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Title: From dust to buzz : Reconfiguring space for organization-creation

Year: 2024

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

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Please cite the original version:

Kuismin, A., Wickström, A., Hietanen, J., & Katila, S. (2024). From dust to buzz : Reconfiguring space for organization-creation. *Organization Studies*, 45(4), 523-544.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406231225041>



From dust to buzz: Reconfiguring space for organization-creation

Journal:	Organization Studies
Manuscript ID	OS-21-0366.R5
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	Space, Entrepreneurship < Topics, Organization-creation, Deleuze and Guattari, Ethnography < Research Design and Data Collection
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	how this ambiguity is enacted (folds) as organization-creation emerges spatially. This allows us to problematize the distinction often made between entrepreneurial spaces of emancipation and managerial spaces of control and to consider how they may co-constitute each other through subtle twists and turns. We conclude by discussing this multiplicity and ambiguity with regard to the politics of entrepreneurial spaces.

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From dust to buzz: Reconfiguring space for organization-creation

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Abstract

In this paper, we examine the relationship between space and entrepreneurship, understood as organization-creation, by drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's spatial theorizing. Building on an ethnographic study of the Nordic Start-Up Incubator, we focus on the ongoing material, discursive, and affective reconfiguration of space to promote entrepreneurial 'buzz'. We show how emancipatory promises (smoothings) are entangled with a logic of enterprise (striations), and how this ambiguity is enacted (folds) as organization-creation emerges spatially. This allows us to problematize the distinction often made between entrepreneurial spaces of emancipation and managerial spaces of control and to consider how they may co-constitute each other through subtle twists and turns. We conclude by discussing this multiplicity and ambiguity with regard to the politics of entrepreneurial spaces.

Keywords

space, entrepreneurship, organization-creation, Deleuze and Guattari, ethnography

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Introduction

The relationship between space and entrepreneurship is an intimate one. This is reflected in the increased scholarly attention to the material, embodied, and affective aspects of co-working spaces, start-up hubs, and other forms of entrepreneurial organizing (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Cnossen & Stephenson, 2022; Dahlman, du Plessis, Husted, & Just, 2022; Jakonen, Kivinen, Salovaara, & Hirkman, 2017; Katila, Kuismin, & Valtonen, 2020; Resch, Hoyer, & Steyaert, 2021). Particular attention has been directed to how space matters for entrepreneurship understood as organization-creation, that is, the creation of new organizations and new forms of organizing within already established organizations (Cucchi, Lubberink, Dentoni, & Gartner, 2022; Garcia-Lorenzo, Donnelly, Sell-Trujillo, & Imas, 2018; Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth & Reay, 2022). Studies emphasize how creating entrepreneurial spaces for ‘play’ and ‘invention’ within established and managerially controlled spaces for work can support organization-creation by opening up new possibilities for imagination and creativity (Hjorth, 2004, 2005; Pallesen, 2018).

Existing studies have primarily explored entrepreneurial spaces in relation to those of economic enterprise (Hjorth, 2004, 2005; Farias, Fernandez, & Hjorth, 2019). Scholars have, for example, used the term ‘heterotopia’ or ‘other space’ to describe entrepreneurial spaces (Hjorth, 2005; Jones & Patton, 2020) and highlighted how they actualize as resistance to (Courpasson, Dany, & Marti, 2016; Jones & Patton, 2020) or the creative transformation of (Hjorth, 2004, 2005; Pallesen, 2018) spaces permeated by managerial control. While these studies have allowed for an understanding of entrepreneurship beyond a simplified economic rationale (Calás, Ergene, & Smircich, 2018; Farias et al., 2019; Steyaert, 2007), they tend to focus on entrepreneurial spaces that already have actualized as such, which limits our

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3 understanding of *how* organization-creation processually unfolds as material, discursive, and
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5 affective elements assemble in space. The emancipatory features of entrepreneurial spaces are
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7 then easily privileged (Jones & Patton, 2020), while less attention is directed toward how
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9 certain values, ideals, and orders come to matter spatially (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Ratner, 2020)
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11 and how that orients organization-creation. This distinction is important as organizational
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13 spaces increasingly are reconfigured to look and feel different (e.g., Alexandersson &
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15 Kalonaityte, 2018; De Molli, Mengis, & van Marrewijk, 2020) without necessarily increasing
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17 individuals' freedom, creativity, or communality.
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24 In this paper, we seek to offer an alternative take on the relationship between space and
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26 entrepreneurship as organization-creation by drawing on processual theorizations of
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28 organizational space (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Stephenson, Kuismin, Putnam, & Sivunen,
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30 2020; Ratner, 2020). This will allow us to study organization-creation *spatially* and with a
31
32 sensitivity to how power operates through space without assuming that there is a correlation
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34 between a given configuration and a given organizational outcome. For example, between the
35
36 seemingly entrepreneurial and the emancipatory. From a processual perspective, organizational
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38 space is not a location, container, or metaphor but a performative assemblage of subjects,
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40 objects, affects, discourses, and practices (Beyes & Holt, 2020, Beyes & Steyaert, 2012;
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42 Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Ratner, 2020; Stephenson et al., 2020). It is then entangled with
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44 organizing as the latter is performatively enacted through ongoing space-making or 'spacing'
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46 (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). With regard to entrepreneurship as organization-creation, this allows
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48 us to consider how it unfolds in an open-ended manner without overlooking the workings of
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50 power (Fouweather & Bosma, 2021).
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To elaborate on this empirically, we draw on materials from a three-year ethnographic study of the Nordic Start-Up Incubator (NSI): an initiative aimed at reconfiguring¹ the premises of the Nordic University to encourage interdisciplinary encounters, start-up creation, and “possibly something completely new” (NSI website, 27.8.2013). The development of NSI coincided with increased emphasis on start-up aesthetics and discourse around the Nordic City, and in other Nordic universities, which (amongst some) was considered key for creating ‘buzzing’ entrepreneurial spaces premised on openness, collaboration, and inclusion. The reconfiguration of NSI was thus guided by an implicit promise of a correlation between how space was designed and practiced and specific organizational outcomes, which makes it an interesting case for studying the relationship between space and organization-creation. To develop the analytical means necessary to consider this process spatially, we ground our exploration on Deleuze and Guattari’s (D+G) (2013) work on *striations* and *smoothings*, and Deleuze’s (1993) writing on *the fold*.

For D+G, striations refer to the spatial forces that promote order, stability, and predictability, and smoothings to those that evoke disorder, disruption, and divergence (Munro & Jordan, 2013; Thanem, 2012). Think, for instance, of how a typical office space orients bodies in specific ways as it is designed with hierarchy and structure in mind (Dale, 2005; Dale & Burrell, 2008). As new ideals enter, managers might start tinkering with the material, discursive, and affective elements of the space and reconfigure it towards an open office layout to promote openness, collaboration, and inclusion (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018). With that, some striations may be smoothed while others persist, thus nurturing ways of feeling, thinking, and organizing that, perhaps, are not solely shaped by

¹ By reconfiguration, we refer to how space is altered to foster changes in the behaviors and experiences of people (De Molli et al., 2020), for instance, to stimulate creativity, enthusiasm, and commitment among them (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018).

conventional managerial means. Now and then an event may, however, allow for a surprising shift in space that unsettles how it is considered, practiced, and thus performed (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013). Such twists and turns can be understood through the fold, an actualization of potentiality – the not yet actualized – that alters what is made possible in a space (Kornberger & Clegg, 2003; Langley, 2020; Pick, 2017). Together, the concepts of striations, smoothings, and the fold can allow us to explore organization-creation as a process of differentiation of space, premised on folds, rather than as related to the characteristics of a specific configuration.

