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Fashionable Interventions: The Pop-up Store as Differential Space

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Abstract: What is a pop-up store and how can it be used for organisational counterspacing? The pop-up can be interpreted as a fashionable and hypermodern platform focusing on the needs of a younger generation of consumers that searches for new experiences and is prone to ad hoc decision-making. From this perspective, the pop-up is a typical expression of the experience economy. But it is more. The ephemeral pop-up store, usually lasting from one day to six months, is also a spatial practice on the boundary between place as something *stable/univocal* and space as something *transitory/polyphonic*. Organizational theory has criticized the idea of a stable place and proposed the concept of *spacing* with a focus on the becoming of space. In this article, the pop-up store is introduced as a *fashionable intervention* into organizational spacing. It suggests a complementary perspective to non-representational theory and frames the pop-up as co-actor engaging everyday users in appropriating space. Drawing on Lefebvre's notions of *differential space*, *festival* and *evental moment*, theory is revisited and then operationalized in two pop-up store experiments. Apart from contributing to the ongoing theoretical exploration of the spacing concept, this article aims to inspire differential pop-up practices in organisations.

Keywords: Pop-up store, spacing, Lefebvre, differential space, everyday user

Fashionable Interventions: The Pop-up Store as Differential Space

Over the last 15 years, pop-up stores, restaurants and galleries have been populating more and more derelict urban spaces. More recently, international brands use them successfully in commercial high streets (Warnaby et al., 2015). The ephemeral pop-up store, usually lasting from one day to six months, can be seen as a new spatial practice on the boundary between a place as something *stable/univocal*, and space as something *transitory/polyphonic* (De Certeau, 1984). Apart from developing into a marketing tool, is there any critical potential in this spatial practice? And if so: How could this potential be used in the organisational field? The present analysis is based on an alternative reading of Henri Lefebvre's (1991) concept of differential space. Lefebvre used this concept to address urban spaces which are the temporary scene of an alternative symbolic order. Differential space can have a transformational influence on its users and surrounding spatial practices. Just how far could pop-up stores be theorised and practiced as differential space in this sense?

On first sight, the mostly commercial stakeholders behind pop-up stores probably don't fit with Lefebvre's idea of the agents of differential space. Commercial stakeholders, such as international brands, use pop-up stores predominantly as part of a broader marketing strategy for affective goods like fashion and branded technology. However, these brands employ designers and artists as producers to make place, which is to say: to conceive and design the pop-up as an engaging material and experiential platform. Recent research in economic geography characterises temporary spaces as post-Fordist placemaking and a "*continual, performative co-production of place by managers and users*" (Steven & Ambler, 2010: 517). This opens up the perspective of framing pop-up spacing as a performative co-production.

Moreover, pop-up stores often blur the symbolic order of a shop. Mostly, they are not designed to sell but to immerse the users in shared experiences which include products. These products are not confined to commercial artefacts and services. Cultural stakeholders, such as theatre companies or artist groups, also explore the pop-up platform to reach new audiences. On their part, they add hospitality offerings or alternatively produced artefacts to their placemaking (Devreese, 2012). Interestingly, all these types of producers see the pop-up as a perfect place to get in face-to-face contact with their customers and audiences. This is to understand user preferences, as well as to co-develop new meaning and purpose for their commercial products and cultural performances. In many cases, they see the consumer as an agent (as opposed to a passive recipient) and search for interagency and co-creation (Carù & Cova, 2007).

This search for interagency through and in a temporal and immersive spatial practice makes the pop-up store also a possible platform for counterspacing (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011: 57) in organisations. However, Beyes & Steyaert's anti-representational concept of spacing is blind to a *differential* spacing by everyday users and the influence of non-human materiality in space as a co-actor herein. Their epistemological perspective is constrained to the performative practice of researchers and artists (Beyes & Steyaert 2013: 1461). This article will show that the pop-up store opens up a complementary perspective on spacing which is still *more than representational* (Lorimer 2005) and highlights critical practices of everyday users of space.

Since 2015, the author has been experimenting with pop-up stores framed as counterspace at her university. During the month of March 2015, a store with a vintage shop, an artist installation and a coffee bar occupied a vacant retail space on the university campus. In April

2016, a flower pop-up *blossomed* for a week as a temporary construction in the university's central hall. Both pop-up stores had been designed and organised by students from different design and management disciplines.

This article will put forward more arguments for adding a complementary perspective to the current concept of spacing in organisational theory. It will suggest a re-reading of (parts of) Lefebvre's theory in order to apply his notion of differential space to pop-up store practices. For this purpose, it will also analyse characteristics of pop-up stores and temporary spaces drawing on recent literature in marketing and in economic geography. Furthermore, it will explain how this new perspective was operationalised for the two pop-up interventions. It will describe the two interventions and summarise the findings from a mixed-method research. Finally, it will draw some conclusions from these findings as to theorising and practising the pop-up store as differential spacing. In doing so, it contributes to geographical studies of economic innovations like pop-up retail. Moreover, by framing the pop-up store as a counterspace intervention, it adds to the development of critical spatial practice in organisations.

