FROM CUBICLES TO OPEN SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF GENDERED MEANINGS OF WORKSPACE

Virve Peteri

Tampere University

Kirsti Lempiäinen

Merja Kinnunen

University of Lapland

ABSTRACT

This article analyses office spaces and their gendered meanings, specifically concentrating on informal spaces such as coffee rooms, corridors and so-called chill-out areas. The analysis draws on feminist research on space and Henri Lefebvre's theory of social space, which focuses on how lived space in the workplace is signified and contested. The ethnographic material was gathered in office environments during the 1980s, 1990s and 2010s. The analysis shows that opening up the office space invites new sorts of management of work tasks, social relations and embodiment. The authors suggest that the aim of fostering and capitalizing on informal encounters and spaces – which were typical for women workers in industrial offices – may paradoxically decrease direct meetings and communication in the post-industrial office.

Keywords: Workspace, gender, body, Henri Lefebvre, ethnographic data.

1. INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, Microsoft launched new business premises in Finland. At first these premises were called "meeting points". Later the office was renamed an "activity-based office". The idea was that these new premises would eventually evolve into a global office concept, a paradigm for innovative office design. Instead of fixed workstations, the workplace consisted of different spaces

of encounter, with different sorts of named ambiance such as "beach", "inspiration", "nature", "home" or "bistro". These spaces were presented as places where employees, objects and information moved effortlessly, without hierarchies, limits or unnecessary controls (cf. Urry, 2007).

In the old industrial order, having one's own room was a mark of status, power and independence. The discipline, order and control of offices was materialized by putting people in lines, departments, units, halls and cubicles (Eräsaari, 1995; Foucault, 1980). In this order, the workspace itself embodies a hierarchical system in which everyone has their own task and their own place. The hierarchical order is usually also emphasized through the furniture, colours and size of the space. By contrast, activity-based offices and the new visions they embody put workers on the move, breaking the visible hierarchical order and the control of visible work. At the same time, new technologies have made it possible for work and control to be increasingly performed in knowledge systems and registers where employees supervise themselves (Author 3, 2008).

We approach the analysis of space through feminist conceptualizations of embodiment and gendered bodies. The embodied and gendered meanings of space shape everyday work and workers, and gender comes alive in specific ways of attuning oneself in space. The meanings of workspaces, genders and bodies mix together in ways that make interpretation a challenge, and therefore we aim to keep these three elements together in our analysis (see Gregory, 2016; Grosz, 2001; McDowell, 1997; Saarikangas, 2014).

While the reformation of workspace produces new modes of governance and power, it also constructs new possibilities for resistance and action. For instance, factory halls enabled novel ways of monitoring and controlling workers, but they also provided concrete places where numerous employees were united for the first time. In this way the factory halls as spatial orders supported and actualized the organizing of trade unions, and created new models of counteraction (Harvey, 1989: 134–135).

In this article, we analyse gendered meanings of workspaces. What kinds of workers and social relations do office spaces enable and shape, and what do they rule out? In the analysis, we

concentrate specifically on informal spaces such as coffee rooms, corridors and so-called chill-out areas.

First we position our research theoretically and present our ethnographic material, after which we proceed to the analysis of 1980s and 1990s offices. Thereafter we move to the 2010s' new activity-based offices. In the final section, we present our conclusions and suggestions for further study. We suggest that the openness of office space might entail new requirements for managing social relations and workers' bodies. We suggest that the attempt to capitalize on informal spaces has led to a situation where informal spaces lose part of their 'informality' and their ability to offer possibilities for non-formal interaction.

2. SPACE, GENDER AND BODIES AT WORK: CONCEPTUAL LOCALIZATIONS

We consider the workspace a modern technology of power that enables one to stay put or move, act alone or with others. It organizes individuals and actions. Agency, social practices and spatial arrangements intertwine so closely that they cannot be understood as separate entities (Foucault, 2003: 372). As John Urry sums it up, "the social solidarities of class, gender, ethnicity, nation and age" intersect with material spaces and structures (Urry, 2007: 19).

Our analysis is positioned within feminist research on space, in which embodiment and gendered meanings of space are the focal points of study. We pay attention to what is expected of employees in concrete spaces at work: what sorts of orientation towards others, what kinds of staying and moving. We are inspired by Elizabeth Grosz's (1995, 2001) conceptualizations of embodiment, which understand bodies as "rewriting" their surroundings. In this view, workers are not victims of their space but actively construct the workspace, suiting it to themselves and making it easy to work in. Thus, space is not limited in advance, and workers can object to changes in space. Our argumentation will be supported by Michele Rene Gregory's (2016) findings about corporate men and women and their embodiment in the workplace. Her conceptual framework highlights the importance of homogeneity (suitability, fitting in) in the construction of embodied and gendered workspaces (see also McDowell, 1997). Gregory's analysis also emphasizes the importance of the "organizational informalities" that are not official aspects of work, but which sometimes matter even more than official aspects in the shaping of gendered work and workers.

Besides individual bodies and social embodiment, feminist analyses also draw attention to the linkages of bodies, space and time. We pay attention to how lived space in the workplace is signified and contested. Built spaces not only construct and revise meanings but also support, create difficulties for and defy various social practices, thus structuring lived space in many ways (Saarikangas, 2006). What are essential are the particular images that people have of good or ideal spaces. While embodied subjectivity is gendered, feminist interpretation also sees living space-time as having different expressions according to different gender positions (Gregory, 2016: 16, 202–203; McDowell, 1997).

