



Lived rhythms as a ground for togetherness and learning in hybrid workspace

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Abstract

Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the flesh as rhythm, this article examines how lived dynamics between embodiment and space construct distinct modes of togetherness and learning in working life. Workspaces are becoming increasingly hybrid collections of various physical and virtual spaces. Contemporary workspace ideals embrace openness and a collective 'buzz', but this can also be disorientating. This article examines how different spaces could be combined to create spatial rhythms that balance collective working and learning with more silent types of understanding and reflexivity. The article suggests that we need both intimate and open spaces, as well as transitional spaces in between, to nurture learning and togetherness. First, spatial withdrawal can help people to connect with their earlier work history and dreams, sustaining openness of perception. Second, rhythmic movements between different spaces create a transitional experience of different worlds overlapping and a fertile condition for immediate communities. The article suggests that both approaches to space can assist in opening personal registers that are often suppressed: imagination and lived past. This article illuminates how reflexively created hybrid spaces can support personal grounding, spur learning opportunities and actualise novel modes of being together.

Keywords

Embodiment, hybrid space, Merleau-Ponty, organisational learning, rhythm, togetherness

Introduction

Work has become increasingly virtual, mobile and fluid. There is a common technological explanation for this development: mobile communication and paperless offices enabling or forcing, depending on perspective, work to transcend its previous bounds to any physical location – an evolution accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are seeing work conducted in various 'third spaces' (Kingma, 2016) or multilocated virtual and physical spaces including homes, on the move, cafés, coworking spaces, makerspaces and fablabs (Aroles et al., 2019; Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2021; Jakonen et al., 2017). As work is transcending its previous physicality

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(Bauman, 2000), it is now able to accompany the worker anywhere, and as a consequence, previously nonwork spaces may have changed their character. These mixtures of physical and virtual spaces have been referred to as hybrid spaces (Halford, 2005; Petani and Mengis, 2023). Yet this hybridity of space and work driven by the technological development has not made the physical characteristics of space irrelevant, as has been assumed (Bauman, 2000). The modern disposition to be creative at work and in life more generally thrusts people to seek novel and disruptive aesthetic experiences also in the spaces where they work (Alexandersson and Kalonaityte, 2018; Reckwitz, 2017). Thus, hybrid space can also mean festivalisation of work (De Molli et al., 2020) – work becoming an increasingly expressive and aesthetic experience.

It seems clear that the sense of togetherness traditionally associated with sitting in close proximity in a shared office every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. is eroding because of the changed spatial expectations and practices. Coworking spaces have presented one prominent solution to the spatial needs of today's individualised workers. These spaces seek to prompt a creative work experience by offering aesthetic design and a sense of community without obligatory commitment. These spaces may enable an expansion of emotional registers at work (De Vaujany et al., 2019), but this does not necessarily translate to a sense of belonging (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoite, 2021; Jakonen et al., 2017). It has been suggested that fluidity and restlessness have become general characteristics of contemporary spaces (Beyes and Holt, 2020; Stephenson et al., 2020). Concomitant to this fluidisation of space, some nonrepresentational approaches in organisational studies have suggested that subjectivities should not be viewed as stable but as emergent in spatial practices (Hultin and Introna, 2019) or unravelling when immersed in a particular atmosphere (Michels and Steyaert, 2017). However, space and materiality, more generally, even when appearing elusive, still have managed to preserve emotional weight and personal history in certain organisational contexts (Daskalaki et al., 2016; Izak et al., 2023; Shortt and Izak, 2021).

These developments indicate that spatiality and materiality have become increasingly important anchors of individual experience and a sense of togetherness in the hybrid contexts of working life. This article asks how the embodied and lived rhythm of occupying hybrid spaces conditions togetherness and learning in working life. It does so by drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968) later ontology of flesh as a rhythm of existence emanating from within the corporeal relations between the self and the world. In Merleau-Ponty's later work, bodies are not conceived as unified subjects but fluid becomings (Al-Saji, 2001) that emerge in the rhythmic relations of a common materiality that Merleau-Ponty terms 'flesh'. However, as opposed to the flattest views on subjectivity as the momentary creation of largely external forces, Merleau-Ponty's (1968) bodily becomings are rooted in previous histories and experiences – an invisible institution and 'depth' that condition the way one perceives the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). Life is thoroughly 'mixed' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968): There is a dose of the world in every human and a dimension of the past in every present experience. However, it is possible to train one's senses to become more aware of this invisible and embodied condition of perception. To this end, I complement Merleau-Ponty's theory with Bachelard's ideas on the dialectical arrangement of lived spatial rhythms that assist in expanding perception (Bachelard, 2014 [1958], 2016 [1936]).

This article also engages with the literature on embodied learning which has demonstrated the importance of sensory experience (e.g., see Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; Mack, 2015; Satama et al., 2021; Tomkins and Ulus, 2016) and collective embodied practices (Gherardi, 2009; Willems, 2018) for learning in various workplace and educational contexts. This literature has viewed the body as adding vitality, joy and sensory fullness to working and learning situations and facilitating an enriched understanding of the complexities of these situations. With a phenomenological approach drawing on Merleau-Ponty, this article extends this literature in two ways. First, the body is approached as a body in the world, where the world is understood not only in an affirmative

sense as a practical resource but also as an existential and ambiguous condition whose rhythms are mutually implicated with those of the body. Second, the body is viewed not only as a site of full sensory experience, joy and vitality but also as evoking invisibilities, absences and hidden selves (De Vaujany and Aroles, 2019; Rigg, 2018). Togetherness is approached as being formed between alternating phases of expansion, withdrawal and spaces in between, thereby essentially being rhythmic. Learning is viewed as occurring along these rhythmic cycles through an implicit process of expanding perception and a ‘retrograde movement of the true’, along the lines of Merleau-Ponty’s (1968, 2010) theory. According to Merleau-Ponty, we cannot learn something unless its seeds are already imprinted somewhere within our lived past. It is evident that capitalist society encourages self-exhibition and competition in visible arenas (Nash, 2020). However, in place of automatically viewing withdrawal as a setback and a turn-away from connection, this article suggests that it is possible to conceive it within the wider embodied and cyclical rhythm of expansion (exploration, challenge) and withdrawal (reflection).

