

The (re)production of organizational time : Reading the feminine through Henri Lefebvre

by Ming Lim

University of Leicester School of Management, University of Leicester, U.K.

Abstract

This paper deals with understanding, firstly, how economic space-time works as a structuring paradigm based on the suppression of feminine time with the inevitable knock-on effects on social or domestic (procreative) life. Because economic space, as Lefebvre believes, is seductive, it “unleashes desire” by claiming all time for itself; time must now be reproduced in such a way that it can open outwards to social dimensions rather than closing them off.

An explorer is trying to find his way in the desert after losing his watch. Exasperated by the natives' apparent lack of interest in his plight, he finally finds one who speaks a little English. The explorer demands to know the time. The native looks at him with amusement. “The time?” he asks quizzically, “the time is everywhere. Can't you tell what time it is?” The explorer loses his temper and exclaims: “Look, I've lost my watch! How am I supposed to tell the time without a watch?”

“Ah,” smiles the native. “You people have watches. I have the time.”

Native American story

Time and Space are Real Beings. Time is a Man, Space is a Woman and her masculine portion is Death.

William Blake

Introduction

It is a fact (almost) universally acknowledged by philosophers that “space” and “time” make uneasy bedfellows, each jostling for pre-eminence in a kind of metaphysical tug-of-war. This volatile relationship has occupied and divided geographers, critical theorists and thinkers on “globalization” (Castells, 1977; Giddens, 1981, 1979; Harvey, 1985, 1978), “gender studies” (see Alcoff, 1996) and “postmodernism” (Jameson, 1984; Foucault,

1986). Edward Soja, for instance, bemoans the historically-entrenched hegemony of time over space and argues for a more equitable “deconstruction and reconstitution” (1989, p. 74) of the power relations between the historicity of time and the social spaces of human life:

An essentially historical epistemology continues to pervade the critical consciousness of modern social theory. It still comprehends the world primarily through the dynamics arising from the emplacement of social being and becoming in the interpretive contexts of time... So unbudgeably hegemonic has been this historicism of theoretical consciousness that it has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life. (Soja, 1989, pp. 10-11)

This primacy of history over geography has characterized much of what we now know as capitalism, through to Fordism and the era of the bureaucratic organization of work and leisure many of us take for granted and which is only now beginning to be questioned by management thinkers. Up to the 1960s, as Foucault observes, “Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.”

Modern critical thought, however, has shattered these conceptions of space-time.

Lim

Late modernism, influenced heavily by Marxism and feminism, has problematized traditional conceptions of space-time and overturned traditional dichotomies. "Space-time" is now one of the defining problems of the "everyday life" of modern men and women today. As work time increasingly dominates lived experience, the problem of "space-time" has become a practical, *organizational* issue as much as an arcane philosophical concern. In recent months and years, the everyday life associated with procreation, reproduction and domesticity, in particular, has become a political lightning rod for governments and organizations in much of the developed world. The domestic sphere, hitherto relegated to virtual non-existence -- indeed, *prohibited* -- by the unrelenting demands of professional bureaucracy and competition, can no longer be ignored by the world of professional management as both men and women demand more respect from employers for their parental identities, familial responsibilities and individual needs for leisure and self-fulfilment.

The contemporary blurring of boundaries between professional and domestic work (resulting in rapid, radical and possibly permanent, changes in work structures and practices) represents a fascinating moment of enquiry for management theorists. The old hegemonies of space-time are steadily shifting in response to demographic trends and, consequently, the demands of a new generation of workers. The question is: how do we intend to *re-produce* time for ourselves as social, not merely -- or even -- economic beings within an organizational context. In an era where the domestic sphere can no longer be ignored by dominant corporate and political discourses, there is still a silence around how organizations propose to deal with the effects of space/time configurations that have held workers in their grasp for well over half-a-century and are now woefully antiquated and unable to satisfy the modern worker. This paper is an address of, and to, that silence.

To clarify my arguments, I shall draw on the

work of Henri Lefebvre to unmask the sources of discontent described in his magnum opus, *The Production of Space* (1974/1991). Not only does Lefebvre attempt to re-introduce late-capitalist space as a primary analytic category of modern experience, he also "takes apart", as it were, its illusory and distorting power to create *other spaces* within its ambit which then take over our social lives. These spaces, in their abstractness, crowd out care, sociality and true intimacy and the more mature forms of sexual love. They "operate negatively," as Lefebvre warns, are highly complex and opaque and cannot be easily understood except by a close examination of their seemingly innocuous forms of being and appearing. One such form, as this paper proposes, is to be found in the practical world of work and in the organizations we have created which are complicit in perpetuating abstract space at the expense of social space.