In what follows, we draw on D+G's theorizing and empirically focus on the ongoing reconfiguration of the material, discursive, and affective elements of NSI. We centralize how smoothings (e.g., embodied orientations, playful designs, and the use of vibrant colors and materials) meant to promote entrepreneurial 'buzz', with time, were laced with striations (e.g., spatial boundaries, disciplining aesthetics, and an emphasis on refinement and growth), which oriented *how* organization-creation was 'made possible'. By tending to how the material, discursive, and affective elements performatively assemble, we thus direct attention to how organization-creation often was oriented in ambiguous ways as, for example, emancipatory promises entangled with an enterprise logic of accumulation and growth-orientation (Farias et al., 2019). This allows us to emphasize how entrepreneurial and managerial spaces may co-constitute each other through subtle twists and turns rather than, necessarily, forming unified, binary spatial configurations, which has implications for understanding the relationship between space and organization-creation. We conclude by discussing the politics of entrepreneurial spaces with an emphasis on the multiplicity and ambiguity of space (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) and why incubators such as NSI thrive on promises of potentiality.

Organization-creation and space

Organization-creation is an expression of social creativity that transforms ‘potentiality’ into new organizational forms within established organizations (Farias et al., 2019; Hjorth, 2004, 2005; Hjorth & Reay, 2022). Potentiality refers to the ‘virtually new’ – that is, the not yet actualized – that allows organizations to differentiate themselves from other organizations (Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth & Reay, 2022). For example, through the development of alternative (Redmalm & Skoglund, 2022; Skoglund, Redmalm, & Berglund, 2020) or social (Berglund & Skoglund, 2015; Calás et al., 2018, Dey & Steyaert, 2010, 2012) entrepreneurship that contribute to value for society (Farias et al., 2019; Rindova, Barry, & Ketchen, 2009). As Steyaert and Katz (2004) note, entrepreneurship is about “introducing innovative thinking, reorganizing the established, and crafting the new across a broad range of settings and spaces and for a range of goals such as social change and transformation far beyond those of simple commerce and economic drive” (p. 182). Organizations, in this view, emerge as “loosely coupled systems” of people and things “that direct energy, focus and forces toward making the virtually new actual” (Hjorth & Reay, 2022, p. 160).

Adopting this perspective, studies have directed attention to how the transformation of space may support organization-creation (Beyes, 2009; Holm & Beyes, 2022; Jones & Patton, 2020). It has, for example, been argued that spatial reconfigurations can allow for alternative ways of feeling, thinking, and organizing (Hjorth, 2004, 2005; Holm & Beyes, 2022). In addition to focusing on the creation of co-working spaces (Resch et al., 2020; Cnossen & Stephenson, 2022), hubs (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019), and hackathons (Endrissat & Islam, 2021), scholars demonstrate how artistic interventions (Beyes, 2009; Hjorth, 2005; Holm & Beyes, 2022; Michels & Steyaert, 2017) can transform institutionalized spaces in entrepreneurial ways.

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3 By highlighting such spatial transformations, existing studies often separate ‘entrepreneurial
4 space’ from ‘managerial space’. While managerial space privileges dominant power relations
5 and order according to the logic of enterprise (Farias et al., 2019; Hjorth, 2004, 2005),
6 entrepreneurial space is marked with new possibilities for creativity and imagination
7 (Courpasson et al., 2016; Jones & Patton, 2020). Studies emphasize, for example, how
8 entrepreneurial space is actualized by resistance to (Courpasson et al., 2016; Jones & Patton,
9 2020) or the creative transformation of managerial space (Hjorth, 2004, 2005; Pallesen, 2018).
10 Analytically, this constitutes a distinction between managerial spaces and entrepreneurial
11 spaces that, in turn, reifies them as such as they are read as distinct spatial configurations with
12 more-or-less stable characteristics. This is evident in studies that examine managerial space as
13 hindering creativity while associating entrepreneurial space with emancipatory outcomes such
14 as ‘breaking free’ from dominant power relations (Jones & Patton, 2020) and enabling ‘play’
15 and ‘invention’ (Hjorth, 2004, 2005).
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35 Approaching entrepreneurial space *as* different (spatial configuration), rather than as
36 constituted *through* differentiation (space-making or spacing) is, however, problematic. It
37 overlooks the multiplicity and ambiguity of space that cannot be reified into a spatial
38 configuration (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Holm & Beyes, 2022) and can result in ignoring how
39 space can co-constitute both emancipatory *and* oppressive organizational outcomes (Thrift,
40 2008). This is troubling as organizational spaces are increasingly reconfigured to look and feel
41 different (e.g., Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018; Jakonen et al., 2017), for example through
42 aestheticization (De Molli et al., 2020) and playful design (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte,
43 2018), without necessarily allowing for more freedom, creativity, or communality.
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To explore the relationship between space and organization-creation without affirming a distinction between the entrepreneurial and the managerial, an analytic shift toward processual theorizing of organizational space is necessary. Rather than focusing on where organization-creation takes place or is sited, processual theorizing could allow for an understanding of how space performs organization-creation by, for example, orienting, affirming, or troubling it in open-ended ways. This would imply studying organization-creation *spatially*, without too readily equating any particular spatial configuration (e.g., a playful office, an inclusive co-working space, or a ‘buzzing’ incubator) with a given outcome. To enable such an analytical shift, we provide an overview of processual theorizing of organizational space and then turn to the work of D+G.

D+G and processual studies of organizational space

A growing literature in organization studies is now treating space as “processual and performative, open-ended and multiple, practiced and of the everyday” (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, p. 47) rather than as a stable, spatial configuration (Stephenson et al., 2020). Such theorizing goes beyond the Lefebvrian (1991) dialectical approach to space (e.g., Dale, 2005; Kingma, Dale, & Wasserman, 2018; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015) and implies a conceptual move from space to spacing; an assemblage of subjects, objects, affects, discourses, and practices (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Knox, O’Doherty, Vardubakis, & Westrup, 2015; Michels & Steyaert, 2017; Ratner, 2020). Rather than focusing on representations of what a space ‘is’, processual studies concentrate on what space ‘does’, that is, how it performs organizations and forms of organizing (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2018; Leclair, 2023; Sivunen & Putnam, 2020). Space is then seen as constantly in the making and co-constitutive of material, discursive, and

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3 affective organizational action (Giovannoni & Quattrone, 2018; Hirst & Humphreys, 2013;
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5 Hirst & Schwabenland, 2018; Ratner, 2020).
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10 A processual approach further acknowledges how space is ripe with potentiality or what it
11 *could* become (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, 2013). Space can therefore not
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13 be reduced to a delineated configuration in the present (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012) as it carries
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15 “an ungovernable excess that cannot be tamed by the customary representational moves”
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17 (Beyes & Holt, 2020, p. 15). This implies that space always *can* unfold differently, which does
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19 not mean overlooking the workings of power (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Beyes & Holt, 2020).
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21 Rather than through certain (e.g., architectural, managerial) spatial configurations (Dale, 2005;
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23 Dale & Burrell, 2008), power operates within spacing through openings that disrupt its
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25 assembled order *and* closings that performatively materialize particular values, ideals, and
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27 orders (c.f., Fouweather & Bosma, 2021). Thus, a processual approach can inform our
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29 understanding of organization-creation without first assuming that a specific spatial
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31 configuration is entrepreneurial *or* managerial. Instead, it directs our attention to how
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33 organization-creation comes into being as space is materially, discursively, and affectively
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35 assembled. To develop an analytic sensitivity to such a process, we turn to D+G’s work on
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37 ‘smoothing’ and ‘striation’, which has been employed to conceptualize the ongoing opening
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39 and closing of organizational space (Munro & Jordan, 2013; Thanem, 2012), as well as to
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41 Deleuze’s concept of the fold which will allow us to elaborate on how such oscillation may
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43 alter how organization-creation is ‘made possible’ in space.
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54 ***Striation and smoothing***

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56 The writings of D+G (2013) and, in particular, the concepts of striation and smoothing are
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58 often evoked to processually acknowledge how space unfolds in relation to organizing (e.g.,
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Kornberger & Clegg, 2004; Munro & Jordan, 2013; Thanem, 2012). Striation refers to the spatial establishment and maintenance of a particular order. It is a force that, for example, operates through managerial practices that control a specific space, divide it into particular areas, and allocate it for specific purposes (Munro & Jordan, 2013; Thanem, 2012). Striation leads to hegemonic structures that exert regulatory effects on those traversing the spaces defined by them. Striated space determines movements and connections and relies on the presupposition of stability (the state, the community, the workplace) and a coherent subject.

