

Let's Dream Big!

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“Let’s dream big!” Affecting future female workers through governmental atmospheres

Mie Plotnikof & Justine Grønbæk Pors

Abstract

This paper addresses the subtle, affective power of organisational discourses and practices concerning employability that target children as future workers. It develops a concept of governmental atmospheres inspired by governmentality studies and theories of affective, atmospheric power dynamics. Governmental atmospheres are defined as an affective charging of a normative setting that incites individuals to attune themselves to this setting. Based on that, the paper examines a case study of a collaboration between a small NGO and a global technology corporation inviting 10–12-year-old girls to a camp intended to raise career aspirations within technology. In three analyses, the paper unpacks how the camp mobilised and circulated affects – through spatial arrangements, sensuous stimulations and engaging practices – thereby creating atmospheres of excitement, (technological) optimism and limitless possibilities. The findings demonstrate how this atmosphere connects play, fun, dreams, societal progress, individual success, gender equality, product innovation and business models in an apparently frictionless space. This contributes to existing governmentality studies by conceptualising the pervasive powers of governmental atmospheres that induce subjects to feel and act on organisational interests in employability and the future worker in a seemingly innocent, inspirational way.

Keywords

Governmentality, Atmosphere, Affect, Worker Subjectivity, Employability, Organisational Power, Technology

Introduction

It is well-documented that contemporary management operates by inciting workers to shape themselves in relation to organisational interests and discourses. Drawing inspiration from Foucault's (2007, 2008) concept of governmentality, scholars have scrutinised how organisational power and control function subtly by encouraging workers to invest in themselves as human capital and become entrepreneurial in the pursuit of self-improvement and endless explorations of possibilities (Lorey, 2006; Munro, 2012). Recently, studies have pushed beyond what Kuhn (2006: 1342) termed the "artificial boundaries of the organization" to understand how governmental incitements to craft oneself as an innovative, productive worker transgress formal employment relations (Fisher, 2017; Mickey, 2019). By attending to flexible and precarious forms of work, scholars have unpacked the extensive self-work that individuals do to enhance their employability and shape themselves as energetic, efficient, optimistic workers throughout their working lives (Smith, 2010; Mackenzie and McKinley, 2021).

These studies critically scrutinise the growing role that corporate organisations play in shaping everyday lives and identities, exploring how they participate in fashioning idea(l)s of the future and the meaning of a good life (Mumby and Plotnikof, 2019; Way, 2021). However, since most of these studies remain focused on actual employment relations, we know less about how organisational interests and discourses operate beyond the formal sphere of work, let alone how they affect children and young people, governing them towards future employability (Mumby, 2016; Pors and Kishik, 2023). To explore this, we examine a case study of a collaboration between two organisations – a small NGO, *TechGirls*, and a global technology corporation, *BigTech* – aimed at inspiring 10–12-year-old girls to work with technology. Due to growing concerns about a dearth of female workers in science and technology, girls and women are currently the target of various initiatives designed to inspire them to work in these fields (e.g., OECD, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). In this context, we investigate a specific event, the Dreamcatcher Camp, which is a two-day event inviting girls to explore how technology can help solve societal challenges. The goal is to "increase girls' future possibilities of working with IT and technology" (TechGirls, 2020). We study how this event is designed to affect their interests by inviting them to work on themselves in relation to future dreams and career paths.

Theoretically, we draw on recent studies suggesting that the pervasive powers of governmentality also operate through affective, sensory registers (Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011; Kantola et al., 2019; Sandager, 2021). Adding to these emerging explorations of the connection between power and affect in organisation studies (Ashcraft, 2017; Fotaki et al., 2017; Ratner and Pors, 2013), we develop the concept of *governmental atmospheres*, which we define as an affective charging of a normative setting that incites individuals to attune their self-work to this setting. This concept, we argue, enables us to analytically explore in rich empirical detail how

governmentality works by affectively charging settings through a variety of modalities such as physical and spatial arrangements, sensory stimulations, discourses, and practices.

The paper contributes to contemporary discussions of the pervasive functioning of governmental powers in organisation studies. It does so by documenting how organisations invite children and young people to create themselves as innovative and self-confident future employees in relation to political and organisational discourses, in our case attuning children to futures where technology is considered the obvious solution to societal challenges. We further contribute by developing a concept with which to analyse the affective functioning of power through governmental atmospheres that induce subjects to feel inspired by and attune to normative idea(l)s about individual skill, creativity, and dedication. Hence, we elucidate the subtle yet intense ways in which organisations seek to govern future workers, extending far beyond the confines of formal organisational boundaries and employment relations.

Below, we begin by engaging with the literature on governmentality and worker subjectivity. In addition, we draw on studies of the affective, spatial, and material dynamics of governmentality to develop the concept of governmental atmospheres. We then present our research case of the Dreamcatcher Camp and our methodology before unpacking our analyses of three empirical vignettes. The paper concludes with a discussion of the analytical insights and how they contribute to the field.

