

Felt presence: the uncanny encounters with the numinous Other

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Received: 1 January 2008 / Accepted: 13 August 2010
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Abstract Felt presence, a sensation that “someone is there”, is an integral part of our everyday experience. It can manifest itself in a variety of forms ranging from most subtle fleeting impressions to intense hallucinations of demonic assault or visions of the divine. Felt presence phenomenon outside of the context of neurological disorders is largely neglected and not well understood by contemporary science. This paper focuses on the experiential and expressive qualities of the phenomenon and attempts to bring forth the complexity and the richness of possibilities for inter- and intrasubjective awareness represented by these experiences. Are these simply misperceptions and hallucinations heightened and enforced by the mystical or superstitious mind? Or are these entities projections of our own “selves”, elements of self-estrangement? How are such experiences shaping our understanding of ourselves and of others? And finally, what is the interplay between intersubjective, private experiences and private or public spaces of dwelling?

Keywords Felt presence · Sleep paralysis · The other · Intersubjectivity · Dwelling · Religious experiences · Self-estrangement

1 Introduction

Felt presence—the vivid sensation that someone or something animate is present in the vicinity of a person—is a common phenomenon that has received relatively little research attention. Felt presence can manifest itself in a variety of ways ranging from the most intense and realistic hallucinations, e.g., during sleep paralysis attacks or sensory deprivation, to the most subtle and fleeting sensations that “someone is there”. In most situations, felt presence seems to have negative overtones, especially when the sensation is deceptively realistic and is a part of sleep paralysis attack. Possible “visitors” frequently include demonic malevolent entities, aliens, ghosts, witches, stalkers, intruders in the home and more. However, felt presence can also manifest itself in positive ways, comforting and reassuring, such as in visions of a divine entity or a deceased relative.

Presences seem to be extremely important during childhood: toys are experienced as sentient, monsters are expected to hide in the closet or under the bed, imaginary friends follow, comfort and guide the child during moments of loneliness, distress or uncertainty. In adulthood, however, these entities normally disappear and are replaced by rational explanations of the world guided by conventional logic. Should the imaginary friends persist, should the monsters under the bed remain there, it is seen as pathological and delusional, and more negative and threatening than before.

There is no consistent body of literature, or even definition, of felt presence experiences. The phenomena seem

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extremely elusive and hard to classify. Even susceptible individuals often have great difficulty in finding a correct vocabulary to adequately address the experiences in all their richness and complexity. Since felt presence is often experienced in apparent absence of identifiable stimuli in other modalities, such as visual, auditory or tactile, it can be extremely difficult to describe them linguistically without projecting extra qualities on their sensory phenomenology. Felt presence belongs to the domain of the subtle, of the emotional, of the imaginary rather than to that of the empirical and classifiable.

2 Main discussion

In the contemporary tradition of scientific reasoning, felt presence experiences are consistently referred to as hallucinations, and in some cases even as delusions (Cheyne and Girard 2007), and are studied only insofar as they are associated with particular neurological or psychiatric conditions, e.g., sleep paralysis or epileptic auras, and only if they cause individuals a significant level of distress. Consequently, only negative and intense experiences are typically assessed and are seen to be non-desirable, dysfunctional by-products of brain malfunction. Other felt presence manifestations are largely ignored, seen as belonging to popular or folk culture and viewed predominantly as atavistic remnants of superstitious and primitive worldview.