In contrast to striation, smoothing disrupts and dissolves established hegemonic structures in ways that open up new possibilities. Smoothing, then, produces an ‘intensive space’ of potentiality that escapes stability and regulation (Beyes, 2009; Munro & Jordan, 2013). Thanem (2012), for instance, illustrates how the nomadic movements of homeless people function as a smoothing force that contests urban planning efforts and enables new possibilities for relating to urban space. Munro and Jordan (2013), in turn, show how street artists at a festival engaged in spatial tactics to smoothen a striated urban space and open up a temporary workspace for their use. Smoothing can, thus, be understood as carrying a capacity to unsettle an established space, for example, through entrepreneurial creativity.

Despite this analytic distinction, striation and smoothing are interconnected (dis)ordering forces that mark the multiplicity and ambiguity of space. In the processual production of space, they simply operate in tension. What interests D+G (2013) are “precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of this striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces” (p. 551). Thus, while smoothing often is portrayed as producing a space of emancipation and resistance (Thanem, 2012; Munro & Jordan, 2013), it is not necessarily free from becoming striated in ways that

order entities, relations, and movements. Forces of striation can even take advantage of smoothings and intensify existing striations that produce stability of and within space. This is explicated by D+G (2013) as they warn us: “[n]ever believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us” (p. 500). With regard to organization-creation, any space should thus be approached in an explorative sense and with a sensitivity toward how new possibilities opened up through smoothing may become actualized through more-or-less striated orders, and vice versa. A lesson that leads us to the fold.

The fold

Deleuze’s (1993) notion of the fold (in French *le pli*) has inspired spatial theorizing of art, architecture, and organizing (Frichot, 2005; Pick, 2017). Building on Leibniz’s infinitesimal calculus and the Baroque aesthetic, Deleuze produces a nonessentialist alternative to Cartesian and phenomenological accounts of space that tend to orient toward stability, fixed identities, and dichotomies (Pick, 2017). Through the fold, space does not solely pertain to a physical world in three dimensions or a subjective world to be experienced. Rather, it emerges as change; as a process of folding between ‘what is’ (actual) and ‘what *could* become’ (potential), which troubles often assumed boundaries between an inside and an outside (see also Farias et al., 2019; Kornberger & Clegg, 2003, Ratner, 2020). This allows Deleuze to account for both the (un)actualized elements of space – its innate potentiality – and how it is actualized.

Through the actualization of potentiality, space emerges through twists and turns that continuously alter what is made possible within it (Kornberger & Clegg, 2003; Langley, 2018). Kornberger and Clegg (2003), for example, draw attention to how a chance encounter between a teacher and a student may turn a local café into a space of interaction, outside of the hierarchies usually associated with their roles. To understand the making of such encounter, it

would not be enough to draw a connection between a particular spatial configuration (the local café) and the outcome (an alternative form of interaction) and assume that there is a correlation between the two that can be *defined* spatially. The teacher and the student could just as easily have ignored each other or fallen into established orderings, all depending on how potentiality actualizes as subjects, objects, affects, discourses, and practices assemble. Here, the fold allows us to consider non-linear and surprising differentiations of space rather than simply its specific characteristics, for example, whether it is considered hierarchal or casual, managerial or entrepreneurial, striated or smooth.

Given the emphasis on the actualization of potentiality, one can draw a connection between the idea of organization-creation and how space becomes different through folds. Following this connection, we can understand organization-creation as a process of differentiation of space, premised on folds, rather than as related to the characteristics of space as a spatial configuration. Here, the interconnection between striations and smoothings may further allow us to understand how some folds come into being and not others as energies, bodies, and affect orient through space. As any expression of space is merely one out of many immanent expressions that *could* actualize, folds draw our attention to *how* material, discursive, and affective elements of space assemble in ambivalent and unpredictable ways. Alongside the concepts of striation and smoothing, we will empirically elaborate on these ideas by drawing on materials from an ethnographic study of NSI and its spatial reconfigurations meant to spark entrepreneurial becomings and, thus, organization-creation.

Ethnographic study

Context

In this paper, we build on a three-year ethnographic study (early 2014 – late 2016) of the Nordic Startup Incubator (NSI): “an entrepreneurial community of the Nordic University open to all curious people seeking to apply their academic insights to solve the wicked problems of the world” (NSI promotional material). NSI is a limited company with around 20 employees (mostly part-time, 25–32-year-old), founded by the Nordic University and the Nordic City to “strengthen the competitiveness of the [Nordic City] region, to inspire entrepreneurship in all the disciplines of the university, and to build a community where all the actors of the [Nordic City region] entrepreneurship ecosystem can meet” (cooperation agreement between the two parties).

In addition to four co-working hubs², NSI organizes events, theme weeks, and start-up accelerators. All the co-working hubs and happenings are open to anyone interested and are free of charge. This openness makes NSI dependent on financial support from the founders as well as the engagement of volunteers and ‘community members’ (e.g., students, researchers, and entrepreneurs). To keep NSI ‘attractive, inclusive, and exciting’ to a broad, interdisciplinary audience, the organizers continuously reconfigure the space to differentiate the site from typical office spaces (e.g., Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; Jakonen et al., 2017). The particular entrepreneurial ‘sense’ of NSI was, at the time of our fieldwork, considered novel and it coincided with an increase in start-up aesthetics and discourse (think: playful, disruptive, casual, competitive, and colorful) around the Nordic City, and in other Nordic universities.

Ethnographic engagement

² The sizes of the co-working hubs vary between 80-150m². Each of them has an open working area with movable tables and chairs suitable for hot desking; a kitchen area with a coffee maker, a refrigerator and all the necessary utensils for cooking; and access to WiFi and printing. Two out of four hubs have a 24/7 access and lockers for personal items. One of the hubs is also dog friendly.

The ethnographic fieldwork began in 2014 when the first and fourth authors started a collaboration with NSI. The purpose was to study how NSI promoted entrepreneurship and ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ in and around the Nordic University. The fourth author initiated the ethnographic work by conducting 14 interviews with the founders of NSI. She also spent several days doing fieldwork in one of the co-working hubs. The ethnographic approach, and the combination of participant observation and interviews, allowed for an in-depth yet open-ended understanding of the complex, mundane, and messy aspects of how NSI was organized (Cunliffe, 2010; Kostera & Harding, 2021). Alongside an emphasis on discourses, narratives, practices, rituals, architecture, and artifacts (Ybema, Wels, & Yanow, 2009), attention was directed to the affective and embodied texture of the site (Gherardi, 2019, 2023).

