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Reimagining the Role of Physical Space in Future Human Thriving

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REIMAGINING THE ROLE OF PHYSICAL SPACE IN FUTURE HUMAN THRIVING

by

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* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

ABSTRACT

As a positive psychology practitioner and residential planner, I divide energy and effort into two distinct fields: one focused on human welfare and the other on optimal aesthetics and functionality of our physical surroundings. This text explores a philosophical shift in motivation for space design prompted by the experience and new potential that result from COVID-19. Rather than space as a means to epitomize style and serve utility, I urge considering the full complexity of the human experience and what would be most conducive to general well-being as a new leading priority. What influence can environmental design bring to generalized well-being? The paper reviews the intersecting potential of positive psychology within environmental psychology principles using social impact as the governing focus.

The essay examines which conditions would be needed to invert our approach to the spatial environment and create a living feedback loop promoting greater human thriving — collaboration, creativity, and contribution as the supportive scaffold. I look at the influencing fields that will contribute to the post-COVID-19 reality of space design and future social norms that will affect social well-being, including social artistry, design thinking, environmental psychology, creative practice, and community impact. Finally, I conclude with a potential first step: a future space proposal bridging social well-being and space design as a community of practice situated in a physical environment.

How could the role of physical space(s) be considered as a factor in human thriving, as an immersive element in imagining and creating positive future potentials?

During the COVID-19 crisis, the role and value of the spaces we inhabit have inarguably reached new heights and levels of consciousness. The sudden widespread, collective merging of personal and professional environments as people isolated and grappled with how to exist and continue working and surviving thrust the topic into a very visible and public light; suddenly "space" was at the center of society wide conversation. As we begin to collectively re-emerge from limited domestic living quarters and go back into workplaces and "third places," a unique opportunity arises: What if, in our return, we shift the priority of physical space by making choices motivated and guided by human thriving and positive potential?

During COVID, the dynamic interplay and flux between people and place have been great, and they will likely have lasting impact. Residential real estate has been radically affected as buyers left population-dense urban areas considered unsafe for spacious suburbs, moving also from apartment buildings to purchase homes. The record-setting pace of residential home sales has not seen this level of movement since the 2006 Great Recession (KPMG, 2021). At the same time that people have been taking measures to distance themselves from fellow humans, they have also found ways to accommodate multigenerational families, carve out dedicated work-from-home areas, maintain personal outdoor space, and put themselves into greater proximity to nature. Education has been taking place virtually, with entire households and often extended family members and friends merging under one roof. The forming of "safe pods" (small groups of people who agreed to share childcare, education, and studying, and limit their socializing to each other) provided a new kind of social activity/arrangement, helping to navigate these unchartered waters (Michigan Health, 2020).

The alteration of workspaces, as companies have adapted to virtual arrangements out of public health concerns, has likewise been dramatic. Sixty-two percent of employed Americans have worked from home during the crisis, with 80 percent reporting that they enjoyed it and many preferring it (McKinsey, 2020). A shift in values related to work is clearly underway. While the emerging workforce, Generation Z (Gen Z), had already shifted priorities from productivity to creativity prior to the pandemic, COVID-19 seems to be further cementing their reorientation and even expanding it across generations. "The dread and anxiety of the past year are giving way to a new kind of professional fearlessness. If 'languishing' is 2021's dominant emotion, YOLO-ing (You Only Live Once) may be the year's defining workforce trend" (Roose, 2021). A Microsoft survey found that more than 40 percent of workers globally were considering leaving their jobs this year (Microsoft Survey, 2021).

Lisa Picard, CEO of EQ Office, a real estate company specializing in "how [work] space feels, activates and performs" from an experiential point of view, shared the following about the emerging workforce: "Generation Z, which is now entering the workplace, is the most connected generation we have ever seen. They are deep into the human experience and human interaction" (Picard, 2020, as cited in MIPIM, 2020). Gen Z already placed a premium on the ability to share decision-making, maintain connections, and have real-time communication. The pre-COVID-19 workplace environment was already adjusting to accommodate a renewed value set. And now the freedom of remote, socially distanced working while still collaborating and connecting has been added to the conversation. With the pandemic necessarily and dramatically demanding that we restructure our spaces, it has also tectonically shifted our thinking, prioritization, values, and decision-making in general, with impact far into the future.

This societal shift in values wrought by shifts in physical space can come as no surprise to professionals in design-related industries; they have long been required to take human behavior into account. Their intent and mandate in doing so, however, has often been to elicit certain desired behaviors associated with specific kinds of production or consumption from inhabitants/users. As a part-time residential remodeler and certified space planner, I am among such design professionals. However, in this paper, I propose approaching our surroundings as a significant measure of and primary medium for human welfare rather than as an asset to be leveraged for economic or productivity gains, and people, rather than being objects whose behaviors need to be directed and controlled, as subjects acting with agency and autonomy in their lives and in relationship to each other, their physical space, and their community. I call for a philosophical shift in my discipline's motivation for space design. Rather than space as a means to epitomize style and serve utility, I urge considering the full complexity of the human experience and what would be most conducive to general well-being as a new leading priority. Advancement beyond the pragmatism of form, function, footage, and floor plan would open the potential to assert more intentional value systems in our spaces.

This paper will explore the conditions needed to invert our approach to the spatial environment, to understand how an environment could be a living feedback loop promoting greater human thriving—collaboration, creativity, and contribution as the supportive tools. Can we move beyond a fixed construct into a responsive generative aspect in the human experience of built environments? What are the strategies, methods, and advances in environmental psychology, the components of well-being prioritized by enhanced collaboration, creativity, and contribution in spatial contexts? What evidenced-based approaches cultivate highly collaborative and creative communities of practice? These inquiries will inform the creation of an innovative,

collaborative social artist studio space designed to benefit the participants/inhabitants and overflow to the community.

My Experience of Quarantine: Home Sweet Home Turns to Cabin Fever

The effect of space on people is an established truth, one that has come into even greater view for me personally, in my lived experience during this pandemic.

Like many other people, I worked, completed graduate school, and homeschooled my children in isolation in our home to accommodate my family's multifaceted, growing needs during the pandemic. It troubled me to know that another portion of the world did not share this privileged option from a public health point of view. My sister is a COVID-19 ICU nurse, and her experience touring the country and witnessing a range of traumatic situations notably influenced my experience. Within our extended family, jobs, homes, and lives were lost due to COVID-19. Moreover, a kind of existential dread surfaced from the juxtaposition of our comfortable, safe surroundings and happy children with the overarching societal and political tension. My internal conflicts ran very deep; the walls closed in, the familiar sentiments of home no longer fit.

My naturally hyper-curious inclination and need for creative expression caused the now fixed surroundings to feel smothering. The open-concept style of our "on trend" floor plan lacked any delineation of intentional zones. The fluidity of spaces exacerbated the challenge of complex family use needs. The minimal privacy also impacted the ability to process, reflect, and reset. The removal of external stimuli and relational connection took an emotional and psychological toll.

I decided to lean on my positive psychology education, specifically the scientific study of human flourishing. I made specific adjustments to our environment both as a mental health measure and as a desperate act to do something creative as a beneficial outlet.

I noticed the positive effect on the entire family almost immediately. The adjustments were minor but specific to insights from positive psychology, and residential planning practices I knew should help the space support subjective well-being. The framework included time in nature, clutter-free rooms, natural light, intentional tech-free gathering areas, stimulating visual accents, sensory cues like music and aromas, designated creativity space, and a dedicated place to move.

As I watched my children, husband, and mother (who lived with us at the time) engage differently and positively, I continued adjusting the space based on observing how they engaged with the environment. Elementary curriculum manipulatives and art supplies kept getting taken upstairs by the back windows, so I changed the space allocated for those things to a porch cabinet. I noticed that workout equipment was carried to a bedroom, accompanied by an increase in my husband's workout frequency and duration, so I added a door lock, sound system, and fan to that space and gave it a name: The Spin Studio. I witnessed this affecting the length of his workouts, and he shared his feeling that his workout time was more restorative and meditative, rather than merely functional.

I further noted my severe mood slumps and negative disposition loosening as the ability to think creatively returned with these minor space interventions. Metacognitive practices learned in the Critical and Creative Thinking program moved into my consciousness. Articulating my thoughts aloud transformed small daily gestures into preventative measures for staving off the emotional vacillation to which I am prone. While continuing to long for

collaborative human interaction and a creative outlet, I began to recognize that simple, conscious, intentional actions taken to adjust the space followed by observation of the reactions and outcomes satisfied me and prompted a gratifying curiosity. How far could the role of environmental psychology and the intentional use of space go as an active part of human thriving and particularly the collaborative creativity I longed to generate?

The Rest of the World in Quarantine

People worldwide experienced the influence of space and surroundings on their lifestyle and, as a result, took action. Real estate categories, both residential and commercial, saw significant shifts, marking record highs in activity. The year 2020 marked a peak in real estate transactions and the all-time highest investments on record in home improvements. A residential market economist shared, “In terms of like-measured history in the United States, this is the highest level of home improvement spending we have ever seen” (Morris & Frank, 2020 as cited in Baker, 2020). Homeowners spent more time in their homes than was typical and began adjusting their space to suit the new circumstances: Adding enhanced air filtration systems, specific playrooms, and accessory dwelling units, and enhancing outdoor areas and dedicated office spaces topped the list (Edgar, 2021). By late May 2020, nearly 80 percent of homeowners reported starting a DIY home project (Baker, 2020).

Reinforcing Reflections

I had many curious experiences, observations, and reflections during quarantine. One particular avenue of observation, offered by an AirBnB home I manage, provided a pulse and an additional reference point on how others beyond my immediate family were being affected by

space. An unconventional earth home (photos inset), an architecturally distinct and intentionally strange Alpine house, the "Wonder Haus" hosted dozens of small groups seeking to escape

pandemic stress and monotony. The name conveys an intention to spur discovery, foster connection, and cultivate a sense of wonder among those who stay.

All bookings were canceled in the initial months of the pandemic, but after a few months, additional information and new sanitizing practices offered a way to begin allowing small groups to again come and stay. The subsequent visits became a social experiment as guest after guest expressed a profound joy and emotional recovery from visiting the curious, eccentric space. The disruptive quality achieved its goal of focusing attention on new thoughts, time outdoors, play, and connection even during the distressing turmoil. With the serenity of snowscapes, a warming fireplace, and limited technology, people were surprised to find a renewed perspective thanks to time spent in the space. Just as environmental psychologists have stated that "unconventional spaces induce unconventional thinking" (Malinin, 2013), when the disruptive quality of the environment was paired with person-to-person and person-to-nature interactions, the elements of thriving were naturally fostered. The lift in spirits was often cited by guests as offering "a renewed hopeful outlook."