In this article, we apply Henri Lefebvre's (2015) conception of social space as consisting of three interrelated aspects. According to Lefebvre, not only do things and matter exist in space, but space is also produced by spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation. The production of space is simultaneously a process and a product that constructs social relations and associations (Lehtonen, 2014: 210).

The first element in Lefebvre's conceptualization is *spatial practices*, by which he refers to the self-evident everyday routines (e.g. workplace, home, shop and the routes between them) that we know without even knowing that we know them. These everyday routines reconstruct space. Such spatial practices include spatial relations in the workplace and understandings of how workspaces (historically) have expressed themselves, so that for instance we immediately recognize an office to be an office.

The second element consists of *representations of space*, that is, existing ways of conceptualizing spaces. These are presented and implemented by architects, political decision makers, officials, planners and engineers. Nowadays we might add to this list the experts Lefebvre calls "social engineers" (Lefebvre, 2015: 38), that is, consultants, interior designers and "change managers" that are hired to execute pre-planned organizational changes. Lefebvre suggests that analysing representations of space is also a form of literary critique equivalent to a *critique of space* that recognizes the dominant representations of society and shows that space is not just a frame or background for action.

Lefebvre's third element is the space of representation, i.e. *lived* space. In lived space the cultural takes material form, and the focus moves from the planners to the embodied users of space. In lived space we also encounter different symbols and images. On the one hand, there is the manager's bigger office and nicer furniture, and on the other are various forms of workers' resistance (for instance, decorating one's personal workstation) which express lived experience (Dale, 2005).

Lived space, representations and spatial practices intertwine. The elements do not always form a coherent whole, and there might be conflicts and contradictions between them (Tyler & Cohen, 2010). In a similar vein, Antonio Strati (1999) argues that organizations' "visual display" always exhibits certain meanings while simultaneously concealing others. This happens even if the space is explicitly designed to be gender-equal and non-hierarchical. Therefore, research must be sensitive to the paradoxical and contradictory nature of organizations' visual display (Strati, 1999: 172–173).

Like Foucault, Lefebvre understands space as simultaneously enabling and hindering practices and ways of action. Lefebvre's analysis highlights the potential of social space to produce fresh, genuinely new action (Saarikangas, 2014). Although the Lefebvrian analysis of space requires the acknowledgement of all three elements, lived space is the starting point of Lefebvre's "spatial imagination". Lived space, and the experience of the uses of power, tension and resistance linked to it, is at the core of analysis (Soja, 1996: 68). Contradictions may create situations where subjects in space "must either recognize themselves or lose themselves" (Lefebvre, 2015: 40). Lived space can also enable a "radical otherness" (Shields, 1999: 185) which helps to create new spaces and practices of resistance (Soja, 1996: 68).

We have analysed office workspaces and their changes in the 1980s, 1990s and 2010s. We have explored older 1980s and 1990s workspaces through long-term follow-up material gathered as part of the project "Changes in Officials' Workplaces" (Author 3, 2003; Korvajärvi, 1998).[1] In this article we use observation diaries and space documents for 1985–1986, 1989 and 1996–1997 from a tax office, an insurance company, a social work office, and metal and chemical companies. This

---

[1] This data consists of 27 binders that include interviews with officials in different positions, fieldwork diaries, documents, and other material obtained from workplaces, such as pictures.

data comprises 217 pages. The material from the 2010s includes observations and discussions gathered in 2010 and 2014 in expert private- and public-sector organizations that had implemented the idea of the activity-based office. Additional material consists of official documents and research reports on the activity-based office.[2]

The fieldwork in the 1980s and the follow-up in the 1990s were conducted in the same organizations (Author 3, 2003). We call the 1980s and 1990s workspaces "offices" because the functional entities were clear-cut units, departments, permanent open spaces or workstations where office work such as payroll computation, secretarial work, and the preparation and handling of materials took place. The 2010s data was gathered from workplaces where the "activity-based office" was the model used and where office-like work was done (handling, preparation and servicing). The data has been thoroughly anonymized (locations, workplaces and workers). The 2010s data was not gathered from the same workplaces as the 1980s and 1990s data, since only a few of those workplaces still existed (thanks to company closures, mergers etc.), and most of the functional entities had vanished following reorganization (e.g. through outsourcing) in the meantime. However, the data from the 1980s and 1990s inspired us in the 2010s to gather data from organizations that included similar kinds of office work, where ethnographic observation might produce fruitful "companion" data to the older data. The recession of the 1990s, and the general adoption of liberal market views, had transformed organizations into assemblages that were very different from the organizations of the 1980s and early 1990s. Most of the organizations in the 2010s data were created or reshaped in the late 1990s through the merger of various private and/or public organizations and the negotiation of new subcontracts. Our focus in this article is not on describing these structural changes or their impact on the gendered meanings of workspaces as such, but rather on how spatial practices, representations of space and lived spaces can take new forms, even while certain gendered hierarchies and meanings continue to resist change.

