



# Spaces of the Future

A SHYFT Collective Study

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An exploration of proactive design decisions with spatial behavior and environmental design - in 2021 and beyond.

By: Asa Plum, Senior Project Designer



# MOVING FORWARD WITH A NEW PERSPECTIVE

**The beginnings of a real estate revolution have been building for decades, but it took a pandemic to force the evolutionary leap of next generation spaces.**

Some will point to COVID-19 as a temporary reason for examining the efficiency, health, and technology of our spaces, but the reality is that a much more seismic shift had occurred. There is no going back, we can only move forward and embrace the spaces of tomorrow, as much as we can perceive them from today.

This is not about a pandemic, but the society that has been rapidly and hastily shaped by such dramatic changes in a short period of time. Change is inevitably a bit uncomfortable, but there are some silver linings to the future.

## Spaces of The Future: Foreword

Society and associated environments typically move slowly over time. Spurred along by the forerunners and innovators, pushing the envelope of what is viable, acceptable, and affordable, dragging along those who seek the tried and true methods of decades past. Lunging forward in great leaps and stuttering back a few steps in the following years, a broad cycle plays out in the world of design and what is old is new again...with a bit of twist.

Long has there been a discussion of the time when a tipping point would hit, forever altering society and our built environments. To be fair, many of these factors have been growing for some time, but it has all come to a boiling point at once. The result is the need (not desire) to change how we interact with our live/work/play environments. This isn't so that we can have a brighter future...but so that we can have one at all. First and foremost, this is not an examination of policy, politics, or speculation, but rather a practice-based look forward to a point we must endeavor to reach in the months and years to come. In service of this greater goal, we will not belabor the origins/influences of the mounting pressures, but rather, accept them as challenges to be met and overcome.

The structure of this study is based around the built environment's evaluation in the critical light of new days. Design of our everyday spaces must proactively play a role in proving what was good enough for yesterday will not suffice for tomorrow.

Perspectives vary and the intent of this study is to take a broad, categorical look at the varied facets of society, environments, and the interface points between them.

The synopsis looks at a sample and examines how these premises may apply for our office and potentially yours.

**Perspective** - Step back and look forward.

**Euthenics** - The human scale interaction of built spaces.

**Interface Technology** - Virtual and augmented technologies.

**Interface Spaces** - Where we interact physically and virtually.

**Invisible Support** - The ecosystems of healthy spaces.

**Place-making** - Stitching the nodes together.

**SHYFT Collective** - Walking the path.

## Spaces of The Future: Perspective

For the last year, there's been talk of "returning to normal." The reality is that there will be a new normal, different from the one that we've known before and appropriate to the challenges of an ever-changing world, very much anchored in our collective history, but oriented to a brighter future.

The future can be summarized in a single word: "adaptive." Yes, this has always been the way of humanity, to grow, adapt and change...but the next generations are experiencing a leap forward, the likes of which humanity hasn't seen since the industrial revolution. "Purpose built," is as antiquated as the coal furnace (apologies to my Welsh miner forefathers), but as our collective knowledge grows, so must our homes, schools, businesses, hospitals, and public spaces. By no means does that insinuate that we raze our heritage and sew anew without regard for the shoulders of giants that carried us to this leaping point of a new age, honoring our parents and enabling a brighter future for our children.

When we "return" to a new normal, we will visit the ghosts of our previous selves; a bit like returning to your childhood home as an adult. Things will not be as you remember, for if the space is the same, YOU are different. Working from the kitchen table with a pet curled at your feet has left an impression on your psyche that can't be dismissed quite so easily as an email from HR welcoming you back would suggest. This is the great challenge, how to facilitate those positive and productive reactions, while folding in the missing pieces of cultural touchstones that have been all but lost to the digital office.

Envision a framework which enables the problems of the future to be solved by the backbone of today, utilizing the technology of tomorrow. Look to those bleeding the way on the cutting edge, the giants of industry, both successful and lost. Reuse, adapt, re-purpose, revise and don't lose sight of those who brought us to the precipice of a brighter tomorrow. Yes, we may lose part of our past, but take it from a 3rd generation master builder, it's impossible to move forward without leaving something behind. Without understanding what is holding us back, we won't know what to leave in our wake.



**"It isn't that I lack affinity for the shells of our past, quite the contrary. The offices, manufacturing facilities, churches, houses, schools and countless shadows of past lives lived/lost hold the keys to tomorrows spaces; teaming with life, love and more loss to come. Perhaps it is just time for a new chapter to be written."**

## Spaces of The Future: Euthenics

Work/Life balance and societal interactions have taken on a new meaning in today's environment. Some aspects are beneficial and will be carried forward in some form, with the intent to shed those detrimental remnants, but at its most raw core, everything is about the human condition.

