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François-Xavier de Vaujany, Aurore Dandoy, Albane Grandazzi, Stéphanie  
Faure

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## **Experiencing a New Place as an Atmosphere:**

### **A Focus on Tours of Collaborative Spaces**

François-Xavier de Vaujany

Aurore Dandoy

Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL

Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL

DRM (UMR CNRS 7088)

DRM (UMR CNRS 7088)

[devaujany@dauphine.fr](mailto:devaujany@dauphine.fr)

[aurore.dandoy@dauphine.eu](mailto:aurore.dandoy@dauphine.eu)

Albane Grandazzi

Stéphanie Faure

Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL

Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL

DRM (UMR CNRS 7088)

DRM (UMR CNRS 7088)

[albane.grandazzi@dauphine.eu](mailto:albane.grandazzi@dauphine.eu)

[stephanie.faure@aliptic.net](mailto:stephanie.faure@aliptic.net)

Corresponding author :

François-Xavier de Vaujany – [devaujany@dauphine.fr](mailto:devaujany@dauphine.fr)

Université Paris-Dauphine, PSL, DRM, M&O research team - Place du Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny, 75016 Paris, France

**Experiencing a New Place as an Atmosphere:  
A Focus on Tours of Collaborative Spaces**

**Abstract:**

In this article, we ethnographically explore how tour guides convey different embodied experiences of space and place during tours of collaborative spaces. These tours draw on participants' embodied experience and emotions in order to reveal the invisible dimensions of everyday activities of collaborative spaces, in particular their different organizational atmospheres. By systematically coding 110 tours of such spaces, we identify four emotional registers – “initiation,” “commodification,” “selection,” and “gamification,” which are used by tour guides to produce a particular atmosphere. We feel that the concept of “atmosphere” is a powerful means of exploring the unbounded and fluid spatiality, the quasi-materiality, and the temporality of the work practices that individuals are likely to experience if they become members of these collaborative spaces. We conclude our analyses by considering the implications of this study for the management of collaborative spaces and new work practices more generally.

**Keywords:** space; place; embodiment; experience; atmosphere; visibility; emotional registers; phenomenology; tours; collaborative spaces; coworking spaces; makerspaces; hackerspaces

## Introduction

Since the 1990s, an increasing number of studies in the field of Management and Organization Studies (MOS) have dealt with the issue of spatiality and materiality in organizations and organizing (Orlikowski, 2007; Leonardi, Nardi, & Kallinikos, 2012; de Vaujany and Mitev, 2013; Carlile, Nicolini, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2013). Interestingly, these “spatial” and “material” turns have been appearing in societal contexts where the space and materiality of organizations and organizing are becoming increasingly problematic. In such contexts, organizations are growing more fluid in nature (Bauman, 2000), as well as more virtual, digital, distributed (Fulk & DeSanctis, 1995), and service-oriented in their conceptions and use of space (Van Marrewijk & Broos, 2012). More specifically, the space and materiality of organizations need to be understood as an “embodied” experience, or in other words, as no longer being systematically connected to a precise “here and now” of work and organization (Halford, 2005; Nicolini, 2007). Otherwise put, work in these contexts can be completed anywhere and at any time, be that at home, in spaces other than work or home (“third-places”), or on the go (Costas, 2013 ; Kingma, 2016). It follows that the space and materiality of work and organizations need more than ever to be understood as *experiences* that constitute and re-constitute collective spaces, and which might not be obvious for those involved in or for those managing them (Halford, 2005; Bohas et al, 2018).

Nonetheless, very little research has focused on the *initial* embodied experience of space and place —i.e. one’s first visit to a space or one’s first day at work there—, or on the relationships between such experiences and the emergence of a sense of work and organizing “inside” of a place (Küpers, 2015; Ropo & Salovaara, 2018). First impressions are known to strongly influence our cognitive experience of things (Damasio, 2012). However, initial space experience is somewhat paradoxical in today’s context: How can one feel work “here”—i.e. in a specific space—when work is more than ever expected to be taking place everywhere all the time? Here, we are interested in exploring how an “initial” experience of a space might contribute to the joint experience of the work and life practices that it hosts.

The first impression of a particular place can shape one’s sense of how work and organization might be conducted “inside” of it (Küpers, 2002). Moreover specifically, such an experience

can produce a particular atmosphere, i.e. “a tonality of our manner to inhabit the world” (Vibert, 2018: 66; Merleau-Ponty, 1945<sup>1</sup>). This notion of atmosphere has been particularly important for the work of Merleau-Ponty, who has stressed the importance of “the emotional ‘atmosphere’ of our relation to our world” (Crossley, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

Relatedly, in this article we focus on a fascinating and relevant organizational and managerial context: the tours organized by “collaborative spaces” (in particular coworking spaces and makerspaces). According to Garrett, Spreitzer and Bacevice (2017), prospective customers of coworking spaces learn about community norms and practices by first taking guided tours with insiders: “We observed that these tours were some of the most lively and interactive times in the space, as members turned the ‘community’ on full strength to make it plainly evident” (p. 10). For those who “join” (i.e. become members of) such a space after these tours, this introductory experience constitutes a first impression of how the organization is structured and how one might feel within it (Spinuzzi, 2015; Jakonen et al, 2017). This is particularly true in contexts such as coworking spaces and makerspaces where peoples’ presence is often ephemeral, i.e. they might stay for mere hours, or a couple of months, depending on the activities that a particular space caters for as well as that space’s pricing model.

For the present research, we define “collaborative spaces” as spaces and places whose facilities, aesthetics codes, temporalities, enacted values, atmospheres, and spatial configurations are aimed at fostering horizontal collaborations. Those collaborative spaces welcome different types of customers or members such as entrepreneurs, employees, students, teleworkers, slashers, and even researchers. While coworking spaces seem to be more business-oriented and entrepreneurial (Gandini, 2015; Spinuzzi, 2012), makerspaces and fablabs tend more to be the ‘place-to-innovate’ and to ‘do-it-yourself’ (Bohas et al, 2018). We have purposefully not included “workplace” in this definition (i.e. “collaborative workplace”) because of the increasing integration of both work/home practices and emotions (Bauman, 2013; Bohas et al, 2018). Collaborative spaces, therefore, can be said to emphasize

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<sup>1</sup> In his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945: part I, chapter 5) draws on the notion of atmosphere in order to analyze sexuality, stating that “sexuality is neither transcended in human life, nor featured in its center by unconscious representations. It is constantly present as an atmosphere” (p 196).

<sup>2</sup> The notions of “atmosphere” and “ambiance” have been used in research in management and organization studies, in particular those about organizational aesthetics (Martin, 2002; Strati, 1999, 2009). Here, we want to draw on Merleau-Ponty’s experiential view.

the tight interpersonal relationships that are typically associated with working remotely, on the go, or at home. Such practices all contribute to the increasingly porous nature of traditional work/home boundaries related to space and time, as well as to the emergence of hybrid organizational atmospheres that fuse work, private, and even political spheres (Borch, 2009).

Ultimately, each tour of a collaborative space is akin to a “practice” or a “logic of practice” (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) in the sense that it alludes to a pattern of meaningful behaviors and movements that tour guides can draw upon in order to produce meaning and emotions for visitors. Coworking spaces, makerspaces, hackerspaces, and fab labs rely more or less on such practices day-in and day-out. With that in mind, here we will draw on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1964); —specifically his theorization of “embodiment” and “emotions”—in order to better understand the managerial stakes of these tours.