Governmentality and the self-crafting of the (future) worker

In discussing the concept of governmentality, Foucault (2007: 108) emphasised how this form of power operates through an “ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power that has the population as its target”. Inspired by this, along with further developments (e.g., Dean, 2010; Miller and Rose, 2008), organisation scholars have shown how workers are incited to self-govern their identity, body, behaviour, and livelihood in myriad ways to make themselves valuable to and employable in neoliberal economies (Mumby, 2020; McKinlay et al., 2012; McKinlay and Taylor, 2014). Others have argued that under neoliberal capitalism, individuals are invited to become “entrepreneurs of themselves” (Foucault, 2008: 226), the living embodiments of “human capital” (Munro, 2012: 348). Hence, organisational discourses encourage employees to develop a self that is creative, innovative, productive, and available to work (Moonesirust and Brown, 2021, 507; Plotnikof and Mumby, 2023).

A central aspect of governmentality is its conception of power as a productive force that works through normative fields of action, demarcating certain possibilities and choices (Foucault, 1982). This challenges traditional conceptions of the relation between power and freedom, where power and freedom are linked so that power equals freedom and, reversely,

less power equals less freedom. Instead, governmentality describes individual freedom and autonomy as highly ambivalent constructs and as effects of the normative functioning of organisational power (Fleming, 2014; McKinlay and Taylor, 2014; Mumby and Plotnikof, 2019). Thus, scholars have scrutinized how power-infused relations between self, work, and capital shape identity formation in “a proliferation of individual differentiation” (MacNay, 2009: 56), whereby workers are given the “freedom” to see their personal development as work-related. For example, studies have demonstrated how identity formation unfolds through heterogeneity and individualisation (Husted, 2021), with imperatives to “Just be yourself” (Fleming and Sturdy, 2019, 2011), or to have fun at work (Andersen, 2009, 2013). For the workers, freedom cannot be separated from the self-work continuously expected of them, as they are embedded in relations of power that govern them to certain forms of self-creation.

While many studies have focused on corporate discourses, unpacking the governmentality and identity work that takes place within specific organisations and employment relations (Moonesirust and Brown, 2021; Watson, 2009), others suggest looking beyond such formal organising (Kuhn, 2006; Mumby, 2016). Critical readings of the ideological underpinnings of the concept of “employability” point to how self-crafting increasingly transgresses the scope and boundaries of an organisation (Smith, 2010; Dill and Morgan, 2018). By studying the exhaustive efforts of individuals to enhance their employability in situations of contingent, flexible, and unpredictable work, scholars have expanded discussions about self-crafting to also encompass precarious work conditions in the so-called gig economy (Carr and Kelan, 2021; Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2021). Further, scholars have documented how neoliberal capitalism individualises organisational interests, making workers expect more of themselves and less of organisations (Pugh, 2015). This “psychological turn within neoliberalism” (Gill and Orgad, 2018: 490) encourages individuals to continually internalise the challenges they meet (Walker and Plotnikof, 2021), and to work on themselves to develop the confidence to ensure their success (Gill and Orgad, 2015), the resilience to deal with failure (Gill and Orgad, 2018), and positivity in the face of great uncertainty (Gill, 2017; Carr and Kelan, 2021).

Following this impetus to explore the powerful ways in which demands of self-crafting come to dominate life outside formal employment (Mumby, 2016), Moonesirust and Brown (2021: 521) have argued that “...in the era of neoliberal governmentality, the identity, conduct, thought, decisions, aspirations, and the entire life of the ‘whole person’ are shaped and instrumentalized in a milieu that authorities of various sorts seek to act upon.” Moreover, Way (2021) has explored the modern corporate encroachment into non-work, arguing that “...more than ever, we turn to corporations to guide our decision making and evaluations of our own worth, rather than deriving values and esteem from organisations designed to serve us, such as families, government, schools, and communities” (Way, 2021: 5-6). Along the same lines,

Costea et al. (2012) have explored how HRM discourses extend beyond the organisation into higher education, showing that, as a result, ideas are circulated that emphasise endless opportunities and dismiss limits to human agency.

This raises questions about the discrete yet pervasive ways in which governmental power incorporates organisational interests and discourses into the self-crafting of (future) workers, even before they enter the world of work. It calls for exploration of how young people are incited to work on themselves as free and enterprising subjects responsible for their own future employability. To this end, we study the case of the Dreamcatcher Camp, examining how it seeks to inspire an interest in technology among girls and help them envisage future career paths in technology-related fields. Before doing so, we develop and outline the concept of governmental atmospheres, unfolding its potential when analysing how individuals, even children, are invited to imagine, feel, and work on themselves as future workers.

Governmental atmospheres

Below, we develop a conceptualisation of governmental atmospheres by first describing our inspiration from governmentality studies and then unpacking the notion of atmosphere. We work towards a definition of governmental atmospheres as an affective charging of a normative setting that incites individuals to attune their self-work to this setting. This allows us to analyse how governmental power works by generating and circulating an atmosphere across various modalities, including spatial and material arrangements, sensory and affective stimulations, and engaging discourses and practices.

Our analytical framework is developed based on a Foucauldian theorisation of governmental power as more pervasive than authority and hierarchy; as a relational, constitutive force that brings normative ideas, identities, and realities into being (Foucault, 1980; Dean, 2010). Governmental power functions through an ensemble of forces, such as discursive and material practices and technologies, which together construct normative idea(l)s and politics of living and becoming a subject (Foucault, 1980: 195). Discourses are understood as power-producing and generative through their relation to materiality, as they “systematically form the objects of which they speak ... by bringing phenomena into being through the way in which they categorise and make sense of them ... and by laying down “conditions of possibility” that define who and what is “normal”, standard, and acceptable” (Foucault, cited in Hardy and Thomas, 2015: 681). In this perspective, governmental power functions normatively through discursive and material practices that demarcate desired identities, futures, and possible fields of action, inciting individuals and collectives to work on themselves.

