Sociology

Changing Organisational Space: Green? Or Lean and Mean?

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Abstract

The recent dynamism in the design of workspace is frequently constructed by developers and managers as motivated by a desire to improve sustainability. These claims are reflected in the growing currency of 'greenspeak' in organizational discourses and policies at local, national and global levels, as well as a developing academic interest in organizational environmentalism. This article explores the extent to which the increase in an environmental rhetoric has been accompanied by a meaningful shift in organizational practices. Drawing on a new empirical study exploring the place of sustainability within workspace transformation, the study engages with Lefebvre and Foucault to argue that 'green' has frequently become bound up with 'lean' and 'mean' within organizational discourses and imaginations. This has important policy implications for organizations as well as broader theoretical implications for organizational environmental sociology.

Introduction

The early years of this century have been characterized by some dramatic changes in workspace, as organizations across all sectors are joining a 'design turn' in the configuration of office landscapes (Felstead et al., 2005; Grech and Walters, 2008; Worthington, 2006). Several key factors are identified as fundamentally reshaping work practices and performances and, consequently, the design of the spaces in which these need to be done. These include financial recession, technological innovation and the increasing mobility of work; all of which are combining to challenge the notion that work is something which is done

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sitting at your desk in an office with your name on the door (Duffy, 1997). In addition to these drivers, an increasingly dominant discourse drawn upon by managers and developers to justify the spatial transformations of work is that of 'sustainability'. The growing currency of environmentalism is reflected in a noticeable increase in organizational 'greenspeak' at both local and international levels. The aim of this article is to explore the extent to which the rhetoric of sustainability is accompanied by a meaningful shift in organizational practices (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005; Hoffman and Ventresca, 2002).

Academically, there has also been a growing interest in the issue of organizational environmentalism (Jermier and Forbes, 2003; Newton, 2002). The focus here is broad, ranging from macro-level approaches exploring aspects such as production, management systems and technological change, to emerging research revealing the importance of micro-level factors such as employee perceptions and organizational culture (Jermier et al., 2006). However, as yet, the *sociological* exploration of the implications of climate change at the organizational level is embryonic, and questions of whether, and how, the daily 'doing' of environmental activity may be differentially constructed and performed within work and organizational contexts have still to be fully researched. In contrast, within domestic contexts, investigations of the social, cultural and discursive processes involved in un/sustainable activity at the level of everyday practices have proved productive. For example, exploring how mundane tasks such as recycling are discursively constructed and performed in the home as 'housework' has revealed how they may augment existing gendered inequalities (Oates and McDonald, 2006). Conversely, exploring how the use of freezers may be bound up with gendered discourses of 'good' mothering reveals that *un*sustainable practices may become embedded in understandings of 'normal' domestic life (Hand and Shove, 2007). Extending such approaches to working lives is clearly important, as, if environmental practices at work are framed by competing and contradictory discourses in ways similar to the home, advancements in sustainability may be undermined (Nightingale, 2006).

This article aims therefore to contribute to sociological understanding of organizational environmentalism through a focus on the workplace and changes in workspace. I am particularly interested in first, the extent and manner to which 'sustainability' is configured discursively by managers to explain changes in workplace design and practices; second, how this is received by employees; and third, what the implications of these changes are in terms of employees' daily experiences and understandings of their workplaces, their work practices and their work identities. To this end, the article draws on ethnographic research conducted in a range of organizations which have recently undergone major reconfigurations within the design and layout of their workspaces. I focus on three case study organizations which have particularly aimed to improve their impact on the environment. The research reveals, however, that improvements made to the sustainability of the physical office may be undermined in discursive practice by the ambivalence and ambiguity which exists in managers' conceptualizations. Thus, rather than the environmental agenda being established as a dominant discourse, it must constantly vie with other competing discourses for status and power. In addition, material changes to office landscapes are usually accompanied by an often draconian range of new or 'green' cultural practices which govern how the new spaces should be inhabited. Drawing on Lefebvre, Foucault and Bakhtin to provide a framework to explore these discursive and

cultural experiences, I argue that there is a risk of 'green' becoming bound up with 'lean' and 'mean' within organizational imaginations. The conclusion discusses the implications of this for organizational policy and, more broadly, for thinking about sustainability and social change.

