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Abstract

This article draws attention to the spaces in-between and employees’ lived experiences of liminal spaces at work. It illustrates how and why liminal spaces are used and made meaningful by workers, in contrast to the dominant spaces that surround them. Consequently, the article extends the concept of liminality and argues that when liminal spaces are constructed, by workers, as vital and meaningful to their everyday lives they cease to be liminal spaces and instead become ‘transitory dwelling places’. In order to examine this shift from ambiguous space to meaningful place, the works of Casey (1993), amongst others, are used to make further sense of the space/materiality/work nexus in organizational life. This article is based on empirical data gathered from a nine-month study of hairdressers working in hair salons and explores the function and meaning of liminal spaces used by hairdressers in their everyday lives. The contribution of this article is three-fold; it argues that space is not just about dominant spaces; it extends the concept of liminality; and in connection with the latter, it demonstrates how transitory dwelling places offer fertile ground in which we might further develop our knowledge of the lived experiences of space at work.

Keywords

hairdressers, hair salons, liminal, organizational space and place, photography, visual research

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Introduction: Considering corners

Over the last two decades the spatial turn in the social sciences has provided a fascinating lens through which organizational life can be better understood. However, the majority of studies in this field have been concerned with dominant spaces in organizations (Dale and Burrell, 2008). The spaces explored, for the most part, are designed, defined and frequently managed; they focus on spaces such as offices, staffrooms, meeting rooms, classrooms, hospital wards or hair salons (e.g. Baldry, 1999; Chugh and Hancock, 2009; McElroy and Morrow, 2010). Little attention has been paid, particularly within organization studies, to the liminal spaces of the workplace. Lifts, doorways, stairwells, toilets and cupboards – these are the spaces that have been neglected in our examination of work space, yet these are spaces that are used and experienced most days in most organizations – these spaces are everywhere.

In this article, liminal space is defined as a space that is on the ‘border’, a space that is somewhere in-between the front stage/back stage; a space ‘at the boundary of two dominant spaces, which is not fully part of either’ (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 238). The ‘no man’s land’ (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 239) feature of liminal space is an important characteristic and, as such, spaces like these are not easily defined in terms of their use, are not clearly ‘owned’ by a particular party and are where anything can happen (Turner, 1974). Although the notion of *anything* may happen is perhaps a somewhat far-reaching claim, liminal spaces are nonetheless in direct comparison to dominant spaces; those spaces that are defined by mainstream uses, that characteristically have clear boundaries and where the practices within them are interwoven with social expectation, routines and norms. Using Dale and Burrell’s assessment of the organization of space, liminal spaces are thus ‘alternative’ to the unambiguous, demarcated spaces of organizational life, and ‘imply alternative organization’ and radical difference (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 233).

This article draws attention to these spaces in-between and argues that if we are to better understand the role of space and materiality in organizational life, we must start to tune in to all the spaces that surround us, including liminal spaces. This is particularly germane given the increasingly fluid nature of work (Donkin, 2010). The growth of shared workplaces, the open-plan office and advances in technology mean that work today is collaborative and conducted all over the office; touch down spaces in foyers, ‘innovation corridors’ and conversation ‘pods’ are all contributing to the changing landscape of the office environment (*Leesman Review*, 2013; Oke, 2002). In addition, many workers now conduct their work on the move and do business in transitory spaces such as ‘office hotels’, cafes, bars, trains and hotels (Donkin, 2010; Duffy, 1997). This fluidity of work space has also been influenced by the increasingly blurred boundaries between work/office space and home working; the past five years alone have seen a 13 percent growth in home working in the UK, as millions of us move from the office to a home-based study (WorkWise UK, <http://www.workwiseuk.org>). These changes should further encourage spatial researchers now and in the future to question: With the increase in the fluidity of work, what role do liminal spaces play? What is significant about the space in-between? How and why are liminal spaces used in the workplace?

This article begins with a theoretical framing of lived space followed by a review of liminality literature where a physical conceptualization of liminal space as a vital

rematerialization of organization studies is developed. Following this, the field study and data are presented. These data show how liminal spaces are made meaningful by workers for privacy, for informal territories and for inspiration, and, as such, when liminal spaces are constructed as meaningful to the workers' everyday lives, these spaces instead become 'transitory dwelling places'. This article concludes by arguing that the exploration of such transitory dwelling places may offer organizational researchers data-rich sites for further study.

Literature review

Organizational space: Where is the 'in-between'?

A variety of perspectives on spatiality, its functions, meanings and practices have emerged within organization studies, including debates within this journal, and increasingly researchers use the workplace setting to structure their conceptual, empirical and methodological interests (Dale and Burrell, 2008; Fleming and Spicer, 2004; McElroy and Morrow, 2010; Taylor and Spicer, 2007). Realist approaches investigate how space can be flexibly reconfigured by organizations to save money (Albrecht and Broikos, 2001; Daniels, 1994) including how space can be managed in order to influence employee and customer behaviour, perceptions and responses (Bitner, 1992). Symbolic approaches examine how physical space tells something of the culture or identity of the organization (Gagliardi, 1990; Yanow, 2006), whilst more critical studies connect space and power, considering the territories and boundaries that impact everyday political life at work (Baldry, 1999; Dale and Burrell, 2008; Fleming and Spicer, 2004). Others connect space with 'lived' experiences and explore the socially constructed nature of the spaces we inhabit (Bachelard, 1994 [1958]; Ford and Harding, 2004; Lefebvre, 1991).

Indeed, anthropological research argues that we must be mindful that spaces are 'doubly constructed'; that they are physically built structures and '... are also interpreted ... felt and imagined' (Gieryn, 2000: 465). Spaces, then, are subjectively lived and should not '... be considered empty "mediums" ... containers distinct from their contents' (Lefebvre, 1991: 87). Lefebvre's 'spatial triad' encapsulates this and demonstrates how we might holistically view space and how it is produced: perceived space – spatial practices and how we move within space as part of daily routine; conceived space – how space is physically constructed as a materialization of power relations; and lived space – the symbolic, subjective experiences of those who use space. The concept of lived space is therefore embedded within a social constructionist paradigm and Lefebvre (1991: 39) suggests it 'overlays' the physical aspects of space and tends to incorporate the 'less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs'. It is important to note here that this article integrates both the subjective experience of space as well as the materiality of the workplace; the idea that there exists a co-creation/relationship between subjects and objects (Borgerson, 2005).