In this regard, the contributions of this article are twofold. Firstly, we understand tours to be key managerial practices that are focused on the first experience of a place as well as on making the activities therein visible. Emotions are thus at the heart of this embodied first experience of a place, which we describe as an atmosphere that is constituted through the narrative and flow of these walking tours. For us, “place” appears in this research as unbounded spatially and temporally, i.e. as a liquid and provisional experience of the space and time of work and life activities, which we call an “atmosphere.”

The second contribution of this article is based on our analysis of our data set, which allows us to identify four emotional registers that describe and enable organizational atmospheres to be “felt” during tours: gamification, commodification, selection, initiation. We discuss the ephemerality of such embodied experience. Beyond this research, our own experience of collaborative spaces shows that they are mainly and paradoxically “atmospheres,” nets of quasi-things and quasi-materials. What is felt continuously once one is “in” is an atmosphere more so than a well-defined community or a clear-cut place.

In the first part of this article, we detail the literature that describes space as an experience. As the bulk of the research that has conceptualized space as an “aesthetic experience” (Strati, 1999; Martin, 2002; Beyes, 2016; Van Marrewijk and Yanow, 2010; Van Marrewijk, 2011), in what follows we propose an emotional and embodied description of the experience of

space, place, and organizational atmosphere (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Küpers, 2002; Vibert, 2018). Specifically, we consider Merleau-Ponty's (1945, 1961) take on corporeity, emotions, and emotional flows to be at the heart of the constitutions of space, place, and atmosphere that we observed during the tours.

Relatedly, in the second part of the article, we detail our research method, which is based on tours of 110 collaborative spaces throughout the world (13 countries). We describe these tours at length, and in doing so, stress that the tours were in fact *experiences*. Lastly, we detail our results, i.e. the four emotional registers that guides played on during the tours. This practice of offering tours is aimed at staging a first experience of a place, which participants can then follow (or not) in order to develop a first impression. Tours are made meaningful through emotional registers, which are in themselves made up of not only coherent emotional narratives, but also gestures, artefacts, quasi-things and places, all of which are wrapped up in the narrative being presented by the tour. With this in mind, the notion of “atmosphere” is a powerful concept with which to explore the spatiality, materiality and temporality of the work practices that are likely to be experienced once one is “in”—or becomes a member of—a space. That said, while an atmosphere can be felt as being “here and now,” it is paradoxically not anchored in a precise and bounded space or time. It can also be related to a quasi-material in the sense that lights, smells, fleeting gestures, and textures are often at the heart of it (Griffero, 2017). Unboundedness and quasi-materiality are therefore precisely what epitomize collaborative spaces such as coworking spaces and makerspaces.

## **I. Theoretical framing: an embodied perspective on space and organizational atmosphere**

### *Space, place, and atmospheres in organizations*

In many ways, how a space is organized highlights the role that experience might play within it. From this perspective, space can be interpreted through architecture, symbolism, discourses, and aesthetics (Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Beyes, 2016). If interpreting it through aesthetics, it is edifying to recall the distinction that has been made “between an ‘apolitical’ – instrumental or interpretative – use of aesthetics in organization theory and its symmetrical counterpart, the critical unmasking of aesthetics and art as yet

another means for managerial control” (Beyes, 2016: 123-124). Otherwise put, from such an “aesthetic” perspective, one might say that our subjective experience of the word is influenced by how materiality and space are both shaped via a dynamic combining instrumentality, aesthetics and symbolism (Vilnai-Yavetz, Rafaeli, & Yaacov, 2005).

This dynamic has been captured by a key aesthetic concept: atmosphere (Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Martin, 2002; Strati, 2005; Vibert, 2018). According to Strati (2009, p. 239): “Organizations have their own specific materiality made of the corporeality of persons and artefacts, but which also comprises something impalpable and invisible that can be emblematically denoted as ‘the atmosphere of the organization’—as suggested by commonplace expressions such as ‘there’s something in the air’, ‘a heavy atmosphere’, ‘there’s an ill wind blowing’, ‘see which way the wind blows’ or ‘let in some fresh air’”(Strati, 2009, p. 239). The notion of atmosphere is a way to shed light on the unbounded temporal and spatial nature of *experiencing* the tours.

According to Böhme (1993: 119), “Atmospheres are always spatially without borders, disseminated and yet without place that is, not localizable. They are affective powers of feeling, spatial bearers of moods.” (see also Langewitz, 2007). In this way, the notion of atmosphere is related to all organizational phenomena: “Organization invariably is an atmospheric phenomenon. It takes shape as a swirl of affect, constructed from constellations of objects, stories, technologies, texts, human bodies and their affective capacities” (Beyes 2016: 115).

As Pallasmaa (2014) has pointed out, atmosphere is deeply linked to the “existent properties” of a space as well as its “human perception”: “Atmosphere is similarly an exchange between material or existent properties of the place and the immaterial realm of human perception and imagination” (Pallasmaa, 2014: 232). When we remember that space is a kind of experience, our perception of it becomes key: “A space or a place is a kind of a diffusely felt multi-sensory image, an experiential ‘creature’, a singular experience (...)” (Pallasmaa, 2014: 235; see also Michels, 2015 and Jacks, 2018). Objects, gestures, and space are constitutive of an atmosphere, as are quasi-things and quasi-materiality, such as smells, colours, textures and ephemeral artefacts contained in the embodied memory and activities that make up the “inside” of a place (Griffero, 2017). Thus, bodies, objects, and places are all expected to



create an “atmosphere,” which is often described in the literature as a relational and processual concept (Michels, 2015).

Interestingly, scholars have recently pointed out the range of the notion of atmosphere, suggesting that it might enrich studies of urbanism, space and architecture (Borch, 2009; Michels, 2015; Jacks, 2018). MOS researchers have similarly been invited “to examine how affective atmospheres are created and how the affective states are transmitted in the organization” (Borch 2009: 224<sup>3</sup>). According to Küpers (2002: 32), “the atmosphere within organising is primarily not what people think about it, but what they live through with their ‘operative intentionality’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. xviii).” In this respect, the notion of atmosphere is related to one’s feeling or experience of a “milieu”: “It constitutes a modus operandi and way of seeing or apprehending” (Beyes, 2016: 116). When thought about in this way, the location and temporality of practices are rarely well-defined, as in them, both of these categories are more related to a particular set of emotions that are likely to (re)create an “atmosphere” (Küpers, 2002). Indeed, during such practices the “sharing of emotional experiences [leads to] mutual affection, connectedness and cohesion that break down anonymity” (Küpers, 2002: 25).

Relatedly, marketing theory has already considered how stores’ atmospheres can affect customer behaviour (Mishra, Sinha & Koul, 2014). Organization studies have gone further in exploring the emergence and political dynamics of atmospheres in organizations and organizing (Martin, 2002; Strati, 1999, 2009; Borch 2009). Nevertheless, no research about atmosphere in organizations has attempted to fully understand the relationship between one’s first ritualized experience of a place/space and the constitution of work activities. For example, is the entry process a first step towards the experience of a genuine, true atmosphere? In this context, does one have a ‘true’, explicit experience of atmosphere that is later unconsciously internalized? Is such an experience superficial, i.e. in no way similar to the ‘true’ everyday work atmosphere of the place? Is atmosphere a useful category to use as a means of better understanding such a first encounter, or is it irrelevant in describing one’s deeper experience of a place? Does one’s experience of an atmosphere overlap at all with one’s sense of place? As we suggested in our introduction, these issues are all the more

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular Michels (2015) for a summary of the theories and debates related to “atmosphere” based on phenomenology and new German phenomenology.

important given that the increasing openness and mobility of work make the “first time in” a place a recurrent experience. With that in mind, we now turn to the possible links between space, place, and atmosphere, as we feel that our phenomenological perspective will illuminate the answers to these questions related to one’s experience of space.