Like shining a light on the dark corners of our lives, individuals have begun to ask some fundamental questions about the conditions of our spaces and our interaction with them. Unfortunately, no result is going to provide universal appeal, but must rather be weighed including the placebo effect to provide a level of reasonable assurance to the patrons. When examining the environmental psychology of a situation, the display is less about statistics and more focused on anecdotal variables that are easily identified and provided appropriate attention.

Today, we are continuously bombarded by stimuli, in the absence of positive information, the human mind inevitably scans for danger. Although this is likely a remnant from earlier times when the survival of the herd depended on identifying those dangerous elements early (say...a bear), that has little meaning while scrolling through social media feeds while awaiting an appointment. Still, the patterns persist and must be overcome with micro-positive reinforcement nodes that indicates your current environment is healthy, clean, and safe.

One of the most difficult challenges will be information that's provided to the target audience and leveraging professionally sound "best practices" as a starting point is highly advised for the benefit of all parties. These are not arbitrary decisions and have been established as a benchmark for your environment. Once undertaken, studied and executed, the most critical portion is to provide sufficient information to the target audience that the work has indeed been done without question. This will require an adept combination of environmental queues, and proactive internal and external marketing to reinforce any work that has taken place. It's imperative to address those items which have been intentionally left out of the process. They will certainly come into question - no acknowledgment implies neglect of consideration.

When envisioning the whole process, end to end, then connection of the people to the space, the changes and the need should be planned first and foremost. In the absence of information, speculation will always fill the void, so outline information and direction will guide users to the end result.





### Spaces of The Future: Interface Technology

The virtual effect has undergone a significant makeover in terms of use and stigma associated with leveraging such technologies. Prior etiquette relegated the use of virtual conversations to personal time with distant relatives, identifying shopping list items and only when absolutely necessary for business meetings. Taking a distant third place to in-person or telephone conversations, virtual meetings have finally seen their coming of age. Largely due to a lack of comfort with this particular method of communication, this sink or swim piece of technology has become a cornerstone of environments.

Now our ability to be “present” has a very limited number of variables: time, device, and connection. Time will always be the ultimate limiter, and the increased ability to attend geographically separated events means more events to coordinate and more division of the most finite amount of resources. Devices are nearly ubiquitous, with most platforms enabling one to attend via smartphone, laptop, tablet or (in a pinch) via voice call. The greatest physically limiting of these factors is an infrastructure for data connection, something that became immediately apparent to ISPs around the globe overnight. No longer were their day demands coming from robustly designed office hubs, but rather a patchwork of residential lines, largely designed for asymmetric download speed.

As technoloy continues to enable our “anywhere” ability, the viability of the data connection and the ease of human interface will continue to be the restriction points. With further resources moving to data centers, information technologies will be constructed around virtual access models, not just for communication, but for data security, storage and scaling capacities.

These technologies are having their moment in the spotlight, some of them after many years in the shadows of the public eye. Necessity has spurred a whole new generation of technologies to be adapted into common usage. QR Codes have been around for years, but now you'll recognize the block code to view the Online menu for your local restaurant. Grocery and Department store pickup processes and lockers are commonplace, decreasing contact and increasing efficiency. Many of these are here to say as part of our daily lives and there will be more to come.

Although there have been some peripheral advancements to the tech on the ends of the interface (smart watch vs. phone vs. computer), the immediate changes will be occurring in the cloud and increasing the need for continuous connectivity with the world.

### Spaces of The Future: Interface Spaces

The physical spaces that we occupy to live, work, learn and build communities have been sparsely utilized or vacant, but must be reincorporated into everyday life.

All of the circumstance has driven a new perspective of space use in our lives. We have experience with this, looking for an underutilized corner of the house to become, “home office #2.” The reality is that most of us find ourselves in a situation where our environment no longer aligns with our lives, enter our old friend...necessity.

The beginning was the kitchen table, couch, patio, recliner (my favorite) and over time we realized that this was far less temporary than we had planned, and it was time to get serious. This need was unexpectedly compounded as summer turned to autumn and schools didn't open as expected and the house became a co-working space with daycare and classroom components. Now, as we grapple with evolving variables and the legacy of existing built space, we are at an impasse until we can synthesize a path forward for each unique condition.

As with the onset of any project, we start with gathering of data, utilizing technology to mine information, analyze, prioritize, set goals and guidelines. With the gathering of quantifiable metrics via survey, conversation and forum, we gain a better understanding of the individual perspectives, which may have largely gone unnoticed, as we were assuming everyone would adapt to the common work environment provided. In this way, we are able to better understand the needs of individuals and truly craft an environment that is more efficient and responsive than ever before.

