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Lydia Jørgensen

“I am not a client, a customer, nor a service user... I’m not a National Insurance Number or blip on a screen... I, Daniel Blake, am a citizen, nothing more and nothing less.”

- 1 These words conclude the film ‘I, Daniel Blake’ (Lavery, 2016, p. 50). The words come from the film’s main character, the middle-aged carpenter Daniel Blake, and sum up his experience in the encounter with a Kafkaesque bureaucratic British benefits system. The drabness of the bureaucracy is made tangible in Blake’s meetings at the local job centre, where he is met by a dehumanized atmosphere consisting of instrumental interactions and an interior of standardized white-beige-grey monotony. These scenes give you a sense of how it feels to be reduced to a number by a huge system.
- 2 In recent decades, the downsides of the dehumanized face of the public sector have resulted in declining trust and democratic deficits. As a response, this has led to paradigmatic shifts in how the public sector understands its interaction with the citizens (Revsbech, 2016). In Denmark, this shift has been formulated in the ambition to ‘put citizens first’, where the focus is on the human before the system (Ledelseskommissionen, 2018; Revsbech, 2016). In this ‘paradigm’, the citizen is seen as an active participant, which is reliant on the citizen’s experience of quality and trust. Recommendations from the Danish Leadership and Management Commission (Ledelseskommissionen) call for the citizen’s experience to be staged in the daily encounters with the public sector akin to creating a customer journey (Ledelseskommissionen, 2018, p. 21). Although the reasons to alter the interaction between citizen and public sector are evident, the way the staging of experience is done remains less pronounced. Accordingly, this paper seeks to ask how public organizations stage citizen experience in everyday interactions and encounters, and more fundamentally, how these might impact our understanding of organizations. Finally, I

ask, how a theoretical approach to the notion of atmosphere will allow me to address this staging of experience?

- 3 With the rise of the “experience economy”, the staging of experiences has become a distinctive way of creating value (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Böhme argues that the enhanced societal emphasis on experiences has changed all value propositions into a “staging value” (*Inszenierungswert*), which reflects the extent to which Western societies are increasingly conditioned by aesthetic capitalism (Böhme, 2016; Reckwitz, 2014). Aesthetic capitalism articulates the general aestheticization of life, where matters of affectivity, experience and material design have become important in organizing social order and work practices. Böhme introduces the notion of atmosphere as a way to think and capture how contemporary aesthetic design practices and technologies across various domains are used to generate and organize experiential value (Böhme, 1995; Reckwitz, 2014). In this respect the notion of atmosphere is considered highly relevant in order to explore how public organizations stage experiences and how it influences organizational practices and behaviour.
- 4 Böhme develops the notion of atmosphere from a combination of phenomenology and aesthetic theory, which results in a re-articulation of aesthetics as a general theory of perception dealing with sensory experiences in everyday life (Böhme, 1995, p. 15). Perception reflects the sensory and affective experiences that occur in our everyday life and that are not cognitively accessible. Atmospheres are affective powers of feeling that emanate in the relation between humans and the environment (Böhme, 2013, p. 25). Accordingly, the aesthetic is no longer solely a question of beauty or art objects, but is concerned with how it feels to be in a room, a shopping mall or at the local job center. The staging of atmosphere is an everyday matter that shows how the theatrical is inherent to the aesthetization of society. And, as noted by Home-Cook, it concerns how ‘perception itself is inherently *theatrical*’ (Home-Cook, 2015, p. 7)¹. The paper will use Böhme’s notion of atmosphere as a way to address the staging of experience, which will mean in particular focusing on how atmospheres can be produced through aesthetic and scenographic practices (see Lehmann, 2006; Fischer-Lichte, 2019; McKinney and Palmer, 2017).
- 5 More fundamentally, the paper argues that staging atmospheres responds to a call for thinking organization aesthetically and processually. In recent decades an enhanced interest in the aesthetic and atmospheric has emerged in organization studies (see Borch, 2009; Julmi, 2017; Beyes, 2016; Michels, 2015; Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Strati, 2010; Warren, 2008; Jørgensen and Holt, 2019). In line with Böhme’s aesthetics, the so-called aesthetic turn in organization studies addresses the ‘felt meaning’ experienced in the sensory encounter between humans and their surroundings, which has contributed to an expanded focus on organizational life by articulating the embodied knowledge of organizations (Strati, 2010; Warren, 2008; Beyes, 2016). This perspective involves a shift from the representational and semiotic understanding of organization towards its formation in everyday practices and affective experiences (Beyes, 2016; Michels, 2015; Strati, 2010). The liaison between aesthetics, affect and space in organization studies resonates with how certain strands of contemporary theatre approach the staging of experiences and events, where the stage is no longer just a decorative backdrop but an active part of the performance (Lehmann, 2006; Fischer-Lichte, 2019; McKinney and Palmer, 2017; White, 2012). Accordingly, the paper argues

that drawing on insights from contemporary theatre is a way to critically discuss the socio-political dynamics at play when staging organizational atmospheres.

