Relational Space:

An Entangled Exploration of Office Space Research

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ABSTRACT

Relational Space: An Entangled Exploration of Office Space Research

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Drawing on interdisciplinary concepts of physical space as a way of understanding and framing organizational experience, this study explores the aesthetic, sensory, and embodied relationships between the staff of a not-for-profit, youth health organization (Head & Hands) and the day-to-day office encounters of its staff members during a significant relocation. This period of change, which increased the staff's interaction and awareness of the office environment, offered a unique glimpse into the transformative impact of physical space on the organization. By highlighting everyday moments between the staff and the space, a rich picture of their experience emerged through nuanced emotions, tacit knowledge, and aesthetic understanding. Despite consistent interest in the affective qualities of physical space, the entwined nature of the social and the material is noticeably lacking in organizational studies, where research on space is often presented in objective or quantitative terms. This paper examines possible reasons for that absence and explores some potential ways forward. Key to future research is the ontological positioning of space as an inseparable and active participant in the organization. Framing space as something central and entangled frees it from objective, external binaries by positioning it alongside, and possibly within, the social, subjective sphere. This ontological shift creates an

emplaced, relational, and more-than-human understanding within which to frame the emotional, sensory, and atmospheric experiences that happen within the office.

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Introduction

As we reacquaint ourselves with our breathing bodies, then the perceived world itself begins to shift and transform. When we begin to consciously frequent the wordless dimension of our sensory participations, certain phenomena that have habitually commanded our focus begin to lose their distinctive fascination and to slip toward the background, while hitherto unnoticed or overlooked presences begin to stand forth from the periphery and to engage our awareness.

(Abram, 1996, p. 63)

Setting the Scene

This is a tale of one researcher, one organization, and two office spaces as they acted upon one another and evolved over time. With data gathered from before-and-after interviews spaced three years apart and conducted in two different spaces, insights around the entangled relationships between the employees, their organization (Head & Hands), and its office space are explored in a somewhat abstract and embodied presentation that never seems to conclude fully yet may satisfy as a snapshot of a living, ongoing relationship. Just as David Abram (1996) emphasized in the introductory quote, this paper attempts to surface the "unnoticed or overlooked presences" so that they may "engage our awareness" and inform our discussion (p. 63).

The scope of this study is both small and large. It does not aim to develop new theoretical models or grand truths about the nature of office relocation. It is not about existential or

philosophical debates regarding the minutiae of human spatial relations, although I touch on, and draw from, these concepts. This research intends to further the practice of understanding physical space through an *emplaced*, *relational*, and *more-than-human* focus within organizational research. These ontologies help shift our focus from the purely social (human) and the purely material (physical space) into something that is entangled and co-productive—something that is more than the sum of its parts (Abram, 1997). An *emplaced* orientation situates embodiment— the reflective joining of body and mind (Varela et al., 1993)—through a "sensuous interrelationship of body-mind-environment" (Howes, 2005, p. 7). Howes offers *emplacement* as a way of "reposition[ing] ourselves in relationship to the sensuous materiality of the world" (p. 7). Such wisdom, nestled at the intersection of the social and the material, or, more appropriately, the socio-material world, offers rich potential for understanding. Seeing through a *relational* perspective highlights this in-between experience (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000), while a *more-than-human* approach draws non-human, material, or ecological perspectives into view (Abram, 1997). This exploration of employee experience before and after an office move offers insights into the staff's emplaced, sensory, and emotional journey through and alongside the changing and evolving space. As Abram (1997) so eloquently outlines, my intention is "not to explain it but simply to pay attention to its rhythms and textures, not to capture or control it but simply to become familiar with its diverse modes of appearance—and ultimately to give voice to its enigmatic and ever-shifting patterns" (p. 35). In a sense, this paper represents a momentary act of witness via observation and surfacing of emplaced relationships.

Evolution and Theoretical Influence

This project began as an effort to grasp the role(s) of office space in an organization's life. Architecture and design have always been of interest to me, particularly their role in influencing how we feel and act. In university, I wrote a feminist essay on my mother's empowering relationship with her kitchen and how she used a renovation to manifest a supportive space for herself. Through light, location, and materials, her kitchen was transformed into a powerful and beautiful centre of the household. A large, carved piece of wood encircled the rounded hand-cut countertops, removing any sharp edges. The kitchen became the main floor's focal point and connective tissue, with the entrance, living room, and dining room all radiating outward from it. It was lit by windows on all sides (including from above), giving it—and Mum—a radiant quality. Rather than disparage her domestic side, Mum not only embraced it but found power in it, and in her kitchen space.

Years later, after working with an organization during a major relocation, I began to think more about how space affects and impacts those working within it. In the weeks and months before the move, staff were deeply affected by their emotional attachments to the old building and anxieties around the new space. After the move was complete, the new premises became even more influential, as decisions regarding future directions for the organization were closely linked to features offered in the new space, such as rooftop gardens, rentable office space, and kitchen workshops. At the time, it seemed clear to me that office space contributes to organizational evolution through macro and micro, and conscious and unconscious, decisions as they are made in relation to the physical space. However, characterizing space in this way—as an active participant within the organization—was not something I had heard talked about in any organization. Nor was it a topic I had read about in articles in the field of organizational studies. When space was discussed, it tended to emphasize elements that can be quantified and

controlled—such as temperature (Newsham et al., 2009), window access (van Esch et al., 2019; Lottrup et al., 2014), air quality (Dorgan & Dorgan, 2006), noise (Leather et al., 2003; Seddigh et al., 2015; Sundstrom et al., 1994), and personalization (Laurence et al., 2013; Lee & Brand, 2010; Wells, 2000)—or understood objectively, such as employee satisfaction and layout (Varjo et al., 2015; Sailer & McCulloh, 2012; Veitch et al., 2007). The focus on office space for knowledge work tends "to examine the end states for those spaces" (Holtham, 2001, p. 1), which places focus on a finished product that may be assessed quantifiably. These qualities are common in contemporary business models such as strategic planning, five-year plans, and SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound). Such approaches stem from the underlying belief that an organization is a "means of ordering, structuring and controlling the chaotic world outside" (Clegg et al., 2016, p. 152). In this paradigm, spatial research is used to design offices that will yield the best possible results in terms of productivity, production and, more recently, wellbeing (inasmuch as it contributes to the former two qualities). Leftover principles from the production line and Frederick Taylor's efficiency-based management style "reflect, to this very day, the dominant values of machine-like organizations" in contemporary office environments (Duffy, 2000, p. 371). Today's "creative" spaces, with their kombucha fridges and ping-pong tables, may be different aesthetically and culturally, but they ultimately reinforce the same demands: productivity and efficiency (Dale & Burrell, 2010). If we frame physical space within this paradigm, we may miss some of the more dynamic, nuanced, emotional, or unseen ways in which organizations interact with their office environments.

The workplace is more than a room in which to accomplish tasks. Seeing space as an active contributor to how we exist in the world elevates office space out of the realm of the *container* or *stage*—terms that situate physical space outside ourselves as a backdrop to, rather

than a contributing element in, what happens. Considering the physical environment as a key component in shaping one's existence in the world, with "its own materiality, its own nooks, crannies and folds, aesthetics and ugliness" (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006, p. 144), shifts how office space is treated, talked about and, potentially, funded and researched. While these concepts are commonplace in philosophy, geography, anthropology, and architecture, the interwoven relationships between spatial structures and those who dwell within them are less common in the field of organizational studies.

In this paper, no singular, dominant theory underpins the research. Instead, I draw from a combination of philosophies, theories, and concepts to inform the exploration of office space within organizational studies, the specific experience of Head & Hands and, later, my own lived experience. The practice of conceptualizing material space as an active force linked inextricably to our social lives evolved out of the phenomenological writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), in which the body is situated as the site of perception, and were developed further with Doreen Massey's (2005) theories of space as a "product of interrelations" (p. 8), time, and possibility; Elizabeth Grosz's (1994, 2001) feminist theories of space and the body; Francisco Varela's (1991, 1999) writings on mindfulness, ethics, and embodiment; and many others.

In examining an organization's relationship to its physical, material office, there is a unique interdisciplinary opportunity for meaningful relational understanding that combines day-to-day spatial interaction with the office's structures over time. Rather than focus on the quantifiable impacts of physical space, concentrating on more nuanced and embodied interaction with socio-material space will produce a different kind of spatial knowledge. The value of this knowledge and its uses remain to be seen. As the boundaries blur between social and material dynamics, new questions emerge regarding the process: what is the role of designers in

choreographing the social and embodied dimensions of an environment? To what extent is it possible to represent the "symbiotic relationship" between the social and the "environment within which it breathes and mutates" (Turner & Myerson, 1998, p. 1) in academic literature? Might a more attuned spatial awareness and recognition shift an environment's connection to, and influence upon, our minds and bodies?

Terms

Before we go further, I will clarify some terms that appear in this paper as well as my approach. I use the terms *physical space*, *material space*, and *physical environment* often and interchangeably to denote the tangible, material structures of physical space, as opposed to immaterial conceptions of space as an invisible field of influence (Wheatley, 1994) as expressed in terms such as *safe space*, *creative space*, and *open space*, among others. The term *built environment* distinctly refers to a humanly constructed environment, while the *natural environment* indicates the opposite. In this paper, I use the terms *space* and *place* interchangeably—since debating these distinctions does not advance the work of this investigation—even as others, especially in the field of geography, have stressed their differences (Tuan, 1977) and "varying meanings" (Ropo et al., 2013, p. 381). In these domains, *space* more or less becomes *place* after it has been imbued with meaning (Tuan, 1977), although the distinctions and discernments of this transformation are owed more attention than I give them here. On the other hand, a more relevant distinction exists between *objective* and *subjective* qualities of space. Rather than separate—as Ropo et al. (2015) have done—the "objective physically observed space (architecture, interior design . . . and other material aspects) and the subjectively perceived space, that is, how each person perceives the environment with their

senses, emotions and cognition" (p. 3), I consider their *intersubjective* state (Abram, 1996; Varela et al., 1991). Drawing from Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity, Abram (1996) explains how the objective world exists not through a solid or fixed state, but from multiple and intermingling perspectives to create a "collective field of experience lived through many different angles" (p. 39). These interwoven subjective experiences, which include the presence of non-human beings and objects, manifest an "ever-shifting fabric, a single phenomenal world or 'reality'" (p. 39). The objective world is discernable not through external reason, but from interwoven, collective perception. In this context, to borrow from Grosz (1998), I "explore the constitutive and mutually defining relations" (p. 43) existing between and within office spaces, organizations, their staff, and research.

Exploration

Involving a disruptive process of displacement and replacement, a physical relocation is a pivotal moment for an organization. A change in the environment can lead to fresh perspectives and opportunities for the organization to reflect, reorient, and make conscious modifications. Simultaneously, a change in location can trigger unconscious shifts at the individual and organizational levels. Over time, these small adjustments may lead to long-term changes in the organization's culture, structure, and vision.

Heading into this project, my questions were:

- What does an experiential and relational exploration (as opposed to a quantitative analysis) of people and their work spaces reveal about how they are affected by physical space?

- Are there identifiable spatial qualities and characteristics that may be linked (for individuals or groups) to a creative work mode and, if so, what are they?

- What spatial qualities and characteristics are linked to moments of delight, curiosity, and pleasure, and how do these qualities affect or contribute to productivity?

While these questions remain relevant to this research and were important to articulate as I prepared my interview questions, I feared they were simultaneously too large and too limiting; they echoed the search for those precise answers and metrics of productivity that I disparaged. Throughout this process, I have struggled to balance my desire to remain open and emergent with a need to set limits and tangible goals. Much of the research in this area confines itself to one or two qualities, such as lighting or air quality, to limit the number of variables. I criticized these papers for creating boundaries in research where none exist in reality. However, as the years sped by and the complexities seemed to extinguish the clarity I hoped to find, my desire to pare down and isolate my research become not only understandable but perhaps even necessary. John Law (2004) asks: "what happens when social science tries to describe things that are complex, diffuse, and messy" (p. 2)? The answer, he argues, is to "make a mess of it" (p. 2)— and not always in a good way. Researchers are often inclined to approach complex issues, simplify them, and present them as clear, objective data; but Law suggests that this process distorts a world that is "vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct" (p. 2). As researchers attempting to glimpse and retain these qualities, we need to "rethink our ideas about clarity and rigour, and find ways of knowing the indistinct and the slippery without trying to grasp and hold them tight" (p. 3).

With this in mind, I loosened my grip and adjusted my questions. This was not a formal process, but something that occurred unconsciously along the way. Instead of seeking to identify specific spatial qualities, documenting how space manifests as an evolving and living relationship became more important. My search became less about finding concrete answers and more of an emergent inquiry rooted in day-to-day experience. In attempting to resolve unanswered questions, the research process can also reveal "unquestioned answers" (Wilson, 2008, p. 6). In seeking to reduce my dependence upon habitual ways of seeing the world—my unquestioned answers—I increased my ability to notice what had always been there (Mason, 2002). As a result, new and straightforward questions have arisen:

What happens when we see space as a co-creator in an organization's evolution? How do changes in an organization's material environment affect the staff? What phenomena or information are surfaced in the experience of changing space?

The answers to these questions are not the same for everyone; they are conscious and unconscious, visible and invisible, held within the space and within one's body. They are emotional, circumstantial, essential, and unimportant, present within the day-to-day but visible year-to-year. Ultimately, after all these dimensions have been explored, perhaps the question that will remain is this one:

What might such revelations about one's relationship to physical space contribute to how we move forward as organizational researchers—not simply in terms of office design but how we research and frame the relationship between people and space?

Structure and Flow

In this spirit, I explore what and how the built environment communicates and how organizations communicate back. With my first chapter, I consider the literature pertaining to past and current organizational research on office space and material culture. This brief survey traces the evolution of built space and how it has been considered and articulated in organizational studies. To situate the discussion, the second chapter reviews and problematizes current research trends. This review then shifts to an interdisciplinary exploration of what is possible when spatial philosophies intermix with research trends in geography, sociology, anthropology, and the arts. The third chapter explores what it means to research and write about physical space in academia and questions how material space is seen, defined, described, and researched (such discussions also form a consistent thread throughout the paper). The fourth chapter continues the discussion, as I present and contextualize my research methodology. In the fifth chapter, I make room for the organization Head & Hands to share their experiences. Here memories, feelings, and lived experience take centre stage as staff members describe their day-to-day encounters with two unique office spaces. Through the staff's diverse "constellation of social [and spatial] relationships," their office is "brought to life" (Jiménez, 2003, p. 139). My final chapter attempts to bring together the experience of Head & Hands with the larger themes explored throughout this paper and with my own, coexisting spatial explorations. These personal insights and experiments weave together throughout the final discussion just as I encountered them in my own process.

The Current Climate of Offices and Work

A slick, black website promotes 444 South Flower, a recently renovated forty-year-old high-rise in downtown Los Angeles. The main page fades in with the slogan "defining the art of workplace" before transitioning to a slideshow featuring pictures of sleek facades, green roofs, and shiny interiors. The website aims to sell more than a new office space; the story it presents provides onlookers with a vision of what is possible.

This vision can be seen and felt on the sixth floor of 444 South Flower, which is home to the Workspace Innovation Lab. Grab a beer, flop into a hammock or atop an oversized bean bag, feel the warm breeze on your neck as you listen to a babbling brook. Walk through the space and you will encounter a variety of scenarios—office layouts and workstations meant to lure young, prospective businesses to the building. The lab features soundproof pods, a massive outdoor common space, responsive ambient speakers that use algorithms to listen to and modify sound production, video screens showcasing numerous nature scenes, and an ocean scent wafting through the space (Armetta, 2018, para. 7). The art of the workplace, it seems, is a carefully orchestrated *mise en scène* designed to dazzle the senses. But while millions of dollars are being spent to perfect this show, what does this direction reveal about our relationship to our environment?

The role of physical space in organizational effectiveness, innovation, and wellbeing has gained traction over the past few decades. Spaces are being transformed into highly responsive, sustainable, aesthetic (Xie et al., 2016), and intelligent settings for work (Niezabitowska & Winnicka-Jasłowska, 2011). A quick scan of headlines on the website of *Fast Company*, a magazine dedicated to the latest in technology, business, and design trends, illustrates the increasing link between environment and work: "Five ways your office is influencing your

brain." "WeWork's latest acquisition? Software that optimizes office design." "Offices that blast you with cold air if you're sleepy are coming." "We spend a third of our lives at work. Shouldn't office furniture be nontoxic?" "More people are working remotely, and it's transforming office design." These headlines offer a glimpse into the notion of physical space as a powerful influence on our day-to-day lives and upon office culture. Physical space is beginning to be understood as affecting our mind-bodies, and with this awareness, and as buildings and spaces become more deliberate in their design, questions arise as to who is planning these spaces and to what intent or purpose. With research on how lighting (Heerwagen, 1990), air quality (Clements-Croome, 2002; Varjo et al., 2015), window access (Lottrup et al., 2014; Tennessen & Cimprich, 1995; van Esch et al., 2019), personalization (Laurence et al., 2013; Wells, 2000), layout (De Croon et al., 2005; Sailer & McCulloh, 2012; Zerella et al., 2017), colour (Beyes & De Cock, 2017), sharp corners (Vartanian & Navarrete, 2013), and sound (Leather et al., 2003; Seddigh et al., 2015; Sundstrom et al., 1994) can affect worker productivity (Heerwagen, 1998; Shafaghat et al., 2015), wellbeing (Heerwagen, 1998; Keeling et al., 2012), stress (Vischer, 2007), communication (Haapakangas et al., 2019; Huang, 2004), innovation (Moultrie et al., 2007; Oksanen & Ståhle, 2013), and privacy (Kim & de Dear, 2013; Laurence et al., 2013) now more readily available, how one is affected by an office space no longer seems accidental.

Meanwhile, billion-dollar technology companies are building Disneyland-like

compounds with flamboyant services catering to their employees' every want and need. At

Inventionland, a product development company self-described as an "invention factory," the

office space seems like a choose-your-own-adventure story, offering employees their choice of

workspace in a pirate ship, a treehouse, or a cottage in the woods (see Figure 1). Google's office

in Tel Aviv, designed by Camenzind Evolution, provides employees with dozens of unique

spaces catering to different moods or work demands (see Figure 2). Berg and Kreiner (1990)

characterized this expensive and playful trend as nothing more than "signs of megalomania or

self-inflation" (p. 42). While these spaces may symbolize fun, their colourful and diverse settings

Figure 1. *Inventionland Office. Source: inventionland.com*

do not necessarily equate to a positive work environment. As the employees' initial delight—at

the novelty of office bars, sleep pods, pool tables, and free breakfast, lunch, and dinner—cools

down, questions are surfacing around the true motivation for these perks. Dale and Burrell

(2010) identify several consistent themes in corporate makeovers and new design, such as: "play

or fun at work . . . the employee as consumer, the workplace as home, and the workplace as community" (p. 20).

 Figure 2. *Google Office, Tel Aviv. Source: officesnapshots.com*

With each theme and layout discretely reinforcing the bureaucratic hierarchy embedded within, the authors caution against letting these signs go unnoticed. In addition to the desire for employees to be more devoted and work more flexible hours, Dale and Burrell (2010) suggest that these spaces and all their fringe benefits are an attempt to elucidate a community that employees "enact, and then repeatedly re-enact" through their interactions with the designed environment (p. 20). This faux-horizontal community, embedded in spaces referred to as villages, towns, or neighbourhoods, is simultaneously "linked with other forms of control" used to benefit the corporation (p. 26). Warren and Fineman (2007) equate these workplace interventions to "wider social expectations about warm, friendly, conditions of work and the importance of 'all things fun' in everyday life" (p. 93). As traditional offices disappear, their

replacements are filled with nuanced symbolism, language, and design. The material nature of this type of influence makes the power behind it trickier to identify.

The advent of smartphones, laptops, remote access, and online conferencing allow employees to be available anywhere in the office or at home, 24/7. This shift toward virtual connection is "providing space and form for a new experience of community which is freed from the limitations of bodily co-presence" (Shilling, 2005, p. 190), the effects of which are unknown. As economic pressure increases, technology advances, and the natural environment deteriorates, the very concept and meaning of work is morphing. Many companies are tearing down cubicle walls to create open-concept spaces in hopes of increasing employee interaction and decreasing costs. Within these open rooms, long tables or desks are either shared or labelled as *hot desks* where on any day, anyone may sit down anywhere to work. In other arrangements, spaces are categorized based on the type of work activity: quiet or loud, individual or collective. Some designs, seeking to calm swelling anger and hatred of the open-office concept (Brennan et al., 2002; Kaufman, 2014), are bringing back the cubicle, but modernized and marketed as a flexible, modular office. During the COVID-19 pandemic, workers require the safety of private spaces, but I imagine these trends may continue afterward.

Underlying these changes are modes of work that are less exact, less predictable, more fluid (Duffy & Tanis, 1993), and more online. These qualities are shifting how employees work and how they interact with the office. As a result, office space itself is in a state of flux, transitioning "from something familiar and predictable to something not yet defined" (Gillen, 2006, p. 62). With spatial changes happening faster than cultural ones, there can be a disconnect between the espoused values of an organization and the physical manifestation of those values within the environment. Individual and institutional memory and cultural notions that define

work may linger in habits and norms (Busch, 1999) creating discomfort between organizations, their employees, and their newly designed spaces. Open-plan offices, if unaccompanied by trust, can feel unsafe. Employees are made more visible, and therefore more vulnerable, as walls are literally taken down (Hirst & Schwabenland, 2017). Symbols of hierarchy can also manifest within the environment, consciously or unconsciously, through placement of spaces or the value assigned to them (Rosen et al., 1990).

Frederick Taylor's (1911/1985) notion of the workplace as a well-oiled machine designed to achieve "maximum efficiency" (p. 12) still lingers in office designs and is the fuel behind many office improvement strategies (Duffy & Tanis, 1993). Changes to the workplace aimed at increasing productivity and decreasing costs are often the result of popular trends and "managers' own interpretations" of employee needs, rather than "specific research" (Davis et al., 2011, p. 194). Companies and their appearance have "in the hands of contemporary management been transformed from 'containers' of organized behaviour to impelling symbols of corporate virtues and managerial intentions" (Berg & Kreiner, 1990, p. 42). As the landscape shifts in visible and subtle ways, and as the world of smart technologies, artificial intelligence, and responsive environments grows, the need for thoughtful connection between people and space is compelling.

Yet, despite an increase in workspace research over the past few decades, further investigation is required to understand the more nuanced and relational ways that physical space is affecting those who work within and with it. Until somewhat recently, the affective role of physical space within the social sciences, and particularly organizational studies, has largely been neglected. With "efficiency experts, architects and designers" left to "'interpret' the *needs* of contemporary society," workplace thinking and design has primarily served status, efficiency,

and profit (Gagliardi, 1990, p. 7). Inquiries that explore how one feels in an office (but see Warren, 2002), or how a space might affect an organization's future direction, have received substantially less attention.

Part of this spatial deficiency stems from the lack of spatial recognition in organizational studies. Historically, research on organizations tends to disregard physical space, seeing such considerations as a separate or insignificant topic. For Cairns (2003), this is the result of a "failure to bring the major theoretical and empirical stances of organizational theory, OB [Organizational Behaviour], architecture, design, etc. together" (p. 98). Dale (2016) describes physical space as an "absent presence that is taken for granted but incidental" (p. 652) within the social sciences. These views have led to calls for a spatial perspective *from within* organizational studies (Burrell & Dale, 2002; Cairns, 2003, 2008; Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Clements-Croome, 2006a; Dale, 2016; Duffy, 2010; Hatch, 1999; Hernes, 2004; Yanow, 1998), with new work contributing to a spatial turn in the social sciences, sociology, and anthropology, among other fields (van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010). This philosophical, ontological, and methodological shift sees physical space and material culture as an inseparable, living component of organizational life. Such an outlook requires an embodied, sensory, reflexive, and/or creative qualitative research methodology. Yet, despite this recent attention and call to arms by organizational researchers, space remains an underrepresented dimension in the social sciences.

Chapter I: Spatial Representation in Organizational Studies

> IT OCCURS TO ME THIS DESIRE TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT
> which is conducive to creative and productive work indicates quite a radical
> shift in the whole philosophy of work and the workplace. I would suggest that
> work and the workplace, for the great majority of people, have not been
> instigated, designed, begun and built with the workers themselves in mind. Most
> office buildings are lumps of grey concrete with bits of glass in, not particularly
> beautiful or inviting to any of the senses, but purely functional. They speak of
> power and money rather than creativity and pleasure.
>
> (Townsend, 2000, p. 18)

Over the past few decades, how healthy organizations are described and characterized in management literature has shifted. The metaphors used have morphed from tightly controlled machines (predict and control) to large families (leadership over management) to evolving organisms (resiliency and adaptation) (Laloux, 2014). These are new definitions that, in practice, could shift how organizations operate, evolve, and interact with their physical space. However, as Townsend (2000) states, the fundamental shifts taking place in organizational management are not always accompanied by shifts in office space.

While the sensory, social, and cultural nature of the material world has been "largely ignored" by organizational scholars until more recently (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006, p. 144)—with Pascale Gagliardi making the claim in 1990 and Clegg and Kornberger in 2006—the office space itself has not been completed disregarded. Interest in work space has existed since offices in their modern form were first established in the late 1800s, with Taylor and Ford working on

industrial efficiency and architects like Frank Lloyd Wright and Mies van der Rohe cementing

the contemporary design in the early to mid-1900s. Movements like the Bürolandschaft (German

for "open office") emerged in the 1950s; these were followed about twenty years later by the rise

of cubicles and modular walls. While this evolution is interesting, I do not intend to provide a

compete historical analysis of office space culture and design—a task already accomplished by

Gideon Haigh (2012) in his comprehensive book *The Office: A Hardworking History*; rather, my

intention is to explore how and why space is portrayed and researched, specifically within

organizational studies.

Symbols and Spaces

Opening with an introduction of the symbolic value found in corporate artifacts,

Gagliardi (1990) brought together one of the first comprehensive collections of essays, from a

variety of authors and perspectives, on the symbolic and cultural value of material artifacts and

organizational settings. Gagliardi (1990) suggests that material artifacts, like immaterial artifacts

(such as storytelling), can reveal patterns of organizational "communication and control" (p. 17).

Disconnections between an organization's *espoused values* and its *theory-in-use*, as expressed by

organizational theorists Argyris and Schön (1978), can be revealed through similar disconnects in

the physical setting and artifacts. For example, in her chapter "Symbolics of Office Design,"

Mary Jo Hatch (1990) explores the values and meanings ascribed to the closed and the open

office. Hatch frames private and open offices as "cultural artifacts of organization," which

provide insight into the significance of office design and could mark a shift in the "core values of

American business culture" (p. 144). As more and more open office designs are implemented, it could indicate a less hierarchical, more collaborative trend.

In a similar vein, Rosen et al. (1990) discuss the physical manifestation of individuation and bureaucracy in office buildings. Looking at how the spaces, walls, and doors divide and place people, the authors point out how these structures serve to construct the individual. Referred to as "disciplinary spacing," the "distribution of offices" may act to produce an illusion of autonomy, but ultimately "serves as a palpable marker of hierarchical power and control" (p. 75). Status and power are manifested through high-quality office furnishings, access to windows and potted plants, etc., while lower-ranking employees must contend with less privacy, smaller spaces, and cheaper materials. Rosen et al. describe the office as a "carefully systematized objectification of bureaucratic social relations and control worked out in vinyl wall covering, wood laminated furniture, bent chrome tubing, incandescent lighting, acrylic carpeting, and floor area" (p. 76). Here, in the material, we see the articulation of the organization's hierarchy—a clear expression of the symbolic information that materials hold.

From a more cultural perspective, Berg and Kreiner's (1990) chapter discusses physical settings as symbolic resources by looking at how corporate architecture utilizes spatial symbols to manifest a visual and material identity. As I noted in the previous section, corporations invest heavily in stylish, cutting-edge office design. According to Berg and Kreiner, these makeovers are not purely "corporate vanity" (p. 41), but are also used to elicit particular behaviours, foster creativity, and send visual messages. Architecture and landscaping can also be a way of "infusing the corporation, its activities, and its products with meaning" (p. 44). However, if these material manifestations do not accord with the corporate values, Berg and Kreiner suggest they may become an "architecture of illusion" (p. 65); they give the example of a prominent environmental

polluter that surrounded the corporate headquarters with vegetation in hopes of improving the company's image on ecological awareness (p. 65). Using architecture and design to influence behaviour is a part of design. Signs and patterns guide people through airports; libraries signal to those who enter to lower their voices; churches "elicit religious behaviour even in people who are not religious" (Berg & Kreiner, 1990). The important thing, once again, is to understand these relationships and how they are being expressed and experienced; organizational researchers may want to consider how designs intended to manifest corporate values align with day-to-day practices and behaviour.

Organizational Aesthetics

Following Gagliardi's symbolic contribution to organizational studies, Antonio Strati (1999) published *Organization and Aesthetics*, which explored an aesthetic framework. Strati's aesthetic approach explores "the constant, collective, and social negotiation of organizational aesthetics in everyday work" environments (2010, p. 886). Tacit knowledge and experience are imbued with aesthetic and empathic understanding, transforming it into something foul, banal, or picturesque. These descriptors highlight feelings, bodies, and judgements, as well as the sensuous nature of work (p. 881).

Strati's (2000a) writing on organizational aesthetics draws attention to the "shortcomings" within "the myth of rationality of organizations" (p. 14) while foregrounding the wisdom found in tacit knowledge—insight that is "not entirely verbal, nor entirely sayable" (p. 14). Describing certain parts of organizations as "beautiful, ugly, kitsch, grotesque, tragic [or] sacred" (1996, p. 209), Strati pushes our conception of aesthetics beyond beauty to a richer, more

vibrant, more shadowy notion. Aesthetic qualities become more than mere visual decor or artifacts, which are typically taken for granted or considered frivolous, and emerge as vessels for emotion, conveyors of meaning, influencers of action, and collaborators for knowledge. Strati (2000) proposes that aesthetic awareness opens up "numerous and diverse paths of analysis" for everyday organizational activities (p. 17).

Strati describes how this shift in focus alters the researcher's process and capacity to conduct "empirical and theoretical inquiry" (p. 14) as they encounter their own "ability to see, hear, smell, touch and taste" (p. 14). This sensory and felt layer—a source of knowledge, authority, and meaning that is experienced day-to-day within the organization—contains aesthetic insight into organizational life. Strati continually links the aesthetic perception of the researcher and the lived experiences of the participants, suggesting that the senses "are actions which provoke emotions in both organizational actors and the researcher" (p. 18). Aesthetic bonds between researcher and organization draw the inquiry forth from its external, objective focus and resituate it as an embodied, sensory experience.

Since Strati's (1999) publication of *Organization and Aesthetics*, the various concepts surrounding organizational aesthetics have developed into an emerging subfield of organizational studies, as more researchers grapple with the felt, sensory, and aesthetic experiences of office space (see Taylor, 2005).

Productivity and the Drive for Competitiveness, Efficiency, and Control

Another substantial compilation that bears discussion is *Creating the Productive Workplace,* edited by Clements-Croome (2006b), a professor of construction engineering. This

collection of essays, which explores how the built environment affects organizational

productivity from a variety of vantage points, is one of the few books looking directly at the

physical environment's role in organizational development. Authors cover topics ranging from

health and wellbeing, emotions, attention, evidence-based design, lighting, air quality and

thermal comfort, intelligent buildings, and economic considerations to the measurement and

assessment of design. Properly designed buildings are to be considered an investment as they are

connected to reduced absenteeism, healthier and happier employees, and—bottom line—

increased productivity. While this book contains a substantial amount of interesting and relevant

information, its main focus, productivity, places it firmly in the managerial or corporate domain.

One exception in this book is Farshchi and Fisher's (2006) chapter on "Emotion and the

Environment," a spatial element the authors describe as "forgotten" (p. 55). Understanding the

impacts of this forgotten element of space upon satisfaction levels, a metric commonly used to

assess office space, Farshchi and Fisher explore how sensory experience, social and cultural

attitudes, imperceptible stimuli, and perception contribute to our experience of place. The

authors argue that in addition to more cognitive evaluations, including affective qualities in place

appraisals will provide a more holistic understanding of space, which can foster "user friendly

design" to "reduce unnecessary stress and other negative emotions, while maximizing positive

emotions" (p. 72). Another interesting element raised in this chapter is the element of time,

which acts to reduce stimuli as the mind-body becomes more familiar with its environment. New

material incentives are required to revive an employee's engagement with the space. While a

relational understanding is not directly mentioned, these qualities are in fact about a person's

evolving relationship with their surroundings.

While Clements-Croome's compilation examines the various ways in which environmental factors affect those working within them, the correlative model of *perfect space equals perfect workers*, which seems to be a trend in how space is conceptualized in organizational studies, is flawed. For one thing, much of the information being collected to create optimal spaces comes from measurable and quantifiable environmental factors: temperature, lighting, air circulation, noise levels, required distance to a window. While understanding how hot a large office might get in the summer is a significant factor for architects and engineers when designing a building, to frame our interaction with space only in such terms can reduce or simplify what optimal space actually entails.

Within this corporate paradigm, goals for wellbeing, while ultimately positive, take on a less altruistic aim. Such prescriptive literature on wellbeing and productivity, misguided in its aim for efficiency, does little to manifest a vision of wellbeing. For example, in chapter eight of Clements-Croome's compilation, Dorgan and Dorgan (2006) write:

> The results of these previous studies and reports were combined with the researchers' experience to determine the percentage productivity increase for each building wellness category. With the number of workers in each wellness category, and the annual salary and fringe benefits of the worker known, the total productivity cost benefits achievable by upgrading the specific wellness category building to a healthy level was computed. (p. 120)

While it is understandable that not all writing can detail the human experience with a creative flourish, this dull expression of the office environment in management literature may well contribute to its reputation as insignificant.

Coming Together: Form Follows ~~Function~~ Organization

Figure 3. *Dilbert Cartoon, by Scott Adams*

Francis Duffy (2000; 1993), an architect specializing in office design, has been adamant about the need to radically redesign and reconceptualize the office. Duffy was dismayed at the pervasive and lingering effects of Frederick Taylor and his notion of people as units of production to be organized for maximum efficiency, which has shaped the twentieth-century workplace. He described Taylor's influence in creating a "mechanical, top-down, inhuman, status-rich, invention-poor, alienated workplace . . . manifested in every workstation, ceiling tile and light fitting" (Duffy & Tanis, 1993, p. 427), qualities of work so well established that they have become embedded in our understanding of what constitutes an office. Duffy and Tanis aptly point out the disconnection between "rich and inventive" (p. 427) organizational theory and static, uninspiring office design. While the rise of knowledge work, learning organizations, systems thinking, and self-managed teams, among other trends, have shifted the ways in which organizations function, generally their spaces have been left untouched. With this in mind, Duffy and Tanis argue that office design is an "essential" method for corporations looking to "affect organizational change" (p. 428). Design should not be used as the sole means to implement organizational change, but as a mirror and collaborator of systemic and cultural developments. Duffy and Tanis continually reference the foundations of organizational change theories, which

evoke an image or concept of what office design could achieve if it were discussed in the same manner. They wonder how Peter Senge, a prominent organizational theorist, would design the office of a "learning organization, [which is] based on fluid team work" (p. 430). Speaking of space in this way, by entwining it with the processes of organizational development, hints at what is possible for organizational studies. While Duffy never speaks of embodied, emotional, or sensory experience of space, he nonetheless conveys their connection.

Almost ten years later, and with marked frustration, Duffy (2000) explores the lack of change in office spaces and the prevalent, dismissive attitude toward office design. He attributes some of this to the ineffectiveness of facilities management, a role which over time has been reduced to a cost-cutting position. A lack of investment and competition has forced many designers and architects to simplify and routinize their services. Consequently, Duffy suggests that office design has become undervalued by organizations. After describing a *Dilbert* cartoon (see Figure 3) featuring a labyrinthine office, Duffy passionately argues that:

> the conventional office is easy to mock and the joke seems to make the horror and the waste tolerable for a moment—but the symbolic connection between the futility of the organization and the banality of its environment is not funny. Buildings can kill. They can kill literally through poisonous air-conditioning and lethal materials. But, much more lethally, office buildings can kill commercially if their capacity to express messages, for good or ill, about whatever businesses think is important is ignored or misused. . . . An organization that wishes to change its culture . . . would be foolish to attempt such changes while persisting with an office environment that expresses, through Dilbert-like inertia, exactly contrary values. Such messages, communicated all too eloquently by the wrong

kind of office environment, fundamentally and fatally contradict the objectives of

the management of change. (p. 374)

This argument for parallel change between the office environment and organizational culture and

structure is compelling. Once again, Duffy (2000) illustrates the socio-material connection

between organizations and their physical spaces, but uses terms such as *change management*,

which are more familiar to organizational studies. In his concluding remarks, Duffy mentions the

need to "put users' interests first" (p. 375), foreshadowing the rise of participatory strategy and

user-centred design.

Organizational Studies and the Senses

In the last decade or so, sensory awareness and knowledge have been used, if somewhat

scarcely, to understand the dynamic and embodied experience of office space. Following the lead

of anthropologists, who have articulated the importance of understanding the senses from a

cultural standpoint (Classen, 1997; Howes, 2005; 2014) as well as tapping into the senses as

sources of data (Pink, 2007; 2009; 2013), scholars in organizational studies are beginning to

investigate sensory ways of perceiving the office. While the senses have long been studied and

utilized in specific technical and psychological investigations to determine ideal levels of

thermal comfort, lighting, and acoustics, these represent a more technical "single sense based"

approach to design (Keeling et al., 2012, p. 4). In a conference address, Keeling et al. spoke to

the "disjoined" nature of this approach, which may be based on "incongruent sensory

information" (p. 4). To illustrate, the researchers gave the example of installing double-glazed

windows that accidentally result in an eerily quiet office. Design interventions based on

"simplified" sensory information often seek the "removal of discomfort" as a means to create

favourable conditions (p. 4). In reality, the overlapping, interactional, entangled nature of human

scenery experience makes isolating one sense virtually impossible (Pallasmaa, 2012). Designing

buildings based on such isolated qualities may not produce the desired or expected outcome.

Purely functional spaces, as offices are sometimes considered to be, often lack qualities beyond

the basic human comforts. Consider walking into a restaurant, a concert hall, or even a retail

shop, where all the details of design come together to produce an almost emotive affect. Keeling

et al. (2012) describe such spaces as *experiential* and therefore more likely to move beyond pure

function and beyond comfort to the level of pleasure. While it is unclear whether Keeling et al.

are advocating for office spaces to become sensory experiences—as described in my

introduction—they succeed in making a case for understanding the sensory experience of an

office space as more than a group of isolated components, but rather as a set of sensations to be

delighted in rather than shut out. This adds complexity to the goal of increasing productivity and

wellbeing through spatial interventions that remove distraction and discomfort without also

considering the addition of "interesting and stimulating" qualities (p. 6).

Empirical studies employing sensory methods offer dynamic and sensuous portraits of

organizational experience. Riach and Warren (2014) "explore the corporeal porosity of

workplace life though smell-oriented" methods (p. 789)—an attempt, they suggest, to move

toward a "sensory equilibrium" (a term they borrow from Classen et al. (1994)) in a domain

traditionally dominated by sight and hearing (p. 789). Exploring how smells, and smelling, are

embedded, and often curated, within organizational life and relationships, offers a unique

glimpse, or should I say *aroma*, into the "unspoken dimensions of porous bodies working

alongside other porous bodies" (p. 789). We learn how certain smells are considered constitutive

of a "normative office smellscape" (p. 799) while others seem "inappropriate" or "out-of-place" (p. 799). These unspoken preferences have shaped a "smell etiquette" (p. 799), which has led to the development of a set of basic, mostly unquestioned strategies to negotiate undesirable smells in the office. We see how smell is enacted in and through the body via its relationship to other working bodies and within the larger olfactory culture of the office.

Other studies have looked at the role that sound plays in the experience of organization; Brown et al. (2020) explore personal agency as it is manifested in listening practices between staff and patients in a hospital, while Short (2013) uses sound to reveal the day-to-day experience of emotional labour at a hairdressing salon. These and other sensuous studies illuminate underrepresented dimensions of organizational experience and offer rich understanding of complex routines as they are enacted through the senses.

From Symbolism to Holism

With spatial discourse in organizational studies moving toward sensory and embodied experiences, the intimate connection between space and those in relationship with it starts to become more visible in the literature. Partly due to a rise in interdisciplinary research, some organizational scholars are drawing from environmental psychology (EP), an interdisciplinary field investigating environment and behaviour (Gustafsson, 2006, p. 228), while many others have looked to the work of philosopher Henri Lefebvre (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Dale, 2016; de Vaujany & Vaast, 2014; Petani, 2016; Shortt, 2014; Wapshott & Mallett, 2011; Watkins, 2005), whose writings have provided a flexible framework through which to approach organizational spaces and their production (for further reading on Lefebvre's influence on organizational

studies, see Kingma et al. (2018)). This shift in analysis and focus is creating a more holistic

research paradigm in which an organization is considered more than the sum of its parts. Rather

than stitch together isolated factors, the "system has to be regarded in all its complexity"

(Gustafsson, 2006, p. 228). However, despite this recognition, Gustafsson points out how this

perspective has "remained largely an ideal and an unrealized vision" (p. 228). This observation

speaks to the difficulty in conducting research in this manner, which entails remaining open to

numerous layers of relationships at play.

Organizational theorists Stewart R. Clegg and Marin Kornberger's (2006) edited

collection *Space, Organizations and Management Theory* provides a significant contribution to

the interdisciplinary and material exploration of space. Recognizing their field's preoccupation

with organizations as "cognitive entities that think, learn, make sense, and behave similarly to

humans," Clegg and Kornberger felt it was important to explore the "physical reality of

organizations" (p. 9). The authors detail the relationships between various elements,

transforming space into something embodied and fluid as well as material and structural. The

resulting vision moves beyond seeing the office merely as an influencer of productivity to

consider, as well, how the space acts upon, and with, an organization to produce and reshape the

different forces at play.

Socio-Technical System (STS) Theory and Open-Systems Theory (OST)

One longstanding area of organizational studies in particular has touched on the

interconnected relationship between the organization and its environment. Developed by

London's Tavistock Institute in the 1950s, socio-technical systems (STS) and open-systems

theory (OST) arose through the work of Fred Emery and Eric Trist (1965), who argued for the study of "environmental contexts in which organizations exist" (p. 21) in addition to the organizations themselves. Initially developed through field projects in the British coal mines, Emery and Trist illustrate the open and permeable nature of systems and their interdependence with their everchanging environment (Trist, 1981).

While STS has gained traction in recent years as advances in technology continue to alter the landscape, the thinking behind OST "appears to have been forgotten in contemporary organizational studies" (van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010, p. 3). This absence is somewhat perplexing considering OST's relevance to current trends. Emery and Ackoff (2008) articulate the importance of parallel or responsive adaptation between a system (a set of interrelated items) and its environment (p. 124). Environment, in this context, refers to "the set of properties of objects or events that, with the subject's choice, coproduce the outcome" (p. 118). Each environmental property is a "potential stimulus" (p. 118) that depends on the subject's action or response. In OST, adaptiveness is considered an ability or skill in a paradigm in which purposeful systems and their environments are always shifting, everchanging. Understanding the ties between an organization and its environment are important. Changes occurring in the environment that go unrecognized in the organization could create an imbalance that increases with time (Trist & Emery, 1965). This open-systems approach draws the environment into a living and responsive relationship with the organization; changes ripple throughout the system. Taking into consideration the extent to which the environment affects the system, and vice versa, ties the two together in a reciprocal manner that broadens the conversation (Ackoff & Emery, 2008, p. 118). In breaking down the impact of environment on one's efficiency, write Emery and Ackoff (2008):

The response of an individual to a subjective or objective stimulus may or may

not have an effect on his environment. His course of action has a significant effect

on his environment only if it changes the efficiency of one or more of the

available courses of action for one or more of the possible outcomes. A person

who wants to read in a room where a radio is playing loudly can turn the radio off

and hence increase the efficiency of his reading. Turning on a light to read by is

also a way of increasing one's efficiency by modifying the environment. (p. 118)

While this level of detail and the desire to measure the intensity of effect may not be appealing to

all researchers, this example provides a clear picture of the spatial relationship and its impact

both on experience and outcome. What is particularly interesting is the reference to multiple

"courses of action," which renders the environment active and influential in everyday decision

making. The authors also include an exploration (albeit a mathematical one) of sensitivity,

perceptiveness, sensory experience, consciousness, and memory in relation to a person's ability

to perceive and respond to stimuli. In Merrelyn Emery's (1993) OST book *Participative Design*

for Participative Democracy, she illustrates the correlation between system and environment

over time (t) (see Figure 3). Emery continues to explore the "lawful and 'able to be known'

transactive" (p. 233) relations between system and environment, which are used to understand

their internal and external dynamics.
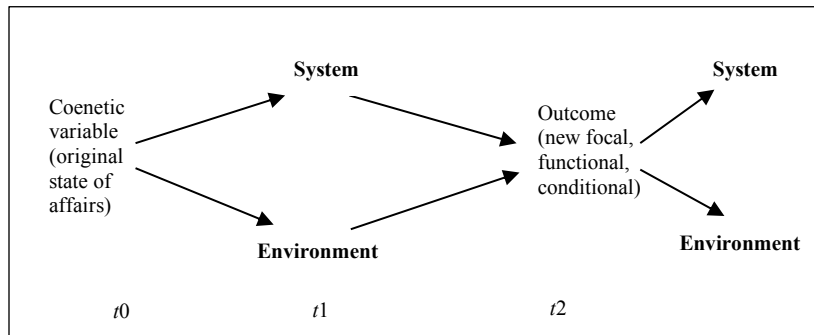
Figure 3. *Emery's Model of Directive Correlation* (1993, p. 234)

What is perhaps most interesting about Emery's (1993) and Emery and Ackoff's (2008) contributions is their focus on social behaviour within an active and participating environment. This, of course, stems from the authors' focus on human relations rather than an approach emerging from architecture or philosophy. While its environmental and social ties are enticing and quite comprehensive, it may be that OST's mathematical framework, at times perplexing, kept it from greater popularity.

