

Spaces that Matter:
Gender In/visibility, Materiality and the Poetics of Organizational Space

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Abstract

Judith Butler's (1988, 1993, 2000 [1990], 2004) performative analysis of gender draws critical attention to the body as an important site on which the gendered subject is brought into being, or made to 'matter' as she puts it. Here she plays on the term matter as referring to both the materialization of gender, and its performance in accordance with the norms of the heterosexual matrix. Gender performativity, and its materialization in the form of 'bodies that matter' she argues, is driven largely by the desire for recognition of the gendered self as a viable, intelligible social subject. In this paper, we seek to extend Butler's analysis of gender performativity through the recitation of particular cultural norms over time, drawing attention to the ways in which these norms are evoked and materialized in the gendered configuration of organizational space. Drawing on work by video artist Sofia Hulten entitled *Grey Area*, we develop Butler's analysis with reference to the findings of a series of group and individual interviews focusing on the ways in which gender in/visibility is performed and materialized in organizational space. Reflecting on the findings of these interviews, we argue that management of this simultaneous in/visibility requires competence in 'gender switching' (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002); that is, in the ability to move between different, often conflicting, gender hegemonies. With this in mind, we describe our analysis as a 'poetics of space' because of the performative role organizational spaces were found to play in the (conscious or otherwise) evocation of meaning in our research. In the discussion of our findings, we explore this theme by linking Butler's analysis of the social production of 'bodies that matter' to Bachelard's (1964) account of the 'poetics of space' and Lefebvre's (1991) concept of 'representational spaces', arguing that an important but relatively neglected aspect of the organizational materialization of the gendered self is the performance of 'spaces that matter'.

Introduction

Workplaces matter to the ways in which we have to negotiate our gender identities at work (Halford and Leonard, 2006: 54, emphasis added).

Our interest in the relationship between organizational space and gender performativity developed largely as a result of two apparently unrelated experiences. The first occurred a couple of years ago when a female academic (who shall remain nameless, but whose work is well known in sociological circles) advised us that it was not only unprofessional to display family photographs and children's drawings in our university offices, but that to do so was fundamentally anti-feminist, evoking a set of associations that feminists have fought hard to challenge and resist. To be honest, we were somewhat taken aback by her tirade; what little thought we had given these apparent displays of essentialism had been based largely on the assumption that they simply brightened up our offices, giving them (for want of a better word), a more 'human' touch. Yet, when we stopped to think about it, we began to wonder if perhaps our children's photos and paintings made us look as if we were indeed, not 'serious academics'. We gradually noticed that few of our male colleagues, particularly senior ones, had similar displays, and began to wonder if ours weren't a little too much. Perhaps a more discrete framed photograph would be more appropriate, pro-feminist, professional even? This set us thinking about how we display ourselves in our offices; that is, about the ways in which we perform our gender identities in and through our workspace, and about the ways in which these performances matter, both in a material sense, and in terms of who and what is valued within organizational life.

A second, initially in our minds, unrelated incident occurred when we were visiting a photographic exhibition on office life at the Photographers' Gallery in London (see Cohen and Tyler, 2004). Here we came across an installation called *Grey Area* by video artist Sofia Hulten. In *Grey Area*, the artist performs in a grey suit that she seemingly uses as camouflage, as she hides in various places in an office (in a locker, behind a window blind, inside a rolled up piece of carpet), until she eventually gets into a bin liner

and throws herself away. The effect is comical, but also deeply disturbing because of what it seems to suggest about the way that women feel about themselves and about each other in the workplace. Watching the video for the first time, we were struck by the apparently irresolvable tension Hulten depicts between the rational setting of the office, and the woman's unsuccessful attempt to escape. To us, her attempts at disguise and disappearance serve to reinforce the sense of abjection she connotes, for she is ever at the boundary (even when reduced to the status of physical waste, and rendered invisible), but inevitably and always present. A little like the criticisms made of the ways in which we had personalized our own office space, we found the video somewhat unsettling. Though strangely familiar, it evoked feelings we hadn't previously been conscious of, and certainly hadn't (knowingly) articulated, in relation to our own experiences of gender performativity at work. In particular, *Grey Area* offered, to us at least, a visually poetic point of departure for thinking about the complex role of organization in the constitution of gendered subjectivity, and particularly of the lived experience (and management) of women's organizational Otherness. It never occurred to us that the images in *Grey Area* were in any sense representative of an external, organizational reality, but rather that the video itself was a fascinating artistic statement that provoked, in us at least, a whole range of thoughts and feelings by way of response to it. Having been 'moved' by Hulten's work ourselves, in similar but unexpected ways, we were interested to explore the extent to which her images struck a chord with other women and whether the sense of abjection and alterity that her video powerfully depicted to us resonated with others' readings and experiences.

To this end we used still images from *Grey Area* (Figure One) as the basis for a series of group discussions and individual interviews with women, focusing on their lived, embodied experiences of the relationship between gender performativity and organizational space.