Following feminist research ethics, we recognize the political nature of spaces and our own intellectual interest in being on the side of the office workers (cf. Skeggs, 1997). The ethnographic

---

[2] The data consists of staff interviews, two ethnographic diaries (62 pages in total), and photos and documents from these workplaces. Furthermore, we have official documents and reports (183 pages) that deal with activity-based or multispace offices.

material was obtained through interviews, observations, discussions, and the gathering of documents and other research-related data (see Atkinson et al., 2001). We are interested in how spaces are concretely and symbolically linked with other spaces, materials and bodies. We analyse concrete, material workstations and workers' actions in them. We contrast 1980s and 1990s workspaces with 2010s spaces, and read across the meanings of gender. We will start with the 1980s and 1990s offices.

3. THE VISIBLE HIERARCHY

Leena Eräsaari (1991: 170–174) has analysed so-called street-level bureaucracies such as tax, employment and social work offices as presenting hierarchizing power in up-down, front-back, large-small dichotomies, and in iconographies of power such as shelves, chairs, signs and boards. In the 1980s and 1990s it was not difficult to detect these spatial expressions of power in public-sector organizations. The hierarchical order of the workspace could be read in the ground-floor nameplates or workplace telephone directories. Nor was it difficult to see the hierarchies in private-sector offices, although the spatial arrangements in these workplaces might have been changing more quickly than in public-sector bureaucracies.

Floors and sides

> *The office is a high building. In the small lounge there are two women in a glass cubicle: one is on the phone, the other is giving advice to customers. (…) In the personal taxation corridor, handwritten cardboard signs give alphabetical directions. Rambling corridors, many doors and names. (…). The spaces, colours, atmosphere seem to me as they should be in a tax office. This image comes perhaps from fiction. There was nothing striking that would stay in one's mind. Light brownish, slightly worn-out narrow space as well and a lot of non-coloured cardboard binders.* (Field notes A3, 15 January 1997).[3]

The researcher's 1990s observations draw a picture of a modest public-sector office where people work hard in their cubicles in obedience to the rules, and where everyone and everything has its

---

[3] Field notes marked A3 refer to Author 3, and A1 refers to Author 1.

place. The Weberian, almost Kafkaesque image of bureaucracy was strengthened by the organization of the tax office departments, with customer services on the ground floor, personal taxation on the first floor, business taxation on the next floor, and senior management at the top. The number of women decreased and the number of men increased as one ascended. The appearance of the space was in a sense self-evidently divided by gender.

It was noticeable in the workplaces that there was a desire to preserve the visible hierarchy. When the 1980s social work centre was combined with a health unit to become a social and healthcare centre in the 1990s, the number and structure of the personnel changed. However, social and health affairs were still kept separate through the organization of space and clothing – in other words, people held onto existing ways of conceptualizing space.

> *On the cafeteria bookshelf, among the dictionaries of anatomy, microbiology and medicine, you could find journals like* Social Security *and* The Child's World. *Along the same corridor, there were office workers from social and healthcare, but their spaces were at the ends of the corridor. The most visible distinction was the white coats of the healthcare workers. A common way of speaking in the workplace was to say "the healthcare side" and "the social side".* (Field notes A3, 29 August 1996)

Since the work and workspaces did not automatically enable face-to-face interaction among the different groups of workers, the key culturally meaningful spaces were informal spaces such as coffee or smoking rooms. Smoking rooms and coffee breaks in the 1980s and 1990s were places where the ethnographer felt there was a hint of counterculture or at least resistance to the official organization of work – especially among female office workers. Here people complained about the workload, told stories about difficult clients and ignorant managers, pondered complex work problems, and related stories about their own lives. In smoking and coffee rooms, people often laughed at the management, at unnecessary changes and at themselves.

> *Smoking was a "real hot potato" (…) Ann said that there is a separate space for smokers where "the riff-raff sit" (…) and people do it on the sly. (…) In all rooms observed there was a coffee maker behind a curtain, and at nine o'clock in the*

morning women made their own "secret coffee". Thus, morning coffee is not officially allowed in this subdivision. (Field notes A3, 19 May 1986)

In 1980s and 1990s office workplaces, coffee and smoking rooms, corridors, canteens, doorways, table corners, photocopier rooms and lifts were spaces where advice was sought, situations were clarified, explained and anticipated, problems were solved, and common interpretations of what to do and why were created (Author 3, 2003). Talking over folding screens and in corridors, discussing work in the canteen, coffee or smoking rooms, and collectively pondering work issues in the supervisor's doorway or the queue for the photocopier were part of everyday action. In these "easy-going" discussions over work, people created mutual frames for the interpretation of work contents. These were not official negotiations or meetings. They were spatial practices without which everyday work would not have run, but which had become so obvious that one did not necessarily think about their meaning. In these situations, women's private, informal chat and escape from male supervisors were enabled. Women withdrew into these spaces to communicate and exchange experiences (Pringle, 1988: 228–229).

In 1986, behind a high counter, Maria and Ester had their own typewriter and phone. (…) In 1989, instead of the old counter there is a glass hatch for clients, between the outer space and the office space. At 10 a.m. the room is suddenly very busy. Workers came from all over the place, they were searching for client files and drank the coffee pot dry. They sat on the office workers' chairs, chatted, and were quite noisy. This looked like a whirlwind to an outsider's eyes. (…) Soon the situation became silent. Irmeli said, "Every time the workers come to work in the morning, there is such a hurly-burly in their room that one can't hear the voice on the telephone." You could see social workers during the day as well, asking for advice. (Field notes A3, 10 April 1989)

In five years, there had been a spatial change, which steered the clients away from the office, to preserve "peace and quiet at work". Previously, the women office workers used to drink their "secret coffee" in their small curtained space. Subsequently, the space had been conquered by office workers from higher positions in the hierarchy, who invaded the space to hang out together and discuss. The office workers wanted to defend their space *as their own* and made themselves

9

fresh coffee. The making of coffee became a means for them to expand their embodied subjectivity and the tranquillity it required. Drinking coffee created pleasure as an everyday routine, and enforced their sense of subjectivity. At the same time, drinking coffee also became a point of peaceful resistance for the women office workers.