Goffman (1959) too locates the subjective experience of space at the forefront of his thinking. His dramaturgical analysis of the presentation of self offers a comprehensive examination of social interactions within particular spaces and the objects or 'props' we use within them, which Jenkins (2004: 69) refers to as the '*spatiality* of interaction'

(emphasis in original). Goffman (1959) proposes that, as social actors, individuals perform in particular spaces, which he refers to as 'front-stage' and 'back-stage' regions. These regions influence social behaviour and demonstrate how an individual's identity is managed in public and private spaces. Goffman describes how individuals can publicly manage this presentation of self according to the audience in front of whom they perform and how private arenas – back-stage regions (such as staffrooms) – allow social actors to relax and step out of character. Such ideas have also been incorporated into the work of Hochschild (1983) and Fineman (2003), noting dominant public spaces in organizations as sites for employee display, where certain scripts are played out and emotion work is done, whereas private spaces may offer a reprieve from such emotion work and rules. Broadly, Goffman's now classic framework is particularly pertinent in the context of this article; arguably, the concept of 'transitory dwelling spaces', presented here, could be said to extend this framework of front-stage/back-stage and looks at the spaces between them, thus adding to the notion that space is experienced as a complex set of regions and zones.

As already noted above, work space studies appear to focus their gaze on the dominant spaces that might 'dazzle' (Dale and Burrell, 2003, 2008). Yet, these are not the only spaces experienced in organizational life; Dale and Burrell (2008) clarify that liminal spaces are broadly overlooked in spatial research but are no-less significant as spaces in which emotions, identity and meaning might be embedded. The conceptualization of space, particularly from a phenomenological perspective, highlights the significance of everyday lived experiences of space; notably, those spaces 'on the margins' (Bachelard, 1994 [1958]; Casey, 1993; Tuan, 1977). Bachelard's (1994 [1958]) philosophical exploration of home/domestic spaces highlights the importance placed on 'intimate spaces' such as corners and secluded spaces in our everyday worlds. Bachelard suggests we seek out and use corners of our home to withdraw from social interactions and find solitude (pp. 136–137). Our experiences and how we feel in these spaces are deeply connected to our memories, thoughts and imaginations.

Furthermore, Casey's (1993) conceptualization of space argues for the embodied nature of *place* and suggests our experiences of place are bound up with our ability to *dwell* within them. The notion of dwelling place is evident in both Casey's and Bachelard's work and is explored as an important part of how we create a sense of stability and belonging in the places we inhabit. Casey (1993: 115) proposes that dwelling places can 'encourage permanent residence (or) . . . transient uses' and lists examples such as houses and schools (which are arguably dominant spaces), as well as street corners and corridors (arguably liminal spaces). It is germane to note here, that these 'places we occupy, however briefly – (have) everything to do with what and who we are (and finally, *that* we are)' (Casey, 1993: xiii, emphasis in original). The more we 'dwell' in a place, Casey proposes, the more 'we feel at home' and construct a sense of familiarity. Dwelling places thus form a vital part of the everyday experiences of lived space and are fundamental to the construction of identity.

It is how and why liminal spaces are 'lived', made meaningful and 'humanized' by workers that is at the heart of this article, and as such the difference between space and place should be acknowledged. Tuan (1977: 54) addresses these terms and claims that 'space lies open . . . has no fixed pattern of established human meaning' and that place

'is a calm center of established values . . . security'. This, importantly, sheds further light on Lefebvre's notion of lived space and suggests we might start to question the terms used and the nuances between them. For example, perceived spaces may well be 'spaces', since the focus is predominantly on functionality, distance and movement, yet if lived spaces are subjectively experienced and made meaningful through pause, associations with identity, and with stability and attachment (Tuan, 1977: 6), perhaps lived space evolves to become lived *place*. Tuan states that places, rather than spaces, are 'humanized' and although human beings require both space and place in their functioning, it is place that offers shelter, stability, attachment and symbols of meaning. These ideas lay the foundations for my later arguments that suggest by making liminal spaces meaningful and thus more humanized, workers are re-constructing such spaces into lived *places*.

Space, liminality and the 'in-between'

The concept of liminal space emerges from the Latin word *limen* meaning on a threshold or at a boundary and evokes a period of time/space 'in-between' typically during an individual's rite of passage (Turner, 1974, 1982; Van Gennep, 1960 [1909]). Van Gennep's theory states that this period of liminality is transitory, temporary and can be an anxious time where, for example, known norms, behaviours and identities are suspended thus giving way to uncertainty. Van Gennep's original work was developed by Turner and although he too saw liminality as a state in which the individual was 'betwixt and between' a social position and/or identity, and as such could not be clearly defined, he also saw it as space for liberation from 'structural obligations' (Turner, 1982: 27) and where 'anything may happen' (Turner, 1974: 13) – a space where we might experience freedom of some kind. Both Van Gennep and Turner's conceptual framing of liminality has been used and interpreted differently particularly over the past two decades and has incorporated both temporal and spatial dimensions across a wide variety of academic disciplines including education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Meyer and Land, 2005), health studies (Pearce, 2003; Peleg et al., 1999), tourism and leisure (Preston-Whyte, 2004; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006), social/cultural geography (Andrews and Roberts, 2012; Shields, 1991; Thomassen, 2012) and consumer research (Mehta and Belk, 1991).