This article is structured as follows. First, it delves into Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the flesh as a collective incarnate element and ground for our sense-making processes. The theory of flesh is further elaborated through different perspectives on rhythmic spatial experience. Next, the article examines empirical organisational studies that demonstrate how a space participates in the creation of different embodied rhythms of togetherness and learning in hybrid contexts – first, as a ground for belonging, self-reflexivity and imagination, and second, by facilitating a rhythmicity between withdrawal, expansion and spaces in between. Then, the article draws these insights together by discussing how embodied spatiality can breed novel modes and rhythms of learning and sensing togetherness in hybrid spaces. Finally, the article envisions future research possibilities for a rhythmic approach to hybrid space and discusses how such an approach could enhance understandings of more flexible ways of perceiving elements that are normally assigned to either visibility or invisibility in organisational contexts.

Merleau-Ponty’s idea of ‘flesh’ as embodied resonance within spaces

From bodily perspectives to sense emerging from within flesh

Within organisation studies, there has been increasing interest in understanding processes of organisational becoming – particularly concerning how organisations emerge in a situation through not only mental effort but also with embodiment and materiality playing an active role. Approaches have emerged that question the Cartesian idea of a bounded individual, finding enduring subjectivities dissolve into atmospheres (e.g., Michels and Steyaert, 2017) or material-discursive practices (e.g., Gherardi, 2020; Hultin and Introna, 2019). Merleau-Ponty (1968) also adopted an antiessential stand in his later philosophy, in which he substituted the perspective of a unified lived body for universal, changeable and differentiating flesh. However, alongside this increased attention to becoming, he constructed another dimension: that of a vertical ‘depth’ in which continually increasing lived histories never cease to condition human perception although individuals are not necessarily aware of it. I now turn to examine how, in Merleau-Ponty’s thinking, the ephemerality of the embodied subject is grounded in such ‘depth’ and how it actually becomes a temporal matter.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1968), our being is densely intertwined with the environment to an extent that merits considering humans as the same ‘flesh’ as everything else in the world. Flesh is neither matter nor spirit but a ‘midway between the spatiotemporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle’ – or element (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 139). The idea of flesh seeks to replace

a traditional and essentialist idea of separate bodies with a view of a 'fluid becoming' from within (Al-Saji, 2001). This difficult task is undertaken because Merleau-Ponty seeks to reveal that what is perceived as distinct entities in the environment are not given and self-sufficient but are instead constructed in perceptions conditioned by the lived past mostly inaccessible to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). This causes our relations with others to be opaque in a constitutive sense (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Merleau-Ponty (1968) conceptualises flesh dividing itself into visible and invisible dimensions, where the former refers to entities that one can identify in perception, with the latter being their opaque ground and a much vaster dimension of existence. The invisible consists at least of the immediate sensory life that is already past, at the moment, the consciousness grasps it; of a 'forgotten' past that implicitly outlines our perception and of an even deeper past that is the realm of the oneiric, imaginary and symbolic (Al-Saji, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1964b 1968, 1988, 2010).

In this ontology, there are no fully positive and self-sufficient beings. 'I' am inscribed in the other, as they are inscribed in me, which leads to recurrent reversions between 'me' as a sensing being and a being sensed by others in my effort to become visible. Even time, as one experiences it, does not consist of full and bounded points following serially one after another. Each present folds backwards and builds upon the lived past. This reflects the workings of an invisible field that Merleau-Ponty terms institution: a cumulation of past experiences that subtly regulate sense-making while remaining open-ended (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). This open-endedness means that each time one acts upon the world, not only does the past condition the present activity but the present experience sends reverberations back upon the lived past. While we usually understand what is happening to us because we have experienced something similar in the past, this moment of revelation also reforms this past by means of a curious 'retrograde movement of the true' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). An example of this is the 'aha' experience, in which we 'find' that something had already existed in our lived past as a germ without us being conscious of it (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 189). Now this germ is expanded to a full meaning and a new level for perception. Thus, what propagates in this back-and-forth movement is not only time but also, more importantly, sense (Al-Saji, 2009).

In organisation studies, there has been an influential approach to sense-making introduced by Karl Weick (1995), which, like Merleau-Ponty's theory, emphasises the situational context and retrograde movement of sense-making. However, Merleau-Ponty's theory differs from Weick's in important respects. First, for Weick (1995), sense-making is a discursive process. For him, everyday concrete involvement with the world is mainly automatic processing which is given sense only in the event of a disruption. This sense-making requires detachment from the situation, and the sense given is more affected by outward concerns of convenience, identity and face-saving than accuracy (Weick, 1995). In Merleau-Ponty's theory, on the other hand, the concrete embodied activity is not only crude and raw (Weick et al., 2005) but also already sensible. The most important choices are taken at this early stage of perception which is a fertile ground for multiple senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). Second, Merleau-Ponty's sense-making is not a personal act of authoring (Weick, 1995) but still embedded in the 'depth' of the world where one is simultaneously the one perceiving and perceived, active and passive, not detached from a nonconscious lateral understanding of the infinity of coexisting perspectives. Here, one arrives to the third difference: Merleau-Ponty's (2010) way of conceiving sense as dynamic and embedded in the flesh preserves the original diversity of sense and understands sense as having multiple layers and significations. The 'retrograde movement of the true' keeps sense-making open to detours with sometimes distant events in history or imagination being recentered. Instead of controlling sense (Weick, 1995), one can end up finding more than what one was looking for (Merleau-Ponty, 2010).

There has been increasing interest in Merleau-Ponty's work in organisation studies. Much as Merleau-Ponty's approach and methodology developed over his career from an essentialist epistemology towards an account of infinitely differentiating flesh, the application of Merleau-Ponty's work in organisation studies has been heterogeneous. Various studies have focused on habitual knowledge as being a possession of the body, conveying the influence of the early works of Merleau-Ponty (e.g., De Rond et al., 2019; Willems, 2018; Yakhlef, 2010). Others have used ingredients from both the earlier and later works of Merleau-Ponty (e.g., McConn-Palfreyman et al., 2022). Still others have leaned more clearly towards his later period's ontology of the flesh and the embodied rhythms between the visibility and invisibility (e.g., De Vaujany and Aroles, 2019; Ladkin, 2013), which is also the direction this article takes.

Spatial rhythms as a condition for seeing differently

The imminent contact between the present and the past in the retrograde folding of the flesh makes the concept of rhythm useful for the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's theory. When considered from the standpoint of flesh, humans are not unified bodies but fields of rhythm and difference being formed by the lived past (Al-Saji, 2001). Life is essentially polyrhythmic. We adapt to and resonate with others' rhythms of speech, walking and presence. While these rhythms change and modulate according to the situation, ours do too. Henri Lefebvre (2004) broadened the essence of this idea with his discussion of societal rhythms such as those of urban life's work and traffic. From a rhythmical point of view, social worlds emerge as this common vibration. Elke Weik (2019) has applied ideas of rhythm and harmony to studying endurance of organisational institutions with an approach not distant to Merleau-Ponty's. Weik (2019) argues that institutions are not only abstract ideas but primarily lived sensually in rhythmically recurring occasions of organisational practices and rituals. These rhythms hold institutions together and provide an experience of meaning for their participants (see also Bailey and Madden, 2017).