### *Phenomenologically exploring space, place and atmosphere*

Phenomenology and phenomenological perspectives— in particular the work of the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty (Dale, 2005; Yakhlef, 2010; Yakhlef and Essén, 2013; Küpers, 2015 ; de Vaujany et al, 2018)—have been attracting a growing audience in MOS (Ciborra, 1999; Dale, 2005; Introna, 2013; Gärtner, 2013; Bazin, 2013; Ziakas & Boukas, 2014; Dale & Latham, 2015). In this literature, space is understood as being produced through everyday experience: “from a phenomenological perspective, spaces and places are not (only) socially and culturally constructed, but also and primarily experienced and consumed through embodied beings at the point of visitation as well as before and afterwards” (Küpers, 2015). In this respect, spaces are not only produced or conceived of, “they are also made (un-)productive in social movements and practices” (Küpers, 2015).

This “production of space” through experience is necessarily related to one’s body, and as such, it is edifying to consider the notion of “embodiment” more generally. This notion is largely derived from phenomenological literatures, and focuses in particular on the role of *bodily* experience. As such, to consider embodiment is to consider the role of the body in organizing practices; indeed, “embodiment is sensible and sentient” (Dale & Latham, 2015). In other words, embodiment prefigures our experience of the world. This phenomenological perspective suggests that practices are largely based on sensation and reflection: “our phenomenologically experienced embodiment (the entanglement of body and mind, biology and culture) is much more multi-faceted than we often allow for in conventional discussions of organizational life” (Dale and Burrell, 2014, p.165).

It is our view that an embodied perspective on spatial organising presents several interesting avenues and possibilities for MOS. Already, many interdisciplinary studies have stressed the

importance of understanding the extent to which physical dimensions are intertwined with intellectual ones (Malafouris, 2004; Ingold, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978; De Certeau, 1980). In an effort both to group several relevant concepts and to adopt a precise intellectual foundation for our research, we rely here on one key author who will enable us to explain the embodied connectivity at stake in the tours in question: Merleau-Ponty (1945, 1962, 1964, 2003).

Merleau-Ponty is widely known as the philosopher of embodiment. As suggested above, embodiment describes one's ability to feel and to "act upon"; embodiment is at the heart of our experience of the world. Rather than simply being "thinkers," we are continuous "doers," experimenting both mentally and physically with what "we," "it," and "they" can do. Embodiment is also the process of how our senses produce these transformations, thus making them visible for ourselves and for those sharing our world (Merleau-Ponty (1945) talked about "intercorporeality"). According to Merleau-Ponty, "perception is an opening-out to and engagement with otherness, a dialectical relationship of the body and its environment, which simultaneously constitutes both subject and object" (Simonsen, 2007). These embodied practices concern pre-reflexive (i.e. they are in the flow of perceptions both before, below, and beyond language and thought), as well as reflexive activities (Ibid). In keeping with Husserl's original example of two hands touching one another, Merleau-Ponty (1945) stressed that both hands are touched and touching, felt and feeling. Similarly, we are all involved in countless "reversible" relationships with the world – our world is always in the middle like a "flesh" or "texture" of experience.

For Merleau-Ponty (1964), the relationship between the visible and the invisible is also key in how we experience this world. In living in the world with others, individuals ignore numerous ways of seeing things, and instead focus their attention on one particular set of perceptions. Otherwise put, it is necessary for us to create specific "visibilities" that will favour other "invisibilities," and conversely "invisibilities" that will improve our ability to perceive particular "visibilities." In this way, gestures, objects, and signs effectively point out, show, materialize, hide and link spaces and places. As this phenomenon is also inextricably related to time, it is necessary for us to establish a time (or an instantaneity) that will enable us to avoid getting lost in endless anticipation of or projections into the future. Accordingly, "there is an experience of the visible thing as pre-existing [one's] vision, but it is not a merger, a coincidence: because [one's] eyes can see, [one's] hands which touch can also be seen and touched [...], the world and [the individual] are inside each other, and from the *perciperer* to

the *percipi*, there is no anteriority, there is simultaneity and even delay” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 162). From this perspective, we thus spend the bulk of our present time in the past, recognizing and reactivating shapes and forms ‘before’ we are able to truly perceive them.

Merleau-Ponty’s holistic approach, which incorporates embodiment, the categories of space and time, can thus be seen as a precious lens for jointly exploring tours and their organization of space, in particular in contexts where co-presence and intercorporeality are key (e.g. collaborative spaces). Thanks to the fact that two of this article’s authors have served as tour guides (a particularity that we describe further in the auto-ethnographic sections of this article), we had access to emotional discussions between actors on both sides of the tour (i.e. both tour guides and visitors). As such, by relying on the ethnography (four of us participated in tours) and auto-ethnography of tour guides’ embodied experience, we were able to understand the space and atmospheres produced or reproduced during the tours of collaborative spaces.

## **II. Material and methods**

### **1. Research object: guided tours of collaborative spaces**

We identified the following criteria for selecting which tours to include in our sample and for distinguishing these tours from simple “visits” or “walks”:

- i) The tour needed to be guided. Visiting a space alone was thus not eligible for being a part of our sample, except when doing so was a specific strategy chosen and recommended by a tour guide;
- ii) The guide needed to be a member of the space, e.g. an intern, a person in charge of communications or PR, the manager or owner of the space, or a member of the security staff whose duty it was to welcome guests;
- iii) A tour did not necessarily need to be scripted in order to be included in our sample. In fact, we noticed that most tours were poorly organized by the guides (which was evident in their discourse, the key ideas that they chose to emphasize, etc.);
- iv) Visits could be internal or external (i.e. related to corporate collaborative communities (or not));

- v) The tour could require a registration process (online) or a procedure that could be activated *in situ* (visitors being invited in and offered a tour on the spot).

We ultimately distinguished between informal tours, formal tours, collective tours, individual tours, tours based (or not) on an interview, tours conducted by an insider or an outsider (see Figure 1 below), tours for special events (such as openings), recurring tours, and tours conducted collectively by at least two of the co-authors. In sum, 52 tours lasted less than 35 minutes (the median tour length), while 58 lasted more than 35 minutes (among which 15 tours lasted more than 60 minutes).

While the majority of the spaces we visited were independently operated, we also explored corporate, internal, hybrid and shared (between several companies) collaborative spaces. Accordingly, we defined each of these places as one of the following: “collaborative spaces,” “collaborative places,” “innovation spaces,” and sometimes simply as “labs,” the last named being integrated into a company’s more innovative projects and activities. We have ultimately chosen to use the terms employed by the guides themselves to label the places we visited.

## **2. Collecting data: ethnographies and auto-ethnographies**

Our research relies mainly on ethnographic (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009) and auto-ethnographic (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012; Boyle & Parry, 2007) accounts of tours of “collaborative spaces” (which we defined in the introduction above). Ethnography can be defined as “the art and science of describing a group or culture” (Fetterman, 1989), and organizational ethnography as “the ethnographic study, and its dissemination, of organizations and their organizing processes” (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009: 4). Similarly, Ybema et al. (2009) have stressed that “everyday organizational life” “can be better grasped not through questionnaires [...], but by going out into the organizational ‘field’” (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009:1). In doing so, they highlight the importance of the hidden dimensions of organization, “including [its]emotional and political aspects” (Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009:7).