Recently, scholars have also started analysing the affective dynamics of power (Ashcraft, 2020; Fotaki et al., 2017; Dahlman, 2023). Bjerg and Staunæs (2011) coined the term “affective

governmentality” to explore the affective economy of appreciation, interest, and shame produced in educational leadership discourses. Also using this term, Kantola and colleagues (2019) have shown how specific managerial techniques sensitise employees to the affective threats and promises of new markets. Further, Sandager (2021) has used the notion to unpack the affective dynamics in mentoring practices, (re)producing masculine leadership amongst women. Building on these efforts, we use the term affect to denote pre-cognitive, pre-reflective intensity (Massumi, 2002; Clough, 2008). Affect, in this sense, is not something someone has. Rather, it denotes the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected and how this capacity fluctuates and changes (Munro and Thanem, 2018; Staunæs and Pors, 2015). As such, affect is relational; rather than an isolated entity, it emerges from encounters (Anderson, 2016; Ashcraft, 2020; Pullen et al., 2017). By paying attention to affective dynamics of governmentality, we can explore the sensory and felt lure of normative discourses or idea(ls) for a better life (Berlant, 2011). Moreover, we can understand how power might generate new potentialities by heightening bodies’ capacity to change (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015; Pors, 2019).

We extend the focus on the affective dynamics of governmentality through the concept of atmosphere. Viewing affect as intensity generated in encounters, and moving and circulating amongst bodies, we suggest that the concept of governmental atmospheres may help us appreciate how normative settings become affectively charged through various modalities. The concept of atmosphere has recently been taken up in organisation studies through research examining the aesthetic work invested in organisational spaces and the vitality of matter (Marsh and Sliwa, 2022; Borch, 2010; Bell and Vachhani, 2019; Michels and Steyaert, 2017). Atmosphere is here understood as the result of more or less intentional efforts to bestow a space with certain affective qualities (Molli et al., 2020; Jørgensen and Holt, 2019; Brown et al., 2019). Such studies often draw inspiration from Gernot Böhme’s (2006: 16) definition of atmospheres as “tuned space”, or “spatial bearers of moods” (cited from Borch, 2010). Böhme (2017: 118) describes how spaces can produce an affective state that is not simply the product of the people who are present, but is a “spatially discharged, quasi-objective feeling generated by the physical arrangements and staging”. By stressing atmospheres as quasi-objective, he refrains from connecting them to either subjective experience or objective environmental features. Instead, atmospheres are considered moods and feelings that emerge between bodies, things, and arrangements of a setting (Böhme, 2016: 13).

We draw on Böhme’s understanding of atmosphere to unpack how the setting we study is “tuned” in particular normative ways through relating specific spatial arrangements, objects, bodies, colour, light, sound etc. (2017: 93). Based on this, we can analyse atmospheres as the interplay of different modalities such as spatial arrangements and sensory stimulations that radiate and spread moods or feelings in a particular setting. Yet, because of our interest in more recent theorisations of affect, our approach is furthermore informed by work that relates affects

specifically to atmospheres (see, e.g., Anderson, 2009, 2016; Brown et al., 2019; McCormack, 2014; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016). Ben Anderson (2009, 2016) treats atmosphere as the process of generating an emergent and intensive space-time that comes to envelop bodies, affecting and moving them. Atmospheres, in this sense, animate bodies as they emerge, circulate, and change. They invite and incite bodies, often in non-conscious registers, to affectively attune to an atmosphere while the atmosphere also transforms and is moved by the ways in which bodies are drawn together.

Anderson relates the concepts of affect and atmosphere in a fruitful manner when he writes that atmospheres can be understood as pragmatic–contextual translations of affect (Anderson, 2016: 741). Atmosphere can then be studied as the conditions through which affects are generated and circulated (Anderson, 2016: 743) – as the *taking place* of affect (Anderson, 2006). This matters to us because, with our interest in how governmentality works in affective registers, atmosphere becomes the way in which this takes place. As Brown and colleagues (2019: 22) also point out, the quest is not necessarily to define exactly what an atmosphere *is*, but to provide rich descriptions of how an atmosphere emerges and circulates to understand it. Inspired by this, we study in detail the various modalities – such as arrangements, sensory stimulations, and practices – through which a normative setting is affectively charged.

By combining insights from studies of governmentality with theorisation of affective atmospheres, we define governmental atmospheres as an affective charging of a normative setting that incites individuals to attune their self-work to this setting. Further, we propose that governmental atmospheres can be studied with thick descriptions of the various modalities and the encounters between them through which atmospheres emerge, such as physical and spatial arrangements, sensory stimulations, and engaging practices.

Research context and methodology

Research case

We conducted a three-year qualitative study (2019–2021) of public, private, and third sector initiatives in Denmark to increase girls’ interest in science and technology education and careers. Quickly, we came across collaborative initiatives between TechGirls, a small NGO introducing technology to girls. We were invited to a series of events designed by TechGirls and involving various collaborations (e.g., mother–daughter tech brunches at local museums, gamer camps for girls at local universities), including the Dreamcatcher Camp co-organised with BigTech, a multinational technology corporation. One of the authors participated in multiple events and we decided to focus on the camp as a case for this paper.

