

Spaces of Birth and Death

Philosophical attention to the beginning and end of life has tended to focus on highly abstract ethical

Spaces of Birth and Death we propose to upend typical approaches and expand the field by investigating beginning and end of life care, focusing specifically on ethical and design questions around the spaces in which we encounter these transitional moments. The project revolves around the spaces where fundamental and deeply human moments of life occur; how such spaces either facilitate or prevent contact between people; how they are architecturally and socially moderated; what the depth structure of these spaces is; the nature and extent of the autonomy of

questions or on matters of legal regulation.

people involved in the journeys of birth and death.

Spaces of Birth and Death is a collaboration between academic architects, political philosophers, and academic medical practitioners (e.g. nurses, doctors, midwives, death/birth doulas, hospice staff). It is intended to develop a philosophical apparatus for understanding how key human values (like autonomy, freedom of association, and well-being) are distinctively promoted or hindered by the spaces in which we are born or die. It will allow us to build a framework for evaluating existing architectural or urban arrangements, and policy tools to help architects and planners make good choices when designing such spaces in future.

We're holding three events which bring together academics and practitioners with interests and expertise in the theme of Spaces of Birth and Death with a view to developing a substantial research project in the longer term. First, a preliminary exploratory in-person meeting in London in February 2023 with invited guests. Participants will explain their past experience in this area and explore fruitful lines of discussion for the project. The February meeting will be followed, in the summer, by two one-day workshops: Spaces of Birthing in London in June, and Spaces of Dying in Glasgow in July. We hope to hold these events in hybrid format, enabling online participation.

The project is an interdisciplinary collaboration (architecture, philosophy, medicine) which has at its heart dialogue and collaboration between academic organisations and practitioners in the public sector (especially healthcare). It is a novel and significant platform for knowledge exchange, bringing together academic staff with the users of research and wider groups and communities to increase the impact of the work. Everyone is born and everyone dies, so there is exceptional potential for extensive positive impact: the aim is to change the way we design spaces of birth and death for the better, improving people's lives via e.g. measurable mental health impact, measurable improvements in experiences in journeys of birth and death, and improvement in relationships of trust between clinicians, patients and visitors.

If you think you have something to contribute and are interested in being part of the Spaces of Birth and Death project, please **contact us**.

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Workshop #1

Spaces of Birth and Death

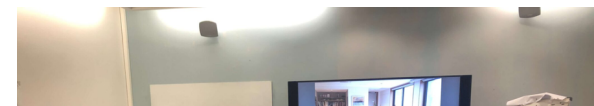
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experts on 17th
Feb 2023.

encounter these transitional moments. Through informal presentations of research at the workshop, we explore the nature of spatial order of Spaces of Birth and Death, and the relationship between people and their environments. We aim to establish common ground; understand the nature and breadth of existing research into spatial ordering of Spaces of Birth and Death; define shared concepts and to begin to explore conceptual and normative issues around architecture and urban design.

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The afternoon was divided into three parts: Spaces of Birthing, Spaces of Dying and a discussion of key themes which has emerged, and where to go next. It was an informal setup, with regular breaks, plenty of tea, and participants were encouraged to make notes on flip chart paper, and to make drawings if they chose to.

Jane Clossick kicked off the presentations in Spaces of Birth with a personal description of the birth of her premature twins at the Royal London Hospital, where she erected a piece of fabric across the birth room as a screen. She went behind the screen, which acted as threshold, with her midwife, doula, obstetrician and husband. On the other side were two neonatal teams, the obstetrician team and the hospital bed. Following Jane's highly personal and specific account, Jenny Wylam told us about the hormonal processes of physiological birth and the interactions between these hormones and the environment. She pointed out that for labour to progress unimpeded by adrenaline (released when a person feels exposed or fearful), the

Kirsty Stansfield and Jeni Pearson explored the different spaces they use in their artistic work with people at the end of their life in The Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice in Glasgow. They showed the sensory room, the art room and a bedroom in the hospice, which was decorated in a homely style with timber-effect furnishings. They introduced their creative practice working within arts and palliative care. This highlighted different spaces within The Prince & Princess of Wales Hospice where they work in Glasgow, and how these spaces need to be flexible enough for people to discover and explore their creativity on their own terms and in an inclusive way. They introduced Tracing Autonomy – a reflective framework initially developed in consultation with Ben Colburn. This includes the holistic terrain which supports a practitioner to understand the wider context and its influence on a person's autonomy. This work continues to be applied to embodied arts practice working with young people who have a life-limiting illness who communicate without spoken language.

birthing person must feel warm, safe, enclosed and protected. She read excerpts from *Childbirth without Fear* by Grantly Dick-Read, and *Birth Reborn* by Michel Odent. The main point was to give an overview of how the birth environment affects a birthing person's psychology and, in turn, physiology which directly impacts their labour, birth, and the postpartum experience. This chimed with Jane's experience, in which she had spent a lot of time in the bathroom, in the dark and the warm, with the shower running. The discussion was wide ranging, touching on the colours, smells and sounds in the spaces of birth, the people, their relationships and the differing objectives of institution and individual.

