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### **Sub-theme 35**

**Title:** Spatializing organisational experience in historical and temporal context

#### **Abstract**

This paper is based on the assumptions of Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and Tor Hernes' processual worldview, with the objective to study the organisational space in historical context. Drawing on archival materials and semi-structured interviews, it demonstrates how empirical case, Founder's Building, has been experienced over 130 years. Specific attention is directed towards both the differing and the similar ways of experiences, and how these interplay with social norms. The case of Founder's Building is used to demonstrate the potential explanatory power of this analytical pathway.

#### **Introduction**

Two decades into the spatial turn in human geography, this turn has spread to various other fields including, increasingly, organisation studies (Warf & Arias, 2009). At the very least for critical researchers in this field, it is a truism that organisations are spatially shaped with the interactions and behaviours of members of the organisation, negotiated and mediated by their interpretations of organisational space. This explains the thriving trend in studying organisation through investigating space and the experience of space. Researchers have long suggested that organisational space

should be approached as a generative force and a social product (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012; Davies, 2000). Here, the socialising of the organisational space encourages a deeper understandings of the organisations, such as in the case of the building of Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2010) or the case of a restaurant in southeast England (Crang, 1994). It also shows the potential above the organisational level, for instance, masculine hegemony in urbanization (Lico, 2001), or how the casino as an entertainment' discourse in the Netherlands interplays with the spatial decisions (Kingma, 2008). These demonstrate the potential to understand the organisational space as a social product, and to contextualise the organisational behaviours on society level. Yet what the majority of existing studies fail to address is how organisation space evolves. This paper therefore aims to address the organisational space by introducing a historical/temporal feature, and uncovering how the organisational space is developed.

This paper nicely fits with this sub-theme in analysing an empirical case based on Lefebvrian theories within historical/temporal context. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* inspires this project as the underlying assumption. Since the English translation of Henri Lefebvre's work was introduced, it signalled the widespread of spatial turn. Lefebvre conceived space as "dynamic, dialectical and full of meanings" (Wapshott & Mallett, 2012, 72), since then, the 'empty container' assumption of space has been supplanted. His dynamic approach allows the study of organisational space as an active component experienced in everyday life. This paper is based on Lefebvre's triad, in particular, one component of the triad, representational space. Representational space is the space as it is lived; how the space is experienced and the interactions that emerge during encounters with the space and time. Lefebvre argues that representational space is "redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements, they have their source in history" (Lefebvre, 1991, 42). The reason behind my choice is that though users' experience of space is socially negotiated, it is very personal where interactions and behaviours are individualised. In order to study the organisational space within a historical/temporal context, lived space offers a more vivid picture.

This paper is organised into four sections. Firstly, I will explore more about processual worldview and the historical turn. Some discussions of the empirical case and research method will be followed. Then the discussion will move on to the case-specific materials and I will examine the Founder's building with the theories. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn.

### **A processual worldview: adding the historical turn**

A processual worldview is necessary to position spatial studies in a temporal context to understand organisation as an evolving process. Hernes' work on processual worldview is widely cited in organisation studies, and my paper is based upon it. Bakken and Hernes (2006) argued that the process view, seeing organisation as a process, was initiated by the early Greek philosophers in social science and this view has increasingly influenced organisation studies in recent years. Calling it a worldview is because it changes not just how to study the particular perspective, like the organisational space emphasised in this paper. More importantly, it represents a philosophical shift in how organisation and society should be seen and approached. This worldview challenges the mainstream belief that organisations are immobile beings. Moreover, grammatically, organisation is a noun. If it is acknowledged that organisation is a noun, then it is justifiable to understand why the majority of organisation studies approach it as a bounded system where actions and interactions happen within this system. Unlike approaching organisations as a bounded system, as Hernes (2004, 11) claimed, this process view of organisation has the advantage that a continual state of formation of the organisation and interaction can be achieved. Based on this view, not only the emergence of contexts, but also the conditions for how the organisation is formed and its evolution, can be revealed. This worldview indicates a switch from the noun to verb. This noun-verb relationship discussion initially comes from Karl Weick and forms the central understanding of the process view of organisations (Bakken and Hernes, 2006). Moreover, the process worldview

