



"On the Potentialities of Spaces of Care: Openness, Enticement, and Variability in a Psychiatric Center"

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ABSTRACT

Science and technology studies (STS) scholars have turned their attention to the materiality of objects and buildings in order to examine what they make users do in practice. Taking a close look at a therapeutic community in a psychiatric day care center for teenagers, this paper joins these discussions by exploring the materiality of "spaces of care" as part of the center's everyday practice. The analysis incorporates the concepts of scripts and dispositifs to describe the conditions of possibility in which caregivers and youths may position themselves in relation to others and to the space itself. This paper describes how spaces of care offer open, enticing, and variable conditions for fostering a dynamic of personal and relational responses as part of the care work. In this sense, the material environment entails potentialities in ways that are unpredictable but nonetheless consequential. Rather than arguing that material arrangements and things act, this paper draws attention to their impact via their potential within dispositifs of care that request participants' attentiveness and responsiveness. Describing these potentialities brings out the subtler requirements of material environments in care practices that aim at circumventing the coercion of disciplinary spaces and their impersonal classifications.

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On the Potentialities of Spaces of Care: Openness, Enticement, and Variability in a
Psychiatric Center

Abstract

STS scholars have turned their attention to the materiality of objects and buildings, in order to examine what they make users do in practice. Taking a close look at a therapeutic community in a psychiatric day care center for teenagers, this paper joins these discussions by exploring the materiality of “spaces of care” as part of the center’s everyday practice. The analysis incorporates the concepts of scripts and dispositifs to describe the conditions of possibility in which caregivers and youths may position themselves in relation to others and to the space itself. The paper describes how spaces of care offer open, enticing, and variable conditions for fostering a dynamic of personal and relational responses as part of the care work. In this sense, the material environment entails potentialities in ways that are unpredictable but nonetheless consequential. Rather than arguing that material arrangements and things act, this paper draws attention to their impact via their potential within dispositifs of care that request participants’ attentiveness and responsiveness. Describing these potentialities brings out the subtler requirements of material environments in care practices that aim at circumventing the coercion of disciplinary spaces and their impersonal classifications.

Introduction

Details in the design of a building may have serious consequences for how people use it. This insight animated a meeting between architects and the coordinator of a psychiatric day center for teenagers, as they sat around a table covered with the plans for a building. A few months later, the staff and fifteen youths would be moving to that bright new building. The meeting was held to examine how each door would be technically equipped. Regarding the door to the coordinator’s office, discussion arose about a plan to install an “availability device” that would allow the coordinator to signal to visitors who pushed the button as to whether they should wait, come in, or come back later. While the architect assumed that the door should ensure the coordinator’s privacy, the coordinator found such a device entirely inappropriate because the door could be opened even if youths were not permitted to enter the office at that

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3 moment. Most of the time, he explained, teenagers came to his office with a problem that
4 needed addressing. How they approached the office conveyed important information. For
5 example, the coordinator said, if a teenager burst into the room and shouted that he could not
6 stand something anymore, the coordinator would respond very differently than to a youth
7 who knocked discreetly and waited quietly. For the door to play such a role, the coordinator
8 had to unfold for the architect these different possible interactions, making clear that such an
9 availability device would have largely restricted the many unpredictable and contingent ways
10 that an adolescent might interact with the door, thus limiting clues on how to best respond.
11 This is the reason why, finally, the device was never placed.

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13 The coordinator's explanation of the difference between a plain door and a door with
14 an availability device draws attention to the important distinction between an object that
15 opens up multiple possibilities of use and an object that restricts these. This distinction was
16 crucial for the team, as they wanted to be able to adjust their reactions to the unpredictable
17 occurrences happening with the youths. Indeed, during the many meetings that I attended in
18 preparation for the new building, I heard caregivers insisting that spaces should be arranged
19 in ways that would enable unexpected uses and rearrangements.

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21 In this article I explore how spatial and material arrangements of the psychiatric
22 facility for youths, located in Brussels (Belgium), contribute to everyday care. I tackle this
23 problem using a concept that I call "the potentialities of spaces," that is, when material things
24 or arrangements, like a door without a device, make teenagers and caregivers act in highly
25 unexpected manners. I describe how these potentialities work in practice and hence
26 contribute to discussions about the agency of material spaces while learning from this care
27 context.

28 29 Studying What Spaces of Care Do

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31 The analysis of materiality and what it can do is a notable contribution of actor network
32 theory (ANT). While sociologists have long described the social realm through the filter of
33 people's meaning or intentions, ANT innovatively proposes modes of inquiry that describe
34 how things are active, meaning how they may make people act in practice (Latour 1988a,
35 1996, 234–40). For instance, an object has a "script," or a scenario inscribed in the device
36 that users are supposed to accomplish (Akrich 1992). Scripts do not merely predetermine
37 users' action. They mediate what people do by inviting some actions while inhibiting others,
38 although users may employ an object for a different purpose than its intended one. The script
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concept hence does not imply a deterministic approach to objects, but it invites a focus on the normative agency of things as well as on users' rooms for maneuver.¹

Recognizing that objects' scripts influence people, a related concern has been raised about the moral responsibility of designers to anticipate uses (Verbeek 2006, 368). In the care facility, however, this concern seemed inverted. Here, the desired design of material entities had to allow for unpredictable uses, rather than scripting them in detail.² Instead of having one particular idea about how the space should be used, the designers were asked to let their imagination partially open onto the unknown. Rather than designing things to make people act in a particular way, these objects had to create *potentialities* for engaging users.