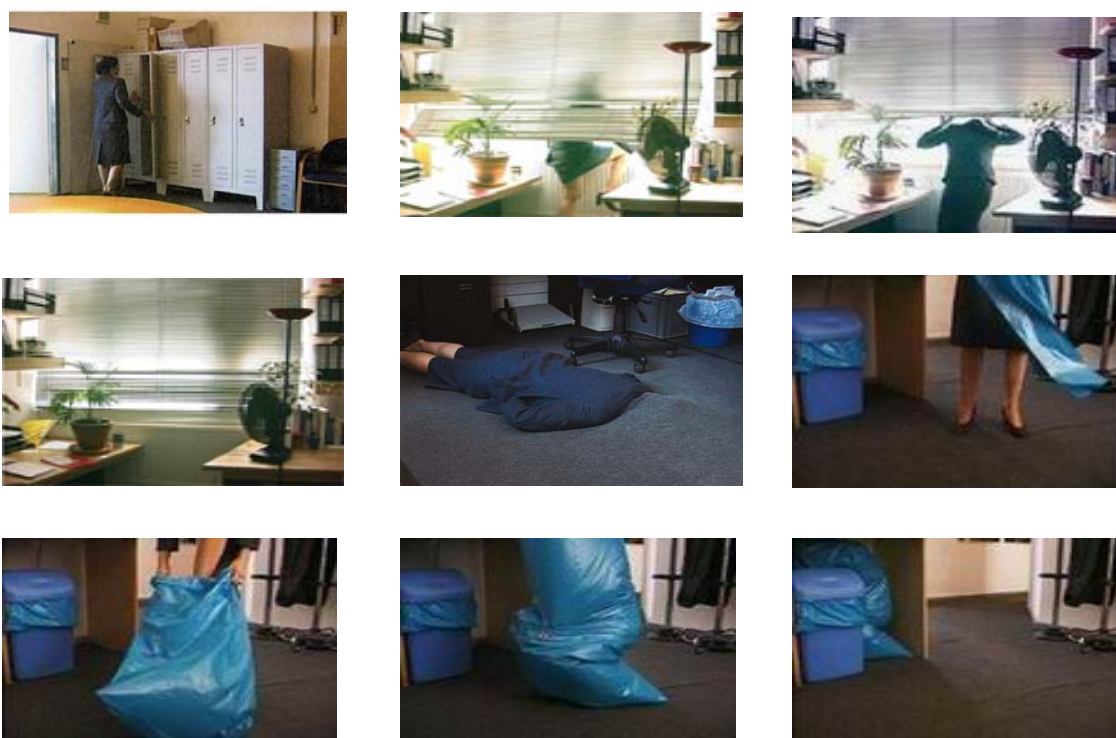


Figure One: Stills from Sofia Hulten's *Grey Area*

We begin our discussion of the findings of this research by considering the theme of gender performativity, drawing particularly on Judith Butler's account of 'bodies that matter' (Butler, 1993), and linking her analysis of the materiality of gender performativity to recent work on organizational space. We then outline the methodological approach that we took to our research on women's lived experiences of otherness and workspace. As we have said, this was triggered largely by our interest in the ways in which we perform our gender identities through various forms of organizational display, such as having family photographs and children's drawings in our offices for instance, as well as our response to Hulten's *Grey Area*. We then present the findings of our research, focusing for the purposes of analysis on four analytically discrete yet empirically interrelated themes: *spatial politics*, *representational space*, *spatial embodiment* and *spatial boundaries*. Linking Lefebvre's (1991) concept of 'representational spaces' to Butler's performative ontology of gender and also Bachelard's (1964) 'poetics of space' we argue, in the penultimate section of the paper,

that an important but relatively neglected aspect of gender performativity in organizational life is the production of ‘spaces that matter’.

Gender performativity, space and organization

Butler’s (1988, 1993, 2000, 2004) performative analysis of gender draws critical attention to the body as an important site on which gendered subjectivity is brought into being, or made to matter as she puts it. Here she plays on the term matter as simultaneously a materialization of gender, and its performance in accordance with the norms of what she calls the ‘heterosexual matrix’ – an ontological, epistemic schema that privileges masculinity through the configuration of gender in binary and hierarchical terms. Gender performance, and its materialization in the form of ‘bodies that matter’ is driven largely by the desire for recognition of the gendered self as a viable, intelligible social subject. In other words, underpinning the ways in which we perform gender is the desire to project a coherent and compelling identity, one that will be recognised as such by others.

While Butler’s analysis of gender performativity focuses primarily on the recitation of cultural norms over time, it is the way in which she extends her analysis to a discussion of the *materialization* of gender that we particularly draw on here, especially in her relatively passing reference to the way in which gender is ‘instituted in an exterior space’ (Butler, 2000: 141). Specifically, we seek to develop her analysis of the materialization of gender with reference to the findings of our research focusing on the ways in which gender in/visibility is performed and materialized in organizational workspaces, highlighting women’s experiences of simultaneous erasure and over-exposure. In doing so, we echo Gregson and Rose’s (2000: 434) observation that ‘doing’ space is a signifying enactment, one that needs to be thought of as ‘being brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power’.

Butler’s account of the materialization of gender emphasizes that gender is ‘*a corporeal style*, an “act”, as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where “*performative*” suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning’ (Butler,

2000: 177, original emphasis). She draws from phenomenology a commitment to revealing the myriad ways in which the social world is produced through the constituting acts of subjective experience. In this sense, Butler emphasizes how the recitation of particular gender norms is ‘necessary in order to qualify as a “one”, to become viable as a “one”, where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms’ (Butler, 1993: 232). Hence, ‘persons only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility’ (Butler, 2000: 22). What she describes as ‘intelligible genders’ are those that ‘in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire’ (Butler, 2000: 23); in other words, successful performances – those that elicit recognition as such – are those that conform to the binary and hierarchical norms of heteronormativity. As a ‘performative accomplishment’ (Butler, 2000: 179), gender configurations are therefore compelled by the matrices of cultural intelligibility that govern social and, we might argue, organizational life (Borgerson, 2005).

Recognizing that the space we inhabit is not abstract or neutral, but lived, embodied, and governed by gender power relations, feminists have argued that we live and move in space as gendered bodies (Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 1995; Young, 2005). Feminist geographers have drawn attention to some of the ways in which women’s lives tend to be more spatially restricted and localized than men’s (Rose, 1993) and feminist theorists such as Young (2005) have argued that while masculinity tends to be performed largely through expansive posture and authoritative movement, embodied femininity often encompasses a more constrained and tentative occupation of both personal and social space. Drawing on existentialism and phenomenology, and attributing women’s relatively bounded spatialities not to anatomy or physiology but to situated otherness, Young (2005: 35) argues that feminine modes of spatial embodiment typically exhibit ‘an ambiguous transcendence, an inhibited intentionality, and a discontinuous unity’ with their surroundings. Reflecting on women’s relatively inhibited spatial performances within an organizational context, McDowell and Court (1994: 732) have noted in their study of performing work and bodily representations in merchant banks in the City of London, how ‘materiality, representations of appropriate workplace gendered

performances, and everyday social practices in combination differentially position men and women at work'. Drawing directly on Butler's account of gender performativity, Gregson and Rose (2000) have similarly argued, in their analysis of performance work in a community arts project, and at car boot sales, that spaces are performative of gendered power relations. Thinking through the relationship between gender, power, space and organization Halford and Leonard (2006) similarly draw attention to what they call 'gender positioning' in organizational space as an ongoing negotiation recreated through mundane everyday practices, routines and interactions.

Feminists have argued therefore that organizational spaces 'embody gender attributes' (McDowell, 1999: 144) in a range of ways. Boyar (2004) sums up some of these issues in her account of the development of office spaces in the financial services sector at the end of the nineteenth century when she emphasizes the extent to which low-level, female clerical workers were accorded relatively little spatial freedom. In particular she notes how in contrast to the small desks and open-floor plans in which women clerical workers laboured, predominantly male managers typically worked in large, well-decorated offices:

Freed from the typewriter or dictaphone, these men worked at desks designed for conversing, reading and thinking, in offices equipped with doors and secretaries to buffer and regulate contact with others. Meanwhile, at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, clerical workers were "tied" or tethered to spatially fixed pieces of equipment such as a typewriter or dictaphone, in workspaces that more easily lent themselves to visual and auditory surveillance (Boyar, 2004: 206).