Innovative and Creative Spaces

A more recent trend in organizational studies has been to look at space for its influence on creativity and innovation. When we think about creative spaces, the likes of Apple and Google, or the labs of Silicon Valley, pop into mind—walls covered in sticky notes, whiteboards, conference rooms made of glass. Here, the role of space in the production of creative thinking elevates space beyond its more functional qualities, those typically associated with the office. Creative organizations and creative people engage with the space differently than typical knowledge workers tied to their computers. Or perhaps it is the image of the creative person or artist as a little wilder, more unhinged, that has driven the design of creative spaces. In a documentary on IDEO (ABC News, 1999), a renowned design firm, its cofounder David Kelly remarks, "this is where the crazies live," as the camera pans over a rather chaotic-looking work

environment. He continues: "If you go into a culture and there's a bunch of stiffs going around, I can guarantee they're not likely to invent anything." At IDEO, the employees design their own workspaces. Each desk space is unique, with bikes hanging from ceilings, plants everywhere, piles of papers and books. This playful and rather disorderly environment is paired with a culture of opportunity, competition, dynamic teamwork, and experimentation. Here, the space becomes part of the creative process. It is not intended to stimulate creativity through whimsical design, but to engage and support the creative organization in other ways. One of those ways is by being flexible or adaptable; when spaces are adaptable and when employees have agency to make changes, new ideas can be nurtured without interference either from restrictive rules or the space itself. In a paper exploring creativity and the role of physical space, Yuri Martens (2011) suggests that creativity needs spaces that "welcome new ideas" and have a "tolerance for unusual or even subversive people and ideas" (p. 70). Such open-mindedness, coupled with the ability to challenge ideas and spaces, leads to a more free-flowing environment, which is more likely to be governed by interdependent relationships than rules or procedures.

Data-Driven Design

Understanding space from the perspective of those who work in and with it has gained traction over the last half century or so, largely due an increase in design processes such as *data-driven design* (see Sailer et al., 2015), which incorporates data gleaned directly from users' experiences and *design thinking* (Brown, 2009) the use of design methods to solve problems. While design thinking is making its way into management strategies and cultural practices to foster innovation (Elsbach & Stigliani, 2018), evidence-based design is being adopted by

designers and architects seeking more collaborative approaches. A common trait of all these methods is the use and incorporation of user experience. These approaches represent a shift from the lone artistic genius, whose vision trumps usability and comfort. How thoroughly a designer understands the needs of those they are designing for, however, or the extent to which they incorporate the data that they collect, may vary. Data-driven design practices are not simple, as they require additional time for research and communication skills not traditionally expected of architects (Sailer et al., 2009). While using experiential data from an organization to inform design is a positive step, once designs are completed, very few design companies perform post-occupancy evaluations (Sailer et al., 2009). The inability to make changes after large-scale redesigns produces little incentive for organizations to actively review design successes and failures. This lack of follow-up, on both sides, leads to a complacency about environment. With attention focused on design outcomes and logistics, understanding how the planning process, relocation, and new environment may affect the organization is often disregarded or forgotten.

Design thinking is being integrated into managerial practices, with designers' attitudes of experimentation and openness being seen as vital for the development of alternative change processes (Våland & Georg, 2014). Boland and Collopy (2008) argue that the act or process of managing is itself a form of design. With the adoption of design processes and values, Våland and Georg (2014) suggest that there is simultaneously "an acceptance of material objects as influential" (p. 394) in organizational culture and development. Through design thinking processes, organizations actively experiment, share opinions and feedback, and then assess the impacts of these changes upon themselves, the organization, and their work (Våland & Georg, 2014). Such an understanding is neither singular nor universal, but fluid and site-specific. Observing how changes to a work space can alter processes, relationships, emotions, and

workflow requires the participation and experiential insight of the workers themselves. In an

exploration on creative work spaces, James Moultrie et al. (2007) offer a cyclical framework that

provides a continuous evaluation of office space. In this model, design considerations are a

continuous process of "becoming and unfolding" (Boland et al., 2008, p. 11). Moultrie et al.'s

(2007) model of evaluation takes into consideration the notion that spaces can and should evolve

as do groups and organizations. Just as companies evaluate completed campaigns and projects,

Moultrie et al. suggest that work spaces should be incorporated into such discussions. In their

model (see Figure 4), those conducting the evaluation can determine the success of a space based

on a list of qualities grouped into three categories: strategic intent, process of creation, and

process of use.
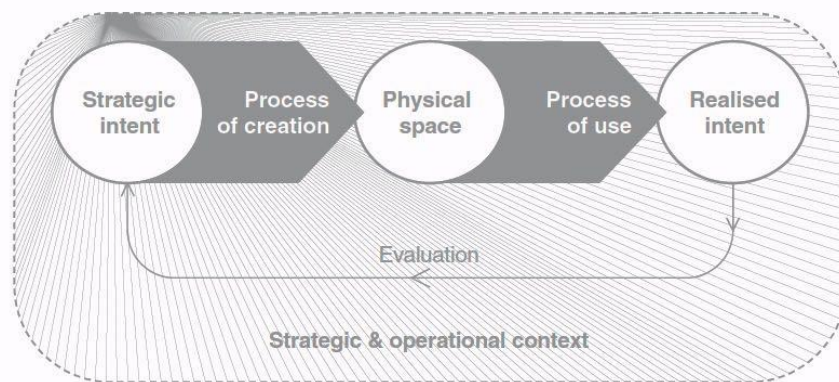
Figure 4. *Moultrie's Framework*

The iterative nature of the model implies that reviews and changes to space are continual

and more hands-on (as opposed to large-scale redesigns). Similar to *action research* (Lewin,

1946), findings and insights are channelled into changes which are then implemented in the next

iteration. This dynamic creates a living system, one that becomes responsive to the goals of the

group. From a spatial perspective, this model enlists the physical environment in playing an

active role in the work itself, where its performance can be understood in relationship to the goals of the organization. This inclusive and evolving relationship with the physical environment contrasts starkly with the treatment of space as a static container.

Spatial Iterations and Organizational Dynamics

Drawing on the work of Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, organizational theorists Martin Clegg and Stuart Kornberger (2006) offer an interesting perspective on spatial organization and the formation of new knowledge. Looking at how the physical structure of space offers "clues to the lives we lead, of who we are, what we want to be, and what we might be" (p. 144), Clegg and Kornberger investigate the control and flow of knowledge through material and immaterial boundaries. Take innovation, for example: a process that "requires cross-boundary and sometimes boundary blurring communication" (p. 153). How does an organization's spatial configuration encourage or shut down these actions? Implicating architecture beyond its aesthetic and functional dimensions, not only in shaping communication patterns, but also the creation of new knowledge, requires us to look more closely at our "practices of living in space" (p. 155). Shifting attention away from design as a standalone predictor of human interaction, and instead toward the interactions between people and space, highlights the relational aspect of physical space. Yes, designs can and do trigger change in the social world, but focusing too heavily on design as the ultimate predictor of behaviour tips the scales toward spatial determinism and a quest for the flawless design.

In contrast to the practice of design as dominance, Clegg and Kornberger (2006) draw on Koolhaas (1995) to explore architecture as the "staging of uncertainty, the seeding of potential,

the creation of enabling fields, expanding notions, denying boundaries, and discovering

unnameable hybrids" (p. 157). Seen through this lens, ambiguous or less intensively defined

spaces leave room for possibility, creative exploration, and collaboration. When the way forward

is left open, previously unseen paths may emerge. Just as empty lots are converted into

community gardens and alleyways are transformed into emergent playgrounds, unplanned or

"unused, unbuilt and empty" spaces can become an invitation for almost anything (p. 156). In the

unknown, there is risk and potential. When designing offices, rather than cement each space with

a designated function, Clegg and Kornberger advocate, like Koolhaas, for empty, "void spaces"

where "excess capacity provides flexibility" (p. 156). Such unfinished spaces shift some

responsibility to those who work within them, thereby creating structures of support and

functionality—characteristics important for comfort and wellbeing, and for deepening

relationships. While spaces must be able to shift and evolve with the needs of those working

within them, this quality is especially important in delineating the difference between an

evolving, adaptable space and the kind of office—the hot desk, for example—wherein and to

which there is no attachment or connection. The latter kind of office, although it appears flexible

on the surface, may in fact be operating under a tightly controlled design scheme.

Chapter II: Reconfiguring Space in Organizational Studies

> Organization, life and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony. If there were only order, if we only heard perfect harmonies, our stupidity would soon fall down toward a dreamless sleep: if we were always surrounded by the shivaree, we could lose our breath and our consistency, we would spread out among all the dancing atoms of the universe. We are; we live; we think on the fringe, in the probable fed by the unexpected, in the legal nourished with information. . . . We are provided with enough senses and instinct to protect us against the danger of explosion, but we do not have enough when faced with death from order or with falling asleep from rules and harmony.

> (Serres, 1982, p. 127)

Hawthorne's Legacy

Many cite the Hawthorne experiments, of the late 1920s, as contributing to the disinterest of the social sciences in physical space (Cairns, 2002; 2003; Kampschroer & Heerwagen, 2005; Davis et al., 2011; Wickström & Bendix, 2000). This series of experiments, which took place at the Western Electric Company plant in Chicago's Hawthorne suburb, were designed by the psychologist Elton Mayo to test the productivity of the factory's workers. By monitoring the effects of changes in the environment, such as lighting, on the work being performed, the experiments determined that productivity improved "regardless of whether the light level was excessively high or barely sufficient for work" (Kampschroer & Heerwagen, 2005, p. 327). The increase in worker productivity, attributed to the fact of being observed while performing a task, became known as the *Hawthorne effect*—a significant development for research involving human subjects. Management–employee relations took on new importance once researchers

connected productivity to motivation caused by "the special experimental set-up, the separation from other employees, and the knowledge that they were participating in work that might benefit their working conditions" (Veitch, 2006). Unfortunately, despite criticism that the Hawthorne experiments "lacked rigour and consistency" (Cairns, 2003, p. 97), the conclusion that the environment exerted minimal effect on the work performed contributed to a "prolonged drought" (Veitch, 2006, p. 207) and general disregard of physical space as a topic of interest. The study also revealed how a singular research focus, in this case productivity, makes it difficult to explore and to truly understand the environment and its effects.

A State of Separation

While the Hawthorne experiments may have impacted future research on office environments, especially in the social sciences, the ideology of Cartesian dualism established during the Enlightenment has had a greater and longer-lasting impact "than any other tradition in establishing the agenda for philosophical reflection and in defining the terrain . . . for later concepts of subjectivity and knowledge" (Grosz, 1994, p. 10). In the Cartesian tradition, the dualisms of mind and body, human and nonhuman, material and social, and emotion and reason were each accepted as "two irrevocably sundered realms of knowledge and experience" (van Marrewijk & Yanow, 2010, p. 3). Nick Crossley (1995) called Cartesian ontology "the chief obstacle" in the development of a sociology of the body (p. 44). Even among the five senses, men were considered to exhibit a "mastery of the 'higher' senses of sight and hearing [while] women were linked with the lower senses of touch, taste and smell" (Classen, 2005, p. 70). This division and ranking of mind and body, and their attributes, spread beyond the academic realm into an everyday, popular understanding of reality. For example, in traditional corporate culture,

as well as within academia, the lingering separation of emotion from reason has led to a disregard of emotions, which often have been relegated to hidden or private domains.

As a discrete phenomenon, emotions "have tended to be dismissed as 'irrational', private, inner sensations tied to women's 'dangerous desires' and 'hysterical bodies'" (Williams & Bendelow, 1996, p. 125). Rather than explore their value and meaning, emotions, especially in a professional setting, "need to be 'tamed', 'harnessed' or 'driven out' by the steady (male) hand of reason" (p. 125). The emotional dimensions of the researcher, and of research itself, tend to be obscured and discouraged by a preference for rational objectivity (Fitzpatrick & Longley, 2014, p. 2). To dismiss emotions as nothing more than untrustworthy or subjective experiential qualities is to fail to understand human experience. This distrust of emotionality lingers in academic culture, where until recently "emotions [have been] seen to be the very antithesis of the detached scientific mind and its quest for 'objectivity', 'truth' and 'wisdom'" (Williams & Bendelow, 1996, p. 126). In this search for objective truths, the emotional work of research is often hidden or shamed to the detriment of inquiry.

The neglect of sensuous, emotional bodies is especially problematic for studies on physical space wherein space is understood and experienced through the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Juhani Pallasmaa (2012) blames the cultural "neglect of the body and the senses" for contemporary architecture's "inhumanity" (p. 21). He laments technology and modern design for its intellectual and ocular bias, which has "left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories, imagination and dreams, homeless" (p. 22). The predilection for rational and objective knowledge dismisses the mind-body's individual experience as subjective and irrelevant rather than vital to comprehension. Setha M. Low (2013) defines *embodied space* as "the location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form"

(p. 20) and suggests that this concept can bring "disparate notions together" (p. 19) in fields where dualist ideologies have yet to be resolved.

Drawing from the work of Bruno Latour, Yanow and van Marreqijk (2010) note that Cartesian separation places a "binary *on* the world that is not *in* the world (p. 3). Rather, the social and the material require a framework that understands and accounts for the correlative relationships *between* them. As Serres (1982) writes: Organization, life and intelligent thought live between order and noise, between disorder and perfect harmony" (p. 127). In the case of the emotion–reason dualism, to understand, through a reflexive and embodied approach, how the researcher's mind-body is affected by the research, "sometimes viscerally" (Fitzpatrick & Longley, 2014, p. 2), will illuminate the emotional and spatial nature of research and provide a more dynamic understanding. Low (2003) draws our attention to the various forces at play between space and the mind-body: "space occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of that space, contracts and expands in relationship to a person's emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations, and cultural predispositions" (p. 10). While drawing together the mind-body into an inseparable entity is becoming more common, a similar fusion between body and space seems less implicit.

In *Volatile Bodies*, Grosz (1994) speaks to the often-cited dualism between minds and bodies, suggesting that they are "not two distinct substances *or* two kinds of attributes of a single substance"; and that, rather, they exist in between these definitions (p. xiii, author's emphasis). In this definition, the exact whereabouts or extent of this connection is left vague. Mind and body are not

Figure 5. *Möbius Strip* (Sheng, 2017)

separate, nor are they one—but they are linked. Grosz offers a model to illustrate these connective elements, which she came across while reading Lacan: the Möbius strip (see Figure 5), "a three dimensional figure eight" (p. xiii). Immediately, you can visualize the two circles not simply as sitting atop each other, but in a relationship where, "through a kind of twisting or inversion, one side becomes the other" (p. xiii). I find this visualization helpful for understanding Grosz's simple yet powerful explanation of the mind–body relationship. Whether or not she intended it, this relationship feels open and malleable—shifting and adapting, just like bodies in space.

Value, Legitimacy, and Scale

While this shift away from Cartesian dualism is by now quite well underway, that ideology's lingering impact on social science research should not be understated. *Is it possible that the lack of research on physical space stems from the notion of space as separate from and therefore beyond the social domain?* Leaving space out of organizational research reinforces an entrenched position that material space is not connected to the realm of the social. Dvora Yanow (2010), an organizational ethnographer, suggests that physical space has been left out of organizational research because "scientific discourse requires words; but space is wordless" (p. 139). She believes this muteness has rendered space "neutral" and therefore "beyond the analytic gaze" (p. 139). Latour (2004) suggests we must stir "the entities of the collective together in order to make them articulable and to *make them speak*" (p. 89, emphasis in original). Thus, it seems there is something to be said and something to be heard—but does anyone care to listen?

Perhaps it is not that spatial elements are unable to communicate, but that researchers have lacked the necessary "spatial sensibility" (Yanow, 2010, p. 139). Given that quantitative inquiry is still considered by many to be of greater value than qualitative approaches, bringing spatial elements into research can become tricky for objective practices. Many researchers attempt to shift language-based research toward quantitative certainty through discourse analysis with "interviews that can be recorded, transcribed, and formally coded," often using computer software or online tools (Yanow, 2010, p. 140). This methodological shift toward standardization and generalizability—to endow research with value and legitimacy—comes at a cost. To be aware of our surroundings demands a certain sensitivity and awareness of qualities not immediately visible or long-lasting. Information about physical space can be found in our own bodies through our movements, emotions, and senses: how one moves through space provides embodied and interactive knowledge; the symbolism embedded in material objects and design offers emotional and historical meaning; and actions, communication, and behaviour can also contain spatial insight. Together, all of these ways of knowing and of gathering data can bring space into an evolving conversation.

Power Postures

The ways in which the mind-body reacts and interacts with its environment can be looked at from a variety of angles and disciplines. In neuroscience and psychology today, there is more research than ever illustrating how the body reacts to its surroundings physiologically and emotionally. Amy Cuddy's (Carney et al., 2010; Cuddy et al., 2018) research into body posture and its effects on levels of testosterone and the stress hormone cortisol has interesting applications to physical space. Cuddy explores what she refers to as *expansive* versus *contractive*

postures and how these may impact a person's risk tolerance, increase assertive and confident

feelings, reduce stress, and anxiety, as well as foster better decision making under duress (Carney

et al., 2010; Cuddy et al., 2018). When considering the role of physical space in shaping the

mind-body's experience—asking our bodies to fit, bend, turn, lean, scrunch, stretch, sit, stand—

Cuddy's research becomes inherently spatial.

In a paper titled "The Ergonomics of Dishonesty" (Yap et al., 2013), published soon after

her first inquiry into body posture, Cuddy and her colleagues compared the emotions and

behaviour of people working at small desks with those of people working at large ones. It was

discovered that the people working at larger desks—i.e., those able to sit or stand in more

expansive positions—"felt more powerful, engaged in more approach-oriented and risk-seeking

behavior, and appeared to evidence a physiological buffer against pain and stress" (p. 2).

Through a series of simulated tasks, these feelings of power were also linked to dishonest

behaviours such as stealing, cheating, and speeding while driving. There are obviously many

advantages to feeling confident and being buffered against pain and stress, but this study

illustrates the dangers of reducing complex spatial effects to singular outcomes. While employers

may want to avoid untrustworthy, dishonest employees, is it worth risking the potential benefits

of resilience, risk-taking, and confidence? Designing office environments based on these types of

studies would seem to oversimplify the issue by promising a particular outcome, when in fact the

result is much more likely to be complex and unpredictable.

These seemingly instinctive ways of reacting to our environment may have roots in

evolution. Psychologist Harry Harlow's well-known and controversial studies on rhesus

monkeys in the late 1950s illustrate how a young monkey, in a state of distress, will "attach itself

to a tactile soft and fuzzy terry-cloth apparatus" despite the "absence of food (and the presence of

food in a steel-wire mother in an alternate location)" (King & Janiszewski, 2011, p. 669). That a baby monkey should risk survival to seek out softness, warmth, and comfort may seem irrational, but it is also understandable. There is a power in comfort—a warm embrace, a favourite blanket, a hot bath—that is understated and undervalued. On a cold winter's night, to walk into a warm room with soft, glowing lights and a crackling fireplace sends a signal to the body—*relax, I've got you*. Moving through these environments, cold to warm, dark to light, discomfort to pleasure, the mind-body receives an array of affective signals. King et al. (2011) argue that our perspective on our environment, our reading of these haptic signals, shifts depending on mood. Called *affect-gating*, this theory suggests that the experience of one's environment changes with one's emotional state. For example, people become more sensitive to tactile stimulation when in a negative-affective state, but more open to visual information in a positive-affective state (King & Janiszewski, 2011). The "eyes, hands, ears, mouth, and nose do not simply compute the world" rationally (Trigg, 2012a, p. 13); they feel and absorb it emotionally. Tactile and visual information, once accepted as objective truths, move toward a subjective realm; rather than consider physical traits as objective qualities (e.g., wood looks and feels more pleasurable than plastic), they should be considered as part of a person's "affective state" (King & Janiszewski, 2011, p. 699). Understanding how these different states influence us may shed light on our own, and others', experiences.

Certain emotional states may also serve different purposes: for example, the positive-affective state for visual sensitivity, which allows for types of creative work that demand heightened visual openness and exploration, may also make sitting still while wrapped in a cozy blanket feel almost claustrophobic. The once-tempting indulgence of the soft, velvety pillows thus loses its power. While these neuroscience studies are quantitative and often narrowly

focused, they do provide insight into the complex emotional and affective relationships between humans and their environments.

Role of Technology in Office Research

As research is supported and perhaps driven by the latest technological advances, it is relevant to understand how the process is impacting meaning and results. Data, whether it is collected by a person or a computer, is neither impartial nor separate from the culture-specific "scientific paradigm" within which it exists (Howes, 2005, p. 5). A smartphone application capable of tracking one's every movement, or a watch that synchronizes with one's heartbeat and body temperature, provides a wealth of user data heretofore incomprehensible. These developments are simultaneously exciting and terrifying. Colin Ellard (2015), an interdisciplinary researcher from Toronto, took advantage of smartphone technologies by inviting individual participants to record their experiences of the city. The impetus came from the rise of big-box stores, transforming whole city blocks into identical panels of glass and concrete. While walking around the city, users could "self-assess" their emotional states and "levels of excitement" at particular locations tracked by the phone's software (p. 109). Ellard also collected information on the participants through wristbands that measured their "skin conductance—a simple but reliable window into a person's level of automatic arousal" (p. 109). The resulting collected data showed that participants experienced increased boredom and fatigue in city blocks with large box stores, as compared to a general happiness and sense of ease in blocks with more visual diversity. The study's simplicity exemplifies the benefits of technological data collection when combined with self-assessments.

But is there a downside? Wearable sensors are now being used to collect information about employees' movements and interactions in the workplace. Microphones embedded in ID cards record how often each employee speaks during meetings or with colleagues. Developed by Boston-based company Humanyze, information collected from wearable sensors is intended to help "companies improve by understanding their people" (www.humanyze.com). These devices, known as Sociometric$^®$ Badges, can capture face-to-face interactions, extract social signals from speech and body movements, and measure users' proximity and location. Problematizing human observation and surveys as "subjective, inaccurate, and time consuming" (Olguin et al., 2009, p. 46), Humanyze touts its products' exactness of measurement and feedback regarding real-time social behaviour. Confronted with such raw numbers, underperforming employees may take steps to boost the level or quality of their interactions. In a research paper published by two of the company's founders, Olguin et al. (2009) state that in order for organizations to be truly *sensible*, they must "start deploying hundreds or thousands of wireless environmental and wearable sensors capable of monitoring human behavior" (p. 43).

Having access to this information means that changes to the workplace can be understood immediately. Based on information gathered using Humanyze sensors, one consulting firm in St. John's, Newfoundland, discovered that its workers took less breaks when working in brightly lit cubicles (Kimura, 2015a). At a Bank of America call centre, after Humanyze recommended that employees take their breaks at the same time rather than intersperse them, productivity rose by 20% while stress levels decreased by 19% (Kimura, 2015a). Monitoring factors such as employee conversation rates, email efficiency, Internet usage, and number of breaks taken all form part of an effort to make companies become more productive. Though no longer occurring

on the factory floor, this invasive means of observation, intended to perfect efficiency and production, echoes surveillance techniques of industries past. Calle Rosengren and Mikael Ottosson (2017) suggest that while "factory organization enabled certain kinds of surveillance, digital technology enables others" (p. 182). As more employees either choose or are forced to work from home, such methods of digital tracking and observation will no doubt accompany them.

Kenneth Goh, a professor of organizational behaviour, laments this big-data trend, with its Orwellian undertones and erosion of privacy. When given space, workers "do more trial-and-error learning, they're more willing to make mistakes in private" (quoted in Kimura, 2015b, para. 8). Mistakes have long been touted as one of the key ingredients in innovation and creativity. It is the unplanned and accidental moments that spark new discoveries.

Will increased observation and more detailed analysis leave room for the messy unknown? What do we lose when organizations have been wiped clean of mystery?

Despite integrating wearable technologies into his research, Colin Ellard, mentioned above, is wary of moving too far into the digital domain. In his latest book, *Places of the Heart* (2015), Ellard considers the implications of individualized spatial research in the era of Google Glass and other digitally augmented realities. He describes a situation in which two people can occupy the same physical space and yet see two different environments, personally curated to each person's tastes and interests. Ellard compares this scenario to a "self-reinforcing feedback loop" in which everything "we see will come to us through the mirror of what has already been seen" (p. 27). This is a familiar fear echoed in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), wherein he describes reality as having become indistinguishable from simulation; over time, the original is lost to representations—to symbols of itself.

Guy Debord (1994) warns of a similar paradox, in which humankind becomes cut off from a life in which it has too much creative control (p. 24). While tailored design is not inherently negative, in an already fairly individualistic society, slipping too far into our own worlds could shift how, and how often, we interact with others. The more that spaces are intensively designed or controlled, the less opportunity there may be for spontaneous interaction. A consequence of design being tailored to our perceived needs and calculated to maximize productivity is the elimination of the accidental unknown—the dark, whimsical, messy, emotional, unexpected qualities of life.

As Humanyze infers on its corporate website, technologically based research is often portrayed as superior to human data collection. This sentiment can be directed both toward the researcher, in regard to their inherent bias and the limits of their ability, and the participants, in regard to their awareness of their own behaviour. In many cases, data that is technologically gleaned is collected without a research participant's full awareness—through skin temperature, eye movement, and unconscious behaviours—which may yield very different results than verbal responses to questions on the same subjects. This type of information has many applications and real value; however, it can also easily place the researcher in a superior position to the participant. When the gleaning of data depends on one's unconscious choices or actions, the participant's conscious views may be considered untrustworthy or even invalid. This becomes problematic when research participants lose some of their agency and are thereby downgraded to the level of research subjects. Placing the researcher in such a position of authority harkens back to the kind of research that is practiced *on* humans rather than *with* them (Heron & Reason, 2001). In today's technologically advanced research environment, the technology itself is taking the seat of authority.

What is the role of qualitative research in an era when technology can surpass the individual researcher's ability to gather and organize data? Is there value in a small-scale serendipitous approach?

No Satisfaction: Use of Scales, Questionnaires, and Surveys

While technology-assisted research is on the rise, another common data collection tool is satisfaction scales. These consist of questions rated on a numeric scale and either compared to a base level of comfort or to other comparable data sets. Vischer (2008), who has written extensively on office design and evaluation, conveys the inadequacy of user satisfaction forms as a meaningful measure of a person's relationship to their physical environment. She notes that "little effort has been expended to understand exactly what users are reporting when they rate themselves satisfied (or not)" with a given work space (p. 233). The nuances behind such numbers is simply missed, which in turn means that factors that may be influencing satisfaction levels—emotional, social, or otherwise—remain unknown and unvalued. Vischer connects this to a trend of environmental determinism, in which a person's environment is seen as the sole determinant affecting their behaviour.

The attractiveness of this approach is the simplification it offers; by removing other, less defined qualities of the human–space relationship from the research, the resulting outcomes are clearer and seemingly more resolvable. To a worker, however, it is possible that a space might meet all the stated requirements yet still feel disagreeable—especially if the design is based on data that does not adequately represent their experience. A more encompassing understanding of satisfaction might include the "feelings, memories, expectations, and preferences" that underlie and inform one's perception of space (Vischer, 2008, p. 236).

Research on subjective and experiential qualities such as employee personalization can become formulaic and prescriptive, however, when the majority of data is collected through questionnaires or surveys. In such reports, messy, emotional, sensory, or relational experience is often stripped away to produce cleaner, more concrete quantitative evaluation. The desire for tangible solutions to improve office function is not inherently negative. However, when the need for quantifiable outcomes overshadows nuanced or evolving qualities, something is lost. In a study on employee satisfaction with an open-plan office (Veitch et al., 2007), the authors emphasized the need for reliable, standardized tools to measure the employees' reactions to the physical work environment, while simultaneously drawing attention to the value of "indirect effects" (p. 178) such as benefits of employee personalization (see Wells, 2000). In this study, variables "related to view and aesthetics" were cut after they "proved to be problematic" (Veitch et al., 2007, p. 187). This way of engaging with human spatial relationships tends to favour qualities that can be easily identified, quantified, and solved. As a result, the pattern of inquiry is built on an "unstated assumption that high performance and well-being will be achieved if problems are eliminated" (Heerwagen, 1998, p. 7). The data itself, which is often collected at a distance using questionnaires and surveys, provides very little room for interpretation beyond the predetermined hypotheses. Vischer (2008) argues that the motivation for such specific, detailed investigations should come from insights generated by user experience of a space. For example, if, through a user-centred assessment, lighting is determined to be an issue, then further research on lighting can be done in consultation and collaboration with those using the space.

Instead of being valued and explored, messy variables are often considered an unwanted nuisance. In a study comparing participants' evaluation of their office's thermal environment to that of another building, alongside a record of both spaces' actual temperatures, Deuble and de

Dear (2014) presented participants' lived experiences as untrustworthy, exaggerated complaints in regard to a building deemed to be—according to *objective* analysis—perfectly adequate and comfortable. Their conclusion suggested that "the occupants, rather than the building, may be the problem" (p. 128). While obtaining accurate measures of a building's thermal environment to achieve a comfortable temperature is important—especially as comfort standards historically have been based on men dressed in full suits (see Kingma & van Marken Lichtenbelt, 2015)— dismissing the lived experiences of those working within it as little more than "lengthy" and "emotional" responses from participants "predisposed to complain" (Deuble & de Dear, 2014, p. 127) is unhelpful and disrespectful. A more interesting conclusion, perhaps, would discern possible correlation between an employee's state of mind and their embodied assessment of the work space's thermal environment. How fascinating that perceived temperatures can change or feel different depending on mood and environmental qualities such as lighting, glare, and noise (all of which were mentioned in Deuble and de Dear's participant response notes). The temptation to wipe clean confusing, emotional, and subjective experience because the participants' perceptions differ from the study's standardized metrics leads research on human subjects into unhelpful and potentially unethical territory.

Questionnaires that require people to objectively assess environmental factors deemed to be quantifiable, such as lighting, temperature, acoustics, or air quality, impose an unstated condition that the body's internal systems of measurement and assessment be immune to emotional variance. The very assumption that a person would experience the same space repeatedly, in exactly the same way, completely strips their way of being of its emotional and evolving nature. To discredit individuals' evaluations as subjective or affected—as though their

inability to correctly and effectively monitor environmental levels is an inherent failure—is to fail to appreciate the complex relationships between people and their environments.

Reimagining and Redefining Organizational Research

Yanow (2010) suggests that waiting for organizational studies scholars to answer the call for spatial analysis in their research is not enough. She proposes that the community itself must first reimagine and redefine what it is to conduct scientific research, and must include aspects "fundamental to the study of space and which pose equally fundamental challenges to a particular view of science: the non-verbal character, the role of the researcher's body, and the matter of researcher reflexivity in the communication and analysis of spatial meanings" (Yanow, 2010, p. 141). This means assigning value to knowledge produced or gathered through such subjective processes as well as to the methods themselves. Yanow also mentions the role of the researcher's body and research reflexivity as key attributes of spatial research that may challenge traditional objective science. Because spatial meaning, affect, and significance are often difficult to articulate, not only for researchers but also participants, a researcher may use their own body and experience in physical space as a primary data source.

In one such insider study, Alfons van Marrewijk (2009; 2010) spent years documenting his experiences within two distinctly different buildings when the corporation occupying one of them moved into the other. van Marrewijk (2009) connected "the aesthetic experiences of the beautiful Moon Plaza" (the destination building) with longer hours, an "entrepreneurial attitude," and a shift in his working identity, which became more aligned with the company's "internationalization objectives" (pp. 110–111). He experienced this personal transformation as part of the embodiment of the Moon Plaza.

This example illustrates an interesting spatial perspective on this particular organization's trajectory and its impact on the employees. The benefit of physically working inside the organization, as well has having the ability to reflect back on that time, forms a valuable picture of the spatial relationships inside an organization. However, not all researchers have the time or ability to conduct this type of long-term insider study. Further, while the researcher's experience is important, their voice should not be heard above those of the employees.

Drawing on the work of Antonio Strati, Warren (2008), suggests that the researcher's embodied experience of space influences their "capacity to empathize with others" (p. 563) who work in that space. The feelings or sensory experiences experienced by the researcher may help them to see their research participants as being engaged or enmeshed in aesthetic experiences themselves, though hopefully without shifting the meaning of those experiences. It is possible that the researcher's spatial experiences may be quite different from those of the participants, who are in contact with the space on a daily basis. Therefore, rather than filter and interpret the participants' experiences, the researcher's embodied understanding of the space can serve as guide for the research process itself. Given such a nuanced, fleeting, and wordless research project, in drawing from one's body one may aid others in accessing their own sensory, emotional, and aesthetic experiences. Warren (2008) outlines two common approaches to conducting research on organizational aesthetics that navigate these issues. The first refers to "analyses of cultural and/or organizational examples in the manner of a detached commentator" (p. 563). In such depictions of organizational experience, the researcher assumes a "privileged interpretive position" (p. 564) that relies upon personal or established aesthetic sensibilities. The second approach attempts "to foreground the voices of organizational members" (p. 563), which is not always easy. The inquiry shifts "from 'how do *we* (as researchers) take an aesthetic

perspective on organizational life?' to 'how do we evoke and represent *others'* aesthetic perspectives on organizational life?'" (p. 564). Because of the embodied, fleeting, and personal nature of spatial experiences, articulating others' aesthetic experiences is profoundly complex—especially if the researcher's own experience differs from those of the participants. Similarly, drawing experiences from, or, as Warren (2008) puts it, "evoking" (p. 571) spatial experiences as part of the research process, could shift or otherwise have consequences for what type of knowledge emerges.

Proposing lengthy, insider, and/or alternative methodologies to research organizational space might not be possible or attractive for every researcher—especially those attempting to produce knowledge that is more in line with objective, positivist scientific formulae or working in or with organizations that do not see the value of embodied spatial inquiry. However, these conundrums remain at the heart of space-based research.

From Related to Constitutively Entangled

Wanda Orlikowski (2016) suggests that organizational studies requires a new way of negotiating materiality that sees the material world as "*constitutively entangled* in everyday life" (p. 1437, emphasis in original). This requires a paradigm shift that fuses the material and social beyond a relational dynamic—such that without one, the other cannot not exist. Such a shift, Orlikowski (2016) argues, brings the discussion away from "interacting entities" into a more circular relationship wherein "humans are constituted through relations of materiality—bodies, clothes, food, devices, tools, which in turn are produced through human practices" (p. 1438). The difference between this approach and an ontology that views human and nonhuman subjects as operating in a mutually influencing relationship is that the former alludes to distinct (potentially

separable) subjects. These ideas, which are explored in Latour's (2005) *actor network theory* inasmuch as the social emerges from the moment of interaction between actors (human and nonhuman), are also present in Castells's *Space of Flows, Space of Places* (2015), which speaks to space as an emergent expression of society. Here, the material world becomes more than a physical by-product or reflection of ourselves; rather, it is a "fundamental dimension of society, inseparable of the overall process of social organization" (p. 231). The important consideration with such views is the inseparable nature and co-evolutionary trajectory existing between the social and material worlds.

Latour (2005) describes the "momentary association" (p. 65) with objects that renders them social through their ability to act upon a situation. He uses hand tools as an example: hammers that *hit*, knives that *cut*, baskets that *hold* (p. 71). These verbs describe these objects' actions and, thus, their role in altering a situation. Latour does not suggest that these objects "do things" of their own accord, but that they need to be considered as being part of the social action taking place (p. 72). In this sense, "representations of space as static, predetermined, and independent are problematized by the recognition of objects as powerful actors-in-space" (Country et al., 2015, p. 5). Understanding the dynamic relationship between the human and the spatial places material objects into a "spatial context within which they themselves help to produce" (Country et al., 2015, p. 5). There is a communication, which, over time, shapes both the physical environment and those who interact with it.

Elizabeth Grosz (1998) frames this process as one of mutual production, drawing on simulation and the hyperreal as "introjections and projections [in] a complex feedback" loop (p. 43). What is significant about how Grosz draws upon simulacra and constructed realities is her grounding in the body. A tangible, pliable substance is being touched here, which extends

beyond a purely symbolic reading of space. Grosz (1994) extends this thinking to how tools, instruments, and other objects extend or reshape the body when in use. From hammers and iPhones to cars and planes, these objects temporarily become "part of the body image" (p. 80). When driving, for example, the car, "its perils and breakdowns, chasing another car . . . are all experienced in the body image of the driver" (p. 80). This new bodily form, a co-creation of machine and body, shifts and alters the corporeal experience of the road and the city. Pringle (2005) describes such extensions as the body's elasticity. To see space and bodies as "flexible and ambiguous" challenges how they may be experienced and perceived, and changes the attention given to both space and body (p. 144). Shifting how we perceive and characterize these sensations and experiences can highlight their relational and interwoven qualities. As the body's physical and social limits dissolve, isolating discrete elements—material or social—becomes difficult. Just as the car transforms its driver's body into something more powerful and mechanical, does the building transform the organization? Can the notion of extending and transforming human bodies through tools, phones, or cars extend to architecture? How is an organization transformed through its interaction and integration with/in a particular space?

~~Un~~seeing Space: Situating Experience in the Body

Like many scholars interested in the mind-body and space, Elizabeth Grosz (1994) draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty, whose phenomenological perspective situates the body as the site of perception and experience: "the very horizon and perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, and other objects, and other subjects possible" (p. 86). This is a unifying stance that brings the world together by understanding the interconnected nature between mind, body, and environment, and that brings all aspects or qualities of

experience into play rather than separating and isolating them as fragmented parts. A significant part of understanding experience in general lies in the meaning created through unplanned connections and associations. Merleau-Ponty (2004) suggests that numerous qualities, when isolated from "the reactions they provoke in our bodies," become "devoid of meaning" (p. 46). This problem seems particularly true in research, as experience is stripped down, separated, and coded—ironically enough, so that the researcher can discern meaning! In phenomenological terms, the act of separating the senses—for example, understanding an object's aroma and its hue as entirely distinct from each other—keeps the unity of an object a mystery (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). However, by understanding these qualities as being in relation to each other, greater insight and a broader overall perspective become available.

Part of what makes phenomenology, and in particular Merleau-Ponty's contribution to it, so appealing for spatial research is the built-in nature of observation and reflection—two key components of research. The act of stepping back is not a disconnection from what we are observing, but is necessary to reveal the wonder of a world that sometimes goes unseen. Indeed, many elements of the day-to-day fade away beyond our attention, usually until something or someone malfunctions. Phenomenological reduction seeks to illuminate qualities that we "take for granted," and, in so doing, to "render the familiar strange" (Crossley, 2004, p. 93). Here, Merleau-Ponty (1962) explains:

> Reflection does not withdraw from the world towards the unity of consciousness
> as the world's basis; it steps back to watch the forms of transcendence fly up like
> sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world
> and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because
> it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. (p. xv)

In this description, reflection is not passive or internal but seems to breathe life into the world; it is to suspend judgement and reason to take notice of what surrounds you. As a reflexive inquiry, the "intentional threads" which connect us are loosened and brought forward, so that we can deepen our understanding of them (Crossley, 2004, p. 93).

At this moment, I look up at the wall above my computer and see a colourful drawing created by my three-year-old daughter. At first, I simply look at the drawing as a finished product, but when I look more deeply, at the quality of the marks, I begin to see more. I see her hand moving across the page quickly and then slowly, back and forth, up and down. Something static becomes animated, partly through my imagination and partly through the marks on the paper. These drawings, no more than scribbles, are very important to my daughter. She makes dozens of them, yet each is a precious creation—a manifestation of her energy and emotion onto paper through colour, texture, and ink. While not an example of phenomenological reduction per se, taking the time to look closely at these scribbles covering my wall brought something faded into view and transformed it from a flat drawing into a series of dynamic movements, relationships, emotions, and materials.

In *The Spell of The Sensuous*, David Abram (1997) follows Merleau-Ponty's work in phenomenology and eloquently details his contributions to the philosophy. According to Abram, Merleau-Ponty strove "not to explain the world as if from the outside, but to give voice to the world from our experienced situation within it, recalling us to our participation in the here-and-now, rejuvenating our sense of wonder at the fathomless things, events and powers that surround us" (p. 47). Abram's articulation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is full of playfulness and curiosity—an acknowledgement of the mysterious and magical, which sits beside or within the dull and mundane. Merleau-Ponty (2004) suggests that it is this obscured "knowledge of the

natural world [as] riddled with gaps, which is how poetry creeps in" (p. 56), a simple and profound sentiment often missing in academic research. Merleau-Ponty's amazement and fascination with the world and how we perceive it—like something being reborn after a period of darkness and numbness—is contagious:

> We are once more learning to see the world around us, the same world which we had turned away from in the conviction that our senses had nothing worthwhile to tell us, sure as we were that only strictly objective knowledge was worth holding onto. We are rediscovering our interest in the space in which we are situated. . . . We are rediscovering in every object a certain style of being that makes it a mirror of human modes of behaviour. So the way we related to the things of the world is no longer as a pure intellect trying to master an object or space that stands before it. Rather, this relationship is an ambiguous one, between beings who are both embodied and limited and an enigmatic world of which we catch a glimpse (indeed which we haunt incessantly) but only ever from points of view that hide as much as they reveal, a world in which every object displays the human face it acquires in a human gaze. (pp. 53–54)

What Merleau-Ponty articulates so refreshingly is the messy, embodied learning and unlearning that accompanies phenomenological perception. We are no longer meant to forgo our senses to master one intellectual truth, but to explore an enigmatic, embodied world that manifests between beings. By seeing the senses, emotions, and embodied perspectives as valuable sources of information, the image of the world shifts into something more alive and full of scents, textures, shadows, tastes, and meaning. "We are not," says Merleau-Ponty (1962), "reducing the significance of the world . . . to a collection of 'bodily sensations' but we are saying that the

body . . . [can] 'be at home in' that world, 'understand' it and find significance in it" (p. 275). For Patricia Pringle (2005), the mind-body is "the source and seat of our knowledge of the world" (p. 143). It is from this locus of experience and interaction that our mind-bodies inform our perception and allow us to engage with the world. Pringle points out that our perception is not formed through a "passive processing of sensory information but by an active engagement between ourselves and the world" (p. 143). Rather than understand perception as a compiling of discrete sensory facts, like a machine sorting and tabulating data, sensory awareness and absorption is collaborative and engaged—like a choir or orchestra working together both as individuals and as a unit. We are not "computing" the world but feel it on an "affective and emotional level," both consciously and unconsciously (Trigg, 2012b, p. 10). Our perception of the world, therefore, is emergent; it emerges not from our environment but collaboratively, through the relationships we forge and experience. Grosz (1994) describes these relationships with objects as defining the body. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty's work, she articulates the body as "sense-bestowing" and "form-giving," which provide a "structure, organization, and ground within which objects are to be situated against" (p. 87). The body and the environment are no longer separate entities, but reinforce and reshape one another. Grosz (1998) looks at how the city and the body produce each other in different but related forms, each metamorphosing the other until the body is "transformed, 'citified,' urbanized as a distinctive metropolitan body" (p. 43). This body is part of the city and is shaped through its organization and systemization. Shifting the image of the body from something mechanical into a more porous, malleable being reinforces the sensitive and affective nature of its relationship with the world. Meanwhile, the nonhuman environment, in which the body is situated, also becomes a more significant and dynamic source of interaction and influence.

Possible Futures

Without getting too deep into the complexities of a philosophy of space and time, about which there could be endless discussions, contemplating how our concept of space influences our interaction and relationship with the material world is worthy of attention. Massey (2005) outlines three overarching qualities of space that together form the foundation of experience: first, that space is considered a "product of interrelations" (p. 8), meaning it only exists inasmuch as it's "constituted" through its relationship with other human and nonhuman forms. Second, that space is understood as a "sphere of the possibility" and, within it, a coexistence of "district trajectories" (p. 8). She connects this openness to latent or possible futures—a stance which differs from the predicted and closed system that accompanies much modern development. And third, that space is recognized as "always under construction" (p. 8), a result of being the "product of relations-between" (p. 8), whereby space, rather than a static construction, is in a continuous process of unfolding. This conceptualization draws space into us, rather than seeing it as an external, solitary form. Though walls and tables do not have agency—they are not living and cannot move on their own—their presence and form shifts and changes according to whom they interact with.