focuses on “how and why things emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time” (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas & Van de Ven, 2013: 1). We can see that the process view denotes the shifted emphasis towards temporality on organisational study. Temporality is conceptualised as an ‘active force’ (Hernes, 2014, 73) in organisation studies and among which the ongoing present is unravelled so that the overlooked forces can resurface. If situating organisational space in the process view, the assumption of organisational space as a container would be transferred to the actual process of how it is produced and evolved. I want to re-emphasise that Lefebvre’s theorisation is also based on an inherent processual worldview, and this worldview is the centre of the spatial turn. Because of the processual worldview, interpretations towards organisational space become subjective and emergent.

Once convinced the organisational space as an unfinished process, a look into the past is necessary and bears the same weight of the present/end-product space. Thus historical turn is introduced to study the past of the organisational space. Historical turn is defined in the organisational context as a historical perspective that falsifies the trans-historical assumption (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004; Barrett and Srivastva, 1991). The historical turn represents a transformation in organisational studies and it has three principal implications for organisational researchers who would adopt a historical perspective. The first implication is that the emphasis should be shifted from science to society in parallel with the linguistic turn. Similar to the linguistic turn, historical turn is also a part of the wide transformation in the society. The second implication is that the history is beyond the role as context or as a competitive advantage to be exploited and managed. The final one is the ‘revival of narrative’ that narratives have greater reflections, which moves the spatial study from holistic to an individualised perspective. (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004, 331-332). Just as stressed by Clark and Rowlinson (2004: 334), the historical turn revitalises the organisational history in a way that “it can teach us to interpret existing organisational structures not as determined by laws, but as the result of decisions in past choice opportunities”. This assumption enables this paper to approach the empirical case from a holistic perspective where both the past evolving spatialization process and the present evolved space are analysed.

Historical turn has another contribution to make: history is alive in the present rather than history determining the present (Barrett and Srivastva, 1991,240). By adopting this orientation, the inquiry into organisational space is conducted from the perspectives of those who live the space rather than treating histories as background. This is achieved through the revival of the narrative as mentioned above; it symbolises the emphasis of the individual experiences, memories. What implications does this revival of narrative have in this spatial study? The answer is that in this paper spatiality is believed to be narratively constructed: it resides in the detailed stories of people. Decker (2014) argued that interpretations towards space depend on the shared memory of people. This understanding brings the concept of historicity into the field, suggested by Dilthey (1977) as everything and activity bears the stamp of historicity. That is, although history can be viewed as a product of the past, all the actions and interactions will carry the past within them. Historicity is a concept that emphasises how contexts evolve and influence the present status, which indicates its potential in researching the way organisational space changes and evolves. Hernes (2004, 51) stressed that historicity is based on the assumption that people, events and interactions would create imprints and these imprints will remain over time, which might impact on the present situation. That is, the current organisational space embodies the histories of their history. By employing the concept of historicity, the significance of the history of organisational space will be revealed.

The most useful and relevant nature of historicity is that it concerns the ongoing production of pasts and presents, where histories are no longer treated as background or context. This belief has attempted to provide alternative reading of history apart from historicism. For instance, the presence and use of a space is formed by the histories and habituations, but conversely and simultaneously, the present will reform the histories. Moreover, Elden (2004, 95) argued that Lefebvre emphasised the historicity of space and spatial experience. Lefebvre's work is a project of spatial history, where space is a tool for the analysis. By applying Lefebvrian orientation into studying history, it is possible to avoid the risk to treat histories as objective. In contrast, Rowlinson, Hassard and Decker (2014) have argued that the history of organisation is made and remade in order to present others from creating adversarial histories. Therefore, the history of a specific organisation can be locked into grand narratives of nations and capitalism. For instance, Anteby and Molnar

(2012) discovered how an aircraft engine manufacturer reinforced corporate identity in collective memory through internal bulletins. However, this is highly implicit and hidden if only specific moments are researched. Therefore, the introduction of historicity viewing histories in retrospect, as well as in the present circumstances, is necessary.