Writing about space in a more symbolic sense, Dick and Hyde (2006) have recently argued that part-time particularly female workers have traditionally occupied a marginal space within organizations, in an account that emphasizes that the choice to work part-time must be understood as situated in both space and time, as well as being constituted through a range of discourses on workplace – and space - commitment. In this sense,

much of the gendered work that we do in managing space, or in making personal investments in our workspaces, through various techniques of spatial re-appropriation or possession for instance (see Baldry, 1999), constitutes what we might think of as boundary work; that is, work that involves negotiating the distinction between work and non-work, and between who and what belongs to the organization, where and when (Nippert-Eng, 1995; Surman, 2002 – see also Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Nippert-Eng (1995) in particular emphasizes that for women especially, for whom this boundary work can be an on-going process of negotiation, displaying photographs of loved ones enables them to have a controlled presence, meaning that they are symbolically represented, but not to the extent that they are disruptive or intrusive on our work practices or personas. These forms of materialisation play an important role therefore in our practice of ‘gender switching’ (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002); that is, in signifying our ability to move between different gender roles and identities. In short, ‘gender switching’ is a term Bruni and colleagues (drawing on Butler) use to describe the performative ability to move between different often conflicting gender hegemonies and versions of the self. A crucial element of this process, we argue here, is the materialization of performative ‘gender switching’ in and through organizational space. In this sense, space, place and materiality do not merely provide a neutral backdrop for the negotiation of gender identities but are ‘central resources in the construction of working selves’ (Halford and Leonard, 2006: 11).

According to Harvey (1989: 225), ‘power relations are always implicated in spatial and temporal practices’. Indeed, much of the literature on organizational space focuses on space as simultaneously a mechanism of organizational control through which for instance, architecture and productivity are intimately linked (Guillén, 1998), or through which employees are encouraged to develop self-images and work practices that are congruent with the cultural objectives of management (Fleming and Spicer, 2004; Hancock, 2006), and as a site on which such control can be challenged and resisted, through for instance, practices involving the personalization of workspace. While the former draws attention particularly to the way in which spatial organization is linked to the management of identity as a form of organizational control, the latter tends to emphasize that the organizational regulation of identity, and of space, is a ‘precarious and

often contested process involving active identity work' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Gordon (2003: 444) has described for instance how a functional university campus toilet was transformed into a 'sensually rich women's community space' through the development of an embodied, gynocentric environment in which everyday objects were used to 'foster connectedness, expressiveness and creativity', celebrating the bodily senses while expressing a non-consumerist ethos. While the latter, as the author herself happily admits, is something of a 'unique' case it serves to provide an interesting illustration of some of the ways in which space can be mobilised as a site of resistance to institutional control and cultural colonization.

As Hancock (2006) outlines in his semiotic analysis of the ways in which meaning is managed through the purposeful encoding of the material environment of organizations, recent interest in the spatial dimension of organizational life, focusing largely on its symbolic and aesthetic qualities, has been influenced particularly by a phenomenological emphasis on the ways in which space is lived, embodied and made to mean. Spaces, as he puts it, have come to be thought of as 'media of meaning construction' (Hancock, 2006: 621). In his account of the management and lived experience of office space, for instance, Baldry (1997) draws attention to the technologies through which office design has constituted an important mechanism of organizational control, as well as highlighting the ways in which lived experiences and forms of re-signification often challenge this control. He outlines how the degree to which space is personalized, the amount of space that individuals and groups are able to appropriate, the degree of influence over décor, and the capacity to reconfigure workspace are all important signals of the agential capacity of employees to challenge managerial control of workspace (see also Baldry, 1999). Similarly, Fleming and Spicer (2004), Halford (2004) and Surman (2002) all emphasize in their work on the lived experience of organizational, spatial boundaries how space is a meaningful construct, enacted through our perception of it, rather than experienced simply as a structural given.

Developing this analytical theme in her account of the spatial and embodied politics of organizational control at Energy Co, Dale (2005: 652) emphasizes the mutually

constitutive relationship between the material and the social. Reflecting on the spatial reorganisation of Energy Co as a result of expansion, and describing a consequential influx of furniture and filing cabinets, and of employee reconfiguration of the spatial arrangements to create clear divisions and enclosures, she notes for instance how

In this material reconstruction of the workspace, the consciously designed control-commitment system of the organization with its goals of communication, openness and lack of boundaries was impeded. In creating these bounded enclaves, the social and the material are ... inextricably intertwined: on the one hand, the agency of the employees is in play, and on the other there are the material constraints of (lack of) space, extra furniture and bodies (Dale, 2005: 671).

In this sense, her account demonstrates both the mutually constitutive and embodied intertwining of the material and the social, as well as the potentially contradictory relationship between how organizational space may be managed and designed, and how it may be lived and experienced. In making sense of this social materiality of spatial embodiment, she draws particularly on Lefebvre's (1991) work on the social production of space.

For Lefebvre, the social production of space connects spatial materiality to its imaginary aspects; that is, to the way that space is lived and experienced. Dale notes that the three realms of space in Lefebvre's (1991) account - what Soja (1996) calls the 'trialectics of space' - are 'difficult to disentangle in our embodied experience of social space' (Dale, 2005: 657), but emphasizes that each is important to our understanding of the spatial politics of organizational control, and to the performance and management of embodiment and subjectivity at work. Broadly speaking, Lefebvre's (1991: 38-40) conceptual distinction is between *spatial practice* (what he calls 'perceived space' - 'the routines and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure'), *representations of space* ('conceptualized space' - 'the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers') and *representational space* ('lived space' - 'space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols,

and hence the space of inhabitants and users'). Each of these elements combine in the social production of space, although not necessarily as a coherent whole, but rather as the outcome of a dynamic process, one that is often characterised by conflict and tension, and that (within the social relations of contemporary capitalism) requires that a consensus or code be established to enable subjects to move relatively seamlessly between spatial realms.

While each element of space in Lefebvre's account, and, indeed, the relationship between them is clearly central to understanding his complex analysis of the social production of space (see Dale, 2005; Watkins, 2005), it is his third concept – space as directly *lived* (and as Dale emphasises, *embodied*) – that is our main interest here. This is the space that, Lefebvre (191: 39) emphasizes, is dominated and hence passively experienced, but which at one and the same time, 'the imagination seeks to change and appropriate'; in other words, it is 'mediated yet directly experienced' (Lefebvre, 1991: 188). This is the inhabited space that, as he puts it, 'overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects' (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). Resonating with Butler's (2000: 141) point (noted above), that gendered subjectivity is 'instituted in an exterior space', Lefebvre (1991: 17 and 35) emphasizes that the social production of space 'implies a process of signification' through which interested subjects accede to their status as subjects; 'all subjects are situated in a space in which they must either recognize themselves or lose themselves', as he puts it. In this sense, social space, for Lefebvre, literally 'incorporates' social actions and power relations; space comes into being by being inhabited, a point that, as Lefebvre (1991: 121) himself emphasizes links his own concept of *representational spaces* with Bachelard's (1964) 'poetics of space'.