- 6 In order to explore how the staging of organizational atmospheres actually takes place, the present study draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2017 in the Danish municipality of Furesø, where an atrium was specifically designed to create an experience of 'putting citizens first'. Although the notion of the citizen will not be of central concern here, the theatricality of organizational atmospheres for public organizations has a particular twist in this respect that needs to be addressed. While Böhme does not address the notion of the citizen, he explicitly deals with the political aspects of atmospheres in the way that it concerns the theatricalization of society and the everyday (Böhme, 2009, p. 192). Yet, Böhme's approach to atmospheres implies a fundamental move away from understanding politics in representational terms. Instead, Böhme's political-aesthetic ambition outlines a politics of the everyday with similarities to non-representational politics (e.g. Thrift, 2008; Jørgensen and Borch, 2018). This means that the staging of atmospheres is imbued with a politics that happens where everyday practices unfold and interaction occurs mediating the social and political order. In that sense, the idea of 'putting citizens first' by staging the everyday practice of encounters within the public sector, the theatricality of organizational atmospheres holds the potential for the expansion of notions of citizenship, although it falls outside the immediate scope of this paper.
- 7 Building on Böhme's understanding of staging as a scenographic practice (1995; 2009; 2013) and Michels' (2015) approach to researching atmospheres, the paper defines an analytical frame to explore how the atrium stages atmospheres to show a new, human face of a public organization. The paper is structured as follows. First, Böhme's theoretical understanding of atmosphere as the art of staging is presented and discussed in relation to contemporary theatre and scenography, concerning especially matters of materiality, affectivity and relationality. It then deploys Michels' (2015) analytical approach to researching atmospheres to set out a framework for an empirical analysis. This is followed by a discussion of ethnographic fieldwork, method and the empirical material gathered, leading to an analysis of how the public organization has staged atmospheres to orchestrate experience. The paper concludes by addressing the organizational staging of atmospheres as an active use of space and affective experience, that in particular, for a public sector organization, also seems critical as a means by which to (re)articulate democratic relations with the citizen.

Atmosphere – a scenography of the everyday

- 8 In his book 'Atmosphäre', Böhme presents a 'new aesthetic' with the aim to re-articulate the human experience of the world (1995, p. 25). With a new aesthetics, Böhme wants to counter the existence of dehumanised spaces and what they do to people, such as in the case of Daniel Blake. Further, by rethinking aesthetics as atmosphere, Böhme draws on the Greek understanding of *aisthesis* as sensation or sensing, putting sensation and affectivity at the heart of how humans perceive the world (Böhme, 1995, p. 15). Aesthetics in this perspective articulates how one feels as an embodied and spatial experience, rather than being limited to an ocular appreciation of a beautiful art object. This further implies that the aesthetic encompasses all kinds of everyday experiences where design is involved, ranging from

kitsch to marketing, shopping malls and design (Böhme, 1995, p. 35). As such atmospheres concern the aesthetic perception and aesthetic production of everyday life (Böhme, 1995; Reckwitz, 2014).

- 9 With atmospheres emanating in everyday encounters between humans and their environment through designed modulations, the production of atmospheres needs particular attention, since aesthetic professions like architects, designers, scenographers, etc. are the ones configuring and modulating our everyday experiences (Böhme, 1995, p. 97; 2009). The aesthetic practice of “producing” atmosphere Böhme defines as scenography² (Böhme, 2009; 2013, p. 172). What defines the atmospheric quality, is what it feels like to be in a space as a holistic experience. Like in theatre, scenography helps to create a sensory experience by using lighting, materiality, etc. However, more precisely scenography is understood as the art of staging, since it “... identifies the main contemporary purpose for the production of atmospheres: the stage set is itself part of the staging of a drama or an opera.” (Böhme, 2009, p. 192). This approach to scenography reflects Böhme’s critique of aesthetic capitalism, where the modulation of atmospheres often take form as manipulative decorations in order to enhance consumption and entertainment (2013, p. 151). Instead an activating scenography at its best unfolds the critical potential. By engaging with the activating part of the stage itself, Böhme’s perspective resembles discussions seen e.g. in post dramatic theatre, where the scenography is not just a background decoration, but instead plays an active, independent role in the theatrical performance (Lehmann, 2006). Understanding the staging of atmosphere as a performative dimension in itself resonates with views in organization studies, that consider aesthetics and space an active force rather than a neutral or decorative background (O’Doherty, 2008; Beyes and Steyaert, 2011). For example, this implies approaching color not just as decoration, but seeing it as a technology of organizing, that intervenes in organizational behavior and transforms the embodied perceptions (Beyes, 2017, p. 1478).
- 10 When the stage itself becomes an active part of the performance, the staging of atmospheres also blurs the lines between perception and production. Atmospheres are simultaneously a condition and being conditioned (Anderson and Ash, 2015, p. 35). The blur of perception and production is what characterizes atmospheres as volatile and constantly changing. This dynamic stems from the in-between constitution of atmospheres as they emanate in the interaction between humans and their environment (Böhme, 1995, p. 23). Consequently, this relational dynamic makes atmospheres hard to define as a classical object and makes them analytically difficult to grasp (Böhme 1995, p.155; Michels, 2015, p. 255). For Böhme, engaging with the production side therefore presents an analytical advantage, since it allows a certain “rational access” to the intangible (Böhme, 2009, p. 188). This argument leads to the assumption that architects, designers and scenographers hold “control” over their designs, which implies an ethical responsibility towards the felt meanings and experiences created (Böhme, 2013, p. 173). This reflects how the intended modulation of experiences are seen to be closely related with power structures and affective manipulation (Böhme, 1995, p. 18), which resonates with critical views on how organizations ‘stage’ power and affective relations in their spatio-aesthetic arrangements (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; O’Doherty, 2008; Beyes and Steyaert, 2011).
- 11 For Böhme, scenography means creating holistic affective compositions through the manipulation of material conditions, things, sound and light (Böhme, 2013, p. 3). This