The "non-noticeable" negotiations about work matters were influenced by individual habits, routines and ways of action. In any other position, the office workers might want to work alone, without social participation – if the "official" work content made that possible. When participation in workplace negotiations was based only on "natural" or "inconspicuous" discussions (or encounters, as one calls them today), some people got left out of shared interpretations, deliberately or otherwise. Shared interpretations were blocked not by the physical space, but by how the work was organized, as demonstrated here: *"The planner, Sara, says that before, things were discussed and made clear over the screens, but now people belong to different profit centres, and negotiations over the screens in other units' fields are not allowed"* (field notes A3, 13 March 1990).

Single-occupancy rooms, shared rooms and the open-plan office

The most obvious spatial expression of hierarchy was that supervisors, chiefs and managers had their own rooms. The higher one was in the hierarchy, the higher (or nearer to a corner) the room was located, the bigger it was and the nicer the furniture it had. In an enterprise with seven-tier management, one could detect this very easily: the higher one rose in the lift, the larger the rooms, and the fewer the people in general and women in particular. Some people in non-management positions also had their own rooms, but usually a room to oneself meant high status in the workplace. In a typical open-plan office there would be single-occupancy rooms for the bosses and accounts supervisor, and a big corner office for the financial director, while the secretaries would share the same table and partition screens.

Spaces also shaped the content of everyday work quite directly:

> *Miriam popped into the aisle. After coming back she said that she had got*
> *information from the communications manager that the negotiators are returning on*
> *Thursday or Friday next week. She was happy to know this beforehand. Said that it is*

> *important to listen and thus anticipate coming tasks, because bosses often forget to tell you. She followed the traffic in the aisle in front, was always watching who was coming and going. Greeted people. Gave a lot of advice to passers-by: who can be found and where, and who has gone in what direction. Miriam said that it is good to have a workspace which allows her to follow where people are going while she is speaking on the phone. She can direct when asked.* (Field notes A3, 6 February 1986)

Here the worker is taking over the space by watching and taking part in the interactions. In Grosz's terms (2001: 47), this is a transcription in which embodied directions and redirections appear.

Four years later the workspace had been renovated, and Miriam was sharing a table and screen with another secretary. Miriam could not see directly into the aisle, and at the same time, she was renewing the content of her work: she stopped anticipating and guiding.

> *Miriam was pleased because "before it was a bit restless too." Now nobody stays at the partition screen to talk nonsense. Now others have to tell her what they know about other people's undertakings. "And then they may say no to clients and we don't know that because others are not informing us."* (Field notes A3, 20 March 1989)

From the perspective of feminist studies, the content of Miriam's work in both 1986 and 1989 was typical women's work which included a lot of interaction and ensuring that things went smoothly, but in the organization this work was taken for granted: the work became invisible (Author 3, 2003). When the workspace was changed into a separate space and the aisle was no longer visible, Miriam stopped being a *hostess* (see Veijola & Jokinen, 2008. When visibility and hostessing work no longer exist, the possibility of building a new social space can vanish too. Thus the variable characteristics of masculinity and femininity show up in workspaces (see Adkins & Jokinen, 2008; Gregory, 2016; McDowell, 1997).

Nikil Saval has studied the evolution of office space, and he points out the paternalism that existed in 1970s offices, a stubborn remainder of which was the persistence of the secretary (Saval, 2015, 222–223). From early on, secretaries were considered "office wives", which not only entailed

taking care of and being close to their bosses, but also expressed a hierarchical relationship (see Saval, 2015, 89–90, 250).

The order breaks down

> *Management, administration and finance are on the top floor. (…) On the ground floor is customer advice. The new space is modern and a sort of big office landscape space. You could see people of different ages, both women and men. On this floor, the atmosphere was bustling.* (Field notes A3, 13 August 1996)

In this new landscape office, there were telephone service workers who in the 1980s had had their own workstations separated by walls or screens. There was a new group of workers comprising young men, and the task of the unit was to sell insurance policies – actively and with great initiative. On the office wall was a scoreboard showing everyone's personal sales goals and monthly results. With its plants, graphics, shiny new tables, colours, materials and carefully placed workstations, the unit's milieu differed from other workspaces, not to mention the modest, colourless workspaces of the female telephone service workers in the 1980s. The new unit was the pride of the male bosses, who were "following international trends". The desks were not separated from each other with screens according to a grid plan, but nonetheless everyone had a permanent desk, separated by low walls, plants or glass.

Information technology enabled the visible control of profit outcomes, and sales and marketing had brought young men and a new milieu to the office. The scoreboard, which was made possible by new information technology, became a visible means of control of everyone's work. Bain and Taylor (2000) call this assemblage of technology and people an "electronic panopticon". The workers could easily see the scoreboard documenting the sales figures. The visible hierarchy had been exchanged for technological control, and the spaces allowed the monitoring of individuals with a collective gaze.