Echoing Massey's second principle, Law (2004) makes a case for keeping "reality-making open" (p. 139) instead of fostering a predictable, fiction-less dead end. Infusing our realities with hidden wonder, where the lines between what's real and imagined are blurred, lays the foundations for possibility. Law suggests that "we refuse the dualism between the real and unreal, between realities and fictions, thinking, instead, in terms of *degrees* of enacted reality, or more reals and less reals" (p. 139, emphasis in original). Blurring the boundary of what is real is not a decision to live in a fantasy world, but an acceptance of multiple worlds, perspectives, and

pathways being under construction at any one time. This somewhat messy ontology departs from

the traditional "representational tendency of fixing boundaries" (Nijs & Daems, 2012, p. 187).

Nijs and Daems illustrate how fixed boundaries may point to divisions between here and there,

between what is and what is not (p. 187). The effect of this delineation is a separation of

elements rather than a fusion of ingredients. Material is detached from the immaterial. Sensations

are disconnected from place: "this is the building, that is my sensation of the building" (p. 187).

Such divisions reinforce a static and closed way of being that is perhaps easier to understand, but

is also less exciting and certainly less meaningful. The interconnectedness of material and

immaterial, human and nonhuman, brings with it greater impact—reverberations of affect—and

therefore requires greater responsibility and awareness. Remaining open to the unknown is also

difficult. While many people crave novelty and adventure, predictability and routine are mostly

more accurate descriptions for our daily lives—at least in the West. Change, whether it is

planned or unexpected, is disruptive. Predictability and control, even within a growth mentality,

are deep-rooted qualities that have shaped our perception and experience of the world. Our

distrust of the unknown has fostered behaviour and an environment designed to reinforce routine

and sameness. There is safety woven into the familiar. Yet as we have seen, our mind-bodies

begin to wilt, physically and mentally, in lifeless, mechanical spaces. In *A Field Guide to Getting*

Lost, Rebecca Solnit (2005) recommends straying from the main road to spend time with the

unfamiliar. To live a life of certainty, she says, and "not to know how to get lost brings you to

destruction" (p. 14). Solnit sees getting and being lost as life-giving, connecting us to ourselves

and our surroundings. Walking through the woods becomes a different type of communication

that demands attention and thoughtful observation. Being lost requires almost artfully "attending

to the weather . . . to reading the sun and moon and stars to orient yourself, to the direction of

running water, to the thousand things that make the wild a text that can be read by the literate"

(p. 10). In this sense, Solnit's concept of being lost is not an absence of place knowledge but the

exact opposite: a deepened awareness of one's surroundings. This flipped definition leads to a

different way of designing and working with space.

Perhaps "getting lost" is not necessarily about shifting toward constant adaptation and

change—an absence of place attachment through the replacement of individual offices with hot

desks—but rather a deeper, more subtle connection to the places we inhabit and use. The shift

comes from within by breaking down the barriers between this and that, human and nonhuman,

mind and body, material and immaterial, inside and outside, and so on. Lefebvre (1991) reminds

us that to conceive of a space without considering what inhabits it, or to think of a moment

separate from the place in which it occurred, renders them "empty abstractions" of themselves

(p. 12). For the "substance" of which they are made—"energy, space and time—can neither be

conflated nor separated from one another" (p. 12). How the material and the immaterial are

entwined and co-produced is not necessarily easy to comprehend and perhaps impossible to fully

understand or communicate, despite the fact, as Lefebvre notes, that "its existence stares us in

the face" (p. 12). Perhaps, to continue the exploration, we need our mind-bodies to get lost—to

sit in a place of (im)possibility.

Crossing Over Boundaries

A large part of an approach to this kind of exploration entails sitting in the unknown—on

the boundaries of some disciplines and at the intersections of others (Dewsbury & Naylor, 2002).

Encouraging a spatial and material perspective within research on organizational practices,

culture, and everyday life requires an openness to multiple perspectives, ontological

understandings, and other disciplines. Rather than remain within established research paradigms, Cairns (2008) calls for the adoption of "multiple perspectives on the complexity and ambiguity of the built environment" (p. 283). Such a flexible and inclusive stance helps to minimize reductive approaches and remain open to less visible forms of knowledge. Integrating knowledge from beyond one's field of study into current and future research may produce a more dynamic and nuanced understanding of spatial relationships. Further, data gleaned from wearable technological devices could take on a new life when combined with qualitative forms of inquiry.

The wealth of knowledge on spatial perspectives in other disciplines is seductive. However, wandering into unfamiliar academic fields—each with its own language, perspective, and foundational theories—can be challenging and overwhelming. Identifying and exploring the various ways, seen or unseen, in which workplace design may influence workers is not easy. Interpreting theories or texts outside of one's discipline can be uncomfortable and disorienting. In addition, the research subject (office space) is always shifting. It is an ongoing, adaptive process, that is continually changing as spatial relationships fade and evolve. This premise makes results specific and contextual rather than broad and widely applicable. It also makes the research time-consuming and difficult to interpret. However, rather than searching to understand the exact impact of every environmental variable, what is needed is a deeper understanding of the human–spatial connection.

Building a portrait of an organization's relationship with its physical space creates a multidimensional story filled with nuanced information about how members of the organization use and connect with their space. Meaning and importance therefore shifts away from the goal of achieving the perfect space to an understanding of the evolving, embedded, and entwined relationships taking place. In her book *For Space*, Doreen Massey (2005) speaks to the aliveness

and the "unavoidable challenge of negotiating the here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and geography of thens and theres)" (p. 140). Here, Massey brings current and past experiences into an embodied collision between the human and nonhuman worlds. To understand the complex, myriad ways in which the social and the material worlds collide, interact with, and influence one another's trajectories over time is almost impossible. This relationship, while at times less visible, is nonetheless always at play.

Chapter III: Writing the Unexplainable

> It has always been a happy thought to me that the creek runs on all night, new every minute, whether I wish it or know it or care, as a closed book on a shelf continues to whisper to itself its own inexhaustible tale. So many things have been shown so to me on these banks, so much light has illumined me by reflection here where the water comes down, that I can hardly believe that this grace never flags, that the pouring from ever-renewable sources is endless, impartial, and free.
>
> (Dillard, 1974, p. 69)

Writing Space

Annie Dillard's (1974) writing illuminates the reflective and empathic connection between self and environment, which is manifested through her pilgrimages to Tinker Creek. But what types of research perspectives are needed to capture and convey these nuanced moments? How does physical space show up in academic writing and can the written version do justice to the original? Andrew Juniper (2003) describes a similar conundrum in the introduction to his book on *wabi-sabi*, the Japanese art of impermanence, which represents the sacred aesthetic qualities of life. It is considered unwise to try to describe *wabi-sabi*, for language cannot capture its complete essence. Therefore, it is preferable to "leave the unexplainable unexplained" (p. ix). In fact, Juniper describes how words are considered "the fundamental obstacle to clear understanding" (p. ix), as though their very utterance forever taints the thing being described— an accidental droplet of opaque ink into a crystal-clear pond. If necessary, only the most poetic language can be considered worthy of such a task. Yet even the most rhythmical words can have consequences.

In a personal essay, Sheila Heti (2019) speaks to the intimate repercussions of portraying one's life—what she refers to as "one's insides" (para. 2). Heti explains how writing can transform "objects and people," who inevitably "take on the qualities of how you portrayed them" (para 2). As if by magic, our words and descriptions shift the way we see and engage with the world so that "a friend drawn ugly becomes ugly. A life drawn sweet becomes more sweet" (para. 2). The inherent power of words to shape and give meaning is as compelling as it is daunting. Not only is it difficult to convey nuanced moments in life, how they are described may shift their essence. What happens when, as Lefebvre (1991) points out, "communication brings the non-communicated into the realm of the communicated" (p. 28)? As more ephemeral or heretofore hidden qualities of space begin to emerge in academia and organizational studies, how shall we write or speak of them, and what can we learn from other kinds of practitioners, such as artists who explore space through their artwork?

In *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram (1997) makes a case for how the potency of language can and should be harnessed:

> For those of us who care for an earth not encompassed by machines, a world of textures, tastes and sounds other than those that we have engineered, there can be no question of simply abandoning literacy, of turning away from all writing. Our task, rather, is that of taking up the written word, with all of its potency, and patiently, carefully, writing language back into the land. Our craft is that of releasing the budded, earthly intelligence of our words, freeing them to respond to the speech of the things themselves. (p. 273)

Throughout the book, Abram successfully achieves this assignment with elegant, descriptive writing, which pulls the reader into the words themselves. His philosophical arguments,

supported by a phenomenological foundation, are brought to life through a whimsical and creative writing style. Similarly, Alberto Pérez-Gómez (2016) suggests that language is a necessary function in architecture and design to convey the atmospheres and moods of rooms, which he deems the "harmonic potential" of architecture. For without such descriptive words, architects would become too reliant on measurements and blueprints and other technological systems of design. Pérez-Gómez draws on the work of Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, an architectural philosopher of the mid-eighteenth century, to explore the "production of meaningful architecture" (p. 83). Le Camus saw "metaphorical language" as necessary for "describing rooms' aspects—textures, smells, decoration, and colors, among others" (p. 84). Similarly, Carl Leggo (2008) suggests that poetic language "works to open up possibilities for constructing understanding" (p. 165) about the world. While imagery is often considered one of the most powerful forms of expression—an image is worth a thousand words, and so on—the ability to convey nuanced or ephemeral qualities of atmosphere can sometimes require more than what is pictured.

Through descriptive language, "deep emotional and narrative aspects that articulate places" can be explored (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 108). These are not purely aesthetic or sensory attributes, but relational ones: atmospheric qualities forged between the social and the material. In this sense, atmosphere is "always in the process of transforming" (Anderson, 2009, p. 79). As different emotions surface or shift within a space, Anderson suggests that they are "taken up and reworked" into the atmosphere, producing a constantly evolving environment (p. 79). Kathleen Stewart (2011) describes atmosphere as a "force field" (p. 452). She explores how this "lived affect" creates "an attunement of the senses, of labors, and imaginaries to potential ways of living in or living through things" (p. 452). For Stewart, engaging in atmospheric understanding

requires writing that does the same; she writes: "things hanging in the air are worth describing" (p. 447). In calling upon theory to become a "descriptive method awkwardly approaching the thing that is happening by attuning to it," Stewart offers an approach to spatial, atmospheric research that draws the researcher, and their words, into the event itself. Paying attention to and writing about everyday "rhythms" gives voice to their affective "tempos, sensory knowledges, orientations, transmutations, habits, [and] rogue force fields" (p. 446). Through such accounts, aesthetic vocabularies go beyond describing experience and become co-creators.

Pérez-Gómez (2016) cautions against a world without these emotional qualities should they be replaced with more "fashionable innovations" (p. 108) such as those driven by technological advances—a kind of innovation which, he believes, "hides [place] from our experience" (p. 109). Thus, part of the value of language in articulating the less visible, less quantitative, less stable nuances of spatial atmospheres is to serve as a form of prevention against spaces devoid of emotional connection.

~~Academic~~ Writing

Within the academic paradigm, the use of words to share work and communicate findings is relied upon and has become a marker of legitimacy (Taylor, 2002). The challenge, then, is how best to achieve "the translation of aesthetic experience to intellectual knowledge of that experience" (Taylor, 2002, p. 823). How do we write about that which transcends words? Even Boal (2006) understands that "reason and feeling, idea and form" cannot be separated, "even when at loggerheads, even when they come to blows" (p. 24). Suggesting that words may only speak in the language of reason strips writing of its creative potential. Instead of sacrificing the written word, *how* we write and *what* we write needs to become the focus.

Changing how we write the story could mean investigating beyond academic writing to more descriptively convey the ineffable. Qualitative research methods that use poetry and other creative art forms are becoming more popular for those wishing to push the boundaries of academic writing. Arts-based research can include photography, drawing, poetry, performance, and other research–creation modalities. However, creative techniques do not necessarily simplify the process, nor do they completely circumvent the role of language. Warren (2008) explores the difficulties of carrying out research in "organizational aesthetics" and laments the lack of concrete tools or instruction for researchers to capture such embodied and sensuous experience when "effective aesthetic communication through language is difficult" (Warren, 2008, p. 561).

Art-based methods can be more than stylized presentation techniques and may indeed be used to conjure embodied, sensory, or emotional experiences, in which the exploratory process of their creation unlocks hidden or unconscious insights. The final product or art piece may or may not succeed in conveying the correct or appropriate message, but through an active process of making it, unconscious emotions or insights may surface. Therefore art-based methods can generate a sort of embodied wisdom and deepen one's understanding about a particular topic or issue. These processes can help participants and researchers surpass habitual ways of thinking and seeing that are bound up in habitual ways of being and speaking. Augusto Boal (2006) sees words as "the work and the instruments of reason," whereas theatre represents "aesthetic communications" (p. 24). Transcending reason, he suggests, is "the reason for theatre and for all the arts" (p. 24). However, rather than perpetuate the dichotomy between rational language and art aesthetics, the question becomes: how can words, written or spoken, be used to express aesthetic communication?

In his article "Confessions of an Organizational Space Writer," Fabio James Petani (2019) laments the current state of academic writing. "Why," he asks, "do journal reviewers and editors so often flatten out all gentle irony, suggestive humour and evocative hesitancy"? (p. 2). In a conversational tone, Petani pleads with his readers (who he assumes are organizational scholars) "to act up" (p. 2) and imbue their writing with simple, honest, and emotional attributes. This call to arms challenges academics to expand their audience and write from the heart, so that research may motivate people and create positive change instead of seeking legitimacy in dull language and standardized expression.

The use of dedicated and specialized language, says Hayden Lorimer (2008), can create a "highly selective lexicon of terms and phrases" to describe the nonrepresentational aspects of life (p. 7). Creating a familiar, well-trodden set of words to foster understanding and kinship among academics and authors certainly has its benefits. However, Lorimer points to the irony of "when the leanness of descriptive language comes up short of the manifold of affective events and textures it seeks to speak up for" (p. 7). This places writers at a loss when attempting, and failing, to describe the intangible. Petani (2019) argues that "passion and form can count as much as content and method, as they are intrinsically related" (p. 7). It is interesting to bring form into a discussion on writing about space.

How does a sentence's shape and flow influence pace and breath? When are images, memories, and emotions conjured by the placement of descriptive words? How does the form and structure of this page affect the reader's experience? What is lost when writers are forced to format their words so strictly and precisely for academic consumption?

All of these considerations are structural, spatial, and literary. They are also uncertain and unpredictable. The act of writing is itself a process of becoming, transforming thoughts,

experiences, stories into something else. As Petani (2019) illustrates, "writing is 'an embodied space', suspended between pain and pleasure, body and mind, self and other" (p. 7). The "other" that Petani refers to could be the natural and/or the built environment—the physical world where the writing is occurring, the location where the writing is being read and consumed, or the place that is written about. The placement of these words and their interaction with the reader summons language into a sensorial and physical realm. Cochoy (2005) describes how Annie Dillard's nature writing—specifically *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*—becomes part of the natural world:

> Annie Dillard situates her writing on nature on the threshold where the meditative ramblings of the mind ephemerally crystallize into the ever-changing substance of nature—where the metatextual or metaphoric "waves" of discourse skillfully coincide with the "heaving" materiality of the world in order to weave the throbbing texture of the book. (p. 35)

What Cochoy describes is the ebb and flow of writing and perceiving, wherein words—alive with potential and materiality—become part of new ways of seeing and understanding how we are in the world. Dillard has stated that for her, "seeing is of course very much a matter of verbalization" through its role as a mediator of perception (Cochoy, 2005, p. 34).

Without drawing attention to particular aspects of our surroundings, would we notice them?

I think about the countless times I used to drive home from university and, upon arrival, have no recollection of the details I must have observed along the way. The trip—so familiar as to almost become invisible—filled instead with rotating thoughts of the day's events. In his book *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, Scott Slovic (1992) details a similar account of

biking tirelessly along shoulderless roads to the university, most of which he hardly notices

(p. 172). He contrasts those hasty trips with much rarer ones, which he describes as

"scheduleless" (p. 172); during these rides, Slovic says, "I barely pedal, talking to myself about

the distant hills, the scrubby bushes and moss-distorted trees, and the dead animals—snakes,

raccoons, armadillos—on the road" (p. 172). The passing countryside is no longer invisible, as

words act to manifest insects, animals, bushes, and trees. Through internal, dialogical

observations, the landscape emerges as a companion and becomes an essential component of the

journey. Perhaps when there is nothing to say about the spaces we inhabit, it is not because there

was nothing there but because we forgot to participate in the conversation. Slovic suggests that

much of environmental literature is "a kind of private murmuring" (p. 172) that strives toward an

understanding of one's experience and, I would assume, one's relationship to it.

Reading these private murmurings shifts writing about the physical environment from

absolute accounts to a more whimsical repartee. Rather than depend on spatial research for

concrete proof and answers to office space conundrums, having conversations with space can

deepen our understanding of the relationships at play. Like other creative art forms that engage

aesthetic and emotion communication, writing can be a subversive act from within the system.

Some journals such as *Organizational Aesthetics* and *Qualitative Inquiry* encourage poetic

writing. For researchers who are required to publish in academic publications, however, it can be

difficult to challenge the boundaries and many find themselves "participating (both reluctantly

and inadvertently) in the very forms of writing that we seek to contest" (Petani, 2019, p. 7).

However, shifting the discussion toward evocative, descriptive, relational, and personal accounts

of spatial experience could produce the complex, nuanced understanding that we are currently

missing.

One interesting approach to highlighting a space's active role can be found in the article "Co-becoming Bawaka" (Country et al., 2015), which explores a relational understanding of place/space. The authors credit and treat the land, Bawaka Country, in northern Australia, as the paper's lead author. In this sense, the land extends into the text, its form and flow. The research paper itself is seen as "a place/space that is co-emergent and that is active and sentient, a space/place that draws attention to the ways in which dynamic, ongoing, intense webs of connection" (p. 4) can emerge through the research process. The inclusion of Bawaka Country as an author transforms that space from a setting where things happen into a collaborator and, as the authors put it, an "author-ity" on the subject matter (Country et al., 2015).

"Co-becoming Bawaka" is rich with description and creative literary writing, which is necessary to convey the ideas and tone the authors wish to create. The land, Bawaka, is not an abstract space but one with texture, substance, and life: "ah, here is a good spot, let's put the *wapitja* (the digging stick) into the sand to see if it is soft enough. . . . In digging *ganguri*, Bawaka becomes Sasha and her long arms. Sasha and her long arms become Bawaka" (pp. 4–5). Through this engagement with the land and text, the authors illustrate how "places/spaces and beings co-become," which are "so wildly diverse, more-than-human, more-than-words, more-than-thought, more-than-feeling, more-than-dream" (p. 4). The way in which Bawaka is treated—with respect and openness—draws out subtle qualities present in the relationships surrounding it that are often overlooked or dismissed as banal. The space/place does not possess agency on its own; rather, it is through dynamic interaction and adaptability with living beings, and day-to-day use and decay, that it too comes alive. While not every space can or should be the lead author of a study, this example highlights the dynamic role that physical space plays through its unique spatial representation.

Spatial Stories

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (2011) writes that every story "is a travel story—a spatial practice" (p. 115). In this regard, he compares people's stories to mass transportation, because "every day, they traverse and organize places; they select and link them together" (p. 115). Through the telling and living of stories, people are connected through place and experience. Narratives are transformed into "spatial trajectories," with sentences becoming passageways "leading from the one to the other" (p. 115). Therefore, each story is located— grounded in the place from which it unfolds. Understanding socio-material space through the lens of embodied communication situates aspects of life in an evolving story. Narratives can provide shape, context, and meaning to nuanced spatial elements by weaving together the social and the material.

Written narratives can provide rich accounts in academic research as they draw readers into the story. Integrating stories into academic writing is what Anita Sinner (2013) has done in her study of new teachers' experiences, a creative non-fiction research method she describes as "controversial in the academy" (p. 2). The aim was to better convey the experiences of Sinner's research subjects, who were also her research partners. The process combines the "facts and events (content) with the conventions of fiction writing (form)—including narrative voice, persona, authentic characterization of place and settings" to produce a creative nonfiction story (p. 2). As descriptions of experience, the resulting stories, though based in fact, become richer and more nuanced. Elements like tone and style, normally dulled or standardized to minimize distraction, are used to enhance the representation. Rather than skip past them, mundane

moments can be presented in ways that draw the reader's attention to their significance (Leggo, 2013).

Methodologies like this enable the reader to access less defined, often invisible experiences. As Lynn Butler-Kisber (2010) explains in her overview of contemporary-art-informed qualitative research, traditional narrative inquiry is a "distinct way of thinking and understanding that is unique and embodied" (p. 62). Stories are at the root of many cultures as a way of transmitting information from one generation to the next, in part because of their ability to be formally simple while carrying complex or powerful messages.

But stories are not found only in print and speech. Dvora Yanow (1998) writes about how "built spaces are at once storytellers and part of the story being told" (p. 215). These built narratives become a fundamental component of how space is lived and experienced by communicating "values, beliefs and feelings" through their material vocabulary (p. 215). Tricia Austin (2011) suggests conceptualizing space through narrative leads to questions: "who is the audience, who is the author? What is the story? What is its underlying message? How is it told? How is it framed by its context? What transformation does it bring?" (p. 4). These questions immediately take us beyond the design- and ocular-centric dimension into the experiences and meanings bound up within a spatial encounter. The story can reveal a space's embedded agency, its "power to change the world" (p. 6). This is especially important in considering how people can experience space in different ways: as powerful, oppressive, celebratory, confining, beautiful, or banal. Take the recent Black Lives Matter protests occurring across the world. Space has co-authored this movement in the parks and streets where protesters have been celebrated, threatened, attacked, and killed; in the vandalized storefronts; and in the historical statues toppled for embodying racist legacies. The stories of these places highlight "the openness

of objects, people and spaces as they act upon each other producing constant flux of events and the dramatic conflicts that arise . . . through arcs of interaction" (p. 7). In this sense, space becomes a co-author of the story, changing not only the plot but the actors. Applying a narrative perspective to space broadens our understanding of the various roles that space can play and how these roles become embedded in the social interactions taking place. Questions of context, author, and audience also remind us of the ways in which forms and atmosphere can shift and morph depending on who is occupying them.

In *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, Rebecca Solnit (2001) attributes the uniqueness of roads, trails, and paths to their inability to be captured in a single moment. As built structures, they "cannot be perceived as a whole all at once"; rather, they "unfold in time as one travels along them" (p. 72). This journey through time and space becomes its own story, in which "a hairpin turn is like a plot twist, a steep ascent a building of suspense to the view of the summit [and] a fork in the road an introduction of a new storyline" (p. 72). As the wanderer takes in new vistas, subtle details or unexpected places may emerge: a spider weaving her web, sunlight passing through branches, a red door, fallen leaves on the ground that leave a stain upon the pavement, a single lost glove. Noticing these details is as much about the qualities of one's surroundings as our ability to converse with them. With eyes focused on screens, ears attuned for that familiar digital chime, and fingers primed for scrolling, aspects of the environment have dimmed (Pallasmaa, 2012). Part of this invisibility may be blamed on cheap construction materials and globalism, which have created a sort of sameness on every corner; but despite these qualities, there is also a disconnection on the human side. In *How to Do Nothing*, Odell (2019) petitions her readers to stop and take note of their surroundings—to "hold open contemplative space against the pressures of habit, familiarity, and distraction that constantly

threaten to close it" (p. 6). The urgency of her call to attention hints at the importance of this relationship—for without a connection to the physical world, we risk losing part of ourselves along with the natural environment.

A Call to ~~Action~~ Attention

Artists have long been part of a movement to cultivate greater attention and awareness through their practice, performance, and work. Art often serves as an opportunity for pause and reflection, for shifting perspectives and seeing daily life anew. Nicolas Bourriaud writes in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) about how, "even when inert forms are involved, there is a possibility of immediate discussion" (p. 16). It is through this conversation and participation, he says, that "I see and perceive, I comment, and I evolve in a unique space and time" (p. 16). Bourriaud touches on the situated and reciprocal nature between the art and audience/participant. The very act of encountering art becomes transactional and alive, transforming gallery visitors into an extension of the art itself. This atmosphere of engagement differs from the increasingly automated and mechanical nature of daily life, which, says Bourriaud, "restricts the possibilities of inter-human relations" (p. 16). As technology and machines enable a much greater volume of communication, a less present, less attentive, less relational way of being becomes the norm.

Artist Janet Cardiff creates immersive installations that destabilize viewers and pull them out of their daily routines. While some of her work combines elaborately constructed sets with detailed narrative soundtracks, other pieces subtly subvert an existing environment. Her site-specific audio walks, for instance, guide participants through cities all around the world with perfectly timed accompanying soundtracks. *Were those chirping birds coming from the tree or my headphones? Did someone just call out to me?* These walks, purposefully unsettling,

challenge and distort reality, resulting in a magical reinterpretation of the city street. All of a sudden, everything becomes something to question and examine. Everything—and nothing—is ordinary. Odell (2019) aptly notes that "nothing is so simultaneously familiar and alien as that which has been present all along" (p. 125). Cardiff's art calls attention to how the senses can be deceptive when we have certain expectations about what constitutes reality. In creating an audio walk for London's East End, with its history of bombings—the Brick Lane bombing, IRA-related bombings, and the German Blitz during the Second World War—she wove sounds from those events together with the present day. In 2006, I interviewed Cardiff for a magazine article (Messer, 2006) about how her work plays with the perception of reality. Describing her London audio walk, she said, "as you're walking down one street you hear bombs go off, sirens from the Blitz, helicopters, machine guns and people running past you" (p. 44), an effect that feels remarkably real. The result is a blurring of past and present, certainty and illusion, which manifests an entirely unique and embodied experience.

In her work on walking, Solnit (2001) comments on how roads "are a record of those who have gone before, and to follow them is to follow people who are no longer there" (p. 72). The history is embedded in the pavement, along the façade, and in the trees. As such, perhaps Cardiff's audio walks emphasize what is *already* there—the combined experience of person, history, and space—through a heightened sensory paradigm. As with most other living things, humans are affected and influenced by the places they inhabit through a myriad of conscious, unconscious, and embodied ways, many of which we do not fully understand. Because familiar details can fade into the background, it is easy to feel indifferent to their existence. Cardiff sees people with greater openness and awareness as "talented viewers" who are able to "create more synchronicity than others" (Messer, 2006, p. 45).

Cardiff connects this talent to the ability to notice opportunity. In *Researching Your Own Practice*, John Mason (2002) associates this quality with sensitivity and presence. Mason explores the potential of what he calls *the discipline of noticing*. In order to notice, he says, we must "be awake to possibilities" (p.7) and willing to adjust or change course as a result. In this example, Mason is referring to classroom teachers who, upon sensing their students' needs, may require an adjustment to their lesson. Noticing is like gathering data about our situation and, as we begin to notice, more data unfolds—be it personal observation about our emotions and bodily sensations, the reactions and behaviour of others, or details about the places inhabited or passed through. "As multi-sensate beings," Mason writes, "we are inundated with sense impressions all the time, but only some of them ever register in our conscious awareness" (p.31). Noticing more, or different, qualities requires sensitivity and mindfulness.

Davis et al. (2008) write about what they call *occasioning*. The word *occasion*—when used as a verb—describes moments of possibility that arise through deliberate or "incidental" interactions (Vettraino & Linds, 2018, p. 21). Shifting and "changing the conditions of interaction" (p. 21) can lead to different ways of seeing and relating to a situation. Vettraino and Linds (2018) suggest that these "rich and diverse possibilities are always present" if we notice and respond to them (p. 21). In *A Place in Mind*, Avi Friedman (2010) suggests that what makes spaces unique is not necessarily the place itself, but "our notice of them and their effect on us" (p. 10). The places we remember are those that have influenced us in some way. This shifts the discussion from the impact of particular spatial qualities to one's relationship with those qualities.

If we begin, collectively, to notice the physical landscape more intimately, what will emerge?

Geoffrey Mead (2015) suggests that our "interactions with the surrounding world do not represent arbitrary designations . . . but a profound attunement to a reality" (p. 61). This notion of *attunement* calls to mind balance, harmony, synchronicity, and deep awareness—terms well established in the mindfulness movement—but what does being attuned to our environment look like? In his aptly titled book, *Attunement*, Alberto Pérez-Gómez (2016) reminds us, while reflecting on Greek and Roman design, that the role of architecture "was to mediate between man and nature, the living cosmos, and thereby contribute fundamentally to the maintaining of such balance" (p. 3). Here, the built environment itself acts as a connecting bridge—a dance between humans and nature. The Japanese word for nature, *shizen*, has a similar meaning; being formed from two characters, the first references one's own self, and the second "the cycle of the sun, water, and living thing" (Farrow, 2013, para. 5). The traditional Japanese house is meant to encapsulate this "connection between humanity and nature" through its materials, design, and use of light and shadow (para. 5). Framing the built environment as a connective tissue with the natural world shifts its role from the destroyer of greenspace to something more aligned and co-productive. Just as throwing a stone in a pond creates ripples, over time our surroundings impact our health and wellbeing, as well as our emotions and actions.

Bourdieu (1992) describes this connective socio-material tissue as a *field*—a way, he writes, "to *think relationally*" (p. 96, emphasis in original). Bourdieu's field "is not just that upon which players make their moves but is also the product of these moves" (Mead, 2015, p. 64). Here, the environment is manifested as creation and creator. This spatial transference influences one's way of being; as environments emerge, "they correlatively organize and form our emerging and always developing sense of self" (Johnson, 1999, p. 99). The process is mutually determined and constantly changing, just as two people respond and adapt to one another. In biological

terms, Humberto Maturana and Fransciso Varela (1980) explored this living adaptation through what they called *autopoiesis*, in which living "organisms are adapted to their environments" (p. 6). Philosopher Edward Casey (1993) emphasized how spaces "serve to implace you, to anchor and orient you, finally becoming an integral part of your identity" (p. 23). Through constant interaction and experience, we become part of the space and the space becomes part of us. It is this quality of space, or of an object, which, like a patina, radiates history—the lifeforce felt, for instance, when entering certain rooms or touching porous materials. In these moments, there is a story being told through osmosis.

Thus it seems appropriate to wonder: do people become or act more beautiful when they are surrounded by beauty? Do they act more mechanistically when surrounded by machines?

Un-learning

Seeing through the looking glass requires that we move beyond our habitual and automated view of the world. In *On Becoming Aware*, Depraz et al. (2003) argue that we must suspend our "prejudice that what appears to [us] is truly the state of the world" (p. 25). By suspending one's habitual way of seeing, sensing, and being, a door to unknown possibility is opened. Just as Janet Cardiff associates openness and awareness with seeing opportunity, or as Slovic's (1992) internal dialogue with his surroundings elevates their presence, Depraz et al. (2003) suggest that the act of *suspending* is integral to shifting how, and to what, we give attention. The benefits of such a shift are the elements previously missed or dismissed, which are newly revealed through fresh eyes.

Returning to the art of *wabi-sabi*, viewers are called to leave behind their preconceived notions of aesthetic value to "rediscover the intimate beauty" of what otherwise might be

dismissed as imperfection (Juniper, 2003, p. ix). A kind of unlearning is accompanied by new modes of attention, presence, and form. *Wabi-sabi* embodies the process of life and death in certain forms; it is "both the joy and melancholy" (p. 1) of what it means to be alive. This fusion of contradiction in emotions and aesthetics rests beneath the surface and is available to those who are open to the exploration. In this regard, *wabi-sabi* emerges as an outcome of this process—a deeply felt beauty and appreciation for the world. Rather than praise "permanence, grandeur, symmetry, and perfection," *wabi-sabi* illuminates the opposite: imperfection, asymmetry, and impermanence (p. 2). When entrenched aesthetic values lose their dominance, the material and nonmaterial worlds are transformed into something different. Finding beauty in the unexpected or overlooked feels like a kinder, more attuned way of seeing and experiencing.

Leaving behind established frameworks to see and experience more authentically is not unique to *wabi-sabi*. Many theorists and researchers see such a shift as an essential process within research and data collection. Suspending our preconceived notions and interpretations (Varela, 1999) is essential to the discipline of noticing (Mason, 2002) and to phenomenological inquiry, which highlights the subjective experience over that of the external observer (Gallagher & Zahvi, 2012). This process is intended to "shake patterned perceptions [and] to clear habituated vision" (Margulies, 1989, p. 8). Margulies suggests that through the separation of "cognitive distractions" (p. 8), the reductive process seeks to capture the pure essence and manifest experience of a phenomenon. In practice, phenomenological inquiry demands that researchers disclose and bracket their assumptions and other potential influences that may alter their perception. Such awareness and openness are intended to aid researchers in understanding "the essence" of others' lived experiences (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 51). The extent to which a researcher can be truly freed from their worldview may be minimal; however, by naming one's

biases and shifting the focus to the others' experiential accounts, a less didactic kind of knowledge emerges.

Habit-us

The places and cultures we grow up in, and the experiences that form our worldview, are impossible to pause or change. Even becoming aware of them can be challenging. According to Bourdieu (1990), this primary framework, which he refers to as our *habitus*, is impossible to fully identify and transcend, because it is the social fabric of our existence. Forged of our collective past, the habitus informs our perception, behaviour, and understanding, as well as our unconscious. Over time, history becomes embodied, "internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history" (p. 56). Recent events and experiences are easier to identify as markers of influence, but, once forgotten, they recede into memories, bodies, and our unconscious. Bourdieu comments on how "selective perception" (p. 64) reinforces and confirms one's habitus: "it adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world" (p. 64). While such a self-fulfilling prophecy may seem rigid or deterministic, Bourdieu was in fact attempting to "transcend the dichotomies existing between past, present and future, between mind and body, between the social and the individual" (Yang, 2014). Bringing these qualities into play, rather than opposing them, creates a dynamic living paradigm—if also, perhaps, the unfolding of a predictable future.

Attempting to override one's habitus—to see the *real world*—may not be the right research approach. It seems to me that the goal is not to rid ourselves of our worldview but to foster a flexibility and openness through which new opportunities and ways of seeing can take root. Massey's (2005) third principle of space highlights exactly this: the stories unfinished and

untold. Conceptualizing spaces as "always under construction" (p. 8) keeps them open to different possible futures. Therefore, a space as it currently stands is neither an end nor a conclusion, but a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005, p. 8). Becoming more attuned to our environment and more conscious of how we are looking and feeling will not, most likely, radically transform the future, but it will increase the possible futures available to us. With increased attention to one's surroundings, details previously muted can begin to emerge. The more you listen, the more you hear. Pausing to notice surrounding sounds can ignite a magical transformation from muffled din to orchestra of life—kids playing, cars passing, birds chirping, computers humming, coffee brewing. However, we cannot keep ourselves continually open to all stimuli; our body's automatic processing and background categorizing of information is essential to prevent being overloaded by the "infinite diversity" of the natural world (Boal, 2006, p. 11). Without this automatic system, we would become overwhelmed and immobile, consumed by the "torrential and catastrophic accumulation" of information (p. 11). Processing every detail, all the time, would be exhausting. However, by building a discipline of noticing and awareness into our routines, we may create new habits of openness and attention. Over time, these habits foster a more attuned way of being. The question for researchers in this field thus becomes one of spatial awareness and attunement.

How does a person's level of connection to their surroundings affect their ability to conduct research or to participate in spatial research?

Living Analysis

As the qualities of our emplaced experience—living and responsive, porous and elastic— become increasingly visible and felt in our mind-bodies, we return, full circle, to how they show

up in our words and research. In his discussion of social analysis, Paul Harrison (2000) draws our attention to two qualities of lived experience, as expressed in the work of Marxist theorist Raymond Williams (1921–1988), qualities that many have failed to represent or conceptualize adequately in contemporary social discourse. The first of these is the inability to present lived experience as such, as experience-*ing*—something alive, present, and continual. This failure translates to a deadening or freezing effect:

> The failure identified is the inability of knowledge in social analysis to do anything other than hold onto, produce, and represent, the fixed and the dead; a failure to apprehend the lived present as *an open-ended generative process*; as *practice*. The everyday experience of the lived disturbs categories of thought by way of contingencies, excess, and indefinite answers. (Harrison, 2000, p. 499, emphasis in original)

This deadening or freezing effect also concerns David Abram (1997), who borrows the term "life-world" from Husserl to describe and assign value to the "enigmatic multiplicity and open-endedness" of one's experience (p. 40). Abram suggests that in conceptualizing and theorizing this life-world, we inadvertently freeze and make static something that is "peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake" (p. 40). In addition to the hardening effect that analysis may exert upon experience, Harrison (2000) also mentions the potential disruption to current systems that a more nuanced, emergent conceptualization might beget. Research within organizations, where values such as efficiency and productivity are often the norm, can make advocacy for a less direct research approach challenging.

Speaking of the obsession with efficiency in the education system, Leggo (2013) suggests that this has come at a cost. In our dependence on regulation and order, we miss out on

"wandering and wondering in uncertainty, in mystery, in the volcanic and vorticular heart of the whirling world we hardly know" (p. xiii). However, as I discussed with regard to the use of creative poetic language in academic writing, whimsical research can feel risky and can affect a researcher's professional reputation within their immediate department by disrupting the status quo. Risk can also be felt in the pressure to publish, which may have an impact on career advancement. Another aspect, more personal but less discussed, is the inherent discomfort of occupying an unknown, emergent paradigm, uncertain of its value or validity, or the applicability of the research. Such internal doubts and quandaries make this type of research less desirable. What is important to recognize is that these apparent drawbacks arise out of a long history of dismissive critique and active devaluation by institutions and governing theories/paradigms. Which takes us directly to Raymond Williams's second failure of social analysis: "that which cannot be reduced is deemed to fail the epistemological test of validity" (quoted in Harrison, 2000, p. 500). Truth, validity, and reliability are pillars of scientific research that, while extremely important, can overshadow and undermine other ways of knowing. Lived experiences are often cast aside as subjective in an attempt to dismiss and invalidate personal impression and knowledge. This is especially true in aesthetic, spatial, or sensory experiences in which personal preference may not generate a cohesive pattern. More often than not, "all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, active, 'subjective'" (quoted in Harrison, 2000, p. 500).

Dismissing lived experience as personal and subjective is a way to push aside what are often complex, multifaceted, conflicting, or inexplicable accounts. This is how Deuble & de Dear (2014), who framed participant experiences of an office space as little more than untrustworthy and emotional complaints, managed to avoid listening to those who were actually

interacting with the building. Even Schein (2004), a leader in cultural analysis, advised scholars about the inherent difficulty in unravelling subjective meaning associated with an organization's material culture (p. 27). To dismiss personal experience for its lack of regularity or trustworthiness is completely understandable, especially within a research paradigm of objective truth and order, but it results in the absence of what Harrison (2000) calls the "sensibility and feeling" of experience (p. 502). These elements are "constantly attaching, weaving, and disconnecting; constantly mutating and creating" (p. 502). Including such qualities in research and writing remains an elusive goal for many—myself included. Even with Harrison's insightful theoretical exploration, there is little guidance regarding how these aims may be achieved.

What would a document that expresses "constantly mutating and creating" experiences actually look like? How does it feel to write it or read it? To witness and engage with it? How does it survive on paper and interact with academic discourse?

Dennis Sumara and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (2006) suggest that this indeterminate type of research requires the reader's participation. They remind us that "the activity of reading is never passive; it is a transaction between reader and text" (p. 387)—and here I would add environment, which weaves memories, emotions, experiences, spaces, and histories into the text. This, the authors argue, is an act of writing in itself. Framing reading in this way suggests that "meaning is not found in the reader, text, or author, but rather in the interactive processes between these" (p. 388). In academia, research texts are too often presented as one-way deliveries of fact and truth, from expert to apprentice. Instead, how might texts become, in themselves, potential spaces for collaborative exchange?

Quoting Madeleine Grumet (1988), Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2006) remind us that "'the text is material . . . we pull and tug at it, it winds around us, we are tangled up in it'" (p. 388).

This physical description of our entangled interaction with the text brings it into the socio-material world where it is felt in our bodies—not just the ink smell rising from every page or the smoothness of an e-reader against our hands (though these are important, too) but the accompanying emotional pulses and the imagination's whimsical interpretations of the plot, adding and rewriting their own adventures. Some writing, Sumara and Luce-Kapler suggest, is "more open, unpredictable, and ambiguous than its readerly counterparts" (p. 391), which tend to be defined by closed, rigid structures and leave little room for engagement or reshaping.

Interacting with the written word helps the writing retain its aliveness. Words and meanings warp and wind, shifting and evolving with each year that passes and each new reader that reads or rewrites them. Research that is presented in this way "does not seek closure . . . but rather seeks ever-evolving understanding among its participants" (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2006, p. 391). Just as Janet Cardiff described the talent of participants to notice opportunities to engage with her art, qualitative research that invites collaboration becomes more representative of the dynamic social life it seeks to represent.

Over the course of this exploration, it has become clear that words constitute more than simple communication and do, in fact, act to construct and to shape the atmospheric and sensuous world that we inhabit and research. Words may draw an environment from an unseen, scentless, flat, tasteless, or quiet state and infuse it with life. Such an attunement to material and immaterial forces acts as a "descriptive detour," which may inject academic prose with spatial "qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements" (Stewart, 2011, p. 445).

Chapter IV: Research Framework

Trees, for instance, can seem to speak to us when they are jostled by the wind. Different forms of foliage lend each tree a distinctive voice, and a person who has lived among them will easily distinguish the various dialects of pine trees from the speech of spruce needles or Douglas fir.

(Abram, 1996, p. 130)

Introduction

Abram writes about the language of trees and the subtle ways in which their foliage communicates. The same can be said of organizational spaces; their walls, windows, atmospheres, desks, posters, and paint colours affect our day-to-day habits, emotions, and sense of self. This interactive and co-evolutionary quality is at the heart of my investigation.

What do these spaces say and how do organizations respond? How do we capture the ongoing reciprocal dynamic between an organization and their space?

My first step in investigating these questions was to find an organization that was interested in exploring spatial dynamics and relationships. With space habitually relegated to the background in day-to-day life, my intention was to work with an organization that was renovating or relocating. This moment of change seemed important as a means of drawing the physical office out of its day-to-day normalcy and thereby tapping into the heightened spatial awareness of the staff. However, finding an organization that was undertaking an office move in a timeline parallel to that of my field research was not easy. After a prolonged search, I decided to work with Head & Hands, which was at that time *considering* a move. I was familiar with

Head & Hands, having served on their board of directors three years earlier. My familiarity with the organization and its space was beneficial for this study, as it provided a basis for working together in a trusting relationship. As an academic researcher coming into an organization, it is my responsibility to create "a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). In addition to familiarly with their staff and culture, my past engagement with Head & Hands deepened my relationship with the physical office space, strengthening my ability to empathize with and contextualize the experiences of the staff without being a staff member myself.

I began working with Head & Hands without knowing if the organization would move or not, and thus focused my inquiry on the staff's experience and relationship with the office. Toward the end of these initial conversations, Head & Hands won a bid for a ten-year, rent-free lease of a space in the old Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG) neighbourhood library and thus took the decision to move. Shortly after this, I gave birth to my daughter and took a two-year maternity leave. After a lengthy renovation process, and shortly before I returned to my research, Head & Hands moved into its new premises. Roughly six months after the move, I contacted the organization and resumed the research.

Conducting research at a moment of change and transition afforded me a unique glimpse into the role of space. Everyday spaces tend to fade, almost disappearing, into the background of social life. By conducting research at these moments when the office spaces were uniquely present to the staff and to the organization—first, when the old office building was under scrutiny, and second, when the new building was still fresh—the comparison of the two provided subtle, nuanced insight into the organization's evolving and entangled relationship with its office. When the "familiar is defamiliarized and unsettled," previously unseen or "hidden"

insights tend to emerge (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013, p. 1447). Such "uncanny" moments present researchers and organizations with opportunities, as they enact an "intertwining of affective, spatial and aesthetic approaches" (p. 1447).

Goals

The aims of this research are twofold: while the topic of study has always been to illuminate an understanding of the experiential, and emplaced relationships existing with office space—a goal accomplished largely by remaining open to the intricacies of spatial life in all its conflicting, unremarkable, inexplicable, personal, sensory, emotional, and embodied qualities—a secondary aim, which surfaced during my investigation of research methods and methodology, is the exploration of experience through a spatial lens. This framework positions material space alongside social experience as balanced, co-contributing, partners and brings me back to my initial research questions:

- What happens when we see space as a co-creator in an organization's evolution?
- How do changes in an organization's material environment affect the staff and organization?
- What phenomena are surfaced in the experience of changing space?

To keep the data pertinent to day-to-day experience and to guide their presentation, I have organized my results in overlapping themes rather than a highly structured format. I want the reader to experience the tangled web of nuanced encounters and tacit knowledge as it exists in the day-to-day, criss-crossed and inextricable. Similar to the ephemeral, embodied, and complex encounter with physical space, these paragraphs constitute an active exploration of the socio-

material relationship. Shawn Wilson (2008), in writing about Indigenous research methods, suggests that "the data and analysis are like a circular fishing net. You could try to examine each of the knots in the net to see what holds it together, but it's the strings between the knots that have to work in conjunction in order for the net to function" (p. 120). It is this *between relationship* that holds meaning for the data and analysis—something connected and whole that creates form, rather than disconnected parts. Four broad themes emerged from the data, which I explore in two parts, though in reality they are intertwined:

- *Displacement*: the disruption, transition, and bonding process between the staff and the old space;

- *Imprints*: the memories and ghosts that shape our surroundings;

- *Supportive space*: the emotional and empowering value of health and wellbeing in the new space; and

- *Potential space*: the possibility embedded in spatial change and evolution.