One controversial line of felt presence research is concerned with the vectorial hemisphericity hypothesis wherein the human brain is seen as “split” into two separate yet interconnected “selves”. One resides in the left hemisphere and is related to the conscious sense of Self that is linguistically determined, rational, and logical. The other “self” is presumably located in the right hemisphere and is normally dormant and subordinated to the left hemisphere “self”. The right hemisphere self is unconscious although active during conscious processes but falls outside of the domain of linguistic inner-dialog awareness. According to Todd Murphy, felt presence is experienced when “the right hemispheric sense of self falls out of phase with the left hemispheric self” (Murphy 1999). Michael Persinger’s experiments suggest that it is possible to evoke felt presence through transcranial stimulation using weak magnetic fields applied to the temporal lobe of the right hemisphere (Persinger and Healey 2002). However, another team (Granqvist et al. 2005) failed to replicate his findings and argue that felt presence experiences that they observed were better predicted by suggestibility. In another experiment, however, stimulation of the left temporoparietal junction produced clear sensations of a felt presence which shadowed the person’s body position and movements (Arzy et al. 2006).

Recently, there has been some movement toward conceptualizing felt presence as a basic phenomenon related to everyday social imagery experiences and which can become distorted and distressing in certain susceptible individuals (Nielsen 2007; Nielsen and Lara-Carrasco 2007; Solomonova et al. 2008). Some individuals demonstrate a particular vulnerability or capacity for experiencing felt presence not only in extreme circumstances but also in everyday life. For example, they may feel that there is an intruder in their home, may see faces in ambiguous objects, may feel that someone is watching or following them when it is not the case. A recent study has shown that in postpartum women, felt presence experiences often arise in dreams associated with nocturnal behaviors; such women frequently dream that their infants are in peril and start searching for them in the bed covers, or even wake up with an intense sensation that the infant is in the bed near her (Nielsen and Paquette 2007).

2.1 Numinous as a cornerstone of religious mysticism

In religious contexts, felt presence plays a crucial part in experiential understanding of the divine. In many religions, the divine presence is symbolically enacted/produced (for example during the sacrament of the Eucharist in the Christian tradition), and accounts of first-hand spontaneous encounters with the divine are numerous. These encounters are well documented in the writings of the mystics. There are also many records by believers dealing with intense feelings of presence, for example, the vivid presence of Jesus. To illustrate, in Quaker churches, the main premise of the service is the *literal*, meta-*physical* presence of God in the parishioners’ immediate surroundings. In religious art, from the more symbolic representations of Byzantine icons to the more realistic trompe-l’oeil works of the early modern era, presence of the divine is evoked and embodied within the sacred spaces of devotional institutions. In Catholic Christianity, relics of the martyrs—which literally represent their *physical* presence—are of great importance; pilgrims come long distances to be in the presence of these sacred objects. Similarly, in many traditions of Hinduism, the deity *is present* in devotional images and objects; these are not representations of idols, but rather the divine is thought to actually inhabit the object. In some cases, the deities also manifest themselves through the believer; both oral tradition and contemporary anthropological research document cases of divine possession in Hinduist societies.

One could argue that religious experience could not exist without the felt presence. The divine may represent a quintessential felt presence phenomenon, a conception or a longing for the presence experience in the absence of an actual autobiographical incident. Whether one has actually felt the presence of the divine—or hopes to feel it—there

seems to exist this vital need, curiosity or desire to experience the divine in this primal fashion.

Rudolf Otto in his influential work *The Idea of the Holy* (1926) regarded felt presence of the divine as being at the root of all religious experience. He coined the term *numinous* to articulate this feeling as “objective and outside of self” (Otto 1926, 11). The numinous is an experience of the holy that is dependent more on the feeling and the inarticulate, non-verbalizable and non-rational sensation which is, nonetheless, quite apparent and recognizable in the context of religious experiences. Otto’s *mysterium tremendum*—that which is mystical and awe-inspiring—exists as something which is “wholly other”, “that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the ‘canny’” (Otto 1926, 26). In this framework, religious experiences evoke the “Other”, which is quite close to Freud’s notion of the uncanny (Freud 1919): that which returns and imposes the gaze that which is simultaneously frightening, new and yet seems to be somehow familiar but long forgotten. Otto’s numinous is devoid of rational and ethical qualities—it can be either positive or negative, divine or demonic, but the essential qualities of the numinous are that it has the elements of “daunting ‘awefulness’ and ‘majesty’” and that it is always experienced as “something uniquely attractive and fascinating” (Otto 1926, 31).

