

Conceptualizing 'Home' in culture and organization

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The 33rd *Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism* (SCOS) was hosted by Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University (UK), between 11 and 14 July 2015. This special issue of *Culture and Organization* presents a set of papers which respond to the conference theme of 'Home.' The theme addresses a part of life that might seem far removed from a conference and journal dealing ostensibly with work and organizational issues. Home is the base from which we begin our journey to work and the sanctuary to which we return after a 'hard day at the office.' Home is part of the 'life' that we should nurture should we wish to achieve 'work-life' balance. However, SCOS has a long history of extending its purview 'beyond the factory walls,' and as ever the theme inspired innovative and creative responses from the conference delegates and from the authors submitting to this special issue.

The conference theme was first inspired by a large research project undertaken by Nottingham Business School, which took a holistic approach to the city's social housing. It examined not only the tangible 'bricks and mortar' of the buildings, but also the intangible aspects of lives and experiences of those who call them home, and the delicate weaving of homes that creates communities. The project explored the personal, social, economic, and environmental impact of a £200 million housing regeneration initiative (Decent Homes Programme) that took place in Nottingham during 2009–2015. The research project was supervised by one of the conference organizers, Néstor Valero-Silva, in collaboration with other academics from the University's Business, Architecture, and Art & Design Schools. It was sponsored by the city's largest social housing provider, Nottingham City Homes, and financed by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Innovate UK, and One Nottingham. The project demonstrated the remarkable outcomes from investing in homes towards improving the lives of individuals in areas such as health; the sense of well-being, belonging and safety; community cohesion and stability, and in providing work/training opportunities (Jones, Valero-Silva, and Lucas 2016).

'Home' also evokes recent spatial turns in organization studies which make connections between performativity (Butler 1990) and 'space as a lived space' (e.g. Tyler and Cohen 2010), to explore how the material and spatial context of organizations orientates people in

ways which create identities, loyalties, and affinities where they might 'feel at home' (Ahmed 2006; Riach and Wilson 2014). Conversely, such organizational practices also have the power to cast 'othered' identities as exterior and abject, with normative and exclusionary effects of cultures and group dynamics leaving people 'not feeling at home' (Hekma 1998). This aspect of the theme resonates with the work of the second conference organizer, Scott Lawley, and provides a link with the preceding SCOS conference theme of 'Sport, Play and Game,' held in Utrecht, 2014. Lawley's work has a connection with Nottingham, where he has had an activist role in developing inclusive sports organizations, and which has led to work which examines how certain gendered and heterosexualized identities are afforded a privileged sense of home in both workplace settings (Caven, Lawley, and Baker 2013) and within sports organizations (Lawley and Boncori 2017).

While the conference theme made many connections between the home and organizational concerns, emphasis was also placed on the 'culture' dimension of *Culture and Organization*, with 'Home' having been a central and problematic theme in many areas of the arts. For example, the sculptural work of Cornelia Parker has included the suspended fragments of a garden shed that had been blown up by the British Army (*Cold Dark Matter: An Exploded View*, 1991), while her 1992 piece *Neither From Nor Towards* was created by suspending the water-eroded bricks of a house that had fallen into the sea a few years earlier, evoking not only a physical formal configuration, but also the lives and memories of those who used or lived in those spaces. Roger Hiorns (*Seizure*, 2008) created a sculpture and installation by lining a council-owned flat in Peckham, London, with a thick layer of glistening and dangerously sharp blue copper sulphate crystals, thus creating a sense of wonder, claustrophobia, and extreme danger in someone's former home, as if the crystallized sulphate allowed the viewer to see a reality that had been hidden. This residue of the former life of a home was also found in Rachel Whiteread's Turner Prize-winning *House* (1993), a concrete cast of the 'negative space' of the interior of the home. In cinema, Ken Loach's acclaimed films *Cathy Come Home* (1966) and *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) painfully portrayed the ever-present issues of homelessness, unemployment, and unfairness in the welfare system, within an otherwise most affluent society.

Aspects of culture linked with the conference home city and the conference activities. In popular culture, the most (in)famous resident of Nottingham and best-known figure from medieval England is Robin Hood, the outlaw whose penchant for robbing from the rich to give to the poor led to numerous clashes with the city's Sheriff. A symposium took place within

the conference which examined not only the mythology of the legend and its reflection in popular culture, but also its contemporary legacy for the city of Nottingham in economic terms, especially through leisure and tourism industries. The conference also drew on connections with current cultural activities in Nottingham, given that one of the conference organizers is a member of the Nottingham Contemporary gallery's academic advisory board. Delegates enjoyed a private view of the *Grand Tour* exhibition introduced by the then gallery director Alex Farquharson (now Director of Tate Britain). The exhibition included 60 precious objects from a nearby stately home, Chatsworth House, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, which were acquired during or inspired by the Grand Tour. This was a formative cultural experience for the eighteenth-century aristocrat traveller which took people such as Lord Byron – another of Nottinghamshire's (in)famous characters – to countries across Europe, the Near and Middle East, and Northern Africa. The ideas and objects collected during the Grand Tour can still be seen today in a range of homes, from aristocratic ones to small suburban gardens.