For the researcher, the break-up of the visible hierarchy was difficult. She missed the 1980s' and 1990s' differences and divisions, the orderly and systematic rows, floors, units and sections. She yearned for what Foucault (2009) calls the classic episteme of detecting surfaces, sizes, amounts

and forms, because she was used to observing those. She was so used to the previous order that the concrete and symbolic signs of its breakdown were shocking:

> *I can't make any sense of what they are doing at the factory now, not the connections between functions, not the ownership relations, not the division of work, not the quotas from Germany, Russia, the USA, Japan, Sweden in the business. I can't understand the divisions of departments, the decrease in the number of people. They all have casual clothes. I got lost while searching for operators and went one floor too high. I see endless empty and dim corridors, screened compartments, abandoned furniture, binders and papers here and there. The vision exposes utterly clearly how few people and how little action there is at the factory now.* (Field notes A3, 7 October 1996)

To summarize our ethnographic analyses of these two decades, in 1980s offices the gender hierarchy was visible in the workspace. The spatial order of the workplace supported hostessing, which was the "invisible" work of women specifically. In the 1990s, gender hierarchies were built into the workplace more implicitly, at the same time as the technological and spatial control of work and workers increased.

4. THE INVISIBLE HIERARCHY

In the 2010s, office design concepts emphasize flexibility, co-working, collaboration and communication. These design concepts have been named, for example, the co-working space (Cohen, 2011; O'Connor, 2016), the multispace (Kleibrink, 2011) or the activity-based office (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011). They have in common that none of the workers has assigned desks or private offices, and the logic of space rests on the idea that work activities dictate who sits (or stands) where and when. In practice, most of the space consists of an open-plan office that aims to maximize chance encounters. There are some spaces for tasks that require a quiet environment, a few spaces for meetings, and spaces for informal social meetings and activities. The idea is that workers will choose the space and the workstation that best suits their work tasks and their mood, and the increased social interaction will produce more innovation.

New spatial practices

The new office concepts promise to liberate workers from the solitude of their rooms and offer them more freedom to choose their own places (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011). However, in the lived space this liberation may appear to produce new restrictions:

> *Johanna sits down in the open-plan kitchen area and recalls how after the change, nobody got their own desks or workstations. There are a few work roles that have their own desks, luckily the IT help desk is one of them, Johanna laughs. Nevertheless, if someone has a desk it is not really theirs but it belongs to the role. The others find their own workstations in the morning, and if you go out or to a meeting during the day, they lose their place and have to seek a new one, always hoping for a place nearby the closest colleagues. The company gave the workers similar bags in which they can carry necessities – relevant documents, technologies etc. – but they are not allowed to have more stuff than fits in the bag. Many people moved their work archives into their basements at home, as did Johanna.* (Field notes A1, 9 December 2014)

The new office design has brought new kinds of spatial practices. In the morning, the workers seek a desk where they can work, and quite often they have to do so again after going to a meeting or out for lunch. The workers seem to seek workstations that are near their closest colleagues, rather than trying to figure out which workstation would fit their activities best. Choosing intentionally or unintentionally to ignore the basic premise of the activity-based office, the workers instead produce the space by settling their bodies down in proximity to their closest colleagues and friends. Some workers described how over time the workers "started deliberately forgetting their things on certain desks", even though the directors tried to prevent this and even removed the things. In time, a tacit knowledge grew about which workstation "really" belonged to whom. Officially, nobody had assigned workstations, but unofficially every worker knew where their colleagues preferred to sit and work.

The open space required a new spatial practice: "civil inattention" (Goffman, 1963), indicating that a person entering a room respected the fact that their colleagues might need to concentrate. The workers reported that it was actually harder to be in contact with colleagues, since most of the

14

space was open plan and you never knew if the others wanted to concentrate on a task. Even saying hello in the morning was no longer routine: *"more often I just write an email to the person who is in the same space. Before I would have gone over and talked to her."* Paradoxically, the activity-based office, which is intended to increase innovation by increasing communication and interaction (Appel-Meulenbroek et al., 2011), may in fact produce spatial practices that decrease face-to-face interaction.

Johanna mentions that archived work documents and books have been moved into domestic settings, and therefore a large proportion of workers' competence and work-related information has moved off the company's premises. This is one form of resistance. The employer encouraged the workers to destroy all the "old stuff" (papers, folders, books etc.) and adopt a new line of thinking, which meant working without paper and print media. Most of this "old stuff" was deemed redundant by the employer, and thus was not transferred to digital format. Instead, several of the workers took those things home without informing the employer. When the researcher talked to the workers, they justified this by saying that the things were not just any old stuff but signified their expertise. These documents consist of information on how their special expertise has developed over time. Thus, the activity-based office design seems to reject historical knowledge and developments. The organization of space is conceived as activity-oriented, rather than taking into account historically developed skills and relationships in the workplace. The rejection of historical knowledge and relationships deconstructs the strategies of hostessing and makes it seem old-fashioned.

Square pegs in round holes

The new office is seemingly without traditional hierarchy. However, it organizes bodies in different ways. Chill-out areas now have Fatboy beanbags or similar floor-level seating. Getting up from this kind of seating requires a young body that does not have bad knees or joints. This kind of seating also requires clothing that is not too tight (e.g. various types of "feminine" clothing). In general, the ergonomic furniture of modern offices has been replaced with lounge-style furniture. The more traditional chairs in the open office areas are the same as you would see in a hotel lobby while waiting for someone or getting ready to check in. This furniture encourages the workers to be more mobile, on the move, ready to encounter other people (Author, 2017).