Organization studies have extended the concept of liminality and has provided a useful framework to study temporary employees (Garsten, 1999), individual and organizational learning (Tempest and Starkey, 2004), management under extreme conditions (Tempest et al., 2007), management consultancy and business dinners (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003; Sturdy et al., 2006), identity transitions (Ibarra, 2007) and identity reconstruction (Beech, 2011). Throughout these studies both positive and negative consequences of liminality have been explored. For example, Sturdy et al. (2006) advance the concept of liminality as one that provides a useful 'space' in which usual social norms dissipate and offer individuals' (in this case, meetings between consultants and managers during business dinners) opportunities to share secrets and speak honestly. However, Beech (2011) argues that anxiety and feelings of social separation are some of the negative psychological consequences that may be experienced by those who spend extended periods of time in a liminal 'state'.

Nonetheless, as Thomassen (2012) acknowledges, the concept of liminality has been predominantly located within a temporal dimension in many studies, drawing on the original ideas set out by Van Gennep (1960 [1909]). These studies consider liminal space as a moment or period of time in which individuals, groups or societies experience ritualistic 'passages' from one 'state' to another – it is a figurative space. However, importantly for my purposes here, Van Gennep also saw liminal spaces as constructs of the physical kind and acknowledged the significance of thresholds, doorways and borders in ritual. Therefore, liminal space might also be understood as a physical, spatial construct, as is the approach I take in this article.

In a recent text that explores 'liminal landscapes', Thomassen (2012: 26), and others, highlight that the 'spatial dimensions of liminality can relate to specific places . . . a doorway . . . areas or zones . . . border areas . . . prisons . . . airports'. Further connections can be made here to Augé's (1995) discussion of airports, motorways and hotels as 'non-places'. Augé identified these spaces as transitory, temporary spaces in which we physically, only momentarily dwell and in contrast to 'places', suggests they are not concerned with relationships, history or identity (1995: 77). Whilst Augé's polar comparison of 'place' and 'non-place' is perhaps overly simplistic, he nonetheless usefully draws our attention to these sorts of spaces and attempts to put uncertain, liminal spaces on the socio-cultural map of everyday spaces.

It has been social/cultural geographers and tourism studies that have helped to extend the liminal space discourse using a spatial/physical lens. The beach, for example, has been defined as a liminal space between land and sea, identified as an in-between zone offering visitors' opportunities for freedom and 'carnival' (Shields, 1991). Beaches are 'limbo-like space(s) often beyond normal social and cultural constraints. In these spaces can be found brief moments of freedom and an escape from the daily grind of social responsibilities' (Preston-Whyte, 2004: 350). Other studies have examined hotels as liminal spaces, arguing that these surroundings too are 'limbo-like' and afford users and visitors a space in which they may suspend the 'daily grind' and where 'anonymity, romance and adventure' may be found (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006: 764). Notably, this contrasts somewhat with Augé's hotels as 'non-places', where he suggests that such transitory spaces lack 'organic social life' (1995) – research, certainly in the tourism/leisure field, argues that such liminal spaces are positively rich with social life.

Whilst these studies helpfully bring liminal spaces to the foreground of spatial research, more recent studies have started to analyse 'micro-geographies of social life' (Iedema et al., 2012: 44), shifting focus away from spaces such as airports, beaches and hotels and towards the smaller, less obvious liminal spaces that surround us. Iedema et al. (2012: 41), for example, focus their spatial interest on hospital corridors and show how these liminal spaces afford hospital staff an important informal, often 'ad hoc' environment in which to engage in conversations, teaching and knowledge exchange. Further studies that explore the health care profession and spatial practices note the use of corridors as key to everyday interactions and communications (Pearce, 2003; Peleg et al., 1999). Although there are debates as to how ethically appropriate it is to conduct such communications in hospital corridors (Hanley, 2003), it is clearly acknowledged that the corridor, owing to its liminal status and 'precisely because it lack(s) functional definition' (Iedema et al., 2012: 43), offers a transitory space for conversations without organizational conventions.

Characteristically, liminal spaces of the physical kind, be they beaches or corridors, share some of the important conceptual elements set out within the temporal 'state' of liminality and we see that the physical and figurative spaces of liminality overlap. Physical liminal spaces too are in-between borderlands where boundaries, to some extent, are blurred and difficult to clearly define, making them semi-private, semi-public. It is in these sorts of undefined spaces we ourselves may then experience being undefined and where our behaviour may be unconstrained by social norms and where we might argue, as Turner suggests 'anything may happen' (1974: 13). Yet, importantly, there is ambiguity here – if such liminal spaces are made meaningful by individuals or groups, through attachment or a sense of stability within them, we might start to question if they continue to be either 'liminal' or indeed 'spaces' at all. Instead, we might define meaningful liminal spaces as transitory dwelling places and consider in more depth the complexities associated with the in-between.

Field study and method

The data presented in this article are drawn from a wider interpretivist study that focused on a deep examination of work space and objects with hairdressers working in hair salons. The study explored their subjective experiences and special attention was given to the way work spaces shaped and colonized their personal identities. Of particular interest for this article, was the spatial context for these employees; working in ostensibly shared, fluid, open-plan environments.

Key to the study was the use of visual methods – namely, participant-led photography (see, for example, Warren, 2002). As part of the research, each hairdresser was given a disposable camera and asked to capture up to 12 images of spaces that were meaningful to them and said something about who they are. After the photographs had been developed, photo-elicitation techniques were used; one-to-one, face-to-face, photo-interviews were conducted with each participant. At the start of the interviews, consent was sought from the hairdressers (using visual ethics guidelines outlined in Prosser and Loxley, 2008) and permission granted to use their images and stories within academic work. It was highlighted that pseudonyms would be used to preserve anonymity throughout. Their images were then discussed and conversations recorded (see Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). Participant-led photography was chosen since it aligned with the ontological and epistemological foundations of the wider study; the concern being with the participant's subjectivity and individual experience of work space. This choice also foregrounded the participant's voice (Warren, 2002, 2005), helped their experiences to be communicated (Strangleman, 2014; Thomas and Linstead, 2002), and created a more balanced power dynamic between the participant and researcher (Ray and Smith, 2012). In addition, by placing the camera in the hands of the participants, the method offered the participants an alternative opportunity to explore the often 'intangible' parts of their organizational worlds – such as identity (Warren, 2005) – rather than relying on textual narratives alone.

