience, as it is given to me in empathetic perception. Empathy, then, is the way in which *I* experience the experiences of *others*.

As mentioned above, the phenomenology of sociality has typically cast atmospheric experience as a case of mere emotional contagion and denied that an experience of atmosphere involves empathy. This diagnosis finds its roots in two claims. The first being that when we are swept up by atmospheric experience we are infected by the emotion of others. This is described as a self-centred experience that gives us no empathetic understanding of those around us (see Scheler 2014; Stein 1989; Zahavi 2015, 2018). Second, as Zahavi (2018, 738) notes, often when we experience an interpersonal atmosphere, we are not aware of any distinct individuals but of a group more broadly and, as such, concludes that this shows that atmospheric experience cannot involve empathy. I argue that this diagnosis rests on an impoverished notion of empathy that fails to capture how we can empathetically perceive not only individuals but also collectives. Having established that we can empathetically perceive individuals and collectives, emotions as well as more general ways of being in the world and the interrelatedness of subjects, I also argue that atmospheric experience has been overlooked as a form of empathy due to an overly visual understanding of empathetic perception. I argue that experiencing an interpersonal atmosphere is an example of *feeling* the *feelings* of others, pushing us to adopt a fully-embodied understanding of empathy.

The thesis I advance, then, is that atmosphere is a bodily *mode* of experience that reveals certain aspects of the world. On my account, atmosphere is not some *thing* that one experiences. It is a *way* of experiencing. Atmosphere, then, is not a *what* but a *how*. This, however, does not reduce atmospheric experience to purely

subjective experience. By conceiving of atmosphere as a *mode* of experience we can adequately capture both how our experience of atmosphere is something both subjective and objective: as a form of empathetic perception, atmospheric experience is world disclosing and, as such, is an essentially relational phenomenon. The mistake is to suppose that atmosphere is the *object* of perception. When we experience the happy atmosphere of the party, this is the bodily way in which we experience the embodied expressivity and interrelatedness of those present as atmosphere.

By reintegrating interpersonal atmosphere with empathy, I claim that we are able to capture this important bodily experience of others. Furthermore, by conceiving of interpersonal atmosphere in empathetic terms, we expand and enrich our notion of empathy. Much contemporary work on empathy focuses upon positioning empathy as a superior approach to the problem of other minds than theory of mind approaches (e.g. Gallagher 2008; Krueger & Overgaard 2012; Zahavi 2015). While endorsing this move, the upshot has been that little work has been done on exploring the limit cases and the different forms of empathetic perception. Discussions of empathy typically focus on examples of an individual in the course of a dyadic, face-to-face interaction with another, e.g. seeing a particular expressive gesture as part of another's emotion such as seeing someone's smile giving us direct perceptual access to their happiness. Through the lens of interpersonal atmosphere, I explore how empathy can be stretched beyond this classic example; examining how we can empathetically perceive not only individuals but collectives; not only emotions but moods, vitality and interrelatedness; not only reflectively but pre-reflectively; not only visually but through our feeling bodies; not only in snapshot moments but as subject's experiences dynamically unfurl in space and time. Perhaps most notably, this allows us to add to the phenomenological work done on *Thou* experience and *We* experience, with an understanding of how we empathetically experience the *They*.

By arguing that empathy is our fundamental way of experiencing embodied subjects, phenomenology seeks to critique and distance itself from accounts of social cognition that give a coldly observational or spectatorial account of other-experience. At the heart of this is a move away from what empathy theorists call the 'spectatorial' or 'observational' view of social cognition – where we have a picture of a perplexed

individual staring at another trying to work out what is going on in the other's hidden inner sphere (e.g. Fuchs 2016; Fuchs & de Jaegher 2009; Gallagher 2008). Rather, empathy has taken centre stage in what has come to be known as the '*you*-turn', where we encounter others as embodied subjects in the course of social interaction. As such, the *observer* has become almost a dirty word in phenomenological circles. A consequence of exploring how we experience interpersonal atmosphere, including at the 'moment of entry' when we first enter a social situation and feel the interpersonal atmosphere before we enter into a dyadic interaction, is that we are forced to reconsider the role of the observer, how we experience coming across others before we are thrown into the midst of a reciprocal, explicitly interactive social encounter. This is not to suggest that we should return to a cold observational stance but to remind us that even before we are in the throes of a social interaction we bodily apprehend others. In part, then, this thesis attempts to rehabilitate the 'observational stance', rehouse the observer in the house of empathy, not left outside in the cold but already bodily sensitive to the expressive other.

In summary, providing an empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere allows us to capture how we bodily perceive the embodied expressivity of others as atmosphere and treating interpersonal atmosphere as a form of empathy leads to a richer conception of empathy that is more fully embodied and captures our experience not only of individuals but collectives. This thesis, then, aims to bolster both work done on atmosphere and empathy, finally bringing both these philosophical areas of research to bare upon one another. I spend the first half of the thesis building up my empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere and the second half showing how this understanding can be applied to how we engage with interpersonal atmospheres, understanding how the material world plays a part in our atmospheric experience, and, finally, to the contemporary issue of experiencing interpersonal atmospheres in online space.

4. A matter of language

It is worth adding a short note on language here. The word 'atmosphere' in English has unfortunate reifying connotations. We can, and often do, speak of *the* atmosphere of a party, or the atmosphere that a person or a group *has*. This gives

the impression that atmosphere is an object in its own right or perhaps a property of subjects. Indeed, it is likely that this peculiar linguistic quirk has fed the confusion about how to talk of atmosphere, about what atmosphere *is*. I, however, characterise atmosphere as a *way* that we experience the expressive experience of others, not a *what* but a *how.* We might, then, be best to speak of *atmospheric experience* (akin to how we speak of visual experience, tactual experience or empathetic experience) or, alternatively, as experiencing *atmospherically* (akin to how we speak of perceiving visually, tactually or empathetically). And, in fact, I do use this language.

However, to reflect how we colloquially talk of atmosphere, I will continue to speak of perceiving *the* atmosphere of individuals and groups. When I talk of perceiving 'the atmosphere' of an individual, the atmosphere of a collective, an atmosphere as radiating from another, I do not mean to suggest that atmospheres are objects, physical emanations, or properties that the subjects have. Rather, when I talk of 'the atmosphere', this is still intended to pick out a relational phenomenon.

We find a similar linguistic quirk in the literature on *affordances.* Gibson (1979) famously describes how we do not experience objects as neutral things in the world. We experience objects as offering us various *possibilities* for action. I do not see my mug merely as a lump of glazed ceramic, I see it as something that I can pick up, that I can drink from, that I can warm my hands around. What affordances an object might have depends both upon what properties the object has, e.g. being a solid object, relatively light, having a handle, and the bodily capabilities that an organism has, e.g. having hands, disposable thumbs. Affordances, then, are typically thought to be *relational phenomena* (e.g. Chemero 2003, 2006; Gibson 1979, 1986; Rietveld & Kiverstein 2014; Krueger & Colombetti 2018). Nevertheless, in the literature we often see descriptions of *the* affordances that an object *has*, of perceiving, say, a mug as having certain affordances. This, I take it, is really shorthand for saying that I perceive the mug as having certain action-possibilities for me as an embodied subject, what we call affordances.

As such, when I speak of perceiving 'the atmosphere' of a person or a group, this is really shorthand for talking of how I experience the expressive, embodied actions, postures, behaviours, interactions of the relevant subjects in a bodily felt manner. It is this experience that we call 'the atmosphere'. Like those working on affordances,

though, this should not be seen as a slip into conceiving of atmosphere as an object or a property out there in the world, separable from my own experience of world.

5. Chapter summary

I've suggested that philosophical work bumping up against atmospheres have two lacuna: disregarding the *interpersonal* aspect of atmospheres and using too-restrictive notions of empathy, leading to the thought that atmospheres are emotional contagion. In the first two chapters I'll tackle the former and then the latter. In chapter 1, I present an overview of the main theories of atmosphere. I highlight how various approaches have placed varying emphasis on either the subjective or the objective dimension of atmospheric experience. In particular, I illustrate how there has been a tendency to sideline discussions of *interpersonal* atmospheres, especially in the context of how they provide us with social understanding and experience of others. I do, however, conclude the chapter with Herbert Tellenbach's account and the work of Thomas Fuchs who both, in different ways, place people front and centre of their discussion of atmosphere. While neither of these accounts provides a full picture of interpersonal atmosphere, they capture how atmospheres arise when we encounter other people in a bodily affective manner. I close by noting that Fuchs discusses atmosphere in the context of empathy, though he does not expand upon this relationship.

While Fuchs (albeit briefly) associates atmospheric experience with empathy and embodied interpersonal interactions, the phenomenology of sociality has typically dismissed atmosphere from empathy discussions. As such, in chapter 2, in order to stave off objections from the classical phenomenological corner, I present, unpack, and challenge the idea that experiencing atmosphere is merely a case of emotional contagion. This allows me to consider the traditional phenomenological notion of empathy in detail, scrutinize the view that experiencing atmosphere is no more than emotional contagion and show why this view is wanting. Despite its popularity, I show how this approach results in an unwarranted expulsion of atmosphere from our social cognition tool-kit.

Having argued that we need to revisit the relationship between atmospheric experience and empathy, I suggest that when we experience interpersonal

atmosphere, what this discloses to us is the expressive emotional experience, mood, vitality and/or interrelatedness of individuals and collectives. As such, I argue that quite contrary to not involving empathy, atmospheric experience is itself a form of empathy; a bodily empathetic perception of the expressive behaviour and interrelatedness of those present. However, in order to make this argument, two key moves are required. The first is to defend a properly collective notion of empathy, thus pushing us beyond the traditional understanding of empathy as directed at singular individuals.

In chapter 3, then, I stretch the traditional notion of empathy in a number of key ways. First, I show that although empathy literature typically focuses on the perception of another's emotions in isolated gestures and expressions, we should also include moods, vitality, style and interrelatedness as targets of empathetic perception. Second, I defend the notion of *collective* empathy and, more specifically, discuss how interpersonal atmospheres arise from the expressive behaviour not just of individuals but of collectives. I also consider how different kinds of collectives give rise to different kinds of atmosphere. This stretching of empathy allows us to understand our experience of interpersonal atmospheres as a form of empathy, as well as refining a conception of empathy more generally.

Having argued that atmosphere is a *mode* of experience that discloses the emotion, mood, vitality and interrelatedness of people and groups, I turn from *what* atmospheric experience discloses to *how* it discloses it. In chapter 4, I describe how atmosphere is a *bodily felt* form of empathetic perception. Drawing on the work of Edith Stein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I explore how empathy is not only confined to visual perception but to a full-bodied feeling of the other. While Stein's work lays the groundwork for understanding how atmospheric experience can be a feeling that discloses the expressive feeling of others, it still leaves the peculiarly spatial character of atmosphere unaccounted for. I argue that as the lived body of another is not a static physical object but a temporally and spatially extended living subject, we experience the other's expressivity as not contained within their body but pouring out into the lived space around them. Even more emphatically, when we experience the interpersonal atmosphere of a group, the group is a diffuse intentional object. As such, we feel the mood of the collective unfolding through their expressive interactions across their lived bodies and the space between them, meaning we

experience the interpersonal atmosphere as suffused through the lived space around them.

In chapter 5, having laid out my empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere, I turn to how we *engage* with interpersonal atmospheres. This marks a move from merely perceiving the presence of atmosphere to considering how we might be swept up by them, contribute to them, shape and change them. I also discuss how being able to engage with interpersonal atmospheres is impacted not only by one's own personality, dispositions and history but also one's social power, social status and one's recognition as a subject by others in the first place. I also explore cases where one is rendered insensitive to atmosphere, such as when one is undergoing intense feelings, suffering from depression, or has autism spectrum disorder. Here, I introduce the notion of 'bodily saturation' which highlights that although we can experience others' expressive experience through our bodies as atmosphere, our bodies do not have an infinite capacity for affective experience. I suggest that when one is already affectively saturated by intense affective experiences, that one has no bodily capacity left to experience atmosphere. With this discussion, I highlight how an empathetic account of atmosphere can be helpfully applied to experiences of social disconnection in psychopathological disorders.

Chapter 6 asks whether an empathetic model of interpersonal atmosphere can account for how aspects of the material environment can shape, drive, and influence our atmospheric experience. In this chapter, I explore how the world can contribute to the emergence of interpersonal atmosphere as well as play a more robust part in our atmospheric experience. Finally, I consider how an empathetic approach might even apply to how we approach experiences of non-peopled atmospheres. I claim that an empathetic approach to interpersonal atmospheres more readily transfers to non-peopled situations than theories that start with non-peopled atmospheres as their focus.

Finally, in chapter 7, I move from considering how the material environment can be experienced atmospherically, to considering how virtual social settings can also be experienced as having an interpersonal atmosphere. While people commonly talk of online atmospheres, this has yet to receive philosophical treatment. I, therefore, conclude my thesis with a discussion of how we not only experience interpersonal

atmospheres in face-to-face situations, where we are physically present with others, but can also in certain online settings. I argue that by conceiving of atmospheres as an affective form of empathetic experience, we can make sense of why we experience atmospheres not only in the 'real' world but the virtual one as well. Applying my empathetic conceptual framework of atmosphere to this contemporary situation not only helps us understand these new forms of sociality, making some in-roads into the currently underexplored realm of online sociality, but provides additional support for the framework itself.

Chapter 1

Situating atmosphere

Introduction

Before embarking upon my own empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere, I start by situating my discussion in two ways. First, I start with a brief outline of what atmospheres are not. Atmospheres are something that are *felt*. Yet, as Fuchs (2014) wryly notes, they are rarely considered alongside other affective phenomena, such as emotions, moods, and existential feelings. Before setting out a positive investigation of impersonal atmospheres, it is helpful to briefly consider what they are not. This will help us fine-tune our understanding of atmospheric experience, as well as showing that the notion of atmosphere cannot simply be reduced to another kind of phenomenon, thus justifying it as meriting its own philosophical investigation.

Second, I provide a critical overview of the most prominent and influential accounts of atmosphere. These include: the causal model, the projection model, Schimitz's radical conception of emotions as atmosphere, and Böhme's notion of the ekstatic properties of objects. I consider these approaches and specifically highlight why they fall short when it comes to understanding interpersonal atmospheres. In particular, I note that the idea that atmospheres relate to the expressive bodies of other subjects is peculiarly missing from these accounts. Indeed, other people are often referred to only in glancing or as an added complication. I conclude the chapter by calling attention to two accounts that sit at odds with the others, as they place our interpersonal experiences front and centre in their discussion of atmosphere: Tellenbach's perceptual account of atmosphere and the brief reflections of interpersonal atmosphere found in the work of Fuchs. Following insights drawn from Tellenbach and Fuchs, I suggest we approach interpersonal atmosphere as a *way* of experiencing others that relates to the expressive behaviour and interactions of embodied subjects. This sets us up for an in-depth discussion, in chapter 2, of the debarring of interpersonal atmosphere from our social cognition tool-kit by the phenomenology of sociality and my critique of this approach.

For some, my departure from discussing atmosphere in the context of Schmitz will be taken as controversial. Certainly his name has become deeply associated with the notion of atmosphere and enthusiasm for his neo-phenomenological work has produced a number of scholarly fans (e.g. Nörenberg 2020; Riedel & Torvinen 2019; Slaby 2016, 2019). However, I think that approaching interpersonal atmosphere through the lens of bodily empathetic perception not only allows us to more fully capture the phenomenon of interpersonal atmosphere, it allows us to move beyond a merely theoretical account of atmosphere to questions about what happens when individuals are insensitive to atmosphere, how our feeling states impacts our atmospheric experience (or lack thereof), how we engage with and co-produce interpersonal atmospheres and to consider more contemporary questions about how we might experience atmosphere in unexpected places, such as the internet.

1. What atmospheres are not

First, we should quickly distinguish between the atmospheres that we refer to in common parlance (the atmospheres that we are concerned with here) and how the term 'atmosphere' is used by meteorologists. Atmosphere is used in meteorology as a technical term to designate the gaseous layers surrounding a material body such as a planet. Thus, when meteorologists talk about how pressure in the air changes, they might talk about the drop in pressure of the Earth's atmosphere. When I describe, for instance, a room as having a particular atmosphere, I am not literally referring to a gaseous sphere surrounding the room.

In order to differentiate our use of the word atmosphere from the meteorological one, some writers dub these *affective* atmospheres (e.g. Anderson 2009, 77). What this intends to capture is that these are atmospheres that we feel, that we are moved by. It makes little sense to talk of an atmosphere that no one is experiencing, they do not lurk around like clouds waiting to be stumbled upon, they do not exist separately from being felt. It also captures how these interpersonal atmospheres have a certain affective character, be it joyful, tense, depressing and so on.

Since we often depict atmospheres in emotive language (e.g. joyful, depressing) one might ask why they are not described as *emotional* atmospheres. The advantage of describing these as affective atmopsheres, rather than emotional ones, is twofold.

First, it avoids the implication that when we experience an interpersonal atmosphere this must elicit a particular emotion in us. Rather, we can talk about being affected in a more flexible manner which incorporates, *inter alia*, bodily stirrings, kinesthetic feelings, proprioception, emotions, feelings, moods, and so on. This allows us to capture how atmospheres are something that are felt, while retaining a broad notion about how they are felt. Second, while we do often use emotive language to describe the character of an atmosphere (e.g. a happy atmosphere, a sad atmosphere), we do not exclusively use emotive language. We can also talk of uplifting atmospheres, tense atmospheres, cold atmospheres, languorous atmospheres, which do not pick out a specific *emotional* hue but use the language of mood or vitality. Again, the term affective generously encompasses all these atmospheres.

Like other affective phenomena such as emotions and mood, atmospheres are something that we *feel*. This, we might suppose, would encourage us to place atmospheres alongside other *feeling*-type experiences.[2] Unfortunately, an explicit comparison between atmospheres and other affective phenomena, such as emotions, moods, and existential feelings is largely missing. In the following, I set out why atmospheres should be differentiated from these other experiences. This helps unpack certain characteristics of atmospheric experience while also serving to show that atmospheres cannot be reduced to these other affective phenomena.

1.1. Not emotions

Over the years, there has been much debate about how to define an emotion and I shall not attempt to present a full overview of the discussion here (for such a summary, see Szanto & Landweer 2020). Historically, though, there has been a split between two opposing factions. On the one hand, theorists who focus upon emotions as bodily feeling and define emotions as feelings of bodily changes (e.g. Damasio 1999; James 1922): e.g. my excitement about my date this evening is the feeling of butterflies in my stomach. On the other hand, theorists who emphasise that emotions are evaluations of a certain situation (e.g. Nussbaum 2003; Solomon 1976): e.g. I anticipate that my date this evening will be enjoyable and this judgment is my excitement. Both these approaches have received criticism: defining emotions

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[2] Note that is a more narrow understanding of the word 'affective' than is used by enactivists such as Colombetti (2014), who conceive of all experience as affective (in terms of being something that is meaningful, salient or significant).

as feelings of bodily changes seems to miss out on how emotions are about something in the world, while defining emotions as evaluations seems to miss out on the felt character of emotions. Not surprisingly, in recent years, there has been a move towards a hybrid-style approach which attempts to capture both the felt quality of emotions and their intentionality.

Nowadays, it is widely agreed that emotions are *intentional*; that they are *about* something. When I feel afraid, I am afraid *of an exam*, when I feel happy, I am happy *about my friend arriving this afternoon*. However, in order to capture the felt character of emotions (and allow us to distinguish them from cold, cognitive judgments), there is often an appeal made to the idea that emotions have a special kind of intentionality, namely an "affective intentionality" (Slaby 2008, 268). The motivation here is to capture both the intentionality and phenomenal character of emotions by characterising emotions as bodily felt experiences that are directed at the world (e.g. Döring 2007; Fuchs 2014, Ratcliffe 2014; Slaby 2008; Slaby and Stephan 2008). Thus, we can think of emotions as having a dual-intentional structure: (i) they are directed towards the condition of one's body, e.g. one's stomach churning, and (ii) they are directed towards the world, e.g. the feeling I have about or towards my upcoming exam.[3] By introducing this dual-intentional structure, such accounts allow for bodily feelings to be intentional and for their intentional object not to be restricted to the subject's bodily state (Ratcliffe 2008, 78). What is more, this account allow us to retain the insight of cognitive accounts that emotions have an evaluative character to them (Helm 2002): in fearing my exam through my bodily feelings, the exam is disclosed as something I am concerned with, as something that I care about, that I judge it to be difficult to pass and thus something to be fearful of. As such, emotions are understood as being about the world in terms of revealing things that matter to me in a certain way.

At first glance, there seem to be some similarities between emotions and atmospheres. When we experience an atmosphere, this involves a bodily feeling; for

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[3] Note that there is some disagreement about how to conceive of this dual-intentionality. Slaby (2008) and Ratcliffe (2008), for example, think this intentionality is unified and draw a comparison between emotional feelings having a dual-intentional structure with tactile perception having a dual-intentional structure (i.e. that when I touch the table, I feel both my hand and the table). Goldie, on the other hand, seems to suggest that bodily feelings get their intentionality from feeling towards (Goldie 2002, 236). I will return to this in chapter 4.

instance, the happy atmosphere of a party might be felt as a feeling of expansiveness in my chest. Yet my chest is not the intentional object of the experience, the expansiveness seems to relate to the party-goers. Indeed, if you only felt an expansiveness this would not amount to an experience of an atmosphere, as it seems to lack the world-disclosing character of atmospheric experience. Thus, the dual-intentional structure of emotions, seems to also apply to atmospheres.

However, while emotions get their character from how *I* feel in any given situation about a particular thing, the affective character of atmosphere does not (necessarily) relate to my own affective state or my concerns. What an interpersonal atmosphere seems to reveal is not my happiness but the happiness of the party-goers. Moreover, I experience my emotions as belonging to me. If I fear my exam, it is *my* fear of the exam, not *your* fear of the exam or a general fear about exams that people have. Atmospheres, on the other hand, are (often) experienced as *not belonging to me.*[4] I do not even need to be experiencing the same emotion as the affective character of the atmosphere - I can experience the happy atmosphere of the party while feeling grumpy myself.

Another important difference is that I can be emotionally directed to something or someone who is not present, for instance I can be sad about my grandmother in Germany being ill. However, it doesn't make sense to talk of my feeling the atmosphere of someone or some group that I am not present with, for instance the atmosphere of my brother's birthday party in Singapore. In the same way I cannot see my mug in the room next door, cannot taste yesterday's breakfast, cannot touch the moon's surface, I cannot experience the atmosphere of a situation unless I am present in that situation.

What this brief analysis has shown is that while atmospheres, like emotions, appear to be bodily feelings that are about the world in some way, there are clear differences between the experiences. This is important as it will suggest that any account of atmosphere that is not able to differentiate between atmospheric and

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[4] I will consider how we can experience ourselves as being part of or contributing an atmosphere in chapter 5. For now, I will focus upon the 'moment of entry', the moment when we enter a new situation and feel the atmosphere of those present.

emotional experience seems unsatisfactory (a critique I will use against certain theories of atmosphere below).

1.2. Not moods

Moods, in contrast to emotions, are often taken to lack intentional objects (or to have a very broad intentional object, such as the world (Goldie 2000)): "Moods such as depression, anxiety, irritation, elation, optimism, or simply "being up" or "being down" are not about anything in particular" (Colombetti 2017, 1438). Moods, unlike emotions, seem to pervade our worlds. Rather than being about a specific event or thing, moods pervasively colour our experience of being-in-the-world. As Ratcliffe (2008, 16) highlights, moods show up in the way we find ourselves in the world: think, for instance, of when you are in an upbeat mood and everything appears to be full of possibility, to look more enticing, to look brighter.

We often hear people talk about the mood of a party, the mood of a conference and so on; in turn, moods are often described as being atmospheric: "moods are atmospheric in nature, radiating through the environment like warmth or cold, and conferring corresponding expressive qualities on the whole situation. It is no coincidence that we often use words taken from weather such as 'bright', 'sunny', 'gloomy', 'clouded', or 'dark' to denote mood states" (Fuchs 2014, 223). Do these overlaps occur because atmosphere is simply a synonym for mood? I think not.

In contrast to moods, which might be said to be simultaneously about everything and nothing, atmospheres have a different intentional structure. Atmospheric experience relates to some aspects of the world and not others. Imagine walking into a party and being struck by the happy atmosphere. The atmosphere seems to be attached to or rooted in the party in some way in which an elated mood is not. We can emphasize this point if we think of atmospheres in terms of their spatiality: atmospheres seem to be something I can walk in to and out of; I can walk away from the happy atmosphere of the party by leaving a room. Atmospheres seem to have, albeit often vague, boundaries in a way moods do not. Of course, in natural language we might sometimes treat 'mood' and 'atmosphere' as synonyms. My point is that there are nonetheless two distinct phenomena here, one of which I'll designate a 'mood' (that is, something about us which colours our general relationship with the world around

us) and the other 'atmosphere'. Indeed, I will suggest that our experience of interpersonal atmosphere is a way in which we perceive the mood of others.

What is more, we can experience atmospheres that are in conflict with our current moods. Take my entering Shay's party in a grumpy mood. While I feel the happy atmosphere of the party, it only serves to deepen my sense of gloom. One can sense the presence of an atmosphere without taking up the affective character of that atmosphere. Moods, however, are not like this. If I am in a depressed mood, that mood follows me everywhere, it pervades all of my experience. One is either in a mood, or one is not. If atmosphere is simply a synonym for mood, it is hard to see how we can maintain the phenomenal characteristic of atmospheres being something we can be sensitive to while not having to be *in* it oneself.

Moreover, as the Fuchs' quote above highlights, moods seem to *confer* expressive qualities onto things: when in a happy mood the field on the way to work might appear beautiful and enticing, while in a gloomy mood the field might appear as an arduous distance between me and the office. Yet, as we will discuss in more detail throughout this thesis, this story seems to be the inverse of what occurs in atmospheric experience: a group of laughing and happy people at a party seem to *create* a happy atmosphere through their expressive, embodied behaviour. Atmospheres, therefore, seem to arise out of expressive qualities rather than conferring expressive qualities onto things or people.

What this highlights is that atmosphere is closely tied to specific people or situations in a way that moods are not. I suggest that whereas emotions and moods are affective phenomena that affect (or perhaps even structure) our perception, atmospheric experience is an embodied, affective form of bodily perception that, when related to people, gives us a form of social understanding.

1.3. Not existential feelings

Existential feelings are a category attributable to Matthew Ratcliffe (2008), that are intended to capture how embodied subjects find themselves in a meaningful world.[5] He argues that all our experience is existentially orientated and that this orientation is

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[5] As Ratcliffe is influenced by Heidegger, we can see a degree of overlap between existential feelings and Heideggerian mood. Due to this overlap, I consider my differentiation between existential feelings and atmosphere to also apply to Heideggerian mood and atmosphere.

something bodily felt. They are "variants of a non-localized, felt sense of reality and belonging, something that all intentionally directed experiences and thoughts presuppose" (Ratcliffe 2020a, 250). These existential orientations affect the way we find ourselves in the world in terms of affecting the kinds of possibilities the world offers up to us. For example, in a homely existential orientation we might encounter all manner of possible actions, whereas when we experience the world as strange or uncomfortable, certain possibilities might disappear, the world might be experienced as alien, odd or burdensome. When we undergo a change in existential feeling, the types of possibility we experience as available and significant in the world also change.

Ratcliffe's existential feelings are intended to capture the affective way in which we find ourselves in the world. On the face of it, Ratcliffe's descriptions of existential feelings might strike us as similar to our descriptions of atmospheres: they have an affective feel that discloses the world and situates the subject in a particular way. Interestingly, existential feelings, according to Ratcliffe, do not belong to the subject or to the world but arise out of a relationship between them, they are *relational* (2020, 215). Again, this might ring some bells in relation to atmospheres, which we have already noted are not experienced as belonging straightforwardly either to the subject or to the world.

Nevertheless, I think we should be careful to distinguish atmospheres from existential feelings as well. Existential feelings structure the world we find ourselves in, give us a meaningful world in the first place. I suggest that rather than seeing atmospheres as existential feelings, we are already in a world structured by existential feelings when we experience atmosphere. Existential feelings, therefore, are more fundamental and experienced prior to our experience of atmospheres. And, just like moods, the kind of existential feelings we are undergoing might impact how or whether we experience atmospheres.

We can appeal to the idea of conflict again to underscore this point. While we are *in* a certain existentially framed world, we do not appear to find ourselves in conflict with *other existential feelings*. We might change existential feelings (indeed, this is when Ratcliffe suggests that existential orientations are most salient to us) but if I am experiencing the world as comfortable, I do not walk into a tense boardroom and find

a tense existential feeling in the room that conflicts with my own. Like moods, we are either in one sort of existential feeling or another. Yet again, this feeling of being in conflict with the atmosphere of a particular situation seems difficult to account for if we equate atmospheres with existential feelings.

Existential feelings do not appear to come in conflict with one another, are about the world more generally, and structure how the world is disclosed to a subject. This does not seem to account for some key phenomenal attributes of atmospheres: as something we can come in conflict with, as somehow relating to certain properties of a situation, and as something we can experience without being *in* (in the sense of not taking that affective feeling up). These differences, again, highlight that atmospheres demands their own philosophical treatment, as appealing to other affective phenomena does not capture the experience of atmosphere in a satisfactory manner.

2. Theories of atmosphere

Having shown that interpersonal atmosphere cannot be reduced to emotions, mood, or existential feelings, and thus warrant their own philosophical treatment, let us now turn to the most prominent theories of atmosphere found in philosophy.

2.1. The causal model

Concerned by the seemingly mysterious character of atmosphere, one might want to adopt a reductive approach, perhaps suggesting that what we describe as our experience of atmosphere is nothing more than the way that particular situations make us feel. For instance, when I say that the party has an uplifting atmosphere, what I am really describing is how the party makes *me* feel uplifted. This is a causal model of atmosphere. Our use of the word 'atmosphere' as something that comes from or radiates off the space, or group, then, can be diagnosed as a loose, metaphorical, or sloppy way of talking (Krebs 2017, 8; Wollheim 1993, 148).

There is an undeniable appeal to this reductive approach. Saying that atmospheres are just the linguistic description of a feeling that is causally triggered by a situation seems to demystify the experience. We no longer need to ask tricky questions about the ontological status of atmosphere; it is simply a subjective reaction to certain

stimuli in the environment. However, there is something deeply unsatisfying about this approach too. It simply fails to capture many distinctive features of atmospheric experience. As discussed above, when we experience atmosphere, it does not seem to tell us about how we are doing but discloses something in the world to us. As Krebs expresses it:

> The problem with [the casual model is that it] fails to capture the way that *the peaceful feeling is intimately related to the landscape*. How the landscape looks, sounds or smells is integral to a full description of the feeling. Contrast this with a bottle of wine that makes you cheerful and reminds you of the good old days. To describe your cheerfulness you do not need to talk about how the wine tastes. *The peacefulness is in the landscape, whereas the cheerfulness is not in the wine*. (Krebs 2017, 8, my italics)

Atmospheric experiences appear to be *about* the situation, in a way that the feeling of cheerfulness when drinking is not *about* the wine. If anything, this seems to be even more empathically the case when talking about interpersonal atmospheres - where someone's angry atmosphere or a party's happy atmosphere seems to pour out of the subjects to whom the atmosphere relates. The risk of the casual account is that it oversimplifies the experience to a brute sensorial reaction. Describing experiences of atmosphere as merely the affective response to environmental stimuli, does not appear to do justice to the richness of the experience or capture its world-relatedness.

2.2. The projection account

Related to the casual model, but arguably more sophisticated, is the projection model of atmosphere. Like the causal model, the projection approach suggests that the experience of atmosphere as being *out there* in the world is illusory. Humboldt describes how he thinks we project our feelings onto aspects of the world when we experience atmosphere:

> Impressions change with the varying movements of the mind, and *we are led by a happy illusion to believe that we receive from the external world that with which we have ourselves invested it*. (Humboldt 1866, 26, my italics)

The projection model suggests that a subject experiences atmosphere when they project a feeling (understood as an inner mental state) onto the external world, be that other people or the landscape. The projection model, unlike the causal account, attempts to capture why it is we experience atmosphere as out there in the world. It is as a result of projecting, or imbuing, the world with our own feeling that we come to experience atmosphere as something that is *out there*, rather than just as an emotion that the situation elicits in us.

The term projection is used to refer to a "psychological mechanism" (Krebs 2017, 7) whereby the subject transfers an inner feeling to an external object. How, though, does projection come about? It does not seem to be the case that I experience *all* of my feelings as atmosphere, as all projected onto the outside world. I can, for instance, feel angry when I remember an argument I had with a lover which seems to have nothing to do with the bustling cafe that I am currently sitting in. Why would we sometimes project our feelings onto the world around us and sometimes not?

Perhaps the most developed account of projection is found in the work of Richard Wollheim. In his essay "*Correspondence, Projective Properties, and Expression in the Arts*" (Wollheim 1993), Wollheim suggests that we project our inner feelings onto the world around us when we are experiencing something overwhelming, intense, or unwanted. He describes projection as an instinctive *compulsion* to expel a certain feeling, such as melancholy, and locate it in another person or thing (Wollheim 1993, 151). When this occurs, the feeling is "expelled from the body and spreads across the environment" (Vendrall Ferran 2019, 299).

Wollheim distinguishes between two cases of projection: simple and complex projection. In simple projection, the individual projects the feeling onto another *person*, such as a figure in the distance. When this occurs, the subject comes to believe that the figure in the distance is possessed of the same melancholy that they themselves had been experiencing and through projection the subject experiences the new figure as having a melancholy atmosphere. In complex projection, the feeling is projected onto an inanimate part of the external world, such as a landscape. In the case of complex projection, Wollheim argues that the landscape is not experienced as melancholy itself, as it lacks the adequate psychology to be melancholy, but as "*of a piece with* a person's melancholy" (*ibid.*). Indeed, he goes

so far to say that in complex projection, the subject is aware that the melancholy found in the landscape originates from their own projection (*ibid.*, 157).

Like the causal model, the projective model roots atmospheric experience in the individual. However, unlike the causal model, the projective model does attempt to capture how the experience of atmosphere relates to others and the environment. Although the feeling *comes* from the subject, flowing from the subject to the world (Galgut 2010, 145), the feeling is not cut adrift from the world entirely. Wollheim firmly connects projection with the perception of people or things in the environment that are ripe for projecting on to.

What makes something ripe for projection? When we are overwhelmed with an emotion or mood, we don't project it onto *any* individual or *any* aspect of the external world. One does not project one's melancholy onto a smiling individual or a field full of daffodils but onto, say, a glum-looking person or a desolate open expanse. Wollheim acknowledges this claiming that we only project psychological properties onto aspects of the environment that have an *affinity* with those feelings:

> When some part of nature is held to correspond to a psychological phenomenon, this is because *it is perceptible as being of a piece with that state or as something onto which we might have or could have projected the state.* (Wollheim 199, 154, my italics)

The slouching figure or the desolate open space, for instance, has a perceived affinity with our melancholy that makes it suitable for the projection of our melancholy onto it. But how do we come to perceive the slouching figure or the open space as suitable for melancholic projection? What does Wollheim mean when he says that we project emotions onto aspects of the world that have an *affinity* with the relevant state? A shadow of circularity lurks here - for, in order for me to project my melancholy onto the world, surely I must have already experienced the figure or the open space as melancholic in some way?

Indeed, there is a concern that, particularly when we are talking about atmospheres relating to people, the projection account actually gets the picture backwards. While it is fair to say that when we experience a wood as having a gloomy atmosphere, we are not experiencing the wood as itself feeling gloomy, is this description really applicable to people? As noted in the Introduction, when I experience a party as

having a happy atmosphere, I would be surprised to learn if everyone present was in fact miserable. Wollheim's suggestion that I project a feeling of happiness onto the party and *then* come to believe those present are possessed of the same feeling of happiness that I had experienced seems to get things the wrong way around. Moreover, projection fails to capture how experiencing a party's happy atmosphere provides me with some kind of social understanding about those present; that in experiencing the happy atmosphere I gauge the mood of those present. To describe the atmosphere as projected onto the party, misses the sense that the experiences of those at the party is what is creating the atmosphere in the first place.

This worry links up to Bohme's broader critique that the projection account is "counter-phenomenal" (Böhme 2017a, 17). Rather than experiencing some intense emotion and projecting it outwards onto the world as atmosphere, we experience atmospheres as something we encounter (also see Fuchs 2013). They can surprise us, we can feel in conflict with them, we can be moved by them. The projection account seems to have a hard time in accounting for cases where our own emotional state or mood is out of step with the atmosphere that we experience. Take the start of our vignette, where I am tired and grumpy when I first enter the party but still experience the happy atmosphere there. How can I be projecting my own feeling of happiness onto the party, when I am not feeling happy myself. By accounting for atmosphere in terms of projection, atmospheres become too tied to the observer to accommodate the various ways one can experience being in conflict or being moved by atmosphere.

2.3. Schmitz, emotions and atmosphere

On the opposite end of the spectrum to the subjective accounts found in the causal and projection models we find Herman Schmitz's "radical desubjectification" of atmosphere (Griffero 2017, xiv). For many, Schmitz has become *the* atmosphere theorist and his work is gaining increasing attention (e.g. Nörenberg 2018, 2020; Riedel & Torvinen 2020; Slaby 2019, 2020; Slaby & von Scheve 2019). Schmitz conceptualises atmospheres, perhaps rather obscurely, as "spatially extended non-subjective feelings" (Schmitz 2019, 110), as forces that fill the air around us and "impress themselves…upon an adequately attuned sensibility" (Slaby 2020, 275). He infamously claims that atmospheres, far from being a private subjective feeling, are

in the world and are as objective as roads (Schmitz at al. 2011, 250). Building on this already controversial claim, Schmitz makes the somewhat surprising statement that *all* emotions are atmospheres. To unpack these potentially confusing claims, we must first turn to Schmitz's broader discussion of emotions.

Schmitz's interest in atmosphere is tied to what he takes to be a necessary, and overdue, rejection of internalist accounts of emotion. He identifies what he calls a persistent 'psychologism' of emotions. This psychologism involves "the act of locking the entirety of personal experience into a closed-off private inner sphere, a soul" (Schmitz 2019, 79). Schmitz argues that this has resulted in an unfounded isolation of an inner private sphere from an external world. Schmitz aims to rectify what he sees as this centuries-old error and attempts to move the realm of emotions from inside the inner sphere of the individual and out into the world.[6]

Like other phenomenologists, Schmitz highlights that we do not simply have a physical body but that we are embodied, feeling subjects. At the core of Schmitz's theory is the idea that it is our corporeality that constitutes us as experiencing subjects (Schmitz et al. 2011, 254). The felt body (*Lieb)* is a living, feeling body through which we experience the world. This reflects many phenomenological descriptions of the body as not just a material object (i.e. an object that science can study, that is an object among other objects in the world) but also a lived and felt body (i.e. the body that we experience the world *through*) (see for example: Husserl 1967; Merleau-Ponty 2015; Leder 1990).[7] It is through the felt body that subjects are affectively involved with the world (we will return to this idea repeatedly throughout this thesis).

Schmitz asserts that emotions are not something that occur within some kind of inner sphere or soul, rather they are "room-filling" phenomena, spatial presences that grip the feeling body of the subject (Schmitz et al. 2011, 254).[8] We experience emotion

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[6] It should be noted that Schmitz does not present a systematic, step-by-step argument for his theory of emotions as atmospheres. However, as Slaby & Müllan (2011) put it, what Schmitz does offer is an alternative description of emotional experience and, relevant for our purposes, an interesting discussion of the notion of atmosphere.

[7] Schmitz seems to underplay the role classical phenomenologists have given to the body, suggesting that he has embarked upon a new 'neo-phenomenological' project. The extent to which his work is truly a departure from the work of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Henry, Stein, Scheler, and so on, is, I think, up for debate.

[8] These room-filling emotions are contrasted with mere bodily sensations such as hunger, which Schmitz denies occupy public space in the same manner (Schmitz et al. 2011, 254).

when "an atmosphere grips the vital drive" of our corporeal bodies (Schmitz 2019, 96). What Schmitz is getting at here is that we do not simply *have* an emotion, we experience ourselves as *seized or gripped by* emotions. He gives this description of anger as an example: when we experience anger, it is not experienced "in reference to a soul" (*ibid.*), rather we experience anger as an atmospheric force that takes over our feeling body, that impresses itself on us. Similarly, he describes sorrow as a deflatedness or flatness which presses in on one's body. Thus, we might speak of sorrow washing over us or something that we wallow in. Emotions, therefore, are not experienced as confined to some inner sphere but as present in the public space around us as atmospheres that press in on us and affectively grip us.

To be clear, Schmitz is not simply making a claim that emotions are always embodied and thus always experienced as spatial due to our bodies being spatial entities, which many people, including me, would wholeheartedly agree with. Schmitz is arguing for a radical externalization of emotions; claiming that emotions themselves are "atmospheres poured out spatially" (*ibid*, 254).[9] According to Schmitz, we encounter emotions as atmospheres in the world around us, as occupying "surfaceless space". This is not the geometric space of mathematics but a pre-dimensional space: "Think of the voluminous sensual presence of sound, or the conspicuous expanse of sombre silence" (Slaby 2020, 278). To illustrate this surfaceless space, Schmitz describes how when we walk out of a stuffy room into an airy one, we experience the space around us as fresher and more open. This is the space of emotions and atmosphere.

At the heart of Schmitz's account of emotions as atmospheres is the idea that atmospheres are *in* public, pre-personal space. They do not belong specifically to any one individual. This description might lead us to suppose that atmospheres for Schmitz are some kind of affective mist floating around in public space that we come into contact with and can be seized or gripped by. However, he explicitly states that "one has to be careful not to reify emotions as though they hovered in space like invisible clouds" (Schmitz 2019, 99). While he argues that emotions are in public space as atmospheres, they are what he calls "half-entities" *(ibid.)*. Half-entities differ

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[9] Note that this itself is an unusual way of talking about atmosphere, as it prompts us to ask where these atmospheres are poured out from. As I discuss below, Schmitz's account does not satisfactorily account where atmospheres come from, nor how they might relate to the people or things that produce them.

from full-entities, such as cups and tables, on two counts. First, they do not need to persist without interruption. An atmosphere can, as he puts it, "come and go". Second, the cause and influence of a half-entity overlap. An atmosphere is felt in the lived body immediately, it does not affect us through intermediate effects.

Schmitz argues that when we experience an emotion such as anger, it is because we are seized by an atmosphere of anger. We experience it as a kinesthetic force that washes over our body. For Schmitz, this atmosphere is not *in* the angry person but is out there in the world, occupying public space. At this point, one is likely to object that many of our emotional experiences do not seem to be floating around in the space around us, available for all to encounter, but are privately experienced. It seems that we often undergo emotional experiences that no-one else does (or perhaps even could) pick up on. Take, for example, a person who is angry but is concealing their anger from others. It seems strange to say that this person's anger is in the public space as atmosphere. Indeed, Schmitz acknowledges that "various people are haunted by very different emotions that are often inaccessible to others" (2011, 256). To combat this apparent contradiction, Schmitz asserts that people experience emotions differently due to their personal history and their sensitivity to atmosphere (*ibid.*).

Thus, Schmitz makes a distinction between an atmosphere merely *encountered or perceived* in public space and the affective involvement of the felt body that the individual experiences when one is seized or gripped by a specific emotion. To return to the example of anger, one can encounter an atmosphere of anger which grips the felt body but, it is only once we are already in the grip of the anger that we have a personal response to that atmosphere. Accordingly, "the affective involvement in an emotion is second to the gripping effect of an emotion as atmosphere" (Schmitz 2019, 95); one must first feel an atmosphere and then either surrender to or resist it. It is this affective involvement that is specifically personal and is likely to go unnoticed by others. Schmitz argues that it is because we tend to focus on the affective involvement with an atmosphere that we have strayed into thinking of emotions as only private psychological affairs.

Schmitz, therefore, allows that we might experience "the mere perception of the atmosphere without being in the grip of it" (Schmitz 2019, 98).This distinction

between merely perceiving an atmosphere and being seized by or affectively involved with an atmosphere is an important one and one that I will emphasise throughout this thesis. As noted above, I can sense the happy atmosphere of a party without taking it up, without becoming happy myself. An individual only becomes affectively involved with the emotion as atmosphere if they give into the stirring of the atmosphere (Schmitz 2019, 101). Thus, only if I give into the happy atmosphere, becoming happy myself, do I move from a mere bodily perception of the atmosphere to an experience of being involved with the atmosphere. Schmitz also nicely highlights how we are not all uniformly sensitive to atmosphere or as easily affectively involved by atmosphere (a theme I return to in chapter 5). He notes that:

> People disposed to greater oscillations of tension and swelling or splitting parts of privative contraction and privative expansion from the whole complex resonate more easily with gripping emotion. Other inhibitions or enhancements of the disposition to be gripped have personal reasons, for instance, in that the personally emancipated conscious subject only in doses admits embodied affective involvement, or in that a youth, from the not yet fully scaffolded elevation of his personal emancipation all too easily drifts off into being gripped, or because of fossilisations rooted in one's life story etc. (Schmitz 2019, 100)

It is in these fine-grained distinctions between experiencing the presence of and one's involvement with atmosphere, and the emphasis on how different people are differently sensitive to the presence of atmosphere and disposed to becoming affective involved by atmosphere that Schmitz shines. However, his account, still leaves us with many unanswered questions and potential confusions.

For instance, despite resolutely rejecting the idea that emotions as atmospheres should be thought of as emotional mists floating around in the world, he does, in places suggest that "[i]t can even happen that an emotion as an atmosphere lies in the air without anyone feeling it" (Schmitz 2019, 98). He also leans towards presenting atmosphere as a unified, homogenous tone that fills a space. As Slaby (2020) points out, there is little room in Schmitz's account for situations with mixed emotions. Take our vignette, where the party seems to have a happy atmosphere but the arguing couple in the corner exudes their own tense atmosphere (that may,

in time, come to affect and overturn the happy atmosphere of the party). It seems odd to suggest that there is one homogenous atmosphere here that is affectively involving the couple and the other party-goers as different forms of emotion. Rather, it seems that the couple have their own, what I call, "sub-atmosphere". It is not clear how Schmitz would go about accounting for mixed or overlapping atmosphere of this kind.

Perhaps the biggest concern, though, is that although Schmitz conceives of emotions as atmospheres out in public space, it is not clear how atmospheres relate to the world more generally. As Böhme (2017a, 17) puts it: "Schmitz's approach suffers above all from the fact that he credits atmospheres with too great an independence from things. They float free like gods and have as such nothing to do with things, let alone being their product" - and I would add to this, too great an independence from the *people* who they relate to. It is not clear on Schmitz's account why I would encounter an atmosphere of a specific tone in any one place, why a party might have a happy atmosphere rather than a depressed one, why a place might have an eerie atmosphere rather than an uplifting one.