In the fields of architecture and sociology, the materiality of buildings has primarily caught the attention of ANT theorists in the form of observing architects' studios (Yaneva 2009a; Houdart 2009), and some studies examine how the actual spaces, when used, make everyday sociality or estrangement possible (Hirschauer [2005] makes this case for elevators; Yaneva [2009b] for staircases, doors, and conference rooms).³ My observation of material arrangements designed for unpredictable uses adds to these studies by learning from a specific context.

My analysis draws upon fieldwork in a psychiatric day center for teenagers in Brussels, as it planned to move, and eventually did move, from one building to another. Among its different forms of care, I became particularly interested in the "therapeutic community," which is based on the idea that everyone present in the center takes part in its organization and social life, especially through mundane daily interactions during informal moments and activities. This approach is intended to help participants learn how to better deal with their feelings and the impacts of social interactions, as well as to regain confidence in their ability to do, think, imagine, and feel their own way. The team combined this therapeutic community life with analytical work, inspired by psychoanalysis and systemic approaches, when taking into account youths' interactions in the group and with relatives. Although this analytical work more explicitly took place with individual youths in consultation offices, its influence on the community work manifested when caregivers collectively reflected on teenagers' interactions with the environment and in daily chats, as these offered a valued way of understanding what was going on with the youths on any given day.⁴

Between June 2013 and September 2015, I was intermittently immersed in the day center before, during, and after the transition between buildings. Studying the working of spaces of care during this transition brought to the surface many concerns about material

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3 arrangements that could otherwise remain implicit. Based on these observations, I came to
4 understand that the center's "spaces of care" encompassed the material environment that
5 counted in everyday use, ranging from the house infrastructure to arrangements of furniture
6 and objects. It is thus not Euclidian spaces that are of concern here, but *material spaces* that
7 are the matter, substances, and textures with which one may interact in tactile and meaningful
8 ways.⁵
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13 A body of literature on the materiality of care offers an avenue to think about the
14 active role of material environments, in contexts ranging from hospital sites to other facilities
15 to patients' houses. Many STS ethnographies explore the implementation and effects of
16 technologies in healthcare practices, such as telecare webcams (Pols 2011), and sociologists
17 have recently attended to ordinary things such as clothing or waiting room chairs (Buse,
18 Martin, and Nettleton 2018). These studies show how things play an active role in forming
19 relations of care and how materialities, as things "in the making," shift over time. Some of
20 these accounts insist on the unpredictable effects of technologies when they are used and
21 attuned in an ongoing practice (Mol 2008; Mol, Moser, and Pols 2010). Although STS
22 scholars have taken interest in the active yet undetermined contributions of technologies and
23 things in the provision of care, spatial and architectural conditions have tended to remain
24 understudied (Moser 2017, 87; a recent exception is Nord and Högström 2017). Health
25 geographers have been examining spaces of care for several decades, pursuing an interest in
26 the idea of "therapeutic landscapes." The notion denotes the physical, social, and symbolic
27 dimensions of a place that have healing qualities (Gesler 1992). Most of these spatial
28 analyses focus on the experiences and interpretations of places by staff, patients, and visitors,
29 including in mental health facilities (Jones 2001). These case studies provide insightful
30 comparisons as they focus on the salience of place and space in health care. For instance, the
31 empirical study of an antipsychiatry peer support group in England recounts the uses of an
32 unconventional meeting place, a city park, illuminating how users' appropriation of the park
33 crafts a space of care in alternative ways than the planned and supposedly pleasant
34 professional sites (Laws 2009). My work joins these STS and geographical care studies by
35 drawing attention to a singular problem, that of material spaces as potentially active entities
36 that may make people act in the ongoing care practice.
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55 My examination of the spaces of the day center for teenagers fine-tunes the focus on
56 the issue of contingency and unpredictability in the roles played by material spaces. Rather
57 than saying that these materialities *act*, I argue that their impact lies in their *potentiality*.
58 Where the notion of "script" draws attention to the program of actions inscribed in an object,
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I use the concept of *dispositif*⁶ to address the unpredictable agency of spaces of care. Foucault introduced the concept of *dispositif* to describe heterogeneous ensembles of discursive and material elements through which the exercise of power and the practice of knowing took place and were maintained in prisons, asylums, hospitals, or schools. These elements, he argued, relate to each other in particular ways, such as through regulations, scientific statements, or architectural forms (see Foucault 1995).⁷ In this view, analysis expands attention beyond the design of a material setting and the interactions it proposes, and examines *the conditions of possibilities* for generating the formations of certain realities, such as the transformation of inmates who may be surveilled at all times. The concept of *dispositif* distributes agency among a broader ensemble of material-discursive elements. As with the door without a device: its agency not only relies on the material setting of the door, including its frame, hinges, panel, and latch that suggests a hand to press it while the whole body steps in. The situations that the interaction with the door generates also rely on the caregivers' agreement on a certain level of permissiveness, which implies letting youths throw themselves across that threshold even if a rule forbids it. The informal encounter between the coordinator and the teen, as mediated by the door, is also made possible by the orientation of the desk facing it. From there, the coordinator can immediately welcome unexpected newcomers in whatever mood, and better respond to them in the moment. Other discursive or material elements may contribute to the particular *dispositif* of access and encounter in which that door worked. Looking at *dispositifs* thus dispels the idea that agency belongs solely to the influence of the materiality of buildings on users, without locating it in anthropocentric approaches that look for subjective interpretations of a place.