Enacting Space in Research

The more I ponder the complexity of bringing space into research, the more I come back to themes of presence and attention—attunement, as some have called it (see Pérez-Gómez, 2016). If we notice our physical surroundings—giving them more room to breathe and exist with us—will they automatically appear to us more easily and often? Or do they require more than that? If we actively include them, will they become a conscious part of our journey, as Scott Slovic (1992) illustrated with his once-invisible bike ride to the university? Perhaps our role is not to decode their exact impact and affect, but simply to bring them into the discussion and

analysis. Even this requires an ontological shift away from understanding the material world as an external, peripheral object, to seeing it as an entwined, co-productive force. Such a shift yields an entirely new way of seeing. Rather than focusing strictly on an organization as one or more groups of people, the emphasis shifts to its relational field, "where *non*-human forces are equally at play in constituting [the organization's] becomings" (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010, p. 525). This shifts the focus from the organization as a purely human system to an emergent state of becoming through its constant interaction with physical space.

The push toward research that includes a more-than-human focus and awareness draws the environment into discussions on topics previously disconnected from their surroundings. A more-than-human perspective "invites researchers to open research relationships, thinking, and representations to beings, things, and objects previously ignored as active agents" (Dowling et al., 2016b, p. 824). First explored by Abram (1997) in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, to include the more-than-human illuminates the omnipresent participation of our lived spaces. As I have explored, qualities and things (including bodies) that are omnipresent are often forgotten. They pass behind us, above us, and through us—emerging without much thought or notice—while providing support, wisdom, or discomfort from an "indeterminate realm" (p. 40). Abram gives the example of how "the physicist analyzing data is still nourished by the air that she is breathing, by the feel of the chair that supports her and the light flooding in through the window, without her being particularly conscious of these participations" (p. 40). Abram's example illustrates the relationship between the physicist and her environment; neither is separate from the other, but dynamically involved. Abram cautions us not to "forget our active participation" when seeking to describe the life-world (p. 40). Descriptions of space can be overloaded with minuscule details without the author, viewer, or participant being placed in the room too.

The emergent qualities of day-to-day living—feelings, emotions, expressions, actions—represent one of the most difficult aspects to express and account for, both personally and within a research context. It is simultaneously a question of the context within which they are produced and the value, or lack thereof, attributed to what can be fleeting moments. Just as life is born, says Giorgio Agamben, "human nature continually passes into existence" (quoted in Harrison, 2000, p. 501)—a joint creation. Harrison (2000) also notes Deleuze's observation that a stutter is not just affected language, but the "enactments of a world and an individual" (p. 502). The stutter is not independent from the spoken words, but the means by which they are born and delivered to the world. It is not affected language; it is the language. The same can be said about a person's environment. Our feelings and actions within a space are not the product of external spatial qualities but are part of, are woven into, our behaviour—they are enacted with the space. That said, these relations are not always as obvious as the shape and construction of language. The point at which the presence of trees outside my window merges with my thoughts and feelings may be beyond my consciousness. Such subtlety often leads to the exclusion from research of such emergent qualities.

In his exploration, Harrison (2000) introduces two ontological terms in an attempt to capture these indefinable and nuanced experiences. The first is Nigel Thrift's "'almost not quite' ontology; an unfinished or processual ontology" (p. 501), which creates value for things that continually exist in an emergent state. The second is Agamben's ontology of the "whatever," which represents that which "is prior to all levels of classification" and exists in the "emergent and never fully determined nature of being (becoming)" (p. 501). In a similar vein, philosopher Doreen Massey (2005) refers to the "throwntogetherness" of place, a quality that "demands negotiation" and "necessitate[s] invention" (p. 141). This indeterminate and evolving role

contrasts with the "view of place as settled and pre-given" (p. 141). Thus we confront the integral and productive *throwntogether* nature of our bodies and day-to-day lives, fashioned from *whatever* qualities, *almost not quite*. If we are in a constant state of becoming, then it is "from the active, productive, and continual weaving of the multiplicity of bits and pieces that we emerge" (Harrison, 2000, p. 502). A fourth notion, *unsiting*, is offered as an "unconcept" by Beyes and Steyaert (2013) as they explore the aesthetics of the uncanny in organizational inquiry. Borrowing the term from Miwon Kwon (2004), Beyes and Steyaert examine how unsiting may unlock "affects by reorganizing a site's constellation of material and immaterial forces" (p. 1450). The resulting "unsettled" (p. 1450) and unfamiliar spatial experience requires that those experiencing it refamiliarize themselves with their environment—essentially a reattunement. Giving value and attention to these bits and pieces—ephemeral scraps that seemingly do not fit together into fully formed thoughts or actions—shifts the focus of study by elevating the indeterminate while simultaneously eliciting alternative ways of evaluating and presenting results.

In a thought-provoking photographic study of children playing, Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) challenge education researchers to adopt a *relational materialist* approach—even if the word *approach* may seem ill-suited to convey the ontological shift implied in this way of seeing and being. This is a shift from a human or social-centred perspective to "a space in which *non*-human forces are equally at play and work as constitutive factors in children's learning and becoming" (p. 527, emphasis in original). Although similar in theory to the entangled and relational perspectives I have explored, here Hultman and Lenz Taguchi provide an explicit example of the relational materialist approach being applied to empirical data—something I have rarely seen in theoretical papers on this topic. In their first example—a photo depicting a young

girl playing with sand—the authors admit how difficult it was for them to shift their attentions away from the child:

> Although our aim was to specifically look for the force of the material
> environment, our gazes were nevertheless persistently drawn to the individual
> child in each photograph. The children in the images seemed to have a magnetic
> power over our gazes: they stood out from the background and seemed to rise
> above the material environment. The sand and the climbing-frame and all other
> non-human matter visible in the photographs seemed inactive, and in our eyes,
> merely the backdrop for these children's actions and competences. Regardless of
> how theoretically informed we were of poststructural thinking about children as
> contextual and situational, our perceptual style and our habits of seeing still
> seemed to be guided by the same liberal humanistic notions of the child that we so
> long had sought to escape. (p. 525)

What is significant about this experiential account is the researchers' transparency and openness as they share their difficulties in carrying out this method. The challenge, therefore, exists in how we may go about comprehending the material world as the research data. This type of shift is not easy or possible without conscious awareness, attentiveness, and practice.

Having successfully applied their method to the photograph, Hultman and Lenz Taguchi's description shifts away from a girl playing with sand—in which the "girl as the subject of the photograph is separated and detached from the sandbox" (p. 527)—to one in which "both the girl and the sand can be thought of as *performative mutually intra-active agents*" (p. 527, emphasis in original). To put it another way: "the sand and the girl are doing something to each other simultaneously" (p. 530). Each account describes a shift in which the sand's materiality comes

into an active, affective relationship with, and causes macro or micro shifts within, the child. A

relational materialist understanding of the photograph captures the world *in-between* the girl and

the sand:

> The uneven foundation of the sandbox forces the body of the girl to adjust to find
>
> the perfect balance to be able to perform her task. She directs her whole body
>
> around the sand. The force of gravity, the uneven foundation, the bucket and the
>
> quality of the grains of sand are all active forces that intra-act with her body and
>
> mind and that she has to work with and against. She is most obviously active, but
>
> in a relational materialist perspective she cannot be thought upon in terms of a
>
> superior autonomous and intentional humanist subject. Rather, in line with
>
> Deleuze's (1990) thinking, the sand and the girl, as bodies and matter of forces of
>
> different intensities and speed, fold around each other and overlap, in the event of
>
> sand falling, hand opening, body adjusting and balancing, eyes measuring height
>
> and distance and observing the falling movement of the glittering sand into the
>
> red bucket. (p. 530)

In this description, even the play of light and the movement of the eye form part of the

relationship between child and sand. Their movements and qualities are woven together,

producing each other in the ever-shifting moment. This example illustrates what a relational

materialist approach can achieve through a seemly simple shift in focus. We understand how the

girl and sand are momentarily entwined and co-producing the moments. These observations are

gleaned from shifting how the researchers are seeing the photograph:

How do these ontological shifts effect our analysis of interview transcripts? Is it enough for the researcher to apply a relational materialist lens or does this process benefit from active spatial attunement?

Gathering Socio-Material Experiences

Semi-structured interviews may not seem the most obvious method for sensory, experiential spatial research given the numerous studies illustrating the benefits of alternative methods (Thrift, 2000; Warren, 2005; Pink, 2013; Dowling, 2016, 2017; and many others); but I wanted to see if and how a relational materialist approach might effect a shift in what is considered a more traditional research method. Though alternative methods are on the rise, interviews remain a key part of research in the social sciences and the humanities. What might happen to the interview dialogue when physical spaces become part of the conversation?

Twenty years ago, Thrift and Dewsbury (2000) looked to theatre and performance to breathe life into dead geographies. Is it possible—as Alan Latham (2003) suggests—to "imbue traditional research methodologies with a sense of the creative" (p. 2000) through the addition of space? Just as Annie Dillard's (1974) writing became entwined with her experience of place, might a conversational interview draw out heretofore invisible aspects of office space? To express in words how one interacts with and perceives one's environment can become part of a new way of seeing and interacting with that space. As Scott Slovic (1992) demonstrated with his "scheduleless" (p. 172) bike rides, words themselves may act to manifest one's environment.

It was with such intent that I selected the semi-structured interview as my primary research method. Although I cannot say that my research process transforms the interview, my attempt to situate this data using a material lens results in a less traditional or less familiar

presentation. As Antoni Strati (1996) says, the oscillation between social and material "assigns greater complexity to the aesthetic dimension in organizations than transpires from tangible and visible elements, like an ugly building or a fine new factory" (p. 216). With two rounds of interviews in two different locations over a period of three years, the conversations provide a comparative snapshot—fleeting moments—of the organization's multifaceted spatial experience. The somewhat ephemeral narrative that results "is the tangle of their interpretations" (Strati, 1996, p. 216), in which the staff shed light on moments with and within their surroundings. These research methods may not satisfy Thrift (2000) in producing "spaces which flirt and flout, gyre and gimble, twist and shout" (p. 412); however, they do produce an account of an office space that "is no longer passive" (p. 415) but responsive and open to "a manifold of possibilities in time" (p. 415). The space's influence, as a force acting upon the organization, emerges through the staff's thoughts, feelings, and relationshp with the space.

Emphasis is placed on everyday spatial negotiations, while my observations draw from the literature in an "attempt to tie [these] descriptions and actions together" (Crang, 2016, p. 498). This way of working with the interview transcripts represents a "shift from interpreting texts to seeing them as agents in action" in and of themselves (p. 498). In the staff's accounts of their experience, socio-material ties can be understood in "terms such as enactment, performance, and practice," which shift the dialogue around space to an active and interactive relationship (Latham, 2003, p. 2012). By remaining grounded in the words and space of the staff, I have tried to illuminate rather than overshadow their experience.

Interview Process and Participants

The first round of interviews took place in the spring and summer of 2016, at the old Head & Hands office. I interviewed ten staff members over a period of four months. The interviews lasted roughly one-hour to one-and-a-half-hours. To participate, staff members responded privately to an email which I had sent to all staff to introduce the project. During this time, the organization was considering a move, but the decision and details were not yet finalized. The second round of interviews took place over the winter of 2018 and spring of 2019, about six to ten months after the organization had moved into a new building. To locate participants, I emailed approximately ten staff members individually. I interviewed five of them; three more responded to the call, but due to various schedule conflicts were ultimately unable to participate. Between the two rounds, only one person was interviewed twice, but all staff participants worked in both offices.

Within the organization as a whole, I focused my research on permanent staff members—those who were in the office *daily*. The embodied relationship between staff and office is most acute when it is lived on a day-to-day basis. While the organization's board of directors and its clients have their own unique relationships to the office space, I wanted to get at the minutiae of daily interaction, rather than merely monthly (board) or occasional (clients) experiences. Therefore, I did not pursue interviews with board members or youth clients. I admit that limiting the perspective of spatial experience to staff members provides an incomplete view of the organization as a complete entity. This would be problematic from a systems thinking approach, which requires experiences from the entire system (Emery, 1993). However, while it could be valuable to the organization to compare and contrast the spatial experiences of its staff, board members, and clients, ultimately such an approach did not benefit my study, in large part due to the inherently *collaborative* relationship between staff and space—a quality less present for the

board and clients. Insight into the staff's numerous relationships, which evolved within and with

the two spaces, might have been obscured or lost had the research also encompassed

comparisons of their experiences with those of board and clients. While there can be little doubt

that the board members and clients would offer rich perspectives, for this particular study the

depth of the staff's connection to the space offered greater and more particularly interesting

insights into the shifting and morphing relationships as the office changed over time. Keeping

the staff members' dynamic interactions with the office space at the forefront afforded me the

opportunity to focus, and unfocus, my attention on this nuanced and already voluminous data.

For this reason, I limited the study's size and scope in this manner.

Emplaced Research Questions

In an attempt to bring space into my interviews, I conducted all but one in either the old

or the new offices. In part, this was a way to create a spatial dimension that is omnipresent—a

triple-layering of office space as focus, setting, and participant. This makes for an interesting,

multidimensional interview in which both participant and interviewer "continue to be active

participants in their environments, using their whole bodies, all their senses, available props and

the ground under their feet, to narrate, perform, communicate and represent their experiences"

(Pink, 2009, p. 85). Bringing the physical environment into the interview process by using

physical means of engagement transformed our material surroundings into an active participant,

which in turn created a more dynamic relationship between me, the staff, and the space. In

answering questions, staff could glean inspiration from what they saw, felt, or smelled.

Additionally, situating our conversation in the office allowed participants to show me pertinent

material objects or locations within the space. Sarah Pink (2007) explores how practices such as

walking can lead to an "empathic and sensory embodied (emplaced) understanding" between researchers and participants as they actively engage with the environment (p. 250). With each interview, staff chose the location, leading me through the office to their preferred place. Most often, staff members selected their own offices, but not always. One interview was held at the front desk, while another took place in a co-worker's office. As we settled into each location, arranging our chairs, glasses of water, and the recorder, we were actively creating the interview setting. Meanwhile, other events continued to occur around us: phones rang and were answered, toddlers cried, clients came to collect food bags, and staff chatted nearby. I noted some of these occurrences in a journal, though many others existed in a subconscious interplay or entanglement with the interviews.

As I participated in the interviews, I became "embedded in the situation" (De Matteis et al., 2019, p. 9) through my emplaced presence with the staff and in the office. Although this dynamic was not always explicitly acknowledged, my mind-body engaged in relationships with the sounds, smells, textures, light, and people in the office. These details are woven into the transcripts, their meaning bound within them. As Strati (2010) suggests in his aesthetic approach, "the understanding of organizational life is conditional on the researcher's capacity to immerse him/herself empathically in organizational action and interaction" (p. 886). Becoming immersed in the organization and its office spaces provided a socio-material basis from which I could connect emphatically to the staff's relationships and interactions. Arriving at the office ten to fifteen minutes before each interview allowed me to situate myself in the space and observe my surroundings. These experiences helped me shape both the interview questions and how I understood the staff members' responses. Developing this level of awareness requires time and presence, as well as intuition and flexibility (Leavy, 2011).

In addition to the emplaced interview setting, in which our mind-bodies together with the space co-created the conversation, I sought to structure the conversation to deepen awareness of the space. I began with a portrait of the office, wherein I asked staff to try to describe the space to someone who couldn't see it, smell it, hear it, or feel it. This immediately brought the richness of the office into our discussion; giving name to these various qualities helped to form the foundation of descriptive language, which simultaneously drew the walls and textures about us into the discussion. As our conversation continued, I asked the staff member to explore specific moments of feeling (such as the first time they entered the space) as well as their personal relationship and history with the office. In addition to these emotional and embodied qualities, our conversations discerned between aspects of the space that manifested the organization's spirit and those that obscured or impeded it. Speaking directly about the connections between the staff members and their physical environment provided an opportunity for reflection on everyday spatial realities and long-term implications.

Although the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forestalled further meetings with Head & Hands personnel, it would be interesting to learn if any new insights or changes emerged for staff members following the interviews. Did our conversations affect the staff's spatial awareness?

Sample Interview Questions

- How would you describe the H&H office space to someone who couldn't see it, smell it, hear it, or feel it?

- When first you come into work, how do you feel as you walk into the office?

  - What do you first notice as you enter?

- What would you say is the spirit of H&H?

- When you think about that spirit, what aspects of the physical office space contribute to these qualities? Are there any aspects that aren't part of H&H's spirit?

- What qualities of the office stand out when you're stressed or tired?

- What's the biggest distraction in the office?

- Is there a place you go when you're feeling tired or need downtime? What's comforting about it?

- Have you made any changes to your personal space? If so, what? Why?

- What changes have been made to the office in general?

- How would you describe your personal relationship to the office?

- How does this space help and or hinder your work? The organization's work?

- Describe your favourite part of the office? What do you love about it?

- When you think of all the smells and noises, or of touching the surfaces and textures in the office, what do you notice? How do these compare to the old office?

- What does this space mean for H&H? For its future direction?

- Do you miss any aspects of the old space?

- What do you think H&H's space is communicating to people?

- Renovating a building, moving, settling in—it's a big transition for an organization. What was the process like for you and the team?

  o What's been hard?

  o What surprised you?

  o What's been most meaningful?

- What advice would you give to other organizations that are about to undergo the same process?

- Has the new space disrupted any patterns, the way you see or do things?

- Do you think the space is still changing?

- Since moving, have you had any reflections on the role that the space plays in the organization?

- Are there any new processes, services, opportunities, or ways of working that have been initiated since moving?

Addressing Aesthetic Muteness

As I have already discussed, the affective, unconscious, and fleeting nature of our relationship with space can make it challenging to describe in words—making the conversational interview a precarious method. In the office, where a culture of rational objectivity often dominates, accessing less rational parts of our mind-body can be even more difficult. Taylor (2002) suggests that this paradigm can produce an *aesthetic muteness* whereby participants are unable to connect, or unused to connecting, with the emotional, aesthetic, or embodied aspects of their work. As a result, questions intended to elicit emotion are often unconsciously reframed into topics or terms to which the participants are more accustomed, "such as 'thinking' rather than 'feeling'" (p. 828). In fact, Taylor, implies that organization members, when faced with such questions, may not "recall the aesthetic experience or even deny that they had any aesthetic experience because aesthetic muteness has lowered the salience of their aesthetic experience below their threshold of attention" (p. 828). In this scenario, it is possible to imagine future

studies downplaying or dismissing spatial value should participants not adequately convey the nuance of their experience. Just as the physical environment requires noticing to become integrated into our conscious awareness, feelings, emotions, and aesthetic impressions also need to be observed and valued. That is not to say they do not otherwise exist, but if they do not occupy a position of importance they may be muted. It seems significant then that the research process itself—through emplaced methodologies—raise the level of appreciation for aesthetic, emotional, and spatial experiences.

In my situation, in addition to situating the interviews and consciously evoking emotive and sensory descriptive introductions, I purposefully timed this research during a period of spatial change. Prior to the first round of interviews, Head & Hands had been through a lengthy and vigorous process of self-evaluation and dreaming as they created the bid for, what eventually became, their new office. This created a heightened awareness of their current office as conversations and imaginations were used to evaluate and construct potential spaces, which ultimately enriched our conversations. Before the second round of interviews, the organization had been in, and in many ways were still in, an intense spatial transition, which contributed, even more so, to the staff's spatial awareness. In addition, the open and whimsical culture of Head & Hands meant aesthetic conversations about their space were not uncommon. However, as Taylor (2002) explores, when conducting sensory and spatial research, it is important to recognize the level of comfort and familiarity with aesthetic ways-of-being.

Unfolding Worlds Through Words

Pulling large, lightly edited, quotes from my interviews and thereby letting the participants speak for themselves will, I hope, bring life to forgotten threads of lived experience.

How we read these narratives can pull us into a particular place through a "multi-sensorial description" or manifest something neither there nor here—"something that does not yet exist [but that] could actually come to life" (De Matteis et al., 2019, p. 3). DeMatteis et al. emphasize the empathic ability of literary devices, which is essential to convey the more ephemeral subtleties of place. Engaging with more-than-human research requires a shift not only in *how* we write but in *what* we write. Through vivid description, aspects of lived experience that would normally be lost or cut out of the process will remain, either by intentional emphasis or unconscious transmission through the story. Allowing the subtle invisibility of one's relationship with space to show up through words may also cause it to unfold unexpectedly in between the lines (Sinner, 2013).

By "employing incredibly sensitive and nuanced analysis to data collected from interviews," the material world can become a more active part of the focus (Dowling et al., 2016b, p. 824). Just as Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) demonstrated with their example of the girl in the sandbox, how the researcher positions the material surroundings can transform an object, such as sand, from something detached and inert into something connected and active. The space—in this case the office spaces—are a setting and, at the same time, "become characters in these stories' plots" (Yanow, 1998, p. 215). Yanow sees this as a double role in which "organizational spaces are both medium and message" (p. 215).

Although conversational interviews are an established research method, my attempt to foreground co-productive moments *between* the space and the staff lent the data a new energy. These relational moments show up in staff members' emotional, sensory, behavioural, and atmospheric experiences in the space as well as through their physical encounters with and changes to the space itself. Kirsten Van Haeren and Klaske Havik (2016) suggest that this

engagement with space opens a "reservoir of possible perceptions, filled with unique connections and characteristics that simply need to be presented in a new light" (p. 6). The result is a messy overlapping of "connecting pathways" (Dowling et al., 2016b, p. 825) that trace the organization's experience of moving. Spaces once considered "too chaotic, dynamic and in a constant state of flux . . . should not be seen as a hindrance or limit, but rather as a place for new possibilities" (Van Haeren & Havik, 2016, p. 6). In this spirit, this research is meant to be an opening—an exploration of lived spatial experience—rather than a confirmation or a conclusion.

In this presentation, the participants' experiences come through their own words. Through the use of participant testimony, coupled with observations from pertinent literature, the text is intentionally open to the reader's interpretation and collaboration (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2006). As with most qualitative presentations, there are many ways to connect with the staff members' experiences and it was impossible to explore all the various significance in this document. As such, I encourage the reader to find additional knowledge and insight from the research presentation.

Office Images

In addition to my conversations with staff, I have included a few photographs that I took during my visits to the organization's old and new offices. In my original vision of this research project, I had hoped the staff would take photographs of the space to accompany their descriptions and thereby offer an alternative perspective to their verbal one. Unfortunately, this idea did not gain momentum; only two staff members in the old office responded to my request. Part of this failure stems from the overload of demands already placed on staff—but there was

another factor, for which I take responsibility. Rather than place photography at the heart of the inquiry, as a way "to *generate* data rather than [as] images" to be analyzed, I saw the images as another text to be read—albeit a visual one (Warren, 2018, p. 239, emphasis in original). Understanding photographs simply as records of physical objects or settings can be limiting without accompanying insight into "how these objects are experienced or made meaningful" by those in contact with them (Pink, 2013, p. 80).

The power of photographs rests not only in their ability to *show* us things: they may also be used as part of the exploration. Warren (2018) delineates a method she calls *participant-led photo interviewing* in which photographs can be used as part of the interview process to aid participants in expressing emotional or aesthetic experiences that may be challenging to express in words. Had I made photographs a part of my interview process, I believe they would have taken on a more significant place in the project. In asking staff to take photographs *after* our interviews, they became *homework*—a mere add-on to our conversation. Of course, this was not my intention; however, after receiving just two responses to my email request and upon viewing the photographs sent without accompanying discussion, I realized my mistake.

In the end, I took my own photos of the Head & Hands offices as another way to show the space to the reader. Looking at the images, they did not convey the same emotional aspects as I had heard described by the staff. My goal in this research was to understand the affective and co-productive relationship *between* the space and the staff. As Holtham (2001) states, by themselves, photographs "of real offices rarely provide sufficient significant insights into the organizational reality" (p. 1). This is why the stories and experiences surrounding the images remain a significant part of the photographs.

Another element missing from most of my photographs was people, something I realized upon revisiting the photos months later. The spaces in the photographs felt empty and lonely. They were uninhabited and thus represented only half of the story I sought to tell. In his *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows*, John Koenig (n.d.) has coins a word—*kenopsia*—to describe this eeriness, the "forlorn atmosphere of a place that's usually bustling with people but is now abandoned and quiet" (para. 1). Although empty offices have become the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic, my photos lacked the lively and emotive social presence that I was used to feeling when visiting the office. Even where there are people in the frame, De Matteis et al. (2019) observe that photographic images can never fully represent an "affectively charged spatial situation, even in its most faithful variation" (p. 4); they are only part of the story. Photographs can impart excellent information and detail, as well as an immediate view of material space which is instantly converted to the viewer's aesthetic perspective. However, they can also form part of "an ontology that privileges the visible 'realities' of the world" (Crang, 2016, p. 500). Because sight is so widely considered the primary sense in the Western world (Howes & Classen, 2014; Pallasmaa, 2012), we tend to read imagery differently from how we hear words. It is important to recognize the power of imagery in these terms.

Therefore, while the images provide glimpses into the two offices of Head & Hands, they do so from my point of view and my subjectivity. Sarah Pink (2013) reminds us that "the meanings of photographs are contingent and subjective; they depend on who is looking and when they are looking" (p. 75). How will these images appear to those who read this paper? Also of interest: how will the meaning of these images change and evolve for viewers as they read the various staff members' accounts of those spaces? How do the staff members' emotive and sensuous experiences shift the layers of meaning and context within the images? The meaning of

a photograph changes not only depending on who takes it or looks at it; its meaning also evolves over time.

While it would have been preferable for the images to function as extensions of each staff member's "voice" (Warren, 2005, p. 870), they nonetheless bring to the text a visual dimension. Simultaneously, they also represent an insertion of myself into the work. In this sense, the images may provide a means for the reader momentarily to place themselves into my perspective, as though looking through the lens of my camera. In this regard, the photographs may foster an empathetic and embodied reading of the text, the office space, and the relationships at play.

Attuning to the Research

The spatial focus of this project propelled me to immerse myself in two ways. Parallel to the emplaced relationship I was forming with Head & Hands was the less structured, exploratory journey of my own spatial experience. Although some may label this an autoethnographic process—one which "allows for an understanding of personal experience intersecting with a social and cultural context" (Haynes, 2018, p. 17)—I considered it to be more of a spatial attunement (though there are obvious similarities). Rather than focus strictly on Head & Hands' relationship with their office environment and my own emplaced experience with the space, I also experimented with my day-to-day experience of the physical world. Haynes (2018) speaks to the reflexive and intersubjective elements of autoethnography in regard to how researchers position themselves "in relation to self-other, self-culture, [or] self-social context" (p. 18). In this project, I positioned myself in relation to the physical environment.

As I researched and read the philosophies of space and place, I actively brought these concepts into my daily life. This was not a formal or planned component of the research and, as such, I have no comprehensive or consistent journal entries tracking my experience. However, actively drawing space into my lived experience increased my sensitivity and awareness to everyday spatial relationships. *How* these relationships with space affect me is not always clear, but attending to certain aesthetic qualities drew them into the foreground of my experience. Overtime I became more aware of how my environment was present or in certain situation less visible. Walking down the street while actively calling out my material surroundings felt as though I was exercising a spatial muscle. I weave some of these experiences into the final chapter.

The value of embodied knowledge held by researchers and their participants is integral to the research process and decision making. Embodiment comes through the encounter—the ongoing engagement between us and our surroundings. Sarah Pringle (2005) suggests that "we come to know space through our knowledge of our bodies" (p. 143). By becoming sensitive to emotional and relational utterances, information beyond objective aesthetic qualities can be gleaned. We may "feel ourselves stretched, opened, compressed, relaxed, shocked, or moved emotionally by spatial experience" (p. 142). Lucy Lippard (1997) underlines the porosity of our spatial boundaries: "we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity . . . by entering that hybrid, we change it; and in each situation we play a different role" (p. 6).

Strati (2000b) spoke about how his two separate passions (conceptual photography and the sociology of organizations) seemed to, not merge but, inform one-another; overtime, he began to "look at organizational life with the eyes of an artist," which ultimately led to an "aesthetic understanding of organizational life" (p. 54). Tapping into the wealth of knowledge

housed within and travelling through both the researcher's and participant's bodies encourages a nuanced and emotional understanding of lived experience. Often chaotic, sensitive, and challenging to navigate, especially when the researcher is entangled in the mix, the research process can become "an intuitive, messy and sometimes serendipitous task" (Pink, 2009, p. 119). What arises from this emplaced reflexivity, in which the researcher shifts continually between experiencing and analyzing, may not always fit neatly into boxes. In this project the two processes were simultaneously separate and entwined. My reflective practice allowed the themes and interview transcripts time to percolate and surface over time—a dance between my developing spatial awareness and the experience of Head & Hands.

Limitations

While supplementary data collection, which included spatial visioning exercises and participant photography, was originally planned for this project, empirical constraints limited the feasibility of these avenues. Time constraints and demands on the staff's workload interfered with my ability to collect a wide range of experiences. In addition, the organization hired an architect to renovate the new building. As she began conducting her own research, it created duplication of processes. My attempts to collaborate with the architect and her firm yielded little action, as I was never officially brought into the planning process. In the end, I attended one group visioning and planning meeting for the new space. Although I was initially disappointed by this turn of events, it was not catastrophic to the study. After reviewing all the data from the research, the interviews—specifically the second round—provided the richest accounts of the staff's spatial experience. Ultimately, the group discussions, and in some ways the first round of

interviews, became my grounding and context for the staff's emplaced experiences in the new space.

In an attempt to provide some anonymity to the staff, I have not included details on age, race, or position within the organization. Its small size made the exploration of inter-employee dynamics, race and power structures difficult—though I touch on some experiences that were shared openly by staff. Additionally, because the second-round of interviews represented less than half of the organization, I was unable to get a complete picture of larger socio-spatial dynamics. While I understand the importance of context on the experience of physical space, and therefore, in reading this presentation, I was unable to reconcile this conundrum.

Relational Ethics

This research is grounded, first and foremost, in the agency of participants. The research will be conducted *with*, not *on*, volunteers who will, in some regards, become my co-researchers through their participation (Heron & Reason, 2001). The relational orientation, fundamental to the research analysis, is equally important to the interview process. Semi-structured conversations create room for uncharted discussion, as stories and experiences emerge from the process. These emplaced connections between myself, the staff, and the space worked to foster a process of collaboration and sharing. Shawn Wilson's (2008) exploration of Indigenous research in *Research Is Ceremony* illustrates the accountability that is created through relational storytelling as the researcher takes on the role of listener and receiver:

Accountability is built into the relationships that are formed in storytelling within an oral tradition. As a storyteller, I am responsible for who I share information

with, as well as for ensuring that it is shared in an appropriate way, at the right

time and place. In receiving the story, you as an active listener are responsible for

putting the story into relational context that makes sense for you and for listening

with an open heart and open mind. If you choose to pass along the story of my

words, you also take on the responsibilities of the storyteller yourself. The

relationships that we build with an Indigenous research paradigm shape and

redefine the concept. In your joint ownership of this concept, you are also

accountable for how you use it. (pp. 126–127)

In this description, Wilson emphasizes the significant transformative role of the research contract

as the researcher's role shifts from listener to storyteller. For this story, while I was given

permission to use the name of the organization, I have created pseudonyms for the staff who

participated. It is impossible to provide full anonymity for the staff who are quoted in this paper

(due to the size of the organization), and largely unnecessary due to the low-risk content,

however, I tried to alter most identifying features of their testimonies. The ethics embodied in

this relationship exist through empathy, presence, and responsibility. Andy Trull (2016) reminds

us how telling one's "story or someone else's involves a sort of tacit social contract" (p. 80).

While these contracts are made explicit in research ethics protocols, they are more often "found

in the doing of how we speak and how we listen in each unique relational encounter" (Trull,

2016, p. 80).

Chapter V: Research Presentation

> Each story is a travel story—a spatial practice. For this reason, spatial practices concern everyday tactics, are part of them, from the alphabet of spatial indication ("It's to the right," "Take a left"), the beginning of a story the rest of which is written by footsteps, to the daily "news" ("Guess who I met at the bakery?"), television news reports ("Tehran: Khomeini is becoming increasingly isolated. . . ."), legends (Cinderellas living in hovels), and stories that are told (memories and fiction of foreign lands or more or less distant times in the past). These narrated adventures, simultaneously producing geographies of actions and drifting into commonplaces of an order, do not merely constitute a "supplement" to pedestrian enunciations and rhetorics. They are not satisfied with displacing the latter and transposing them into the field of language. In reality, they organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it.
>
> (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 115–116)

Introduction

This *travel* story consists of two parallel narratives, each following the Head & Hands organization's office relocation. One is the turbulent yet remarkable journey of the staff as they dislocated—physically removing themselves and their departments from a rundown yet beloved house—and relocated into a newly renovated, intelligently designed space. The other story follows the transition of Head & Hands through a period of disruption and potential, and as the organization adapted and reformed itself with and within the new space.

I begin by introducing the story's main characters. These descriptions are an amalgam of my own observations, public information about the organization, and sentiments and imagery paraphrased from interviews with the staff.

The Participants

The Organization: Head & Hands

Self-described as down-to-earth and informal, Head & Hands is a grassroots, not-for-profit organization focused on providing a variety of vital resources (medical, legal, and social) to local youth. In addition to these main areas of support, two additional branches of the organization offer care through a young parents' program and a youth drop-in centre. In operation since 1970, the organization employs between ten and fourteen full-time staff members,* supported by volunteers and part-time workers. Their approach is holistic, harm-reductive, non-judgemental, and inclusive. According to its website, Head & Hands' mission is to "empower youth, and to facilitate social change based on the needs of youth" within the community.

Head & Hands is located in the residential neighbourhood Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, commonly referred to as NDG. Situated southwest of downtown Montreal, NDG is a diverse area woven through with multiple socioeconomic strata. Although Head & Hands primarily serves youth, certain outreach initiatives, such as their street work program, broadens the organization's mandate by offering support to those working or living on the street. Striving to be an inclusive environment, Head & Hands works diligently to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalized youth can receive the help they need.

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* For reasons of privacy, all names of staff members have been changed for this paper.

The Old Office

Figure 6. *Old Office Street Front and Front Desk*

The old office occupied the first two floors of a rundown traditional Montreal triplex with

a lower-level storefront on a busy street in the neighbourhood of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce

(N.D.G.). The third floor, accessible via a shared stairway, was rented (by the landlord) to a

family. The entrance, directly off the street, gave into the waiting room: a light-filled space,

somewhat chaotic and overflowing with plants, posters, pamphlets, books, and chairs whose

backs faced the large window facing the street. Beyond the waiting room were a half-dozen

makeshift cubicles with partial walls, constructed from donated lumber and old window frames

and hand-painted a deep orange and burgundy. Curtains of different fabrics hung from some of

the open windows. Opposite the cubicles were three closed offices, also perforated by old

window frames opening up to rest of the office. An open corridor ran down the middle, between

cubicles and office, leading away from the natural light toward a small, dingy bathroom and a

large, windowless room filled with mismatched old couches and chairs. Beyond the couches was

an exam table and a doctor's stool, while medical tools hung from a blue wall. A ceiling track with a light-blue curtain accorded a degree of privacy.

The second floor, originally built as an apartment, housed offices and an exam room in what were once bedrooms. A double living room housed a legal office and health services; broken windowpanes in the glass door separating these offices afforded more of a conceptual separation than an acoustic one. The kitchen was functional, though dirty—a tragedy of the commons—and was used primarily by staff to warm lunches.

Many of the staff considered the office space a second home. Its atmosphere was frequently described as homey and warm, and at least one staff member admitted to occasionally sleeping there after working too late. Haphazardly cobbled together, the office was an agglomeration of patchwork fixes, paint donations, and staff turnover—unique and endearing—littered to overflowing with boxes, meeting notes, filing cabinets, and years' worth of handmade posters and decorations. Brightly painted walls and buckets of condoms distracted from the crumbling floors and disintegrating sofas in the waiting room. The linoleum floor tiles, peeling or missing, were etched with a patina of dirt and decay.

As part of its whimsical aesthetic, the office was intended to be unpretentious, accessible, and welcoming to youth, especially those marginalized in our society—a space where they could find the services and support they needed without judgement or bureaucracy. This was not a sterile, faceless medical clinic, but somewhere youth could go and be comfortable while speaking with somebody who cared about them and prioritized their needs. Conversations about a new space were often fraught with fear about alienating the clients and spending money on nonessential services.

The New Office
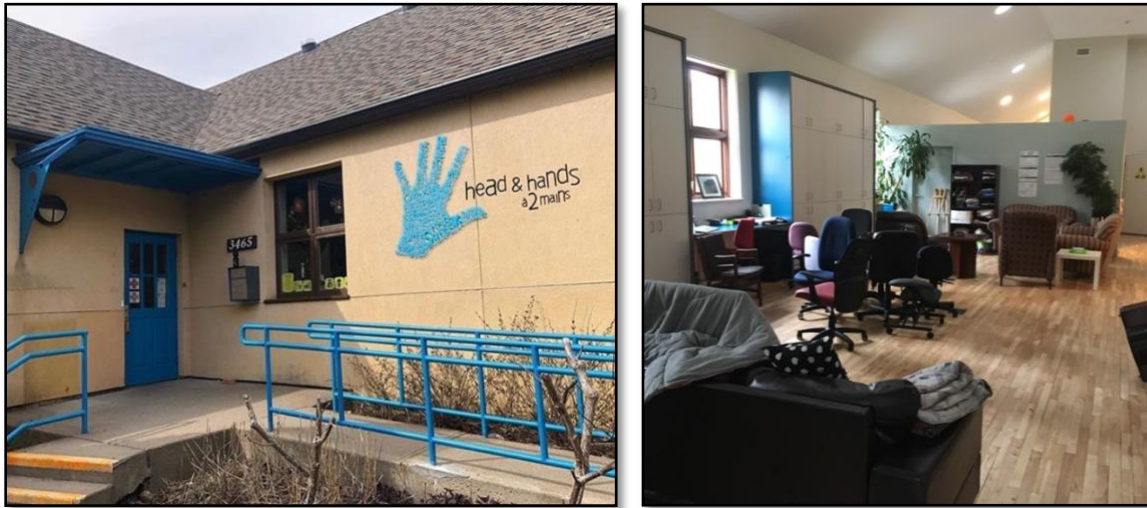
Figure 7. *New Office Entry and Meeting Room*

Echo, Echo, Echo. The new office *feels* and *sounds* new. It is shiny, clean, and bright, with a smell of fresh paint. Its layout, converted from an old church that was later a library, allows words whispered at one end of the building to be heard at the other. The new office sits in a small, green park on a tree-lined residential street about a block from the busier main street it used to be on. It is owned by the city and was donated to the organization for a 10-year period. The church spire and sloped roof still preside over the building.

The entire office sits on a single floor spread over two wings. The entrance, accessible by wheelchair (a quality lacking in the old building), leads into a large waiting room, which sits in the centre of the building. Plastic chairs and an old wooden church pew line the neutral walls, which are decorated in framed posters from the old office. The reception desk is painted with black chalkboard paint—it is covered with drawings depicting a diverse group of faces. Sunlight beams through a large window, where plants hang in baskets and various brochures line the sill.

To the right of the reception area, past the wall and through a wooden gate, are staff offices and a small kitchen, which look out onto a large, open space for meetings and volunteer work. This area is not visible from the front door as you first enter the building. Beams of light enter the space through circular light tubes in the ceiling—an ingenious design strategy to increase natural light. For the most part, the walls—freshly painted in neutral blues and greys—remain unadorned. Two banks of large, white, almost floor-to-ceiling storage cabinets line the far wall, separated by a bright window with a built-in desk below it. Miscellaneous tables, mix-and-match chairs, and textured couches sit about the open space—a contrast to the flatness of the new walls, flooring, and institutional fixtures. A pile of boxes, unpacked and leftover from the move, awaits a permanent location. The vastness of the space makes it feel empty.

To the left of the reception is the childcare centre for the Young Parents Program (YPP). The back wall is painted, floor to ceiling, in black chalkboard paint and is covered in children's drawings. Colourful desks, shelves, and toys fill the room with a playful energy, while the sounds of kids playing interweave with the voices of staff chatting at the front desk. Just past the YPP room are the health services office and exam room. It would be easy to miss the large kitchen and workshop—used by the YPP—tucked in directly behind the reception area. This is a large space with multiple worktables, shelves, and stoves. From here, the smells from the instructional cooking classes waft through the building. Sometimes they bake cookies.

Time

Time was an important factor in this project, both in terms of alignment and process. The timing of the research overlapped with the organization's own investigation of office space, the two enquiries together providing a heightened awareness of spatial dynamics. Being involved in

a collaborative design practice with the architect, together with the physical move itself, afforded the Head & Hands staff with a greater knowledge of office design against which their lived experience in the new space could be compared. The timing of my maternity leave which, serendipitously, happened in parallel to the organization's move, allowed for interviews in both spaces.

The period of leave spent away from the project, as well as the time I spent immersing myself in the literature and the first round of interview transcripts, led me to an intuitive and embodied connection to the data. It took me a long time to see the meaning in these relational, aesthetic experiences, to feel comfortable exploring and presenting this story—the kind of story that is often dismissed as too subjective or cut altogether. My visits to the office spaces, combined with my personal exploration and experimentation with the theory, created for me a nuanced and empathic understanding of the staff members' experiences. Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2006) articulate how "research emerges from day-to-day lived practices" such that "the lines between 'research' and 'researcher' become blurred" (p. 391). The more I became immersed in the research, the more fluid and immersive my research practice became. Similarly, Linstead & Höpfl (2000) speak to the "integrity and coincidence of self-identity and expressive form," which the researcher creates through the merging of "text and experience" (p. 3). They suggest that this is a form of "reconciliation between theory and practice" (p. 3) in which the researcher's embodied process exists on the page. I am woven into the story as a character (the interviewer or the narrator); at once, the story is a reflection of the staff's experiences as well as my lived experience of spatial theory.

Part I: Group Displacement

Moving Space(s)

Moving as an emotional experience—the sorting, the packing, the decision making, the unpacking—is rarely spoken about in research on office transitions. Management literature on office moves has tended to describe employees as objects being "relocated" to new spaces (Cairns, 2002; Gerdenitsch et al., 2017). However, the lived experience of moving can be stressful, disruptive, emotional, and physically challenging. The logistics of organizing and packing while maintaining the standard services and productivity is difficult. One detail that often accompanies a move is the relentless stream of micro-decision making (see Schwartz, 2004) that occurs as documents and objects are assessed and categorized. Our confrontation with the material world is accentuated during a move, personal or professional, as every item requires some level of attention. *Which box do these papers go in? Will I need them before we move? Should I pack, scan, shred, or recycle these documents?* As the office is disassembled, chaos and mess increase. While a certain amount of mess has been linked to creativity and innovation (Vohs et al., 2013), the dismantling of an environment can be chaotic and challenging. This combination of uncertainty and disorder creates an environment brimming with heightened emotion and fatigue—accentuated in turn by individuals' different approaches in navigating unfamiliar terrain. For Head & Hands, maintaining relationships with clients and other staff members added an additional challenge.

When I spoke with staff members about the moving process, it was consistently described as long and hard, but also meaningful. The coordination and time required to sift, sort, and scan

decades' worth of documents and memorabilia made individuals involved in the process dependent upon one another for help. Closing services to clients in need was an additional, and emotional, burden for the staff. In Amara's account, the loss of services to clients weighed heavily on her and the organization during what was already an exhausting time. Her experience illustrates the organizational and interpersonal challenges of negotiating varying levels of motivation, commitment, and preparedness:

I would say what was the hardest for me was getting everyone prepared and realizing that the big move was going to happen. Yeah—and that it would in some way impact our clients because they wouldn't have access to us for at least six weeks. Because for the move itself, we closed for a month, but it also overlapped with the holidays.

So, in fact, it was six weeks. That was hard. It was really hard and clients didn't stop having crises. You know, so even though we weren't physically open, we still had client interaction and the holidays is a tough period for people who are marginalized. So yeah. Yeah. That was—that was tough. And just getting everyone on board. Like some people were not packing or shredding or doing things and then they were like hustling last minute. When other people were very methodical and planned out, so—and also, like my physical space on Sherbrooke then was filled with boxes for weeks—stuff everywhere. Yeah, like it wasn't the most welcoming space while we're preparing to leave, you know, so yeah. (Amara)

With all staff members contributing in different ways, times, and capacities, the office was constantly filled with diverse and sometimes competing energies. While some people packed

systematically over time, others rushed at the last minute. Amara describes the disarray in her office as unwelcoming. Piles of boxes and papers left to be sorted became part of her temporary physical landscape as she continued to work in the weeks before the move. The chaos of a space in the weeks before a move can be confusing. All the familiar cues—posters on the wall, tools accessible in drawers or on desks—are no longer there. The spatial disorder creates a disruption in our mind-body's automatic process, which we rely on to function absent of excess contemplation. A familiar place is "habitually sensed and manoeuvred through and around, becoming 'sedimented' in a habituated body" (Degnen, 2015, p. 1647). Similarly, in *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder (1990) suggests that we are not aware, nor should we necessarily be, of our bodies in everyday experiences. The body, says Leder, has a "tendency toward self-concealment" (p. 69) and thus is seen as freeing us from its confines. While meditative processes to deepen awareness of our surroundings can bring elements to the surface in a controlled and pleasant way, more sudden interferences in the environment force the background to the foreground momentarily, ousting our tacit knowledge. In regard to people, Leder speaks of how the body reveals itself when its typical function is disrupted, such as by sickness or injury. Disorder or pain heightens and diverts attention to our once absent physical form. The disarray of the office thrusts the environment into the staff's day-to-day reality, creating a heightened experience. Some chose to avoid the feeling by not packing, while others attempted to regain control and stability.