We can diagnose this problem of seemingly detached atmosphere as resulting from Schmitz's scepticism towards phenomenology's traditionally intentional approach. Much of classical phenomenology takes as a starting point that experience is always *about* something. I do not just have a visual experience, I have a visual experience of my room; I do not just feel embarrassment, I feel embarrassment about the cup of coffee I dropped on the café floor. Schmitz distances himself from the idea that emotions, and thus atmospheres, are *about* anything in particular. His worry being that this robs atmosphere of their character of suffusing space pre-intentionally. Indeed, Schmitz's assertion that atmospheres are not intentional has resulted in continued controversy regarding the intentionality of atmosphere (see Nörenberg 2020; Trigg 2020).

Certainly, Schmitz's hesitation seems well-founded if we want to capture how atmospheres not only relate to individuals but to groups or environments more broadly. The happy atmosphere of the party does not seem to be *about* a singular intentional object but the holistic situation. However, to throw out the idea that atmospheres are about anything at all rests on a narrow conception of intentionality.

I will suggest, though, that rather than claiming that atmospheres lack intentionality altogether, that we conceive of atmosphere as having a broad field of intentionality; not necessarily about any one object or person specifically but as directed to a situation or a gestalt. In chapters 3 and 4, I set out how we can capture what I call the 'diffuse' intentionality of atmosphere. For now, though, suffice to note that in his rejection of the idea that atmosphere is *about* anything he seems to cut atmospheres adrift from the world.

Schmitz, perhaps somewhat ironically given his intention to unseat emotions from the inner private sphere of individuals, provides what is ultimately an individualistic, ego-centric account of atmosphere. While atmospheres themselves are described as being out in public space and as allowing for differing individual affective involvement, atmosphere is still experienced in terms of how *one* feels in the presence atmosphere, how the atmosphere grips oneself as a form of emotion. What Schmitz fails to discuss is how atmospheres arise, what creates them, and, specific to our concerns, how they relate to other people's experiences and expressivity, how we might contribute to, share in and change them, and how we might get the atmosphere 'wrong' in some instances. Indeed, even Jan Slaby, one of the leading contemporary scholars on Schmitz, concedes that there is a whiff of "latent solipsism" (2020, 285) to Schmitz's account.

Due to these concerns, while I want to retain Schmitz's helpful distinction between perceiving an atmosphere and becoming affectively involved with one, as well as his emphasis on how we can be differently sensitive to atmosphere, I leave his broader theory of emotions as atmospheres behind.

2.4. Böhme and ekstatic properties

As we saw above, Böhme criticizes Schmitz for allowing atmospheres to become too detached from that which creates them. Indeed, he specifically points to the realm of theatre to illustrate how we use objects, light, sound and so on to deliberately create and manipulate atmospheres: "It is the art of the stage set which rids atmospheres of the odor of the irrational: here, it is a question of producing atmospheres" (Böhme 2017a, 30). This highlights that the objects or people involved are not incidental to the experience but are essential to it. Böhme, then, is eager to reintroduce the role of

the world into our understanding of atmospheres; to tie them to the objects or people that produce them as well as to the subjects who experience them.

While Böhme has written extensively on atmosphere, in both English and German, he provides no singular definition of atmosphere. Nevertheless, he describes an atmosphere's character as the feeling that is "communicated" to a subject in a certain situation (*ibid.*), the mood that we *tend* to be drawn into when encountering that kind of atmosphere.[10] He, like Schmitz, emphasises that we encounter atmospheres through our lived bodies but, unlike Schmitz, does not claim that atmospheres *are* emotions in public space - though, he does highlight atmosphere is experienced as a *spatial feeling*: "atmospheres are essentially spatial; more precisely, they are spaces pregnant with a mood" (Böhme 2017a, 92). He describes how atmospheres envelop us and that we experience them as being anchored to a place which we can enter and leave. What is more, he claims that this spatial character gives atmosphere a "quasi-objective" quality; we do not experience atmospheres as an internal feeling (say like a stomach-ache) but as an external, spatially extended one.

Böhme's account focuses upon how atmospheres are *both subjective* in the sense that they are something experienced by a subject, but *also objective* in the sense that the arrangement of the environment plays a role in producing atmospheres. Recognizing this dual-aspect of atmosphere, Böhme suggests that atmospheres are *relational* phenomena; they emerge from the "copresence of subject and object" (2017a, 26). By deeming atmospheres relational, Böhme explains why atmospheres cannot be straightforwardly attributed either to the subject experiencing them or to the situations from which they arise. It is through the interaction of subject and object that atmosphere emerges. As highlighted in the Introduction, I follow Böhme in emphasizing that atmosphere is a relational phemomena. How, though, does Böhme characterize this relationship?

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[10] Like Schmitz, Böhme highlights that we can feel the character of an # atmosphere (e.g. the festivity of a party) without taking up that feeling of being happy ourselves (e.g. it might serve to emphasize my own grumpy mood) (Böhme 2014, 92).

To understand Böhme's account we must turn to his analysis of objects. He is interested in how objects are *felt as present* in an environment, as sitting *in relation* to other objects, constellations and subjects. Böhme notes that how we perceive an object is "very dependent on the respective situation" (2017b, 74). How a candle, for instance, tinctures the space will change depending on whether the space is already brightly lit or dark. One's perception of an object, how one experiences its presence, is therefore not simply to do with the properties that an object might be said to have but how it relates to the space around it.[11]

Böhme talks about how the 'ecstasies of things' tincture the environment (2017b, 43). What does Böhme mean by this mysterious phrase 'ecstasies of things'? The word *ecstasy* is taken from the Greek word *ekstasies* which means to 'stand out from oneself'. Böhme uses the term to refer to how an object's presence radiates into the space around it:

> Thus, we must characterise things according to the forms of their presence. I deliberately do not say *determine*, since this traditionally means isolating and excluding. Forms of presence, by contrast, are modes in which a thing characteristically steps out of itself. I call these *ecstasies*. (Böhme 2017b, 46)

As Dorrian puts it, by introducing the notion of ecstasies, Böhme "mobilises against the conventional philosophical understanding of the closure and passivity of the object" (2017, xi) in favour of a conception of object-as-present that is always in relation to the subject experiencing it and the space in which it is situated. It is these ecstasies of an object that we bodily perceive, that excite the subject in certain ways (Böhme 2017b, 91). What Böhme is advocating is the idea that an object can "give 'colour' to its surroundings...exercising a presence by affecting the world around it" (Sørensen 2015, 65). The subject is receptive to this tincturing and experiences it through their body as atmosphere.

By appealing to the ecstasies of things, Böhme attempts to side-step the seemingly random nature by which atmospheres arise in accounts such as Schmitz or Wollheim and anchor them to the environment:

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[11] We find some similar ideas hinted at in the notion of 'affective arrangement' in the work of Slaby et al. 2019.

Conceived in this fashion, atmospheres are neither something objective, that is, qualities possessed by things, and yet they are something thinglike, belonging to the thing in that things articulate their presence through qualities - conceived as ecstasies. Nor are atmospheres something subjective, for example, determinations of a psychic state. And yet they are subjectlike, belong to subjects in that they are sensed in bodily presence by human beings and this sensing is at the same time a bodily state of being of subjects in space. (Böhme 1993, 122).

But what really are these ecstasies of things? While Böhme mentions that objects have a felt presence to them and that they sit in relation to other objects and their context, these ecstasies remain rather mysterious. This, I suggest, becomes particularly esoteric when we consider interpersonal atmospheres.

The motivation for introducing ecstatic properties is to account for how objects are experienced as emanating a particular presence as atmosphere. Yet does this analysis apply to people? When I walk into Shay's house and feel the happy atmosphere of the party it seems to be intimately related to the people present, their beaming smiles, their upbeat chatter, the way the guests stand close together caught up in each other, and so on. Indeed, Böhme himself points out that when we are in interpersonal situations, subjects "co-produce" (*ibid.*) social or interpersonal atmospheres. As I have done, Böhme calls attention to how styles of behaviour and communication contribute to the tone of an interpersonal atmosphere: intonation, linguistic style, and body language are all elements that produce an atmosphere. A good way to illustrate this is to think about how an utterance or a gesture might *change* the feel of a group situation. Imagine that Massih, Tom and Cat are having coffee together. They are all talking animatedly about potentially going on holiday together. Then Cat slumps in her chair and says despondently that she is not sure if she will be able to get the time off work. The other two express their disappointment over this. The initially excited atmosphere of the group has shifted and been replaced by a sad one. Their utterances, tone, gestures and expressions have *changed* the atmosphere that they are co-producing. What is more, the atmosphere both emerges from the interaction and determines that interaction. Imagine I then

join the three friends, feeling the sad atmosphere leads me to temper my own expressive behaviour.

However, while Böhme acknowledges that it is odd how little explicit attention interpersonal atmospheres have received (2017b, 98) and describes certain features that interpersonal atmosphere might have, he stops short of providing an account of interpersonal atmosphere. Perhaps more frustratingly, when describing how individuals and their expressive gestures and interactions can create an interpersonal atmosphere, he does not comment upon how this is meant to mesh with his earlier discussions of atmosphere relating to the ecstatic properties of objects and the co-presence of subject and object.

Following his descriptions of non-interpersonal atmospheres, one might be tempted to say that a person's gestures, expressions, body language and so on might be similar to the ecstasies of things, in the sense that they radiate out into the surrounding space, colouring the interpersonal situation. However, I think it should strike us as rather odd to say that an individual's' embodied expressivity is an ecstatic *property* that they have. When I smile, my smile is not a property of my face but the embodied expression *of* my happiness. When I experience the happy atmosphere of the party-goers, it is the expressivity of the party-goers and their interactions that seem to *produce* the atmosphere. It is not clear, then, whether Böhme's foray into interpersonal atmosphere is meant to be an extension of his account of atmosphere or is meant to be a different *kind* of atmosphere to non-peopled ones.

The introduction of people into Böhme's account leaves us with more questions than it answers. In characterising atmosphere as arising *between subject and object* we end up with another individualistic account which does not consider how atmospheres arise *between subject and subject(s)*. As such, I will now turn to two accounts which stand out precisely because they place interpersonal encounters front and centre of their approach to atmosphere.

2.5. Tellenbach's perceptual account of atmosphere

It is widely acknowledged that the phenomenological psychiatrist Hubertus Tellenbach introduced the notion of atmosphere into scientific literature (Böhme 1993; Hauskeller 2014; Costa el at 2014), primarily in his book *Geschmack und Atmosphäre* (Taste and Atmosphere, 1968). Yet, his account of atmosphere has become somewhat overlooked - overshadowed by the more infamous work of Schmitz. Tellenbach kicks off his discussion of atmosphere, perhaps surprisingly, by asking what the quality or essence of oral-sensuous perception is, i.e. of tasting and smelling. He proclaims that science, with its objective approach, will always fall short of describing the experience of such perceptions. This is because science seeks only to present an "objective portrayal of…[the] method of functioning" (1981, 221) of oral-sensuous experience; for example, when investigating taste, science will describe how our taste buds work. For Tellenbach, the *essence* of sensory experience cannot be captured by an explanation of how it functions; the experience itself always amounts to something "more" (*ibid.*). He argues that "[i]n almost every sensual experience, there is something inexpressible that we call atmosphere" (1968, 47).

Tellenbach's claim that tastes and smells are atmospheric is, at times, described very literally. For instance, he talks of the odours that one's glands emit, one's perfume or the smell (and taste) that one's own mother has, that seems to radiate off her, that she carries as a kind of personal atmosphere (1981, 227). However, he also talks more abstractly as well; he indicates that this personal radiance consists of more than merely a factual smell, a smell *of* something (e.g. milk): "An individual has atmosphere in that *he [or she] radiates the nature of his personality*" (1981, 227, my italics). Thus, it is not that an individual necessarily smells of some*thing*, rather that they have a personal radiance that is intimately linked (somehow) to their character:

> And yet, in this fragrance something more than mere sense qualities pass from the mother to the child, since, in this fragrance, the child sense also the *personal nature* of its mother, her *atmosphere*. Not as if the mother's fragrance were the same thing as her personal nature, or her atmosphere merely an analogy for her fragrance. No! *Her fragrance is also her atmosphere. It is the simultaneousness of both*. More than any other sensory experience our sense of smell reveals that, beyond the mere fact of sensory

reception, something enters into perception that tells us about the inherent nature of the thing, thus received. (Tellenbach 1981, 227)

This atmosphere that Tellenbach describes as emanating or radiating from a person, that is simultaneously their fragrance, can sound like some kind of cloud that wafts out of them.[12]

Although Tellenbach primarily characterises these personal atmospheres in terms of radiating the *personality* or the *essential nature* of the individual, we can see how his account opens the door for talking about how interpersonal atmospheres relate to the people who seem to produce them more generally. What is important for Tellenbach is not just the unusual spatial character of atmosphere but that they *convey* something to us (Tedeschini 2019, 281). So, in his example of the mother, we are not only experiencing a smell of milk but something about our mother's personality is conveyed to us in her atmospheric fragrance. By associating atmosphere with perceptual experience, Tellenbach is able to capture how atmospheres are *about* the world; not just in the sense of an emotional response to something nor in terms of disclosing the world in light of a subject's own concerns or cares, but as a perceptual apprehension of the world.

Tellenbach, like others, lumps interpersonal and non-peopled atmospheres together. Thus, we also find in his work descriptions of how environments have atmospheres:

> Aside from [personal atmosphere] there is the atmosphere which does not primarily emanate from us, but instead has its own sphere into which we enter. Thus churches, hospitals, schools and barracks have their typical smell and with it their specific atmosphere which reveals their character qualities more comprehensively than does their physical equipment perceived by the higher-sense organs. (Tellenbach 1981, 228)

Again,Tellenbach asserts that atmospheric experience *reveals* something about the world to the subject, how it puts us in contact with the world around us. However, his understanding of taste and smell experience as atmosphere goes beyond the mere factive taste or smell of a person or place (e.g. the smell of milk, the smell of

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[12] Minkowski also describes atmospheres (or auras) of individuals as "like a delicate cloud, which emanates from his person" (1936, 118).

incense) and talks, rather obscurely, about how we are given the character or the essence or the personality of that which we are in contact with.[13]

What Tellenbach's approach highlights is that atmosphere is not itself some kind of object that we encounter. Rather, when we experience an atmosphere, this is a specific *way* in which we experience a situation, a person, or a thing. Compare this to phenomenological conceptions of perceptual experience. As Zahavi (2003) highlights, when describe a perceptual experience, say seeing a table, we must describe both our subjective experience of seeing and the object that we perceive. The subjective and objective are two-sides of the same coin, as our perceptual experience arises from our contact with the world. Just so with atmosphere. By tying atmosphere to perceptual experience, Tellenbach seems to be advocating the idea that atmospheric experience is both something that I experience while also disclosing something about the world to us. I will adopt and advance this approach in my own account of interpersonal atmospheres throughout this thesis.

However, I do not whole heartedly endorse Tellenbach's approach in its current form. For one thing, I think tying atmosphere specifically to olfactory experience construes atmosphere too narrowly. As Böhme (2017a) carefully describes, there are many aspects of the material environment that we can use to create a certain atmosphere, such as light and sound. If atmosphere is a quality of olfactory experience, we seem unable to account for why changing a light or sound source would alter an atmosphere. It also seems that someone's personality might emanate from the glint of their eye and the sound of their voice, not just from their 'perfume'.

Atmosphere, rather than being limited to one or two sensory modalities, seems to be a multi-modal or polyphonic sensory experience. Take, for instance, the atmosphere

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[13] Interestingly, we find a contemporary parallel to Tellenbach's theory in Teresa Brennan's book *The Transmission of Affect*. While Brennan does not refer to Tellenbach, she also ties atmospheric experiences closely to smell: "I suggest smell (in this case unconscious olfaction) is critical in how we "feel the atmosphere"" (2004, 57). She describes, for instance, the "whiff of the room's atmosphere" and the atmosphere of a room being "rank with anxiety" (2004, 1, 57). According to Brennan, through smells, affective states are transmitted to the subject that are, at least some of the time, experienced as atmosphere. For instance, she claims that when we enter a room with an anxious or tense atmosphere, that feeling of anxiety or tenseness is transmitted to us primarily via olfactory experience. Where people are concerned, she goes so far to postulate (contentiously) that pheromones might be responsible for this kind of transmission (2004, 57).

of festivity at a football match. Although there are smells involved, perhaps beer and fast food, there seems to be many other factors that contribute to the atmosphere that do not appear to be directly linked to olfactory experience. For instance, seeing the crowd celebrate and the sound of the crowd cheering appear to also play an important role in the creation of the atmosphere. To suggest that the something 'more' of the experience, the festive atmosphere, is only transmitted to us through the smell of the bodies and food, seems to miss out on something. Indeed, I think we can highlight this with the following example. Imagine that the home team is a goal ahead and we are approaching the final minute of the game. The crowd is already celebrating the anticipated win, there is undoubtedly a festive atmosphere. However, seemingly out of nowhere, the other side scores just before the whistle blows. In an instant, the celebratory atmosphere evaporates and is replaced by an atmosphere of despair. It is not clear, at least to me, that the olfactory experience here would have shifted: the beer, the fast food, the smell of the stadium, of the weather, all seem to be the same as before. How, on Tellenbach's model could we account for such a shift in atmosphere?

Even when we focus on the personal atmospheres that Tellenbach is fond of discussing, it seems we want to go beyond talking about how someone's *personality* emanates from them as atmosphere. A generally happy person might, in certain circumstances, radiate an angry or tense atmosphere. Rather than suggesting that atmosphere relates to someone's essential character, we can highlight how atmosphere relates to their *current* expressive, embodied behaviour. There is, then, a risk that his account is overly static, unable to capture the dynamic nature of atmosphere. While I follow Tellenbach in discussing atmosphere as a *mode* of experience, I argue that it is a form of affective empathetic perception that is not tied to any one realm of sensory experience. This, I think, allows us to provide a more nuanced and more robust picture of atmosphere.

2.6. Fuchs, intercorporeality and atmosphere

Thomas Fuchs discusses atmospheres in two contexts. First, in his writings about embodied, affective interpersonal interactions (Fuchs 2013a, 2016) and second, in the context of schizophrenic episodes (Fuchs 2019). While Fuchs neither produces a full account of atmosphere nor, arguably, an entirely consistent one (his discussion

of the uncanny as atmosphere in schizophrenia is more akin to Ratcliffe's existential feelings than atmosphere as a separate phenomenon), his discussion of atmosphere in interpersonal settings stands out for putting people and their expressivity front and centre.

While Fuchs does not refer to Tellenbach, or the wider debates on atmosphere more generally, he discusses personal atmospheres in the context of them 'emanating' or 'radiating' from "the appearance and comportment of a person, integrating his or her physiognomy, expression, gesture, voice, posture, and comportment into a unitary impression" (Fuchs 2013a, 620). Here, Fuchs emphasises how personal atmospheres are intimately related to and arise from a person's embodied expressivity. They are not limited to the taste or smell of a person but to a person's expressive gestures and behaviours more generally. Moreover, Fuchs highlights that atmospheres emanate not only from *individuals* but from the *interpersonal interactions* of multiple individuals (*ibid.*) (note that I refer to both atmospheres that relate to individuals and collectives as *interpersonal atmospheres).*

Fuchs, like other phenomenologists, is interested in how our interpersonal interactions do not take place between two minds encased in a fleshy shell but are embodied, interactive, and expressive. Contrary to the analytic framing of 'the problem of other minds', which asks how it is we can have knowledge or experience of another's mind and experience when their mental states are trapped inside their skull, phenomenologists have consistently emphasised that when we encounter others we encounter *embodied subjects* (e.g. Colombetti 2014; Husserl 1967; Gallagher 2008; Scheler 2017; Stein 1989; Krueger & Overgaard 2012; Taipale 2014; Zahavi 2014, 2015). By emphasising that we are embodied subjects, phenomenologists are not committed to the idea that minds are hidden inside the body but see the body as a necessary and constitutive part of being a subject in the first place. This approach urges us to move away from talking about how the experiences of others are hidden away from us inside their heads and instead focus on the way that we often see minds *in action* – that is, the way we can have direct perceptual access to (at least part of) others' thoughts, feelings, and intentions in their embodied and expressive behaviour.

The key idea here is that, when I see you smile, I do not need to imagine or infer that you are happy. Rather, I can see your happiness directly in your smile, just as I can see your sadness directly in your tears or your pain directly in your wincing. Your happiness, sorrow, and pain are out there in the world for me to observe. This way of directly perceiving other's subjectivity and their experiences is deemed 'empathy' or 'empathetic perception' in phenomenology (e.g. Husserl 1967; Scheler 2017; Schutz 1967; Stein 1989; Zahavi 2014) and 'direct social perception' in phenomenologically inspired discussions in the social cognition debate (e.g. Gallagher 2008; Krueger & Overgaard 2012). I will return to this notion in chapters 2 and 3 in significantly more detail.

Influenced by Merleau-Ponty, Fuchs adds to this notion of empathy by emphasising that it is not just in our perceptual apprehension of the other's smiles, frowns and so on, that allows us to experience the other and their experience. Rather, it is through *interacting* with others, as another embodied subject, that we gain interpersonal understanding (Fuchs 2013b, 2-16; Fuchs 2016; Fuchs & de Jaegher 2009). Fuchs highlights the reciprocal, affective relationship between oneself and others as a fundamental part of our empathetic experience of others:

> Our body is affected by the other's expression, and we experience the kinetics and intensity of his emotions through our own bodily kinaesthesia and sensation. Our body schemas and feelings expand and 'incorporate' the perceived body of the other. This creates a dynamic interplay which forms the basis of social understanding and empathy. (Fuchs 2016, 198)

Fuchs point is that our bodies are feeling bodies that resonate and are affected by the bodies of others. Experiencing others is not some cold, cognitive experience but involves our body. Our body is the medium through which we experience the world, and that applies to our experience of other people. When I am interacting with someone our interaction creates an interlocking, interaffective feedback loop, whereby my expressions affect you and your expressions affect me and as part of the affective loop we both are attuned to, or resonate with, one another. For instance, the tense interaction between us arises not in your angry grimaces, nor my frustrated expression but in the interplay between us. Social understanding can,

then, arise between individuals. Not simply in one person but through the looping interaction of the two.

What is key for our purposes is that Fuchs describes how, when individuals are engaged in this reciprocal embodied interaction, an *interpersonal atmosphere* is created:

> Each lived body with its sensorimotor body schema reaches out, as it were, to be extended by the other. This is accompanied by a holistic impression of the interaction partner and his current state (for example his anger), and by a feeling for the overall atmosphere of the shared situation (for example a tense atmosphere). (Fuchs 2016, 198)

Fuchs borrows Merleau-Ponty's term 'intercorporeality' to capture this interlocking of embodied expressivity that arises in interactive interpersonal encounters. What both Fuchs and Merleau-Ponty emphasise with the notion of intercorporeality is that when we talk about empathetically perceiving another this is not meant as a some kind of detached visual observation of the other's expressivity but is a perceptual apprehension of the other through our pre-reflective feeling bodies. We do not, at least often, coldly watch the other but are responsive to, are moved by, are affected by the other's expressivity. Note, though, that this is not meant to suggest that we must be moved in the same way as the other. I might be bodily affected by the anger of someone in my urge to step away from them, not because their angry gestures incite angry gestures of my own. While Merleau-Ponty is often attributed with this more emphatically embodied notion of empathy, I will highlight how Edith Stein is, in fact, a precursor to Merleau-Ponty in this regard (see chapter 4).

Fuchs, then, ties interpersonal atmosphere to the expressive embodied behaviour of individuals. Moreover, implicit in his description is the understanding that atmosphere, in arising through embodied interaction, can also be *part* of our social understanding of a situation. Experiencing the tense atmosphere of our interaction is part of experiencing the discomfort of the shared situation that we are in.

Unfortunately, though, while Fuchs mentions how atmosphere arises *from* interpersonal interactions, he does not provide any further detail on the phenomena.

Moreover, there seems to be an implication that one can only experience the atmosphere of an interpersonal atmosphere if you are one of the subjects participating in the interpersonal encounter. This, potentially, rules out the possibility of encountering an interpersonal atmosphere as a newcomer. There is a worry, then, that Fuchs description implies that atmosphere can only be experienced in the context of a mutually reciprocal, interactive dyadic exchange. Fuchs' description prompts a number of unanswered questions: Can I only experience an interpersonal atmosphere if I am in the kind of active interlocking interaction that Fuchs describes above? What happens when I feel in conflict with or cut off from the atmosphere of, say, a party? Does it matter how many people are involved or whether there are mixed emotions in the group? How might the broader environmental features of a situation (such as the music, the lighting, and so on) add to or drive an atmosphere?

Despite Fuchs description leaving us with a number of open questions, it is his initial sketch of atmosphere that I want to build upon. By focusing upon interpersonal atmospheres and how they relate to the embodied expressive behaviour of individuals and interpersonal interactions, Fuchs explicitly captures how interpersonal atmospheres emerge from social interactions and implicitly suggests that they relate to our understanding of others. Where Fuchs mentions atmosphere in passing in the context of our intercorporeal and affective interpersonal interactions, to do justice to this phenomena we need to more critically evaluate how such atmospheres arise, how they change, what exactly they disclose to us, and how they might allow us to feel we are sharing a situation with others (as he puts it). Rather than seeing atmosphere as a side note, I want to consider interpersonal atmosphere in greater depth and detail than Fuchs does.

Conclusion

Many theories of atmosphere struggle to account for how interpersonal atmospheres relate to and disclose the expressive experiences of others. If atmospheres are a result of either causation or projection, the feeling of atmosphere ultimately reveals more about me than it does about those present. Ironically, even Schmitz, who aims to radically desubjectify atmosphere, to place atmospheres out in public space, ultimately falls back on characterising atmosphere in terms of how the perceiver is

gripped by them. Böhme, who admirably attempts to more fully account for how atmospheres are created and produced, highlighting their *relational* character, seems stumped by the introduction of people into the equation. While Böhme acknowledges that interpersonal atmospheres emerge in social contexts, it is not clear how this marries up with his notion that atmospheres relate to the ecstacies of things or the conception of atmosphere as the co-presence of subject and object. This summary illustrates how accounts of atmosphere that take as their starting point non-peopled atmospheres fall short when it comes to interpersonal atmospheres.

Tellenbach and Fuchs, on the other hand, take a different approach, considering the personal and interpersonal atmospheres that we experience radiating from people and their interactions. Tellenbach, in tying atmospheric experience to perceptual experience, captures how atmosphere is something that is felt by the subject but discloses the world. Despite his account sometimes erring on the slightly mystical, in his suggestion that atmospheres reveal the essential character or personality of people and places, his emphasis on what atmospheric experiences convey to us underscores the advantage of aligning atmospheric experience with perceptual experience. We do not just sense atmospheres as objects, rather our atmospheric experiences disclose and reveal aspects of the world to us. However, his account seems unnecessarily constrained by his linking atmosphere to olfactory perceptual experience. Rather than suggesting that one or other perceptual experience has an atmospheric quality to it, I suggest that we understand atmosphere as a *mode* of experience in and of itself. I will suggest that atmosphere is an affective form of empathetic experience. Like empathetic perception, it is not tied to a singular sense nor a separate sense *per se* but supervenes on our holistic sensing body.

Fuchs highlights how interpersonal atmospheres relate to the expressive embodied subjectivity of individuals. The tense atmosphere that radiates from someone is intimately linked to the way in which they hold themselves, how they move, their worried frown, and so on. If the person's embodied expressive behaviour changes, then their atmosphere changes. He also nicely illustrates how atmosphere can emerge out of multiple people interacting. Given the context of his discussion, Fuchs seems to imply that atmospheres relate to the phenomenological concept of empathy in some way. Indeed, I explicitly argue that atmosphere is a form of affective, embodied empathetic perception that discloses the expressive emotions,

mood, vitality, and interconnectedness of others. However, as we will see in chapter 2, there is a potential stumbling block to this view. For phenomenologists working on empathy frequently dismiss atmosphere as being a case of emotional contagion and explicitly rule out the idea that atmospheric experience involves empathy. Given that Fuchs does not address this issue and that this has and still is the dominant view in the phenomenology of sociality, it is to this hurdle that we turn to next.

Chapter 2

Interpersonal atmospheres and emotional contagion

Introduction

Following Tellenbach's oft-neglected work, we can move away from the idea that atmosphere is a mere subjective feeling or some kind of unusual object out there in the world, towards conceiving of atmosphere as a *way* that we experience certain aspects of the world; not a *what* that we experience but a *how*. On my account, atmosphere is not a thing that we experience, nor a half-entity or quasi-thing as Schmitz and Griffero suggest. Rather, I suggest that we can experience aspects of the world through our feeling bodies *as* atmosphere. Atmosphere is neither subjective nor objective but relational.

Discussions focused on trying to unravel the ambiguous nature of atmosphere by positing new ontological categories or creating new properties of objects or describing atmosphere in terms of *co-presence*, do so at the expense of asking what it is that atmospheres reveal to us. Atmospheres are not the *object* of interest here but rather are a vehicle or medium for conveying something about the world to us; I experience something in the world *through* atmosphere. This is, perhaps, most obviously missing in the context of interpersonal atmospheres where the character of the atmosphere (e.g. happy, depressed, welcoming, tense) seems to arise from and disclose the expressive experience of those present. I suggest that interpersonal atmospheres are a *way* that we experience others, their expressive bodies, and their on-going, dynamic interactions. They convey social understanding to us, disclosing the experience, emotion, mood, vitality and even interconnectedness of those present. When we walk into a room of people, whether there is a tense or relaxed atmosphere in the room *tells us something* about those present.

While Fuchs describes how interpersonal atmospheres arise out of intercorporeal interactions between subjects, in the context of what he calls 'primordial empathy', and implies that there are atmospheres of shared situations that we are bodily sensitive to, it is not entirely clear what the relationship between atmosphere and empathy is supposed to be on his account. While it seems to be implied that one's

sensitivity to personal and interpersonal atmosphere gives us social understanding of others, I want to take this implicit reading of Fuchs and construct an explicit theory of atmosphere as a form of affective, bodily empathetic perception.

For those familiar with the phenomenological work done on empathy my claim that atmosphere is a form of empathy is likely to strike an odd note. While Fuchs seems to allude to a potential relationship between atmosphere and empathy, this view is highly contentious in the phenomenology of sociality. The exclusion of interpersonal atmospheres as part of our social understanding tool-kit is glaring when we turn to the work done in this arena. Here, while all manner of social phenomena are considered, atmosphere has fallen by the way-side. Why so? The reason for this can, in large part, be tracked back to Scheler's discussion of atmosphere in his book *The Nature of Sympathy* (2017). Here, Scheler states that experiencing atmosphere is simply a case of *emotional contagion*, where one is infected by the emotion of others. Indeed, atmosphere is used explicitly as an illustration of an experience that does not involve empathetic perception of others and their experiences.

Broadly speaking, emotional contagion is described as the transference of a particular feeling of one (or many) individual(s) to another (or others) which is experienced as an I-experience. Interestingly, and perhaps rather tellingly, in such discussions atmosphere itself goes undefined. Despite the common linking of these two notions, the phenomena of emotional contagion and interpersonal atmosphere, as well as how they relate, are peculiarly undeveloped. Becoming cheerful when entering a place suffused with a cheerful interpersonal atmosphere is simply labelled as an illustration of "mere" contagion and little more is said on the matter (Scheler 2017, 15; Schloßberger 2016, 179; Stein 2000, 217; Zahavi 2018, 737).

Nevertheless, Scheler's discussion of emotional contagion and atmosphere has been so influential in the phenomenology of sociality that the notion of emotional contagion is presented, almost without fail, in the context of being swept up in, assailed by or exposed to an atmosphere, and atmosphere is often invoked as a standard example of what empathy is not (e.g. Stein 2000, 203; Szanto 2018, 99; Zahavi 2018, 738). Rolling atmosphere into discussions of emotional contagion have led to atmospheres being ousted from the roster of other-directed social experience

and, more broadly, have resulted in atmospheres being neglected from discussions in the phenomenology of sociality.

Clearly, in proposing that we understand interpersonal atmosphere as a form of affective empathetic perception, I am going against the grain of established empathy literature. In order to clear the way for making my claim, I take the time in this chapter to outline and critique the reduction of atmospheric experience to emotional contagion. While this is the dominant view of atmosphere found in empathy literature, this view is often stated rather than argued for and is overdue a rigorous re-examination. In the following, I outline the classic phenomenological account of atmosphere as mere contagion and show that it: (i) fails to do justice to the complexity of atmospheric experience and (ii) overlooks how atmospheres tell us about the experiences of others. I argue that this oversight is closely linked to both the tendency to discuss empathy in *individualistic* terms (i.e. I (singular) can empathically perceive the experience of another singular individual) and in *visual* terms (rather than recognizing that our empathetic experience of others can be *felt*, rather than seen). Having pre-emptively dealt with the objection that atmosphere is nothing more than emotional contagion, I argue that atmospheres should be brought firmly back into the purview phenomenology of sociality. I then proceed with my analysis of how interpersonal atmospheres empathetically reveal others and their experiences to us.

1. Emotional contagion and atmosphere – a presumed relationship

Emotional contagion is often discussed within phenomenology with a certain disdain. Indeed, it is not uncommon for it to be referred to as "mere" contagion (e.g. León & Zahavi 2016, 225; Scheler 2017, 15; Stein 2000, 217; Zahavi 2018, 737). Perhaps due to this dismissive attitude, the concept of emotional contagion is not well-developed in many phenomenological texts but used only as a point of contrast for other social phenomena. Broadly speaking, emotional contagion is said to occur when one 'catches' the emotion of another. For example, imagine that Gertrude is feeling happy about something and, when Alice goes to have coffee with her, that happiness infects Alice and she also experiences feeling happy. It is suggested that emotional contagion occurs via unconscious imitation and mimicry of the other's

expressive behaviour (Krebbs 2011; Schloßberger 2016; also see Hatfield et al. 1993).

The notion of emotional contagion is intended to capture the idea that a feeling state can pass from one person to another. It should be noted that while contagion is usually referred to as "emotional contagion" or "emotional infection" it might be better to describe the passing of feelings, moods or affects more generally. For the sake of simplicity, I will leave aside the question of exactly what kinds of states of feeling pass in emotional contagion. Nevertheless, while I will stick to the phrase "emotional contagion" in line with other phenomenological discussions, it might be more accurately described as "affective contagion" and I intend for this phrase to capture the broad array of feeling states (including emotions, moods, feelings) without confining us to just one subset (i.e. emotions).

Where emotional contagion *is* discussed, it is nearly always exemplified in terms of being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere (see: Ahmed 2013, 5; Scheler 2017, 15; Schloßberger 2016, 179; Stein 2000, 203; Szanto 2018, 99; Zahavi 2018, 738). In the following, I wish to explore the presumed relationship between interpersonal atmosphere and emotional contagion. First, though, we must provide a working concept of emotional contagion. To do this, I will draw from Scheler's account of emotional contagion (primarily because this is the starting place that many other phenomenologists take). In his book *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler seeks to clarify what he calls 'fellow-feeling' or 'sympathy' (*Mitgefühl*) from 'empathy' (*Einfühlung*), 'community of feeling' (*Miteinanderfühlen*) and 'emotional contagion' (*Gefühlansteckung*). In order to grasp Scheler's notion of emotional contagion, it is helpful to briefly outline the phenomena he contrasts it with.

1.1. Empathy

Scheler describes a special kind of other-directed experience which is commonly labelled 'empathy' in phenomenological literature (also see Husserl 1976; Stein

1989).[14] Note that empathy is used in phenomenological literature as a technical term and is not identical to the colloquial use of the word. Contra other theories of social cognition, those endorsing phenomenological empathy do not take their starting point to be that others' experiences are essentially unobservable. Such a starting point rests on the assumption that experiences are something that happen *inside* a person, hidden behind the veil of our bodies; thus, rendering another's experience inaccessible to us. This 'Unobservability Thesis' is frequently taken as the very motivation behind the problem of other minds (e.g. Goldman 2012, 402).

Empathy proponents rebut the Unobservability Thesis on the grounds that we are essentially embodied subjects. Empathy theorists claim that at least some aspects of another's experience are perceptually available to us, as these experiences are embodied in their expressive behaviour.[15] That others have experiences, have consciousness, is given to us in their expressions: "that 'experiences' occur there is given for us in expressive phenomena – again not by inference, but directly, as a sort of primary perception. It is *in* the blush that we perceive shame, *in* the laughter joy" (Scheler 2017, 10). Here, Scheler is arguing against the idea that we experience others' experiences either through some kind of inferential process (e.g. when I smile I am happy, so when she smiles, I infer that she is happy) or through a process of imitation and projection (e.g. when I see her smile, I (perhaps unconsciously) imitate her smile, feel happy and project that feeling of happiness onto her).[16]

Empathy is typically taken to be a perception-based experience, where the other and their experience are given to me through the 'field of expression' that is their lived body (Schutz 1967, 22). This is not meant to imply that when I encounter another person that I see bodily changes which merely indicate that they are undergoing some kind of inner experience. Rather, the claim is that when I experience another person, I encounter them as an embodied subject. Their bodily expressivity is a

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[14] It should be noted that Scheler himself does not use the word 'empathy'. However, it is commonly accepted that when he talks of this other-directed experience he is appealing to the phenomenological concept of empathy (e.g. Agosta 2014; Salice 2016; Schloßberger 2016; Stein 2000; Zahavi 2008). I shall adopt this approach here.

[15] Although the most common examples of empathy refer to emotional experiences (such as seeing someone's happiness in their smile), other experiences can be empathetically perceived (such as seeing someone's intention to pick up their cup when seeing their hand move towards it). I, therefore, use 'experience' here broadly.

[16] Empathy, while having its roots in classical phenomenology, has received a recent revival, sometimes being discussed in terms of 'direct social perception' (e.g. Gallagher 2008; Krueger & Overgaard 2012).

constitutive *part* of their experience, not just a behavioural cue (Krueger & Overgaard 2012). When I see you smile, I do not infer from this that you are happy. I *see* your happiness *in* your smile; your happiness is perceptually given to me "directly, unmediated, and non-inferentially" (Zahavi 2014, 125).

Scheler points out that social cognition theories that rest on inference or simulation actually presuppose the very experiences they are meant to explain (Scheler 2008, 7; also see Stein 1989, 12). For, in order for us to know when to employ inference or simulation, we must already have recognised the other as an experiencing subject to whom we ascribe – or onto whom we project – experiences in the first place; must have recognised the other *as* a subject and their bodily actions *as* expressive. Consequently, empathy is presented not simply as *a* form of other-understanding but *the* fundamental form of other-understanding (Scheler 2017; Stein 1989; Zahavi 2014).

Importantly, while empathy gives us access to the other's experience, this is not to say that we have full access to their experience. If I see your smile and empathetically perceive your happiness, that is not to say that I perceive your entire experience of being happy. That I do not have full first-personal access to your happiness is precisely what makes it an experience of your happiness and not of my happiness (to which I do have full first-personal access). As such, empathy is understood as my experience of your experience; a structure that preserves the asymmetry between first-personal experience and a second- or third-personal experience of another's experience. Nor do I need to share your happiness, I can perceive your happiness while remaining grumpy myself (Scheler 2017; also see Stein 1989; Zahavi and Rochat 2015). As we will see, Scheler argues that emotional contagion does not presuppose nor involve empathy.

1.2. Fellow-feeling (or sympathy)

Scheler also distinguishes emotional contagion from fellow-feeling (or sympathy). In fellow-feeling, a person is emotionally directed towards the experience of another person. This is not to say that the individuals are having the same feeling (as in shared emotion) but that one individual's feeling has as its intentional object the feeling of another. Imagine as I walking down the high street I see a woman who has dropped her phone on the pavement and I see her sorrow as she looks at its

smashed screen. Here, I might not just empathetically experience the woman's sadness but I also feel sad *for* her; I am aware of her sadness *and* I am experiencing my own sadness about her situation. However, it should be noted that I am not experiencing the same sadness as the woman. As Scheler puts it, my commiseration and her sorrow are "phenomenologically *two different facts*" (2017, 13); it is not *our* sadness, but *my* sadness about *her* sadness. Scheler describes fellow-feeling as involving a *participation* in the other's experience (*ibid.*). As we will see, Scheler denies that any such participation occurs in emotional contagion.

1.3. Shared emotion

To illustrate what Scheler deems 'community of feeling' or shared emotion, he presents a famous example of two parents grieving the death of their child. He states that they feel this grief *together*, it is a *feeling-in-common* (*ibid.,* 13). The parents are not simply both having a feeling of grief that coincides. When individuals undergo a shared emotion they no longer have an experience of the kind '*I* am sad' but experience it together with another as '*We* are sad'.[17] Recently, there has been a significant resurgence of interest in shared experience in both phenomenology (e.g. Szanto 2015; Szanto & Moran 2015; Zahavi 2015, 2018) and analytic philosophy (e.g. Bratman 1999; Gilbert 1990; Searle 1990).

Experiencing a shared emotion with another person presupposes that we experience the other person empathetically in the first place. I must empathetically perceive the other person both as an embodied subject and their emotion in order for me to experience sharing that emotion with them. This is a reciprocal requirement, as the other person must also empathetically perceive my emotion for them to experiencing sharing an emotion with me.

The core idea of shared emotion is that when we experience an emotion together with another, there is a shift in how we experience that emotion; a move from the first-person singular to the first-person plural. As we will see, Scheler claims that in emotional contagion there is no equivalent shift from the singular first-person perspective to the plural first-person perspective; no sense in which the individuals

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[17] For more extensive discussions on shared experiences of this kind see: Carr (1987); León & Zahavi (2016); Szanto (2018); Zahavi (2015); Zahavi & Salice (2016).

are experiencing an emotion *together*. That atmosphere is not a case of shared emotion, is often emphasized (e.g. Zahavi 2018, 738).

1.4. Emotional contagion

Now to emotional contagion itself. Unfortunately, as Scheler is primarily using emotional contagion as a contrast case, his account is not as detailed as one might wish. However, from the examples he provides, we can draw out a number of characteristics that he attributes to emotional contagion. He describes emotional contagion as involving the transference of a particular state of feeling from one person (or people) to another person (or people) (Scheler 2017, 15).[18] He suggests that the most basic form of emotional contagion can be seen in herds or crowds:

> [Emotional contagion] occurs in its most elementary form in the behaviour of herds and crowds. Here there is actually a common making of expressive gestures in the first instance, which has the secondary effect of producing similar emotions, efforts or purposes among the people or animals concerned; thus, for instance, a herd taken fright on seeing signs of alarm in its leader, and so too in human affairs. (*ibid.* 12)

Here, Scheler is illustrating how states of feeling pass between the individuals in a crowd. What Scheler wants to highlight in this example is that in emotional contagion an individual is infected by a particular emotion and that emotion is given to them as their *own* original experience: "the participant takes the experience arising in him owing to his participation to be his own original experience, so that he is quite unconscious of the contagion to which he succumbs" (*ibid.*). In emotional contagion each individual experiences his or her own emotion as their *own* emotion, not the emotion of others. While Scheler does not specify how he thinks emotional contagion occurs, he indicates in several places (including in this quote), that emotional contagion arises when individuals unconsciously mimic the expressions of others.

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[18] It should be noted that Scheler briefly suggests that we can also be emotionally infected by things, such as landscapes (2017, 15). However, as he does not expand on this, we will leave the question of landscapes, emotional contagion and atmosphere to one side.

This broadly fits with contemporary psychological work on emotional contagion (e.g. Hatfield et al. 1993; Hatfield et al 2011).[19]

Scheler wants to show that there is no shared experience between the individuals, they are not alarmed 'together' in the strict sense of the term. The individuals in the crowd are simply alarmed *in parallel* with one another. Neither is this a case of fellow-feeling: as the individuals are not directed towards one another, there is no participation in the others' experience. Indeed, Scheler goes so far to state that in cases of emotional contagion there is a "complete lack of mutual understanding" (Scheler 2017, 12) between the individuals involved. On this reading, then, each of the individuals in the crowd affected by the infection has an experience of 'I am frightened' not of 'we are frightened', 'they are frightened' or 'you are frightened'. Scheler adds that as the experience is given as the individual's *own* original experience, the individual has no awareness of being infected by the others, that the contagion occurs unconsciously (*ibid.*). The infected individual experiences the emotion that has arisen from infection (e.g. fright) *without having an experience of being infected*.

Scheler then expands upon the notion of emotional contagion with the following example:

> We all know how the cheerful atmosphere of a 'pub' or at a party may 'infect' the newcomers, who may even have been depressed beforehand, so that they are 'swept up' into the prevailing gaiety…Here there is neither a directing of feeling towards the other's joy or suffering, nor any participation in [their] experience. On the contrary, it is characteristic of emotional infection that it occurs only as a transference of the *state* of the feeling, and does *not* presuppose any sort of *knowledge* of the joy which others feel. (*ibid.* 15)

In this example, it is the gaiety of the pub or party that is transferred to the newcomer. Again, it is claimed that this transference can take place without the newcomer having any knowledge of (i) what the others are joyful about or (ii) that the others are feeling joy at all. In his discussion of Scheler, Zahavi (2018, 738) goes so

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[19] Note, though, that I might imitate someone's smiling demeanour in conversation while not catching their emotion. For instance, I might be imitating their expressions out of politeness, while really being bored or thinking about something else entirely. So, mimicry seems insufficient for accounting for the occurrence of emotional contagion.

far to say that in emotional contagion the newcomer need have no awareness of the others as distinct individuals at all.

Scheler is not just saying that emotional contagion is not the same as empathy but that it does not presuppose empathy at all (i.e. that emotional contagion can occur *without any understanding or knowledge of the other and their experiences*). As Krebbs puts it: "you get infected from others involuntarily and without understanding it, like you would get infected with the flu" (Krebbs 2011, 38).

Scheler's point is that in instances of emotional contagion, rather than being directed at the other's experience, you simply experience your own emotion: in this example, the joy I am infected with is simply present to me *as my joy*. As Zahavi neatly sums this up: "In emotional contagion, the feeling you are infected by is consequently not phenomenally given as foreign" (2015, 88). Where empathy is characterized as being an 'other-centered' experience, emotional contagion is often characterized as 'self-centered' (de Vignemont 2009). Deeming emotional contagion a self-centered (rather than other-centered or other-directed) experience means denying that emotional contagion can provide us with any "social comprehension" (Zahavi 2014, 123); all it gives us is an I-perspective experience that sheds no light on what others experience. To underscore this point, Scheler notes that we may be unconsciously infected by an atmosphere and only later, through causal inference, trace the emotion back to people we encountered earlier in the day (2017, 15).