The spaces must follow the needs of the occupants and it all comes back to data. Asking the hard questions, for which there may be no easy answer. Begging the question of who you want to be as a work environment, a company, and a culture; how consistent is that vision with your most important resource? For in the end, a company is it's people and the space just enables them to collaborate as a whole.

It may not be what we anticipated to occur in the last year, but it does present a unique opportunity, should one have the fortitude to rise to the challenge.

**Envision a framework which enables the problems of the future to be solved by the backbone of today, utilizing the technology of tomorrow. As such, look to those bleeding the way on the cutting edge, the giants of industry, both successful and lost.**

**Reuse, adapt, re-purpose, revise and don't lose sight of those who brought us to the precipice of a brighter tomorrow. The next generation is waiting in the wings for their opportunity to correct our errors or build on our successes.**

### Spaces of The Future: Invisible Support

Businesses are cemented in the idea that the physical occupation of a space is paramount to the success. Given some notable exceptions, having individuals occupy space just because it is “the way we've always done it,” is getting to be a hard sell. When stepping back to evaluate the cost/benefit equation of a dispersed working model there are some unexpected advantages to daily operations. Fewer people mean less need for daily space, parking, cafeteria supplies and mileage. Workers gain commute time, drink their own coffee and (somewhat) enjoy a relaxed dress code. The tipping point between the two perspectives is supervision of time but depending on your office culture...there is probably an app for that.

Again, with notable exceptions, there will inevitably be a need for a physical congregation area which is the hub for the community and culture of a successful organization. While much attention is paid to the branded fit & finish of an office, beneath the glossy skin, there are utility players, silently enabling the viability of any constructed environment. Infrastructure goes unnoticed, but any under performance or failure can paralyze even the most well conceived of environments. Heating, cooling, ventilation, lights, power, and data systems rarely take center stage, but exact a heavy toll on the bottom line success of any space.

When focusing on the needs of a new generation of workplace, special attention must be given to those essential components that provide clean, safe and nurturing environments. Air quality, ventilation and filtration systems play a significant role in the health and productivity of any employee, both physically and mentally. We all feel comfortable in our own homes where we have control over all environmental factors, something that isn't possible to such a degree in a shared space.

Technologies that have long been relegated to the realm of healthcare are finding their way into more widespread application by a combination of more cost effective technology and a sociological need to ensure higher degrees of hygiene than were possible before. Better filters just the visible tip of a technological iceberg that spans from simple air exchanges to active plasma and learning environmental control systems. Weighing the cost to benefit ratio of these critical systems is an integral part of a successful rejuvenation plan for a sustainable space.



**As we wrestle with the monumental tasks at hand, building for an uncertain future, the mantra to carry us forward is, “Fail fast, fail often, and never make the same mistake twice.” Embrace iterative design and all the bumps and bruises that it entails, let it be your teacher. With that, flexibility and adaptability are the path in an uncertain future, know that you will be wrong, do not let it dissuade you from pushing forward into the pitch of an unlit path.**

### Spaces of The Future: Place-making

Regardless of the onset of an effort, something came beforehand. From forest, field, town, city or industry center, there was always a before and there will always be an after. What speaks to us, guides our path and pulls us forward on our journey? With all the data spread before us, where do we take the first steps?

We must take stock of all possibilities and perspectives considered before we can begin the task at hand. Do two distinct vectors inevitably come into focus, adapt, or begin again? Like roads diverging in a wood, we must chose, knowing no more than what we can see from where we stand and what is behind us.

What already exists and does it share a lineage with your future goals? Within the confines of your resources, how much can you risk before there is danger of a fatal mistake; how far off the charted path and deep in the woods do you feel you can survive and survive to venture again tomorrow? Beyond that question, the nature of design is as unique as the footfalls of paths unmapped. Does standing on the shoulders of predecessors enable us to reach higher or hinder from moving forward on our own path?

Only time will tell if we have done our jobs well, learned from the past and made the most appropriate choices. The best path forward is seldom the clearest and only through the efforts of diligent research, critical discussion, careful planning and precise execution will the paths reveal themselves. It is then upon us to choose the most appropriate one and forge ahead into an ever uncertain future.

Place-making is an art of nuance, balanced between the physical space and the people who inhabit it, ever changing as time passes. It is upon us as design professionals to reflect upon our past successes and embrace our failures to lead our peers on a better way to a better space.



We're walking the path, just as you are. It's important to understand that there is not one perfect solution for everyone. No checklist of procedures or product can resolve the complex and unique challenges faced by your business in this challenging time. Let us show you what we've done and how it might work for your office.