In what is, it has to be said, a somewhat whimsical study of the ways in which we inhabit space, Bachelard (1964) - in an account that has been relatively neglected by recent phenomenological approaches to the study of organizational space (see for an exception, Fleming and Spicer, 2004) - develops what might best be understood as a phenomenology of spatial belonging, reminding us that we become aware of existing in and through space. In particular, he draws attention to what he calls 'the powers of

matter' (Bachelard, 1964: 117); that is, the capacity of materiality to both evoke and project our sense of self. As he puts it in this respect, 'the coexistence of things in space to which we add consciousness of our own existence is a very concrete thing' (Bachelard, 1964: 203). Emphasizing how space is always poetic in this sense, he notes how 'poetic space, because it is expressed, assumes values of expansion' (Bachelard, 1964: 201); in other words, space poetically incites the evocation of meaning, both in it and of it. Towards the end of *The Poetics of Space* his account draws attention in particular to what he describes as a dialectics of 'outside' space characterised by spatial expansion and projection, and 'inside' space, characterised by spatial intimacy and belonging. The routines that we follow and the meanings that we seek to evoke in the production of these spaces involve what for Bachelard (1964: 230) is an 'osmosis between intimate and undetermined space', between inside and outside. Again, reminding us very much of Butler's account of the materialization of gendered subjectivity, for Bachelard, our sense of space is as much a product of how we project ourselves in and through it, and of what it is made to mean in this respect, as it is of its physical materiality. Linking this dialectic of outside and inside space with Lefevbre's account of the social production of space and Butler's analysis of gender materiality, we argue in the remainder of this paper that for women in particular this dialectical relationship is shaped by the performance of gender in accordance with the demands of what Bachelard (1964: 202) describes as 'valorised space', a spatial configuration and materialization of viable ways of performing the self, mediating and materializing what Butler calls 'intelligible subjectivity' (Butler, 2004).

The idea that space is performed in accordance with power relations and the norms governing viable, valorised, intelligible subjectivity was certainly evident in our research in terms of the lived experiences of women. It was particularly evident in the ways in which they reflected on their gendered performance and presentation of their bodies in workspace, as well as in their own understanding of their relative entitlement to space. The ways in which the women we interviewed occupied space and situated themselves spatially was driven largely, we found, by their desire to elicit recognition of their competency in performing multiple yet coherent selves, through spatially situated 'gender

switching' (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002; Bruni et al, 2004), and through the performance of gendered 'spaces that matter', a theme we return to below.

Researching *Grey Areas*

We began our research by circulating a 'call for participation' on the university campus on which we both work, and on the relevant email lists and electronic notice boards to which we have access. The response we had was overwhelming; we found that many women were extremely keen to be involved, partly (they suggested) because they were intrigued by the methodology, but also partly because many of them felt that they had no other forum in which to talk about their own experiences of work, and to listen to those of other women. We undertook three discussion groups, each of just over an hour's duration, in which between 10 and 13 women took part. These were then followed by a series of individual interviews with 47 women (some of whom had taken part in the discussion groups, while others had volunteered for the discussion groups after they were full, or were women with whom we had been put in contact by colleagues or other women who took part in the focus groups, or who had simply heard from friends, neighbours or relatives about the work that we were doing).

We used printed (colour) sheets of *Grey Area* as a starting point for the group interviews (reproduced here in greyscale - see Figure One), and were (loosely) guided by an interview schedule, in which we asked the women taking part to reflect on the images and on how they might relate (if at all) to their own experiences of the workplace, and of their own workspace. We asked the women what their first impressions of the images were, and if there were any specific images in the sequence that struck them as being particularly interesting or important, and why. We then talked about how the images made them feel, and about how they thought the woman in the video was feeling. We also asked participants about what they thought the artist was trying to say, and why. At various points in the discussions we focused on the theme of hiding, and particularly on the woman throwing herself away at the end of the sequence. We asked the women what, if anything, they found funny or absurd about the images (many participants reacted with

amusement to their first sighting of the images – as one put it, ‘I ... find it humorous in a dark, bleak way because I recognise that feeling sometimes’), and what, if anything, they found disturbing (again, several participants looked or sounded concerned when they first saw the stills). In each of the discussions, the women asked questions of us, of themselves and of each other. For instance, one woman wondered why we (the researchers and the other participants) thought the woman’s face is never shown. Others asked why the woman is lying face down in the central image, and about why the images seem to focus on the woman’s legs. We also had lengthy discussions in each group about the reason why the video is called *Grey Area*, and about what greyness connotes in relation to gender, identity and workspaces.

Following these group discussions, the individual interviews that we undertook involved more in-depth reflections on women’s sense of in/visibility in the workplace. We asked women to reflect on their experiences of invisibility and of over-exposure – a theme that recurred in our group sessions, as we discuss below. We also talked about women’s lived experiences of their workspace, focusing on spatial politics and power relations, as well as the ways in which women personalized their workspace, and inhabited it in an embodied sense. Many women also discussed instances when they had been conscious of feeling particularly emotional at work, and some reflected on their experiences of emotional displays and interactions with others, articulating these in largely embodied and spatial terms.

Inspired by O’Neill’s (2002) work on ‘ethno-mimesis’, our intention was to use the images from *Grey Area* to ‘move’ respondents, and so to encourage them to reflect on aspects of their own and other women’s lived, embodied experiences that they might not otherwise think about or find easy to articulate (Cohen, Tyler and Hancock, 2006). In this sense, our research sought to create a ‘space’ within which those who took part in it could interact and reflect on their own and each others’ everyday organizational lives (Fletcher, 2002). Many but not all of the women worked at the University, and in the discussion groups and interviews we asked them to reflect on not only their current employment, but also previous experiences of work.

The women who took part (referred to here using pseudonyms to protect their identities) worked in a broad range of departments (some worked in mainly female work groups, others in gender-mixed groups, and some worked in largely male groups). Most of the women worked in departments in which the senior members of staff were disproportionately male, and a few worked in groups in which they were the only women. They represented a broad range of age groups and work roles, from very senior to entry level, manual and non-manual occupations, and included women who described themselves as single, as co-habiting with partners, as married, divorced or widowed, and as identifying with a range of different sexual identities. The nature of the sampling technique used however, meant that the sample was relatively ethnically homogenous and did not represent a full range of socio-economic groups. We fully recognise that this is a limitation of the research we have undertaken, but also feel that the university was an interesting site on which to base the research, given its complexity as an organization and the relatively blurred boundaries that exist between work and non-work for many of its employees.