In my fieldwork, I focused on details of particular settings, such as a door with or without device, instead of the institution as a whole. According to the idea of therapeutic communities, patients' mundane responses to particular arrangements, and the informal knowledge these responses generate for others, support and engage patients in therapy. This focus on small entities aligns with a poststructuralist strand of Foucauldian work within STS approaches. As Moser (2005) traces it, material semiotic studies take literally Foucault's proposition that a discourse is "*a strategy in materials*" (669, emphasis in original), but they do not always assume that discursive ordering materializes in a coherent manner (668). This empirical approach fragments the generative power of *dispositifs* in many particular arrangements. It asks how entities and normativities are enacted through modes of ordering in particular practices, and how they are achieved in ways that may not fit into coherent norms, thereby avoiding enhancing dominant powers (Law 2009, 145). This Foucauldian heritage

thus enables us to analyze several, smaller dispositifs, and how they provide conditions of possibility, in this case, the conditions in which caregivers and youths may position themselves in relation to others and the space itself.

To sum up: Looking at particular dispositifs, I observed the *potential* of materiality to follow caregivers' wish that spaces must enable unpredictable events, in order to avoid producing the normativity of a whole institution and its buildings. The guiding questions in the research were: How do material arrangements afford what their inhabitants do in unpredictable ways? What emerges from these interactions with spaces?

In the next sections, I examine particular arrangements of the care facility during the design phase, in combination with everyday anecdotes occurring before and after the move, including those related to its living room, ateliers, exhibits, and corners. I describe material attributes of these spaces and explore how they co-shape situations in the everyday care practice. The layouts of these spaces, I emphasize, were *open* to several possibilities for a user's engagement; things *enticed* users into uncertain involvements in activities, and the appreciations that emerged often expanded into shared interests that *varied* with the material spaces. Foregrounding these three properties of the space—openness, enticement, and variability—allows me to develop the notion that the center's material spaces entailed potentialities for engaging the youths and caregivers in a play of personal and relational responses. In the conclusion I discuss how such unpredictable scripts and dispositifs worked in the care context as well as the power they generated.

Openness: Layouts Suggesting Possible Movements

In both the old and the new buildings of the care center, back-and-forth movements and anchors in the living spaces created the rhythm of days. Some people settled on the sofa, someone grabbed a coffee at the kitchen bar, others chatted around tables in the dining room, and someone else headed towards the terrace, from which came the sounds of a ball bouncing across the ping-pong table. Living spaces, the caregivers insisted, needed to be located at the core of the building, since they were part of a central dispositif that everybody called "*le communautaire*," which means the sharing of informal time, outside of planned activities, in spaces accessible to all. The domestic aspects of these spaces provided conditions for everyday life to unfold. *Le communautaire* was a crucial dispositif for teens and caregivers to develop closer connections and to find their own familiar modes of being in those spaces. How did their material arrangements foster or hinder familiarity with the spaces?

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Circulating Here or There

5 In the old building, a townhouse, a recurring problem occurred: youths were regularly
6 agitated because the living spaces were small and confining. Lacking sufficient social
7 distance and being cramped made it difficult to let relationships unfold without generating
8 tensions. A top priority for the new building concerned facilitating informal circulation
9 within these spaces, to allow youths to find their own comfortable distances from each other.
10 The new shared living spaces were designed to be much bigger. However, though more space
11 could help to ease tensions, it was not enough to suggest how inhabitants might adjust their
12 distance. Rather than a vast plain, the new living room, dining room, kitchen, and
13 courtyard/garden were distinct spaces but near each other. Most of the time, the doors
14 between these spaces remained wide open, permitting all to cross the thresholds. Moreover,
15 caregivers sought to arrange corners for withdrawing, which were neither too closed off nor
16 too remote. In the living room, they arranged the sofas in order to create a main sitting area
17 and another smaller one in a nook, and corners were arranged to create spots where youths
18 could withdraw from the main living spaces.