### **Research method: case background**

Founder's Building, the original building of Royal Holloway College, University of London<sup>1</sup> is the empirical case for this paper. The RHUL was founded by Thomas Holloway as a women's college. Founder's Building was designed by William Henry Crossland, and was inspired by the Chateau de Chambord in the Loire Valley, in France. Founder's Building is an eye-catching building and is famous for its luxurious and ornate decorations. The 'Royal' was endowed after the opening by Her Majesty Queen Victoria in 1886. The RHUL remained a women's college until 1945, when the first male postgraduate was admitted, and in 1965 the college became co-educational. At present Founder's Building is still an important site for campus life and it houses students residents, academic and administrative staff.

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviated as RHUL in this paper. RHUL was formerly known as Royal Holloway College, abbreviated as RHC.



Image 1: South Quadrangle of the Founder's Building

Founder's Building vividly witnesses every important moments of RHUL and evolution of higher education in UK. Every shifts happened in the past or happening in the present have inscribed on the Founder's building: on its stones, on its sculptures, on its temperament, and its occupants. In order to help the reader understand Founder's Building, it is worthwhile combing through the key moments that Founder's Building witnessed in the past and still witnesses at present, and this will also clarify recurrent nomenclatures in the following analysis and discussion of the Founder's Building. For instance, to take an example of 'maids', together with other supporting staff, like butlers, they formed an important group of occupants in Founder's Building for a long time. Students were encouraged to bring their maids was written in the early documents of the RHC, and this tradition lasted for more than 60 years until World War II. This written college policy and tradition did not come from nowhere; it reflected the social trend of how higher education should operate and an understanding of the upper to middle class lifestyle. This envisaged lifestyle then created other similar traditions, such as afternoon tea parties, and dances parties in the Picture Gallery. Among them, family system was one tradition that seems like vanished completely, yet it is still present but in an appropriated way. The family system in the College was effectuated in the conception stage, and it lasted for more than 60 years until 1950.

Hence, the family system was one of the traditions that contributed to college life dramatically. Based on reminiscences of students and staff's <sup>2</sup>, the family system was introduced when the college was opened in 1886, and since then, every new student would be arranged in a family at the beginning of the first term and this family group would last for three years. The purpose was to reproduce a domestic life similar to that which they experienced at home. This family system is now seen as outdated and irrelevant to college life, however, if scrutinised more closely, I find that the way RHUL promotes the value of 'community' somehow shares similarities. For instance, similar to how the enclosed and safe family was advertised in the prospectus in the 1940s, nothing changed in the 2017 prospectus, where the 'close-knit community' is strongly stressed. What is important here is how Founder's Building remains as central in these descriptions of family or community culture. Therefore, this case further illustrates the potential of this study and how analysis of Founder's Building can help understand the organisation and society in general.

### **Research method: a twin-track strategy**

A twin-track strategy was adopted and it included the archival sources for the previous occupants and the interviewing for the present experience. Archival sources attempt to uncover how Founder's Building was experienced over time; interviewing aims to discover how the current users experience this inherited space. However, calling it 'twin-track' is not to say that the archive work and interviewing are two stand-alone components, but instead, they are mutually constituted. Although this research is designed in a way that the collection of archival materials will inspire the interviewing questions, the reading of the interviewing transcripts will also lead to new themes to discover in the archive. The first scenario, how analysis of the archive materials inspiring the interviewing questions, was prominent in this study. For instance, when I