A final example urging me to dig deeper into my topic occurred through my time as a creative cultural advisor at a digital firm. The new job began just as COVID-19 cases were spiking and going remote was decided on. One core function was to facilitate creative brainstorming sessions, but due to the circumstances these needed to occur virtually. I immediately realized how many other people would be experimenting with new ways to cultivate collaboration and creativity in separate, remote spaces around the country. Having worked in several creative agencies throughout my career and facilitated many brainstorming sessions, I felt apprehensive about this different virtual format. The energy, movement, and feedback of people in a shared space are the primary fuel for stimulating creative energy. I had no idea how things would work, but I recognized that being remote was going to persist, so we would need to figure it out together.

The real-time adaptability was challenging and revealing. I could not research, predict, or forecast what approaches would work best, since no one had ever been in these exact same circumstances before. The first several sessions were foremost to observe, understand, and note reactions and plan adjustments worth trying. The impressive gains that resulted and the stories from others around the country navigating this new territory made for an exhilarating reflective practice. The process was necessary and extremely valuable. The greater emphasis on the people and adapting to their behaviors resulted in improved outcomes overall. The creative work was not the goal but became a clear overflow of how people felt, connected, and contributed during our sessions. I was positively influenced by this diversion of focus onto others and their ability to feel well and connected. The recognition from this experience triggered a renewed appreciation for the value of approaching future norms using a human-centered approach.

Interior Design: A Historical Trajectory

Whether domestic, commercial, civic, social, or other, structures are necessarily a reflection of the era in which they are conceived. The physical surroundings of the places in which we live, work, and play will always influence people and human activity, just as people, in any given era, will affect their physical environments. The relationship is reciprocal, and the more conscious we are of that reality, the more beneficial and intentional we can be in how we structure, view, and create the spaces in our lives.

Interior design is defined as "the art and science of enhancing the interior of a space in order to create a polished and more aesthetically pleasing environment" (Hussien, 2020). The early origins of interior design demonstrate the significance of the domestic space as a symbol of one's wealth and status. The goal was opulence and ornamentation that would signal to other people the personal identity of the inhabitants. During the Industrial Revolution, as a growing middle class emerged, the idea of design as a possibility and priority to the mainstream also grew (Pile, 2018). To capitalize and commercialize on this upward prosperity, fashion and lifestyle publications were ready to depict and narrate an aspirational picture of "the home." Mass-produced furniture and accessories, luxury items, and a field of interior decorators were prepared to prescribe the styles, trends, and pieces necessary to establish one's space as current and culturally fashionable.

The Arts and Crafts movement of the late 1800s to early 1900s advocated a reclamation of craftsmanship in opposition to the mass-produced sea of sameness. This period also gave rise to Art Deco's glamour and elegance, which featured embellished, gold-and silver-laden surfaces and objects to adorn a space. Modernism (1880–1950) inspired and prioritized simplicity of aesthetic form, and Mid-Century Modern (mid-1900s) featured Scandinavian cues and mixed

pattern textures to counter glamour. Transitional (blending of styles) and Contemporary (occurring at present) are now central, as interior design trends have progressed to include more functional necessity, prioritizing the primary use of space as a complementary guide to the style. Televisions are now often the focal point of living spaces. Likewise, kitchens and meal prep areas moved into central locations as the 1970s open-concept movement persisted (Schwartz, 2021).

Janice Rutherford notes, "Domestic theorist Christine Fredrick's term 'creative waste' summed up the new mentality: It was the moral obligation of the 1920s housewife to buy and discard products, one that elevated the concept of waste as being positive, indulgent, and stimulating to the economy" (Rutherford, 1996). The assertion of a home built for entertaining became evident in the spacious and connected common spaces used to accommodate many guests even on an infrequent basis. Workspaces have undergone a similar trajectory toward open concept and the workplace being treated on a continuum between socially symbolic or utilitarian cubicle-laden human productivity farms.

I say all of this, of course, in relationship to affluence. These movements and modes of assertion about how one should situate a living space to suit the current trend relate back to status. The mass and federally subsidized house constructions of the early 1950s included a very closed floor plan out of necessity. Most economically viable homes had three to four rooms, and interior walls offered necessary privacy in cramped quarters (Public Works Authority, as cited in Gustafson, 2018). Whether or not importance is given to space and interiors corresponds heavily to class, income, and circumstances; space and interiors can be a fully undervalued, inaccessible, unconsidered aspect or a top-rated priority, and even a compulsion or obsession.

When environments are extensions of personal style and reflections of our identity, the outcome can be an aesthetic veneer projecting an image in compensation for a lack of authentic identity. If instead our surroundings intend to serve as a responsive medium to inhabitants thriving, then priorities like inclusion, creativity, curiosity, and well-being may be elevated. We grasp how immersion in nature and our original dwelling, the outdoors, enriches the lived experience (Robbins, 2020), but in contrast to that fact, we actually spend most of our lives indoors. I would like to reimagine what informs the prioritization of healthy, whole, positive space design.

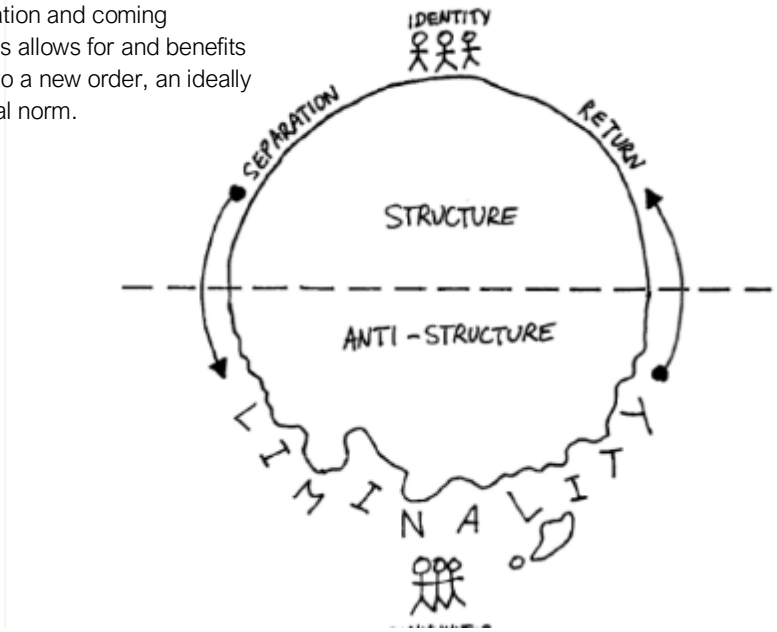
So, the question becomes "What now?" Will the necessity of having sheltered indoors in our fixed spaces for such a long time, coupled with a future quandary of how to responsibly and reasonably entertain and work and socialize together again, prompt a reconsideration of the priorities shaping our future physical environments? The field of environmental psychology, which has emerged over the past few decades, will have a lot to say regarding the experience of COVID-19, as will creative change agents and activists shaping new realities. How will they variously come to collide, resonate, and mingle with one another in their understanding and future engagement of the physical spaces we dwell in and share? If connecting, creating, and contributing are the guideposts for well-being rather than the achievement of "a polished and more aesthetically pleasing environment," greater contributions to human thriving from physical space may result.

The Collective Liminality of Our Present Moment

Richard Rohr, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation, describes liminal space as an uncharted territory that we, as individuals or a collective society, experience. Liminal

space is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in new ways. We usually enter liminal space when our former way of being is challenged or changed. It is a graced time but often does not feel 'graced' in any way. In such a space, we are not certain or in control. This global pandemic is an example of an immense, collective liminality. It would be difficult to exist in this time of global crisis and not feel caught between at least two worlds—the one we knew and the one to come. (Rohr, 2020).

The perspective here shows the necessary role of community during the unstructured time of liminality.The intentional separation and coming together as equals allows for and benefits the future return to a new order, an ideally elevated structural norm.



Source: Franz Pfluegl

Communitas is a Latin noun employed by anthropologist Victor Turner to mean "the spirit of community" (Turner, 1969). In anthropological terms, communitas occurs during a distinct period outside the typical hierarchical class system composed of individual identities acculturated from social rank, rules, and structure. In liminality, communitas gives rise and recognition to a sense of humility and our essential human bond as equals (Turner, 1969).

John Carroll, emeritus professor of sociology at La Trobe University, comments:

> The central question for sociologists is what is society. The answer comes in terms of families and institutions, work and leisure, class hierarchy and status, and cultural attributes such as values, traditions, and beliefs. But it is only with massive social disruption, such as that caused by COVID-19, that a clearer picture begins to emerge of the dynamic whole (Carroll, 2010).

Carroll's reference to what remains to be seen is "the emerging clearer picture of our dynamic whole" shared in The Social Disruption of COVID-19 resounds (Carroll, 2020). COVID-19 breached the social obligations of adhering to convention or maintaining the status quo. The unjust inequalities, political division, and overwhelming loss have resulted in a profoundly unknown way forward. This time in human history is marked by our current moment of shared liminal space as we scan for a future dynamic whole that needs to take shape.

The liminality of our moment is also driven by the disruption and breakdown of the mental models and beliefs that we grew accustomed to leaning on in order to make sense of the world, the subconscious tools we employ to maintain a sense of psychological safety and stability. The experiences of the past year are inviting in new constructions of meaning to help us regain our bearings. Philosopher and logician Willard Quine's "Web of Belief" theory describes the interconnectivity and interdependence of beliefs. Those nearer the core of the web, the core beliefs, are more fundamental than those nearer the periphery and as such are more difficult to change—very powerful evidence or logic is required to change them. The uprooting of some dominant core beliefs—the world is a safe place, people generally help and care for one another, threats to our children will be visible and known, among others—have been put into question, inviting an unprecedented reboot and reweaving of beliefs and models. The extreme discomfort of cognitive dissonance might instead be driving some to hold on to previously prevailing core

beliefs with even greater ferocity, now not to maintain but to regain the stability of the web (Quine, 2009), while others are working to construct some entirely new conceptions.

Given that the most searched term of 2020 was the question prompt *Why?* (Sullivan, 2020), a majority is in the process of searching for meaning to re-create core beliefs and models. The need for reasoning and sense-making to find answers is churning away.

The Compounded Anxiety of Our Moment

Liminality also contains the potential for tremendous anxiety—fear of the unknown, lack of agency or control in managing what the future will bring. Anxious rumination, a downward spiral of thoughts, shifts the prefrontal reasoning center and often follows a future-oriented thought cycle. In an elevated reaction to the amygdala, a response by the HPA axis (hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenals) triggers a network linking the brain and the stress glands (Smith, 2006). Novelist Franz Kafka describes the experience as "the feeling of having in the middle of my body a ball of wool that quickly winds itself up, its innumerable threads pulling from the surface of my body to itself" (Kafka and Brod, 2000).