Lefebvre calls attention to how *Time*, in particular, has taken on a complex and altogether troubling aspect. The contrast between our conceptions of time and 'natural' time is marked:

In nature, time is apprehended within space - the hour of the day, the season, the elevation of the sun above the horizon, the position of the moon and the stars...the cold and heat, the age of each natural being and so on... *Time was thus inscribed in space.* (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 95)

In capitalist and post-capitalist societies, this organic space-time matrix is shattered and time itself disappears:

Let everyone look at the space around them. What do they see? Do they see *time*? They live time, after all; they are *in* time. Yet all anyone sees is movements. In nature, time is apprehended within space - in the very heart of space: the hour of the day, the season, the elevation of the sun above the horizon, the position of the moon and stars in the

heavens, the cold and the heat...Time was thus inscribed in space, and natural space was merely the lyrical and tragic script of natural time. With the advent of modernity time has vanished from social space. It is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are as isolated and functionally specialized as this time itself. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 95)

"This time," according to Lefebvre, is a particularized form of *modern*, capitalist consciousness. As we shall see, "time spent working" comes under special scrutiny in Lefebvre's argument about the nature of space-time. In his view, our denial and denigration of entire realms of human experience arise from our focus on the time spent working. The highly problematic results of the fragmentation of time emerge more clearly, therefore, in *working life* than in almost any other domain and must be investigated afresh as much for emancipatory purposes as for our theoretical understanding.

Working life, of course, necessarily creates further implications for the procreative, familial and sexual identities of modern men and women. Doreen Massey (1996), for instance, cites instances in her research on high-technology workers in Cambridge, U.K., where domestic spaces have become so porous, there is virtually no spatial difference between 'work time' and 'home time.' Work seeps into every aspect of life, and *when it doesn't*, guilt and dissatisfaction are the result. Even when partners or children need attention, these researchers are torn between a sense of joy and frustration. When a new baby arrived for one of them, for instance, this ambivalence between Transcendence (Reason, Science, Knowledge) and Immanence (Reproduction, Service, Care of Others) is expressed thus:

I go home early every other day (almost), and ...play with her until bedtime and ... I find that sometimes that's quite frustrating and keeps me away from work. I mean - it's fulfilling in its own right, but its'...I'm conscious of the fact

that...I call it a half-day, you know. I find it frustrating. (Massey, 1996, p.115)

What this professional expresses is the growing encroachment and valorization of the logical or 'abstract' upon the space and facticity of the domestic sphere. This dualism is just one of a number of instances which "cuts (space) up into pieces...setting up mental barriers and practico-social frontiers" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 89). In so far as late capitalism has failed to take into account the effects of space-time upon all these dimensions of social ontology, the *practical* effects of such an enquiry cannot be underestimated:

Theoretical and practical questions relating to space are becoming more and more important. These questions, though they do not tend to suppress them, tend to resituate concepts and problems having to do with biological reproduction, and with the production both of the means of production themselves and of consumer goods. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 62)

It is because of these effects of time that a *science of space* is urgently needed. It is not so much that space must be resuscitated but that it must be re-produced because *time has lost its way* and with it, our free and unobstructed enjoyment of home, leisure, procreation, care. We are now called to reconsider the long-held dominance of "the world of work," the conditions for its production and hegemony and its literal effects on the economy of the body. The second half of the twentieth century has seen our civilization suppress a serious discourse on space - in the name of "productivity," "efficiency," "material progress," "competition" -- which casts more than a contemptuous glance at what Lefebvre calls the "living body." Instead, this kind of space serves us as egoic beings, *serves power, serves the establishment, serves the hegemony which controls space itself*, and where it succeeds, excludes other forms of knowing which refuse to acknowledge power, the establishment and

Lim

its hegemonic practices (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 10). The political and human cost of this suppression can be seen in the violence of our cities, the incessant riots in urban ghettos, the growing numbers of increasingly hopeless and disenfranchised individuals and groups torn apart by frenzied opposition against the grip of state rationality, with its insistence on sweeping "reforms," and its grand schemes and plans. But "other forces are on the boil," and this paper argues that forms of the organizational "return of the repressed" turn on a space-time matrix we must comprehend in its abstract power, a configuration that has rejected the family and our erotic and social lives, in particular, as (literally) a waste of space and time (Cockburn, 1991).