There is a growing body of literature on women's lived experiences of academic life, much of which highlights women's continuing structural disadvantage and cultural marginalization, manifest for instance in the persistence of the gender pay gap and in sedimented patterns of horizontal and vertical segmentation (Finch, 2003; Knights and Richards, 2003; Ramsay and Letherby, 2006). Ramsay and Letherby (2006: 26) sum this up when they argue that the gendered organization of academia is characterised by a

wealth of practices which render women academics' participation undervalued, unrecognised and marginalized, leading to an overwhelming feeling of 'otherness'.

While the main focus of much of this literature is the experience of women academics, universities are clearly host to a whole range of very different occupations; they are complex organizations incorporating a variety of often competing or conflicting workplace cultures, identities, roles and workspaces. Our research sought to capture

something of this complexity, and to link it to the focus on women's Otherness, and on the struggle for identity, that we had encountered in Hulten's work, as well as to the self-consciousness we had both experienced in relation to our own workspaces.

Gender and Spatial Matters: Living and Working in *Grey Areas*

Spatial matters recurred in our group discussions of Hulten's *Grey Area* and in the interviews that we carried out with women following these discussion groups, the latter focusing particularly on women's lived experiences of the workplace. Although not discrete categories, for the purposes of our analysis here we have described these recurring themes as *spatial politics*, *representational spaces* (a concept borrowed from Lefebvre, 1991), *spatial embodiment*, and the management of *spatial boundaries*.

Spatial politics

The politics of space, and of perceived entitlement to space, was a particularly strong theme in our research. In the first of our discussion groups, several participants commented on the theme of spatial constraint, noting for instance (with reference to the woman in the images - see Figure One) how 'it looks as though the environment is actually closing in on her. She's in a confined space ... She is enclosed in this sort of space. She seems claustrophobic, desperate to escape' (group interview, November 2005). This theme of being trapped, and unable to escape was linked to the 'trash' metaphor:

it's more than hiding. It's like she's hiding in and from the space at the same time. I thought there was something quite menacing about it ... It's almost like she's sort of identifying herself with the trash. There but not there ... She feels unworthy. Desperate really. Nobody's listening to her. She's overwhelmed. It's as though she's given up (group interview, November 2005).

Others linked this feeling of being overwhelmed and engulfed to the woman's apparent vulnerability, again in spatial terms: 'She's in quite a dark place I think ... She's face

down with her head under the carpet and she's extremely vulnerable in that position' (group interview, November 2005). The woman's vulnerability and over-exposure was also discussed in relation to women's general spatial and social availability within organizations:

I think there's a demand that women are accessible. When you're talking about women being in offices where ... where you can't hide away, I don't know, somehow I think as a woman you're expected to be always happy, happy, shiny, accessible to people to come and talk to (group interview, November 2005).

While most readings emphasized (in various forms) the theme of negation, others interpreted the woman's behaviour as a form of play, involving her reclaiming her space and identity as a conscious act of resistance:

I felt it was all to do with something happening on her own in the office at the end of the day that I couldn't quite make head or tail of really, but it ... I was quite intrigued by it but it felt like she was ... it was something to do with enjoying the office being quiet at the end of the day and her kind of playing around in it somehow. So taking the space ...

I can see kind of the play element in it but I almost feel as if that play ... in that play she's trying to represent the way she feels when she's at work - like she is a person that nobody sees the face of. She's a person that people consider to be hidden away and don't see perhaps as a proper ... or don't appreciate her role in that situation.

This latter participant in particular seems to interpret the images in such a way as to emphasize not only the appropriation of space, but also of identity; that is, her reading interprets the woman's actions as a refusal to be negated, or rather, as playing with her own negation.

In the interviews that followed our discussion of Hulten's *Grey Area*, spatial politics also recurred as a theme, particularly in relation to women's reflections on some of the ways in which they feel overwhelmed or engulfed by their workspace, as well as feeling over-exposed and vulnerable, at the same time as being rendered invisible. Many of the women who took part in the research reported feeling uncomfortable in their workspace, but at the same time, many of them also articulated what seemed to be a lack of perceived entitlement to space, particularly if space was regarded as a scarce resource, and/or as a status symbol. As 'Bethan' put it for instance, 'I have just kind of accepted that we are in a small space, but it's not terribly comfortable. I feel terribly cramped in ... I have a desk, I have a pedestal and I have appropriated a shelf. It's not really mine, but you know' (interview with Bethan, February 2006). Another participant, 'Katy' reflected on her workspace: 'I'm not expecting to keep it – particularly as it's a nice space' (interview with Katy, March 2006). Another said simply that 'I'm very lucky because I have an office to myself three days a week and share the other two ... But ideally this would be mine all of the time' (interview with Susan, February 2006).

Linking her perceived entitlement to space with what she assumed to be her ascribed status, another respondent reported how 'a lot of people think it's a bit small and poky in here and that it's no ... it doesn't represent a very good impression of me, and the work I do. It maybe suggests that I'm not an important part of the organization, perhaps that I ought to do more. When people see my office, they think I'm not important. Genuinely' (interview with Jane, April 2006). One particular respondent reflected on the effects of recently losing her dedicated workspace:

I feel like an outsider now ... now that I've had my desk taken away from me because that's kind of like ... right, you've had this position ... and people just don't understand. They say, "Well it's only a desk". Yeah, but it's not a desk because that was where I sat. That's where I had all of my stuff. Now I've just got to find a desk wherever I can. I've lost all my space, that's why I feel like an outsider now, really (interview with Gwen, January 2006).

Evoking similar feelings of negation, 'Anna' reflected on the ways in which her inadequate workspace is a burden, one that she experiences in a highly embodied way, and that she feels she is very much on her own in dealing with:

My space is grossly inadequate. I cannot function in it at all and it disrupts my working patterns because of it ... I find I work on the floor often because I haven't got enough space. I started developing abdominal pain last year and realised it was because I was working like this down on the floor ... I just find it depressing. I do find it very depressing. I feel burdened ... like it's my problem, and mine alone. It's overwhelming ... It gets me down terribly. It's exhausting ... It's one of my biggest complaints because I just feel I have no control and physically, I'm always uncomfortable (interview with Anna, March 2006).

Others reflected on some of the ways in which other people invade their workspace, or overlook them in it, leaving them feeling simultaneously over-exposed and invisible.