understanding builds on Wöllflin's seminal work on the relation between architecture and embodied experience, where attention is paid to the type of attunement obtained rather than physical properties of the scenographic composition (Böhme, 2013, p. 116). For example, lighting choices around degrees of "brightness" put an emphasis on the human scale of experience by emphasizing embodied intimacy, affective relations and immersive experiences, whereas a functional approach to light seeks to promote oversight and control. Similarly, both sound and color affect the way materials "talk" to us, by, for example, providing rhythm as an embodied spatial sensation, by being radiant, shiny and so on (Böhme, 2013, p. 78). This stands in contrast to the modernist legacy, where the dominance of white, functional lighting and quantifiable space has been socio-politically linked to a (modernist) ideal of order, cleanliness and control (Connellan, 2012, p. 66; Pallasmaa, 2014, p. 35).

- 12 While Böhme's approach to scenography acknowledges the affective and dynamic qualities in the organization of experience, current discussions on "expanded scenography" have taken the understanding of scenographic capacities further by articulating the agential capacity of materials, such as wind, water etc. (McKinney and Palmer, 2017, p. 12). This opens the potential for embracing a 'less controllable' design that challenges the assumption of a 'rational access' to the intangible, as argued by Böhme, in favour of the immersive quality of scenography and space as presented in contemporary theatre (White, 2012; McKinney and Palmer, 2017) and organizational aesthetics (Beyes, 2016; O'Doherty, 2008). On a general note, these discussions foreground an approach to space that moves away from representational space towards a space of presence and affective dynamics. In the realm of immersive theatre, the integration of the spectator through the immersive quality of the scenography seeks to advance an involving and participatory experience (Home-Cook, 2015, p. 134) in keeping with the move away from textual limitations in search of a greater integration of spectators in the performance identified by Lehmann as characteristic of "post-dramatic" theatre (Lehmann, 2006). Although Böhme acknowledges the importance of action in creating atmospheric spaces and experiences, he nonetheless engages only elusively with how scenography actually makes people move. Böhme's approach to scenography has been said to assume a resting individual and an inactive human body (Kamleither, 2009, p. 3; Bille and Simonsen, 2019, p. 10) or that the role played by the participating spectators is at least sparsely discussed (Home-Cook, 2015, p. 161). For some, this has amounted in a critic of Böhme as having a conventional approach to scenography and architecture without attention to the practical use (Kamleither, 2009, p. 3).
- 13 Accordingly, turning towards immersive theatre helps advance a scenography that more explicitly engages with movement and participation (White, 2012; Home-Cook, 2015, p. 134). In order to achieve a moving, immersive quality, the scenography lays out different spatial strategies for movement and interaction (White, 2012, p. 229). These spatial strategies may include ways to walk around, touching things and interacting with performers, which should spur participants to create their own narratives as well as promote an openness towards surprises as they happen when moving through sites and situations. The drama happens as spectators move through and are moved by the theatrical performance in its totality. Rather than scripted plots the scenography exposes parallel worlds and potentialities through the participants active engagement and movement. Considering such spatial strategies in the staging atmospheres offers an elaboration of Böhme's linking of politics and aesthetics by showing how movement

and action can actually be articulated by design. In this sense, scenography constitutes the theatricalization of life itself (Böhme, 2009, p. 192), implying that the political itself involves the staging of experiences in the constitution and modulation of values in relations between citizens. As such, Böhme's new humanism resonates with Jacques Rancière's argument for the emancipated spectator by (re-)articulating the role of the spectator and the audience from aesthetically and politically passive to active (2009). Yet, despite acknowledging that staging atmospheres consists in a co-production of the relationality between humans and their environment, Böhme pays little attention to how the organization of the social happens (Julmi, 2017; Bille and Simonsen, 2019, p. 10). Turning towards discussions on relationality inside contemporary theatre reveals more adroit ways to address and unfold the social (re)organization of relations (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 58; McKinney and Palmer, 2017, p. 8). Emphasizing relationality addresses how the scenography organizes the intersubjective and social by building relations, rather than highlighting the individual aesthetic experience of a staged event (McKinney and Palmer, 2017, p. 8). This has led to scenographic strategies that inform the co-presence of actor and spectator, where focus is put on changing the roles between spectator and performer (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 62). Accordingly, the scenography facilitates a continuous transformation of the subject-object positions as a way to disrupt power relations and fixed orders. This changing of roles also constitutes of a continuous feed-back loop defining a disruptive processual event, which lets the aesthetic make the political explicit (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 77). These contemporary developments challenge Böhme's consensus-oriented and stability-seeking apprehension of atmospheres, where the disintegration of atmospheres is to be avoided for the sake of reciprocal trust as key to the (common) well-being (Böhme, 2013, p. 32.). In this respect, contemporary theatre addresses another social dynamic of scenography and how it contributes to (re)organizing the social and power relations, which adds to understanding of the scenographic potential outlined by Böhme.