In the second session, Matilda Carter began with her experiences of the ethical dilemmas around care of people with advanced dementia: considering what kinds of places such care can occur in, and the range of different types of people in these spaces. It led to a discussion of the range of roles played by both patients and staff in spaces of birth and death, and

The warm aesthetic of Kirsty and Jeni contrasted strongly with Harriet McKay's experiences of being with her mother in hospital while she was dying. Harriet described the sequence of different spaces she journeyed through with her mother, many of which she found unpleasant, uncomfortable and clinical. The discussion explored the objects in the spaces of death, from bright yellow sharps bins to the lack of seating for family members visiting a dying person. We talked also about the power of vulnerable people in spaces of both birth and death to control their environment.

In the final session, the eight participants had a quick-fire discussion to identify both key themes, and avenues for further exploration. Ben Colburn chaired and took notes. Of particular importance seemed to be: the journeys undertaken by those going through birth and death, both spatial and mental (spiritual); the significance of the objects present in a birth or death space and the life and connections those objects have which extends beyond the immediate situation; the

how these roles might be guided by the objects present. The delivery of social care for people living with dementia raises a range of significant ethical questions, a large proportion of which involve space. In this presentation, Matilda explored issues concerning what kind of space a social care institution is, how it ought to be connected to the rest of the community, and the norms that ought to govern it.

space on the inside of a person, as well as on the outside and the conversation or interaction between those two states. In terms of further work, the workshop felt like only the beginning: we plan to further explore the relationship between the human body and spaces of birth and death; to involve other cultural perspectives; to use drawing and movement more extensively in unlocking our ideas and exploring spatial configurations, thresholds, boundaries and social relationships. The future is exciting for the next two workshops and for the longer term goal to develop a larger funded research project.

Presentations

Name // Emily McTernan and Ben Colburn

Introduction to Spaces of Birth and Death

Name // Jane Clossick
The Space of My Birth

Name // Jenny Wylam
Spaces of Birth

Name // Matilda Carter
The Philosophy of Dementia Care and Social Care Institutions

Name // Jeni Pearson and Kirsty Stansfield
The Holistic Terrain: a changing landscape of interdependent and interconnected relationships

Name // Harriet McKay
My Mother's Journey

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Workshop #2

Spaces of Birth

A scoping
workshop about
Spaces of Birth at
London
Metropolitan
University,
Aldgate Campus

This is the second in a series of
three interdisciplinary workshops,
this one is specifically
investigating beginning of life care,
focusing specifically on ethical
and design questions around
the spaces in which we encounter
these transitional moments.
Through informal presentations of

on 2nd June
2023.

research at the workshop, we explore the nature of spatial order of Spaces of Birth and the relationship between people and their environments. We aim to establish common ground; understand the nature and breadth of existing research into spatial ordering of Spaces of Birth; define shared concepts and to begin to explore conceptual and normative issues around architecture and urban design.

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Presentations





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Deanna Gibbs //

Becoming a family in the NICU: Parenting in Public

[[Transcript < https://urbandepth.research.londonmet.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Transcript-Deanna-Gibbs.pdf](https://urbandepth.research.londonmet.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Transcript-Deanna-Gibbs.pdf)>]

Philippa Corson //

'Birth space as performative space'

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Helen Watt //

'Perinatal Hospice'

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Polly Mitchell //

Quality Control in
Healthcare

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Mitchell.pdf>](https://urbandepth.research.londonmet.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Transcript-Polly-Mitchell.pdf)]

Claire Feeley //

Institutional Influences
upon Clinician's Care
Practices

[[Transcript <
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9/Transcript-Claire-
Feeley.pdf>](https://urbandepth.research.londonmet.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Transcript-Claire-Feeley.pdf)]

Emily McTernan //

'Freedom of Association
in Birth Spaces'

Elsie Gayle//

'Cultural Safety'

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