Oscar spoke of his frustration with the chaos and a lack of leadership during the move. From his perspective, the physical and emotional work required of the staff in moving the organization exceeded what was reasonable:

I don't feel like anybody liked the process of moving. Like let's be clear about

that. People injured themselves! . . . You know, it's the kind of thing where we were like, "we need all hands on deck," but everyone was very passive and just being like, "I guess I gotta be here, but I don't know what I got to do." And I feel like I would have paid people. I didn't need to be there. It was a lack of leadership. And like fine, you know, this is something that happens a lot at Head & Hands. Like counting on everybody—scraping energy from individuals and being like, "if we all put energy into this, it is gonna work." But I'm like, "no!" We need leadership and structure, you know, to make things happen. (Oscar)

Oscar's experience radiates with frustration and confusion. The disruption and chaos of the space became mirrored in the disorganized structure of the group. Cora's account also references the chaos and difficulty of the move, but she frames it as a collective problem—one that required empathy and compassion from fellow staff members:

A lot of the people who have programs that are very hands-on don't always have the time to do all their filing. It's very hard for them to finally be like, "we have to move so I can't just like take all of this, like these things, with me," and so it meant having to ask for help sometimes or having to think about the common space that we had and ask, "okay, well, who's gonna be in charge of the common space?" And moving out of that common space, "who's going to want that task and who's going to want to clean out the things that need cleaning out?" And then having to go up to one another and ask, "hey, do you have any time to help me shred things? Hey do you have any time to help me file things?" And at other times, just saying, "hey, I'm actually a mess right now and I have to be super honest."

Just having to sit there and not judge people, and be like, "okay, I don't do

this program. So, I don't know what it's like to have all these files and I really

cannot judge this person for having their life and this many files and being

afraid." So, it's really an intimate process of being in each other's business

because we have to. Yeah, so a lot of things came up with that—helping people

and then also just being like, "who's going to handle these logistics? Who's going

to like, handle the truck? Who's gonna handle the movers? And who's going to

make sure that all these things are in place?" And just kind of trusting each other

to do that. (Cora)

Cora frames this process as a collective problem rather than one of leadership. For her

department, which stored most of its documents online, packing was not especially difficult, but

she observed and spoke about the link between certain departments' day-to-day functions and

their ability to sort and pack. The act of helping one another with shredding or packing

documents is an intimate one, with the documents—our work history and record—acting as an

extension of our private selves. The physical task of sorting old papers can also become an

embodied trigger of memories. Whether as momentary flashes or lingering emotions, the

recollection of past events surfacing vis-à-vis a stack of documents or an object can be

pleasurable, painful, tedious, joyful, or all of the above. Dylan Trigg (2012b) reminds us that

memories are not "confined to our heads" but in fact also exist in "*things* in the world" that serve

to "activate our brains" (p. 47). As a staff member packs material objects, these "things act upon

the body" (p. 48) through a process of remembering. Understanding this entwined and affective

aspect of the office space as acting upon the staff as they act upon it—dismantling, sorting, and

packing it in cardboard boxes—immediately intensifies and personalizes it. Cora's experience of

the move, serving in a helping role, seemed to allow her the ability to recognize and respond to the ebb and flow of others' experiences and needs. Asked what advice she would give to another organization, Cora's response describes the feelings and intimacy associated with the moving of personal objects—details that require tenderness and empathy:

> I'd make sure that every single person is being supported and held, because it's really easy to fall through the cracks and be like, "oh, I just need to move my things or something." But you forget that a lot of other people might be feeling very overwhelmed, and that it's a whole team that has to move, and that it becomes a very personal process because all your things are being added to other people's things. It's hard to explain, but it's a very personal thing to have all of your things being moved to another place and essentially leaving memories behind, so it's just something that is inevitably hard and just has a lot of feelings and emotions attached to it. So, it's not going to be this amazing professional thing. You're going to have to try to be professional while having a lot of feelings and just try to imagine holding everybody. Because it can be a very intense experience. (Cora)

Cora comments on the challenge of having your "things" taken and piled with "other people's things." It is difficult for her to find the words to express these nuanced emotions—how she feels about seeing her personal papers and objects in moving boxes. This challenge to describe socio-material relationships is what Taylor (2002) calls *aesthetic muteness*, and it is one of the reasons why researching spatial relationships can be difficult: people are often not used to speaking emotionally and descriptively about physical or aesthetic relationships. Cora also mentions how

she is "leaving memories behind." She describes these memories as though they are physical objects that will remain behind in the old building.

Cora's portrayal of moving is personal and emotional. Tamira's account also reveals the heavy burden moving can place upon staff, but also certain contradictory elements inherent in any socio-material relationship:

The packing process was my nightmare. I vividly remember. It was like 10 p.m. Like the week before we moved. And I was throwing out old documents from like bins and bins and bins and bins of fundraising shit and I just started crying. So hard. When I'm overtired, I cry, and I was so tired. I started sobbing uncontrollably.

But I really like organizing and I like throwing things out. So that part of it was nice, because I was like throw this out. Throw this out. Throw this out. Scan this. Downsizing is super fun for me. (Tamira)

Despite Tamira's love of organizing and downsizing, the stress of physically moving and making these micro-decisions under pressure became too much for her. However, despite these challenging moments, there were also meaningful elements in the process. Tamira shared her experience of sorting through the organization's old historical documents:

Going through all the old documents was really special. . . . And it's really an honour. I feel honoured to be part of this process and to witness the organization go through this huge transition into this like really nice, sustainable space and sense of security. . . . We went through all these old documents and we found some documents about the fire in the old, old, old, building in—whenever—the nineties or eighties. But we found a bunch of old documents about why Head &

Hands had to move—we had a fire! And we found photos from the aftermath of

the fire, that kind of stuff. And it just felt like really, really important and

meaningful to me because it like brought up those legacy feelings and like the

continuing of the work and, you know, people come in and out of this

organization really quickly. People last . . . some people are like Alice and they're

here forever and some people are like one year in and out. . . . So it's like often

you're like, we're in and out, in and out. We're just flashes in the pan of this

organization, but then being able to revisit that in the middle of this transition was

like, oh no, I'm actually part of like a lineage rather than just like in another

phase. It felt like building on that continuity and being like, so many people have

invested so much love and care and energy into this space, and it's so like

incredible that we get to be part of that too. (Tamira)

In her description, Tamira describes uncovering historical documents—organizational memory—

that reveal the cause of the organization's last move more than three decades ago: a fire. The

merging of past, present, memory, and place created a meaningful moment and context for

Tamira, who became, in a sense, timeless. So often, we are ignorant of the longer narratives of

the places in which we live and work: there are whole stories that are never recorded or told. As

Tamira's work connected her with those who came before her, her employment no longer felt

isolated but part of something larger. Such a significant moment cannot be designed or planned,

but occurred spontaneously through a deepening of Tamira's relationship with the physical

space, the organization, and its history. The experience also shifted her sense of the move itself,

from logistical and burdensome to significant and historic. Trigg 2012b) speaks of the unique

fusion of time, place, and event during moments of profound change:

Indeed, precisely through their strangeness, places become memorable by

disturbing patterns of regularity and habit. In doing so, a given narrative is broken

while another one begins. Such moments tend to impart significance into our

lives, even if that significance is realized only belatedly. To this extent, places

become the stage setting for profound events in the life of an individual. In turn,

the places where those events occurred form a union with the very environment,

whether those events are strange, pleasurable, or traumatic. (p. 9)

As the staff uprooted their patterns and disassembled the space, the old office took on a certain

significance through its newfound strangeness. By disrupting the staff members' usual ways of

being in the space, the moving process provided an opportunity for reflection and reconnection

to the space and the organization. Cora, for example, saw her participation in the move as an

important moment in her commitment to the organization: "for me, having gone from this

building to the next was very much me being like, 'oh, wow, I'm moving forward with this

organization.'"

New Ways of Working

The moving process became a different way of working together as a staff and a team.

The absence of the organization's typical demands and focus provided opportunities for new

ways to interact, to see one another. Amara's account illustrates some of the bonding that took

place:

We got to bond in a different way. . . . some of us got really sort of united in

preparing to move, and some people really like *invest* in making the space as user-

friendly as possible and working really, really late at night to make things happen,

you know. So it was, it was kind of neat to see who really dug in and contributed.

It was really nice. (Amara)

Similarly, when asked about the most meaningful part of the move, Cora framed the difficulty of moving, and the hard work involved, as a meaningful accomplishment:

Just doing it all together and going through a move together with people is, as

people like, always say, like moves are really hard and doing it as a whole

building was very much like us working together to try to make those pieces

come together. So, it was really meaningful for us when it all started to come

together. And all moving to the same place is definitely like a bonding

experience. (Cora)

For the staff, the collective, embodied experience of interacting with and finally moving the contents of their office created a new way of being with one another and with the space. Degnan (2015) reminds us how place attachment "is forged and experienced in [a] dynamic interaction" that is also "collective, relational and embodied" (p. 1646). While the act of moving and leaving a building may not conjure traditional notions of place attachment, interaction with a building soaked in history and memory, and the material objects within it, can be powerful.

Not all staff felt such an emotional bond with the space or with each other. Oscar, who felt that too much time was dedicated to the move, commented: "Damn, like we're really taking a month for this? I honestly didn't think our conditions would upgrade that much out of this." For Oscar, the disorderly process of moving overshadowed any value a new space promised. Amara spoke of her frustration with staff who were not as committed to the process. From her perspective, they were not "invested" in the new building. As a staff member who was part of the design committee, she took this disinterest personally:

You know, they complained a lot about the state of affairs with our old building, but weren't doing anything to move things along and sometimes, on a personal level, it was hurtful. Sometimes people would be like, "Oh, well, that wasn't well thought out," after we had brought it to them, where they would have had a chance to give their input. And now they weren't happy with it. Well, no— actually, it was super well thought-out, you know. It couldn't have been more thought-out than it was. Like, it was so specific. Yeah, so that was a bit hurtful at times. (Amara)

The staff were not united in their approach to the move or in their investment in the new space. Simultaneously, each staff member experienced their own unique, personal relationship with the office. Understanding all of these different interactions occurring within the space as active contributors to the space frames staff and space not as independent of one another but as co-constitutive. Just as Massey (2005) suggests, the space is a "product of interrelations" that is "always under construction" (p. 8). With each coexisting relationship, different possibilities are formed. Thus, as Van Haeren & Havik (2016) express it, a space "consists of multiple identities, experienced differently by different people" (p. 7). For Head & Hands, the moving process existed as a "weaving together of ongoing stories, geometries, and events," rather than any singular organizational experience (p. 7). It would be easier to speak about staff members who forged emotional connections with the space and define the move through their experiences; but for those who remained at a distance from the space, perhaps feeling too overwhelmed by or indifferent to their circumstances, their relationship with the space, or lack of such a relationship, also constitutes part of the experience.

Emplaced Memories and Spatial Imprints

The Presence of Buildings Past

While the old office contained many reverberating echoes of the organization's past iterations, its domestic history also had an interesting impact on the staff and organizational culture. The building, like many in the neighbourhood, was built as a traditional ground-level storefront with two upper storeys for residential apartments. Head & Hands occupied the storefront and the second-floor apartment. Every staff member I spoke with commented on the office's homeyness—a defining quality of the organization. Speaking at the old office, Jenna describes how her apartment-style office contributed to the clients' comfort:

> So, upstairs has a really nice, chill, calm vibe that I like. I love my actual office, itself. I find it very comfortable. I guess I've decorated it in a way that reflects me or things that I like. I've got my Bruce Springsteen poster on the wall. [laughs] I get so many comments about my office from clients and patients really liking it. It's always nice to get that external validation—hearing people say "I like your space, I feel comfortable here. It feels like an old apartment." It *is* an old apartment! And then, yeah, you can just watch how they kinda relax in it and they're more likely to share the important information about their lives that you need to know about to take care of their health, you know? (Jenna)

I asked Jenna how her office makes her clients feel comfortable. She continues:

> I think it's the homey feel. I think it's the old-apartment feel. I think it's the creaky old wooden floors and there's just some character. Especially upstairs. My office is contained, it's got closed doors and walls. . . . And I think that helps clients feel kind of *held* a little bit. It's comfortable, it's not austere, it's

colourful—the walls are yellow and turquoise and burgundy and stuff. And you know, it was my predecessor who painted the office, but I just kept them. It works. Yeah, and to see the artwork up, and the pamphlets, and the things I put around—I mean, sometimes it's kinda messy. Right now, it's messy. I need to tidy it. Generally, it's a space that I feel really comfortable and at home in, and maybe that also influences the clients coming through. It reflects me, and maybe if they see that I'm really at ease in the space, maybe it helps them to be that way as well. (Jenna)

In her description, Jenna mentions things like creaky wooden floors, colourful walls, and character. It's messy, but it feels like home—to her. In this sense, clients enter into a more personal space. Here the building's construction as a residential apartment shapes the mood and interactions within the upstairs offices. In describing the old Head & Hands office, Louis, who also worked upstairs, attributes the warmth of the Head & Hands office to its homeyness:

First thing I would say is it's a warm environment because it's very homey—like, kind of like, you know, someone who had never been here, I would describe this place as your old-architecture Montreal, but inside looking like a non-profit organization. But it's warm inside because it looks like an apartment. The way it's set up—the configuration is set up in a way that it is very warm from like the colours that are selected [for] the space. And I'd say it looked pretty much warm like an apartment—like a home. . . . It makes you feel very comfortable in the space, you know. For sure, there are a lot of things that need to be changed here. Since it's an old building, and you see some windows missing and cracks and whatever, but I could say it almost looks like my old house when I used to live in the Plateau, for

example. (Louis)

Through these descriptions, we get a sense of how spatial memories—the memories and identity of the space—are manifested. The building's past exists through its material design and construction, but it is also enacted on a daily basis. Elements like creaky wooden floors, old doorknobs, French doors, and inadequate lighting are very tangible contributors to the present. Listening to a co-worker or client walk down the hallway—*creak, creak*—becomes an auditory reference of home. Trigg (2012b) speaks of how our "memories pursue us as we pursue place, both forming an ambiguous zone somewhere in between" (p. 9) For Louis, the memories of his house in the Plateau-Mont-Royal neighbourhood become intermingled with his embodied experience of the office. In this sense, the office is lived both in place and in memory.

Haunted by ~~Im~~material Ghosts

While the staff was packing, Cora mentioned how she felt like she was leaving her memories behind—as though they were part of the building itself—yet they might not be so easy to leave behind. When we move through a space, an embodied process of encounter and adaptation is simultaneously mediated through past experience and interwoven with our identity. Therefore, the ways in which we orient ourselves and the imprint they leave in our memory are, as Trigg has it, "the very facticity of the world existing through the porous retention of our bodies" (2012b, p. 11). Looking at the physical environment as something or somewhere that is retained within us evokes a very tangible and real notion of space as part of us, waiting to be remembered. How memories accompany and influence one's journey into both new and familiar spaces is a topic that seems essential when thinking about an office transition.

During my first round of interviews, one exchange stood out as particularly relevant for exploring spaces of memory. I was speaking with Emma about her relationship with her office space—a tiny, windowless room tucked beside the radiator at the rear of the main floor—when she told me about the death of her colleague, Owen. The two of them had shared the space. Emma's description of the room is fluid with the events that took place within it:

I left all his things the way they were for almost a year—*so*. I felt in a lot of ways comforted, I think. I think some people were weirded out by it and they were like, "you should get rid of stuff," and I was like, "no, it's kind of comforting," just having these things around. So, yeah, it's kind of a loaded question for that reason. I have slowly been taking his things down and trying to make space for somebody new, and his posters that he put up and stuff are still there. And he put up a dreamcatcher. Yeah, so it's also a room that's had a lot of shit go down. I was a street worker in 2013—sorry, 2011—when we lost our funding. It sucked. Rebecca and I had a month to sort of pack up and let our clients know. It was terrible in terms of having that happen to you. Like, "wow, what am I going to do next month?" But mostly because we weren't able to reach clients in time. At any rate, while that was happening, we were having a Save Street Work[1] meeting in the director's office, and it was thundering and lightning and raining out. All of a sudden, we hear all this water rushing in and it flooded the street work office. Like there was this much water on the floor. I've never seen anything like that.

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[1] Street Work is an outreach program that supports youths and drug users working or living on the street. Two staff members ran the program until a funding cut in 2011 temporarily halted its activities.

And previously, there was water damage in the street work office when I started.

So, water was kinda dripping . . . and all the files and street work computer was

water damaged, and nothing was really done about it and so we're just like, well,

we're not going to set up in this office. We're just going to make a new space. So,

there is sort of history of this office being waterlogged. It did get redone when I

came back, but it was storage, so I moved everything out and got myself set up.

(Emma)

In this vivid description, the objects in Emma's office *become* Owen after he is no longer there.

She is comforted by their presence. In a similar overlapping, Emma's memory of her job coming

to an end is forever linked with the physical destruction of her office during the rainstorm. The

precarious nature of her job—which at the time depended on government funding—and the lack

of an uplifting, clean, dry work environment are entwined, the facts compounding each other. In

the following account, Emma continues to describe the effects that her office had upon her

personally and on her work conditions, which were sometimes unsafe situations. Being located

next to the radiator made for a very warm, noisy work environment in a location mostly invisible

to the rest of the office:

It's very loud because the heater is right outside, and the fan. So, I always have to

close the door if I'm in a meeting with a client, which I might not always want to

do, honestly. Like sometimes I won't know someone very well and I'm not sure

where they're at in their mental health, and I've been in situations back there

where it has felt a little bit like you know you're listening and you're sort of

feeling like this doesn't feel great, cause the person is sitting next to the door—

there's no window. It's a bit sketchy, where, like my de-escalation training—I

hope I really let that sink in, if I really needed to leave the room with someone

between me and the door. And I think it's a space where people can sort of forget

about you. Like I've been in the office with a client after we'd closed, but usually

whoever is doing the front desk will knock and be like, "we're going to leave,"

and I would be like, right, "okay we have to wrap up." But we were about 10

minutes after we had closed, and I opened the door and all the lights are off and

we'd been locked in, and it's just not ideal to have that. (Emma)

In this memory, Emma is simply forgotten by others in the building; her office hides her and her

client away from everyone else's attention. Instead of offering protection, the walls become a

hazard. The precarious conditions which Emma continually experienced while working in her

office reinforce the active role the room played in these scenarios. Later in the interview, Emma

returns to Owen's presence in the space:

Actually Owen, who is the other street worker, who passed away—when he came

on, he had this vision and just like drew out a little map of the office and how

we . . . I wanted him to feel comfortable in the space, because I'd been there for

six months and I wanted him to feel like that was his office too. And so, we

moved stuff around and he put up shelves and, honestly, he made the space

functional and livable, and I always just feel so grateful about that because there's

a lot of materials in that office. Like, it's where I put all the different needles and

steri-cups. There's just boxes and boxes of gear back there and condoms galore,

and all that stuff. (Emma)

For Emma, in a way, the office is a manifestation of Owen. His investment in the space through

decoration and reorganization is part of her relationship with him, in the past and in the present.

This happens through her memories of creating the space with him, but also through her relationship with the material objects themselves. Stevenson (2014) suggests that the "development of emplaced knowledge" can become "inseparable from the development of emplaced, often material, memories" (p. 338). How Emma's mind-body interacts with the space—a space that Owen helped shape—is a continuing of their relationship, albeit carried out via the material space. Emma's ghostly connection with her office "requires that the present is understood as composed by the past, and that these, indeed, anticipate future" (Ropo et al., 2013, p. 384). The blurring of time, space, and materiality "means that past, present and future are simultaneously present and thus co-create the momentary experience" (p. 384). These connections through spatial memories also obscure the boundaries between the immaterial. As Nijs and Daems (2012) observe, these moments "come into existence or are enacted and actualized through elements that are neither totally material nor immaterial" (p. 189). The entangled nature of such encounters makes them impossible to separate and quantify by category or time. Emma's experience illustrates how places and people not only leave traces of themselves as memories and imprints, but also become part of a potential and "uncertain" future (p. 189). Because memories are not static—they shift and morph over time—how a space is experienced in the present cannot be "disentangled from these features" (Petani, 2016, p. 16). As Emma's memories evolve, so does her interaction and relationship to the office.

Adapting Spaces

Not all offices are as haunted by the past as Emma's. But as the organization evolves and new staff become part of the space, it is interesting to notice how a relationship with the space

develops. I interviewed Amanda about her space in the old office. She was just settling into a new room following a collective staff decision to rearrange who would occupy which office:

> I definitely feel a lot better about this space, actually, because I inherited the office I came into, and there was a lot of furniture and I couldn't move a lot of things around. Like I started to try, especially, to make a space so that we're not sitting across a desk from one another. So, that was some of the first steps, and then, when time came to switch offices, I was able to take that time to really consider how I wanted things arranged and what would I want to keep or had no choice but to keep. But this led me to a space that I'm happier with. (Amanda)

The office originally given to Amanda had been her predecessor's. New to the organization, she found it difficult to make substantial changes to that space. This was in part because the physical desk, cabinets, and other furniture were too heavy for her to move on her own. The oversized filing cabinets, filled with years of organizational documents, could not be thrown out, leaving very little space for creative rearrangement. Jacqueline Vischer (2008) examines how a truly supportive environment is not only about "receiving support from, but also being able to act on the environment" (p. 237). This underlines the importance of a reciprocal connection with space, with changes to one's own space being an integral part of that relationship. When Amanda moved into a new office, she was able to create a functional space that felt good.

Figure 8. *Window Chats*

The image above (see Figure 8), was one that I took while waiting to speak with Amanda. She came out of her office, which was down the hall to the left, and poked her head through the open part of the window to speak with a colleague. The exchange, which only lasted a minute or so, was framed by the makeshift structure of the office. While Amanda could have opened the office door—visible, in the photograph, to the left of the window—she chose a more informal route of communication. At the time it felt playful and familiar—an act that had been performed dozens of times. It is easy to imagine the staff member on the inside of the office speaking to this head peeking through the window, half-in and half-out of the space. Also visible in the office is the long hallway to the large meeting room, also known as the "cave." While fluorescent lights beam down into the space, the windowless room at the end of the hall exists only as darkness.

Another staff member who experienced the same office reorganization was Katelyn. She, too, found it hard to make changes to her initial workspace—a small desk squeezed in behind

some open cubicles with office thoroughfares on three sides. Her desk was next to a noisy fan, a public bathroom and a large meeting space. She describes it here:

> For the first three years that I was working here, I was in that space and I actually didn't make any changes in that space. I really hated it. Then the fan broke and I was right next to the fan, and the by-product of it breaking, or the consequence, was that it was on all the time, and so my ability to be in that space deteriorated. This was not a good working condition—there's no light, it's right next to the bathrooms clients use—so I used to hear people having all sorts of experiences. And it was right next to the "cave," where people have bigger meetings, which means people often leave garbage or dirty dishes, and it just wasn't a good space. So, for a while, I wasn't working there. I would try to work out in a café or at home. (Katelyn)

Katelyn's account provides a visceral description of her unhealthy workspace. Without walls, the noises of fan and bathroom became part of her space. It was dark. Other uses and users of the space impinged upon her area. There was no privacy. While these qualities are not immediately recognizable as ghostly imprints, they do remain in the space as lingering smells: apple cores and forgotten dishes. In a similar way, the residues of this space were stored in Katelyn's body, contributing to her sense of self as she existed in relationship to the office and her work (Trigg, 2012b). In this situation, Katelyn found it difficult to feel motivated or inspired. She did not make any changes to the space, but instead found somewhere else to work.

In *Places Through the Body*, Heidi Nast and Steve Pile (1998) trace the "intricate webs" of relationships woven between space and bodies, which embed themselves into bodies and onto places (pp. 4–5). Just as buildings are constructed, so too are bodies shaped through their

interactions with other humans and nonhumans. During these spatial experiences, we may be "stretched, opened, compressed, relaxed, shocked, or moved emotionally" (Pringle, 2005, p. 142). The built environment becomes a visceral language, communicated through symbols and forms, which we "ingest" (p. 4) sensorially through our bodies. The word *ingest* is powerful; it leaves a sour residue on my tongue and conjures sensations of indigestion as I speak it. Ultimately, its use implies an intimate connection between ourselves and our space through a consumptive relationship. Food is a substance we consume both for pleasure and for sustenance. *How do we consume spaces? What do they taste like?*

It is hard not to imagine the old Head & Hands space from this sensuous, boundary-crossing perspective. Katelyn, in her description of her desk in the old office, spoke of being situated beside the washroom and forced to listen to "all sorts of experiences." In another other conversation, Amara described the smell of the old office as putrid, like rotting wood. Smell is a quality that literally enters the body; sound does this, too. Tamira spoke of the constant din of fluorescent lights and not being able to hear over the bathroom fan. Other aesthetic qualities may not physically enter the body, but they can still have an effect on it. Amara described the old office as painted in oppressive burgundy, weird green, and pee-yellow. Being surrounded, day after day, by a colour you find oppressive must surely infiltrate one's mind and body.

These qualities and descriptions deepen the reciprocal relationship taking place and transform it into something animated and alive. To speak of one's relationship to physical space as alive may seem strange, but in seeming perhaps overtly descriptive it also feels appropriately invasive and lush. In this way, "the body activates place. But the same is true in reverse: Place activates the body" (Trigg, 2012b, p. 11).

Spatial Engagement

In a study on spatial engagement in long-term care homes, Knight et al. (2010) found that residents who were not able to engage with their environment effectively became disempowered. Those who actively participated in spatial decisions affecting their communal space "reported increased identification with staff and fellow residents in the new home, displayed enhanced citizenship, reported improved wellbeing, and made more use of the communal space" (p. 1393). In essence, those who helped create the space felt themselves a part of it and more connected to others who also used it. Another study by Knight and Haslam (2010) found that "increased managerial control of office space (operationalized in terms of both lack of involvement and lack of autonomy) was associated with reduced employee comfort" (p. 723). Both studies draw a strong connecting line between spatial participation and support. When it was decided that Katelyn would move into the front office with her colleague, everything shifted:

> We spent a day destroying big bulky pieces of furniture, getting rid of filing cabinets, and little unnecessary things, and then we went to Ikea and got really small desks. So, that's what we've done so far. It was like eight hours of changes to the space and we still want to paint and get rid of more things so that we just have like one office with two desks. I really like it. It's physically comfortable— like, it's like the right height, so I'm not in a lot of neck pain all the time. . . . It's been nice, because Tamira is new and she's the other fundraiser, the other half of my department. So, it's been cool because she doesn't have to pick up the phone to buzz me. So, you can literally have the same document open on our computers and just be talking back and forth. . . . So, I feel like that's helping the fundraising team because we will be physically closer. And I'm really happy to be able to

close the door and turn on music, and I get to have a window. I can see the street,

which is amazing! (Katelyn)

Before Katelyn and Tamira moved into their new office (see Figure 9), they spent time

"destroying [the] big bulky pieces of furniture" that were weighing the space down—the same

heavy objects that had prevented Amanda from engaging with the space. Physically demolishing

the oversized desks and other furniture seemed to give Katelyn and Tamira permission to rebuild

a space and office that was supportive for their work and their bodies. The new, appropriately

sized desk—assembled by Katelyn with her own hands—no longer inflicted pain.

Figure 9. *Katelyn and Tamira's Office*

Having a window, which has been found to improve health (Ulrich, 1981), and a door,

provides benefits that are more important than mere office perks. Katelyn and Tamira's space

became supportive on a physical level, a functional level, and a psychological level (Vischer,

2008). Actively engaging in the destruction and recreation of their space created bonds between their physical bodies and the material work space. There is "a wealth of sensory experience that we are aware of" that it is the moments we engage in that become memorable (Taylor, 2002). Similarly to Knight et al.'s (2010) research in long-term care homes, after moving into their newly created space, the staff members "reported feeling healthier and happier" (p. 1408). In addition, the positive effect of proximity for Katelyn and her co-worker to collaborate and function as a team reminds us how quickly space can shift patterns of behaviour to inspire new ways of working.

Reorienting (Challenges), Embodied Encounters

Displacement and Reorientation

Moving into a new space was not simply an adjustment for the organization, but a fundamental rearrangement. Staff members had performed their jobs in the old space for months or years, and their emplaced skill sets—now embodied memories—were coming into contact with a new space within which they would have to perform their jobs. Part II of this exploration will delve more deeply into the adaptive process and impact of moving upon Head & Hands, but first I want to consider the staff's initial encounter with the building and how it manifested in their experience and our conversations. In line with the discussion of immaterial ghosts, above, the staff's experience and perception of the new office was "constructed between places, rather than merely (confined) in them" (Stevenson, 2014, p. 341). This in-between manifestation ultimately formed a collaborative presence between the old space and the new. As I spoke with staff members about the new building, I noticed that the conversation would often turn to the old office. At first, I attempted to keep the conversation on the new building, steering the focus back

to the present. Nijs and Daems (2012) encountered a similar dynamic as they tried, "rather unsuccessfully," to keep their conversations "in the immediacy of the unfolding moment" (p. 189). Soon, I realized the old space *was* the present moment. Through our conversations, staff members were "actualizing realities akin to Proust's emplaced memories" (p. 198). How they encountered and oriented themselves in the new space was being informed by their embodied memories of the old space. The following are some examples of this from the interviews.

When I asked Tamira how the new office helps or hinders her work, her reply immediately recalled the old space: "It helps my work. Because my old office, in the old space, was incredibly depressing and a horrible colour, and had no windows." Tamira's improved experience in the new space was almost entirely based on the negative memory, carried in her body, of the old space. In another question exploring how the new office affected the staff interactions and work processes, the old space surfaces again as a comparison or framing of Tamira's answer:

> There's a good balance between taking space from each other and still being
> social that is enabled by this building. It's not like . . . so, in our old space on the
> first floor, there were no doors except for two offices, and those offices had a wall
> of windows. There was no space. People would be walking by all the time and
> talk to whoever or whatever. And then upstairs, none of them had, well, one
> office could close and be private—no, two—but it was still weird. So, I think that
> overall staff health—not health, but the way we are with each other—is better.
> Also, having staff meetings not in the cave is the most incredible experience.
> Everything feels easier when we're not crammed together in a dark room that
> smells weird. (Tamira)

To demonstrate how the new building enables a balance between taking space and being together, Tamira draws on patterns from the old office. Even months after the move, staff members continued to interact with each other as if cloaked in the essence of the earlier office. These emplaced memories are interwoven with the staff's perceptions of both their behaviour in the new office and the physical office itself. Appraisals of new elements are continually held up against the old and familiar. The new office feels good—not just because it is bright and fresh, but because it is not dark and smelly.

Such comparisons appeared throughout the interviews. In responding to a question about what makes the new office inviting, Cora's response moved between the new space and the old:

> Just the fact that we actually have a place for everything, so it's not going to look like a makeshift place anymore. Where it was like, "oh, we're just going to put this here" because we have to, because we don't have the space. It's a space that has dedicated areas now, so it just feels like our clients know that it's for them.
>
> (Cora)

This fusion of space and time draws a particular attention to the office space that allows staff members to see that space, and their relationship to it, anew. Elements that are new and different from the old space stand out, making the lived experience of the office more conscious and dynamic. This is a theme that I will revisit in the next section.

The continuing presence of the old space was something Cora addressed in the interview. Realizing that the conversation's focus was the new space, she paused to clarify how to answer the questions:

I feel less intimidated. . . . I'm sorry—just a question. How would you like me to answer these questions, because I'm kind of comparing it to our old space, but I don't know if I should answer it based on that or just this building? (Cora)

Later, she mentioned how the memory of the old space shaped her impression of what was important in the new office. Qualities like light, plants, and spaciousness seemed to take on a greater significance and value after having gone without for so long:

We have so many more plants. We moved [everything] around so that whenever we have staff meetings, we actually have room and there's light. I think everybody is definitely very aware of all the things that we didn't have in the old building in this building. We make sure that there's always light and plants, and that we can walk in and not feel too crowded. (Cora)

Reverberating Echoes

Figure 10. *Benny Library. Source: imtl.org*

When Head & Hands moved into its new offices, there were many lingering histories to negotiate in the new space. Initially designed and used as a church, the building retained some of its original religious forms, such as the spire and peaked roof. Following the church's deconsecration, but many years before Head & Hands' occupancy, the building served as the neighbourhood library (see Figure 10). These past lives were present for the organization and its staff, who sought to establish their programs and make the building feel like it was theirs. In one conversation, Amara spoke of the community's well established familiarity with the building:

A lot of people know it and have fond memories about the library where our offices are. Like my department, it's where the children's library used to be. A lot of our clients are from 12 to 25, so when they come here for services, they're sort

of like, "oh, I used to, you know, get books in this section." So, it's kind of cool

in that way. I think people enjoy it. (Amara)

Similarly, Oscar appreciates the familiarity that people have with the building. When giving

workshops at schools in the area, he uses people's memory of the library to introduce Head &

Hands:

But when I'm doing the FEELS project and I'm telling people like, "who

remembers the old Benny Library?" And like half of the classroom raises their

hand and I'm like, that's where *we* are now. Everybody has a clear idea of where

Head & Hands is, you know, and that helps a lot in terms of like visibility. Like

having the kids knowing where we are, right? (Oscar)

On the other hand, Mary mentions some confusion regarding the office's appearance:

When we first opened and I started seeing clients again, I had clients who didn't

think this could be it because it was a church. And, you know, who are so

confused. . . . Sometimes I get an email, "oh, I couldn't find the place," so, you

know, like "I just saw this church." Yeah, that was it. Now, I tell people it used to

be a church, it used to be a library. Now it is us. So, that has gotten easier. Clients

come in and they're like, "wow," you know? But I've had clients also come in

and say "oooooh, your other room was so cozy." (Mary)

The new building, which sits atop a little hill in a park, still has the old façade, the grandeur of a

church. Walking up to it feels very different than approaching the old office's storefront windows

on a busy street. For older clients coming to the new office for the first time, walking across the

grassy, tree-filled park toward what looks like a church is a drastic change from Head & Hands'

former aesthetic. Mary mentioned some of her clients' initial responses to her new office, their

laments at the loss of coziness, a quality that defined every aspect of the old space. Similar to the impact of the church facade, this immediate recalling of the old office draws past into present, momentarily merging the two spaces. The new office is haunted by these overlaid memories and comparisons; it "is inseparable from how [it] 'used to be'" (Nijs & Daems, 2012, p. 189). It is a church, a library, and now an office *all at once*. Interestingly, this lineage is also experienced through sound. The architecture of the church was designed to channel and move sound through its structure to accentuate the voice during services. Cora describes this effect:

> Yeah, it is spacious. It's really roomy. It's like you can definitely hear a lot of the sounds, because there's not a lot of like . . . it's just the way that the building was built, from what I understand, is that it used to be a church and then it was a library. So, that means that the way that the space is set up, it's like so that somebody can hear you from far away. And so, sometimes, it can be a little bit hard for people to kind of not eavesdrop. (Cora)

Mary described how sound moves through the office as transforming the space into "an echo chamber," adding that she could hear the front-desk person from her office on the other side of the building. When I interviewed Tamira at the front desk, I noticed immediately that she was speaking at a level barely above a whisper to avoid being heard by everyone. Oscar also changed his work patterns due to the "distracting" sound: "I often have to work with my door closed, which I feel is like not with the spirit of Head & Hands." The noise level led to micro-adjustments in how the staff members worked and related to one another, with some new behaviours moving away from the organization's culture of openness. Cora speaks to other, more nuanced ways in which the sound affected the office atmosphere:

> The noises are very—it can be good and bad, because, like if you're feeling kind

of down, like you never feel too alone. Mmm, and then just like the, just the

echoes in it feel very like . . . it can be like a really nice feeling, because it's just

like, it's just everybody can really hear each other clearly. Hmm—but it's obvious

that sometimes it can be a little overwhelming, because you don't you feel like

you can do anything discreetly. So sometimes, depending on the mood, it can feel

really nice or very hard to kind of manage, so it depends on the mood. (Cora)

The permeating contact of sound resulted in a comforting connection between the staff, located

in different parts of the building. On days when few people were in the office, the space felt large

and empty; hearing someone at the other end of the building made staff feel less alone. On busier

days, however, this very connection overloaded staff by creating an overwhelming and chaotic

environment. For Mary, the noise directly affects her job. As a counsellor providing support to

youth in need, the atmosphere in her office can influence how her client feels. She takes pride in

providing a safe and supportive space within which she can concentrate and focus on her client.

However, unlike her old room, which was upstairs and separate from the meeting area, the new

space has private offices surrounding the collective spaces. This creates conflicting energies and

needs within the same space:

Sometimes when I'm in here with clients and, you know, it can be very intense,

like my client experience can be very intense. Telling me stories that are you

know hard to tell and then, you know, we hear gales of laughter out there, and you

know, the kitchen is there, right? And, of course, my colleagues are allowed to be

happy. But I've had to, a couple of times, open my door and just say like

"please?" (Mary)

The frustration that Mary feels comes from a lack of privacy. The newly constructed walls are what Barry Blesser (2007) refers to as "acoustically transparent" (p. 21). This means that despite being able to close her office door, "the auditory channel, which supports voice communication" remains open (p. 21). The original acoustic design of the church creates an unsupportive aural experience for a contemporary office. Excessive noise and "reverberating clatter produces stress, anxiety, isolation, and psychological tension" (p. 3) while compromising employees' ability to accomplish their tasks. Exposure to loud noise can increase heart rate, blood pressure, and can interfere with sleep (Sternberg, 2009). Sound, unlike sight, enters into our bodies. It can provide immense connection—bringing our environment to life—but its intimacy can also quickly become an intrusion.

While the building's construction as a church affected the staff internally, it also provided an external presence that was new for the organization. Its meaning and legacy, both as a church and a library, are entwined in a role that was now being passed on to Head & Hands. Tamira explains what the building offers to the organization:

> Longevity—for sure, longevity. We get to be here for a long time and then even
>
> longer, if we want. I think it offers a commanding presence. I think that this is just
>
> so big, you know, and it's just kind of like *plopped* in the middle of a park. And
>
> so, it feels like the park is our backyard. And I think that that makes us seem more
>
> commanding in this neighbourhood. Which, in addition to that and the fact that
>
> this is a historic building, adds reputation. Not reputation—validation. In the city
>
> or in the borough? Validation in the borough and the support of the community
>
> and politicians. (Tamira)

The building offers the organization a more "commanding" voice through which it may speak to the community. In this example, the building is directly connected to how the organization perceives itself. It is like getting a new body. Petani (2016) suggests that organizational memories are key to informing current realities. It is in moments of change where "intentional and powerful histories and organizational remembering of space inform the way in which available possibilities are represented" (p. 17). In this sense, how the organization perceives and reacts to the new building is connected to its past experiences and spaces.

Looking at Head & Hands' move through a lens of ghosts, memories, and imprints emphasizes a time–space relationship. Understanding how spatial memories create present realities, or how past spaces infiltrate current experiences, underlines a rich dimension to spatial transitions. While all of these themes would benefit from further exploration, the aim of this discussion is to surface a multiplicity of experiences in the hope of inspiring further research and consideration of spatial affect in organizations. In that vein, I continue the exploration with the displacement and reorientation of staff as they adjust to the new office.

Encountering Displacement

Settling into the new space surfaced moments of uncertainty and challenge. Oscar found it difficult to create the structures he needed in the new space. After losing elements of his old office setup in the move, he seemed uncertain about how to figure out a new solution:

> I'm really having a hard time rebuilding my FEELS-shelf where my volunteers
>
> can pick up the stuff they need. Because in the old space, there was something
>
> built for this. And now I'm just like, "where am I putting it?" I have to reorganize
>
> it. And I've just gone along the whole last year not having it and preparing the

stuff myself for volunteers, because I was like, it's just going to be easier like

that. But then like, no, it's a lot more work for me and I'm just like, I have to do

this. But then I just I don't know how, yeah, so this disrupts my work. (Oscar)

Losing the physical structures—in this case an accessible shelf—completely disrupted Oscar's

work. Rather than have his volunteers grab the documents and pamphlets they needed on their

own, Oscar had to create packages for them. The physical structure was no longer there to

support this part of his work and he felt incapable of creating a solution. All of a sudden, Oscar

had to address part of his work that heretofore had functioned on autopilot. His tacit,

subconscious way of working had been shaken up.

New spaces can force changes to habitual ways of working that are rarely thought about.

Mary mentioned how the size of the new medical office had affected one of the doctors: "I think

Dr. B. is struggling. He's got [a] very small office there and he has to step out when women

changed, because there's no room for a curtain. Yeah, there's some problems there." Adjusting to

new technologies was also challenging for staff. A new phone system was installed and, all of a

sudden, something that used to be very basic and automatic required thought and learning. For

Mary, this was particularly challenging:

Even our phone—it's different. We've got this fancy phone system and it's a

problem. Nobody really knows how to use it. I've asked people, "please help me

use this." Yeah, and nobody seems to really be able to help me. . . . So, it's tricky

for me. I generally just put people on hold to go and tell whoever it is that the

phone is for them—you know, transferring calls, etc. It's not easy. And also, the

concern that some of us have about clients calling and getting that system and not

hearing a human voice. . . . It just says the extension you want to reach, and we're

not happy about that. Some of us don't like that it doesn't just jump to another

line, you know? (Mary)

Mary speaks about feeling confusion and a lack of agency. This physical object, once so familiar

and comforting, is suddenly transformed into something much less trustworthy. Mary

circumvents the phone's complicated system by getting up and walking across the room to

deliver messages. She also mentions the impact that this technology could have on youth clients,

who may have a harder time reaching a human. Instantly, the phone becomes worrisome for its

impact on warmth and caring—qualities the organization strives to provide.

The feeling of being displaced during the move was evident in my interview with Mary.

She was the first person I interviewed after the move and the only person I was able to interview

twice—once in the old space and again in the new. The following is Mary's response to my

question: When you first come to work, how do you feel in the space and what do you notice?

It's a really good question. It's different. There's a different feeling here, for sure.

Often I feel quite alone and it's probably also the result of staffing—which is

different. We've had a lot of problems with the front-desk staff position and so

often when I come in, I'm the only one here—sometimes for an hour. I don't

answer the phone. Sometimes I do. It's a bit . . . there is sort of a sense of, um, a

bigger responsibility. A bigger building. Well, it's actually not, space-wise. I

think it's a different space. But we had two floors there, you know, and um, I

don't have the beautiful sun pouring in my window that I had there and that view

onto Sherbrooke Street that I really loved. It was a very small space, but it was a

very cozy, comfortable space. This is less so. I mean it's a little bigger, but it's a

lot colder. I tried to cozy it up. The sound is terrible—it carries. I can hear Mia on

the phone at the front desk here. If my door is open, I hear everything. That's

been a huge adjustment. The other space was so quiet. This place is pure echo.

When you come in the morning, it's very echo-y and it doesn't feel very warm.

So yeah, we're trying to figure out how to warm it up because, I'm not the only

one, I think, who feels that way. But it's clean and it's fresh, right? And there's a

lot better storage space. YPP [the Young Parents' Program] is here with us. But

it's very, very noisy. Yeah. It's like an echo chamber and because there's all

wood floors. And we're not really sure what we can do about that. (Mary)

Here is Mary's response to the same question in the old space:

I'm usually the first person here except for Tuesdays, so it's kind of like getting

the place ready for the day. Turn off the alarm. I feel really good. I feel like this

place, this community is really lucky to have this place, and I feel very blessed to

be here. Very privileged to be here, and yeah, I feel good. It's a good feeling. . . . I

love that there's trees that I look out on here. The sun moves across the sky this

way, so there is sun here all day, every day. Even in the winter, it's bright. And

it's like I'm blessed. And I have this sense of aliveness without it being imposing.

I see the birds, the squirrels, the pigeons, come. I have a sense of things

happening out there, without them really being imposed upon me. So yeah, I

really love this space. It's really great. I have lots of personal things that I bring

in. And my whiteboard that I also like. . . . It's great. (Mary)

The difference between the two responses is stark. Mary's comfort and familiarity with the old

office comes through in the confidence with which she describes the space. As she spoke, her

routine and presence emerged in the details. We can visualize her walking into the space and

turning off the alarm, setting up for the day in an environment that supports her. The sun moves across the sky as she attends to her clients and works at her desk. She is not alone here, even though she is the first to arrive.

In contrast, Mary's testimony regarding the new space is less cohesive. When she arrives at work, she is alone in an unfamiliar environment. It feels bigger—a greater responsibility. It is "echo-y" and cold. The question she is seeking to answer gets lost in her meandering thoughts about the space. However, sometimes these nonwords can provide "valuable information" on how she feels (Mackrodt, 2019, p. 7). When participants cannot find the right words to describe their spatial relationships or experiences, "nonverbal expressions or even stammering related to spatial experiences provide a valuable proxy to atmospheric perception" (p. 7).