Institutional rhythms thus create continuity, but a question that arises time and again in Merleau-Ponty's work is that of how to perceive differently – a key question for learning. Despite all the implicit richness of the invisible realm, everyday perception is often conservative and satisfied with habitual patterns. Merleau-Ponty (1968) was interested in how artists could perceive in a manner more 'wild' and innovative – and, in doing so, 'deflagrate' being into life (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 1964b). For Merleau-Ponty (2010), such 'pure creation' is a limit case of institution (p. 26). Fluid modern society (Bauman, 2000) has been found particularly welcoming to pure novelty and creativity (Reckwitz, 2017) – some have argued that our times have a special affinity for limit experiences, that is, liminality (Ibarra and Obodaru, 2016; Johnsen and Sørensen, 2015; Stenner, 2018).

In spatial organisational studies, increasing attention has emerged to such unsettling experiences. While space may have ordinarily been conceived as a solid container (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004), there has been a recent call for nonrepresentational approaches that understand space as inherently mobile and unstable with a repetitive spatial rhythm being only a particular enactment (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012). Using such an approach, Beyes and Steyaert (2013) examined how ordinary experiences of urban space were contravened by an art installation that rendered the space an uncanny and intensive experience. Moreover, Michels and Steyaert (2017) examined how similar breaches were created by pop-up concerts in urban spaces that produced uniquely affective atmospheres. Kuismin (2022) examined sensing in a 'buzzing' entrepreneurship event as an affectively and spatially unstable experience. On the other hand, studies of embodied learning have attended to the movement of actors in space, as in the cases of walking (Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; Zundel, 2013) or aesthetic and artistic exercises (Mack, 2015; Pässilä et al., 2015). These studies

have challenged the notion of learning as being an orderly, stable and exclusively mental activity devoid of emotions.

The abovementioned studies have approached learning and creating connections with others as an event in the present. For instance, they have considered how ordinary spaces can be recomposed to pave the way for a more instant and vital togetherness (Michels and Steyaert, 2017) or how engaging the body by means of mobile exercises in a space creates fuller and more authentic, emotional and expressive learning occasions (Beyes and Steyaert, 2021; Mack, 2015; Pässilä et al., 2015). These studies have been driven by a search for how people could be more present and attuned to one another and the space around them. However, according to Merleau-Ponty's theory of flesh, such full attunement cannot be achieved because there is a constitutive lack in our interactions with both others and the world. The flesh 'returns to itself and conforms to itself', having its own inertia and ties (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 146–147). The route between oneself, space and others is indirect – while we are directed towards the world, there is something within that reaches back to the muteness of our sensory life and the invisible. The rhythm between our flesh and that of the world resonates not only in the present but also along the lived past. Clare Rigg (2018) has illuminated this by discussing how experiences become stored in 'somatic knowledge', how these affective layers can hinder conscious activity and how access to this invisible knowledge requires embodied sensitivity and reflection.

Other studies have viewed this fleshy rhythm of reaching outside and returning to reflection as embedded in a back-and-forth movement between spaces. Francois-Xavier De Vaujany and Jeremy Aroles (2019) examined the dualities of noise and silence as well as that of sociality and solitary reflection in makerspaces. The way in which working, learning and a sense of community were achieved in this social setting was depicted as an intricate dance between visibility, privacy and liminal spaces, requiring embodied sensitivity and reciprocity from each party. Yet other studies have examined how workers temporarily withdrew from their formal organisational space to liminal spaces for creative experimentation and respite from ordinary expectations (Shortt, 2015; Sturdy et al., 2006; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018). Liminality, being a limit experience close to 'pure creation' (Merleau-Ponty, 2010), is a highly affective experience (Stenner, 2018). Liminal experiences have been connected to spaces where one 'wavers between two worlds' (Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]: 18) with contradictory worlds or sets of norms colliding and overlapping (Greco and Stenner, 2017). Togetherness is characteristically immediate, close and nonhierarchical in liminal spaces, being referred to as *communitas* (Toraldo et al., 2019; Turner, 1974). As mentioned earlier, some theorists have associated liminality with the transitional, liquid and uprooted modern experience (Bauman, 2000). Hybrid workspace is a prime example of a space in which different norm sets and emotional registers overlap, setting in motion a process where new ways to perceive work/life may emerge (Izak et al., 2023). Thus, a hybrid workspace may have its liminal moments.

However, hybrid space may not be just about unhinged proliferation of spatial constellations. Gaston Bachelard (2014 [1958]) examined depictions of rhythms of spatial withdrawal and expansion in spatial poetry. He found that these rhythms reflected human existential needs for both intimate and homely spaces and vaster, more adventurous and open spaces. He also claimed that the poetic homely spaces such as nooks, corners and nests can be lived more fully when they are contrasted by opposite spaces. In this sense, home and vastness require one another. For example, Bachelard (2014 [1958]) depicted a poetic image of an isolated hut within the wilderness and the way this hut metaphorically expanded inwardly and realised its full potential of protection when it had to fight a storm. Isolated spaces and the wilderness have traditionally been related to liminality (Thomassen, 2012). However, the 'limit experiences' of Bachelard's poets enforced their connection to the core experience of home and dwelling. This befits Merleau-Ponty's (1968, 2010) idea that there is a hidden, historically instituted structure in embodied experience. A liminal experience

need not only be chaotic but can help realise an essence of something. In an earlier work, Bachelard (2016 [1936]) stated that a harmonious development of mind requires finding a way to live in a juxtaposition of different rhythms – the dialectics between the activity, the withdrawal to reflect and find repose and the recommencement of activity (see also Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 175–176, 1973 [1955]). Ideally, living such rhythmic contrasts in organisational contexts would provide ‘unsettling’ experiences for perception (Beyes and Steyaert, 2013) but in a framework of an overall ‘happy vibration’ (Bachelard, 2016 [1936]) that preserves coherence of activity.

In the remainder of this article, I combine these insights on rhythmic dialectics to Merleau-Ponty’s ideas concerning humans’ inherent connectivity to the physical world and examine them in different hybrid organisational contexts. I propose that the idea of an interaction between contracting and widening spatial rhythms offers a direction to examine the workings of the flesh in hybrid spaces and work. This approach can illuminate how people act out embodied and prereflective ties with space in practice and illustrate how these fleshy relations can provide existential support and facilitate togetherness and learning in an uncertain world of work. I now turn to examine more closely empirical studies that demonstrate these relations.