Smoking rooms no longer exist, as legislation does not allow them. Coffee rooms nowadays are open areas connected to the general office space; there is a lack of privacy compared with the traditional closed coffee rooms. As the coffee rooms are more visible and open, they are now part of the front stage (Goffman, 1956) of the office – part of the official work area – and they seem to offer fewer settings for informal communication. In particular, younger workers and those who do not have a long history in a specific organization report that there are fewer opportunities to ask for help or casually consult a colleague.

Even though the open areas have increased, the departments still have doors and walls, albeit made of glass, and the names of specific departments are still on display on the doors. Quite often, the name does not clearly reveal the function of the department, and it is impossible to discern any single logic from which the names are derived. One name may refer to the world of competitive sports (e.g. Boxing Ring), the department next to it point to a certain state of mind (e.g. Happy Place), and the department on the next floor have a name that sounds like a management consultancy buzzword (e.g. Nomadic Corner).

> *The main part of the office is designed as a large open-plan space. The open-plan space consists of plenty of standing workstations where I see mostly women working. The head of department explains that when the workers arrive at the office, they are allowed to choose a place that fits their current mood and work tasks. There are some big plants, which offer visual obstructions. Strikingly, a lot of bright green is utilized in the decor. At the back of the open-plan space there is a big wall with photographic wallpaper showing a landscape in Lapland. In two corners of the open-plan area are a few glassed-in oblong spaces of approximately four to six square metres. These spaces are reserved for tasks that demand concentration or meetings between two people. I asked the head of department if we could go and talk in one of these smaller spaces, as I felt that we were disturbing the women working in the open-plan space. There was a lot of noise in the open-plan area. Therefore, we went to this small glassed-in space. There was funny sea wallpaper in the space. It created the illusion that we were under the sea or in a fish tank.* (Field notes A1, 17 October 2010)

The knowledge workers in the new office are constructed almost as "one-person businesses" that should decide for themselves which workstation or working area fits their current task and mood. The novelty of the design concept is created by using "nature" elements in the decor. "Nature" elements were already an essential part of the introduction of the open-plan office concept in the 1960s. At that time, it was emphasized that the open floor plan increased communication and egalitarian practices. However, by the 1970s the idea of office landscaping had lost its newness, and it was realized that it created subtler status distinctions rather than the new democracy that had been promised (Spain, 2003).

New materials and furniture in the chill-out areas invite youthful bodies with playful states of mind. The ideal subject of these spaces seems to be a certain kind of young man.

> *I met up with Anne first thing in the morning, as she knew the managers would not be in and would not see us talking. We went to see the chill-out area, which used to be a coffee room before the new office design. The space had bright colours, big cushions and board games. Anne noted that nowadays it was very difficult to try to concentrate at work, as the chill-out area was right in the middle of the office space and the young guys were often playing PlayStation games together and it sometimes got really loud. Some people had complained about the noise, but the managers had said that you either live with it or leave. Anne and a few of her older colleagues had suggested that they might arrange a lecture and conversations on some topic in the chill-out area. One of the bosses had said that the space was not for that kind of activity.* (Field notes A1, 3 September 2015)

Young masculine embodiment is a frame for performance used by the new office spaces (cf. Gregory, 2016). Thus, the elements that create this playfulness typically belong to young males' milieus. This spatial setting and related practices promise to emancipate the workers, but they oppress women and older men (who feel that the space and its materials reject them) as well as the young males themselves (whose leisure time activities are suddenly colonized by the work organization). The new office concept seems to emphasize the free mobility and communication of all people, but the open-plan areas and their material settings seem to be based on a narrow view of gender.

Office spaces in the 21st century may promote multiple ideals of masculinity, which do not just emphasize power, success, rationality and rigid hierarchies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For example, emotional expressivity and aesthetics, which have traditionally been associated with femininity, are perceived as new resources for every person in the workplace (Adkins, 2005; Swan, 2008). Thus, the new organizational culture might appear feminine with its emphasis on aesthetics and the expression of emotions. Instead, however, it reproduces the old hierarchies in novel ways. The young men are in sight in the playful chill-out areas, and their bodies become part of a corporate aesthetic (Gabriel, 2005). This may also secure them more stable career ladders, as they are more visible and their bodies become a kind of embodiment of the organization. In this situation, for some women and men the opportunity to work at home may offer an escape from the feeling of no longer fitting the corporate aesthetic (Cohen, 2010). Hence, the glass walls may reproduce glass ceilings in more subtle ways.

In both organizations, the management justified the decision to move to glassed-in office spaces as being the wish of their clients. Rather than present the decision as their own, they externalized the responsibility. The directors also stated that they were sympathetic to the employees' wishes, for example to have their own personal things and photos, but the designers did not approve them. Here again, the responsibility for the decision to forbid people to have personal things (e.g. indoor plants, decorative objects and photographs) in the office was externalized. Although the interior design and designers emphasize the meaning of design and aesthetics, the new design rejects everyday decoration and decorative objects, which are traditionally considered to belong to the feminine and the domestic sphere (Negrin, 2008).