If the emotion arising from contagion is experienced as my own originary experience and the contagion occurs unconsciously, we might ask how we differentiate a case of emotional contagion from any other emotional experience given to me as my own originary experience. I think that Scheler would have to respond to this by saying that phenomenologically these experiences may not differ. The individual in both cases simply has an emotional experience of, say, 'I am happy'. It is not clear, however, that emotions arising from emotional contagion are experienced in *exactly the same* manner as other emotional experiences. Emotions are usually defined as having intentionality, they are about something. So, if I am having an experience of being sad, I am sad *about* something. However, when an emotion comes about due to emotional contagion, there seems to be a lack of intentionality, they do not appear to be about anything. Rather, I might say that I feel sad without knowing why. As such,

even if the experience is given as my own experience it might be said that there is something phenomenologically different between a normal emotional experience and one arising from emotional contagion. For the sake of generosity, though, this issue might be ironed out if we were to adopt the term 'affective contagion' rather than 'emotional contagion', as it would not restrict us to infection only by emotions but more intentionally diffuse feeling states such as moods.

Nevertheless, it seems that Scheler is presenting the process of contagion as something that happens at the sub-personal level; it is a mechanism by which emotions are passed between individuals but there is no experience of the 'emotional contagion' itself. However, I will suggest that there is an important difference between having an emotion that arises from a process of emotional infection and *an experience of being infected* by an emotion. I will argue that emotional contagion is a case of the first kind and the second is what happens when one experiences being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere.

In summary, based upon Scheler's description of emotional contagion, I think we can broadly identify emotional contagion as: *the unconscious, involuntary transference of a feeling state from one person (or persons) to another person (or persons), where the feeling state that arises is given to the individual as their own originary experience, where no knowledge or understanding of the other's experience is presupposed.* If interpersonal atmospheres are, then, just a case of 'mere' emotional contagion this means that when we experience an interpersonal atmosphere, what happens is that we become infected by the interpersonal atmosphere, for instance becoming happy when we were previously sad, and that this occurs without conveying us any interpersonal understanding or even requiring us to be aware of the other people and their experiences.

2. Emotional contagion and interpersonal atmosphere

I suggest that the relationship between emotional contagion and interpersonal atmospheres is not nearly as simple as is traditionally supposed and that we must be careful to distinguish between the mechanism by which a person is infected by the emotion of another (i.e. emotional contagion) from both: (i) the experience of the presence of interpersonal atmosphere, and (ii) the feeling of being swept up by an

interpersonal atmosphere. The first point highlights that treating interpersonal atmospheres simply as a case of emotional contagion completely overlooks how we can experience an interpersonal atmosphere without being infected by it. The second point involves distinguishing between unconsciously being infected by an emotion and the *experience of being infected by an interpersonal atmosphere*. I argue that when the latter case occurs, one must have some kind of empathetic understanding that informs your understanding of what you are being infected by. If one experiences being swept up by something, one must have some awareness of what one is being swept up by; *contra* Scheler, the experience is characterised by a certain 'foreignness'. As emotional contagion is deemed not to presuppose other-understanding or knowledge, claiming that being swept up in an atmosphere is simply an example of emotional contagion is at best misleading, and at worst, wrong. In the following, I demonstrate why this dominant phenomenological view of interpersonal atmospheres is woefully lacking and argue that this opens the door for us to re-examine the previously debarred relationship between atmosphere and empathy.

2.1. Interpersonal atmospheres always involve emotional contagion

First, let's immediately put aside the idea that an experience of interpersonal atmosphere always involves emotional contagion. While we often speak of atmospheres as assailing us, of sweeping us up, of infecting us even, this is not always the case. There are many instances where we experience the atmosphere of a person or a group without becoming assimilated with the emotional character of that atmosphere. Take the opening of our vignette, when I first enter Shay's house, I *feel* the happy atmosphere of the party. However, I am currently tired and grumpy from my long working week. Here I *feel* the happy atmosphere but I am not infected by it. This is a case where we resist 'taking up', so to speak, the interpersonal atmosphere. Where such resistance takes place, it seems fair to say that there has been no transmission of emotion, no emotional infection. Yet the interpersonal atmosphere itself is still experienced.

Using Schmitz's terms, we can distinguish between being gripped by an atmosphere (in the sense of experiencing it as present) and becoming affectively involved with that atmosphere (in terms of how we personally engage with the atmosphere). If

interpersonal atmospheres are *just* a case of emotional contagion, we are unable to make this distinction, for we would have to conclude that we only experience atmosphere when we are swept up by it, when the character of the atmosphere infects us. What is more, if experiencing interpersonal atmosphere is a matter of emotional contagion, then anyone encountering the happy atmosphere should all be impacted in the *same* way. Yet, we can be differently sensitive to atmosphere and differently impacted by it (as I shall discuss in detail in chapter 5). Clearly, then, we should dismiss the idea that experiencing an interpersonal atmosphere *must* involve emotional contagion. This alone demonstrates that we need to provide a positive theory of interpersonal atmosphere that captures the bodily feeling of an atmosphere where one is not swept up. As such, dismissing atmospheres as cases of mere contagion is short-sighted and provides an incomplete picture of the ways we can both experience an interpersonal atmosphere and then engage with it.

What strikes me as particularly interesting, though, is that cases of experiencing the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere actually seem to mirror the structure of empathetic experience. Remember that in empathy, what occurs is that an individual perceptually grasps another's experience. This is typically described as being an originary experience of a non-originary experience, i.e. *I* experience *your* experience (see, for example, Stein 1989, 2). Where one feels the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere, this too is an originary experience – *I* feel the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere. However, that interpersonal atmosphere is not given to me as *my affective or emotional experience*, rather I experience it as belonging to the people to whom it relates, as 'their' atmosphere.

Recognizing that experiencing the presence of a happy group atmosphere gives us an empathetic understanding of those present, however, has been blocked on the basis that when experience a group as having a certain atmosphere we are not directed to or necessarily even aware of any distinct individuals (Zahavi 2018, 738). When I experience the happy atmosphere of Shay's party, I do not necessarily empathetically grasp the experience of any particular member of the party. Rather, it seems that the atmosphere might relate to the experience *of the group* rather than of any one individual person. In chapter 3, however, I suggest that this problem can be overcome by providing a robust account of collective empathy; an experience of empathetically perceiving the experience, mood, or vitality of a *group*.

For now, though, what we have shown is that experiencing the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere has a different phenomenological blueprint to that of emotional contagion, where an infected individual simply experiences their own originary experience of the infected emotion. Indeed, experiencing an interpersonal atmosphere seems to be an experience precisely of something foreign to oneself. At the very least, then, the emotion contagion approach to interpersonal atmosphere provides us with an incomplete picture.

2.2. Being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere

Let us now turn to cases where an individual does experience being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere. As Scheler describes, we might enter a party in a bad mood but be swept up by the gaiety, thus becoming happy ourselves. This experience of being assailed by and influenced by the atmosphere, does seem, at least superficially, to fit with the idea that we become infected by the happy atmosphere. It might, then, seem rather obvious to say that this is an example of emotional contagion at play.

Following the above characterization of emotional contagion, if this experience of being swept up by an atmosphere is a case of emotional contagion, we would expect the swept up individual to experience a feeling of happiness that is given to them as *their own experience that does not presuppose an understanding of the happiness of those around them*. The question I want to ask, here, is whether this is a good phenomenological description of the experience of being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere.

It may well be the case, as Scheler notes, that an individual can walk into a happy party and be infected by the atmosphere, coming to feel happy themselves. This might arise by way of imitation of the gestures and expressions of those present.[20] In such an instance, it seems that the individual experiences a change in their affective state, from being depressed to being happy, without knowing where this change arose from. Stein describes cases where "we wind up" in a different mood "without

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[20] It is worth noting that there is, in fact, a potential inconsistency in Scheler's account here. For he suggests that emotional contagion might occur via the imitation of others' expressive behaviour. Yet, in his critique of Lipps, Scheler explicitly states that even "unconscious imitation" involves empathy (Scheler 2017, 5). While this goes beyond the scope of our interest here, this does bring into question the coherency of the phenomenological notion of emotional contagion and its relation to empathy more generally.

knowing "how we got there"", and where we "perhaps don't discern until afterwards the soul-medium of our surroundings that incubated the contagion", as a case of "uncomprehending contagion" (Stein 2000, 213).

Without denying that this kind of experience can take place, what this example seems not to be is an experience of either the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere, nor of *experiencing oneself as swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere*. What, is key to the experience of being swept up by a happy atmosphere is the very experience of *feeling oneself infected* by something outside of you, as coming to be like those around you. This is not a case of suddenly experiencing oneself as being happy without knowing why. Quite the contrary. In order to experience oneself as being swept up, one must experience oneself as being swept up *by* something. As such, to simply say that when one is swept up in an atmosphere one experiences an emotion that is given to you as one's own, without saying anything further, is to miss the very essence of atmospheric experience.

Indeed, when one experiences this sweeping up, the experience is permeated by a feeling that the emotion or mood that one is swept up by *is not one's own*. To illustrate this point, think of the difference between suddenly finding oneself overcome by a burst of happiness compared to experiencing oneself as swept up by the happiness of a party's atmosphere. In the former case, one simply experiences a change in one's affective state, a feeling that does not seem to be about anything in particular, that has apparently come from nowhere. This is a purely I-centred experience. What is left aside here is what it is like to experience being swept up *by the happy atmosphere.* When this happens, I do not just catch happiness, I feel myself caught up by and influenced by feelings that are not my own, feelings that I might become attuned to or share in. One does not simply experience an I-am-becoming-happy but an experience of being-swept-up-by-the-happy-atmosphere. This latter case, involves an experience of becoming like the other people around you, perhaps even sharing in their experience. This necessarily exceeds an I-centred experience, it points beyond what I as an individual am experiencing to those around me.

Why is this central feature of atmospheric experience not mentioned by Scheler (or indeed by others discussing atmosphere in the context of emotional contagion)? I think perhaps this oversight creeps in due to the way Scheler switches between third-person and first-person descriptions in his example. Initially, he remarks on how we, as observers, are familiar with how a newcomer can be infected by the atmosphere of a party. This is a third-person description of the effect an atmosphere might have on a newcomer which does not, in itself, indicate whether the newcomer *themselves* experience being swept up by the atmosphere or not (or indeed if they experience the presence of the atmosphere at all). If so, plausibly the individual in this example has no experience of atmosphere at all. However, Scheler also talks about being 'swept up', alluding to the first-person experience of *feeling oneself infected* by the happy atmosphere of a party. It is this latter description of feeling oneself swept up by an atmosphere that I suggest points beyond a merely self-centred experience of 'I am happy' to some kind of awareness of what one is swept up by.

So how should we think about this experience of being swept up? Stein, although not discussing atmosphere specifically, describes how one might be *swept up by* another's vigour:

> where one subject sweeps another away with him and the second subject feels like he's being carried along by the first (or, according to the *sense* content of the mental function, the first subject himself can have the lead), a mutuality of life feelings is created, and "our" collective deed goes forth afresh. This vigour, experienced as going out from the one and now filling both, turns into a manifestation of a power that both draw upon and that's their common property. (Stein 2000, 216)

Could we say, then, that what happens when one experiences being swept up by an atmosphere is a case of emotional contagion *plus* some kind of awareness or understanding of where the transferred feeling has come from?

Overgaard (2018) does, in fact, present an example of an individual who undergoes emotional contagion with an awareness of others. He discusses how Jack enters a pub and is infected by the happiness of those present. However, he suggests that

although Jack is infected by the others' happiness, because he does not know what the others are happy about, his awareness that he has caught the happiness of the others cannot be a case of empathy – the implication being that Jack has some kind of causal awareness of where the happiness has come from but no empathetic apprehension of the others and their happiness. This seems puzzling, for it relies on a very robust notion of empathy, where to have an empathetic grasp of your experience I must not only grasp that you are happy but why you are happy. This seems to go in the face of empathy accounts that discuss how I see your happiness in your smile, your anger in your clenched fists and so on, which do not require that I either understand why you are feeling the way you do, nor need I be particularly concerned with your feeling. If empathy is the fundamental way in which I grasp other's experiences, I do not see how Jack could have any awareness that the others were happy unless this were a case of empathy. It seems as though in the eagerness to oust experiences of atmosphere from empathetic experiences, an inflated notion of empathy is put in play, that has a higher bar than usual.

Nevertheless, what I take to be Overgaard's concern here is that the emotional contagion *itself* still only gives rise to a self-centred experience of 'I am happy' and having knowledge of the others' happiness does not mean that my own feeling of happiness empathetically discloses the others happiness to me. The empathetic awareness of the others' happiness might be described as an accompanying awareness of the others but does not change the fact that the feeling of being swept up by the others' happiness is fundamentally a self-centred experience.

Could experiencing being swept up by a group atmosphere be cashed out in terms of a self-centred experience of becoming happy which is accompanied by an empathetic awareness that others around me are also happy? What we have might be described as a bifurcated experience – an affective experience of emotional contagion in the form of 'I am happy', with an additional awareness of what is going on around you. My worry here is that this does not adequately capture the lived experience of feeling oneself swept up by a group atmosphere. The feeling itself, as Stein indicates, is of being *filled up by* the others' experience, of being led along by the feeling of the others.

Being swept up by an atmosphere seems to go beyond having a causal understanding of what the source of one's emotional state is, for this fails to capture *the experience of being swept up or infected by something outside of oneself*. It is not simply a case of *knowing* one has been swept up by an atmosphere but a case of *feeling* oneself swept up. If I feel myself swept along by a river, it is not that I experience being moved and then have a kind of clinical awareness that it is the water that is causing me to move. Rather, I experience the water itself as pulling me along. I think that this is a helpful analogy to the feeling of being swept up by a happy atmosphere. I am not simply aware of the atmosphere but feel it as the thing that is affecting me. Indeed, this is what allows us to make a distinction between suddenly feeling happy without knowing why and the feeling of being infected. What I think this suggests is that when one experiences being swept up by an atmosphere, it points beyond one's own I-centred experience.

Another useful analogy here can be made with Joel Krueger's description of experiencing oneself as being affectively guided by a piece of music. Krueger discusses how when we listen, say, to a sad piece of music we undergo an "experience of letting go when we listen to music in a sensitive and immersive way…-—we feel as though we are experientially consumed by, or somehow taken up into, the musical soundworld unfolding around us" (Krueger 2018, 2). This is not an experience simply of becoming sad and realizing it is the sad music that has brought about this change in us. Rather, the experience itself is an experience of being carried away by the music, of feeling oneself caught up by the music. This, I suggest, is analogous to feeling oneself swept up by an atmosphere. I do not just experience myself as 'I am happy' but feel my happiness as being carried along by the experience of those around me, by the happy atmosphere. When we experience being swept up by the happy atmosphere, I also experience a letting go that involves feeling that I am *joining* with the experience of the other party-goers. In short, the feeling of being swept up by others experiences involves an experience that points beyond one's own I-centred affective response as part and parcel of the experience.

There are two further points to consider here. First, is that while experiencing being swept up by a group atmosphere does not necessarily involve my feeling that I am sharing the happiness of the party with the others present, it certainly can. I may experience myself as being swept up by the happiness of the party while feeling a

certain distance between myself and those present; I might feel like I am *joining* the happy atmosphere while not feeling like I am sharing an experience of happiness of those present in a robust sense. For instance, it might be that the others have yet to notice my arrival and while I feel myself being caught up by the happy atmosphere, I do not feel like I am having a we-experience with the others. However, it might be the case that part of my being swept up by the happy atmosphere does involve an experience of sharing the happy atmosphere with those present in a robust sense. I shall return to this point in chapter 5, where I consider how we can experience contributing to, participating in, changing and sharing in an interpersonal atmosphere. For now, though, it is suffice to note that if experiencing being swept up by an atmosphere as mere contagion, that I might experience sharing a happy atmosphere with others is explicitly debarred by Scheler, who states that when emotional contagion occurs because it is experience in the I-singular mode of 'I am happy' there is no sharing of experience. Again, what seems to be missing on the emotional contagion approach is a rich description of the various ways we might experience an interpersonal atmosphere.

Second, if we stick to the emotional contagion model where I have a self-centred experience that arises because I unconsciously imitate the expressions and gestures of those present, then we must say that when I experience being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere, I am imitating the expressiveness of those present. However, when I feel myself swept up by the happy atmosphere of Shay's party, I do not need to exactly imitate the expression of others there. My bodily expression of 'being swept up by the happiness of the party' might involve my dancing along to the sound of the music while removing my coat, waving at some of my friends across the room, excitedly pulling out my present for Shay.

As Fuchs (2013) points out, when we are affected by others and engaging with them, to experience an attunement or convergence of experience does not imply that we must be imitating one another, our movements, expressions and actions are not mere mimicry but can be complementary or mirroring actions. Nor, indeed, is there necessarily one expression for me to imitate. Shay might be happily chatting away to friends, while other people there are dancing to music. All these forms of expressivity seem to contribute to the group atmosphere but there is a heterogenous expression of this happiness across the various individuals present. Whose expressiveness

should I be imitating for me to experiencing emotional contagion? If I am imitating Shay's relaxed posture and happy smiles, it seems that I might have caught the happiness of Shay but not be infected by the happiness of the party as a whole. Yet, as Zahavi points out, when I experience a group as having a happy atmosphere, I might not even be aware of any distinct individuals. When put under the microscope, then, there are various incoherencies in adopting the idea that when I experience being swept up by a group atmosphere this is a case of 'mere' emotional contagion.

The emotional contagion model, then, seems to fail on three counts. First, it fails to capture the various ways of experiencing atmosphere, at best focusing only on the effect that being exposed to atmosphere *might* have if we experience being swept up by it. Second, on closer analysis, it even appears to fail to capture what it is to experience *being swept up by* an interpersonal atmosphere. Third, it leaves no room for the experience of sharing an interpersonal atmosphere with others, feeling oneself as part of and contributing to an atmosphere with others. By relegating atmosphere to being an I-centred experience, the emotional contagion model does not do justice to the felt experience of encountering an interpersonal atmosphere, nor does it capture how interpersonal atmosphere tell us something about the world.

Conclusion

Where has this discussion left us? In this chapter, I have shown that the traditional, and still prevalent, view of interpersonal atmosphere being nothing more than a case of emotional contagion that is found in the phenomenology of sociality is deeply flawed. Conflating atmospheric experience to emotional contagion falls short of the complexity and variety of ways that we experience interpersonal atmosphere. As such, the premise that experiences of interpersonal atmosphere do not involve empathy is unseated. By discrediting the emotional contagion picture that is adopted almost as cannon in the phenomenology of sociality, we are now able to start an analysis of interpersonal atmosphere as a form of social understanding afresh.

Quite apart from seeing atmosphere as an I-centred experience that does not involve empathy, I claim that interpersonal atmospheres are not a thing that we encounter but a relational phenomena that arises out of my bodily empathetic perception of other expressive, bodily subjects – a *way* that we experience others. In part, what

may have led the discussion astray is considering atmospheres only in terms of how they might affect us, might sweep us up. Rather than starting here, I begin with an analysis of what it is like to experience the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere.

By starting here, we do not get distracted from the start by what emotional state an atmosphere might evoke in me but can examine what my initial experience of atmosphere reveals. This allows us to forefront atmosphere as a *mode* of experience that reveals others to us. As mentioned in the introduction, this also enable us to start a rehabilitation of the 'observer' - capturing how we empathetically and bodily encounter others, even before we are in the midst of a dyadic reciprocal, interaction with them.

If atmosphere is a mode of experience that discloses aspects of the world to us, there are two questions that must be asked: *what* does atmosphere disclose and *how* does it disclose it to us. These are the two sides of the relational coin. I shall take these questions in turn. In chapter 3, I explore how interpersonal atmospheres disclose the expressivity of individuals and groups, arguing that this is, in fact, a form of empathetic perception. Having argued that interpersonal atmospheres disclose the expressive experience of others, in chapter 4, I look at *how* atmosphere discloses emotion, mood, or vitality. This is crucial for capturing the felt and spatially diffuse nature of atmospheric experience. Remember that an atmosphere is not something that we coldly judge or infer but something that we feel. We experience interpersonal atmospheres through our living, feeling bodies.

Chapter 3

Stretching empathy

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented and critiqued the classical phenomenological conception of interpersonal atmosphere as emotional contagion. I highlighted how this conception under- and even mis- describes atmospheric experience. Having pre-emptively dealt with this potential objection, I now embark upon my positive empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere.

Contrary to many atmosphere discussions, I suggest that rather than take atmosphere itself as the *object* of our experience, we should consider atmosphere as a way that we experience certain aspects of the world. Atmosphere, then, is not a *what* but a *how.* I will argue that we experience interpersonal atmosphere when we affectively perceive the expressivity of others. Interpersonal atmosphere, on my account, is a bodily felt form of empathy - I experience someone as radiating a happy atmosphere when I bodily apprehend their happiness, I experience a group as radiating a tense atmosphere when I am bodily sensitive to the tense interactions of those present. To put it in intentionality language: the intentional object of our atmospheric experience is the expressive gestures, behaviours and interactions of individuals and groups.

Building an empathetic account of atmosphere involves two moves. First, considering *what* atmospheric experience discloses to us. In this chapter, I argue that when we experience individuals or groups atmospherically this empathetically discloses the emotion, mood, vitality, style, and interconnectedness of the participating subjects. Second, accounting for the way in which atmospheric experience discloses others to us, i.e. as felt through our bodies and as having a peculiar spatial character. This chapter will deal with the first of these moves. However, while I must make these points separately, it should be born in mind that when discussing atmospheric experience in this chapter I do not mean it to be understood as a cold, intellectual, purely visual grasping of others and their experience.

In order to make the case that atmosphere is a bodily form of empathy, I need to stretch the traditional notion of empathy in a number of ways. Classic examples of empathetic perception are of seeing someone's happiness in their smile or their anger in their clenched fists (e.g. Scheler 2014, 8; Stein 1989, 2). I suggest that when we experience an individual as, say, radiating a joyful personal atmosphere, we do not just empathetically perceive their happiness in their smile but perceive their happiness in their temporally and spatially extended movements. Rather than conceiving of empathy as simply the ability to perceive isolated emotions in discrete expressive gestures, I show that we also empathetically perceive others' moods, 'style' (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 151) and 'vitality' (Stern 2010, 1) through their dynamic lived bodies. By stretching empathy to cover these more holistic ways of experiencing another's way of being in the world, I suggest we experience a person as radiating a personal atmosphere when we empathetically perceive the temporally and spatially extended expressivity of their lived body.

However, in moving from a consideration of personal atmosphere to group atmosphere we face a potential problem. As Zahavi (2018, 738) points out, we often experience group atmospheres without being aware of any distinct individuals at all. For instance, I might experience the festive atmosphere of a carnival without being directed to the expressivity of any particular individual. If empathy involves perceiving the other's expressive lived body and atmospheric experience is a form of empathy, how could we experience a *group* atmospherically without being aware of all the distinct individuals involved?

I argue that this potential objection is underpinned by a distinctly individualistic conception of empathy. As such, I proceed to stretch the traditional notion of empathy in order to accommodate cases of collective empathy – cases where we empathetically perceive not just the embodied expressivity of an individual, a singular 'you', but of a collective, a 'they'. Using the example of empathetically perceiving two individuals in love, I motivate the notion of collective empathy by exploring how we do not empathetically perceive the two individuals separately and then piece these experiences together but rather we experience the love as spanning the two individuals. I argue that while we typically talk about empathetically perceiving the field of expression of an individual's lived body, we can sensibly talk about perceiving a field of expression that spans multiple bodies, their collective

expressivity, as well as their interconnectedness or 'betweenness'. From this initial characterisation, I detail the different ways that we can perceive fields of expression as spanning collectives and how this helps unpack our experience of interpersonal, collective atmosphere.

This chapter, then, marks the first step in my re-conception of interpersonal atmospheres as a bodily felt form of empathetic perception, as well as developing a more fine-grained account of empathy more generally. Having defended the idea that we can empathetically perceive not just emotions but mood, vitality, style and interconnectedness, not just individuals but groups, I then make the claim that atmospheric experience is itself properly speaking a form of *embodied* empathetic perception by developing an account of how our bodily feelings can disclose the feelings of others and unpacking the peculiar spatial character of atmospheric experience.

1. Empathy and personal atmospheres

As outlined in chapter 2, phenomenological discussions of intersubjectivity typically pose empathy as our fundamental form of interpersonal understanding. It is argued that as we are essentially embodied subjects, we can empathetically perceive others' experiences through the expressive field of their lived body. I can, for instance, empathetically perceive your experience of happiness through your smile, without needing to infer, imagine or simulate your happiness.

The notion of empathy is underpinned by the phenomenological distinction between the physical, material body and the lived, expressive body. The body, in one sense, is just an object in the world like other objects. It has extension, mass, colour, is subject to the laws of physics, and so on. This is the objective, physical body. I experience my body as an object if, for instance, I examine the texture of the skin on my arm or measure it in some way. However, I also experience my body as a subject. It is not just an object of experience; I am a bodily subject of experience. It is this lived body that phenomenology brings to the fore. When, for example, I reach out to grab my mug, I do not pick up my arm and move it towards the mug. I simply extend my arm without thinking about it. Due to processes such as proprioception and kinesthesis, I am always aware of where my limbs are and what I can do with

them without needing to explicitly locate them. This is because my lived body is always given to me experientially from a first-person perspective. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, "I am my body" (2012, 151) and I experience it as the centre of my agency and experience. Indeed, that I am a lived body is what enables me to experience my body as an object in the first place; for me to perceive my body as an object, I also must be the subject perceiving it as such.

Crucial for our purposes is that I can experience the other's body either as an objective body or a lived body. Think of a surgeon cutting open a body to take out the appendix, a tailor measuring someone's waistband, an artist examining the bright blue of someone's eyes in order to create a certain shade of paint. In these cases, the surgeon, the tailor and the painter are all attending to the objective body. When we perceive the other as an expressive body, though, we are turned to their lived body. For example, when I look into my sister's face and see tears falling down her cheeks, I experience her sadness through her expressive lived body. When I see my sister's tears, I see her sadness; I am not turned to an objective, material body that is secreting water out of tear ducts. What is important here is the idea that when we perceive others, we do not typically perceive them as objects in the world but as expressive subjects. The other's lived body is perceived as a field of dynamic expressivity, across which their experiences play out. Typical examples of empathy are of seeing someone's happiness in their smile, their sadness in their sobs, their anger in their clenched fists.

I want to turn to our experience of *personal* atmospheres. These are atmospheres that we experience as emanating from *individuals*. We often talk about how someone radiates an angry atmosphere or an atmosphere of joy. Heidegger, for instance, remarks upon how "[a] human being who – as we say – is in a good humour brings a lively atmosphere with them" (Heidegger 1995, 66). What these descriptions are trying to capture is the way in which we can experience someone's liveliness, their anger, their joy not just in a specific expressive gesture or expression (such as in a smile or a frown) but as somehow *pouring* out of them, into the space around them.

Why do I think empathy might be relevant to our experience of personal atmospheres? Like Tellenbach, I think that when we experience someone radiating, say, a lively atmosphere this tells us something about the other. *Contra* Tellenbach, I

do not think that the atmosphere reveals the other's essence or even their personality to me, but their current expressive experience. When I experience my friend Alex as having a lively atmosphere, this seems related to her affective state. I would, certainly, be very surprised to learn that she were actually sad. Crucially, although I *feel* Alex's lively atmosphere through my own body, I do not mistake the lively atmosphere for my own liveliness, or the liveliness of the air (whatever that might mean), nor for the liveliness of someone in the room next door, but Alex's liveliness. The atmosphere, in part, seems to be produced by her and her expressive behaviour. As noted in chapter 2, my experience of the lively atmosphere, seems to have the same structure as empathetic perception in terms of it being my originary experience of another's embodied, affective experience.

That atmospheres tell us about the individuals to whom they relate has been captured in some medical literature. Psychiatrists, for example, talk about how the atmosphere of individuals with schizophrenia can be used as part of their diagnostic tool-kit.[21] Building on Tellenbach's notion of diagnostic atmosphere, Costa et al. (2013, 351) discuss how being sensitive to atmosphere can aid the clinician in understanding the patient; the felt experience of atmosphere helps the clinician "achieve an understanding of the meaning of a clinical situation as felt".[22]

Yet, it does not seem right that when we experience someone as having a lively atmosphere that we are simply empathetically perceiving their smile, or their wave; rather, it concerns their holistic way of being in the world, their dynamic unfurling movement and energy. When describing our perceptual experiences, phenomenological methods can sometimes lead to isolated depictions of our experiences.[23] Phenomenology is littered with examples of seeing mugs and chairs, touching tables and so on. While phenomenologists are keen to emphasise that we always see such items in relation to other objects in our field of vision, such as *on*

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[21] Note that Jaspers (1913) in his description of "delusional mood" and Sass & Ratcliffe (2017) in their paper *Atmosphere: On the Phenomenology of "Atmospheric" Alterations in Schizophrenia*, also discuss how individuals with schizophrenia experience a change in their sense of reality, their experience of the world in terms of atmosphere. I will consider in chapter 5 how mental illnesses and bodily feelings can alter one's experience of interpersonal atmosphere, often with the result of negatively effecting one's ability to experience interpersonal atmospheres and thus impacting one's social sensitivity.

[22] This is perhaps best documented in discussions of praecox-feeling (e.g. Grube 2006).

[23] Sara Ahmed (2006) also notes how *what* objects feature in phenomenological discussions of perception also isolates the kinds of phenomenological investigation we do. For an illuminating discussion of this, see the introduction of *Queer Phenomenology*.

tables, *next to* pencils, (e.g. Husserl 1975) there is still a risk of presenting an account of perception that seems to spotlight specific objects of experience and tear them apart from our more holistic experience of the world. This trend also occurs in empathy literature where the discussion is dominated by examples of empathy in terms of seeing episodic emotions in discrete gestures, such as happiness in someone's smile or anger in their clenched fists. There is a risk here of portraying us an intentionally directed to isolated gestures or actions. Yet, we do not usually experience individuals as simply flashing a quick smile, as making discrete gestures. Rather, we apprehend a unified, holistic impression of their smiling face, their sparkling eyes, their upbeat posture, their tone of voice, and so on.

By focusing on individual gestures (and episodic emotional experiences), what falls into the background is a more holistic way of experiencing the other's embodied expressivity. What also often goes unremarked is how we experience another's expressivity as temporally and spatially extended, as dynamic and unfurling. We do not just see a smile at the moment it is a grin, we see the up-curling of the mouth, the creasing of the eyes, the peak of the smile, the opening up of their bodily posture, the bashful expression that follows it. We do not perceive expressive others in snapshots, in frozen moments, but in a temporally extended dynamic unfolding.[24] We do not encounter the other's *lived* body so much as we encounter their *living* body.[25]

Indeed, despite the extensive work done the wide variety of affective states that we experience - such as emotions, moods, existential feelings, the experience of flow – empathy literature is dominated by discussions perceiving another's emotions in isolated gestures. However, moods and existential feelings, for example, are not expressively embodied in individual expressive gestures or actions, but in a more general way of bodily being in the world. Merleau-Ponty alludes to this when he discusses how we can perceive another's 'style'. He details how an individual's

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[24] This 'snapshot' impression may well arise in part due to a tendency of talking about embodied expressions as part of an emotional expression (e.g. Krueger & Overgaard 2012), which risks presenting expressions as static aspects of an experience, rather than a dynamic unfolding expressivity.

[25] As we shall see in chapter 4, this will become particularly pertinent for accounting for the spatial character of atmospheric experience.

gestures, movements and postures can express a certain "style" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 151). To empathetically perceive someone's style we are not turned towards one expressive gesture but rather to an overall tone or rhythm of the field of expression of someone's lived body. For instance, I might empathetically perceive that you are happy from your smile. However, the overall style of your body might 'colour' the happiness as a languid happiness, as an exhausted happiness, as a frenetic happiness. One's style arises out of "the particular fashion in which [one's] body moves" (*ibid.*).

Stern discusses a similar idea in his book *Forms of Vitality* (2010). There he describes how we do not just perceive the what or why of expressive actions but the *how*. For instance, I am sensitive to whether you reach out for a cup hastily, languidly or authoritatively. Stern describes these as "forms of vitality" or "vitality effects". Again, the emphasis here is not on single gestures or actions but on the movement and energy of someone's lived expressive body. Stern describes vitality as being made up of a pentad of movement, force, time, intentionality, and space (Stern 2010, 4). Both 'style' and 'forms of vitality' capture the way in which we perceive other's dynamic movements as expressive.

These stylistic forms of vitality have been largely overlooked by discussions of empathy and expressivity (c.f. Krueger 2019; Osler forthcoming b). Yet, these too are forms of embodied expressivity that I can empathetically grasp. These styles of expressivity are often temporally extended dynamics that are not expressed in one particular movement but relate to an ongoing pattern of expressivity. They, therefore, exceed the present moment (as I shall explore in chapter 4). By focusing on discrete gestures in empathy, the risk is that we abstract from the flow of the lived body and its expressivity. This may well be why discussions of personal atmospheres often fall by the way-side, as we do not experience discrete moments of atmosphere. Rather, they arise from the temporally and spatially extended unfurling of experience. Empathy, then, can be conceived of more broadly than simply in terms of grasping specific emotions or intentions but can allow us to grasp unfolding styles that reveal someone's mood or being-in-the-world more generally.

Having stretched the notion of empathy in order to capture this more holistic way in which we can perceive the expressivity of others helps us open the door to

understanding the experience of someone's personal atmosphere as a form of empathetic perception. For, a lively atmosphere, say, does not seem to either arise out of singular gestures nor is it experienced in a snapshot manner - I do not experience someone's lively atmosphere as arising out of a quick smile. Rather, it relates to their more general way of holding themselves, of the energy in their movement, the breadth of their movements, and so on. An atmosphere is experienced as something that unfurls, that is temporally extended, that is dynamic – changing as an individual's style or vitality changes, as they move through time and space.

Now, we still need to examine why we might experience mood or vitality as *emanating* from someone as atmosphere, as something that we feel through our bodies and as *radiating* out of others – this I shall do in chapter 4. For now, though, extending our notion of empathetic perception in a way that captures the holistic, dynamic unfolding of expressivity, opens up the idea that we might empathetically perceive this unfurling expressivity *as* atmosphere. For we are empathetically directed to the temporally and spatially extended expressivity of an individual here, rather than a discrete moment of their experience. Importantly, by extending the object of empathy from another's emotions to their mood, vitality and style, we can also make sense of why how we can experience someone as having a lively or cold atmosphere – descriptions that capture their way of being the world (and thus part of their embodied experience) without limiting ourselves to describing only emotional experiences they might be undergoing.

While this discussion motivates further consideration of how experiencing someone as having a personal atmosphere is a way in which we experience another's expressivity, we seem to run into immediate problems when we turn from individual to group scenarios. As Zahavi (2018, 738) points out, it is possible to experience an interpersonal atmosphere of a group where we are not even aware of distinct individuals. If empathy is a perception of other's expressive experience, and I am arguing atmospheric experience is a form of empathy, how can we experience a group atmospherically if we are not aware of the expressive individual subjects involved? Indeed, it is explicitly on this basis that Zahavi rules out our experience of atmosphere as involving empathy.

However, taking empathy to be something that can only occur in relation to one individual seems to me to be a very narrow way of employing the notion of empathy. It does not, for instance, currently allow for a discussion about how empathy might play a role in our encounters with groups or collectives of people.[26] The absence of literature on collective empathy (with the notable exception of Salice & Taipale 2015 and Szanto 2015), seems particularly surprising given the proliferation of interest in the realm of social phenomenology in collective experience (see Krueger & Szanto 2016; León et al 2019; Osler 2020a; Salice & Schmid 2016; Szanto & Moran 2015; Zahavi 2015). Such discussions highlight that we not only have individual experiences but collective experiences too. It seems probable, then, that as empathy gives us access to the experiential lives of individuals, that some form of collective empathy is at play where we are given access to the experiential lives of groups. While there has been much work on how experience might be had as a *We*, there is little corresponding thought given to how one might empathetically experience a *They*. Given that we often experience atmospheres of groups (not just of individuals), I think this oversight is partly responsible for the failure to recognise our experience of interpersonal atmosphere as a form of bodily empathetic perception.

It is interesting to note that there are some hints that 'collective empathy' was considered possible by some classic phenomenologists. Stein, for instance, makes reference in a footnote to collective empathy in her book *The Problem of Empathy* (1989), suggesting that there are instances where the person we empathise with is not an individual subject but a collective 'We' (Stein 1989, 29f). Sadly, however, chapter 5 of this dissertation, which is thought to have dealt with collective empathy, was never published and has since been lost (Szanto 2015). We can also find implications of collective empathy in Scheler's work. When discussing shared emotion, Scheler discusses how an observer might grasp the shared grief of two parents mourning the loss of their child (Scheler 2017, 10). However, Scheler does not expound upon this example of an observer perceiving a shared emotion of two individuals.

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[26] Moreover, that empathy is taken to only occur in face-to-face interactions precludes discussions of how we might empathetically perceive others outside of strictly face-to-face encounters. For instance, over the telephone or on the internet. I will return to the question of how empathetic perception, in terms of interpersonal atmosphere, can occur in online situations in chapter 7.

In the following, I defend the notion of collective empathy, where an individual empathetically perceives the experience of a group and present several varieties of collective empathy. I stress how, in collective empathy, we are empathetically directed to a field of expression that spans the lived bodies of the participating subjects, as well as the space between them. This opens the door to understanding how an experience of interpersonal atmosphere can be a form of embodied collective empathy - bringing experiences of interpersonal atmosphere soundly back into our social cognition tool-kit.

2. Collective experience

The idea that we can have group experiences not just as an I but as a *We* has gained significant traction both within phenomenology (e.g. Carr 1987; Krueger 2015; León et al. 2019; Schmid 2009, 2014; Scheler 2017; Stein 1989; Szanto 2018; Walther 1923; Zahavi 2015) and without (e.g. Bratman 1992; Gilbert 2009; Tuomela & Miller 1988; Searle 1990). The notion of shared or we-experience is supposed to capture experiences where "I ascribe the experience or action neither to an I, a thou, a they or an it but to a we "(Carr 1987, 525). This is not meant to be metaphorical or shorthand for saying that individuals are having the same kind of experience simultaneously. Rather, it is intended to denote a situation where it seems appropriate to say that an experience is had in the first-person plural rather than a first-person singular.

Carr (1987) notes that there are many ways that the term 'we' is used colloquially. For instance, when saying that 'we saw the Eiffel Tower' it might mean that I have seen the Eiffel Tower and that you have also seen the Eiffel Tower, but that our sightings took place at different times. In such a case, one could quite happily replace the 'we' in this expression with 'you and I'. However, Carr suggests that this substitution is not appropriate if the expression is meant to capture that 'we saw the Eiffel Tower *together'*. In such a situation, Carr argues that something is lost in the substitution. What Carr is drawing to our attention is that there is a phenomenological difference in experiencing something together with someone else compared with experiencing something on one's own, which a collection of individual experiences does not seem to capture.

While discussions of shared experience often focus upon shared emotions, there is also work done on shared intentionality and shared action (e.g. Gilbert 1990; Searle 1990; Schmid 2009). Talk of shared experience, of we-experience, is not meant to suggest that there is some hive-mind or super-ego that emerges. As Zahavi nicely puts it, to be a we implies plurality: "[a] we, a first-person *plural*, is not an enlarged I" (Zahavi 2016, 5). If you and I are having a shared experience of 'We are happy' this is not to say that our individuality dissolves into a fused I, rather each of us experiences ourselves as participating in each other's experience. What is more, in a case of you and I having an experience of 'We are happy' this does not mean we have to be having identical experiences. There is room for individual inflections or tones within the experience: "Thus the feeling of joy can vary between wild exuberance and silent satisfaction" (Schmid 2009, 64) across the individuals involved.

In order for a shared experience to arise, there is a general consensus that there is a shared focus in such experiences. This focus might be something that the individuals are jointly attending to, something that they are jointing doing, or something that the individuals are jointly emotionally experiencing. The literature is filled with examples of shared experiences of jointly seeing something (such as the Eiffel Tower (Carr 1987) or a hedgehog (Zahavi 2015)), of jointly feeling something (such as Scheler's grieving parents mourning the loss of their child), or of jointly doing something (such as building a wall together (Walter 1923)). These forms of shared experience require a closely-knit interlocking of experience in order for a shared experience to arise.

While not often discussed, I think we can also think of 'looser' forms of group experience. By looser I do not mean to imply that these are less affectively intense or experienced as weaker, but that the shared experience is not closely tied to sharing a particular focus with others. For instance, while there is little literature on this, it seems that people can not only share episodic emotions as a 'we' but also share more generalised moods.

A mood is typically described as a feeling that, unlike emotions, has no specific intentional object. Indeed, some go so far to say that they have no intentional object (Fuchs 2013a). An example might be when one is in a depressed mood, that mood permeates one's experiences, shapes the affective tone of one's experiences, but is

not *about* anything in particular. It seems clear that two people might be in the same mood. My friend and I might both be in a state of general happiness, without wanting to say that we are happy about something in particular. But is there any sense in which we might be sharing in this happy mood? I think so. Take, for example, two people on holiday. They might be taking a break from stressful jobs, get on holiday and be feeling a general sense of being happy and relaxed. The holiday might have brought about this feeling but the feeling itself is not *about* anything per se and is best described as a happy mood. It seems fair to say that in such a scenario it is plausible that this mood of happiness might be experienced as including the other. Think of the difference between the calm mood of being on one's own in contrast to the happy contentment of being on holiday with one's best friend or partner. Like in our cases of shared emotion, it seems to miss out on something to say that the two people on holiday are in separate but coinciding happy moods.

Indeed, when individuals are sharing a common mood, the participants co-regulate or scaffold the mood that they share. The happy mood emerges from our interactions with one another, the calm way we prepare our lunch together, the contented silence as we both sit in the garden reading our books, and so on. This shared mood arises and is sustained by the embodied, expressive and interaffective interactions: "When we interact with others, their expressive actions—gestures, facial expressions, postural adjustments, intonation patterns, movements and manipulations of shared space, etc.—directly modulate our expressive responses, and vice versa" (Krueger 2019, 9).

We can see some hints of this notion of collective mood in Stein's discussion of 'life-feelings'. By life-feeling, Stein intends to pick out the way a group can have a certain 'emotional energy' to it. She highlights how "vigor and weariness, relaxation and feverish excitement vary continually, and along with them are altered the rhythm of the whole communal experience and the "life-coloring" of its contents" (Stein 2000, 217). Here, Stein is not picking out a shared emotion with a specific intentional focus but rather the affective contour that emerges across a group. We might be reminded here again of what Merleau-Ponty calls style and Stern calls vitality. What Stein is suggesting is that collective experiences can also be coloured by a certain *shared vitality* that does not relate to any one individual but is distributed across the group as a whole. Indeed, as Krueger (2019) highlights, forms of vitality can emerge from

and are co-regulated by our interactions with others. I think we can, then, go a step further and suggest that forms of vitality are not only co-regulated by multiple individuals but can be shared by them. Think of how two dancers have a graceful vitality that is not in either one dancer but spans both of them.

What this discussion shows is that there are a variety of ways that collective experience can arise. In particular, I have highlighted how we can broaden our conception of collective affective experience from specific instances of episodic shared experience which have a co-intended object of intentionality, to cases that include instances of group mood or group vitality. This is important for our discussion of interpersonal atmospheres, as often we experience a group as having a shared mood or vitality that is temporally extended and does not necessarily involve the individuals all sharing an emotional reaction to a specific event or jointly undertaking some kind of action. For instance, a party might have a happy atmosphere that seems to relate to a shared mood or a shared vitality of the party-goers, without us wanting to say that the individuals are sharing a particular emotion or carrying out a particular shared action. This allows us to conceive of a broader set of collective experiences that can emerge between individuals.

3. Collective empathy

Having established that individuals can have experiences that can properly be called shared or communal experiences, we can turn to the idea that an observer can empathetically perceive group experiences; this moves beyond the typical conception of how we experience the *Thou* (singular) to a consideration of how one might experience a *They* (plural). In the following, I suggest that there are a number of ways that we empathetically perceive collectives. In the first case, I present the example of empathetically perceiving the love between two individuals. Here, I argue that the field of expression which we are turned towards *spans* the two individuals in love, that encompasses their interlocking interactions, as well as the space between them.

I then show that we can also empathetically perceive the emotion, mood and vitality of larger groups, such as a mass or a crowd. Here, although we cannot perceive the specific interactions between individuals, we are still able to grasp a holistic sense of

the crowd's emotion, mood or vitality. Importantly, there are some limitations to our collective group empathy in such scenarios. In particular, while we can perceive the emotion, mood or vitality of the group, because we cannot typically see the fine-grained expressive gestures of the participants, a certain fine-grainedness of experience is lost. Thus, I might perceive that the atmosphere of a crowd as angry, excited or tense but I am unable to grasp more subtle atmospheres, such as an atmosphere of sullenness or tired resignation. The field of expression here is, so to speak, coarse-grained. Also, when dealing with large crowds or masses, the scale of the field of expression has a homogenizing effect - masking discrepancies between individuals who do not fit in with the crowd - meaning that the atmosphere is perhaps more robust, more able to encompass discrepancies without disrupting the overall atmosphere.

Finally, I return to our example of Shay's party, where we have a small group of people, not necessarily all interacting with everyone at the party, and where I can perceive the individuals present with more detail than a mass. I discuss, here, how the field of expression can incorporate a heterogeneity of expressions that, providing there is still a certain coherence or a predominant vitality, can give rise to a collective empathetic experience. The field of expression, here, might be 'looser' than that of a dyad or a crowd but can still give rise to a group atmosphere. I highlight here how my empathetic perception does not simply attach to the physical gestures of those present but more broadly to the ways in which the participating subjects interact with one another, how the expressivity also is in their relatedness in space, in their interconnectedness or 'betweenness'.

By defending these various ways in which we can empathetically perceive a field of expression made up of more than one lived body, we can rebut the claim that experiencing atmosphere is not an empathetic experience on the basis that it might relate to more than one individual. This sets us up to endorse how atmospheric experience, which is something *felt*, can amount to an embodied form of empathetic experience that has a peculiarly spatial character to it in chapter 4.

3.1 Dyadic collective empathy

Consider seeing two people on a bench gazing at each other with love. Virginia is lying on the bench, her head in Vita's lap while Vita gently strokes Virginia's hair and

talks to her in a soft voice. Coming across these two individuals, I am instantly aware of the love of these women and the caring moment that they are sharing. On our current individualistic model of empathy, it seems that I must experience Vita's love for Virginia in the expressive lived body of Vita and separately also experience Virginia's love for Vita in the expressive lived body of Virginia. However, this is a rather unsatisfactory account of my experience of the love of these women. I do not empathetically grasp two separate experiences of love, rather I seem to experience the love that is shared by the women, that arises from their interactions, their co-ordinated movements and conversation.[27] It is not simply in Vita's leaning in towards Virginia but in Virginia's smiling back up at her, of their interlocking limbs, their gazes, their complementary smiles. Indeed, it seems there if we were to extract one of these women from the scenario, the expression of love itself evaporates.