This study was conducted in 2008–2009 and was based in five hairdressing salons across the UK: a hairdresser working alone in her home on the outskirts of Bath (a city located in the south-west of England); a vibrant city-centre salon in Bath; a small salon managed by one hairdresser working alone on the outskirts of Worcester (a city in the Midlands, in England); a huge 'super-salon' in London, frequented by celebrities; and a

large salon in the heart of London's West End. Owing to the large numbers of hairdressers based in the two London salons, participants were 'purposively' sampled (Blaxter et al., 1996: 79). The sample included 43 hairdressers in total, both male and female, aged between 17 and 50 years old and incorporated junior hairdressers (those in training and not yet qualified) and senior/experienced stylists and colourists (those specializing in cutting or colouring hair). See Table 1 below.

These data were then subject to qualitative analysis from which key themes were established. Schroeder (2006) reminds us that photographs and images not only embody a variety of meanings and can be interpreted in different ways, but can require different analytical strategies to glean such meaning, and as such careful thought should be given to the most appropriate tools available. Analytical tools used to analyse visual data produced by participants in qualitative field studies have been identified as somewhat scarce (see Catalini and Minkler, 2010), although recent research published in Bell et al. (2014) suggests methods of visual analysis are developing within this specific field. Here, in this study, existing analytical methods contributed to the design of the method used (which is described below), as well as incorporating my own approach to analysing visual data produced by participants. Indeed, Pink (2007: 117) advocates '[using] an existing method of organizing, categorizing and interpreting visual materials . . . or invent [your] own'. Therefore, the method of analysis developed for this study integrated the meanings assigned to the photographs by the participants (textual narratives) and the content of the photographs themselves/what they are *of* (visual narratives).

The first part of this tripartite analytical process included 'photographer-led meaning attribution', where the photographs were categorized according to the meanings ascribed to them by participants. This took place within the semi-structured interview setting; participants talked about the meanings their photographs held and why they captured these images. This stage of the process is rooted in the existing and well-established method of photo-elicitation (see Heisley and Levy, 1991 and Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001 for examples). The second part of this analytical process included 'theming'. First, transcripts from each interview were produced and initial memos were recorded as part of the preliminary reading of these texts (Saldaña, 2012). Codes were grounded in the data so as to preserve the inductive participant-centred character of the research. For example, and in relation to the data presented in this article, codes such as 'hide away from others'; 'my own space'; and 'escape the salon' were assigned to relevant parts of the transcriptions during the line by line analysis. This coding process led to the development of the theme 'spaces for privacy'.

The final part of this tripartite analytical process was 'researcher-led pattern analysis'. If, as Saldaña (2012) suggests, the analysis of interview transcripts may be part of 'first cycle coding', then this final stage could be seen as part of the 'second cycle', where unexpected discoveries may emerge (Lindof and Taylor, 2011; Saldaña, 2012). At this stage, all the photographs within a particular theme (e.g. spaces for privacy) were grouped, revisited and their *visual* contents analysed based on what was captured in the image. This was an important part of the visual analysis as it allowed the images to be brought back into the analytical process, as opposed to simply being used as prompts for talk during the photo-interviews. The images in the 'spaces for privacy' theme (and consequent others) were viewed in their entirety and a 'final exposure to the whole' (Collier, 2001) allowed for patterns to be seen and similarities and differences to be acknowledged.

Table 1. Statistical data illustrating the salon location, sample and visual thematic analysis.

Location of salon	N = salon employees	N = study participants	N = average photos per participant	N = photo-interviews	Photos in theme: spaces for privacy	Photos in theme: informal staff-rooms	Photos in theme: professional spaces for inspiration	Photos in theme: professional spaces	Photos in theme: unprofessional spaces	Photos in theme: social entertainment spaces	Photos in theme: unpleasant/boring spaces
London	80–100	20	15	20	Images of toilets, cupboards, corridors, stairways etc. Liminal spaces	23	8	15	16	3	11
London	50	15	15	15	12	8	3	8	10	12	12
Bath	10	6	14	6	2	2	2	5	4	2	3
Bath	1	1	18	1	1	0	0	2	1	0	0
Worcester	1	1	15	1	4	0	0	1	2	0	0

For example, the contents of all the images associated with the ‘spaces for privacy’ theme included toilets, cupboards, corridors and stairways – and thus the idea of liminal spaces emerged.

In the wider study, 11 themes in total were identified using this analytical method. Only themes relevant to the arguments in this article, therefore, have been selected here as they provide a useful comparison between how and why liminal spaces are used by workers and how and why dominant spaces are used (or not) by workers. This is explored in more detail in the following sections. However, Table 1 provides some context and includes descriptive statistics on the wider study, including how many photographs were captured within the themes discussed in this article.

Findings: Hiding in the corners of a hair salon

The hairdressers showed me photographs of liminal spaces, such as cupboards, toilets, stairwells and doorways, during the photo-interviews and discussed what meanings they held. The hairdressers identified these spaces as those that held the most importance to them and those in which they chose to ‘dwell’ (Casey, 1993) throughout the day; these are the spaces they escaped to for privacy, reconstructed as spaces that they could call ‘their own’, and where creativity and inspiration were found or sought. They also captured images of dominant spaces – the formal staffrooms and the work stations (the salon equivalent to an office desk). These spaces were associated with corporate culture, a sense of professionalism, and expectations of clients, management and colleagues. The data presented below are divided into three core sections in order to further explore the significant role liminal spaces play in the lives of these hairdressers; (1) Privacy and ‘being hidden’, (2) Informal staffrooms, (3) Inspiration.