In the *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), William James argues that religious conceptions are able to “touch... reality-feeling”, to expand and provide grounds for the felt presence in one’s everyday experience. “It is as if there were in the human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call ‘something there’, more deep and more general than any of the special and particular ‘senses’ by which the current psychology supposes existent realities to be originally revealed” (James 1902, 66–67). After considering and describing numerous instances of felt presence phenomena, James concludes that “such cases (...) seem sufficiently to prove the existence in our mental reality of a sense of present reality more diffused and general than that which our special senses yield” (James 1902, 72). Although in his *Varieties* James disagrees with “medical materialism” and states that even if there are certain neurological underlying pathologies, (i.e., today conceptualized as known or suspected history of schizophrenia, epilepsy and so on), these still do not provide sufficient grounds for disregarding the value of mystical and religious experiences or revelations. Still, the felt presence experiences that he describes are considered as hallucinations, that is, perceptions, often erroneous, which have little or no basis in real life. However, even though he leaves the question of agency and source of such phenomena open, it is clear that James regards them as indispensable and

important qualities of the human psyche, which play an important role in both development of cultural institutions and individual spiritual evolution. Religious experiences, of which felt presence is an integral part, are a natural expression of human existence: “Such is the human ontological imagination, and such is the convincingness of what it brings to birth” (James 1902, 83).

2.2 The other and psychoanalysis

Freud discusses this feeling as the *uncanny* that represents the ‘double’, an individual’s projections of his/her own qualities (real, desired or feared) onto other people, fictional characters and even objects. For Freud, the uncanny stems from one’s earliest childhood experiences. Its function evolves throughout life and represents the “unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in *phantasy*, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of Free Will” (Freud 1919).

Both Freud and his disciple Otto Rank view this ‘double’ as an expression of one’s desire for immortality wherein the idea of the eternal soul becomes the most prominent ‘double’ in the history of civilization. Rank’s “immortal double”, a “magic self” (Rank 1941, 102), is the basis for human creativity, a driving force to build, to create art, to ensure one’s symbolic presence after physical death. Moreover, for Rank it is the supernatural, and not the rational and logical, that lies at the base of all human civilization and culture. That which lies outside of the limits of our immediate understanding, that which defies easy explanation creates culture that is “made up of things non-existent in nature” (Rank 1941, 63). The ‘double’ can take on many forms, referring not only to spontaneous and extrapersonal felt presences, but also to instances of depersonalization and multiple personality as in the case of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hide*. The latter type of felt presence phenomenon is quite different from the former, spontaneous and ambiguous type that is the object of the present project, although it can be argued that depersonalization and multiple personality are more extreme and pathological instances of the same essential ‘Other’. For the aims of the present paper, we will not discuss the dramatic out-of-body experiences or fully embodied ‘doubles’ that are endowed with particular qualities of a subject and are complementary to the subject’s perceived self, similar to the *Portrait of Dorian Grey*. Here we will limit our discussion to the more subtle, ambiguous and basic felt presences that are so difficult to articulate.

In Jacques Lacan’s psychodynamic theory, heavily influenced by Saussure’s semiotics, the concept of the ‘double’ is expanded and represented as the Other (or the big Other) that organizes the symbolic order of the psyche