Conceptualizing Organizational Space

It is now well established in organizational sociological analysis that the spaces and places of work play a significant role in the framing of identities, relationships, performances and experiences within working lives (Baldry, 1999; Dale and Burrell, 2008; Felstead et al., 2005; Halford and Leonard, 2006). Specifically, it has been argued that space influences organizational practice as a result of either the deliberate exercise of managerial control, or the meanings attributed to material aspects by workers (Baldry et al., 1997; Strati, 1999). More recently, these two approaches have been brought together to explore how organizational spaces affect work experiences in the ways they are *simultaneously* planned, imagined and performed (Dale, 2005; Taylor and Spicer, 2007). The key contribution of all of these accounts, however, is to argue that the social processes of work and organizational behaviour should not be conceptualized in abstract terms alone, but should be understood as *co-constituted* together with the material aspects of organizational spaces and the spatial embodiment of working subjects.

This approach has its legacy in Lefebvre's (1991) influential conceptualization of space as *active*, simultaneously socially producing and socially produced. Lefebvre constructs space as mutually created by and creating social actors, through both discourse and the senses, and as therefore necessarily involving issues of identity, politics and power (Massey, 2005; Merrifield, 2000). These notions are brought together in a triadic analytical framework which I suggest offers a particularly useful point of access to exploring the multiple processes involved when organizational spaces are changed as a result of new management policies. The first aspect, *spatial practice*, makes clear links with Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Bourdieu (1984) by recognizing that space is a phenomenological experience, taken for granted through the habits or practical 'know how' of the body. This is particularly relevant in workplace analysis, where many engage with the spaces and material artefacts of work on a daily basis, in regular, habitual and even pre-reflective ways. These routines or practices usually require a combination of sensory and spatialized activities which not only 'constitute the phenomenological ground of "doing work" but are also useful in revealing the embodied ways in which work is accomplished both individually and collectively within specific work systems and under particular employment relations' (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009: 220). The focus on embodied practice is also relevant to the analysis of everyday (un-)green activity and how this differs across both space and time (Shove, 2003). Reconfiguring the spaces of work will therefore have an impact on the phenomenological experience of space, affecting the production and performance of the spatial practices and relations of employees (Rodaway, 1994).

The conceptualization of the second aspect, *representations of space*, is particularly useful to capture the planned nature of organizational spaces, and how these may be strategically redesigned in the management of cultural change. The energy and expense

marshalled by managers in redesigning the material conditions of work bear witness to the fact that dominance of space is viewed as an integral means by which to change employees' working practices and relations not only materially, but also socially, politically, culturally and psychologically (Van Marrewijk, 2009). However, whilst there has been a strong tradition of understanding the physical working environment as a constituent part of the control of the labour process (e.g. Baldry, 1999), Lefebvre's triadic framework challenges us to develop a more heterogeneous or even heterotopian perspective; one which complicates the relations of power between planners and managers and employees, and represents the contemporary workplace as *simultaneously* controlling and enabling (Cairns et al., 2003; Foucault, 1980). Pertinent here also is the third aspect, the notion of *representational space*, which enables the conceptualization of workspace as something imagined and discursively constructed by *everyone*, through symbols and language (Taylor and Spicer, 2007). It is thus not only planners and architects who have the power to interpret workspaces; we all do, whether this be through positioning furniture, decorating workstations or selecting neighbours. In this way, whilst the working body may be positioned as a potent part of cultural change, it may, in its generative relationships with space, position itself as a source of socio-political struggle (Rodaway, 1994).

This dialogic production constitutes what Lefebvre calls the 'practico-sensory realm', in which space is perceived and constructed through the senses of sight, hearing, temperature, smell and touch as well as the social and political imagination. The result is akin to – and makes connections with – theories of *practice* successfully used elsewhere in research on sustainability (e.g. Hand and Shove, 2007; Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005). The Marxist Lefebvre makes a distinctive contribution within these however, developing the Bourdieusian focus on the unconscious routine aspects of practices to offer the possibility of embodied and expressive *resistance* through what he describes as decisive and intensive 'lived moments'. These are dramatic episodes, serious and/or playful in nature, wherein the dominant order is resisted. Likening such moments to festivals, Lefebvre (1991) suggests these performances offer release from, and resistance to, the constraints of everyday working life, and yet at the same time are not separate from it (Merrifield, 2000). This suggestion has similarities with Bakhtin's (1984) description of the embodied practices of 'Carnival'. These disparate forms of 'grotesque realism', challenging officialdom and the established order, are also not seen as solely to be found in 'revelry and riots', but in the everyday performances of spatialized social relations (Holloway and Kneale, 2000: 80).