The Dreamcatcher Camp is a two-day event inviting girls aged 10–12 to explore in playful ways how technology may help solve societal problems. The invitation, showing an image of

a Native American dreamcatcher with the words “ideas”, “girl power”, and “vision”, outlines the camp’s goal as “catching the dreams of young girls” (TechGirls, 2020) while playing with technology. This involves: “dreams about how we make the world a better, more fun or maybe more interesting place with the help of digital and other technologies” (TechGirls, 2020). At the camp, this was materialised through, for example, posters depicting UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), female technology role models, and stories of female technology inventors. Located at the headquarters of BigTech, the camp involved 20 volunteer role models from TechGirls and BigTech and was attended by approximately 60 girls from local schools. Activities (e.g., idea generation based on the UN SDG, business cases, technical work, and inspirational presentations) were intended to help the girls articulate dreams for the future, and to help them gain the self-confidence to achieve these dreams using technology.

Data collection

We developed a qualitative research design inspired by non-representational and affective ethnographic methods (Dille and Plotnikof, 2020; Gheradi, 2019) encompassing participant observation (including video and photographs); informal conversations and semi-structured interviews with selected camp organisers and participants; and document gathering from websites and (social) media campaigns, as well as policy and strategy documents related to the camp and similar initiatives. The total dataset on which this paper is based amounted to 30 hours of participant observations, 10 hours of audio recordings of interactions, 4 transcribed interviews, 120 photos, 3 YouTube videos, 1 TikTok video, and around 200 pages of documents, including the business cases developed at the camp, the strategy documents used to design the event, and the instructions for female role models volunteering at the event.

The participating researcher mapped and described different discursive and material practices at the camp, including inspirational presentations, role models, collaborations, photos, videos, and the use of furniture, technology, and space of BigTech’s headquarters, plus activities linked to playing, pop culture, and social media. Using video and audio recordings, we transcribed talk and interactions as well as interviews. To explore how governmental powers also operate through the affective, we sensitised these methods towards “data that move” (Gherardi, 2019) as a form of “elusive knowledge” (Toraldò et al., 2018) comprising tacit, aesthetic, and embodied aspects of organisational life. In line with non-representational approaches, we did not try to fixate affects, but rather to enable rich depictions of their atmospheric intensities (Brown et al., 2019; Dille & Plotnikof, 2020).

Thus, the researcher who attended the camp also noticed how bodies (including her own) were organised and moved at and by the event: how participants were gathered, energised through exercises, invited to move by music and light installations. Field notes and photos depicted how the camp affectively charged the atmosphere by noting changes and fluctuations in the

level of intensity as the participants switched from concentrated group work to vibrant dancing and posting it on TikTok. Focusing on increasing and decreasing energies and changing sensations and soundscapes (e.g., silence, quiet murmurs, loud giggles, laughing), the researcher followed affective encounters and materialisations, such as rosy cheeks, smiles, brows furrowed in concentration, and how bodies moved around in shifting flows and tempi.

Analytical process

We developed the analyses by two interrelated processes, one focusing primarily on the empirical data, the other on analytical conceptualisation to unpack the governmental powers infusing the camp. In working with empirical data, we used a thematic analytical approach that focused on zooming in on situated moments, dwelling on their affective qualities, and carefully unpacking the dynamic movements that affectively charged them (Bell and Vachhani, 2020; Gherardi, 2019; Beyes and Steyaert, 2012). We (re)read and (re)coded situations in the data (field notes, interviews, documents, photos, videos, social media etc.) that were rich in affective qualities, exploring how participants were incited to perform self-work in relation to technology through discursive and material practices and modes. We repeated this process, identifying tangible examples, and eventually wrote three vignettes. We define vignettes as rich empirical descriptions of situated complexity (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014) that may include and attend to the multiple modalities of empirical data. Following Orr's (2014: 1046) argument that vignettes are particularly well-suited for this purpose, we use them to "conjure the atmospherics" of our field notes.

Parallel to this, we worked conceptually, inspired by studies of affective governmentality and atmosphere, leading to our theorisation of governmental atmospheres. This enabled us to revisit and re-analyse the vignettes with a focus on interplays between rich moments in the data and our emerging conceptualisation.

In unpacking our findings, we present the three vignettes and subsequent analyses of how governmental atmospheres work by affectively charging a normative setting across different modalities (see an overview in table 1). Vignette I concerns the incitement of participants to a heightened sense of possibilities with technology. Vignette II focuses on the encouragement of participants to see themselves as capable of transgressing boundaries with technology. Vignette III unfolds the invitations to align ambitions to make the world a better place with a successful career in technology. Acknowledging the unsettled, moving qualities of atmospheres, we analyse these vignettes in terms of how the atmosphere emerges and circulates through physical arrangements, sensuous stimulations, and engaging practices.

Table 1. Analyses of the governmental atmosphere of the Dream Catcher Camp.

