

# Design with people in mind: psychological environments

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Two of the research team (PR & SB) enter a ward on the medium secure unit. We have been through a number of security checks and several locked doors to arrive at the ward to conduct our interviews on this very hot summer's day. The ward is a fairly calm space, with large windows, high ceilings and glaring white walls. Before we move through the air-locked space onto the ward, the member of staff who accompanies us stops suddenly, with a sharp movement of the hand. "Wait there, please". She moves into the ward to discuss something with another member of staff. We wait in the airlock, anxious about what is going on. The atmosphere is tense. The staff member returns and explains there is a patient lying on the floor near the doorway. She instructs us to enter the ward, and to not pay any attention to the woman who appears to be sleeping. Why doesn't she just sleep on her bed in her bedroom? Nobody asks: we are told to move slowly round her. The member of staff jokes that the woman just needs a little rest - nothing to worry about. We walk round the woman, confused by this whole episode. When we return to exit the ward later on, the woman has gone (extract from research diary - PR)

# What's going on?

- Material space as conducive to recovery and choice
  - traditional design
- In design terms, how is the environment facilitating behaviour?
- Design changes don't necessarily lead to positive relationships and shared realities
- Privatisation of distress and exacerbation of difficult experiences

# What's missing?

- How people are moving through the space, and the relationships afforded by that space
- Collective life and its facilitation
- Rather than the impact of the environment 'on' behaviour – co-creation between people and the space

# How to conceptualise space as psychological?

- 3 concepts
- Life-Space
- Atmospheres
- Remembering



# Empirical data

- Studies in inpatient wards
  - Forensic
  - Psychiatric
- Visual and narrative data collection
- Staff and patients

# Life-space (Lewin, 1936)

- “[T]he life-space of an individual, far from being limited to what he considers the present situation, includes the future, the present, and also the past. Actions, emotions, and certainly the morale of an individual at any instant depend upon his total time perspective” (Lewin, 1948: 104).
- Space is defined by relations, rather than metric properties.
- Expanding the focus to include ‘quasi-social’ causes – hospital life, sounds, smells, interpersonal communication, the ‘outside’.
- Action at a distance.
- What kinds of relations are afforded by the physical spaces of the ward and the activities that take place there?



# Inside/Outside

- Extract 3
- P: This first one ... it's in my – it's in the room that I was in round by the office, and um, it's got a picture of my hi-fi where I listen to music and just chill out in there. And there's ward activities, some of them I do. Some of them I don't do. I'm not, and this where I spend most of my time, in my rooms.
- I: Do you use the kind of outside space?
- P: NO
- I: NO? You don't go out there? [P: NO] No? Why not?
- P: Just can't be bothered with it





# Public/Private

- **P:** Say if I'm not feeling safe, and everyone wanted to go up to the games room...I couldn't say anything about how I feel to the other people cos it would trigger them, it's really risky. Because they know what you're going through...it is hard to spread all your stuff out and get it out in the open...but it's like should you be saying it? Because it could trigger them or it could trigger yourself, so you have to kind of like watch what you saying (CH)

# Atmospheres

- Blurring of individual/collective and person/setting distinctions
- In between spaces – feelings extended into space
- Atmospheres have a life of their own
- Atmospheres suggest thinking and acting



It was September, the low season, but the space was filling up, and he leaned back against the bar with his ginger ale and scanned the club for pockets, those dark human spaces in the room where something has just changed: above the music a man lets out an appreciative yell when before he was quiet; one of the dancers out on the floor laughs a little too hard or steps back too fast; a chair leg scrapes the carpet – something Lonnie can't hear, just feels, a shift of objects in the space there, this change in the air, a pocket of possible trouble. (Dubus, cited in Stewart, 2011: 446)

# Co-constituting: Atmospheres have a life of their own

**P:** I went to (the mindfulness group), what D ran, but I just couldn't go to it. I wouldn't sit there or nothing, I was always fidgeting, I was always crying, it was just like really hard, especially like art therapy, that shouldn't be on the ward because that like really triggers people, that's one thing I would take off the flipping timetable...it triggered loads of people, after (the mindfulness group) finished, people would be in their rooms, cutting themselves, they'd be in the bathroom, they wouldn't come out for dinner. They wouldn't even talk to no one. It's just such a bad idea...

**I:** Do you think staff were aware of this?

**P:** No

# Remembering

- Spaces move between past, present and future
- The space is constituted by, and constitutive of, these movements and flows
- The uses of space require an attending to the work of remembering that occurs in institutions



P: We do BRT and PD group. I find that [difficult] cos the voices were kicking in and I couldn't focus and I was getting really angry. So I didn't – I wasn't in there long.

I: Hmm.

P: I don't like a lot of people.

I: Okay. So is that difficult living in this kind of environment, then, that there's always people?

P: Yeah. Yeah. No, I can – It's stressful where they're rapists and paedos as well. Not good with that.

I: No. No, I can see that. So do you – oh, sorry – so do you feel quite unsafe, do you think, on the—?

P: In a way, yeah, cos I've been raped in the past. So I'm always like – I can't deal with being around them.

I: Yeah. So is there any kind of acknowledgement of that by the staff, do you think?

P: Yeah.

I: Yeah. So how do they – how – how's that dealt with?

P: They're helping me, um, find ways of dealing with it.

I: Yeah.

P: At the moment I'm dealing with it by pretending to be happy and whatever around them, but what I wanna do is hurt them.

I: Yeah. No, well, um, it makes sense (laughs) [06:39] really. So they're in these kind of groups, those sort of people there...

P: Yeah.

I: ...in the groups?

P: They have to talk about what they did and why they did it and whatever, and I can't sit there and listen to that.

I: And is that somehow related to the voices as well?

P: Hmm. Yeah.



# Frozen in the present

P: Yeah. I just want to get out there and see my son and my daughter... really, really badly. Um, I've got it in mind to get, um, these people here to write up a visit, I can send a letter to my son and my daughter and say, "Look, here's a date and a time....can you come visit me?" But, you know, I don't want to get upset. I hate it with my heart and I cry, I just don't want to do that again cos I've done that so many times in the street, you know, and I just don't – it ain't going to happen again, and I won't let it happen again. But if I see my son and my daughter, um, if it does – if I do get emotional – I'm not an emotional sort of person. If I do get emotional I probably will cry when I see my son and my daughter when I ain't seen 'em for a long time. Well, it's very emotional. I'll probably be like, "Hello, are you all right? How you doing?" (Laughs) You know, and— Give my daughter a big hug and kiss on the cheek. And, um, my son, give him a big hug and...reunite with 'em and live my life again. And going to the seaside, and live down there. And have them come down there and have a nice flat in where my dad used to live, have somewhere like that, in a nice quiet street, hear the seagulls and... ..the sea front just down the road. You know, a bit of money in the bank and, you know. You know, and stuff, and just survive. And that's, that's all I want really. That's all I want. I just want to see my father in my life, you know, I want to see me nan and me uncle and all me family, you know. Yeah.

# Conclusions

- 3 concepts: life-space, atmospheres and remembering
- Co-constitution of the material & psychological space
- Opening up spaces of relationality
- Experience ecologies