Spacing in organisations

Organisational studies have embraced the *spatial turn* during the last 15 years, predominantly using Henri Lefebvre's (1991) theory of space. However, texts like Taylor & Spicer (2007) and Beyes & Steyaert (2011) have criticised the collapsing of Lefebvre's dynamic theory into one-dimensional studies of space as a materialisation of power relations as opposed to a *holistic* research into the dynamics of planning, practice and integration of space (Taylor & Spicer, 2007: 335). The present analysis subscribes to their criticism of the *essentialist* reception of Lefebvre's theory of space by organisational theory. So, ontologically, it will follow Beyes & Steyaert in using the concept of *spacing* which entails a focus on the becoming of space in studying spatial practices.

However, by stating that every organisational space is processual and performative (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011: 47), their concept of *spacing* cannot account for the idea of counterspacing as a critical practice. The authors put artistic sensing of movement and becoming (ibid.: 51/52) at the centre of their methodology and favour the process of becoming over the actors herein. Thus, the everyday producer and user of space and their possibly differential practice get out of sight. The criticism of the concept of spacing here is an epistemological one. To develop a complementary spacing theory, a re-reading of Lefebvre's spatiology as a dialectic, non-dualistic epistemology is at stake. This re-reading will focus on his notion of differential space, as well as his idea, and its interpretation in the literature, of alienation, the festival and the moment. In theory, this re-interpretation will allow to understand spacing simultaneously as a "*flow and a thing*" (Merrifield 1993: 527), and help to understand the pop-up store as a possible co-actor in counterspacing. Here, counterspacing is understood as a spacing that counters other, less differential, spacings.

Hirst & Humphreys (2013) have stressed the foregrounding of the spatial agency of buildings, artefacts and spaces for an organizational theory that wants to account for power relations. Cenzatti (2008: 9) also underlines the *critical opening* that Lefebvre offered by recognizing that space is not an inert support of social action, but participates in the social action itself. This is why a critical, more activist perspective on spacing must have attention for the pop-up itself as a *non-human* actor in the unfolding of an organisational presence, in the sense of a

presentification.¹ From the perspective of *presentification*, agency resides in the joint mediation between the *build-in properties* of objects and the conscious and unconscious intentions of human subjects (Cooren et al., 2008: 1342). Beyond the dual extremes of Harvey's social revolution based on a coherence of place (Harvey 2012: preface XVII) and Beyes & Steyaert's minor politics of artistic practices in space, this article will take a glimpse on the "*poetic dwelling*" (Elden 2004: 190) of the everyday user in and with spatial constellations. In order to do this, let us start with the re-reading of Lefebvre and his main interpreters.

Lefebvre's differential space

Exploring the pop-up as a counterspace comes down to an alternative reading of the pop-up store as a spatial politics. Of course, Lefebvre, when he first published *The production of space* in 1974, grounded his understanding of the political in his analysis of the capitalist production of his time. Lefebvre's paradigm changing perspective claims that the main contradiction of that production displays itself in the realm of space: The clash between capitalist utilizers of space and community users of space.

The contradiction lies then in the clash between a consumption of space which produces surplus value and one which produces only enjoyment – and is therefore "unproductive". (Lefebvre, 1991: 359-360)

As a consequence, he identifies agents in this clash mainly with the state in its role of organiser of space on one side and grassroots counter projects on the other side. However, interpreters of Lefebvre have stressed that his theory is more fluent than this statement suggests. Merrifield (1993) argues that Lefebvre's space is not a receptacle but a realm of flows (of capital, money, information) and place is a specific and localised, *thingified* moment in space. Talking about the process of producing *things in space*, Lefebvre also hints at new actors:

(...) thanks to the potential energies of a variety of groups capable of diverting homogenized space to their own purposes, a theatricalized or dramatized space is liable to arise. Space is liable to be (...) restored to ambiguity, to the common birthplace of needs and desires, by means of music, by means of differential systems and valorizations which overwhelm the strict localization of needs and desires in spaces specialized (...). (Lefebvre, 1991: 391)

Lefebvre hints at an appropriation of space by a new type of user. This appropriation by new users is connected to diverting homogeneity and restoring ambiguity. So, provided that producers and consumers of contemporary pop-up platforms were able to "*divert homogenised space to their own purposes*", the main question of the current analysis becomes: Which build-in properties make pop-up stores work for this kind of differential spacing? In order to specify this question, it is necessary to shortly retrace the theoretical triad of Lefebvre's theory of space.

Lefebvre looks at space from three perspectives: The representation of space, representational space and spatial practice. The representation of space is born from logic/quantification and connected to formal power and experts. These agents produce conceptual space as an abstract and *decorporealised* space supported by visual logic,

¹ This concept is associated with the Communicative Constitution of Organizing (CCO) approach and states the continuous performance of an organization's mode of being. It focuses on communication, but highlights materiality and embodied practice as one of three key issues. See for this discussion Putnam & Nicotera, 2009.

commodification and fragmentation. Representational space on the other hand is produced by use and is invested with meaning. It creates lived space which often is not coherent or consistent, but affective. Finally, spatial practice denotes the way users generate, perceive and use space, and insure cohesion, continuity and spatial competency. Lefebvre calls this last aspect of space *perceived space*.