Governmental atmospheres	Analysis of Vignette I: Sensing a world of possibilities	Analysis of Vignette II: Moving beyond limitations	Analysis of Vignette III: Dreaming of a better future
Physical, spatial arrangements	Buildings, furniture, laboratories, hardware	Role models, uniforms, (in)accessible grounds	Labs, prototypes of past/future inventions
Sensuous stimulations	Technologies, lights, music, smells	Colours, visuals, resemblances	Videos, visuals, music, humour
Engaging practices	Dreamcatcher symbol, dancing, social media	Historic narratives, Imaginaries to overcome obstacles	Group work, tours, technology solutions to world problems
Affectively charging a normative setting	Inciting participants to attune to a heightened sense of possibilities in a world of technology	Encouraging participants to imagine transgressing limitations	Aligning dreams of solving world problems with a career in technology

Findings: The governmental atmosphere of Dreamcatcher Camp

Below, we present and analyse each vignette in turn. We explore how governmental atmospheres affectively charge the normative setting of the Dreamcatcher Camp through physical arrangements, sensuous stimulations, and engaging practices. We unpack how the camp incites participants to work on themselves and consider a future in technology by creating a felt sense of technology’s endless possibilities and ability to overcome limitations.

Vignette I: Sensing a world of possibilities

The Dreamcatcher Camp takes place at BigTech’s headquarters, a massive, sleek and modern building with a glass and steel structure. The sun’s rays dazzle against the windows, catching the eye of passers-by and making them squint. “Wow!”, a woman exclaims as she and the girl she is with pass a sign stating: “Here you can look into the future”, with a peephole offering a limited glimpse into a laboratory. At the entrance, the girls have to show their invitations at a security post, causing some fumbling in bags and pockets, uncertain glances, before the invites are eagerly brandished and the girls move on excitedly. Colourful signs lead them through a spacious hall, welcoming them with the smell of freshly baked pastries. The large white

surfaces and the ubiquitous tech products – tablets, screens, headphones – project a strong corporate feel, yet voluminous plants and small, intimate, even playful furniture (e.g., table football) also emanate a relaxed vibe. Moving along, the girls pass an enormous screen, making them stop, chatter among themselves, and stare: first at a robot, then a lab team, then a tech product, then a big smiling face. The shifts create a dizzying mix of moving lights, colours, figures, and sounds. The girls follow the rapidly changing images, pointing fingers, until they set off again – with beaming smiles – towards a large auditorium. Their excitement is palpable – smiles, sparkling eyes, giggles, and high-pitched laughter – but rosy cheeks and rapid eye movements also hint at feelings of insecurity.

A large screen towers over the auditorium, welcoming the girls with the image of the camp invitation showing a dreamcatcher with the words “ideas”, “girl power”, and “vision”. Invitations are also laid out on tables along with name tags and camp T-shirts. After a first round of inspirational talks and exercises, the CEO of TechGirls announces: “it’s time to have fun” with a TikTok dance. The room is immediately energised by loud noise: girls laughing, screaming, moving, and jumping from the chairs. Running after the CEO into the spacious hall, they all move with high-pitched voices, practising dance moves, bunching together so they can record the whole group (approx. 80). The music starts, filling the hall and mixing with the excited laughter and screams. The CEO yells: “It doesn’t matter how we look, as long as we have fun.” Some of the girls giggle, take a step forward, glancing from side to side while keeping an eye on what is going on behind them; others blend with the crowd or disappear. Closely gathered, they move with the music, sometimes in sync, sometimes not. When it stops, the crowd explodes with excitement: with rosy cheeks, laughing and jumping around. The CEO posts the video on TikTok, and later they watch it and celebrate as it accumulates “likes”.

Analysis I: Generating a heightened sense of possibilities

As a collaboration between a small, non-profit organisation and a multinational technology corporation, the camp is enacted as a friendly, fun, and safe space with girls from local schools, yet is at the same time placed in a huge, upscale building with fancy technology, laboratories, and offices, stressing a corporate feel of important, high-tech innovation. The glass and steel structure of the building, its sleek white surfaces, technological products, and signs depicting “The Future”, as well as a security post, underline how small the participants’ bodies are. This intensifies a sense of both humility and privilege at gaining access to a world where the newest technology is invented. Across the architecture, materials, signs, and security practices, participants are attuned to an anticipation, inviting their bodies to prepare to join an exclusive technology community and alerting them to an abundance of possibilities.

With the building projecting a corporate sheen, a heightened sense of possibilities not only emanates from the architecture but is also underlined by sensuous stimulations and expressions

in the camp set-up. The large screens demand attention, for example, stimulating the eye with colours, changing images, and rhythms of light waves. With flowing light waves and images so outsized that they blur, the screens allure participants' senses and prepare them to attune to what may come next and is imaginable. Further, the image of the dreamcatcher adorning the auditorium's screen and tables stimulates a sense of imaginaries and dreaming. A dreamcatcher is a Native American artefact, a handmade willow hoop with netting originally intended to prevent nightmares from reaching a sleeping person. The dreamcatcher is also enmeshed in a history of (mis)appropriations by new-age cultures and commercial tourism, resulting in mass production for worldwide marketization and potential loss of the original native meaning. At the camp, the dreamcatcher is used in the literal meaning of "catching dreams", bestowed with a positive connotation, optimistic about the future. This is stressed with words like "ideas", "girl power", and "vision", as well as when the girls are invited to dream about technological innovations.