The first author conducted additional fieldwork between January 2015 and late 2016. The fieldwork involved active participation in NSI’s happenings, including attending dozens of events and taking part in two start-up accelerator programs. This allowed for an immersive engagement with the site and insights based on bodily sensations, affective flows, and movement between bodies (Gherardi, 2019). The first author also conducted 20 interviews with the employees of NSI, the users of the co-working hubs, and the participants of various events. The interviews were seen as a complement to the interviews with the founders and an attempt to include a broader array of voices and experiences (Ybema et al., 2009). Together, the materials comprise about 200 hours of participant observation recorded in fieldnotes, 34 semi-structured interviews (40-90 min), 30 video recordings (incl. clip of everyday happenings as well as fully recorded events), 180 photographs, and 150 pages of official and unofficial documents (newsletters, annual reports, etc.).

The longitudinal, ethnographic engagement with NSI allowed the first and fourth authors to observe and experience the continuous spatial reconfiguration and how it influenced organization-creation. During the fieldwork, the authors, for example, noted an ongoing tension between attempts to create a space meant to be attractive to an interdisciplinary audience and what kind of entrepreneurship was practiced and valued at NSI. This gave rise to a sense of ambiguity at NSI, which became evident in the oscillation between struggles over the inability to build community and inspire entrepreneurship (in the way first imagined), and strong feelings of ‘buzz’ amongst both the organizers and participants of events. These initial observations inspired the first and fourth authors to explore the multiplicity and ambiguity of entrepreneurial spaces by drawing on D+G and, more specifically, the ideas of smooth and striated space. Later on, they discussed the idea with the second and third authors, as they too have an interest in post-structural theorizing. The team got excited about working together and the second and third authors joined the project.

Thinking space with D+G

The authors adopted an interpretive approach guided by processual theorizations of space (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). This required a sensitivity to the authors’ different positions to NSI and how that influenced the interpretive process. The first and fourth authors could engage more readily with the spatial sense of NSI (e.g., architecture, discourses, atmospheres, and objects) due to their engagement as community members and researchers. This allowed for an affective understanding of the site (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013; Gherardi, 2019; Kuismin, 2022) that differed from the second and the third authors, who primarily came to understand the site through the elements ‘captured’ in the ethnographic field notes and other materials (e.g., images, videos, and documents). The second and third authors have, however,

done research in the start-up scene in the Nordic City (e.g., Hietanen, Andéhn, Wickström, & Takala, 2022) and are, thus, familiar with the discourse and aesthetics that characterize it.

The noted tensions between attempts to create an attractive, interdisciplinary entrepreneurial space and what kind of entrepreneurship was practiced and valued at NSI continued to puzzle the authors. This guided the interpretive focus to the relationship between spatial reconfiguration (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; De Molli et al., 2020) and the possibilities for entrepreneurship as organization-creation, which was understood as materializing in relation to both conventional ways of organizing and limited understandings of entrepreneurship as equated with start-ups (Farias et al., 2019; Rindova et al., 2009). The authors then began working with the concept of the fold to account for how expressions of (entrepreneurial) differentiation of space were actualized in relation to the interplay between smoothings and striations. Here, the authors made an interpretive distinction between the reconfiguring of the space, which was understood as ‘operating’ on the level of smoothings and striations, and the possibility of differentiation, twists and turns, which was understood as tied to the emergence of folds. The fold, thereby, became a means to explore how the space altered in terms of degree rather than of kind (e.g., smooth versus striated) while also accounting for how interconnections between smoothings and striations conditioned some folds but not all. This implies that folds cannot be represented in a fixed sense but need to be approached through the (possible) differentiation of space that, for example, contributes to materialize specific values, ideals, and orders and not others.

The authors proceeded by sketching different events to account for how various forms of spatial reconfiguration shaped the possibilities for organization-creation by using interview and promotion material, images, videos, and field notes. The initial interpretive approach was, thus,

typical for working with ethnographic materials as the emphasis was placed on forming a sociocultural understanding of the site (Cunliffe, 2010) though the authors also tended to the connections between bodies, artifacts, affects, intensities, and practices and how these, in relation to each other, contributed to spatially *perform* organization-creation (Bruni, 2005; Gherardi, 2019). Here, the authors made use of their different positions and understandings of the material to establish a sense of ‘stranger-ness’ (Ybema et al., 2009). While the second and third authors, at times, were more critical in their interpretations they lacked an understanding of the complexity of being at NSI. At the same time, the first and fourth authors tended to overlook specific discursive and spatial details that had become normalized due to their prolonged engagement with the site. The interpretive engagement was thus collective, immersive, explorative, and ongoing.

Writing space with D+G

To explore organization-creation spatially, we wrote a series of expressive ethnographic vignettes. This style was chosen to provide a sense of the material, discursive, and affective interplay of the site (e.g., van Eck, van Amsterdam, & van den Brink, 2021) and to embrace the multiplicity and ambiguity of space (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012). The vignettes depart from traditional qualitative writing that tends to fixate meanings and promote coherence through, for instance, categorization and rationalization (Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019). Instead, the open-ended style of writing works to destabilize given meanings and distinct boundaries (e.g., Stewart, 2007) while foregrounding the sensory rather than the descriptive (Gherardi, 2019; Kuismin, 2022). The vignettes are, thus, meant to serve as an engagement with the non-representational aspects of space, which cannot be reduced to an ‘object’ of inquiry (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, 2013).

In practice, this called for textual experimentation and poetic play. The first and fourth authors narrated the first version of the account more conventionally and focused on describing events, practices, and the material character of the space. The team then worked with expressive elements to ‘animate’ (Vannini, 2015) the materiality and multiplicity of space in an explorative sense (e.g., van Eck & van Amsterdam, 2021; van Eck et al., 2021). This resulted in several rounds of experimental, polyvocal writing as the authors reimaged the vignettes to express the ‘lively’ material, affective, and embodied character of the site while, at the same time, accounting for how it spatially shifted in ways that often were ambiguous and difficult to grasp. They, thereby, attempted to account for affect, artifacts, lighting, sounds, wordings, and movements between bodies, and paid attention to how these conditioned the space, for example, what kind of expressions, practices, and ideals were valued, sanctioned, and celebrated, and which ones were marginalized.

The approach, thus, differed from conventional styles of ethnographic writing that seek to account for an organization or process of organizing by making sense of it from an emic perspective (Ybema et al., 2009). Instead, a performative, creative, and expressive way of engaging marked the process (Vannini, 2015). Though the vignettes are premised on a longitudinal ethnographic engagement and a certain sociocultural understanding of the site, they do not seek to represent what NSI ‘is’ as an organization but rather how it *becomes* as a space through affects, intensities, rhythms, and orientations. There are, of course, limits in accounting for such spatial multiplicity and ambiguity in writing. Not only because of what can be expressed with words but also trusting an expression to carry a tale without spelling out each twist and turn. Given how performative expressions seek to enliven thought rather than describe happenings in isolation (Vannini, 2015), the vignettes invite the reader to think ‘with’ the text instead of always offering direct answers.

The vignettes consist of an introduction to the site to ‘set the scene’ and three events that exemplify the spatial reconfiguration of NSI aimed at supporting organization-creation: ‘The Co-Working Hub’, ‘The Think Africa Week’, and ‘The Solution Competition’. The events were chosen because they were recurring though their spatial expression differed over time. The vignettes (marked with indents) are combined with interpretive reflections to offer ‘guidance’ to the reader. Quotation marks are used when citing interview data or other textual materials such as promotional material. Most often, these are direct citations though slight alterations were at times needed given that some material was translated from the Nordic language. In combination with these direct quotes, italics are used in a stylistic sense to mark or break sentences and passages and to evoke affective resonances and moments for reflection and pause.