On first sight it seems that indeed there is a power struggle between the conceived space of the experts and the lived space of the users. However, Lefebvre's politics are not about one overthrowing the other, but about their integration into different spatial practices. Following Stewart's interpretation (1995), Lefebvre was after spaces that are represented and lived, functional and symbolic at the same time. Taylor & Spicer (2007) made the same argument when they called for a *holistic* approach to organisational space including planning, practice and integration.

In this aspect, it is important to realise Lefebvre's dialectic logic. His science of space is not about reaching an ideal, absolute space, but about second natures realising themselves in spatial practices between use/exchange and appropriation/domination, quality/quantity, enjoyment/surplus value, technology/poetry, and the triad of function, form and structure. These are important contradictory categories signifying two or three incompatible elements of the whole which both support and undermine each another. It is crucial to remember here that dialectics are a relational ontology and method based on the idea that dynamism is inherent in all reality (Merrifield, 1993).

Whereas, within this dynamism, a hegemony of conceptual space tends to produce homogeneity, difference, according to Lefebvre, comes from the body, understood as dynamic materiality of the human body, the spatial body and the social body of needs. Sensitivity amplifies this difference, and sound and smell play prominent roles. Bodies can thus (re)appropriate or (re)invent space. Differential space then creates hetero-logics through collaboration and expression of difference.

Just like the fleshly body of the living being, the spatial body of society and the social body of needs differ from an "abstract corpus" or "body" of signs (semantic or semiological – "textual") in the following respect: they cannot live without producing, without creating "differences". (Lefebvre, 1991: 396)

Lefebvre is known as a humanist marxist and this is where his call to appropriate space comes from. The human being is not alienated from any essential nature, but from the appropriation of his products and spaces. According to Eldon (2004: 41), Lefebvre's concrete humanism is centred around this idea of alienation, an alienation which can be overcome by an *art of living*. More than artistic spacing, this art of living can be a spatial practice of everyday users in everyday life. Merrifield (1993; 1994) stresses that Lefebvre embeds daily life practices in particular places:

Life is place-dependent and hence the Lefebvrian struggle to "change life" (...) has to launch itself from a place platform. (Merrifield, 1994: 525)

Looking at the pop-up store as co-actor from this perspective means looking for its potential to encourage everyday users' appropriation of space. This is an important element to operationalise Lefebvre's theory. The main question of this article, "Which build-in properties make pop-up stores work for differential spacing?", can thus be divided into the following four sub-questions:

What are relevant build-in properties of the pop-up platform? (Theory)

How can pop-up interventions in organisational spacing use these build-in properties to encourage users' appropriation of space? (Operationalisation of theory)

How are pop-up spaces appropriated by organisational users through sensual experience and representational meaning? (Practice)

What are examples of differences produced in organisational pop-up spacing? (Practice)

The pop-up store as a fashionable space of co-creation

To answer the above stated theory question, it is necessary to trace some characteristics – understood as build-in properties of objects (Cooren et al, 2008) – of the pop-up platform in the research literature. So far, pop-up stores and temporary places have predominantly been discussed in the disciplines of marketing and economic geography. Dominant aspects of these separate discussions are *meaning co-creation* in marketing and *post-Fordist placemaking* in economic geography.

The temporary use of urban spaces by pop-up stores is not brand new. The emergence of temporary shops, galleries and restaurants started some 15 years ago, when in 2004 the fashion label *Comme des Garçons* for the first time opened a temporary *guerrilla store* furnished in an abandoned bookshop in Berlin, Germany. Since then, temporary stores have been popping up in urban environments all over the world, albeit in highest frequency in the so called global cities of the North.²

The name pop-up refers to the namesake internet application, small screens with additional information requested or appearing on a website by surprise. This naming from the digital world is accompanied by a high level of online and social media integration of today's physical pop-up spaces: activity on brand websites, social networking sites and text messaging belong inseparably to the placemaking (Gursch & Gursch, 2014). Also, with regard to the element of surprise, the stores do justice to their name. They appear in unconventional locations, announced and dramatized by online and social media marketing (Pomodoro, 2013). The pop-up store has a growing economic importance in the retail of international luxury and high street brands selling affective goods such as fashion, cosmetics and high-tech. According to marketing research, luxury brands use pop-up stores successfully as part of their overall marketing strategy (Klein et al., 2016; Lassus & Anido Freire, 2014; Warnaby et al., 2015).