The presentations at SCOS 2015 interpreted the conference theme in many ways, highlighting the eclectic creativity, and the freedom of exploration, that characterizes the SCOS annual gatherings. The papers explored the concept of 'home' through themes such as: migrants and nomads; work-life balance and flexibility; organizing and professionalizing home life; communities and homes; home policy and planning, homelessness; home and work; arts and crafts; domestic work, and emotions, aesthetics, and embodiment. In doing so, the papers evoked themes from SCOS conferences *passim*, for example: Organizing Through Displacement, Travel and Movement (Barcelona, 2013); The Bridge: Connection, Separation, Organization (Copenhagen/Malmö, 2009); The City (Manchester 2008); Sensation (Halifax, Canada, 2004), and Self and Identity in Organizations (Turku, 1995).

In this special edition, we present four papers that responded to the conference theme by conceptualizing the concept of 'Home' and its relationship to the workplace in four different ways: exploring the distinction between work and home; examining work which takes place within the home setting; visualizing images of the home within the workplace context, and, finally, exploring a sense of homelessness within working life.

Work-home distinction

In the first paper, Elizabeth Wilhoit examines the distinction between home and work from the perspective of what links the two: the daily commute. While the commute is often

overlooked as an inevitable chore, Wilhoit views it as a liminal space that is neither home nor work, but which is an important routine for upholding both structures. Drawing on interviews with commuters in the United States, she explores how, rather than seeing the commute as a burden, they frame it as a 'sacred time' where they can engage in activities that would not be possible within either of the two realms that are linked by the commute. Wilhoit expands Nippert-Eng's (1996) examination of the commute as being a liminal space in two ways. First, she outlines two aspects of the liminality of the commute – it serves as a period of *transition* between the two realms of home and work yet is also an *ambiguous* space of 'departure' from the structures, rules and norms in both. Second, she explores the routine, twice-daily nature of the commute, which makes it a predictable and stable part of life that would seem to be at odds with the ambiguous and transitional nature suggested by liminality. Wilhoit proposes a concept of 'routine liminality' to bring together these two aspects of the commute.

The link between the routine and liminality is in their generative nature (Feldman 2000), with routines providing the regular context for the ambiguous liminal spaces from which creative and unpredictable activities might occur. The interview data thus draws out the activities which commuters regularly and routinely perform – knitting, reading, or simply 'recharging' and 'destraining.' These activities smooth the transition between work and home but at the same time the possibility for these activities taking place is provided by the ambiguous context of the commute, which is different to home and work and facilitates activities that can take place in neither. Wilhoit suggests that the concept of routine liminality can be applied to wider contexts where liminality has been explored in organization studies. Many of these instances are also routine and predictable in nature, however she suggests that their liminality still affords the ambiguity from which generative and creative activities might occur. Wilhoit's paper concludes by considering how people who work within the home might miss out on the opportunities afforded by the commute, and invites us to consider how such routine, liminal spaces might be created within a home-working environment. In so doing, she shifts the focus to the extent of work as it manifests itself within the setting of the home.

Work within the home

Work had always taken place in home settings before large-scale industrialization shifted manufacturing from the home to the discrete factory workspace. Computer and mobile networks have made the home once again a workplace, allowing a return to the autonomy of cottage industries, and providing flexibility to those in paid employment, but conversely bringing with it constant physical manifestations of the workplace within the space of the

home (Tietze and Musson 2005) and the intrusion of technology allowing work a 24/7 presence within home life through the curse of 'always-on' email (Gregg 2011; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, and Yates 2013).

Of course, work in the home has always been present through the gendered domestic division of labour. This provides the starting point for Guro Korsnes Kristensen's paper, which examines paid domestic migrant labour and, specifically, the role played by *au pairs* in Norwegian home settings. As such it resonates with Hochschild's (2000, 32) observation of the creation of global care chains that comprise 'a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring.' Kristensen uncovers a complex relationship between work and home that is played out within the home settings where *au pairs* are employed, whilst also revealing wider issues concerning the work-home divide within Norwegian society. Kristensen provides rich and engaging data from interviews with Norwegian parents, giving us a vivid picture of their experiences with the *au pair* system. She begins by outlining the significance of the home within Norwegian culture as a private and 'cosy' realm, but one which is also tidy and ordered, with this order traditionally underpinned by a gendered division of domestic labour. Greater equality in workplace participation has led to difficulties in maintaining this domestic order, creating a role which has been filled by *au pairs*.

The interview data highlight two contradictions resulting from this arrangement. At the level of the household, the *au pair* allows parents to participate in the workplace safe in the knowledge that the traditional order of the home will be maintained. However, this is accompanied by a paradox of the home itself becoming a workplace for the *au pairs* whose permanent presence problematizes the traditional notion of the Norwegian home as a private respite from the workplace. In the wider context of Norwegian society, Kristensen observes that the *au pair* arrangement allows greater equality in the labour market by providing the domestic support which facilitates equal gender participation in the workplace. However, this is underpinned by reproducing inequalities within the domestic setting through the work undertaken by the (almost exclusively female) *au pair* workforce, and indeed introduces new inequalities given that this workforce is largely from poorer, developing nations.