Our organizational ethnography of tours of collaborative spaces is particularly relevant for two reasons. Firstly, these tours have been described in the literature as “the more lively and interactive times in [an organization’s] space” (Garett et al, 2017: 10). Accordingly, our

ethnography of these tours consisted of broader, “long-term” ethnographies (of the spaces themselves) that we completed in several collaborative spaces, mainly in Paris. These “long-term residences” helped us to “internalize the basic beliefs, fears, hopes, and expectations of the people under study” (Fetterman, 1989: 45). Moreover, this broader experience also led us to gain a better understanding of the tour as the materialized and condensed expression of community, largely thanks to a “cyclical process”. Fetterman’s (1989: 47) view of ethnography is that “it begins with a panoramic view of the community, closes into a microscopic focus on details, and then pans out to the larger picture again”. Tours are thus particularly interesting in that they are likely to make an organization’s atmosphere visible.

Auto-ethnographic narratives such as ours are reflexive insofar as they enable researchers to reflect not only on the practice of guiding tours, but also on being a researcher that is studying the practice of guiding and taking the tour(s). This approach thus allows for multiple levels of embodied understanding, and provided us with original inputs for our research and results, largely because all of the co-authors were involved in the physical, embodied experience of participating in a set of tours of collaborative spaces. For this ethnographic study, our team’s four researchers had varied profiles: three women and one man, one researcher external to the sites visited, and two researchers who at the time were serving as facilitators (holding action-research positions) in several of the collaborative spaces that we visited. The last of the four researchers was employed by a large company, and in turn was able to carry out several visits to related corporate collaborative spaces. Collectively, our team represented a diversity of positions, ranging from researchers that were part of the object being studied, to researchers not formally connected to the space(s) visited. These differences in position greatly influenced the emotions that the visits provoked. This gave us the opportunity to complete our research through the telling of two auto-ethnographic tales consisting of multiple levels of complexity (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2012). First, as guides themselves, two of the researchers had inside insights which enabled us to uncover the key emotional registers that we discuss below. Second, these same researchers sometimes had a different point of view on the same tour than did the other co-authors, which allowed for discussions and debates about our different perceptions of the tours. Third, the two auto-ethnographic researchers also observed tours in their own spaces with another guide, which allowed for peer-to-peer discussions (see Boyle and Parry, 2007). We documented these auto-ethnographies using the same coding elements that we did for the other tour experiences (i.e. the emotions that they provoked).

In total, we included 110 tours in our sample, which took place in 13 different countries between October 2014 and October 2016.

<b>Type of collaborative spaces:</b> <b>9</b>	<b>Number of tours:</b> <b>110</b>	<b>Countries:</b> <b>13</b>
Independent coworking spaces	67	France, Thailand, Singapore, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Israel, Taiwan, Australia, India, UK, Greece
Independent hybrid spaces	13	France, Singapore, Israel
Independent fab labs	10	France, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Taiwan, Singapore
Independent makerspaces	5	France, Spain, Taiwan, Germany, Portugal, Australia
Corporate coworking spaces	4	France
Corporate fab labs	4	France
Independent hacker spaces	3	France, USA, Taiwan,
Corporate hybrid spaces	2	France
Independent artistic makerspaces	2	Spain, Germany

Table 1: Types of collaborative spaces visited

On average, each tour lasted 40.05 minutes. 63% of the tours were guided according to a routinized practice. These tours gave us a better feel for each space's atmosphere, enabled us to use its facilities, and to meet some of its members. We visited a number of spaces several times; some of them were visited by several of the co-authors at once, at times months after an initial visit. This made it possible for the co-authors to share their emotions and to compare how their emotions had evolved over time.

Finally, we sort the tour guides' profiles into two categories: insiders and outsiders (Figure 1 below). The tours themselves were led by various institutional actors, and who gave each tour depended on a number of different factors, including whether the tour was seen as an impromptu opportunity (i.e. the tour was unscheduled), part of a business model (interns were typically recruited for such tasks), or used as a means of managing a community (various members were asked to give tours when needed). Among the 110 tours, 107 could be seen as having had a defined strategy.

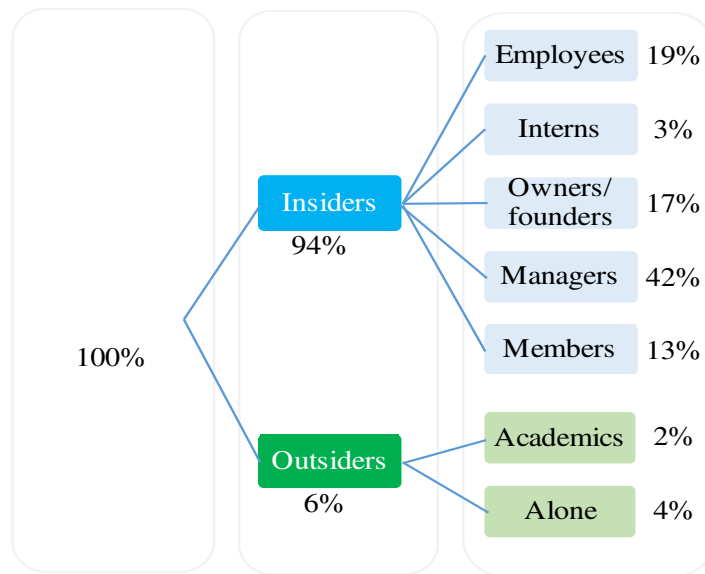


Figure 1: Tour guides' profiles

Thus, we defined insiders as employees, interns, managers of the space/place, co-owners/co-founders/founders, or community members, and outsiders as academics or the (outside) co-authors alone. Four of the tours were individual visits (including one co-author alone). Six of the tours were led by more than just one person, and at times included both insiders and/or outsiders.

### 3. Treatments of the tours:

In line with our emotion and experience-oriented perspective, we drew on Merleau-Ponty's (1964) chiasm of visibility-invisibility (as two sides of the same coin rather than opposing categories involved in perception). We subsequently stress the emotional and perceptual continuity between visibilities and invisibilities as these were enacted by each guide through her/his comments, gestures, rhythms and trajectories. As such, the former is the necessary extension or counterpart of the latter (see Figure 2 below). These "visibilities" and "invisibilities" were accordingly at the heart of our analyses of place and our understanding of how "atmosphere" was materialized during tours.