Dwelling in hybrid spaces?

Space has become an important force for structuring experience and a sense of belonging (Alexandersson and Kalonaityte, 2018; Dale and Burrell, 2008), particularly in the type of work associated with contemporary experience economy (Reckwitz, 2017). Harriet Shortt and Michal Izak (2021) have offered an in-depth examination of embodied spatial relations in such an organisational environment. They examined how hairdressers experienced and expressed their sense of togetherness in a shared workspace that foregrounded brand visibility but erased signs of concrete embodiment and lived history. Hair salons do not readily relate to an image of hybrid space associated with information technology–related spatial diversity, but in the cases examined by Shortt and Izak (2021), they certainly exemplify experience economy’s aim of reforming a traditional workspace to a dazzling experience (Dale and Burrell, 2008). Shortt and Izak (2021) viewed the salons of their study as transient workspaces, likening their ethereality to spaces of mobile knowledge work. Importantly, the study by Shortt and Izak (2021) addresses a key question concerning hybrid spaces: How to achieve a sense of belonging in a fluid workspace? (Petani and Mengis, 2023). Their findings can be instructive concerning the purpose of this article; thus, they are discussed below through Merleau-Ponty’s theory.

The overriding importance on maintaining a desired visibility of luxury and cleanliness in the hairdressing salons meant that the embodied dimension of the hairdressers’ work was required to be as subtle and invisible as possible (Shortt and Izak, 2021). However, this ‘cleansing’ effort could not prevent marks and scars from emerging in the workspace as time passed. While such marks were likely invisible for a random spectator, they carried hidden significance for the hairdressers as traces of their own work history. Hairdressers perceived these marks and scars both in their space and appearance – scuffs left by the everyday turning of the hairdresser’s chair or stains in a cardigan worn while working – as extensions of their own body. This is conveyed, for instance, by the expression, ‘that’s me right there!’ (p. 1697), by a participant pointing to scuffs on a personal workstation. This case demonstrates how a seemingly outside matter emerges as something inseparably connected to human embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

The marks that had developed through interactions between bodies and the workspace’s materiality can be conceived as a ‘fold’ in flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) that created an opening to past times and allowed the hairdressers to make sense of their work history in a manner that was corporeal and lived and not only mental (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). Even fleeting marks, such as hair

on the floor soon to be wiped out or marks of a colleague's lipstick on a glass, were perceived as meaningful (Shortt and Izak, 2021). Merleau-Ponty (2010) suggests that sometimes the most banal and seemingly unimportant things in the environment – things that are not 'rational' to attend to – carry our previous history to the fullest (p. 197). These marks and scuffs were not even solid objects, but they managed to evoke a sense of history otherwise invisible. They show that one cannot create a space that would be totally visible and graspable even if one wished to (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). A spatial experience always entails a distance between the actor and space, a distance that is simultaneously thick, weighty and affective (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). These traces were imprints of daily rhythms and practices (Weik, 2019); thus, they embodied the implicit institution of these hairdressers' organisational life (Merleau-Ponty, 2010).

In a similar vein, Gianpiero Petriglieri et al. (2019) found dense connections between embodiment, spaces and emotional containment in their study concerning independent creative knowledge workers. Their findings can again be translated to the terminology of flesh. Without a position in an organisation, these workers lived a precarious life both financially and emotionally (Petriglieri et al., 2019). They felt a constant threat of falling into oblivion – into invisibility (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) – if they were unable to produce and sell their work. Without a visible identity guaranteed by an organisation, these workers were in a constant process of crafting one themselves, which meant self-marketing in every possible space virtual or real (Petriglieri et al., 2019). They conceived their working spaces equally mental and physical and in need of continuous cultivation. Thus, these workers can be considered to have operated in hybrid spaces. For lack of formal organisational space, these people came 'to embody the work' themselves (p. 137). According to the reversibility principle of flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), however, it could as well be said that the work came to embody them.

As the above description already conveys, work was both a means of self-expression and self-development for these workers. Although they needed to work to become visible and be 'somebody' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), the ability to 'work well' (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 139) was pronounced: Their main aim was to work 'vigorously, regularly, and competently expressing an urge' (p. 139). These expressions reflect an embodied relation to meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). 'Working well' also involved retrograde self-reflexive meaning-making (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010), as in the words of an artist: 'work becomes almost something I give birth to. . . [It] brings memory of a time or a theme that you went through' (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 137). Another participant, a consultant, expressed the same tendency by wanting, with the help of work, 'to find out more facets of who I am' (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 137). Being unproductive, by contrast, meant losing vigour (Petriglieri et al., 2019) and, thus, falling out of this fleshy rhythm of expression and productivity.

It is interesting that these individuals sustained this fleshy rhythm through engaging with personal spaces the study refers to as 'holding environments': specific routines, workspaces, significant people and a sense of purpose (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 141). In the lack of formal organisation, these personal spaces subtly organised and rhythmised these individuals' work. For example, informants adhered to embodied routines, such as exercising, dressing or preparing themselves in a regular way and order (Petriglieri et al., 2019). The workers also placed particular importance on their workspaces, which were either in their homes or in a public or privately rented external location (Petriglieri et al., 2019). These spaces were typically not intended for outside viewers, and the private and personal spaces were characteristically intimate and functional. The workers sought a feeling of comfort in these spaces, and in many cases, this was achieved in tight, womb-like spaces (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 143) similar to Bachelard's (2014 [1958]) homely nests and nooks. As with the nests, these spaces and their materiality had grown through the labour of these workers' bodies – as in the case of a participant who had 'everything at fingertip reach' (Bachelard (2014 [1958]):

143). The workers related to their spaces with warmth, with the materiality of these spaces carrying their lived histories, as in the case of Shortt and Izak's (2021) hairdressers. Importantly, these spaces also managed to contain the emotions and insecurities triggered by a precarious situation in the manner of Bachelard's (2014 [1958]) archetypical hut fighting the storm. As one participant expressed, 'If I didn't have this space that is really carved out and dedicated and all mine, then I feel like I would be working in the dark. It would limit my ability to dream and give myself tasks' (Petriglieri et al., 2019: 145). These spaces seemed to contain even a sacred dimension (Petriglieri et al., 2019). The oneiric and imaginative character of the invisible of flesh was reflected in the symbolic meanings that the workers assigned to these spaces (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). Such dimensions of existence can flourish in private spaces that are not restricted by external rules and regulations.