- 14 While Böhme's approach to scenography as the art of staging atmospheres (Böhme, 2009) contributes to apprehending how experiences can be staged and partake in modulating socio-political relations through sensory perception, discussions in contemporary theatre disclose Böhme's tendency towards a more conventional focus. This tendency may on the one hand be explained through a difference in the understanding of the critico-political intension of scenography. On the other hand, it reflects Brejzek's (2017, p. 64) point that scenography and architecture traditionally tend to focus respectively on either the ephemeral or the durable. Although Böhme does not distinguish between the two, he generally refers to architectural practices when talking about scenography, which might explain a certain preference for stability. In comparison, recent discussions in theatre studies on scenography have suggested engagement with an 'expanded' scenography 'as a mode of encounter' (McKinney and Palmer, 2017, p. 2) or seeing scenography as a performative event (Fischer-Lichte, 2019) in order to allow for disruption and difference. Putting movement, disruption and non-human agency at the forefront implies that the scenography articulates the changing rather than the stable and controllable nature of atmospheric patterns.

Empirically exploring public atmospheres

- 15 While the previous section addressed a theoretical approach to staging atmospheres and what dimensions it entails, this section will explore empirically how a public organization has engaged in the staging of atmospheres that put the citizen first. The aim of this empirical analysis is to illustrate how a public organization stages atmosphere by exploring the scenography in use.
- 16 Empirical approaches to atmosphere to date, do not build on a common methodology or method (Bille, Bjerregaard and Flohr Sørensen, 2015; Michels, 2015; Pink, Leder Mackley and Moroşanu, 2014). Some of the main methodological differences reflect a distinction between dualist and non-dualist conceptions of atmosphere (Julmi, 2017). This research builds on a non-dualist approach that acknowledges the relational dynamic inherent in the notion of atmosphere (Julmi, 2017; Böhme, 1995; Michels, 2015). It draws inspiration from methods that account for the relational, the spatio-material and the affective, that involve considering the researcher as embodying and reflexively engaging in the research process (Michels, 2015, p. 257; Beyes and Steyaert, 2011; Pink, Leder Mackley and Moroşanu, 2014, p. 362; Warren, 2008).
- 17 Analytically, the research draws on Michels' outline for researching atmospheres, which consists in exploring the processes of their composition (2015). Analyzing the composition of atmospheres addresses three affective dimensions, which involves focusing on the material composition, focusing on the sensual capacity of the human body and finally reflecting on the (re)production of patterns. Focusing on the material composition means addressing the aesthetic modulation, such as the composition of light, color, materials, etc. Focusing on the sensual capacities means attending to how sensing bodies are affected by the scenography and the modulated environments. In this study, this both accounts for how the researcher and the participants resonated with the scenography in order to address the immersive and affective qualities of the design. Finally, the (re)production of patterns addresses how atmospheres can be both stable and changing, which in this study addresses the multiplicity of atmospheres at play and how they affect the everyday practices of the organization. This dimension also explores how the staging of atmospheres partakes in shaping (new) patterns of socio-political order and potentially alters the relation between citizen and public organization. Analyzing the three dimensions is a way to explore how public organizations approach the staging of citizen experiences and provides an illustration of the potential implications for thinking (public) organization aesthetically.
- 18 The empirical material was generated by ethnographic fieldwork in a Danish municipality (Furesø) with approximately 300 employees as the organization moved into re-designed facilities. The actual move happened in September 2017 after the organization had been physically divided into two main locations for two years. The move of the organization was followed from January until December 2017. This paper studies only the inhabitation of the new facilities, and specifically how a newly designed atrium was taken into use in the new joint office building. The office building was re-designed with an overall ambition to put citizens at center stage and as a way to enhance the organization's internal collaboration. The atrium has been chosen for this study, firstly due to an explicit focus on designing an atmosphere that would put the citizen at the center. Secondly, the atrium is the space where the everyday interactions between citizens and the public organization happen. Finally, the organization itself

describes the atrium as a wish to facilitate the meeting with the citizen by promoting an experience of openness and professionalism. Overall the scenography of the atrium suggests an experience that stands in contrast to the more classical representational spaces often associated with public organizations.