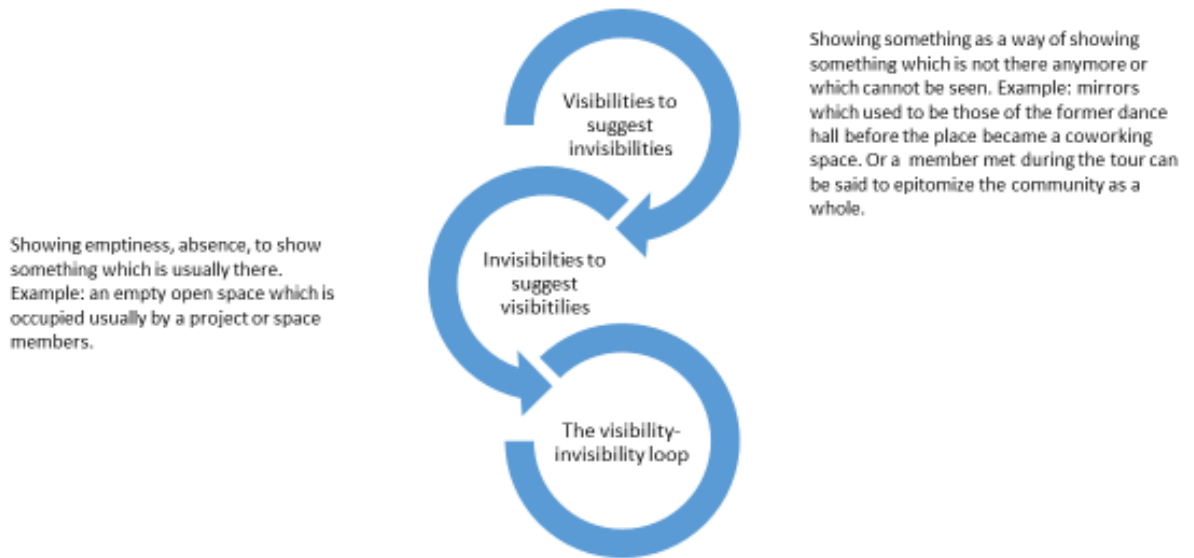


Figure 2: Visibility-invisibility loops

We have also drawn on Merleau-Ponty’s notion of continuity versus discontinuity. We were particularly interested in the rhythm and pace of each tour, the breaks (where, when, how, and their status in the context of storytelling), and any explicit detours taken within the space. In line with Merleau-Ponty, we saw discontinuities as moments that made continuities visible within collective activities, and in turn came to understand continuities as requiring numerous discontinuities in order to be maintained and sustained. After several discussions and rounds of coding, we also added four additional categories in our coding table: “key artefacts shown,” “trajectory through the space,” “thematic dimensions emphasized during the tour,” and “temporal structures of the activity.” Moreover, the continuities and discontinuities of the walks and the narratives around them appeared as key components in how the tours constituted or re-constituted particular atmospheres.

The emotions of the researchers-ethnographers themselves were also at the heart of our research. We kept daily logbooks with detailed descriptions of the tours, their characteristics, and so on, as well as accounts of our own feelings and perceptions during the tours. What did we feel, touch and smell during the tours? Did we have the same experiences as the other participants? In order to keep in line with Merleau-Ponty’s holistic approach to time, we also

recorded/wrote our personal past experiences as they related to our lived experiences during the tours. This was in turn a way of exploring how our past was part of our present experience of each tour.

We formalized these observations in a report, after having used a table of 25 columns, where we transposed by collective consensus the circumlocutions of our notebooks to make emerge the underlying emotion. Then, we coded them using Nvivo software (Figure 3). We first collectively elaborated a set of tags (28) that described our emotions about the space during each respective tour (sharing, sense of mutual help, gift, well-being, kindness, conviviality, history, desire, imitation, unease, seduction, closure, sense of mutual interests, caring, pleasure, fun, etc.). Beyond basic emotions (anger, happiness, fear, etc.), our first line of tags thus included emotional perceptions, i.e. what we strongly felt (or emotionally experienced) during the tours.

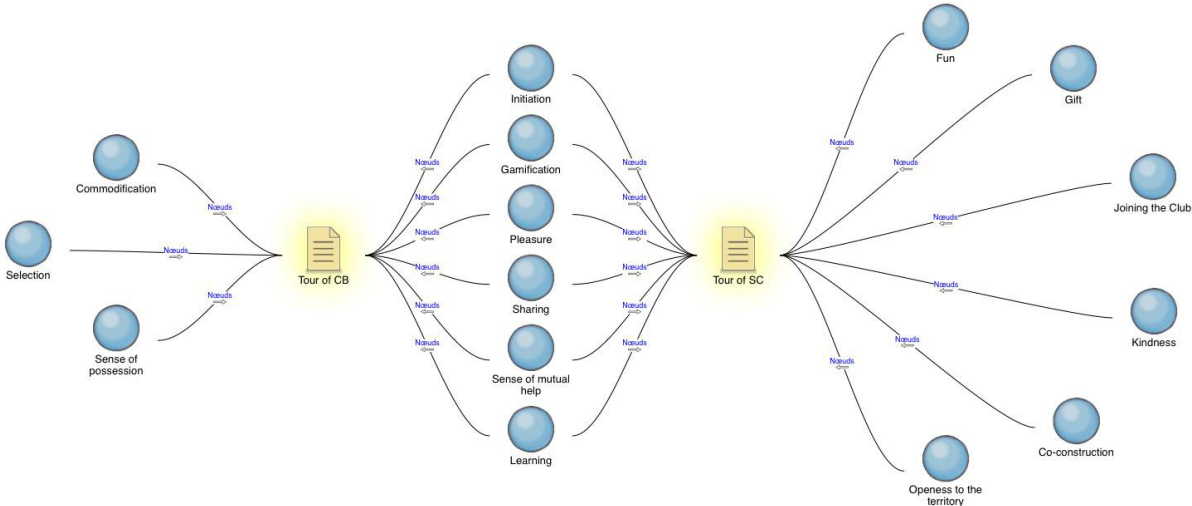


Figure 3: Example of a comparison of our coded emotions between two spaces (source: Nvivo, authors’ own)

Our tags included both descriptions of the emotions (“basic” emotions) as well as of the deeper (but also emotional) impressions that we felt, which were often linked directly to our basic emotions. Following several group discussions, we clustered these tags into four categories (“ritual,” “sales pitch,” “gamification,” and “learning expedition”). This led us to define a set of emotional registers that we view as being the foundation of our results. These emotional registers are made up of coherent emotional narratives (i.e. stories with emotional tones), gestures, artefacts, and space itself. Otherwise put, these emotional registers are in a

way “samples” of the atmosphere we are likely to feel once “in,” i.e. once we become members of the space in question.

Lastly, in an effort to explore further the tours and their different atmospheres, we compared both the atmospheres produced by the various tours and their related emotional registers with the atmospheres that we had experienced as members or managers of the collaborative spaces. This extension of the horizon of our ethnography was useful as it allowed us to better explore the atmosphere of place and to link it with its initial experience.

### **III. Results and discussion: From the three steps of the tour to the four emotional registers of the production of spatial atmospheres**

Here, we provide an ethnographical account of our experiences of the 110 collaborative spaces. In doing so, we use Merleau-Ponty’s categories (in particular, visibility versus invisibility) in order to shed light on the four emotional registers that we view as being involved in the production of spatial atmospheres that “start” with tours. In doing so, we also chart how this emotional view enables a better understanding of how tours of collaborative spaces are designed.

#### **The experience of the tour: emotions, embodiment and atmosphere**

The phenomenological categories identified above were part of the materiality, spatiality, and temporality of the tours. However, one of the most important dimensions of our research relates to how embodied experience is constitutive of a sense of place and atmosphere. As such, here we describe the tours’ general narratives as well as their spatial, material, and temporal structures.

##### *Entering a place*

In most cases, tours required either online or offline registration. A number of the collaborative spaces that we surveyed had routinely scheduled tours, while others had online portals for tour registration (and thus scheduling). At this stage, it was obvious that facilitators had already commodified the tours. Beyond requiring that participants register, several spaces

charged a fee for tours, while others simply encouraged donations. At times, we had the opportunity to preview the tours online: there, we found pictures of the spaces and of its related events, as well as 3D-virtual visits and other resources. The difficulty involved in accessing some of these places increased their perceived selectivity before a tour had even begun. That said, the accessibility of each tour was also impacted by the position of the researcher in question (inside or outside the organization, introduced or not by someone).

We can note here an initial element that was common to all of the places that we explored: their visibility within the broader spaces in which they were located. For independent spaces, visibility was at times aimed at attracting prospective customers and/or at communicating with the surrounding neighbourhood (see Figure 4 below), while for corporate spaces, visibility was at times aimed at the organization’s employees or at external clients. For example, the Paris-based innovation lab of a major auditing firm used their space as both a showroom and a makerspace – this space was meant for “making” and for “showing” services to customers unaccustomed to buying their (the auditing firm’s) digital products. Moreover, some of the corporate spaces that we visited were located near reception desks or elevators. In coworking spaces, it was clear that location choice was a key element in the space’s visibility and atmosphere.



Figure 4: Collaborative space, “Le Credo” – France (source: authors’ own) (Note: We have changed the names of all of the collaborative spaces discussed here in order to ensure their anonymity.)