The emphasis on resistance also links usefully to Foucault's productive contribution to conceptualizing organizational space (1979, 1980). Specifically, his focus on *discourse* – the knowledge, social practices and administrative procedures produced by institution – adds texture to the ways in which planners and managers can be understood to exercise power through space. In changing workspace, and, in the process, the statements, rules and practices which organize understanding of it, the governance of subjectivity is simultaneously achieved through both discourse and the manipulation of spatial relations (Feindt and Oels, 2005). However, the relational, diffuse, unstable and productive qualities revealed by Foucault's analysis of power suggest that resistance is always a possibility (Mills, 2003).

Changing Organizational Space

> Organizational greening should represent … the probable uncertainty, confusion and tension experienced by employees and others as greening initiatives *unfold*, as well as whatever insight and inspiration employees might experience. (Jermier and Forbes, 2003: 170, italics added)

Whilst interest in climate change is still somewhat marginal within organizational sociology, there is a growing recognition that the implications are complex, multi-dimensional and context-dependent. A focus on changing organizational space offers a useful point of access by which to explore and represent this complexity, particularly in terms of how initiatives to improve the material environment may 'unfold' in everyday social practices. In the contemporary UK context, the recognition that workplaces should be *sustainable* – safeguarding the environment from the impacts their buildings have in terms of carbon emissions, energy use and the creation of waste – is becoming of increasing critical importance to built environment professionals. However, this recognition exists alongside other and sometimes powerfully competing drivers, such as the challenges of economic efficiency and security, developments in information and communications technology, the growth of the knowledge-based economy, increased mobility and changing work practices. These considerations are leading practitioners to question the Taylorist principles which have long governed the western office, whereby workers are ordered and supervised through rows of highly visible, individualized desks, whilst hierarchy is defined through the provision of a cellular office (CABE and Yeang, 2005; Laing, 2006; Leonard, 2010; Moynagh and Worsley, 2005).

However, in practice, new interpretations of the workplace are remarkably uniform in design (Laing, 2006). Most organizations are shifting completely to open plan, often with 'hot-desking', whereby employees have no fixed workstation and work at any unoccupied desk. This not only cuts costs (Baldry, 1999; Felstead et al., 2005; Knight and Haslam, 2010), but it can also be more sustainable, reducing emissions through streamlining floorspace, heating, lighting, etc. and improving occupancy rates. It also offers flexibility in terms of creating team space and aesthetics (Strati, 1999).

It was against this background that I conducted research on the design of office space and its impact on the performance, productivity and practices of organizational members. Ethnographic research was conducted over a 12-month period in 2008–9 in 13 organizations with a variety of business and service provider interests that had been identified through the membership lists of the British Council for Offices (BCO) as having recently undergone office redesign. Although the selection of case studies aimed to incorporate a span of sector (private, public, voluntary and occupational), geographical location and size, because of the uneven configuration of the BCO's database, the final case studies consisted of one public, one voluntary and 11 private sector organizations located in Scotland, the Midlands, South Wales, Southern England and London. These were variously involved in education, conservation, IT, management consultancy, law, architecture, mining, construction and the media. Whilst all of these were undergoing some profound changes to their workspace, most openly acknowledged these were primarily for economic and/or communication purposes rather than environmental priorities. However, in contrast, sustainability *was* identified as key by three organizations: the

conservation charity, the IT consultancy, and the mining company. I thus focus on these to explore the unfolding of organizational greening initiatives in practice, and the ways in which these were positioned vis-a-vis other discourses.

The research involved semi-structured interviews with managers and employees, observation, photography and analysis of organizational documents. In addition, a number of key informants from the commercial property world were consulted for background advice. The initial meeting within each organization involved the key personnel concerned with the planning and managing of workspace, and usually included a 'walking interview' in order to 'observe, experience and make sense of everyday practices' (Clark and Emmel, 2010: 1). This was not only a means by which to observe the whole of the office space, but also enabled me to understand how managers conceptualized and articulated the workplace and practices within it. Their imagination of the space was revealed in the order in which they chose to show this to me, their comments about different landmarks, the events and stories they chose to tell me and the pride that many of them expressed in respect to certain aspects of the design. Indeed, many commented that it was enjoyable to walk the office again, enabling them to reconnect with their experiences in the design phase and refresh their sense of this as an 'ideological space' (Anderson, 2004). In addition, the method gave me access to their *embodied* and sensuous relationship with the building: the ways in which they comported themselves through the space – striding the floors, swerving into lifts, leaping up stairs or opening doors with a flourish – these bodily movements gave me a point of access to the sensuousness of their spatial practices (Lefebvre, 1991; Pink, 2009; Rodaway, 1994). The method also prompted me to ask more knowledgeable questions about the space and others not previously thought of in planning the research (Clark and Emmel, 2010). Frequently we bumped into people along the way and engaged in spontaneous conversations which added to the richness of the interviews. I was also able to take photographs as we walked.