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20 With these new arrangements, teenagers or caregivers were able to adjust their
21 distance to their own comfort. Distance adjustment was an integral condition for engaging in
22 closer interactions and developing familiar bonds with the environment. Indeed, the new
23 living spaces greatly helped in easing tensions, and the teenagers stressed that the possibility
24 of improvising distance adjustments was a key difference from disciplinary spaces, mostly
25 schools or psychiatric wards, with which they were already acquainted in oppressive ways.
26 Caregivers, too, kept adjusting their distances through these ordinary placements and
27 movements, attempting to generate the “right atmosphere.” This way, the tangible
28 arrangements of the center’s living spaces were constitutive of familiar bonds since they
29 offered possibilities to circulate and to adjust one’s comfortable distance.

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31 In contrast with the living spaces, workshops didn’t aim at becoming familiar, but
32 rather at involving the participants in an activity. But this was not always easy. One day,
33 when the other youths left for a workshop in the clay atelier, Sandro did not move at all. As I
34 sat next to him, he told me he did not want to go because he had barely slept the night before
35 and he knew he would easily be carried away by the group’s agitation and things would go
36 awry. I proposed that we give it a try and go together. Neither of us had previously gone there,
37 and when I mentioned its location, down the street from the center in a small brick house at
38 the back of a garden, Sandro agreed to give a try. This environment was unusual, very
39 different from the center and the everyday venues we usually went to. But it was precisely its

interior layout that helped unblock Sandro's difficult involvement. When entering the atelier, many youths were already at the central table. Remembering Sandro's wariness about getting too involved in the bustle of the group, I proposed that we sit at a table off to the side. Indeed, the spatial layout interlaced different areas, with a central table and side tables in various nooks. This compartmental organization, caregivers told me later, was chosen to avoid the ordering typical of factories and its logic of parceling out spaces and people into hierarchical leadership, functional tasks, and interchangeable workers (Bouchy 1981). In contrast, convolution enables flexibility for irregular placements and unexpected moves. Throughout the session, Sandro was able to avoid getting engrossed in modeling and, when he got tired or restless, he could wander through the atelier's different areas.

Such spatial organization—one that circumvents a disciplinary ordering—was valuable for other workshops as well, but the factory wasn't always the counter-model. School was another one, as with a pedagogical workshop that aimed at re-engaging youths in schoolwork or training. Since most of the youths had dropped out of school, this was not an easy path. The architects had proposed to arrange the space of that workshop like a traditional classroom, ordering the bodies in a square room, in rows of immobile seats, all facing the same interlocutor who would address them as a group.⁸ The caregivers designed a different layout, one that organized each person's presence within the group with chairs around a central table and one or two smaller tables in corners, slightly on the margins. This layout granted degrees of latitude for being within the group and engaged in the task, and left the possibility for participants to move to another spot as their involvement fluctuated over the session. Such workshop spaces thus diverged from disciplinary spaces, allowing flexibility through a range of suggestions.

Openness for Improvisation

The layout of the living spaces in the new building offered many more possibilities for circulating, and the flexibility of the workshop spaces suggested diverse positionings. They allowed people to orient themselves in one way or another, according to what was happening in the moment. Their "openness" was not a physical quality (as with a vast plain), but an ontological quality: the reality of everyday circulation and positioning was enacted with a material setting that was "open" since it enabled movement to happen in many ways. The concept of "enactment" (Mol 2002, 32–33, 44) draws attention to how a sociomaterial practice may bring a reality into being, and how it may also happen otherwise. In the center, this "otherwise" remained open because the respective rooms, corners, and compartments

invited users to orient themselves towards here *or* there throughout the day. The openness to enacting preferences suggests that what these spaces contributed was *potential*, since circulation and positioning could easily be improvised.

One may wonder about the limits of such an “openness of the otherwise.” Of course, it is not endless. The arrangement of rooms next to each other, corners for withdrawing, tables off to the side, and convoluted compartments also restricted teens’ and caregivers’ movements because they proposed a limited set of invitations. Yet they did so without clearly assigning distinct statuses, tasks, or ways to pay attention, in contrast to what disciplinary spaces demand without ambiguity. And, of course, the youths’ familiarization with spaces might stabilize into daily routines, and their involvement in activities can crash or develop with intense concentration. But with such spatial layouts that are potential, a routine can easily be altered, and an involvement can find a way to fluctuate. The openness of the living spaces is thus not entirely devoid of normativity, but renders it much more supple than a disciplinary setting. It happened that some youths did not find their way within this set of invitations: they left the center or escaped to the back of the garden, hiding from the casual togetherness and its possible glances. Openness then requires caregivers to work with these resistances on a case-by-case basis. It is an ongoing work that implies questioning how to best reply to a teen’s challenging response. I will come back to this point, which touches on the issue of power, at the end of this article.