One of our first shared impressions was how we were welcomed into each space. Strangely, some collaborative spaces did not have welcome desks or clear entry points. This generated a sense that we were in a “non-place” (Augé, 1992), that we had not arrived “somewhere” until a guide ultimately welcomed us. Put in phenomenological terms, each arrival was an

encounter more so than a precise point in space. As such, a guide's simple "welcome" became a central feeling within our experiences of the tours.

### *Materializing a promise: the role of the tour guide*

We discovered that tours (given by space managers, community managers, facilitators, interns or other members of the space) are ways of showing, performing, and materializing the services on offer in a collaborative space, and that tour guides play a critical role in this process.

The tours that we took lasted between 10 minutes to over an hour and a half. While most of them represented the first time we were "in" the space, one third of them constituted a re-exploration.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes, these visits consisted entirely of a tour, while at other times, an interview was involved. Tours largely consisted of a tour guide(s) presenting the space's key artefacts and facilities (3D printers, shared desks, open spaces, ping-pong tables, artwork, etc.); these artefacts and facilities revealed each place's services, the skills that it promised to foster, and features related to its atmosphere. Together, these elements seemed to be promises that the space was making to potential members taking the tours. During these tours, each individual that we talked to had their own method of storytelling and of (at times) conveying important information about the commercial offer (or promise) at hand. We also had (chance) encounters with members of the community and short discussions with them and other tour participants about the space.

Different tours had different ways of embodying the promises being made by the space: some tours only allowed conversation with the coworker leading it, while others insisted on stopping throughout the space as a means of facilitating conversations with other coworkers. However, the majority of the spaces that we visited (in particular coworking spaces) were silent. Visitors often felt embarrassed about conversing with coworkers, as they were largely worried that they would be disturbing them. As such, it seemed that coworkers at times had been pointlessly primed for the tours, as visitors typically did not use these opportunities to deepen their experience of the space.

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<sup>4</sup> These cases were particularly interesting for comparing the different atmospheres that we felt during the tours and as members of the place.

Tours clearly represented an opportunity for the guide to give visitors a feel for the space's atmosphere. Tours thus allowed visitors to see and touch the facilities, to smell (sometimes literally) the place, to have chance encounters and discussions with interesting members/coworkers in order to get a feel for the space's (potential for) experience and to hear stories about the space (e.g. during events). The "invisibilities" that the guides' storytelling alluded to represented a powerful mode of materialization: participants were invited to imagine an event, a project, or even members (we often visited spaces that were nearly empty). What remained to be seen, to be felt – i.e. what would be seen and felt if one were to join the place – was very important for the guides we met. In other words, convincing visitors of the materiality of these invisibilities was at the heart of the expected experience of the place.

During our tours, we were surprised by the central role that aesthetics often played in collaborative spaces. More specifically, we observed that spaces highlighted specific aesthetic artefacts of their collaborative environments: lockers, photographs of the members, members' business cards, mascots, maps showing the locations of ongoing projects, typewriters used as decorations, sewing-machine tables converted into working tables. These various elements gave a strong aesthetic "sense of" the place. For the independent spaces that we observed, aesthetics played a pivotal role in attracting customers; these spaces seemed to recognize that customers are often in search of a very particular aesthetic. In corporate spaces, aesthetic design was often met with ambivalence: there, we noted that the desire to differentiate the company from others, translated (somewhat paradoxically) to an attempt to conform to the company's more general aesthetic. For example, in a building dedicated to design and architecture, the aesthetics of a lab evoked the industrial past of a former car production plant that the site had formally housed.

Quasi-objects such as light, smell, colours, textures, were also central in the tours, and these elements were often designed in contrast to the "grey," "closed," "serious," "impersonal" tone of a more traditional work (or life) environment. A sensorial feature that was particularly stressed was the spatial settings and tools found in many of the collaborative spaces (3D printers, digital milling machines, members' creations), allowing visitors to "touch," "manipulate," and to create an environment conducive to creation itself. This point was emphasized by most of the guides in our sample: innovation was *materialized* in each space.

During several of the visits, another interesting material element was also mentioned – the movable geographical location of the space. Once, for example, this was evoked by a plaque bearing an inscription of the space’s opening date. In many cases, places (mostly fab labs in our experience) seemed to exist *beyond* themselves. These spaces would often change location, inserting themselves into larger spaces.

Surprisingly, tours were also opportunities for guides to make good on a space’s promises about broader invisible areas and territories. The surrounding bistros, public gardens, metro stations, streets, and ecosystems were often mentioned during the tours, and at times, guides connected them to a personal story, pointed them out through a window, identified them on a map, or referenced them during encounters and conversations with other space members. Indeed, these “externalities” were presented as promises that visitors could access if they became members.



Figure 5: The community charter of “Love & Win” in Sydney (source: authors’ own)

We observed that tours often feel like a first step *into* a community, particularly in the context of coworking spaces. A second step often followed: potential customers were at times offered a free half-day trial, or given the opportunity to become a member of the “community” on the spot. This notion of “community” was central to every space’s promise: not only would you be joining a space – you would be becoming a part of a “community,” a “family” where people help one another and have fun while doing so. Beyond this, customers were promised a “network,” a place where they could connect with other people. The events organized in and by the various places also played a central role in communicating and enforcing these promises – events (and their management) were at the heart of building a sense of community; in this way, “community” revealed the atmosphere that each of the tours attempted to create.

This said, however, from a phenomenological point of view, the very first step of a tour could be the space's name. Some such names are highly evocative, such as “The Lighthouse,” which might evoke other places such as the Eiffel Tower (due to the light at its top) or the Atlantic coast (which for French people is a synonym for holidays and vacation more generally) (see Vignette 1 below). From this point of view, a name provides a certain level of visibility, and thus can shed light on the invisibilities of a visitor's mental associations. These invisibilities may become perceptible through language or names, or through anecdotes and projections. For example, in one corporate fab lab, the tour guide mentioned forthcoming plans for the space, including the addition of furniture, machinery, tools and so on, that would all be created by fabbers. Such plans represent an invisible category that can be elicited through the tour.

*Vignette 1: A visitor sniffing around*

When I used to have an hour or less to kill before an appointment, I would check Google Maps to see which collaborative spaces were closest to me. Similarly, before travelling to Thailand, I made a list of collaborative spaces using Google Maps, but I ultimately didn't visit any of them because I later realized how difficult it would be to get to the nearest one. I chose the one accessible by boat.

For the same reason, I googled Belgian coworking spaces while attending a conference. I ultimately chose one—not based on proximity or convenience—because its online pictures resonated with my contextualized feelings: the space (close to a river) was called the “Phare” (lighthouse), and had a beautiful painting of a boat on its external wall. At that time, I had been dreaming of moving to the coast, and these photos thus resonated with my preexisting feelings and desires – indeed, it is often these seemingly irrational decisions that inform the decision-making process of potential customers.

*Global and local tours*

We were surprised by the various global tendencies that we identified in the aesthetics, spatial arrangements, furniture, facilities and gestures that we experienced during the tours. Of the 110 spaces visited, one of the most amazing elements related to this was a general impression of isomorphism (in particular for coworking spaces; see Vignette 2 below). These spaces were



truly “same-same,” as the saying goes in Thailand. They had the same furniture (phone booths, ping-pong tables, chalkboards, Ikea seats...). They also took the same pride in having Steelcase furniture or cheap or free furniture, the same space design (welcome desks, general L- or U-shaped layouts, open spaces surrounded by small, private offices), and the same emphasis on a “community” (see the charter in Figure 5 above). Together, these similarities contributed to a familiar atmosphere: indeed, it felt simple, if not natural, to project the work habits and routines we had developed in other collaborative spaces into the one that we were touring. Paradoxically, the more we moved from one space to another, the more we felt at home everywhere, or perhaps more appropriately, anywhere.