The spatial practices of independent workers in the study by Petriglieri et al. (2019), while some of them occurring at home, did not contain references to domestic life activities with family. However, these descriptions still conveyed a strong sense of dwelling (Bachelard, 2014 [1958]) or perhaps of some alternative, oneiric home or playground. Studies of hybrid knowledge work that examine the entanglement of work with domestic spaces have provided a more contradictory picture concerning this spatial arrangement (Izak et al., 2023; Koslowski et al., 2019; Tietze and Musson, 2005). In these studies, workers often found themselves uncomfortably 'in between' due to blurring of spatial boundaries and symbolism. These studies show continuous negotiation over space. For example, in the study by Koslowski et al. (2019), the home-workers tried to reduce spatial ambiguity by 'narrowing' the presence of either colleagues or family. They replaced work-related video meetings with audio-only connection or tried to silence and avoid family members when working.

Commercial coworking spaces that have spread during the last 10–15 years promised to resolve the spatial conflicts that home-workers might suffer from. While many studies have emphasised the communal potential of these spaces (e.g., Blagoev et al., 2019; Garrett et al., 2017; Merkel, 2015), others have shown that the community of independent workers in different work situations might not realise as expected (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoite, 2021; Jakonen et al., 2017; Wijngaarden, 2022). These spaces are usually carefully designed to create special atmospheres, and their urban users are also inclined to find disorienting and novel experiences (De Vaujany et al., 2019; Liegl, 2014). However, such spatial practices spur nomadism and may cause coworking communities to remain fragile (Endrissat and Leclercq-Vandelannoite, 2021). De Vaujany et al. (2019) found that, to attract customers, the coworking spaces they studied emphasised visuality, aesthetics and narratives that conveyed more a dream of a space than an actualised collective reality. This could leave the spatial experience flat instead of growing with further use of space (De Vaujany et al., 2019). Furthermore, individual workers who are concentrated on their laptops may perceive social gestures as disturbances instead of welcome interruptions in these spaces, leaving less opportunities for genuine interactions (Spinuzzi, 2012; Wijngaarden, 2022).

In summary, hybrid workspaces may nurture an alternative approach to sense as not something that is strictly positive but rather in between, with several layers of signification (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Organisational actors could benefit from replacing a strongly categorical orientation to sense with a more lateral, embodied approach to sensing and living a space (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). In the first two case studies of this section, workers had a living, sedimented relation to their spaces which enabled them to connect with alternative ways of sensing and perceiving. On the other hand, the studies of coworking spaces show that these spaces are driven by a commercial model that might undermine an instituted relation with space (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Home-working cases, on their part, highlighted the liminal 'waving between two worlds' (Van Genep, 1960 [1909]) and conveyed a sense of struggle to arrive at a settled spatial order. As Merleau-Ponty stated, the most

private experience is simultaneously an opening to the most common one (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). A grounded experience of space enables one to live out the invisible of the flesh more fully: our past experiences and dreams that have formed us to become what we are today (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Such an experience would be something to strive for. The abovementioned cases show that hybrid spaces need not only be about transience, mobility and change. A strategy to manage the complexity of a hybrid space could include allowing embodied dwelling that enforces continuity in space (see also Bachelard, 2014 [1958]). In this context, the sense of togetherness emerges as something akin to a primal unity through history (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). This is a dimension of togetherness that is undoubtedly oneiric but never altogether outside everyday perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). It is something that working life emphasising creativity and innovation could benefit from. However, it might be at risk of disappearing if spatial experience is reduced to constant change and a clean desk after one is done.

Togetherness rhythms in a hybrid space

I now move from the strategies of creating permanence in a hybrid space to physical movement within them and how togetherness and learning are facilitated within this mobility. I examine such relations' rhythmic formation by first attending to the rhythmicity found within the community surrounding the hybrid space of the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland. This festival was described as having a distinctly intimate and imaginary atmosphere characterised by an inclusive sense of togetherness (De Molli et al., 2020). This togetherness was evident among local community members from different backgrounds working voluntarily for the festival and appropriating the aesthetic theme of the festival and among movie stars feeling confident enough to drop their security measures and interact with the general public (De Molli et al., 2020). An immediate, equal sense of community has also been found in another case of festival volunteers in UK music festivals, in this case being conceptualised as liminal *communitas* (Toraldo et al., 2019). At the Locarno Film Festival, the boundary between contributors and spectators was blurred (De Molli et al., 2020). This development fostered encounters and learning: In the words of De Molli et al. (2020), the festival managed to become a place 'where people temporarily extend their horizons and open up to stimulating debates and encounters' in an intimate and magical atmosphere (p. 1500).

De Molli et al. (2020) examined the process leading to this sense of immediate community and sharing and found that creating different and overlapping aesthetic atmospheres played a crucial role. The festival took place in a historic city, which provided an intriguing 'depth' of absent and imaginary worlds (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Furthermore, the festival used various public and rented spaces for its organisation, and the application of these different spatial layers contributed to the hybridity of the festival's space. While the different festival spaces were decorated with a common aesthetic theme, these spaces were also left intentionally open for festivalgoers and locals to complete the atmosphere with their own appropriations of the aesthetics. De Molli et al. (2020) theorised the festival's hybrid atmosphere as being 'in between' multiple ambiguities. For me, it seems that the festival managed to cleverly activate the interplay between the visible and the invisible – emphasising the way spaces embody different layers of meanings (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). According to Merleau-Ponty (1968, 2010), the more one can renounce a categorical perception, the more one obtains a lateral view: an ability to sense the different perspectives and histories in space (see also De Cock and O'Doherty, 2017). In Locarno's case, the constant spatial overlap and indeterminacy prevented the space from being reduced under a unified norm. Space remained in the state of openness and multiplicity (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), signalling equal rights to participate in its creation.

However, this atmosphere was not achieved merely by visual planning. The lived bodies of the festivalgoers were made to gradually immerse themselves in the festival's world through bodily traversal between diverse spaces (De Molli et al., 2020). From the intimate, dark and dreamy movie theatres, one transited to lengthy outdoor walkways alongside strangers united in the common experience of walking (see also Beyes and Steyaert, 2021). The festival's ability to create a community among strangers emerged possibly in the clearest manner within these in-between walks which I find liminal spaces (see Turner, 1974 on liminality of pilgrimage). Finally, the festival experience culminated in collective gatherings in the festival's central square (De Molli et al., 2020). To me, these rhythmical journeys resembled an effort to increase the sense of 'depth' in space: It was not a simple facade quickly grasped and consumed but a three-dimensional meaningful world in which one could sense the imaginary and the historical on the other side of the ordinary and the everyday (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, 1968, 2010).