The openness of spaces was crucial in the care practice because it allowed users to gain informal knowledge. A particular youth’s movements and engagements were personal and relational responses, at a particular moment, to a dispositif of care. Being in the same rooms and sharing activities, caregivers were able to notice ephemeral preferences, and this knowledge enabled them to adjust their attitude towards a youth. For instance, if a teenager often withdrew from the group, caregivers would not approach them in a direct and confronting way. This subtle relational dynamic could not happen in a “closed space,” where one would definitively know what one is expected to do there. Reflecting on the stark disciplinary space of an emergency psychiatric unit, Rhodes (1991, 11–33) depicts it as a “holding environment,” where its materiality witnesses monotonous days. Patients are distributed in an area at the back, which is markedly different from the various staff areas; these spaces structure their different functions: the higher the staff’s status, the more distant they are from patients. Rhodes (1991, 33) analyzes the consequences of that spatial partition on the way caregivers see patients: as “wholly others.” The psychiatric unit thus stands in vivid contrast to the day center, with its openness to different possibilities for engaging with

the spaces and with others, allowing staff to know patients with their personal and changing nuances.⁹

The Enticement of Things

Living spaces were also populated with many everyday objects that anyone could grasp. The permissiveness of the material environment thus worked with a range of possibilities, which were part (or not) of a situation as it occurred. One morning, the situation was the cooking of the lunch meal. Emile, one of the youths, remained sitting, his head resting on his crossed arms. As I passed him on the way to the trash bin with some potato peelings, I asked him a question about his native country. Asking this question, among many other potential engagements, was a way to adjust the contact to make it less formal. As Emile's answer turned into a chat, he suddenly asked if I would set the tables with him. He moved towards the sideboard and handed me a few plates. Just as my invitation was casual and indirect, so was Emile's response: setting the table together was a way to pursue our interaction by other means than a face-to-face conversation.

Engaging in an Activity

Most of the time, moving about in the center did not happen without something or someone attracting the motion. The materiality of the living spaces offered a range of opportune objects for turning towards this or that activity. This was true in the cooking atelier, but also for other everyday objects available in *le Communautaire*, such as comics, games, the music player, etc. This ensemble of possibilities enabled one to address others in more casual ways, in ways less direct and singular. Without the mediation of the many objects available in the lunch-making situation, addressing Emile directly would have led to a dead end. It was thus thanks to these available things that creating contact and luring him into the activity was possible, hinging on very informal adjustments.

Here the material environment did not only open up possibilities for engagement, but also gave opportunities for someone to become involved in a particular activity. Whereas *le Communautaire* most often sought a casual togetherness, in workshops the goal was to foster the youths' involvement in specific activities. Such involvement meant that youths would let themselves be "caught" as they involved themselves in the doings and things proposed in an activity. In considering an attachment as an accomplishment, rather than something given, Hennion and colleagues (2000, 151–208) describe a middle path in which action happens between people and objects, rather than being just done by one or the other. They describe

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3 how amateur musicians actively abandon themselves to the constraints of a dispositif for
4 listening, such as a concert with its stage, lights, acoustics, and audience, emerging as the
5 appreciating subjects of these techniques, objects, and collectives. In this sense, the power
6 emerging in the dispositif of a workshop may reinvigorate personal affinities, when one
7 actively makes an event happen and is being passively caught up in it (Hennion 2009, 63).
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11 With workshops, caregivers sought to induce the youths' engagement, yet
12 appreciations were not easily accomplished. Often youths' involvement manifested in
13 attachments that arose tentatively and remained on the verge of fading into disengagement. In
14 each activity, caregivers chose specific spaces and created particular conditions in the hope
15 that the teens would respond. Each activity was a dispositif with its practical framework and
16 pace, material spaces, and objects. And again, involving youths in activities was not just a
17 normative program, but allowed the caregivers to notice the youths' emergent attachments
18 and to discern how best to guide and respond to each teenager.
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26 27 *Arousing Curiosity, Rekindling Involvement*

28 Compared to the living spaces, the objects available in workshops were much less familiar
29 and some of them worked better than others at enticing involvement. This was the case for
30 the paintings and art supplies located in the pedagogical workshop mentioned above. Amidst
31 a slight disorder of collages, brushes, and maps, a caregiver shared with me how they were
32 better at "catching" teenagers by arousing their curiosity:
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38 I always do a first interview with a new youth in these rooms, because I want them to
39 see it, to feel it. Even if it's messy, at least something might speak to them. It is a
40 good indication when one says: "Hey, what's that?" And when nothing special
41 catches their attention, you think: "Ouch, it is still complicated." But when I draw
42 attention, it's when I show them [these] three paintings placed under glass. These
43 often interest them, probably, because they are beautiful. And because it's something
44 within their reach, a drawing—it is easier to do than study electricity, algebra, or
45 French. . . . There, you can feel how you will start to work with a youth, by being
46 attentive to the way they take up the space: what do they look at, what are they are
47 going to touch.
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55 Artworks were just displayed with a certain moderation: without great intention or fanfare,
56 left here and there within the mess. In this type of material setting, "curiosity" traces a middle
57 path, emerging both as a state of the youth and as a possibility inherent in the thing that
58 triggers it (Cochoy 2016, 23–34; Bessy and Chateauraynaud 1995, 133).¹⁰ Latour's (1988b)
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notion of “trials” draws attention to moments of suspension when differentiation happens: prior to putting ingredients to the test, participants don’t know what will be different or the same, or what will be associated or not. We can see caregiver’s strategy in the art room as a curiosity trial, one that allowed her to notice the advent of a youth’s involvement to the slightest degree. The three paintings thus tackled indifference as they worked in a highly indeterminate manner: with their interesting features, teenagers *might* display a rise in attention that might be noticed by an observant caregiver. This curiosity held potential for enticing youths’ involvement while still leaving it uncertain.