After these interviews, emails were sent inviting staff members to become involved in the study. The aim was to select a range of women and men across career structures and organizational functions. Forty semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded, then transcribed and subjected to poststructuralist discourse analysis, which encourages a focus on the discourses by which people are positioned or position themselves. By discourses here I refer both to 'language in use' and to more powerful sets of assumptions which govern social practices (Baxter, 2003: 7). This Foucauldian approach is operationalized by a micro-analysis of language to identify the different and often contradictory or inconsistent versions of people, motives and events. This approach is further extended by Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of polyphony, which stresses the recognition of the plurality of voices, and heteroglossia, whereby non-official viewpoints are represented – those of the marginalized and peripheralized (Baxter, 2003). I was interested in combining this Foucauldian approach with Lefebvre's framework in order to explore not only how changes in the design of sustainable office space were discursively constructed by both managers and employees, but also how these were embodied through sensuous practice. Analysis thus involved the premise that interviews are not only texts of identity but also of the senses, produced in context, and, more specifically, *in place*. For logistical reasons, I start my discussion with Lefebvre's second notion, the representations of space, to explore how space is planned and managed before considering employee responses.

Representations of 'Green' Space

The reconfiguring of space was configured in distinctive ways by each case study organi-zation, and this was articulated symbolically, culturally and materially in the new lay-outs. The charitable organization 'Greenspace'[1] had recently undertaken a wholesale move from old, rambling, expensive-to-run premises of cellular design to a new state-of-the-art building. Concern for the environment was claimed to be the primary impetus for the move; as Lesley, the facilities manager, explained: 'It's a big thing, it really is part of everything that we do.' The new building was consequently designed to perform homage to Britain's natural landscape: walls were bedecked with handmade tapestries forged from recycled textiles and vast photographs of green fields and seascapes; floors were covered in reclaimed timber; washroom water was grey; lighting was predominantly natural; heating and cooling systems relied on solar panels and roof vents; whilst canteen food was locally sourced. The floorplate was vast and open plan to rationalize services. In terms of changes to organizational practice, there was a strong cultural emphasis on utilizing natural and local resources, reducing energy consumption and waste, and increasing recycling through a sophisticated array of disposal units.

Whilst 'ITspace' had also made some fundamental changes to improve sustainability targets, the focus here was on the ways in which technology can change workspace requirements. A key aim was to reduce the carbon footprint through work-related travel and waste creation, and consequently the new space was used to shift to home-working as common organizational practice, as well as to implement measures to cut down on paper creation. The open-plan office space, although aesthetically pleasant, aimed to discourage presenteeism through hot desks, meeting areas with standing posts to lean against and small telephone booths with uncomfortable chairs and cold air conditioning, and no storage facilities. The identity, culture and practices of the organization were symbolized through technology – all staff were provided with state-of-the-art mobile technologies, and a boardroom with satellite surround video-conferencing facilities to replace the need for international travel was a particular source of pride for Bruce, the facilities manager.

'Minespace' had also recently moved: from Victorian cellular offices in Central London to contemporary glass-clad premises in the suburbs. A key aim was that the new design should represent the corporation's *global* environmental credentials symboli-cally: whether it did so materially was less clear. Vast, iconic photographs attempting to convince how natural landscapes and indigenous communities benefit by mining activity papered stairwells and the reception area. In the 'back offices' sustainability was most visibly interpreted primarily through conserving energy through the streamlining of ser-vices, reliance on white decoration and natural lighting, and reduction of personal space and waste. The functional white furniture and crowded open-plan workspace provided for employees posed a stark contrast to the public spaces designed for clients.