I suggest that by enforcing a changeable and kaleidoscopic view on space, Locarno created conditions for immediate and embodied modes of togetherness and learning through expanded registers of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). This is something to bear in mind in the context of knowledge work practices that are often assumed to be incorporeal. Lived bodies were first engaged by the interplay of the visible and the invisible, and this engagement was sustained by regular rhythmical movements between intimate movie experiences, collective central gathering and transitioning between venues. Both the spatial openness and the rhythmic dialectics (Bachelard, 2016 [1936]) were perhaps necessary to create the atmosphere that engaged not only minds but also lived bodies.

In their article, De Molli et al. (2020) inquired as to whether the rhythmic patterns of withdrawal, expansion and the spaces between them might characterise hybrid spaces more generally. A similar rhythmic pattern was also found in the case of knowledge workers who collectively retreated in small groups to experiment working for a short period of time in an isolated rural archipelago on the Baltic Sea (Vesala, 2021; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018, 2019). These workers represented different creative and knowledge work backgrounds (Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018). This case revealed various rhythmic dynamics involving withdrawal and expansion. First, while the retreat was a withdrawal from the more intense networks of everyday urban working life, it was simultaneously an adventure and opening of a new kind of life in an alternative environment. The environment's overall atmosphere was imprinted heavily with geographical isolation, the remains of the local and traditional villa architecture and the presence of the sea (Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018). The rural aesthetics of this environment contrasted with the general image and culture of knowledge work. This was an initially puzzling and even hilarious experience for the workers, leading them to relate to the space openly and playfully (Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018) – somewhat like the Locarno festival participants. Spatial openness set conditions for the formation of a hybrid space also in this case.

Similar to the Locarno experience, the workers appropriated this environment by creating rhythmic patterns of withdrawal – expansion in addition to being in between as they bodily oriented to the rural rhythm of the archipelago (Vesala, 2021; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018, 2019). In this case, the rhythmic patterns emerged as a spontaneous response to a new situation and environment. For example, workers created rhythmic interplays of solitary working, collective deliberation and venturing out to explore their new environment or take a reflexive break (Vesala, 2021; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018, 2019). Walking both together and alone became as integral an aspect of the archipelago experience as of the Locarno experience. Furthermore, as in the case of Locarno festival (De Molli et al., 2020), immediate, open and equal community was characteristic to the archipelago experience (Vesala, 2021). The workers could reflect on their extraordinary experience within small groups in the comfort of the lodging spaces or alone at the rocks by the sea if they so

wished (Vesala, 2021). As Bachelard (2014 [1958]) suggested, imagination can be spurred in both intimate and vast spaces, but it can be particularly provoked by their contrast – and this coastal rural environment provided plenty of these contrasts for these urban knowledge workers. The workers could occasionally allow themselves to be immersed in free dreaming and the collective sharing of broader thoughts concerning work and the future (Vesala, 2021). After these moments, workers were left feeling highly connected both to the group and to their own sense of purpose – in this sense, eventually reaching an outcome not too different from that of the independent workers in their protective spaces that allowed them to dream (Petriglieri et al., 2019).

Much as how De Molli et al. (2020) described the case of the Locarno Film Festival, the embodied and spatial experience on the archipelago was not merely one of sensory fullness and presence in the moment. As this atypical space did not offer clear spatial cues for any habitual work activity, the workers found themselves in a liminal and void-like space (Vesala, 2021). This situation changed their instituted ways of perceiving and acting (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). The workers turned to their own invisibility (Merleau-Ponty, 1968): They could engage with their own previous lives and future dreams. For example, one participant felt that when pursuing creative writing in the archipelago, she was reliving her childhood dream (Vesala, 2021; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2019). For several other participants, earlier periods of their working lives became vividly present – times in which they had felt particularly vital, creative and positive (Vesala, 2021). However, for other participants, their altered vision led to them viewing their everyday conditions critically. They grew aware of differences between this freer environment and the exigencies of daily toil, which could prohibit them from conducting their work in more meaningful ways (Vesala, 2021; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018, 2019; see also, Petriglieri et al., 2019). These are examples of Merleau-Ponty's (1968, 2010) retrograde meaning-making, in which a present situation can restructure the institution of past experience, reshaping the way the past, present and future are dependent on one another. This new outlook was by no means unproductive: For instance, it led workers to invent new working practices, find their inspiration and rethink their careers (Vesala, 2021; Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018, 2019).

Therefore, an experience of a hybrid space may not only engage aesthetically (De Molli et al., 2020) but can also expand the perception by kindling visions in which those elements of life that seemed finite and irreversible no longer appear so. Merleau-Ponty has asserted that learning is profoundly connected to reactivating earlier experiences (De Vaujany and Aroles, 2019: 210). Thus, embodied learning may involve not only sensory fullness (Tomkins and Ulus, 2016) but also an affective awareness of absence: past selves or alternative work and life trajectories that could have transpired under different circumstances (see also De Cock and O'Doherty, 2017). This embodied learning in Merleau-Ponty's (2010) sense, when truly lived and done, ends up finding something else than expected, and this was characteristic to the archipelago experience. For instance, some participants expected to grasp the full meaning of the period only once it would be over (Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018: 1387). The archipelago case also demonstrates that members of collectives do not always experience spatial atmospheres in a highly uniform manner, as another research has suggested (Michels and Steyaert, 2017), but from the standpoint of their own sedimented individual histories (Merleau-Ponty, 2010).

In summary, the archipelago case supports the theory of De Molli et al. (2020) that rhythms of expansion (openness), withdrawal (intimacy) and in-betweenness can be identified in hybrid spaces. Furthermore, these rhythms are used to support embodied reflexive processes in conditions that can be considered liminal (Vesala, 2021). These two cases suggest approaching hybrid spaces not as unified entities but as constellations that continuously differentiate and overlap. The cases imply that a hybrid space cannot be completely controlled or even appropriated, but this living space instead crystallises in moments of a modulating rhythm (Al-Saji, 2001) that unfolds little

differently for each individual. In his theory of rhythmic dialectics, Bachelard (2016 [1936]) argues that a productive rhythm is one that has contrasting moments. In particular, he speaks of the ‘power of three’ as a coherent rhythmic composition that supports mental vigour. Expansion, withdrawal and silence, thus, should not be conceived as disconnected phenomena (De Vaujany and Aroles, 2019: 215). In the silence of withdrawal, the processing of one’s previous experiences and dreams can emerge in a manner that allows an enhanced sense of purpose, which could lead to a more meaningful public social activity (De Vaujany and Aroles, 2019). The examples of the Locarno Film Festival and the archipelago work periods suggest that a three-phased rhythmic dialectic of withdrawal, expansion and the spaces in between could guide reflexive work activity in a hybrid space.