The camp also invites participants to have fun and enjoy themselves along the way. Aside from numerous games of table football, playfulness is incorporated in activities such as the TikTok dance. It is a practice involving rising levels of intensity, facilitating bodies physically coming together, laughing, moving, and touching. First, excitement and nervousness while waiting to get started. Then bodies are touched by the music, alluring them to follow and coordinate with each other. The energy builds up with movement, rapid breathing, and rosy cheeks to finally peak in a shared outburst of energy when the performance is over. This intense atmosphere comes from a feeling of togetherness in a shared here and now. However, the greater intensity also moves with the participants' anticipation of this shared moment's imminent journey through time and space via social media, reaching new and unexpected audiences, and thereby potentially creating unexpected future connections. The room is affectively charged with the anticipation of what could happen when the dance travels on TikTok.

As such, an atmosphere of limitless possibilities is generated and circulated across corporate architecture, security systems, technology laboratories, discursive practices, and signs, providing sensuous stimulations that attune bodies to technology's potentials. This atmosphere is intensified by a sense of exclusivity and importance (e.g., security measures, signs depicting "the future"); by empowering the girls' visions and dreams (e.g., the dreamcatcher visuals and symbols); and by alluring practices that change moods, flows, and rhythms while hinting at exciting, unknown futures (e.g., a dance going viral). In such ways, the Dreamcatcher Camp generates a governmental atmosphere that incites participants to attune to a heightened sense of possibilities in a world of technology.

Vignette II: Moving beyond limitations

TechGirls have invited 20 adult female role models with successful careers in technology, because: “If you can see it, you can be it”, as the CEO stresses. They all wear the same light blue T-shirts as the girls, adorned with an image of the dreamcatcher. The CEO explains: “We’re not pink here, but blue, because it’s about breaking with gendered stereotypes and instead, we focus on the potential for every girl to become what she wants with tech.” At the camp, she asks the girls to notice the text on their shirts, a well-known quote from Astrid Lindgren’s heroine, Pippi Longstocking: “I’ve never tried that before, so I’m sure I can do it.” She assures them: “If we don’t know the answer to something, we’ll figure it out. Because we’re here to find your dreams. We’ll go into your minds and find your dreams about making this world a better place.”

During an inspiring talk about female inventors in the technology sector, the CEO asks the girls if they knew that the computer was invented by a woman. The room, buzzing with conversation, falls silent. Standing on the stage, she shows pictures of historic figures on the massive screen: Ada Lovelace, Grace Hopper, and the so-called Rocket Girls (Barbara Paulson, Macie Roberts, Helen Ling, and Eleanor Frances). Their hair, clothes, and technological devices reflect a different era. Next, she shows a drawing from the 1920s of two women conducting a video call and a photo of a woman using FaceTime. The large room full of girls all silently face the big screen, listening intently. The CEO smiles and reads aloud: “Framing tomorrow today”, adding: “Yes, it’s crazy, right? Almost a century ago, someone envisioned this. Now, think of all the solutions to future world problems we can imagine today: How far can we get?” A few exclaim “wow”, while others whisper to each other.

The CEO explains in an interview that they aim to assure girls that “there are no boundaries for their dreams. If something didn’t exist, we assumed it did when the girls needed it. An entrepreneurial spirit often demands something that does not already exist and then sets its imagination free.” Thus, she says, they invite girls to “come out of their shells” by “hacking their interests”, whether that be fluffy teddy bears, barbie dolls, or helping to save the world.

Analysis II: Mobilising capability to transgress boundaries

The camp seeks to facilitate a transformation among participants: from being shy, unsure of their own capabilities, or uncomfortable with technology to believing in themselves and feeling skilled in the use of technology. This mobilisation of self-work emerges through various modalities, including the bodies of role models. The role models are all female technology professionals, and all wear the same T-shirt as the girls. They materialise bodily mirrors for the girls in which they can see possible future selves in the form of successful career women. The Pippi Longstocking quote on the shirts places a girl hero on their bodies circulating a sense of

optimism and self-confidence. Moreover, the role models and girls wearing the same T-shirt creates a collective, uniformed space, where everyone with this uniform belongs.

The blue-coloured, bodily figures of role models and girls, physically arranged with the same shirts to mobilise representation, familiarity, and self-confidence also stimulates bodies in sensuous ways. As the participants move around and work together, they become a collective blue body-in-movement. The colour saturates the camp as a continuous visual backdrop that radiates and stimulates the participants' eyes. Blue is meant to be a tangible colour of empowerment, helping to transgress stereotypical ideas about girls being less skilled at technology. It is hoped that the colour will perform certain affective work on participants, helping to transgress limitations, break with gendered stereotypes, and open potentialities of becoming whatever one wants (with technology). Thereby, the role models and uniforms circulate optimism and the self-confidence to overcome obstacles of various kinds.

This atmosphere is intensified by the slide show of photographs of female inventors throughout history. These images juxtapose the different eras in which their inventions were made; yet the collage of portraits from different epochs collapses the distance between the early-19th and late-20th centuries, aligning the women as a collective of female inventors. The women are connected by their ability to move beyond their own time with the skill to envision progressive technological futures, hence simultaneously visualising and symbolising a visionary female skill set and space of potentiality in technology. Since these women worked during periods of greater gender inequality, when women were not expected to work in science or engineering, the photos also circulate a sense of struggle, but one that can be overcome. As such, the visuals stimulate hope and encourage a drive to transgress structural limitations.