Vignettes

Welcome to the Nordic Start-Up Incubator

The day has finally come! The doors of the first NSI co-working hub are open to the public! The mayor of the Nordic City and the rector of the Nordic University smile alongside students, faculty, entrepreneurs, city representatives, and clinking wine glasses. *Festive*. Vibrant enthusiasm for the hub meant to become an interdisciplinary “space for encounters”, supporting “action and business from ideas born at the University”. Natural light, high ceilings, and industrial materials entangle with promises of openness, collaboration, and inclusion, a smooth contrast to dusty lecture halls, grey office buildings, and bureaucratic rigidity. After all, entrepreneurship is

meant to be different! *Growing through cracks and feeding on connectivity, carefully reconfigured through the color yellow.*

Just look around! Capital letters covering walls, doors, and tables ready to be reconfigured: “CO-CREATE”; “YOU MAKE WE”; “TEST, PROOF, VALIDATE”; “THINK & DO”; “MMM... SCIENCE”. Inspiration, in print between windows creating porous distinctions. One side: a rarely trafficked pedestrian street, almost as if forgotten between more buzzing parts of the Nordic City, an entrance to the library, an antiquarian bookstore, and a women’s clothing store that never seem to be open. Our side: bodies in motion, lush green plants, up-beat tunes, eclectic ads for upcoming events, hundreds of sticky notes, cricket pancakes (“for everyone!”), and plenty of artful slate boards reminding us of how much potential we *still* have within.

Something lingers in the air, vibrating through colors, tunes, words, walls, and bodies. New becomings are in the making! Welcome to a space that never looks, feels, smells, or sounds the same.

The Co-Working Hub: Promoting new (entrepreneurial) becomings

A tireless tinkering by community members follows the opening event. NSI needed to be distinguished from the university premises and their assumed order. Engage and excite to actualize potential! More sticky notes, more pancakes, more plants, more events, more buzz! A series of ‘Been There Done That’ events are orchestrated to set the tone.

Shared enthusiasm fueled by curiosity, dimmed lightning, and craft beer. “Encounters, collisions, and new openings”, a poster playfully promises in color. Indeed, a buzzing

atmosphere is building up. Students, faculty, and alumni struggle to find good spots. The chairs and tables – simple and secondhand – arranged to accentuate the hype. Usually, casually scattered for a laidback feel; now, ordered in neat rows facing the front. *This is where the action happens! Please, organize accordingly.* At the back of the room, a tall, green wall built by an alumni firm exemplifies university-based entrepreneurship. *The future is bright!* The line-up of the events: Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and big shots, there to share stories and struggles. Peter Vesterbacka (famous), Ilkka Paananen (famous), Thomas Anderson (famous), Paul Bragiel (famous), Male name (famous). *A pattern?* A pattern. “If you’ve followed the start-up scene even a bit, and if you understand anything of what it is about, you know that these are some tough guys [referring to the line-up]”, one of the organizers tells us.

Over time, a feeling of unease. Is this a space for (tech) start-ups, unicorns, and growth companies, solidified in a specific type of body?

THINK & DO, *they* tell us.

The strange sense lingers as the story of NSI unfolds. We hear that it was birthed through dreams of the management of the Nordic City and the Nordic University. Disheartened by the local innovation scene, Johan (Nordic University’s head of research) and Mikael (Nordic City’s manager of start-up services) thought about ways to strengthen the “innovation ecosystem”. With rough sketches waiting to come alive, they turned their gazes toward the Valley. Perceptions and experiences left them in awe. *Who knew such potential could be actualized by attracting bodies, by constructing a hub?* Something like this could be in the Nordic City too, right? the team asked.

Through that which resonated abroad, they began to reconfigure at home. Start-up aesthetics, disrupting artifacts, and playful elements, check! *Now, let us await the 'unexpected'.*

The spatial reconfiguration of NSI was meant to smoothen perceived striations within the Nordic University, that is, all that was considered grey, bureaucratic, boring, and slow. This was seen as key to actualize the innate potentiality of the university space and enable organization-creation in form of “action” and “business ideas” born in the University. By playing with spatial mobility, start-up aesthetics, and inspirational discourses, the founders and community members hoped to attract different bodies (e.g., students, entrepreneurs, artists, and researchers), build (an entrepreneurial) community, and nurture alternative ways of doing, thinking, and feeling. It was, however, not enough for the space to look and feel different from typical office spaces and lecture halls, it needed also to be in constant flux (e.g., through Valley-aesthetics, actors, ideals, and narratives) to keep the ‘buzz’ going. NSI was thus organized with an emphasis on what *could* become rather than with a consideration of what the reconfigured space actually made possible. A matter which became evident as weeks passed.

Hello? Traversing NSI looking for fellow unicorns only to encounter traces of past gatherings; burnt coffee, a couple of crumpled sticky notes, a slate board with a fading message. At the Been There Done That events, the intensity of audiences has also begun to dissipate. Empty chairs and unopened beer bottles cause posters with promises to reek of desperation. *This does not feel right... Where did all the excitement go?* Bodies relating through distance rather than proximity, conditioning spatial freedom with a sense of wilting. Yet, seasoned stars remain on stage. Young men, self-confident and casual in start-up uniforms: hoodies, jeans, and sneakers. *Stubbles rubbed.* Ready to

1
2
3 start, but for what? New becomings? The students at the Nordic University respond: “If
4
5 you think about Vesterbacka [one of the ‘Been there done that’ speakers], he is some
6
7 sort of rock star and that is not at all for us.”
8
9

10
11
12 *What was new ‘there’, was not for them,*
13
14 *and a ‘you’ make a ‘we’ only when bodies attract*
15
16
17
18

19
20 Though the reconfiguration NSI made it resemble a space for infinite (entrepreneurial)
21
22 becomings, struggles marked the actualizing of such potential beyond the adorned, buzzing
23
24 crust. While an interplay between smoothings (e.g., the material, discursive, and affective
25
26 tinkering of university hierarchies, aesthetics, and practices) and striations (e.g., the founders’
27
28 expectations and start-up orientations), indeed, allowed for the space to unfold differently, it
29
30 did not always alter how organization-creation was performed. For example, while the initial
31
32 reconfiguration of the space allowed for an aesthetic demarcation from the perceived rigidity
33
34 of the Nordic University, the invited speakers, discourses, and seating arrangements of the
35
36 Been There Done That events contributed to subtle scripts, which went against ideals of
37
38 openness, collaboration, and inclusion. As some were given a stage and a mic and others a seat,
39
40 a hierarchy of knowing bodies was spatially established while energies were directed towards
41
42 valorized forms of start-up enterprising. This seemed to hinder rather than actualize potential
43
44 for organization-creation in more creative ways and, with that, buzz slowly turned to hesitation.
45
46 When students and other stakeholders started to question *how* the space had become assembled,
47
48 further attempts to reconfigure it unfolded.
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56 ***The Think Africa Week: Building different connections***
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“Could we do something different here, starting from the bottom rather than the top?”, some development studies students note when working at NSI. “Entrepreneurship is too narrow of a focus for the Nordic University”, they continue. Instead, they want to “empower” the African diaspora and enhance collaboration between the Nordic City and African countries. *There are, indeed, real wicked problems, ‘out there’!* And so, the Think Africa Week is born. The reasons are bountiful; equal and fair trade, employment opportunities, and business collaborations. Depends on who answers the question, *of course*. Could NSI, finally, allow *for* difference, on different terms? One thing is agreed upon, some spatial reconfigurations are in order.

Imagination, inspiration, and transnational partnerships allow the organizers to ‘think’ Africa through bright lightening, Afrobeats, art, a pop-up shop selling Kenyan crafts, and a shift in discursive emphasis from *unicorns* to diversity. A flight from what had begun to striate. A reorientation towards interdisciplinary collaborations and inclusivity. The tone? Vibrant yet professional.