Where we have Vita and Virginia gazing lovingly at each other, the love is something that is shared between them and is given to me as shared between them. Just like it seems to miss out something to say that this is not just a conjunction of 'I[Vita] am in love' and 'I[Virginia] am in love' rather than 'We are in love', so it seems to miss out something to say that I empathetically grasp that each of these individuals is separately in love. It seems clear to me that what I am empathetically given is *their* love. This, I think, makes a compelling case for the idea that empathy can be directed not only at individuals but also at collectives.

Remember that an individual's experiences are empathetically given to me through their lived, expressive body. What seems to be happening here is that I do not simply perceive the expressivity of one body, e.g. Vita's body, but the expressivity of *their* bodies, their interaction. The field of expression that I empathetically grasp is not confined to one individual's material body but spatially and temporally extends across both of them, engulfing their synchronized, co-ordinated expressive behaviour. Fuchs (2016) (also see Fuchs & de Jaegher 2009) discusses how interaffectivity is a fundamental part of our empathetic grasp of one another. He describes how we do not just coldly perceive another's experiences but are attuned

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[27] Note that this does not have to be a positive shared experience. If Vita and Virginia were in the middle of a raging argument, I would experience their shared anger radiating from them as an atmosphere.

to them by the way that we engage with others, how our own experiences are shaped by interacting with another person:

> The facial, gestural and postural expression of a feeling is part of the bodily resonance that feeds back into the feeling itself, but also induces processes of *interaffectivity:* Our body is affected by the other's expression, and we experience the kinetics and intensity of his emotions through our own bodily kinaesthesia and sensation. (Fuchs 2016, 195)

This interaffectivity, Fuchs claims, is part and parcel of our empathetic grasp of others. Through interaffectivity we experience being in a shared situation with another, experience our emotions emerging from and through our interaction together.[28] In our example, the love that Vita and Virginia experience is constituted, shaped and driven by the loving gaze they share, the interlocking of their fingers, their intertwined bodies, their gentle tones.

What I want to highlight is that this interaffectivity between Vita and Virginia is also available to me *as an observer*. I can perceive how the two of them are interacting, affecting one another, their mutually-coordinated and reciprocal movements, how their experience emerges out of this joint interaction. Through their expressive movements I can see how they are engaged in an interlocking, interaffective communicative act. The expression of love seems to be distributed across Vita and Virginia's bodies. Note, though, that the two women do not have to be expressing their love *in the same way* as one another. Vita is sitting up, stroking Virginia's hair talking softly, while Virginia is lying down, smiling up at Vita. The women's expressions are not the same, rather they are complementary, showing a certain synchronicity and responsiveness to one another. For the field of expression to span two individuals, then, it is not necessary for those individuals to be expressively identical. Rather, the expression is what emerges from their interrelatedness, their interaction as a whole.

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[28] Krueger (2011, 644) also suggests something similar when he discusses how a 'we-space' arises in dyadic interactions: "an emotion-rich coordinative space dynamically structured via ongoing engagement of social agents" which supports and drives social cognitive processes (also see Maiese 2016a).

What an individualistic account of empathy seems to leave out is not just how a field of expression can span the lived bodies of each of these two women but also how their interaction permeates the space around them. The way Vita reaches out for Virginia, the closeness of their bodies, their immersion in each other to the exclusion of all around them, if they are both attending to a book that they are reading – all of this is part of what I am empathetically directed to. This expressivity is not just *playing across the material bodies of these individuals* but emerges *between* them, in the way they interact and share space together. My experience of Vita and Virginia would be very different if they were exchanging loving glances across a crowded room. It is not that I would be unable to experience the love of Vita and Virginia in this instance, but the affective contour of that love would be altered. When they are curled up on the bench together there is a cosy, intimacy of the space they inhabit. In contrast, at the party there is a sense of connectedness between them across the sea of other people, as though they are connected by a tendril across a space. This illustrates how it is not only *what* expressive acts and gestures that Vita and Virginia are making that I empathetically perceive but *how* they act, *how* they fill out the space around them. The Japanese phenomenologist Watsuji Testsuo describes the spatial dimension of our social interactions as "betweenness" (1994, 4).

This *betweenness* of Vita and Virginia, then, also forms part of the field of expression to which I am turned, informing my empathetic grasp of them. How they occupy space together conveys their interconnectedness – think of how differently an arguing couple compared to a whispering couple not only expressively co-ordinate their actions but how they share space between them. Indeed, we can think of cases where the expressions of two individuals might be the same but the way they stand in relationship to one another reveals stark differences. Think, for instance, how a couple that has just had an argument might go through the motions of acting normally at a party, but they stand slightly further apart than usual, staying out of each other's personal space and we can perceive the tension between them. How people relate to one another in space forms part of their expressive interaction and this interconnectedness is something that we, as an observer, are empathetically sensitive to. We can, perhaps, think of the field of expression as a piece of fabric that encompasses both the women, but also the space between them. What I empathetically grasp in the case of Vita and Virginia is not two separate expressive

women but a dynamic experience across the two women that unfolds through time and space, an embodied expression of their relatedness.

We might reasonably ask here what binds Vita and Virginia into an extended field of expression to the exclusions of others in the park. Why, for instance, does the field of expression span the two of them but excludes Orlando, who is sitting on another bench in the park quietly eating a sandwich? In part, we can answer this by reference to the interlocking acts that Vita and Virginia are expressing. Using Krueger's term, we can talk of a shared "we-space" (2011, 643), a shared social space that Vita and Virginia occupy together that excludes Orlando. The term we-space is intended to capture how we experience occupying lived space with others as an emotion-rich space of social interaction. It arises out of the interlocking, interaffective expressive behaviours and gestures and gives a sense of connectedness with one another. Just being in the same place as another person is not enough for a we-space to arise. Although Orlando is in the same physical place as Vita and Virginia, he does not share a we-space with them; he is 'outside of their world' in a certain sense.

What I perceive, then, is not only the expressive gestures and movements that Vita and Virginia make but the *betweenness* that binds them together to the exclusion of Orlando. This betweenness can, as we shall see below, be more or less tightly bound together. What has gone overlooked is that we are sensitive to this *betweenness* when we encounter others. We might also appeal to the idea that Vita and Virginia have a shared vitality here, a shared bodily affective style, which marks them as sharing an experience together. Orlando, in his quiet concentration on his sandwich, is not expressing the interlocking, shared vitality of the two lovers.

However, it should also be noted that partly what binds Vita and Virginia into a shared field of expression is me as an observer. What do I mean by this? When I am walking through the park, my attention is caught by the women on the bench. I am empathetically grasped by *their* loving interaction. However, it might be the case that I am walking through the park on a sunny day and there are many couples and groups of people milling around, enjoying the weather and each other's company. I might experience the park as having a languorous, lazy atmosphere, which relates to the expressivity of all those present, not just Vita and Virginia. My attention here

seems not to be focused on any couples or groups in particular but has a wider, more holistic, focus. What emerges as a dominant form of expressivity across a group of people depends, in part, on who is experienced as part of the group. What I shall explore below is that the various individuals, couples, and groups that I experience as all being woven into the field of expression that gives rise to the languorous atmosphere, need not actually experience themselves as all sharing an emotion, mood or vitality. Rather, it might be me as an observer, in perceiving a certain harmony, and overarching vitality that they *seem* to share, that experiences them all as being part of the same field of expression.

For our purposes, what is important to note is that I not only *see* this love between the two women but I can *feel* the loving atmosphere that seems to come off them, emanating into the air around them. Their expressive interaction seems to colour the space around them in a particular way, I experience them as being soft-hued. As I will explore in the next chapter, having established that empathy can be directed collectives, if we understand empathy not simply as some cognitive understanding but as an embodied, affective experience we can understand this experience of the loving atmosphere of Vita and Virginia.

3.2. Collective empathy and crowds

In the case of Vita and Virginia, we are dealing with a specific, and potentially quite intense, form of shared experience. Perceiving the love of Vita and Virginia is, I think, an incontestable example of collective empathy and, while I may not be specifically directed at either one of them individually, they are physically and emotionally 'close knit'. I can perceive their interlocking expressive acts in a way that binds them together as a 'they' in my empathetic perception. One might be happy to accept that this is an example of collective empathy, while being sceptical about how far we can push this notion. What about larger groups? Take, say, a crowd at a football match celebrating the winning goal of the home team. As an observer, can I be said to empathetically grasp the joy of the crowd? I think yes.

Again, there seems something wrong in saying that I am empathetically directed at particular individuals in the crowd and from that piece together that the crowd is joyful. Indeed, the crowd might be so large that I am not really aware of distinct individuals at all but of a 'mass'. Yet, it seems a leap to rule out the idea that my

experience of the crowd as joyful is not an empathetic one. It has the empathetic structure of being my primordial experience of another experience given to me non-primordially; though this experience is not one that belongs to one individual but to the crowd itself. Given that empathy is supposed to be our fundamental form of other understanding, it is unclear to me that I would be able to experience the crowd as having any sort of affective experience at all if it I do not empathetically perceive the crowd as an expressive collection of lived bodies in the first place. Yet, we are fully capable of experiencing and distinguishing between a crowd that is joyful and one that is hostile. If we are ruled out from empathetically grasping the expressivity of the crowd, it is a puzzle to me how we can account for our ability to easily distinguish between the different moods that we experience crowds as having.

So, what do I experience? Well, there is cheering, lots of arms being waved in the air, singing, a kind of buoyant vitality to the movements of the crowd. I experience *the crowd* as joyful, as celebrating. Moreover, I experience the happy cheers, the upbeat energy as part of the joy that I am experiencing. Just like in individual empathy, it is the expressive behaviour of the crowd that prompts my empathetic experience. Although, I am unable to actually pick out a specific cheer, a specific voice, a specific smile, or (if I am at a certain distance) even a specific individual, I still seem to experience the collective shared joy of those present. Salice & Taipale (2015), in their singular discussion of group-directed empathy, take as their focus how we experience a crowd's shared emotion. When considering how we hear the 'voice' of a crowd, Salice & Taipale use the lovely analogy of hearing a chord: I know that it is made up of individual notes, however it is given to me *as a chord* (2015, 176). Likewise, with the joy of the football crowd. I may know the joy is constituted by many participants but it is given to me as the joy of the crowd not of any specific person. It is, then, the shared joy that is given to me, a 'they' to whom I am directed towards. As such, I think we can scale up the number of people involved and still sensibly talk about collective empathy.

What is different to the case of Vita and Virginia is the scale of this example. With Vita and Virginia, while I experience the field of expression as spanning both of them, there is a sense that I experience them as connected individuals, or individuals-in-togetherness. The crowd, on the other hand, might be so large that I

cannot pick out any discrete individuals, cannot see their interlocking expressive acts. How, then, do I experience the field of expression of the crowd? Why do I experience the crowd as a 'they' having a collective experience?

Crowds, in phenomenology, have traditionally received rather short shrift and are viewed primarily in the negative. Drawing on the psychological work of individuals such as Gustave Le Bon (1896) and Gabriel Tarde (1969), there has been a tendency to view crowds as dangerous and violent (for a summary of this, see: König 1992; Thonhauser & Wetzels 2019; Trcka 2017). Crowds are often considered to arise from emotional contagion and imitation which, as discussed in chapter 2, is thought not to involve an empathetic awareness of those around you, nor a shared experience with the other members of the crowd. Without directly challenging this analysis of 'the crowd' here (though I think that this approach is too broad-brush and rather crude), what I want to consider here is how a crowd might be experienced from without. How I, as an observer, experience the joyfulness of a football crowd.[29]

The first point to emphasise is that it does not matter to my experience of the crowd as an observer whether there is a *genuine* case of shared joy among the crowd. What matters is if I empathetically perceive the crowd to have a shared emotion, mood or vitality. Empathy, like other perceptual experiences, can be wrong. I can empathetically perceive your smile as a smile of happiness, when in fact you were smirking with disdain. That I am wrong, though, does not change the structure of my empathetic experience. I, as an observer, can experience the crowd as having a shared emotion, mood or vitality, even if the individuals involved are not themselves experiencing a shared experience with the other members of the crowd.[30] Indeed, our lives are littered with instances of misfiring empathy. This may be most pertinently captured when we think about actors, many of whom are very good at using expressivity to convey emotions and experiences that they may not be feeling. Empathy, then, is something that can go wrong. As such, I do not think it is problematic to assert that while I may experience the football crowd as experiencing

[29] For an interesting attempt to complicate how we understand the phenomenology of crowd dynamics and shared experiences, see Thornhauser & Wetzels (2019).
[30] Interestingly, it might even be the case that I as an observer have a better grasp of a shared vitality across a collective, than the individuals involved may be unaware of.

a collective joy, it could turn out that those involved where in fact not experiencing a collective experience.[31]

What is important, for our purposes, is to consider *how* I experience the crowd as having a common emotion, mood or vitality. In contrast to Vita and Virginia, I cannot see distinct individuals, nor their specific interactions with one another. Rather, I see the crowd as a unified whole. Yet, this crowd still has a certain expressivity to it, the tone of the cheers, the upbeat energy, the movement of the crowd all can be empathetically grasped by me. Again, the field of expression that I experience is not located in one individual lived body but in the lived body of the crowd as a whole. When the crowd breaks into uproarious cheers at the scoring of a goal, I experience the crowd's happiness about the goal. Rather than hearing one voice, I hear the unified voices that echo around the stadium, a vast cheer of happiness. Even though I cannot hear individual voices, I still hear the cheer as having a particular expressive tone. Had the player missed and the crowd let out a collective groan, I would be able to distinguish this as a different group emotion.

We might think, here, of how my own body's field of expressivity is made up of many limbs. My happiness might be expressed in both my smile, as well as my waving hands, and my excitable bobbing up and down on the balls of my feet. While we can break down these various components of an individual's lived body as a field of expression, and I can take one aspect as my focus, usually one empathetically grasps the other as an expressive whole, grasping the various bodily expressions of happiness in their totality. So, too, with the crowd.

What binds the crowd together as a field of expression? We can again appeal to the unifying vitality or style of the crowd. I, as an observer, experience the crowd's field of expression as united by the common joyful vitality that suffuses the crowd members. What seems to be required for this experience of a field of expression that unifies multiple lived bodies, is a certain coherence of expressivity that is distributed across those present.

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[31] That we our empathetic perceptions can be wrong is often not front-lighted and has the lack of emphasis given to this has, in my opinion, greatly constrained our discussion of empathetic experience. I shall return to this point in chapter 5, when we consider how I might even experience myself to be part of a collective experience, part of the group atmosphere, without requiring that I am right about their being a genuine case of shared experience.

This unifying effect that occurs in the crowd example does not occur in the case of Vita and Virginia. With our couple in love, I perceive their interlocking expressive acts and their interaffectivity. I do not, though, experience them as fused. In some groups, a certain amount of fusion of expressivity might be said to occur. Remember that when I hear the exuberant cheer of the crowd, I do not hear individual voices per se, but the cheer of the crowd. There is a certain sense in which those in the crowd are experienced as being part of one larger group body (Salice & Taipale 2015). While this unification or fusion is what has led many phenomenologists to question whether crowds really experience a shared experience (e.g. Scheler 2014; Zahavi 2014), this does not prevent me as an observer as empathetically grasping the crowd's glee.

What is interesting to note here is that the field of expression of the crowd and the field of expression of Vita and Virginia do differ in other important regards. Where I can perceive the expressive acts of Vita and Virginia with rich detail, the crowd's dynamic vitality is less fine-grained. This is because in its grandiosity there is a certain blurring that happens at the level of the crowd, a certain depletion in the richness of my empathetic experience. This has two consequences. The first is that the sensitivity of my empathetic experience of the crowd is reduced. While I can empathetically grasp what we might call basic or simple emotional hues, moods and vitality, it is harder for me to grasp more subtle ones. For instance, I might be able to experience a crowd as having an atmosphere that is joyous, hostile, aggressive, agitated, it is more difficult to experience a crowd as having an atmosphere of anguish, pity, or sullen resignation. We might think of the field of expression of the crowd as 'zoomed out'. I can empathetically grasp the affective shape or contour of the crowd but the more fine-grained detail of that experience is lost.

Alongside this, the zoomed-out field of expression that I experience, masks individual discrepancies among individuals within the crowd. If Virginia were suddenly to jump up and start angrily yelling at Vita, this would immediately change their atmosphere from a loving one to a tense one. However, in a crowd there may be numerous individuals who are bored, unhappy or apathetic, all of which is expressed in their individual live bodies. However, while the majority of the crowd members are still expressively harmonious, the mood of the crowd can remain intact. We might, then, think of crowds and larger groups having a more robust atmosphere, than individuals, dyads, or smaller groups.

3.3 Collective empathy and 'looser' groups

So far, we have considered how I can empathetically perceive a couple's love and the joy of a crowd. While there are a number of ways in which I experience the field of expression differently in these cases, there is one key similarity. Both the couple's love and the sheer vastness of the crowd give rise to what I call a 'closely-knit' field of expression that spans multiple lived bodies. On this basis, I have argued that it makes sense to speak of group-directed empathy. This, then, opens the door to understanding how I experience the atmosphere of a loving couple or the atmosphere of a joyful crowd as a form of empathy, as it cannot be ruled out on the basis that we might not be aware of a distinct individual. What, though, of groups whose interaction is not so closely knit together? Returning to our vignette, the people at Shay's party may be doing a variety of things, some dancing, some chatting, some listening. There might even be various sub-groups in the party, with some collecting in the kitchen, other on the dance floor, and still more perched on the sofa. Does it make sense to speak of empathetically grasping this kind of gathering as a collective?

Here we do not have the close interlocking interaction between all the party members that we see in the case of Vita and Virginia. Nor do we experience the group at the party as a homogenous mass or crowd. Rather, we have a collection of people who are not necessarily all engaging in close-knit interlocking acts. Nor is there something at the party that all the participants are jointly attending to or having a shared emotion about. Yet, I still experience the party as having a celebratory, happy atmosphere that encompasses all those present. Moreover, I experience the happy atmosphere as arising from the people there, as disclosing the happiness of the party-goers. If we took away all the people, or the mood of those present changed, then my experience of the group atmosphere would disappear or change. How can we make sense of this?

Above, I introduced both shared mood and shared vitality (style or life feeling) as collective experiences that have gone relatively uncommented upon. Here what is shared between the group does not turn on the individuals sharing a specific episodic emotion or a specific intentional focus. I suggest that what I experience as the happy atmosphere is my perception of this looser form of group experience. Note

that when I use the term 'looser' here, I do not intend this to refer to the intensity of the experience *per se*, rather I am getting at the fact that the group members are not necessarily sharing a specific focus, nor might they all be engaging in tight interlocking expressive acts with all those present.

As mentioned above, moods are typically understood as having no particular object of intention, rather they structure the way in which we experience the world. If I am in a happy mood, the world shows up for me full of salient possibilities shaped by my happiness. I might, for example, experience the park I walk past as inviting, as offering me the possibility of walking through. If I were in a depleted mood, however, the same park might be experienced by me as offering no such enticing pull. When we talk of a shared mood or a shared vitality that spans a group of people, what we are picking out is how a group might share a certain way of being in the world. Thus, for a group that shares a mood, the situation in which they are in is experienced as affording them the same types of affective experience, the same types of action. Our party-goers, in sharing a happy mood, experience Shay's house full of possibilities for socialising, for relaxing, for celebrating in.

The participating subjects might all have a certain upbeat energy to their actions and expressions that are shared across the group. Remember, though, that for a common vitality to emerge, those present do not need to have *identical* postures, *identical* rhythms, *identical* expressive gestures. Rather, their expressive movements have a certain tone to them. To riff on Salice & Taipale's chord analogy, we might think of the party as having a certain tonal range. People present might be expressing themselves in different ways, undertaking different actions, but all these expressions are in the same *key* as the others. At a party, for instance, the expressivity of those present are all happy and celebratory in tone. While some at the party might be dancing, others chatting, others listening, there is a certain liveliness that pervades all the lived bodies of the participating subjects.

Moreover, as mentioned in reference to Vita and Virginia, even though not all the party-goers are interacting directly with one another, there still might be a certain interaffectivity between the subjects present. The participating subjects might be bodily attuned to one another, their bodily styles co-regulated by the others present. This can help give rise to what we called 'betweenness' earlier. A sense that they are

all sharing a social space together, that they are part of a group, and part of an overarching mood or vitality. It is also worth noting that when a group mood or vitality arises, this can help sustain the ongoing group dynamics. For, as noted above, our gestures, experiences, actions do not take place in a vacuum but affect and are affected by those around us. Sharing a mood or vitality with others, then, can have a certain robustness as all the individual's present are caught in a cycle of reinforcing affective behaviour that affects the others present.

This helps unpack how a shared mood or vitality can take hold of a group. How, though might I, as an observer, experience this? And how might I experience this looser form of collective experience empathetically? Unlike the crowd, I might be more aware of individual expressions of those at the party, rather than experiencing the party as one unified mass. I can hear, for instance, Shay's excitable voice coming from the corner, can see the dancers and so on. Yet, I still experience the group in a holistic manner, as all sharing the same mood or vitality. Unless I specifically turn my attention to Shay, for example, I do not appear to be experiencing each of the individuals separately and piecing together the mood of the party. Rather, I experience the mood as distributed across the various lived bodies there. I experience the party as brought together, as connected by, the overarching mood and vitality that suffuses the individual expressions of happiness.

Yet, the party-goers are not all interacting with one another in the tight-knit way that Vita and Virginia are. What, then, ties the party-goers into an extended field of expression that I perceive? Though, the party-goers are not in tightly interwoven interactions with one another, the happy mood and cheerfully vitality is still distributed across the multiple lived bodies here. This, I think, is sufficient for me to experience the field of expression as spanning those present. The *how* in which the party-goers are behaving creates a certain coherence between them that I am sensitive to.

Note that this does not mean I *have* to perceive the party-goers as all part of a field of expression. I might have gone up to Shay and am engrossed in talking to her to the point where my awareness of the others drops away.[32] The point is that where

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[32] In chapter 5, I will also consider how in certain states of being, for instance in the throes of depression or anxiety, I might be having an intense self-centred experience that precludes my

there is a certain commonality of vitality amongst those present, it is *possible* for me to empathetically perceive the mood or vitality of the group, without needing to be aware of any single distinct individual. In this type of scenario, not only is there a heterogeneity of expressions that make up the field of expression that gives rise to the happy atmosphere, there is also some leeway for a small amount of discrepancy. In our vignette, there is a couple that is having an argument in hushed tones over in one corner. Certainly, their tense postures and stiff voices are not in line with the general cheerful vitality of the other party-members. If I pay attention to this arguing couple, it might be the case that I experience the couple as having their own tense sub-atmosphere, that is in conflict with the party around them. A cool pocket of air in the warmer surroundings. However, if I am not paying them much heed, it might be the case that their conflicting vitality is not enough to destabilize the overall happy mood that I perceive the group as having.

When I am having a Gestalt experience of the party as a whole, even though the couple's expressive gestures are out of sync with the other party-goers, this may not disrupt my overall experience of the happy atmosphere. Why, though, might they be experienced by me as part of the field of expression giving rise to the happy atmosphere if they are not happy? We can, perhaps, make an analogy to other forms of perception here to account for how I can accommodate a certain amount of discrepancy in the field of expression, without it changing the overall atmosphere I experience. Think of the following: on a page I draw 10 lines in various complementary tones of red close together and one white line. I *can* turn my attention to each of these individual lines and discern their individual shades. However, from a certain distance, I perceive the overall tone of these closely drawn lines as red. The white line has not disappeared, but it has been obscured somewhat by the dominant shade. If I were to thicken this white line enough, it might then come to be seen as disruptive of the red patch. If I were to change more of the red lines to white, the patch might come to be seen as pink. These lines are analogous to the various individuals at the party. Where there is a dominant shade, other shades might go unnoticed up until a certain threshold. In our party vignette, as the couple's

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affective apprehension of those around me, might leave me insensitive to the atmosphere of the party. This highlights the important role that the observer plays in constituting the experience of group atmosphere.

argument escalates and those around them become tense, stop talking, start staring, the overall tone of the party, the atmosphere, shifts.

Different atmospheres might have different thresholds for disruption. If, for instance, this couple were arguing in a quiet park, their expressivity has a different *weight* to it than in the midst of a rowdy party. Atmospheres can be more or less robust depending upon their affective quality. More subtle or quiet atmospheres, such as an atmosphere of stillness or peace, might be less robust that their louder counterparts, such as a rowdy or hostile atmosphere.

Interestingly, while we might experience the atmosphere as pervading the party as a whole, as relating to the overall happy vitality of the party-goers, we do not have to experience the atmosphere as equally distributed. There might be pockets of greater and lesser intensity. Take Alex who, performative soul that she is, is loudly telling a funny story to a group. She is gesticulating wildly and has a really upbeat vitality to her. The happy atmosphere coagulates around her in some way. Whereas towards the back of the living room, where there are fewer individuals, the atmosphere seems weaker. That we have these pockets of intensity and weakness in atmosphere should highlight how our experience of group atmosphere is importantly tied to the expressivity of those present.

Again, it is important here to remember that as an observer I might perceive there to be a shared mood or a shared vitality across the group, that the group themselves do not experience or perhaps only some of the group experience. For me to have a collective empathetic experience does not guarantee that the collective experience I perceive is veridical. This is crucial to highlight given the on-going scepticism about whether groups or crowds can be said to be having a shared experience proper. While I think there are many cases of groups and crowd experiences that do involve a collective experience of some kind, this is not necessary to establish that I as an empathizer can experience collective experiences. Indeed, this often might occur in cases where I experience a group atmosphere pervading a space which involves individuals who may be unaware of the other people around them. I, as an observer, might then experience individuals as part of a field of expression, bound together say by a common vitality contour, a common hue, that they would not identify being part of.

Conclusion

In this chapter, our first step has been to extend our understanding of what can be the intentional object of empathetic perception. I've shown how empathy is traditionally conceived in terms of perceiving discrete expressive gestures and actions of individual as amounting to direct access to another's emotions. I have argued that this paints empathy too narrowly, failing to capture the more holistic nature of empathy, as well as overlooking how we can empathetically perceive not just individuals but groups.

By taking as our starting point personal atmospheres, I have underscored how our experience of an individual's atmosphere is related to our empathetic perception of someone's holistic way of being in the world. By detailing various collective scenarios, I have gone on to put forward various forms of collective empathy at work. In doing this, I have responded to the concern that our experience of interpersonal atmospheres cannot involve empathy because when we experience groups as having a particular atmosphere, I may not be aware of distinct individuals.

While I have argued for a significant expansion and enrichment of our notion of empathy, allowing us to better capture our interpersonal encounters and social understanding, one might be concerned that while this advances our understanding of empathy, this does not really tell us anything about interpersonal atmospheres. Where I have bolstered our understanding of what empathy can be about, I now want to argue that we also need to bolster our understanding of how we how a bodily feeling can amount to empathy and why we experience atmosphere as having a spatially diffuse character.

Chapter 4

Feeling the other

Introduction

In chapter 3, I argued that the exclusion of atmospheric experience from discussions of empathy rests on an overly narrow conception of empathy. I have stretched the boundaries of empathy in two regards: first, by explicitly including in our empathetic perception the apprehension not just of singular emotional episodes, but also moods, vitality, and more holistic ways of being in the world, and second, by cashing out a robust notion of collective empathy, where we empathetically perceive the expressive experiences of various groups and their interrelatedness. This move allows us to sensibly talk of empathetic perception outside of the traditional framework of dyadic face-to-face interaction. While this provides a richer and more expansive concept of empathy and our empathetic capabilities, if we leave the story here it is not clear yet what this tells us about our atmospheric experience. For it seems possible that I could *judge* a crowd to be happy or to have a lively vitality without experiencing a happy or a lively atmosphere.

Remember that interpersonal atmospheres do not just give us social understanding, they have other characteristics that are essential to their make-up. In particular, atmospheres are something that we we feel through our bodies. As Schmitz puts it, they grip us. Just seeing that someone is happy does not equate to an experience of them having a happy atmosphere. As highlighted throughout atmosphere literature, there is no such thing as an unfelt atmosphere (Böhme 2017a,b; Fuchs 2014a; Griffero 2014, 2017; Slaby 2019). Moreover, while atmospheres are experienced through our feeling bodies, they are not experienced as within our bodies but out there in the world, in the air around and between us. They have a peculiar spatial diffuseness to them that an expanded theory of empathy alone cannot account for. Indeed, it is because of this spatial quality that we use the word 'atmosphere' in the first place. If we do not capture this felt, spatial dimension, we have left out the very 'atmospheric' nature of atmospheres.

In this chapter, I explore the *felt* aspect of interpersonal atmosphere: how we perceive them through our feeling bodies, while simultaneously experiencing them as emanating from people, radiating into the space around others' bodies. As such, we now turn our attention from *what* the atmospheric experience discloses to *how* it discloses the emotion, mood, or vitality of those present. I argue that the felt quality of atmospheric experience is not incidental to the empathetic experience of the expressive other(s). Rather, it is *how* the others are experienced.

In order to examine the affective dimension of atmosphere, we must unpack the various ways in which we describe the felt quality of atmosphere. As will become clear, this involves untangling our descriptions of: (i) the bodily feeling of the observer (e.g. the uplift in my chest when I walk into a party), (ii) the affective character of the atmosphere (e.g. the happiness of the atmosphere), (iii) the spatially diffuse nature of atmospheric experience (e.g. that the atmosphere seems to fill the room), and (iv) that atmosphere is felt as tethered to the situation or the group (e.g. that while it does not have a fixed, determinate location, I can feel myself walking into an atmosphere and, conversely, away from an atmosphere).

As part of this analysis, it is essential to spell out how a bodily feeling can be about the world (not just about the subject or the subject's body). I, therefore, start this chapter with a discussion of how our bodily feelings can be intentionally directed at the world, disclosing aspects of the world to us. While I draw on ideas found in the discussion of 'affective intentionality', I show how this debate has predominantly focused upon how emotions are feelings that disclose the world in terms of what matters to me or how things are going for me. By approaching affective intentionality through the lens of emotions, we are presented with an account of bodily feeling that discloses the world in terms of the individual's own concerns. Drawing from Ratcliffe's work on the touch and existential feelings, I suggest that we adopt a broader notion of affective intentionality, where our bodily feelings can disclose the world to us not only in terms of what matters for us, but in a way that reveals others and their experience to us.

While Ratcliffe lays out the foundations for understanding of bodily feelings as intentional, his interest is in how we find ourselves in a meaningful world in the first place. This scope is too broad to perfectly apply to atmosphere. We do not feel a

generalised worldly atmosphere but interpersonal atmospheres of specific people, groups or situations. I, therefore, move on to discuss how bodily feelings can themselves be empathetic perceptions (without mistaking this for imitation or simulation), in particular drawing from the work of Edith Stein (1989). I then go on to explore how a 'fully-embodied' empathetic perception can gain its spatially diffuse character which marks it out as an atmospheric experience. What this chapter seeks to show is how we can understand interpersonal atmospheres as a form of embodied, felt empathetic perception. This allows us to make sense of how atmosphere can be characterised as a form of embodied empathetic perception.

1. Feeling atmosphere

That atmospheres are felt is almost universally agreed upon among theorists. Anderson (2009), in calling atmospheres "affective atmospheres", has even been accused of coining a tautology (Bille et al. 2015). The idea that there is such a thing as an unfelt atmosphere is typically dismissed as making little sense. Unfortunately, here the consensus stops. *How* atmosphere is felt is described in a wide number of ways, including: a "felt co-presence between subject and object" (Böhme 2017a, 10), as "feelings poured out spatially" (Schmitz 2019, 97), as "tuned spaces" (Biswanger 1933, 174), as "spatialized feeling" (Lipps 1935, 187), as "force fields" (Stewart 2011, 445), as "tangible, forceful, qualitative "presences" in experiential space" (Slaby 2019, 275), as given in the "felt body" (Griffero 2014, 10), as "emanating" from people, places, and things (Tellenbach 1981, 221).

Such phrases have some intuitive sense to them: experiencing atmosphere does involve a feeling in the body, it is hard to imagine an unfelt atmosphere. As I will discuss in more detail below, this feeling can be very explicit – such as when we enter a new situation and feel the atmosphere grip us - but this feeling can also be pre-reflective. Atmospheres also are experienced as spatial, as outside of our bodies - they feel as though they are in the air around us. As Trigg nicely puts it: "we might say an atmosphere is not only in the air but also under our skin" (Trigg 2020, 3). Atmospheres, then, seem to have a dual character to them. Moreover, they have a certain character or affective tone to them (i.e. think of the difference between a

happy atmosphere and a tense one) and they can grip us or influence us in certain ways, pull us in or repel us. Nevertheless, such phrases tend not to be further elaborated upon and need further exploration. Unless we buy into the Schmitzian view that all emotions are atmospheres, we need to explore why atmospheres are experienced as being both in the body and in the world, in the way that bodily sensations and emotions seem not to.

To get a clear picture of the felt quality of atmospheres, let us return to the vignette that we started with and consider the various affective aspects that are at play. In our scenario, I am heading from a long day at work to my friend Shay's birthday party. I walk along Shay's street and I can already hear voices chattering, music, and see light spilling onto the pavement. I feel a sense of warmth emanating from the house that pulls me towards it. I hear the chattering voices as upbeat and happy. This chatter has a warmth to it that touches me. This is not to say that I feel physically warmed, as in heated up, by the happy chatter. Rather, I experience the chatter as having a warm quality to it, expressive of the tone of the participating subjects. I begin to feel the happy mood of the party, experiencing it as escaping from the house into the quiet street. I feel that the happy atmosphere is tethered somehow to Shay's house. I have a sense that as I get closer to the house, I get closer to the happy atmosphere.

Before entering the house, I peer through the windows. I can still hear the buzz of voices and now see people dancing, smiling and talking. While I can feel the atmosphere to a certain degree, I also feel that there is a distance between me and the atmosphere, that I am on the edge of it. The atmosphere seems to be located within the house and I sense that I will have a fuller experience if I go inside. As I enter the door, my experience of the atmosphere intensifies, I feel the sense of happiness and joy wash over me. It is as though the air in the room is suffused with happy feeling, as though the air is shot through with a certain emotional tone. I feel the warmth across my skin, I feel a sense of expansiveness across my chest, an uplifting of my body.

While nothing is in the strict sense touching me, I feel the presence of the atmosphere around me. I experience the atmosphere as filling the room. There is no fixed, determinate point to locate it. However, I can feel the atmosphere concentrated in particular spots. For instance, the atmosphere seems to have a particular denseness around my friend Alex who is loudly telling a funny story. It feels sparser over by the

sofa, where there are just a couple of people hanging out. As I move further into the throng of people, I feel as though I am more fully immersed in the atmosphere.

Clearly there is a lot to unpack here. In the example, we find descriptions of:

i)   sensations in the body (e.g. a feeling of uplift in one's chest, a feeling of warmth);

ii)   the atmosphere feeling as though it is out there in the world (e.g. as in the air, as a force);

iii)   where the atmosphere seems to arise from (e.g. emanating from a group of people); and

iv)   the particular affective tone or character of the atmosphere (e.g. as happy).

What this picture might suggest is that there is some*thing* called an atmosphere that a subject comes into contact with which causes certain bodily feelings. However, I want to move away from this bifurcated picture of the atmosphere and the subject's bodily feelings. I suggest that we instead understand my bodily feelings as disclosing the field of expression of those present in an atmospheric way. What we experience *as* atmosphere, then, is something relational; the way we bodily apprehend others' expressive lived bodies. It is this unified experience that is the experience of atmosphere. In order to understand this, we must first consider how bodily feelings can be about the world.

2. Affective intentionality

2.1. Bodily feelings

Bodily feelings have commonly been thought of as something that simply happens within the confines of the body, as raw or brute sensations. When I hit my foot against something, I feel a sharp, hot pain *in* my big toe. When I feel sad, I feel a heaviness *in* my chest, an ache *in* my heart. This approach is inherited, in part, from the Jamesian concept of bodily feelings as being non-intentional, bodily sensations (James 1884, 1890a, b). It is also inherited from the cognitivist approach to emotions which sought to capture how emotions were not bodily feelings but rather intentional cognitive states about the world (e.g. Nussbaum 2001; Solomon 1973, 1976). This might be seen as somewhat ironic, given that Jamesian and cognitivist accounts of emotion are typically

thought of as being in direct opposition to one another.33 However, the cognitivist account, in focusing on how emotions have intentionality, downplay *bodily feelings* as a kind of brute accompaniment to the emotion proper. Both accounts, therefore, relegate bodily feeling to something that simply happens in the body and are not *about* anything.

That feelings might themselves be intentional found traction particularly in analytic philosophy of pain. Crane (2014, 98), for instance, discusses how "in bodily sensation, something is given to the mind, namely the body, or a body part...in the sensation something is sensed: the body". While this is a step away from feelings being brute or raw sensations that happen in the body, to an acceptance that feelings have a form of bodily intentionality, this intentionality is somewhat limited. According to such views, feelings only present us with our own bodies. Thus, we are left with a picture where feelings only tell us about our own bodily state in the world; pain is about, for instance, a damaged part of my body; the bodily feeling of sadness discloses how I feel when I am sad about something.

This picture has been famously challenged by Goldie's influential conception of emotions as "feelings towards" (Goldie 2000, 2002, 2009). In his seminal account, Goldie attempts to bridge the gap between Jamesian accounts of emotions as bodily feelings and cognitivist accounts of emotions, claiming that emotions are indeed feelings but that these feelings can themselves be world-directed. According to Goldie, emotions are made up of (i) bodily feelings and (ii) feelings towards. Bodily feelings are conceived in a similar manner to Crane's account; they are feelings that are intentionally directed at one's bodily condition. Feelings towards, however, are "directed towards the object of the emotion – a thing or a person, a state of affairs, an action or an event" (Goldie 2002, 236). Feelings towards are felt but rather than being directed at the body are outward facing, world disclosing. Goldie describes how bodily feelings and feelings towards are (usually) inextricably linked. When I lose someone, my bodily feeling of grieving is united with the grief about the loss of that individual. Thus, "our whole being aches in grief *for* the one we have lost" (Goldie 2000, 55). Through this account, Goldie attempts to provide an account that does justice to the phenomenological unity of emotion as involving both the body and as being about the

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33 For an in-depth summary of this debate in the philosophy of emotions, see Szanto & Landweer (2020).

world. Goldie's account is, therefore, often seen as a hybrid of the 'best bits' of Jamesian and cognitivist accounts of emotion: capturing both their feeling aspect and their intentionality.

However, Goldie's account does not allow that bodily feelings have intentionality in the full sense of the term. Remember, for Goldie bodily feelings can only be properly speaking intentionally directed at the body. He claims that bodily feelings only have a derived or borrowed intentionality which allows them to be about the world.[34] Bodily feelings gain intentionality by "piggybacking" (Taylor 2010, 53) on properly speaking intentional mental states. This is perhaps best captured when Goldie describes emotions as "thinking of *with* feeling" (Goldie 2000, 55).

While Goldie's account has been lauded by phenomenologists as a move in the right direction, it is often criticised for still failing to capture how bodily feelings themselves can have full, world-directed intentionality (e.g. Helm 2020; Slaby 2008; Slaby & Stephan 2008; Taylor 2010). Proponents of 'affective intentionality' go beyond Goldie's picture and argue that feelings can themselves be about the world (without needing to borrow their world-directedness from elsewhere). Such discussions often draw upon the phenomenology of touch as a way of capturing how a bodily feeling itself can be intentionally directed to the world, without needing to fall back on the 'add-on' style of argument that Goldie adopts. In the following section, I briefly summarise the insights taken from the phenomenology of touch that inform two accounts of affective intentionality: (i) the affective intentionality of emotions found in Slaby's (2008) and Helm's (2002, 2020) work that relates to emotions, and (ii) the intentionality of existential feelings found in Ratcliffe's work (2005, 2008).

2.2. Phenomenology of touch

While phenomenological work on perception has, like its analytic counterpart, largely focused upon visual perception, there has been increasing interest in the phenomenology of touch. This revitalized interest often draws upon insights from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty; both of whom remark on the interesting way in which touch discloses the world to us. Let us explore the structure of tactile experience

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[34] How bodily feelings borrow the intentionality from other states is not altogether clear on Goldie's account. For a discussion of this, see: Döring (2007), Reisenzein & Döring (2009) and Taylor (2010). Note that even Goldie admits that this relationship is somewhat vague (Goldie 2000, 56-58).

through an example. When I reach out and touch the table in front of me, I feel the cold surface of the wood. However, I feel that coldness through the palm of my hand. The experience of touching the table is unified - I do not experience just my hand, nor just the table (though I can direct my attention to one of these more or less). The table is something I experience through my feeling hand and the feeling is not simply of my hand but of the table. This analysis draws on the phenomenological insight that our bodies are not just objects in the world but are the medium through which I have a world; my body is not just an object that I can feel but is that through which I feel.

What this observation highlights is that feelings in our bodies can reveal the world to us. When I touch the table, I am not intentionally directed to my hand, nor am I feeling something in hand that piggybacks on a thought about the table. Rather, the bodily sensation of my hand discloses the table to me. What this reveals is that when we describe touching the table, for instance, my bodily feeling of the table and the table as felt are inextricable. Tactile experience is essentially relational: "Touch is a matter of relatedness between body and world, rather than of experiencing one in isolation from the other…In touch, perception of the body and perception of things outside of it are tied together" (Ratcliffe 2008, 77). While I can turn my attention more towards how my hand is feeling or turn my attention more towards how the table is feeling. These descriptions form "two side of the same coin" (ibid., 111).

Indeed, this is actually the case for all perceptual experience; I cannot describe how the table looks without referring to my own perceptual experience of it. Perceptual experience always both refers to the perceiver and that which is perceived. As Merleau-Ponty (2012) famously points out, in visual experience it is easy to forget that our bodily selves are implicated in our visual experience, as our visual experiences appear to present the world to us in an objective, distanced manner. Whereas, when we consider tactile experience, we cannot deny our bodily engagement with the world is part of the experience. Indeed, work on affordances (e.g. Colombetti & Krueger 2018; Gibson 1986) and enactive accounts of perception (e.g. Noë 2004) highlight how our bodily capacities shape our visual perceptions, e.g. I see my mug as graspable because of the shape of my hands. However, that our perceptual experiences are relational to our bodies is often lost due to our philosophical tendency to focus on visual experience.

Interestingly, we are able to touch more than what our skin directly comes in contact with. Ratcliffe (2008), for example, explores how we can feel things at a distance. Here Ratcliffe introduces the idea that we can have bodily feelings about the world even when we are not touching them with a part of our physical body. In his example of the blind man touching the cobbles with the end of his cane, he (like Merleau-Ponty before him) notes that the feeling of the cobbles' uneven texture is at the tip of the cane. Thus, a feeling does not have to be located in the place that it is felt. This insight has often gone overlooked due to bodily feeling discussions centring around pain. When I have a headache, I feel the headache in my head. The pain does seem to be experienced at the location of where it is felt. We might even suppose that when I touch the table, I feel the table at the point of contact with my palm (though I suspect things are not as simple as this, I do not go around experiencing objects as being shaped like the palm of my hand but as extending beyond my fingertips). Such examples disguise the fact that what is felt, like other perceptual experiences, does not have to be found in the body as a perceptual organ. This should not strike us as particularly surprising, for as Ratcliffe notes: "What is seen is not located in the same place as the organs of sight and what is heard is not experienced as residing in the ears" (2008, 90). As I will highlight in section 4, this insight will help us unpack the peculiar spatial character that the feeling of atmosphere has.

2.3. Affective intentionality

How, though, do these reflections on touch help us with our understanding of affective intentionality, of bodily feelings being about something in the world? The takeaway point for our purposes is that our bodily feelings can be both about the world and experienced through our own bodies. They are, to use de Sousa's term, "Janus-faced" (de Sousa 2002). This insight, taken from musings on the structure of tactile experience, has been notably used in discussions of the affective intentionality of emotions and in the context of existential feelings. While I do not think either of these accounts quite captures the structure of our atmospheric feelings, I will draw upon both the discussions.

First, affective intentionality of emotions. As mentioned above, while phenomenologists have lauded Goldie's notion of 'feelings towards' as moving in the right direction, many have argued that the bifurcation of feeling and thought that

underpins Goldie's account is misguided. They suggest that the feeling of an emotion does not gain intentionality from thought but is itself intentional. The idea being that the feeling of, say, one's stomach clenching in fear and the judgement that the large-toothed dog is dangerous are *unified*. Helm, for instance, describes emotions as "*felt evaluations*: feelings of pleasure or pain that are essentially evaluations of their object" (2020, 228). The point being that although the clenching of one's stomach is a bodily feeling, that bodily feeling is not about the body but is about something in the world. Although we are not in touch with a physical object, as in tactile perception, emotions are, they argue, structured in a similar way in that they are about the world.

We might, then, make a similar point in relation to our experience of atmosphere. While we experience atmosphere through our bodies, through the feeling of uplift in our chest, this does not mean that we must experience that sense of uplift as being about our body. Rather, this bodily feeling is about something in the world (the expressive lived bodies of others, as I have suggested). However, we must tread carefully here. Embedded in the idea that emotions have affective intentionality is the idea that what emotions reveal through bodily feeling is what is of import for me (Helm 2020, 228), "how things are going for us" (Slaby & Stephan 2008, 509), or, as Szanto colourfully puts it, what I give a damn about (forthcoming, 1). The feeling in my stomach reveals to me my fear of the dog, it is a felt evaluation that I am in danger, that I do not want to be bitten. When I experience a happy interpersonal atmosphere, though, I am not experiencing how things are for me. Rather, my experience of the interpersonal atmosphere tells me about how things are for others. I can experience the jubilant atmosphere of a right-wing political protest while being personally afraid of this. Thus, the way that affective intentionality is described in the context of emotions seems to be too individualistic a stance for us to wholesale adopt and apply to atmospheres.

Let us, then, turn to a slightly different discussion of affective intentionality, that also finds its roots in the phenomenology of touch. The quotes taken above from Ratcliffe's work on touch is found in his book *Feelings of Being* (2008), where he formulates and advances the notion of existential feeling. Existential feelings are background orientations which set up the world, for instance as homely, familiar, uncanny; they are ways of finding oneself in the world, that structure the world as a

world of possibilities. Ratcliffe's interest is in how we find ourselves in the world in an affective manner, prior to having experiences 'within the world'. We never are situated in a neutral world but also affectively orientated in the world through existential feelings, which themselves structure the kinds of possibilities we experience. We can, for example, only experience the possibility of interacting with objects when we find ourselves in a world structured by a sense of reality (if this sense of reality breaks down, as perhaps in schizophrenia, objects no longer present themselves as something that we can, for instance, pick up). These existential orientations, it is argued, are bodily feelings (Ratcliffe 2008, 105).