With contemporary American society already grappling with unprecedented stress levels in children and adults prior to the pandemic, the anxiety-inducing elements of an extended unknowable future, the threat of illness and death, isolation, unpredictability, lack of structure, and a constant media-generated stream of suffering and turmoil spiked anxiety and depression to an even greater pitch. Four in ten adults in the United States have reported anxiety or depressive disorder symptoms during the pandemic; this compares to a baseline of one in ten adults the year prior (World Health Organization, 2020). Dr. Steven Taylor, a clinical psychologist and author

of *The Psychology of Pandemics*, shared, "From the very beginning of the pandemic, those of us who worked in the field knew that there would also be a mental health crisis." And World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus stated that the mental health effect would last "for many years as each and every individual on the surface of the world has been affected" (Taylor, 2021, as cited in Melimopoulos, 2021).

Through the lens of cognitive psychology, the attempt to make sense, the asking of why and the imagining and anticipation of future scenarios, is a unique hardwired function believed to be limited to our species and is how we humans process the world around us. The need to prioritize reflection and inquiry increases as one's compulsion to find answers persists. Reframing is an important technique to ensure that the starting questions we prompt ourselves to consider are productive and beneficial. Our brain will always seek to find answers to whatever question we ask. *Why is the world so awful?* will trigger a stream of responses while *Why is the world so beautiful?* does the same, even though one situates the asker in an entirely different frame than the other.

The work of reframing—a cognitive psychology technique that helps shift how we view a situation, helping defuse an initial potentially triggering or limited response—is what must be undertaken now. Revisiting and reconstructing one's view of an experience imbues it with a different, usually more positive, meaning in the individual's mind (Jonas, 2005 as cited in Kusnadi, 2010). The capacity to find objective clarity is essential in a reflective practitioner's toolkit, particularly following a once-in-a-century global pandemic. When plagued by the *Why did it all happen?* question we come up short on a suitable answer, with a result that feels like

helpless and potentially hopeless grief. So, instead, we refrain from asking the unanswerable *why* and choose a usable *What will we make it mean?* to again find our footing and step forward.

What comes next in the way of our spaces and interactions must take these prolonged effects not only of anxiety and depression but also conflict and rage, and gross inequities and social unrest—the dynamic and multifaceted emotional reality of our shared humanity that has come into clearer view—into account. Anxiety can block experiences of meaningful inquiry and contribution that are essential for human flourishing. It is also an emotion that we might associate with creativity, which necessarily engages with liminality.

Creative people often experience a higher degree of anxiety than their less creative peers. “Anxiety is often felt more by creative people,” shares psychotherapist Diana Pitaru (Scientific Advisory Board, 2016). The scientific explanation provided refers to a genetic profile that allows different thinking to occur, saying, "[T]he main reason a connection exists between creativity and anxiety is imagination" (Kaufman, 2013). The scientific findings also illuminate an insight into the bidirectional nature of creativity as a healthy channel or means of coping with anxiety (Grossman, 1981). The adage that our strengths are our weaknesses comes to mind as relevant.

The hyper-intense thinking and dichotomy of visual exploration about what is and could be can result in expansive and exciting creative work. It can also create internal chaos and anxiety: The limiting effect of anxiety can often spike when trying to flesh out theoretical ideas. I describe this anxiety-stricken processing as being held mentally hostage, stuck in considering and exploring. The opportunity to take action in a creative process can be an invaluable resource externalizing or bringing forth the internal tension, musing, or idea. An example of a related practice is called visual or generative scribing. I was introduced to the artist Kelvy Bird’s work

(see Appendix A, Fig. A1) to process the experience of COVID-19. Scribing works as an exercise to externalize the internal anxiety and chaos onto the page (see Appendix A, Figure A2). A supportive, collaborative space can similarly help loosen, open, and channel a pathway to presence inner psychological stirrings, releasing the anxious grip. Grossman describes the interplay of creative persons and their experience with anxiety, saying, "[I]t reflects a striving to find solutions to humanity's existential problems that are better than those that prevail" (Grossman, 1981).

Creativity has the potential to induce healthy beneficial possibilities for the whole. The data shows that achieving a creative flow state comes from a balance between perceived challenge and skill, a complete mindful concentration on the task at hand, and a clear sense of the task goal (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The heightened enjoyment and release of being in a flow state causes some to suggest that to catalog as many flow experiences as possible is to experience the richest quality of life (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Being in flow is such an enjoyable experience that "people will continue to do it even at a great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2009). For creative thinkers, the exertion of meaningful creating can achieve this transcendent state.

The neuropsychological or cognitive effects during flow indicate that transient hypofrontality occurs, which is the temporary reduction in prefrontal activity. The downshifting of prefrontal activity relates to our attention networks. In the case of flow, it allows for the loss of self-consciousness; there is also a distorted orientation to time and a reduction in the looking-glass self, allowing the "implicit mind" to take control (Dietrich, 2004).

The implicit mind has become a hot topic in cognitive neuroscience circles, so I shall dispense with any examination of the merits of the discussion and focus instead on the deeper brain functions, or the emotional driver's seat underneath our actions. The ability to access this part of our mind without the reasoning center muddying the waters may lead to a sincere expression, experience, or creative outpouring. The individual is entirely focused on the task at hand and may not even notice the body's physiological responses. This is a self-described pleasant departure from the typical self-orienting norm (Dietrich, 2004). Habituation of this process encourages a repeated focus away from self, offering greater space and potential consideration toward the collective whole.

With specific regard to mobility and the changing of space(s), creative people change environments to keep their creative productivity high (Buttimer, 1983). They describe how they take advantage of opportunities to move between home, work, and third places as part of their process. Much like those used in the Disney creative process (Dilts, 1994), the physical surroundings and environments were used to prompt varying thinking modes: dreamer, realist, critic. Creative practitioners replicate this process by changing physical settings as a passive role based on their individual identification with a space versus the space asserting or extending it outward. Buttimer (1983) suggests that "creative work demands quiet and privacy, but also needs movement and a sense of change". Kopec similarly notes, "We humans are inextricably woven into the fabric of our environments, and we affect those environments just as they affect us" (Kopec, 2020).

With this understanding, creativity might be considered a tool for processing outside the body—and a means of activating a sense of agency in the midst of fear and the unknown.

Invitations to unknowable exploration, i.e., creative engagement, may turn out to be an essential component of a post-pandemic space, to support the shift of the pandemic anxiety itself into an actionable and positive resource that is essential for human flourishing.

The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, like those garnered in a flow state, explains how positive emotions may play an essential role in human understanding and flourishing (Fredrickson, 2004). This theory posits that the experience of positive emotions "broaden[s] an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire" (Fredrickson, 2010). As Fredrickson says, "The broadened mindsets arising from positive emotions are contrasted to the narrowed mindsets sparked by many negative emotions. The scope of attention, cognition, and action widens the array of percepts, thoughts, and actions presently in mind" (Fredrickson, 2010). Additionally, it is suggested that positive emotions "promote discovery of novel and creative actions, ideas and social bonds, which in turn build that individual's resources; ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources" (Fredrickson et al., 2010). The processing of hardship inside a positive framework, positioned in a positive environment, can create a healthy momentum of elevated well-being for the individual that then overflows into the broader community.

If the spaces we create can shift from identity-oriented, fixed structures with limited affordances into spaces of expectancy to bring oneself into a positive, nonjudgmental expanse via supporting creative actions and positive connections, then we are on what I believe is a sustainable, progressive, healthy track. When positive effects result, transformative potential is enhanced and creativity can more easily emerge, thus broadening and building the reinforcing momentum. The construction and reimagining of space established by this experience can be

reinforced by the "meaning of place" and the process scaffolded within (Kopec, 2020). The cultivation of opportunities for self-transcendent positive experiences promotes thriving, which in turn benefits collaborative creativity, which can benefit the thriving of the dynamic whole, thus reinforcing the kind of feedback loop that meaningfully generates positive potential.

Space can become a tactile, physical tool shifting an essential self-centering condition—being human—into an experience in which the loss of self-focus enhances imagination and heightens positivity and an opening for creating social good emerges to further benefit collective welfare. The influence of the space design and intention of a physical environment on human thriving can inform a practical action plan. If embodiment and consciousness of our human wiring, default responses, and need for more optimal engagements can be one of our points of origin, recalibrations of the physical environment must occur in the process.

The practical applications we might bring forth must build on new understandings of environmental psychology, on both cognitive and positive psychology as well as creative processing to make manifest the stirrings of our shared pandemic experience into new, constructive models, stories, and core beliefs. The environment would be built on a foundation of intention and inclusion, engaging *with* the community *for* the community. The goal is to honor this liminal time in an environment intended to consider, capture, and channel healthy, positive paths forward together. What are the future choices we can make to elevate individual human thriving to the level of primary purpose, so that we can more meaningfully contribute to collective social welfare? And in what kind of environment would these dialogues, ideas, and decisions best be supported? I want to build and contribute with and in that space. However, in setting out to manifest a new reality or vision, it is important to keep Peter Senge's insight in

mind regarding the potential distressing emotional toll of creative tension, the social and emotional aspects of it, the possible friction with core beliefs. He states, "[I]f we fail to distinguish emotional tension from creative tension, we predispose ourselves to lower our vision" (Senge, 2006) As I personally consider, question, and resolve to find a way forward from where we sit now to a desirable future, I sit with the creative tension between the current and future that Senge describes. I can anticipate release from that tension in moving and acting in ways and in directions that close the gap between the two—I am keenly aware that this is what I am seeking for myself and see a need for in society at large. We need movement potentials to take us from the current toward the new.

A Return to a Greater Community and Larger Collective

In heightening an awareness of the dynamic whole, the pandemic has heightened our Sense of Community. Sense of Community (SOC) is a term stemming from psychology, where the "creation of vibrant, healthy communities through catalyzing the active involvement of community members" is seen as central to many positive reinforcing aspects of well-being, even a direct artifact of psychological well-being (Nowell, 2014). The theory relates to an individual's feelings of "belonging, [a sense that] members matter to one another and the group, and a shared faith that the members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (McMillan, 1986). When paired intentionally with the Sense of Community Responsibility (SOCR), we see a reinforcing channel outside the member group to orient the values and actions of the group. Defined similarly with a nuance regarding contribution, SOCR is characterized by a community member's feelings of "belonging and responsibility among community members" (Sarason, 1993). The distinction becomes the motivation around the community as a vehicle or channel, in

addition to simply a safe, secure way to find belonging. SOC influences well-being and engagement, while the addition of a sense of responsibility provides the "stronger predictor of higher-order engagement behavior that requires greater (time and resource) investment" (Nowell, 2014).

McMillan further articulates community as consisting of four elements: membership, cohesion, shared values, and shared emotional connection (McMillan, 1986). The starting point for fostering a sense of community begins with membership, or an invitation to belong to a community and identify as a member.

Will we be able to extend and hold on to the pandemic's newfound awareness of the necessity of social contact for human thriving and of the dynamic whole into the larger society once we have re-emerged? Will we be able to make beneficial advances from this shared human experience, or will the reactions to differences degenerate into familiar conflict, prejudice, divides? Will invitations for community exist and a sense of belonging and contribution be easy to come by and maintain? The fragility of these propositions underscores the need and importance of (re)shaping physical space in order to have a viable container for emerging post-pandemic conversations, one in which the future society could be imagined, articulated, and created. How the future emerges within our physical environments could be an ongoing conscious dialogue.