'Helen' for instance reflected that

there are times when people need to know something and I ... I feel sometimes that I'm the last person they come to to ask ... I don't know whether it's my physical placing in the office in that I'm in a ... it's a double open plan office and I'm actually tucked away in a corner, so I'm one of the last people they would come to physically within the room ... It's a physical thing (interview with Helen, February 2006).

'Barbara' similarly reported how 'I was once in a very dark space sort of shoved away in a corner in a big, open plan office and that was absolute hell. I felt like a no-body and I hated it' (interview with Barbara, May 2006). At the other extreme, participants like 'Anna' made comments such as: 'I'm very exposed in this space. That's another issue I have about sitting in this office. I have one slot a week open office. Does anyone take any notice of it? No. If they see my door ajar they'll knock on it and come in and speak to me. Even if I keep it shut I constantly get interrupted ... It's very stressful' (interview with

Anna, March 2006). Similarly, 'Debbie' commented 'there are occasions when I've felt that my job's like living in a goldfish bowl because I'm watched so closely by others' (interview with Debbie, April 2006). Another woman, 'Lisa', reflected on the changes she had recently made to her workspace because of a persistent feeling of vulnerability:

I changed my desk layout a few months back because I had been sat several years with my back to the space where people walked. I'm tucked round a corner so my space is very limited because I'm in that sort of space and I've just got room to get in and out and I'd been sat with my back to anybody who was approaching my area and I realised I was very uncomfortable with this because whereas some people would speak as they approached so I knew they were coming, there were a couple of individuals, who were men, who would come and stand and that was creepy ... So I rotated my desk 'round (interview with Lisa, February 2006).

Other participants, such as 'Claire', discussed the ways in which male colleagues 'spill' into their workspace, and reflected (somewhat despondently) on their attempts to contain these spatial invasions, at the same time as feeling awkward about articulating their concerns:

I've tried to tidy it up a bit because it just is so awful. I mean I'm still trying and I shall carry on trying, but it's a bit of an uphill battle because the amount of paper he generates is just ... I mean there's a stack of stuff ... He gave me a definite instruction "Don't put anything in a black bag". So, yeah, I can organise things a bit, but I wouldn't feel comfortable about saying anything ... You know, if he's not going to be comfortable with it then I'm not going to say anything. We've got to make allowances for each other. But then again if I had total control over it a lot of that would have gone, but ... (interview with Claire, April 2006).

Participants such as 'Julia' reported that they felt overwhelmed and engulfed by their workspace, and reflected back on the woman in *Grey Area*, linking the images of her apparent attempts to escape with their own feelings of being trapped: 'It's out of control

because it's just full of paper and rubbish and things like that. Yes, it gives me the feeling that I just want to escape from it all, but just like the woman in the pictures, I know I can't really [laughter]' (interview with Julian, April 2006). 'Erin' similarly reported: 'I'd like all this mess off the floor. It just sort of pulls you in. You think "Oh, I'll sort that out tomorrow" and you never do; tomorrow never comes' (interview with Erin, March 2006).

Representational spaces

Some women in the research consciously resisted spatial politics through their attempts to personalize their workspace, but most did so in a relatively bounded way. That is, they did so in a way that seemed to be driven largely by the constraints of what they thought would be deemed acceptable and appropriate, and by what they thought other people would find interesting or welcoming. This aspect of our research reminded us very much of Young's (2005: 35) account of women's 'ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality and discontinuous unity' with their spatial surroundings, as well as Butler's (1993, 2000, 2004) concern with the materialization of gender performativity in and through the recitation of particular cultural norms and the desire for recognition of oneself as a viable subject.

In each of the three discussion groups, participants commented on how impersonal the office space in Hulten's *Grey Area* seemed to be. Several people noted that it seemed clinical, institutional, 'grey' and anonymous; others commented that they would be unable to work in such a stark, unwelcoming space, and contrasted this with their own, more personalized workspaces. As one woman put it in a follow-up interview, 'I think I may be pushing it a little bit. I've got more things. It's like I've got a quote on my wall and things like that ... but *it takes the grey edge off my work space*' (interview with Bethan, February 2006, emphasis added). Another commented simply that 'when I work, *I like to have things around that mean things*' (interview with Julie, May 2006, emphasis added).

Most of our participants had taken some steps to personalize their workspace, but almost all of these had done so, as we said, in a relatively bounded, contained way. 'Debbie' for

instance reported that she had personalized her workspace ‘a little bit yeah, but without wanting to infringe or impose ... So I have got a photograph up, but it’s not space I could fully relax in’ (interview with Debbie, April 2006). Reminiscent of Nippert-Eng’s (1995) description of the ‘contained presence’ of others, ‘Rachel’ similarly reported how she had personalized her space in a relatively guarded way:

I’ve got photos – you know, a photo of the kids up I think. I’ve got a couple of their drawings. What else have I got? Stuff that friends have sent, but apart from that not masses ... Just a few little bits ... I think I’ve kind of got enough without having too much, you see. Do you know what I mean? I feel it’s the right balance. You know it’s not like there’s pictures plastered everywhere and that’s all there is. You know, it’s kind of there’s just enough there I just feel like I’ve got enough for them [her children] to be there and to be present, if you see what I mean, but not so much that it just looks ridiculous (interview with Rachel, March 2006).

In this sense, some women (including, as we have suggested, ourselves) became conscious of their representational spaces through the research process. As ‘Susan’ suggests, reflecting on why she has chosen to display her children’s photographs and artwork:

I think it was just to have my kids near me I suppose. I guess it shows people I’m human and that I’m approachable. That’s what I’d like them to think. You know, it’s not ... It wasn’t a conscious effort on my part to make me seem mumsy or anything, you know. It’s funny you should ask me about it because I’m noticing all these things now – like there’s a butterfly I made out of my son’s hands over there as well – and just like work is my escape and yet, I’ve surrounded my office with all these things that remind me of them. And then there’s a picture of them up on the side thing as well and the one that’s on the computer. Oh no, I’ve gone a bit mad, haven’t I? I’ve never noticed how many I’ve put up really! (interview with Susan, February 2006).

As noted above, many of the women who took part in the research seemed to personalize their workspaces largely in accordance with what they thought other people would find interesting and welcoming ('I'm a bit of an approval junkie', as one respondent put it); indeed for many, making their workspaces welcoming for others was the only reason they had attempted to personalize them. 'Katy', for instance, described the ways in which she had personalized her office largely in terms of making it welcoming and interesting for other people:

I often feel that if I just took another few minutes I'd put more postcards up ... When I had Christmas cards up and they're visible – because I have the door open so these things are visible from the door – it did look nice and bright and one or two people commented on it and I do think I should do more things like that [did you like those positive comments?] Oh yes. Yes, because it did make it look more colourful ... and welcoming (interview with Katy, March 2006).