*Vignette 2: Globalization and the feeling of loss*

This makes me realize, again, how global our world has become. People share the same information, the same training (e.g. standardized MBA programs), the same providers and partly the same problems (housing costs in big cities, economic competition, the need for more sustainable development, etc.). The same buzzwords are used in Paris and in London. However, despite a real advantage of appearing global and familiar, these spaces also embody a feeling of loss: a loss of identity, a loss of the pleasure of travelling around the world in search of new cultures/routines/habits, a loss of disorientation. As has been pointed out in a recent article about the homogeneity caused by AirBnB or Instagram<sup>5</sup>, such an homogeneity of furniture, communication, etc. leads to the homogeneity of wishes and wills, and thus becomes a dangerous way of enclosing people in a single way of thinking.

Indeed, these tours of collaborative spaces highlighted how open and global our world is becoming. Beyond these general trends, we also noticed that these spaces shared niche markets, which at times focused on one particular gender (such as “Ventura” in Sydney and its focus on women), entrepreneurs in digital areas and communication (geared towards collaborative work, such as in Singapore), academic labs (LabUM in Singapore), or fintech (“Love & Win” and “Wild Talk” in Sydney). The presence of international networks (e.g. “Huben,” “Botega,” “FullDay,” etc.) and the emergence of global social movements (notably hacker and maker movements) reinforced this impression of globalism.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2016/08/27/actualite/societe/bienvenue-lere-vide-decoratif-11859129/>

Nap rooms epitomize this move towards globalization (see Figure 6). Many spaces we visited offered bubbles to help one do a break and to take a nap. These places were more or less visible, and once in, offered more or less possibilities to be invisible for neighbours and visitors.



Figure 6: Nap rooms abound – invisible at “Huben” (Singapore), visible and tested at “Uni-Lab Paris” (France), and visible at “The Flat Rennes” (France) (source: authors’ own)

#### **Four emotional registers in collaborative spaces: Initiation, Commodification, Selection, and Gamification**

The logics of visibilities and invisibilities that we have highlighted thus far can accordingly be seen as contributing to the construction of atmosphere, a process which itself was common to all of the external collaborative spaces that we visited. More generally, we identified four emotional registers that emerged from our coding of emotions, each linked to specific visibilities and invisibilities: initiation, commodification, selection, and gamification (see Table 4).

The “initiation” register is epitomized by our experience of visiting corporate collaborative spaces and a handful of independent spaces. Each tour was clearly a ritual made up of explicit and particular rules, values and practices of the “community” being channelled. The next implicit step was simply to take a seat and become part of that space’s atmosphere and community. Surprisingly, the communities themselves were largely invisible (most of the time we visited empty spaces), made visible through artefacts and the guides’ storytelling, which together conveyed the spaces’ collective dynamics.

In contrast, the “selection” register was based on less inclusive emotions and experiences. Clearly, some places were not intended to include everyone: this is mainly due to their respective areas of specialization (e.g. spaces devoted exclusively to Internet of Things or to design) or to the projects that the space promised to foster. Such selectivity could also be noted in the organization of space itself: areas where one “should not go,” areas whose teams “do not like to be bothered,” etc. This emotion was paradoxically increased when teams were not present during the tours: moving into empty offices in a space described as “very innovative” gave us the strange impression of visiting a museum-like organizational space.

“Gamification” was another emotional register that tour guides tended to draw on. “Having fun” appeared as a very open, sane and creative practice. The production of a friendly atmosphere was often constructed when tour guides referenced a more “adult” or constrained world while simultaneously pointing out the “gamified” materialization of that world in a set of “fun” mobile artefacts, such as beanbag seats and football tables. It is in this sense that these spaces represent new, somewhat paradoxically “relaxing” work environments for employees, attracting them and encouraging them to spend more and more time in the space. During our visits, we observed that the spaces reserved for innovation and creativity were also used as places for gathering, exchanging, or even escaping. Unsurprisingly, similar “nice” and “convivial” details were highlighted during the tours: guides pointed out and/or made sure to guide tours close to cushions, hammocks, relaxation areas and mindfulness rooms.

Lastly, “commodification” was a prevalent register, and was often associated with “selection.” This dimension was present when guides framed the visits for external clients and for future collaborators by using the “showroom effect.” For customers that had already paid to be part of a community or particular atmosphere, seeing a company hosts a particular kind of event in the space can represent the promise that that member is part of an innovative organization. We observed that this use of space occurred chiefly within companies’ head offices or strategic centres: surface area therefore served to showcase the space’s possibilities while also functioning as internal advertising for the group.

	DESCRIPTION	EMOTIONS (we felt the guide wanted to evoke)	VISIBILITIES
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INITIATION	<p>The tour is a first step towards the “community.” It makes explicit particular rules, values and practices. The next implicit step: taking a seat and becoming part of the space. The tour is: a RITUAL</p>	<p>Sharing, sense of mutual help, gift, well-being, kindness, conviviality, history</p>	<p>The “event” room, large open space, people chatting in the kitchen (opportunity to partake in the community’s atmosphere). Implicit invisibility: the community Key gestures: showing the event room, stopping in it, stopping in front of the wall of member pictures, shaking hands of members during the tour, etc.</p>
COMMODIFICATION	<p>The tour is a means of showing, materializing, and experiencing key services offered by the place, its employees, and its community. The tour is: a SALES-PITCH</p>	<p>Desire, imitation, unease, seduction, closure, sense of mutual interests, expertise, communication, disappointment, dismay, liminality, aesthetic pleasure or familiarity</p>	<p>Facilities, up-to-date furniture, aesthetics, description of good practices, etc. Implicit invisibility: the value of each service. Key gestures: mentioning fees, distributing leaflets, showing and walking through up-to-date facilities, etc.</p>
SELECTION	<p>The tour is part of a process that can lead to a “club,” an elite group, and a set of “happy few.” The guide (quickly) makes one feel what would remain to be done for those in the group who might wish to be a part of it. It is: an INQUIRY, the first part of an EXAMINATION</p>	<p>Ambition, joining the “club,” caring, competition, sense of possession</p>	<p>People are taken “close to”, to the entry of, but not inside (yet). Visibility from afar. Invisibility of what could be experienced once inside. Implicit invisibility: excellence, success, power. Key gestures: showing different areas to different member profiles, visualizing the selection process, pointing out areas from afar that cannot be accessed (until one’s possible admission).</p>

<b>GAMIFICATION</b>	<p>The tour is a first opportunity to learn something, to have fun together.</p> <p>The tour is: a LEARNING EXPEDITION.</p>	<p>Pleasure, fun, learning, co-construction</p>	<p>Rhythm of a game, sense of a party, childhood, people can touch, experience, and take pieces of materials cut by machines.</p> <p>Implicit invisibility: new skills, new business models.</p> <p>Key gestures: chaotic gestures and trajectory, invitation to play and test facilities.</p>
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Table 2: Four emotional registers and four universes of visibilities-invisibilities in the context of tours of collaborative spaces

These four emotional registers can be combined in various ways. For example, after a tour of “Botega” (an independent urban coworking space) in Berlin, we felt both initiation and selection emanating from our guide’s practices. In contrast, during our visit to “Roadmap Digital,” a fab lab in Paris, we experienced both gamification and initiation.

In addition, all emotional registers corresponded to different temporal orientations. A long-term process for initiation (beyond formal membership, becoming part of a community can be a long process), a sense of immediacy for commodification (you pay and in turn feel that you are immediately granted “access” to something), a feeling of uncertainty and possibly of discontinuous time (trying and re-trying) regarding selection, and the bounded time of the expedition and games for gamification.