The first day of Think Africa Week arrives! A logo with the outline of the African continent invites bodies ‘in’ while altering the border to that which have been considered ‘out’. Spatially, NSI is no longer defined through its demarcation to the Nordic University, and in extension the Nordic City, but in relation to a distant continent. *Awe in eyes entangle with confused curiosity. What is going on here?* A sense of hesitation in absence of up-beat tunes, dark lightning, and patterned scripts. Diverse bodies and mixed languages crowd the space. Come on in! Maybe for a bite, a drink, or a dance? Indeed, a welcoming contrast to the gloomy street outside, seldom marked by the warmth of proximity. “It is time to stop feeling sorry for Africa”, an organizer

notes in the opening speech. There is more than poverty and struggle, there is “creativity, hybridity, and unused potential”, someone adds! Let the “cracking” of African business cultures begin! CHEERS! *Or wait, what? An engagement of sorts, between parties that are assumed to be equal, yet who is ‘tapping’ into whose unused potential here?*

Through the use of creative elements such as music, art, and crafts, and a shift in spatial arrangements and focus, the Think Africa Week spatially smoothened emerging striations in ways that allowed for NSI to unfold differently. As all things Valley-like temporarily were made absent, possibilities for more collaborative ways of doing, thinking, and feeling were actualized. At the same time, seemingly familiar power relations were nurtured as much of the *assumed* capacity to make the space different emerged from predominantly White bodies (university students) searching for “unused potential” (and ways to “empower” Others). An ambiguous interplay, indeed.

Reversed tokens, varied rhythms, and carefully crafted jewelry, baskets, and fabrics challenging received ‘entrepreneurial’ views. Walls and slate boards no longer serve start-up ideals. Instead, they carry messages of history, oppression, and a possible reversal, embodied in portraits of Herero tribe members of Namibia. Black skin, fabrics with color, headscarves with patterns, and suits as of armies. A celebration of sheer creativity conveyed through a firm stare. The Hereros were nearly extinct, slaughtered by their colonizers but now they are here, on display in a Nordic incubator space. *Contrasts linger.* Is a portrait passive or active, an object, or an observer? *What can it do in this space?* Let’s keep on walking...

Ah, finally, differences *in* proximity! Artifacts arranged in flux – chairs facing each other, chairs in lines, no chairs at all – orienting bodies and enabling encounters. A gentle invitation: sit down, face-to-face with knees centimeters apart. The making of (eye)contact by tearing down (perceived) borders between bodies. *Do not compete with me, we make we now, building community and not distinctions.* A change in space, reflecting tensions and openings on a global scale.

Bridges built between differences, across opportunities! *All unfolding according to plan.* How about an Umbrella Corporation? Connecting The Confederation of Nordic Industries with the African diaspora? *Tapp, tapp, tapp...* Helping those interested in African trade by disseminating knowledge and building local contacts! *Distances undone?* “A great example!”, a student volunteer says. *This is where it could all start...* Entangling people from all walks of life; researchers, students, entrepreneurs, enthusiasts, and activists. Bonds, oscillating between what has been and that which could be. Buzz, beginning to sprout anew. *Who could imagine otherwise, here?*

During the Think Africa Week, NSI was reconfigured with ideas of organization-creation across differences in mind. The cheerful vibe and embodied proximity, for example, allowed for more intimate ways of (be)coming together within a space that emphasized collaboration rather than individualized ideals. Rather than ordering bodies with a specific purpose in mind, emphasis was placed on the possibilities of open encounters, thus forming gentle striations rather than strict scripts that spatially altered what was made possible. This was mirrored in what forms of organization-creation were discussed and valued, for example, more cooperative and collaborative forms of organizing.

At the same time, remnants of colonial relations lingered by the presence of the Hereros on display and the emphasis on bringing “entrepreneurship” and “opportunities” to Africa. While the reconfiguration, thus, allowed for alternative ways of doing and feeling it, partially, also disciplined these through ideas of progress and change that aligned with Western growth-oriented organization-creation. The potentiality of space was, thereby, actualized by inviting bodies ‘in’ only to allow new possibilities to materialize in the familiar form of market-based organizing. A pattern that seemed to striate over time. The following year, The Think Africa Week was co-organized by one of the biggest start-up events in the world and a global humanitarian organization. The theme? “Do it!”.

Another year, another Think Africa Week! The anticipation stumbles along hyped taglines transmitted online: “This year it will be all about action”, “Impact together”, “Turn failure into success”, “Do it yourself!” A (entrepreneurial) mentorship program for unemployed immigrants. A “Black Market Day”...? *This looks and sounds strangely familiar... What is the point of thinking difference through the same?*

Later, the Think Africa Week departed from NSI and turned into its own “community-driven” organization. The focus on growth-oriented ‘entrepreneurship’ is no longer prevalent. Potential actualized, though elsewhere?

The Solution Competition: Transforming passion to potential

It is, once again, time to rekindle the entrepreneurial spark of NSI! How about hosting a Solution Competition to create organizations ready to “solve the needs of the world”? A space combining different bodies, disciplinary backgrounds, ways of “doing and thinking” with a start-up ethos. Bye, bye pollution, poverty, and melting ices!

With “action” and “businesses” yet to be born, NSI is playfully reconfigured for the two-month-long Solution Competition. Piles of thin sticky notes and thick markers waiting on the tables, up-beat music playing louder than usual, and a lingering smell of fresh coffee. Excitement entangled with lightning makes the yellow walls extra striking: the color of creativity and optimism, *some say*. All energies align! Who can create organizations ready to solve the wicked problems of the world? We can! A deliberate mix of participants, handpicked by NSI employees to avoid homogenous, disciplinary backgrounds and all-male groups. Bodies crowding around tables, restlessly waiting to share emerging ideas. The first assignment: allowing values to form on sticky notes under close watch. *Disrupt!* “Use all the surfaces! The floors, walls, and ceilings are for ideas, drawings, and notes!”, the facilitator tells us. *Here, there are no boundaries! Except for those of time...* “Three minutes left, keep the ideas coming!”, he shouts. “Rights for animals!”, “Rights for immigrants!”, teams respond. Many demands and silent nods. *Who would disagree with that which is obvious, in thought?* Through brightness, bodies, ideas, sticky notes, authoritarian-like hype, and playful vibes a boundless space of potentiality emerges. *Finally, the birth of new becomings?*

For the Solution Competition, NSI was reconfigured to nurture creativity and optimism by smoothing boundaries and rigid disciplinary thought. Participants were, instead, encouraged to come together and act upon “wicked problems”, not bound by background, gender, discipline, or political ideas, and make use of walls, floors, and the ceiling in ways that exceeded typical ways of working. To further actualize entrepreneurial becomings, up-beat music and a hurried pace contributed to order participants towards that which was yet to come.