The opportunity in this transitional time starts with how our physical spaces could contribute to human thriving in a better way in the future. We have no established formula or road map forward—everyone on the planet is decidedly in new territory. The risk, ability, and space (metaphysical and literal) to let the current circumstance call forth a new approach are what is needed now. What do we want for one another? Can we let go of attachments to the

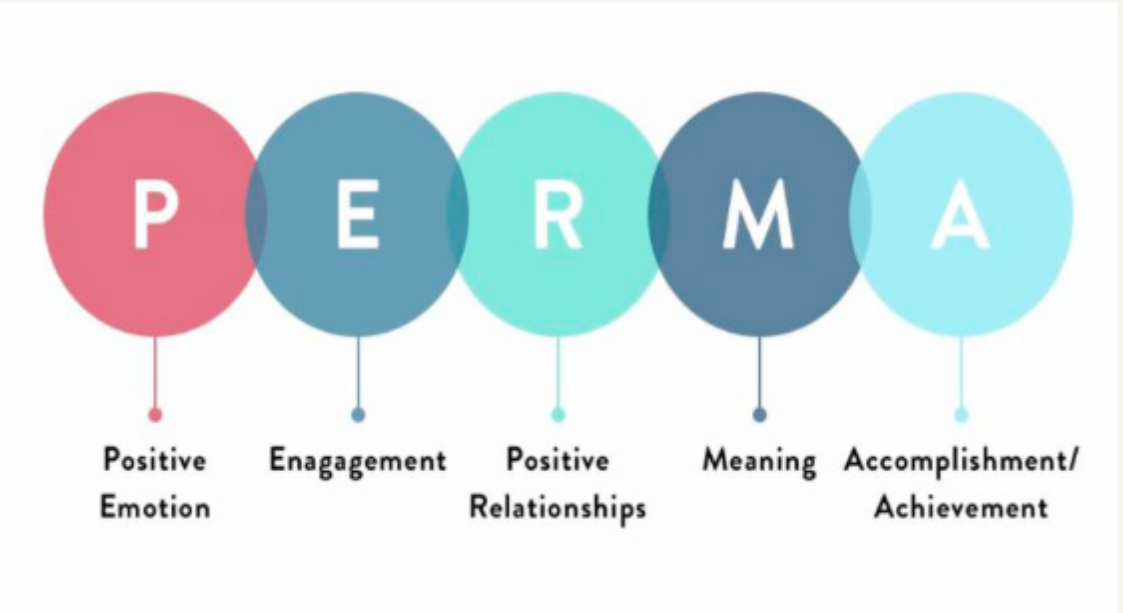
past—our known and familiar structures—and wrestle together to find some sense of equilibrium within new, dynamic space with the intent to serve and benefit the flourishing of the whole and the individuals who comprise it?

A Shift Toward Flourishing: Positive Psychology as an Essential Starting Point and Ongoing Goal

Established as a field of study in the late 1990s, positive psychology aims to better understand not just the ailments of people but also their upside potential—a sharp contrast to deficit- or disease-led psychology models focusing on ailment identification and reduction per the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. The end goal of psychology was historically to remove illness, with the aspiration of getting patients to a neutral baseline—without ailment. The founders of positive psychology focused on what lies at the other end of the continuum and how to guide patients in moving beyond neutral toward thriving. The field began to aid in assisting patients in moving toward thriving by examination and consideration of the themes common among those who were flourishing. Treatment interventions were introduced to help more people experience greater dimensions and duration in a state of thriving. The many supporting practices and interventions include:

- Mindfulness and presence practices
- Gratitude and appreciation acknowledgment
- High-engagement flow activities
- Meaning construction and creation
- Prioritizing energy and time anchored to a eudaimonic life outlook

The most widely accepted positive psychology theory is abbreviated as PERMA.



Source: University of Pennsylvania, Positive Psychology Department

The PERMA Theory of Well-Being (inset) identifies five elements and building blocks for human thriving as identified by the acronym P (positive emotion), E (engagement), R (relational connection), M (meaning and purpose), and A (sense of accomplishment).

Critics of positive psychology sometimes assert that the field promotes "too much of a good thing," citing the effect that occurs when the upside assets of something intended to be good reach the turn of an inverted U, thus shifting toward the negative (Grant & Schwartz, 2011). Other points of concern refer to the lack of broad objective critique due to myopic focus on the narrowed published efforts of a distinguished in-group (Ryff, 2003, as cited in Wong, 2017). Still others have claimed that the dismissive elite arrogance of the narrow view in the domain has been "detrimental to scientific progress" (Durston, 2015), as cited in Wong, 2017).

I suggest that whether or not the full complexity of scientific rigor has been applied to the field, the inherent value of its principles has validity and remains relevant as an essential point of orientation in reimagining collective physical environments and communities. The merit of application exists whether the influencing factors are more extensive than presented. Built or constructed space, rather than having and being evaluated as a fixed form and for functionality, must be a living part of a dynamic responsive and reciprocal human process, and the PERMA points must come into play.

I also hypothesize that people who are flourishing and thriving have the resources, motivation and capacity to invest in the thriving of others (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Those in a state of thriving have the psychological capacity to consider and prioritize the flourishing of others, too. To equip empathy and offer engagement, a tactile space can situate the metaphysical idea of collective goodness into a physical environment.

Critical Insights and Guidance from Environmental Psychology

Environmental psychology has been evaluating the relationship between people and places since its emergence in the 1960s, constructing a wide array of hypotheses and studies centered on the fit, function, and effect of people's environments, particularly hospitals and clinics (healing), schools (education), and workplaces (productivity). The Person-Environment Fit theory (PE), which suggests that "a reciprocal relationship exists between people and environments" (Murray, 1938, 1951, as cited in Malinin, 2013), was foundational for the field and has its origins in early work by Parsons (1909, as cited in Malinin, 2013), whose efforts, in theory, were related to finding suitable vocations and work-related roles for people based on an individual's personal attributes.

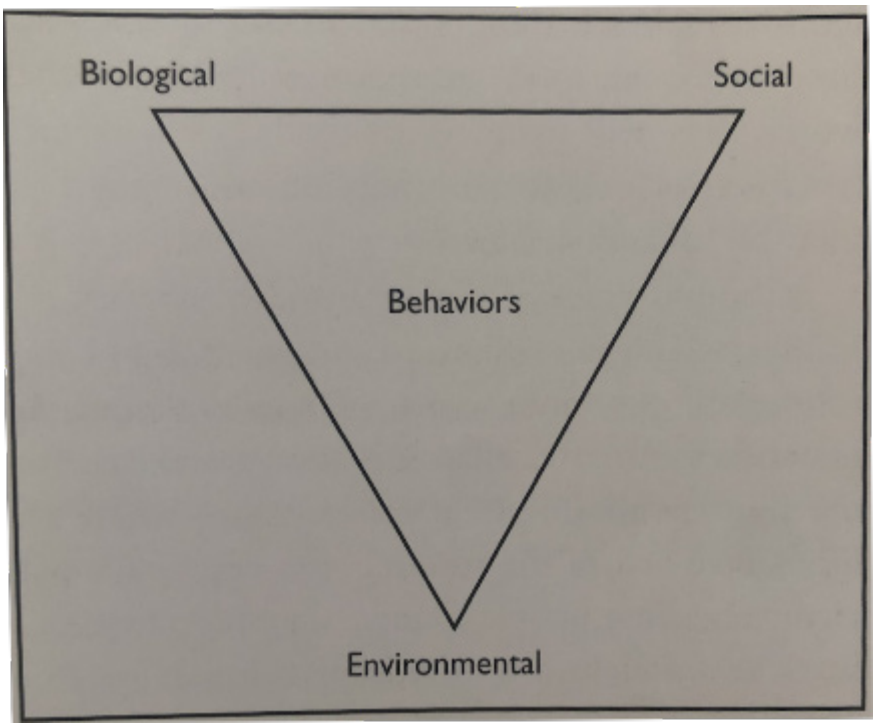
American psychologist Henry Murray's person-and-environment-fit and need-press model (1935) and the field theory developed by Lewin (1935, 1951) are the core tenets of the field. Murray's Needs and Presses theory outlines the role of an individual's needs, motives, and the surrounding press on their personality. Murray describes needs as a "potentiality or readiness to respond in a certain way under certain given circumstances." The needs are categorized into two separate groups, primary (basic survival) and secondary (psychological). The press or environmental factors are believed to also play a role in how a person's needs are displayed in behavior. Lewin's Field Theory relates to the field of forces, called life-space, that result in reactions, engagement, or responses by individuals. He proposed that an individual's behavior results from personality and the environment in which the individual is situated. The confluence of person and environment in the movement of behavior was captured by the formula $B = f(P, E)$ (Lewin, 1936, as cited in Malinin, 2013). This heuristic formula relates behavior (B) as a function (f) of a whole situation represented by the coming together of two essential parts, the person (P) and the environment (E). Research in the field effectively shows that human behavior can change or be modified through intentional space design, and some of the literature evaluates cues and stimuli sources to shape behavior (Kopec, 2020). The emphasis on the applied practice of environmental psychology, rather than a strictly theoretical focus, positioned people in the field "not only to understand but also actually to create the kinds of environments in which people thrive" (Devlin, 2018, as cited in Malinin, 2013).

Three additional specific points of address in environmental psychology also converge on issues associated with thriving: place identity, sense of place, and place attachment. This is expressed as "how we see ourselves in relation to others and a particular environment which explains the emotional bond we develop to that place" (Kopec, 2020). We know from human

behavioral psychology that people are wired to seek positive reinforcement, and a core human need is a sense of belonging. When people have a sense of agency anchored to a clear expectation, like the positive curiosity-first intention of a place, they are much more apt to bring forth and surface what is within.

Meaning of Place

- Place identity: Refers to how people incorporate a place into the larger concept of their sense of self
- Sense of place: Develops from emotional bonds and attachments people experience in connection to a particular place
- Place attachment: Describes the emotional connection between a place and person (it globally affects social well-being)



(Source: International Association of Applied Psychology)

Environmental psychology also studies the human-environment relationship at three levels: psychological processes, social management of space, and physical setting effect on behavior. Environmental psychologists are "poised to explain why humans engage in particular behaviors in relation to their environments" (Kopec, 2020). Reciprocity—a sense of balance, even—remains central to the field's lines of inquiry and explanations. As Kopec shared the reciprocal relationship we have with our environment affects us just as we affect it. (Kopec, 2020). Environmental psychologists identify factors that support or detract from desirable behaviors and evaluate attributes within the environment to enable or diminish specific emotional and psychical reactions. People need a sense of both control and certainty, which contrasts with another core need for variety and novelty. A sense of personal control "relates to both our freedom of action and to the level and type of stimulation to which we are subjected; our actual or perceived control over our environment directly affects our feelings" (Pagnini, 2016).