All of these emotional registers are resources that a guide can draw on in order to produce an organizational atmosphere; in doing so, these guides can make this atmosphere visible through their emphasis on specific trajectories, gestures, artefacts and narratives (see Figure 7 below). As Strati (2009: 239) has stressed, “atmosphere” is initially largely an invisibility. The process of giving and taking a tour generates the visibilities and invisibilities necessary for visitors to be able to “touch” the organizational atmosphere at hand. It also maintains a subtle balance between which needs, and need not, be shown or made explicit. The narratives produced by tour guides’ speech, gestures, and trajectory can also be part of temporal work (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013). A powerful lineage of past emotions can be activated by describing possible futures to prospective members. Emotions associated with childhood can

come out of gamification and initiation, whereas commodification and selection can draw on more adult imaginaries and temporal structures.

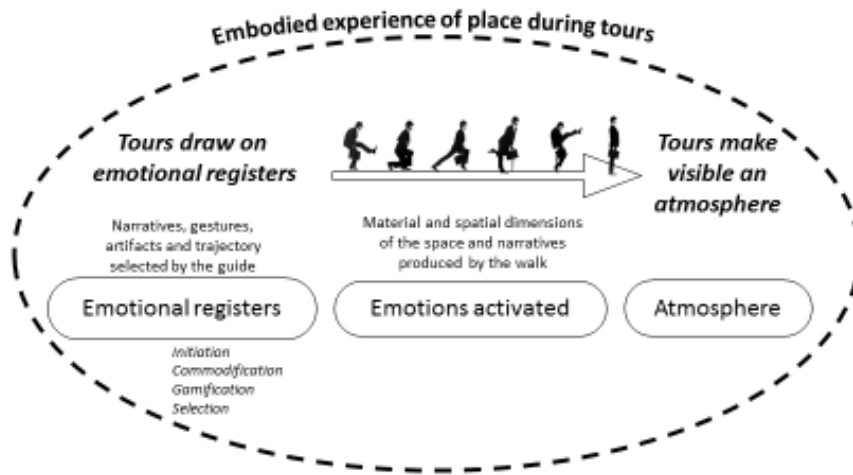


Figure 7: The emergence of atmosphere during the walking in and narrating of collaborative spaces (source: authors' own – Monthy Python's silly walk (CC))

Guides' abilities to lead tours and produce narratives can serve to extend, stretch, and ground various emotional registers in a particular place. In our observations, the discontinuities and rhythms of the tours played a key role in this process. For example, the pace of the (guided) tour and the number and contexts of the breaks also functioned as a way for guides to suggest other organizational continuities: the importance of silence, the existence of closed and transitional spaces, and the importance (or lack thereof) of specific spaces could be emphasized by the speed at which one walked through the space and any associated commentary (or lack thereof).

Interestingly, the process of entering and exploring a place was at the heart of the spaces' various atmospheres. In this way, tours symbolize, epitomize, and embody their respective place and that place's sense (or non-sense) of togetherness (i.e. its atmosphere), for better or for worse (at times, collaborative spaces disappointed with their failure to make good on their promises). Thus, collaborative spaces can to a certain extent be reduced to their atmospheres, the kind that one is likely to "touch" during a tour. Moreover, for "insiders," it is a common experience to see visitors exploring and getting a "taste of" or "feel for" their space, as such visits and free trials are often regularly on offer. Over the course of this study, we experienced

this “everydayness” of the tours, and identified how it was made spatially, temporally and materially visible through the tour.

Our participation in the tours and our ethnographies of collaborative spaces made us understand that place is not necessarily bounded, and further, that space is not simply a vessel to be “filled by something.” The narratives of the tours made it clear that the collaborative spaces were also territories (which included nearby shops, bistros, and other surrounding social hubs), places made up of past histories (during which the building had undergone several transformations) and biographical relationships (many individuals’ histories were connected to those of the collaborative spaces). We identified numerous people, practices and projects to be more-or-less spatially and temporally involved in the experience of each place. All of these elements can be described as part of a more “temporal work” (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013) based not only on text and discourse, but on past and anticipated emotions as well.

### **Contributions, limitations and avenues for further research**

This research contributes to studies and theorizing of space (Clegg & Kornberger, 2006; Taylor & Spicer, 2007; Orlikowski, 2007) in organizations and organizing as it highlights the role that embodied experience plays in the production of space and place in organizing. The dimensions of visibility-invisibility and continuity-discontinuity that we have borrowed from Merleau-Ponty (1962) further illuminate the spatial and temporal activities of organizing. More precisely, our research relies on the concepts of “atmosphere” and “emotional registers” as means of exploring the spatial and temporal unboundedness of new work settings such as collaborative spaces. Ultimately, we hold that one can better comprehend the nature of such places by considering their atmospheres. Phenomenologically, our experience of long stays in collaborative spaces is close to that of our participation to tours. Working in a coworking space or a makerspace does not mean belonging to a clear-cut community and sensing more and more faithfully what is the true, stable place. Staying and visiting both result in the experience of an atmosphere. New ways of working (e.g. telework, digital nomadism,

coworking or DIY) can be seen as ‘things’, but they can also be described as quasi-things and practices which are part of an atmosphere.

Empirically, our research has enabled us to identify precise emotional registers and atmospheres related to collaborative spaces. In order to “make invisibilities visible,” the guides that we observed jointly created space while simultaneously focusing on the present and on the on-going experiences of tour participants. Each of the registers relates to specific temporal orientations the guides could play with and combine in their narratives: a long-term process for “initiation” (as once “in,” becoming part of a community can be a long process); a sense of immediacy for “commodification” (you pay and feel that you immediately have “access” to something); a feeling of uncertainty and (possibly) discontinuous time (trying and re-trying) for “selection”; and the bounded time of exploration and games for “gamification.” Together, this temporal work (Kaplan and Olikowski, 2013) was particularly precious in lending legitimacy to the various collaborative spaces that we studied by sticking to the temporal orientations of the visitors.

From a managerial perspective, our study makes two key contributions to the existing literature. The first is our identification of the four emotional registers, which are related to the design and management of tours of collaborative spaces. Each of these requires an ever-increasing degree of bricolage, as well as tour guides that can effectively mix and match the various emotional registers during their tours. Moreover, the forms of identification that we saw as being accessible to guides represent a valuable managerial tool. Being a woman (or not), or introducing oneself as a researcher (or not), both have impacts on an interlocutor’s perceptions.

Our research suffers from three limitations. First, this study includes a very limited number of collaborative spaces located in rural areas, and the business models of such spaces are on the whole different from those found in urban areas (which made up the majority of our sample). Second, as we did not follow-up with other tour participants, we were unable to chart how the emotions elicited by the tour shaped their perception of the various spatial atmospheres, or their decisions about membership subsequent to the tours. Finally, we did not systematically link our physical experiences of the spaces to our online experiences of them, as only a fraction of collaborative spaces offered virtual visits and podcasts.



In addition to considering the aforementioned limitations, future research could also investigate the relationship between the four emotional registers and the business models of collaborative spaces. Interestingly, business models were often part of the “invisibilities” that these spaces were creating and maintaining. Indeed, almost nothing was said during the tours about the place as an *entity*; instead, what was made emotionally visible was a *community* (which might or might not be an extension of a particular business model) rather than the larger meta-organization itself (Ahrne and Brunson, 2008).

Future research could also focus on how embodied phenomenological processes and practices impact customer relationships in other contexts, such as after the signature of a membership contract. Such studies would be the next logical step towards a greater understanding of phenomenology within the everyday life of collaborative spaces.

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