Ratcliffe, therefore, uses his account of touch to warrant talking about how feelings more generally can be world-directed and disclosing. It is through our feeling body that the world opens up to us as a space of possibility, and the character of our existential feelings shape what possibilities we experience the world as having. Clearly, I want to make a similar move here: if we understand bodily feelings as being about the world, we can make sense of atmospheres having both a subjective and an objective character because the experience of atmosphere is relational. The uplift in my chest is not *about* my chest but discloses something in the world to me, i.e. the expressive experience of others. However, what I am not doing is suggesting that atmospheres are existential feelings. I want to draw a distinction between the affective intentionality of existential feelings and atmospheric feelings. Where existential feelings set up the world for us in a certain way, atmospheric feelings do not have the world as their intentional object. The intentional scope of atmosphere is narrower than this. Atmospheres are neither as foundational as existential feelings are meant to be, nor does experiencing a happy atmosphere preclude one from the possibility of feeling grumpy (see chapter 1 on this point).[35]

What this discussion opens up is the way in which we can understand how our bodily feelings can be *about* something in the world. However, where the affective intentionality of emotions is too individualistic for our purposes (only telling us about how we fare in the world, what is significant to us), the affective intentionality of existential feelings is too holistic (applying to the world itself, rather than to specific interpersonal situations). The 'what' of atmosphere is different to both emotions and

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[35] This, though, does not mean that existential feelings and our experience of interpersonal atmospheres do not overlap or interact. In chapter 5, I will explore this idea further.

existential feelings. Important for our analysis, too, is that at the moment while this framework helps make sense of how a subjective feeling can be about the world, we cannot, as yet, account for the spatial character of atmosphere. My feeling of uplift does not simply reveal the mood or vitality of those present but I experience the atmosphere as out there in the world. I now want to put the notion of affective intentionality to work in the arena of empathy, to show how our bodily feelings can be an empathetic perception of others.

3. Fully-embodied empathy

When we experience an interpersonal atmosphere, we experience something through the felt body that seems to relate to and disclose the expressive, lived bodies of those present. Using the notion of affective intentionality, we can understand how a bodily feeling can be about the world around us. Bodily feelings can, thus, be understood as relational in structure; being a subjective feeling that discloses aspects of the objective world. How, though, does this tie in to my argument that our atmospheric experience is a form of empathetic perception; that when we experience atmosphere, we are given the emotion, mood, or vitality of those to whom the atmosphere attaches?

Typically, empathetic perception has been cashed out in somewhat of a cold, cognitive manner. We perceive someone's happiness when we see their smile, for example. How can this be squared with the felt character of atmosphere? One option would be to adopt a framework that mirrors Goldie's account of feeling towards. That we have some kind of felt experience that makes up the 'atmospheric quality' of the experience that piggybacks on our empathetic perception of others (either individuals or collectives). However, drawing on the insights of affective intentionality, I suggest that we are able to capture how the feeling of atmosphere itself is a bodily form of empathetic perception; that we do not need to separate a cold perception of living bodies from a feeling of atmosphere. Rather, the bodily experience of the happy atmosphere itself is what gives us empathetic understanding of those present. This approach involves conceiving of our experience of interpersonal atmosphere not just as involving empathy but as a form of affective, embodied empathy itself. Note, again, that we must not mistake the atmosphere itself as the object of experience

here, rather it is the mode of the experience, *how* we experience the presence of others and the affective experience. It is *through* our bodily experience of interpersonal atmosphere that we experience others empathetically.

Historically, empathetic perception has often become peculiarly divorced from bodily feeling, leaving us with a picture of empathy that is somewhat cold (if not, cognitive). In large part, I think we can attribute this to a fear that if empathy is cashed out as a bodily feeling, it will collapse into simulation theory – the theory that we bodily simulate the feeling of others and project it onto others in order to grasp their emotional experience – or into emotional contagion (e.g. Overgaard 2019; Zahavi 2014, 2018; Zahavi & de Vignemont 2009). However, I think this fear is unwarranted as it overlooks the way someone's anger might be given to me through my bodily feeling, without requiring me to simulate or catch the others emotion. I, therefore, advance an understanding of embodied empathy that captures the self-other distinction that empathy theorists strive to preserve.

In particular, I discuss how Stein's notion of sensual empathy captures how our empathetic perception itself can involve bodily feeling. Stein highlights how we do not coldly look upon the other but can empathetically perceive the other's experience 'at' their body in a sensual manner.[36] However, I suggest that while Stein's account acts as an important in-road to understanding personal and interpersonal atmospheric experience as a form of embodied empathy, as it stands it does not adequately capture the *spatial* quality of our atmospheric experience; our experience of the other's embodied expressivity *as* atmosphere; our experience of interpersonal atmospheres as pouring out of, radiating from, and surrounding the bodies that give rise to our atmospheric experience.

As such, in section 4, I move from Stein's account to an explicit consideration of how our bodily empathetic feelings can have an 'atmospheric quality' to them. I argue that the spatial quality of atmospheric experience arises from the fact that living, expressive bodies are peculiarly diffuse intentional objects; unlike most material objects, they are not fixed but dynamically temporally and spatially extend, unfurling through time and space, intertwining with the broader environment. Thus, our 'feeling

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[36] While Merleau-Ponty does not reference Stein's work, we can see much of his notion of intercorporeality pre-empted in her notion of sensual empathy.

at' another's body is not neatly contained in the physical body of the other but spills out into the lived space around them (and us). By deeming the object of embodied, empathetic perception 'diffuse', I argue that we are able to capture the spatial character of atmospheric experience.

3.1 Empathy - the missing body

The role of the body, particularly the body as a feeling body, in empathy has gone underexplored in much contemporary empathy literature. This should strike us as rather unusual given that the phenomenology of sociality explores our "affective and embodied experiences" of one another (Szanto & Moran 2015, 5). Claiming that empathy literature does not attend properly to the role of the body might seem surprising. Empathy is rooted in the idea that we can perceive another's experience because we have access to their expressive body (Schutz 1967; Scheler 2008; Stein 2000). Think of the classic examples of empathetic experience that are given such as seeing the anger in the brows (Stein 2000, 15) or clenched fists of another (Scheler 2008, 6), their shame in their blushing cheeks (*ibid.*). Empathy, then, rests upon an understanding of subjects as embodied. Indeed, it is of such central importance that many empathy theorists suggest that empathy can *only* take place if the individuals are physically face-to-face with one another (e.g. Schutz 1967; Fuchs 2014 (see Osler 2020a, *forthcoming a* for a challenge to this assumption)) and, thus, that the body is an essential component of empathy. This picture seems to place the role of the body front and centre. What is the basis, then, for my claim that the body has gone underexplored in empathy discussions? What I want to draw attention to is that while the body of the individual who is being empathized with (i.e. the person who I, say, am experiencing empathetically) takes centre stage, the role of the empathizer's body is noticeably absent.

A key tenet of phenomenological discourse is that we are embodied subjects. Indeed, one of the motivating arguments for empathy is to dispel the idea that we are minds hidden inside a body. It seems reasonable, then, to expect a phenomenological treatise on empathy to capture not only the empathized individual as an embodied subject but also the empathizer as an embodied subject. Otherwise, although we move away from the idea of two hidden minds meeting, we are left with

a picture of one mind looking upon an embodied subject. Embodiment, then, has only been captured on one side of the picture here.

One might argue that although the empathizer's body is not explicitly mentioned, it is implicitly there. It is only by being an embodied subject that the empathizer is in the world in the first place; only by being embodied that they can encounter the other. How could I, for instance, see your anger if I did not have eyes? Empathy is based upon perception, and we need a body to perceive. While this is no doubt true, I think do not think that this exhausts our understanding of ourselves as embodied, *feeling* empathizers. While having a body is what makes experience possible in the first place, the body is not some cold, mechanical container. The body is a field of sensations, feeling, attraction and repulsion, a "sounding board" (as Fuchs 2013b calls it) of experience. My point being that our conception of empathy should also reflect that we are not just a coldly perceiving body but a feeling one.

As noted above, the philosophy of perception is dominated by discussions of visual experience (Idhe 1976; Heidegger 2010; Merleau-Ponty 2012; Ratcliffe 2008). The same is true for descriptions of empathy. The most common examples given for empathy are of *seeing* other's experiences in their lived, expressive bodies. References to smiles and blushes and tears and clenched fists proliferate. The emphasis on vision downplays the body in two ways. First, vision is itself often conceived of as something that does not involve bodily feeling or affectivity (cf. Döring 2008; Merleau-Ponty 2012). Second, due to the dominance of visual images in examples of empathy, other forms of empathetic experience go overlooked. For instance, it is not uncommon for us to talk of feeling someone's anger. What is crucial, is that this does not seem to be a statement that I, as empathizer, am made to feel angry in response to the other's anger (e.g. emotional contagion) or that I see their anger, simulate it and project it on to them (e.g. simulation theory) but that their anger seems to radiate out from them and is felt by me (note, that this already sounds similar to how we describe personal atmosphere). These descriptions seem to imply that the empathizer's feeling own body plays a role in the experience of the other and their experience.

As Colombetti (2014) highlights, we often talk about 'feeling' the other. Yet, such common descriptions are almost entirely absent from many dominant theories of

empathy. Even those accounts that do want to recognise the feeling, affective body of the empathizer in empathy, such as Colombetti (2014), more often than not, talk of 'seeing' another's experience rather than 'feeling' or 'sensing' it. As we will see, a notable exception to this is found in Stein's underdiscussed account of sensual empathy (Stein 1989), as well as Merleau-Ponty's notion of intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 2012).

3.2. Stein's account of sensual empathy

Stein, a student of Husserl, presents what initially looks like a traditional phenomenological theory of empathy (indeed, she is often glossed over as contributing little more than Husserl and Scheler in phenomenological literature on empathy). She, like others, defines empathy as the perception of foreign subjects and their experience and emphasises that the structure of empathy should be understood as a primordial experience about a non-primordial experience (Stein 1989, 1-11). Therefore, there remains in empathy a distinction between my experience and yours. As Stein puts it: "There is a two-sidedness to the essence of the empathetic act: an experience of our own announcing another one" (2008, 19).

So far, this is akin to many other phenomenological accounts of empathy. What, however, Stein brings to the table is the role that the feeling body of the empathizer has to play in empathy. Indeed, Stein herself notes that the motivation behind her account of empathy is to "examine more closely one of the points on which the Master [Husserl] and I differ (the necessity of a body for empathy)" (Stein 1989, 269). According to Stein, empathy does not simply involve being presented with a cold perceptual understanding of another's experience but is a feeling about another's feeling (Svenaeus 2016, 2018).

According to Stein, our experiential access to the other's experiences can be cashed out in terms of a 'sensing-in' or a 'feeling-in'. Her classic description of this is of an empathetic experience of someone's hand resting on a table:

> The hand resting on the table does not lie there like the book beside it. It "presses" against the table more or less strongly; it lies there limpid or stretched; and I "see" these sensations of pressure and tension in a con-primordial way. If I follow the tendencies to fulfilment in this "co-comprehension" my hand is moved (not in reality, but "as if") to the place

of the foreign one. It is moved into it and occupies its position and attitude, now feeling its sensations, though not primordially and not as being on its own. Rather my own hand feels the foreign hand's sensation "with", precisely through the empathy whose nature we earlier differentiated from our own experience…the foreign hand is continually perceived as belonging to the foreign physical body so that the empathised sensations are continually brought into relief as foreign in contrast to our own sensations. (Stein 1989, 58)

This idea of 'sensing-in' also applies to emotional experiences, as well as sensations. For instance, Stein talks of how we might empathetically "live" in the other's joy (1989, 11) without mistaking that joy for our own. According to Stein, empathy is itself a sensual bodily experience. Those familiar with Merleau-Ponty will recognise here a precursor of his notion of intercorporeality. Merleau-Ponty discusses how:

The communication or comprehension of gestures comes about through the reciprocity of my intentions and the gestures of others, of my gestures and the intentions discernible in the conduct of other people. It is as if the other person's intentions inhabited my body and mine his (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 215).

While Merleau-Ponty is describing not just someone empathetically observing another but interacting with them, his description captures how our other-directed experience is something that is bodily felt, not coldly observed.[37]

What is key is that, while this involves the bodily feeling of the empathizer, it is not that the empathizer must be feeling the same as the other. Rather, it is through my feeling that the other's joy is given to me as theirs (i.e. non-primordially). Thus, the two-sidedness of empathy remains in place, even when we place empathy in the realm of bodily feeling. Stein's account, then, does not collapse empathy into shared experience or emotional contagion (cf. de Vignemont & Singer 2006).

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[37] Note that it is due to both Merleau-Ponty's and Fuchs' tendency to talk of intercorporeality (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 215; Fuchs 2016, 197) as something that occurs in a reciprocal dyadic interaction that I favour Stein's sensual account of empathy as a way to approach our experience of interpersonal atmosphere.

We might ask how we can experience your happiness through, say, the uplift in my chest without experiencing it as mine. Take the following example, I might experience your happiness while being in a grumpy mood. Whereas my grumpiness is experienced as mine, as an *I* experience, my feeling of your feeling does not have this same sense of ownership. What Stein is getting at is that the feelings of my grumpiness vs. my feeling of your happiness are structured differently. While it is my *bodily apprehension* of your happiness, I do not have an experience of happiness as belonging to me. We might think of an analogy with feeling the warmth of a fire as I approach it, I feel the warmth prickle over my skin but I experience the warmth as coming from the fire even though it is through my body that I experience it. Again, what we are drawing upon is that when my bodily feeling is world-directed, is *about* the world, I can experience what the feeling is about as being in a different location to where it is felt. Thus, although I experience your happiness through an uplift in my chest, I experience this as a feeling of your feeling.

Admitting this, how can I simultaneously feel your happiness through the uplift of my chest, while feeling my own grumpiness? Doesn't my apprehension of you take over my own feeling of grumpiness? I think not. What often gets left out of philosophical, even phenomenological, literature is the complexity of our feeling states (as well as our perceptual ones more generally). While philosophical examples tend to give the impression that we feel emotions one at a time, our experiences are far messier than this. We are quite capable, in our day to day lives, of experiencing more than one feeling state at once, even ones that seem to clash. For instance, I can be hungry and excited simultaneously, I can be in a depressed mood and still experience a flash of happiness, I can simultaneously be relieved and disappointed that I got a job.[38] We are able to experience a polyphony of feelings (and experiences more generally) at the same time. That my apprehension of your happiness, even where my apprehension is bodily felt, can occur while at the same time I myself am feeling glum, is not out of the ordinary course of things as a complex experiential being.[39]

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[38] While this is rarely discussed, Ricoeur notes something similar in his description of "Joy in and through anguish" (Ricoeur 2010, 106); also see Zaborowski (2020) for a discussion of 'mixed emotions'.

[39] Though in chapter 5, I will introduce the idea that some of my bodily experiences (e.g. intense moods, pains, emotions), may inhibit or even prohibit my being able to be bodily affected by others.

As I will discuss in chapter 5, it is possible for us to follow the empathetic feeling we experience, joining with the other, say, in their sadness. This experience of being pulled in by the other's sadness is what Svenaeus describes as the "dynamic *drift* of the empathy process" (Svenaeus 2017, 4). However, what is key is that this does not have to happen. It is worth noting that there is some dispute about whether Stein thinks that empathy must always be sensually experienced (Szanto & Moran 2020). Rather than attempting to solve this exegetical debate, I instead note that I do not think that all empathetic processes must be fully-embodied in this way. In the following chapter, I will discuss cases of individuals who are not sensitive to atmospheres, do not feel pulled in by the overarching mood or vitality of others. I will suggest that while this generally results in a constriction of their social understanding, this does not necessary render them unable to empathetically perceive others at all.

Having explicated Stein's sensual account of empathy, let us look at how this can be used to elucidate how an atmosphere can be a bodily feeling that discloses the experiences of others. To start with, there already seem to be some notable similarities in the way in which Stein talks about sensual empathy and the way in which we talk about atmospheres. What Stein is presenting is an account of how I might have a *bodily feeling of a feeling* that I experience as *not belonging to me.* As emphasised, this is an essential feature of atmospheric experience; what motivates the very discussion of atmosphere is that they are something that we *feel* but are experienced as a feeling that is not our own, as not coming from us. What is more, if we have a feeling about another's feeling, what the other's feeling *is* will give the character of the experience. For instance, I feel Audre's sadness or Maggie's joy in a different bodily way (similarly to how I experience a hot fire differently from how I experience the cold coming off an ice statue). It is then, the object of my bodily empathy that gives the experience its particular character.

What is more, Stein actually talks about how when we sensually empathise with individuals, I can experience emotions "pouring out of [their] lived body" (Stein 2008: 65, 117). This is strikingly similar to the way personal atmosphere is described. In these depictions of empathy as an affective experience, it seems that Stein is describing how we experience individuals as having personal atmospheres. However, we are still left with questions of why affective empathy involves

experiencing emotions as pouring out of someone, as having a spatial quality. It is not clear on Stein's account why she sometimes talks of feeling-at another and experiencing the other's experience as pouring out of them. It is to the specifically spatial nature of atmospheric experience that I now turn to.

4. The spatial character of atmosphere

Drawing from the insights found in discussions of affective intentionality and Stein's notion of sensual empathy, I have argued that our empathetic perceptions of others can, and often are, experienced through our feeling bodies as a bodily apprehension of the other's expressive experience. Here, the intentional object of our bodily feeling is the experience of the other as given to me in their expressive lived body. This allows us to capture how our own bodily feeling can disclose to us the feelings, intentions, style, vitality, or mood of others. What is interesting about atmospheric feelings is that what they relationally disclose are not fixed physical objects in the world but the living expressive bodies of others, other-experiences that are continually unfolding. I suggest that by analysing in more detail the intentional object of bodily empathy, i.e. the temporally and spatially extended dynamic expressivity of others, we are able to capture the spatial dimension of our atmospheric experience.

4.1. Feeling-at the other

As Ratcliffe (2008, 90) highlights, in perceptual experience we do not experience our perceptual experiences *in* our sensory organs of perception. When I hear a car alarm, I do not hear the sound as in my eardrums but coming from the car (Nudds 2001); when I see my cafetière, I do not see it on my retina but on the table. While our world is given to us through our senses, through our bodies, we do not experience the world as located in our bodies but rather as out there, as around us. Bodily feeling, in disclosing the emotion, vitality or mood of the other(s), is about the other(s). It should, therefore, be no surprise that if atmospheric experience is the bodily perception of another's expressivity, that I do not experience it as located in my expanding chest but as out there in the world.

Indeed, this seems to be what Stein is getting at when she describes how we empathically feel the other's experience 'at' the other in terms of 'feeling-at' or 'sensing-in'. Yet, while we do not experience atmospheres as being contained in our bodies, neither do we experience atmosphere as being neatly 'at' the physical body

of the other or others. We do not talk of atmospheres as being *in* others but radiating or emanating from others, as surrounding them, as filling the space between us. Stein's description of sensual empathy as a 'feeling-at' the other or a 'sensing-in' the other, then, does not adequately capture the diffuse spatial nature of atmosphere. How, then, can we account for the spatial character of atmosphere? Does this character undermine an empathetic account of atmosphere? Or require us to come up with some additional feature to account for what is atmospheric about atmospheres?

First, we should take some care when talking about the spatial character of atmosphere. People are fond of talking about atmospheres as "spatially diffuse" (Anderson 2009, 78), as being "diffused through a given world in a porous and non-containable way" (Trigg 2020, 3), that they have an "indeterminate" location and that we are "unsure where they are" (Böhme 1993, 114), that they are both everywhere and nowhere (Griffero 2014), how they lack or have fuzzy boundaries (*ibid.*). However, I think it important not to overemphasise the indeterminate location of atmospheres. While we cannot give a co-ordinated geographical location of an atmosphere, they are not experienced as entirely free-floating. We experience atmospheres as tethered to that which produces them. I do not, for instance, experience a happy atmosphere as having no location or a random location; I do not experience Maggie's happy atmosphere as pouring out of Audre, nor do I experience the happy atmosphere of the party as being somewhere in the street. Rather, I experience the atmosphere as radiating from Maggie or in the house where the party is happening. As noted above, we describe atmospheres as emanating from the people to whom they relate. To overstate the indeterminacy of atmosphere is to risk untethering atmospheres from the fields of expression that they relate to.

While the boundaries of an atmosphere can be hazy and it can be difficult to point to an exact, specific location, atmospheres are tied to a certain location. This is why, as I stand outside Shay's house, I feel that I have approached the atmosphere and that if I enter the atmosphere I will be 'in the atmosphere', as opposed to on the edge of it. Atmospheres are, importantly, something that I can walk towards and away from, into and out of. This should remind us of how we can walk towards say a car alarm or towards the smell of baking bread - when we walk closer to an atmosphere, we are walking closer to the field of expression that we are apprehending through our

felt body.[40] Moreover, as noted in chapter 3, we can experience atmospheres as being more concentrated in certain spots than others. For example, as my friend Alex loudly regales a funny story, gesturing wildly, chuckling and so on, we experience the happy atmosphere as coalescing around her, as being particularly 'thick' in that part of the room. In the living room, where there are fewer people, we might experience the happy atmosphere as 'thinner'.

What we are faced with, then, is the question of why our bodily empathetic perception of others is experienced as diffused throughout space rather than just in or at the bodies of those empathized with. I suggest that this is because we should understand the lived bodies of another, and in particular the field of expression of collectives, as a *diffuse* intentional object - an intentional object that is temporally and spatially extended, that unfolds dynamically, and thus is experienced as having 'fuzzy' boundaries. Crucially, this involves us understanding the space of atmosphere not as geometric, Euclidian space but the spatiality of living bodies, a social, intersubjective space.

4.2. The space of embodied expressivity

In empathetic perception we are not turned towards a physical object but to the living embodied experience of others. As noted in chapter 3, I do not perceive someone's smile in a snapshot moment. I see someone break into a smile, their smile fade, how their own expressive features give texture and tone to their happiness (e.g. as a simple happiness, a cautious happiness, a tired happiness). There is no end point to one emotion and another. Our expressivity transitions through movement, changes in emotion blur into one another. Think, for example, of seeing someone's smile fade as someone takes a joke too far. Lived bodies are not static, material things, they are *moving* bodies and we perceive them as such. As Stern (2010, 9) notes, what can be

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[40] We might think of this in terms of 'optimal grip'. This is a notion taken from Merleau-Ponty which describes how our perceptual grasp on an object, for example, has better and worse vantage points. When looking at what a painting is of, for instance, being too far away means that I cannot see what is depicted. Likewise, being too close allows me to see the detail of the brushwork but not be able to make out the subject matter. Being too far from the expressive behaviour and interactions of an induvial or group, might prohibit my atmospheric perception of them and put me 'outside' the atmosphere.

so unnerving about seeing a dead body is the stillness, the absence of movement that we commonly experience when we are present with living bodies.

The intentional object of empathy, then, is both temporally and spatially extended. Talk of seeing-at, hearing-at, or even feeling-at gives the impression that we perceive intentional objects as having a fixed position in objective time and space. For instance, I see the tissue box as on the edge of the table. I see it as having a fixed location (unless I or something else moves it), with firm boundaries. This, though, is not the space of living bodies. Embodied subjects do not simply *take up space* the way that tables, chairs, and tissue boxes do, they *live in space*. First, I will consider the spatial character of the expressivity of a single individual, and then I will move onto cases in which an atmosphere fills a space more generally.

The Japanese phenomenologist Watsuji Testuro provides an extensive discussion of lived space, which is both a response to Husserl and Heidegger and a precursor of later work done by Merleau-Ponty and Sartre.[41] Lived space for Watsuji "is not so much the essential quality of a physical body as it is the manner in which a subject operates" (1996, 170); it is "not the same as space in the world of nature" but the space of interaction, subjective possibility and meaning. Lived space is not measured in centimetres and co-ordinates, rather it is lived through. It is the world as we experience it as living bodies with possibilities of action, movement, connection, and so on. It is "characterised by qualities such as vicinity or distance, wideness or narrowness, connection or separation, attainability or unattainability" (Fuchs 2007, 426). I do not experience the tissue box as 2 metres away or at a particular co-ordinate but to my left, within arms' reach. Moreover, what and how I engage with the world around me depends upon my concerns, projects, and broader 'orientation' (Ahmed 2007, 152). My experienced nearness to the box of tissues is shaped by my current cold and my need to blow my nose (Carel 2013). Last week, when I was fighting fit, I barely noticed the tissues there at all. We are not coldly in space but use space in relation to the objects and people that we find there.

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[41] While Watsuji was deeply influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger, he was also critical of both. For example, he develops a deeply social characterization of intentionality that is, in part, a direct response to what he sees as Husserl's excessively individualistic focus (Krueger 2019b). Additionally, Watsuji develops a sustained critique of Heidegger, who Watsuji argues over-emphasises temporality at the expense of spatiality —and as a result, fails to develop a satisfactory account of Dasein's social relations. See Culbertson (2019), Johnson (2019), and Mayeda (2006).

Not only do I experience myself in lived space, I apprehend others in lived space too.[42] I do not chart the physical movements of others but see them as expressive, meaningful bodies in a space of action and possibility. When I see my friend as tense, I am not turned to the physical contraction of their muscles but see their stilted, erratic movements, their awkward engagement with the objects and people around them, their frenetic style. Thus, I experience their expressivity not just in their physical body but in their living body as they move through and use lived space.

This is all to say that while empathy has an intentional object, it is an unusual intentional object. Lived expressive bodies unfurl into the space around them, they are dynamic, they move, they are never complete. An emotion or mood is not just what someone looks like at any given moment but how they move, how they interact with the things and people around them. Expressivity bleeds out of our physical bodies into the world around us. The lived body is not some closed object, bounded by skin and flesh, but exceeds the physical body both temporally and spatially. As such, the intentional object of empathy, then, exceeds the *static, time-slice* physical body both temporally and spatially.

Indeed, we might want to push this point even further. When I encounter an angry Audre, her anger is not static, it unfolds with her anger, extending beyond any particular moment. It also extends beyond her skin; I see her anger in relation to how she interacts with the world, how I anticipate her on-going interaction, how she is orientated. For instance, I see her expressivity extend beyond her fingertips into the slamming of her book onto the desk, her blindness to others around her, and so on.[43] Audre's expressivity, then, extends beyond her physical body and when I empathetically perceive her anger it is her animated, situated, living body that I apprehend. This is what empathy theorists allude to when they talk about seeing mind 'in action' (e.g. Krueger 2012).

When we perceive others through our feeling bodies, then, while it is true that we do not feel the other in our own bodies but out there in the world, there is no exact moment or location that we feel them at. Rather, we feel them as they dynamically

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[42] It should be noted that while lived space is intersubjective, we do not all experience lived space in the same way (Young 1980), nor do we have equal access to lived space (Ahmed 2007, Fanon 2008).

[43] Colombetti & Roberts (2015), though not discussing empathy, discuss a similar point when they consider how our emotions can extend into the world.

unfurl, we anticipate where they will move, how they will act, as well as retain where they have been or what expression they have just had. Expressive experience does not just flash across a physical body but pours out of an embodied subject in a temporally and spatially extended manner. On this basis, then, I suggest we think of the expressive lived body not as a physical object in space but a diffuse intentional object in lived space. This helps us unpack why we describe personal atmospheres as emanating from or pouring out of individuals. When we talk of 'feeling-at' another, we are not feeling at a specific point in space that we can point to with determination. For the expressive space of the lived body exceeds the objective space of their physical body at any one moment. Rather, we feel-at the other's body as it unfurls through time and space. We experience others atmospherically, as colouring the lived space around them, because they are animate expressive bodies. A person radiates an open, expansive atmosphere when they are joyfully waving their arms around, they are taking up the space in a gleeful manner, affording upbeat interactions and connectedness to others. A person radiates a tense atmosphere when they are wound up tight, moving jerkily, contracting themselves in lived space, not reaching out towards others or inviting them in. Our bodily empathetic perception is sensitive to these different forms of vitality and expressiveness and we sense the other's expressivity pouring out in lived space as atmosphere.

If we think of an individual's lived body as a diffuse, spatially and temporally extended intentional object, this is even more emphatically so when we empathetically perceive the expressive bodies of a collective. Lived space is not a solipsistic space. I find myself in space with others, able to connect (or disconnect) with them. We not only experience others' expressivity as exceeding their physical lived body, we are also bodily sensitive to the *betweenness* of our interactions. There is a marked difference between how we feel the comfortable unfolding interaction with an old friend, which proceeds in a smooth, warm manner and the awkward interaction with say a stranger on the street, where our bodily interaction feels clunky and out of sync. These feelings of betweenness are spatial experiences, the interaction colours the lived space between us in comfortable or uncomfortable ways. Indeed, it is when we are engaged in an intercorporeal, interaffective dyadic interaction that Fuchs suggests we experience "a feeling for the overall atmosphere of the shared situation" (2016, 199).

I shall return to the idea that we not only experience others as pouring out atmosphere but ourselves as embedded in and contributing to an atmosphere in chapter 5. For now, though, I want to explore how we experience a collective as having an atmosphere that is experienced as not just pouring out of one individual but as filling the space more generally. As discussed in chapter 3, while there has been growing interest in discussing how our empathetic understanding of others is rooted in our intercorporeal and interaffective interactions with others, there is little discussion of how I might also be able to empathetically perceive the interrelatedness of others, of the *they*; I do not only find myself in the world with others but I encounter others in space with each other. Here, we are not only turned to the spatio-temporally extended lived body of *an* other but to the on-going expressive interactions of multiple bodies. When we experience an interpersonal atmosphere of the happy party, for instance, that happy mood is not instantiated in just one individual, in one body. Instead, I experience the happy mood as distributed across the participating subjects.

Where we might experience an individual's personal atmosphere as surrounding them like a sphere, we experience the interpersonal atmosphere of a group as filling the space more generally. This is because when we empathetically perceive the expressive experience of a collective, the intentional object is a field of expression that spans multiple lived bodies and the space between them. The 'location' of the happy mood, tense vitality, and so on, is then even more diffuse than cases of personal atmospheres. The mood or vitality of a group is not just a particular vitality that is repeated in many different bodies but arises out of the Gestalt impression of the group. It is in the attunement, harmony, or disharmony between the living bodies that gives rise to the particular mood or vitality (not just an aggregate of many expressive experiences, as discussed in chapter 3). Indeed, if we think about a tense atmosphere of an argument, this tenseness cannot simply be located in one individual as it is a mood which emerges from the interaction. It is not just one person's anger or another's frustration, it is what arises from this.

When we empathetically experience collectives, we are not simply bodily sensitive to other expressive bodies but to how those bodies are in lived space and related to one another across this space. Our bodily empathetic perception has this spatial, atmospheric quality to it because we are sensitive to the social situation and not to

isolated individuals. Interestingly, we can experience walking further *into* an atmosphere if, for instance, we walk further into the party. When we are dealing with collectives, the field of expression spans multiple bodies and we can walk into the space between us, experiencing ourselves as surrounded by the atmosphere. The field of expression that gives rise to our atmospheric experience is not only the visual embodied behaviour of the participating subjects but also, for instance, their tone of voices, their happy laughter and so on. We can experience the field of expression as something that is around us, reinforcing the diffuseness nature of the intentional object to which we are directed. This is analogous to the experience of walking into a soundscape, where we can experience ourselves as becoming immersed in the sound, of it surrounding us, even though we are not ourselves the source of the sound. So too might I experience walking into the atmosphere, even before I might experience myself as part of that atmosphere.

5. Pre-reflective experiences of atmosphere

So far, I have discussed our experience of atmosphere in terms of an explicit, foregrounded experience. I have used examples of experiencing atmosphere at 'the moment of entry' to a new situation, when we are often explicitly aware of the atmosphere of an individual or group, in order to illustrate our atmospheric experience. However, this should not be taken as saying that we only experience interpersonal atmospheres explicitly or only when we first come across an individual or a group. While it is easier to analyse our atmospheric experience in these moments, we can also be pre-reflectively bodily aware of interpersonal atmosphere.

There is little discussion of whether empathetic perception can take place pre-reflectively. However, we can find suggestions that empathy can take place pre-reflectively in discussions of shared experience. Zahavi (2016) notes that we-experiences can arise pre-reflectively. Given that we-experiences presuppose a mutually reciprocal empathetic awareness of the participating subjects, this implicitly suggests that we can pre-reflectively empathetically perceive the other. Empathy, broadly conceived, then is something that can occur pre-reflectively. I can be aware of your happiness while you sit at the table next to me, even when I am not explicitly reflecting upon your happiness.

What, though, about atmospheric experience specifically? As Ratcliffe (2008) notes, our bodily feelings can be pre-reflective. He gives the example of sitting at a table working. While typing away at my keyboard, I am sitting on a chair. However, I am not explicitly turned to the sensation of my behind on the chair sear. Nevertheless, it is not that I have no feeling of the chair at all. Rather, my feeling of sitting on the chair recedes into the background. I can turn my attention to this feeling but while immersed in my writing my bodily awareness of the chair is pre-reflective. Bodily feelings, then, can also be something we experience pre-reflectively (also see Colombetti 2011).

Given that both empathy and bodily feelings can be pre-reflective, and interpersonal atmosphere is a bodily felt form of empathy, I think this justifies saying that our atmospheric experience can also be pre-reflective. Indeed, I think this is often the case. Once I have arrived at Shay's party, I can start taking off my coat, getting out my gift, grabbing myself a drink and so on, without explicitly attending to the happy atmosphere. However, this does not mean that I have no experience of the atmosphere at all. Rather, like the chair in the example above, my apprehension of the atmosphere drops into the background – not gone but not foregrounded in my experience.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed how our bodily feelings can be about the world, as having affective intentionality. Specifically, I have argued that our bodily feelings can be about the expressive embodied experience of others. This is not to say that our bodily feelings tell us simply how others make us feel but that they can disclose the experience of others too us. Drawing upon Stein's work, I have argued that we should not limit our empathetic perception to the mode of vision but recognise that we our bodily feelings can disclose the experience of others to us. Having argued for a fully-embodied understanding of empathy, I asked if our experience of interpersonal atmosphere is a mode of embodied empathy, why we experience atmosphere as having a peculiar spatial quality to it; why, if it is a bodily perception of others, we experience atmospheres as pouring out from individuals or in the air around us. I have suggested that the key to understanding this peculiarly spatial

character of atmosphere is to recognise that the embodied expressive experience of others is not simply located on or in someone's physical body. Rather, the expressive living bodies of others are spatially and temporally extended.

Consequently, we should understand the intentional objective of our atmospheric empathetic perception to be a diffuse object. We do not experience individual or group expressive experience as simply located in their bodies but as unfurling in time and through space. Our atmospheric experience has its atmospheric quality precisely because we do not feel the other at their physical body but at their animated, moving living bodies. I concluded the chapter by emphasising that our experience of personal and interpersonal atmospheres do not need to be explicit, we can (and often are) pre-reflectively aware of atmosphere in a way that still grants us social understanding.

In setting out this empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere, I have focused upon our initial experience of the presence of a personal or interpersonal atmosphere. However, as Schmitz (2019) rightly identifies, we not only experience atmospheres as present but become affectively involved in them. In the next chapter, I move to a consideration of how we can engage with interpersonal atmospheres.

Chapter 5

Engaging with atmosphere

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have constructed an empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere; a concept of interpersonal atmosphere as a fully-embodied form of empathetic perception, where I experience atmosphere when I bodily apprehend the temporally and spatially extended expressive experience of individuals or collectives. In order to explicate this thesis, I have focused upon what we might call 'the moment of entry', the moment at which we first experience a person or a collective as having an atmosphere. Focusing on this moment of entry has allowed me to capture an aspect of social experience which often falls out of the picture of phenomenological accounts of sociality – namely, how an observer bodily experiences others and their expressive experiences as interpersonal atmosphere before becoming engaged in a face-to-face interaction. Cashing this out in terms of atmospheric experience allows us to move away from the dichotomy of cold observer vs. engaged, embodied interactor. Experiencing others atmospherically, even before we actively engage with them, captures how the observer already experiences others in an embodied, affective manner. This allows us to do justice to forms of social experience that take place before we are thrown into the midst of interaction, capturing how we do not come to an interaction as a blank state, that as an observer we already have some kind of bodily empathetic understanding of a person or social situation. Finally, by talking about interpersonal atmospheres of collectives, we are better able to conceive of how we might experience the 'they' – a collective that we experience as collective, without necessarily experiencing oneself as part of a 'we'.

However, we do not only experience interpersonal atmospheres as observers, from the outside. We can and do experience interpersonal atmospheres as sweeping us up, as something we can participate in, contribute to, change and even share. In this chapter, I turn from a broad conception of interpersonal atmosphere as a form of empathy, to a more specific consideration of how we *engage with* atmosphere. This includes thinking about:

(i)   how we experience ourselves being swept up by, contributing to, driving or changing an interpersonal atmosphere;

(ii)   how we might get an atmosphere 'wrong'; and,

(iii)   how it is that we might be insensitive to interpersonal atmospheres in certain cases.

This chapter, then, takes as its focus a closer look at how we not only perceive a person or group atmospherically but how we are moved (or in some cases not moved) by interpersonal atmospheres.

1. Joining an interpersonal atmosphere

In chapter 2, I started our exploration of interpersonal atmosphere by critiquing the idea that experiencing atmosphere is simply a case of emotional contagion. This challenge, in large part, rested on the insight that we can experience an interpersonal atmosphere without feeling oneself swept up by it at all. As such, I started my analysis with the question of what it is to experience the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere. I now want to bring back to the fore considerations about what it is to feel swept up, participate in, contribute to or change an interpersonal atmosphere. In Schmitzian language, having looked at how we experience being gripped by the *presence* of an atmosphere, I now turn to how we can become *affectively involved* in an atmosphere.

2.1. Being swept up

We experience the presence of interpersonal atmosphere through our felt body, through feelings of constriction, contraction, opening, tension, and relaxation and so on. While our bodily feelings convey the feelings of others to us, this does not mean that I must feel those bodily feelings as *my* emotion, mood or vitality; hence why I can experience an interpersonal atmosphere as not belonging to me but to those who produce it. I can keep a distance between my own feeling state and my bodily apprehension of others. When we encounter others through interpersonal atmosphere, we do not have to become like them, their expressivity does not dictate a predetermined response. As Trcka poetically puts it: "The impact of embodied expressive behaviour of others on us is more like a question, requiring an answer"

(2017, 1653). How we receive and respond to others' expressive behaviour, experienced as atmosphere, depends on a variety of things. As Schmitz remarks (2019, 100), we are differently sensitive to the presence of atmospheres and we become affectively involved in them in different ways.

In chapter 2, I emphasised that we should not mistake atmospheric experience for emotional contagion because one can experience a happy atmosphere without feeling happy oneself. We can experience a conflict between our own affective state and the affective character of the atmosphere. Here, our 'response' to the interpersonal atmosphere is to maintain a distance between us and the others. Note, here, that when I talk of response, I do not mean to suggest that this response must be deliberate or consciously adopted (although it might be, think of how a therapist or a teacher cultivates a certain distance between herself and the interpersonal atmosphere of her charges); I can pre-reflectively respond to a happy atmosphere with distrust or grumpiness if I am tired and feel myself in conflict with the character of the atmosphere. Here, my own feeling state can result in a refusal to enter into or attune to the atmosphere I experience the others as having.[44]

Nevertheless, we can and often do respond to interpersonal atmospheres by feeling swept up by or carried along by the interpersonal atmosphere. In our vignette, I described how, having entered the party in a grumpy mood, the happy atmosphere takes hold of me, leading to my feeling swept up by the happiness around me, changing my mood. I can "follow" the feelings of the others, letting it take over me, altering my own affective state (Stein 2000, 216). When this happens, I do not simply experience the happy atmosphere of the others, I let that happiness take hold of me, let it become my own or even ours. As discussed in chapter 2, to understand this as a case of emotional contagion (understood by Scheler and others as an I-centred experience), fails to do justice to the experience that one is caught up by the atmosphere, the experience that it is the atmosphere that carries you along with it. Without rehashing the argument I set out in chapter 2, it will suffice to reemphasise that what marks the experience of being swept up by the atmosphere is the feeling of being caught up by the mood of the others, coming to feel the affective character of the atmosphere take hold, coming to feel like the others present. This experience,

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[44] In section 3, I explore how this 'refusal' to enter into an atmosphere may occur because our on-going bodily state may not *allow* us to be swept up by the atmosphere.

then, cannot be adequately captured in terms of a merely self-centred I experience that involves no awareness of the emotional experience of the others.

There is, then, both an experience *of* the interpersonal atmosphere and an experience of the affective possibilities this atmosphere presents me with. Through my atmospheric experience, I empathetically grasp the emotion, mood, or vitality of those around me. This, in turn, offers me various affective and social affordances (Kiverstein 2015). I not only feel the presence of the atmosphere, but I respond to the expressions of others that *solicit* responses, and which afford further action. In cases of being swept up by the happy atmosphere of the party, I experience the happiness as something that I can *follow*. I allow the happiness to wash over me as atmosphere and let it become my own. My own affective state becomes like those around me, I experience the happy atmosphere not just as present but as changing my own affective state. We might think of ourselves as letting go in these moments, not only bodily perceiving the happiness but letting it in and affecting my own I-centred affective experience.

Note though, that even when we are swept up by the same atmosphere, different individuals can experience this in different ways. I might feel myself becoming happy 'in spite of myself', another might embrace this feeling of becoming swept up, some might experience it is a warm comfortable happiness, another as a jubilant, euphoric high. Even when people experience the same type of emotion this does not mean that they must all experience it in an identical fashion (Schmid 2008; Seyfert 2012). When you and I are both swept up by the happy atmosphere, becoming happy, our affective involvement with the interpersonal atmosphere need not be exactly the same. Our own affective states that we entered the room with, our personal histories, our dispositions, our personalities, our bodily sensitivity and make-up – all of these can impact how one experiences being swept up by the happy atmosphere of the party. Our receptivity to the interpersonal atmosphere, even when we allow ourselves to be swept up, is individualized. This highlights that becoming swept up by an atmosphere does not involve exactly mirroring the expressivity of those present. I can feel myself swept up by the happy atmosphere of Shay's party, for instance, without immediately dancing along with the other party-goers, even by doing something that no one else at the party is doing at that moment (e.g. handing Shay her present, pouring drinks for people). Along with other flaws, this subtlety

falls out of the picture when we talk of being swept up by an atmosphere merely in terms of contagion, as it gives the impression that there is a feeling, e.g. happiness, that can be passed around between different subjects without recognition that how a particular subject experiences happiness in a particular situation is always specific. Discussions of emotional contagion and entrainment risk homogenizing experiences where we come to feel like others around us.

Indeed, as I discuss in more detail below, while we might share the same apprehension of the interpersonal atmosphere as happy, what that atmosphere affords us is not fixed; I might experience being swept up by the happy atmosphere as moving me to walk further into the party, to talk to the other party-goers, while another might experience the atmosphere as affording a quieter form of passive participation. As both Gibson (1986) and Kiverstein (2015) highlight, affordances are self-specifying; as relational phenomena the same situation can solicit different social affordances for different people. Just as with any other form of empathetic perception, while two people might perceive another's happiness, what social possibilities and forms of action this offers these people is an individual affair. As such, we should not expect individuals who experience being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere to have identical experiences of being swept up nor to experience the atmosphere as offering identical interactive possibilities.[45]

Just as how our experience of being swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere is not fixed, nor is our being swept up a one-way street. Being swept up can be something transient - I might fall out of attunement with the atmosphere. As Ahmed (2004) points out, with her characteristic nuance:

> I might enter a situation that is cheerful and 'pick up' that good cheer in
> becoming cheerful, without reference to anything, only to realise that this is

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[45] Note that this is why we should be careful of accounts that treat atmospheres *as* affordances (e.g. Slaby et al. 2019). Experiencing an interpersonal atmosphere certainly offers affordances: a happy atmosphere might afford animated engagement, a tense atmosphere might afford a safe retreat or reconciliatory behaviour, and so on. However, it is not what the atmosphere affords that determines its particular affective character. Both you and I might enter Shay's party and experience the happy atmosphere there. I, as an extrovert, might experience that happy atmosphere as affording loud hyper-active interaction, while you as an introvert might experience that happy atmosphere as affording a quieter form of interaction or even retreat to somewhere more calm – the point being that the same interpersonal atmosphere can afford different people different action possibilities.

not a situation I find cheerful. Say people are laughing at a joke. I might start laughing too; perhaps start laughing before I hear the joke. When we are laughing, we are facing each other; our bodies are mirroring each other. I might hear the joke, and when I register what has been said, I might find that I do not [find] it funny, or even that I find it offensive. (Ahmed 2004, 223)

Even when we are swept up by an interpersonal atmosphere, our experience is not determined by them. We can begin to follow the atmosphere, feel ourselves swept up by it, only to fall out of it again. Moreover, as I will explore in section 2.3 below, engaging with others not only includes our becoming aligned with an interpersonal atmosphere but can involve our shifting the affective character of the atmosphere. If I realise the joke is distasteful to me and this is expressed in my bodily postures and gestures, this can alter the interpersonal relations of those present and thus alter the atmospheric tone – maybe leading the atmosphere to change from one of amusement to one of tension. It is worth noting, though, that it is also possible that I may feel uncomfortable when I realise what the others are laughing at but in order not to be disruptive, to fit in, I might still adopt a bodily expressive style that suggests that I am still swept up by the atmosphere (e.g. by laughing along, even when I do not find the joke funny). The extent to which we are comfortable disrupting an atmosphere and the extent to which we have control over this is, as I explore below, often a political matter relating to our social positions, social cachet, and social power in any given situation.

Now, it might be the case that upon being swept up by the happy atmosphere, that I get so involved in my own feeling of happiness that I no longer bodily apprehend the others, and thus the interpersonal atmosphere, around me. For instance, I might experience the happy atmosphere of the party as becoming my own, resulting in a feeling of *my* happiness to the exclusion of feeling the happiness of the party anymore. When this occurs the individual in question is no longer having an empathetic feeling of the other but their own self-centred experience. It is this kind of experience that emotional contagion discussions appear to focus on. Yet, as discussed in chapter 2, while this self-absorbed I-experience is one possible effect of being exposed to an interpersonal atmosphere, once we are having a fully I-centred experience, it seems we can no longer properly speaking be having an experience of interpersonal atmosphere nor an experience of being swept up by that atmosphere.

2.2. Contributing to

What is interesting about the experience of joining an atmosphere is not simply that one can experience being swept up by the prevailing mood of the party but also experience oneself *as part of* that atmosphere, as *contributing* to the happy atmosphere of the party. I have described how when we experience atmospheres of collectives, we are not only empathetically perceiving the expressive gestures of isolated individuals; rather, the field of expression spans the participating subjects lived bodies, their expressive interactions and their relatedness in social space. When we experience being swept up by the happy atmosphere of the party-goers, we can do so from the side-lines, enjoying the happiness sweeping over us while maintaining some detachment from the others present. More commonly, though, we join in with those present, entering into the fray, becoming part of the woven field of expression that gives rise to the atmosphere. For instance, when I enter Shay's party, rather than hovering on the threshold, I go give Shay a big hug and her gift, start chatting animatedly to my friends there, may rush onto the dance floor and so on. I might not only come to feel myself becoming happy, attuning to the tone of the atmosphere, but experience my own happy expressivity as part of what co-produces the overarching atmosphere.