Ecological Psychology: A Yet More Dynamic and Relational Model of Space and Design in Which Individual Creative Agency Emerges with Greater Clarity

There are many opposing views on the various person-environment theories (Goffman, as cited in Caplan, 1987). I draw from the one that is most agreed upon and viable: the possibilistic and probabilistic design approach (Lang, 1987, as cited in Malinin, 2013). "Theories in cognitive science and ecological psychology of the person-environment relationship explain this position by stating that the environment does not determine behavior, but it does appear to be part of our cognitive system" (Malinin, 2013). Malinin's work provides a roadmap in the potential application by addressing how and why this is the case. Introduced by ecological psychology,

person-environment is referred to as "taking as its central tenet the interdependent relationship between living organisms and their environment" (Malinin, 2013). In this work, *synmorphy* is introduced, a term used by Barker (1968, as cited in Malinin, 2013) to describe the congruence between environments and behavior patterns to form a behavior setting.

Malinin brings together ecological psychology toward creativity by building on Barker's (1968) behavior setting theory and integrating Hutchins's (2006) distributed cognition theory (Malinin, 2013). She describes the overlapping position that the people-environment relationship extends between group (social) creativity and how cognition is shaped by people's interaction with their environments.

The Creativity-in-Context framework (see Appendix B, figure B1) assumes a group dynamic, the constituency group, and describes the person-environment relationship wholly during creativity built around affordances. Malinin (2013) describes affordance as an instrumental relationship between person and environment. Affordances may be perceived, actualized, false, hidden, or potential (see Appendix B, figure B2). Gibson (1977) described affordance as "equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the user" (Maier, 2009).

It is preferable to think in terms of the potentials afforded an inhabitant of a space and the choices made to use, inspire, manipulate, or create from said potentials as a result of being in that particular environment. The iconic artist Yayoi Kusama comes to mind. The affordances in her space were walls, paint, and the need to process trauma—thus the emergence of a dot-covered surface (see Appendix C, photograph C3). The dual or reciprocal nature of influence illustrated

for the creative person applies to all people. As our surroundings provide affordances around the possible actions or engagement to occur, so too our actions influence our surroundings and communities. Affordances can come via materialized objects, visual cues, nature settings, and modular elements, and the accessible social interactions all providing a rich breadth of creative and beneficial resources.

Malinin says that taking a multimodal process of creativity offers benefits over the stage models. She describes the physically situated nature of creativity to draw insight and inspiration in structuring a supportive and reciprocal collaborative creative environment.

> Each mode describes a state of enactive cognition. An enactive state may entail different physical, social, and mental processes, but the quality of the state is fairly constant, and it is engendered, sustained, or inhibited by consistent environmental conditions. A modal process model will therefore be useful for aligning creative processes with environmental conditions. (Malinin, 2013)

Malinin's framework illustrates the following propositions:

- Creative people are active agents in their environments who exploit, leverage, and manipulate features of the designed environment to enhance their ability.
- Environmental features serve different roles in sustaining, engendering, or inhibiting cognitive modes of creativity.
- Changes in environmental features and changes in a person's creative cognition mode alter the affordances of the person-environment relationship, thus affecting the perceived opportunities for action in a creative situation.

What About Architecture?

Another critical component of physical space design is architecture. Though not at the heart of my primary focus, architecture does have a role to play. With "architectural purpose" defined as, "the building's function relative to its form" (Kopec, 2020), it holds an important hand in informing the meaning of a place. Architecture begins to associate people to the territoriality of place. Territoriality refers to the perceived exclusiveness/inclusiveness of use, identity of would be occupants, self-reflective attachment and the mutually established norms/behaviors associated with the space. From a behavioral standpoint, the role of territoriality can be described as a way individuals find "reliable access to the social contacts they need" and reinforcement to a sense of belonging in community as part of the "turf" we align to ourselves (Kopec, 2020).

The unspoken relationship between a space and people governs much of our behavior and is often established in significant part through the meaning we assign to our environment, often impacted by the architectural or aesthetic cue. For example, if I make reference to a Michelin star restaurant you conjure a particular image and the same occurs if I were to describe a hole-in-the-wall diner. The meaning you associate to those ideas convey social rules related to those spaces as territories. In the same way there are social guides for our personal homes where your role as a guest differs based on the particular home you may be visiting. The same notion applies to public spaces. As a reference, when visiting a contemporary art gallery you may have an expectation that differs from visiting a dog park. These expectations connect to a particular meaning you assign that kind of territory and the perceived social rules in that space. There are three types of territories; primary, owned by individuals offering high importance and is typically a personal dwelling, secondary, of lesser importance to the individual as occupants are not

owners and thus have little agency over their environment and public territories, open to people within the community (Kopec, 2020). While occupants have little control in public territories the associative meaning of place (really nice park vs. abandoned playground) influences the self-perception and behavioral social rules.

Theory into Practice, Concept into Space: A Vision for an Experiential, Third Place Social Lab

The notion of a "third place," which refers to the idea of a social place one chooses to inhabit separately from home or work, has existed for centuries. From a sociological perspective, third places have been viewed as essential for building community, building empathy, and seeing oneself as part of a larger whole. Oldenburg's description of third places (1989) as "spaces that promote social equity by leveling the status of visitors, providing a setting for grassroots politics, creating habits of public association, and offering psychological support to individuals and communities" suits my proposed endeavor. The notion of a third place is often used in relationship to the creative process as well (Buttimer, 1983; Tornqvist, 2004; Wu et al., 2007).

Current societal circumstances and our shared pathway forward are not something to be strictly reasoned through but instead something we will collectively create. I believe we must do this in earnest and with great intentionality inside a dedicated supportive space. I am calling for a third place in the form of a social impact Lab where creativity and creative thinking are central to the scope of activities. My collaborators are creative (big C or little c) change agents, and creative techniques and projective models are a strong axis of alignment among us, as well as serving as an outlet and healthy coping mechanism in the context of the current crisis.

Unlike a coffee shop or bar, where the social purpose is unstructured and entirely self-determined, the functionality of this Lab space is a reseeding ground for personal and social discovery and will emphasize creativity in community as a method supportive of flourishing. A core group of collaborators playing key roles in catalyzing the space's potential forms the hub of the organization, while a broader group of people—little-c creatives (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)—could come to discover and reflectively consider their contributing role within the societal whole in public-yet-personal space.

In formalizing the structure of the space into a social lab for creatives, I see a merging of person-fit models with Rhodes's Four Ps of Creativity (people, press, processes, and products; Rhodes, 1961) to provide a primary methodology for the Lab's operations. *Product* equates to something beneficial to the creators, contributors, and the community, which guides the goal, and *press* to the physical or social environment influencing creativity (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012). Supposing behavior is a function of a person and environment, the behavior of creative agents could inform a responsive, collaborative *process* in tandem with elements of physical space. The expanded potentiation of the *people* (creative change agents) both in capacity and motivation reinforces the cycle of human flourishing within the group and beyond, for social impact.

The Four Ps of Creativity in application:

1. **Press.** Here I will draw on environmental psychologist Malinin's environmental psychology work to equip the space using rich environments guidelines to empower creative practitioners. The groundwork wraps around the other elements to support social impact creativity. Malinin's

work provides *Rich Environments Design Guidelines* (Appendix D, Table D1), as a potential keystone for the formation of the space itself and the processes carried out in it:

- Physical settings must provide resources to support the process intended but should not draw attention away from the task at hand.
- Conditions in the designed environment may serve as a stimulus to engender intuitive investigation (Appendix E, Table E1).
- Aesthetic qualities may play a role in the intuitive investigation; in particular beautiful settings are most commonly cited as sources of inspiration. Natural views and daylight have been documented to provide a positive effect on attention and inspiration, noise pollution notwithstanding (Malinin, 2013).

2. **Person.** The social space invites creative change agents invested in community impact. I will solicit a multidisciplinary participant group ensuring that conceptual ideas are logistically feasible in execution. The rationale of inviting artistic change agents is based on their intrinsic motivation and natural ability as it applies to the goal. Participation reinforces the "product" and the beneficial payoff for them as contributors.

3. **Product.** Energy, talent, and collaboration will all work to elevate projects to benefit the broader community and social good and create notable impact.

- See social artistry and social impact projects, below, for a comprehensive outline.

4. **Process.** For this I draw on human-centered design thinking rather than creative problem solving as illustrated in Diagram G. In the context of the Lab, design thinking would necessarily be "a context-based, solution-focused utilization of the creative problem-solving method" (Ricketts, 2019). A departure from CPS in favor of Design Thinking aligns with the Lab's intent to pursue potentials rather than to engage in removing or solving a known problem.

Diagram G: From CPS to Design Thinking

Source: (Ricketts, 2019)
Model References: References:
Dam, R. and Sian, T. (2018). Design Thinking: A Quick Overview.
Davis, G. A. (2004). Creativity is forever.
Simon, H. A. (1996). The Sciences of the Artificial.
Waloszek, G. (2012). Introduction to Design Thinking.

The Lab's collaborative design-thinking process steps, which are below, have been inspired by and adapted from Ricketts and Olsson (2018). My departure from their framework underscores the Lab's commitment to emotional authenticity and transparency for their great importance in well-being and in healing and resilience; for the creative freedom and energy emotions provide in their authentic, unfrozen state; and for their role in effecting truly sustainable social change.

The Lab Design-Thinking Process Framework:

1. *Creation of a value-based, generative space* intended for freedom to explore societal challenges openly with curiosity.
2. Use of *social artistry* to build on predefined *values* upon which action is based.
3. *Sharing of creative skills, talents and resources*, for the benefit of contributors and the community outside the generative space, to promote positive impact projects on the basis of the shared elevate human thriving vision.
4. *Sharing of intuited insight*, intentional grappling, and bringing forth emotionally charged ideas to integrate the full human experience and the intelligence, depth of meaning, and impact that emotional transparency provides. An emotionally safe space will provide a container for greater transparency and consequently even more effective contributions and outcomes. The beneficial application of "So what?" about the topics necessitates a safe and welcoming community space both psychologically and literally.
    a. For example, we cannot contend with addressing systemic racism without walking through the intensity of associated feelings. Moreover, allowing transparency enables us to get at the underbelly of such core beliefs fueling superiority, e.g., in suggesting "others" have lesser worth. Such hostility comes back to the issue of worthiness and can serve as the beneficial stimulant for opening the necessary conversations about collective worth and human value that must be had in order to effect change.

Other design variables and considerations include support resources (stimuli, modular surfaces, indoor/outdoor arrangement) and the observation of beneficial engagement in the space (to determine where participants are most energized and why). Factoring in the lessons learned from the fields of environmental and ecological psychology to design a collaborative creative space with supportive cues will, I believe, establish a clear connection between the people and the environment as a positive behavior support loop (Kopec, 2020).