However, in spite of the clear references to sustainability made by the physical designs, and in the facilities managers' descriptions of their redesigned workspaces, it was also clear that its position in managerial intentions is complex. In their talk, there was a continual interplay between the sustainability discourse and other powerful dis-courses: particularly that of *cost cutting* (Foucault, 1972, 1980). Thus, even for these

organizations which claim sustainability as an imperative, it is evident that in practice this must *also* deliver economic and other organizational benefits. It would appear that the environmental agenda on its own is not sufficient as an organizational strategy, as Lesley exemplifies:

> … not only does it have to hit environmental targets but it also has to be economic. When you are a charity organization you have to be realistic about what you can have and what it's going to cost to run as well. I mean obviously the sustainable features are criticized because they cost a lot more to go in, or you end up paying out more in the long run, so that was a huge factor to consider as well.

Similarly, Bruce at ITspace, whose key aim was to encourage people *not* to come into the offices, reveals the constant interplay between the competing intentions:

> I look at workplace transformation as an enabler in terms of the environment. If less people have to travel into the office on a daily basis, that's a benefit to me. If we have less offices, because there are less people based in offices, that's a benefit to me … there is no doubt that there is also a financial benefit to rationalizing office space, as well as from a work ethics perspective.

Developments made to the sustainable design of workplaces were accompanied by significant changes to administrative procedures and daily work practices, many of which appeared to move the organization in a leaner and meaner direction (Knight and Haslam, 2010). At Greenspace, plans were afoot to remove personal workspace and move to hot-desking, whilst desks at ITspace were deliberately in short supply to dissuade people from coming in at all. At Minespace, new and complex 'knowledges' (Foucault, 1980) were introduced around the provision of central services – all had to be booked centrally and remotely. A 'clear desk policy' (tidying all personal belongings away at the end of the day to minimize waste creation) was introduced and 'disciplined' by security guards, who, as part of a daily surveillance, would 'impound' any laptops, documents or personal items left lying about. Miscreant staff are issued with warning notes and required to explain themselves to Security in order to retrieve their belongings. As I demonstrate more fully in the next section, the new cultures can lead to some resentment and an assumption that these are about cutbacks to save costs. But here, as Bruce exemplifies, 'sustainability' can be seen by managers to have an important part to play within this contestation, being mobilized to provide a useful discourse by which to frame change as well as to defend against charges of being 'lean' and 'mean':

> The whole floor space has changed from having lots of pig pens everywhere to a lot more hot-desking … There was some kick back about 'are you doing this as some sort of cost saving stuff?' And the answer was 'No!' What we are trying to do is to improve our diverted-from land fill rates, recycle more, and meet our own operation goals around these.

However, sustainability struggles to maintain any stability as Bruce continues his justification:

> Employees always think that when you do something it's all about cost cutting. There is no denying that there will be an element of that along the line, but it is not about cost cutting, it's about improving and making the working environment more conducive to the employees at the end of the day …

A few lines later he adds:

> Working environment changing is to reduce costs and support company efficiency and growth …

Whatever the 'real', material improvements have been to sustainability, positioning this in a slippery and contradictory discursive relationship with financial imperatives is a problematic tactic. It creates ambivalence and ambiguity in its status within organizational strategy, and, in particular, by interlocking it with profitability, rather than establishing it as a key objective in its own right, the kind of policies required to create environments that genuinely favour the reproduction of sustainable ways of life may be constrained and/or prevented (Shove, 2010). The question of how employees respond to these contradictory managerial representations is one to which I now turn.

'Green' Practice

Bourdieu (1977) notes how changes to objective structures may break the 'fit' with subjective and embodied dispositions, such that 'the opportunity for critical reflection and debate upon previously unquestioned assumptions is made possible' (Crossley, 2001: 113). From the employees' point of view, the most noticeable aspects of sustainable change to their workplaces and their daily lives were indeed those which 'broke the fit' with their previous experience, affecting both their embodied and sensory understandings and their imaginative constructions of their workplaces (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009). These were principally the changes made to the indoor environmental conditions of the office: the moves to natural lighting, insulation and ventilation, recycling and waste minimization, and, particularly, alterations to the floorplate through open planning. Many of these changes were perceived as directly affecting employees' concepts of comfort and normality (Shove, 2003). In terms of the sensory, they were perceived as directly, and often negatively, impacting on sight, sound, smell and body temperature. Whilst such 'grindingly ordinary' (Shove, 2003: 1) responses may suggest that changes made to the buildings' sustainability profiles were merely superficial, this was not necessarily the case. Nor was it that moves towards sustainability were regarded negatively in abstract by employees. Rather, it was the discursive ambiguity which existed to explain the rationale for the changes which led to a general lack of sympathy with, and even suspicion towards, the motives for the new environment, and a consequent focus on personal discomfort and changes to habits rather than any broader environmental achievements.