There is no question that Mary misses some elements of her old office. A period of loss and grieving can occur when a staff member loses such aspects of their space. Mary loved her old office. Her new one is not quite as cozy and it does not have a big window overlooking a treelined street. However, the value in comparing her two accounts is not in determining which space was better, but in understanding the disorientation and adjustment that occurs for staff after a move. Such periods of adjustment are rarely given empathy or attention, but rather are usually dismissed as necessary hurdles to overcome. *Moving is difficult. Buck up.* In a comprehensive look at the experiences of newcomers to organizations, Meryl Reis Louis (1980) outlines three features of the entry experience that could also be applied to an organization in spatial transformation. In a sense, after all, the entire organization becomes a newcomer as its personnel are forced to adjust, to learn how to perform in the new space. Louis's three entry features for "understanding the process of newcomers' coping, or sense making" are change, contrast, and surprise (p. 235). *Change* is the "objective difference" between the past and current settings

(p.235). These changes are publicly noticed, meaning they are visible to everyone. Such changes may be small or large, depending on the situation. The second feature, *contrast*, represents the personal shifts or adaptations that "emerge when individuals experience new settings" (p. 236). The personal basis of this feature emphasizes the individuals' lived experiences and memories, which inform their perspectives and actions. The final feature, *surprise*, deals with a person's preconceived or anticipated notions. These anticipations can be "conscious, tacit, or emergent" and both "overmet or undermet anticipations can produce surprise" (p. 237). Often emotional and affective, these encounters may produce joy or disappointment.

In Mary's experience, the presence of all three features can be identified. As she describes navigating the changes in the office, she reports a high degree of contrast to how she used to work—especially in relation to her experiences with the new phone system and the office noise interfering with her work with clients. Her tacit knowledge, once dependable, no longer supports her as she is forced to learn new ways of working. Meanwhile, she lives with her disappointment at the lack of warmth and coziness in the new office, two qualities that she previously identified as extremely important.

Louis (1980) uses the phrase "reality shock"—a term borrowed from Everett Hughes—to describe the experience of a new "physical and social world" in which one's "senses are simultaneously inundated with many unfamiliar cues" (p. 231). When an organization moves into a new space, there is "no gradual exposure and no real way to confront the situation a little at a time" (p. 231). Everyone is tossed into an unfamiliar situation and must navigate their personal trajectories (excitement, disappointment, or malaise) as well as their organizational tasks and functions. Sometimes the physical space can accentuate, or obscure, this process. Cora spoke of the emotional transference that operates in such an open space:

> If I am feeling something, I have to go outside or close my door. I have to shut
>
> myself off because it's such an open building. And if I'm not trying to have those
>
> emotions or I don't want to stress everybody else out, I have to be careful—
>
> because it is a very, like even just the way that you hear noises . . . like your
>
> energy can come off if you're stomping or even walking loudly. Like you can feel
>
> it in the building. (Cora)

Feeling others' emotions in the space occurs on a regular basis, but even more so during times of change and transition. As the organization adapts to the new space, it is in a state of forming. The anticipations of the staff are continuously "tested against the reality of their new work experiences" (Louis, 1980, p. 232). This spatial formation process has many qualities similar to organizational change models, which focus on different states or levels of change. For example, Bridges (2009) speaks of "leading people through the neutral zone," a region characterized by instability, ambiguity, change, and creativity (p. 39). Similarly, organizational scholars such as Kurt Lewin, Edgar Schein, and Chris Argyris "indicate that unfreezing, moving away, or letting go is a necessary preliminary step in effecting change at individual and group levels" (Louis, 1980, p. 232).

In a longitudinal study on the implementation of an innovative office design, researchers (Meijer et al., 2011) compared staff health and productivity levels with results gathered 6 months and 15 months following a move into a new office. They found that while some health and productivity indicators decreased in the short term, they improved significantly in the long, even beyond the baseline 15 months post-implementation. These findings underline the time required to adjust and to feel settled in a new space. While an initial negative reaction may present itself during and after a move or change in the environment, the long-term effects may be positive

nonetheless. Unfortunately, there are very few longitudinal studies that explore the impact of a new or different space on the future of an organization (but see van Marrewijk, 2009). How do the staffs embodied encounters with their office space alter or evolve the organization over time?

Rather than emphasize a return to the status quo following a transition, the period of change or—and perhaps more importantly—the heightened relationship to one's surroundings presents an opportunity for new ways of working within and relating to the space. In the next section, I explore various dimensions and qualities of Head & Hands' dynamic relationship with their new office and how these shifts become embedded into the daily routines and outlook of the staff.

Research Presentation Part II: Shape Shifting

The second part of this study focuses on the opportunity or potential embedded in spatial shifts and transformations. Beginning with the benefits of a healthy, supportive space on staff members' wellbeing and their ability to perform their jobs, I then explore how feelings of pride and ownership can lead to organizational dreaming and future possibility. When an organization is supported by its culture and processes, and by its space, a state of change and transition can reveal previously invisible opportunities. With increased spatial knowledge derived through the process of changing spaces, the background environment is thrust forward into the organization's daily reality. As I discussed earlier, this can be a disorienting and emotional experience. However, such disorientation can also lead to experimentation—spatial and organizational. As such, I will explore some of the micro-shifts that took place as Head & Hands settled into its new office. These shifts represent the co-productive, entwined nature of people's relationships to space and provide a basis for understanding larger organizational shifts that may emerge in the years to come.

I have loosely created some different themes to represent these transformations. However, just as one's experience is not felt or perceived according to isolated categories, this written exploration shifts between, and among, these themes.

Illuminating Wellbeing

When Head & Hands moved from an old, dark, rundown building into their well-lit, spacious new premises, the impact on the organization's health and wellbeing was substantial. This new environment shifted how the staff *felt* in the space. The spaciousness and lightness of

the new office seemed to transfer itself into the staff members' very bodies. In addition to the new space's architectural features, its energetic, emotional, symbolic, and sensory qualities all seemed to come together into a healthy atmosphere. Working in a space that is bright and clean, spacious and functional, affected the relationship of the staff to their work and their building. Asked about how the new building helped or hindered her work, Tamira drew a connection between the new space, her mental health, and the organization's health:

Tamira: [The new space] helps my work. Because my old office in the old space was incredibly depressing and a horrible colour, and had no windows. So, it helped my work.

Karen: So, you feel better?

Tamira: Yeah, 100 percent. Our office is white, which I like. I need the most open, the most-bright space, to feel focused. Yeah, I think that because there's so much space, empty space, and the ceilings are so high, I feel open and relaxed in the space. I think the natural light is really vital to my health, my mental health, and my workflow. So, having one of the offices, maybe the only one, with one of the solitudes [ceiling light wells] in it—which is part of why I took it—we have a lot of natural light in there and that helps a lot.

I think about how excited I am that we have this space that we love, you know, and having an actual staff kitchen that's closed. . . . Hopefully, if we feel more well-lit emotionally and physically, then maybe we can give that back to our clients. All of our services are direct human-to-human, so if our frontline staff don't feel good in this space, then our clients won't feel good in the space. (Tamira)

Tamira describes the bright natural light as vital to her mental health and workflow (see Figure 11) and the reason she picked her office. Despite the conclusions of the Hawthorne experiments, in which light was not found to improve performance (Veitch, 2006), important connections between light and wellbeing are being made. Understanding the value of "luminous conditions that match what the occupants want and expect" is leading to associations with what psychologists call *positive affect* (Veitch, 2006, p. 212). This "pleasant emotional state" (p. 212) is being connected to benefits in "mood, comfort, and environmental satisfaction" (p. 213). Light shifts how we see, Mikkel Bille and Tim Sorensen (2007) explain, but it also actively contributes to our everyday connections and social interactions with a space. In this sense, light becomes a socio-material factor by influencing the meaning and experience of a space. Through design or general mood, light can determine how a room looks or feels. Bille and Sorensen argue that light is not only a filter through which we view the world, but an active contributor to our experience. For Tamira, the light makes her feel "well-lit emotionally and physically," which shifts how she connects to the space, her co-workers, and her work.

Figure 11. *View of Main Office*

This picture of the main office was taken about six months after the move. The kitchen and some closed offices line the left side, while the open area on the right is mixed-use space for meetings, group work, volunteers, or other miscellaneous tasks. The glowing circles on the ceiling are light wells, or "solitudes," which beam natural light into the building. In the lower-right corner is a sign asking people to check in at the front desk before entering the space.

Not everyone felt the light to be purely positive. For Mary, the light was beautiful, but it also brought an element of coldness to the office:

Well, there's a lot of beautiful things in terms of the light. You know, the light is so much fresher and more inspiring than the old space, but there is sort of a coldness about it that we're sort of trying to figure out—what we need to do to

warm it up a bit. (Mary)

Experiencing the space's brightness as cold speaks to the atmospheric qualities of light. In Bille and Sorensen's (2007) work on light, they discuss the coziness of low lighting (including candlelight) in homes. In these intimate lightscapes, "the movement of the shadows and the inability of the candlelight to fully light up the room are considered more hyggeligt (cosy) than what the light of a bare electrical bulb would offer" (p. 275). Pallasmaa (2012) explains how "homogeneous bright light paralyses the imagination in the same way that homogenisation of space weakens the experience of being" (p. 50). While darkness and poor lighting are often unhealthy traits for a work environment, these qualities can also contribute to a space's warmth, coziness, and mystery. For Head & Hands, although their old office was falling apart and sometimes depressingly dark, it often exhibited an atmosphere of homeyness. Its haphazard, whimsical construction and layout were endearing, offering endless nooks and crannies to explore. While the organization has gained a clean, bright, solid space, it is evident that some of the cozy, intimate and, as Katelyn has put it, "higgledy-piggledy" characteristics have been lost.

When you listen to staff members describe the old space *in* the old space, one senses a fondness for its ramshackle nature. Jenna suggests that the old building possessed a sort of "humanness" that was represented by its many cracks and faults:

It's always felt like a very organic space. So, for example, nothing matches; there's no coherent paint scheme or decoration theme. Everything you see in the space has just grown organically over the 16-or-however-many years we've been in this space. It's very cobbled together—like a collage—which, I think, contributes to its charm and to the whole comfortable, homey feel of it. So, you know, the couches downstairs were donated to us at some point along the way,

probably. And now they're falling apart and they've got cracks in them that have

duct tape over them, and that's gross and we should replace them—but you know,

it is what it is. I think if you focus on a little detail like that, you're like,

"eeeeew!" But if you take the space as a whole, I think it actually contributes to

the positive vibe in a sense . . . within reason—the humanness. (Jenna)

This way of speaking about the old office—tinged with fondness and acceptance—was shared among all the staff members in the first round of interviews. Replacing these makeshift, organic qualities with new, clean, solid features changed the atmosphere of the office. How it felt to come into work changed. For all the staff, it was a positive change—but even a beneficial transformation requires an adjustment time. Mary's experience of the space evinces an ebb and flow between sadness and contentment as she grapples with the changes. She misses the friendly spirit, but enjoys the new cleanliness:

I'm not like "Oh, *yay*, I love it here!" It's got some drawbacks. I find it very, very

cold and very sterile. Well, it's been great in the heatwave, because we've got *air*

[conditioning]. We've got a system. How do I turn that fan off? But yeah, it

doesn't feel as warm and friendly to me. It just doesn't. Even the way people sit

in the waiting room. You know, clients aren't [supposed] to come into this space

here. This is a more private space. Yeah, it doesn't feel as warm and friendly, but

maybe that that will come. Yeah, you know, that will come.

The big echo. It sort of makes you feel sometimes like you're in a factory

or something, you know? So, there's that. It does feel cleaner. The air feels

cleaner. The surfaces stay cleaner. The place is so much cleaner. And you know, I

think we all deserve that and so do our clients. So, it's sort of lacking that old

charm—which is a very valuable cosmetic point, you know, there's a lot of charm

in those little places. We don't have that here at all—quite the opposite. (Mary)

In sharing her experience, Mary realizes that some of the "warm and friendly" qualities she

missed will come back over time. Just as the old space was a collage co-created over time, the

new space will shift and be shaped as the group uses it. Having a foundation that supports such

growth in a positive and healthy way enables the staff to build from more consciously. For Cora,

the impact of the new space on staff was unexpected:

I was surprised by how much a building can effect like the mood of workers.

Like, I knew that, but just seeing it in action was still surprising. How just having

a little bit more light and having like a common area to eat that's more accessible

can make a huge difference in the way that we relate to one another. (Cora)

Cora remarks how the new kitchen has produced a shift in how the staff relate to each other.

Similarly, Oscar credits the kitchen (see Figure 12) for pulling staff away from their desks at

lunchtime:

Something that really helps staff, I feel, is having like a nice staff kitchen. You

can sit down and have your lunch. It's nice not having to eat in your office and

it's understood as a break room. People like sometimes work in there and I'm

like, "no! I'm getting my food and don't want to see you work," you know? Yeah.

But yeah, having a break room. People feel like they can go there. The old kitchen

was so cold in the winter and it didn't have a table. (Oscar)

Figure 12. *The New Staff Kitchen*

The new kitchen became a sanctuary or respite from work, where staff can interact without work demands. These seemingly small details have had a huge impact on how staff members feel in the space. Part of this shift relates to the space's newness and cleanliness—qualities absent in the old space. Amara explains:

> It's not perfect, you know, but it's a massive improvement over the other place.
> The other place had crumbling walls, and a toilet that didn't work and would back
> up all the time. And, you know, the rooftop would flood. It was just a mess. It was
> a big, big mess. So being here, where it's nice and clean and well-lit, feels so
> much better. (Amara)

Being in a space that is clean and bright *feels* good. One staff member described the windows as "comforting." Research on the impact of windows and light in the office confirms such feelings

(Ulrich, 1984; 1991) with lack of light being connected to increased cortisol, lower levels of

melatonin, and depressive symptoms (Harb et al., 2015). Amara's frank comparison between the

new and old spaces emphasizes the contrasts. Words such as "crumbling," "mess," and "flood,"

or the description of toilets backing up, express visceral sensations. On a metaphorical or

symbolic level, it's impossible not to consider that two so very different spatial contexts might

impact the work occurring within them. When I spoke with Louis in the old space, I asked him to

name the first thing he noticed when he arrived at work. Most staff mentioned the person

greeting them at the front desk, but for Louis it was the broken front steps leading up to the old

office (see Figure 13). For him, it was a daily reminder of their landlord's neglect and broken

promises. While hardship was often rallied around as something to overcome, the crumbling

building was a constant reminder of going without.

Figure 13. *Front Steps at the Old Office*

In the photograph of the broken steps, we see how someone has arranged little pebbles along the cracks and in the holes. Dirt has also been added to the largest crack. It is not clear if the plant was planted intentionally or growing wild. Despite the neglect, there seems to be a creative effort to manifest something whimsical. My shadow is also present in the frame, bringing me into the picture. Have I just walked down the steps? Or perhaps I am about to bring my foot up and place it on the concrete, next to the plant.

Amara describes how the new building might affect clients as they arrive seeking services. She uses the metaphor of a person's "spoon inventory" as a measure for how well they are doing:

> Being able to walk into a space that is not crumbling is helpful. Like you can clear your mind. As a user of the organization, if you're walking in and you're already at minus five spoons and you're having a hard day, but you walk into a space that smells or looks smelly, is crumbling, the couches have tears in them, it doesn't help. But if you walk in here and it's nice and lit-up, and there's fresh coffee and, you know, you sit on the chair that is not falling apart, your spoon inventory has increased, you know? So, I think that it has a huge impact. (Amara)

Here the space becomes *part* of the services that are offered—an extension of the organization's mandate in providing support to youth. The new building helps clients by offering somewhere clean to sit, fresh coffee, and brightness, whereas the old space was unable to offer such supports. This set the old space out of alignment with the organization's values and mission. Where previously the organization offered services *despite* the building, now the building is an

extension of the service. Even if it is just for a moment, the structure and atmosphere of the building are entwined, offering those who enter a solid and welcoming place to "exhale and be."

Amara's comment made me think of my first interview in the new building. It a was hot and sunny day. I arrived a little early and sat at a little picnic table outside. Though I could hear the distant sounds of traffic, the sound of leaves rustling in the breeze dampened them. I watched an old man fold up his bed of cardboard in the park and walk along the sidewalk in front of me. He asked for the time before heading through the Head & Hands front door. At the same time, a staff member exited the office through the back door into the park; she sat on a bench under a tree while checking her phone. Although I was quite nervous, being about to begin my second round of interviews after a lengthy maternity leave, being at the office physically was immediately calming. I felt the warm air against my skin as the light glimmered through the trees. Then I walked into the office for my interview with Mary. Cool air hit my whole body. The old man I encountered earlier is loudly asking the staff member at the front desk for a bag of food while pouring himself a coffee. I hear a baby crying in another room. Some posters on the wall read: *What is the Opposite of a Prison?*, *Health Care for All*, and *We Didn't Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us.* The old man leaves the office and a staff member approaches, asking why he was yelling. The person at the front desk responds: "He was hungry." My presence in the office during this exchange feels normal. The space is here for me too. I am part of what unfolded.

The new building has wheelchair ramps entering the building and throughout, bringing together the building design and the organization's values. A comment that came up repeatedly in the first round of interviews was the lack of accessible access to the old building. Its offices located atop a steep staircase, staff members felt that their building was in direct conflict with

their organization's safe, accessible, nonjudgemental policies. Cora explains how the structure and design of the new space helps make clients feel welcome:

> I feel like the space is designed in a way that is very thoughtful of the clients. The fact that we have become an accessible building—it's because we're trying to be better than all the other kinds of institutions that are not equipped or are failing people. So, I feel like we're really trying to try to fill those gaps. . . . So, I feel like the building reflects that and that there are little parts of it that are really like trying to keep in mind like who [we] are trying to serve. The fact that we have a waiting area where we have toys for people who have children. We have a changing table. The fact that we have a ramp outside and inside. And at the back, a lot of the doors open in a way that are also accessible. The fact that like the space is just configured in a way that also thinks about the children that might be here and the different people who might be here and needing different things.
>
> (Cora)

These material elements become a way for the organization to send a message of inclusion to those who come through the door, whether they arrive on wheels or with children in tow. Various posters and pamphlets and jars filled with condoms, all brought over from the old space, line the walls and shelves (see Figure 14). They have become a material manifestation of the organization's values. This alignment between the social and material contributes to the wellbeing that staff feel when in the new space.

Figure 14. *Condom Wall and Visual Accessibility Stickers*

Pride, Ownership, and Legitimacy

In addition to acknowledging the new space's better capacity to support the organization (the mind-body experiences of its staff and clients as well as practical work functions), the staff expressed a sense of pride and ownership. The meaning of a shift from a rental tenancy with an absentee landlord to being one's own landlord is both real and symbolic. Rooted in this deeply emotional shift were other qualities, such as hope, optimism, and opportunity. These powerful traits were not present in the first round of interviews. It is as though the old space drained all the energy from the organization, leaving no room to dream. Mary's account clearly illustrates the transformation that occurred when the organization stepped into its new role:

The other place was so depressing—honestly, it was falling apart. The ceiling was

caving in there. It was just disgusting. You know, we had rats and mice, and it

was just uninspiring. And the windows were old and freezing, and it was dirty—

the kind of dirt that you could never actually clean very effectively. But now
we're the landlords! If something happens, we fix it! Yeah, or we get it fixed. We
don't wait for the landlord and that is very freeing. This is ours. So, there is a
sense of belonging and ownership. And that also feels like growth, it feels like a
new step up for Head & Hands. (Mary)

Moving from a space in which the organization had no authority or freedom to make changes to one where the organization is accountable is empowering. As Mary indicates, there is a feeling of belonging, of ownership, and of new opportunities. There is more investment in the space as a resource of the organization. As a side note, I would point out that Mary loved her old office, as illustrated by her comments in the previous section. At the beginning of her interview, she expressed her difficulty feeling at home in the new space, feeling its coldness. Now she speaks about the new building's effect on the organization as a whole, of which she is a member. It is a reminder of the conflicting emotions that are emerging, not just *between* staff members but within the same individual.

Similar to Mary, Tamira speaks of the possibilities for future growth, for next steps, which the new building offers to Head & Hands. You can feel her sense of pride—almost a surprise for Tamira—at the organization and its new space:

When you see the office spaces and the big open space, you're like, *oh wow*. I
work here! And it kind of demonstrates that like we've got our shit together. The
old space didn't really communicate that. It was more scrappy. It's not saying
that's a bad thing—I like scrappy. That part of the spirit is like fun to me and why
I wanted to work here. So, we've moved away from scrappy to a little more
professional/institutional, but I think that it just seems like we kind of like left

high school or something. And for returning clients, I think that's the feeling they

get. And for new clients, I think it adds like a bunch of . . . it's like *trust-able* to

have that mix of the cool posters and the plants and weird mess with this like

really beautiful, really high-end-looking space. . . . I think it offers a lot of

opportunity. I think that the space is so versatile and so malleable that it has

endless possibilities within it. (Tamira)

As she spoke, the sound of a baby crying and cooing quietly wafts through the space—a constant

reminder of who is creating the space. In Tamira's account, there seems to be a convergence of

possibility and potential with pride and strength—all of which radiates from the new office

space. For staff members who were more closely involved in the design process—as staff

consultants for the architect—the feeling of investment in the building is even greater. Amara

explains her sense of pride:

I feel personally invested. It was such an involved process. So, I do have a big

sense of ownership of the building itself and how we use it. . . . I have a lot of

pride in the building because I literally helped design every nook and cranny of

this building. Yeah. It was a massive labour of love and it's not perfect—which

irritates me to no end. So, I walk in with a sense of pride and a sense of

accomplishment, but also a bit upset because there are things that need to be

addressed and various people are involved in addressing this. But I've worked in

a lot of community organizations where it's just like dodgy—where our working

conditions were very dodgy—and so when I come in here and it's nice and bright,

and open and airy and clean and mold-free and accessible, I have a lot of pride.

(Amara)

Not-for-profit organizations often end up in less-than-ideal spaces because they do not have the resources—money, time, and knowledge—required to maintain and potentially renovate a building. There is also sometimes a subtle antagonism toward spaces considered too slick or too corporate. The value of a rundown space is in understanding it as a badge of honour given to those who neglect themselves in the service of those in need. In a first-round interview, Michelle referenced the old building's shabbiness as emblematic of the organization's spirit:

> It's very much a community organization that probably doesn't have a lot of
> money to re-plaster the walls all the time. . . . People are really committed to
> what's going on here. . . . I think a huge part of that is that there is clearly no
> money being spent on things that aren't absolutely necessary, and that links to the
> spirit of wanting to provide the absolute best service for youth and so everything
> is very functional. (Michelle)

The same resourcefulness and functionality are qualities which Mary reiterated in her first interview. We were speaking about what the space communicates to those who enter. Mary saw the organization's ability to exist in the old office as part of its identity:

> I think it's communicating that we're really trying to make the best of a not great
> situation. I think we're really communicating that—just with the curtains we put
> up downstairs and the barriers so people can sit on that side when they're here for
> the doctor's visits—it says we're really trying to respect confidentiality and
> warmth, and being kind of informal and yet comfortable. Like we're really trying
> hard to make it work. You know, that's what I think the big message is. (Mary)

Mary felt pride at making something work, despite difficult conditions. This sentiment was shared by some of the staff, but not all. Geneva lamented how the organization's "quality of

service [was] not represented with the quality of space." The not-for-profit "culture of adversity" can become a problem if it leads to poor and unsafe working conditions. Oscar described the unhealthy energy within this culture, calling it "devotion discourse." The term refers to the reward or satisfaction that comes from "doing the work" in marginalized communities, which may be assumed to obviate otherwise normal requirements such as adequate pay, functional office space, or other personal and organizational supports:

> I don't feel like a lot of community orgs have had the chance to have a space that is good-looking, has a lot of light, and is functional. And it's so important! But it's like . . . people are going to do it anyways and not fight for shit, because they're like, "I'm just lucky that I could do this work. It is so important." Well, I'm just like, "fuck this." I hate this devotion discourse. Like to me, this is my work. Of course, I love my work and am passionate about it and will do everything so that my program is on top of what it can be—and elevate the bar. I'm all about that. But this is my work. I'm not putting my mental health on the line for this, you know? (Oscar)

Part of the work for Head & Hands, as the organization moved into its new building, involved overcoming this culture of sacrifice and claiming the new facility as rightfully theirs. The organization and its work deserved this space and this investment.

In their study "Space, Place and Identity," Nick Hopkins and John Dixon (2006) speak of a moment in which something or someone appears "strongly 'out of place'" (p. 177), when "we become aware of the degree to which spatial behaviour is controlled by particular conceptions of place" (p. 177). Head & Hands and other not-for-profit organizations are conditioned to see themselves in spaces of neglect. Something feels wrong about a small, youth-run organization

occupying a fancy building. Hopkins and Dixon suggest that this moment is important; the discomfort is revealing, as it "interrogates common sense assumptions" (p. 177), in this case about how these organizations and their work are valued and characterized. Moving into a valued space into which so much had been invested, both by the organization and on its behalf, challenged these unhealthy spatial norms. Amara addresses this success and points to the move itself as an accomplishment:

> Finally, this project, after years of being conceptualized, came to an end and we
>
> are here! You know that is super-meaningful and that we went away from
>
> crumbling buildings to something that was more solid. Working in collaboration
>
> with the city. . . . Like it was just . . . yeah, it was good. (Amara)

These expressions of pride in the space and its potential for the organization illustrate the power of a supportive, healthy space, even when the future is unknown. Mary speaks about occupying and working in this still-unknown place:

> I really believe that it's given the organization a fresh start and the possibility for
>
> growth. We don't really know what that means yet, or who we're reaching out to
>
> share this space with. We haven't really figured that out yet. But yeah, it's really
>
> been inspiring in a lot of ways, a bit overwhelming. I think we still have stuff to
>
> work out. But yeah, really inspiring. The other place was so depressing. Honestly,
>
> it was falling apart. (Mary)

The organization is in a place of unknown potential. It's scary, but inspiring. Much of the staff's pride and their excitement at the new space's potential was expressed in terms relating to the organization's ability to serve clients—in effect, to being able to do their jobs. With less time and

energy being spent on mitigating the old space's many problems, more can be dedicated to services. Cora remarks how it feels like the new space is working *with* them:

It definitely feels like we're moving in a direction that feels like more sustainable, because we actually are able to serve our clients and their needs more instead of having to work harder. It feels like we have a space that's working with us. So, it means a little less work for certain things.

It also means that we are growing. Because we actually have moved into a space that helps our needs more. It doesn't make me feel like we're regressing. It really makes me feel like we are just going to keep growing and we're going to keep being able to offer more services in a way that is more tailored, and like in ways that like work more for clients and less of us trying to like stretch and ways that don't work. (Cora)

Cora speaks to the energy and hard work it took just to function in the old space, where the staff had to "struggle to perform their tasks because the built environment" had failed (Vischer, 2008, p. 237). Not only did the old office space fail to provide basic support, the "adverse environmental conditions" sucked morale and creativity from the staff and the organization (p. 237). Without this burden, the organization is free to work *with* the space, transforming it in ways that help them reach their goals. In this sense, is it possible to "conceive leadership as an aesthetic, relational experience rather than an influence from one person to another" (Ropo et al., 2013, p. 378).

Spatial Improvisation

   After all the packing and upheaval of moving comes the unpacking—settling in and getting to know the space. While larger companies often hire people to unpack, arrange furniture, and hang artworks, not-for-profit organizations like Head & Hands do it themselves. This process requires a substantial investment of time and energy. With the space still fresh and unknown, unpacking becomes an emergent process of testing, adaptation, and rearranging. This somewhat chaotic period thus provided a unique setting for change, reflection, and opportunity. While everyday environments often fade into the background or become permanent, unmoving fixtures, in times of spatial change the material office emerges as a set of hyper-present, malleable structures that elicit a range of emotional responses. As Alberto Jiménez (2003) articulates, new space is not a "known place that exists prior to our engagements with it"; rather, it is through a process of engagement and decision making that eventually "we become the spaces to which we have invested our practices" (p. 141). Just as Head & Hands shaped the space, the space began to shape the organization. Part of this becoming *with* the space—the co-constructive encounter between subject and object—had to do with the emotion and mood, or *atmosphere*, that surrounded and emanated from this relationship. This "hazy and vague in-between phenomenon" contributed to how staff experienced the building (De Matteis et al., 2019, p. 3). Bringing atmosphere into our conversation keeps the focus on the entangled relationship between the material and social paradigms. It combines "objective parameters, such as materiality, shadow, light, dimension [and] temperature," with subjective ones, "such as mood, memory, and sensitivity" (Havik, 2019, p. 3), into a complex interplay of "something more" (De Matteis et al., 2019, p. 3). As the perceivers of such an atmosphere, the staff were part of its creation—in collaboration with their surroundings—and were simultaneously affected by it.

As the office took shape, the group adapted and evaluated, making more and new changes, and then repeated the process. Similar to Lewin's action research model, these micro-feedback loops of reflection, learning, and change happen consciously and unconsciously (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Though many organizations adopt this change model for learning and change outside of the spatial realm, massive spatial transitions *can* provide the right conditions for an adaptive and emergent learning environment. However, while the potential exists for such adaptation, it is not always possible. The personnel in organizations without a culture of trust, openness, and risk taking may not be encouraged to actively experiment with the space. Companies that outsource the design and setup of their new offices may also miss out on such opportunities for creative interaction with the space (Knight et al., 2010; Knight & Haslam, 2010). This in turn alters the connection and attunement (Pérez-Gómez, 2016) that staff feel with and in the space.

As the atmosphere shifted through new spatial placements and encounters, new views about the space and ways of feeling in it presented themselves. De Certeau (2011) describes the transformation that occurs with "the awakening of inert objects . . . which, emerging from their stability, transform the place where they [once] lay motionless" (p. 118). These micro-transformations—a couch moved to another spot, a painting hung, the addition of shelves—can shift the feeling or atmosphere of space as well as its functionality. Altering an office space's affordances or capacity changes how the staff and organization are supported and held by that space (O'Toole & Were, 2008). Such rapid changes can produce an atmosphere of disruption and chaos—but these are not always negative qualities. Complexity theory—a popular model in organizational studies—"proposes that systems are most creative when they operate with a combination of order and chaos" (Barrett, 2000, p. 229). Such periods of change are often filled

with moments of surprise or shock, which momentarily offer "glimpses into other possible worlds of reality" (Bjørkeng et al., 2009, p. 156). Referencing the work of Alfred Schütz, Bjørkeng et al. credit such moments with the capacity to spur the "realization that the world can be experienced in ways beyond the taken-for-granted meanings that construct our experience of it" (p. 156). With habitual ways of being disrupted, a new embodied presence can emerge.

To explore more concretely how these concepts manifested for Head & Hands, I will look at some moments of spatial connection and change. By highlighting themes of potential or new behaviour and micro-adaptations, I hope to emphasize the interconnected and dynamic nature of the staff's relationship to the space and to their work.

Shifting Atmospheres

Being in a space with unexplored possibilities is freeing. As Massey (2005) suggests, it gestures toward an open future whose avenues have yet be explored. In our conversation, Mary spoke about how this flexibility and openness within the office affected her and the staff:

Well, I think there's a bit more of a sense of freedom here, you know. Open,

freedom feeling—like I can go over there and sit on the couch and take my book

and read there in the sunlight. And you know, my colleagues are more accessible

now, too. We spend more time hanging out in the kitchen together. There's a

camaraderie. I think this space, in creating it—just having to build it together,

come up with ideas and solutions, too, and then talk about where things are going

to be and what we want, or what we don't want—has been a good discussion for

us. Yeah, good sort of team building. (Mary)

Mary's experience speaks to a certain awareness or attunement with herself and with the space. She has the freedom to change work locations or to sit down and rest in the sunlight, and bound within these choices is an embodied knowledge of herself in relationship with the space. The couch, the open space, and sunlight all become inseparable qualities that affect how staff feel in and about the space; they form part of the experience and contain meaning. The brightness of the space, feeling the warmth while lying in the sun, radiates achievement and potential.

Some of this comfort and familiarity—with the space and with each other—is due to the organization's process of creating the space together. The staff participated in conversations about the organization's future direction, logistical needs, and personal preferences, while simultaneously engaging in spatial negotiations regarding constraints and opportunities. Mary also mentions how the space fosters a different way of being together; the proximity of the offices makes her colleagues more accessible. But perhaps even more profound than the impact of layout is a shift in atmosphere. While it is fairly easy to notice how layout impacts function, atmospheres, on the other hand, "are omnipresent and touch us in a subtle and sensing way, informing our alleged neutral and objective decision-making" (Mackrodt, 2019, p. 5). The sun beaming in through the windows and light wells, the spaciousness of the high ceilings, the echoes of voices reverberating through the building, the feelings of pride and togetherness, the staff laughing at the kitchen table, the distant sounds of playing toddlers in the YPP, and a dozen other ephemeral qualities and nuanced moments abide in between the lines of Mary's testimony.

In the old space, the physical separation between upstairs and downstairs was blamed for creating a division in the staff between those who worked upstairs and those who didn't. The reception area was downstairs along with the administrative staff offices (fundraising, office management, outreach, etc.), while the upstairs offices housed the various service programs

(legal, health, social). These physical divides, as Katelyn articulates here, were felt by many of the staff:

> I wish that we were all on the same floor. There is that divide where I feel like upstairs people are a lot closer to each other. It's not cliques, but sometimes something will happen in a staff meeting and you can tell there is a divide. I think that being on two separate floors creates different formations. (Katelyn)

While these divisions could be explored through a strictly social lens, another element that manifested was more atmospheric. Each floor had very different energies. The main floor was lively and boisterous. An open space where clients and guests congregated, the atmosphere was filled with music, conversation, laughter and, on busy days, a frenetic energy. Upstairs was quieter and homier. The program staff worked in larger individual offices, which some staff chose to paint and decorate. Geneva, who worked upstairs in the medical office, spoke of feeling a stress in her body that physically dissipated as she walked up the stairs to her office:

> I try to check in downstairs and then, going upstairs for me, I always get calmer going up the stairs because that's my area. I think it's a different vibe for me downstairs than upstairs.
>
> When I have to work downstairs, I'm definitely not in the same mindset or in the same zone than I am when I'm upstairs, because my office is upstairs. But also, we're four permanent workers upstairs. There's this kind of vibe that we have altogether because, even if my door is closed or when my door is open, I can hear everything that's happening in some ways. So, I really feel more at ease and calmer when I'm upstairs. (Geneva)

Geneva's description of working upstairs in the old space is similar to how staff described working together in the new space. The new space, with closed offices for all staff, eliminated the physical upstairs–downstairs division. It feels less home-like, but the mode of interacting together with the openness of the space bridges the various departments.

For Tamira, this atmosphere created a new and healthier way of being together. Having access to their own private space, meant more energy could be given to the group. This dynamic of spatial self-care created a more supportive and generative time when the staff was together. She also describes staff meetings as an "incredible experience" compared to their earlier conversations in the darkened "cave" of the old building:

> We are able to take space from each other in new ways, because we actually have offices that close. Which can be, you know, bad if people are shut up in their office, but most people don't really do that. So, there's a good balance between taking space from each other and still being social that is enabled by this building. . . . So, I think that overall staff health—not health, but the way we are with each other—is better. Also, having staff meetings not in *the cave* is the most incredible experience. Everything feels easier when we're not crammed together in a dark room that smells weird. I think that it helps. I think that it helps, because it's just like shifted the way that we really are for the better, and I think things are a lot easier to manage now in a lot of ways. (Tamira)

Once again, the space's physical attributes and the feeling of being in it join together to provide a very different experience for the staff. There is an ease to working in new building that was not present in the old office. In fact, according to Cora, the old space made the staff "work harder."

The new space completely changed the organization's relationship with the Young

Parents Program (YPP), which before the move had been housed in a different building. Adding

YPP into the main office provided a much more intimate relationship with the young parents and

kids. For Mary, this enabled greater interaction with these clients:

> The nice part is that the Young Parents Program is here now. And so, I get to see
>
> those clients a lot more and there's so much more available and the children and
>
> everything. It feels so much more in touch with that program, which is a very
>
> integral part of the H&H philosophy, right—just in terms of that holistic
>
> approach. I have been very helpful in accompaniments. I've gone to court with a
>
> couple of clients. I have provided supervision for a family that had to have
>
> supervision in order for the father to see the children. So, you know, that wouldn't
>
> have happened, I don't think, if we were in the other building. So, there is that.
>
> It's nice thing. Yeah, it's really great. (Mary)

Having the YPP physically present in the same building has allowed Mary to better serve those

clients and offer services she might not have provided in the old building. YPP's presence also

feels better, being more aligned with Head & Hands' "holistic" philosophy to serve youth. With

YPP in the building, the atmosphere of the office shifts. Amara describes how she can hear and

smell their presence:

> I'm [working in a space] off the entrance, so I hear everything that happens—like
>
> earful conversations to the reception. I hear other programs running and I hear the
>
> children, you know, being children, and so I'm going to say it's highly stimulated
>
> every day in my office.
>
> If the Young Parents Program are cooking lunch, I always know what

they're having for lunch because I can smell it, which is actually nice and

comforting. They often make cookies—yum. They hire cooks from the pool of

their clients, too. So, I know that they're learning a skill. It's actually kind of neat

to smell what they're cooking and knowing it's a skill they're acquiring too, you

know? It's kind of . . . it's kind of neat. It gives me the warm-and-fuzzies.

(Amara)

Amara's descriptions of the comforting smells wafting into her office from the YPP kitchen and

the sounds of children "being children" illustrate some of the more sensory shifts in the

atmosphere of the new building. These smells and sounds within the office are contextualized

within Head & Hands' larger culture and mandate to serve youth. While the sound of kids and

the smells of lunch might be off-putting in other office cultures, for Head & Hands they are

tangible markers of success. As Riach and Warren (2014) explain, smell is more than a singular

sensation; it is "one element of an experiential system that summons us to the world so that both

the world and ourselves are constituted through that experience" (p. 790). Knowing that the

smells of lunch mean young parents are learning how to cook healthy meals determines how

Amara feels about them: it gives her the "warm-and-fuzzies."

I remember entering the new office before an interview and seeing a staff member with

her child (same age as mine) sitting on the stairs with one of the YPP workers. Being in my own

experience of being newly back at work following a maternity leave and witnessing an

organization that had managed to make it possible for parents and kids to coexist in the

workplace was meaningful.

Emergent Talent

As the staff went through the intimate process of moving and unpacking, they got to see different sides of each other. In part, this happened during the height of the move, when staff were the most stressed, anxious, exhausted, and emotional, but other traits also surfaced after the move, when the organization was settling into the new space—before daily work routines had taken shape. Mary spoke with praise about how her co-workers helped set up the space:

> We've had to build this place from the ground up. So, for example, people's talents have been used—like Mia. She is so fabulous around staging. Things coming in, and her finding its place and putting things away, and you know, moving this plant over here instead of there. I mean, she is so talented. And Terrell and Otis, you know, really helped out a lot with the electronics and getting computers going, getting the photocopy machine going. I mean really, really helpful. And to us, we haven't really seen that before, because the old place, well, there wasn't necessarily room, right? To do allow them to really . . . yeah, and because we were still trying to figure it out here, right? . . . Amara was the right-hand person for the architect and they spent a lot of time figuring stuff out together, too. Yeah, and other talents have kind of come forward, which is great. (Mary)

Because the old office was so entrenched in routine, so full of material accumulated over many years, little room remained for staff to exercise their spatial creativity, passion, and talent. Immediately after the move, the new building was full of the process of creation, which invited participation in a fresh way. Staff engaged with the new space in ways that were necessary to the organization, but also personally and creatively motivated. A few staff members I interviewed

mentioned Mia's talent for spatial organizing, while Tamira commented on the staff's willingness to invest in the new space as it evolves: "The benefit of the space is that it's not like rundown and shitty. So, we're willing to put that investment in and be flexible with how it will change, and Mia, especially, keeps changing lots of stuff." Feelings of pride and ownership toward the building have sparked a tangible investment on the part of the staff. This creates a dynamic relationship in which the space serves the work and the organization through the interventions and alterations made by the staff.

Room for Dreams

One difference that I noticed between staff attitudes in the new building compared to the old was the mention of a possible future. It is difficult to illustrate the absence of something, so I will focus on moments in which staff describe a link between their new premises and the organization's potential. The new office's spaciousness offered the staff room to dream.

Asked whether the building helped or hindered the organization, Amara told me about a program that had been contemplated in the old space yet never took shape, but which was now possible:

> The counselling program had developed this program for recently out-of-care
>
> youth through the youth protection system.[2] Because at 18, they age out and then
>
> they're just left to themselves, right? It's sort of a preparedness program, you
>
> know: how to cook themselves a meal or how to budget, or things like that. And

---

[2] In Quebec, youth protection services are provided by youth centres located across the province. These centres operate under the governance of the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services.

in the new space, we have a functioning kitchen in YPP. And in the evening, it's

not being used, so we could actually start that program—you know, where before

we would have needed to rent some other place and have to deal with landlords

and all the things. Right, so it's neat to see how things could expand.

     Or my program. I have two nights a week where I run programs. Now I'm

able to have a third night or day where I can run the program. Because the space

definitely lends itself to more services. (Amara)

To run this program in the old space would have required additional logistics, coordination, time,

and funding. With the merger of YPP (a daytime program) into the main office, the two branches

of the organization are able to support each other. In the evening, the large, empty kitchen and

the group space become resources that the organization can use for other purposes. Although not

originally designed for this new youth program, Amara looks at the space through a lens of

possibility and potential. Similarly, she sees how the space can support an additional night of

services. While she does not describe how this feels (beyond it being "neat"), being able to feel

that she can grow her program and be supported in that journey is clearly meaningful to her.

     Cora draws a direct link between the new building and the growth of the organization.

The expansiveness of the building mirrors its potential for expanded services:

It also means that I feel like we are growing. Because we actually have moved

into a space that helps our needs more. It doesn't make me feel like we're

regressing. It really makes me feel like we are just going to keep growing and

we're going to keep being able to offer more services in a way that is more

tailored and in ways that work more for clients and less of us trying to like stretch

in ways that don't work. Just being able to have more space has allowed for Mia,

who works at the front desk, to have a boot program. Just being able to have that space has given her . . . like we were able to do in the other space, but it was so cramped that it always ended up being a bit of a bother. And now she has her own place to put the boots and be able to do all the things that she wants to do with her program. It's like when we are also able to have rooms so that other organizations can come and do a workshop or something. So, we're actually able to serve our community and our clients at the same time. So, it's just nice to be able to do that. (Cora)

Cora mentions Mia's boot program not as a new program but as one that *feels* better in the new space. Once "a bit of a bother," now it is something to be proud of. Having the physical space for the boots has transformed how the program functions and how staff feel about it.

To become a resource for the wider community is something the new space has made possible for Head & Hands. Being able to host other community organizations, or lend the space for other uses, broadens their role and enhances their mandate to support youth. While it is indeed "just nice to be able to do that," this shift feels big! These new opportunities highlight a collaboration between the new building and the Head & Hands organization as they explore, together, possible avenues that were previously unavailable. Although some of these changes may seem small, they are not insubstantial. Over time, these micro-adaptations could lead to bigger organizational changes.

Having an office space that provides different options for meetings or independent work helps the staff maintain a fresh perspective. If the space is being used for different purposes, then it will feel different as the atmosphere shifts with each group and task. Tamira illustrates how the space can be used in different ways depending on current needs:

Just having a space that's movable—like sometimes we will have meetings in the

staff kitchen because other things are going on and they need privacy. So, it helps

us to be more on our toes, you know, and be able to be more adaptable. And I

think that that will transfer to the way we approach clients. (Tamira)

Tamira explores this quality of flexibility further and questions how the organization might

become more adaptable in serving its clients. If the space can shift to support the organization, it

may also be adapted for clients' future needs. In a sense, the versatile relationship that is

developing with and through the space is providing tangible experience in emergent ways of

working. The space becomes *enabling*, as Duff (2012) suggests, by positively affecting the

staff's interactions and promoting opportunities for an ongoing relationship.

The office's physical structure and amenities, such as the two kitchens and the large

meeting/multipurpose space, enable the organization to have more people in the building. For

Oscar, this means being able to hold his program training sessions and workshops in-house:

It helps me in my program like this, because I have space to do my training. Or to

do workshops in-house, if I wanted to have some in-house project. And I feel like

it helps the organization just for that, like just having a space, having nice offices,

having a meeting room that has natural light coming in—that's not a fucking

cave, you know? (Oscar)

Where previously staff would have had the additional task of organizing logistics for onsite

events, meetings, training, etc., the new building makes these activities less arduous. Hosting

more people and groups in the Head & Hands office transforms the space into more of a central

hub, shifting energy *toward* the space rather than away from it. Using the building and office for

major events also allows the community to participate in the space. For the first time, Head &

Hands was able to have their annual general meeting (AGM) in their own space instead of at a community centre. As the community elects new board members, celebrates successes, reviews budgets, and discusses future plans, it does so in the organization's space—a fusion of place, community, and possibility. For Mary, hosting the AGM was just the beginning:

> We had our AGM here instead of going to another space, which was also really nice. . . . It just makes all of that easier. And I think, you know, we will start being able to dream a little bit more about what we can do. (Mary)

Mary's thinking on room for dreaming was echoed by Cora, who suggested that the work of setting up the building forced the organization to discuss its future in relation to the space:

> Just knowing that our goal is being better reached with this space kind of brings us closer. It also makes it feel better, because we're actually doing what we want to do and it's giving us more time to get the grit out and be like, "oh, what else do you want to do with this part of the building?" It makes us work together to figure out how to grow more. . . . And if we all feel like the space is serving us in that way, I feel like it affects the way we work, the way we talk to each other, because there's a different feeling. There's something there where it feels like it's adding onto what we are here to do. It's actually serving us and it's helping us serve people better. (Cora)

Cora's account illustrates the tightly woven qualities of socio-material space. Through their engagement and collaboration with the office, the staff began to work and *to be* in the space differently. These micro-alterations can shift the staff's experience of the space (the overall atmosphere and their way of being in the space) as well as their experiences of one another. When the space is an actively supportive one, there is freedom to explore and take risks.