Beyond this capacity to arouse curiosity, the material environment of a workshop should also provide the conditions to enfold the participants as a session progressed. In the clay atelier, the arrangement of the small house included arrays of unfamiliar objects that gave clues about the process of crafting. There were long shelves with dozens of clay sculptures, others with colored pots, tools, pigments, artworks-in-the-making, an oven, and clay packets. These objects constituted a “world” answering specific tastes, with its own tools, textures, style, and (temporary) boundaries (Hennion, Gomart, and Maisonneuve 2000, 218–19). During the session I spent with Sandro, seeing these exhibited objects and then manipulating them lured us into the activity; for example, we passed by sculptures displayed on a window ledge and began modeling pieces off that inspiration. Or, again, when Sandro could not focus anymore, we stopped by the shelves to look at an impressive collection of artworks. Since the many objects inhabiting the atelier intrigued while immersing us in that specific world, and offered ways to contemplate or handle them, they entailed potentialities to rekindle Sandro’s involvement in the activity, yet without demanding his constant engrossment throughout the session. It was indeed striking how his involvement in the clay modeling remained uncertain, not only when joining the atelier and choosing where to sit, but also when finding which figure to model or when getting tired.

By noting how the objects displayed performed along the middle path of “curiosity trials,” and how objects fostered contemplation or manipulation throughout the session, these accounts of workshops foreground moments of indeterminacy and a materiality that enticed participants’ involvement while leaving it uncertain. In viewing workshops as dispositifs for stimulating involvement, these descriptions shed light on moments of indeterminacy: when material spaces do or do not realize their potential effects to elicit appreciations that remain uncertain, in the encounters between teenagers and things, and at different moments. The openness of spatial layouts works with this *enticement* of things: whereas the first suggests several possibilities to go here or there, the second relies on displayed objects whose

contemplation or manipulation attempt to lure one’s engagement in a particular direction, to attract in a way that remains undetermined.

Allowing for Variations over Time

But there is more than open layouts and uncertain enticements in the spaces of the care facility. As I returned to the center repeatedly over the course of a year, something else became visible: the material spaces did not stay the same. Walls were repainted. Furniture was repositioned. Heaps of objects reconstituted or dissolved sociomaterial tastes. Vegetation was replanted. And so on. I came to see how the building’s interior arrangements held potential for variability, since they were partially undefined. The new building was equipped with many spots for activities, whose diversity in sizes, shapes, lights, acoustics, textures, and locations at the core of the center or on the margins, could make this or that spot better for this or that workshop. Just as the tools or materials that were dispersed among these spots did not strictly delineate a purpose for each of them, their names also remained vague, only giving clues to an imprecise ensemble of activities: “sport,” “creativity,” “relaxation,” “media,” etc. The diversity of shapes and undefined boundaries of different spots with their stuff created room to make them vary.

When I asked caregivers about these variations, they pointed to the importance of maintaining participants’ interest in an activity. Institutional components too, like regular daily schedules, rendered these variations necessary. While in the previous section, I noted that participants’ involvement in an activity often was to be enticed out of indifference, here a lasting interest needed to be present to forestall boredom. In empirical studies of science, the practical formation of an interest is called an “*interessement*”: a particular sort of translation between people or other beings who may become concerned (Callon and Law 1982, 618). In this framework, an interest may persist or wane through particular strategies of enrollment, in other words, the mutual process of seeking out the interests of others, within the ensemble of constraints limiting each option. If we now see the day center as a “*dispositif* of *interessement*” (Callon 1986, 185), how do variations happen with its spaces?

Attentiveness and Responsiveness

One day Safia, a quiet adolescent, did an unusual thing. She took a dance step to one side as she encountered her image in a mirror. She did it again on another day when a caregiver was around and started to do it with her. The caregiver reported this cheerful moment during the next meeting. The dance-step story was of great interest amongst the staff, especially since

Safia so rarely engaged outside her quiet routines. The team then started to discuss whether to resume a hip-hop dance workshop. They discussed which space might be a suitable room. The idea was launched; they now had to test it, first by carrying the proposition to teens in the center's community meetings. In this way, caregivers cultivated an interest by being around the adolescents during informal moments in the living spaces and by then relaying notable occurrences in staff meetings.