The visuals and words on the next slide, "Framing tomorrow today", fold together past, present, and future, creating a space for past(s) and future(s) in the present, collapsing their distance. The images symbolise an extreme ability to envision a distant, unknown future, transporting participants back in time, but immediately sucking them back into the present of video calls. This stimulates ideas of an unknown future of technological potentiality and invention, suggesting to the participants that with enough imagination one can transgress boundaries between today and tomorrow, the known and unknown. The rapid time travel and tangible examples of female inventors activate bodily expressions of awe and excitement among the participants, which the CEO links to their own potential visions. This infuses the camp with a sense that the only limit is their own ability to imagine yet unknown technologies, a message the CEO repeats during the camp.

As such, the Dreamcatcher Camp invites participants on a transformative journey to leave behind insecurities and work on themselves to become confident in using, familiar with, and excited about technology. Through role models that materialise gender representation, the

colour blue that arouses alternative gender norms, and visuals that collapse time and symbolise individual skill and strength to overcome limitations, an atmosphere is produced and intensified that affectively charges the setting. This atmosphere envelops the participants in a sense of collective optimism and encourages them to imagine transgressing limitations.

Vignette III: Dreaming of a better future

As the video “Meet Molly, the kid who never stops inventing” (produced by General Electric) starts, the room falls silent, all eyes on the screen. Molly’s dad asks young Molly to take out the rubbish. Annoyed, Molly designs an automatic rubbish-removal system to do it for her. As Molly grows older, she creates one invention after the other: a pulley device delivers cookies to girl scouts; a rope tied to a stick is used to operate a lawnmower; a robot arm turns the pages of her schoolbook. Before long, an adult Molly impresses a manager with a new robot that inspects a large machine. The girls are glued to the screen, laughing at Molly’s efforts, smiling as she succeeds.

After the video, the CEO says: “Let’s dream big! We will develop ideas for whatever we want to do: creating new computer games, saving the planet, inventing a new device. We will learn how to develop ideas by analysing products and markets.” The screen behind her lights up with the words: “The dream catching begins.” She introduces a group assignment for developing new technology based on their dreams and the UN SDGs, pointing at UN posters that hang from the walls around them. She hands out worksheets illustrating a dreamcatcher framing a business case model of “market analysis” and “product innovation”. Each group is also invited on an exclusive inspirational tour of BigTech’s laboratories. Led by a role model, they pass through a security post upstairs, leaving the massive hallway, and walk close together along narrower corridors showcasing historical inventions and with labs behind locked doors, their eyes wandering past steel and glass walls, catching glimpses of what lies behind them.

The camp ends with presentations by all the groups, showing how dreams can be turned into inventions linked to the UN SDGs: an app mapping disability-friendly playgrounds; a friend-finder app for lonely elderly people; a waste-eating robot fish for cleaning water. Finally, the girls receive a diploma confirming their professional experience in “group work, market analysis, idea generation, product development and presentation, and improving the world with technology.” As members of TechGirls evaluate the camp, they proudly proclaim that “90 % of the girls believed that technology can save the world ... and 87% that technology helps the environment.”

Attuning to a future career in technology

The camp makes use of different spatial arrangements in the corporate building, such as an auditorium and areas for group work, cosy and playful zones in the hallway, a high-security

corporate laboratory. However, rather than seeming contradictory, this combination mobilises a flow between opposing physical expressions, spaces, and moods. Moving between these different arrangements, the bodies of participants are invited to be touched by the different vibes, bringing the spirit and mood from one activity into the next; from having fun, laughing, and being moved by visuals and music that underline a little girl's progression and success in creating unseen inventions, to walking around secret laboratories and getting inspiration from historical inventions, to deep concentration as they strive to develop good ideas for new technologies, surrounded by posters with the UN SDGs. The interweaving of workspaces, technological spaces, playful and visionary spaces, and problem-solving spaces stimulates an intimate connection between feeling amused and attuning oneself to future technologies.

Moreover, through the sensuous stimulations of the homely visuals, happy music, and humorous inventions in the video about Molly, the camp also evokes connections between childhood play and a successful career in technology. An inventive mindset and dedication gradually move a child towards a career in engineering and technology. The video's images quickly cut from one stage of Molly's life to the next, thus suggesting a straightforward, fun, linear progression through life, from innocent childhood play to high-impact problem-solving. The video establishes relationships between a young girl's dreams, blueprints, and simple machines and a successful career in technology as an adult. With the combination of a homely setting (including artefacts and situations that are easy to identify with for many children) and music and other effects designed to create emotional responses, the video invites the participants to affectively attune to dreams of exciting futures in global tech corporations.

Furthermore, as participants are moved by these moods and stimulations, their attention is also directed towards market analysis and product innovation, linking their experiences directly to imaginaries of a successful future work life in a technology company. The group work is facilitated by a business model worksheet, asking the girls to identify their dreams and relate them to the UN SDGs. The worksheet turns their dreams into questions about innovation and market potential. Whereas the image of the dreamcatcher is at first utilised to create a sense of limitless dreams and open futures, now, it is part of the business model worksheet, attuning dreams to profitable prototypes and problem-solving. The exercise mobilises creative self-expression and collaboration, yet it also relates directly to successful technology innovations – a practice further intensified by visits to otherwise inaccessible labs. This circulates the feeling that technology corporations can be a (girl's) playground to achieve future dreams.