- 19 The empirical material emerges from participant observations and interviews. The participant observations in the atrium were done in the week of the move and was followed up by a four-week period of full-day observations and interviewing. Due to the move, both the researcher and employees' aesthetic and embodied experiences were intensified in the sense that old routines and habits were disrupted on many levels, e.g. the sensory awareness of new routines, lighting, smells and sounds was heightened. As such, the move enhanced the possibility of engaging intensively with the participants experiences and ways of life (Pink, 2012, p. 53), but may therefore also have enforced more distinct experiences. The observations were documented in field notes (FN), interview transcripts (IT) and photos. The photos were understood as invitations to empathetically relate to the sensory moment of the space, place and movement (Pink, 2012; Warren, 2008), and where considered as 'an index of the intensity and consistency of attending to and through the everyday life' (Latham and McCormack, 2009, p. 256). The photos used in the article were taken by the researcher.
- 20 The following section shows how atmospheres have been staged in the public organization by examining the scenography of the atrium: firstly, looking at the material composition, second, the sensing capacities of the body and lastly, how the two take part in producing atmospheric patterns of socio-political order.
- 21 According to the spatial program of the architects (Furesoe Municipality, 2017, p. 26), one aim of the atrium was to transform the classical reception and waiting room into a citizen square. The ambition underlines a shift in both functionality and feel of the atrium from a passive to an active experience. To achieve the feeling of a citizen square, the composition of materials and light is central (see figure 1). Emphasis was put on creating a bright and lively space, that was experienced as open and welcoming, while also handling issues of security and functional requirements.

Figure 1: View of the atrium (from the public entrance end) and plan drawing of the atrium

Source: own photo and own plan drawing. Copyright: Lydia Jørgensen

- 22 The atrium is made up of wooden side panels partly interrupted by white cubicles and covered by a glass ceiling. The cubicles contain meeting rooms and on the top are small balconies that can be accessed from the first floor (only by employees). On the first floor, windows surround the atrium, providing lighting to the office spaces. The backstage office spaces are closed off to the public due to security and confidentiality reasons. Several seating arrangements, made of green and blue felt, are scattered throughout the atrium. High back rests divide the seating into small intimate niches and the felt sustains a tactile experience. Three green trees populate the space. The wooden panels, the trees and the colored felt balance the white floor with a warm, tactile sensation and offers the triangular space a rhythmic interruption. The glass ceiling allows natural lighting to dominate, continuously varying the brightness and temperature (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Natural light in the atrium (far end)

Source: own photo. Copyright: Lydia Jørgensen

- 23 Figure 2 invites a sensation of how the natural lighting combined with the trees and materialities assist the play of brightness, shadows and temperature, opening for variation in the sensory and spatial experience. My own embodied experience of the atrium over time displayed varying sensations depending on the time of day, the light, the heat and the number of other people present. At times I got a sensation of being in either a (public) green house or in an Italian square. Being in the position of an 'outsider' myself, the total experience of brightness, materials, temperature and sound gave me a sense of openness, ease and being welcome. This experience was generally repeated by employees and visiting citizens. One citizen described his experience by pinpointing "You feel very welcome.. The colors are nice, how they mix and fold together." (FN. 17.11.17), adding further how the calm sound gave a feeling of privacy

and being shielded. As such the citizen's experience demonstrates how the scenography fosters both a sense of openness and intimacy while being in a public space, which contrasts with the experience of traditional waiting rooms dominated by institutional control.

- 24 As a scenographic composition of materials the atrium creates a holistic sensory experience. The natural lighting and trees especially modulate the aesthetic experience of being in a square and generate a welcoming sensation by allowing for brightness and shadows (Böhme, 2013, p. 91). Indeed, the material composition of the atrium contributes to staging a more humanized organizational atmospheres, as described by Böhme, by taking a user's perspective and modulating the perceptual relation between human and environment. While the use of trees nurtures the sensation of being in a public square, it however, also adds a touch of non-human agency into the scenographic composition.
- 25 Another central ambition of the atrium design was to engage both citizens and employees actively. This reflects how an atmospheric scenography contains a spatially engaging force building on bodily presence, movement and the affective qualities of the material composition. The atrium clearly disrupts the idea of a representational and geometrical space due to its multi-directionality, which is obtained by the use of cubicles, the design components and the balconies. The natural lighting and its continuously changing brightness further advances a sense of rhythm in the space. I noticed myself that the scenography made it easy to move around without feeling either exposed or surveilled. Without much thought the seating arrangements drew me in and created small pockets of privacy that changed my rhythm and movement. When employees I knew discovered me, and I them, we exchanged short pleasant greetings, which momentarily disrupted their pace and my 'privacy'. Sometimes these interruptions even altered the whole situation as they lead into a conversation or a shift in positions. That the scenography created a moving and active space was distinctly noted by one of the employees, who was part of organizing the relocation:
- I've been surprised by how much the Atrium is actually used... when you sit at the windows (on the first floor) and look down at the Atrium, you notice how many things are actually used during the day. Suddenly two colleagues meet, start talking and then they actually sit down on the couch...and talk. And you also start to see the citizens now, that come in and walk around, and some of them also grab a cup of coffee. Makes you think 'uh, they have discovered that there is coffee '... I think it's nice to see that it's not just a big empty space down there, but that something is actually happening (IT, 8.11.17)
- 26 While the atrium has a functional character, the spatial strategies of the design and the materials nurture a dynamic and engaging atmosphere. The human body easily resonated with the space as the activities and movements of the employees and citizens bore witness to. In that sense, the atrium shows how staged atmospheres 'talk' back in a sensory way through the affective and immersive forces of the scenography in terms of color, rhythm, lightning and so on.
- 27 Another key spatial strategy that invites movement in the atrium is the placement of the reception. Looking at the reception (figure 3) it is placed on the axis of the two public entrances partly covered by a lower ceiling, which also defines the edge of the main atrium space.