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<sup>2</sup> RHC RF/132/3, Miss Burt, 1939-1941;

read through the reminiscences describing how previous students and staff lived and socialised in the Founder's Building, I discovered that students and staff groups had two opposite attitudes towards the level of proximity in the building. To put it simply, at that time period of cohabitation, for students, Founder's Building was a home-like space, which made students feel safe; but for staff who lived in the same corridor as the students felt Founder's Building was uncomfortable because it was too homelike for working. When I read these different stories and feelings, I thought it would be interesting to ask current occupants how they feel about the level of proximity at present. Of course, no staff actually live in the Founder's Building anymore, however, they still share this building with lots of students. This is just one case demonstrating how dynamic this twin-track strategy could be, and similar examples emerged from analysing of the archive. Indeed, the deeper I dug into the archive, the more inspirations I had for what questions to ask. The second scenario, the interviewing materials leading to the discovery of new themes in the archive, was also evident in this study. Here is one case: during the interviewing, both staff and students described their feelings or interactions with the Picture Gallery or the Chapel as if they are not part of the Founder's Building, which surprised me because this isolation was not found in the archive. Therefore, this encouraged me to return to the archive to dig further to find the possible answer, and this search process actually enabled to look into the social activities of RHUL within the changing wider social trend and helped me to further contextualise this study. To summarise, this interactive twin-track strategy is not only a tool for collecting empirical materials, but also more importantly, it works well in fulfilling my assumption of the organisational space as a socially constructed process.

The empirical evidence was collected from RHUL Archive and interviewing with the current occupants of Founder's Building. The archival material consisted of reminiscences of the alumni, individual journals and diaries and interview transcripts in RHUL Archive. The timeframe of these reminiscences and recollections range from the opening of RHUL to the 1980s, which was a good coverage. Although the earliest material in the archive dates back to the 1880s, the formal attempt to start collecting and preserving materials did not start until 1948, and it was not until 1971 that a temporary archivist was appointed. Before that, the archive sub-committee was

responsible for the collection of the relevant materials.<sup>3</sup> The archive and the reading rooms are located in the Founder's Library, which locates in the South Tower of the Founder's Building. The development of the archive accelerated in the 1980s, and one reason was believed to be a preparation for the upcoming merger with the Bedford College in 1985. Centenary celebrations for RHUL also encouraged the cataloguing work and research work of the archive. For instance, most of the available reminiscences came from Caroline Bingham's research, with a purpose to write a centenary book for the RHUL. Hence, the timespan of reminiscences and interview transcripts in the archive ranges from 1908 to 1985. All of the archive materials were analysed based on the assumption suggested by Cook and Schwartz (2002: 172), that the archive site is an "active sites where social power is negotiated, contested, confirmed". Hence the aim is not merely attempting to understand what the materials are, but to draw attention to how they are produced, used and communicated. That is to say, it is essential to uncover the meanings the owners try to convey. What is central here is regarding the archive materials as subjective, for instance, to take an example of the reminiscences, many alumni who wrote fondly recollect the beauty of the grounds of the Founder's Building, complete with wisteria in the quadrangles and rambling roses on the balustrade. One alumna, who studied in the mid-1940s, recalled the beauty in a nostalgic way, "I was saddened when I revisited college to see that the rambling roses which used to grow on the balustrade all-round the college were no longer there. In my day there was an unwritten custom, handed on from year to year, that third year students were allowed to cut one good rose". In this alumna's reminiscence, the major claim was that she lived in a glorious time that could not be brought back, therefore, she only picked the better bits of the past, in this case, the rambling roses, to re-emphasise 'past is better'.<sup>4</sup> This type of nostalgic narrative is sentimental nostalgia, where the past is presented with rose-coloured glasses. This is not to suggest that the analytical value of stories written with rose-coloured glasses should be downplayed, but instead, it invites more critical reflections by acknowledging the inherent nostalgia, which enables to unravel the claims they want to make. Perhaps just as Lundgren (2010) argued, all kinds of reminiscences of the aged are more prone to the nostalgic reflections.

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<sup>3</sup> These come from a document named 'Timeline about archives', which was written by one of the record archivists in 2008, and this document recorded the set-up and development of the College Archive in RHUL.