With physical arrangements combining corporate, technological, and playful components, serious and fun-having practices, and a video linking childish imagination to successful adult careers, the camp mobilises and circulates an atmosphere in which playfulness, dreams, individual achievement, societal progress, market analysis, and technological innovations do not just co-exist, but feed into each other in a smooth, frictionless way. Participants are invited

to have fun and be creative, as well as to channel this excitement into product innovation and dreams of successful careers. Thus, an atmosphere circulates that attunes participants to feel and experience an alignment between dreams of solving world problems and building successful careers in technology corporations.

Concluding discussion

In this paper, we developed the concept of governmental atmospheres by combining insights from governmentality studies with theorisations of affective atmospheres. We defined governmental atmospheres as an affective charging of a normative setting that incites individuals to attune their self-work to this setting. This concept, we argued, facilitates analysis sensitive to the subtle ways in which governmental power acts on individuals and collectives by mobilising and circulating affective atmospheres through various modalities, such as spatial arrangements, sensory stimulations, and engaging practices.

We explored the governmental atmosphere of a Dreamcatcher Camp, an event organised by a local NGO and a global technology corporation targeting girls aged 10–12 with the aim of inspiring their interest in technology. We examined how the camp generated an atmosphere of endless possibilities in an exclusive world of technology, inciting bodies to attune to this potentiality. Moreover, we studied how the atmosphere circulated a sense that limitations can be transgressed, encouraging participants to build their self-confidence and believe that with dedication and talent they can overcome any obstacles. Finally, we explored how the atmosphere mobilised creative self-expression and dreams of a brighter future and aligned these with examples of successful careers in technology. Together, the analyses showed how the camp's normative setting was affectively charged through different modalities, including physical and spatial arrangements, sensuous stimulations, and engaging practices. We documented how this incited participants to attune to limitless potentiality, while being subtly guided to envision their future selves as working with technology.

Our findings contribute to a growing body of literature concerning the pervasive role that organisations play in shaping individual desires and identities (Moonesirust and Brown, 2021; Way, 2021; Mumby, 2016). Expanding discussions about the extensive self-work that individuals are incited to perform – not just within actual employment relations, but also beyond formal organisational boundaries (Kuhn, 2006; Kishik and Pors, 2023) – we offer detailed empirical analysis of how organisations inspire children to imagine their future selves as successful and inventive workers. Specifically, we demonstrate how children are invited to experience, feel, and live imaginaries of the exciting possibilities for dedicated, skilled individuals working with technology. We contribute to existing research on how flexible and precarious work relations impose demanding self-work on the individual (Carr and Kelan, 2021; Riach and Loretto, 2009) and how HRM discourses saturate educational spaces (Costea,

et al., 2012) by offering an insight into the far-reaching performativity of organisational discourses of employability and the good worker, extending well beyond both formal and informal spheres of work. By studying the Dreamcatcher Camp, we have shown how organisational efforts to shape future workers reach into childhood and, through play, fun, and dreams of changing the world, target the identity formation and self-expectations of 10–12-year-old girls.

Furthermore, our study testifies to how contemporary forms of power constitute an ambiguous terrain, where individual freedom, self-development, and creative self-expression interweave with control (Mumby & Plotnikof, 2019). Studies have unpacked how “passion” and “fun” have become intimately related to work, making made work a site of self-actualisation (Fleming and Sturdy, 2011). In particular, scholars have shown how optimism (Carr and Kelan, 2021), hope (Mackenzie and McKinley, 2021), confidence (Gill and Orgad, 2015, 2017), and resilience (Gill and Orgad, 2018) are discursively stressed in organisational expectations of individuals. In our case study, we unpacked how the Dreamcatcher Camp attempts to increase employability and labour market equality, by countering harmful stereotypes and empower girls. However, this unfolds in a corporate setting where girls are invited to work on themselves to aspire to successful careers in technology aligning their own dreams with those of technology corporations. We contribute to this literature on the ambiguities of contemporary power by drawing attention to the complex entanglements of discourses, materialities, and affects through which power intensifies (Ashcraft, 2020; Fotaki et al., 2017). By developing the concept of governmental atmospheres, we seek to enhance analytical approaches to better understand the pervasive ways in which power acts on individuals and collectives by affectively charging normative settings.

Thus, we join emerging efforts to extend the scope of governmentality studies beyond linguistic, symbolic, or psychological dimensions (Bjerg and Staunæs, 2011; Kantola et al., 2019; Sandager, 2019). We suggest the concept of governmental atmospheres as one way of furthering these efforts to understand how organisational interests and power do not only reach and shape us through language and ideas, but also through the affective charging of normative settings. We extend these studies of the affective workings of governmentality through a specific focus on the ways in which affect *takes place* (Anderson, 2016) and thus illuminate *how* certain spaces become saturated with affective intensity. We argue that the concept of governmental atmospheres enables analytical sensitivity to the different modalities through which atmospheres are generated and circulated. We hope to have shown that this concept allows for detailed empirical descriptions and analytical insights into the ways in which a particular normative setting is affectively charged through various modalities, such as spatial arrangements, sensory stimulations, and engaging practices.

As such, we have offered critical insights into the subtle ways in which organisations mobilize self-work, making human capital the “grid of intelligibility” in all spheres of life (Fleming, 2014; Foucault, 2008). Future research might further explore the discursive, affective, and material dynamics of the myriad modalities (e.g., campaigns, education, commercials, toys, etc.) through which organisational interests in shaping future workers are incorporated into childhood, examining how such processes occur and with what consequences.

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