The temporary staging of their offer not only strengthens the consumers' brand experience, but also helps brands to explore new regional and generational markets through face-to-face contact with future customers (Surchi, 2011). Also, the added value of temporary physical platforms in retail is often interpreted as an event, creating opportunities for product and experience co-creation between producers and consumers (Russo Spena et al., 2012, Kastner, 2015). Like global brands, starting entrepreneurs and online retailers understand pop-up as an opportunity to add an offline experience to their online offerings and experiment with new products and services together with users. Main build-in properties of the pop-up platform from a marketing perspective are (Russo Spena et al., 2012; Kastner, 2015; Haas & Schmidt, 2016):

² It is hard to give a quantitative estimation of the appearance of pop-up stores in different countries. The British Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR 2014) stated in July 2014 that the country's pop-up retail sector generated 2.3 bn. pounds Sterling (around 3.1 bn. euros back then) per year and thus represented 0.6% of total retail sales in the UK.

- Unconventional, urban location,
- scarcity, restriction in terms of time (1 week to 6 months) and product range on offer,
- experiential, interactive store design,
- cultural/hospitality programming,
- social media activity, online integration.

The fashionable user and Lefebvre's festival

In all research about pop-up stores, there is strong consensus about the type of consumer who feels most attracted to temporary places: the millennials. This diverse group of people born between 1980 and 2000 (mostly in the Global North) seek adventure and behave hedonistically, focusing on pleasure (Twenge & Campbel, 2012). Raised in relative prosperity and in a time of accelerated technology use and globalisation, they are well-informed consumers and use online product information, blogs and peer reviews for orientation. Offline and embodied, they are predominantly looking for experiences and the identification with products and their producers (Gursch & Gursch, 2014; Lassus & Anido Freire, 2014).

The time experience of this generation could be described as that of so-called *intuitive actors* (Bergadaà, 2007). Time is not planned and experienced as coherent continuum, but rather as fragmented, juxtaposed exciting moments. Millennials are prone to spontaneous decisions-making. The experience-oriented pop-up store, which provides the opportunity to join and visit on an ad hoc basis through social media communication, is in line with these preferences. The pop-up can thus be interpreted as a fashionable and hypermodern (Lipovetsky & Sennett, 1994; Lipovetsky & Charles, 2004) platform focusing on the needs of a younger generation of consumers who search for new experiences and are prone to ad hoc decision-making.

In the broadest sense, fashion is about adding emotional and aesthetic desirability to a product or experience (Kawamura, 2004; Schroedl, 2015). As such, a pop-up platform is a very fashionable format by creating unconventional aesthetics in space and by immersing the user into a new experience. While the first studies into the *experience economy* (Pine & Gilmore, 1999) still emphasized the entertainment of consumers, later studies point to the co-creation power that connects active consumers with producers and product experts (Carù & Cova, 2007). This co-creation seems to be closely tied to the immersive character of pop-up stores. Immersion has been described as the sensation of entering a space which is immediately perceived as *a different world*. Entering a pop-up feels to the user like an imaginative journey to a distant place, historical time, projected future or fictional world.

According to marketing literature, it is the immersion of the user in an interactive pop-up environment that provides the platform for co-creation between producers and consumers. The consumer no longer buys in a store, but gives – through his behaviour and feedback – meaning to products and experiences. It is this engaging potential of pop-up platforms for millennials which potentially also empowers them as users to appropriate space. The pop-up's build-in property of immersion shares a lot of similarities with Lefebvre's idea of the festival in rural France. Back in 1945 Lefebvre wrote:

Festivals contrasted violently with everyday life – but they were not separate from it. They were like everyday life, but more intense (...) moments of that life (...) were reunited, amplified, magnified in the festival. (Lefebvre wrote this in *Everyday life in the modern world* quoted by Eldon, 2004: 118)

Lefebvre later realised the nostalgia of this idea, but held on to the very concept of the festival as *magnifying moment* in space (Eldon 2004: 118). The immersive property of the pop-up store creates such a magnifying moment in space and this can account for its potential as co-actor in counterspacing. The article will follow up on this stream of thought at the end of the next chapter.

Post-Fordist placemaking as a spatial event

Typically, multiple urban stakeholders with different objectives are associated with the creation of pop-up spaces. This is why, next to the marketing discipline, economic geography has vitally discussed the phenomenon. Being more interested in the creation of space than marketing research, they analyse three major spatio-temporal imaginaries of the pop-up or interim space: flexibility, immersion and interstitiality (Harris, 2015). Flexibility refers to the easiness with which pop-up spaces can be installed and deployed playing to the volatility of post-Fordist economies.³

A recent Dutch study on the supply side of pop-up retail (Loggers & Kooijman 2014) shows that the immediate financial benefits of pop-up spacing are small. However, the social value is assessed as very high. Municipalities and property owners are satisfied with the quality of life and safety-enhancing effects in regions with successful pop-up projects. These pop-ups are involved in placemaking: the pop-up spacing often reevaluates (vacant) public and corporate space. This is very successful when cultural or commercial initiatives work closely together with local residents and users. The result is a re-evaluation of the space after the temporary experience, a new recalled identity of place (Finan, 2014).