In the new data, the management told stories of employees wanting to keep their personal things. The punchline of these stories was that the employees were "endearing" as they wanted to "mark" their own places with their personal things or with piles of dusty papers. In these stories, the tone was ironical. In the stories, the women office workers wanted to save old papers, or for example old, redundant typewriters, or in one story even a photo of a dog. "There they go, still carrying their old piles of paper in anguish, not knowing where to put them any more", was how one boss started a story about a group of women employees who did not want to let go of their archives. In the story, the manager was like a patient parent who in the end convinced the

children (the women workers) that they could let go of the past. The papers in these stories were always described as "dusty" or "old". The moral of these stories was that change is fundamentally not about office spaces, but about people and their need to change. By sheer chance or not, the principal characters (the workers) in these stories were all women. Stories about pictures of loved ones and ridiculously old, dusty and heavy piles of paper constructed the women employees as infantile and old-fashioned (Peteri 2019).

> *I went with Sofia and Amanda to a more private space. Sofia recalled a time when the directors commented that the old office was dusty and dirty and they could not even invite visitors onto the premises. Sofia said that the comments were deeply offensive. The employees felt they had a long-standing relationship with the office. Sofia laughed and noted that it was not only about the office but maybe we were also too dusty and dirty for the directors.* (Field notes A1, 25 November 2014)

Felstead et al. (2005, 24–25) have noted that "management removes opportunities for employees to personalize space", which reveals power differences at work. In the directors' stories, the women who resist change are constructed as infantile and old-fashioned. They cling to material things and to a world symbolized by photos of loved ones and old piles of paper. This interpretation has come across to some of the employees, as Sofia says that she felt they too were dusty and dirty.

The office spaces shaped the ethnographies as well. In the 1980s and 1990s office settings, the researcher wandered freely around corridors and floors, sometimes even getting lost on the premises. The researcher in the 2010s was under technological surveillance, as she had to ask a contact person to let her change floors or departments. The office premises included open spaces and glass walls, and that made some employees more reluctant to talk to the researcher. *"If I criticize the new order I'll get fired,"* commented one employee, with whom the researcher ended up talking in a storeroom among old furniture and partition screens. In this shadowy room, the worker and the researcher could talk peacefully in a safe place. Taking part in the research was clearly an effort to resist spatial representations. Those who took part highlighted that it was important that their story be told.

To sum up our ethnographic analysis from the 2010s, there is an impression of increased openness. The new open spaces are seemingly ideal for networking and communication, but they offer fewer settings for informal communication. A new digital infrastructure is present in everyday work. The concrete archives of the 1980s and 1990s have been destroyed and some replaced by digital files. Digital communication offers more opportunities to be in contact, but it seems not to offer a platform that could replace the informal communication that previously took place in more closed spaces.

5. CONCLUSION: FROM WORKSPACE TO MENTAL SPACE

In the neoliberal capitalist economy, people have to change to fit in with the market-oriented society. Workers have to be ready to adapt, orient and govern their selves and bodies in various ways. Spaces are modified intensively, and at the same time there is an increasing aim to influence the actions of embodied actors. Although workspaces have been adjusted and redesigned many times before, our 2010s data suggests that this time the central aim is to remould informal spaces to cultivate innovation. However, it seems that in this process the informal places lose their meaning as informal, and this also changes the social and gender relations in the workspace. Therefore, we ask: where are the informal places of work hiding now?

The three interrelated aspects of Lefebvre's (2015) conception of social space were found to be useful in the analysis. The analysis shows that there is a clear contradiction between visions of space and lived space. Traditional office work allocated to women – which per se has not vanished – is not easily transformed into mobile discussions or place-changing encounters. Instead, it demands an ordinary work desk with drawers, a chair, a computer, walls that protect clients or patients, and peace and quiet to work. To put it bluntly, the embodied (female) actor of industrial work is seen as dusty, old and dirty, whereas the embodied (male) worker's agency is seen as mobile, playful and up to date. Additionally, we see that the aim of fostering traditionally feminized styles of informal encounter in activity-based office space might paradoxically be lessening direct meetings and communication. The corridors, copy rooms, smoking rooms and coffee rooms of the 1980s enabled hostessing by creating settings that were more backstage (Goffman, 1956) by nature. They offered opportunities to swap information casually, and to "rehearse", prepare and talk over aspects of work in a less official manner.

In both industrial and post-industrial workspaces, gendered bodies and spatial practices are visibly governed. The industrial office environment openly manifested the hierarchy of the organization where the (male) manager's room was the biggest; he sat on a so-called executive chair and gazed upon the most ostentatious decor. The workers' gaze is controlled by giving a real-time results counter a central place in the workspace. A similar orienting of bodies in the post-industrial workspace happens when workers are brought together as if by accident (e.g. as if in a bistro, a café or nature). The presence, interaction and representation of things – sometimes even branding (Mäkinen, 2012) – are emphasized in embodied performativities. Spatial arrangements and practices seek to govern the "customers'" conceptions of the company or institution. Spaces and ideal workers control body shapes (not too fat) or ages (not too old or old-fashioned). Anyone can do the job – as long as they fulfil the expectations directed at the embodied actor (Parviainen, 2014).

A body is always a *spatial body* (Lefebvre, 2015, 195). Increasing the multiplicity and openness of spaces and apparent spatial freedom may mean that embodied actors are governed in new ways. Performing and controlling the right kind of embodiment has been made the worker's responsibility. The activity-based office actively changes bodies by changing space. Playful gatherings of young men in the Microsoft office's "beach" and "inspiration" spaces reflect the way bodies are arranged to produce innovation. An open space may in fact be full of things and spatial arrangements that are strange and uninviting for some. The familiar object world of binders, books and reports now rests in the workers' domestic basements, as if signalling that historically layered knowledge is no longer valued in the workplace. However, this enables a new kind of resistance, as historical knowledge no longer belongs to the organization.