Lefebvre pays particular attention to this ontological lack in the study of space-time: namely, the erasure of an entire category within time -- the denial of the female principle which makes reproduction and care-giving possible for future generations. This category suffers most deeply the effects of modern space-time upon the body and even between all bodies in society. In this context, he considers a proto-Freudian view that the strategic organizing principle governing our social lives may be founded upon a disciplinary regime which imposes psychic and emotional separation between and within our selves:

Some would doubtless argue that the ultimate foundation of social space is *prohibition*, adducing in support of this thesis the unsaid in communication between the members of a society; the gulf between them, their bodies and consciousnesses, and the difficulties of social intercourse; the dislocation of their most immediate relationships (such as the child's with its mother), and even the dislocation of their bodily integrity; and lastly, the never fully achieved restoration of these relations in an 'environment' made up of a series of zones defined by interdictions and bans. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p.35)

But this view, though it captures with chilling

resonance the divisive tenor of our times, does not describe the modern condition adequately, in Lefebvre's view. Even the more psychologically complex (Lacanian) view that our consciousness is split by language and leads the (male) child to objectify his phallus as external to the mother, her blood and her sex ("because language in constituting consciousness breaks down the unmediated unity of the body" [p. 35]) is misleading. In this view, language is assumed to operate in an unproblematic pre-discursive social space. This assumption, clearly, must be questioned. For psychoanalytic structures to fulfil their true epistemological power, Lefebvre argues, we must understand *the space* within which what he calls "phallic verticality" takes place. The double nature of this space may, admittedly, benefit from a psychoanalytic explanation, but it cannot be reduced to only that, if only because the world we live in is not constituted by imaginary realms where social practice is made up only of what is unacceptable to socially-defined forms of consciousness. The *obscene*, in other words, must be supplemented by an explanation for the *scene* in which it takes place and which forms the background for its existence.

The 'scene' under neo-capitalism is obviously spatial both in its nature and in its representations of that nature. That is, while space is pre-given, it also promotes a hidden 'scene.' This latter scene gives the impression that every effort has been made to associate daily routine (work, leisure, play and so on) with urban reality (public transport, city plans, offices), but in fact, such configurations - however 'convenient' they may seem to the capitalist consumer and worker -- are based on the radical separation between spaces and between a member of a society and the spaces he or she is entitled to inhabit. The decisions about which spaces we construct and allow ourselves to occupy are, of course, political. The mechanisms of control which shape how we place ourselves in relation to the spaces we inhabit, play and work in are poorly-understood by the vast majority of people and, what is worse, meekly

accepted. The connections between leisure spaces, work spaces and living spaces are hardly questioned any longer. In other words, space has become *abstract* to us. We no longer own space; rather, we are in thrall to it. What are the sources of this spatial alienation?

To Lefebvre, such an extreme degree of abstraction must be clearly understood before any kind of practical social change can occur. In fact, change of a radical nature appears nearly impossible; modern space is governed by a global logic of commodities and desire which seems irresistible and irreversible, even eternal, knowing no past or present, only some endlessly utopian future. As long as the economic life prevails over all other forms of life, space will dominate our lived experience. The characteristics of modern global space must, therefore, be understood before modern men and women can reclaim their lives. To effect change, we need to understand the key characteristics of abstract space, its modes of operation and its invisible effects. To begin, therefore, Lefebvre describes the nature of abstract space in the following terms:

Abstract space is not defined merely by the disappearance of trees, or by the receding of nature; nor merely by the great empty spaces of the state and the military...nor even by commercial centres packed tight with commodities, money and cars. It is not, in fact, defined on the basis of what is perceived. Its abstraction has nothing simple about it...it is not transparent and cannot be reduced either to a logic or to a strategy. Coinciding neither with the abstraction of the sign, now with that of the concept, it operates *negatively*. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 50)

This negativity - a 'worldwide trend' -- is founded on two primary operations: firstly, it *fragments experience*. Abstract space carves out spheres of activity for human beings so that we live life through representations founded in illusory transparency such as "leisure," "sex," "travel" and so on. The abstractness of such

categories is so powerful that one cannot actually be said to "live" them. It is highly doubtful, in fact, if a reconciliation between spheres of modern experience can be successfully achieved. Instead, one only conceives of, or conforms to, *representations* of these experiences as they are sold to us at some price. Witness the frenzied will to repetition of the masses for 'packaged' experiences, including the more recent 'do-it-yourself,' 'free-and-easy' or 'exclusive' movements which are themselves part of a pattern of willed conformity.

Secondly, abstract space fragments *the body*. "Under the conditions of modern industry and city life," notes Lefebvre, "abstraction holds sway over the relationship to the body." A classic example of this fragmentation is in the Taylorist model of work, where abstract goals extend into the body and fragment it utterly, reducing the body as a whole to a small number of motions subjected to strictly controlled linear determinations: 'a division of labour so extreme' that individual gestures themselves are specialized and the body breaks down into a number of unconnected parts (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 204). Taken together, the body collective or what we might call the 'social body' is thus mutilated into categories called 'work,' 'play,' 'rest,' and the erotic, 'sex' and 'family.' A further complication is that the space of "work" itself, if we can call it that, it itself always already contaminated by global forces or networks made up of business units, the operations of markets, property relationships and the technical and social division of labour (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 191). These invisible forces further serve to exacerbate the splitting of "work" into spaces of abstraction which remain poorly comprehended by the analytical body-mind.