Place expresses how a spatially connected group of people mediate the demands of cultural identity, state power and capital accumulation. (Sharon Zukin quoted in Finan, 2014: 3)

Purely from a flexibility point of view, this mediation is strongly influenced towards the demands of capital accumulation. Colomb (2012) and Stevens & Ambler (2010) show in the case of Berlin how a global city is exploiting small cultural and creative entrepreneurship related to pop-up spacing in order to build a *creative city* narrative. Whereas the users are attracted by cheap or *for free* space, their stories are instrumental for marketing and they are gradually pushed into commercialisation, or out. These producers and users of pop-up space experience an "*exploitation of their creativity for the economic benefit of others*" (Colomb, 2012: 143). Andres (2013) who researched temporary use of space by cultural initiatives in Lausanne and Marseille also describes how power differences play in the favour of commercial and real estate stakeholders. Consequently, flexibility as a characteristic of the pop-up platform cannot be marked as a build-in property enabling critical counterspacing.

Economic geography authors also see immersion as important imaginary of temporary places. Similar to marketing scholars, they describe the effect of immersion as the power to attract visitors to themed and experiential spaces. However, for a Lefebvrian reading of pop-up practices, the most interesting characteristic flagged by economic geographers is that of interstitiality. Pop-ups are in-between spaces existing in the cracks of dominant orders or *residual spaces* left out of time and place (Harris 2015: 596). As such they can work as differential spacing, disrupting rhythms such as trajectories and aesthetics of the surrounding

³ For the multi-faceted concept of post-Fordism, please refer to the summary Amin gives in the introduction to his reader (1994). Information technology, globalization, postmodern consumerism, flexible workforces and global corporate control are the most prominent developments discussed under this concept.

spacing, and thereby pulling everyday users out of their spatial routine. Harris (2015) stresses the eventual conception of the interstice as opposed to a merely visual interruption:

In this sense pop-ups are interstitial spaces which, conceptualized dynamically, can prompt reassessment of how space-time should be imagined and distributed, offering a "performative critique" of urban organization (...). (Harris, 2015: 597)

It is this interstitiality or in-betweenness of pop-up spacing which, next to immersion, can be qualified as the second most promising build-in property of the pop-up store as co-actor in counterspacing. Again, it reminds of Lefebvre's concept of the festival as a *magnifying moment* in space. Eldon mentions the push/pull relation between Lefebvre's thinking and ideas of the situationists in his time. He influenced their idea of the, spatially and temporally marked, situation and they contributed to his idea of the moment as temporal-spatial event (Eldon 2004: 153). Merrifield emphatically describes this temporal-spatial event as

(...) something intense but fleeting, of pure immediacy of being there and only there like the moment of festival (...). (Merrifield 2011: 474)

A critical practice and fashionable intervention in organisational spacing should make use of the immersive and interstitial properties of the pop-up platform reinstating this kind of temporal-spatial event. Finally, we are ready to operationalise the theoretical findings.

Two pop-up interventions in an organisational geography

How can pop-up interventions in organisational spacing use the build-in properties to encourage users' appropriation of space? Immersion, offering an imaginative journey and allowing interaction and co-creation, is one important property of the pop-up platform as co-actor in differential spacing in the Lefebvrian sense. However, as co-creation depends particularly on power symmetry and active users, control of the conception of an immersive space cannot lie exclusively with a brand (or other functional stakeholders). As confirmed by economic geography, only a dynamic concept of place with an *incomplete immersion* that allows ambiguity can create the context for users' appropriation of space allowing them to explore according to their own senses and representations.

A pop-up intervention should therefore minimize the control of a brand or organisational stakeholder on the conception of the pop-up store. The strength of a distributed conception of space lead by the proposition of *incomplete immersion* could be tested in different pop-up settings. Furthermore, following Lefebvre's notion of the *magnifying moment* and the findings of Harris (2015), a pop-up intervention should employ an *evental interstitiality*. This means that, to be engaging, the pop-up needs to create an in-between-space which is kept eventual. For the rest, general characteristics of a pop-up store to be fashionable such as temporal scarcity and social media activity should not be neglected. Using this operationalization, two pop-up spacings were created to explore the two remaining questions:

How are pop-up spaces appropriated by users through sensual experience and representational meaning? What are examples of differences produced in this organisational pop-up spacing?

Intervention one – Vintage pop-up

The university teaches over 25,000 students in Bachelor, Master and postgraduate degree programmes at four campuses. At the main campus, a shopping arcade with book shops and convenience stores is part of the building. Due to lack of commercial exploiters, several spaces in this arcade had been unused for some time when the author suggested to open a pop-up store. A long-term student who is active in the vintage market and several first-year Small Business students were ready to commit themselves to the project. In order to create *incomplete immersion* and ambiguity, we also got in contact with a resident artist who was looking for a space for an installation called *In my life*. This installation consists of a clothing rack with neatly hung dresses. On touch, the hangers of the dresses activate an audio *telling* the visitor the memories the artist holds with each particular piece of clothing. Afterwards, the visitor can record his/her own memories of clothing in front of a static camera.