Privacy and ‘being hidden’

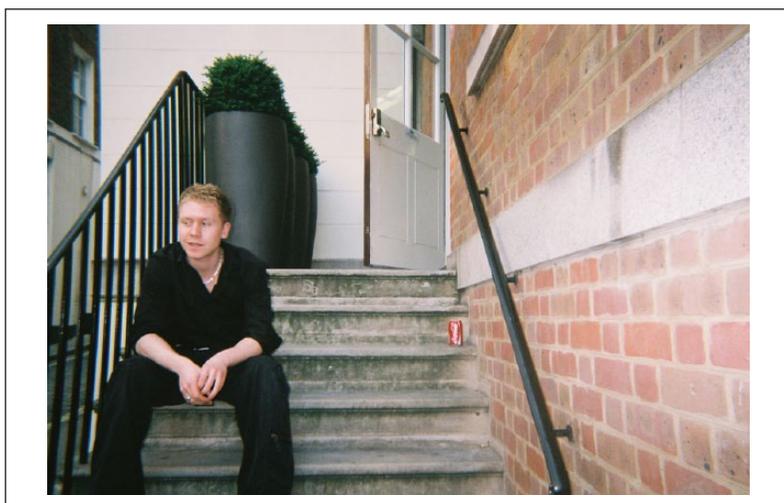
Sara-Lou, a junior hairdresser in a large London salon, took a picture of the metal staircase that formed one of the main thoroughfares in the salon:



Picture 1. Sara-Lou.

Sara-Lou: Well, it's somewhere I like to go and take a moment, not for very long, but, well, the other staircase, the posh one where we're supposed to take the clients up to reception, that's for them I guess . . . but this one is quieter and it's not out in the open. I like it because it's dark, not like the rest of the salon, which I do love, but here it's like you can hide away for a moment or two and chill out . . .

Steps and stairways featured in many images captured by the hairdressers, identified as spaces in which they snatch private moments either alone or with colleagues, much like the lifts discussed by Dale and Burrell (2008) and Bachelard's 'imaginary rooms' (1994 [1958]). Grace, a senior colourist in another London salon, took a picture of the steps outside the salon:



Picture 2. Grace.

Grace: I love this place, I love sitting here, getting away from the salon . . . there's so much going on and it's so hectic and so much talk . . . the steps are me getting away from everyone, me being myself, by myself, so that's my favourite place . . .

The hairdresser's narratives about such locations evoke a sense of needing brief private moments away from busy daily routines. Many found this a useful way to negotiate the constant conversations with clients and the wide open spaces of the salons, so characteristic of this professional environment (see Black, 2004; Gimlin, 1996).

Ali, an experienced hairdresser working alone in her small salon on the outskirts of Worcester, notes her 'turf' is a spot on the pavement outside her salon:

Ali: . . . this is my little spot . . . and I stand out here . . . several times a day . . . and it's nice, it's my little area, a bit of calm . . . I hate it when they

[her clients] want to come out there with me! I think, no – it's mine! I just want to be by myself.



Picture 3. Ali.

These liminal spaces, then, offer moments of respite for the hairdressers; a dwelling place (Casey, 1993) away from the emotion work, scripts and emotion rules prescribed by the organization (Fineman, 2003; Hochschild, 1983), and a breather from the expectations of maintaining professional performances 'on stage' (Goffman, 1959). Stories that often focused on the gaze of the client and relentless need to portray an immaculate professional self were often associated with the hairdresser's images of *dominant* spaces in the salon. For example, Charlotte, a hairdresser from Bath, took a picture of her work station:



Picture 4. Charlotte.

Charlotte: I hate the chairs, they are absolutely vile. These chairs . . . are covered in colour and stains. It's really embarrassing and so unprofessional when clients sit down. I hope they don't judge *me* on this – I'm a professional. If I had my own salon things would be spotless! Salons have got to be clean and presentable – we make sure *we* are!

Guy, a senior hairdresser from a London salon told similar stories of the importance of a professional image:

Guy: This is a £2.5million pound salon and don't get me wrong, I'm proud to be part of this name, but this does not look good. Look at the clutter! Look at the crap. This was not supposed to look like this, it wasn't designed like this and in front of clients like ours . . . they don't expect this. There should be clean lines, space, a feeling of, y'know, expensive luxury . . . that's why they're here . . . that's why we're here! But this?

Nonetheless, contrary to the images and stories of embarrassment in relation to the dominant spaces of the salon, some hairdressers spoke of their prideful feelings towards being associated with the 'image' of their salon. Bill, a hairdresser in London, took a picture of his salon and said:

This shows how stylish we are. I'm very proud to work here. I brought my brother-in-law here the other weekend and I showed him through the window. He was like 'wow!' . . . I just like to work somewhere, y'know, not in a suburban salon where they hang the towels over the chairs at night. We've got fluffy towels all the time . . . loads of space! We can afford to have space and not even use it. That says something, y'know, about who we are.

There is a sense that the hairdressers associate the dominant spaces of the salon with social emotions of pride and embarrassment. They place their own values, and those of clients, on these spaces that have the power to embarrass if they do not reach expectations surrounding a professional self. Since the hairdressers are surrounded by spaces they feel 'reflect' them and, importantly, embarrass them, an identity 'struggle' can occur. Embarrassing aspects of space reflect what Alvesson et al. (2008: 19) define as 'anti-identities . . . dis-identification, all of which constitute the self around what it is not'. Alternatively, it could be argued that the hairdressers use dominant spaces to identify with the corporate culture and physical surroundings (Webb, 2006). The salon represents something these hairdressers want to associate with professionally and want to be seen to be part of that corporate image.

It could be argued, therefore, that the liminal spaces of the salon provide vital sites for constructing or regaining a more 'stable sense of subjectivity' (Hancock and Tyler, 2001: 568; Knights, 1990). The hairdressers note particular spots in their liminal locations and use these as 'physical identity markers' (Elsbach, 2004), in order to create a seemingly much-needed affirmation of 'who I am' in relation to, perhaps, the unprofessional chaos-of-clutter of 'who I am not'.

Informal staffrooms

Doorways and toilets, for example, were also commandeered by the hairdressers at various moments throughout the day as micro-territories on which they like to stake claim and construct as informally 'owned' terrain, or as many of them suggested, 'our own little staffroom'. Tina, a senior colourist in London, talked about her photograph of the toilets:



Picture 5. Tina.