Such abstraction, Lefebvre notes, tears apart the utopian notion that different spheres of life are equally valid, and hence, equally valuable. In this regard, he echoes Hegel's critique of the Kantian legacy of modern consciousness as the segregation of the

Lim

“value spheres” of reason and judgement and their progressive refinement in the domains of science, ethical freedom and aesthetic judgement (Kant, 1952). While Kant saw no fissures or “charring effects” (Dallmayr, 1987, p. 683) inherent in this differentiation of value spheres Hegel famously noted the contradictions and inherent ambivalence of the differentiation of reason and took up the challenge of attempting to reconcile the separation between nature and spirit, reason and emotion. Lefebvre calls us to understand, instead - echoing the anti-modernist discourse of Nietzsche -- the “*violence intrinsic to abstraction*” (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 289). What is the nature of this violence and how does it operate? Is there a distinction, in other words, between abstract space and the social manifestations of it?

Lefebvre makes a clear distinction at this point between philosophical and mathematical conceptions of space and the political and social *practices* which concretize and entrench abstract space in capitalist society. Abstract space unleashes certain effects on and in society, benefits some and displaces others, creates barriers between spheres of life which become virtually impossible to overturn and, in the process, accounts for why work has become detached from play, from family life, from the erotic sphere.

As Lefebvre observes with incredulity and not a little indignation, the fragmentation and violence which abstract space introduces into social life have hardly been called into question in the twentieth or even the twenty-first centuries. It is simply incredible to him, the “silence of the users of this space” (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 51). Why have so many workers allowed themselves to be exploited in ways which threaten the very balance of their lives without raising a protest? Must it be left to the elites to mount this necessary revolt against the shattering effects of space and its social uses? We will come to this question at the end of this paper, but for now, let us grant that it is simply unbelievable that we have allowed, as Lefebvre asserts, “so disturbing, so

outrageous an operation” (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 96) to have gone unremarked and worse, to have been so passively accepted and even embraced.

A genuinely polemical turn against the tyranny of abstract space must, therefore, begin with an understanding of the practical effects of abstract space upon time and the body. Beyond that, we can examine more closely the loci of their operations, viz., the domestic, familial and erotic realms. The following sections will take these themes up in turn: the death of Time, the Body and the Female Principle.

The effects of abstract space-time: The death of time and the female body

With the advent of (abstract space), time has vanished from social space. Lived time loses its form and its social interest - with the exception, that is, **of time spent working**. Our time, then, this most essential part of lived experience, this greatest good of all goods, is no longer visible to us, no longer intelligible. It cannot be constructed. It is consumed, exhausted, and that is all. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, pp. 95-96)

Lefebvre regards modern space as inimical to lived time. Space as we know it crushes time, expels it in the name of the division of labour, the commodification of leisure and the fragmentation of the body. Space as we know it is not inherently full, not that in which we live and play; rather, it has become, in its capitalist incarnation, as that which we have to fill with other things and effects, as though it were always already a *lack*.

Indeed, one of the most striking effects of abstract space upon our social lives is our (relatively modern) conception of it as a passive vessel into which we 'pour' activities, visions, objects and even - or especially - people. To conceive of space in this way is to submit already to its abstraction in our lives. And this is how we mistake the nature of abstract space. Far from being its master, we

are in thrall to its abstract power. For abstract space is not a nothing into which we pour our social bodies: it has devastating effects. Its *modus operandi* is devastation and 'destruction' (p. 289). As a result of this conception, we have fetishized space and relegated our social lives to its *abstract* power. As a result, the time for living, for human social relations and for meditation upon one's relationship with self is all but 'murdered by society' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 96).

The effect of such a conception of space upon time is, literally, to 'vanish' time, make it disappear. It does this by compartmentalizing time through instruments which measure and calibrate, mostly through watches and clocks. Calibrated time, of course, is seen and measured, but not wholly or *sensibly* lived, and thus represents a constant source of guilt and tension in the global information society. One of its defining characteristics, in fact, is the way our bodily needs are brutally shoved aside in the interests of 'saving time,' 'increasing productivity,' and so on. But the abstract power of space in our modern era far more insidious effects. One of its most devastating operations is what Lefebvre calls 'the logic of space' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 306). This logic is one which actually conceals the fact that space is abstract only in our conception of it; in and of itself, its operations are far from abstract. It appears homogeneous, but its operations are primarily fragmentary and divisive. The reasons for this are two-fold: abstract space is the space of commodities and markets (high finance, the labour market, the property market), first and foremost, and therefore the space of calculation, programming, intense state and business-driven planning, growth and more growth, targets and accumulation. The natural rhythms no longer have any appeal for the subjects in its grip. The Marxist orientation of this argument may be familiar, but it is the second reason Lefebvre gives for the destructiveness of abstract space which we need to examine in some detail.