The Vintage pop-up on the day of the opening


From the beginning, it was clearly communicated online and via flyers that the pop-up store would be open for a month, from 20 March to 17 April 2015, between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m. Visitors could browse and buy vintage clothes and objects there, as well as have a coffee sitting on a huge bench or at two tables (all from the university storage) or explore the art installation. Although this sounds all quite straightforward, the pop-up store was visually *out of place* in the functional academic environment. This created an attractive interstitially. People would enter curiously but hesitantly and often ask about the purpose of the place. In order to keep the ambiguity, they did not get a definite answer but rather an invitation to explore the space, such as: *"There are vintage clothes, an installation and you can get coffee."*

The author visited the pop-up store every day for one hour and wrote her observations and reflections down in a logbook. She published four posts on the blog of the Change Management Research Group. After the four weeks, she conducted semi-structured interviews

with the two producers, their helpers and with two regular users (student and staff). Interview questions focused on the experienced immersion and interstitiality of the pop-up store. Producers and users were also asked to which extent they felt they could appropriate the space.

Popup @THUAS Day9

🕒 2 APRIL 2015 👤 ANJA OVERDIEK 💬 EEN REACTIE PLAATSEN



Listening to the story of INMYLIFE

“You only enter a place if you know what it is”, says Jurrian Langewen, the student who coordinates the popup store at “De Haagse”. Turning my back to the homy smell of Italian coffee from the popup bar, I gaze outside of the store: Indeed, students wrapped in all shapes and colours facing the University’s main entrance with a fixed stare ahead. No time for looking right or left. On days after its opening, the popup store still feels a little “out-of-place”. Those who do come in, are mostly international students and teachers. Also, parents returning from their children’s graduation or people from the neighbourhood attracted by the offer of free tax advice in the main hall. They are the most curious and many of them also explore the art installation. They start conversations: About clothes, about studying at THUAS, about the almost private and welcoming atmosphere once they are in the store. It seems like time for a moment stands still. Maybe this is not despite, but because this space is “out-of-place”?

Source: <https://lectoraatchangemanagmt.nl/>, visited 20 July 2016

The impression described in the above blog post was confirmed by several interviews with producers and users of the pop-up store. Users said that once they were visually attracted by the interstitial aesthetics and sight of the pop-up, or later by stories and word-of-mouth of colleagues who already had visited, it was the alluring setting of the installation working with sound and touch as well as the smell of freshly brewed coffee which “*pulled them in*”. The fact that they couldn’t make sense of the place right away actually strengthened their sensual perception of the moment. In particular, the students and members of staff felt taken out of their usual curricular and spatial routine and transported into a slower time zone. They often got inspired by this sensation to take time and explore the space or to start conversations with other visitors. When the pop-up closed its doors, there were many members of staff complaining that they lost their *place of inspiration*.

With students, staff and neighbourhood residents visiting the pop-up store, diverse social interactions took place. The *In my life* art installation had been shown before in a gallery context and later in a clothing library. In reflection, the artist noted that compared to the other environments, much more diverse people had interacted with her work in the pop-up store, also filming their own clothing memories. Whereas the gallery and the clothing library are perceived as more elite environments, students from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds

interacted with the art piece in the pop-up store. This diversity and the contact between users was an obvious difference co-produced by the pop-up store. (For examples of the diversity of users see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=meA91wFgjWw> and other linked films.)

Also, other more surprising differences emerged in the pop-up store. Many long-term students or alumni frequented it. They explained that visiting the pop-up and meeting people from the university in this space was less confrontational than entering the school. Inside the university they felt that they had to justify themselves, whereas inside the pop-up they could just *test the waters* and talk to teachers without formal commitment.

huge red sofa which spent a former life in the archives of THUAS. His relaxed energy inspires me to calm down and look around.

I realize that other than attracting "drop-out" students, the store does a good job in creating a synergy between the art installation and the vintage merchandise. From conceptstore experiences it is often criticized, that art or distracts the customer from actually buying, or is just a "prop" looking nice, but isn't interesting or useful for the customer. Here it's different: After listening to the "clothes stories" of INMYLIFE, many students and lecturers actually feel encouraged to look at the vintage clothes for sale. Or the other way around. Jurrian wouldn't be able to make a living from the sales alone, but the social encounters and cultural experiences generated by the store are priceless!



Source: <https://lectoraatchangemanagment.nl>, post from 11 April 2015, visited 20 July 2016

Interestingly, the producers (the Small Business students and the artist with helpers) had felt in the beginning that the pop-up store was divided into a shop (run by the students) and a gallery (run by the artist). They had the urge to explain this to the visitors. After a few days, they both realised that the visitors were not in need of this explanation and often made their own connection of the space using the vintage theme. With the active participation of visitors as users, the Vintage pop-up quickly became a space to use one's senses, take time and have conversations with strangers.

After the first week, visitors/ users came back because the place had taken on its own identity of cool meeting-point with *people on the edge of the organisation*. A lot of users had shared their experience of the space on social media and thus reinforced the differential spacing to *solidify* into a shared narrative of placemaking.