Bjørkeng et al. (2009) emphasize that these conditions are not solely aimed at the destruction of old habits, but are an essential component in the creation of *new* practices. The authors argue that processes are not static but embedded—something we *become*. As Cora mentioned, the new space shifted how the staff spoke to one another and worked together while simultaneously situating their next steps as an organization. In this sense, practices themselves become a "movement that develops and unfolds through the intensity of connections that drive the process of becoming" (p. 156). When shifting practices and modalities are connected to a malleable and evolving space, the entwined nature of the material and immaterial is ongoing. It is no longer about the final design, but the *process* of creation and recreation. In their research, Van Haeren and Havik (2016) investigate space through moments when "perception of the real and the projection of new possibilities converge to introduce a new articulation of space of which one feels a part" (p. 7). This definition brings a sense of belonging and interconnectedness to these moments of fresh possibility and intuited wisdom.

Emplaced Change

In the final part of this section, I want to highlight some specific examples of how staff members adapted to the new space and how this contributes to the evolving, active relationship which the organization is developing with its new building.

When Head & Hands began the unpacking process, it soon became evident that creating the new office would entail more than just unpacking boxes. One staff member recalled a particular "now what?" moment that occurred *after* the unpacking was done. All the essentials had been unboxed, yet questions such as *Now what do we envision? How do we expand it? How*

do we make it perfect for us? remained unanswered. In our interview, Tamira spoke at length about this time in the space. She describes a state of experimentation and dreaming:

> I think there was a period where we were rushing to get it perfect. Eventually, we got lost in other things. And so that sitting happened naturally, because we were distracted and so, when you don't think about something too much, it comes to you. So that's kind of what happened. I think we started thinking about events and summer and everything else, and then things would come to us when we weren't looking at them anymore.
>
> It looks like sitting in the space for a while and then feeling your way around a little bit—you're in the dark and kind of touching things and seeing things, and being like this doesn't make sense. This isn't working. This doesn't make sense, and then trial and error to get it right. And then a little bit of dreaming and asking what would make this feel beautiful? What would make this feel homey? What would make this feel *like us*. I have a tendency to like want to nest really fast and that was not something we're able to do. But in the end, I think it was nice to have like a long process to do that work with each other.
>
> (Tamira)

Although this period of place-making and experimentation with the space was not intentional, the organization ended up experiencing a very open and creative moment. Tamira illustrates the process by which staff explored how they *felt* in the space and formed tacit and explicit wisdom about the organization. Barrett (2000) describes such moments as poetic wisdom, which "involves intuiting glimpses of immediacy and fluidity, experiences of awe, reverence and wonder" (p. 230). Accessing these moments requires a certain letting-go—an "absence of

certainty and a fresh perception" of what was once ordinary and common (p. 230). As Tamira described, the staff had been more-or-less stumbling about in the dark—touching, feeling, and dreaming their way through the space. As the space appeared to them in states of discord or harmony, questions around beauty, homeyness, and identity presented themselves. Sitting in this ambiguous and fluid state can be destabilizing, and for this reason, the wisdom and revelation that are born out of such fresh encounters may benefit from some support and stability. Barrett (2000) suggests that organizations cultivate an ebb-and-flow of practice and learning, grounded in a flexible structure that "keeps agents richly connected as they respond to one another in non-linear ways" (p. 230). Being in this exploratory state was not a comfortable or positive experience for everyone. Oscar felt the ongoing spatial adjustments were too much:

> I feel like there's been a lot of change in the big common area—I mean, in the way we organize for meetings. What do we put there? What do we do there? It's an ongoing conversation? It's *always* a conversation and *never* a conversation. Never an official conversation. That tires me. This is not the kind of thing I really care about. (Oscar)

To Oscar, the informal and continual change felt tiring; perhaps there was not enough structure for him to feel grounded and supported. It is also possible that the atmosphere of constant change simply did not feel good to everyone.

Spatial Adjustments

I have explored many of the affective qualities of office space for those who work in it, but as we are investigating spatial relationships, it is worthwhile to consider some the ways in which staff made changes to the material space, and why. I am sure there were dozens of such

changes; for those I interviewed, however, it was difficult to remember them all. One interesting example was the reception desk, which had been much larger originally. To create more room behind the desk—so that multiple staff could move through the space—Mia had it cut down. Its substantial width was replaced with a thinner, crescent-shaped desk, which curves about the person who sits at it (see Figure 15). In her interview, Tamira noted that in the end, "they cut it deeper than [Mia] wanted. It feels a bit exposing." The openness of the now-thinner desk no longer imposes a barrier between those to either side of it.

Figure 15. *Front Desk*

In the image, you can see the curved desk with Mia behind it. The curved cut creates a larger, rounder space behind the desk and one can imagine how the space behind a wider, straighter desk might be a lot tighter. Now, whoever is working there has greater freedom of movement. There is also enough room for an additional person. Certain other atmospheric elements in this photograph are also worth mentioning: a sunbeam strikes the chalkboard drawings on the side of the desk; two staff members crouch by the far stairs; light beams in through the ceiling solitudes; and a sign on the wall reads "what is the opposite of a prison?"

Cutting down the desk altered the space's functionality and energy. The decision to change it was an embodied one; in its original form, the desk did not feel right. Edward T. Hall (1982) once described a woman who assessed whether her office was large enough based on her body's experience of the space. Unconsciously, she would push her chair back from her desk and stretch out her arms and legs. If the chair hit the wall, it was too small; if not, it was adequate. Hall's insight regarding this woman's unconscious method came to him upon speaking with her and observing her in the space (p. 53). There is much to be learned by how our bodies feel in relation to material objects and spaces. Listening to these feelings and experimenting with a space can lead to unique outcomes.

Another interesting development was the evolution of Tamira and Cora's office after their first design attempt didn't take. Tamira tells the story:

> At first, we wanted a white office. First thing, [Cora] and I put up old posters—all the "Sunday in the Park posters"—on the wall. We wanted it to look nice and minimalist, but like decorated, and then at some point we felt our office was boring. How do we make it feel more like us? We're very silly people. So, we got a graffiti artist to come in and spray-paint a tag on our wall. It says "since 1970,"

and it's humongous, and that really cinched my office for me. Where I was like,

we have this really minimalist "professional" quote-unquote office, with nicely

curated posters and nice little wooden furniture, calendars on the wall and stuff

like that. But then I was like, it needs to feel younger! Yeah, you just feel

younger, it needs to be more fun. It needs to feel representative of our clients.

Cause fundraising—you can get lost in it, and you have to find some sort of way

to connect and remember that connection when you're not seeing clients or

building relationships with them. So, I think adding [the graffiti] felt like part of

that for us. Cora and I are both Black, and having a big graffiti thing on our wall

adds a sense of ownership of our office. It's very unique to us—very *ours*. That

helps make it feel good for us. (Tamira)

Similar to the front desk, Tamira and Cora's office did not feel quite right. It did not represent

them or the organization's clients. Even though they wanted a minimalist design with white walls

and curated posters, something was missing. Hiring a graffiti artist to come in and tag the wall

with a date meaningful to the organization shifted the atmosphere in the space by connecting

Tamira to her youth clients and to her Black culture. By literally putting a stamp on the wall,

Tamira and Cora became part of the space, creating a sense of ownership and connection. These

performative interventions illustrate the symbiotic process by which Tamira and Cora imprinted

themselves onto the space. Sarah Curtis (2012) writes that although graffiti can be seen as

vandalism or symbolize "social disorder," its symbolic impression shifts with the "content and

location" (p. 181). At Head & Hands, the "since 1970" tag conveys "playful emotion and

illustrates how graffiti may communicate and symbolise messages in ways that support

psychological wellbeing" (p. 181). Whenever Tamira feels lost or disconnected, her office walls now serve as a connection to herself and to those she is serving.

Figure 16. *Tamira and Cora's Desks "Kissing" Below Their "Since 1970" Graffiti Tag*

As the organization settled into the new building, the clients and community were also learning about the space. Because of the building's open flow, there was no clear division between the front desk and the main office, which included private offices, meeting space, and the staff kitchen. Amara explained how this openness made the boundaries between public and private spaces less visible:

Clients were just going to our staff kitchen, and we had said we wanted a place

that was just ours. And so we had to make the decision that clients were not to go

in there. But if they needed something, we would heat up their lunch or do

whatever they needed in there, but that people weren't to just roam about the

entire building. (Amara)

To address this problem, a wooden swinging gate was hung between the two spaces to discourage clients from proceeding past that point. As in previous examples, this insight about the space came about through interacting with it. While the kitchen was always intended for staff, the decision to *prevent* clients from using it arose out of the staff's embodied and emotional experience with the space. When clients used the kitchen, it shifted the private, secure atmosphere of the kitchen into something else. The wooden gate became a spatial response to this experience.

Another change that came about in response to the space relates to the staff's aural experience of the office. As we have already heard, being originally designed as a church, sound carries and echoes throughout in the building. With personal and confidential subjects being discussed, the front-desk staff began playing music to camouflage voices. I asked Cora if they had made any changes to how they work since the move. She spoke about how the new building's sonic environment had led to more music:

> This is a weird one, but we definitely try to play more music now—just to make sure the clients don't necessarily hear what we're doing and so they feel like it's more confidential. If we have somebody coming in, we do try to separate the working space—like *our* working space—with like the client space because we're trying to make sure that there's some kind of separation. And so, we've been kind of coping by just like playing music and making sure that the client space where they sit down is as like cozy and welcoming as possible. (Cora)

In Cora's account, music takes on multiple roles. First, it protects confidentiality by surrounding people's voices with melody. Second, it becomes a barrier providing a clear separation between public and private spaces (see Blesser, 2007). Last, it creates a cozy, welcoming atmosphere

around the front desk. This musical intervention is another example of spatial experimentation that adds to the experience of the Head & Hands office. Through these micro-adjustments, the organization alters how staff members interact with the space and consequently the affect it has on them and their clients.

My interview with Tamira took place at the front desk, as she was doing her community shift. We had just begun our conversation and were talking about the noise in the building when I noticed that she was almost whispering:

Tamira: Noise. When I say cavernous, I mean it. You can hear everything.

Karen: And you are speaking quietly, because I've heard voices really travel!

Tamira: Yeah, but to be honest, if her door was open, Mary can probably hear me

right now, because it carries. It's the church. It's designed that way. (Tamira)

Tamira was whispering because she did not want to disturb Mary. The sound in the building heightened Tamira's awareness of others' experiences in the office and motivated her to modulate her own voice.

The final example of spatial change is more recent. In an Instagram post of August 7, 2020, Head & Hands shared some before-and-after photos of the front of the building (see Figure 17). The *before* photo shows a wheelchair ramp surrounded by weeds. The *after* photo shows a diverse flower and vegetable garden. The caption reads:

Like us, the concept of "edible forest gardening" was born in the 1970s. The

garden mimics the natural forest ecosystems, it'll meet human needs while

improving the ecosystem heath by cultivating resilient, vibrant, self-sustaining,

and productive edible landscape that will grow, self-regulate, and evolve for many

years to come. Harvestables from the garden will support the community at large,

as well as our Food Pantry Program and the Young Parent's programs food

security efforts. (Head & Hands, 2020)

What is remarkable about this Instagram post is how it illustrates the significance of spatial

change. Two years after the move, the organization is still collaborating and working with the

space to create new potential and growth. Head & Hands can now include a vibrant edible

garden on their list of services, something impossible in the old space. This is a physical

manifestation of their core mission to support the community, as food from the garden will help

to sustain the Young Parents Program. The new premises, in collaboration with the desire and

effort on the part of the staff, has led to an expansion of the organization rooted in its core values

and spirit. In this way, the space is an active contributor in the organization and is helping to

shape its next steps.

Figure 17. *Before and After Photographs of the Front Garden*

Chapter VI: The Value of Physical Space: Reflections and Discussion

> Human consciousness, one that is not merely in the brain but is fully embodied, needs an external environment pregnant with meanings and emotions for its self-awareness. It is futile to try to hypothesize what might happen if the environment was simply "smooth" and opposed no resistance, like a perfectly "comfortable" place or a drug-induced hallucination.
>
> (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 8)

Introduction

In this final section, my aim is to weave together themes from Head & Hands' moving experience with additional literature and my personal journey of spatial awareness. Where the first half of this paper reviewed past and current research trends in organizational studies, this chapter looks through a lens of spatial experimentation and potential. *What do we learn when physical space becomes a more engaged, active, and valued role in everyday work?* Pushing past the notion of organizational space as "controlled, defined and predictable" (Clegg et al., 2016, p. 152) into more interactive, embodied, and whimsical territory, I explore themes of health, wellbeing, and support, as well as qualities like potential, hope, and curiosity. This subtly shifts the discussion toward what is possible when space is given greater agency and, as Pérez-Gómez (2016) states, "is pregnant with meanings and emotions" (p. 8). To begin, I turn the lens inward to situate both my writing and myself within the context of physical space—an act of emplacement.

My Space

Figure 18. *My Office*

For the most part, I have written this dissertation while working in a classroom in an old school that has been converted into offices to be rented to freelance workers. There are old-fashioned black chalkboards along the walls and large dividing boards covered in textured beige material. I occupy a corner space with one large window, which is currently open with a warm breeze flowing in. Raindrops splat against the leaves on the trees. There is a daycare on the first floor and, in the morning, I can hear the sounds of the kids playing outside. Even though my daughter does not attend this daycare, hearing the kids laugh, sing, or cry makes her feel closer. It is nap time now. I know this because the sounds of kids playing have ceased. These sounds were also absent for five months during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all schools and daycares were closed. During this time, I came to my office alone. There were no sounds from kids outside and no other people working. But it was not a peaceful quiet; it felt unnerving and I had a hard time writing.

The floor of my office is a dingy tan-and-burgundy laminate; no matter how much you clean it, it looks dirty—I have tried. There are two rows of fluorescent lights, only half of them functional, and the paint on the ceiling is beginning to crack and peel away. Admittedly, I do not look up there that often, though I get a good view when I stretch my neck back to compensate for the long hours at the computer. I do not like fluorescent light, so I recently invested in a few lamps. My desk, which is actually my husband's desk, is handmade of finished particleboard. It is covered in printed journal articles, photocopied pages from books returned to the library, tall, wobbly stacks of books, scrap paper scribbled with random thoughts and ideas, and two monitors that seem to emerge from the chaos.

I try to imagine this room as a classroom—its original purpose—lined with rows of little school desks and the storage closet filled with lunchboxes and colourful backpacks. Whose little feet made these scuff marks, which I can never completely scrub from the floor?

Seeing how the ghosts of buildings past appeared for Head & Hands has made me wonder: how do the past lives of this space affect me while I work here? Is this a school or an office? Or both?

Connecting to the Research

While working on this project, I began to notice that my environment was becoming more present to me in my life. As I read through other writers' theory and research on space, I consciously and somewhat unconsciously began applying them to my day-to-day. Engaging with the topic through an autoethnographic spatial lens became a parallel practice to my writing. These relationships, which appeared to me in various shapes and forms—treetop gazing (see Spatial Noticing 3, below), rainbow projections (Spatial Noticing 7), and an attuned observation

of my surroundings (see Spatial Noticing 2)—ultimately became something like companions in my journey. These experiences have been a way to activate and ground myself in the research and in my environment. The notion of spatial attunement (as discussed in the previous pages) felt like an essential component of this research—one that took me beyond the walls of Head & Hands and into my own day-to-day surroundings. Being able to attend to my material world through an experimental process of awareness, emplacement, and play brought me closer to the experiences of the staff—not through a linear process of analytic understanding but an empathic and embodied knowledge.

As I weave elements of this journey into my discussion in the subsequent pages, the reader should bear in mind that my goal in this final chapter is not to conclude but to consider, and to become open and attuned to, the potential and possibility embedded in our surroundings.

An Invitation

Reading this dissertation can entail something larger than merely reviewing the words on these pages. It is also an invitation to develop your own spatial awareness. Have you considered the role of physical space in your own life or research? Do you notice your surroundings? Do researchers need to have or to develop spatial sensitivity to practice spatial research? Just as I have been exploring, inquiring, and reflecting on my personal spatial relationships, I invite you to do the same. Periodically, you may be prompted to pause, attune to your body, engage with your surroundings, and reflect on those observations.

Let's begin.

Now that you are not only a reader but a participant in spatial inquiry, you may wish to permit yourself to notice how it feels to articulate your body's presence and relationship in space? *Are you ever aesthetically mute?*

Begin by taking note of where you are sitting. At one time, you would most likely have been reading this at the university, but now perhaps you're working from home. What kind of chair is supporting your body? Can you feel fabric against your legs, or perhaps it is leather, plastic, or wood? When you gaze around the room what do you notice? Look closely at the textures, shadows, or objects. Feel them; how do they feel against your skin? Are there plants? Is there natural light? Or are you listening to the dim buzz of fluorescent lights? Is everything still? Or is there movement—sounds, perhaps, that float melodically or maybe claw at your concentration? Take a deep breath and feel your body fill with air. What do you smell? Lean back, stretch your legs out, and raise your arms above your head; how is your body filling the space? Does it encounter anything?

As you take in the physical space that surrounds you, notice how you are feeling. Do you feel attached or ambivalent? Are there any memories or moments that flash in your mind? How has the space evolved over time? How has the space changed you? This might seem like a strange question, but just consider the micro-decisions or adjustments that you have made because of the space. Perhaps the desk chair is not so comfortable, so instead you sit in the padded armchair. Maybe your office is a bit small for meetings, so you visit a café to meet students or colleagues? Or it could be something less noticeable, like a hard-to-access switch or plug that causes you to contort your body as you reach for it. A sunbeam that shines on your monitor too brightly at a particular hour, subconsciously motivating you to take a break. All

these details provide a framework for the active role of physical space in our day-to-day lives—yet this mysterious, ephemeral relationship is consistently left out of the discussion. Why?

Now that you are a little more aware of your surroundings and how you interact with them, does it shift your engagement with the words on this paper or screen? Does spatial awareness lead to more in-depth, relational understanding of our environment?

Emplacement

When was a kid, my father chose what shirt to wear based on how it felt against his skin. He is red–green colourblind, so colour was never a factor in these decisions. The softer the shirt, the better—brushed cotton, silk, flannel. As we walked through the department store, his hands would trail behind us, palms out, waiting to touch the right one.

Natural materials generally feel best. We are told they breathe. I imagine my cotton t-shirt taking a deep breath, letting the air fill the space

Spatial Experiments

Recently, my mother made my daughter the softest white, cotton nightie (see Figure 19). I got one too. Perhaps due to the romantic or nostalgic memories of times past, wearing the nighties makes everything feel more magical. Their long, flowy shapes move and transform into different combinations of foldings, over-layerings of material that occasionally catch the breeze to dance with our bodies. Wearing the nightie shifts how my body moves, its cotton rhythms influencing how I walk and move through the house.

Invitation: Do you have clothing that affects how you experience your surroundings? What is it? How does it make you feel? In what ways does it alter how you act or feel? Does your body move differently?

Spatial Noticing 1. *Dancing Fabrics*

between each thread. In response to *my* inhalation, the shirt I am wearing expands to accommodate the expansion of my lungs. If I were wearing a tighter, harder shirt, my breathing might adjust to become shallower, more restricted. The thought of a living and breathing shirt (or nightie—see Spatial Noticing 1) may be absurd; however, it illustrates how the environment influences mind-bodies. In one scenario, my shirt expands to accommodate me; in the other, I adapt my body to the shirt. Staff members shift and adapt to their work environments all the time; however, these modifications are often unconscious or considered unimportant—little more than a nuisance. For Merleau-Ponty (1962), the "body is the fabric into which all objects are woven" (p. 273)—the site of experience, perception, and knowledge. In this regard, senses are significant channels of information, like receptors for messages sent by the built and natural environments. The entangled connection between the body, the mind, and the senses imbues our experience and understanding of space with value and meaning.

Figure 19. *Magic Nightie*

My daughter's nightie transformed her way of being and moving in the space. Through the nightie, she became an embodiment of its flowy magic. In an exploration on boundaries, Nijs

and Daems draw our attention to William James's suggestion, in *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (1907/1996), "that in 'pure experience', it is not clear yet what is body and what is world" (quoted in Nijs and Daems, 2012, p. 187). Asking how a nightie or building can shift the way we relate to ourselves—our perception of reality—draws space into the construction of the day-to-day. Accounting for the multitude of ways the Head & Hands offices contributed to the staff and ultimately organization's way-of-being at work allows us understand some of the entangled relationships at play.

An example of this can be seen in how the new Head & Hands office, and its presence and status within the community, gave Tamira feelings of legitimacy and validity regarding the organization's mission and vision. Whether or not this is shared by all staff, or generally at the organizational level, these traits empower a different way of seeing the work and making decisions about it. The symbolic meaning embedded in the building's walls envelops the organization and infuses it with a new kind of energy. Instead of offering services out of a crumbling structure, the new building becomes *part* of those services and offers clients a warm place of stability and cleanliness whenever they need care and support.

The Emotionally Placed Body

Low (2003), an urban anthropologist, believes this embedded relationship to physical space is key to grounding the body. Space orients us; it is one's "position from which to view the world" (p. 12). Through our bodies, this orientation informs our perception and understanding of others, the environment, and ourselves. David Howes (2005), an anthropologist of the senses, defines this fusion of body, mind, and environment as *emplacement*—a configuration that adds a rich dimension to how space and the mind-body are conceptualized. Emplacement sees people as

"parts of places" (Pink, 2011, p. 347) rather than isolated subjects. This connection of place and material objects to the body is not new. Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin (1864 [1994]) wrestled with the mind-body's empathic connection to place. Astonished by architecture's ability to "express emotion or a mood" (p. 149)—such as "serious," "somber," "cheerful," or "friendly"—Wölfflin drew a link between building and body, suggesting that "physical forms possess a character only because we ourselves possess a body" (p. 151). This material connection, he argues, is also an empathic one. Therefore, as we encounter the nonhuman world, we read in it elements of ourselves and our own experience. Wölfflin believed that we experience and create meaning from the physical world through connection and familiarity with our own bodies. When the old and new Head & Hands offices are considered through such a lens of empathic connection, mood, and atmosphere, the shift from the one office to the other becomes more pronounced. How did the old office, which was dark, neglected, and falling apart, affect the staff who, as Wölffin suggests, saw themselves and their work reflected in the space?

Is it easier to value one's work when it is supported aesthetically and functionally by its environment?

Wölffin's descriptions of embodied reactions to our surroundings include painful asymmetries, powerful energetic columns, and expansive hallways that change the rhythm of our breath (p. 155). Recent studies in neuroscience have confirmed some of Wölffin's claims. According to neuroscientists Bar and Neta (2007), angular or sharp edges, as opposed to curves, trigger the amygdala, a brain structure involved in processing fear. It is easy to see why, in evolutionary terms, humans might have an innate fear of sharp, jagged rocks, but it also illustrates the powerful body-mind-place interconnection. Merleau-Ponty (2004) suggests that sounds and tactile data also have particular moods and that colours may evoke the "equivalent of

a particular sound or temperature" (p. 46). This interplay between colour, emotion, and the senses, which is always taking place, may produce stronger affiliations in some persons than in others. Our interactions with others, as well as with spaces or objects, produce experiences that are co-created. Davidson and Milligan (2004) describe this fusion as the "fabric of our unique personal geographies" (p. 523) and link it to a broader social "connective tissue" (p. 524). These metaphors elevate emotion from an untrustworthy or inappropriate quality to an essential component of one's experience of way of being.

To some staff members at Head & Hands, the new, well-lit office felt uplifting and energizing, but others experienced the colour and light as cold and distant. For the latter group, the low lighting (the product of unreplaced lightbulbs and dirty windows), together with the space's years of accumulated history, had created a charming, homey atmosphere. The experience shared by Emma of being locked in the building after closing, hidden by the very walls that should be serving her, transformed the space into somewhere potential dangerous. These spatial interactions are more than fleeting experiences, they linger—twisting and pulling at the relationships they foster. These emotional connections are difficult to interpret and put into context, in part, because they are constantly shifting. For the Head & Hands staff, there seemed to be overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, layers of understanding and emotion. These complex experiences are not rational or linear. One can understand how a new environment is better suited to the organization while simultaneously feeling sadness and loss. Describing our empathic and embodied bonds to things, Merleau-Ponty (2004) writes:

> The objects which haunt our dreams are meaningful in the same way. Our
> relationship with things is not a distant one: each speaks to our body and to the
> way we live. They are clothed in human characteristics (whether docile, soft,

hostile or resistant) and conversely they dwell within us as emblems of forms of

life we either love or hate. (p. 49)

This eloquent, emotional depiction of haunting objects dwelling within us blurs the boundaries between interior and exterior as well as those defining the human–nonhuman relationship. Tacit and emotional connections to the socio-material world are something to take seriously, especially, as Davidson and Milligan (2004) remind us, "there is little we do with our bodies that we can *think apart* from feeling" (p. 523). This includes "the most basic bodily tasks of resting, eating, working out or just getting around [which] can be 'fraught' with fear, guilt and shame, or infused with adrenaline thrills, cravings or dreamt-up desires" (p. 523). Our mind-bodies experience so much in a day and, depending on our physical location or emotional state, these experiences can feel entirely different from one day to the next. Sheila Heti (2019) describes her attempt to work in an unfamiliar rented studio. She writes: "I quickly found that the room was too empty of feelings and emotions and objects for me to work deeply. The space didn't belong to me the way my home belonged to me; my home was my insides" (para. 1). Although working from home is difficult for many people, Heti draws our attention to the relationship she developed with her own space—one that was familiar and full of history. The rented studio, empty of objects, made creating new connections difficult. Regardless of one's personal preference for working amid chaos and history or in clear, empty spaces, to attribute such powerful emotions to everyday activities represents a stark difference from how the working body is typically characterized.

For many organizations, time for reflecting on transition and loss is scant and difficult to create. With everyone experiencing different emotions, it is hard to attend to everyone's needs. While some staff at Head & Hands wanted to honour and say goodbye to the old building, others

could not leave fast enough—good riddance. Emotions influence and shape our perception by altering meaning. What comes to the forefront, or retreats into the background, ebbs or flows with our emotions and makes our experience unique to ourselves in that moment. Experienced as a group, these emotional waves become multiplied and are carried into the day-to-day interactions of, and with, the office.

Emotionally tinted perspectives do not produce realities that are entirely socially constructed, built solely from internal social experience, but instead are joint creations in which feelings and emotions are *located*—each "bound to a particular place with its specific temporality and qualitative character" (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 1). Bridging the bodily and material worlds underlines the role of environments in shaping our lived experience. As Pallasma (2012) writes: "the geometry of thought echoes the geometry of the room" (p.48). Just as Heti (2019) could not write in her empty, unfamiliar studio, we behave differently, make different decisions, and "think different thoughts in different places" (Pérez-Gómez, 2016, p. 109). Though subtle, these actions reinforce nonetheless the deeply *affective* nature of physical space. Our surroundings act upon us, just as we act upon them—hanging paintings, moving chairs, covering floors—transforming and creating spaces, "dressed with our memories and hopes" (p. 3). Whether we are cognizant of it or not, the emotional narrative that accompanies one's experience of space at home, on the street, or at work offers glimpses into the deeper connections at play.

Health and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing is an area of spatial research that is receiving more attention these days, a trend that seems to be infiltrating many aspects of contemporary life. With the discovery

of what is commonly referred to as sick building syndrome (SBS)—a condition where the physical environment is connected to, and potentially the cause of, symptoms such as tiredness, headache, stuffy nose, throat irritation, and dry eyes or skin (Burge, 2004)—interest in research to improve one's health in relation to architectural spaces is on the rise. While this was not originally part of my research agenda, the new Head & Hands building's impact on the perceived health of the staff made it hard to ignore.

Many connect contact with the natural world to improvements in health. While spending time completely surrounded by nature (without even a glimpse of the urban) has been linked to greater levels of perceived restoration (Hauru et al., 2012), even watching nature views on a video screen can reduce heart rates and increase attention (Laumann et al., 2003). Other, non-ocular-centric stimuli, such as bird sounds, have also been linked to stress recovery (Ratcliffe et al., 2013). Walking in nature has been shown to improve cognitive functions and reduce levels of depression (Berman et al., 2012), fatigue, anger and hostility, tension, and anxiety (Park et al., 2011). Forest environments are perceived to be more enjoyable, friendly, natural, and sacred than urban areas (Park et al., 2011). Even when viewed at a distance, from behind glass, natural forms have been shown to improve a person's spirit. The staff at Head & Hands commented numerous times about the impact of windows and light on their wellbeing, mood, and health. Early studies in this field by Roger S. Ulrich (1981; 1984) reported better recovery times among hospital patients who had rooms with windows. Current research in hospitals is also pointing to other, similar spatial and atmospheric qualities affecting health and wellbeing.

In *Healing Spaces*, Esther Sternberg (2009) adopts a sensory perspective on how space influences the body's ability to heal. Like at Head & Hands, noise is a common complaint among patients in hospitals, where decibel levels often exceed the recommended levels. Exposure to

loud noises increases heart rate and blood pressure, and can interfere with sleep. To further illustrate these impacts, Sternberg refers to a study conducted in a Swedish hospital's intensive care unit in which researchers "replaced sound-reflecting ceiling tiles with sound-absorbing tiles" (p. 218). The results showed fewer hospitalizations, general improvements in health outcomes, and improvements in staff members' satisfaction and sleep quality at home (p. 218). The effect on sleep outside the building is particularly interesting and somewhat surprising—that a body's exposure to a noisy workplace during the day could affect its ability to function at home. These studies point toward the kinds of impact that noise may have been having on the staff at Head & Hands. While the new office, as a healthier space, represented a major improvement, its noisiness remained a specific irritation that hovered, omnipresent, over staff members' interactions with one another and with the space.

Sternberg connects today's sterile hospital designs—absent of plants, decor, ornament, or colour—to the hospital's historical origin as a place to die, not heal. In the early twentieth century, as doctors began to connect hospitals with the spread of infection, their spaces were stripped of any element, material, or surface that might harbour and spread infectious agents. As hospitals modernized, they "became cleaner, they became colder, noisier, and less comforting" (p. 219). While Head & Hands is not a hospital, it is, in part, a medical clinic. The clean and streamlined qualities of the new building imbued the staff with feelings of pride and wellbeing; however, for some, they created an environment that felt cold and sterile. While maintaining a clean environment is vital for the health and recovery of patients, understanding other ways in which hospital design can contribute to recovery is also valuable. Is it possible to integrate more comfortable amenities without increasing the hospital's risk of spreading infection?

Recent design advancements at hospitals and care facilities are beginning to do just that by examining patients' or clients' lived experiences in these spaces, rather than viewing them as one-dimensional (i.e. utilitarian and sterile). Sternberg (2009) describes a healthcare facility for people with dementia, where design features were used to "serve as prosthesis to aid failing memories" (p. 166). Making sure the bathroom was in view of the bed helped residents remember where the toilet was, which in turn helped them "remain independent for longer than they would in normal facilities" (p. 167). Integrating residential architecture and atmospheric qualities into the hallway, the building featured a "main street" complete with glass ceilings, natural light, and the appearance of "two-story red-brick or wooden buildings" with "colourful awnings, flower boxes [and] faux wrought-iron balconies" (p. 167). These design features—reminiscent of the town squares where residents spent much of their time before coming to the care facility—serve as guideposts to help residents orient themselves within the space.

In a similar vein, the presence of natural light during the day, and lit streetlamps in the evening, announces the time of day in a thoughtful, recognizable way. While this is not feasible in every facility, it does prompt reflection on the breadth of possibility for how space can be used. Many staff members at Head & Hands lamented the lack of youthful or whimsical decor. At a healthcare facility, such features are more than creative designs with a visual aesthetic; they provide residents with familiar environments that actively support their ability to function normally. In a sense, the Head & Hands edible garden—a project developed a year after my interviews—has contributed to the space in a creative and transformational way. The garden goes beyond creative aesthetics and becomes a resource that interacts with the organization and the community. Just as the care facility for people with dementia mentioned above enabled its residents to remain independent, the Head & Hands edible garden provides food and

nourishment to the organization and offers a place of respite from the office walls and a means of engagement for those who decide to pull some weeds.

Duff (2012) uses the term *enabling places* to examine the roles of place and placemaking in the lives of people living with mental illness. His goal is not to prove a direct correlation between place and recovery, but to explore the ways by which space is identified and relied upon. This relational framing of how place figures into people's day-to-day routines allows Duff to freely explore space in relation to its "social, material and affective" nature (p. 1353). In interviews and mapmaking, participants describe places they inhabit and the routines or rituals associated with these locations. Rather than reduce these transcripts to themes or tables, the participants' words/voices, describing their lived experience, remain front-and-centre. We read about the significance of "otherwise unremarkable sites, like a charity store, a suburban shed, a street corner or a hair-dressing salon," and how these places have been "converted into places of recovery" (p. 1394). Duff explores how spaces can become enabling, not by design but through ongoing interaction and placemaking.

In the social sense, spaces were enabling, or became enabling, by positively affecting participants' interactions and/or way of being, either in promoting opportunities for "greater intimacy," creating "novel connections with peers and strangers," or otherwise shaping social interactions (Duff, 2012, p. 1391). The relationships between participants and these spaces were built and nurtured over time, emphasizing the living and evolving connections between people and spaces instead of seeing spaces as static receivers of people, or mere containers within which social events take place.

Despite some of the derelict conditions that plagued the old Head & Hands office, many staff found places of comfort there. These special spots or rooms became part of the staff

members' rhythms within the space, as they headed there for rest, reassurance, or relief. One spot was the upstairs rooftop—a secret hideaway under the trees. The other place was Mary's old office, universally known as *the* place of comfort and escape—available to anyone who needed it when Mary was not working. Almost everyone I interviewed spoke of Mary's office as one of their favourite places, and as a place to go when feeling down. Staff would lie on the couch, relax, sleep, or just go there to get some space. In the new building, these collective places of comfort disappeared as staff elected to seek solace within their own closed-door offices or leave the building altogether. This was not an inherently negative change, but it did shift the relationship away from the shared, collective experience of the old office as represented by comfortable spots like Mary's office.

Participation

To understand how almost any space can be enabling and foster dynamic engagement, we need to shift our attention away from the final result to the process through which that result is created. In an

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Spatial Experiment

It started as a joke. One winter, my husband put a video of a fire—a burning yule log—on the living room TV. We laughed at the tackiness of it. A real fire is so rich with sensory affect: the heat it projects; the crackling of wood and damp sizzling as the log burns; the light itself, first bright with flame then glowing embers.

I grew up with a fireplace in the house. Winters were spent gathering in front of its warmth. Pushing my heat-seeking-dad out of the way so my legs could soak in the heat too. I didn't have much expectation that this flat, filmed fire would add much value to our home, but I was wrong. Not all of the fireplace videos, but some, allowed the fire's natural soundtrack to crackle in the background. When sitting in an adjacent room—with the TV out of sight—the sound of the fire filled the space. Despite knowing it wasn't real, the audible warmth shifted the atmosphere. Our ears tricked us into having a fireplace. It was glorious.

Invitation: What sounds do you hear in your space? How do they shift the atmosphere?

Spatial Noticing 2. *Auditory Atmosphere*

interesting longitudinal, experiential study, Knight et al. (2010) looked at residents' sense of autonomy before and after a move into a new long-term care facility. The researchers met with two groups, each residing on a different floor of the facility. One group was collectively consulted and actively involved in decisions on design and decor for the new facility's communal space. The group on the other floor (the control group) was not consulted; instead, their space was designed for them. Residents in the first group immediately began to self-organize and hold meetings to discuss the new design options. After moving into the new facility, these residents reported "enhanced feelings of comfort and social identification" as well as "feeling happier and healthier" (p. 1408). These positive feelings also led to increased interaction with the space, the residents using the communal lounge almost four times as much as the control group. Other significant developments, such as taking pride in their accomplishment and expressing ownership over the space, were self-identified by the participants and witnessed by the staff. The marked difference between the two groups clearly illustrates the value of participation in the creation of space. The residents who were given the opportunity to work with the space, to contribute their creativity and input, felt more connected to the space and more liberated within it. The process through which a space is created is powerful and, as with any relationship, benefits from time and investment.

Out of all the interviews, such feelings of investment were most evident in my conversation with Amara. As the staff liaison with the architect, she developed an intimate knowledge of the new building and the considerations behind its design. In her words, she "helped design every nook and cranny of this building." Walking around the finished space, Amara spoke of her feelings of "accomplishment." There was one wall, in particular, which she painted herself, and she feels pride every time she passes it.

Framing spaces as "enabling places" (Duff, 2012), "therapeutic landscapes" (Gesler, 1992), and "restorative environments" (Hartig & Staats, 2003) calls attention to the affective and supportive qualities of the environment. While the health benefits of being in or even just looking at nature (Ulrich, 1981) are becoming more established and documented, these studies have a tendency of framing particular settings with "intrinsically therapeutic properties" (Conradson, 2005, p. 338). Labelling certain environmental qualities as *inherently* restorative or enabling can create a false or predetermined guarantee of receiving its "therapeutic influence" (p. 338). For this reason, Conradson suggests that the "therapeutic landscape experience is best approached as a relational outcome, as something that emerges through a complex set of transactions between a person and their broader socio-environmental setting" (p. 338). In this definition, all places (even unremarkable ones) have the potential to contribute to wellbeing (Duff, 2012). Using a relational approach to explore wellbeing and environments allows even places that are not filled with beautiful green trees to be considered therapeutic. Here, wellbeing becomes more about developing a connection and relationship over time than a specific design.

In an interesting study, researchers Korpela and Ylén (2009) considered the impact on participants of visiting or not visiting their favourite places. A group of 92 volunteers were asked either to visit their favourite place once per day, or not to visit it. Those who did not visit it went to other locations. Each participant kept a diary in which they described the place they visited, the location, reason for going, etc. Every day, each participant also completed a restoration outcome scale (ROS) to rate levels of "relaxation, attention restoration, clearing one's thoughts, subjective vitality and self-confidence" (p. 436). The places that participants visited were a mix of natural environments, places of work or study, community services, and meeting places. The outcome of the study indicated positive increases, in each of these categories, among those who

visited their favourite places. Korpela and Ylén question whether "favourite-place prescriptions" could be integrated into health strategies and call attention to the potential "restorative outcomes" associated not only with natural spaces but also with preferred environments (p. 438). As mentioned above, in the old space, Head & Hands staff regularly visited Mary's office or the rooftop space for comfort. These favourite spaces—self-prescribed—became care-takers for the staff and organization.

The subjective and personal nature of our relationships with physical spaces, often considered a nuisance by researchers in search of clear, objective truths, may be central for redefining how human spatial relationships are framed and investigated. Perhaps creating supportive spaces is less a matter of perfecting their design and more about developing and deepening our relationship to them.

But what if there is nothing to relate to?

disConnection

The anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1982), who coined the term *proxemics*—a cultural theory exploring the human use of space—spoke of the lack of "excitement or visual variation" (p. 62) within modern urban spaces. These visually similar spaces lack opportunities for kinaesthetic experiences and thus create an urban population that is "kinaesthetically deprived" (Hall, 1982, p. 62). Hall looks to traditional Japanese gardens to illustrate how well-designed spaces can engage the body. While walking through a Japanese garden, visitors are required to alter their step as they place their feet onto the stepping stones, often surrounded by water, without losing balance. Thus, visual concentration and unusual "muscular sensations are built into the experience" (Hall, 1982, p. 51). Vistas present themselves, not just in front of the viewer

but also up high or behind them, forcing neck muscles to stretch, or, as Hall puts it, to be "brought into play" (p. 52). This kinaesthetic way of experiencing space prompts the visitor to become more aware, not just of the aesthetic surroundings, but also of their own body. Hall's observation was substantiated forty years later by Ellard (2015), with his wearable technology research on city blocks. As mentioned earlier, Ellard found that the absence of visual diversity on city streets led to boredom and fatigue in his participants. With no invitations to connect and to engage with one's surroundings, the human body becomes weary and tired. *Is this loss of stimulation connected to a loss of potential?*

As current technologies and building materials manifest an environment "increasingly devoid of qualities, reduced to a set of coordinates in a global positioning device," Pérez Gómez (2016) suggests that human beings today face not just boredom and fatigue, but a "sense of despair in view of the 'meaningless of existence'" (p. 108). Pérez Gómez focuses on technology's role in distancing people from their surroundings and observes that despite the fact that humans actively perceive space through "our senses and our emotional consciousness, the technological world tends to deny the cognitive value of such perception" (p. 108). Viewing and conceptualizing space through a screen, and actively accessing it through various technological instruments and devices, ultimately "impacts our perceptions, so that place effectively hides from our experience" (p. 108). Perceiving through a phone limits the multisensory reality of the world by transforming space from something porous and all-encompassing into a flat screen.

In *The Urban Village*, Alberto Magnaghi (2005) blames the standardization of building materials such as "concrete, aluminum, plastic [and] steel" for the bleak portrait of our current metropolises. These materials manifest sameness throughout the cityscape by "dissociating architecture and the city from" (p. 13) the nuances of place. Abstract spaces created by recent

advances in technology abandon site-specificity in favour of the "virtual factory" (p. 18). This detachment from our banal physical surroundings has a destabilizing impact, a dismemberment from material culture, and what Magnaghi refers to as relating in an *aspatial domain* (p. 18). At the same time, the bombardment of mass-produced imagery online, plastered across the city, and streamed through television sets produces a "mesmerizing flow without focus or participation" (Pallasmaa, 2012, p. 25). Recipients are simultaneously over- and under-stimulated.

While the new Head & Hands office is by no means a banal "white box" devoid of interesting aesthetic qualities, its simplicity and newness stands in stark contrast to the old office space. The organization's transition from a chaotic hodgepodge of whimsical clutter to a bright, pristine, and spacious building is difficult to summarize. The new building is a resounding improvement over the old space; however, the loss of years-old improvised creations has changed the eccentric atmosphere. "We need more whimsy," Tamira lamented during our conversation. Over time, as the organization and space evolve and transform, some of these qualities will return; however, the embodied impact of the loss (and the gain) was felt by the staff. Being in the new space was like staring at a blank, white canvas as a self-portrait. When I asked Mary how the spirit of Head & Hands is conveyed through the new space, she had a hard time answering: "I think we're still trying to figure that out, quite frankly. I think we're still trying to make it our space. We're not quite there yet."

Stimulation

A common complaint from people working in open-office spaces is the constant noise and distraction. Large open-office spaces can feel chaotic, with too much visual and aural stimulus, and few or no barriers allowing noise to accumulate and rebound. The result is often a

room packed with workers wearing noise-cancelling headphones. A sea of people side by side, in their own little worlds. No music playing, no clicking of keyboards, no murmurs or hums. For Head & Hands, the intense echo in the new office forced many staff to work with their office door closed, something that went against their open-office culture. The heightened sound caused staff to whisper, play music, or move a meeting location to maintain privacy or avoid disturbing co-workers—small shifts that overtime can become engrained behaviour.

Researchers Rachel Kaplan and Stephen Kaplan have investigated stimulation in offices (Brookes & Kaplan, 1972; Kaplan, 1993) and in nature (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Kaplan, 1995), and developed an attention restoration theory (ART) from examining different types of environmental stimulation and the quality of attention they demand (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989). Unlike the kinaesthetic stimulation provided by Japanese gardens, mental fatigue has been linked to too much environmental stimulation. Urban environments tend to expose people to relentless stimulation, which the authors say requires *hard fascination*. In these

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Spatial Experiment

After learning about the restorative qualities of soft fascination, I started looking at the treetops on my walk home every day (see Figure 20). Walking with my head in the clouds, my neck tilted back. This position nicely counteracts the usual hunch over my desk, spine arched forward, eyes a-glow from the computer screen. The trees appear in different forms as I walk toward them. Each then disappears, a new one rising in its place. The sky behind them is grey or blue, full of clouds, or snow.

Lately, during these walks, ideas seem to pop into my mind. After a day of struggling to write, ideas flash inside me, words forming perfect, articulate sentences. If I do not stop in that instant and jot them down, they disappear—lost in the branches of the swaying trees.

Invitation: Next time you're out for a walk, look up!