Shifts to open plan in particular enhanced people's sensory awareness and, consequently, their resentment of the distractions which the physical environment offered. Noise was the biggest issue here, whether this was because it was found to be too noisy or, due to a culture of surveillance, too quiet:

There are 300 people here all in one space – a recipe for the escalation of sound. Everyday it's the same – it builds to a crescendo … (Jacob, Greenspace)

The biggest change has been a kind of surgical silence. You can be at your desk and you don't hear anything, and that takes some getting used to … (Gabriel, Minespace)

Visual distractions can be equally invasive:

I find myself awfully distracted because there is always somebody moving within my field of vision and so it really takes a lot of concentration to stay focused and not to be distracted. (Jacob, Greenspace)

… desks look like a madman's breakfast with banana skins, and coffee cups and all the rest of it. When people actually do want to come and talk to you, your desk often looks and smells pretty horrible! (Kay, Minespace)

Whilst natural lighting was liked by all, as Patricia at Minespace exemplifies:

It's bright, it's light, and it's a pleasure to actually come to work. Where we sit is right by a window and the natural light makes a whole difference to your mental attitude.

New heating and cooling systems may necessitate new knowledges in terms of appropriate clothing to cope with changes in body temperatures throughout the day:

… this building will heat up more in the afternoon than it does at night – that's the way it works. So we have an extra layer which we can take off, it's been called 'the cardigan culture' which is true! I mean the building won't be 21 degrees all the time: you have to accept that it may start at 18 degrees in the morning and it will be 23 when you go back in the afternoon, so you bring something to put on in the morning and take it off when you get hot. (Chloe, Greenspace)

New sustainable work practices can also bring new locomotive properties as well as a changed 'haptic' interaction (touch behaviour) with the occupational 'terrain' (Hockey and Allen-Collinson, 2009; Rodaway, 1994):

This is the only photocopier we have in the building so we have to keep traipsing up and down … (Heather, ITspace)

… every time you've got some scrap of waste, you have to either go to the print area, or your refresh area and dispose of them in these bins, certain bins, a confidential one … blah, blah, blah … (Kate, ITspace)

… if they see your laptop they will physically remove it, leave you a little ASBO[2] on the top of the pedestal, and the next morning you've got to go down to security, and explain … (Nancy, ITspace)

In addition, clearing desks and shutting down laptops was seen as a time-consuming practice which has to be newly built into the working day:

… the laptops take so long to shut down, it takes a good five or ten minutes so you're standing there waiting, because if you don't undock them, they're going to be impounded. So that's impractical, it's tiresome and it means that you build your working practice around that so you think 'right, I've got to start shutting down now, and then I'll clear my desk and then I'll go to the toilet and then I'll make a phone call and then I'll put my trainers on and then I'll turn my computer off' … so that's odd. (Ian, Accountant, Minespace)

Employees may therefore need to develop a creative range of new rhythms and 'ways of doing' – sensory knowledges which are required to negotiate and manage their changed workspaces. These range from the symbolic to redefining the use of space:

I have three circles of card pinned to my cubicle and whichever card is uppermost is the one which is appropriate: 'I'm not busy', 'I'm busy', or 'I'm completely out of the office as far as you're concerned'! (Daisy, Greenspace)

I find that often, if I really need to think about something in great detail, the only place I can go to is the toilet, because there is this statutory requirement that you have to have two doors between the toilet and any thoroughfare, so it means there is actually three doors between the toilet and anyone making any real noise and it's absolutely silent in there which is lovely at times. (Jacob, Greenspace)

Merleau-Ponty argued that 'to be a body is to be tied to a certain world' (1962: 148). These reflections reveal how changes in (green) office spatial practices and administrative procedures, perceived and constructed sensorally, may involve employees in new embodied relationships with, and knowledge about, their workspaces and work relations (Foucault, 1979; Lefebvre, 1991). The above examples also show how the living out of sensory work practices, and the engagements of the forms of sensory knowing embedded in them, can become in itself a way of constituting specific identities (Pink, 2009). In some instances these identities may be a marker of difference between employees: it was noticeable, for instance, how women complained less of being disturbed by other people, whilst for men such as Jacob (Greenspace) gendered stereotypes were drawn upon to emphasize his perceived difficulties:

I actually had one woman leaning across my filing cabinet into my office's cubicle, having a conversation and gesticulating wildly, which meant her arms were sort of flailing right in front of my face …

That the reconceived workspace is often received phenomenologically by employees as an unpleasant onslaught on both senses and habits, and yet such discomfort remains unrecognized by management, underscores the importance of representations of sustainable practices. However, the language that people use to describe their sensory experiences also conveys how these are inseparable from broader political emotions and attitudes; and that body and mind are 'thoroughly interfused' (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 54). For Lefebvre, this conjunction produces the *lived* experience of space: how it is imagined and understood. It is to the representational that I now turn.

Representational 'Green' Space

Whilst there were some prevalent and recurrent themes in the recounting of workplace, a sense of gain through the developments towards sustainability was not dominant amongst these. Rather, employees centred on notions of *place-identity* and *territory*, and a sense of loss when aspects of these are taken away. It is clear in employee talk how abstract space becomes place through the personal relationships people have with it, and that any disturbance to these relationships is contested. In particular, work desks are persistently constructed as important to personal identity, as Daisy at Greenspace illustrates:

> A lot of people are very very fond of their desks; they see it as an extension of their home! You can see that some people really do personalize their desks, they feel more comfortable if they're going to the same place every day and sit next to the same people …

New administrative systems which challenge this, such as hot-desking and clear desk policies, thus run the risk of being contested. Some

> … get very 'arsy' at people sitting at 'their' desks. People walk up and say 'that's my desk!' (Heather, ITspace)

> … if I come in on a Monday morning and there's somebody sitting in my work station, I'm not going to go off and work somewhere else, that's my work station, that's my desk! So you leave things deliberately as you become very territorial! (Kay, Minespace)

Murdoch (2006) suggests forms of spatial solidarity can be understood as an accomplishment in the face of flux and uncertainty. Many of the employees had been through periods of real insecurity throughout the workspace change, and, for both Greenspace and Minespace, substantial changes in location meant for some also moving home. This may help us to understand the importance that people hold in keeping some form of spatial stability at work. Further, as have seen above, place is made through the repetition of everyday habits (Bourdieu, 1984) and challenging these may lead to further political conflict. For example, at Minespace, where employees had been instructed to use only the drinks provided in the 'refresh areas', resistance sometimes drew on an unusual range of weapons:

> In my cupboard … I brought in my cup, I brought in a little sponger, I even brought in a little bottle of washing up liquid coz that's not provided for me either, because how am I going to wash my cup? I don't like the coffee in the machine, so I bring my own Maxwell House, and I put my spoonful in at my workstation, bring my cup over to the refresh area, and then get the hot water. So there are ways around it … (Kay)

Also resented was the forced removal of rubbish bins, a policy which at Minespace had been dramatically introduced overnight. Although sustainability was claimed to be the rationale behind the decision, it was understood through the discourse of *leanness*, as Kay goes on to explain:

> People want things. What else was it … no bins! Not allowed a bin, I brought my own bin in! Bit of a rebel! No, it's a little tiny bin because they obviously wanted to cut costs, they didn't want to pay cleaners …

Particularly contentious at Minespace was the introduction of new procedures to 'police' aspects such as the clear desk policy. The manner in which these policies were implemented was seen as an abuse of managerial power as well as an attempt to redefine the organizational hierarchy. Discussion of these drew on a discourse of the *meanness* of these procedures, as Nancy explains:

> Just madness to be honest, and completely disrespectful of adults going through a very significant change in working conditions. I think 99 out of a 100 people genuinely wanted to make the most of the move and do the right thing and then being dealt with in this very, very punitive way! I even said to the Head of HR: 'I'm not exaggerating with this, this is minutes away from the "thought police"; this is 1984 stuff'.

Resistance to perceived managerial 'meanness' manifested itself across organizations, often in Carnivalesque performances (Bakhtin, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991). Greg, a publisher for Greenspace, narrates:

> We have a lady that has never liked open plan and she's always been hugely against it, so when she is here and she thinks she is being disrupted, she wears industrial ear defenders, which look hilarious! It can be really quiet and she is there with these huge great big ear muffs!