and provides a semiotic framework for understanding the self and others in a relational way. Lacan argues that the unconscious is organized as language, consisting of an infinite chain of signifiers in the absence of fixed signified; and essentially, the “unconscious us the discourse about the Other” (Lacan 1966, 814, p. 689). Homer writes that the Lacanian big Other “...is that absolute otherness that we cannot assimilate into our subjectivity [...] it is also the discourse and desires of those around us, through which we internalize and inflect our own desire” (Homer 2005, 70). Thus, the Other becomes an organizing element of one’s subjectivity and at the same time, paradoxically, of both intrapersonal and extrapersonal awareness and experience. The Other is a vehicle for both self-identification and self-estrangement, and also for one’s desire: “as the Other’s desire that man’s desire takes shape, though at first only retaining subjective opacity in order to represent need in it” (Lacan 1966, 813, p. 689). Perhaps felt presence experiences represent the Other in a most literal, temporarily embodied, way. Perhaps they represent an essential quality of human intersubjectivity and capacity for empathy. How much of one’s individuality is shaped by relations with others and how much does one borrow from others in order to construct one’s own uniqueness? In Lacanian view: “The psychoanalytic subject—the subject of the unconscious—can only come into being through others and in relation to the Other” (Homer 2005, 71).

2.3 Sleep paralysis as a most salient and independent manifestation of felt presence

Sleep paralysis is a common benign phenomenon occurring during transitions between sleep and waking, i.e., during sleep onset or at sleep offset. It is characterized by a temporary inability to move and is often accompanied by vivid, fearful hallucinations. These hallucinations may be of any sensory modality: experiencers may hear demonic voices or electrical buzzing; they may see shadows and creatures in their room; they may feel a touch or pressure on their body that is sometimes so intense that it is interpreted as assault and even rape. Neurologically, sleep paralysis seems to be related to the state dissociation phenomenon, where elements of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep (or paradoxical sleep), associated with intense and emotional dreaming, intrude into wakefulness producing a particular and paradoxical reality. During these episodes, experiencers are usually aware of the surroundings, often can hear people or televisions on in the next room, yet cannot move and may have extremely intense hallucinations. The latter may become amplified by the fact that individuals are convinced that they are wide awake when they occur.

Felt presence is often experienced during sleep paralysis attacks and is arguably the most distressing and fearful

element of the event. While in most cases the felt presence is just a fleeting sensation and lasts only a few seconds, sometimes they are extremely elaborate, panic provoking, even traumatizing. To illustrate, McNally and Clancy (2005) suggest that some cases of alleged recovered memories of sexual abuse or alien abduction may be readily explained as due to intense sleep paralysis episodes.

In the recent years, there has been considerable research on sleep paralysis hallucinations and their cultural interpretations. Sleep paralysis is consistently described by subjects as a spiritual experience and is at the root of some folk traditions. For instance, in Newfoundland, sleep paralysis is well known as the “Old Hag” phenomenon during which an individual is “hagged” or under a hag’s curse. The phenomenon is so widespread and well known that an oral tradition exists concerning cures from and methods of prevention against “being hagged” (Hufford 1982). In Japan, the same phenomenon is known as *kanashibari*, a demonic entity, in Cambodia as *Khmaoch sângkât* or “the ghost that pushes you down” (Hinton et al. 2005); in African communities, as “being ridden by the witch” (Hall 1993); in Canadian Inuits, as *uqumangirniq* or *aqtuqsinniq* when the dreamer becomes vulnerable to the attacks of shamans or malevolent spirits (Law and Kirmayer 2005); in Ethiopia, as a *Zar* ghost that sits on the victim’s chest (de Jong 2005); in the Caribbean, as *kokma*; in the Philippines, as *hart nagarat* (de Jong 2005); and in China, as “ghost oppression” (Wing et al. 1994). Although cultural explanations of the nocturnal visitors are fairly different and detailed, the basic experience they all refer to seems highly similar.

Although the lifetime prevalence of sleep paralysis has been estimated to be approximately 40%, mainstream science and medicine pay surprisingly little attention to the phenomenon. This tendency persists despite the fact that more extreme and distressing episodes, such as being attacked by a demon or an alien, may lead to erroneous diagnoses of schizophrenia (Stores 1998).