Fuchs (2016) describes how in face-to-face interactions we enter into an inter-bodily feedback loop, where my expressive behaviour shapes your expressive behaviour and vice versa. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, Fuchs describes how our bodily interaction involves our responding to, resonating with, complementing, synchronizing, and coordinating our bodily behaviour in a process of mutual interaffectivity. Through this bodily integration our understanding of one another emerges; we are not turned to the other in isolation but in relation to oneself. Our bodily expressivity not only impacts the other, we can also be aware of *how* our body impacts the other. For instance, I can feel you relax as I smile, become tense if I step too close.

We are often (though not always) sensitive to the impact we have on others, adjust our bodies accordingly, and have some self-awareness about how we form part of the pattern of expressive behaviour that emerges between us. We can conceive of this in terms of experiencing oneself as part of the field of expression of the

encounter. When I enter the party and interact with the other participating subjects, I can experience not only my own mood, my own vitality, as coming to match the overall tone or style of the others, I can experience my own mood and vitality as continuing to set this tone, as regulating the affective states of others, of sustaining the upbeat happy mood at the party. As such, when I experience the happy atmosphere, it is not only the others' expressivity and relatedness that makes up the field of expression that underpins the atmosphere but mine too. I can be aware, either explicitly or pre-reflectively, that my own enthusiastic entry onto the dance floor is not only in-line with the happy character of the atmosphere but helps contribute to this atmosphere.

What is important to highlight is that we can experience ourselves as enmeshed or interwoven into the field of expression that gives rise to the atmosphere, as a co-producer of atmosphere. The point being that if our experience of interpersonal atmosphere is a form of bodily empathetic perception of others and their interrelatedness, when we are one of the participating subjects, we experience ourselves as part of the expressive field from which the atmosphere emerges. Moreover, we are aware that our own expressive lived body forms part of the field of expression that *others* can bodily apprehend as atmosphere.

When we come face-to-face with others, we not only perceive them but are aware that we ourselves are perceived. Luna Dolezal discusses how in intercorporeal interactions we are not only "pre-thematically attuned to the expressivity of other" but are also "inherently concerned with how we appear to others" (2017, 238). In intercorporeal interaction, then, we are aware of our own visibility to others. This self-awareness does not need to be explicitly reflective nor deliberate (though no doubt it can be) but often takes place at a pre-reflective level. The point I want to draw out here, is that not only can I be aware of my own expressive bodily contribution to a dyadic interaction but more broadly aware of how my own bodily expressivity relates to a wider group and to how my own embodied expressivity contributes to the overarching atmosphere of a shared social space that I and others empathetically experience.[46]

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[46] It may be the case that in some instances what I experience is my own atmosphere. When I am dancing around on a Friday, getting ready to go out, I can have a certain level of self-awareness of

Notwithstanding what I have just outlined, it is important to recognise that being able to enter into and contribute to an interpersonal atmosphere rests upon a presumed recognition by the other participating subjects (or at least some of them) of one's presence and one's expressive subjectivity.[47] This might seem banal, as it seems obvious that in order to contribute to the unfolding social mood, and thus contribute to the overarching atmosphere of the group, that one's expressive activity must be noticed and responded to. The point that I want to make, though, is that this presumed recognition should not be taken for granted. Being recognised as worthy of attention, as an expressive subject, is a privilege that not all embodied subjects are awarded. James Jardine brings our attention to this on his work on social invisibility; individuals whose presence elicits "behaviour that expresses an attitude of nonrecognition" (forthcoming, 5). This nonrecognition can happen in terms of a missing emotional reaction to someone's presence (Honneth 2001) or in terms of a dehumanizing emotional reaction to someone (Fanon 2008).

While social invisibility is often talked about in the context of what it is to be recognised or fail to be recognised as a human worthy of respect and dignity, this also has a knock-on effect on how individuals can participate (or not) in intersubjective encounters. Where an individual is not afforded the status of a potential participating subject, or even a subject at all, their ability to enter into and contribute to an interpersonal atmosphere is cauterized, leaving individuals with a sense of powerless, humiliation, and unease. For instance, it might be the case that at the same time I arrive at the party, that the cleaner also arrives. However, their role, their social status, perhaps their gender or ethnicity, might result in a nonrecognition of their presence. Their expressive gestures, actions and so on might not be awarded the recognition required for their expressivity to influence, to move,

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my own style of presentation (Dolezal 2017). It seems possible that this self-awareness not only occurs when I am faced by gaze of the other. I can, so to speak, turn my gaze upon myself. I can have a self-referential experience of my own atmosphere. In the same way that I can touch my own body, I can also bodily apprehend my own expressive behaviour as atmosphere. Think of how we can experience ourselves as radiating joy or anger into the space around us. In some instances, then, we might not be empathetically perceiving others atmospherically, we might be alone but experiencing ourselves as producing an atmosphere, that we experience as being intersubjectively available if someone else were to come in.

[47] Even before this, being able to enter into and contribute to an interpersonal atmosphere presumes entry to the social space in the first place. Not all social spaces are accessible to all (whether this be in the physical or the virtual world), as such there may be physical or societal barriers of entry in place.

those at the party and thus to enter into and contribute to the prevailing interpersonal atmosphere. My discussion of contributing to an interpersonal atmosphere, then, rests on a presumed recognition that is not equally afforded to all people.

2.3. Changing an interpersonal atmosphere

So far, I have talked primarily about how one might become attuned to the expressivity of the individual or group in a way that one feels oneself swept up and part of the prevailing interpersonal atmosphere. However, atmospheres do not have a fixed, determinate character. As I have previously emphasised, interpersonal atmospheres are dynamic, in flux, are always 'becoming'. In our party example, the happy atmosphere changes to a tense one as the couple's argument becomes louder, changing the dynamics of the collective interaction more broadly, changing the relatedness of those present, and thus changing how we bodily apprehend the expressivity of the participating subjects atmospherically.

Consequently, when one engages with an interpersonal atmosphere, it is not necessarily the case that one simply attunes and contributes to the on-going character of the atmosphere – one's presence might lead to a change in the interpersonal atmosphere. Interpersonal atmospheres are something that the participating subjects co-produce; how we expressively act in relation to the others present impacts the affective tone of the atmosphere. We contribute to an atmosphere through our own expressive style of interaction – through our gestures, postures, vitality, speech and so on. Each individual's own expressivity adds to the broader atmosphere and if the expressive behaviour of the participating subjects change, so does the atmosphere.

The impact an individual has relates to a number of aspects. The first, and most obvious, relates to the size of the group. In chapter 2, we noted how, when we are dealing with the atmosphere of a large crowd or mass, the crowd has somewhat of a homogenizing effect across those present and it can be hard to make out distinct individuals. Here, unless one's expressivity is so at odds with the others and large enough in scale to be noticed by an observer or the others involved, it is unlikely to materially change the overall tone of the atmosphere. However, when we are talking about smaller groups, the introduction of a new person and their own personal style might significantly shift the vitality or mood of the group, and thus the atmosphere.

Although entering an interpersonal atmosphere might encourage one to adapt one's own behaviour to those present, this does not mean that if I enter a happy atmosphere and am swept up by and contribute to it, that there is a determined way in which I must participate in the happiness. As noted above, if I am a sociable, loud individual who knows many of the other party-goers, I might wade in, immediately chatting away happily with those present. However, a shyer individual might smile quietly at those around them, tap their feet in time to the music, warmly talk to one person at a time. Trcka makes a similar point when she states, in relation to shared euphoria, that: "We can participate in collective euphoria in very different ways – self-consciously, reluctantly, passionately, etc." (2017, 1656). The expressivity of both these individuals adds to and drive the overarching happy atmosphere. However, their different styles shift the tone of the atmosphere in different ways; the extrovert might instil a more energetic manic note, while the introvert might create a warm, gentle happy atmosphere. As we enter a social space, as we interact with other subjects, we are not just impacted by the embodied expressivity of others, our own embodied expressivity impacts them. The same can be said for someone leaving the party. If my friend Alex, who has been the heart and soul of the party, fuelling the overall happy atmosphere there, suddenly leaves, we experience her absence keenly and the overall atmosphere changes on her departure.

Some people disproportionately dominate and drive atmospheres by their presence. This can occur when someone is particularly expressive. For instance, in our vignette, my friend Alex, who is energetically telling stories, enacting out funny parts, getting people engaged and laughing, holds particular sway over the character of the atmosphere; her mood setting the tone for those interacting with her, driving the happy mood of the party more generally. Alex's vivid expressive style (conveyed through her facial expressions, intonation, gestures, and so on), therefore, plays a particularly important role in shaping the affective contour. Moreover, if Alex were suddenly to become sad, her vivid expression of this could quickly affect those around her, prompting their expressive interaction to change (perhaps in displays of sympathy or a spreading sadness that seems to flow outwards from Alex) and thus cause the atmosphere to shift.

Alex's vivid expressive style commands a certain amount of attention, pulling people into her sphere of influence, prompting interlocking acts of interaction. Where these

interlocking interactions are particularly tight and closely knit, we experience the field of expression as particularly dense or thick around them, which we might experience as a certain thickness of atmosphere. The social space of relatedness here is dense with expressivity and plays a crucial role in setting the tone of the atmosphere in the room. If we think of interactions as expressive threads connecting people, particularly expressive people often take up a lot of space and attention, multiplying the number of threads that connect with them (even when the very expressive person is eliciting reactions of disapproval, distaste or hatred). This links back to an earlier point made in chapter 3 about how we experience interpersonal atmospheres as arising from the interactions and relatedness of individuals, as spanning multiple bodies, but not necessarily experienced as evenly distributed across those bodies. By playing an important role in shaping, sustaining, and changing the overall tone of the party, we experience the atmosphere as particularly dense around Alex, reflecting both the intensity of her expressivity contributing to the wider field of expression and the way her interactions have particular sway over the patterns of relatedness and interactional dynamics. This is what we colloquially refer to when we talk about individuals who 'set the tone' of a room or who are the life and soul of a party, for instance.

Other factors can also contribute to how an individual can play a significant role in setting the tone of a room and, thus, the atmosphere. Individuals with strong social cachet, figures of authority, and so on, all might exert a particularly strong influence over the interpersonal atmosphere that is co-produced. People in positions of authority and power, for instance, might attract closer attention, their mood or vitality perceived as more salient, and, therefore, have greater impact over the group dynamics (even those who are not directly interacting with them, may be more sensitive to that individual's expressivity over others). Empirical research into charismatic leaders suggests that leader-figures are more likely to influence the mood of a group than non-leaders (Erez et al. 2008), particularly when the leader figures are highly expressive individuals (Gooty et al. 2010; Johnson and Dipboye 2008; Sy et al. 2013).[48]

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[48] Note that there might be somewhat of a chicken and egg question around whether people who are charismatic hold particular sway over the expressive dynamics of groups or whether people who are particularly expressive are more likely to be deemed charismatic.

Interestingly, we might be aware of our own power to both contribute and change the character of an interpersonal atmosphere. An extrovert who knows many of the other party-goers entering Shay's home may be aware of their potential to change the tone of a party through their expressivity and their social cachet. One might be aware of one's *ability* to make a contribution or a change to the over-arching atmospheric tone even if you are not currently enacting this ability – that is, be aware of yourself as a potential but not actual contributor, driver or changer of atmosphere. The extrovert, in wanting to allow Shay to be the centre of attention at her own party, in wanting to let Shay 'set the tone' of the atmosphere, may hold back from contributing to the atmosphere in a way that lets them dominate and drive the atmosphere of the party. Likewise, one might be aware that one can 'lift' the party if it the mood if flagging, helping create a jubilant atmosphere. One might do this even if you are actually feeling tired by enacting out expressive behaviour that will drive energetic and happy forms of vitality and engagement. As such, one can contribute or change an atmosphere deliberately (or hold back from doing so).

It is also important to remember that interpersonal relations, and thus interpersonal atmospheres, can also change simply in response to *who* a person is or *how* they are perceived. This is because our intergroup dynamics, our social practices, are normatively and socially framed. Not all bodies can enter a room in the same way, receive the same kind of reception. Ahmed describes how "[a] woman of colour can just enter a room and the atmosphere becomes tense" (2004, 224). This is not because this woman is affectively engaging with the room in a certain way, altering the field of expression through her expressive actions, but because her very *presence* disrupts the dynamics of the group. Her mere presence changes the group's atmosphere based upon her reception, before she even has a chance to engage with those present. As such, we must be careful to remember that not all bodies have the same point of entry to an atmosphere, not all bodies have the privilege of entering into certain atmospheres, of participating and sharing in them. Social spaces are not created equal.

This can also occur when someone's expressive lived body does not conform to normative or cultural models. Individuals with moebius syndrome, a congenital form of bilateral facial paralysis, and individuals with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) also report experiencing interpersonal atmospheres changing upon their entry into a

social in a negative manner; that their very presence can give rise to awkwardness, disrupting the social dynamics of a situation (Gallagher 2004; McGeer 2009). As such, for a particular atmospheric tone to be sustained over time depends closely upon the participants all acting according to certain value-laden expectations, and within certain normative constraints. When a person, through no fault of their own, does not abide by these expectations, this can have a destabilising effect on the group and its atmospheric character. This divergence from expectations can lie at a level that is as small as facial expression, comportment, verbal exchange, or even visual appearance.

When one's body is received as disruptive or discordant, where one experiences interpersonal atmospheres negatively shifting when one enters social space, this can tinge one's social world more generally as something hostile, unstable, and uneasy. As discussed above, different atmospheres afford different social possibilities to different people. However, if one's body changes atmospheres by presence alone, this results in a continual sense of closed-down and closed off social affordances. As Tellenbach (1969) recognises, interpersonal atmospheres are powerful conveyors of in-group and out-group dynamics.

2.4. Sharing an interpersonal atmosphere

In the above, I have explored how we can feel ourselves swept up by, contributing to and changing an interpersonal atmosphere. I want to conclude this section by suggesting that we can also come to experience ourselves as robustly sharing an interpersonal atmosphere with others. Remember back in chapter 1, that those who conflate atmospheric experience with emotional contagion, place a lot of emphasis on the idea that experiencing an interpersonal atmosphere is not a case of shared experience (e.g. Scheler 2017, 10; Zahavi 2018, 738).

However, I have suggested that one can not only feel oneself swept up by an atmosphere but can be aware of oneself as participating in and contributing to an interpersonal atmosphere. This allows us to go one step further and claim that, in some instances, one might even experience oneself as sharing the interpersonal atmosphere with others. Note that just because one is contributing to an interpersonal atmosphere does not mean that we necessarily experience ourselves as sharing in that atmosphere in a robust sense, in coming to experience oneself as

part of a 'we' to whom the atmosphere attaches. For instance, I could be performing happy expressive behaviour at Shay's party and thus contributing to the happy field of expression to which the atmosphere relates, without actually feeling happy myself; or I could be going round pouring drinks for everyone, quietly smiling and exchanging pleasantries in a way that contributes to the happy vitality of the party without feeling myself to be fully integrated into the party such that I experience myself as partying with the others as a 'we'.

When we experience a shared experience with others, such as a we-experience of celebrating one's sports team scoring a goal or a shared mood of general levity and celebration, or a shared vital energy, we not only experience ourselves as an *I* contributing to an interpersonal atmosphere but can experience oneself as part of a *we* which co-produces an interpersonal atmosphere in a stronger sense. For instance, I can be at a cosy dinner party with friends and have a shared experience of the collective mood while also having an awareness of the happy atmosphere surrounding us all. I can experience this interpersonal atmosphere as something that 'we' produce. Not just as an aggregate of our expressive activity but as something that arises out of our shared emotion, mood or vitality. This might be most clear when we think about affective experiences that are necessarily collective, for instance the tense atmosphere that arises out of an aggressive interaction or the loving atmosphere that arises out of a loving interaction. Here, we do not just experience ourselves as a part of the atmosphere but more firmly as part of a we from whom the atmosphere emerges - I am aware not only that *I* am contributing to the co-production of an interpersonal atmosphere but that *we* are, in the robust sense. There, may, then not only be an experience of collective cohesion that I experience from the outside – in terms of experiencing the interpersonal atmosphere as belonging to a 'they' – but an experience of being part of the 'we' to whom the atmosphere belongs. Remember from chapter 3 that whether there is a we-experience cannot be determined 'from the outside' but only by the participants involved (Schutz 1967). Thus, we can only experience sharing in an interpersonal atmosphere in this strong sense when we are part of the *we,* i.e. not as an observer.

In turn, interpersonal atmospheres may help sustain on-going shared experiences. As interpersonal atmospheres arise out of the bodily apprehension of a group's expressive vitality, interrelatedness and betweenness, they take on a kind of quasi-

autonomy as they do not specifically attach to any one person. I can feel myself becoming tired as the party goes on, feel myself flagging, while still feeling the happy atmosphere of the wider group. This overarching happy atmosphere can carry my happiness forward, so to speak, can help upregulate my feelings. In this way, interpersonal atmospheres not only emerge from the expressive actions of the participating subjects but they also can scaffold the experience of those present, perhaps sustaining a continued feeling of shared happiness that the individuals on their own would not be able to sustain. Thus, interpersonal atmospheres can be seen as a form of emotion regulation, a way of maintaining, shaping and driving emotions and in turn means that interpersonal atmospheres can be partly 'self-sustaining'.

By playing a role in emotionally regulating individual's affective states, interpersonal atmospheres may, in fact, be an important ingredient for sustaining shared experiences with others.[49] For when we come to experience a sense of happiness with the others at the party, of participating in the same intersubjective lived space of relatedness with them, my on-going awareness of the interpersonal atmosphere may help me to stay upbeat, reinforce my sense of connection with the others, thus prolonging the shared happy mood that I feel myself part of. Indeed, our awareness of all being part of the field of expression that gives rise to an interpersonal atmosphere may be particularly important for sustaining looser forms of shared experience (such as shared mood or shared vitality) than the dyadic forms of shared experience that dominate the current discussions. The mutual reciprocal awareness that is thought to be a necessary ingredient for shared experience (Walter 1923; Zahavi 2015) does not have to straightforwardly be cashed out in terms of a direct awareness of every individual present but an awareness that we are all part of the overarching interpersonal atmosphere. Experiencing oneself as being part of a group whose happy, upbeat expressive interaction creates a happy atmosphere that one is aware binds you altogether. Not only can we experience being part of the same atmosphere, this sharing in the atmosphere can reinforce one's mutual reciprocal awareness of being part of a 'we'. This helps us understand how we can experience a shared emotion or mood in larger groups. For instance, at the party I might have a

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[49] For a slightly different account of how atmospheres might 'ground' shared emotions, see Trigg 2020.

sense that *we* are all in a happy mood even though I am not in a tight-knit interaction with everyone present there.

2. Getting it wrong

In section 1, I explored how we can engage in an interpersonal atmosphere in terms of being swept up, contributing to, changing and even sharing an interpersonal atmosphere. However, it is important to emphasise that just because I experience, say, a happy atmosphere this does not mean guarantee the veridicality of the experience. By cashing out interpersonal atmosphere as a mode of empathetic perception of the expressive experience of others, what we preserve here is the idea that I might *mis*perceive the atmosphere. I might experience Shay's party as having a happy atmosphere when, in fact, those present are deeply miserable. By endorsing the idea that our experience of interpersonal atmosphere is a relational mode of empathetic experience, we are able to say that if this occurs, I have in an important sense got something wrong. This is because my experience of the interpersonal atmosphere is not simply a subjective experience, nor an emotion that tells me how I am doing in the world, but is a way the expressivity of others is disclosed to me. Just like other empathetic experiences, and perceptual experiences more broadly, we can get it wrong.

Indeed, I suggest that this is a point in favour of adopting an empathetic model of interpersonal atmosphere. If we understand interpersonal atmospheres as something we project onto the group, as our own reaction to the group, as simply an experience of our presence around others, we are blocked from saying that we can get the atmosphere wrong in this robust sense. The best we might be able to do is say that our experience is unusual or inappropriate in some way. Yet, we are all aware of moments when we or others have got the atmosphere of a social situation wrong. Such experiences are captured when we talk about someone misreading the room or getting the tone of the room wrong.

The idea that we can get the atmosphere wrong is obscured if we take as our starting point non-peopled atmospheres. For it does not seem to be the case that I can get the atmosphere of an environment wrong in the same way as I can be wrong about personal or interpersonal atmospheres. This is because, when we are talking

about interpersonal atmospheres, we are talking about a way of experiencing others' expressive experience and this is something that can be right or wrong (not merely appropriate or inappropriate). If I experience a funeral ceremony where people are softly crying, mournfully holding one another, talking in low voices as having a jubilant atmosphere, I have got this wrong in some important way. My experience is not correctly disclosing the others' expressivity and their interrelatedness accurately.

Indeed, we are all acutely aware of how awkward it can be when someone misjudges the atmosphere; for instance, boisterously launching themselves into a tense atmosphere. Getting it wrong has real consequences for social interaction. Those who are not sensitive to atmosphere or get it wrong can end up making social faux pas, missing the tone, putting their foot in it and so on. Interestingly, this introduces the idea that we can be better or worse at experiencing others' expressive experience through atmosphere.

Like other perceptual experiences (such as looking more closely at the figure to realise it is a mannequin not a person), we can also correct our experience of atmosphere. For instance, if you walk into the party with me and when I say 'oh what a happy atmosphere' and you look at me askance, proceeding to point out the people crying, the hushed tones, and so on. Bringing my attention to the ways I have misperceived the expressivity of those present brings about a change in my atmospheric experience. Or if, for instance, I have come from a different social or cultural background, and I can have my atmospheric experience corrected by learning the differences in cultural expressivity.

3. Insensitivity to atmosphere

Having set out how we can engage with an interpersonal atmosphere or get the atmosphere wrong, I now want to explore cases where we are rendered insensitive to atmosphere. I have outlined how it is possible that we can feel, say, that a party has a happy atmosphere while still feeling tired oneself by appealing to the idea that we are capable of having a polyphony of feelings. What this captures is that we are not monochromatic beings; we do not usually just feel one thing at a time. I can be hungry and excited simultaneously, I can be in a depressed mood and still experience a flash of happiness. However, it is important to highlight that this does

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not mean that we are capable of feeling *all* things at *all* times. Sometimes we are overwhelmed by certain experiences that seem to preclude our ability to experience other kinds of experience. If, as Fuchs puts it, we think of the body as a "sounding board" (2016, 197) for experience, we must remember that this sounding board has limits. In the following, I introduce the idea of 'bodily saturation'. Using this notion, I explore how individuals may be rendered insensitive to interpersonal atmospheres and apply this specifically to those with depression or autistic spectrum disorder.

3.1. Bodily saturation

While we are feeling beings, we do not have an infinite capacity for feeling. I want to introduce here what I call 'bodily saturation'. This term is intended to capture situations where we are, so to speak, affectively 'full'. When this occurs, one is rendered less sensitive, or even insensitive, to other affective, bodily experiences. When one has a sudden experience of pain, for example, it can be experienced so intensely that we seem to *only* experience that pain. If the pain continues, it does so at the expense of feeling much else. When, for example, I have an ongoing headache, I feel a kind of distance from the world around me, it no longer solicits my attention in the way it normally does, it does not draw me into it. My affective engagement with the world seems to have been muted by this other bodily feeling. This can be thought of as akin to a loud noise drowning out all other noises or a flash of bright light taking over one's visual field. The suggestion is that this also happens at the level of affectivity, that we can be overwhelmed or filled up by a particularly intense feeling (or feelings) which renders us insensitive to other feelings at that moment, including the kind of bodily perceptual feeling that I have argued is at the root of our atmospheric experience.

That pain has this saturating effect is well-supported by cases of self-harm. Self-harm is defined by Brown & Kimball (2013, 1) as "the intentional harming of one's body in order to reduce emotional pain and cope with overwhelming emotions". One might ask why the infliction of bodily harm brings about a reduction in 'emotional pain'. One suggestion might be that physical pain, in these cases, distracts the individual from their emotional pain. I think a better formulation of this is to say that the physical pain *blocks out* one's capacity to feel the emotional pain. If we think of the body as a glass that only has so much room for feeling, then the pain can be

thought of as filling us up to the exclusion of other feelings. On the 'distraction model' there is the impression that we can be in emotional pain or distress while not feeling it in moments of distraction. The 'bodily saturation' formulation avoids the potential oxymoron of unfelt feelings, opting for the idea that when we are in intense physical pain, we no longer have the capacity to feel anything else.[50]

Such bodily saturation does not only occur in cases of bodily sensation (such as pain). We can also be fully saturated by emotional experiences. Think of cases where one feels very anxious about something, like an upcoming presentation. Concern about whether your material makes sense, worries about whether someone might spot a problem in your account, or ask you a question about a philosopher you know next to nothing about, fear that you might forget what you were going to say. This anxiety can be so all-consuming that you no longer feel hungry (despite not having eaten yet), you no longer feel affectively drawn in by the beautiful scenery on the walk to the conference, you are left untouched by someone's excited telling of how they are planning a birthday dinner that evening that you are invited to.

The examples I have given here are of a particular feeling or emotion or mood that overwhelms us. However, it is also possible for an accumulation of experiences to oversaturate me (rather than a single, intense feeling). Take, for instance, being in the middle of a food market with a friend. There is a cacophony of affective experiences going on, the smell of baked goods drawing me in, my friend's exciting news that she has had an article published, my slight anxiety about being hemmed in by many people, the banging noises of trucks, people shouting and so on. There is no one single intense affective experience here, rather a wide and rich array of them. This can, in some cases, be sensorily *too* much and prohibit my bodily awareness of anything further.

Now this is not to say that our bodies are all the same 'size', that we all get bodily saturated by the same 'amount' of feeling. Different individuals might have a greater capacity to feel a multitude of things at the same time or to feel overwhelmed by feelings. Nevertheless, the point stands that no individual is capable of an infinite

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[50] A parallel example of this might be anorexia nervosa. When the anorectic starves herself, she subjects herself to a near constant experience of hunger. This is a visceral experience that she might inflict upon herself as a way of diminishing her experience of other feelings, such as stress or anxiety, that are outside her control (Osler forthcoming a).

array of feelings at any one time. Nor is this to imply that bodily saturation only occurs in cases of negative sensations or emotions. We can, for instance, have our bodily bandwidth used up with positive feelings and sensations; think of an experience of intense joy that leaves us desensitized to other feelings (e.g. episodes of mania (Bowden 2013; Fuchs 2015)) or intense pleasurable experiences like when one orgasms. Moreover, while I have used pain in self harm as an example of how individuals use bodily saturation as a way of blocking out negative feelings such as stress or anxiety, it is conceivable that bodily saturation can be sought out in and of itself. For example, individuals who enjoy pain as part of their sexual practice might enjoy the sensation of being bodily saturated, being entirely in a particular moment and a particular feeling, that need not be related to a desire to force out other negative feelings.

How, though, does this relate interpersonal atmospheres? I suggest that the notion of bodily saturation can help us understand certain instances when we are not sensitive to interpersonal atmospheres, where we do not *feel the feelings of others*. So far, I have talked about how we feel atmospheres, how we are sensitive to them, how they move us, how we might get swept up by and participate in them, even how we get them wrong. I now want to explore why we might not experience atmospheres in certain situations.

Going back to our vignette, I described how the family argument unfurling on WhatsApp can lead me to have an intense experience of anxiety. In the first instance, I turn my attention away from the party to my phone and the experience of atmosphere seems to disappear. This, though, could be that my attention is no longer directed at those present, which is why I no longer am experiencing their mood in an atmospheric way. However, even after I have dealt with the situation and turn back to the party, I feel the anxiety still pumping its way through my body leaving me feeling peculiarly disconnected from the party and unable to experience the happy atmosphere. I can see that there are still happy people present, dancing, and hear the chattering voices and so on. I can coldly *see* and *hear* that the mood is still joyful, but I seem to be cut off from feeling the happy atmosphere. As my anxiety subsides, the atmosphere seems to re-emerge. I feel the sense of expansiveness again across my chest.

This highlights how my own feelings, emotions and moods can impact my experience of atmosphere. All these experiences play out across my bodily stage and some can be so loud that they inhibit my ability to feel anything else. With the notion of bodily saturation in play, we can account for how a short-lived, intense bout of emotion renders me insensitive to experiencing atmosphere, leaving me incapable of being affectively directed to the situation.

However, I now want to consider cases where this bodily saturation is not a result of a short-lived feeling experience but can be a more sustained feature of certain psychopathological disorders. These cases not only support the idea that our sensitivity to atmosphere is impacted by our own feelings, emotions and moods but helps us unpack the impact on interpersonal understanding that many psychopathological disorders have.

3.2. Depression

Take depression. While depression is often associated with feeling deadened or flat, depression is a bodily intense experience. As the DSM-V highlights, depression is characterized by feelings of lethargy, tiredness, heaviness, sadness, and/or hopelessness. Moreover, it notes that depression can "cause significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning" (*APA 2013, 163*). While the DSM briefly refers to an impairment in social functioning in depression, it does not expand upon *how* interpersonal relations are altered in depression; although the DSM makes explicit reference to experiential disruptions in depression, its descriptions of them are only "cursory" (Ratcliffe 2014, 5). This might seem surprising given that most first-person descriptions of depression put much emphasis on feelings of isolation and disconnection from others. For example, David Karp (2017) in his book *Speaking of Sadness,* which records both his own and others' lived experience of depression, notes that "the most insistent theme" (2017, 73) that arises is the effect depression has on relations with other people; he goes so far as to describe depression as "an illness of isolation, a disease of disconnectedness" (*ibid.).*

Phenomenological psychopathology, though, has brought the interpersonal impact of depression front and centre. Ratcliffe, in his book *Feelings of Depression* (2014), devotes a whole chapter to detailing how a central feature of depressive experience

is a change in the structure of interpersonal experience. He describes how feelings of isolation, estrangement, distance from the world and from other people frequently crop up in descriptions of depression: "The person is cut off from the world and, most importantly, from habitual forms of interaction with other people" (Ratcliffe 2014, 31). What Ratcliffe claims is that there is an erosion of "certain kinds of interpersonal relation" in depression (*ibid.*, 202). Ratcliffe is not alone in this diagnosis. Fuchs, for instance, argues that an individual's intercorporeality and interaffectivity with others is impacted by depression. Fuchs (2014, 223) describes how the individual with depression loses their ability to be affected by others, that the depressive body "acts as a barrier" to being moved by the world and other people. This leads us to ask *how* this loss of connectedness is experienced in depression and *what kinds* of interpersonal relations are impacted by this. I suggest that one such form of interpersonal relation that is eroded in depression is interpersonal atmospheric experience and that the idea of bodily saturation can help us unpack why depression disrupts the body's affective relation with others.

Interestingly, while depression has a negative impact upon an individual's interpersonal relations, it does not (usually) render the depressed individuals completely devoid of interpersonal experience. Others still feature in experience and depressed individuals do not seem to lose their ability to understand others entirely (unless depression has, perhaps, reached a state of catatonia (Takaoka et al. 2007)). Indeed, many reports of depression highlight that depressed individuals are aware that others around them are happy, which suggests that at least some empathetic perception is preserved in depression. Indeed, in order to capture the experience of depressed individual's as missing out, as being cut off from others, some of their empathetic experience of others must still be intact in order for the depressed individual to experience being cut off from another's happiness, they must be able to empathetically perceive that the other is happy to some extent in the first place.

Using the notion of bodily saturation, we might suppose that a depressed individual's intense bodily experience of depression renders them insensitive to interpersonal atmospheres. Reports from depressed individuals seem to suggest that this is, in fact, the case. Depression is commonly marked by the sense that one is cut off or disconnected from others in a particular manner. What seems to be lost is a capacity

to be *moved* by others. As Plath (2008) puts it in *The Bell Jar*, others seem to be just out of reach, behind a screen. This out of reach-ness is not that others are physically elsewhere, nor are they not perceptually available. Rather, it seems to be an affective, felt out of reach-ness.

Remember depression is an intensely felt disorder. Feelings of tiredness, lethargy, anxiety are experienced as particularly prevalent in the depressed body. I suggest that we think of this in terms of the body being saturated by such feelings to the exclusion of other felt experiences - like when I experience an intense bout of anxiety, this can be understood as feelings that block or get in the way of being affectively sensitive to those around us. While the depressed individual might be able to see and hear the happiness of those at Shay's party, they are left *cold* by this experience, leaving them feeling cut off from those around them. What is diminished is the depressed individual's ability to experience the *atmosphere* of the party, they are unable to feel the feelings of others. This leaves the depressed individual feeling peculiarly distant from the other(s), no longer feeling bodily sensitive to them. I suggest that what is damaged in depression is the individual's ability to both experience and, consequently, be caught up by interpersonal atmosphere. While the depressed individual still has a certain degree of empathetic perception intact, the inability to experience others atmospherically may also lead to a diminished social understanding. For instance, it might render someone insensitive to the affective interconnectedness between others, the concentration of expressivity where we tend to experience the thickness of atmosphere, and so on.

By bringing in the idea that atmospheric experience is a form of felt empathetic understanding, we are able to more specifically capture how an *aspect* of interpersonal relations is damaged in depression, while allowing that other aspects of empathetic perception (e.g. the ability to see and hear others' emotions) remain. This helps us understand the experience of a veil dropping down between the depressed individual and other people.

This idea neatly dovetails with Fuchs' claim that depression involves a *bodily disturbance* that impacts our bodily orientation towards others, resulting in a deleterious effect on interpersonal understanding and interpersonal relations. As Fuchs highlights, our bodies are a medium of interaffectivity that resonates with the

bodies of others. This, I have argued, is how we experience atmosphere. When the depressed body is over-saturated with feelings of tiredness and lethargy, our bandwidth for bodily resonance with others is used up; "Instead of expressing and connecting the self with others, the depressive body turns into a barrier to all impulses directed to the environment, resulting in a general sense of detachment, separation, or even expulsion" (Fuchs 2013b, 222). This is not to suggest, as Fuchs does, that this is because the depressed individual's body becomes object-like or corporealized but because the depressed individual's body is *already saturated* with intense bodily feelings. This, I argue, better captures the felt dimension of depression, while still accounting for the experience of interpersonal disconnectedness.

While the depressed individual may be desensitized to interpersonal atmospheres due to bodily saturation, this has knock-on implications for the difficultly of being moved out of depression. As discussed above, interpersonal atmospheres are not *only* experienced as a form of bodily, affective, empathetic experience that gives us social understanding but they *move* us, can sweep us up into the prevailing mood of those around us. If depressed individuals are not sensitive to atmosphere, this not only impacts their social understanding of others and leaves others feeling at a certain *remove*, but also impacts the depressed individual's ability to be influenced by the atmosphere – unable to experience being swept up by the interpersonal atmosphere and, thus, experience a change in their affective being in the world. This can result in patients feeling a loss of shared lived space with others. If we think of our bodily affectivity as threading us into the affective world around us, in depression many of these intersubjective, interaffective wires are cut, leaving the depressed individual feeling as though they have been cut adrift from the social world.

Interestingly, as Fuchs goes to lengths to highlight (2013b, 227), depression's other face is that many depressed individual's own expressivity is diminished, leading them to be difficult to understand or to being experienced as having a depressing, deflated atmosphere. As many have reported, others often experience depressed individuals as having a deflated, depressive atmosphere (Karp 2017). This might be unpleasant to be around, as it might lead to my feeling drained by this depressive atmosphere. This might help us to unpack reports that family members and friends

often find it difficult to be around those who are depressed. Being cut off, then, can occur from both directions.

3.3. Autistic Spectrum Disorder

It has long been recognized that individuals with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) suffer distinct, and often severe, difficulties with social understanding and interpersonal relations. While this has often been cashed out in terms of individuals with ASD having some kind of inhibited ability to form and apply a Theory of Mind to other people (e.g. Baren Cohen et al. 1985), there has recently been a move towards paying increased attention to embodied aspects of ASD social discrepancies (e.g. De Jaeger 2013, forthcoming; Krueger 2019a; Krueger & Maeise 2019).

Krueger (2019a) has recently argued that there is evidence that individuals with ASD struggle to perceive others' forms of vitality; while they might see someone reaching out for a glass and see their intention to pick it up, they miss the style of the movement, whether it is rushed, languid, confident and so on. I have highlighted how many interpersonal atmospheres are intimately related not just to the expressive *what* of actions and gestures but the style in which they are done. This helps us capture the temporally extended and dynamic field of expression that we affectively perceive as atmosphere. Moreover, as discussed above, forms of vitality often co-regulate our behaviour. Thus, when we are exposed to other people, we can come to mirror and complement their styles of behaviour, integrating us into a group field of expression and experiencing oneself as both caught up by and contributing to the interpersonal atmosphere.

Krueger suggests that "people with ASD exhibit what I will refer to as "style blindness": they quite literally *fail to see* certain qualities or patterns of neurotypical [forms of vitality], which impairs their ability to become responsively regulated by the expressive norms regulating neurotypical interactions" (2019a, 3). This, then, will impact the ability of individuals with ASD to not only recognize interpersonal atmospheres but also to feel themselves swept up by them.

If individuals with ASD are typically insensitive to vitality effects, then this may severely diminish their ability to experience interpersonal atmospheres. However, I want to add an additional layer to this picture. Like many other accounts of empathy

or direct social perception, discussion of forms of vitality often centre on an individual's ability to *see* the vitality of others (e.g. Krueger 2019; Stern 2010). I have argued that we should not limit ourselves to understanding forms of vitality as something that we can *see* but also as forming part of the field of expressive action that gives rise to our felt experiences of interpersonal atmosphere. I suggest that individuals with ASD might also have a diminished bodily sensitivity to interpersonal atmospheres.

There is increasing recognition that individuals with ASD may find the world sensorily overwhelming; that loud sounds, lots of people, lots of sensory stimuli is extremely uncomfortable (e.g. Crane et al. 2009; Marco et al. 2011). As discussed above, we can think of this in terms of bodily saturation, with the individual with ASD experiencing a continual bombardment of sensorily intense bodily reactions to their environment. If this is the case, then we might suppose that this could impact said individual's sensitivity to interpersonal atmospheres. It is not simply that individuals struggle to be swept up by interpersonal atmospheres but that they are not bodily sensitive to them in the first place. This helps us unpack an additional element of social understanding that individuals with ASD report experiencing cut off from, another part of the "magic" that seems denied them (Grandin 2006).

As we will see in chapter 6, there is some evidence that individuals with ASD may find some aspects of empathy easier in online settings, where the sensory overload is sparser. Indeed, this may suggest that individuals with ASD might be sensitive to interpersonal atmospheres online in a way that they struggle with in offline social encounters.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the numerous ways that our experience of interpersonal atmospheres can move (or fail to move) us and how we can engage with interpersonal atmospheres. Emphasising the differences in sensitivity that individuals have to atmosphere, as well as the different ways we respond to atmosphere, emphasises that our experiences of atmosphere are impacted by our own bodily sensitivity, dispositions, on-going affective states and interests. I have also drawn attention to the way that political and social structures shape whether and how

bodies are received by others and that this impacts one's ability to be enter into, participate, and change an on-going atmosphere. As interpersonal atmospheres emerge from the expressive, cohesive relations of living bodies, they are normative experiences both on the side of the observer and the participant.

Chapter 6

Expressivity, the environment and non-peopled atmospheres

Introduction

I have argued that we should understand our experience of personal and interpersonal atmospheres as a form of fully-embodied empathy. They are relational phenomena that arise out of our bodily apprehension of others' expressive embodied experience. I have set out how we can (i) experience the presence of an interpersonal atmosphere and (ii) engage with an interpersonal atmosphere in various ways. I have also shown how we can be rendered insensitive to interpersonal atmospheres when we are bodily saturated by other affective feelings and how this can lead to inhibited social understanding.

Part of my motivation for taking interpersonal atmospheres as my focus is that accounts which preface non-peopled atmospheres fail to capture how interpersonal atmospheres are a bodily form of social understanding and emerge from the expressive experience of those to whom the atmosphere relates. Yet, even when we are talking specifically about interpersonal atmospheres, aspects of the environment do seem to contribute to, create and sustain the atmosphere. For example, the upbeat music and the soft lighting at Shay's party add to the happy, festive atmosphere that I experience. Moreover, we experience atmospheres when there are no people around (what I call non-peopled atmospheres), such as the gloomy atmosphere of a wood, the solemn atmosphere of a church and so on. How, though, can the environment feature in an empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere? Unlike the people present, whose expressive behaviour, movement and interactions are a constitutive part of their experience that I bodily perceive, neither the music, the lighting nor the wood are *happy* in the way the group is happy. I am not perceiving part of the music's experience of happiness. If, as I have argued, atmosphere is a mode of empathetic perception, how can the world feature in such experiences?

In the following, I suggest that there are a number of ways that the environment impacts our experience of atmosphere. First, I consider how the material features of

the environment can both influence the other's expressive behaviour (e.g. changing people's bodily comportment and vitality based on the material spaces they are inhabiting) and alter the way in which we experience other's expressive behaviour (e.g. changing the volume or tone of people's voice as a result of the space). By influencing people's expressive behaviour and modifying how that expressive behaviour is perceived, the environment shapes the bodily field of expression which we experience as atmosphere. I, then, explore how cultural and normative expectations, which often attach to our environmental situation, also impact both how people act in space but also my perception of others' expressivity. Thus, the world encroaches in important ways on both the emergence of group experiences and my atmospheric apprehension of them.

What, though, about atmospheres that I experience when there is no one present at all? Where there is no field of expression of lived bodies that I can be said to be affectively perceiving as atmosphere? One option would be to bite the bullet and say that non-peopled atmospheres are just a different kind of experience and require a separate analysis. Indeed, as noted in the Introduction and chapter 1, that is sometimes how interpersonal atmospheres are treated by philosophers who focus on non-peopled atmospheres (e.g. Böhme 2017a). Given that non-peopled atmospheres, at least initially, seem to be experienced in a similar way to interpersonal atmospheres, not being able to account for non-peopled atmospheres could be seen as a significant objection to my empathetic model. However, I argue that my analysis of interpersonal atmospheres can be helpfully applied to non-peopled cases. I argue that even when there are no people present in an environment, we experience the environment as having the potential to support, shape and drive particular human experiences. The way that we experience the world as potentially affording or scaffolding forms of expressive behaviour and vitality can also be an affectively perceived. While I may not be empathically grasping an actual field of expression of lived bodies, I have a quasi-empathetic experience of how *some* individual or *some* group of individuals might act in such a space, giving rise to what I call a *quasi-interpersonal atmosphere.* In other instances, I suggest that we experience the absence of others as an *empty interpersonal atmosphere*.

In conclusion, I suggest that an empathetic account can shed some light on how we approach non-peopled atmospheres and I broadly sketch how we might make such

a move. I argue that moving from interpersonal atmospheres to non-peopled atmospheres is more successful than moving in the other direction because not only are other subjects expressive but we experience the world as fundamentally intersubjective and suffused with subjective expressivity. Note that while I provide some in-roads into how to approach how the environment features in our atmospheric experience, I do not provide a systematic account here.

1. How the bodily field of expression is environmentally shaped

1.1. Practical matters

The environment can, in quite a simple way, shape how and what interpersonal atmospheres arise. Human action and expressive behaviour do not take place in a vacuum but in a material setting and that material setting can impact what expressive experience emerges in a given situation. One way to think about this is in purely practical terms. How a space is set up shapes the types and styles of interaction that people have. For instance, if you are in a small café that is crammed full with chairs and tables, the expressive actions that you can take are constrained in certain practical ways. One cannot, for example, use large sweeping gestures, dance a tango, or run in this small space. The environment impacts what embodied possibilities are available to us. Consequently, it shapes what expressive behaviour emerges in certain settings and, in turn, alters the character of the interpersonal atmospheres that might arise in a particular space.

Imagine that I enter such a café and see Dido and Aeneous, who are sitting with knees knocking together, heads bent into one another, talking in hushed tones, as emanating an atmosphere of intimacy. Their interaction, which I empathically perceive, is shaped by the space that they are in. Their bodily dynamic is shaped by the amount of room they have, the need to lean in to speak to each other so that they can be heard, their low voices, and so on. The practical space available to them imposes certain *physical* constraints on their actions and thus impacts their behaviour in ways that alter their expressivity and thus the way I atmospherically perceive them.

It may even be the case that this intimate style of interaction masks that Dido and Aeneous are actually in the middle of a hushed argument. Had they been in a different space, say in an open park, where they are not sitting and are able to hear each other without getting so close, their interaction might look very different and thus change how I perceive them atmospherically. As noted in chapter 3, the setting of an interpersonal interaction can also affect how a particular atmosphere emerges, as well as the robustness of an atmosphere. In the café, Dido and Aeneous' hushed argument is largely masked by the other voices that fill up the café, the bustling energy in the room. In this space, Dido and Aeneous' argument, though in conflict with the pervading cosy atmosphere of the café, might not be too noticeable or disruptive. However, if they were having this argument in hissed undertones in the middle of a library, where there is little other noise, their quiet argument can saturate the overall space, affecting others, creating a tense atmosphere. Aspects of the wider environment, then, seem to impact how we affectively perceive the relevant field of expression.

The above example highlights the way that the environment can influence what expressive behaviour and actions people and groups might engage in in various situations, thus impacting the expressive actions and interactions and thus how we experience them atmospherically. However, the material space of a setting might also *morph* the field of expressivity in certain ways that impact my experience of interpersonal atmosphere. In an echoey, high-ceilinged room, voices can be magnified, enhancing the sense of busy chatter that we might perceive as a bustling, dynamic atmosphere. The echoing chatter can give a sense of unity between those present, as we hear the 'voice' of the crowd, creating the impression of a common mood across the group. The materiality of the space, with its high ceilings, has a homogenizing effect on the expressivity of those present, creating the impression of a unified field of expression in a way that might not have occurred were the space designed differently. Those present may in fact be all undergoing various different experiences. However, the echo of the room can create a kind of flattening effect, creating the impression of a common mood which we perceive as an atmosphere that spans all those present. On the other end of the spectrum, a room with soft padded carpets, lined with lots of books, and so on, may soften the voices of

individuals present. Thus, I might perceive those present as having a serious or studious atmospheric character.

What these examples show is that how we interact with one another is practically impacted by the spaces that we find ourselves in. The design of spaces might force or encourage particular ways of sitting, of talking, of interacting with others, thus impacting the expressive postures, behaviour and vital style of the people I empathetically perceive. Moreover, the material setting can magnify or deaden expressive behaviour (such as voices in an echoing hall or a muffled library). This, in turn, impacts how I perceive the field of expression of those present; thus, altering my atmospheric, bodily experience of them. What I have highlighted here picks up on the practical materiality of a setting and its impact on atmosphere. In the next section, I consider not only how the material environment practical shapes bodily fields of expression but how it solicits or drives certain styles of interaction in terms of what the action-possibilities an environment *affords*.