'Anna', whose discomfort with her office space we discussed above, reported that despite her own lack of satisfaction with her workspace – space that she described as 'grossly inadequate' and 'very depressing' – she ultimately liked it because other people found it welcoming:

It's very important to me that people find this space welcoming and interesting and that they see that actually it's got a personal dimension ... [People] find it welcoming ... I think it is because it looks homely, it looks lived in, but it doesn't function ... that's what's missing. But I like it because people do find it welcoming and homely (interview with Anna, March 2006).

Several respondents, such as 'Hilda', suggested that they conceived of their workspaces very much as a reflection of their own identities, and configured and presented them accordingly, but still in a relatively bounded way:

It's my workspace. I spend 8 hours a day working in that office and if I want to put up nice, friendly things around me then I'm going to do it. I've only ever had one objection ... I think there are limits, but generally it's my workspace. Because if you go in somewhere and it's too clinical it's horrible, isn't it, and it gives the wrong image I think. I would hope it gives a sort of friendly, ... happy feel ... It's an extension of me I think ... So yeah, I think my workspace is an extension of me (interview with Hilda, May 2006).

Linking this spatial performance of the self to gender in a more direct way, one particular respondent, 'Ursula', when we asked her to describe how she perceives her own office space, reflected:

Well, it's a shambles basically. No, that's not fair. It's very cluttered. There's a lot of stuff here which I don't have time to get organised and tidy. I don't like it being cluttered ... It's not particularly feminine or welcoming or ... It's a workspace. It's simply a workspace. There isn't time to make it how I might like it to be, to make it more congenial for me, or for people who come into it. I'd really like it to be much more welcoming ... Having said that, quite a few people look at the pictures by the door there and enjoy them, ... they look at those ... So it's a kind of way of interacting with people other than, you know, the immediate demands of work (interview with Ursula, May 2006).

Another respondent expressed similar connections between gender performativity and the presentation of office space, when she commented how:

I want the office to be hospitable – yeah, to be a pleasant place where ... people feel welcome. And I also try ... to be pleasant when people come into the door. So I try to stand up and make a fuss about them being there – you know, like to pay a tribute to their visit. That's very much how I'd like to be seen – as someone who does that, you know. My mum and my grandmother groomed me for keeping households tidy, pleasant too. Being pleasant in the hospitality element is very important to me. So I

think I'm carrying that ... I'm creating an impression, yes (interview with Mandy, May 2006).

For some participants, choosing not to display personal items such as family photographs was a way of actively resisting what they saw as an organizational appropriation of their selves. Reflecting on the increasing demands made on her time and also on her own home space when she had to take work home, 'Lauren' for instance, when asked about her decision not to personalize her office said, 'You must be joking! No. I don't want them looking at my life. It's mine. It's secret, at home where I've got control of it. That's one thing they can't encroach on ...' (interview with Lauren, May 2006).

Interestingly, on this theme of personalizing office space through display, one of the women who took part in our discussion groups decided to display the still images from *Grey Area* in her own office after taking part in the research:

I really liked this last one [image] I mean I like it. I actually would like to take it away and pin it next to my computer or something. I know how stupid that sounds, but it's just like, it's a humorous kind of "Yeah, yeah, it's escape". It's stupid, but, you know, sometimes it's necessary to have that kind of reminder that ... to take the lighter side of it and just think, you know, you're asked [to do] too much sometimes. So I'm going to take it and pin it up.

Spatial embodiment

As we have noted so far, many of the women who took part in the research reported feeling (often simultaneously) over-exposed, vulnerable, negated and invisible in their workspaces. Some of them attempted to resist this by personalizing their workspaces, but as we have described above, most of them did so in a relatively bounded way, often with a view to giving a particular impression, or eliciting a desired – often highly gendered – response from other people, particularly in terms of making others feel welcome. Many of our participants articulated these feelings and experiences in largely embodied terms. Again, reminding us very much of Young's (2005) analysis of women's contained and

constrained embodiment, and Butler's (1993, 2000, 2004) account of the materialization of gender performativity in the form of 'bodies that matter', several respondents reflected on the ways in which they seek to contain their bodies at work. 'Katy' for instance, reflected:

You know the way we're supposed to sit neatly while men are allowed to sprawl sort of thing? Well, I do a bit of sprawling but if somebody comes in, you know, I'd sit neatly, properly ... you know, it's not like I'd talk to them like that. So I'm not too inhibited, but relatively inhibited (interview with Katy, March 2006).

Linking this theme of contained embodiment and gender performativity to the social materiality of organizational space more specifically, 'Hilda' commented similarly how

because it's an open door policy anybody could walk past, so I try to maintain a professional look for anybody. I think possibly, you know, if you're behind a closed door, then it would be nice to be able to put your feet up and read a paper, but no, not in an open environment (interview with Hilda, May 2006).

Comparing their own experiences of hiding and trying to retreat into their bodies when they feel simultaneously exposed and invisible with those of the woman in *Grey Area*, several respondents drew attention particularly to their embodied experiences of meetings. 'Lauren' for example, recalled how 'in meetings I would sit in the corner, at the end of the table. Because normally we sit in a round so if you sit at a corner, you know, right at the very, very end then you tend to disappear and keep your head down' (interview with Lauren, May 2006).

Other women talked about the relationship between the experience and display of emotions in largely spatial terms:

When I've felt that I've been poorly treated, that people have been dismissive, I have felt very emotional at work ... On one spectacular occasion just before

Christmas I sat at my desk and sobbed my heart out and then had to get someone to come round and help me out of the office, past all the men, and take me somewhere – because we have nowhere to hide in our office (interview with Lisa, February 2006).

Spatial boundaries

In all three groups, a discussion of physical engulfing, and of simultaneous exposure and invisibility was used as a springboard to explore, in a more experiential way, the ways in which participants felt that work and organizations often fracture and fragment women's lives, such that each leaks and spills into the other. Many women reflected on the ways in which managing their lived space involves large amounts of boundary work:

Work fragments our lives a lot of the time. It fragments mine totally... I have an impossible relationship between my home and work life. You know, it's a hell, and it's irreconcilable and I suspect a lot of women have that ... both sides are clashing in the middle and you're stretched across really (group interview, November 2005).