Abstract space, according to Lefebvre, is

where the middle classes jostle for eminence in a mad struggle to fulfil their desires. While architects and city planners construct our cities and our leisure spaces as though they were empty spaces ready to receive those desires, the reality of post-capitalist society is that abstract space manipulates the middle classes by blurring the distinctions between fashion and art, art and advertising, money and happiness, sport and money and endless chains of substitutions. The most pernicious of these substitutions happens in the space of *the body*:

...sex becomes no more than another localization, specificity or specialization, with its own particular location and organs - 'erotogenic zones' (as assigned by sexologists), 'organs of reproduction, and the like....Confined by the abstraction of a space broken down into specialized locations, the body itself is pulverized. The body as represented by the images of advertising (where the legs stand for stockings, the breasts for bras, the face for make-up, etc.) serves to fragment desire and doom it to anxious frustration, to the non-satisfaction of local needs. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 310)

One need only consider the modern obsession with cosmetic surgery (a perfect metaphor for fragmented or localized desire) to comprehend the degree to which men and women believe that the manipulation or correction of certain body parts constitute whole-bodily or even life-happiness. The part has become the whole, in other words. For Lefebvre, this split within the bodily consciousness of man is, moreover, profoundly gendered. It is localized most explicitly in the female body. It is her life which is most commonly experienced as a fragments of existence, as spaces in which she floats in and out, depending on sociological constraints. She occupies

the space of a metaphorization whereby the image of the woman supplants the woman herself, whereby her body is fragmented, desire shattered, and life explodes into a thousand pieces. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p.

Lim

309)

These 'thousand pieces' are fragments of her sex carved up into spheres or 'erotogenic zones,' as we have seen. Her body is familiarly recognized as 'commodity' or 'use-value', coded and decodable and traded endlessly in an economy of exchange. Abstract space pulverizes the female body in a 'symbolic' way (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 310). In symbolic terms, the female body, in particular, suffers profound fragmentation. Her body occupies abstract space typically as the 'image which sells' or as a commodity *per se* in the global economy. Her living, concrete, human unity is not regarded as inherently valuable in this space.

This fragmentation of woman's unity of being is a symptom of the failure of Western philosophy since Descartes to regard the body in its unity. The Cartesian split between *res cogitans* (the thinking subject) and *res extensa* (the body-as-object) has yet to heal within Western philosophy. This split between subject and object may be a familiar narrative in Western philosophy, but Lefebvre's goes further than most commentators to argue that it is the female body, in particular, which has suffered the most from the inability of the body -- *any* living body -- to tolerate such a conceptual division. Knowing this, Western philosophers consider philosophical ideas to belong firmly to 'the signs of non-body' and the body itself is 'abandoned' and 'betrayed' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 407).

While abstract space has the effect of breaking the body apart, symbolically and literally -- in particular, the female's -- it is less clear what the relationship between 'time' and abstract space consists in. Lefebvre is forced to admit as much:

The standing of time as it relates to this (abstract) space is problematic, and has yet to be clearly defined. When religion and philosophy took duration under their aegis, time was in effect proclaimed a mental reality. But spatial practice - the practice of a repressive and oppressive space - tends to

confine time to productive labour time, and simultaneously to diminish living rhythms by defining them in terms of the rationalized and localized gestures of divided labour (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 408).

The articulation of the relationship between time and abstract space has, in a sense, been the domain of patriarchy. As long as time is valued as 'paid time' or 'work time' (excluding the time given over to care and other), the 'living rhythms' of the female body and sexuality are excluded.

As Kristeva (1986) has argued, the female body must be recognized as belonging to cyclical time (repetition) and monumental time (eternity) while not being excluded from the linear time of male history, of 'teleology, departure, progression and arrival.' The female body, the 'name and destiny of woman,' therefore, is more appropriately regarded as that of *space*, 'forming the human species' rather than of 'time, becoming or history' (p. 190). Here, too, female space hardly survives the battle with the spatial dominance of male sexuality. The fluids of woman, as Wigley (1995, p. 342) observes, 'endlessly overflows and disrupts' boundaries, including the boundaries within which man tries to keep her. The matrimonial home is a symbol of this attempt at containment. In her home, the woman appears to operate freely, but is in fact, already bounded by male power. The ancient Greeks knew this. Alluding to Xenophon, for instance, Wigley (1995) notes that:

the role of architecture is explicitly the control of sexuality...In Xenophon, the social institution of marriage is naturalized on the basis of the spatialized division of gender...Marriage is the reason for building a house. The house appears to make a space for the institution. But marriage is already spatial. It cannot be thought outside the house that is the condition of its possibility before its space. (p. 343)

By closing off the boundaries of woman's operational space, her sexuality is also

protected from other men. More profoundly, she learns to protect her *rhythms* from the outside world and, laterally speaking, from herself, her own consciousness. She suffers a double exclusion: the denial to her of linear time (or *valued* time) and of a space that is uniquely hers to control.