LITERATURE

Adkins L (2005) The New Economy, Property and Personhood. *Theory, Culture & Society* 22(1): 111–130.

Adkins L and Jokinen E (2008) Introduction: Gender, Living and Labour in the Fourth Shift. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 16(3): 138–149.

Appel-Meulenbroek R, Groenen P and Janssen I (2011) An End-User's Perspective on Activity-Based Office Concepts. *Journal of Corporate Real Estate,* 13 (2): 122–135.

Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (2001) Editorial Introduction: Mapping Ethnographic Diversity. In: Atkinson P, Coffey A, Delamont S, Lofland J and Lofland L (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage, pp. 1–7.

Bain P and Taylor P (2000) Entrapped by the 'Electronic Panopticon'? Worker Resistance in the Call Centre. *New Technology, Work & Employment* 15(1): 2–18.

Cohen AM (2011) Four Scenarios for Co-Working. *The Futurist* 45(4): 8.

Cohen RL (2010) Rethinking 'Mobile Work': Boundaries of Space, Time and Social Relation in the Working Lives of the Mobile Hairstylists. *Work, Employment & Society* 24(1): 65–84.

Connell RW and Messerschmidt JW (2005) Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society* 19(1): 829–859.

Dale K (2005) Building a Social Materiality: Spatial and Embodied Politics of Organizational Control. *Organization* 12(5): 649–678.

Eräsaari L (1991) Bureaucratic space. In: Lehto J (ed) *Deprivation, Social Welfare and Expertise*. Helsinki: National Agency for Welfare and Health Research reports 7, pp. 167-179.

Felstead A, Jewson N and Walters S (2005) *Changing Places of Work*. Basingstoke : Palgrave Macmillan.

Foucault M (1980) *Tarkkailla ja rangaista* (Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison). Helsinki: Otava.

Foucault M (2003) Space, Knowledge and Power. In: Leach N (ed) *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge, pp. 367-380.

Foucault M (2009) *Sanat ja asiat: Ihmistieteiden arkeologia* (Les mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines) Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Gabriel Y (2005) Glass Cages and Glass Palaces: Images of Organization in Image-Conscious Times. *Organization* 12(1): 9–27.

Goffman E (1956) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Edinburgh: Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Edinburgh.

Goffman E (1963) *Behavior in Public Places*. New York: Free Press.

Gregory M (2016) *The Face of the Firm: Corporate Hegemonic Masculinity at Work.* New York and London: Routledge.

Grosz E (1995) *Space, Time and Perversion*. New York and Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Grosz E (2001) *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press.

Harvey D (1989) *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Kleibrink M (2011) The World of Office Work in Flux: Usage Strategies and Freedom of Choice. In Schittich C (ed) *In Detail, Work Environments: Spatial Concepts, Usage Strategies, Communications*. Basel: Birkhäuser, pp. 11–17.

Korvajärvi P (1998) Reproducing Gendered Hierarchies in Everyday Work: Contradictions in an Employment Office. *Gender, Work & Organization* 5(1): 19–30.

Lefebvre H (2015) *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lehtonen M (2014) *Maa-ilma* ('Mattering matter'). Tampere: Vastapaino.

McDowell L (1997) Capital Culture: Gender and Work in the City. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Mäkinen K (2012) *Becoming Valuable Selves: Self-Promotion, Gender and Individuality in Late Capitalism*. Tampere: University of Tampere.

Negrin, L. (2008). Ornament and the Feminine. In: Negrin L (ed) *Appearance and Identity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 117-137.

O´Connor D (2016) Shared Work Spaces Spur Creativity, Collaboration. *Central Penn Business Journal*, July 15.

Parviainen J (2014) The Performativity of Double Bodies. *International Journal of Work Organisation and Emotion* 6(4): 311–326.

Pringle R (1988) *Secretaries Talk: Sexuality, Power and Work*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Saarikangas K (2006) Displays of the Everyday: Relations between Gender and the Visibility of Domestic Work in the Modern Finnish Kitchen from the 1930s to the 1950s. *Gender, Place and Culture* 13(2): 161–172.

Saarikangas K (2014) Sandboxes and Heavenly Dwellings. *Home Cultures: The Journal of Architecture, Design and Domestic Space* 11(1): 33–64.

Saval N (2015) *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace*. New York: Anchor Books.

Shields R (1999) *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*. London: Routledge.

Skeggs B (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Soja EW (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Spain D (2003) Excerpts from The Contemporary Workplace. In Borden I, Penner B and Rendell J (eds) *Gender Space Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. London: Routledge, pp. 118–127.

Strati A (1999) *Organization and Aesthetics*. London: Sage.

Swan E (2008) 'You Make Me Feel Like a Woman': Therapeutic Cultures and the Contagion of Femininity. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 15(1): 88–107.

Tyler M and Cohen L (2010) Spaces that Matter: Gender Performativity and Organizational Space. *Organization Studies*, 31(2): 175–198.

Urry J (2007) *Mobilities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Veijola S and Jokinen E (2008) Towards Hostessing Society? Mobile Arrangements of Labour and Gender. *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 16(3): 166–181.