2.4 Felt presence represented

The Other, that imperceptible elusive entity belonging to the world of the night and of strange environments populated with mythological beings, is possibly not only at the root of the religious mysticism and creativity but at the root of all expressions of human culture. The Freudian *uncanny* is an essential mechanism at work in artistic creation and in the contemplation of works of art and literature, enabling the spectator to partake in the act of creation and to establish a two-way interaction with the aesthetic object. Through the *uncanny*, an aesthetic object actively returns and imposes its gaze, changing the spectator’s response and shaping his/her perception. The ‘otherness’ in a general

sense can be attributed to any writer or artist by definition, but there are numerous examples of depictions of more concrete and concentrated, explicit felt presence experiences.

Luis-Carlos Alvaro (2005) related several short stories by Maupassant about the latter's long-standing history of neurological problems. *Le Horla*, in particular, was related to nightmares and intense sleep paralysis episodes involving the spectrum of negative and threatening hallucinations including felt presence and tactile sensations of pressure, and which he interpreted as an assault. One description of the unwelcome nocturnal visitor goes as follows:

"I sleep—a long time—2 or 3 h perhaps—then a dream—no—a nightmare lays hold on me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep—I feel it and I know it—and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between his hands and squeezing it—squeezing with all his might in order to strangle me.

I struggle, bound by that terrible powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out—but I cannot; I want to move—I cannot; I try, with the most violent efforts and out of breath, to turn over and throw off this being which is crushing and suffocating me—I cannot!" (Maupassant, pp. 108–109).

This description of a nocturnal supernatural assault is familiar to someone who experiences recurrent and intense sleep paralysis episodes. The inability to move, feelings of being strangled, shallow breathing and especially the feeling of presence all convince the dreamer that a malevolent creature is nearby.

Among the most famous descriptions of sleep paralysis are Henri Fuseli's *Nightmare* paintings. The most well known of the series (1781) depicts a helpless sleeping woman with a demon sitting on her chest. Sensation of pressure on the chest and of being strangled or suffocated is among the most prevalent characteristics of sleep paralysis episodes (Cheyne et al. 1999). According to Harris (2004), *The Nightmare* was among the prints decorating the walls of Freud's apartment in Austria, and Ernest Jones, the famous Welsh psychoanalyst and neurologist, chose one of its versions to be on the cover of his book *On the Nightmare*. Originally, according to one account, the term nightmare in the English folk tradition referred to a nocturnal demon that assaulted its victims and caused bad dreams. A more intense and graphic depiction of the Incubus phenomenon, a malevolent nocturnal visitor, is *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches* (1796; Feingold 1982, 49).

A less intense but still quite obvious example of an everyday felt presence is found in Giorgio de Chirico's *Mystery and Melancholy of the Street* (1914). De Chirico's interest in the oneiric and the unconscious is well documented; his early work is consistently referred to as

"dreamlike", and the artist himself explicitly stated his interest in dreams. In 1929, he published a dream-novel *Hebdomeros*. His early works are characterized by a predominance of empty streets, twilight illumination, "random" objects, and obscure characters. One could argue that de Chirico's empty cityscapes with ambiguous objects and strange lighting create ideal circumstances for the emergence of felt presence. *The Mystery and Melancholy of the Street* seems to evoke the uncanny, the basic presence phenomenon that fills one with anxiety, anticipation, and uncertainty. A silhouette of a running girl is contrasted with the static emptiness of the street while the shadow of a statue is almost menacing, evoking deep anxiety and suggesting a presence of someone in the space. It has been suggested that de Chirico suffered from temporal lobe epilepsy which is characterized, among other symptoms, by frequent "dreamy" states with a strong hallucinatory component (Blanke and Landis 2003).

In Velasquez' famous *Las Meninas*, a whole other type of 'otherness' that is even more subtle and elusive is depicted. Only after the beholder focuses and gets immersed in the pictorial space does the presence emerge. It is concealed within the mirror on the wall such that if one contemplates the painting from just the right angle—where the vantage point of the space is seamlessly integrated within one's view—does it become clear that the two reflected figures belong to the 'real' space outside of the frame, replacing or standing right beside the beholder.