1.2. Afforded interactions

Not only does the world practically constrain and allow certain styles of expressive action (e.g. how an individual can move depending on how much space there is), the world also affords different forms of interactive possibilities. That we do not perceive our environments as neutral but as permeated with certain *affordances*, solicitations for particular actions, is famously described by James Gibson. Gibson (1986) details how we do not experience our environments as a blank space or neutral terrain but is experienced with regards to the action possibilities that it affords us. For example, I experience my mug as affording picking up and drinking from, not merely as an oddly shaped clay piece. The affordances that objects and the world have are shaped by the material features of the object as well as our bodily capabilities, they refer back to how we can *use* objects. I see the mug as affording picking up both because of its size and shape and because I have a hand that can grasp it. A horse would not perceive the mug as affording picking up and drinking from as it does not have opposable thumbs with which to grasp the cup and its muzzle is too large to drink from the opening of the cup. While affordances have most prominently been spoken of in terms of the action-possibilities of objects, there is increasing recognition that we also experience other people as affording action-possibilities

(Kiverstein 2015; Valenti & Gold 1991) – e.g. the barista affords ordering a coffee from, my friends open arms afford hugging – and that objects and people can afford us affective possibilities, ways we can engage with the environment that regulate our affective states (Hufendiek 2016; Krueger & Colombetti 2018) – e.g. the notebook affords drawing to calm us down, the ukulele affords playing to upregulate our mood.

By affording various action, affective, and social possibilities, the environment not only *practically* shapes the way we act but can *solicit and drive* particular forms of interaction. For instance, the café affords sitting and chatting in a way that a busy high street does not. When I walk into a café, the chairs affording sitting down at, at a pub the bar might afford leaning on, at a library the books afford reading. The point here is that the environment not only asserts some practical constraints on how we can act in a certain space but different environments solicit different forms of expressive action and social interaction.

The importance of this is two-fold. First, the environment can promote the emergence of particular expressive behaviour. A library might have single person desks that are set up to afford quiet and solitary study. This encourages an individual to sit and read on their own, while discouraging library visitors forming chatty groups with one another, encouraging a quiet, still vitality across those there, thus giving rise to a quiet atmosphere. A bar or café, on the other hand, has tables with multiple chairs around them encouraging people to engage with one another, affording a more social setting to promote the kinds of interaction that might give rise to a happy atmosphere. Consequently, depending on the setting, different expressive actions are more or less likely to be afforded by the environment. Importantly, we can exploit this when we want to set up a space that will prompt certain expressive forms of interaction and thus generate a certain atmospheric character to emerge when people are present there. For instance, Shay puts on music at her party and moves her furniture to make space for a dance floor, so that the environment *affords* dancing, thus promoting a particular expressive style of behaviour and social interaction at her party, which will give rise to a happy atmosphere. By manipulating the kinds of affordance that an environment offers people, we can encourage the emergence of particular styles of expressivity and thus prompt the emergence of a particular atmospheric experience.

Second, by affording certain styles of action and interaction, the environment can also help *sustain* a particular mood or vitality, and thus sustain a particular atmosphere. As Krueger & Colombetti (2018, 225) highlight, environments not only afford particular affect regulation possibilities they continue to "to set up, drive, and regulate affective experiences at multiple timescales". Environmental resources can provide on-going feedback. For instance, the music at Shay's party does not afford dancing just at the moment I hear it but for as long as the music is playing. As such, the environment can scaffold on-going emotion, mood or vitality regulation that can help drive on-going expressive behaviour - perhaps even in ways that we would not have access to without the relevant environmental scaffolds (*ibid.*). Our "bodily-affective style" (Maise 2016), then, can be both diachronically and synchronically regulated not only by our interactions with others but also by the material environment. This, in turn, influences how one's bodily expressivity is atmospherically experienced. [51]

While affordances are, as Gibson puts it, "self-specifying" – what an object affords refers back to my own bodily capabilities – different people can experience objects as affording the same kinds of action-possibility. Sterelny (2010, 472) makes a similar point when he notes that we often create affective niches that scaffold not only the actions of individuals but of collectives. As I shall explore below, this is particularly the case when those people are entrenched in the same cultural norms. For instance, both you and I might experience the music at Shay's party as affording dancing too. Thus, what the environment affords can drive collective forms of vitality and mood. This can help establish and drive the kind of harmonious and dominant expressive character that weaves together multiple bodies into a field of expression. Thus, being in the same environmental space can promote a common way of being and way of expressively acting and feeling across multiple individuals. Thus, promoting the kind of expressive consistency (though not necessarily expressive homogeneity) from which an experience of interpersonal atmosphere emerges.

In the above, I have explored both how the environment can promote, drive and sustain various expressive behaviours and interactions both practically and in terms

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[51] Krueger & Colombetti (2018, 229) go on to suggest that in certain psychopathologies individuals "inhabit different – often profoundly different – affordance spaces". This might, then, be another way in which depressed individuals or individuals with ASD struggle to integrate with others and thus experience themselves as being 'outside' of an interpersonal atmosphere.

of action or feeling possibilities. In the next section, I want to throw light on the way in which environments are not only material settings but settings saturated with normative and cultural practices. These, too, can shape how we act in certain situations and thus impact, influence and drive the kinds of interpersonal atmospheres that arise.

1.3. Normativity, culture and the environment

Human beings do not exist in a neutral world. Rather, they are always in an intersubjective, normative, and culturally shaped world. I see my table as something to sit at, rather than something to sit on (even though it can bodily afford both these possibilities), due to sedimented notions of normative behaviour that I have inherited and habitualised. What objects afford me, then, is not just shaped by my own bodily capabilities but also by sedimented and inherited cultural norms. Gibson highlights this as follows:

> It is a mistake to separate the natural from the artificial as if there were two environments... It is also a mistake to separate the cultural environment from the natural environment... There is only one world, however diverse, and all animals live in it, although we human animals have altered it to suit ourselves. (Gibson 1986,130)

The affordances that an object has is influenced by both my own historical ways of interacting with that object and broader social and cultural norms. Krueger & Colombetti (2018, 223) give the following example to illustrate this: "the "natural" character of nuts in a dish at a cocktail party mean that they afford being grasped all at once. But such activity is generally frowned upon; sociocultural norms constrain the range of possible actions available in that space". Different objects, different spaces, different situations, different groups elicit different styles of bodily expressivity, different interpersonal interactions, different ways of being in the world. The same object might solicit different action-possibilities depending upon the situation: for instance, a table in a library is likely to afford quiet study, while a table at a bar might (at least to some, at a certain point in the evening) solicit dancing upon. The object itself has not changed, neither has my body, but because of the setting, what affordances are more salient or are more appropriate has changed.

Cultural and normative expectations also shape not just the what but also the *how* of my expressive behaviour in the places that I inhabit. In the library, I check my usual loud, chaotic vitality in favour of softer, quieter movements. When I enter a library, I am culturally attuned to what behaviour is considered appropriate in such a place. As Krueger (2019) notes: "the shape or contour of [forms of vitality] are determined not just by features of an individual's embodiment but also by physical, social, and symbolic features of the context in which they arise". The cultural and normative expectations that relate to library behaviour are different to the expectations of being at a gig, for instance. Thus, our environments play a key role in shaping our expressivity. This is not merely a matter of what behaviour I can practically engage in, but what behaviour is experienced as appropriate in a given situation.

As such, normative and cultural associations with certain environments can shape the vitality, the expressivity, of lived bodies in those spaces. Importantly, these norms are often *shared* norms; not just ones that I adhere to but that others adhere to as well. This can have the effect of modulating the expressive behaviour of individuals in a way that gives rise to a certain coherence of expressivity across those present in that space. For instance, when I enter the library, I not only adopt (either reflectively or pre-reflectively) a quiet, calm vitality but my vitality adheres to and matches the others present there; it is not only me who is influenced by the cultural context of the library space but all those who are familiar with the normative expectations attached to libraries in my society. We can see how this can give rise to the kind of expressive harmony that creates a field of expression that spans multiple individuals. For, in the library, my quiet demeanour complements and contributes to the overall quiet mood that spans the individuals there. These cultural and normative expectations can work in a way that helps bind people together in a field of expression that spans multiple bodies. Each person's vitality being a specific instantiation of an overall collective vitality or style. If someone were to enter the library with a bustling, loud style, dropping their books loudly onto the table and chatting away on their phone, this vitality is experienced as inappropriate, as disruptive to the vitality that joins the other's together in a shared field of expression.

Consequently, the cultural expectations attached to particular spaces and situations can encourage, drive and sustain particular vitality styles, particular expressions to arise, and create a certain coherence across multiple bodies. This can lead to our

experiencing an interpersonal atmosphere as emerging across the collective whole. In this way, it is the world, the environment in which we find ourselves, that can support the coalescing of human expressivity and, in turn, drive the emergence of certain forms of interpersonal atmosphere. Remember that this does not mean I as an individual must genuinely experience a shared mood in the library. It might be the case that I am so caught up in my own research that I am not aware that anyone is present with me in the library. However, to an observer, the quiet vitality expressed by those present can be perceived as a collective vitality or mood that spans those present.

That environments culturally and normatively drive bodily vitality and style is often used in order to encourage certain shared styles to arise, to create certain interpersonal atmospheres. Slaby (2019b) describes how companies make use of this by designing workspaces that elicit certain forms of behaviour in order to create atmospheres that encourage and drive concentration and productivity: "A crucial feature of social domains is that their material layout in concert with prevailing discursive structures – among them explicit rules, informal codes of conduct, favourite styles of interaction, etc. – implement arrangements that are such to prompt, channel, structure and sustain relational affect" (Slaby 2019b, 74). As noted in chapter 5, interpersonal atmospheres not only arise from collectives but diachronically modulate, drive and sustain certain experiences and expressive behaviours. Hence why there is interest in companies in prompting the emergence of certain kinds of atmosphere that, in turn, help to promote and sustain certain forms of experience and activity.

The second thing for us to consider is that not only is our expressive behaviour influenced by cultural and normative environmental expectations and affordances, our perceptual experiences are also driven and shaped by our normative and cultural expectations (Watsuji 1996, 80[52]). Not only are the library-goers' forms of vitality and bodily style influenced by the setting they occupy, but the observer's own apprehension of a setting is shaped by normative and cultural expectations. When I walk into a library, I have certain expectations about what the atmosphere will be like, I expect people to be sitting quietly, studying, for there to be an atmosphere of

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[52] For a discussion of Watsuji's view of perception as irreducibly socially, see Krueger 2020.

quiet concentration. On the one hand, this might influence my experience of there being a quiet, studious atmosphere as my expectations perhaps make those who are expressing this bodily style more salient to me, might bias my perception in a way that influences my bodily apprehension of those who fit with my expected atmospheric experience. On the other hand, given my expectations, in part formed by my previous experiences of libraries, I might expect there to be a shared mood of quiet studiousness that all those present are bound up in. As such, not only might individuals who embody this this expressive style appear more salient to me, my expectation of this mood might drive my affective apprehension of multiple individuals forming part of the same field of expression.

It is also worth flagging that how we perceive another's expressivity is also normatively and culturally shaped - in the UK I see my friend's nodding head as expressive of her agreement, while someone who has grown up in India would see this as an expression of disagreement. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: "every human use of the body...inaugurates an order and founds an institution or a tradition" (as quoted in Dolezal 2017). Both my use of my own body as well as my perception of others as a field of expression, then, is culturally and normatively saturated.

1.4. Material interactions

In the above example, while I have discussed how the materiality of an environment can drive, support and sustain certain forms of interpersonal atmospheres, I have described the people making up the relevant field of expression in ways that are still peculiarly distant from the world in which they are in. There is a risk of giving the impression that the world is some kind of container in which we carry out our interpersonal interactions. However, we often interact *with* our material environment. As many highlight (e.g. Gurwitsch 1977; Jardine & Szanto 2017; Schutz 1967; Zahavi 2011), our empathetic perception of others does not just single out individuals as cut off from their environment. Rather, the way people interact with their environment informs my empathetic understanding of them. For instance, my seeing you wave a scarf around versus my seeing you wave around a knife significantly impacts my empathetic grasp of your experience (even though your movements might be the same). We should be careful when focusing on interpersonal interaction not to forget that people are intricately embedded in their environment.

What people are doing *in* space often involves actively them engaging with and manipulating objects in the material environment around them. At Shay's party, I don't just see people milling around chatting to one another, I perceive people dancing *to* music, perceive them holding drinks, playing games and so on. The boundary between the lived bodies and the material world is, then, *blurry* in a certain sense. While I think it is important to maintain that there is something special about the lived subjective body, in that it is constitutive of human experience and thereby gives us perceptual access to the other's experience, the lived body is in constant interaction with the object world around it. When we are empathetically turned to someone's lived body we do not simply perceive them as separated or isolated from that object world but embedded in it in a meaningful and expressive way.

This, I suggest, can occur in two ways. First, in the weaker sense, we perceive others and their expressivity embedded in their environment. How they interact with the environment gives their expressive behaviour context and thus informs and influences my empathetic perception of them, thus impacting how I atmospherically perceive them. For instance, when I see someone reading a philosophy textbook, compared to seeing them reading a magazine, contextualises their expressive activity. Turning my empathetic perception of them from a relaxed reading to a studious reading. As such, the atmosphere I perceive them as having can be altered based on what kinds of objects the relevant subject or subjects are interacting with.

Second, in the more robust sense, parts of the material world can be perceived as *part of* an individual's lived body. As I shall discuss in chapter 7, the lived body is not constrained to the physical body but can extend beyond the limits of skin and skull. Merleau-Ponty (2012, 144) famously talks of how objects in the world can be incorporated into our lived bodies and, as I shall argue, we as empathetic observers can apprehend this. Indeed, we take advantage of this in many ways. For instance, fashion can be a way of enhancing forms of vitality. A dancer, for instance, might choose a specific article and material of clothing in order to enhance their expressive movements. The graceful spin of the ballet dancers skirt, for instance, not only contextualises what the dancer is doing but expressively enhances her movements. I shall return to this point in more detail in chapter 7.

2. Non-peopled atmospheres

The examples in section 1 detail how the environment can actively drive, shape and sustain the emergence of interpersonal atmospheres. Practical, cultural and normative features of the environment can prompt and even scaffold expressive behaviour and thus influence the bodily style and vitality of those inhabiting that environment, thus influencing the field of expression that is affectively perceived as atmosphere. A potential objection to this approach is that although this incorporates the environment in a weak sense, the examples I have given above still turn on the people present. Yet, we can experience atmosphere when there are no people present at all. For instance, I can walk into an empty library and experience a quiet, calm atmosphere, I can experience the gloomy atmosphere of a dense wood or a misty field, I can experience the eerie atmosphere of a deserted house. If atmosphere is detachable from our bodily experience of embodied subjects, surely this undermines my claim that our atmospheric experience is a form of empathy, for there are no embodied subjects in these scenarios for me to empathetically perceive.

As mentioned above, one response to this might be to bite the bullet and say that yes we do experience atmospheres when there are no people present but this is a different type of phenomenon. This would be to push against the idea that we can come up with one, unified account of atmosphere. As my approach has indicated, I do think there has been a tendency to employ 'atmosphere' as an umbrella term – rolling together atmospheres of people, places, and things (e.g. Griffero 2014, x; Böhme 1993, 153; Tellenbach 1968, 229). I have argued that using the term in this undifferentiated manner has led to the lack of specific research done on interpersonal atmosphere. Indeed, as will become clear, I do think that there are some important differences between interpersonal atmospheres and non-peopled atmospheres.

Nevertheless, I suggest that, despite initial concerns to the contrary, we can use our empathetic account of interpersonal atmospheres to shed light on how to approach non-peopled atmospheres. How so? While we are not strictly speaking experiencing a *bodily field of expression* in these instances, I argue that our experience is still structured around intersubjectivity and interpersonal experience. To suggest that we experience the library as devoid of subjective expressivity is, I think, to ignore the

fact that our worlds are fundamentally intersubjective. When I am alone, I am not suddenly thrown into a solipsistic world, a world devoid of others. The world is saturated with others, even when we are by ourselves.

In the following, I sketch out two ways in which we might experience a non-peopled space atmospherically. First, by appealing to the idea that even when no people are present, I am bodily sensitive to the way the world affords and promotes certain styles of expressive behaviour, interaction and interrelatedness, and thus allows me to experience a kind of *quasi-interpersonal atmosphere*. Second, drawing from Sartre's notion of present absence (Sartre 2003), I suggest that sometimes we can experience the *absence* of others atmospherically as an *empty interpersonal atmosphere*. While neither of these sketches amounts to a systematic treatment of non-peopled atmospheres, I aim to show the ways an empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere can inform our approach to non-peopled cases.

2.1. Subjective expressivity in the world

When I walk into a library, I do not find myself in a neutral environment devoid of meaning, devoid of culture, or devoid of humanity. Rather, I find a space that is set up in a particular way, for a particular use, that supports certain subjective bodily engagement and behaviour. As Landes (2013, 97) puts it, "[t]he cultural world surrounds us as a network of material supports for expressive gestures, each grasped in an impersonal sense: *someone* drives down the road; *someone* smokes this pipe". Human expressivity permeates the environments that we find ourselves in. Thus, I experience the empty library not as a merely empty space but an environment that supports particular forms of interaction and ways of being in the world.

The point here is not simply that cultural artefacts are expressive of humans simply in the sense that they have been fashioned by human hands. Nor that they are expressive of humans in the sense that they refer to human use in order to make them intelligible – e.g. the desks in the library might be thought to be expressive of humans because they refer back to carpentry or because to perceive them as desks, rather than to hunks of wood, they refer back to human culture. The point is rather that we experience artefacts as expressive of humanity in the way in which they offer up particular possibilities for interaction. Merleau-Ponty describes this as follows:

behaviors also descend into nature and are deposited there in the form of a cultural world. Not only do I have a physical world and live surrounded by soil, air, and water, I have around me the roads, plantations, villages, streets, churches, a bell, utensils, a spoon, a pipe. *Each of these objects bears an imprint the mark of human action it serves.* Each one emits an atmosphere of humanity that might only be vaguely determined (if I explore a recently executed house from top to bottom). (Merleau-Ponty 2015, 363, my italics)

The point is that not only can the environment, in real time, actually support, drive and sustain the bodily expressivity that underlies interpersonal atmospheric experience, but that even when there are no individuals present, the environment is expressive of the role it plays in supporting human behaviour.

In a similar vein, and pre-empting the better known work of Merleau-Ponty, Watsuji (1994) describes how the world can also be expressive of our subjective interconnectedness. He describes how we experience roads, trainlines, postboxes and so on, not merely as physical objects but expressions of human 'betweenness'. The felt significance of a road, for example, "has nothing to do with that physical thing that is of a certain width and length in merely physical space" (Watsuji 1994, 158). Rather, communication and transportation technologies are experienced not merely as physical objects but as "an expression of human connection" (*ibid.*).This is because these technologies create new opportunities for betweenness by opening up new and more immediate possibilities for connection and shared experience not bound by physical space or by the physical properties of the technologies that extend through physical space.

Accordingly, subjective expressivity seeps into the world around us. When I experience an empty library as having a calm atmosphere, what I bodily perceive is the way in which the environment is set up to support calm bodily styles, vitality, interaction and interrelatedness of embodied subjects. We experience the space as primed to bring about expressive experience and interaction, as affording particular action and affective possibilities. As Landes and Merleau-Ponty emphasise, this imprint of action that an object or environment serves need not be what the environment offers *me* specifically, but an anonymous subject, a *someone* rather than a specific individual. We are not, then, simply talking about what I perceive the

environment as affording *me* in any one moment but to my sensitivity to the affordances that the environment might have for others. I can, for instance, experience a church as having a solemn or reverential atmosphere even though I am an atheist and do not experience the pews and prayer cushions as affording me religious activity.

Now, we are not turned to a bodily field of expression here, there is not an expressive subjective experience that we are empathetically perceiving. We might, then, be best to talk of these atmospheres as 'quasi'-interpersonal atmospheres. Cases where we experience a space 'as if' there were embodied subjects present, interacting with the environment and one another in ways that are supported and suggested by the material setting. On this reading, then, non-peopled atmospheres are importantly derivate of interpersonal atmospheres. Rather than arising from a world empty of human subjectivity, my experience of a non-peopled atmosphere arises from my bodily sensitivity to how a currently non-populated space potentially supports and promotes various styles of human expressivity.

One might worry that this interpretation only applies to environments that are specifically designed by humans for humans. That the gloomy atmosphere of a wood, for example, does not bear the imprint of human expression that Merleau-Ponty and Watsuji are referring to. However, I think this is wrong. Although the wood is not specifically designed to solicit particular affordances for subjective activity, it still is suffused with affordances. I can easily experience a twig as affording picking up as I can a mug, experience a sunny meadow as affording affective possibilities for upregulating my mood as a cosy café.

Interestingly, there might be another factor to consider here. As emphasised throughout my thesis, forms of vitality are part of another's expressive comportment that I bodily perceive as atmosphere. The freneticism of a crowd gives rise to a very different atmosphere than the a languid crowd – even where the crowd is *doing* the same thing, e.g. progressing down the street. It might be the case that we perceive movement more generally as having a certain vitality to it (even when we are not talking of subjective bodies). Stein seems to endorse this kind of view when she talks of how we might empathetically grasp the movement of a plant: "we not only see such vigor and sluggishness in people…but also in plants" (Stein 1989, 69). Stein

does not rule out that we can have empathetic experiences of plants but rather poses it as a "limit case" (Ruonakoski 2017, 29). It may, then, be the case that we also apprehend aspects of movement in the material world as having vitality reminiscent of human vitality effects which prompt us to experience them atmospherically.

Note, though, that Stein emphasises that when we empathetically perceive the plant as having a sluggish vitality, this is not to say that this is identical to our empathetic perception of other subjects. Unlike with subjects, I do not experience the plant as actually having sensations, nor being as having a spatial, conscious perspective on the world (Stein 1989, 69). Instead of characterizing this as empathy proper, we might then want to classify this as a kind of quasi empathetic experience. An experience of the plant 'as if' it were a subject of experience (I leave aside the question of whether plants could be subjects of experience here). This might help us to explain why, for instance, we see the gentle wafting of the bent over weeping willow as having a melancholy atmosphere, reminiscent of the melancholy vitality of a melancholy person.

One of the advantages of this approach to non-peopled atmospheres, based upon human expressivity and potential subjective interaction, is that it helps us account for why two seemingly very different environments seem to have the same kind of atmospheric character. In the above, I mentioned that we could experience a dark, dense forest as having a gloomy atmosphere. I could also experience a misty field or a cemetery as having a gloomy atmosphere. Materially speaking, though, these environments are very different. The first is dark, there are tall overbearing trees around me; the field, in contrast, is an open space filled with mist; the cerimetry is also more open than the wood but is filled with gravestones covered in lichen, there is a path winding through, green grass. Visually these places appear very different. Why, then, would we experience them as producing an atmosphere with a similar affective character? On my model, we can account for this by appealing to the fact that different material objects and environments can have the same action, social, or affective affordances. Objects that *look* very different may share the same affordances. For example, I perceive both ice cream and walnuts as affording eating (even though they look very different), I perceive both a swing, a deckchair and a beanbag as affording sitting, I experience both a sad song and a discarded sock in a

tree as affording sadness, I perceive both the physical presence of my friend and my WhatsApp window with the same person as affording social interaction possibilities. While affordances relate to the materiality of objects, they are relational, so they arise through my own bodily capacities and I can bodily engage with different objects in similar ways. Consequently, the wood, the misty field and the cemetery might all have a gloomy atmosphere as they afford similar action and affective possibilities – e.g. solitary walking and contemplation, quiet vitality, down-regulation of emotion or mood.

2.2. Presence in absence

Some of our experiences of non-peopled atmospheres appear to relate to the experience of the *absence* of people. For instance, when I walk into an empty lecture hall where I expect there to be a throng of students, I can experience an eerie or unsettling atmosphere. This can arise due to an experience of absence. Sartre (2003) famously discusses how we can experience the absence of others. He describes waiting in a café for his friend Pierre to arrive and having a positive, explicit experience of their absence. He describes Pierre's absence as 'haunting' the café (Sartre 2003, 34). We do not simply experience the café as not yet including our friend but have a palpable experience of them not being there. This is what Sartre describes as an example of experiencing a 'nothingness'.

Sartre's discussion of presence in absence can be helpfully applied to my experience of the non-peopled atmosphere of the empty lecture hall. What Sartre brings to the fore is that "it is not only when we are directly confronted with other people that we 'experience' their presence" (Webber 2011, 155). Here, while there is no present bodily field of expression that I am bodily perceiving, I am affectively aware of this absence. Some cases of non-peopled atmosphere, then, might hinge precisely on the bodily anticipation of others being present being thwarted, leaving one with a felt absence of the other or others. We feel the lived space as 'lacking' the other, as empty. While there is no bodily field of expression to empathetically perceive, this absence of the other might still be experienced as a temporally and spatially extended absence. We anticipate the presence of others and the empty field of expression leaves us with an atmospheric experience of absence, of eeriness or emptiness, of something or someone as missing.

We might draw an analogy here with other perceptual experiences of absence. Merleau-Ponty describes us as tactually feeling absence. He describes how when we draw a hand over a brush, we *feel* the gaps between the bristles: "if I touch a piece of linen material or a brush, between the bristles of the brush and the threads of the linen, there does not lie a tactile nothingness, but a tactile space devoid of matter, a tactile background" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 329; also see Cavedon-Taylor 2017; Ratcliffe 2008). There is increasing recognition that we hear silence not simply as a void but as an absence of sound: "Hearing silence is successful perception of an absence of sound. It is not a failure to hear sound. A deaf man cannot hear silence" (Sorenson 2008a, 126; also see Phillips 2013, Meadows 2020); as well as discussions of how we might *see* absences, such as empty spaces or darkness (Richardson 2010; Sorenson 2008b; Soteriou 2011). In his paper 'Feeling Nothing' (2019), Tom Roberts also explores how we can have emotional experiences of absence. If, we understand interpersonal atmospheres as a mode of empathetic *perception*, then it seems reasonable to suppose that just like other perceptual experiences, I can have an empathetic perception of the absence of bodily expressivity. My awareness is not just of a nothingness but the lack of a bodily field of expression.

Such experiences of absence as an eerie atmosphere are particularly noticeable in places where we don't just expect there to be others but where there is evidence of the recent presence of others, in particular of unfinished activity. Think, for example, of the uncanny atmosphere of deserted shopping malls in the US or the ghostly atmosphere of an abandoned room, such as those preserved in Chernobyl. Here, we experience the other's present absence in the traces of human activity that they have left behind:

> The room of someone absent, the books of which he turned the pages, the objects which he touched are in themselves only books, objects, i.e., full actualities. The very traces which he has left can be deciphered as traces of him only within a situation where he has been already appointed as absent. (Sartre 2003, 61).

As discussed above, human expressivity is embedded within the world, involves the world, interacts with the world. Our embodied expressivity can, therefore, be implied in the traces that we leave behind.

This experience of absence seems particularly fruitful for unpacking atmospheres of loneliness or eeriness. What is interesting in these examples is that we do not seem to apprehend the environment simply in terms of what it affords – for instance, the lecture hall or the abandoned study might still afford studying, calm attentive work and so on. Rather, it is the absence of embodied, expressive subjects that seems to give rise to the eerie or lonely atmosphere. There is an absence of embodied subjective expressivity in *lived space*. It is not just an empty physical space but a lack of embodied expressive activity. My feeling body reaches out for a bodily field of expression that it anticipates will be there but is met with nothingness. We experience this as a space of negation (Herrington 2008).

This, then, seems to be a subtly different experience of non-peopled atmosphere than the above. It is as though we are experiencing half of a coupled system. We perceive the environment as scaffolding expressive activity; such as students listening and writing, of someone engaged in research at their desk, a child playing with the toys on the floor – but the people, whose activity *should* be scaffolded by these scenes and situations, are missing. We experience the environment not so much as *potentially* scaffolding the production of certain actions but as having been interrupted part way through scaffolding that action. We experience absent subjectivity in such instances as uncanny, perhaps in a similar way to the way we experience the stillness of a corpse as uncanny when we expect to encounter a subject but only find an object (Stern 2010, 12). Indeed, silence and lack of movement seem to play a particularly important role in experiencing an environment as *lacking* a bodily field of expression, experiencing the lived space as empty. These eerie atmospheres, then, might be best described as empty interpersonal atmospheres. Again, what this approach allows us to do is account for how very differently structured material settings might be experienced as having the same eerie atmosphere.

What I think this draws attention to is how, more than in cases of interpersonal atmospheres, the observer's own expectations play a crucial role in terms of how a

non-peopled atmosphere is experienced. The felt sense of absence that produces an eerie atmosphere is prefaced by an anticipation that someone *should* be there. If I had no such expectation, I might find the quiet lecture hall as offering a quiet and calm atmosphere. Here, we are not bodily attending to the potential atmosphere that an environment might support, so much as experiencing the lack of bodily expressivity in a place.

Ratcliffe discusses a similar idea of how our own expectations can lead to an experience of "sensed-presence" (2020, 1) in the context of grief. Here, Ratcliffe analyses the common experience of bereaved individuals still feeling the presence of a deceased person. We might, for instance, continue to feel the presence of another when our habitual expectations that they will be in a certain place, or in our lives, have yet to adjust to the new reality; where we still take it for granted that someone will be there, even though this is no longer the case: "when the partner dies, a habitual world may remain largely intact for a time, despite an explicit, propositional recognition of the death" (2020, 3).

It should be noted that Sartre, in talking about presence in absence, uses this as a way to consider what the relationship is between perception, expectation, and imagination (Sartre 2004, 185-188; Webber 2011, 2018). To dig into this idea of atmospheric experience of the absence of bodily expressivity, then, would involve an interesting dive into how best to cash out this experience of anticipation in terms of perception, imagination or a synthesis of both. This, sadly, goes beyond the scope of this thesis but raises a rich question on which further research can build.

2.3. A notable difference

Above, I have suggested that quite apart from leaving no room for a discussion of how the environment influences our atmospheric experience and instances of non-peopled atmosphere, an empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere can be used as a fruitful starting point for unpacking such cases. Nevertheless, I think there is a key difference between our experience of properly-speaking interpersonal atmospheres and how we experience the world as playing a role in how atmospheres emerged and 'quasi-interpersonal atmospheres' or 'empty interpersonal atmospheres'.

One crucial difference about my apprehension of an atmosphere where there are no people present is that I cannot be *wrong* about this atmosphere in the same way that I can be wrong about an interpersonal atmosphere. If I walk into Shay's party and experience there being a happy atmosphere but come to realise that the people present are in fact melancholy, I am wrong about that atmosphere (see chapter 5). This is not to say that I was mistaken about *my* apprehension of the happy atmosphere, my affective perception did give me the atmosphere as happy. However, like other forms of empathy, I can get it wrong. For instance, I can mistake your grimace for a smile. In empathy, I am perceiving *your* experience and I can misperceive this. In contrast, when I experience the library as having a calm atmosphere, I am not bodily perceiving an actual embodied experience, another's expressive experience. Rather, I experience how the environment *might* support various human experiences. Someone could come into the library, being loud and gregarious and not take up the affordances that I perceived to be there. This changes the atmosphere. However, it does not render my previous experience wrong, as what I perceive is better described as a 'potential interpersonal atmosphere'. You and I might experience the empty library as having very different atmospheres, I might experience it as having a calm atmosphere while you experience it as having a lonely one. However, I do not think either of us is 'right', or conversely 'wrong', in the way that one can get an interpersonal atmosphere wrong.

Indeed, what shapes my apprehension of a quasi-atmosphere is the way my own expectations are culturally, historically and normatively shaped. I might experience the world as affording particular action, affective and social possibilities for a *someone*, and while this someone is not a specific other (necessarily) neither are they an entirely blank slate. Although neither Landes nor Merlau-Ponty make this point, the features of this 'someone' will be culturally and normatively shaped by my own background, culture and society. For instance, I might perceive the environment as affording expressive interaction for someone with a certain body, certain interests, certain cultural practices and so on. Someone from a different background, then, may have a differently shaped 'someone', which impacts how they experience the character of the *quasi-interpersonal atmosphere*.

Conclusion

I have highlighted that the main objection to my empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere is likely the question of how it can account for our experience of the atmosphere in relation to the material world; cases where the environment seems to contribute to an interpersonal atmosphere (e.g. the music and lighting at Shay's party) and, perhaps even more problematically, cases where we experience atmosphere when there are no people present at all. While I have fallen short of providing a full account of non-peopled atmosphere, I have sought to show how an interpersonal account can helpfully inform our understanding of non-peopled atmosphere. I have argued that the environment can, and does, practically, normatively and culturally shape, prompt and sustain the emergence of embodied expressive action and behaviour, thus impacting the expressive experience of others and our bodily empathetic perception of them as having a particular atmosphere.

Moreover, I have shown that even when there are no people present, we might experience either a quasi-interpersonal atmosphere (where we experience the world as potentially scaffolding a particular subjective experience and interaction) or an empty interpersonal atmosphere (where we experience an interpersonal atmosphere of the absence of others). What this initial sketch reveals is that appreciating how we experience non-peopled atmospheres could rest on an understanding of how we experience interpersonal atmosphere – for, by understanding our atmospheric experience of people as tied to our bodily perception of their expressivity, we can examine how we find the world more generally as saturated by subjective expressivity. As such, starting from atmospheric experiences that are rooted in the expressivity of people can inform our understanding of non-peopled situations as atmospheric. Non-peopled atmospheres are, on my account, derivate of or referential to our interpersonal atmospheres. It is no surprise, then, that accounts of atmosphere that start with non-peopled atmospheres, run aground when it comes to introducing people into the mix - as suggested in the introduction, this is to move in the wrong direction.

Certainly, more work needs to be done to present a systematic account of non-peopled atmosphere. In particular, the role of expectation and imagination in my concepts of quasi-interpersonal atmosphere and empty interpersonal atmosphere

present a rich area for further research and discussion. Nevertheless, what this chapter seeks to demonstrate is how starting with an analysis of interpersonal atmosphere, quite apart from failing to address non-peopled cases, can be used as a fruitful starting point for such an investigation.

Chapter 7

Online atmospheres

Introduction

In our contemporary, technologically dominated lives, many of our experiences no longer take place simply in concrete, material space but in online space. We already see discussions cropping up about atmospheres on social media platforms. This happens both in the media and in academic research. Discussions in the media tend to focus upon the hostile, toxic and disruptive atmospheres found online, particularly in cases of trolling and flaming. Indeed, in 2018, the Church of England even published guidelines about how best to foster a kinder, calmer, more positive atmosphere on social media (Church of England 2018). In academic work, while there are references to hostile atmospheres online (e.g. Miller 2016), there is a broader recognition of the variety of atmospheres that arise online. For instance, in research on online learning, there has been a surge of interest in how to curate inclusive and warm atmospheres online to promote distance-learning. Such research highlights the importance of, for instance, creating a "positive social atmosphere in order to build a feeling of belonging and community through WhatsApp" (Ayuningtyas 2018, 165; also see Ashiyan & Salehi 2016). Online atmospheres also are described in the context of sociological and anthropological research in relation to how online atmospheres and affective attunement can arise and drive political emotions, feelings of solidarity and belonging online (e.g. Papachrissi 2015). However, while the term 'atmosphere' is used in relation to these online contexts, little to no consideration is given to what an online atmosphere might be or what experiencing an atmosphere online specifically involves.

While there is a tendency to talk of 'the Internet' or 'online space', we should be careful not to approach online activities as taking place in one homogeneous space (Krueger & Osler 2019; Osler forthcoming b). When talking about online atmospheres, what is being described is not the atmosphere of the Internet as a homogenous space as a whole. Rather, discussions of social atmospheres typically refer to specific platforms, even to specific group chats on specific platforms such as WhatsApp (e.g. Ashiyan & Salehi 2016; Ayuningtyas 2018), Facebook (e.g.

Carpenter 2012; Park et al 2009) and Instagram (e.g. Jenson 2014; Serafinelli 2018; Souza et al 2015). When looking at the notion of online atmosphere, just as offline atmospheres, we must be careful to make the distinction between online atmospheres and online *climates*, to borrow the terms from de Rivera and Paez (2007). Climates are intended to pick out a more abstract 'mood' or 'tone' that characterizes, say, an epoch or a nation, whereas atmospheres refer to specific situations: "Unlike emotional atmospheres, which depend on group members focusing on a particular event, emotional climates involve the relationships between group members. They involve feelings such as the collective fear used by a dictatorship" (de Rivera & Paez 2007, 232). While it may be the case that the Internet does indeed have some kind of 'climate', I will leave this question to one side and focus instead on these descriptions of atmospheric experience online on specific platforms that relate to specific social interactions.

Given my proposal that we understand atmosphere as an affective mode of experiencing the emotion, mood, vitality and interconnectedness of others, we might suppose that this requires my being physically present with a person or group in order to experience them as having a particular atmosphere. If our atmospheric experiences are dependent on being corporeally present with those we experience, the idea of an online atmosphere may seem impossible as we are not in the same space as others when we encounter them online. The worry, as Smart articulates it, is that "it is by no means clear that details of our physical embodiment and environmental embedding really matter that much when it comes to understanding the nature of our online interaction" (Smart 2014, 327) and, as such, this worry might carry over to a concern that my empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere has little bearing on experiences of online atmospheres. We might, then, deem the discussions of online atmospheres as a mere linguistic hangover from face-to-face interactions; a kind of shorthand for describing the tone or mood that a group chat, Facebook page, or comment section that we might *infer* is there but that we do not experience strictly as an atmosphere in terms of being a bodily apprehension of the mood.

In this chapter, I start by setting out an initial summary of why some might rule out the possibility of online interpersonal atmospheres. This line of thinking would lead us to either deny that we can experience online atmospheres at all or suggest that

the term atmosphere, when used in an online setting, is picking out a different kind of experience (perhaps closer to a projectionist account of atmosphere). However, I present a defence of online atmospheres as a genuine category of atmospheric experience that is commensurate with my own empathetic account. My argument rests on the claim that although we are not physically present with one another online and we are not in the same physical place, we still have access, in certain circumstances, to the field of expression of individuals and groups and can empathetically perceive this as atmosphere. I will, however, suggest that because the field of expression online is often 'sparser' than when we are physically present with others, we might be more prone to getting the atmosphere wrong online. I will also suggest that as there is less material scaffolding of emotions, mood and vitality on the Internet, that online atmospheres are typically more precarious.

For the purposes of this chapter, I limit myself to talking about two forms of online atmospheres. First, I will consider how we can experience atmospheres online when we encounter people via video link, such as on Zoom or Skype. Second, I will turn to the case of online atmospheres experienced in primarily text-based encounters, occurring on platforms such as WhatsApp or Messenger.

1. Atmospheres online – alternative accounts

When talking about interpersonal atmospheres, we typically talk about the atmospheres of parties, family dinners, rallies, or individuals. In all these examples, the person experiencing the atmosphere is physically present with those to whom the atmosphere relates. Often these examples involve being in the same room as those creating the atmosphere. Occasionally, as in our example of walking towards Shay's party and experiencing the happy atmosphere as something spilling out of the house, we are not strictly face-to-face with those to whom the atmosphere relates. Nevertheless, such cases still seem to require some degree of physical proximity to the party. When I am approaching Shay's house, I still can hear the happy laughter, the music, can see the warm light pouring into the street. If I were two streets over and could neither hear nor see the party, it seems odd to say that I could still experience the party's atmosphere. This seems like saying that I can see a bird when it is on a roof on the other side of a city. We might think that what is

fundamentally different about our experience of others online is precisely that we are no longer able to directly perceive them. For, when I go online, what I can grasp of you is not your lived body as a field of expression but merely mediating signs and symbols (Fuchs 2014, 165-7). It might seem, then, that if we want to account for online atmosphere, we need to find a different account than the empathetic model that I have presented.

1.1. Fuchs and 'The Virtual Other'

While phenomenology has not, thus far, paid much attention to online interpersonal encounters (c.f. Fuchs 2014; Kekki 2020; Osler 2020a, forthcoming b), Fuchs, in his 2014 article 'The Virtual Other', claims that online interpersonal encounters are significantly different to those in the 'real' (i.e., nonvirtual) world. Fuchs states that in contrast to face-to-face encounters, in "virtual worlds there is a suspension of immediate bodily experience, a disembodiment" (Fuchs 2014, 165). According to Fuchs, then, when we go online, we leave our physical bodies behind us (Fuchs 2014, 166; also see Dreyfus 2008, 10). A knock-on effect of this disembodiment is that when we go online, we lose our direct empathetic access to others as we no longer have perceptual access to the other's body: "[i]nstead of interacting with embodied persons, we interact more and more with pictures and symbols" (2014, 167). As empathy involves perceiving the other's lived body, empathy is deemed impossible in this online world of "disembodied communication" (*ibid.*).

Fuchs recognises that virtual communication can be highly emotive. Nevertheless, he argues that what is lacking online is "the direct feedback from the embodied contact, based on emotional cues and expressive gestures by which we perceive one another empathetically" (*ibid.*). He suggests that we make the mistake of thinking we encounter the other online as we engage in a kind of imaginative form of other-understanding, a quasi-empathy 'as if' we were really encountering the other. Instead of really encountering the other online, "[t]he other has become a projection surface, a product of my imagination" (2014, 168). Consequently, Fuchs claims that we do not empathetically perceive the other's experience but project our expectations onto their communication.

Empathy cannot take place online, according to Fuchs, because we no longer perceive the field of expression of the other's lived body, we cannot perceive the

other's expressive behaviour, their gestures, postures and so on. This clearly has a knock-on effect for the idea that we could experience atmosphere online. If group atmospheres are a form of bodily empathetic perception, then Fuchs' analysis of online encounters seems to preclude the occurrence of online interpersonal atmospheres, at least as I have presented them; we simply do not have access to the other(s) in the right way for atmospheric experience to arise.

Why, then, do people still use the term atmosphere in relation to online situations? One conclusion might be that people are using the word 'atmosphere' as a kind of linguistic hang up, rather than to pick out the same kind of experiences that we describe as atmosphere in offline situations. It might, then, simply be a result of 'laziness' that we have not created a new vocabulary suitable for our online encounters, instead misapplying offline terms in ways that create ambiguity and confusion. Alternatively, as I set out below, we might want to acknowledge that there is a kind of atmosphere experience occurring in certain online situations but these are a different kind of experience to the one's I have been analysing in offline settings.

1.2. A projectionist account of online atmosphere

We might want to allow that something like atmospheric experience can occur online but that, because we experience people in a fundamentally different way online, we need a different account of these experiences. Given Fuchs' position that we do not, properly speaking, empathetically encounter others online but rather *project* emotions onto the symbolic surface of the other, it might seem that the projectionist account of atmosphere (which I dismissed in chapter 1) may well apply to our online cases.

Remember that the projectionist account of atmosphere suggests that what happens when we experience atmosphere is that we experience, say, tenseness in a certain situation and project it onto the surrounding environment. So, if I experience a family dinner as having a tense atmosphere, I experience myself as tense and then project that feeling onto the situation. Experiencing atmosphere, then, simply tells me about my own emotional reaction to a situation, it does not tell me anything about the experiences of those present. This echoes Fuchs' account of other experience online, where he says that I project my own feelings onto the symbols and signs the

other sends me; that I do not empathetically experience, say, the other's sadness online but project sadness onto them based on the signs I am receiving: "the internet produces fictional or 'phantom emotions'" which "are not directed to the actual other but… [are] a product of my imagination" (2014, 168).

Fuchs' analysis could, then, be extended to online atmospheres. We could conclude that when I experience a family conversation on WhatsApp as having a tense atmosphere, this is because I am projecting tenseness onto the conversation based upon my own feelings, imagination or inference. This would amount to a very different kind of experience to the experience of atmosphere I have put forward in offline cases. In offline cases, atmosphere is an affective empathetic experience of those present which I experience through my body. Whereas, while we might experience something that might feel like atmosphere online, this is a kind of *quasi-*atmospheric experience; I do not really encounter the others and, therefore, do not experience atmosphere as a bodily empathetic perception. Rather, I project an atmosphere onto the messages I received, based perhaps on inferences made relating to the words and symbols the others are sending. Unlike our offline cases, online atmospheres do not, therefore, reveal the other and their experiences to me; I do not properly speaking experience their mood, rather their messages elicit an affective response in me that I project back onto the messages.

However, the reasons for rejecting the projectionist account in offline cases (as discussed in chapter 1) hold for online ones, too. I can, for example, experience a WhatsApp group as having a tense, uncomfortable atmosphere while not feeling tense myself. Quite the contrary, the sadist in me might be finding the situation amusing. That I can experience my own feeling states as being in conflict with online atmospheres suggests that I am not simply projecting my own emotive response onto the online interaction. Moreover, it does not capture my lived experience of online atmospheres, where I experience a tense atmosphere on a WhatsApp thread as *disclosing* the mood of the others, as suffusing the online space with affectivity.

What is more, we are left with the odd situation where Fuchs' claim that I project emotions on to the other online (and the implication that an atmosphere would also be projected onto the other), leaves us asking how we recognise the other as something we can project onto in the first place. Remember that empathy theorists,

in part, reject the idea that our other-understanding is rooted in inference or projection on the basis that such accounts presuppose what they want to explain; for unless we recognise someone as a subject, recognise their behaviour as expressive, we would not know to whom to project experience onto. If Fuchs is right that we project emotions onto the other online, we must have first empathetically experienced their words as expressive. In Husserl's words: "the possibility of sociality, the possibility of comprehension, presupposes a certain lived-bodily intersubjectivity" (Husserl 1970, 297) and this applies just as much to the online world as the offline one. It is, therefore, unclear how a projectionist account of encountering the other and experiencing online atmospheres would get off the ground in the first place.

2. (Dis)embodiment online?

The analysis in section 1 hinges on the assumption that because we cannot experience other people's physical bodies in online space, we cannot, therefore, have access to the field of expression of their lived bodies that underpins our atmospheric experience. In many ways this claim has a certain intuitive appeal. If I experience Shay as having a joyful atmosphere because of her smiles, her laughter, her upbeat vitality and so on, if I do not have access to her bodily field of expression, I can no longer experience her joyful atmosphere.

However, when considering whether we can experience interpersonal atmospheres online, what we are concerned with is whether the other's *lived body* is available to me in online space. Although there is usually a broad coincidence between the physical body and the lived body, this does not have to be the case. I do not have to be able to *see* your physical body in order to experience your lived body. If you are in the room next to me and I hear you yell out in pain, I have access to the field of expression that is your lived body. As described above, I can experience the atmosphere of the party as I am walking up the street, before I can *see* the party-goers. This is because the field of expression is still available to me. We can, then, already start to conceive of how one experiences an atmosphere at a distance from strictly face-to-face situations.

There are other interesting ways that we can have access to the field of expression of the other without being in a strictly face-to-face interaction. Consider the case where I catch a glimpse of my friend Camille smiling in the reflection of a mirror. Camille is in the next room to me and I cannot see her physical body. Yet there in the glass is her beaming face. Her body is *mediated* by the glass but her expressive lived body is still readily available to me. This may seem like an obvious point but one that is worth making as here we have a field of expression that is perceptually available to me even though it is *mediated* through technological means; it is an example of where I have access to someone's lived bodily field of expression without requiring that I am in a strictly face-to-face situation with them.