Spatial Noticing 3. *Soft Fascination*

environments, people are "forced to use their attention to overcome the effects" of persistent distraction (Pearson & Craig, 2014, para. 2). In contrast, natural environments are filled with visual qualities that are considered "soft" fascinations, such as leaves, branches, shadows, flowers, clouds, and patterns of dappled sunlight (Kaplan, 1995). These abundant, sensory-rich features call for the kind of attention that feels unencumbered. Rather than monopolize focus or dampen the senses, they allow the mind-body to contemplate other things (p. 174). Such traits found in nature have been linked to cognitive restoration and reduced stress (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Thompson et al., 2012). Becoming momentarily distracted in the fascination of multicoloured fall leaves allows the mind-body space for unconscious thought. Similar to the insights that may appear a person in the shower or just before falling asleep, the presence of *soft fascination* seems to provide the conditions for unencumbered, unconscious reflection—a push-and-pull between presence and absence, ambiguity and certainty.
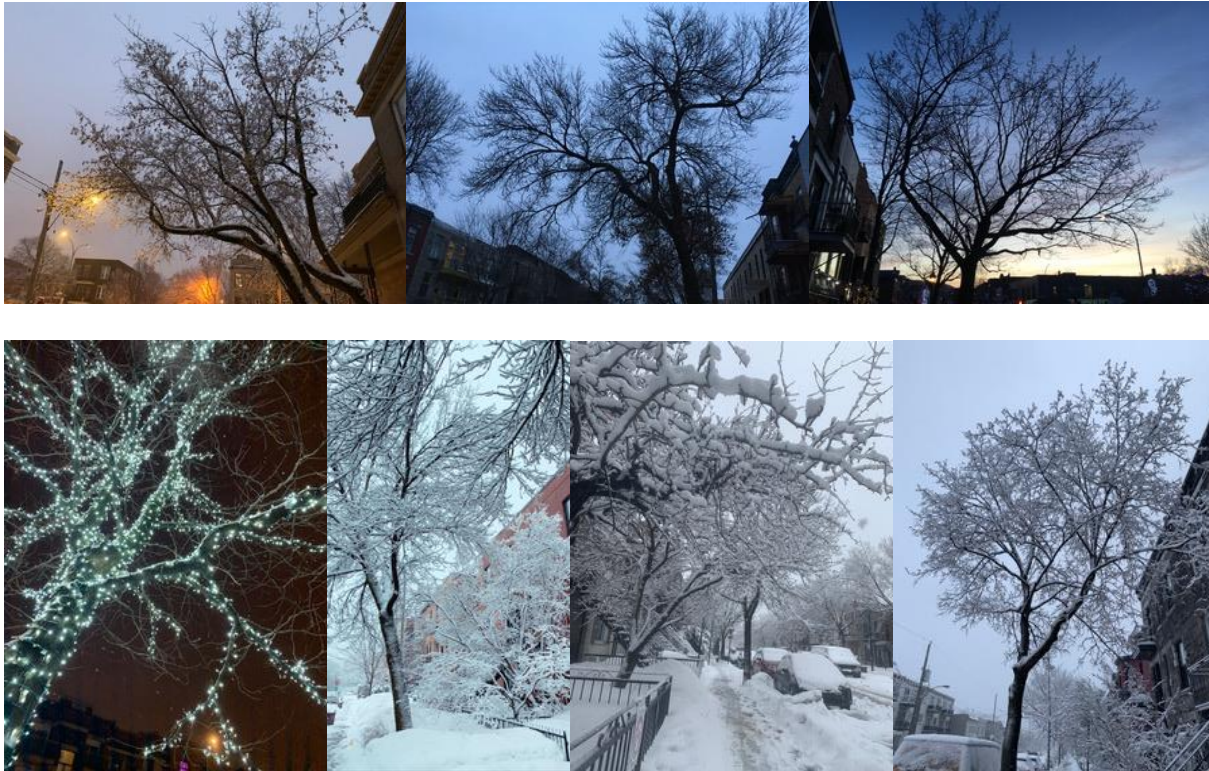
Figure 20. *Photo Journal of Treetop Gazing*

Supportive Space

Examining office space through a supportive lens shifts how the evaluation of buildings is conceptualized and performed. Deuble & de Dear (2014) state that a building's purpose is to "provide a safe and comfortable environment that neither impairs the health of its occupants nor hinders their performance" (p. 112). This definition is correct: a building or office space should not hinder or impair health. However, the statement does not speak to how office spaces can nurture, support, and enhance the work being performed in them.

How may a space be considered supportive? Can the same space be considered supportive to all people?

Reimagining space as a supportive and active component of an organization's comfort and effectiveness requires a shift in how space is conceptualized. In their paper "Designing Space to Support Knowledge Work," Peponis et al. (2007) explore notions of office design beyond the more traditional patterns of interaction and information flow. Instead, they consider space as an "intelligible structure" (p. 816), a porous framework within which people and information connect to form ongoing projects. Space is important because "it supports and restricts" how resources become available (p. 816). The authors define resources in two ways (though I think this list could be expanded). The first resource category is people: their expertise, experience, and skills. The second is material: "visual representations and diagrams of different kinds, symbolic expressions, models, charts, or images" (p. 816). Adding physical space to this list as a third category adds room size, flexibility, aesthetics, and atmosphere to the list of resources. Space becomes part of the equation by bringing these qualities together to create something new, thereby essentially becoming a facilitator of new knowledge.

Elevating space to the role of facilitator assigns it a rather intelligent role. In this dynamic, space becomes a part of an organizational evolution achieved by creating an "intelligible framework within which copresence, coawareness, and interaction patterns become engaged in the exploration, representation, interpretation, and transformation of collective knowledge" (Peponis et al., 2007, p. 816). This detailed list underscores the collaborative nature of space during times of playful exploration, when participants are present and aware of their surroundings and tasks. Often groups can become too focused on completing their project or task, and miss opportunities to discuss the process—*how* they are accomplishing their work. In successful teams, there is a constant back-and-forth between task and process. This happens at both a conscious and unconscious level. Seeing space as part of the process forces teams to look

actively at how the space is helping or hindering their task. These active participatory and relational questions can become embedded into how a group is working *with* a space rather than simply in it or around it. Over time, this way of relating and collaborating with space becomes part of the organizational culture. As working with the space becomes more intuitive, the relationship between the space and its users becomes more dynamic and embedded. Such an ongoing participation with the space shifts and elevates the environment, and embeds it into daily use for individuals and groups.

For the staff at Head & Hands, the evolving process of settling into their new space was partially intuitive and circumstantial. After the allotted moving and setting-up time was over, the organization returned to the daily demands and work responsibilities. This allowed the space to pause and the staff to settle in through *doing*. As they worked and became more familiar with the space and with their new needs, changes and adjustments were made. Swinging doors were added, closets reassigned to new programs, desks cut, and other small modifications were made that became physical manifestations of support. This process transformed the act of setting up into a responsive, dynamic interaction.

Generative Support

Peponis et al. (2007) borrow the term *generative* (see Hillier and Penn, 1991) to describe how a space can foster "intensified awareness and cognitive opportunity" (p. 836) for its users. As organizations begin to work more collaboratively with their space, what emerges is "an integrated, intelligible, and behaviorally diversified spatial ecology" (p. 836). Hillier (1991), best known for developing space syntax, a theory and method for understanding spatial patterns and decisions through maps, argues that tacit, unconscious knowledge is "embedded" within physical

space (p. 32). He makes the significant distinction that "spatial configuration *constitutes* rather than *represents* social knowables" (p. 32, emphases in original). Once again, space is elevated from an external symbol or product (representation) to an aspect of tacit knowledge. Framing space as part of our unconscious, everyday life also contributes to the development of new knowledge. Investigating how space fosters innovation or thwarts creative impulses can be connected to the gradually increasing invisibility of one's surroundings over time. Just as all routines can become stagnant and tasks performed without much thought, spaces can become dull—removed from our conscious awareness. During times of transition, change, or malfunction, structures move to the foreground, creating new opportunities. Hillier (1991) argues that "in the absence of [tacit knowledge] the spatial conditions can exist for all kids of *generation*" of new knowledge (p. 29). When the mind-body is forced to confront the unfamiliar, the new experience, in all its emotional and sensory fullness, becomes a generative quality. Such moments, wherein the mind-body has opportunities to explore, either physically or mentally, beyond its habitual patterns, may bridge the connection between potential and wellbeing.

While it is difficult to conclusively link specific organizational changes at Head & Hands to the new building, small shifts and adjustments in how the staff envisioned their future were evident. As the staff came to view their programs as being in relationship with their new environment, new knowledge was formed, leading to new opportunities. Even small changes, such as lending their space to other organizations or hosting trainings onsite, shift the potential. As new programs take root and gardens grow, many small changes may lead to even greater shifts yet unknown. Understanding a space's potential is just as much about supportive structure as it is connection. What will Head & Hands look like five years from now, after some of these shift and changes have had time to emerge?

Can the way we treat and relate to space shift our vision of what is possible?

Spaces of Memories

I am sitting at my computer for the first time in a couple of weeks, back to writing after staying at my parents' house in Victoria while attending a friend's wedding. Mentally, I understand the distance we travelled across the country, by plane, from one place to the other. I packed my suitcase, drove to the airport, said goodbye, watched movies, ate terrible pizza, drank mediocre wine, and soothed my exhausted two-year-old. The sun was setting when we arrived back in Montreal. The humid air hit my body as we walked through the airport doors and got into a taxi. We went to bed late, our bodies still operating on Vancouver Island time. In Greece, there are two words for the way we experience time. The first is *chronos*, which refers to standardized and scheduled time; it is the time we read on clock and calendar. The second, *kairos*, is less programmed. It is felt; it changes and adapts, lives and breathes. Kairos is rhythm. It calls upon intuition, presence, and awareness to feel it and act within it, rather than itineraries and alarm bells. Jetlag pulls me temporarily into Kairos time. In it, I am neither here nor there.

The next day, while unpacking my suitcase, I bring a shirt up to my face and take a deep breath. It smells like my parents' house. I take another breath and close my eyes. For a second, I am back—or perhaps part of me is still there? I feel out of sync here. My body is still on West Coast time, making us all sleep in late. It is slowly adjusting to the hot, sticky air, which has replaced the cedar- and kelp-scented ocean breezes.

I take my daughter to daycare and come into the office. I am staring at the screen, looking for something that calls out to me. Where do I start? Uncertain and looking for distraction, I take a bite of the snack I brought. It is an oatmeal-and-chocolate-chip cookie, which my mother had

baked just before we left. It tastes like her. It feels strange and good to taste home here—a momentary merging of two different places. In the past, I have tried to make these cookies, but they are never exactly right. They never deliver my childhood home into my mouth.

Marcel Proust (1922) made famous this type of spontaneous, embodied memory when he bit into a tea-dipped madeleine and was unexpectedly transported back to a vivid memory of his aunt. He describes feeling as though "an exquisite pleasure had invaded [his] senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin" (p. 48). In this passage, Proust conveys both the pleasure and disorientation in the experience—not being fully aware of what was happening or where he was being transported. Philosopher Edward Casey (2001) describes Proust's notion of memory and place as a moment or essence that "can be compressed into a single sensation, which being reawakened, can bring the place back to us in its full vivacity" (p. 688). Such impressions of places past, he continues, remain "lodged in our body long after we have left [them]," waiting to be released by the correct sensation or trigger (p. 688). In this sense, memories do not transport us elsewhere; rather, they bring part of ourselves forward.

Similarly, Dylan Trigg, in *The Memory of Place* (2012b), describes these memories as "residue" within the body (p. 11). He defines the act of remembering as "the meaningful retrieval of an experience, encompassing a surrounding world of place, time and corporeality" (p. 51). In this definition, memories are located both in terms of their surroundings and within the body. At the old Head & Hands office, this phenomenon was most evident in Emma's description of her office, still brimming with the memories and objects of her former colleague. How she felt in that room was mediated through her relationship to the past and present. When Emma described the objects in the room, she spoke of them not in terms of texture or shape but as memories in and of themselves.

Regardless of how the memories arrive, their existence within the mind-body influences how one relates to one's present environment. Place contributes to how we exist in the world at a very fundamental level, shaping behaviour, affecting emotion, and guiding action. With such powerful qualities, it makes sense that these influences would not simply disappear when we leave a room. Casey (2001), in an attempt to explain the inseparable link between people and place, describes the relationship through the act of subjugation:

> We are the subjects of place or, more exactly, subject to place. Such subjection ranges from docility (wherein we are the mere creatures of place, at its whim and in its image) to appreciation (by which we enjoy being in a place, savouring it) to change (whereby we alter ourselves—our very self—as a function of having been in a certain place). In every case, we are still, even many years later, in the places to which we are subject because (and to the exact extent that) they are in us.
>
> (p. 688)

Places are in us. They become part of our physical being, leaving "traces" (Nijs & Daems, 2012, p. 190) on our bodies that later resurface through memories often triggered by sensory experience. But past spaces do not only exist as flashes in our mind. Through habitual daily interaction, they can alter and shape our movements, our ways of communicating, and how we interact with each other. Because of this, "present practices and experiences are imbued with the thickness of a past that has not ceased to be" (p. 188). These spatial habits do not immediately disappear when we leave a space, or replace an old space with a new one. The old office was present for Head & Hands' staff, ether consciously or unconsciously, as they navigated and made sense of the new space. In their research exploring the mobility of people moving into old age, Nijs and Daems question the fixed boundaries between the material and immaterial. Rather than

understand memory and remembering as a recalling of the past, they consider how past and present become entwined wherever the past "filters or bursts into daily mobility practices and forms of spatial behavior" (p. 188). These spatial ghosts blur the boundaries by acting as "equivocal figures lingering between past and present, absence and presence" (p. 188). It is like walking through a once-familiar town in which the well-known stores are long gone, and as you look upon the buildings the view simultaneously contains what is and what once was—a living memory overlaying the current moment. Time and space seem to merge with, and through, one's body as memories and experiencing inform the present.

At Head & Hands, the staff's spatial memories of the old building became fused with their descriptions of the new one. At times, accounts of the new space were almost immediately replaced with memories of the old office. It seemed difficult for some to describe the new space—as if they did not know it yet—while their memories of the old office were lush with sensory and emotive description. Even questions about how the staff felt in the new office were informed by embodied memories and tacit knowledge of the old space. The unconscious comparison provided a framework around which the staff and the organization could evaluate and understand their position.

Trigg (2012b) argues that "by carrying places with us, we open ourselves to a mode of embodiment that has less to do with habit and more to do with the continuity of one's sense of self" (p. 11). The repetition of actions is easily understood as a defining factor of how space affects those who use it. When in my office space, I sit in the same chair, at the same desk,

moving my hands across the same keyboard—every day. But what Trigg (2012b) is saying is that these spatial routines are less significant than how they function in creating a sense of self. Their very banality and familiarity are simultaneously part of what make them invisible and an embodied part of us. Removing this familiarity and reassurance is discombobulating and disorienting. Everyday actions require new energy and attention.

Rather than consider spatial qualities by themselves, it is in fact our relationship with them that is significant. The questions then become: "How does this room envelop me? How do I hold myself in this room? . . . At which point did I cease feeling a visitor in this room and more a fundamental part of it" (Trigg, 2012a, p. 5)? Such questions have little to do with environmental satisfaction scales used to measure employee contentment; they are more personal, more embodied. They get at the rich, dynamic relationship between a person's mind-body and their space—but they often remain unasked until something changes and draws our attention to them.

Spatial Experiment

One of my favourite times of year is the fall. The colour infused into the city through the red, yellow, and orange treetops never ceases to feel magical. But there is something even more mysterious that happens when the leaves fall to the ground. They leave an imprint—a perfect, ghostly print as though the leaf's shadow forgot that it and its leaf were supposed to stay together.

The sidewalk is preserving the memory of the leaf in a beautiful display of something that came before (see Figure 21). Sometimes, if it snows early enough, the prints remain until spring—a little time capsule of leaf shadows.

Invitation: Have you ever noticed these leaf prints before? Next time you see them, stop and take notice. In what other ways do elements in our environment reflect memories?

Spatial Noticing 4. *Shadow Printing*

Head & Hands used its time of change as an opportunity to reflect on how they were using their space and what impact it was having on their work, team dynamics, and the organization as a whole. As expressed in Mary's comments above, the new space became part of a larger conversation about the future the organization wanted to create.

Figure 21. *Leaf Imprints on Sidewalk*

Potential Space

Growing up, once I was able to dress myself, I did so four to six times a day. Constantly trying on new combinations, each outfit felt like I was wearing a different person. The clothes gave me permission to play with and express different aspects of myself that were usually hidden. When I was a little older, and physically able to move furniture, my fascination with transformation shifted to the rooms in our house. My childhood bedroom was very small. It fit a

single bed, a desk, and not much more. Yet, a few times each year, I rearranged its contents. It was as though my room became a mirror for the emotional upheaval and confusion of adolescence. The obvious position for the bed was lengthwise along the right-hand wall. At the far end of the room was a medium-sized window and, along the other wall opposite the bed, a closet with folding doors. Once, I remember positioning the bed horizontally under the window. In this configuration, I couldn't completely open one of the closet doors. But it didn't matter. It was an experiment. Every time I rearranged, I would tap into a somewhat fantastical hope that something new would emerge—that somehow, if I kept trying, a new, totally different room would be revealed.

Spatial Experiment

My habit of rearranging furniture, plants, and art keeps my spaces more present and attuned to my current mood. It transforms our house into a subtle but constantly evolving space. Most often, the changes will be very slight. A plant rotates or moves to another location. The rocking chair and armchair switch places. A pillow moves from here to there. But even when the shift is small, the entire room has a slightly different resonance. Unfamiliar shadows appear and new relationships between objects emerge like shifts in the conversation. Now, my view from the rocking chair is different—from here, I can see the painting.

Recently I moved a lamp from the bedroom to the dining room for more light, now that winter is creating darker evenings. What happened surprised me: the light projected shadows, of the plant sitting beside it, onto the ceiling (see Figure 22). All of a sudden, the ceiling became part of the room.

Invitation: Move something around in your home or office. How does it change the space? What do you notice?

Spatial Noticing 5. *Re-Arranging*

Figure 22. *Ceiling Shadows*

Potential

  Potential space, a term used by Winnicott (2005) in his influential work *Playing and Reality*, is filled with possibility through its indication of presence and absence, a simultaneous joining and separating between subject and object. Winnicott, a psychoanalyst and theorist, introduces the term *potential space* as a quality of the (un)coupling between mother and child and emphasizes the importance of trust and reliability as foundational qualities for the creative play flourishing at its centre. Winnicott does not attempt to resolve this inherently paradoxical term (p. 145). Instead, it exists as an (im)possibility—the co-creation of material and immaterial during a transitional state of separation and becoming. Rather than isolate these qualities, they

are all considered part of a loving relationship, within which—through a creative process of exploration—the child begins to understand themselves as something separate from the mother.

In their article "Potential space and love," Metcalfe and Game (2008) argue that accessing the state of *potential space* requires an ontological shift "from the identity logic of Euclidean space to the relational logic of potential space" (p. 18). Repositioning from an objective and rational state to a relational way of being in and understanding the world opens up one's perspective infinitely. Within this openness, "potential is neither internal nor external, but is the nonfinite difference that emerges through *relation*" (p. 18). One way to access potential is through a spontaneous eruption that guides our behaviour, as opposed to conscious, deliberate action. Winnicott (2005) similarly points out the attention given to "undirected" contemplation and play that is "deliberate, but without too much deliberateness" (p. 147). This wavering back and forth between the sharp focus and the soft, presence and absence, is also present in phenomenological writing and practice.

In *The Empathic Imagination*, Alfred Margulies (1989) speaks to notions of the self in terms of possibility. This self is constantly creating and being created through the presence of possibility. What emerges from possibilities are aspects of ourselves that may not yet fully exist but are revealed or created from the unknown (p. 131). It reminds me of feeling my way through the dark; with no or limited sight, I am forced to rely on my other senses, embodied knowledge and intuition. Margulies uses the phenomenological term *transcendence*, which "implies the simultaneity of presence and absence-in-presence" (p. 132). Transcendence refers to our inability to perceive every particular feature of an object, while simultaneously bringing the object to life by manifesting its surface, pattern, breadth, and "fullness of being" (p. 132). Margulies elegantly writes how the "feel of [transcendence's] otherness, its realness, is embodied in its having more

dimensions than are immediately available to us, facets that come alive within the play of presence and absence-in-presence" (p. 132). Within these unseen and unperceived aspects of the word and self, there exists an unknown potential. Brian Massumi (1995), while (un)tangling theories of *affect* and emotion, speaks about *intensity* as something "embodied in pure autonomic reactions" (p. 85). Intensity is "static"—almost as if time were suspended "in a state of suspense, potentially of disruption"—while simultaneously "filled with motion" and resonance (p. 86). It is through this intensity or affect—a simultaneous pause and growth of frenetic energy—from which we get the "unexpected and inexplicable" (p. 88). In this exploration, Massumi separates affect from emotion by positioning it within the body as an abstracted paradox where "opposites coexist, coalesce and connect" (p. 91). It seems that the more one tries to comprehend and disentangle such states, the more it is discovered that "outsides are unfolded, and sadness is happy" (p. 91). Instead, leaving room for the unknown, unfathomable, and undefinable becomes part of the process.

The disruption and confusion of moving positions organizations (perhaps involuntarily) into such a place. This can be viewed as a hindrance or a moment for reflection and innovation. How the staff at Head & Hands approached setting up their new space—as a (somewhat unplanned) relational evolution paired with their own self-reflection and needs—illustrates the potential within the incomplete and unfinished. Hesitant answers about how the new building embodied the organization's spirit are not inherently negative; rather, they signify a willingness to be momentarily lost while sifting through possible futures. Seeing some of the micro-adjustments that Head & Hands made to their space—the addition of swinging doors, playing music, cutting the front desk—demonstrated the staff's willingness to engage with their physical

surroundings as interventions into their social processes—a wonderful example of socio-material experimentation.

Playing with presence and absence-in-presence seems to be an essential element for often undervalued aspects such as curiosity, surprise, and mystery. Perhaps the creative potential embedded within *mess* stems from the possibility hidden underneath or behind stacks of books and papers. Researchers (Vohs et al., 2013) examining the impact of order and disorder on behaviour and decision making discovered that participants in an orderly room were more likely to choose more conventional and healthier options, while those in a messy room were more likely to exhibit enhanced creativity and favour novelty. This study uniquely links the presence of mess or order to how one makes decisions. With tidying being elevated to an art form (see Kondo, 2014) and a "growing industry centred on instilling environmental orderliness," Vohs et al. (2013) illustrate the creative value of disorder and mess while acknowledging the benefits of a clean, uncluttered space (p. 1866).

Spatial Experiment

My daughter loves playing hide-and-seek. She often will show us where to hide and then return, with boundless surprise and delight, to find us exactly where she left us. Other days, we spend enormous amounts of time taking turns hiding and finding, always stumbling upon new spaces to curl into or lay beneath—holding our bodies still, breathing into the cloth, and sensing the approach of discovery. It is a marvellous way to play with each other and with the space. My favourite, though, is when my daughter closes her eyes and says, "you can't see me. Where am I?" For her, we instantaneously disappear and she hides for a second or two in the darkness behind her eyelids. *Found you!* While we play, the house is both obscured and revealed in novel ways. The game therefore becomes a process of discovery, a practice of transcendence. As we run from room to room, the house unfolds before us, but never all at once. There always remains a part that is unseen and perfect to hide in.

Invitation: Where are the hiding spots in your space? Can you fit there? Or maybe hidden objects—a drawer filled with old forgotten treasures? What can you find or hide?

Spatial Noticing 6. *Absence-in-Presence*

Perhaps both are possible. Perhaps it is not about the mess or cleanliness, but about the ability to hide.

Margulies (1989) offers a description of the conflict and potential bound up within the taking of a self-portrait:

It is like trying to take a photograph of oneself in a mirror while looking through the view finder—not only is one's perspective limited to a particular and instantaneous view, but the wholeness of the self is obscured by the machinery of looking, by the impossible process of the enterprise itself. However, it is within this very paradox, this process of forcing to a new level of play of presence and absence-in-presence, that one constitutes self-awareness. (p. 133)

In this analogy, Margulies illustrates how little of oneself is available to view and how much information is filled in by our minds without conscious thought or awareness. Becoming more sensitive to what is hidden, within one's mind and within the physical world, opens a world of possibility and potential. The presence of mystery, mess, or undefined qualities within spaces cannot be reduced to aesthetic preferences; rather, these ingredients are necessary to shape the future. According to Massey (2005), a space cannot be "a container for always-already constituted identities nor a complete closure of holism" (p. 12). This would be a space without relation—of closed, insular, and static action. This description pushes past space as an external framework—which so many are desperately trying to perfect—because regardless of how accurately a space is designed to meet every possible need, as Massey puts it, for "the future to be open, space must be open too" (p. 12).

What does openness in a space look and feel like?

Too often, undefined spaces seem predestined for junk storage—fatalities of collective neglect. This was the fate of many areas in the old Head & Hands office. On the other hand, to realize the possibility and potential within a space requires a balance of trust, flexibility, engagement, and experimentation. From a relational perspective, there needs to be a certain level of awareness and attunement between the space and the organization. Head & Hands demonstrated such qualities through its ongoing amendments to the space in response to the needs of the staff and organization. They also showed up in how staff spoke about the connection between the space and their wellbeing, exhibiting an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the space and the organization. Almost every staff member spoke of natural light as essential to their wellbeing. With a supportive and healthy environment, and energy freed up for new projects and initiatives, the space became creative and open—not through mess but through opportunity.

Curiosity

The presence of possible futures can also be linked to emotions such as excitement, optimism, curiosity, and hope, among many others. But why does it feel difficult to justify the need for curiosity in space? In organizational studies, how often does one evaluate a space based on its ability to provoke curiosity? Richard Phillips (2013) suggests that we need to actively "make space for curiosity" in everyday work environments (p. 1). Acknowledging that we are in an era of adapting others' buildings, rather than create new ones, he offers practical suggestions ranging from physical modification to a shift in culture and behaviour. A university that desires a

less rigid and hierarchical space, which it came to believe cultivated passive students, created flexible rooms to "facilitate play, interaction and innovation" (Phillips, 2013). Giving students increased control over and freedom within these spaces ignited greater creative engagement and participation. Phillips draws attention to a time when wonder was ignited through display cases and entire rooms were filled with magical unknowns. Known as *Wunderkammern*, these cabinets of curiosity from early modern Europe were dazzling displays of mysterious, undefined objects that created a sense of fascination and delight. Unfortunately, this sense of wonder, too emotional and fantastical for Descartes and others, was beaten down by the Enlightenment "with its penchant for a more skeptical, vigorous, and systematically delineated type of order" (Weschler, 1996, p. 88).

Spatial Experiment

My penchant for moving furniture helps me remain attuned to my house and to notice qualities that may have shifted beyond my awareness. I recently placed a crystal on a high windowsill to catch the afternoon light streaming in. All of a sudden, the house was covered in dozens of rainbows gliding, ever so slowly, along the wall (see Figure 23), the subtle retreat of the sun now reflected in luminescent colour.

Invitation: Is there anything magical or curious in your space? Anything that moves or changes with the light? Does your space feel alive? What could you add to create such a connection?

Spatial Noticing 7. *Rainbow Refractions*

Figure 23. *Rainbow Refractions*

Fast forward a few hundred years and it seems that few opportunities for curiosity are left. One of them, however, awaits us at the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, with its delightful collection of rare artifacts and other oddities. Here one can explore life in "the Lower Jurassic" through dark rooms offering a seemingly endless maze of delight and bewilderment. While wandering between the displays, a visitor "continually finds himself shimmering between wondering at (the marvels of nature) and wondering whether (any of this could possibly be true)" (Weschler, 1996, p. 60). Through its interplay of fantasy and reality, this museum offers more than detailed models or information on didactic panels; indeed, it transforms visitors into part of the show while offering them "the capacity of such delicious confusion" (p. 60). Confusion thrives as an intentional feature of the experience. Inside the museum, traditional frameworks seem to disappear into the shadows and visitors are left to navigate through the maze on their own.

While it is unlikely that organizations' offices will be transformed into cabinets of curiosity, the significance of wonder and novelty should not be disregarded. Spaces can be embedded with curiosity through the qualities of the space itself. Throughout his work *In Praise*

of Shadows, Jun′ichirō Tanizaki (1977) meticulously describes the settings and qualities of Japanese architecture, design, and ritual, often contrasting them with Western aesthetic and cultural norms. His words lead us into a room that is empty yet overflows with detail and potential:

> Whenever I see the alcove of a tastefully built Japanese room, I marvel at our comprehension of the secrets of shadows, our sensitive use of shadow and light. For the beauty of the alcove is not the work of some clever device. An empty space is marked off with plain wood and plain walls, so that the light drawn into it forms dim shadows within emptiness. There is nothing more. And yet, when we gaze into the darkness that gathers behind the crossbeam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquility holds sway. (p. 20)

Here Tanizaki illustrates the beauty and power held within "the secrets of shadows" (p. 20) by emphasizing their almost mystical qualities. We cannot help but be affected at a subconscious level, for what we are witnessing is not a gimmick or device, but the dynamic relationship between the built and natural environments. In a study similar to that of Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) work on soft fascination, Kevin Nute and Zhuo Job Chen (2020) have been investigating the psychological benefits of what they refer to as "wind-generated movement" in traditionally static environments—such as the office. Natural movement is defined as flickering sunlight or the animated shadows of tree leaves or branches (see Figure 24). Nute and Chen found that the

presence of these naturally mobile phenomena fostered a sense of presence and timelessness similar to the results of meditation and mindfulness.

Figure 24. *Shadows of Trees Dancing on My Wall*

Jenny Odell (2019) sees curiosity as an essential quality of seeing anew. Without it, one is drawn into one's habitual practices, which reinforces a limited point of view. Curiosity, she writes, "can suspend our tendency toward instrumental understanding—seeing things or people one-dimensionally as the product of their functions—and instead sit with the unfathomable fact of their existence" (p. 104). This interruption of assumptions or predetermined judgments halts the mind's automatic processing and opens new pathways. It requires presence, attention, and noticing.

Grounding oneself in a particular space can be comforting and reassuring. Odell describes her return to a tiny creek bed surrounded by box stores, which she had not visited since childhood. An unremarkable, unnoticed, fenced-off, dried-up stream, when given attention, is transformed into something else entirely. It becomes "a reminder that we do not live in

simulation—a streamlined world of products, results, experiences, reviews—but rather on a giant rock whose other life forms operate according to an ancient, oozing, almost chthonic logic" (p. 126). This strange description offers a new reality, manifested through greater attention, that we can inhabit. Seeing one's surroundings anew by being curious offers an expanded version of our day-to-day—one that is alive with rich, subtle detail and full of potential.

The seasons can give us this sense of transformation as our surroundings are transformed from lush greenery to brilliant red, orange, and yellow leaves, to snowy mountains. Montreal gets a lot of snow, most of which is plowed, piled, and picked up by giant trucks. But as this happens, while the city works, there is a moment where the sidewalk is transformed from a straight cement grid to a fluffy, winding pathway. This usually occurs because the snow-plow drivers swerve down the sidewalk to avoid forgotten bicycles, telephone poles, and other miscellaneous street debris. The result is magical. The city becomes softer, as many

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Spatial Experiment

After years of living in the city, I easily forget the feeling of walking down a winding trail. The snow beneath my feet has a spongier vibration than pavement. The fluffy white coat (which doesn't last for long) lightens the shadows and quiets the hum. Every sense is altered. The chirping of birds becomes louder and clearer with the softening of the urban din. It is sort of like nature's white padded room, within which we are forced to endure tranquility and discomfort simultaneously. I wonder if the city, stripped of straight lines, makes us more at ease? Or does the transformation from cement grid to snowy pathway cause something more enticing by "creating a kind of pleasant sensation of unfinished-ness and of something just around the corner" (Odell, 2019, p. 104)? In this environment, my body becomes activated. Each foot is placed carefully to ensure a safe and sturdy step forward. Wandering through the snow-shaped streets, navigating their ever-shifting, crunching textures, allows an innate curiosity to take hold as unexpected qualities and sensations of the landscape invite participation.

Invitation: Think about which spaces make your body feel most activated? Why?

Spatial Noticing 8. *Embodied Texture*

of its grit and sharp edges momentarily vanish. This past winter, while scaling metre-high snowbanks to reach our taxi on a very early morning—hauling suitcases, car seat, and daughter—we discovered that her small, stuffed grey bunny had fallen out of the car seat into the snow. It was dark and snowy, and despite a quick, desperate look, we failed to find Grey Bunny before leaving for the airport. It was now part of the lost but plentiful debris of the snowbank, never to be seen again . . . or so we assumed. Months later, as the snow began to melt and morph into new and mysterious shapes, a familiar grey shape emerged atop a melting snowbank near our house.

Hope

Just as curiosity can provoke a sense of inquiry and delight, the presence of hope floods a space with possibility. Anderson and Fenton (2008) describe hope as being "life as not-yet-become" (p. 76), the transformation of space into a constant state of becoming that "heralds the possibility that the spatial/temporal here and now *may* become otherwise" (p. 76). A space, then, is not suspended in a static state but in an interplay between present, past, and future. Hopeless space—that is, a space without potential—becomes lifeless and dissolute. With all possibilities visible and surfaced, spaces lose their mysterious qualities, energy, and life force. Might this description apply to spaces that are predesigned, unchangeable utopias of production and productivity? Or is the characterization of a dead space too harsh? In organizations either unwilling or unable to shift, adapt, or respond to their users' needs or whimsy, spaces can become static and depressing. Even the best-researched designs can leave their inhabitants feeling controlled. Planning and precise design can cause spaces to feel mechanical, cold, and void of relationships, "swept clean of all manners of relational dross" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 16).

Space is often considered a background element, a container or stage within or upon which life unfolds. Such portrayals allow no room for the interactive, reciprocal relationships that form between spaces and those who use them. As Clements-Croome (2006a) comments, "when we are inside a building, it is the architecture of the space which sculpts the outline of our reactions" (p. 18). Physical space is not just a place *where* life happens, but a key ingredient in shaping and affecting that life.

While Head & Hands' old space could be likened to a *Wunderkammer*—with its nooks and crannies full of delightful junk and the oddities of years past—the new building gave the organization hope. The pride, validity, security, and support that the staff felt in the new space led in turn to feelings of hope and excitement, rather than dread, for future initiatives. With their energies—previously needed simply to survive in the old space—freed to create and grow, the new building helped empower the organization to succeed in its mandate.

Conclusion

By taking a relational-materialist approach to organizational space—highlighting the entwined nature of the social and the material—a nuanced and evolving narrative emerged for the Head & Hands organization. In my research, I was curious to discover what kinds of phenomena would surface in the experience of changing space. This narrative materialized memories and ghosts, emotions, embodied displacement, wellbeing and light, sterile coldness, echoes, transition, and camaraderie, as well as feelings of support, pride, and hope. The foregoing list rather resembles all the subjective variables usually cut from quantitative research on office space. However, rather than see subjective and emotional qualities as nuisance, here they form a foundation, adding depth, radiance, and meaning to spatial experience. These stories do not represent the experiences of Head & Hands as a singular unit, lived and shared equally by all staff; rather, they offer glimpses from those who participated in entering into a myriad of possible relationships and ways of being in the organization's two very different spaces.

In this narrative, the two office spaces themselves were characters—not just accompanying the staff in their lived experiences, but contributing to them. Elevating the presence of the physical space in the research shifted the focus from a purely human-centred realm to a more-than-human view (Dowling et al., 2016b). Focusing on the evolving relationship of the staff and their office space during a time of immense change provided a unique snapshot of the moving experience. This placed experiences into an entwined socio-material framework rather than position the two as separate and distinct entities. By highlighting everyday moments between the staff and the space, a rich picture of their experience emerged through nuanced emotions, tacit knowledge, and aesthetic understanding. Meaning and realization are gleaned

from the smell of cookies baking, the reshaping of desks, the sorting of historical documents, graffiti, echoes, and light tubes.

Through this research with Head & Hands, I explored how changes in the organization's material environment also affected its staff. The future of Head & Hands as an organization shifted when they moved into the new building. Without the stress of working in an unsupportive and deteriorating building, the organization was freed to hope and dream, sharing heretofore hidden talents and exploring opportunities with their new space. While many of these opportunities took time and were not immediately visible (like the edible garden), the seeds were already present in the staff's way of experimenting with and embracing their new space. In emphasizing the reciprocal and evolving nature between Head & Hands and its space(s), new socio-material knowledge and insights emerge. Subtle shifts in atmosphere, created by the sounds of kids, the streaming natural light, and the heightened sound, resulted in changes in how staff members felt and behaved in the space. Such adjustments cannot be reliably planned and designed into new spaces; yet, it is important that organizations and researchers acknowledge their role in organizational evolution. Moreover, by framing space as an active participant in organizational development and day-to-day experience, a new and valuable form of collaboration may result.

The goal of this exploration is to broaden our understanding of how the physical office environment affects and impacts the staff and the organization *beyond* basic satisfaction and productivity, which often position space as a controllable external backdrop. By remaining open and "attuning" ourselves (Pérez-Gómez, 2016) to our surroundings, previously unnoticed qualities begin to emerge. These details have the potential to shift the quality of interaction and presence between people and their space to something more supportive, collaborative, and alive.

How one feels, and what one hears, sees, touches, and smells, become ways to communicate with and about the space. When the physical office is treated as a participant, there is better potential and possibility for actively shifting and shaping experience *in concert with* the material world. This assigns greater value to our surroundings and accords staff and researchers greater agency to engage with it.

In my own spatial journey as researcher and a human being, I experimented with the presence and absence-in-presence (Margulies, 1989) of my surroundings. This personal exploration brought what I was reading—philosophies and theories about physical space—into my own living, material relationships. Although not a formal process, this unplanned investigation wove different aspects of my life and way of being in the world into my research data. My embodied experience was not centred in the office space(s) that I was researching, but nonetheless infused my research with a spatial knowledge generated through intuitive, sensory, and aesthetic forms of knowing. Feeling the changes happening within my surroundings in my body and through my senses helped me attune to the environment. This sensitivity and awareness of physical space created an empathic connection to the nuanced experience shared by the staff at Head & Hands.

Impact on Organizational Studies Research

Future research on the workplace demands an ontological shift in perspective that considers spaces as active contributors to organizational life. By seeing ourselves and our spaces as an entangled co-creation, space is elevated from being perceived as a static, external container to a nuanced, emotional, and affective part of how we exist at work. By understanding space as an integral part of an evolving relationship, researchers can begin to access more subtle and

experiential qualities—qualities that exist as part of a dynamic relationship connecting people and space. While these concepts are well-established in other disciplines, organizational studies ought to follow in the same direction and confront the more ephemeral, sensuous, and relational nature of material objects and spaces. These socio-material dynamics form an integral part of organizational experience in both a day-to-day and a longer-term perspective. The office, as an affective material space, becomes implicated in how the organization functions and evolves. Such affects, often quite subtle, emerge through the staff's encounters and embodied experiences with the space. Shifts in perception can become shifts in behaviour, which result in new or different actions within the organization. Here, the spatial experiences of the individual staff members are intrinsically linked to the porousness of the organization: spaciousness, smells, closed doors, light wells, or whispers, when embodied in the staff, become threads tugging at the organization.

A relational, socio-material orientation considers not just the social and cultural organization or just the materiality of the office space, but their entanglement (Orlikowski, 2016). It sits at the intersection of production, in which people simultaneously produce their surroundings and are produced by them. Relationships are like connective tissue—entwined with what they are producing. Seeing office space as possessing these vague, shifting, and morphing attributes may not fit easily within the boundaries of research categories, disciplines, academic language, or even simple words on paper. Such a perspective emerges over time out of conversations, experiences, reflections, and the body, as well as the material space itself. Noticing how spaces change, how they shift or morph over time, how they are used and cared for, and how they are valued can offer perspectives that may not arise in conversation. Observing social patterns as manifestations of physical spaces and objects requires an increased spatial

awareness. Researchers themselves need to become more attuned to their surroundings, drawing from an embodied perspective as well as cultivating a deeper synchronicity with the environment. Highlighting these interactive qualities through a relational-materialist perspective and mode of inquiry draws space into us, into our bodies, and simultaneously pulls the research into the space. Researcher and research become part of the space, situated in time and place with the participants.

Understanding how words, or "private murmuring" (Slovic, 1992, p. 172), may act to shape and to manifest our surroundings transforms internal and external dialogue from descriptors into producers of space. Naming what and how we see, hear, smell, and feel draws space out from the background and into our experience. This practice of spatial attention or attunement deepens through practice, and eventually becomes part of one's perception. Aspects of spatial awareness can occur with and through the research. Words spoken in interviews may reflect an organization's "aesthetic muteness" (Taylor, 2002) or may form part of a material relationship by illuminating aesthetic, sensory, and emotional moments. As researchers, we can bring space into the writing process through poetic and descriptive language; but we may also bring words into space as a means of seeing and perceiving our environment.

Raymond Williams suggests that "it is the reduction of the social to fixed forms that remains the basic error" of academic research (quoted in Harrison, 2000, p. 498). It occurs to me that even asking questions about someone's relationship to a physical space forces them to condense and consolidate what may be a complex, shifting, and changing emotional experience into something reduced and singular. Asking if someone likes or dislikes a space, or feels comfortable or uncomfortable in it, may offer insight into a specific moment in time, but it might not convey the whole story. This becomes evident in common forms of data collection like

interviews, but is also true of photography, drawing, or performance. As experience is translated into document, image, or theatre, it most often becomes a singular representation of a past moment, not representative of a fluid and evolving relationship. Likening social sciences research to a sterilization process, Bruno Latour (2005), suggests we "take all the uncertainties, hesitation, dislocations, and puzzlements as our foundation" (p. 47) and bring them to the forefront, rather than more convenient, loud, certain, and "convoluted productions" (p. 47). Ignoring or removing "the queerest, baroque, and most idiosyncratic terms offered by the actors" amounts to a "mistake [that] is made so often that it passes for good scientific method" (p. 49). The desire to know everything with absolute certainty can lead to a sort of blindness whereby peripheral, nuanced, or imprecise qualities go unnoticed. But to tip the scale in the other direction is not the answer. Rather, it is a dance between the planned and unplanned, certain and uncertain, categorized and uncategorized, order and chaos. Embracing all these qualities is part of an interdisciplinary discourse.

Reflections and Learnings

The original intention for this research was that it be based on a participatory action research model. This type of project enlists the participants as members of the research team and shifts the investigation into a collaborative process. Several factors pointed to likely failure in pursing this approach. The first was timing, as the project overlapped with hiring an architect and the birth of my daughter. Head & Hands entered into partnership with an architect just prior to my first round of interviews. Through this relationship, they engaged in planning and design meetings and data collection. My attempt to join this group was somewhat unsuccessful and I remained only partially included. The work being done created a duplication of the participatory

nature of the research I was trying to organize in an already overworked and overextended organization. In addition to this overlap with the architect and unsuitable participation demands, my daughter was born, which led to a two-year absence from the project.

These factors made a participatory action research project *with me* impossible. Head & Hands was in fact already engaged in such a project with their architect. However, all was not lost; the time I took away from this project allowed for a comparative view between the two offices. The initial interviews in the old space provided a grounding and framework, which gave meaning and nuance to the subsequent interviews in the new office. This would not have been possible without a substantial break in between.

While I am satisfied with my conversations and relationships with the staff, I believe that a more participatory investigation, in which the participants become the co-explorers of their own space, would benefit future research on office space. This could happen especially in situations where there has not been a relocation or large-scale change. Participation has the potential to deepen participants' spatial awareness and relationship with the space. As Knight et al.'s (2010) research in care facilities illustrates, participants who are involved in spatial decision making feel more engaged and empowered in their space. Engagement in a space through rearrangement or other aesthetic changes may reveal previously unnoticed qualities or surface unseen atmospheres within the space. Drawing attention to the environment through a discipline of noticing (Mason, 2002), be it talking, writing, drawing, or photography, can lessen aesthetic muteness (Taylor, 2002) and draw spaces out of the shadows, or perhaps into them. In my situation, during a huge transition and following a lengthy participatory design process, the staff were familiar with the practice of thinking about their space—perhaps too much so, which might explain a lack of participation in the second round of interviews. However, despite this

familiarity, looking at the Head & Hands office spaces through a lens of sensory, embodied relations remained a novel undertaking.

Future Implications

With the future of the office unknown given the changing face of work spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic, this approach to organizational research can provide a more nuanced understanding of our reciprocal relationship to the office. As the office is rapidly transformed and more people work from home, to learn how physical space impacts not only our productivity but also our emotional mind-bodies is important. The moment of change presented by the pandemic provides us with an opportunity not just to redesign the office, but to notice our surroundings and deepen our relationships with them. This deepened awareness provides avenues for new socio-material knowledge about the role of the office.

Understanding the supportive value of physical space for organizations, particularly not-for-profit organizations struggling to accomplish their missions in a precarious environment, is vital. Working toward a greater focus on spatial security and support can equip organizations with a solid foundation upon which they can grow their potential.

Beyond offices and organizations, how might this approach be used in other areas where spatial precarity exists, such as homelessness or new arrivals of refugees—areas where the value of homes is often reduced to numbers and statistics? Considering the potential of space through one's embodied experience and relationship with it can impart details that might be missed when using a purely social approach. By framing physical space as a partner in the co-construction of life and work, we may draw on relational and emplaced understandings that are based on embodied imprints and memory, atmosphere and aesthetics, emotion and tactility, as well as

functionality and wellbeing. In so doing, we can create new and meaningful knowledge about the

relationships between people, their organizations, and their spaces.

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