In workshops, too, surprising occurrences were noted by caregivers and fostered possible variations. One day, a group went out to a circus school. In the next team meeting, a caregiver reported that the youths had wrapped themselves in fabrics that hung from wooden beams:

It was like a bodily constraint, but an interesting one. . . . With those fabrics, you can go up, put yourself inside, and it swings a bit because it is hanging. It's really like a cocoon, and this has such an effect! There is such a silence during these moments.

The calming effect it can create is just astonishing.

The effect of these fabrics, and how they lured in the teens, intrigued most of the caregivers, who then gauged whether it would be possible to hang some in a relaxation room in the new building. Caregivers' interest also drew on their professional concern about bodily constraints, which were a sensitive matter for those who had experienced them in psychiatric settings. Speculating about possibly good and calming constraints with agitated youths made the story even more interesting to the team.

However, fostering an intersement that actually enrolled youths into activities was not always an easy path. In contrast with caregivers' daily meetings, weekly community meetings included everyone in the center. While caregivers were concerned with the therapeutic impacts of activities, youths often wanted to have fun. At some point in my fieldwork, community meetings had been especially quiet for several weeks, and most of the adolescents asserted that these meetings were not interesting. This resistance through silence confronted caregivers' moral and political concerns to foster and deal with the teenagers' interests, and obliged them to investigate "when is an issue interesting or not" to the youths for unblocking the situation. Community meetings were thus an indispensable component in nourishing variation, since they more directly enrolled (or not) the adolescents.

These stories, which recount the spatial conditions for familiarization in living spaces, and involvement in workshops, also showed that seemingly small engagements and appreciations had greater consequences than just in the moment. The caregivers' attentiveness to appreciations extended into meetings, where the team scrutinized details and

discussed possible responses. And just as staff meetings were a vital component of the dispositif of intersement, community meetings made palpable the limits and tensions about whether an interest was dying out. This dynamic of attentiveness and consequential response drove interests that declined and were rekindled over time, and hence produced variations in activities and their spaces. The material arrangements of the center helped make these variations of interest emerge. First, since rooms were diverse and remained partially undefined, they could easily host new purposes. Second, as the arrangement of the living spaces and workshops stirred up unexpected occurrences with teens, such as Safia’s dance step in front of a mirror, or fabric cocoons in which youths calmed down, these settings offered clues to the team about possible activities to suggest. Several STS studies about buildings emphasize reciprocal processes, in which a practice enacted in a material environment in turn modifies it (Guggenheim 2013; Gieryn 2002; Martin et al. 2015, 1011). Here, the specificity of the variation process is that it relies on a dispositif of intersement, with its dynamic of attentiveness to unpredictable occurrences and consequential responses to them. Of course, such a variability knows its limits, as it mostly concerned some of the interior arrangements of the buildings, and as the team did not have the time and money to pursue and develop each growing interest among the group. But at its scale and pace, the variation process shows another way the spaces entailed potential in the ongoing care practice.

On the Potentialities of Spaces of Care

This paper started with the observation that material entities in the care facility were designed to afford unpredictable uses. The stories of living spaces and workshops have sharpened our understanding of how arrangements and things potentially engage users, rather than making them act in a clear direction. First, the openness of the living spaces’ and workshops’ layout enacted preferences through different circulation and positioning patterns that may easily happen otherwise. Second, available and displayed objects enticed participants’ uncertain involvements during the very moments of indeterminacy when one may come to like something or not. And third, appreciations enacted with such an environment were seized on in the moment and could expand into interests more widely shared within the group, therefore driving variations of activities and their spaces. These three characteristics—openness, enticement, variability—together demonstrate that what these spaces contribute is *potential*: while several possibilities for a user’s engagement coexist, some might be more attracting than others, and emerging appreciations may in turn be further implemented in the material environment. These spaces of care entail such subtle possibilities.

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3 What do these observations from a care context add to the analysis of material
4 environments and their agency? The concept of “script” helps in seeing object scenarios that
5 users are supposed to accomplish. In the care center, the scenarios envisioned in the material
6 arrangements were multiple and their realization remained widely unexpected. Of course,
7 how one interacts with an environment is always to some degree unpredictable. But in the
8 care facility, the design shaping the material setting increased the chances of personal and
9 contingent responses with open arrangements (corners, convolutions, etc.), beautiful yet
10 modestly displayed things, and partially undefined rooms.

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12 What, then, about a context of use in which such material entities do not give clear
13 indications of what to do? What are the specificities and implications of highly unpredictable
14 interactions? First of all, unpredictability does not only rely upon the design of material
15 arrangements, but also upon the dispositifs in which they are used. Indeed, *le communautaire*,
16 workshops, and intersement through meetings are dispositifs that amplified the
17 indeterminacy of a person’s inclination. Such amplification comes from normative ideas and
18 requirements with which these settings are used (permissiveness, familiarity, involvement,
19 lasting interest, to name a few). These requirements indicate that caregivers could not and did
20 not want to know in advance what would animate a youth.