Intervention two – In Bloom

With the second intervention, the experiment was taken one step further. Instead of using a residual space on the campus, the author decided to build a stand-alone pop-up store right in the central hall of the university. At approximately the same time, the Dutch flower and plant growers had approached her, because they wanted to know more about flower preferences of millennials. Together with colleagues, the author designed a set-up in which Industrial Design Engineering students would conceive and build the pop-up, International Communications Management students would think of a theme/imaginary, and a Small Business student would coordinate the process. Twelve growers provided flowers and plants, but were confined to the role of sponsor. By this their influence on the conception of the pop-up store was minimized.

Furthermore, there was no advertising involved, just the promise to share information and pictures. The briefings we gave to the producing students stated minimal rules and opened up a lot of freedom to design and communicate the pop-up store as they wanted. From design, we only asked that the pop-up should allow at least 20 visitors at a time. We stressed however, that it should be immersive, experiential and interactive. From the Communication students, we requested the creation of suspense preceding the pop-up store and the conception and communication of a story around the pop-up store executed in online and offline communication. The pop-up was scheduled to be open for five days, from 4 – 8 April 2016. For research purposes, students collected data with a short questionnaire at the entrance and again at the exit of the pop-up store. We collected 200 valid questionnaires. The questions focused on the visitors' perception and appropriation of the space and of the product (flowers). Again, the author spent at least an hour every day at the pop-up and kept a logbook.



Film impression of In Bloom pop-up <https://youtu.be/JY2B9e0StRQ>

The Communications students conceived a mystery story around the pop-up which was strongly communicated by the above logo they released two weeks before the opening. They also came up with a *guerrilla action*: They subsequently *bombed* tables and walls with origami paper flowers in different parts of the university building to draw attention to the upcoming pop-up store. The design students conceived a construction of two domes connected by a tunnel. They made this construction from cheap plastic tubes. They also designed an interactive tree which sent out sound upon touch as centrepiece of the pop-up store. Further, there was a visual, auditory and olfactory presentation of flowers including a lounge space. Finally they created work stations where users could paint or eat flowers.

One day after the opening, the university's internal magazine published the following:

When you walk into the aluminium igloos on a green carpet, you enter another world. Fresh flowers colour the walls, the smell does take you to a beautiful spring day in nature and the music moves you further: to a distant place with trickling water and chirping birds. And that's all while you're just in the main atrium. (Link, 2016)

During the five days of In Bloom's spacing, more than 2,000 students, staff and neighbourhood residents visited. Judging from the questionnaire and observations, it was the *oddness* of the place as much as the *overall flower experience* which had attracted them. Clearly, the fashionable aspects of the pop-up and the immersive story and design had worked. But to which extent had they as users also been able to appropriate the space?

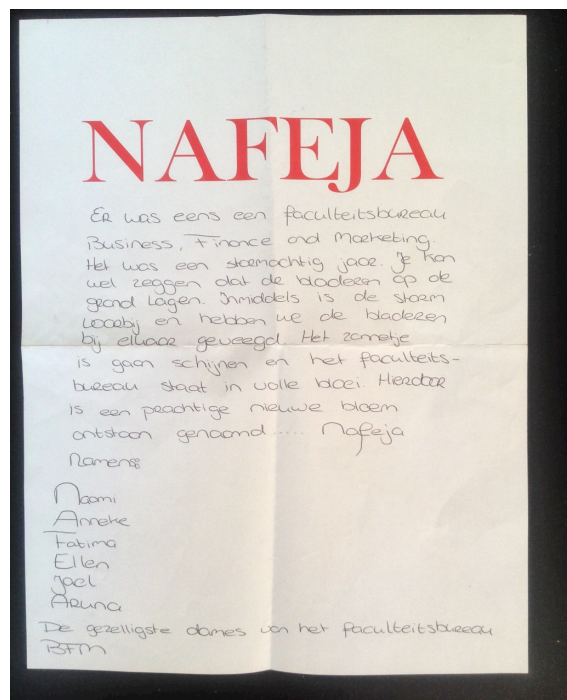
(...) there are two students amidst the sea of flowers undisturbed, discussing different forms of legislation. Whether they are involved in the project? "No, we do not have much to do with flowers. But when you walk in here, you come in a different state of mind. We wanted to learn for our exams, and this is wonderfully soothing." (Link, 2016)

Apparently, the interstitiality of the pop-up store not only attracted the visual attention of students and staff. It also triggered their curiosity, which made them take time and enter the space. As in the Vintage pop-up, their question "*What is this?*" was not answered conclusively by the helpers on site, in order to allow for ambiguity. They were just told that it was a research project and that they were free to touch and explore. According to the collected answers to the questionnaire, most visitors framed the pop-up as an exhibition, as opposed to a shop, a promotional space or a garden. More interestingly, a huge majority of the respondents stated that, after having visited the pop-up, they realised the added value of flowers and nature to the organisational environment and/or to their homes.