Tina: It's like our kind of personal chatting area, like our own private staffroom, our own meeting area! We go to the toilets to talk . . . we can still hear the tannoy in the loo [the tannoy is used to call hairdressers to reception to meet clients because the salon is so large] . . . we just go in there and talk about life! Y'know, talk about anything really!

Another informal 'staffroom' can also be found in the towel cupboard of another salon.



Picture 6. Ella.

Ella explained this is where she and other junior hairdressers would meet up and gossip. She talked to me about the fact that she liked how it was ‘a bit womb-like’ and ‘much darker than the rest of the salon’ and was a space dubbed by most of the workers as the ‘junior’s staffroom’. Although the formal function of this cupboard, or the cupboard as conceived space (Lefebvre, 1991), is a space where towels are washed and dried, the experience of it, for the juniors, was attachment and ownership. They use the dryers as seats, smuggle in food and develop subversive practices that give the impression of work (see De Certeau, 1988, and his discussion of ‘la perruque’) for those that might pass by: ‘we fold all the towels in there like we’re supposed to and chat whilst we do it and then we basically throw them all on the floor so we can start folding again so we get more time to talk . . . !’. Others photographed and talked about steps and ledges, and yet others, doorways – all frequented as meaningful dwelling places throughout the working day.

In comparison, and when asked in the photo-interviews about the *formal* staffroom spaces, the hairdressers told me that being in the staffroom sometimes brought with it struggles and expectations – expectations from colleagues in that they were ‘required’ to talk to their colleagues and listen to whoever was in the staffroom. For many, this was a space where the thought of engaging in conversations, that were perhaps not choiceful conversations, did not always appeal. Maybe because such discursive interactions form a large part of the hairdressers daily work with clients (Black, 2004; Gimlin, 1996) this is unsurprising. Terry, a senior hairdresser told me:

I’d rather sit in this corridor than have to sit in the fucking staffroom . . . here I don’t have to listen to anyone, I don’t have to be on a break, I can just get a bit of privacy and watch what goes on around the salon . . . and listen to the general buzz of stuff going on.

Others captured images of the social interactions and ‘fun’ they had in the staffroom, but often noted the weariness they felt when having to join in with such merriment and jocose talk. Emily told me:

We have a lot of fun in the staffroom. This is Ed with one of my wigs doing an impression of another stylist. It’s naughty really . . . taking the piss like this. Sometimes it’s a bit full on y’know . . . like it’s high energy here anyway and then on your break you just keep it up, messing about and dancing in here. I guess sometimes . . . I’m not saying I’m not fun . . . sometimes I want to chill and talk to my mates . . . have a proper break, y’know.

Others felt the staffroom brought expectations from managers; this dominant space is defined by formally ‘being on a break’ and as such is expected, by managers, to only be used at designated times of the day. Furthermore, junior hairdressers specifically saw the formal staffroom as a space where their work continued – below, Fabia explains:



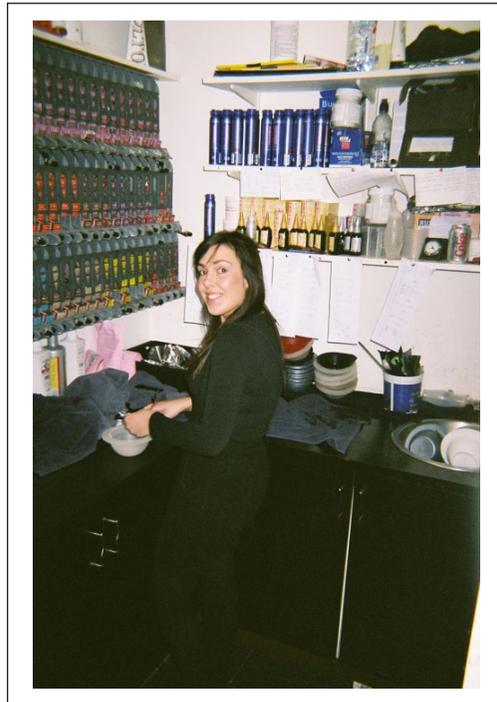
Picture 7. Fabia.

Fabia: This is a picture of the phone in the staffroom. Basically, if we [junior hairdressers] want to qualify quickly, we have to pick up that phone. It's a separate line that people can use to book appointments with juniors . . . and we use them to train on in the evenings. So, if you want to keep training you need to book people in so you need to be in here to pick up that phone! So, yeah, not that relaxing in here . . . but we get to sit down!

These staffrooms are not straightforward, distinct private spaces and do not always offer what Goffman (1959: 115) would argue as back-stage spaces where masks may be removed. Instead, it is the liminal, transitory spaces that offer hairdressers a dwelling place to call 'their own' and over which they frequently stake claim. The doorways, toilets and other undefined spaces in their physical environment are micro-territories, informally established as 'theirs', 'mine' or 'ours' that provide them with the opportunities for a break and where corporate performances may be dropped and corporate masks removed.

Inspiration

Often described as 'positive pockets' and 'spaces for inspiration' other unmanaged nooks such as cupboards, steps and walkways were pinpointed by the hairdressers as meaningful spatial resources for creative conversation:



Picture 8. Andrew.

Andrew: I love it here, you tend to just go in, get your colours [coloured hair dye] and leave, but sometimes you'll stop and meet someone in there and get chatting about what you're doing and it's like, it's like a space for inspiration! You can get new ideas and see things differently. It's where I like to go for inspiration . . . as well as colour! It's a positive little pocket right there!

Equally, creativity and ideas are found outside and away from the salon itself:



Picture 9. Tim.



Picture 10. Steve.

Tim: This road is on my walk home and I'll meet other people, other stylists and we'll just chat. It's really nice because it's like I'm not a junior anymore and they'll just talk to you like normal, you get to know each other better. It's useful too 'cos you learn random stuff, get inside info on what's new and what's going on in the industry. It's nice 'cos they're not just shouting at you to do something, like in the salon.