Figure 3: Reception and art exhibition (view from the atrium space)

Source: Own photo. Copyright: Lydia Jørgensen

- 28 The placement of the reception and its dimension makes it fade into the spatial totality, becoming less dominant. This underlines the multi-directional quality of the atrium, where the main orientation is no longer the reception as the main reference point, which in a traditional bureaucratic space would promote a hierarchical power relation. Instead, the spatial sensation itself and its multi-directionality advances the feel of being in a square rather than waiting room. The scenography transforms the reception from a gatekeeper function into a greeting or meeting point, that spatially dissolves classical hierarchical power relations between citizen and public organization. Spatially decentering the reception promotes a threshold experience rather than a border experience, that could potentially open for the unforeseen, since other interactions and events are happening simultaneously (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 306). On a small scale, the unforeseen was already introduced by constantly changing art exhibitions displayed next to the reception (Ill. 3 – white pedestals). Although acknowledging the functionality of the reception to have a certain gatekeeper function e.g. regarding who could access the back stage offices, on the level of the scenography the decentering of the reception clearly tones down the dominance and opens for alternative movements to develop and dynamics to happen such as having citizens hang out drinking a coffee.
- 29 The immersive power of the atrium in particular occurred to me, when the sunlight, the temperature, the buzz of activity and people hugging reminded me of Italy and hanging out in the local square. In these moments, I would briefly forget myself and my reason for being there. My experience of the immersive quality of the atrium was echoed, when the receptionist told me that employees often had to be ‘told’ how to talk, because they would forget that they were in a public space. One of the middle managers added to the immersive experience by saying “I think that’s where (the

atrium) you can really feel and, I really feel, at home.” (IT, 8.11.17). Evidently these experiences underline how the immersive qualities builds on bodily presence as a sense of “being-here” (Böhme, 2003, p. 4). The atmospheric experience exhibits how the immersion may dissolve a distinct line between private and public. At the same time, the immersive quality also indicates the power of staged atmospheres in terms of manipulation, since the critical (self-)awareness gives way to the sensory immersion.

- 30 While the scenography and the spatial strategies of the atrium mainly created an immersive sense of well-being, the scenography also invited individual narratives, surprises and disruption. One employee described how a situation occurred that made her think about the organizational behavior. She explained that, upon exiting one of the meeting rooms adjacent to the atrium, she noticed how a couple of colleagues were hanging out in a sofa and having a break:

And they just sit there for a short break, talk a bit, eat their fruit... It was just a bit cozy, I thought, because it is such a contrast to what I experience in my own department... I thought, that was also an option... to use it (the atrium) like that... (IT, 6.11.2017).

- 31 While the surprising experience promoted a feeling of coziness it also triggered a change of perspective on both personal and organizational behavior, exposing how the scenography can advance parallel worlds and potentialities (see White, 2012). By being spurred to critically reflect upon the employee’s own organizational reality, the situation pinpoints how sensory experiences are at play and contribute to apprehending the aesthetic dimensions of organizing.
- 32 As the atrium illustrates, by modulating aesthetic experiences the staging of atmospheres is a way to create spaces of movement and engagement. While the current analysis shows a scenography that predominantly contributes to a sense of well-being, it also touches upon the transformative potential promoted by changes in perspective (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 305). Presenting a space favoring the immersive qualities of space and displaying a scenography that invites for movement, exploration and participation the atrium sustains a user’s perspective. This perspective opens for an experience of possibility (Böhme, 2003, p. 5.), which extends beyond the moment and into the larger organizational context.
- 33 While aiming at making the atrium an engaging space, the broader ambition noted in the architect’s spatial program (Furesoe Municipality, 2017, p. 26), was to establish an atmosphere of strong co-creating communities across citizens and professionals. This indicated how the scenography was meant to (re)organize the relations between the municipality and its ‘audience’. The ambition entailed a move away from the traditionally distanced and instrumental bureaucratic relation, where the citizen is understood as a client or consumer. By putting the citizen first, the experience of classical hierarchical (and spatial) power structures were to be transformed as already manifested, e.g. in the decentered reception.
- 34 The ability of the scenography to alter traditional power-relations and hierarchies became evident to me while observing people entering and moving around in the atrium. The multitude and pace with which different people would pass through the atrium, as in a public square, exposed a blurring of who was a citizen, a politician, a manager or employee. Who was visiting out of pure curiosity, who came for the renewal of a license, who was a researcher, who had had a meeting concerning their

social benefits and who were colleagues having a break? My own presence added to the blur of who was who, where intentions and purposes were not (immediately) revealed.