Extending and celebrating the autonomy and flexibility of a fluid design also scaffolds the notion of reflective living. If an environment intends to suit the choices in behaviors vs.

default modes, what might occur? A kind of user-responsive environment primes the user to be thoughtful about their behavior. Here again, we consider the inversion to space not as the director of behavior but instead as a supportive aid to the human direction. Empowering and elevating the users of the space brings forth intentionality in the physical environment, and the physical surroundings play out the ideas that resonate and compel the people in their collaboration.

The affordances in the physical space acknowledge the practices and lifestyle choices proven beneficial but become resources, not directives. For example, we know from environmental psychology that open views to nature or expansive vistas help people foster cognitive expansiveness. An unobstructed view subconsciously triggers openness to thoughts and ideas. In a similar vein, spaces with affordances supporting creativity, connection, and social contribution open up thinking and consideration around these very topics.

"Thinking and activating are intertwined; therefore the types of activities afforded by a particular environment will influence the modes of creative thinking that may occur within it" (Malinin, 2013). Even if the affordances evoke a sense of exploration, we are moving in the right direction. Being immersed in an environment intended to support flow, active reflection, social interaction, and contribution to thriving (the creative contributors and the extended community) would theoretically aid in induction and expectancy.

With liminality informing this physical environment's intention, this type of space would prime curiosity and openness: creativity, contribution, and inhabitants' connection as a sense of community.

The liminality of our post-pandemic moment resolutely calls for this kind of third place to hold the complexity and perceive the potentialities. It is a moment, as Rohr states,

> when you have left the tried and true, but have not yet been able to replace it with anything else. It is when you are between your old comfort zone and any possible new. If not trained in how to hold anxiety, how to live with ambiguity, how to entrust and wait, you will run…anything to flee this terrible cloud of unknowing (Rohr, 2004).

The Lab as an intentional and therapeutic means to immerse and engage in the ambiguous unknown, collaboratively and creatively, is a site to begin to birth a post-pandemic world open to new possibilities.

> Liminal space is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in new ways. It is where we are betwixt and between, having left one room or stage of life but not yet entered the next. We usually enter liminal space when our formal way of being is challenged or changed - perhaps when we lose a job or loved one, during illness, at the birth of a child, or a major relocation. It is a graced time, but often does not feel "graced" in any way. In such space, we are not certain or in control. This global pandemic we now face is an example of an immense, collective liminal space. This in-between place is free of illusions and false payoffs. It invites us to discover and live from broader perspectives and with much deeper seeing (Adapted from Richard Rohr, 200, as cited in Center for Action and Contemplation, 2020).

Connection and Contribution Toward Cultural Shift: The Immeasurable Value of Social Artistry and Social Impact Projects

Social artists work in collaborative networks to create social innovation that helps people envision, discover and realize the most beautiful, powerful and evolutionary of the possibilities—one that evokes a better world for everyone. Karakas (2007)

Social artistry can be described as "the art of enhancing human capacities in the light of social complexity. It seeks to bring new ways of thinking, being and doing to social challenges in the world" (Houston, 2021). And its impact "can be defined as the net effect of an activity on a community and the well-being of individuals and families" (Centre for Social Impact, 2020).

As an avenue for engagement and a channel for people who desire to be part of the fabric of bringing "new ways of thinking, being and doing to social challenges in the world," social artistry describes the overarching operative intention/activity of the Lab. The creation of a purposeful context as a focal point for a sense of both community and collective responsibility provides a priming device and source of meaning to connect the shared values of participants and manifest the benefits of community. Creative impact projects invite collaboration in situations where profound meaning is attached—to such a degree that the impact might fan out beyond the immediate context to an extended community. The energy of the collaborative constituency necessarily cultivates a sense of community beyond the limits of the creator group.

While Jean Houston, a cofounder of the Foundation for Mind Research and a leading researcher in the human potential movement, defines social artists as people who use their creative skills to effect community change positively, Elizabeth Lingo and Steven Tepper, authors of *Looking Back, Looking Forward: Arts-Based Careers and Creative Work*, take things a step further, stating that a social artist's work "is meant to include community engagement from autonomous to socially engaged" (Lingo and Tepper, 2013).

Such projects feature participatory experiences outside typical art environments (i.e., they move in short order from the gallery, studio, or lab to the broader community). They also operate within an action research cycle in which themes for action emerge in and out of dialogue, and reflection/feedback and evaluation take place.

While metrics for evaluation may appear subjective or non-quantifiable in strict economic terms, I can attest firsthand that the more informed by the community the project is, and the more engaged the community is with the project itself, the more effectively the project delivers a meaningful, beneficial solution and effects change. The social impact projects I have

participated in were characterized by the formulation of a compelling story of what we would like to pursue, followed by awaiting responses from those who were interested. The "I'm interested in participating" individuals proved to be the most dedicated contributors. They joined the projects because of value align interest, not an obligatory requirement. The power of such projects should not be underestimated in their capacity to usher in sweeping change.

Important social artistry project examples include the Aids Quilt, conceived by San Francisco gay rights activist Cleve Jones in 1985 following the assassinations of San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk, who was gay, and Mayor George Moscone. Now at 50,000 sewn quilt panels, the AIDS quilt is the product of contributions by thousands of people (National Aids Memorial, 2021) and is far too large and expansive to display in a museum. It is a humanitarian beacon that was crucial in bringing the suffering and humanity of AIDS victims into the light and combating the neglect and shame placed on victims by the dominant culture. It shifted the discourse around AIDS, turning the matter of systemic prejudice and persecution of homosexuals into a human rights issue. The Quilt has been nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize based on its record, as the result of discussions, coverage, and experience, of changing the hearts and minds of millions and pointing out a more equitable path forward. Not only did the quilt provide a touchstone for an entire social movement, it was crucial in shifting terms, attitudes, and allocation of resources.

Another iconic example, the *Before I Die* wall, was created initially by New Orleans artist Candy Chang following the death of a loved one. Chang first introduced it on an exterior wall of an abandoned home as a space to reflect and to share life aspirations collectively. The project has now grown to include over 5,000 wall installations in seventy-five countries (Before I Die Project, 2021). This project, which inserts reflections on mortality into the public space,

became a social phenomenon, with widespread participation reflecting the desire of people to share and express their relationship with life and death. Chang says that each wall is "a tribute to living an examined life." In revealing our common humanity, the importance of this project in building a healthy community should not be underestimated.

Another recent example is the Black Lives Matter street murals that have spread through major cities around the country. In responding en masse to systemic racism, racial injustice, and social inequity in a public format, this movement is actively pressuring for systemic change. The wave of protests and interventions has prompted cities to pledge to reform policing and organizations to commit dollars and actions to prioritize diversity and inclusion, as well as the prosecution of police officers involved in the unjust taking of black lives. Following George Floyd's murder, Minneapolis lawmakers committed to making major changes in the city's police department, and other cities around the country have agreed to move funding from police departments to youth and social safety programs prioritizing public safety in new ways. The full social impact has yet to emerge, but this intervention matters.

Another recent example is the *In America: How Could This Happen...* public art installation created by artist Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg. The use of small white flags to represent lives lost to COVID-19 has been a defining moment of the crisis. The intention was "to help people to grieve their lost loved one and to show both the enormity of our loss and more" (In America Virtual Flags, 2021). This project signaled resistance and fought back against the Trump administration's denials and downplaying. As the polarization around COVID-19 as a partisan political issue swelled, the project drew attention back to the loss and restored the impact of the public health crisis to the foreground. By rendering the scale of the impact in visual terms and memorializing the thousands of lives lost, it not only made the loss tangible, it also

opened up an outlet for collective expression in the context of grieving—the processing of loss in a way that supports mental health and resilience for both individuals and the nation as a whole.

While these projects gained momentum far beyond local communities, the local level is where they started and were carried out. I have witnessed such local impact firsthand through several projects I have participated in. One involves a growing issue in Oklahoma City: food insecurity. The effort began with a conversation on social media, initiated by an invitation, a prompt for fellow Oklahomans ("What would you do_____?") regarding what would they personally feel compelled to help resolve within the community. The topic of food insecurity was validated on social media as a need that hundreds of Oklahomans were interested in helping to address.

My first consideration was about when people were most likely to be thinking about food. The obvious answer was mealtimes. At the time, Oklahoma City hosted the nation's largest food truck event, called H&8th, whose attendance topped 50,000 at its height. The entry point for our social impact project was the insertion of the topic of food insecurity into a social sphere dominated by food. I gathered collaborators and nonprofit recipient partners to launch a crowdfunding campaign to create a Food For All food truck. The truck raised funds for the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, for school programming, and for meals for students in area "food deserts." The truck also served as a free-meals truck for homeless camp events, distributing thousands of meals directly to those in need. The project raised $20,000 in donations and served thousands during its tenure. The conversation about Oklahoma City kids going hungry was elevated, and the mindsets of the hundreds that engaged with the service truck were impacted. So too were the volunteer chefs, many of whom made new choices about food waste in their restaurants after participating in the food truck program.

I also saw firsthand the value of local impact and intervention in community placemaking projects that I participated in. A historic commercial district in Oklahoma City was losing interest among patrons and neighbors to the “new and improved" mass chain developments happening in other areas in the city. I was hired as the executive director of the district, as local independent shop owners were pleading for help in increasing visitor and foot traffic. Their desire and commitment in generating and renewing interest in the area were palpable and clear—an important starting point for launching any effort and ensuring its sustainability over the longer term. The modest historic buildings could not compete with the alluring contemporary architectural showpieces major commercial developers had introduced, and the project that ultimately emerged was the launch of the first ever public art gallery in Oklahoma. With a group of ten area artists, we converted a group of building sides into canvases. This project took months of effort, new civic processes, arts commission review, and approval and public participation. It started in 2014 and continues now, growing by a few new works every year.

The impact was beautification of the historic neighborhood, elevation of the district into a must-see landmark, and newfound appreciation and sense of ownership/identification from the public that helped fund, participate, and celebrate the unveiling of an Oklahoma first. Oklahoma City has now been named the top ranked Street Art city in the United States. (*USA Today, 2021)* In 2015, Google acknowledged the public art effort with a grant funding all recurring years of additions to the street gallery and inducting the city into its digital cultural institute. The pride of place and public participation also enhanced the sense of community among area residents and visitors. This work made a dramatic difference for the merchants and the community.

The value of this type of work has long been put into question, even though those of us doing it can see the immeasurable value playing out. The ixia public art evaluation Matrix (Table

F1) was conceived as a framework to facilitate the valuation of public art in particular. While social impact should always be evaluated by "the net effect of an activity on a community and the well-being of individuals and families" (Centre for Social Impact), the ixia Matrix (Appendix F, Fig. F1) provides a helpful way to objectively consider other values in this work. The two axes of information include the range of possible stakeholders and the range of possible "values" by which outcome measures can be identified (ixia Public Art Think Tank, 2013). The four optional value clusters include artistic, social, environmental, and economic. The value measures of the Domains of Gross National Happiness (GNH, Appendix G, figure G1), as used in Bhutan, if blended with some aspects of ixia's matrix would form an arbiter of success suitable to evaluate the Lab's impact. The GNH assigns value to nine key measurements: psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standard.