> Another of our team lost his desk and the very first time he came in here to hot-desk, he brought with him a load of his own stuff to put on the desk, his business card which he tucked under the hot-desk side and then he's been published in a book that started the chapter with his name and he actually opened the book on that page and stuck it at the back of the desk and there was this huge personalization going on. So I had this fraught phone call from one of the other people in his team who said 'come and see what he's done!' We could have put a picket fence around it, you couldn't personalize it any more, it was hilarious.

Helen, at ITspace, laughs:

> There have been other times when somebody's been stood on the floor and yelled at the top of their voice 'if someone doesn't get me a desk in the next 5 minutes I'm going home!'

Whilst Nancy at Minespace argues:

> … if you start treating people like children, then they start behaving like children and if you start treating people as if they can't be trusted, then they will actually start to do things! People have got all sorts of ways of dealing with the ASBOs like collecting them as badges of honour and stacking them up!

Discussion and Conclusions

The case study material discussed in this article has revealed how the introduction of sustainability into organizational life can be a fraught, fragmented and uneven affair. A Lefebvrian focus on changes to workspace design helps to expose this complexity by highlighting the interrelationship which exists between the representation of sustainability within workplaces by managers, and the (embodied) understandings of employees.

Combining this focus with a Foucauldian analysis of talk enables us to drill deeper, and to reveal both how managers' commitment to sustainability may in practice compete with other powerful organizational discourses, such as reducing costs and streamlining administrative procedures, and how employees may position themselves in relation to the resulting ambiguity. The conflation of 'green' with 'lean' and 'mean' can lead to a muddying of the representation of sustainability, not least for employees for whom workplace change may mean taking on new, and possibly initially 'uncomfortable', spatial practices and knowledges (Shove, 2003). Further, leaping upon the sustainability discourse to 'greenwash' these discomforts may come at the cost of compromising a meaningful shift in practices. The result may be that employees become turned off sustainability at a time when they need to be turned on. To return to the key research question posed at the beginning of this article, this means that the noisy rhetoric of sustainability made by developers and office managers may be just that, and that much more care needs to be taken to ensure significant social change. Organizational policies on sustainability, if they are to be successful, must thus acknowledge how changes to discourses and practices can potentially play out in practice, both bodily and imaginatively, and attention be paid to how these impacts might be then best framed and managed.

In line with this, the Lefebvrian framework adopted in this study has offered not only an analytical platform to the empirical material, but a broader theoretical contribution to understanding issues of sustainability and organization. Politically complex as these may be, the strength of Lefebvre's triadic framework is to offer a point of access to the multiple discursive and material positions and performances which co-constitute outcomes. Of critical importance is the recognition that the ordinary may be as important as the epic (Merrifield, 2006), and that it is through the mundane, everyday ways in which environmental initiatives are framed, performed and shaped by different organizational members that competing positions and identities in relation to sustainability are produced. Applying this framework to the case study material has thus exposed divisions and differences between managers and employees, but has also shown how, through performances which may veer towards festival and the carnivalesque, employees may resist sustainability as a symbol of managerial power.

Beneficial as the Lefebvrian framework may be however, it is by no means a new paradigm to studying organizational environmental issues. Its celebration of the particular means that it fails to go *beyond* the lived moments produced through festival to account for ongoing and sustainable organizational change. Yet, how innovation may be produced across organizational hierarchies and boundaries to generate and maintain a mutual and sustainable habitus for all is a key challenge for environmental sociologists. Further, it can also be accused as failing to offer a nuanced approach to understanding the importance of other social differentiations beyond manager/employee. How and why sustainability may be further intersected by gender, race, class, age, etc. are important questions which still need to be explored within organizational contexts.

In spite of these criticisms, the interconnections exposed by Lefebvre between space, the body and the social production of subjectivity and intersubjectivity make an important contribution to the methodological and theoretical toolkit that organizational sociologists need to get inside questions of organizational sustainability. Establishing exactly how sustainable practices may be produced and/or jettisoned at the mundane level of

people's everyday working lives in local organizational contexts will help policy makers stand a better chance of influencing behaviour. As Lefebvre has argued, the everyday may in fact be a primal arena for social change (Merrifield, 2006),and, as such, 'an inevitable starting point for the realization of the possible' (Lefebvre, 1971: 14).

Acknowledgement

Notes

1 All names are pseudonyms.
2 ASBO refers to 'Anti-Social Behaviour Orders' which were used in the UK between 1998 and 2010.

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