To us, this particular participant conveys how the persistent encroachment of their workplaces into other aspects of their lives seems to undermine women's attempt to sustain an orderly sense of who they are and what they do, a process that many of the women in our research acknowledged involves a constant struggle, one that is experienced or at least made sense of, very much in spatial terms. Many of the women who took part in the research articulated their feeling of not quite belonging in their workspace. Particularly those who had children commented that they often never felt entirely comfortable in either of their 'social' spaces – work or home. Living in the boundary between the two – in that 'grey area' – seemed to be something that many of the women identified with. This was especially the case for women who worked part-time, perhaps in two different locations, as well as having caring responsibilities for children, partners and/or other relatives, as indeed many of our respondents did. 'Claire' seemed to evoke this sense of dislocation when she described her own experience:

Because I sort of whiz in, do what I have to do and whiz out again ... I don't really belong. I'm a bit of an outsider and also because it's a very male dominated environment I work in it's difficult to sort of fit in it that way as well ... as individuals I get on with them all fine, but I'm just never sure where I quite fit in (interview with Claire, April 2006).

While not being sure where they fit in was dislocating for some, for others it seemed to be somewhat enabling, providing a degree of temporal and spatial flexibility that was necessary to reconciling the often competing demands made on them. As 'Abbie' describes:

I have an office over here rather than in the main block so that I can manage my time and space. I have three children so it's very important to be able to manage your time and to, you know, accommodate everybody's needs and I can do that much more effectively if I haven't got people constantly knowing where I am ... I'm sure that ... work actually benefits usually because I can work anywhere which is great for me, but that's what makes this job do-able with children and so, you know, I quite like to be able to be invisible when I need to be (interview with Abbie, April 2006).

Organizational space as (a) gendered matter

What the above discussion of women's lived experiences of organizational space emphasizes, to borrow from Butler, is that space is not merely matter but 'a materializing of possibilities' (Butler, 1988: 521), in the sense that we do not simply occupy space but in a very material and symbolic sense, we 'do' space. This doing of space is certainly not arbitrary, but is driven by the desire for recognition as a viable, intelligible subject and hence is performed largely in accordance with the norms governing the conferment of such recognition. In the case of our own research, this was manifest particularly in *spatial politics* – in women's reluctance to complain about male space invasion, or about their simultaneous in/visibility for instance; in *representational spaces* – through women's

bounded personalization of their workspaces in accordance with what they thought would be acceptable and appropriate, and what others would find welcoming; in *spatial embodiment* - in the ways in which women self-consciously occupied their workspaces in relatively contained, inhibited ways, and in the management of *spatial boundaries* in alignment with the norms of what Butler (1993, 2000) calls the heterosexual matrix.

In terms of the performance of gender, space (much like the body) is therefore ‘an intentionally organized materiality’ (Butler, 1988: 521); one that must be understood as lived and embodied (Lefebvre, 1991). In organizational terms, gender materialization constitutes a set of repeated acts and cultural recitations undertaken within a regulatory framework that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, a process that involves what Butler (1993: 10) calls the ‘repetitive labour of recitation’ (see Borgerson, 2005). In this sense, performativity becomes a process of material citationality, one sedimented over time, Butler argues, but also, we might add, within space. In this sense, to borrow further from Butler, space – as a form of social materiality – marks ‘at once the *limits* of agency and its most *enabling conditions*’ (Butler, 1993: 228, original emphasis). Space, in other words, constitutes an important ‘site where “doing” and “being done to” become equivocal’ (Butler, 2004: 20).

Reminiscent of Bachelard’s ‘poetics of space’, we could argue then that the spatial materialization of gender is ‘a morphogenesis that takes place through a set of identificatory projections’ (Butler, 1993: 17). If for Butler, ‘performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms’, and ‘this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject’ (Butler, 1993: 95), then we would argue that such repetition also constitutes the subject’s spatial conditions. Yet, as Butler also emphasizes, such repetition is far from fully stable; as several of our respondents themselves emphasized, gender performativity is always provisional and precarious, depending as it does upon the constant recitation of appropriate norms and reference points, driven by the desire for recognition of one’s viability as a subject. Further, as Butler also emphasizes the subject produces its coherence, its viability, at the cost of its own complexity, and in a realm of

social norms that we do not fully choose, ‘but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have’ (Butler, 2004: 33).

As Fleming and Spicer (2004: 88) have put it, ‘when employees participate in exercises like bringing an object of private obsession into the workplace they conjure up places of leisure, private relations and consumption’. They also, our research suggests, seek to display competence in the performativity of ‘gender switching’ (Bruni and Gherardi, 2002; Bruni et al, 2004). In other words, through the display of particular artifacts, and through the recitation of certain cultural norms, space performs our identities in particular ways (and of course, vice versa), ways that drawing on Butler, Bachelard and also Lefebvre, we might understand in relation to the evocation of recognition of our work selves as viable gendered subjects, living and occupying valorized spaces, through the social production and poetics of ‘spaces that matter’.

Concluding Thoughts

Our aim in this paper has been to link a critical analysis of the production and poetics of space to the performance of gender within work organizations. This led us to focus particularly on what our workspaces required of us in terms of self-presentation and performance, and vice versa, that is, what the subjectivities we consciously or otherwise perform within organizational settings require our workspaces to materialize. Our discussion drew on the findings of a series of interviews, focusing particularly on the performance of gender within the organizational space of a university setting, and reflecting on the materialization of gender through the performance of what we might call, borrowing from Butler, ‘spaces that matter’. This is a term we have used here to refer to the ways in which gender is performed and materialized in and through space, largely in accordance with the requirements of what Butler (2000 [1990]) describes as the ‘heterosexual matrix’ in order to elicit recognition as a viable subject. The materialization of gender in and through space in this respect is a crucial element of what Borgerson (2005) describes as ‘organizing subjectivities’ within the context of contemporary work organizations. Butler’s account of the materialization of gender and the findings of own

empirical research on gender in/visibility suggests that a central element of this materialization process is the spatial embodiment and enactment of appropriate gender norms.

With this in mind, we have described our analysis as a 'poetics of space' because of the performative role organizational spaces were found to play in the (conscious or otherwise) evocation of meaning, and subjectivity, in our research. In the discussion of our findings, we explored this theme by linking Butler's analysis of the performance of 'bodies that matter' with Bachelard's (1964) account of a 'poetics of space', as well as drawing on Lefebvre's (1991) work on the lived experience of what he calls 'representational space', arguing that an important but relatively neglected aspect of the organizational materialization of the gendered self is the performance of spaces that matter. So, while we appreciate that for many of us, working practices may well be becoming increasingly spatially and temporally flexible, despite the proclamations of management writers such as McGregor (2000) that in the near future, work will no longer be a place, but a range of activities that can be undertaken in a range of dispersed or virtual locations, the social materiality of space and indeed of gender, continues to matter. It matters, to borrow from Butler, both in terms of its meaning, and also in the sense that it continues to embody - to materialize - socially significant aspects of identity, of social interaction, and perhaps most notably, of power relations.

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