The Lab's own evaluation criteria could be centered on the aspects of well-being outlined by positive psychology and influenced by the following measures: sense of community, equity, and representation (to be seen, heard and valued); subjective well-being; environmental resilience; and a shared sense of meaning/purpose. If our work is evaluated against these measures and deemed successful, then the goal of benefiting human welfare is realized.

CONCLUSION

The Press, which in this context refers to the physical environment of the Four Ps of Creativity, provides a frontier for further enhancement and enrichment worth exploring to enliven post-pandemic social welfare. Press becomes a way to contextualize the conceptual and externalize inner necessities and imaginings in the face of the collective crisis we are

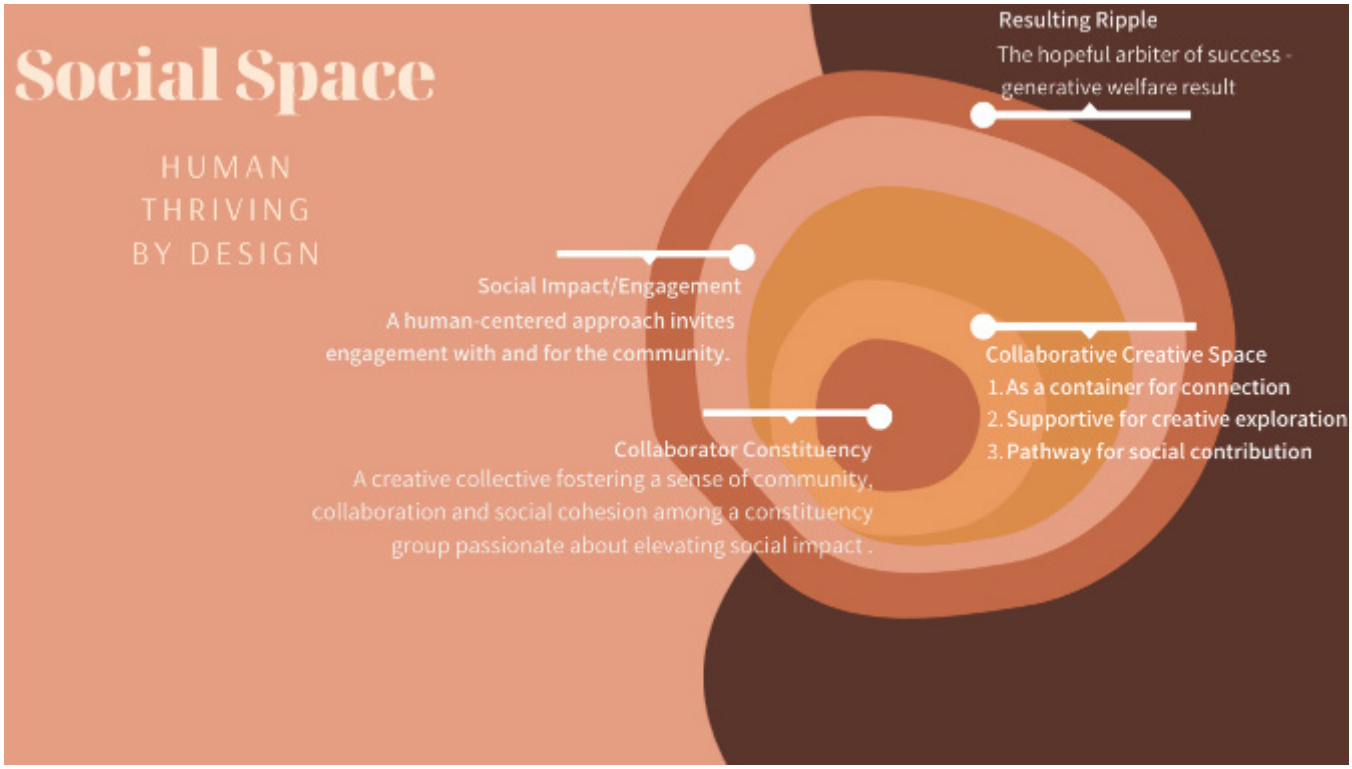
experiencing. The intentionality in the future role of Press provides a path to begin consciously and actively rebuilding/reshaping the world with the opportunities that this moment's liminality presents, with thriving and well-being as primary operating principles and goals.

A dynamic physical space that is social, relational, has the capacity to nurture engagement, dialogue, and co-creativity intended for community building, as well as greater social equity beyond its immediate walls. The formation of a creative community in alignment with the outlined Lab evaluation criteria embodies a profound shift from the mere idea of human welfare to actual intervention and realized impact. Press becomes a living part of the dynamic work about "what we will make for better future realities" by serving as an outlet to bring that work to life. The shared suffering, hardship, humanity, grief, joy, division, polarization—and potential—of the last fourteen months' unmistakable shared experience can be channeled through a collaborative dialogue with the community that allows stimulating societal engagement, provocation, and healing solutions to emerge. In the absence of a deliberate and intentional space to support these interactions, the product and the richness of community impact suffers.

The inclusive and invitational role of a social impact Lab, moreover, elevates public investment in a shared dialogue about where things are going and ownership of and accountability for the outcomes. A shift in public perception around the contributing role and responsibility of a collective movement is developing. The community having a place and a way to shape the emerging world propels the momentum necessary to materialize progress.

The more we activate projects centered on human welfare, the closer we advance human flourishing—if even only one step or one space at a time.

A Social Impact Lab



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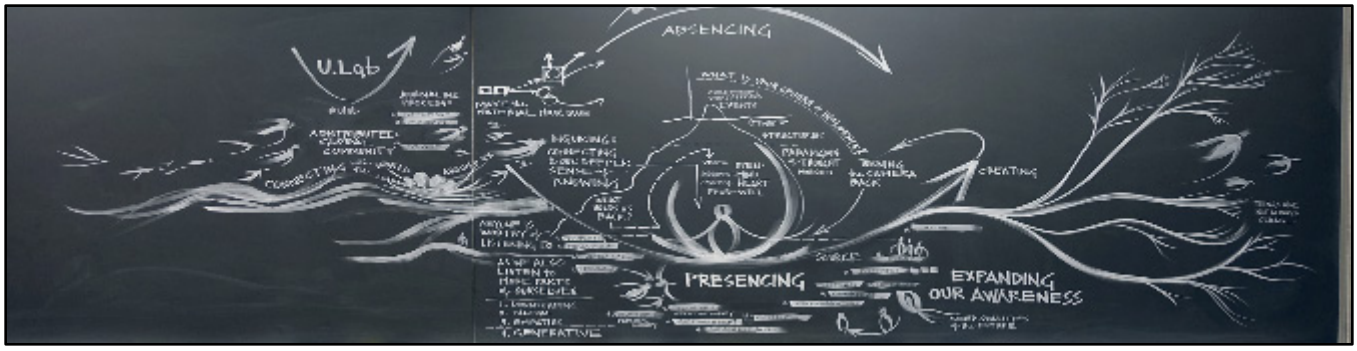
APPENDIX A

Visual Scribing Exercise

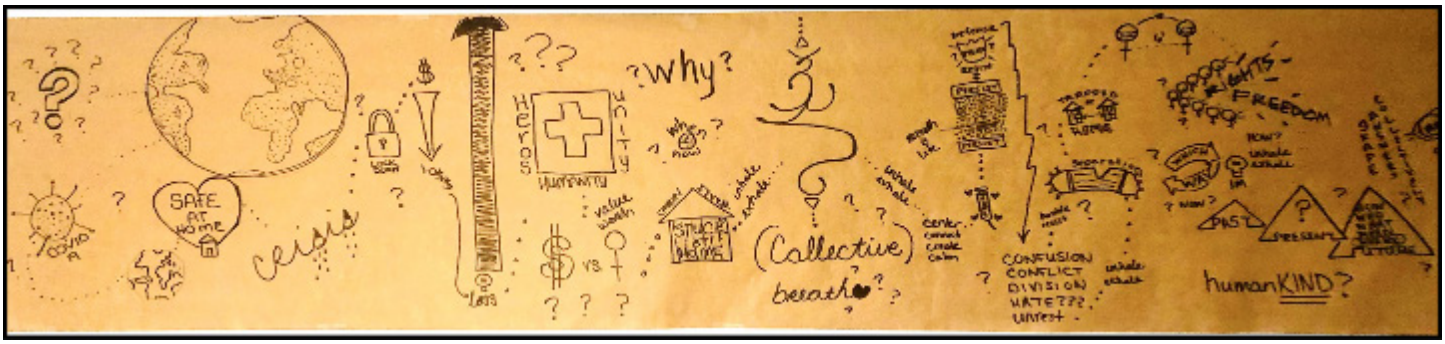
Figure A1



Kelvy Bird, "Generative Scribing" Cambridge, MA (2016)

Figure A2

Inspired by the work of artist Kelvy Bird, "generative scribing" extends art by attending to the field of energy and relation between people and its emerging potential. During my synthesis presentation, I used this technique as an active response to a video compilation of media depictions that occurred over the past year during COVID-19.

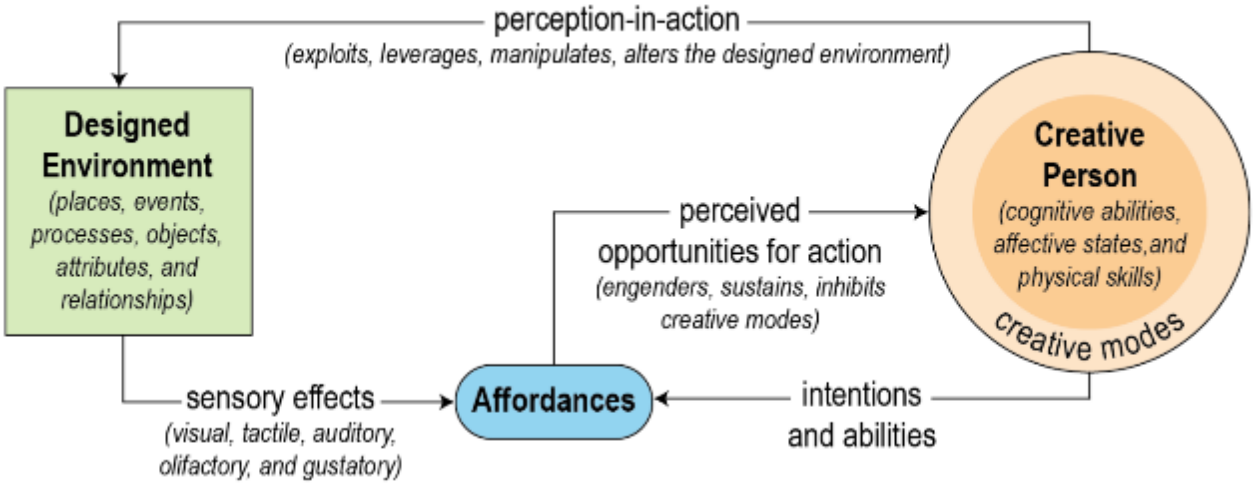


Adrian Young, CCT Synthesis Presentation (2021)

APPENDIX B

Creativity-in-Context Framework

Figure B1



Creativity-in-Context Theoretical Framework (Malinin, 2013)

Figure B2

A transactional relationship between person and environment
Affordance (Gibson, 1977)

APPENDIX C

Photograph C3

Yayoi Kusama Dots

Following a traumatic childhood and second suicide attempt, the prolific Kusama checked herself into a mental hospital and used art therapy to rebuild her life and make art again.