The production of space-time, far from being the intersubjective in its effects and operations, *is* the production of gender roles. How, then, do we restore to woman the intersubjectivity of her time-space? For this, we turn back to Lefebvre's philosophy of how society reproduces space and time so as to make possible a new space for female autonomy and, ultimately, for human enjoyment and pleasure.

The effects of abstract space-time: Restoring feminine space-time

Lefebvre's analysis of space-time -- as lived through work and much of commercial leisure -- is, as we have seen, founded on an economics of organization which is, at its root, inherently abstract. It cannot be grasped by the usual philosophies of the body because it only appears homogeneous; in fact, 'there is nothing homogeneous about it' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 308). It subsumes and fragments by force. Abstract space-time, therefore, is inherently violent. One of its most startling manifestations is in our experience of the body accordingly to various localizations of space and time, as portrayed through 'all the agitations and disputations of mimesis: of fashion, sport, art, advertising, and sexuality transformed into ideology' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p.309). Colluding with this violence -- and making it possible *in* time and space -- is the modern State. State apparatuses are increasingly based on homogenizing and reproducing spaces through all its overt and covert agencies, through 'networks', 'information flows,' and every possible means of surveillance and spatial control.

This violence upon the human body by the

State is most profoundly exercised upon the female body, Lefebvre notes, and has devastating effects upon the female generative principles of procreation, life, care. Unless industrial forms of space-time configuration are radically questioned and re-visioned, the space-time matrix associated with the feminine situation cannot be resolved. For Lefebvre, the answer lies only partly in 'pluralism,' 'communitarianism,' or the localized protests of citizens against the state, but also in a different kind of analysis of the human condition altogether.

Such an analysis would directly address the crude uncoupling of needs and desires and instead restore the body to its rhythms, to the total body:

The body's inventiveness needs no demonstration, for the body itself reveals it, and deploys it in space. Rhythms in all their multiplicity interpenetrate one another. In the body and around it, as on the surface of a body of water, or within the mass of a liquid, rhythms are forever crossing and recrossing, superimposing themselves upon each other, always bound to space...Such rhythms have to do with needs, which may be dispersed as tendencies, or distilled into desire. If we attempt to specify them, we find that some rhythms are easy to identify: breathing, the heartbeat, thirst, hunger, and the need for sleep are cases in point. Others, however, such as those of sexuality, fertility, social life, or though, are relatively obscure. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 205)

Here it may be possible to discern the reasons why issues of *accounting* for femaleness in our society is so difficult, and therefore, easily ignored. Until our methods of analysis are not merely statistical or linear or abstract or 'masculine-time-based', women's working bodies cannot be understood, let alone measured, in any specifiable way. The usual calls of 'equal pay for equal work' or 'pay equality' are all deeply, *philosophically*, flawed, in other words. They are flawed because the measurement or analysis of the *rhythms* of women have not begun to

Lim

overturn abstract space-time. And abstract space-time currently dominates lived experience. But can we begin to work towards a new vision?

This project of overturning abstract space-time is itself complex and abstract. Although thrilling in its implications, one cannot deny that its contours are, as yet, indistinct. Lefebvre simply asks us to consider the possibility of 'a sort of 'rhythm analysis' which would address itself to the concrete reality of rhythms, and perhaps even to their use (or appropriation)' (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 205). He envisions a new discipline, a sphere of experimentation which would explore principles of a general 'rhythmology' of the living body and its 'internal and external relationships'. The study of these rhythms through music and dance may thus inform social practice. These studies would dedicate themselves to the articulation of daily, monthly, yearly rhythms and our places in the spaces we inhabit. It is impossible to say how we will structure 'time' and 'space' as a result, but we will at last, perhaps, not only have watches, but also the time.