Tim, rather like Andrew above, identified particular borderlands where ideas, creativity and information sharing takes place, albeit in an ad hoc manner. Just as Sturdy et al. (2006) observed during business dinners, there is something about these sorts of spaces where social norms, usually associated with more dominant spaces, are suspended. There is a sense of informality and freedom in the conversations had within them.

In another salon, the manager talked about the spaces he used and those he saw the hairdressers use, like these fire exit steps:

Steve: I guess I get a bit frustrated really . . . we have staff meetings in the salon or staffroom every week and not much can happen, but when they're out here on the steps . . . there's so much creative stuff that goes on out there, so many creative conversations. I wish they'd bring them to the bloody staff meeting, that's all!

Steve appeared somewhat resigned to the fact that his employees continue to use this space for 'creative conversations' despite his weekly staffroom meetings, and acknowledged that creative talk amongst the hairdressers may not always be something within his control. Indeed, unlike the hairdressers in the section above, who took pictures of formal staffrooms as spaces that represented expectations surrounding social entertainment, others took pictures of formal staffrooms as spaces that represented boredom. Time took a picture of the formal staffroom in his salon and told me:

Well, I took this because this is a space I never want to be in. Look at it . . . would you want to spend time there? I never spend time there. Everyone is too busy on their phones . . . or reading crappy magazines or talking about *EastEnders*. There are messages stuck on the wall, stuff from when the salon has been in the news. It's boring.

Alana too talked about her salon's staffroom space and said:

It's always a total mess! No one wants to spend time there. You eat and run! We meet in here for staff meetings sometimes, if we're not in the salon . . . but really it's just to, y'know, catch up on what's going on, what's changing . . . so not very interesting really.

Comparatively then, it is the salon's liminal spaces such as steps and walkways, rather than the dominant spaces, such as staff rooms that are used in 'creative ways' (Hancock and Tyler, 2001; Taylor and Spicer, 2007). Again, it is the dominant salon spaces that

forces these workers to seek out alternative non-corporate territories, where the freedom to exchange ideas and find inspiration naturally unfolds. It is somewhat ironic, then, that this creative exchange of ideas is arguably in support of the corporate good and yet occurs in non-corporate territories.

Discussion: From liminal space to transitory dwelling place

The photo-narratives presented above indicate there are daily struggles and tensions between how hairdressers experience their work spaces and the power dynamics that exist within the organization (Bell and Forbes, 1994; Tyler and Cohen, 2010). This is not uncommon – in most organizations space is, as Knights reminds us, a ‘material and symbolic resource’ (1990: 329) and may be used as an artefact of power. However, what has emerged from this research are the uses and experiences of liminal spaces in relation to dominant spaces within this power dynamic, which I will now explore further.

For these workers, privacy away from client gaze is essential; a hairdresser’s work is seen, heard and produced in front of others, is permanently on display (Gimlin, 1996). Within the beauty industry, as Black (2004) reminds us, this work involves emotional connections with clients and the expectations of hairdressers as counsellors, friends and confidants is ever present (also see Gregg, 2010). Conceivably, this is why the hairdressers seek out private moments where they hope to ‘hide away’ and ‘get away from everyone’. Much like the liminal space of the beach or hotel (Preston-Whyte, 2004; Pritchard and Morgan, 2006), these are unmanaged spaces (Gabriel, 1995) in which workers are able to create a sense of seclusion and privacy. This suggests that the dualistic thinking of space as either public or private, as Goffman proposes, is rather stark. Instead, as Ford and Harding (2004: 820) argue, ‘there is . . . something private about this public space of work’. It is the undefined areas between the public and private that may provide both researchers and practitioners with a more nuanced view of work space. For example, it provides the researcher with an improved understanding of the relationship between the social and the material in the workplace, and for the practitioner it offers an enhanced appreciation of the function and uses of spaces that may often pass unnoticed in our peripheral vision.

We have also seen how the managed, defined and dominant spaces, be they the public front-stage spaces of the salon floor or the supposedly ‘private’ back-stage spaces of the staffrooms, are sites of expectation and corporate culture. Professional standards are to be maintained at work stations, where the need to portray an immaculate image of the salon, and to a certain extent, the self, is ever present and there are expectations from colleagues in the staffroom to engage in particular topics of conversation and to ‘join in the fun’. Furthermore, junior staff might find work spans both the salon floor as well as staffroom, and yet further, managerial expectations shape how staffroom space ‘should’ be used and when.

Yet the hairdressers ‘subvert [these] places, boundaries and . . . materials of organizational identity’ (Bell and Forbes, 1994: 182), negotiating their own workplace practices. Their accounts tell of conflicting or paradoxical selves that are worked upon between the public, private and somewhere in-between, the formal and informal, and their experiences of inspiration and boredom. Juxtaposed to the dominant spaces then, liminal,

non-dominant spaces, such as the fire exit steps or cupboards within salons, are where arguably a more autonomous non-corporate identity can be created and permitted to emerge. These spaces provide much needed escape from the surveillance/gaze of corporate power in an otherwise panopticon-style workplace; the shared open-plan work space of the salon, with its corporate image and norms, forces employees to resist dominant spaces and seek out liminal sanctuaries and territories, like toilets, away from corporate expectations.

More broadly, it is somewhat paradoxical that such a sense of identity and territory should be established in these spaces, since the very notion of liminal space suggests uncertainty (Turner, 1974). Indeed, it may be considered at odds with the 'uncertain non-places' Augé (1995) discusses. The notion that these spaces are 'non' seems contrary to the very essence of what these spaces represent for the hairdressers – where relationships and a sense of ownership are created, negotiated and sought; as Tina, in her story about the toilet noted, 'It's . . . our personal chatting area, like our own private staffroom . . .'. Contrary to Augé's (1995) belief then, these spaces are entirely concerned with 'relationships, history and identity'. We need only think of graffiti on street corners or the 'usual spots' snatched up in public parks by groups of teenagers to notice how individuals, who may lack their own formal territories, often attempt to assert a sense of power, control and subjectivity and create their own footholds within the liminal spaces around them.