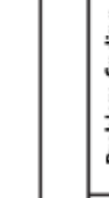
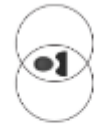
Image Credit: Tokyo Lee Productions

APPENDIX D

Rich Environments: Design Principles

Table D1

Rich Environments: Design Principles

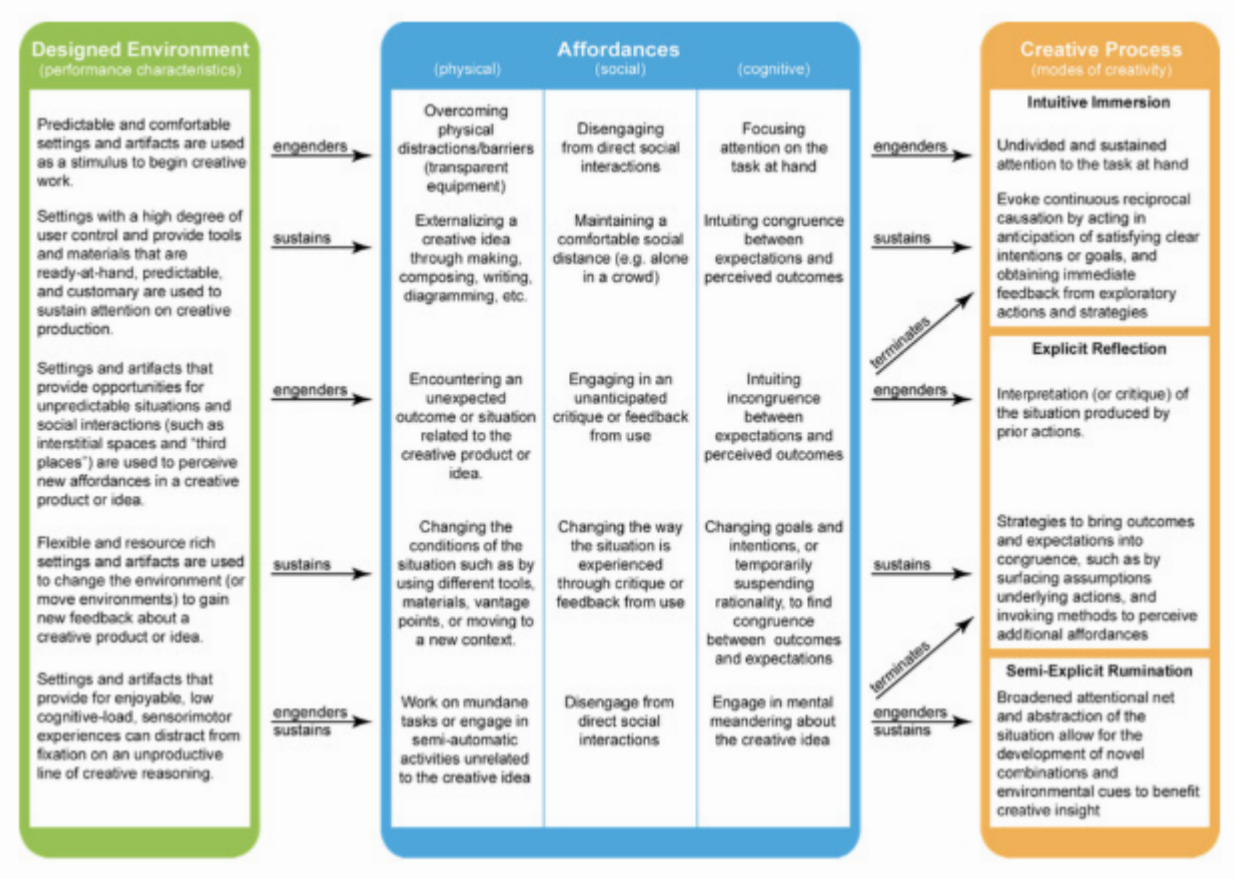
Creative Mode	Problem-finding	Immersion	Reflection	Rumination	Evaluation
Places	**Serendipitous Settings** • links and nodes • density and diversity • tight and loose spaces	**Inspirational Settings** • pleasant • comfortable • adaptable	**Deliberation Settings** • available • reconfigurable • resource rich	**Restorative Settings** • enjoyable • sensorimotor • undemanding	**Curatorial Settings** • social density • connectivity • access
Events + Processes	**Attractor/Reactor Space** • social interactions • serendipitous situations	**Improvisation Space** • rituals • externalization	**Evocation Spaces** • physical modulations • social modulations	**Interstitial Spaces** • mundane tasks • semi-automatic actions	**Implementation Spaces** • use • critique
Place-scale Objects	**Loose Parts** • moveable • transportable • reconfigurable	**Instrumentation** • ready at hand • predictable • customary	**Things to Think With** • versatile • complex • unfamiliar	**Diversions** • rhythm • repetition • concurrence	**Ventures** • implemented • exposed • disseminated
Relationships	**Participant/Observer** • person—event • person—process • person—person	**Transparent Equipment** • person—object • person—place	**Cognitive Artifact** • person–object • person–event • person–person	**Intersections** • person–process	**Feedback** • person–process • person–event • person–person
Attributes	**Apertures + Thresholds** • connectivity • access	**Buffers** • control • separation	**Variables** • resources • responsivity	**Sensations** • multi-modal stimulation • physical engagement	**Networks + Filters** • social density • social diversity • connectivity
Spatial Relationship (person–environment)					
Cognitive (Attentional focus)	**wide**	**narrow**	**moderate**	**variable**	**wide**
Physical (Level of user control)	**low**	**high**	**moderate**	**low**	**low**
Social (Opportunities for social interactions)	**high**	**low**	**moderate**	**low**	**high**

"Empowering the creative practitioner: Towards an ecological framework of creativity of creativity
as embedded practice to inform environmental design" (Malinin, 2013).

APPENDIX E

Table E1

A Model of Affordances in the Creative Process



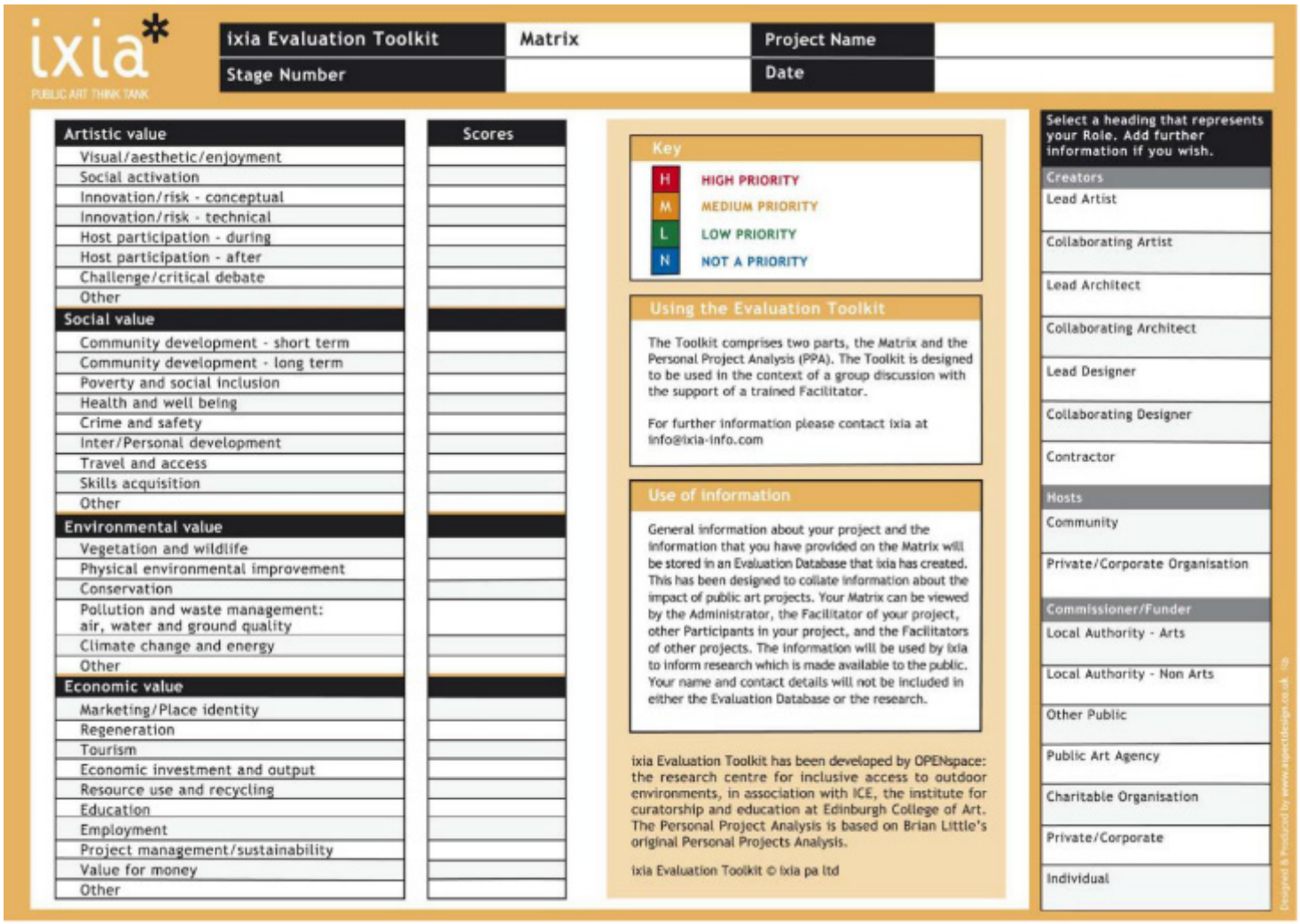
"Empowering the creative practitioner: Towards an ecological framework of creativity of creativity
as embedded practice to inform environmental design" (Malinin, 2013).

APPENDIX F

The ixia Public Art Matrix Form

A framework that captures two axes of information: the range of possible stakeholders and a wide range of "values" by which outcome measures can be identified.

Table F1



ixia Public Art Think Tank, 2013

APPENDIX G

Domains of Gross National Happiness Measurement

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is a measurement of the collective happiness in a nation by Bhutan's fourth Dragon King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in 1972. The concept evolved into a socioeconomic development model. The United Nations passed Resolution 65/309 (adopted unanimously by the General Assembly) in July 2011, placing "happiness" on the global development agenda (Gross National Happiness USA, 2020).

Figure G1