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2
3 Happenings, happenings, happenings! Throughout the weeks of the Solution
4
5 Competition, NSI becomes a “lean” factory for “execution plans” and “convincing sales
6
7 pitches”. Performances orchestrated; to become similar yet unique within walls covered
8
9 with overlapping sticky notes, cluttered start-up canvases, reworked pitch scripts, and
10
11 rough sketches of company logos. *A mess? No! All things needed to succeed, now*
12
13 *reminding us of the porosity of progress.* Refine, refine, refine! The music continues to
14
15 pump as endless microwave lunches are heated. *No creative energies wasted on care,*
16
17 *forward and onward!* Always working late, trying to squeeze everything into a three-
18
19 minute show. Experts, advisers, and sparrers come and go. “Teams, gather up!” A final
20
21 opportunity to turn passion into potentiality! The admired Paula arrives: a famous social
22
23 entrepreneur. Bodies, chairs, and energies reconfigured to bask in her “oracular
24
25 wisdom”. *Could it be contagious?* Top-notch cocktail for presenting ideas; quantify
26
27 them and their effect. “This is what doing business is about”, she notes. Applauds and
28
29 whistles follow, accentuating distinctions between bodies. *Imagine, this could be us*
30
31 *one day!*

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34
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38
39
40 The buzz intensifies. A set of “important questions” is shown on a beaming screen:
41
42 “Who’s problem is this, what is your market, who are your competitors, what is the
43
44 value proposition?” An orientation offered as *the* solution in solid digital form, readily
45
46 distinguishable from sticky notes easy to discard. *Some matters do not need to be*
47
48 *refined, one might say.* The space is quickly reconfigured into bounded camps and
49
50 teams huddle up, getting ready to actualize that which is put on display. Paula, now
51
52 working her way around entangled energies. “Too much!” “Not enough!” “Too
53
54 strange!” “Too much the same!” “More!” *A hail storm of reactions, a sprinkle of doubt.*
55
56
57
58 “We want to make things easy for you, guys. During the competition, you can work on
59
60

whatever kinds of solutions you want to... But to win it, it must be based on a business model”, the facilitator notes with a purposeful emphasis, again, drawing attention to the screen. *An echo of past striations, born anew.* The output: apps for peer learning, apps for language learning, apps for equality planning... *Endless possibilities of valuation or was it value?* All like-minded-difference-makers are, at least, included. “Don’t forget to have fun too!” *A sprouting sense of alienation, or just an overflow of excitement?*

The reconfiguration of NSI during the Solution Competition was premised on a steady influx of excitement and alternative ways of working, keeping the space in smooth motion spiked with a wild flurry of competitiveness. Through the use of disposable materials (e.g., sticky notes, start-up canvases, and pitch scripts), teams were oriented to continuously refine their ideas by incorporating the facilitators and experts’ solid know-how. This gave rise to a fast-paced, future-oriented way of working that, in turn, promoted standardized forms of growth-oriented organization-creation (e.g., tech start-ups) instead of, for example, slow, collaborative, or value-oriented problem-solving. Towards the finale, entrepreneurial becomings had both sparked and faded.

It is the final hours of the Solution Competition! Passing weeks have made most teams redundant, turning up-beat participants into passive spectators in the audience’s seats. *Don’t pout! It is a competition, after all.* Spatial reconfigurations to match anticipating vibes and pumping tunes. The Nordic University goes nightclub? Oh, yes! Countless spotlights shower walls and faces with vibrant purples and blues. Artificial smoke, alcohol, and playful professionalism blur lines between bodies, expectations, and responsibilities. *Entrepreneurship is, indeed, different!* The judges of the competition rest on firm armchairs, clearly distinct from the rest: the business angel, the start-up

guru, the lawyer, and the adviser. Ready to determine which potentials are to be actualized, which bodies are to be prized, and whose passions are to be dismissed. *Attract and intensify. That which always is yet to come is what makes something entrepreneurial, no?* They leave space for the first pitcher. Again: hoodie, jeans, and sneakers. Weeks of training have made her self-confident, someone to admire, someone like Paula. With restful eye contact, she convincingly conquers the stage and tells others what to think. *At least for now, for words are only so much.* But yes, a mobile game teaching young people better eating habits is what we need! Then they follow: Pitch. Pitch. Pitch. Pitch. Pitch...

During the Solution Competition, NSI emerged through an interplay between striations of competitiveness, perfected pitches, and an emphasis on solutions; and smooth moments of creativity, buzz, and excitement. The latter were intensified due to the spatial reconfiguration of the site during the teamwork (e.g., spatial alterations and the use of “lean” elements and aesthetics), and during the final performances (e.g., spotlights, up-beat tunes, staging of actors, and artificial smoke). Together, these elements formed a spatial contrast to how business usually was done at the Nordic University, and in the Nordic City more broadly. However, while new possibilities were actualized as NSI unfolded, it did not always translate into organization-creation addressing “wicked problems”.

Rather, the space of NSI nudged participants and teams to align with idealized depictions of enterprising, for example, in terms of approach, focus, jargon, body language, and clothing, which materialized as a goal in and of itself. The finale ‘buzz’, and competitive emphasis, reinforced this as bodies oriented in space (and on stage) through distinctions, signaling worthiness, status, and success. While the spatial reconfigurations of the Solution Competition,

thus, nurtured creativity and collaborations, they also contributed to order action, energies, and bodies toward *a* solution. With that, the emphasis on ‘rights’ was readily replaced with ‘apps’.

Almost judgment time... Values, intentions, energies, and passions have been shared and “wicked problems” solved. *Or, not really but almost.* A wait. Contemplation behind closed doors, signaling the importance of the decision and the judges’ distinct sense. A simultaneous sense of excitement and disillusionment. *Was this it?*

The decision is announced. The crowd cheers for victories and winners now entangled in a group hug. A start-up! Worthy and Valley-like, alas.

Now, *whose* potential will be actualized next?

Discussion

In this paper, we examined the relationship between space and entrepreneurship, understood as organization-creation, from a processual perspective. We theorized space as an assemblage of material, discursive, and affective elements (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Ratner, 2020) and employed the theorizing of D+G. We empirically offered three vignettes based on materials from an ethnographic study of the Nordic Start-Up Incubator (NSI), an initiative aimed at reconfiguring the premises of the Nordic University to encourage encounters and start-up creation across organizational and disciplinary boundaries. Through the concepts of *striation* and *smoothing*, we examined how power operated through these reconfigurations as NSI was ordered and disordered to create a ‘buzzing’ entrepreneurial space. With the concept of *the fold*, we elaborated on how such reconfigurations gave rise twists and turns that oriented how

organization-creation at NSI was ‘made possible’ in ways that trouble any clear distinction between the entrepreneurial and the managerial.

Our ethnographic vignettes emphasize how the spatial reconfigurations (such as the use of bright colors, a ‘buzzing’ atmosphere, music, alcohol, and inspirational events) smoothened the Nordic University space in an attempt to promote openness, collaboration, and inclusion and, thus, organization-creation. By drawing on popularized start-up aesthetics and discourse, the reconfigurations initially fueled excitement, energy, and ways of coming together and collaborate that differed from the perceived rigidity of the Nordic University. While these smoothings reverberated emancipatory affects, they simultaneously veiled values and ideals of growth-oriented enterprising that subtly came to straiten the space. This oscillation shaped NSI as well as the ongoing attempts to reignite the ‘buzz’ through events such as the ‘Think Africa Week’ and ‘The Solution Competition’. Thus, though NSI continuously was made to look different, potentiality was often actualized following familiar patterns, for example, with regard to what forms of entrepreneurship were privileged and who or what was considered entrepreneurial.

By tending to the material, discursive, and affective assembling of space, our ethnographic vignettes thus illustrate *how* organization-creation unfolded with a sensitivity to the noted ambiguity and multiplicity of space (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, 2013; Ratner, 2020). From this perspective, the reconfigurations of NSI can be understood as ‘buzzing’ injunctions of liberatory openness that paved ways for the materialization of ideals of growth, success, and individualism rather than collectivity, societal change, and ‘wicked’ problem-solving. Instead of subverting the managerial order the reconfigurations, thereby, kept

the promise of societal transformation through enterprising alive as action, energies, and bodies were oriented toward *that* which was yet to come.