<sup>4</sup> RHC RF/132/22, 1944-1947, Jeanne Brown

Interviewing materials supplemented the archival materials. I interviewed 47 people in total: 28 academic staff, 11 students, and 8 administrative staff, who worked in Founder's Building. Like my assumption of the archive materials, I regarded all of the empirical evidence collected from the interviewing stage as subjective to interpretations, and moreover, I took the view of interviewing as an interactive process (Denzin, 2001; Cassell, 2005). As an interactive process, the meanings of the evidence were co-constructed by myself as researcher and the interviews collaboratively. That means, during the process of interviewing, both the interviewees and I made sense of and interpreted the process. In the case of the Founder's Building, this collaboration was particularly obvious and important, for instance, the choice of the location for the interviewing is a good example to show how this worked. During the first contact with the potential interviewing participants, I made the interviewees decide which place s/he preferred to be interviewed. For the staff, academic or non-academic, most of the interviews were conducted in their offices, and only three interviews were conducted in a public space in Founder's Building, including Crossland's Café and Senior Common Room. As for the students, the locations varied; I had experience of sitting on the floor with interviewees in the corridor in the building, or being invited to look around an interviewee's room and doing the interviewing there, or sitting on the bench in the quadrangle. Instead of deciding and standardising the interviewing place for each participant, it is better for building rapport to empower them to decide their most comfortable space. Moreover, because all of them work or live in Founder's Building, all of the interviews were done in the building, and I also had the opportunity not only of asking questions, but also of observing how they interacted with the space and the building.

## Experiencing the space in temporal context: multiple interactions

Taken together the empirical evidence in a timeline of over 100 years, complexities are noticeable because personal interpretations of the Founder's Building play a major part. First of all, RHUL was originally founded and remained as a women's college for over 80 years where college life was monitored rigidly, yet many cases have indicated how users experienced and justified the appropriate behaviours individually, even with the strict regulation of the interactions with space. Yet, occupants living in Founder's Building behave based on their evaluation of social norms and college regulations rather than the written-down rules. To take just one example from the reminiscences of students in the 1940s, a maid pointed out that:

*On another night we had all been out to Staines. And the boiler house man said that he would leave the gate open, so we would get down with the light on, run up the tunnel and you could come up the tunnel on the East Side.<sup>5</sup>*

What this excerpt shows is how an occupant of Founder's Building violated the college regulations with the help of other occupants, in this case, the boiler house worker. It might seem unreasonable now for an organisation to regulate employees' schedule in terms of when to sleep and when to get up, but 50 years ago in RHC all staff, including academic and supportive staff, who resided in Founder's Building, were expected to follow the Daily Routine. In this case, the maid was supposed to be in her room no later than 10 p.m. when all of the gates were closed, yet because of the help of the boiler house man and the presence of the tunnel, she could choose to disobey the rules. However, it should be noted that this is an individual case needs carefully contextualisation. In this excerpt, 'this tunnel' denotes the tunnel underneath the Founder's Building which was built originally to separate the female residents from the male servants. Hence, this tunnel was designed and built to reinforce the separate-sphere in the college spatially. From what the maid recalled, this tunnel was sometimes used as a way to avoid the regulation of time and space. Some students

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<sup>5</sup> RHC RF/132/4

also recalled that they used the tunnel to hide male visitors, whereas ironically the opposite was intended. So the question is why opposite interactions emerged? Historicity can provide one possible explanation. The heart of historicity lies in the ongoing process of interpretations, that is, people will interpret the spatial artefacts and buildings continuously based on the personal preferences and social norms. Lefebvre (2003:130) further defined this process as the appropriation of space in the temporal context, in which users can “alter, add or subtract, superimpose their own ideas on what is provided”. An additional example may well explain process of appropriation too. As I touched upon earlier, family system was a tradition nicely built in the college life and the core of it lies in the controlled actions and behaviours of the occupants in an enclosed space. Family system was achieved through the spatial arrangements and regulations, such as meeting in each other’s rooms and sitting together in the dining hall. It was operated quite rigidly and, in fact, it was a taboo to socialise and make friends out of one’s family group. However, some<sup>6</sup> had attempted to break this tradition and this caused waves in the college. For instance, a student had experienced difficulties with both her original ‘family’ and new ‘family’ when she tried to socialise with them. Although this is insufficient to conclude that this ‘violation’ was popular at that time, it did serve as a good example of how occupants attempt to violate the temporal and spatial regulation.

Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of these stories should not be overstated, it was not until the late 1930s that similar cases of using the tunnel to avoid regulations emerged. One way to explain this might be the lack of available records. However, I am more convinced that for a long time female students and staff did not regard this separate-sphere as problematic. It should be reasserted that the notion of separate-sphere was embedded in the whole society at that time. RHUL, could by no means escape from this, indeed, safety and separate-sphere are two concepts exerting influence throughout the entire history of Founder’s Building. The first thing to clarify is that both safety and separate-sphere are socially-constructed concepts, that is, meanings of safety varied in different times. In the earlier stage, safety was understood as distant location. Yet, the choice of location in the countryside was more than for safety and protection, it was also motivated by the idealised upper-class

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<sup>6</sup> RHC RF/132/8

countryside life. After the co-educational, when the requirement of the socialising increased, the distant location was then seen as negative for the students' experience. Similar sentiment emerged when interviewed the present occupants. Both academic staff and students interpreted the distant location as inconvenient for inter-collegiate activities. Yet from the perspective of the RHUL, the distant location was reinterpreted as a tranquil lifestyle and close-knit community, and is still attached to safety. Here, the emphasis of safety has been switched to technologies, such as CCTVs(closed-circuit televisions) and swipe-card access.

The physicality of the organisational space cannot be ignored, that is, conceived and perceived space in Lefebvre's triad. It is the physicality that makes the Founder's Building as a powerful reminder of the history. The physical arrangement of furniture, for example, can make certain actions easier or harder for a specific gender to carry out. If considering the perceived or lived space, then personal decorations can be an expression of gender identities. Apart from considering the gender issue, Lefebvre's triad can also reflect the power and politics perspectives. For instance, Kingma (2008) added that while conceived space is relevant for the power issues in an organisation, lived space is particularly helpful for the analysis of alternative meanings of the organisational space. For example, unlike the majority of the interviewees, one of the staff being interviewed described his feeling about the impressiveness of the building as negative:

*I find that grandness is a bit intrusive, even now, the college, the way it is represented is hallowed, you feel you cannot lean on the wall, and you will be worried that you might spill drinks over the painting, you know, you cannot do anything, I just don't like it.*

This alternative interpretation indicates that the occupants and users of the space are not passive recipients reacting to these spatial cues, that they act based on their interpretations. These individual interpretations are complex and contradictory; lived

space is introduced based on the attempt to uncover and unravel the complexities of the lived experience in an organisational space (Watkins, 2005). Wasserman (2011: 23), argued that conceived space is the “discourse of planning and conceptualisation of space by architects and managers”; perceived space is the architectural discourse transformed into artefacts and actions and lived space is the interpretations towards the space. In particular, lived space will be influenced by conceived and perceived space. Perhaps just as Wilson (2003: 1) said, “The Victorian are still with us, because the world they created is still there”. The Founder’s Building is still there, though changed. Specifically, interpretations of the conception and perception of the Founder’s Building change along with the evolved social conditions. For instance, gender segregation was deeply ingrained in lived experience. Just to take an example of the pig-man<sup>7</sup>, who retired in 1945, he had never been inside the Founder’s Building. Of course, this was an extreme example and needs contextualisation. Unlike the servants, gardeners, or engineers, the pig-man did not work inside the Founder’s Building. This example helps to understand the stir caused when the first male postgraduates arrived in 1945:

*I was in a room one day getting ready for lunch and my next door neighbour-she came into my room and she said ‘Look, look, men!’ And there were two or three young men wearing blazers and standing around ...and they were obviously waiting to go into lunch. And we thought ‘Gosh you know. I think they must be those post graduates’.<sup>8</sup>*

As this excerpt describes, the male postgraduates came to the building only for lunch because the admission of male students did not allow them residency in Founder’s Building. Thus when RHUL became co-educational in 1965, the ‘separate sphere’ notion changed but was not discarded straight away. Instead of living in Founder’s Building the male students were all resident in the Kingswood Building, which is located one and a half miles away from Founder’s Building. This tentative re-negotiation of space and gender should be understood in terms of the impetus