- 35 The scenography facilitates co-existing scenes to take place, which means one scene will indirectly serve as a back ground or ‘audience’ to other scenes being played out. The movement and many simultaneous scenes happening, constantly switches the positions of ‘actor’ and ‘spectator’. In that respect, all participants take part in (re)producing the atmosphere(s) of the atrium. With the blur, the traditional distinctions between public and private, the citizen and public officials are, at least momentarily, dissolved. Different patterns of atmospheric compositions emerge that resonate with the sensing body and provide a different experience of the relation between the citizen and the public organization. In this sense, the constantly changing roles contribute to letting the aesthetic make the political explicit (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 77). In comparison with its earlier form, the scenography assisted in changing and (re)-organizing relations, as elaborated by a middle manager:

...I also know from my employees, that it (the atrium) means something for the meetings they have with the citizens. It is just so much nicer to be able to invite them here... You can say that we represent the municipality and a workplace, so, after all, it (the atrium) defines what you invite into, what kind of collaboration and what the framework for the collaboration is. (IT, 8.11.17).

- 36 With the atrium facilitating an altered experience and new ways of encountering the citizen the opportunity for different professional and collaborative relations was enabled. In that respect the scenography sustains a reframing of the relation between organization and citizens that aids employees in acting out a citizen-oriented approach in the everyday interactions. Another example of how the atrium facilitated altered relations with the citizens was described by an employee working with citizens with social issues, who explained:

...we also talk about the art (in the atrium)... That is also an icebreaker. We had a parent visiting, that a colleague and I had to talk to, and it was pleasant, because we could begin with that (the art). Since you go down in energy, right!. Then, I speak a bit about the building, that's a way to small talk into each other. Making yourself more human in that way. (IT, 10.11.17).

- 37 Contrary to the case of Daniel Blake, the employee strived to humanize the relation with the citizen. Further, the scenography of the atrium acted as an active part in creating a trustful relation by inciting small talk. This further re-iterates Böhme's point, that small talk gives atmospheres their base-tone of human trust (Böhme, 2013, p. 38). Tracing the movements and practices of the employees as well as citizens unfolds how material composition and the sensed atmospheres are (re)produced in atmospheric patterns.
- 38 For organizations in the public sector, the staged atmospheric experiences of the atrium recasts how the staging of experiences is more than setting up a nice background decoration. Firstly, it has relevance regarding the relation to the citizen by engaging ‘the spectator’ in collaborative efforts and co-creating communities. Secondly, the staging of atmospheres entails a rethinking of organization in the way everyday practices evolve and impact the political and social order. In that sense, the atrium reflects a scenography as a real theatricalization of life (Böhme, 2009, p. 192), where the political and social is reflected in the everyday practices and organizing. On the one hand this displays a move away from the representational and instrumental relation with the citizen towards emphasizing the aesthetic experience by modulating

everyday interactions and the environment. On the other hand, taking an organizational perspective on atmospheres stresses how their staging impacts on rethinking organization by acknowledging its aesthetic nature and how it influences work practices, including ways of organizing and thinking potentialities. In that sense, the atrium illustrates the theatricality of organizational atmospheres, where atmosphere and organization intertwine, supported by a scenographic orchestration.

- 39 One critical aspect in the study, though, was that no situations of direct conflict or unease in the atrium were experienced. This led to an experience of the atrium as predominantly a space of well-being and stability. The scenography largely seemed to echo the tradition of Danish welfare state in building on consensus and sameness, very much in line with Böhme's ambitions and Habermas' idea of deliberative democracy (1997). However, considering how contemporary theatre often works with disruptive and uneasy aesthetic experiences provides an interesting trajectory for addressing further the transformative potential of scenography, and what it would imply for working with difference and otherness in the scenographic staging of organizational atmospheres.