Furthermore, since liminality is concerned with transience, it is apt to ask what happens when it is fixed – how do liminal spaces maintain their liminality? To stay liminal within an organizational context spaces may require the maintenance of the very power relations outlined above. From the explorations here, it is precisely because these spaces are overlooked by organizations, management, and perhaps other workers, that they are liminal; cupboards and stairways must remain at the margin, opposed to the realm of dominant spaces and corporate management of space. However, with the increasing managerial interest in space as an expensive and generative resource, as outlined at the beginning of this article, liminal spaces are increasingly put to 'good use' by official monitors of space. Dale and Burrell (2008: 283) remind us that lifts are ripe sites for the display of 'company mission statements' and the corporate aims. Toilet cubicles too appear to be frequently littered with organizational rules, signs and posters inflicting their messages on occupants, which arguably then detracts from their freedom to be liminal spaces. In addition, Oke's (2002) work demonstrates AXA's attempted take-over of liminal spaces, converting their corridors into 'innovation corridors'. This initiative has transformed these once liminal spaces into vast corporate-driven noticeboards complete with television screens and sound systems promoting the latest strategic developments across the organization, thus colonizing the perhaps once sought after private spaces used by workers. Yet, despite the creep of corporate culture into these spaces, in this article we have seen how workers continue to seek out and establish their identities and territories in places that are often hard to come by and maintain a sense of subjectivity within them; as Ali states about the pavement outside her salon, 'this is my little spot . . . it's my little area, a bit of calm . . .'.

Given these peripheral, liminal spaces clearly become important to the hairdressers' daily lives and non-corporate identities, we might further question if these liminal spaces continue

to be defined as liminal spaces at all. Since they are made meaningful by the hairdressers, to continue to call them liminal spaces perhaps ignores how these spaces become lived. For example, Sara-Lou's account of the staircase and its darkness, mirrors Bachelard's reflections on corners as 'symbols of solitude' and how users of such spaces or rather places, may withdraw, create an 'imaginary room', think that they are 'well hidden' and where shadows may be experienced as walls (1994 [1958]: 136–137). Although these spaces are used in a transitory way, so characteristic of liminal spaces, perhaps Casey's (1993) terminology – 'dwelling place', is better suited here. The hairdressers reconstruct the stairways and corridors as intimate places with clear definition and it seems the more they dwell within them, the more they construct a sense of belonging and attachment and meaning to them. Certainly, this is not only in connection with where the hairdressers like to seek privacy, but also where they like to create informal territories or 'staffrooms' and seek their inspiration.

If these spaces are symbolic of such territories then by definition, arguably, they evolve through meanings and associations, from spaces to places. More accurately, these are dwelling *places* and, to borrow from Casey's (1993) and Bachelard's (1994 [1958]) phenomenological perspective, if places are treated with such a sense of compassion, feelings of homeliness, indeed are 'womb-like', as Ella, the junior hairdresser described above, then these emotional and 'humanized' (Tuan, 1977) responses thus construct their sense of *place* in the world. And if these are *places* – they are conceivably no longer liminal. These would only continue to be liminal spaces if they maintained their 'no-man's-lands' status (Dale and Burrell, 2008: 239) and to continue to define them as liminal spaces does not capture all that they are. The toilets for Tina and her colleagues are no longer just toilets and, for Andrew, the cupboard in his salon is far more than just a store; these are 'lived' spaces and are vital to the hairdresser's lives. Consequently, these spaces shift in nature and an important extension of liminality is generated. By taking account of the transitory *and* intimate nature of these spaces, these informal hideaways, staffrooms and pockets of inspiration are conceivably transitory dwelling places.

Conclusions: From liminality to dwelling

Space at work matters but, perhaps, not just where we have been looking. Much of the mainstream work space literature has focused on the dominant spaces that embody corporate culture and has paid little attention not only to the lived experience of such spaces but also to the spaces in-between. As such, studying space at work should encompass a broader map and should include more than just the dominant spaces of work. Liminal spaces of organizational life all play an important role in the lives of those working in organizations – becoming dwelling places for privacy, for creating informal staffrooms and territories, and for creativity and inspiration. These are important sites for subjectivity and autonomy. In addition, this highlights that those working without desks or offices and without a great deal of autonomy over where they work, seek out these spaces 'in-between' for a multitude of purposes thus underscoring that liminal spaces are vital to everyday work life in shared, fluid workplaces specifically.

Furthermore, this article has not only contributed to the exploration of liminal spaces at work, it has theoretically extended the concept of liminality. Spaces like these are used and made meaningful. The hairdressers associate belonging, homeliness and security within these spaces and we must therefore acknowledge a shift from ambiguous space to

meaningful place. If we simply define these spaces as liminal it suggests they are abstract or conceived spaces and denies the fact that individuals experience them. As a result, liminality is perhaps more complicated than has been treated by other writers and is more nuanced than first thought. By drawing on the temporary and transitory characteristics of liminal space and simultaneously recognizing that these spaces are 'lived' and re-constructed as dwellings by those who frequent them, we might better describe such spaces as transitory dwelling places.

All this perhaps raises further questions and reflections about other workers in similarly fluid workplaces; workers in gymnasiums, health spas, hotels, airports and large retail centres. What new insights might we discover about their spatial/material worlds? What meanings do liminal spaces have in other contexts? And would this impact on how organizations design or manage their work spaces in the future? Indeed, as noted at the start of this article, with the changing nature of work and work space and with the increasing number of people working on the move and between the office and the home, we can no longer assume a well-defined dichotomy between front-stage and back-stage spaces; there are many more spaces in-between. The more nuanced dichotomy here, perhaps, is between the dominant spaces and the liminal spaces of organizational life. Indeed, it is this insight that offers rich and fertile ground in which spatial researchers might further develop the theorization of lived experiences of space in organization studies.

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