Through our work, we build on existing studies in two ways. First, we contribute to studies on entrepreneurship as organization-creation (Cucchi et al., 2022; Garcia-Lorenzo et al., 2017; Hjorth, 2014; Hjorth & Reay, 2022) by offering a processual theorization of how organization-creation unfolds spatially, that is, through the ongoing assembling of material, discursive, and affective elements. This perspective enriches studies on the relationship between space and entrepreneurship that, thus far, primarily have focused on how certain configurations, for example an “actualized other space” (Hjorth, 2005, p. 392) for ‘play’ and ‘invention’, differ from managerial spaces in ways that support organization-creation (Jones & Patton, 2020; Pallesen, 2018). Instead of focusing on an already actualized configuration, our processual theorization allowed us to direct attention to the performative assembling of space without assuming a correlation between a given configuration and a given organizational outcome. In so doing, the theorization also challenges a distinct separation between entrepreneurial and managerial spaces and suggests that they may co-constitute each other through subtle twists and turns. Thus, our work offers an understanding of how entrepreneurship as organization-creation may emerge *spatially* within workspaces (Hjorth, 2005, 2004) or particular sites and locations (Beyes & Holm, 2020; Hjorth & Reay, 2022; Steyaert & Katz, 2004) through the ongoing actualization of potentiality.

Examining the relationship between space and organization-creation processually brings the politics of entrepreneurship to the fore (e.g., Hjorth & Steyaert, 2010; Holm & Beyes, 2022), that is, its capacities to challenge ‘settled, institutionalized and habituated’ ways of organizing (Farias et al., 2019). Specifically, this approach allows us to trace how power unfolds in and

through organization-creation by emphasizing how space is “open-ended and multiple, practiced and of the everyday” (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, p. 47) rather than functioning as a container of given values, ideals, and orders. At NSI, this was evident in the interplay between openings and closings of possibilities to practice organization-creation ‘differently’ and the reiteration of more-or-less hegemonic orders that nurtured enterprise in an entrepreneurial ‘disguise’ (see Farias et al., 2019). However, instead of questioning the sincerity of NSI community members’ eager attempts to ‘include’ and ‘excite’, our work sheds light on the limits of equating spatial smoothings with emancipation and, thus, organization-creation. The emergence of ‘alternative’ or ‘social’ forms of entrepreneurship (e.g., Berglund & Skoglund, 2015; Calás et al., 2018) would in this case, arguably, have required alternative striations to orient the ‘unleashed’ creativity, buzz, and excitement in ways that supported social rather than corporate growth. These would have needed to *elude* the order of enterprising altogether.

Second, we contribute to processual literature on organizational space (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Cnossen & Bencherki, 2019; Stephenson et al., 2020) by elaborating on how its potentiality may unfold in ambivalent and unpredictable ways. We, specifically, build on studies that have emphasized the innate potentiality of space (e.g., Beyes & Steyaert, 2013; Beyes & Michels, 2011; Knox et al., 2015) and how that can allow us to imagine, practice, and orient organizing differently (e.g., Holm & Beyes, 2021; Skoglund & Holt, 2021). Scholars have, for example, highlighted how its potentiality can open up “*new* possibilities of feeling and acting collectively” (Michels & Steyaert, 2017, p. 79, emphasis added), which has implications for organizing that should not be overlooked. However, while the material, discursive, and affective elements of space, indeed, assemble to perform organizing, ‘newness’ does not by necessity unfold in affirmative ways. Here, D+G’s theorizing offered us means to consider *how* potentiality was actualized through folds, without affirming a binary

understanding of space as *being* either striated or smooth (Munro & Jordan, 2013; Thanem, 2012). Through an ‘animated’ (Vannini, 2015) style of writing, we also offer a means to account for such spatial ambiguity and multiplicity empirically (Beyes & Holt, 2020; Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, 2013; Ratner, 2020) and direct attention to how minor matters, for example, affective intensities, ideals, sticky-notes, music, and cricket pancakes may contribute to the materialization of values, ideals, and orders.

Echoing D+G’s (2013) warning “[n]ever believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us” (p. 500), our work thus offers a caution against too readily equating smoothings with affirmative organizational outcomes. For what may seem like a playful (Alexandersson & Kalonaityte, 2018; Katila et al., 2020) or communal (Jakonen et al., 2017; Resch et al., 2021) space may easily become laced with exploitative or controlling orientations, including those that discipline action, energies, and bodies according to an enterprise logic. To think otherwise would be to confuse emancipatory affectivity with the axioms of capital; and though their “affinity is great” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2013, p. 282) the latter will always return to its model of incessant accumulation and domination. Any attempts to unfold space *differently* should, thus, be examined in relation to the processual workings of power and with a sensitivity to how it may give rise to both emancipatory *and* oppressive organizational outcomes (c.f., Fouweather & Bosma, 2021; Thrift, 2008). Here, it is key to further consider not only how organizational space could be assembled in ways that ‘unlock’ affirmative possibilities for organizing (Michels & Steyaert, 2017) but also how unlocking itself can be turned into an organizational imperative, for example, when it comes channelizing funds into growth-oriented start-ups that demand incessant novelty.

This prompts us to linger on the affirmative potential of Deleuze's (1993) writing on the fold. As mentioned, Deleuze regards the fold as a force that may destabilize fixed identities and dichotomies (Pick, 2017), however, what could it 'do' in contemporary organizations? Based on our empirical work, one could argue that an overemphasis on the promise of potentiality – both in theory and practice – ties our attention to that which is yet to come while overlooking how both emancipation and control may unfold *through* such promise. Incubators like NSI, for example, 'freely' fold together objects, affects, discourses, and practices in ways that are aesthetically seductive and oozing with a sense of differentiation while serving the flows of capital; actualized through individualized and growth-oriented forms of entrepreneurship. An overly affirmative account may, thus, not allow one to readily discern ridged, bureaucratic, or in other ways ordered organizing from what is *seemingly* liberating.

With regard to the fold, Deleuze (1993) further notes that the problem is not "...how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling" (p. 34) which can be read as a process of organization-creation that makes a difference rather than necessarily *being* different. Instead of assuming that the endless actualization of potentiality can 'undo' any perceived managerial ills, one should thus acknowledge how capital, indeed, too is premised on creativity though through the 'finishing' of folds. This is evident in how promises of potentiality readily are actualized with an emphasis on accumulation for the sake of accumulation rather than through organization-creation that subverts the logic of enterprise (Farias et al., 2019). In the spirit of D+G, we should then further consider *how* extracting forces may operate in and through the seemingly new and question to what extent they enable social creativity or merely mimic emancipation through a seductive 'buzz'.

Conclusion

The creation of ‘exciting’ entrepreneurial spaces has become a common response to an assumed need for increased creativity and productivity across both public and private organizational contexts. In this paper, we have illustrated how the creation of such a space within the Nordic University and Nordic City involved constant reconfigurations of its material, discursive, and affective elements and emphasized how this both opened up new possibilities *and* subtly harnessed those possibilities for accumulative and profit-oriented purposes. This has implications for considering the implicit politics of space without assuming a correlation between a given configuration and a given organizational outcome. We thus suggest that more critical attention should be directed not only to the materiality, design, and architecture of spaces for entrepreneurship but also to how they contribute to materializing certain values, ideals, and orders. Specifically, we ask researchers at the intersection of organization studies and entrepreneurship to avoid too readily affirming the importance of entrepreneurial spaces in the name of difference without also examining to what extent they allow for differentiation. We, thus, hope that our work can serve as an invitation to further explore the ways in which these processes may represent transformative becomings *and* reinforce established power relations that may not be readily recognizable.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Senior Editor Timon Beyes and the three anonymous reviewers for their generous guidance, comments, and patience throughout the development of this article. We would also like to thank the community members of the Nordic Start-Up Incubator who shared their experiences for this research.

Funding

This research was supported by Tekes, the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (grant 264/31/2013).

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