2.5 General qualities and circumstances conducive for felt presence experiences

As Nielsen writes in a review of the felt presence phenomenon (Nielsen 2007), despite all dramatic differences in context and narrative qualities, there are some fundamental properties of the felt presence experience that are shared among its manifestations.

First, felt presences are always *apparent*, that is, the sensation is always recognizable and independent of whether other cues are available. Often other ambiguous visual, auditory or tactile hallucinations or subtle sensations are interpreted in relation and in subordination to the presence. Thus, people may hear subtle, ambiguous sounds, often just above the threshold of detection, or they may see strange shadows or obscure shapes. But only in association with the feeling of presence do these stimuli take shape and become more meaningful than they are in reality; in combination they create a more coherent whole. In case of the more intense experiences, where presences are embodied and experienced as almost real, the other cues are probably completely overpowered and are not even perceived. Second, the presences are *localized* in space in relation to the experient. More often than not, the felt

presence is experienced on the periphery of awareness, at the place where mental and physical effort is required to direct one's attention. Third, the presences have some sort of *intentionality*, they exist in a particular relation to the subject—be it in a positive and comforting way as in the cases of divine apparitions, or in a threatening and menacing way as in intense sleep paralysis experiences. Most presence experiences are negative in their emotional intention. The most immediate reaction, which can fall just below the awareness threshold, is almost invariably fear or startle. We can add to this another important quality of felt presence experiences: that they are *spontaneous*, that is, their appearance is non-volitional and sudden. As Leube describes some of his early experiments to evoke felt presence in *Psychology of Religious Mysticism*: “if the presence appeared at all, it came unexpectedly, after [our subjects] had ceased to visualize or otherwise to realize it” (Leube, 285). It should nonetheless be kept in mind that there are individuals who are more prone to these experiences than others and there are conditions under which felt presence episodes are more likely to happen than others. If felt presence experiences belong to some “other reality” or to some sort of altered state of consciousness, the first link that comes to mind is sleep: they never appear when one is concentrated on forcing an occurrence, but rather happen when one's mind is elsewhere and surrendering to the present moment.

There seem to be at least two types of environments that facilitate the appearance of the felt presence. These environments are, however, inseparable from particular mental states with which they are associated. The first type is the extreme environment in which an individual is under some unusual stress, for example, high altitude mountain climbing, sensory deprivation, or solitary sailing. The subjective stress may be a direct product of how an individual copes with the environmental pressure, or might be generated from within, e.g., as a result of a neurological condition. Suedfeld and Mocellin (1987) describe some of the extreme circumstances that evoke intense felt presence experiences. They also discuss felt presence experiences in light of Julian Jaynes' bicamerality hypothesis and propose that these phenomena constitute an important adaptive mechanism of the human mind. They claim that felt presence experiences should be de-mystified and removed from the domains of religion and psychopathology in order to be accepted as a normal way of coping. The second type of presence-inducing environment is conducive to more subtle, everyday felt presence experiences, the type that often goes unnoticed. Dark alleys, dimly lit rooms, objects of ambiguous shape or simply being alone at home are often sufficient to produce fleeting but startling sensations that “someone is there”, that an intruder is in the house, or that someone is watching or following the individual. As is

in case of sleep paralysis experiences or intense religious, visions related to a neurological condition, moments of transition, the liminal, “fringe” states of consciousness seem to play an important role in enhancing an individual's awareness of the Other, or of “another” reality.

2.6 Dwelling and presence

Some environments seem to be more conducive and more linked to felt presence experiences than others. Sacred spaces, or places where the divine are thought to dwell, are endowed with this capability, in both theological, culturally dependent and in tacit, almost imperceptible ways. Both religious and non-religious individuals are attracted to built sacred places of worship, places linked to religious traditions, places where divine messengers were thought to have preached, places where revelations were experienced, or places where influential individuals were born or died. Places of birth and death of important others are seen as particularly potent. Cemeteries, for instance, seem to hold an uncanny fascination in addition to uncanny felt presence. Religious and folk traditions are formed around such places of transition between the physical life and the afterlife. They revolve around religious conceptions of hope and peace and the supernatural.