Discussion

This article set out to examine how the lived dynamics between the body and space condition togetherness and learning in working life. The study was situated within the context of work being conducted increasingly within a hybrid space comprising various physical and virtual spaces and emotional registers nontypical to work as traditionally understood. Spatial organisational research has emphasised the processual, fluid and emergent nature of space and the importance of understanding space as an embodied experience (Beyes and Holt, 2020; Beyes and Steyaert, 2013; Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Shortt, 2015; Stephenson et al., 2020). Many workplaces endorse this idea of nonfixity of space (Dale and Burrell, 2008). Simultaneously, meaningfulness in work is increasingly seen as the product of aesthetic, inspiring and playful spatial experiences that blur the boundaries between work and other aspects of individuals’ life (Alexandersson and Kalonaityte, 2018; Dale and Burrell, 2008). Workers seem to be searching for a space practically anywhere they can feel at home, emotionally comfortable and, thus, productive (De Vaujany et al., 2019; Petriglieri et al., 2019). Some of these newly found spaces can be unconventional (Vesala, 2021).

In this article, I theoretically analysed the rhythmic formation of hybrid workspace through Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) ontology of flesh, complemented with Bachelard’s (2014 [1958], 2016 [1936]) dialectical rhythmic and spatial theories. Striving for a complete mental possession and control of a space (as well as of an idea, situation, and so on) is an ordinary approach in contemporary Western societies. However, according to Merleau-Ponty (1968), this is impossible to achieve in practice because an invisible distance, depth or weight of the past settles between an actor and an object. One never reaches full certainty of space and is bound to reinitiate the cycle of reaching out, perceiving and being perceived to stay in course with the changing environment. This is even more pertinent to fluid hybrid spaces, implying the relevance of the concept of rhythm in studying these spaces. The first section covering empirical examples examined ways of coping with the transience of hybrid space by affectively inhabiting it, or in other words, by dwelling. This was first illustrated by two occupational groups that had established nuanced personal worlds in which they could dwell in the middle of their turbulent work environments: hairdressers (Shortt and Izak, 2021) and independent creative knowledge workers (Petriglieri et al., 2019). In both these cases, the felt and lived contact with materiality or, in the case of hairdressers, mere traces of materiality sustained a calming invisible world of history and imagination aside from the visible working world that was changeable, and in the case of independent workers, highly stressful. This sense of dwelling created durability and institution in their daily work activity (Merleau-Ponty, 2010).

In both the abovementioned cases, the intimate relation with materiality opened a space in which reflection and retrograde meaning-making in Merleau-Ponty’s sense became possible (Al-Saji, 2009; Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Workers withdrew from the demands of the external, transient and fluctuating working worlds into these spaces, where their inner world expanded

(Bachelard, 2014 [1958]) in a manner that let them sense echoes and reverberations of their lived past. These cases were briefly compared with other cases of hybrid spaces where such protective dwellings seemed more laborious to establish. In the case of commercial coworking spaces, a historically living relation to a space was thwarted by the business model of these spaces which, as in many other contemporary workspaces (Dale and Burrell, 2008), views users as consumers of aesthetic experiences. This supports variety-seeking and nomadic behaviour. Home-working studies, on the other hand, showed an on-going competition between the institutions of work and home although they also implied that this might entail a process of transition towards a new type of space.

The next empirical section addressed physical movement within hybrid spaces. This section examined cases in which a hybrid space was grasped through embodied experiences and a rhythmical arrangement of three phases: the withdrawal to intimate spaces, the expansion and the spaces in between. In the first empirical case of this section, the Locarno Film Festival (De Molli et al., 2020), the festival created hybridity, first, by incorporating the historically different spatial layers of the city to the aesthetic theme of the festival and by encouraging festival goers' own aesthetic participation. This approach produced curious spatial overlapping and ambiguity which prevented the space from falling under one normative order. Second, the festival sustained this sense of ambiguity by creating pathways that rhythmically contrasted different spatial experiences: intimate movie experiences, open collective gatherings and walkways in between. The aesthetic openness of space and the three-phased rhythmic arrangement managed to kindle an atmosphere of curiosity and exploration that was particularly inclusive and conducive to novel encounters and exchanges of views. The second case of this section involved knowledge workers' collective work retreats to a rural archipelago (Vesala, 2021). The initiating movement in this case was that of a withdrawal from everyday connections and expectations to an isolated rural archipelago, which became an opening to a new, spacious and ambiguous environment. The ambiguity of this environment created an impasse to continuing work in its usual instituted ways (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). The workers were sensitised to the affective experience of this environment, and they gravitated spontaneously towards spatial rhythms similar to the case of De Molli et al. (2020), which, in this environment, consisted of withdrawal to solitary work, collective deliberation and venturing out to explore the environment or have a reflexive break. The ambiguity of the environment turned the archipelago period into a liminal experience for the workers (Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2018). Their own invisibilities (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), personal histories and dreams were recentered from a novel perspective in this alternative space. This is an example of Merleau-Ponty's retrograde meaning-making where an event changes the institution of the past experience with direct consequences on how the present and future are seen (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). Personal senses of purpose were fostered through their critical re-examination within an immediate community of peers navigating together the ambivalent experience (Vesala, 2021).

The empirical cases illustrate two particular approaches to space that I suggest could be relevant in arranging the hybrid realities of contemporary working life. The limitlessness of hybrid space may pose a risk of losing oneself in the whirlwind of changing situations, expectations, assignments or communities both online and offline (Petriglieri et al., 2019), thus causing a deficit of concentration (Wijngaarden, 2022) as well as a loss of identity and belonging (Shortt and Izak, 2021). On the one hand, personal dwelling spaces can enable living a dimension of working life that often remains invisible: past events, social connections and personal dreams that have structured one's career trajectory so far. This past cannot literally be translated back to existence because it is something that can only be sensed (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). It resides between the more determined objects and perspectives and is, therefore, sensed as disappearance, absence or 'thickness' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010). Perhaps this is why the scuffs that embodied the disappearance of

the time passed in the case of hairdressers drew their attention (Shortt and Izak, 2021). Sometimes the most banal everyday objects embody the invisible weight of the past (Merleau-Ponty, 2010) or a sense of sanctity (Petriglieri et al., 2019). Such dwelling experiences can have important consequences for both sense-making and a sense of belonging in the hybrid conditions of working life. On the other hand, a hybrid space can be a liminal experience where any operative sense can be difficult to grasp. Such uncertainty is both an affective and an existential experience but also conducive to creativity (Stenner, 2018). The ambiguity and liminality of hybrid space could be managed by means of creating balanced rhythmic patterns of contrasting spaces (Bachelard, 2016 [1936]). Such embodied rhythmic patterns were found to support the mental activation that followed from arriving in an ambiguous space while also providing stability and a communal practice (De Molli et al., 2020; Vesala, 2021).