In conversations with the author, many students and staff expressed the feeling of lacking a "*serene*" and "*living*" place like this in their daily routine. Already on the day after the opening, some people came back to lunch, to meet or to work in the pop-up space. They all stressed the time-out effect the space had on them, i.e. a student said: "*I've just had terrible exams and have come to this place to recover.*" Many pointed out that it was the combined visual sight, smell and sound of the place they appreciated. Like with the Vintage pop-up, photos and stories were shared by users on social media. At some point between the third and fourth day of the pop-up store, users aligned more and more in communicating about it as a "*restorative flower oasis*". Again, the spacing had solidified into an identity of place.

In addition to this obvious appropriation of the space, two particular differences that emerged with In Bloom need to be pointed out. The first has to do with the already mentioned origami-flower campaign. There are strict rules about leaflets in the university's main building. They can only be distributed if they had been run by the communications department and the security department. Upon approval with an official stamp, they may be posted on dedicated bulletin boards. The students however, with a lot of effort, had reached special approval to initiate a couple of *guerrilla* postings of the paper flowers on workspaces, columns and main doors. Many students and staff photographed these pop-up flower appearances and shared them via social media. But this was brief. University security staff immediately disposed of the flowers once they spotted them. Afterwards the author found out that it was not a conscious counteraction against the flowers, but the fact that the staff could not think of such an activity being allowed, even so they had been informed beforehand by their managers. This incident triggered a discussion among the university's facility managers about more flexibility in the appropriation of space by students and staff.

The second difference to which In Bloom provided space to express itself was the appropriation of the flower space and theme by six secretaries from faculty administration. After being sighted subsequently at the pop-up store during lunch hours, they took part in a name-the-flower contest which was part of the pop-up programming with the following letter.



Author's translation: *Once upon a time there was a faculty office. It had a stormy year. You can rightly say that the leaves were on the ground. Now the storm is over and we swept up the leaves. The sun came up and the faculty office is in bloom. Like this, a beautiful new flower developed called: Nafeja. (The flower name is an acronym of the first letters of the women's first names.)*

Apparently, the pop-up store as interstitial spacing had allowed them to appropriate everyday university space differently and express and transform experiences they had made in the context of the university's reorganisation. According to their own analyses, it was the sensual impact of the pop-up store and the time they spent there together that had triggered the idea to move on using a shared metaphor.

Conclusion: Rules of pop-up counterspacing

This article shows both theoretically and practically that the pop-up store can engage everyday users in organisational counterspacing. In regards to theory, this enriches Beyes & Steyaert's concept of spacing with a complementary view. Non-representational theory is not the only perspective on spacing. Next to spacing which is prone to an artistic methodology, differential spacing as exemplified in this article also yields critical potential. This new *more than representational* perspective focuses on the appropriation of space by everyday users counterspacing in interplay with temporary spatial materiality and symbolism. Producers, users and the pop-up store itself can be seen as new actors in the Lefebvrian sense "*diverting homogenized space to their own purposes*" in a "*theatricalized or dramatized space*" (Lefebvre, 1991: 391).

Relevant build-in properties for this counterspacing were traced by analysing literature from the fields of marketing and economic geography. A pop-up store can be seen as a post-Fordist platform, appealing to millennial consumers who prefer experiential interaction and ad hoc decision-making. In this sense, pop-up spacing is fashionable, and adds, with its scarcity and visual shareability on social media, desirability to the spacing.

Incomplete immersion and *evental interstitiality* were found to be the major build-in properties of this form of pop-up spacing, engaging everyday users into the appropriation of space. Both immersion and the event aspect of interstitiality could be traced back to Lefebvre's concept of the festival as *magnifying moment* and a temporal-spatial event.

In regards to practice, *incomplete immersion* and *evental interstitiality* were further explored in organisational interventions using pop-up stores. For this purpose, commercial and organisational control of the conception of the pop-up spacing was prevented as much as possible in order to allow for ambiguity. Both pop-up spacings blurred the hegemonic symbolic order of the university spacings as they could not be connected to any direct function (i.e. they were not shops, exhibitions or information centres). The findings suggest that it is indeed the immersion combined with ambiguity which opens up space for the users to appropriate what they find to their fleshly and social *body of needs*.

Both pop-up stores attracted visitors due to their build-in interstitial property. They were perceived and explored by users as *in-between* spacing. Visitors often returned and appropriated the spaces to their own needs: concentration, relaxation, inspiration or meeting diverse people. Thus, the pop-up spaces slowly turned into places with an identity expressing differences. A Vintage pop-up became a meeting point for diverse people at the edge of the organisation and a flower pop-up (In Bloom) became a restorative oasis of the senses. The performative and spatial critique expressed by everyday users was most obvious in the described differences the two pop-up spaces co-produced, or rather, allowed to emerge. These differences could not be predicted.

Last but not least, both pop-up interventions indicated a strong connection between spacing and the user's perception of time. As movement of bodies and objects and the emergence of thingified moments in time, space-time was produced. Pop-up counterspacing as described in this article could help to better understand the interwoven character of space-time. Spacing-timing could be further explored as a hybrid achievement (Vasquez & Cooren, 2013: 29) using the pop-up platform as a co-actor with its build-in properties of *incomplete immersion* and *evental interstitiality* to engage everyday users in appropriating space.

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