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22 Second, from these spatial interactions emerged a play of responses from the youths
23 and caregivers. In the care facility, unpredictability not only existed in a person’s encounter
24 with a material thing, but also moved in a play of responses among these things, youths, and
25 caregivers who adjusted their care work according to what they noticed in informal moments
26 and situations. The unpredictability, then, was driven by the interplay of sociomaterial
27 invitations for teens’ responses, including resistance, in particular dispositifs of care, and by
28 caregivers’ attentiveness and responses in return. Such dynamic of re-engagements, of
29 adjustments according to responses, lay in luring processes that often worked better when
30 much more implicit and ambiguous than when there were clear proposition. This is why the
31 caregivers insisted that their spaces of care must be scripted in ways that would generate
32 potentialities, rather than directing someone to act in one particular way.

33
34 A limit of these dispositifs of care appeared when a teen’s responses did not match
35 with the caregivers’ expectations, for example, if the youths hardly let themselves engage
36 with anything, or when they go all over the place. It is tempting to think that this
37 incompatibility between teens’ responses and potential spaces indicates a coercive force
38 unleashed by the spaces. However, caregivers tried to work as much as they could with such
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challenging responses by keeping possibilities open and by reflecting on what to do in each particular situation.

In fact, I rather locate the risk of coercion elsewhere. When users activate spatial potentialities—when moving around, contemplating or handling an object, or reporting a mundane occurrence in meeting—these activations indeed produced power. But they did so in a very different way than spaces and objects that restrict users’ possibilities, such as disciplinary spaces and their impersonal classifications. In such micro-dispositifs, the power of materiality or the power of staff over teenagers should not be understood as negative per se, as mere domination that prohibits or regulates. Such power can also transform those entering those dispositifs in positive ways, as through lure or enticement. Thus, rather than domination or constraint, I observed a very intuitive and implicit power technique when caregivers handled contingencies. They took advantage of material spaces, of the social environment, and of the unexpected occurrences that might happen in a moment when a person is responding to that milieu, with all of their preferences or disinclinations, and then adjusted to those responses.¹¹ So, if coercion occurred unwittingly with these techniques and material arrangements, it would implicate caregivers’ attentiveness. Should such attentiveness and responsiveness be seen as a form of diluted surveillance? The team had to remain reflexive on this point, knowing that their relational practice necessitated a subtle play of distance. They remained aware that too much attention, that “being after the youths,” could devastate the equilibrium between invitation and letting be, since it would shift their casual relationship to a formal and disciplinary one.

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Author Biography

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¹ In Akrich’s first elaboration of the script concept, she described how users tinkered with photoelectric lighting kits, and since then, as she reports (Akrich 2010), numerous studies have explored users’ creativity with many kinds of technologies. For works reflecting on buildings, see Gieryn (2002, 70–71).

² Caregivers’ concern about unpredictable uses of space is also understandable in the wake of critiques of psychiatric asylums, whose spaces were conceived through the lens of “environmental determinism”: the idea that the architectural environment shapes behavior and can cure diseases (Yanni 2007).

³ Such a pragmatic approach distinguishes the notion of script from that of affordance. Although both notions allow scholars to locate the action *between* things and users, an “affordance” draws attention to the perception of the object by users (Gibson 1979), while a “script” offers insights into how an object articulates social ties and involves normative prescriptions. This distinction stands on early elaborations of both concepts, and latter uses of them may have complicated them.

⁴ I was not allowed to attend consultations in offices, nor in the biomedical practice that was confined to the nurse’s office and that remained contested within the team.

⁵ “Euclidian space” implies an understanding of space in terms of distance and volume between several points. This conception prevails in the field of architectural practices. An anthropological look at the materiality of space and its uses departs from those geometrical abstractions about space and emphasizes other practical and discursive dimensions of it.

⁶ “*Dispositif*” has often been translated as “apparatus.” Yet, as Bussolini (2010) argues, the philosophical specificity and empirical lineage of each of these terms require maintaining the distinction between them. In addition, since I use other French studies that refer to “*dispositif*,” I do not translate it into “setting” as Akrich and Latour (1992, 259) propose. Here “setting” denotes the concrete arrangement of things as part of a *dispositif*.

⁷ Foucault never gives a full definition of the concept, but he presents a comprehensive account of it in an interview (Foucault 1980).

⁸ This strongly framed setting of classrooms contrasts with, and maybe is bearable thanks to, recreation areas and corridors where one is more likely to venture into unexpected encounters among many different movements (Markus 1993, 41–94).

⁹ Of course, the living spaces or workshops are also functionally organized, but their layouts are breached with ambiguous invitations.

¹⁰ Other material settings for displaying objects work similarly, such as the old cabinets of curiosities, or the window displays that limit viewers to seeing a side of an object, without having immediate access to it (Cochoy 2016, 54–58).

¹¹ This technique is recognizable in other institutional care. See for example the “sociomaterial awareness” that Driessen (2019) observes in dementia wards in the Netherlands. More generally speaking, the ongoing process of adjusting variables, including attunements with technologies, is a crucial aspect of “the logic of care” (Mol 2008, 50–54).