Presence of the divine is intrinsically linked to the notion of *dwelling*, of inhabiting in spatial terms and also in being *within*. This notion implies some enclosed area, some finiteness of the space which acts as a vessel for and is enabling *dwelling*. A sacred built space can be seen as a dwelling space for the divine. The Hebrew word *shechinah* denotes dwelling or settling but also translates as *presence of God*. It is of particular importance in describing the idea of God's presence in the Temple of Jerusalem. However, even in the absence of the Temple, the presence does not disappear, it stays with the believers, it denotes a creative and inspirational force. Architectural and aesthetic decisions related to building sacred spaces are interlinked to and dependent on theological and mystical traditions. Not only do decorative elements evoke religious symbols, but the whole of the building is related to the perception of the divine. It is oriented toward creating and stimulating experiences of presence in those it shelters.

Another, more immediate type of space that calls up experiences of felt presence consists of places where people dwell, i.e., where they live everyday. An experience of entering someone's house containing objects arranged in ways their owner intended can lead to a distributed but clear sense that the person is actually there without actually being there. Used furniture and personal objects have a tangible capacity for producing the uncanny feeling that someone has been there, has left a gestural imprint on them.

In *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (1971) Heidegger relates the Old English and High German words *building* and *bauen* to *dwelling*, though this original meaning of the terms has been largely lost to current Western world generations. To build is to dwell, to dwell is the only way that humanity can experience living. To dwell, according to Heidegger, is to exist in harmony with the fourfold of the divine, and it is through dwelling that “mortals... preserve the fourfold in its essential being, its *presencing*”. For Bachelard, the house represents the universe of subjectivity. Homes are built for sheltering, protecting and especially for preserving and enacting one’s personal and collective identity through dreaming and daydreaming. Any place that becomes a place of dwelling becomes home in its essence. There is a reciprocal relation and co-creation of meaning between the dweller and the home: “the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to its shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thoughts and dreams” (Bachelard 1958, p. 5). Even though in its essence, home is made for dreaming, it “protects the dreamer”, it “allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard 1958, p. 6). Sometimes the safe space can become a battlefield, where nightmares and sleep paralysis attacks come to the surface and transform it. When one is alone at home, the slightest noise can provoke an impression that there is an intruder. Do we lose our guard when we are at home? Does the impression of being sheltered and protected from outside dangers provoke inner demons to resurface?

3 Conclusions

We argue that felt presence constitutes a basic phenomenon which is at the center of the interplay between intersubjective and intrasubjective self-expression. Felt presence can be seen as a cornerstone of religious and spiritual experiences, of creativity and of one’s self-identity in relation to others. There are a multitude of possible presence phenomena, subtle and extreme, menacing and comforting, but perhaps at the core of all of them there is a basic sensibility or vulnerability to such experiences. Is it possible to create a right combination of elements to facilitate its appearance? What is a function of space in creating such conditions? Is it possible that felt presences animate space, make it more liturgical and, perhaps, sacred? Or do these phenomena bring the mystical into the mundane and animate our everyday existence?

In the accompanying paper by Elena Frantova, we present a description of an experiment in which we attempt to integrate our interest and curiosity about the felt presence phenomena with the richness of the possibilities provided by the media technology. We describe how we

blended an aesthetic immersive installation with a well-controlled experimental space for the empirical study of the felt presence. We further discuss the uses and implications of felt presence phenomena in the domains of performance, theater and emergent new media technologies. Using the narratives collected from various felt presence descriptions, especially sleep paralysis episodes, we created a space for an individual experience which would be open for interpretation and conducive for spontaneous felt presence emergence.

Acknowledgments the authors wish to thank Sha Xin Wei, Timothy Sutton, and Philippe Stenstrom for their invaluable help.

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