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<sup>7</sup> RHC RF/132/4, Doreen Coker, student, 1944-1947

<sup>8</sup> RHC RF/132/5

towards co-education. From the excerpt above, even though the conceived and perceived space was ready to change, in this situation, allowing the male students to have lunch with female students, the lived space was not ready so the female students reacted to this change in various ways. This is why lived space should not be misunderstood as more important or that the three perspectives of the triad are stand-alone components. The conceived space and perceived space act as the raw materials for people to experience the space, which is the lived space. Here the conceived or perceived space are no longer fixed, instead, they are changed by how people experience them. As discussed, these experiences or interpretations are individualised, but they are, at the same time, socially conditioned by the habituation. To take one example from the interviews, a student living in Founder's Building commented on the feelings about separating floors by sex:

*I just feel it makes no sense in 2016, feels like it is something to do with, you know, no sex in your room rule that was there hundred years ago.*

This excerpt works nicely as an example of the appropriation of the space, and unlike their predecessors who lived in the building one hundred years ago, the students in the twenty-first century are more likely to consider the separate-sphere as problematic. It would be unsophisticated to draw the conclusion that the students are bolder than those 100 years ago or they are more willing to challenge. The key difference here is how deviated the tradition being challenged from the current norms and social expectations. One hundred year ago separate-sphere was not a choice but a prerequisite for higher education, and it would be more abnormal to challenge it, so the appropriation of the spatial rules, such as hiding boyfriends in the storage rooms, seldom happened. Whereas in the present, both social norms and expectations for a university have changes and the separate-sphere now becomes unusual.

It is worthwhile noting that the floor plan of Founder's Building is still segregated by gender for students where the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is for male students, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors

are for female students. In the interviews, many similar sentiments could be enumerated. They interpret this twenty-first century version of 'separate sphere' design as the legacy of Victorian sexuality and morality. However, values of society and students have changed and deviated from Victorian morality. The more deviated the current value system from the original values embedded in the conceived level, in this case, the physical layout and floor arrangement, the higher possibility for the current occupants to appropriate how they interpret and use the space. Though, it is by no means that students living in Founder's Building are still closely monitored as they would be one hundred years ago, yet this indeed suggests how the past is still alive and feeds into the present experiences. For instance, transformation from a women's college to co-educational on the perceptual level took much longer, until 1970, the students described the number of male students as 'a dearth'.<sup>9</sup> This could be owing to the student's subject or year, which is hard to know due to the lack of information, but choosing 'dearth' to describe the situation does suggest that the college at that time did not change that much. In a similar way, some academics credit the higher gender equality of the professorships with the historical legacy as a women's college. Whether this is true or not is not important for this paper, but instead, it is this way of justification and interpretation that interests me and indicates how important it is to study the organisational space within the historical/temporal contexts.

### **Concluding remarks**

This paper is written as a nuanced story with the assumption that the space is experienced not as a fixed 'being', but it is 'becoming' continually. That is to say, people experience the space individually yet shaped by social norms. Thus two scenarios are discovered in the case of Founder's Building in terms of the way people experience it. Firstly, we could see how the space is used to demonstrate individual

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<sup>9</sup> RHC RF/132/6, 1970-1973

values or expectations, which could explain why resistance emerge. Secondly, I discussed the scenario that 'where the past is always present', indicating how and why persistent spatial legacies could contribute to occupants' experience in a long time period. This paper contributes to organisation studies, particularly in the way it links the past to the present. This is important because without understandings the past, it is impossible to rationalise the present, and vice versa. If organisational space is always an unfinished process, then the organisation itself is also a continually evolving process. Lefebvre (1991: 190) said in his famous book, "to change life, however, we must first change space" Perhaps this neatly answers the question why what happened in the past still lives in somewhere. It is because we still live in that space; we still experience and make connections with the building, and that is why the current lifestyle always seems to resemble the past.

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