On a practical level, Lefebvre calls for a time in our history to be given over to a 'women's space':

It is time for the sterile space of men, founded on violence and misery, to give way to a women's space. It would thus fall to women to achieve appropriation, a responsibility that they would successfully fulfil - in sharp contrast to the inability of male or manly designs to embrace anything but joyless domination, renunciation - and death. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 380)

Unless we embrace social spaces as spaces of enjoyment rather than control, space-time constructs will continue to be joyless for vast numbers of men and women. Instead of women continually raising their voices for such a space, Lefebvre implies that the kind of leadership required for such a transformation must involve a class. He

suggests that the most well-educated and privileged among us must take on a greater responsibility to show why abstract space-time structures corrode enjoyment:

In the end, the invention of a space of enjoyment necessarily implies going through a phase of *elitism*. Elites have a role, and first and foremost, that role is to indicate to the masses how difficult -- and indeed impossible -- it is to live according to the strict constraints and criteria of quantity. It is true that the masses already experience this impossibility in their working lives; but this awareness has yet to be extended to the whole of life "outside work. ...the production of a new space ..can never be brought about by any particular social group; it must of necessity result from relationships between groups -- between classes or factions of classes -- on a world scale. (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p. 380)

It is precisely because the educated elites understand the power of quantification that we can best effect change. Lefebvre's ideal, however, faces two serious charges.

Firstly, the elites have a vested interest not in admitting the masses to their club, but in keeping them out. Christopher Lasch's conception of the 'elites,' for instance, echoes Lefebvre's description of them as uniquely qualified to mobilize society in this new way but highlight their 'ingratitude' to society. Quoting Robert Reich, Lasch describes elites as those who 'live in a world of abstract concepts and symbols, ranging from stock market quotations to the visual images produced by Hollywood and Madison Avenue, and who specialize in the interpretation and deployment of symbolic information (Lasch, 1995, p. 35). But Lasch is ultimately critical that elites can redress the 'revolt of the masses', signs of which, as I have argued, have already appeared in the context of our space-time structures. There is every possibility, Lasch argues, that elites desire to keep the masses ignorant, perpetuating the illusion that achievement

rests on hard work and social mobility. The viciousness of this illusion, of course, rests on the fact that mobility relies on the comprehension of abstractness which the elites themselves jealously guard through prohibitively expensive qualifications in top-tier universities.

Secondly, the elites benefit greatly from abstract space-time. The exclusion of others unlike themselves -- rather than the communities which Lefebvre calls for -- is the first impulse of those who have achieved membership of the elite classes. As Lasch notes, elites are wary of communities. They find it difficult to imagine a community, even an intellectual community, 'that reaches into both the past and the future and is constituted by an awareness of intergenerational obligation' (Lasch, 1995, p. 40). Instead, communities are kept 'alive' (and the illusion maintained that they are alive) through the virtuality and proliferation of 'collaborative' technologies -- chat boards, collaborative software, email and blogs. The elites cling to others like themselves and distance themselves more and more from their own countrymen and women, either by leaving their country of birth or else by erecting physical spaces or enclaves of privilege from which the 'rest of them' are fiercely excluded. They distance themselves from the State, paying for their own security, medical care, garbage collection and anything else they need to sustain their luxurious lives. As Lasch (1995) notes, these strategies provide us 'with a particularly striking instance of the revolt of elites against the constraints of time and space' (p. 47). Indeed, the new elitism appears to be interested in the manipulation of time and space rather than in the emancipation of others from its shackles. Do we, therefore, conclude that the very people -- elites -- who have the power to transform the status quo are the ones least likely to desire (and thus facilitate) such a change? Even worse, have the elites of our time lost the moral imagination to conceive of such a change in the first place?

Whether the elites can address the tyranny of

space-time constraints, therefore, remains a loaded question. Lefebvre's vision may be misguided and unrealistic in this respect, but the question of how organizations can be called to account on this matter remains of paramount importance to management researchers and philosophers.

Conclusion: The reproduction of space-time or how is the war to be won?

Throughout his book, Lefebvre makes clear that he is concerned primarily with the practical effects of abstract space-time. Because economic and political institutions have, for too long, exercised a tyranny over time which *rendered it invisible*, its ominous practical effects could not be articulated.

In the same way that we cannot "see time," we cannot see the division between space itself. This invisible divide is the most stunning feature of late capitalism, as Lefebvre explains, carried over from a more fundamental schism in society, that between "economic space" and "social space" (Lefebvre, 1974/1991, p.34). Economic space tends to reject the "social", or practices which include family, self-fulfilling pursuits and so on, while simultaneously retaining the right to benefit from its advantages, such as personal relationships, connection to "nature, to the earth, to procreation, and thus to reproduction" (p. 35). This radical separation between economic space and social time in organizations has, up to now at least, resulted in deeply-entrenched and institutionalized forms of work which *erased time* from the lives of managers and other workers. The reactions of workers to this erasure implies also that we need to examine the real possibility that organizational work-time itself has reached a point of saturation for many people for whom it had previously held a powerful interest and emotional force. The increasing disillusionment of many workers with the prevailing structure of space-time obliges management theorists to re-examine the sources of its power and to propose potential strategies of resistance and

Lim

re-engagement.