The home in work and organizational life

Kristensen's paper problematizes the work-home binary from the perspective of the home, however this interweaving of home and work can also be seen in the workplace. For example,

corporate campuses such as the *Googleplex* bring home comforts to the workplace, while elsewhere workers themselves personalize their workspace with reminders of home (Warren 2006). The body, work, and emotions debate has previously addressed less tangible aspects of home life that appear in the workplace. For example, 'domestic skills' employed in the case of *au pairs* in the home context are also being pressed into the service of workplace profit through 'emotional,' 'affective,' and 'aesthetic' labour (Adkins and Lury 1999; Taylor and Tyler, 2000).

Patricia McCarroll's highly original contribution is set firmly within the workplace, but draws in several aspects of home. First, it is set within the discipline of Facilities Management (FM), which, in line with the original inspiration for the conference theme, deals with the management of the built environment – the bricks and mortar that create the organizational 'home.' Second, it examines the sense of home experienced by FM practitioners in terms of their professional identity. Third, it combines these by using a representation of the physical home – a house – as a spatial metaphor through which to elicit and outline the sense of identity and home as perceived by FM practitioners. For McCarroll, FM occupies a precarious position as a 'secondary service,' and as such its practitioners experience a fragmented, insecure, and transitional nature of professional identity.

As with Wilhoit's paper in this volume, McCarroll draws upon the concept of liminality, in particular by mapping the transitional nature of FM professional identity onto three stages of separation, liminality, and incorporation. The metaphor of the house is used first in fieldwork, where different rooms and areas of the house are given as prompts for FM practitioners to reflect on the state of their profession. These are used as a spatial metaphor for the presentation of the results, which are narrated as a walk around the 'house of FM' and its surrounding areas, linked to the three stages of liminality. The separation stage is linked to the relationship between the FM 'home' and the organizational 'neighbourhood' of other professions. The rooms of the house act as a metaphor for the liminal state of the FM profession. The existence of a 'hidden house' and outbuildings such as a shed serve to reinforce the perpetual liminal state of the FM profession, while also offering pointers to movement towards the third stage of incorporation and the development of a clearer professional identity: a 'home' for the FM profession.

A sense of homelessness

McCarroll's paper outlines a profession in search of a home, and as such points to links between work and organization, and notions of 'homelessness,' displacement and escape. At the level of the physical environment of organizations, Cubitt (2001) notes how organizations themselves have become placeless 'rhizomes' of shifting data connections, ones we might now observe as being co-ordinated and consolidated virtually through the 'home page.' Turning to intangible feelings of home, we may consider the diaspora in the context of the workforce, where an organization fails and its workers perforce disperse to new 'homes' (Lennerfors, 2013). Furthermore, we might consider the sense of homelessness experienced by the precarious migrant worker, the expat, or the nomadic boundary-less careerist, individuals who live and work far away from their original homelands or permanent organizational homes, whilst at the same time considering Hardt and Negri's (2000) recognition of migration as a powerful form of transgression where homelessness might be viewed as a form of freedom from and creative resistance against dominant social structures.

A sense of homelessness among a migrant workforce is the subject of the final paper in this volume, where Gabriella Whitehead focuses on transnational professionals – workers who undertake a series of overseas postings away from their respective home environments. The paper draws on narratives of these serial expatriates, taken from interviews and internet forums, uncovering their experiences of a 'contradictory condition' of homelessness. On the one hand, the transnational professionals view continual migration as a source of personal strength and power from which they derive increased career capital when compared to 'sedentary' workers, similar to Hardt and Negri's observation of the transgressional power of migration. On the other hand, the narratives indicate weakness with an inability to form a sense of home in any one place, whether in professional or private lives, leading to a permanent sense of estrangement that ultimately leads these nomadic workers to lose sense of their own identity.

Whitehead's data is enriched by an intertextual narrative analysis which finds traces of these narratives in fictional works that also explore themes of travel and displacement. The fictional works invite comparisons between the transnational professional and archetypal characters within these works, with the contradictory condition of homelessness being illustrated, for example, by the heroic notion of 'the wanderer' as found in Homer's *Odyssey* being juxtaposed in the workers' narratives with traces of the alienated identity of Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Whitehead's conceptualization of the 'contradictory condition' of

homelessness draws the special issue to a close by encompassing the three aspects of home that informed the original SCOS conference theme: the physical location of the home, the home as a sense of identity and belonging, and the representation of the home in arts and culture.

Conclusion

In many ways SCOS has a life similar to that of the nomadic workers described by Whitehead – a global itinerant troupe of academics, making a temporary home each year in the conference host city. As SCOS settles into its new home, it allows delegates to interact with the history and its environment of its surroundings while drawing inspiration from the conference theme. We hope that the conference in Nottingham has made a valued contribution to this tradition and to the evolving identity of SCOS, and that this is reflected in the issue of *Culture and Organization* that follows. We ask you now to please make yourself at home, and enjoy this special issue.

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