Conclusion

- 40 By focusing on how the staging of atmospheres in public organizations can be understood as a way of modulating lived experience, this paper provides insights into how organizations can manage and modulate atmospheres and as a result contributes to discussions in organization studies on (re)thinking organization as an aesthetic and atmospheric phenomenon (Beyes, 2016; Michels and Steyaert, 2017; Borch, 2009). Having presented how a Danish municipality has designed an atrium space with the explicit intent to put the citizen first, serves as an illustration of how public organizations engage in staging citizen experiences as a response to the malaise of previous instrumental and dehumanized relations. By drawing on Böhme's notion of atmosphere (1995) as the art of staging, the paper has shown how the interplay between material composition and bodily capacities can result in modes of atmospheric production. The study offers an understanding of how experiences may be managed and engineered by showing what a scenography does and how it works, and in particular how its affective power impacts social and political organizing.
- 41 Concerning the notion of organizational atmosphere, the paper presents how organization and atmospheres intertwine, underlining the blurring of aesthetic reception and production. Accordingly, engaging with the staging of atmospheres entails more than modulating the customer or citizen experiences, but also addresses how organizations are shaped and shape affective encounters as they happen in everyday practices. The interaction between human bodies and the designed environment reveals how atmospheric patterns can be produced, stabilized or are changing, which adds alternative perspectives on how organizations work and are experienced.
- 42 Reflecting on Böhme's point that scenography mirrors the theatricalization of everyday life (2009) has been a way to approach the enhanced societal focus on experiential value and the ongoing aesthetization of everyday spaces and practices. Further, the paper has shown how contemporary theatre offers an opportunity to develop insights and inspirations, that provide a possibility to elaborate practical and critical

perspectives on what scenography affords in terms of affective, social and political dynamics. As the paper shows, insights from contemporary theatre expands Böhme's understanding of scenography and some of the critiques of his approach are met. More essential, however, is a key contrast in the critical and political dimension of aesthetics. While Böhme seeks an aesthetic stability ultimately satisfying emancipation and well-being (Böhme, 1995, p. 42), discussions in contemporary theatre rather focus on an aesthetic experience of instability, affective destabilization and transformation (Fischer-Lichte, 2019, p. 310; White, 2012, p. 222). Finally, engaging with scenography has shown how theatre can contribute to organization studies (Beyes and Steyaert, 2006), and in particular how the understanding of aesthetics can contribute to discussions in the field of organizational aesthetics concerning the tensions between the desire to live in a beautiful and pleasant world (that may result in a bourgeois view on organization), and a focus on 'difference, otherness and novelty' that comes with paying more attention to instability (Beyes, 2016, p. 117; Julmi, 2015, p. 82; Beyes and Steyaert, 2011, p. 52; O'Doherty's, 2008, p. 546).

- 43 Finally, a concluding reflection on the citizen is due. By attending to the staging of atmosphere in the public sector as a way to fulfill a new paradigm of putting the citizen first, the orchestration of the citizens' experience is focal. The paper has only briefly touched upon the relationship between atmospheres as a means of staging citizens experiences and discussions in areas like public governance, participatory democracy and political theory (Habermas, 1997; Revsbech, 2016; Agger and Hedensted Lund, 2017; Clarke, Newman and Westmarland, 2007). However, by addressing the staging of atmospheres in a public organization, it can be seen to complement these areas, by offering an opportunity to respond to a call to rethink institutions by emphasizing the everyday practice in order to consider the connection between legitimacy, justice and aesthetic sensibility (Ljungström, 1998, p. 22). As a result, the theatricalization of organizational atmosphere not only reflects an aesthetic approach to organization, but also re-articulates an ancient democratic relation between theatre and the citizen.

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NOTES

1. 'Theatrical' for Home-Cook implies understanding perception as necessarily unfinished and in process.

2. Although Böhme does not distinguish between architecture and scenography, which also the case this article, it should be noted that difference are observed and may have an impact (see Brejzek, 2017).

ABSTRACTS

In recent years, it has been argued that the public sector should stage citizen experiences to put the human before the system. The paper explores how a public organization stages such citizen experience in practice. In order to do that, the paper builds on Gernot Böhme's understanding of atmosphere as a scenographic practice, reflecting how aesthetic practices have become pivotal in an ongoing aesthetization process in society as an enhanced focus on experiential value. The paper engages with contemporary theatre to critically elaborate the theatricality of staging organizational atmospheres as both a social and political concern. While the paper studies how the staging of atmospheres can be theoretically understood and empirically investigated, the paper argues that the staging of organizational atmosphere contributes to thinking organization as an aesthetic phenomenon.

Ces dernières années, on a soutenu que le secteur public devrait mettre en scène des expériences citoyennes pour placer l'humain avant le système. L'article explore comment une organisation publique met une telle expérience citoyenne en pratique. Pour ce faire, l'article s'appuie sur l'approche de Gernot Böhme concernant l'atmosphère en tant que pratique scénographique. Cette approche reflète comment les pratiques esthétiques sont devenues essentielles dans un processus d'esthétisation en cours dans la société : une esthétisation qui concerne une concentration accrue sur la valeur expérientielle. L'article entre en dialogue avec le théâtre contemporain pour élaborer de manière critique la théâtralité de la mise en scène d'atmosphères organisationnelles comme une préoccupation à la fois sociale et politique. L'article ne clarifie pas seulement comment la mise en scène des atmosphères peut être théoriquement comprise et étudiée empiriquement, mais soutient également que la mise en scène de l'atmosphère organisationnelle contribue à penser l'organisation en tant que phénomène esthétique.

INDEX

Keywords: organizational atmosphere, scenography, public organization, aesthetics, experiential value

Mots-clés: atmosphère organisationnelle, scénographie, organisation publique, esthétique, valeur expérientielle

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