This paper has been concerned, therefore, with understanding, firstly, how economic space-time works as a structuring paradigm based on the suppression of feminine time with the inevitable knock-on effects on social or domestic (procreative) life. Because economic space, as Lefebvre believes, is seductive, it “unleashes desire” by claiming all time for itself; time must now be reproduced in such a way that it can open outwards to social dimensions rather than closing them off. For Lefebvre, economic space-time has the effect of rendering the age-old distinctions between private and public, inside and outside, sacred and profane, irrelevant. Private life has never been so vulnerable to the demands of commerce and industry while public agendas now pervade the private sphere. All walls are disappearing.

Time, in other words, must be *spatially* reconfigured to become visible to the people who have been most excluded and oppressed by its organizational forms and dysfunctions. While organizational literature has, of course, identified the patriarchal nature of temporal configurations at the workplace (Mills, 1993; Grint, 1998). The inflexible -- in effect, brutal -- division between work and home is deeply ideological and often invisible, for both men and women. The *visible* measures now taken to alleviate the consequences (“flexi-time”, compressed working time, job-sharing and so on) are in the main fairly clumsy attempts to redress a deeper philosophical void at the heart of work structures and governance. How do we begin to unravel the space-time constructs which continue to oppress the ontological status of the social or domestic sphere, as much as it does any of the traditional categories of age, class, race or disability (Hearn & Parkin, 1993)? Drawing upon the writings of Henri Lefebvre, we have been able to identify the erasure of an entire category of time -- that which makes reproduction and care-giving possible for future generations. To the extent that the female principle, in particular, is essential to

its continued production and reproduction, management researchers have yet to undertake substantive conceptual or empirical studies into how time and space have negated its function and importance. Such studies can facilitate new forms of interaction and integration between the hitherto distinct spheres of work and reproduction.

References

- Alcoff, L.M. (1996). Feminist theory and social science: New knowledges, new epistemologies. In N. Duncan (Ed.), *BodySpace: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (pp. 13-27). London and New York: Routledge.
- Castells, M. (1977). *The urban question*. London, England: Edward Arnold.
- Cockburn, C. (1991). *In the way of women*. London, England: Macmillan.
- Dallymayr, F. (1987). The discourse of modernity: Hegel and Habermas. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 84 (11), 682-692. Eighty-Fourth Annual Meeting American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division.
- Forman, F. & Sowton, C. (Eds.). (1989). *Taking our time: Feminist perspectives on temporality*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1986). Of other spaces. *Diacritics* 16, 22-27 (Jay Miskowiec, Trans.). 16, 1 (Spring), 22-27.
- Giddens, A. (1981). *A contemporary critique of historical materialism*. London and Basingstoke, England: Macmillan; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory*. London and Basingstoke, England: Macmillan.
- Grint, K. (1998). *The sociology of work*. (2nd

- ed.). Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Harvey, D. (1996). *Justice, nature and the geography of difference*. Oxford and Cambridge, M.A: Blackwell Publishers.
- Harvey, D. (1985). *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.
- Harvey, D. (1978). The urban process under capitalism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 2, 101-131.
- Hearn, J. and Parkin, W. (1993). Organizations, multiple oppressions and postmodernism. In J. Hassard and M. Parker (Eds.). *Postmodernism and organizations* (pp. 148-162). London, England: Sage.
- Jameson (1984). Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism. *New Left Review*, 146, 53-92.
- Kant, I. (1952). *Critique of judgement*. (J.C. Meredith, Trans.). Oxford, England: Clarendon.
- Lasch, C. (1995). *The revolt of the elites*. England: WW Norton & Company.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space* (Donald Nicholson-Smith, Trans.). Oxford, England: Blackwell. (Original work published 1974).
- Massey, D. (1996). Masculinity, dualisms and high technology. In N. Duncan (Ed.). *Bodyspace: destabilizing geographies of gender and sexuality* (pp. 109-126). London, England: Routledge.
- Mills, A.J. (1993). Organizational discourse and the gendering of identity. In J. Hassard and M. Parker (Eds.). *Postmodernism and organizations* (pp. 132-147). London, England: Sage.
- Morris, J. (2004). The future of work: Organizational and international perspectives. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15, 263-275.
- Soja, E. (1989). *Postmodern geographies: The reassertion of space in critical social theory*. London, England; New York: Verso.
- Wigley, M. (1995). *White walls, designer dresses: the Fashioning of modern architecture*. Cambridge: Mass., London, England: MIT.

Copyright of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science is the property of TAMARA: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.