We can also appeal to the phenomenological notion of incorporation to understand how the field of expression of the lived body extends beyond the physical body. Phenomenology has long described how parts of the external world can come to form part of our lived body. For instance, tools can be incorporated into our lived body when they are used in a way that they become transparent, come to shape and mould our experiences. The archetypal example of this is Merleau-Ponty's description of the blind man and his cane. Merleau-Ponty describes how a blind man uses a cane to navigate his way down a cobbled street, using the cane to feel the stones in front of him. Merleau-Ponty notes how:

> [t]he blind man's cane has ceased to be an object for him, it is no longer perceived for itself; rather, the cane's furthest point is transformed into a sensitive zone, it increases the scope and the radius of the act of touching and has become analogous to a gaze. (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 144)

The blind man's lived body extends beyond his fingers to the tip of the cane, which allows him to feel the cobbles at the tip of the cane. The cane is no longer experienced as an object that the blind man holds but as part of the experiential field of his lived body. Thus, the lived body, in certain circumstances, can include aspects of the world.

Incorporated objects can, then, come to form part of the field of expression that we perceive atmospherically. Imagine that at the party, there is an individual with a prosthetic limb. They are dancing away with the other dancers, adding to the jubilant atmosphere of the party. They are waving both their organic left arm and their

prosthetic right arm in time to the music. It seems artificial to say that my atmospheric perception of the field of expression includes their left arm but excludes their prosthetic right one; their expressive movements include the way they are using their prothesis, which forms part of the field of expression to which I am directed. We can and do perceive the other's lived body as expressive, even when it is partially comprised of non-biological parts (Osler forthcoming b, 7).

All these examples help show how the lived, expressive body of the other can be perceived by me outside of the context of a strictly face-to-face interaction. This has important implications for the claim that we cannot experience the embodied other online. The claim that Fuchs seems to be making is that because we cannot take our physical bodies into online space, we cannot, therefore, encounter the other as an embodied subject online. The assumption being that because we leave behind our physical bodies when we enter online space, we become disembodied. But, as we have discussed, the physical, objective body is not the same thing as the lived body and the lived body is not tied to skin and bone. More needs to be said to justify the move from saying that the physical, objective body cannot enter online space to saying that the lived body cannot enter online space. Simply put, there is a conflation of the objective body with the lived body in Fuchs' account.

In the following section, I explore how we can and do encounter the lived, expressive bodies of others in certain online settings and make the case that this allows for the experience of online atmospheres. Note, though, that this is not to say that online atmospheres are experienced in exactly the same way as offline ones. I will explore how technologically-mediated atmospheres might differ from offline ones, in particular in relation to the sparser access we have to the other's lived body, as well as the more transitory and precarious nature of online atmospheres.

3. Lived bodies online

3.1. Video links and online atmospheres

What Fuchs overlooks is that online we are not restricted to encountering the other only through signs and symbols. While he talks about the virtual world, he seems preoccupied with discussions that involve text-based interactions, as well as

acknowledging that we might use avatars in certain online settings. Clearly, though, this is not the only way we can encounter others online. Online we can use platforms such as Skype, WhatsApp, Messenger, Zoom, and HouseParty to speak to one another. These platforms allow us to both see and hear others in a technologically mediated manner. When arranging a group dinner on Zoom, I am able to see Cee and Maddie, their smiles, their gestures, and also hear not only what they are saying but the tone in which they say it. Although there are multiple screens and microphones mediating our hang out, I am not turned to the screen, the pixels, the soundwaves. Rather, I am directed towards Cee and Maddie. Their lived bodies are given to me in a technologically mediated way that does not involve me suddenly perceiving them as objective bodies or pixelated screens (Osler 2020a, forthcoming b). I still perceive the others as expressive, both through their expressive gestures and through their expressive voices. This example might, then, not fall within the parameters of Fuchs discussion of the virtual other. Like Camille in the bathroom mirror, it seems wrong to say that simply because Cee and Maddie lived bodies are mediated, I cannot empathetically perceive them.[53]

Importantly, for our purposes, I also experience our virtual dinner as having a certain atmosphere. Just as offline, I can feel the feelings of groups, so can I feel the feelings of Cee and Maddie. In saying that we leave our bodies behind when we go online, what we risk overlooking here is that just because my physical body does not go into online space does not render me some kind of disembodied spirit (Osler 2020a, 10). My physical body is still there using the computer, looking at and hearing Cee and Maddie. I remain embodied when I go online. As such I am not precluded from empathetically perceiving Cee and Maddie and I can do so affectively. I not only see and hear their feelings but can bodily feel them. Thus, as I have access to the field of expression of their lived bodies, I can experience this affectively as atmosphere.

Although Cee, Maddie and I are all in different physical places and in our own segments on the screen, our expressivity can coalesce in a way that creates a warm atmosphere. Like offline, I experience Cee and Maddie's interaction as interlocking, intermeshing and influencing one another. Cee's chuckling is a response to Maddie's

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[53] For a more extensive discussion of this, see Osler forthcoming, b.

story, and Maddie's pleasure at entertaining Cee ties into the unfolding interaction between them. *Contra* Fuchs, intercorporeality and interaffectivity does takes place in these rich online settings, where Cee and Maddie enter into an interactive feedback loop with one another. Just as with Vita and Virginia (see chapter 2), I am turned to the field of expression that is not merely an accumulation of their individual bodies but that spans their lived bodies, their unfurling interaction with one another and their interrelatedness. As in offline situations, my affective empathetic experience is distributed across the group, resulting in the experience of the atmosphere being diffused across all those (virtually) present.

Note, though, that when there are just three of us online, it is still relatively easy to perceive the interlocking group relations. However, this might not be the case when the online group is larger. Think, for instance, of when attending an online workshop with ten others, where it is harder to perceive the relationships between all those present. Unlike at Shay's party, where the sub-groups are more readily available to us (based on where people are standing, how they are interacting and so on), it is more difficult to detect this online as we cannot see how each of the individual's lived bodies are interconnected with specific others. It is harder, for instance, to be sensitive to who is holding sway over the conversation, whose expressive demeanour might be driving the dominant mood of the group, who is exchanging amused glances with whom. This does not rob the online workshop of atmosphere entirely. We can still differentiate between the supportive atmosphere of one workshop from the tense atmosphere of another. Nevertheless, as it is more difficult to perceive the intermeshing relations between the participants, this can affect the complexity of the atmosphere that I can experience. Below, I will discuss how the atmospheres we find online might be of a more basic kind (akin to those of a mass or a crowd), rather than the more complex ones of individuals or smaller groups.

Someone might ask at this juncture how we can make sense of atmosphere as something we experience as spatially diffuse when we are not talking about physically shared space but online space. What is important to remember here is the type of spatiality that we are working with. As discussed in chapter 4, when we say that atmospheres have a certain spatiality to them, we are talking about how the atmosphere of a group seems to pervade lived space. Remember, this space is not

the Euclidian space of geometry. Atmospheres do not sit in space like cups and tables, they cannot be plotted on a map, or given co-ordinates. The mood which we atmospherically apprehend is not an object, fixed in physical space but the experience that is embodied by and across those present. This lived space is the space of temporally and spatially extended interacting bodies and their environment, a felt space of possibility and feeling. Online space, like offline space, falls within our lived space of possibilities and feeling. While I cannot physically walk into online space, an array of actions are offered to me there: I can enter certain websites, I can connect with certain people, I can type words, I can upload pictures, and so on. Indeed, as Smart et al. (2017) note, there has been a growing shift of thinking of the internet not simply as a source of information, "it is now common to see the Web as something of a 'social space' – a space in which people are able to interact, socialize and share information" (2017, 111). Indeed, it is no coincidence that we speak of online *space*. What we have online is not a physical, geometric space but a space of *action-possibilities* (Ward et al 2011), a lived space in which we can act and interact.

While Cee and Maddie are not physically sharing space with one another, they inhabit the same lived space in which they are interacting with one another and their expressive interaction unfolds in a temporally and spatially extended manner. Thus, we can understand how the field of expression that encompasses the two of them, spans their lived, dynamic interaction and is not fragmented by the fact that they are not physically beside one another. Their interaction and interlocking expressions play out in our shared online space. Indeed, it is their interaction that creates the shared space in question, a "we-space" created by the co-presence and interlocking acts of me, Cee, Maddie (Krueger 2011; Krueger & Osler 2019).

In summary, I think that Fuchs' analysis does not apply (whether intentionally or by omission) to online interactions enabled by video-link which easily allow for my empathetic perception of the other, which can form the basis for online atmospheric experience. What, though, about other forms of online interpersonal experience? So far, I have looked at cases where we have interpersonal encounters that, in many ways, closely resemble our offline ones. Through video link, we have both visual and auditory access to others. Yet, many, if not most, of our online encounters do not

take place via video link but via text. Let us turn to cases of online interpersonal interactions that primarily take through the medium of text.

3.2. Speech, text and the lived body

Fuchs claims that we do not have access to the other as an embodied subject when we go online on the basis that most of our online interactions take place via text or symbols. Given that atmospheric experience is an embodied mode of experiencing other embodied subjects, it makes little sense to speak of atmospheric experience taking place in a virtual, disembodied mode of interpersonal encounter. However, Fuchs' claim that interacting via signs and symbols is a disembodied form of interaction, rests on an understanding that written words are merely a *sign* of the other, not the other themselves. I want to challenge this. To do so we need to understand how words as speech, while not a part of our physical body, can form part of the field of expression of our lived body. The assumption that Fuchs seems to make is that when we encounter others online all we have access to is 'signs and symbols', which he claims results in a "culture of growing virtuality and simulation [that] is connected with a disembodiment, a retreat from bodily and inter-corporeal experiences" (2014, 169). I take this to refer to the fact that many of our online encounters take place in the form of written words, supplemented with a variety of emojis.

On Fuchs' account, language, and in particular writing, is reduced to a way of signaling one's experience, rather than a way of giving the other some kind of direct, empathetic access to one's experience. One has experiences that are boxed up into words in order to communicate to the other. The other, then, is given a *sign* of your experience, not the experience itself. This, though, is a rather passive understanding of language. Rather than treating language as some kind of container for thought, Merleau-Ponty famously claims that "speech accomplishes thought" (2012, 183). In stating this, he distances himself from the idea that speech is merely the externalization of inner thought. He argues that we should not think of speech as a sign of thought, the way that, say, smoke is a sign of fire. Instead, it is *through* speaking that we think and feel. I do not (typically) have a thought and then translate that thought into words so that I might communicate it to someone. Rather, when I speak, my speaking is my thought. Indeed, often we use speech as a way of

unearthing what it is we think or feel. For example, think of the occasions where we talk through our thoughts and feelings in order to work them out. This also accounts for how "my words can surprise me and teach me my own thought" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 111);[54] they are not signs of something ready-formed but are part of the thought itself.

Language, for Merleau-Ponty, is not derivate of thought but is a constitutive part of thought (also see Colombetti 2009). Already we can see a resemblance between how Merleau-Ponty depicts speech and how we have discussed bodily expressivity as a constitutive part of experience. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty makes precisely this analogy when stating that speech itself is "gesture" (2012, 187). Just as a smile is not experienced as a muscular twitch that indicates that someone is happy but as an expressive part of someone's happiness, so speech is not simply a collection of signs that indicate thought but is *expressive* of thought. Merleau-Ponty also makes a beautiful analogy between speech and music where he discusses how the musical notes are not a sign of the unfolding sonata but that the sonata is there *through them.* Likewise, our words are not signs of the thoughts we have but our thoughts are there through the words.

This is particularly salient when we think about the way that language can *shape* the very experiences I am having. When we talk through our feelings, in some instances, this very verbalisation can shape and modify the contours of the feeling: "putting one's feelings into words can clarify what one is feeling, and thereby constitute and change one's experience" (Colombetti 2009, 5). Again, we see a parallel with gesture here, where a smile is not a mere indicator of happiness but a constitutive part of that happiness which not only expresses how we feel but can enhance and shape our feelings. Speaking, then, is not a simple transmitter of experience but forms, moulds and is part of that experience. Indeed, language is so deeply incorporated into our subjective experience that we literally struggle to think of what it would be like to be without it.

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[54] Collingwood (1938, 111) also highlights how we use language as a way of exploring and uncovering our own emotions: "Until a man has expressed his emotion, he does not know what it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions. He is trying to find out what these emotions are".

Not only is speech constitutive of thought but speech is itself embodied. Speech is a type of bodily expression: "Speaking is (also) something a human organism does with her body, like dancing, gesturing, grimacing, screaming, singing, etc." (Colombetti 2009, 9). Speech does not arise from nowhere, it is something I *do*. Speech is something that I voice, using my body. How, though, can we make sense of the idea that words form part of our lived expressive bodies? Unlike our smiles, frowns, clenched fists, words are not part of our lived body simply in virtue of being part of our physical body.[55] I suggest that we consider words to be incorporated into our lived body (akin to the way the blind man's cane is incorporated into their lived, expressive body). They are something that we pick up, something we inherit, that are not part of our physical body but are tools we use with such frequency and skill that they become a transparent part of our bodily equipment. Just as the blind man's perceptual experience extends to the tip of the cane, so I experience my words as *part* of my experience not a mere container for it. As we will see, it is precisely because these are incorporated elements of our lived body that they can go into online space even when our physical bodies are left behind.

Importantly for our purposes, because speech is embodied it is intersubjectively available: "it must be acknowledged that the person listening receives the thought from the speech itself" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 183). Speech is accessible to others; the *speaking* subject is an *embodied* subject. Husserl makes a similar point when he states that "the hearer perceives the speaker as manifesting certain inner experiences, and to that extent he also perceives these experiences themselves" (1970, 278). When you speak, I hear your experience embodied in your voice. Viewing speech as something embodied has, I think, gone underappreciated due to the prevailing trend of thinking of embodiment in visual terms. When you speak, I do not *see* what you are saying but rather I *hear* it; I have access to your lived, expressive body in auditory terms. This, though, should not be considered a controversial point. We've already discussed how vocal gestures such as screaming, yells, or laughter are embodied experiences that are empathetically available to others. Empathy, as I have repeatedly emphasised, is not limited to visual

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[55] Note that being part of the physical body is not a sufficient condition for forming part of the lived, expressive body that is intersubjectively available. My liver, for instance, is part of my physical material body but it is not part of the field of expression of my lived body. You do not empathetically apprehend my experiences by attending to my liver.

perception. Indeed, if this were not the case, we would be in the uncomfortable position of denying that blind individuals have no empathetic access to others.

What this suggests is that instead of seeing language as a sign of thought, speech is something expressive that is available for empathetic perception. One does not need to infer from hearing someone speaking that they are having experiences, they are perceptually available for us in their speech. As a listener, I perceive your experience through your speech. Thus, when I hear your satisfaction, I not only hear the tone, I also hear your satisfaction through what you say – part of my understanding that you are angry is you telling me that you are angry. I do not need to infer what your words mean, I do not need to endow them with sense. I directly hear your words saturated with your experience, with your meaning. I hear what you are expressing because I am attending to your subjective, lived, expressive body not to a physical body emitting noises. Speech, then, forms part of the field of expression of our lived body that can be empathetically perceived.

What is key here is that, at least usually, the listener does not attend to the *words* as signs or objects but to *what* the other is saying. I do not hear a string of words issuing from your mouth, I hear what you *say*. The words themselves are typically transparent: "The perfection of language lies in its capacity to pass unnoticed" (Merleau-Ponty 1993, 10). Just as when I see you smile, I do not see the movement of muscles in your face but a *smile*, so when I hear you say 'This coffee is delicious', I hear your pleasure and satisfaction about your coffee-drinking, rather than the words as objects or as signs. We can, then, think of speech in the same way that we think of the body as being primarily experienced as lived rather than as an object. Usually we attend to speech as *living speech* rather than a set of object-like signs. This is revealed when we think about the contrast between listening to someone speaking in our own language and listening to someone speak a language we are unfamiliar with. In the latter case, I do not hear the words as expressive in the same way but can pay attention to the word as a sound-object. It is remarkably hard to hear someone say the word 'elephant' in our own language and only attend to the sound of the word, the shape of the word. Rather, I hear what the word expresses. Indeed, we are all familiar with the unusual experience of repeating a word over and over until all we hear is the weird sound it makes, where the meaning drops away

and all we are left with is the uncanny experience of a word robbed off its expressivity, as being torn apart from expression and thought.

What, then, is empathetically available to us in speech? When you tell me that you are frustrated about being stuck inside during a Covid-19 lockdown, I perceive your frustration through the words you use to tell me this. Your disappointment and frustration are expressed to me when you speak. However, your experience is not only given to me through the words you use. We do not speak in set phrases, in preformulated sentences. Speaking is a creative act.[56] When I hear *you* speak, you do not simply express the words as building blocks but the way you put them together has a certain style, rhythm, patter, tone, emphasis. All of these elements form part of your 'voice'.[57]

While Stern (2010) focuses predominantly on the movement of the physical body, our voice has a certain vitality to it. When you talk to me you can do so excitedly, frenetically, pensively. This is given to me in the *how* of your speech; the tone, the tempo, the rhythm, the cadence. Moreover, it is not simply what is said but what is not said, the silences, the melody of your speech. Speech, as something dynamic, also has a vitality to it that I can empathetically perceive. To perceive someone's vitality, then, does not require me to have visual access to their moving, physical body. It is sufficient for me to have access to their moving, living speech, as part of their lived body, without being able to see their physical body. For instance, over the phone I can *hear* the vital effects of your voice as your speech unfolds without needing to see your accompanying frowns and pouts.

How, though, does the above analysis apply to texting? Texting involves written words, not spoken ones. It might seem that when we are restricted to seeing the typed words of others, that we are not perceiving the field of expression that is their lived body anymore, just static markings from which we must infer or project

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[56] That speech is typically creative might shed light on how cliches can *lose* their expressive power with overuse.

[57] Remember, like empathetically perceiving someone's bodily expressions, how well I know someone will contribute to the richness of my empathetic perception of someone. When you, a normally upbeat and chatty person, describe your feeling about being locked down in a monotonous, monosyllabic manner this adds to my empathetic perception of you. That this is out of character for you adds to my direct perception of your frustration.

experience onto. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty explicitly states that when we listen to someone speaking we precisely do not experience them in the same way as reading a transcript:

> …the exact recording of a conversation which seemed brilliant later gives the impression of indigence. The truth lies here. The conversation reproduced exactly is no longer what it was when we were living it. It lacks the presence of those who were speaking, the whole surplus meaning yielded by the gestures and faces…The conversations no longer exists. (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 65)

Texting could be viewed precisely as such a transcript; a record of speech, rather than living speech. Does this mean that when we are reading the words of the other on a screen that we no longer have empathetic perceptual access to the other, only access to signs and symbols as Fuchs claims? If so, this suggests that any atmosphere that we experience, say, a WhatsApp thread as having, cannot arise from my embodied empathetic perception of the other.

However, I think this presents too static a picture of writing and reading, particularly in the context of *instant messaging*. Let us start by considering what I experience when I am messaging with my friend EJ on WhatsApp. I can see the messages that EJ sends, I can see when she is 'online' or last present, when she is 'typing…', when messages have been delivered and sent and EJ can see the same on her screen in relation to me. There is, then, already more perceptually available to me than Fuchs seems to suggest. What, though, about the words specifically?

Above I argued that speech should be considered part of the lived body as it is both expressive of someone's experience and a constitutive part of that experience. This can also apply (in some instances) to writing. Just like when I speak, I do not use words simply to package up a ready-made thought. I can find out my thoughts through speaking, so too when writing or texting. We are familiar with this in the course of everyday life, before we even think about the Internet. Think of how people use diaries as a way of realizing their emotions, jotting down thoughts and feelings as a way of exploring and revealing our emotions to ourselves (Colombetti & Roberts 2015). EJ's texting also accomplishes her thoughts and feelings as she writes to me

about her new partner Baxter. She discovers the intensity of his feelings for Baxter as she tells me about him, realises her own excitement in her fast-paced messaging. Texting, like speaking, can be a constitutive part of her experience, is incorporated into her lived, expressive body.

Writing is not simply a way to record fully-formed thoughts but can itself be a process of thinking and feeling. The key point being that when EJ and I are texting one another, we are not transcribing a past conversation but engaged in an active, unfurling conversation. Under certain circumstances, text, like speech, can thus be considered part of someone's field of expression, a part of their lived body. Like spoken words, written words are not simply signs or artifacts of thought but tools that can be incorporated into the lived body.

Again, like spoken words, written words are intersubjectively available. They are an expressive part of the lived body that can be perceived by others. Just as when I listen to someone speaking, when I am reading EJ's messages, I am not (usually) directed at the words but to what EJ is saying to me. There is a certain transparency to the text - I do not attend to the black forms on my phone screen but to experience that EJ is sharing with me. What is more, when we are dealing with instant messaging, I do not only have access to the words that EJ uses but to her texting as it unfolds. As such, I do not just see the words but the pace of her messages, the patter and rhythm of her speech, her choice of words, her use of emojis and wild punctuation. All these elements form part of the field of expression I directly perceive. I 'hear' EJ's voice through all these aspects of her texting.

Indeed, we should not underestimate how expressive texting can be. While it is sensorially sparser than a face-to-face interaction, or even one via video-link, as we do not have visual or auditory access to the other, this does not render texting non-expressive. As Baym highlights, "text-based media afford many ways to express emotion. We use emoticons to signal friendliness, we use punctuation and capitalization to insert feeling, we use informal language and talk-like phonetics spellings to create an air of conversationality" (Baym 2015, 13; also see Ben-Ze'ev 2004, 10). I experience EJ's voice given to me in her effusive words, her excited tone, the rapid style of responding, her use of emojis, and so on. While I do not see her excitement play across his face in smiles, I experience it in and through her

texting. Like speech, the style of his texting has a certain vitality to it that is not contained *in* the texts but unfolds through the texting itself, giving her messages a certain expressive tone. Like the hearer, I, as a reader, perceive EJ's excitement through his texting, which forms part of her lived, expressive body. *Contra* Fuchs, EJ's texts are full of emotional cues and expressive gestures which I perceive as her messages unfold on my screen. If, as I have argued, EJ's texting voice is also an incorporated part of her expressive, lived body, her texting is an appropriate target for my empathetic perception of her. This motivates the claim that not only do we empathetically perceive the *speaking* subject but also the *texting* subject.

We can help draw out how we experience EJ's texting as not mere signs by thinking about the difference between having an active texting conversation with EJ on WhatsApp in real time compared to rereading the text conversation the next day. When rereading a text conversation that was originally experienced as fluid, expressive, dynamic, the text can seem static, stilted and lacking in vitality. This cold reading, where we do not experience EJ as present, can strike us as rather empty, as having something lacking. This, I think, is closer to the experience of reading the transcribed script that Merleau-Ponty discussed. What this helps highlight is the importance that movement and the other's presence has when encountering the other online empathically and atmospherically.

So, where does this analysis leave us with regard interpersonal atmospheres on online platforms such as WhatsApp? The point I have made above is that when I am texting with someone, I have empathetic access to their expressive experience through their words, tone, rhythm and vitality. Texting platforms also now allow for us to perceive the *interconnectedness* of individuals as well. For instance, in a group thread, individuals can reply to specific messages – allowing us access to who is responding to whom, who is being ignored, who is driving the conversation and so on. This, I suggest, is a field of expression that prompts our empathetic grasp of those involved. What is pertinent here is that I do not think that just because we are faced with a field of expression that unfolds on a screen that we can only visually perceive the experience of others. We can still *feel* this expressivity as atmosphere. The conversation unfurls in the lived space of interaction, unfurls dynamically in a temporally and spatially extended manner. We do not just experience how the

conversation makes us feel, we feel the expressive experience of those involved. While we are texting in real-time, we do not experience this as a record of speech but an unfurling, dynamic experience. Given that this field of expression unfolds in a lived interactive social space, I see no reason why we should not be comfortable talking of experiencing the expressivity of the others here *as* atmosphere.

4. Unique features of online atmospheres

In the above, I have defended the idea that we can and do experience interpersonal atmospheres online. However, this should not be mistaken for a claim that there are no differences between online and offline atmospheres. I now sketch a number of interesting ways that online atmospheres differ from offline ones.

4.1. Basic vs subtle atmospheres

I have argued that we can encounter the field of expression of others online atmospherically. I have suggested that not only do we have access to other's lived bodies in terms of a mediated face-to-face interaction (such as on Skype, Zoom or Houseparty) but also that we encounter the 'textual other' online platforms such as WhatsApp. However, even though there is a field of expression that is the others' lived bodies on my screen, this is sensorially much sparser than a face-to-face interaction. As my family WhatsApp group explodes into a series of angry, sharp messages that creates a tense atmosphere in our shared online space, this is different to the experience of a family argument around the kitchen table - I am not able to see my father's tense shoulders, my brother's angry scowl, my sister's frustrated tapping of the table. When we are face-to-face, the field of expression that I am directed to is far richer than that available online as the expression can arise in many ways: words, tone, how people are sitting or standing in relation to one another, how their bodily interactions unfold.

What are the implications of going online where we seem to have a sparser, less sensorially rich field of expression? One implication seems to be that where we have a sparser, less fine-grained field of expression, we might only be able to experience fairly broad atmospheres. As discussed in chapter 3, we can distinguish between atmospheres that convey fairly basic moods, such as a happy, sad, tense or hostile atmosphere, and atmosphere of a more subtle hue, such as an atmosphere of

bubbling anticipation, an atmosphere of quiet concern, or a languorous atmosphere. Earlier I suggested that in order to experience these more subtle or complex atmospheres involves experiencing a field of expression that is rich in bodily cues, where we can perceive not only broad group movement (e.g. such as those offered by a crowd) but a more fine-grained field of expression (e.g. one that involves subtle bodily gestures, tones of voice and group interactions).

Given the relative sparseness of the expressivity available online compared to face-to-face situations, the more subtle atmospheres that require a rich and textured field of expression may be less likely to arise online. I might experience my family WhatsApp argument as having a tense atmosphere, without being able to grasp a subtler shade such as been suffused by a weary frustration or boredom about rehashing the same argument yet again that my family's rich bodily gestures might convey.

This is not to suggest that atmospheres online are necessarily 'weaker' or 'less intense', indeed the tense argument online can still be viscerally uncomfortable. However, the social understanding that this grants me might be less refined. Indeed, that this is the case may be considered a clue as to why atmospheres on the internet can often fall to extremes. The hostile atmosphere of Twitter exchanges, for instance, might be experienced as particularly aggressive due to the lack of complexity of the field of expression, where the field of expression is constituted by the text and the rhythm of the tweets but not supplemented further by the facial and bodily gestures of those involved. Exactly because a level of subtly is lost online, the atmospheres we experience online can be loud and intensely felt but have a broad-brush emotional hue to them. Think, for instance, of the hostile atmosphere of political arguments that play out on Twitter that have an aggressive tone but, due to the character-limit, do not give rise to more subtle, refined atmosphere. We can think of atmospheres arising online as only occurring in primary colour, losing the rich array of other affective colours. The tone of the atmosphere we experience is broader, more basic than of in the richness of face-to-face scenarios.

4.2. Getting it wrong

Building on the idea that the field of expression is less rich, less subtle online, it also seems that we might be more prone to 'getting it wrong' online. As I have

emphasised, experiencing interpersonal atmospheres is an important part of our social understanding. Remember, though, that my experience of the atmosphere can be wrong – I might experience the party as having a merry atmosphere, when in fact those present are anxious. Like other perceptual experiences, the more sensory information that is available to me is going to increase the chance of me getting it right. I am more likely to be able to see that the large pole on my street is a wooden lamppost when I look at it in good lighting than I am when I peer at it in the middle of the night through mist. Ditto our atmospheric experiences. If I experience not only the loud chatter in the room but also the tense bodily postures of those present, this will change my atmospheric perception of the situation. The richer the grasp I have of the field of expression, not only will my atmospheric perception be more subtle but also more likely to be right.

Offline the field of expression available to us might be visual, auditory, supported by the material setting and so on. Online, where the field of expression is sensorially sparser, there are likely to be more 'gaps' in the field of expression, more opportunities for me to get it wrong. I might mistake the sarcastic tone of my brother's messages as being jovial, not being able to see the look on his face while he says it. Our atmospheric experiences might, then, be deemed more unreliable online than offline.

However, this conclusion comes with a caveat. It should be recognised that there is an important normative assumption being made here about richness of field of expression giving us a better atmospheric grasp of those present. Broadly speaking, I have implied that more sensorial exposure to others' lived bodies and their field of expression will give rise to an atmospheric experience that is more likely to convey accurate social understanding. This, though, will not be true in all circumstances or for all individuals. In chapter 3, I discussed how, when we are bodily saturated, our atmospheric perception might be debarred. For instance, if I am extremely anxious, I am not bodily sensitive to those around me and do not, therefore, atmospherically apprehend them. I also discussed how those who find a lot of sensory 'noise' overwhelming, for instance those with ASD, may be unable to grasp atmospheres in a socially salient manner. If this is the case, the relative sparsity of online interpersonal interactions may be better for social understanding, not worse.

Indeed, there is evidence that many individuals with ASD are increasingly turning to the internet for social means (Burke et al. 2010). Online there is less external stimuli at play and "the reduced bandwidth makes it potentially ideal for adults with ASD" (Burke et al. 2010, 435). In these less sensorially overwhelming social spaces, there is at least some suggestion that individuals with ASD are "better able to share feelings and ideas with social partners leading to more satisfying, supportive and intimate relationships" (Jennes-Coussens et al. 2006).[58] We should be careful, then, not to assume that access to 'richer' fields of expression is always better for empathetic social understanding. For some, the relative sparsity of online settings might be conducive to empathy (Osler forthcoming b), as well as to atmospheric experience.

4.3. Precarity

Online atmospheres might also be more 'precarious' than their offline counterparts. First, the temporal dynamics of online interactions are different to those of a face-to-face situation. When I am at Shay's party, I have immediate bodily access to the lived bodies of those present. The field of expression of the group is made up of tightly interlocked interactions, with people interacting and reacting to one another in a smooth, fluid manner. When online, although I access to the others' lived bodies through their texting, the exchange that takes place is slower; it takes longer for someone to text out a reply than for a smile to widen across someone's face, for someone to lean in intimately to another person and so on. In addition to this, people can drop in and out of the shared online space. My brother, who was quickly sending off terse messages might suddenly drop out as he goes to the bathroom or makes himself a cup of tea. The field of expression that is available in the WhatsApp group is both stretched over a longer length of time and those present might pop in and out of the WhatsApp, meaning that there is a certain amount of stilted conversation that takes place there.

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[58] There are a number of interesting ways in which the internet might provide a favourable environment for individuals with ASD. Strickland (1996), for example, has explored how virtual reality might be a useful in creating safe spaces for children with ASD to inhabit, explore and learn. He notes that "Virtual environments can be simplified to the level of input stimuli tolerable by individual" as one dimension of online worlds that might be beneficial for those with ASM (Strickland 1996, 320); also see Mitchel et al. 2007, Ringland et al. 2015). However, we must also be careful here not to over-simplify this example. Burke et al. 2010, also highlight that texting can give rise to other forms of social anxiety amongst individuals with ASD because the text can be continuously ruminated over.

How might these temporal dynamics affect our experience of online atmosphere? One possible impact is that the atmosphere that arises is weaker (as in felt less intensely), due to the looser interlocking acts of those involved. While the family argument still has a tense atmosphere, it might not be experienced as being as intense as if it were taking place face-to-face. That this is the case is supported by reports in Turkle's book *Alone Together*, of teenagers who feel that interpersonal interactions online are less visceral, less overwhelming (Turkle 2017, 187). That our family interaction unfolds in a slower, perhaps even more stilted manner, may impact the felt intensity of the atmosphere. Due to both the longer temporal lags in replies, the atmosphere might be more easily fragmented. An intense flurry of messages might create a tense atmosphere but an hour-long gap in the conversation may result in the atmosphere being 'broken' and 'reinstated' when the conversation gets going again. We might, then, talk of a certain precarity that arises in our atmospheric experience where the temporal flow of an exchange is significantly different to a face-to-face one.[59]

In addition to these temporal considerations, as discussed in chapter 6, the material environment can shape, support and sustain group atmospheres. What might be missing online are various ways that the material environment can sustain and support interpersonal atmospheres. For example, compare the celebratory atmosphere of Shay's party, that is supported and sustained by the music, the lighting, the arrangement of the furniture and so on, with a celebratory atmosphere on a WhatsApp group. While I have argued that in the WhatsApp group, I still have access to the field of expression of the others' lived bodies through their texting, which gives rise to an atmosphere, what is lacking is material means of supporting this atmosphere. Our online space does not have music, lighting or other material features that drive and sustain the atmosphere there. This might make the mood of the group, and consequently, the atmosphere less robust. It might be easily disrupted. Online atmospheres might have a certain 'shallowness' due to the sparsity of the material environment.

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[59] It should be noted, however, that when we are habitual texters, that our expectations of what is a 'normal' temporal dynamic of a conversation might change. When this occurs, we might not perceive 'temporal lags' as disruptive to our atmospheric experience (see Osler forthcoming b for a more detailed discussion of this).

While the material setting of the internet may lead to more precarious atmospheres, we should be careful not to rule out material scaffolding online entirely. Online platforms are not neutral or empty spaces. Online platforms are designed in specific ways, that vary from platform to platform, and impact our affective engagement with those sites:

> Social networking sites such as Facebook enable, institute and 'machinate' particular ways of affective engagement. What we see here is a mesmerizing affective pull that certain leisure technologies exert, engendering attention, affect and activity that is then channelled in particular pre-arranged ways thanks to the network site's architectures, consisting of items such as profile pages, like buttons, walls, groups, pokes, friends lists, VIP sections and so on. This is a good example of how technological design and the operative architecture and user surfaces of networking technology directly engages, enhances and focuses affectivity (Slaby 2016, 11)

Online space is not, then, empty of scaffolding. This, though, comes with its own implications. While I have control over many of the material offline settings I am immersed in, such as my house, my office, a space for a party, my classroom, much of the material scaffolding online is controlled by other agents (Ahmed 2007; Krueger & Osler 2019).

4.4. Multiple and sub-atmospheres

The internet allows us to 'sit' in a number of shared spaces almost simultaneously. I can, for instance, toggle between my family WhatsApp group with its tense atmosphere and a friend WhatsApp group that is suffused with an excited atmosphere. If, as I have argued, we can share space online and experience online atmospheres, we are able to be part of multiple shared spaces with an easy and quick change of screen. We can move between WhatsApp groups and between platforms. On top of this, not only can we switch between multiple online social spaces, but we can also do so while in an offline shared space (Krueger & Osler forthcoming). I can, for instance, both experience the tense atmosphere of my family WhatsApp group while also being sensitive to the celebratory atmosphere of Shay's party.

Previously, I explored how within the party there might be various sub-atmospheres. The arguing couple, for instance, before their argument has shifted the happy atmosphere, might have their own tense atmosphere that sits within the larger context of the party. Likewise, with our mobile devices, we have access to all manner of potential social atmospheres in various online conversations. The internet allows us to occupy multiple discrete social spaces, each suffused with its own particular atmosphere.

The above illustrates how our online atmosphere can be nestled in our offline lives. However, it is also the case that out atmospheric experience can span both online and offline. Not only in the sense that I, as an embodied subject, am always both online and offline when I am on the internet, but also in the sense of experiencing an atmosphere that spans both online and offline settings. Imagine, for instance, that our friends Gordie and Anders could not attend Shay's party as they live in Canada. However, we have set up a video link with them so that they can attend the party virtually. They have on the same playlist as the party-goers and are interacting with those physically present in Shay's living room. Here the party and my experience of the celebratory atmosphere transcends the two spaces, bringing us altogether in one lived space with one unifying atmosphere. Gordie and Anders expressive, lived bodies form part of the field of expression that gives rise to the happy atmosphere. The online atmosphere is not separate, not nestled in the party, but is part of the overarching atmosphere. What this helps reveal is that online atmospheres do not have to take place merely in online space, atmospheres can arise that span online and offline, resulting in what we might call a "blended space" (Krueger & Osler 2019, 4).

4.5. Experiencing oneself as part of an online atmosphere

Interestingly, online video link platforms such as Zoom not only display those I am talking to on my screen but also me. This has unique implications for my experience of myself as contributing to or changing the warm atmosphere of our dinner (see chapter 5). On the one hand, I am also there on the screen with the others and I can clearly see how my own expressive lived body is in tune with the others. I can see myself as forming part of and contributing to the field of expression that I affectively perceive as atmosphere. If I suddenly start making a despondent face because I feel

sick, I can also *see* how my own behaviour is at odds with the atmosphere, how, as Cee and Maddie notice me and make concerned looks, the warm atmosphere slightly shifts into a slightly more tense, worried atmosphere.

What the internet allows, then, is a uniquely refined way of experiencing oneself and one's interlocking expressive behaviour as forming part of the field of expression that underlies the atmospheric experience. Rather than simply experiencing myself as part of the atmosphere in terms of how the others' behaviour responds to, mirrors, complements, and interlocks with my own, I have a visually explicit view of my own lived bodily movement interweaving with the others in an interaffective manner.

On the other hand, being able to see myself is an unusual and, for many of us, fascinating experience. I can get caught up attending to my own gestures and the tone of my voice in a way I cannot do in offline settings. There is, then, more opportunity for me to get distracted by my own expressive behaviour, allow my attention to turn more keenly to my own bodily movements and the video of me mirroring these movements. As discussed in chapter 5, when my attention is directed primarily at myself, my experience of atmosphere can drop away, as I stop attending to the others, stop empathetically perceiving them through my body. Online, not only might I be attending to my own body but also to my virtual body on the screen. As my attention slips towards myself, I stop empathetically perceiving Cee and Maddie and my experience of the atmosphere fades away. What might be interesting though is that by being able to attend to my own virtual self, I might get caught up in the unusual experience of affectively perceiving my own expressive, lived body and experience my *own* personal atmosphere. This, then, might lead to another way in which my experience of online atmospheres is open to fragmentation. Not only might I toggle between different online and offline atmospheres, but I might get distracted by my own appearance in a way that desensitizes me to the group atmosphere.

4.6. Past atmospheres?

The final aspect to consider here is that an atmosphere might get 'congealed' online in a way we do not see offline. The party, while temporally smoother and more fluid than our WhatsApp chat, is made up of a field of expression that is ever-changing and modifying but that also disappears. The gestures and happy voices that I

experience flow onwards and disappear into the past. The WhatsApp conversation, on the other hand, is preserved on my screen in the messages that stay in the conversation history. While atmospheres might dynamically unfurl in a more precarious manner, be more at more risk of fragmentation, there is also a sense in which the atmosphere seems to be frozen in place online. I can reread the messages and experience the atmosphere of the argument over again.

That an online atmosphere may appear to 'survive' the passing of time has some interesting implications. What could it mean to experience a past atmosphere? Presumably if I re-watched a video of my video-chat with Cee and Maddie I could still experience the mood and interconnectedness of us all as atmosphere. But do we want to maintain that when I see a video recording of the other that I have an empathetic perception of them? What about old message threads or static blogs posts. Where the moving vitality of the interaction fades because we do not see the messages popping up on the screen, lose the experience of the pace or the rhythm of the conversation. As mentioned above, this seems to get close to what Merleau-Ponty describes when talking about how a transcribed conversation is emptied of something, is no longer the conversation.

We can, though, experience old message threads as having a particular tone or mood. Is this a form of empathetic perception? Or would it be better here to talk, as Fuchs does, of a quasi-empathy. Perhaps we do not really experience these discussions as having an atmosphere, but we reinvigorate the atmosphere we experienced at the time – a vivid memory of the original atmospheric experience. In recording many of our social encounters, the internet opens up a wealth of questions about not only how we encounter others in the moment of interaction but in relation to past interactions. This reveals how phenomenological investigations of online sociality provide us with interesting ways to explore the limit cases of empathy in more detail.

Conclusion

Online atmospheres, while talked about in day-to-days lives, have received little philosophical attention. Given that my account presents atmospheric experience as a

form of bodily empathetic perception, we might think that this has no light to shed on atmospheres experienced in a seemingly disembodied world. However, I have argued that although the physical body cannot go into online space, the lived body can. Online we have perceptual access to the expressive behaviours of others. On videos we can see and hear the other's expressive body mediated by our screens, on text-platforms we experience the style, vitality, tone, rhythm of the other's expressive voice. Moreover, even when we are interacting with others online, we are not rendered disembodied. Our empathetic perception of others can still be experienced as atmosphere.

What, perhaps, is most interesting though is the ways in which online atmospheres are different to their offline counterparts. Examining online atmospheres forces us to ask broader questions about empathy: whether it can happen at a distance, what happens when we have less sensorily rich access to the other's lived body, whether movement is a key ingredient for our empathetic perception, whether we can empathically perceive others when there are temporal lags in our encounters, whether we can empathetically experience filmed bodies and past experiences. While I have set out some initial sketches of the issues and questions, as well as some of the ways we can go about answering these, clearly there is much work to be done on the phenomenology of online atmospheres and online social encounters more broadly. This chapter, I hope, has served to highlight the richness of this new field of research and provide a starting point for some of these further investigations.

Conclusion

I started this thesis with a vignette of experiencing the unfolding atmosphere of a party. While it is a common enough experience, our experience of personal and interpersonal atmospheres have, to date, lacked rigorous phenomenological consideration. As highlighted in the introduction, interpersonal atmospheres are given peculiarly little specific attention in atmosphere literature and are glossed over in phenomenological work on sociality. My empathetic account of interpersonal atmosphere fills this double lacuna. I have argued that atmospheres are not material objects out in the world but are relational phenomena. We experience atmosphere when we bodily apprehend others. However, it is not just a matter of being co-present with other subjects, our experience of interpersonal atmosphere gives us social understanding. As such, I have argued that we should conceive of atmosphere as a form of bodily empathetic perception which discloses the lived expressivity and interconnectedness of other embodied subjects. By cashing out atmosphere in this way, we capture both the felt dimension of atmospheric experience, while also accounting for how this experience discloses the emotions, mood, vitality and interrelatedness of others. What is important, here, is to highlight how the atmosphere is itself not the *object* of experience but is the *medium* through which we experience others. As highlighted, we cannot conceive of the happy atmosphere of Shay's party as separated from the expressive bodies that produce it.

By developing an account of interpersonal atmosphere as a form of empathetic perception, I have not only given *interpersonal* atmospheres specific and much-needed philosophical attention, I have also pushed the traditional notion of empathy in a number of important directions. Over the course of this thesis, I have highlighted how empathy does not disclose only episodic emotions but moods, vitality, and interpersonal interconnectedness; I have made the case for applying empathy not only to individuals but to collectives, where we experience the emotion, mood, and vitality of the 'they'; and, I have argued for a more fully-embodied understanding of empathy, which accounts for our we can be given the experiences of others through our own bodily feelings. I have highlighted that we should not limit our

empathetic perception to situations where we are already in the midst of an interpersonal encounter nor should we promote a picture of an observer staring bemusedly at other subjects trying to work out what they are experiencing. I have suggested that by capturing how 'at the moment of entry' to a social situation we can be bodily sensitive to the atmosphere of individuals and collectives. As such, we are able to bring the observer in from the cold, so to speak, capturing how even before we are in the throes of a mutually reciprocal interaffective interaction, we can have a bodily felt experience of those present. In accounting for the spatial character of atmospheric experience, I have also drawn attention to the way in which we encounter the other as a temporally and spatially extended subject in lived space, whose expressivity is not confined to their physical body in snapshot moments but dynamically unfurls through their expressive engagements with others and the world around them. In turning our attention to interpersonal atmospheres, which have been traditionally ousted from empathetic experience by phenomenologists, we have, ironically, pushed the boundaries of empathy further.

In this thesis, I have moved beyond questions about what atmospheric experience *is* to questions of how we can engage with atmosphere, how we might be rendered insensitive to atmosphere, and whether we can experience atmospheres in online space. In doing so, I have shown how atmosphere research has more to investigate than the ontological status of atmospheres, moving to pressing questions about how an account of interpersonal atmosphere might inform our understanding of social experience in certain psychopathological disorders and in contemporary technologically-mediated social settings. The benefit of this line of research is two-fold. First, it shifts atmosphere discussions away from mere ontological questions to broader questions about what we can do with a theory of atmosphere, how it can contribute to broader questions about interpersonal encounters. Second, it provides support for my empathetic account, showing how it not only captures the key characteristics of atmospheric experience but can be applied to real-world examples of how we experience and engage with atmosphere.

While I have opened up a field of exploration of how we engage with atmospheres, as well as experience them not only when we are physically present with others but also in online space, there are undoubtably many more avenues to explore. In

chapter 5, I explored how our sensitivity to atmosphere, our ability to be swept up, contribute to and change atmosphere, is normatively and culturally impacted. Here I drew, in part, on the work of Sara Ahmed (2006, 2007) and James Jardine (forthcoming) to contemplate how one's social status and power feed into the extent to which we are able to or in control of our ability to engage with certain interpersonal atmospheres. Further exploration of these issues would benefit from additional insights mined from critical phenomenology – focusing on questions of exclusion, belonging, recognition, race, class, gender and disability. Additionally, further questions about who is responsible for producing atmospheres (e.g. through the use of charisma and power), designing material environments that are likely to encourage certain interpersonal atmospheres to arise, as well as questions about how these can be manipulated, for example, for political ends, deserve pressing attention.[60] Likewise, phenomenological psychopathology has a flourishing role in informing therapeutic techniques (e.g. De Jaegher, forthcoming; Škodlar 2013; Maise 2016). While I have argued that certain disorders, such as depression, might impede one's sensitivity to interpersonal atmosphere, further questions about what therapeutic implications this might have should be considered.

With my empathetic account in hand, though, I suggest that we are well positioned to pursue these further questions. Like my own explorations, exploring further questions of how we engage with atmosphere, how our sensitivity to atmosphere might be heightened or inhibited in certain situations, how cultural differences and issues of power and exclusion impact our atmospheric experience, and additional questions about atmospheres found online, will not only deepen our understanding of interpersonal atmosphere but also continue to push us to find the limit-cases of empathy.

As highlighted in chapter 6, however, the risk of developing an account of interpersonal atmosphere that rests upon the notion of empathy is that it is not immediately obvious what such an account could say about the role the environment plays in producing atmospheres or atmospheres where there are no people present at all. Given that I critiqued atmosphere theories that focused predominantly upon non-peopled atmospheres for failing to say anything

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[60] See Osler & Szanto (forthcoming) for an account of political atmosphere.

about interpersonal atmospheres, we might fear that my approach opens itself up to the same criticism inverted. However, I have argued that starting from interpersonal atmospheres can shed light on how to unpack the role environments play in shaping, sustaining, and producing atmosphere, as well as our experience of non-peopled atmosphere. The advantage of starting with our atmospheric experience of people is that we experience the world, even when there are no people present, as inherently intersubjective. As such, I have shown that my account is well placed for considering how we experience the world as expressive in relation to how the world is experienced as saturated with subjective meaning and subjective affordances, structures, expectations and culture.

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