It seems that the exchange between the visible and the invisible, the latter referring to affective life, lived past and imagination (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), is intensified in the hybrid conditions of working life. This scenario might seem to support the theory of the individual subject as a situated emergence within constant change processes, as is suggested by certain sociomaterial and nonrepresentational approaches in organisation studies (e.g., Hultin and Introna, 2019; Michels and Steyaert, 2017). However, if one follows Merleau-Ponty's approach that is founded on the idea of the common existence of all flesh, what is discovered is not only continuous change that fills the present with action. According to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) theory, the idea of a situated subjectivity is problematic because one never fully exists in the present. There is opacity to the self and the situation that will never really be clarified. Perhaps this depth, thickness (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) or ambiguity (De Molli et al., 2020) would be something to embrace?

Merleau-Ponty emphasised that experiencing a space is not a matter of direct sensory stimulus. Entering a space, one carries their previous spaces with them (Bachelard, 2014 [1958]; Merleau-Ponty, 2010); thus, each sensory experience has multiple significations and senses. In a hybrid space in particular, one lives in a kaleidoscope of multiple spaces' rhythmic relations. Thus, hybrid spaces are stimulating, but they can also be complex, liminal and difficult to endure. Virtual tools render it difficult to be ultimately disconnected; however, this raises the question as to how these tools support processes of retrograde meaning-making that require an event to be activated and are integrated into the nonconscious rhythms of the flesh (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). New impulses also need time to be processed and connected with past experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2010). Hybrid spaces thus foreground open-ended but also potentially sporadic development of meaning and togetherness.

Togetherness has traditionally been associated with common identity: similarity with the other. However, from the perspective of the fleshy rhythms outlined in this article, togetherness emerges in a dialectical manner. There exists a primary sameness before things appear to perception in their distinct forms (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Distance is then caused by our emerging different points of views in relation to the other. In meeting with the other – a person, space or a thing – togetherness ensues as a resynchronisation but always remains in process. The difference between my rhythm and that of the other opens a new horizon, which can be made sense of with sensory responsivity and creative expression. One can play with the distance and use its creative power to produce different visibilities. Hybrid spaces in particular enable exploring how different spatial rhythms affect perception, sense of belonging and understanding the other – thus, they open our lived spatial relations in a potentially transformative manner. This may lead to increased self-reflexivity about career, work practices and how to achieve enlivened contact with others. Uniform and repetitive work patterns and workplace rhythms are becoming dated as an organisational foundation for togetherness. Today's workers are in contact with diverse communities, temporalities and processes, and they carry these multiple worlds with them. This is a creative resource for collaboration

if communication is not prematurely forced into official patterns. According to Merleau-Ponty (1973 [1955]), difference is what motivates communication and enriches togetherness.

I suggest that the two principles of creating togetherness and learning through spatial and embodied rhythms discussed in this article – personally grounding spaces and rhythmical movement between secure, open and in-between spaces – could be used together as a reflexive tool in organisational life, with sensitivity to individual work situations. One could withdraw to make space for silence, memory and imagination – the invisibility of flesh and to shift away from this space when needing alternative perspective, for example, feedback from colleagues or simply a different space and rhythm. In need of a more significant reassessment of work or career, one could retreat alone or together with colleagues to an alternative liminal space that is open for rhythmic appropriation and experimentation within space. Such procedures would use sensitivity to the invisible fleshy ground of togetherness or the primordial ‘us’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 84), helping us not to lose our earlier selves and layers of meaning while we traverse in the transient constellations of hybrid space and adapt to the demands of changing organisations.

Possibilities for future research

Living in transitional, turbulent times in a (post)pandemic world of work may elicit an increasing need to search for security in the affective, embodied and grounding experience of space. Future studies could further examine other contexts where the limitlessness of hybrid space is rhythmically balanced with personally created shelters and where such shelters are found. Future studies could also analyse whether the rhythmic dialectics of intimate, expansive and in-between spaces addressed in this article can be recognised in other research contexts. A hybrid space is typically associated with knowledge work. However, the idea of knowledge itself is expanding to cover not only cognition but also various types of embodied knowing. Future studies could examine hybrid contexts beyond urban knowledge economy. While hybrid spaces comprise both physical and virtual spaces, existing studies focus more on physical space, so future studies could also examine movement in virtual spaces. An evident question following from these considerations is how the understanding of work meaningfulness is changing in the course of the everyday life of hybrid spaces.

In terms of methodology, meanings that people assign to their spaces are challenging to study because embodied experience of space is mostly affective and silent. Interviews are a common method for studying meaning, and I suggest that when using this method to examine spatial relations, the interviews could be as open as possible. Special attention could be paid to moments when participants resort to more creative use of language such as narratives, poetic metaphors or humour because this could indicate that they are trying to express something that cannot be conveyed with ordinary language – the invisible embodied experience. Furthermore, change of space could be used as an interventive tool to open the instituted ways of perceiving a space.

The theories of corporeality by Merleau-Ponty could be further developed in organisation and management learning studies. Merleau-Ponty developed his ideas of embodiment throughout his career, and his later texts appear to be situated in between successive process philosophies as that of Deleuze and his own early philosophy of the lived body. Further organisational research could perhaps attend more to this variance within Merleau-Ponty’s work, as it could indicate different onto-epistemological approaches to examine organisational activity. In general, Merleau-Ponty’s work sensitises to the nuances of perception. Therefore, future research could examine possibilities for more flexible and fluid perception and attend not only to what would seem most ‘natural’ to perceive but also to the invisible ground, the ambiguity (De Molli et al., 2020) in which one is

embedded. An interesting study in this regard is that of Suvi Satama et al. (2021) which examined dancers' embodied communication in an artistic project. In this project, the leader's position was not essential but changed intuitively as the dancers revealed their intentions through movements. We cannot be fully attuned to each other (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), but this means that there is always potentiality for novel crystallisations of togetherness and learning. In terms of designing learning situations, this approach suggests leaving room for invisibilities, absences and ambiguities that are always part of a spatial experience but more prevalent in some spaces than others. I suggest that one could be sensitised to such ambiguity particularly in historical, natural and peripheral spaces. An interesting avenue of research would then be to examine learning in spaces other than the ordinary ones and whether such spaces are more conducive to in-depth retrograde meaning-making (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 2010) than more ordinary learning situations.

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